

Wine Orbit

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Marques de Vargas Dinner The New Zealand School of Food & Wine

Auckland, 27 March 2013

It turns out that an office building in central Auckland can be transformed into a piece of Spain with right food and wine. At least it goes a long way in creating the right mood for a great night of Spanish dinner. After many years providing excellent facilities for hospitality students in Christchurch, The New Zealand School of Food & Wine moved to Auckland after the earthquake. The school is headed by the highly experienced and accomplished director, Celia Hay. Many excellent courses are available including WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust courses) and Restaurant & Café Management. Today we were treated to a sumptuous Spanish dinner brilliantly prepared by the team at the school. A small consignment of wines, which are not yet available in New Zealand, were shipped from Spain for this occasion.

I attended the dinner as a guest of the school.

Prices are estimates only.

On Arrival

Giró Ribot	"Mare" Gran Reserva Cava 2007	Catalonia	88	4 Stars
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It's elegantly aromatic showing citrus, floral and subtle almond characters on the nose. The palate is beautifully weighted and creamy with crisp acidity and a long, silky finish. A delightful sparkling wine offering delicate fruit intensity and a nicely rounded palate. \$35.00. March 2013.

First Course

Roast peach, goat's cheese, Serrano ham

This entrée combined the creaminess of the cheese with the salty, meaty flavours of this famous Spanish ham, beautifully rounded by the succulent, but not too sweet, roasted peach. An elegant dish, a perfect entry to the dinner, and a delightful partner to sparkling wines.

Giró Ribot	Brut Reserva Cava NV	Catalonia	84	3.5 Stars
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An easy-going sparkling wine with elegant citrus, apple and subtle savoury aromas, followed by a nicely flowing palate. It's refreshing and crisp to the finish. A lovely example of everyday-drinking Cava. \$20.00. March 2013.

Giró Ribot	Avant Garde Reserva Cava NV	Catalonia	90	4.5 Stars
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The bouquet is complex and lifted showing citrus, floral, roasted nut and vanilla notes. It's focused and richly textured on the palate with beautifully integrated acidity, leading to a lengthy, expansive finish. Seriously good. \$45.00. March 2013.

Second Course

Octopus with smoked paprika and garlic

The octopus was cooked slow and long with garlic, and was very tender. It was served with zesty lemon dressing, made with olive oil and garlic, and fragrant smoked paprika which gave subtle depth and warmth to this vibrant dish. Two elegant crisp whites were served. With this delightful dish I preferred the younger, cheaper albariño to the richer, older wine.

Pazo San Mauro	Albariño 2012	Rias Baixas	86	4 Stars
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A lovely pristine expression of the variety displaying citrus, floral and peach characters on the nose. The medium-bodied palate is juicy, intense and crisp with a long, mouth-watering finish. Elegantly fragrant and tasty. At its best: now to 2015. \$20.00. March 2013.

Sanamaro	Albariño & Loureiro 2010	Rias Baixas	88	4 Stars
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This is fuller and richer with yellow peach, floral, almond and subtle vanilla notes. The palate is broad and textured with excellent mid palate weight. Showing some maturity, this will be lovely with savoury, flavoursome dishes. At its best: now to 2015. \$40.00. March 2013.

Third Course

Hay's Canterbury lamb rack with chorizo and broad beans

The lamb was specially shipped from Celia's family farm for this dinner, and it was cooked to a perfect medium-rare. The spicy sausage and creamy beans complemented the meat beautifully, adding extra layers of texture and flavour. It's an elegant dish, although with plenty of tasty flavours, and was brilliantly matched with a mature, silky red that wasn't too bold or gutsy.

Marqués de Vargas	Reserva Privada Rioja 2005	Rioja	91	4.5 Stars
	Smokey and gamey, the gorgeous bouquet shows dark fruits and leather characters with hints of vanilla and roasted nuts. It's rich and sumptuous on the plate with silky texture and plenty of fine tannins. Long and satisfying. At its best: now to 2017.			

Fourth Course

Cordero al Chilindron

A gorgeous lamb stew, it was fragrant, spicy, herby, meaty and sweetly succulent. Each mouthful was packed with delicious flavours and rich texture. Two outstanding reds were served. I rate the younger Ribera del Duero as a better wine, but preferred the older Rioja with this sumptuous dish.

Marqués de Vargas	Reserva Rioja 2008	Rioja	93	5 Stars
	It's beautifully fragrant and complex on the nose displaying game, leather, dark fruit, spice and black truffle characters. The palate is succulent and vibrant with lovely intensity and bright acidity, leading to a superbly long, refreshing finish. Excellent balance and harmony. At its best: now to 2017. \$45.00. March 2013.			

Conde de San Cristóbal	2010	Ribera del Duero	94	5 Stars
	It's youthful and powerful on the nose displaying blue/blackberry, dark plum, floral and cocoa characters. The palate is weighty and succulent with excellent density and velvety texture. It's extremely long on the finish backed by plenty of supple tannins. Very promising. At its best: 2015 to 2022. \$40.00. March 2013.			

Fifth Course

Manchego

After two sensational lamb dishes, this was a welcome follow-up as the degustation was coming to a close. Manchego, made from sheep's milk, is a lovely dense, slightly crumbly cheese with rich creamy texture. It's intense yet elegant, and was served with warmed figs and honey. A brilliant combination of flavours. Loved this dish but not with the wine. The sweetness of the fruit and honey didn't work with the mature dry red.

Marqués de Vargas	Hacienda Pradolagar Rioja 2005	Rioja	95	5 Stars
	An impressive rendition of Rioja, the gloriously complex bouquet shows dark fruit, cedar, vanilla and game characters. It's concentrated and dense on the palate with stunning intensity and a superbly long, smooth finish. The wine shows fabulous maturity and integration with layers of delicious flavours and textures. At its best: now to 2023. \$150.00. March 2013.			

Sixth Course

Dark cacao custard tart with confit of black fruit

The chocolate tart was rich and velvety but not overly sweet, and was beautifully contrasted by the fruit. Lovely balance. A fabulous way to finish a gratifying dinner.