

a DREAM COME true



Everyone knows what a boutique hotel is; typically, it's a small establishment run by its owners and showing a high level of quality and service, often expensive. But what about a boutique winery? To be fair, Rickard Enkvist's winery in Gaucín (yes, you read it right, Gaucín, the small village about an hour's drive from the coast up a tortuous mountain road) has never been described, as far as I know, as a boutique operation but it ticks all the boxes.

There is still some lack of agreement in the wine industry about what can authentically be called a boutique winery. The first references surfaced in France 20 years ago, where wines from small producers were – and, indeed, still are – often referred to as *vin de garage*, as it was not unusual for the winemaking process to take place in a garage or small workshop. The first qualification is that the grapes are not pressed too hard so the resulting yield per vine is much less than for conventional production methods. In Europe no-one has yet put a figure on it but, in legislation-mad USA, such mini-wineries have their production limited to no more than 120,000 bottles a year (they have big garages in America...). Apparently the term 'boutique winery' helps sell wine, so the idea is that it should not be used to misrepresent the producer's aims or capacity.

Do not get the term confused with *vinos del autor*, a common misconception. The expression Author Wines is probably on the same level of pointlessness in wine marketing terms as *vino de pago*, which in Spain is meant to convey the same elite source as the Bordeaux chateaux single-vineyard wines where, usually, the existence of a local microclimate influences the end product.

Enkvist, whose commercial career in his native Sweden (which was obviously very successful) embraced the media and property businesses, built his hilltop eyrie nine years ago although he had owned

several homes in Spain prior to coming to the Costa del Sol full-time. Initially referred to as 'el Sueco loco' (the mad Swede), Enkvist has ultimately qualified as an adept winemaker, and has confounded all those who gave his project 'nul points' when he planted the first vines 13 years ago, although it was not until 2004 that the first grape harvest took place. You would indeed have to be a little bit crazy to even think of making wine on a hillside that most half-intelligent goats would turn their noses up at. Although this area



was planted with vines in the Roman epoch (well, they tried to make wine wherever they settled, with varying degrees of success) there was no reason to think that the usual grape varieties would prosper at this altitude. But they did, and Enkvist's Cézár Viñedos y Bodegas is the southernmost producer of red wine in Spain.

What made Enkvist spend a small fortune in setting up a winery and vineyards in the back of beyond? Scratch any *aficionado*-producer and you will find a lifelong wine buff. Rather in the same way as every golfer would like to build his own golf course or every financier would like to own his own bank, every half-serious wine buff dreams of making his own wine. Nothing wrong with that, just so long as you can

afford it; but, unless you charge the sort of indecent prices that some of the new Spanish producers are trying to get away with, there is no way you will ever make a profit, let alone see your investment back in your lifetime. As José Antonio Itarte, who launched Cortijo de los Aguilares in Ronda, once told me, "I will never make any money from this, nor will my children. With a bit of luck, my grandchildren may see some financial benefit..."

Enkvist is not a newbie to the wine business. In a previous existence, he bought modest amounts of quality wine for reselling (at the time of my visit he was packing up some vintage Protos that he was sending to a customer in London for a special dinner). A chance encounter with Carlos Falco, the Marqués del Griñón of wine fame, at his then new winery in Toledo launched a lifelong friendship that gave Enkvist the extra incentive he needed to become a hands-on wine maker.

The large house that Rickard and Inga Lill call their home has the winery and the ageing cellars in the basement. Originally carved out of the mountainside, the below ground installations were used to store Enkvist's wine long before the house was completed but now the attractive building blends effortlessly into bodega, kitsch museum, wine store and living quarters. At 680 metres, it is not as high as some Ronda wineries but high enough, and the views are surely outstanding. Unfortunately, on the day I was there, visibility was down to 20 metres although, through the curtain of rain and mist, one could just make out lush vegetation stretching down towards the coast.

The location is no doubt a privileged one and the Enkvists are happy to welcome visitors to the estate on day trips and provide them with wine and tapas (at a price). They even have limited accommodation available for overnight stays. Prices range from €25



REPORT AJ LINN
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ENKVIST
AND KH PHOTOGRAPHY

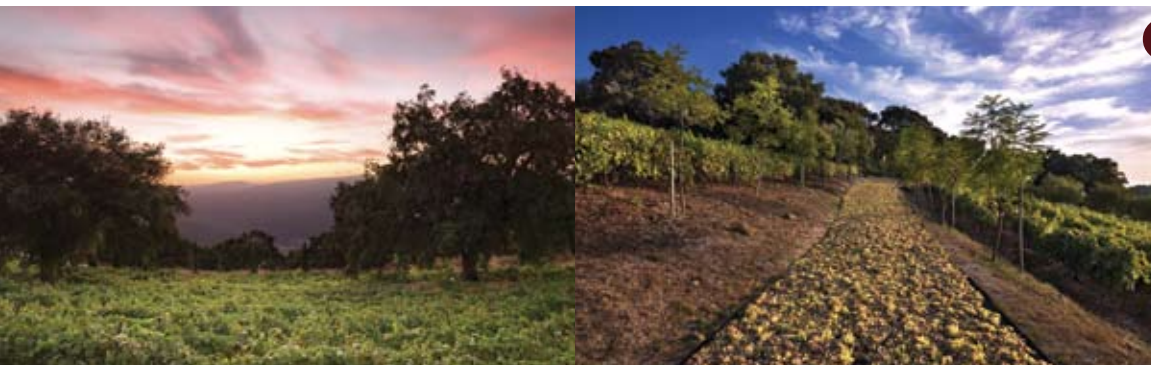
to €125 per guest night, depending on meals and facilities required.

Many Ronda winemakers use the Petit Verdot grape both as a blend and on its own but prices tend to be on the high side and I have even seen one on offer at €39. No doubt encouraged by the experience of the Marqués de Griñón, who was instrumental in reintroducing this grape variety to the Ronda region where it seems to grow better than in other areas, Enkvist makes a 100 per cent Reserva Petit Verdot that sells ex-bodega at €16. Every serious wine maker in Spain wants to produce a wine made from 100 per cent Tempranillo grapes, the epitome of what Spanish wine is all about. Not as easy as it sounds, and if I had a euro for every poor Tempranillo I have tasted I would be a rich man. Enkvist makes a Gran Reserva Tempranillo (€22), 'Últimos' Tempranillo (€18) and a Reserva Tempranillo (€16), all very acceptable. His Gran Reserva Inga (named after his wife) is a blend of Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot, aged for 24 months in French oak and then 24 months in the bottle, a good buy at €22. (All prices include IVA).

The Chardonnay grape does not usually present problems but it must have been pushing the envelope to expect it to produce good wine

in such a harsh climate. However, both the Chardonnay (€8) and the Astrid (€6, named after Enkvist's daughter) are more than drinkable and good value at the price. There is also an interesting Moscatel with a small amount of Chardonnay blend that seems to work (€8). The Moscatel comes from 100-year old Manila vines.

Perhaps we should not go any further without reference to the Enkvist's oenologist, José Manuel Cozar Cabañas, a young man who cut his teeth on local wines and must take the credit for the impressive list of prizes that the Bodega's products have been awarded. There are those who say that if you submit your wines to enough wine competitions you will eventually win a prize but the consistency and high category of the awards received is a testimony to the quality of the wines submitted. It would be tiresome to list the awards individually but I counted at least 10 between 2008 and 2010, added to which are two 'Muy buenos' for Últimos Sueños and Sueños Reserva in the *Penin* Guide (Spain's 'Wine Advocate'), and over 90 points for the same wines in *Guía Interviños*. One of Enkvist's proudest moments came when he was awarded a gold medal for one of his wines in the Mezquita, Córdoba, by his friend and mentor, the Marqués de Griñón.



If you want to try these Gaucín wines, visit the winery or lunch at one of the small local restaurants in the village where Enkvist delivers regularly. The local distributor is Viñasur, Avda. Pablo Ruiz Picasso 48, San Pedro de Alcántara. Tel 952 785 193. www.vinosdegaucin.com www.enkvistwines.com www.suecoloco.com re@enkvistwines.com