

Week of 07-31-07

White Bag Clues: **Serve in a White Stem**

Grape -

Produces very aromatic, glyceric, soft wines with body.

Typically wines are crisp with soft, creamy, nutty overtones, and sometimes accompanied by notes of honey.

Languished in obscurity for several hundred years before being rediscovered 15 years ago.

Most successfully cultivated in high altitude vineyards where the soils are calcareous and well drained.

In the past this particular varietal was worryingly prone to premature oxidation. With better techniques, such as: night-time harvesting, cool fermentation and the use of an inert gas blanketing have led to the delicate and youthful aromatic freshness of the wines being preserved.

Blends sublimely with Sauvignon Blanc.

Where is it from?

One of this countries best varietals.

Wine has been produced here since the 11<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Alfonso XI who was the ruler of the kingdom of Castilla y Leon.

Located northwest of Madrid and just southwest of the mythical Ribera del Duero red wine region.

It is considered a main variety of this DO.

Producer –

A small bodega in Rueda that is owned by Emilio Lustau, the world's greatest producer of Sherry.

Answer – Marqués de Irún Verdejo 2005 Rueda

## Marques de Irun Rueda Verdejo 2003 – Spain



Marques de Irun is a small bodega in Rueda that is owned by Emilio Lustau, the world's greatest producer of Sherry. Rueda is one of the few appellations in Spain that makes outstanding dry white wines, due in large part to the region's finest white varietal – the indigenous Verdejo. In addition, the commitment by Lustau and other forward thinking sages, who understand the region's history and recognize the potential for white wines in Rueda, has done much to advance the production of dry white wine throughout Spain. Moreover, it has critics turning their heads and panel members nodding their approval.

Lustau purchased this traditional Rueda estate, which was then called Lagar Noble, in 1990. Upon acquiring the property, the Lustau group renamed it Marques de Irun. More importantly, Lustau renovated and totally transformed this 165-acre estate, building it into a model for the production of dry white wines. The latest technology has been added, including stainless steel vats, computer cooling systems, pneumatic presses, and just about everything else one needs to make white wine in a hot climate. In short, the place has undergone an extreme makeover and that includes the estate's white wines.

Located in the heart of old Castile, a region dominated by legendary red wines (most notably those of the Ribera del Duero, Rueda became Spain's foremost white wine region many centuries ago almost by default and a series of unfortunate circumstances. During the wars between Spain and the occupying Moors, Rueda lay virtually uninhabited due to the scorched earth policy practiced by the retreating Moors. Once resettled, the only plant that took quickly to the worn soil of Castile was a wild vine, which became known as Verdejo. Under the hot Castilian sun, Verdejo at first yielded only a strong course wine that the local inhabitants were happy to sell to the thirsty royal court that were holed up in nearby Valladolid due to the Moorish domination of Andalucia and nearly all of southern Spain. This unfortunate circumstance also precluded the flow of the already famous white wines of Jerez (Sherry), making the local Verdejo that much more attractive.

In spite of a less than auspicious debut, Rueda and its resulting wine grew in quality and stature over the centuries, until Rueda became the finest white wine of Spain, thanks to the innate quality of Verdejo. By the 17th century, the white wines of Rueda were so highly prized that at least half of the region's annual production was reserved for the Spanish court. This was the Golden Age of wine in Rueda as well as Spain's el Siglo de Oro. Unfortunately, for every day consumers and connoisseurs alike the glory did not last. Phylloxera, the deadly North American vine louse that had quickly decimated the vineyards of Bordeaux and Burgundy at the end of the 19th century, struck Spain, too, and unleashed its worst fury upon Rueda. Jerez or Sherry rather easily recaptured the quality white wine market in Spain, a situation that prevailed until the recent Renaissance in Rueda and elsewhere in Spain. Not surprisingly, the resurgence of Verdejo, which has been ardently supported by Lustau as well as the pioneering Angel Rodriguez of

Martinsancho fame, has done much to restore Rueda to its former glory as Spain's capital of still white wine. Bravo!

**Tasting Notes:** Bold and bright, the 2003 Marques de Irun Rueda Verdejo shines like the sun; its rich color captures the light and presages a burst of sunshine as well as all the latent goodness that lies tucked within this tasty wine. An entrancing, utterly pleasing nose offers up the scents of apricot, lemon oil, sesame, and spring flowers. What follows is even more intriguing: a host of fruits and spices form a solid core of hedonistic pleasure that amplify the palate. Yet, vibrancy and a hint of the sea, borne on breeze of a late spring day, caress and temper this wine's fruit and ribald character, adding clarity, focus, and a clean, refreshing finish. On a hot day, this delicious Verdejo is best served well chilled, at least initially. When served iced cold, the 2003 Marques de Irun Verdejo exhibits a crisp, utterly refreshing quality that can quench the thirst on the hottest of days. On cooler days or indoors where more ambient temperatures prevail, we prefer the Marques de Irun only moderately chilled (45°-50° F), so as to release the fine floral scent and the burst of fruit for which Verdejo is justly famous.