

## The man with the Godello gleam

19 Feb 2013 by Jancis Robinson

Rafael (Rafa) Palacios is the white-wine member of the family described in Luis's [Guide to the Palacios family](#) that I see was our Christmas present to you. I'll be describing more of his life story on Saturday. I have long been a fan and had the chance recently to taste some of the wines of which he is quite rightly most proud. They included his first single-vineyard wine, Sorte O Soro, that should be wonderful eventually and a new late-harvest wine, Sorte dos Santos, which I found slightly less convincing.

He was encouraged to try these because of the exceptional (and delightfully evident) quality of the 2011 vintage, along with 2005 the best vintage, he thinks, since he started in Valdeorras in north-west Spain in 2004. It's apparently a matter of having just the right amount of rainfall before veraison. He didn't, show any 2010s because 2010 was such a cool year that the local Godello vines didn't manage to ripen fully 'so we had to work a bit more on the lees (unlike classic vintages)'.

See my tasting note for the confusingly named Louro do Bolo 2011. This is a man who seems to live and breathe Godello, one of the greenest grapes around - so green that even though he is one of the last to pick, and even in the ripest years, the juice 'looks like kiwi juice'. He has 26 different parcels of vines, each one called a *sorte*, one of which is only 2,000 square metres, but the vines are 40 years old. This is dramatic boulder-strewn land on the steep banks of the river Sil that needs special equipment.

These tiny plots are so high up that he has already lost two vintages in some of them to frost and is installing wind machines. All his vineyards are organic and some biodynamic.

He has flirted with making a single-vineyard wine for some time but is determined that his top wine, As Sortes, should not suffer so had to wait for this exceptional vintage. More detail on Saturday.

Bolo is the most basic wine, Louro do Bolo (which should be called Louro, please) the very good intermediate level and As Sortes the top bottling.

### **Rafael Palacios, Bolo 2011 Valdeorras** 16 Drink 2013-2015

Total acidity 6 g/l. At least 600m altitude. Vines 7-16 years old on heavy sands. 40 hl/ha. No oak and added selected yeast. Bottled at three months. 68,570 bottles. Clean, fresh, vibrant. A good introduction to Godello with all its directness and balance. A good aperitif. Very finely chiselled like Rafa's face and as bright as his eyes.

### **Rafael Palacios, Louro do Bolo 2011 Valdeorras** 16.5 Drink 2013-2017

6% Treixadura is blended into the Godello for this wine. 35 hl/ha. TA 6-7 g/l, pH 3.2 ish. From 17- to 28-year-old vines at at least 600m altitude on heavy sands on degraded granite. Fermented in 3,000-litre round casks and aged there for five months. 75,345 bottles and 500 magnums. Confusingly named. It would be better to call this simply Louro, I and UK importers Indigo think. This wine is served by the glass at Lutyens restaurant in London where this tasting took place. Still very young and tight at this stage but perceptibly more generous and subtle on the palate than the Bolo. Tense. Lots of lime fruit flavour and reverberation.

### **Rafael Palacios, Louro do Bolo 2009 Valdeorras** 16.5 Drink 2011-2015

By now this wine is creamy, broader, with much less obvious acidity and a little noticeable oak. Perhaps the French oak casks for this wine were newer than for the rather more sophisticated 2011.

### **Rafael Palacios, As Sortes 2011 Valdeorras** 18.5 Drink 2014-2020

All the fruit comes from their own vineyard at 620-780 m on decomposed granite. Vines are 35-92 years old (though presumably there are very few this old). 29 hl/ha. Some biodynamic vit. TA 7.5g/l. Fermentation and eight months' elevage in 50-litre French oak barrels. 22,500 bottles.

This is clearly the most wonderful vintage of a great wine. Fantastic length and balance even if still very youthful. Racy and hugely precise. A beautiful wine that should unfurl gracefully over many years.

**Rafael Palacios, As Sortes 2009 Valdeorras** 17 Drink 2011-2016

This tastes slightly middle aged with a vegetal note. It has the classy build of As Sortes but is not quite as tense and racy as some vintages.

**Rafael Palacios, As Sortes 2007 Valdeorras** 17.5 Drink 2010-2017

This vintage was just a little reduced but still deep flavoured and very firm. Impressive! Palacios apparently changed the vinification in 2007 and stopped using strong bâtonnage aiming for 'more relaxed' wine. A rather attractive salty note on the finish.

**Rafael Palacios, As Sortes 2005 Valdeorras** 18 Drink 2008-2015

Vibrant and reverberant. Not quite the same style as the younger vintages but very impressive and holding up well.

**Rafael Palacios, Sorte O Soro 2011 Valdeorras** 18.5 Drink 2015-2025

A single-vineyard wine from terraced 38-year-old vines biodynamically grown. Faces south west but is the highest site at 740m and is always windy. Sandy - looks like beach, says Rafa. 24 hl/ha. Just 2,680 bottles.

Even more intense and deep flavoured than As Sortes, and will presumably need even more time. Very concentrated. To be released in 2014.

**Rafael Palacios, Sorte dos Santos 2011 Valdeorras** 16.5 Drink 2018-2025

43-year-old vines at 710 m and 23 hl/ha picked according to the moon. Usually very high acid. Not botrytised just late picked. 80% of these grapes went into As Sortes. RS 85g/l, TA 9.75g/l, pH 2.88 Just 2,345 bottles.

Quite hard now with acidity the dominant feature - so much so that it swamps the sweetness. In build it's a bit like a sweetish Vouvray Demi Sec. It may flower into something wonderful and I can see why it has been made, especially from this vintage, but I'm not convinced that Godello is destined to be a great sweet white wine grape. 11%