



Jorge Ordóñez

Biography

When Jorge Ordóñez arrived in the United States in 1987, the international Spanish wine market was bleak. Jorge grew up in Málaga and managed his family's wholesale wine business before arriving in the United States. As a result, he understood the potential market for Spanish wine in the U.S. For his vision to succeed, however, drastic changes had to occur both in Spain and abroad.

In the U.S., a lifetime of misconception about the caliber of Spanish wine had to be dispelled. In a market saturated by French, Californian, and Italian wine, Spanish wine was thought to be low quality, funky, and cheap. Jorge understood that much of this was the result of external factors, most importantly, poor storage and transportation conditions. He revered the wines of his homeland and was one of the few to recognize the vast potential of Spain's old, dry farmed vineyards of indigenous grapes. He also recognized Franco's detrimental impact on agriculture and the wine industry. It geared towards bulk production and the cooperative system, rather than producing fine wine. Due to these conditions, much of the country's winemaking needed to be revitalized: cleanliness needed to be a priority, yields needed to be lowered, and some traditional methods needed to be updated. Most importantly, Ordóñez sought to preserve the ancient vineyards of his homeland and fought brazenly against the trend of ripping up indigenous varieties to replant with more productive international grape varieties. He crusaded to uphold the heritage and character of Spanish wine by highlighting the oldest clones of Spain's authentic indigenous varieties and by celebrating his homeland's unique terroir. There was a great deal of risk involved. Ordóñez boldly challenged the international palate by being the first to introduce and champion exotic varietals such as Albariño, Godello, Garnacha, Monastrell, Tinta de Toro, and wines from Txacoli.

Ordóñez established himself as a relentless advocate for the proper handling of wine. He demanded major improvements in the transportation of wine until it reached the U.S. Fine Estates From Spain was the first wine broker in the U.S. to have a refrigerated warehouse in Spain and the first to demand refrigerated shipping and storage at every point of travel to the final market. The decade long battle was won in the late 90's, when Spanish wines were finally recognized for their quality.

As Americans were just learning of Ribera del Duero and Albariño, Ordóñez was beginning his first forays into production, searching out D.O.'s where potential was vast – regions covered with old vineyards of Spain's indigenous varieties, but where winemaking remained primitive and dominated by cooperatives. In unheralded regions such as Toro, Málaga, Calatayud, Jumilla, Alicante, Montsant, and Valdeorras, Ordóñez partnered with the most talented winemakers to produce fine wines where none existed. These were wines that championed Spain's oldest, forgotten vineyards. Jorge now owns Grupo Jorge Ordóñez, a group of five boutique wineries that produce wines from these unheralded regions.

Jorge boasts an impressive list of accolades; twice named one of the Top 20 Wine Personalities of the Year by Robert Parker, who also named him one of the most influential wine personalities of the past 20 years. In 1997, he was awarded the Golden Grape Award by Food & Wine Magazine and the Spanish Premio Nacional de Gastronomía. In 2008, Jorge was named Luminary of the Year at the Nantucket Wine Festival, the first time the award had been bestowed. Amongst these many awards, his proudest achievement has been creating a market for Spanish wine by celebrating its history and indigenous varietals, while making Spanish grape growers and winemakers believe that their wines deserve a place alongside the greatest wines of the world.