



Written by
Julia Harding MW
20 Jun 2018

MW symposium - wines on the frontier



I spent last weekend in a buzz of 450 Masters of Wine, MW students and wine producers from 30 countries in sunny Logroño, the capital of Rioja. Entitled 'Living Wine', this ninth four-yearly symposium was all about the vitality and inspiration of vines and wines and those who care for them - or just enjoy pouring and drinking the results.

The first full day began with a panel session on microbes, for which I had gathered a panel of three superb researchers and practitioners. I will be reporting on their work and results in due course. This was followed by a seated panel tasting of seven wines focused on 'new terroirs around the world'.

The final speaker in this session was Frenchman **Jean-Baptiste Ancelot**, founder of *Wine Explorers*, 'a unique project to inventory all of the wine-producing countries of the world'. (Their website is a deep well of information and great photos.) He has spent the last two years travelling with a photographer in 75 countries, including Palestine, Luxembourg, Armenia, Ethiopia, Senegal, Dominican Republic, etc, with one more year to go. He and his team have so far travelled 316,780 km (197,000 miles). They are looking for 'original' wines, new vineyards in existing regions as well as the most far-flung and least known or developed, not forgetting less well known indigenous varieties. One of their main sponsors is Pilote, the leading French manufacturer of camper vans like the one pictured below that Ancelot uses in Europe and the Caucasus.



While Ancelot did not present any wines, he was spoilt for choice when it came to the unusual and the far-flung, though his first example was Assyrtiko - most commonly associated with Santorini - on the Greek island of **Tinos**. More unexpected was the Awash winery in **Ethiopia**, where men armed with noisy whips stand on platforms in the vineyard to scare off the birds.

Three further examples couldn't have been more diverse: the Marques de Puntalagra winery, two hours' drive north of the **Colombian** capital Bogotá and run by an 84-year-old grower, has Pinot Noir, Silvaner and Riesling, the only three varieties that survived out of an experimental 74. At 2,800 m (9,200 ft) and this close to the equator, the ultraviolet light is six times more intense than in Bordeaux and apparently results in extremely high *resveratrol* levels, accounting for the grower's apparent youth, suggested Ancelot.

GranMonte in **Thailand** are producing 'good wines where you don't expect them', said Ancelot. They are making Durif, Verdelho and a sparkling wine made from Chenin Blanc with 15 months on the lees. Despite the warm, humid climate, they have found a mesoclimate where they can work almost organically.

Last but not least: Hallakra Vineyard in **Sweden**. It's 12 km from the sea and gets 1,000 hours of sunshine a year. They are happy if the temperature reaches 23 °C in September and they have to do a 75% green harvest to get the remaining fruit to ripen. Ancelot chose this example because 'global warming is pushing us north', also suggesting that the *PIWi* varieties may be one way forward in the goal of resisting viticultural scourges such as the mildews while reducing the use of synthetic fungicides in the vineyard. (*PIWi* is short for *Pilzwiderstandsfähig*, meaning 'fungal resistant', and such varieties are mostly crosses of *Vitis vinifera* and American vine species.)