

Salnes Surprise

A Camino Adventure

I recently cycled the Camino from Porto to Santiago de Compostela. After seeing the Botafumeiro in action at Mass in the Santiago Cathedral and receiving my Compostela, I headed to Nomade Wine Bar to celebrate my 280 km journey. I ordered Padron peppers and Octopus croquettes to pair with a glass of Attis Albarino 2022 that the sommelier recommended. The wine was enchanting with its white fruit and flowers, minerality, and Atlantic influence. Chatting to the sommelier I was thrilled to learn that one of the subregions of Rias Baixas, Val do Salnes, where the wine came from, was only 50 km away. To top things off, the Variante Espiritual of the Camino went straight through the region. So I jumped on a bus back to Pontevedra and started a three day walk in search of Albarino.

The first day I walked 25 kms to the monastery in Armenteira, not many vines, and a 9 km uphill and singing nuns to end my day. The next day I detoured off the trail at Ribadumia in search of wine, but no wineries I passed had tasting rooms. When I found the Camino trail again, I had all but given up on my wine search until I started chatting with Line, a Danish woman doing the Camino. With slightly more Spanish than me, the two of us wandered on stopping under overhead pergolas to speak to every grape picker we met, pop our heads in any winery we came to, and joined the locals for a pork lunch, and yes, Albarino. We arrived at Villanova de Arousa in the dark after a good 30 km walk, and joined a dozen other pilgrims to feast on mussels and clams paired with a selection of Albarinos.

The next day the pilgrims all continued on the boat up the river towards Santiago, while I headed the other direction on my wine quest. I arrived at Martin Codax mid day to taste through their Albarinos. The current vintage was a racy, young wine showing oceanic, floral and lime notes. The Lias 2020 showed more complexity with more time on the lees and in the bottle, but the salty brine and sense of minerality along with the citrus, was still the main component of the wine. The last wine, the Organistrum, I found the wood overpowered the gentle aromatic profile of the wine. The export director was very informative about the huge rise in popularity of the region in the past dozen years, making Albarino the trendiest Spanish white grape of the moment.

I then walked on to Cambados where I caught a bus back to my starting point of Porto. Goodbye to the Salty Valley, hello to the Douro Valley! Could there be a bigger contrast in these wines!