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The kingdom of Bobal



An intensive (and blind) look at Spain's third most planted grape.

Today I shine a spotlight on a Spanish grape variety that has for long been dismissed, but now makes me feel proud of what many producers achieve with it. The tasting described below is unrivalled because, for the first time, almost 60 different Bobal were gathered on the same table to be compared blind.

I had been discussing such a tasting for some time with Bruno Murciano, a top sommelier, awarded Best Sommelier in Spain in 2008. He started his career at the Hôtel de Crillon in Paris, where he worked with the renowned sommelier David Biraud, now at the Paris Mandarin Oriental. Later, he moved to London and worked for a long time as a sommelier at the Ritz. Today, Bruno has his own UK wine-importing company and also, together with his brother José Luis, runs a fascinating winery focused on Bobal in Utiel-Requena. He truly is a Bobal

ambassador.

Bruno took the challenge of selecting and preparing the tasting, which would have been impossible 20 years ago when Bobal was out of favour.

According to data supplied by the OIV in 2017, Bobal is the third most planted variety in Spain with 62,000 ha (153,200 acres), well behind Tempranillo (203,000 ha) and Airén (217,000 ha) and closely followed by Garnacha (62,000 ha). This figure contrasts with the 105,000 ha of Bobal planted in early 1990s.

Bobal is found in Castilla-La Mancha (60% of all plantings) and Valencia (40%). It has its particular golden mile in the Utiel-Requena appellation, and specifically on the ferrous clays of the villages of Utiel, Caudete de las Fuentes and Requena, forming a celebrated location for Bobal.

However, there are also remarkable Bobals from La Mancha, Manchuela, Ribera del Júcar and Vino de Pago El Terrerazo. The Bobal Kingdom, as Bruno explains, encompasses those appellations, all located in the warm south-east corner of Spain, quite high in elevation and sheltered from Mediterranean influences.

Let us take a closer look at the regions of the Bobal Dominion.

Ribera del Júcar, an appellation traversed by the Júcar River, is located west of La Mancha, specifically in the southern part of Cuenca province. Elevations vary between 650 and 750 m (2,130–2,460 ft) and soils are calcareous.

Manchuela is also in the province of Cuenca, between Ribera del Júcar to the west and Utiel-Requena to the east. It is a plateau at 500 to 600 m with peaks at 1,100 m (3,610 ft).

Utiel-Requena is also high country (600 to 900 m) and, although it is in the province of Valencia, its people, culture, climate and soils are very close to their La Mancha neighbours. (It is a full hour's drive from the city of Valencia on the touristic Levante coast.)

El Terrerazo is a Vino de Pago appellation located well inland, in the highest, north-facing, calcareous part of Utiel-Requena appellation.

All these regions are quite hot and experience a high degree of continentality, a climate that helps to fully ripen Bobal with its medium to long growing cycle. Spring frost was a common threat in the past, but no longer, or at least not in recent vintages.

Utiel-Requena and the neighbouring regions have been a nucleus for the co-operative movement. For instance, the appellation's 34,000 ha (84,000 acres) of vineyards are shared among 5,804 growers and only 94 wineries. In Manchuela the ratio is even more marked: 72,000 ha and just 35 wineries. The region has been, and still is, a bulk-wine production hub.

On the other hand, both private wineries and co-operatives have been focusing a great deal of attention on bottled wines, especially Bobal, since the beginning of this century.

It was back in 1999 that the first bottled Bobal appeared thanks to Casa Don Angel, a classical winery within the region. At the same time, Toni Sarrión, the Bobal maverick, also started to bottle it. Toni is the person behind Finca Terrerazo, which obtained the **Vino de Pago** classification in 2010. Previously it was a table wine and a Vino de la Tierra. He produced a

bottled Bobal in 1999 that never reached the market. The 4,000 bottles of this historic wine remain in the cellar of Sarrión's winery for use exclusively at special events.

Toni is a very relevant name for Bobal, as is evident in my ratings for his wines. Back in 1998 he studied oenology in Requena. At that time, the college recommended Bobal exclusively for rosé production. Inspired by several trips to regions such as Rioja and Burgundy, Toni decided to bet on his local grape. At the time, Cabernet, Merlot and Tempranillo were far more fashionable than Bobal, and the Spanish Department of Agriculture was encouraging growers to pull up Bobal in favour of those supposedly 'improving' varieties. As a consequence, thousands of hectares were grubbed up.

But why did Bobal have such a bad reputation?

Surely because Bobal vines suffer from uneven ripening and can produce bunches of different sizes on the same vine. It is common to find clusters weighing 200 g (7 oz), 500 g and 1 kg on the same plant. Furthermore, in many of these clusters, particularly on younger vines, are grapes at very different ripening stages: well ripened, green, and overripe berries. When that happens, the wine produced can have a decidedly rustic character. As a consequence, a bitter finish is often found in lower-quality wines. Bobal might be challenging in this sense, but with a sorting table this can be avoided, with underripe grapes excluded from the fermentation tank for better wines. Old vines are better regulated and exhibit more even ripening.

On the other hand, Bobal is productive, and capable of giving relatively high yields even in dry conditions. This is why old vines have survived and today represent a valuable treasure. In fact, lots of the wines tasted below are from old vineyards.



With these viticultural peculiarities, winemaking has to be precisely executed. Over-extraction can result in rusticity and the most refined examples are produced by long but gentle extraction during fermentation. The alcohol level of the wines is generally high; Bobal produces full, rich, wild red wines.

My blind tasting was ordered by vintage and I was quite surprised by the vintage variation. The 2017s were a bit rough; 2016 displayed elegance, and bitterness was kept under control; 2015 was a bit of a disappointment; 2014 was a fresher vintage and the wines displayed great finesse and elegance; while 2013 is showing advanced maturity compared with 2012.

I tasted one flight of fresh rosés, which I found a bit simplistic but very well managed in terms of winemaking.

In general, the average quality of the wines presented in the tasting was unexpectedly high. In fact, more than a dozen of the samples had a really good quality level and rating.

Particularly well-made, authentic Bobals are:

- **Gracias, ¿Y tú de quién eres?**
- **Vinos y Sabores Ecológicos, Aniceta Bobal de Ángeles Bobal**
- **Murviedro, La Casa de la Seda** (from the large Murviedro winery)
- and the idiosyncratic **Familia López Días Alejo, Respeto**.

In addition, in the Bobal Kingdom there is an array of outstanding examples of the potential of Bobal:

- **Bodegas Ponce, PF** (Manchuela)
- **Bruno and José Luis Murciano, L'Alegría**
- **Dominio de la Vega, Finca la Beata**
- **Coviñas, Adnos Bobal** (from an important co-operative producing 12 million bottles)
- and **Manuel Manzaneque, Mil Cepas** (Manuel junior started his own project back in 2011).

A further four wines blew my mind and made me feel proud of Bobal: **Finca Terrerazo** and **Quincha Corral** from Toni Sarrión, **El Sueño** from the Murciano brothers, and **Signo** from Finca Sandoval can be considered top Spanish wines in its own right.

I hope you will enjoy discovering all those Bobal wines. Furthermore, I am sure that in the future more wineries and projects will boost the reputation of this corner of Spain. There is still long road to travel, but Bobal is today a very welcome reality with an even more promising future.

I would like to thank Bruno Murciano, who kindly prepared all the wines, selected the venue for the tasting and looked after the logistics of the blind tasting.

Before presenting my tasting notes, I would like, wearing my sommelier hat, to enthusiastically share with you one of the most surprising, simple but delicious food and wine pairings I have encountered. It was in the tiny, traditional bar that Bruno and his family run in the village of Caudete de las Fuentes. Bruno's mother offered me a cake made of salted sardines and local bacon, such a salty preparation that came with a small piece of really bitter chocolate. As a pairing, of course, a glass of a youthful Bobal. Yummy, yummy! What an explosion of contrasted flavours. I will retain such a unique taste in my mind forever. (I hope Nick will not mind me entering his territory for a day.)



Six rosés are followed by 52 red wines grouped by vintage and then listed alphabetically by producer.

ROSE

- Coviñas, Enterizo Bobal 2018 Utiel-Requena *Bobal. Coviñas is a big group comprising ten different Valencian co-operatives. It was created in 1965 and produces 12 million bottles.*
Tasted blind. This is a charming rosé wine, very vivid and youthful. It has lots of freshness and rich fruit. It is directed by ripe strawberry, candied fruit and citrus-peel aromas. It will not keep long but it is very expressive now. I enjoy the simplicity of this textbook, modern Bobal rosé wine. (FC)12.5% Drink 2018-2019
16
- Gracias, Rosé Bobal 2017 Manchuela *Bobal. Stainless-steel fermentation. Eight hours' maceration and three months' lees contact.*
Tasted blind. A very intense colour for a rosé wine. It is slightly drying and displays lots of sweet fruit and leafy character. On the palate, it is dense and ripe and already mature. Do not expect a lively style. (FC)13.5% Drink 2018-2019
14.5
- Iranzo, Cañada Honda Bobal 2018 Utiel-Requena *Bobal, fermented in stainless steel.*
Tasted blind. The wine is clean and youthful, displaying a lot of sweet strawberries as well as bubblegum notes. It is intense but slightly monothematic. Easy drinking and a bit sweet. (FC)12.5% Drink 2018-2020
14.5
- Ladrón de Lunas, Bisila 2017 Utiel-Requena *Bobal. The winery was established back in 1916. Stainless-steel fermentation.*
Tasted blind. Pale rosé wine. Light and showing ripe red-fruit aromas. It is well made but it has slightly lost its vibrancy. I would prefer to taste a younger vintage. (FC)12% Drink 2018-2019
14.5
- Latorre, Parreño Bobal 2018 Utiel-Requena *Bobal. Stainless-steel fermentation.*
Tasted blind. Intense rosé colour with some flashes of violet. Very youthful and refreshing,

really fruity with green raspberry and citrus notes such as lime. Good winemaking and a lovely easy-drinking quality. A light and refreshing wine. (FC)12.5% Drink 2018-2020
15

- **Bodegas Utielanas, Vega Infante Bobal 2018 Utiel-Requena Bobal.** *Produced by a local co-operative based in the village of Utiel. Stainless-steel fermentation.*
Tasted blind. Very intense and bright colour with violet hints. It has an intense and refreshing nose showing strawberries, apple and bubblegum. Quite delicate, fresh and well filled with fruit. Approachable and easy to drink. Technically well made. (FC)12.5% Drink 2018-2020
15.5

RED - 2018

- **Murviedro, Pugnus Bobal 2018 Utiel-Requena Bobal.** *Young wine produced from old vines. Murviedro is a significant producer within Utiel-Requena founded in 1927.*
Tasted blind. It has an intense character and is full of youthfulness. It shows ripe blackcurrants and blueberries with a touch of herbs. The tannins are really mellowed and ripe. It has a soft mid palate. An easy-drinking wine, simple on aromatics but vivid and pleasurable. An affordable, well-made young wine. (FC)13% Drink 2019-2022
15.5

RED - 2017

- **AltoLandon, Mil Historias Bobal 2017 Manchuela Bobal** *matured for four months in oak.*
Tasted blind. It has a medium-intensity nose showing ripe black fruit, rubber, chocolate, oak and touch of Mediterranean herbs. On the palate, it is juicy and ample showing lots of sweet fruit. The tannins are firm, and it lingers due to an intense bitterness. Slightly restrained. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2022
15
- **Aranléon, Sólo 2017 Utiel-Requena 80% Bobal, 20% Syrah.** *Fermented in concrete tanks. 11 months in French and Hungarian oak barrels.*
Tasted blind. The nose is really open and with noticeable alcohol. It shows black fruit, spices and wicker. It is a huge wine that you can chew! It is firm and rustic, with ostentatious concentration and power - enormous but not refined. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2022
15
- **Las Calzadas, Tinácula 2017 Ribera del Júcar Bobal.** *This is a really authentic winery as it bases its production on wines matured in tinajas (clay amphorae). This wine has spent five months in them.*
Tasted blind. The wine is really dark and deep in colour. It has a leafy green character and is dangerously playing with over-cooked notes. It shows black olives, prunes, plums and jam. The wine seems a bit oxidised, probably due its maturation in tinajas. I would love to see this wine with more precision and less oxidative character. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2020
14.5
- **Casa Lo Alto, Manzán 2017 Valencia 50- and 70-year-old Bobal in Venta del Moro** *at 700 m elevation. Spontaneous fermentation and 12 months' ageing in barrels.*
Tasted blind. It shows concentrated black fruit and lots of herbal notes such as thyme and medicinal herbs. The oak is noticeable but well judged. It is a serious wine, quite vibrant, appetising but rustic. The tannins are firm and slightly bitter. The wine has good-quality fruit and is really charged; however, it also displays a lingering tension. I would love to see how it

will evolve. A powerful and tense Bobal of remarkable intensity. (FC)15% Drink 2019-2025
16

- **La Comarcal, Carmen Bobal 2017 Valencia 100% Bobal.** *La Comarcal Viticultores Ambulantes is a promising winery created in 2017 and owned by Javi Revert (previously working at Celler del Roure) and Víctor Marqués (having worked at Casa Lo Alto, Murviedro). They work together with local growers to produce 'out of the ordinary' wines. Carmen takes its name from a grower who at 75 years old still takes care of his ancient Bobal vines. The wine is aged for 12 months in concrete egg.*

Tasted blind. The nose is really open and slightly wild. It shows herbs, tart wild red berries and a touch of earth. On the palate, it is intense, deep fruited and really creamy, extremely clay-textured for a red wine. This is a project to keep a close eye on – the fruit is there but I would love to see more cleanness and definition. Promising! (FC)14% Drink 2019-2022
15.5

- **Dussart-Pedrón Bobal 2017 Utiel-Requena 70-year-old Bobal vines.** *Hand harvested, four days of cold maceration and wild-yeast fermentation. Seven months maturing in oak and tinajas (clay vessels).*

Tasted blind. Very pleasant and fruit-driven nose. It has a vivid character far removed from the average Utiel-Requena red wine. Medium bodied, bright red-cherry and blackberry flavours. The tannins are really polished and well defined. I really like the deep fruit character it has, displaying freshness over power. It is remarkable and quite easy to drink. An unconventional, fruit-driven Bobal. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2025
16

- **Gratias, ¿Y tú de quién eres? 2017 Manchuela** *The wine is predominantly Bobal co-planted with many rare local grapes such as Marisancho (a local synonym for Pardillo), Teta de Vaca, Pedro Juan, Moravia Agria, Moravia Dulce, Cegivera, Rojal, Valencín and Albillo. Manual harvest, whole-bunch fermentation and aged in tinajas, barrels and stainless steel. 5,300 bottles produced.*

Tasted blind. The wine has intense aromas of wild berries, strawberries and red cherries. It is really rounded and juicy, with superbly ripened tannins. It is a pleasant wine that displays bright fruit and vibrancy. The oak is almost unnoticeable. An authentic and very sincere wine that is all about gluttony! (FC)14% Drink 2019-2025
16.5

- **Iranzo Bobal 2017 Utiel-Requena Bobal.** *No added sulphites. Old-established winery dating back to 1916.*

Tasted blind. The nose is undoubtedly hot-climate. It is a very ripe wine showing a vigorous character. I like the fruit charge it has: ripe but not over-cooked. The tannins are firm, slightly rustic for such a young wine. The fruit character is quite pure and clean, very juicy indeed. On the back palate, it has lots of chocolate and coffee aromas. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2022
15.5

- **Jiménez-Vila, La Novicia 2017 Utiel-Requena Bobal wine with a short passage in oak.** *Jiménez-Vila is a tiny, recently created producer.*

Tasted blind. This is quite a promising wine from a very unknown producer. It shows an intense nose with complex aromas of ripe black fruit, chocolate, tar and vanilla. It takes a modern approach with clean and mellow fruit. It is voluminous with generous alcohol and well-ripened tannins. It is a powerful Bobal, finishing with a lovely lavender and herb back palate. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2023
16

- **Ladrón de Lunas, Crianza 2017 Utiel-Requena Old-vine Bobal, oak aged.**

Tasted blind. The wine shows consistent fruit and mellowed tannins. However, it seems the oak is too noticeable and has hidden the fruit. It displays vanilla, cinnamon, cloves and a

certain dusty character. I would love to see it with less oak, as the fruit is promising and broad. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2022

15

- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez, Fatum Tempranillo/Bobal 2017 La Mancha *Bobal and Tempranillo. The vines were planted 35 years ago in the village of Pozoamargo. Extremely low yields of 15 hl/ha. Four days of cold maceration. Malolactic fermentation in stainless-steel tanks.*

Tasted blind. The nose is intense and shows garrigue herbs and lots of pungent spices such as black pepper. It is well ripened, with fruit lying beneath the spiciness. It is very rounded and broad, like a fruit explosion on the palate, lots of sweet-related texture and a voluminous approach. It has a characteristic bitter and rustic back palate. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2024

15.5

- José V Pardo, Alboenea Bobal 2017 Utiel-Requena *Bobal. Old vines yielding less than 1 kg/ha. Unoaked wine.*

Tasted blind. The wine is really youthful, slightly raw. It shows an intense, ripe black-fruit character and jamminess. You really can feel the well-ripened fruit. On the nose, it is more intense than complex. The palate is big, a full packet of black fruit, firm and displaying slightly harsh tannins. Lots of power and density but I would love a bit more elegance. It has a rustic and powerful finish with dominating bitterness. The potential is there but it has gone a bit far in terms of extraction. (FC)13% Drink 2019-2022

15

- Pigar Bobal 2017 Utiel-Requena *Bobal from a garage winery (quite literally – before being a winery the space was used to keep two cars). The project focuses on recovering ancient Bobal vineyards.*

Tasted blind. The wine tastes really modern to me, showing savoury fruit and lots of herbal notes such as mint and sweet spices. The tannins are particularly well worked: extremely sweet and rounded. The wine is impeccable, really immaculate, but it almost tastes like a New World wine. Very savoury and deep. A super-attractive discovery and worth keeping an eye on. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2025

16

- Ponce, Estrecha 2017 Manchuela *Old-vine Bobal from a single vineyard. Bodegas Ponce is a remarkable Spanish producer. I admire the work they are doing in Manchuela. Their PF cuvée showed extremely well today, but La Estrecha did not shine this time.*

Tasted blind. Slightly closed and green. It is a totally idiosyncratic style, looking for finesse and depth over power. The nose shows delicate, ripe fruit but it is slightly monothematic. On the palate, it is soft, restrained and shows lightness and acidity. It is a risky but extremely interesting style. I am sure they will get more refinement in later vintages. (FC)12.5% Drink 2019-2022

15

- Ponce, PF 2017 Manchuela *Mainly Bobal. PF are the initials for Pie Franco, the Spanish term used for ungrafted vineyards. 90-year-old vines with some Garnacha, Moravia Agria and Marisancho (local name for Pardillo) also planted. Aged for 10 months in 600-litre oak barrels. Tiny production of just 9,000 bottles.*

Tasted blind. This is a really substantial nose! It shows lots of black fruit, strawberry and a lollipop touch. I like it because it is intense without being extreme in ripeness. The nose is dynamic; it starts closed and intriguing but opens up beautifully. Well made in terms of texture, superbly polished and elegant through the palate. It is a courageous and authentic style, softly extracted like a tisane. (FC)13% Drink 2019-2025

17

- Pago de Tharsys, Carlota Suria Bobal 2017 Utiel-Requena *100% Bobal.*

Tasted blind. The wine shows intense black-fruit aromas, it is clean and precisely made. It is less structured than the average Bobal from Utiel-Requena, however it has good drinkability. The oak is noticeable but still well placed. Really spicy, subtle and rounded on the back palate. Nicely made and easy to drink. (FC)13% Drink 2019-2025

15.5

- Vera de Estenas, El Bobal de Estenas 2017 Utiel-Requena *Bobal. Matured in large earthenware tinajas for four months. At the beginning of the 20th century tinajas were very common in the region, and a few producers are trying to revive their use.*

Tasted blind. The nose has a pungent intensity; it has a touch of rubber and tar overlaying the fruit. On the palate, it is slightly disordered but not without merit: the tannins are firm but not drying and the acidity is very elevated for such a ripe profile. It lingers through the palate. It is not a standard wine; the flavours are slightly attenuated and closed, showing meatiness on the back palate. It is a freestyle, wild wine. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2022

15

- Vinos y Sabores Ecológicos, Aniceta Bobal de Ángeles Bobal 2017 Utiel-Requena *50- to 100-year-old Bobal vines. Low yields of less than 2,500 kg/ha.*

Tasted blind. This is a stimulating approach to Bobal. Explosive and extremely concentrated, it is really muscular and broad. The fruit is extremely ripe and intense showing black plums, herbs and smashed blackberries. The fruit concentration and quality is superb, with firm tannins and generous alcohol. Blockbuster Bobal with more power than refinement. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2025

16.5

RED - 2016

- Casas de Moya, Maria de Moya Bobal 2016 Valencia *90% Bobal and 10% Merlot planted at 850 m. Hand harvested, then long maceration on the skins (almost 35 days in total). Aged for 12 months in large casks and barrels.*

Tasted blind. The nose has very good fruit impact showing blackberries, plums and prunes. It is a pleasant style. It is, in the best sense, simple and enjoyable, to be drunk without much contemplation. The oak is well integrated and everything in the wine is mellowed. Not really complex and slightly drying on the back palate, but super-pleasurable. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2022

15.5

- Ferrer-Gallego, Endemic Bobal 2016 Vino de España *Ferrer-Gallego is the family name of three brothers. They produce just one wine, from two hectares of Bobal planted on sandy soils. Produced in a natural way, without sulphites. No clarification or filtration.*

Tasted blind. Earth notes, leafy character and a touch of leather dominate the nose. The palate is soft and delicate and lingering due to that acidity. A touch of farmyard aromas on the palate. It is an idiosyncratic style within the region. (FC)15.5% Drink 2019-2022

15

- Hispano-Suizas, Bobos Finca Casa la Borracha 2016 Utiel-Requena *100% Bobal from 70-year-old vines. Hand harvested in 15-kg boxes. Cold maceration for three days. Fermented in 400-litre American oak barrels and aged for 10 months in French oak barrels. Bobos is an old synonym for Bobal.*

Tasted blind. This wine is renowned as one of the best Bobals in Spain, however the 2016 showed a classical style favouring the oak over the fruit. It has remarkable acidity, but fruit is slightly hidden. Not an over-extracted wine, it is clear that the winery is looking for delicacy over power. However, I still think the oak charge is too evident. Very much looking forward to

seeing new vintages of it, as I am sure the progression will be stunning. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2025

16

- **Lo Necesario Bobal 2016 Valencia** *45-year-old Bobal planted on sandy soils. Hand harvested and aged in French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. The wine shows a classical profile, with a marked presence of oak. The nose is open and displays earthy and forest-floor aromas, accompanied by black fruit and a touch of toasted grain. Medium bodied with grainy tannins. The bitterness is noticeable on the back palate. Intensely oaked version of Bobal. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2025

15.5

- **Familia López Días Alejo, 6º Elemento 2016 Vino de España** *70-year-old Bobal vines located in Venta del Moro. Very long maceration and fermentation in parcels of 1,000 kg. It is made in a natural way with wild-yeast fermentation.*

Tasted blind. This is a personal wine that has lots of followers. It is a well-regarded natural producer and a sought-after wine. The nose at first brings up nail-varnish notes, a slightly unorthodox nose. The aromatics are really green and herbal such as garrigue, dill and green leaves. The wine was decanted and left for one hour; however, after that time, the wine still failed to shine. The texture is chalky. It leaves me completely at a loss, as I am not particularly responsive to natural wines. I wish Walter Speller were sitting next to me to get his opinion; he is far better than me at assessing natural wines. (FC)15.5% Drink 2019-2020

14?

- **Manuel Manzaneque Suárez, Mil Cepas 2016 Valencia** *This is the personal project of the son of Manuel Manzaneque. After spending time in Château Le Bon Pasteur together with Michel Rolland and having spent 10 years as a technical director of the family business, Manuel Manzaneque junior started his own project back in 2011. He produces wine from several appellations, DO Valencia, DO La Mancha and Vino de la Tierra de Castilla. The Mil Cepas Bobal is from a single vineyard known as La Palomera and located in Casas del Rey (Valencia). It comes from 60-year-old vines planted on sandy soils. Cold maceration and aged for 14 months in French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. Great concentration of fruit, with touches of tar and carob. Attractive ripe nose. The palate has firm fruit and is concentrated. The bitterness is kept well under control. I like the palate profile; it is savoury and meaty in a good way. Very serious and good quality of fruit. Succulence and substance in my glass. It has an outstanding back palate displaying smoke, jam and a meaty touch. It seems that Manuel Manzaneque junior is as talented as his father. What a wine family! (FC)14% Drink 2019-2025

17

- **Las Mercedes, Las Mercedes del Cabriel 2016 Utiel-Requena** *80-year-old Bobal planted at 800 m elevation. Matured in oak for 18 months.*

Tasted blind. This is a more classical approach to Bobal with a dominating oak sensation and showing attractive maturity. It has lots of spicy notes such as cloves, a leafy character and extremely ripe black fruit. On the palate, it has plenty of sweet fruit with bitterness kept well under control, quite soft and velvety in texture. It is an elegant style with prominent alcohol and really ripe fruit character. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2022

15.5

- **Montesanco, MÓN Bobal 2016 Utiel-Requena** *This is the first wine produced under this new branding. The project takes place at the former Casa La Viña winery, a property that has been producing wine since 1882. Century-old Bobal vineyards in Requena at 730 m elevation. Aged in new French oak barrels for 12 months.*

Tasted blind. The wine is creamy on the nose, it displays sweet black fruit, jam and Indian ink. On the palate, it is dense, almost gummy, with lots of dairy notes. The quality potential is

there, as the wine is really concentrated and voluminous. It is slightly dry on the back palate. Hopefully, time in bottle will make it more polished. (FC)15.5% Drink 2019-2025

16

- **Moratalla, La Casilla de Adrián Bobal 2016 Manchuela 100% Bobal.**

Tasted blind. The nose is really open and shows lots of sweet spices, oak and toast; fruit is slightly underneath. Less extracted and more gentle than the average for Bobal. I like the softness and balance that it has, although the finish is slightly warm and has the characteristic Bobal bitterness. Starting to evolve and very open now. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2022

15.5

- **Bruno Murciano, L'Alegria 2016 Utiel-Requena Old-vine Bobal from the village of Caudete de las Fuentes. Produced by top sommelier Bruno Murciano and his brother José Luis, who is in charge of the vineyard and the winemaking. Entry-level wine, production less than 12,000 bottles per year.**

Tasted blind. Very intense and aromatic, you can notice a great fruit charge and quality. Spiciness dominates over the fruit, showing cinnamon and nutmeg. I really like the style. It is hedonistic and broad, with concentrated sweet fruit on the mid palate. The freshness and acidity is noteworthy, as it balances and lengthens the wine. It is a mouth-watering Bobal. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2025

17

- **Bruno Murciano, El Sueño 2016 Utiel-Requena Century-old Bobal vineyard planted on calcareous soil. It comes from a top cru known as Las Brunas, located at 900 m elevation. Hand harvested, cold maceration and aged in barrels.**

Tasted blind. Inky and very deep in colour. Very intense, complex and elevated nose. You can feel the old vines on the palate, mouth-watering quality! It has tons of massive fruit and concentration but still keeps a remarkable shape. Vivid and firm, quite packed and still fresh for such concentration. Lovely balancing acidity and elegant herbal garrigue flavour on the back palate. I am thrilled! Not drying despite such a charge. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2030

18

- **Murviedro, La Casa de la Seda 2016 Utiel-Requena Murviedro is a big company founded in 1927. 70-year-old Bobal vines yielding less than 1.5 kg/vine. Aged for six months in oak.**

Tasted blind. It shows lots of sweet fruits, chocolate, vanilla and generous oak. The wine looks pretty modern to me. It is ample, broad and offers extremely sweet tannins. Easy and pleasurable despite such a rich fruit charge. Very friendly and polite, replete with sweet fruit. It has lots of sweet spices and figs on the back palate. Impeccably made. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2025

16.5

- **Hacienda de la Pajarera, Especies Nativas Bobal 2016 Valencia 65-year-old Bobal planted at 650 m elevation on sandy soils. Hand harvested in 10-kg boxes. Cold maceration and aged for 14 months in French oak.**

Tasted blind. This is a clean and well-made wine. Pleasurable and quite easy to drink, with an intense ripe character showing black olives, bramble fruit and figs. Well-built and quite approachable Bobal style. Excellent drinkability. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2025

15.5

- **Pigar Bobal 2016 Utiel-Requena Bobal from a garage winery (quite literally - before being a winery the space was used to keep two cars). The project focuses on recovering ancient Bobal vineyards.**

Tasted blind. This is an extremely extracted and inky wine. Flavourful nose showing pencil lead, violets and well-ripened black fruits. The palate is prominent, with a firm character and slightly drying tannins. Very good quality of fruit and remarkable winemaking. Sweet and kindly character on the back palate, finishing with a minty lift. Modern but really hedonistic

(FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2025

16.5

- *Finca Sandoval, Signo 2016 Manchuela 90% Bobal and 10% Syrah. The old Bobal vines were planted back in 1939. Fermented with indigenous yeast and matured in oak for less than one year. The Spanish wine expert and well-regarded journalist Victor de la Serna is behind the project.*

Tasted blind. It has remarkable sweet dark fruit on the nose, a touch of violet and a herbal lift. It is really juicy and broad, with a consistent palate based on sweet fruit. It is voluminous and has tons of fruit. Well balanced and remarkable in terms of texture: velvety and not drying. The oak is noticeable, but of great quality. Gentle and sweet back palate. Very hedonistic and well-delineated Bobal. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2030

17.5

- *Señorío del Júcar, Tranco del Lobo Bobal 2016 Manchuela 80-year-old Bobal vines from a high-elevation vineyard in Manchuela. Oak aged.*

Tasted blind. It is a conventional wine with a bit of everything. Ripe black fruit, oak and leafy character. I like its chalky tannins and the well-delineated palate. It is well made and not too extracted. Slightly earthy and rustic on the back palate. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2023

15.5

- *Sentencia 2016 Vino de España Old Bobal vines and a bit of Garnacha. Tiny winery headed by Alberto Pedrón. The winery is located in Requena, but the wine is bottled without appellation. 12 months' ageing in French oak.*

Tasted blind. The wine is starting to evolve. It shows lots of herbal notes, mint, medicinal herbs and leafy character. The fruit is slightly underneath. On the palate, it is dense, with an inky texture and filled with chalky tannins. I am unsure of its ageing capacity. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2022

15

RED - 2015

- *Carres, Membrillera 2015 Utiel-Requena Bobal. Five months' ageing in oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. The wine shows development and it is very open now. A mature nose of mushroom, earth and cherry liqueur. I like it in terms of texture, as the tannins are well placed and mellowed. However, there is a leathery touch on the palate that does not let the fruit fully express itself. The evolution and the oak character are triumphing over the fruit. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2022

15

- *Gratias, Maximas 2015 Manchuela Old vines of Bobal planted on clay and calcareous soils in the villages of Alborea and Serradiel. Hand harvested and cold macerated for 48 hours. Aged for 12 months in used French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. It is full of ripe black-fruit aromas with a touch of tar, herbal character and spiciness. After time in the glass it loses the tarry note, and starts to show more complex earthy aromas. Quite polished on the palate, with an elegant texture. However, the alcohol is a bit warm. Well made and pleasurable, looking for refinement rather than power. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2025

15.5

- *Latorre, Duque de Arcas Solo Bobal 2015 Utiel-Requena Bobal. 45-year-old vineyards planted between 600 and 800 m elevation. Limited yields of 4,000 kg/ha. 12 months' ageing in French and American oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. The wine seems to have suffered from premature oxidation. It is vinous, with the

fruit lying underneath a nail-varnish sensation. Slightly dusty and farmyardy. I would prefer a younger and more youthful version of it. (FC)14% Drink 2017-2019

14

- *Murviedro, Sericis Cepas Viejas Bobal 2015 Utiel-Requena 100% old-vine Bobal. Long skin maceration and eight months' ageing in French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. On the nose, it has medium concentration but it is complex and open. The fruit is developing but well supported by notable acidity. It is quite easy and expressive. It is not the archetypal fruit bomb of the region, it is tamed and rounded. A lingering and well-managed wine. (FC)13% Drink 2018-2022

15.5

- *Mustiguillo, Finca Terrerazo 2015 Pago El Terrerazo 100% Bobal. This is a pioneering Bobal wine. The vineyard was planted between 1945 and 1970. The estate gained the Vino de Pago category in 2010. Toni Sarrión, the maverick producer behind the project, has showed the world that wine made from Bobal can be as good as any other varietal. Hand harvested, cold maceration, double sorting table and long post-fermentation maceration. 14 months in French oak.*

Tasted blind. The Terrerazo 2015 has the same rich fruit as ever. However, I found it to be more refined and concentrated than previous vintages. I actually find vibrancy and depth. The fruit charge perfectly holds the tannin. It is really youthful for a 2015 and is flawlessly made. It has bright, ripe fruit and lots of herbal character. It really shone during the blind tasting. Hats off to this Bobal! (FC)14% Drink 2019-2025

17.5

- *Finca San Blas Bobal 2015 Utiel-Requena Single-vineyard wine from a plot called El Pitorral located at 750 m elevation. Hand harvested. Fermented in second-use French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. The nose is very open and it has a developing fruit character. Ripe black fruit and complex aromas of toast, dairy and coffee. It is a classic style, quite polished on the palate, with an evident presence of good-quality oak and a touch of farmyard on the back palate. A classic and oaky version of Bobal. (FC)14.5% Drink 2018-2020

15.5

- *Sierra Norte, Cerro Bercial Ladera Los Cantos 2015 Utiel-Requena 65% Bobal, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon. The vineyard is planted at 900 m elevation. Hand harvested, cold macerated and aged for 18 months in French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. The wine has medium intensity, showing really ripe fruit character, leafy and peppery notes. It is slightly advanced in maturity. The tannins are polished, although it lacks the fruit charge expected for Bobal. It is a mature style, on the classic side. (FC)14% Drink 2019-2022

15

- *Vega Moragona, 60's Bobal 2015 Ribera del Júcar 100% Bobal produced in a co-operative. Aged for nine months in 500-litre French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. The nose is undoubtedly warm-climate, it shows chocolate, jam and oaky notes. The sweet spices and toast are prominent at the moment and hide the fruit. The palate profile is well delineated and pleasurable, not excessively dry. It is a classic style, with obvious oak. I am sure the wine has its followers, as it is well-charged with sweet spices and shows some development. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2022

15

RED - 2014

- *Celler CataRuz, Maneras de Vivir 2014 Valencia Bobal and Syrah blend. The vineyard is*

located in Hoces del Cabirel at 900 m elevation. Hand harvested and aged in French oak barrels for 14 months.

Tasted blind. The wine is developing and showing elegant mushroom and earthy character. You can feel the ripeness and the warmth of the climate. However, it also has a herbal and minty touch that lifts it. It has a lingering, bitter and herbal finish. (FC)13.5% Drink 2018-2022
15.5

- *Coviñas, Adnos Bobal 2014 Utiel-Requena Bobal from a major co-operative within Utiel Requena. It comes from two different plots named El Matorral and El Rubiales, located at 850 and 720 m elevation. Very low yields of less than 2 kg/vine. 24 months' ageing in French and American oak.*

Tasted blind. I am especially happy after uncovering the bottle because Coviñas is a principal co-operative - very proud to see good things being done by them. The wine has a massive oak charge, but the fruit is so vibrant and present that it totally holds it. Mediterranean freshness on my palate. Not massive texture, quite well built and mellowed firm tannins. The oak charge is noticeable on the palate, displaying lots of sweet spices. The fruit expression is great, ripe but not excessive. It has a classic palate and a remarkable quality. (FC)13.5% Drink 2019-2025
17

- *Familia López Días Alejo, Respeto 2014 Vino de España Bobal vines located in Venta del Moro. Wild-fermented and aged for 24 months in oak.*

Tasted blind. I had a huge surprise when I uncovered the bottle. If I had my reservations about the entry-level wine from this producer (called 6º Elemento), I was quite amazed by this top cuvée: a really remarkable natural wine. It is savoury, with vivid fruit expression alongside a touch of spices and a meaty character. I like the delineation it has, fluid and delicate, displaying chalky tannins and well-placed fruit character. It has very good momentum providing drinkability and tons of pleasure. A remarkable and quality-oriented natural wine! (FC)15% Drink 2019-2025
16.5

- *Dominio de la Vega, Finca la Beata Bobal 2014 Utiel-Requena Single-vineyard, centenary Bobal, located at 780 m elevation. Hand harvested and fruit selected on a sorting table before fermentation. Aged for 20 months in French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. What serious stuff! It has deep black fruit well supported by a qualitatively oaky character (displaying toast and sweet spices). On the plate, it has a great texture with superb refinement. It is a seamless wine, without any hard edges. Superbly made, well filled with savoury fruit, and with a characteristically (for Bobal) rustic back palate. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2025
17

- *Vera de Estenas, Casa Don Ángel Estenas Bobal 2014 Utiel-Requena 100% Bobal. Aged for 14 months in French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. Very open nose showing herbal notes, blackberry jam and a touch of nail varnish. It is a super-extracted and powerful wine, showing lots of intensity and good-quality fruit. Although I am sure the fruit is great quality, I found it a bit over-extracted and mature. I would love to taste a younger vintage of it. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2021
15.5

RED - 2013

- *Bruno Murciano, La Bruna Bobal 2013 Utiel-Requena Century-year old Bobal from the village of Caudete de las Fuentes. 2013 was an extremely hot vintage in Utiel-Requena.*

Taste blind. On the nose, it shows warmth-related aromas, very ripe black fruit and some

mature notes such as earth and cloves. Well polished and mature, the wine is perfectly balanced and has a classic profile. The maturity and the spiciness dominate over the archetypal fruit charge that Bruno and José Luis's wines normally have. However, it has a very good herbal, toasty and spicy character. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2023

16

RED - 2012

- *Mustiguillo, Quincha Corral 2012 Pago El Terrerazo Single-vineyard Bobal, one part of the parcel was planted between 1919 and 1945 on a north-facing slope. Situated in the highest part of the Utiel-Requena appellation at 850 m. The soils are really poor and calcareous. This parcel is bottled separately under the name Quincha Corral only in top vintages; otherwise, it ends up in the blend of the Finca Terrerazo bottling. No production expected in 2017 and 2018, the last vintage available is 2016.*

Tasted blind. The 2012 Quincha Corral is as good as usual! It is really herbal and deeply flavoured, almost like tasting an After Eight with deep fruit and cacao aromas. It is immense and huge, with superbly sweet tannins and unctuous mid palate. Top, powerful and energetic Bobal! Super-refined back palate. I'm amazed by its consistency and delineation. (FC)14.5% Drink 2019-2030

18.5

- *Vinos y Sabores Ecológicos, Vitis Miguel de María Vino de Ángeles 2012 Utiel-Requena 70% centenarian Bobal and 30% Tempranillo. One year ageing in tank, with a subsequent six months in French and American oak barrels. The wine is aged further in bottle before release on the market.*

Tasted blind. Quite elegant and mature, it shows sweet black fruit, leather and touch of farmyard. It is polished and ready to drink displaying some tertiary fruit character. Good to drink now but I am not sure about its ageing capacity. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2022

15