

# THE SPANISH INQUISITION

Penny Boothman

**M**asters of the unexpected Matt Gant and John Retsas have added a new wine to their ever-increasing First Drop range. And that new wine needed a new label. Unsurprisingly for a brand that has a Montepulciano, an Arneis, a Nebbiolo Barbera blend, and a Cabernet Touriga blend in the line-up, this isn't just another Shiraz. The boys have finally found a patch of classic Spanish variety Tempranillo that they like. The First Drop stable is a collection of stand-alone wines, so it wasn't going to be as simple as just slapping the word 'Tempranillo' on the front of their usual label. Because there isn't one. A new approach to finding the right design concept for the wine was needed.

The solution they landed on was a label design competition: getting their regular punters involved and hopefully generating a bit of new interest in the overall brand. After that it's just a question of crossing your fingers and praying that someone with a lick of talent enters some artwork. The Temp Design 2009 competition was launched late last year through the website and strategically distributed flyers. The idea really began 10 years ago, in Spain. Matt Gant explains:



“When I worked *en Espana* in 2000 I was addicted to a TV show called *Pasapalabra*, and all the contestants seemed to be called ‘Alejandro’, and the host seemed to always be saying ‘Muy bien Alejandro!’ So that became the catchphrase of my vintage in the Campo de Borja. The soundtrack was Robbie Williams’ *Ser Mejor* (the Spanish version of *Better Man*); the diet was beer and tapas for lunch, and three courses every night in the hotel restaurant washed down by a cheeky bottle of Borsao Garnacha.

“This all fuelled one of my best ever vintages. I was making £3.99 Campo de Borja Garnacha/Tempranillo for a UK supermarket out of a little cooperative called Santo Cristo in a nearby village of Ainzon. It was my first winemaking gig, and it taught me an obvious but vital lesson: with quality fruit, winemaking is simple and it’s easy to make great booze. And boy was there gold in them there hills. It’s the best Grenache in the world—don’t take my word for it, ask Chris Ringland who started his project there in 2001—and some equally smart Tempranillo. And so the love affair with



these two varieties started,” says Matt.

“I obviously made a bit of Grenache in my St Hallett days, but unfortunately I only know of one Grenache vineyard in the Barossa that is the deeply coloured Spanish version—which I can’t get my mitts on—so I’ve not produced one under First Drop. But in 2007 I managed to get those aforementioned mitts on a cracking Tempranillo vineyard in the west of the Barossa. Great site!”

The 2007 wine wasn’t quite up to scratch so it was never released, but the 2008 has made a structured,

Riojan-inspired expression of the grape matured in 55% new French and 45% new American oak for 20 months. However, after the wine was made things hit a slow patch.

“The birth of my first bub, Scarlett, and JR’s constant jet-lag led to a bit of a blockage in our creative juices midway through last year, so we decided to put the design process out to tender and launched the ‘Temp Design 2009’ competition at the end of last year,” Matt explains.

The eye-catching flyers were distributed through independent retailers, universities

and design schools, and called for ‘graphic designers, serious/not so serious artists and doodlers’ to visit the First Drop website to see a film with the brief and details of how to enter. Once the winning artwork had been chosen, it was just a question of transforming it into a functional wine label. The winning design was rewarded with a return flight to Barcelona and a case of the wine, packaged in their label.

“Now given the fact that people had to get off their bums and send in an actual design, we were stoked to get 25 entries,” Matt says. “The winning concept was a standout—a cubist inspired painting by Angela Collins from Adelaide. And thanks to Zebra Paradigm and the 3 Deep Design team, we have a contemporary, Spanish-inspired label which will sit proudly with the rest of the First Drop family.”

Zebra Paradigm (formerly known as Tongue) is a marketing, ideas and communications agency headed by the inimitable Rory Kent of Young Guns of Wine and Wine of Design fame. Zebra Paradigm partners with Melbourne design and image agency 3 Deep Design in creating visual identities for wine brands. The labels are being printed by Graphix Labels in Melbourne.

At the time of going to print, the wine is in the bottle, the finished label has been approved and it’s just a question of getting the two together and putting it on a shelf. The 2008 ‘Pintor’ Barossa Tempranillo will be released in April retailing for RRP \$30.

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