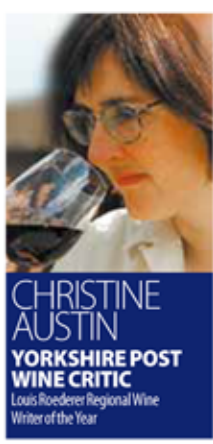


Catalonia to California

FAMILY TIES: A Spanish winemaker has forged an individual style in California. Christine Austin meets Marimar Torres.

DESPITE having lived in in California for over 35 years Marimar Torres still has a light Spanish accent which makes her seem much more European than American. She is part of the Catalan Torres family who are among the most important wine producers in Spain, but clearly Marimar has an independent streak. Leaving Spain in her twenties – “Spain was a different country in those days” – she married, then divorced, an American writer and then established her own wine estate in Sonoma, California. I met up with her, and her daughter Cristina, to find out more about Marimar Estate and the way she has developed her wines which are now sold in some of the best restaurants and retailers in the world.



CHRISTINE AUSTIN
YORKSHIRE POST WINE CRITIC
Louis Roederer Regional Wine Winter of the Year

cool-climate grape growing. At 600 feet altitude it is naturally cooler, but the ocean fog settles around the vines on a daily basis, making this an ideal site for Pinot Noir. Once again, various clones were selected to build flavour into the wines and this shows in the final product. Again in a nod to her family ties Marimar has named this site Doña Margarita after her mother.

Both sites have now converted to organic viticulture and Marimar also uses some biodynamic methods which links viticultural activity in the vines to phases of the moon and the use of various composts.

“This was a real leap of faith, and while I am a great believer in encouraging biodiversity and using composts I am not totally ruled by the biodynamic calendar. If the grapes are ready to pick, then I don’t worry whether it is the right phase of the moon, I just go out and pick the grapes.”

It is this focus on quality that has seen her develop a range of wines, essentially Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, now augmented by a small release of Albariño which I tasted over lunch. I wanted to introduce a local Spanish grape and I thought this would be perfect for the Sonoma coast vineyard, but it just didn’t ripen there. I had to replant the vineyard in the Don Miguel vineyard in Russian River, just six miles away, where it ripens perfectly. Tasting this wine with grilled asparagus it echoed the light pineapple and passion fruit flavours of a Galician Albariño but mustered greater intensity without losing the crisp acidity

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which makes this such a great wine to match with fish. Clearly disapproving of my choice of asparagus, I was treated to a sliver of Marimar’s smoked salmon to appreciate this combination, and I’ll admit, hers was the better match.

Moving on to the Pinot Noir, we tasted first La Masia 2009 (£29.99, Roberts and Speight, Beverley) from the Don Miguel Vineyard and then Cristina 2009 (2008 vintage at Roberts and Speight, £36.99), named after her daughter. The wine Cristina is a special selection of just six top barrels and represents a unique expression of the vineyard. Each has a particular character. La Masia has deep, rich cherry and raspberry fruit, with a rounded, full palate and silky tannins. There is a streak of spice in the wine, but it is nestled under the fruit and the oak is harmonious and balanced. In contrast Cristina is quite like the person it is named after. Sleek and smooth, it has an extra bounce of flavour, vibrant and lively. Just to compare these Californian

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These are limited production, low-yield, hand-made wines that combine the warmth and informality of California with just a glance at the structure of Spain. A lovely combination.

The Chardonnays were a revelation.

Overall I was surprised by these wines. They are leaning much more to a harmonious European style and the oak is delicately handled - more French in character than Californian.

the terror.
Marimar clearly had a vision for the quality of wine she was intending to produce. Various clones were selected to suit the light, loamy, sandy soil and give flavour diversity in the wine. In recognition of her family ties back in Spain, this first vineyard is called the Don Miguel Vineyard, after Marimar’s father who died in 1991.

A few years later a second vineyard of 20 acres, in the Sonoma Coast area was bought and planted. Just six miles from the coast, this is another step towards



A TASTE OF SPAIN: The Marimar Estate vineyard in Sonoma, California, is in a cool climate area and uses biodynamic techniques. Above, Marimar and Cristina Torres

Acero 2012 (£22.99, Roberts and Speight) is unoaked and full of bright citrus fruit with white floral notes and a crunchy, mineral finish. La Masia (around £25) is barrel fermented and then aged on lees which gives a gentle hazelnut and spice note. This is a wine for richer foods such as chicken and even a Spanish paella. Overall I was

surprised by these wines. They are leaning much more to a harmonious European style and the oak is delicately handled – more French in character than Californian.

At these prices, Marimar Estate is definitely a special occasion wine, and you are more likely to come across them on wine lists in good restaurants than on the

shelf, although Penistone Wine Cellars (01226 766037) is also a stockist.

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