



TEXT NICK STOCK

Euro Spin

From his tasting bench Nick Stock is taken on a European adventure, discovering superb grower Champagnes, exhilarating Mosel rieslings and innovative reds from Spain.

FRANCK PASCAL

Franck Pascal's journey to becoming a maker of Champagne is a simple but interesting one. Having set off on a career path as a chemical engineer, a job that included training members of the military to deal with chemical warfare, he was shocked to discover that many similar chemicals were used in viticulture.

He returned to Champagne in 1994 and set about converting the practices of his tiny four-hectare family estate to biodynamic principles. The decision came as a result of observing that the wines were best expressed through biodynamic methods, not simply following an ideology or as a reaction to what he already knew about industrial chemistry.

palate has the merest soft edge; yeasty chalk and mineral abound. There's real intensity to the palate, acidity is salient, plus there's concentrated fruit and grilled nuts to close.

2005 Franck Pascal Quintessence Brut (A\$147) shows plenty of flesh and fruit in a very grounded, earthy and savoury style. There's grilled nuts and nougat, strawberry and cherry, deep spices and a hint of cedar. The palate has a core of rich and ripe fruits, and red berries. It is juicy, lithe, smooth, airy, and very supple with a sorbet-like texture. The finish is fresh and upbeat.

2004 Franck Pascal Quintessence Brut (A\$147) is a much more complex and savoury expression than the 2005. It has dark, roasted

be typical, racy Saar wines," Müller says. "However, the vintage will mostly be remembered for the small yields, the lowest since 1945." The resulting tension between the fruit concentration and the high acidity in the low-yield grapes is as thrilling as ever.

2013 Egon Müller Scharzhof Qualitäts Riesling (A\$62) pitches big acidity, fruit weight and sugar in an equal contest. There are ripe white stone fruits and citrus on the nose, plus plenty of wet stony notes. The palate is tight and tingly, succinct and precise, it really delivers delicious, exciting form.

2013 Egon Müller Scharzhofberger Kabinett Riesling (A\$124) runs at an entirely different pace to the wine above, pushing rich fruit into the frame and then reclaiming the palate with acidity. Flinty wet stones and sulfides rule the nose, and feed into white peach on the palate. It has very ripe and intense stone fruits, and is fleshy with a soft, supple fruit layer around the solid core of acidity. It really is a perfectly pitched wine; steely and fine with power and poise.

A rare bird indeed, **2013 Egon Müller Scharzhofberger Spätlese Riesling** (A\$240) brings fruit and acid balance to the fore. Seamless and rich, it seems drier than the Kabinett with less flint and more pure white peach and nectarine. It is also very floral with white flowers and jasmine, plus some mango and tropical fruits. The palate is masterfully textured with great build, impressive weight and depth. The flesh and acidity are perfectly partnered, succulent and superbly balanced.

Tension between the fruit concentration and the high acidity is as thrilling as ever.

Pascal's superb wines are the product of an intelligent and deeply committed grower and further evidence of the Marne Valley's ability to stand tall as a source of some of the most interesting grower Champagnes.

NV Franck Pascal Reliance Brut Nature (A\$108) is pure and restrained. It is very mineral, chalky and gently spicy, and the savoury pinot meunier (75 per cent) characters are assertive but under wraps. There's some grapefruit reduction, too, that is intense but pared back. The palate has great depth and weight, flesh and texture. The layers are engaging with stone fruits, wild red fruits and good acidity tempered by supple, well-resolved winemaker influence.

Even more restrained and racy is **NV Franck Pascal Reliance Extra Brut** (A\$108). It has savoury aromas, plenty of autolysis, dried red fruits and red flowers, a little spice and lots of pink nougat complexity. The

spices and dried berry fruits, some nougat, Swiss brown mushroom and a sweet dried porcini, almost truffle-like edge – terrific complexity here. The palate has great depth and weight, sweetness from aged spice and gentle, savoury cashew flavours, too. With good concentration and balance, it combines boldness with elegance.

EGON MÜLLER

These are wines that need no introduction save for the fact that they are a triumph of what was an extremely mixed, low-yielding vintage in Mosel in 2013.

Yields were reduced more than once through the season as vines were reportedly unevenly poised, and September was cool with some significant rain. October warmed up but remained cloudy. The grapes harvested from 21 October to 1 November remained very high in acidity. "2013 vintage wines will

BODEGAS PONCE

Bodegas Ponce is one of the most interesting Spanish producers to emerge in the last 10 years. Having worked for Telmo Rodriguez, Juan Antonio Ponce's approach to the reinterpretation of winemaking should come as no

surprise. He differs from Rodriguez on scale and methodology though, farming small parcels of land and using biodynamic methods.

Ponce works in Manchuela, an inland region that does not have a reputation for high-quality wine. Even more obscure is Ponce's chosen grape, bobal, a variety that is commonly used as a blending component, not to make wines that cause you to swoon. But in his hands, these are among contemporary Spain's most charming, distinctive and drinkable young reds.

2013 Bodegas Ponce Clos Lojen (A\$24) is made from a single plot of 30- to 50-year-old bobal growing in calcareous soils. It's a very attractive pure and crunchy expression with plenty of cassis and other blue fruits, plus a hint of dark stones, slate and wet earth. The palate has a smooth, supple and even-handed shape to it with focus on the mid-palate that has blue plum and cassis flavours. Tannins are undemanding, lively and balanced and they hold the finish well. This is Spain's foil to drinkable Côtes du Rhône.

Ponce's archetypal bobal is the **2013 Bodegas Ponce P.F.** (A\$31), a single cuvée made from 80-plus-year-old vines. It is a beautifully settled and brightly expressed wine that shows an alluringly fragrant, gently smoky edge. There are some flint-like aromas ahead of ripe, dark fruits, cassis and hints of cardamom, clove and star anise. The palate is ripe and juicy with more licorice-framed raspberry fruit as well as plum and black cherry. Fleshy, yet savoury tannins hold through to the finish in a gently drying style. It is medium-bodied, dark and glossy.

As if the obscurity scale wasn't already completely tipped, **2013 Bodegas Ponce Buena Pinta** (A\$36) fuses 140-year-old moravia agria (60 per cent) with 80-year-old garnacha (40 per cent). A very fragrant expression with wild, rustic, raw characters. The nose has pepper and musk, while wild raspberry fruits build with air. There's some sappy notes, too, and meaty fermentation characters below. The palate has musk-like texture that is really fine and lithe, juicy and ethereal. Tannins are assertive, yet not intrusive. This is a medium-bodied wine that has an edge of power with freshness, raspberry and cherry to close.

