

A Visit to Torres Winery in Pacs del Penedès

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On a recent vacation to Barcelona, my fiancé and I decided to plan a day trip to visit Torres Winery in Pacs, located in the Penedès wine region. The purpose for our expedition was two-fold: to nurture and educate our aspiring “wine-geek” selves; and to break the pleasurable and enviable monotony of idling in one of the most gorgeous cities in existence.

Aboard the chartered taxi, we watched as the striking modernist architecture yielded to the city’s seemingly barren outskirts. The morning’s *café con leche* could not overcome the rhythmic rocking of the automobile and the drabness of geography, and we were soon lulled to a reluctant sleep. In an hour’s time, we awoke to the car swerving as it expertly negotiated the sharp curves of the mountainous hillside; and, to our right, a breathtaking, almost otherworldly view of sprawling, lush green vines signaled the proximity to our destination.

The Bodegas Torres’ Visitors Centre is situated in the heart of the estate, a single-level structure that echoes the nearby picturesque Mas Rabell farmhouse of the Mas La Plana vineyard. (It was during the tour that we learned the significance of Mas La Plana on elevating the Torres name, beating renowned estates such as Chateau Latour in the 1979 Paris Wine Olympiad.) We pulled into the circular driveway and parked beside a made-made reservoir, built to collect the region’s sparse rainfall—just one of the many nods to the Torres’ commitment to environmentally sound practices.

The Visitors Centre, in its effort to position itself as a premier destination for wine enthusiasts of every level, offers a myriad of options: besides the standard winery tour, they offer an exclusive (read: pricier) “VIP” tour, an “Ecotour” that explores Torres’ preservation practices, wine-tasting courses, as well as themed brunches and dinners. We opted for the standard winery tour at 6,10€ per person (approximately \$8 USD).

We were seated in a fairly large auditorium, adorned in deep red velvet, to watch a presentation on the Torres family history. The audience was provided with headphones in order to be able to listen to the presentation in their native language, whether it was English, Spanish, Catalan (the co-official language of Catalonia, in which Barcelona serves as its capital city), French, Russian, or Chinese.

According to the film, though the Torres family had been making wine since at least the 17th century, it was in 1870 that Don Jaime Torres established Bodegas Torres (the “house of Torres”), the wine company that would later come to be known the world over. He had returned to Spain from the Americas after

establishing a great deal of wealth in the oil and shipping trades, and went into the wine business with his brother Miguel. The Spanish Civil War dealt a catastrophic blow to the winery, leaving it in ruins after being bombarded during an attack. Miguel Torres Carbó, a third-generation Torres, rebuilt the winery in 1940 and masterminded its evolution from bulk wine to quality varietal wine producer. Today, under the direction of his son, Miguel A. Torres, Bodegas Torres is comprised of a multitude of successfully branded products (including the renowned Mas La Plana), with extensive properties throughout Spain, Chile, and California.

At the film's conclusion, we were led to an interesting feature of the Visitors Center, the "Tunnel of the Seasons," which is a large, half-cylindrical room in which images of seasonal changes corresponding to the vine life cycle were projected onto the walls. The multisensory experience was replete with ambient temperature changes and vineyard aromas. At its completion, a four-car tram entered from our right, and we were ushered onboard for a guided tour (by way of multilingual recordings *à la Epcot*) of the winery itself.

Riding through the grounds, we were continually impressed with the Torres' dedication to promoting Earth-friendly practices. Bodegas Torres was involved in organic viticulture since 1975, decades before "organic" became the industry's buzzword. The vines are free of herbicides and pesticides; instead, Torres vineyards opts for the use of biological methods such as pheromone capsules that attract male moths, so that they are prevented from breeding with female moths, whose larvae would ultimately feed on the vine.

On the crest of one particular hill, we directed our attention to the massive crusher/destemmers. By force of gravity (and thus reduction of energy consumption), the must is funneled into large stainless steel fermentation vats. Temperature is strictly controlled—According to the Torres website, red wines are fermented at 26°C to 29°C (79°F to 84°F) for eight to twelve days, while white wines are fermented for two to three weeks at temperatures below 18°C (64°F), to maintain their youthfulness. The cap formed by the grape skins floating to the top of fermenting red wines is disrupted by pumping over, so as to further extract aroma, flavor, and tannins. Torres red wines also undergo malolactic fermentation, a secondary fermentation that converts the harsh malic acid into the softer lactic acid.

White wines at Torres are not typically oak aged, with the exception of rare white wines that are fermented in small oak barrels from the start. Meanwhile, all red wines are aged in small barriques—using calculated percentages of French or American oak, depending on the particular wine profile sought—that are stored in tremendous aging cellars spanning the length of two kilometers (1.2 miles), at staggered depths. As the tram snaked through the underground tunnels, the lights brightened to reveal the stunning breadth of the amassed barrels. The dramatic sight left the audience, including myself, in complete awe.

We made our way back to the Visitors Center, after quickly passing the bottling plant and bottle aging cellar. A Torres representative who sat next to me pointed out the solar panels used to produce hot water for the bottling plant, the

installations to collect rainwater, and the white sands laid on the earth above the underground cellars to reflect sunlight and counteract global warming (This last practice is known as the *albedo effect*). Clearly, preserving the environment and mitigating the effects of global warming are at the top of Bodegas Torres' priorities. In fact, they have made it their objective to reduce CO₂ emissions by 30% by the year 2020.

The Tasting Room at the Visitors Center was an austere setting composed of high wood tables blanketed with wine glasses. Our standard wine tour entitled us to one tasting, for which we were poured a meager serving of the 2008 Fransola, from Penedès, which was made of 90% Sauvignon Blanc and 10% of the native Parellada. It appeared bright, pale yellow, and presented with a fruity, complex nose. On the palate, it felt full-bodied yet pleasantly acidic, with oaky and vegetal notes.

Though it was time for us to leave, we decided to splurge on one more tasting: a 2006 Mas La Plana. We had become fascinated with this wine after its incredible buildup during the tour, and could not fathom leaving without a taste. Another aggravatingly economical pour could not take away from what we still recall as one of the best wines we have ever experienced. Bright ruby color in the glass, not quite inky, with a warm fragrant nose of ripe cherries and tobacco. On the palate it was complex and long lasting, allowing us to savor the evolving fruit and smoky flavors.

We exited by way of the wine shop that, at a quick glance, offered the entire spectrum of Torres products (which includes dessert wines, rosés, and brandies). We settled on purchasing a waiter's corkscrew as a souvenir (for a wine-geek can never have too many). As the backdrop of the picturesque vineyard faded away, we reflected on what we had learned, and sat in envy of the winemaker's life, at least until we fell asleep.

Reference

Torres. (2010). Retrieved November 27, 2010, from <http://www.torres.es>

Nominating faculty: Professor Karen Goodlad, Hospitality Management 2402, Department of Hospitality Management, School of Professional Studies, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

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