



# HARPERS WINE STARS AWARDS SPAIN 2017

With a true wealth of quality and diversity across the price points, not to mention unusual and interesting styles in spades, Spain was the obvious contender with which to launch the Harpers Wine Stars Awards

**W**elcome to the results of Harpers' inaugural Wine Stars Awards, launching into life with a focus on the most dynamic of northern hemisphere producers – Spain.

In a world awash with so many awards, you might well ask “why introduce yet another competition”? The answer is simple. Our Wine Stars Awards are markedly different from the run-of-the-mill, being judged by buyers for buyers, taking

blind-assessed quality as the starting point, but then adding two further layers for consideration as extra rounds of judging added points for value for money and then design and packaging.

Only buyers judge these awards and furthermore each judging session focuses on just one country, allowing an in-depth look at the wines, the trends and the development of that country.

As such, these awards are like no other, taking an holistic approach, considering all of the factors that influence buying decisions, including elements of appeal to the final wine-buying consumer.

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The quality of the liquid in the bottle is paramount, but from a buying perspective, the quality-to-value ratio and presentation are further factors that go beyond a critical score that essentially indicates how much the tasters liked the wine in the bottle.

On all but the most esoteric and freewheeling lists, a wine needs to fill a certain criteria, meeting a brief for a slot in a given portfolio, delivering a certain quality and price level, while also having appeal and communicating itself to potential customers.

And this is the case not just for supermarkets and multiples, but for individual merchants, restaurants and bars too. It is for this reason the Harpers Wine Stars Awards were conceived, to judge wines through buyers' eyes, and in doing so introduce a new approach to the world of wine competitions.

### Judging criteria

The judging process was split into three tranches, with judging teams assessing wines grouped by region. The aim was to arrive at an accumulative and then final judging average score, or Star Award, out of a maximum of five stars, after three rounds of judging for each wine.

### Round 1 - The Quality Round

All wines were tasted blind, aside from knowledge of the broad region of origin, and assigned a score by each judge based on quality alone.

### Round 2 - The Value Round

Following the quality assessment of the wines in each regional flight, prices were then revealed and judges gave a further mark based on the perceived quality-to-value ratio.

### Round 3 - The Design Round

The identity of all wines was then revealed, with further marks given for the overall packaging and design of each wine, with judges also appraised of the intended sales channels – on-trade, off-trade, multiples, etc – for each wine.

## THE JUDGES' VIEWS

**Theo Sloot, The Oxford Wine Company**

“If you look at the overall trend towards quality rather than bulk, then Spain is increasingly pushing towards quality – it still has the bulk, but the quality is increasingly there. And it is a country with loads to offer, with so many styles now coming out, it's really exciting. Spain has gained a lot more recognition in the past 10 years and there are a lot of go-ahead things going on. And they are really getting their act together in terms of modern marketing.”

**Charles Pashby-Taylor, Chez Bruce**

“The biggest tranche was Rioja, some of which were lovely, but several of which were a more generic style. I think consumers, even when shopping in a supermarket, do want some point of difference, so those that showed this stood out. The white Riojas were showing well, from quite opulent traditional styles to lighter, fresher modern styles. Spain is a big place and Rioja is only part of that. There was a lot of variety elsewhere, fresh wines, reds like Mencia, and whites from Galicia, that show a different side of Spain.”

**Michael Patterson, D&D London**

“The Riojas were fairly similar, but for many Rioja is quite a specific product and recognition is so high that it's quite a barrier to move beyond. There are definitely some alternatives that are commercially viable now, with the availability and access, so it has become easier to explore some of those alternatives on the list. In restaurants there is an opportunity to not put something that people recognise at entry level, so you can put a Rioja further up [the list] and then introduce wines that they don't know, so this is creating space for new styles to come through.”

**Gerard Barnes, Berkman Wine Cellars**

“You have to kiss frogs to find the princes and there were a lot of wines scoring in the middle, but some of those would make good pub wines, so there is a place for them too. Those that stood out included some wine styles that I've never tasted, so it's been really interesting, with discoveries and some really good wines, although there were some ambitiously priced wines. It's been really interesting to see some of the styles and fashions that are now appearing on our list.”



The wines were blind-tasted by buyers for buyers

