

Swedish/Catalan vineyard in Montsant

The Spanish wine region Montsant has become known for its dedicated winemakers, focus on sustainability, old vines and determination to challenge old traditions. While neighbouring Priorat became a world-renowned wine region, Montsant found itself in the shadow of its famous sibling. But that was then. Things are different now. The winemakers in Montsant took the challenge seriously and the vineyards started to produce both delicious and high-quality wines. Bell Cros is one of these vineyards and is already showing real progress.

Montsant arouses interest

Montsant is close to the city of Tarragona south of Barcelona. If you head west into the mountains, you come to the famous region of Priorat. This is one of the best wine regions in Spain, well-known for its high-quality concentrated red wines. Winemaking in Priorat draws on an ancient tradition, with popular wines like L'Ermita gaining popularity centuries ago. Montsant is a ring of land encircling Priorat and its wines are equally as interesting. Although they are currently less well-known, that makes them all the more interesting to discover.

Bell Cros is a good example of a modern vineyard

In its first year, Bell Cros expanded through the purchase of seven adjoining vineyards. Its Swedish owners Peter and Ann Skoglund will be working alongside their team to develop their vineyard and wines. Peter says, "It is a privilege to work with such fantastic people in these incredible surroundings. Although we're expanding, the focus will always be on the wines expressing their local identity, and having a unique character and superior quality. I think we have come very close to achieving our goals".

Bell Cros starts as a vineyard

Bell Cros is the name of the vineyard and it is based on Catalan traditions stretching back thousands of years. But its sights are set clearly on the future. The vineyard combines the joy and enthusiasm over a new-found passion with pride, knowledge and the rich, deeply-rooted culture of winemaking. Bell Cros can look forward to a bright future in its venture.

When the couple purchased their first piece of land here in June 2017, it was the start of a new chapter. "We had never really thought about or longed to own a vineyard," they say. "We sold our business in Sweden a few years ago and bought an apartment in Barcelona where we could spend a few weeks whenever we wanted. We have always liked the culture and climate of more southerly countries." They got the idea of buying a vineyard to take up winemaking as a hobby and explored Priorat and the neighbouring region of Montsant. It wasn't long before they found their vineyard, and what was going to be a hobby soon grew into something much larger. "We enjoy drinking wine and that's an excellent start for a project like this," they say. Today, they are determined to become the best and most skilful producers in the whole of Montsant. An ambitious project that is becoming more and more achievable.



"El Tracte"

Each wine from the vineyard has a name of its own to distinguish between the different wines. The first to be given a name was 4,500 bottles of wine made solely from Carinyena grapes. It is called "El Tracte" which means "handshake" in Catalan. Quite simply because it was agreed with a handshake, and the signing of the official contract, that 4,000 kilos of grapes would be included in Peter and Ann's purchase of the land from its former owners. "El Tracte" was made from those grapes. A proper Catalan handshake is a customary way to seal an agreement and it means more than a signature on a piece of paper – something that the wine would also symbolise.

Creating a dream team

"As the project grew, we came up with the idea of putting together a locally-based team that could create wines in order to raise the profile of Montsant wines even more. We never imagined we would receive such keen support from people in the area. They generously shared their experience and knowledge with us, considerably giving advice that would help us newcomers avoid pitfalls. We were welcomed with open arms," says Peter. Ann and Peter have learned about wine and its production from enthusiasts and mentors in Catalonia and have steadily gained experience as producers. Bell Cros is currently in the process of turning organic and its first wines to be produced from organic grapes will be from vintage 2021.

Open to interested wine tourists

The vineyard is now geared to welcome wine enthusiasts who can look forward to tasting wines and sampling local fare. The nature of the visits will vary, depending on the time of year. In January, visitors can see the vines being pruned, early summer is the flowering period, and in the autumn it's harvest time. Visitors are naturally treated to locally produced foods that the winery pairs with its wines. It also gives visitors the chance to blend their own wine. A number of ready-to-drink Carinyena and Garnacha wines can be used, taken straight from the oak barrels and steel vats.

The idea is that you, the guest, decide how you want your wine to be blended. This is a very special experience and clearly reflects the vineyard's welcoming attitude to visiting guests.



JOAN ASEN

His name is well-known and he is Bell Cros' wine-maker. He is frequently honoured with the epithet of "crac" which roughly translates as genius. As chief oenologist at famous wineries in Priorat, he has played a key role in developing renowned and exclusive wines that enjoy international acclaim and command high prices. Joan was named Winemaker of the Year 2019 in Catalonia. Being able to present wines bearing the signature of Joan Asens is a privilege that comes to

Openness – like a school.

Miguel Figini, who is responsible for looking after the vineyard's visitors, is also principal at "L'Espai del Vi Català", which is a regional school in Catalonia for future winemakers and the next generation of growers taking over their parents' vineyards. The school teaches the practical aspects of caring for vineyards and which methods are used to produce wine. As a way of supporting the region, the Bell Cros vineyard invites the students to come and gain practical experience by picking grapes. The students can partake in other activities too, including "La pisada de uva" which is stomping the grapes the traditional way.



” We know... that the earth, vines, grapes and weather in DO Montsant offer everything that's needed to produce excellent wine”

New winery – building themselves

Creating a fully-functional vineyard is a major project and a key piece of the puzzle recently fell into place. The couple made further purchases of local land that now connect their vineyard with an area of high-lying ground with a fantastic view of the fields of vines and Marçà, the closest village. The idea is that guests will be able to enjoy Bell Cros' wines while soaking up the stunning view from this vantage point. And it is also the perfect place to build a winery. The project is under way and is expected to be completed in 2022. Before it can come into being, it has to be designed, planned, financed, and permission to build has to be granted. “We are not in a rush to have a winery of our own,” says the couple, who are still in a learning phase and are currently renting space at the neighbouring winery “Cellers Sant Rafel”.

The winery will be designed with a focus on the wine experience. After visiting Bell Cros, it should be the combination of the wines and breathtaking landscape that visitors remember, not so much the building.

Fascinating facts

Many of the vineyards in Montsant are small and often considered not large enough to make a living from. For years, the people here have been moving from the countryside into cities. A lack of much-needed investment has made it difficult for the winegrowers in the area. The fact that the wine cooperatives usually pay growers by the kilo for their grapes, regardless of quality, has made the situation more complicated, with growers being forced to prioritise volume over quality.

Unusually dry conditions and extreme heat

Montsant has experienced unusually dry conditions with not enough rain in recent seasons. Bell Cros has also been affected and the oppressive heat has shrivelled the grapes and rendered them useless. The vineyard does not buy any grapes from other producers and only uses its own in order to have full control over the quality. However, the dry conditions have made it difficult to produce enough grapes, which poses a whole new challenge.

To succeed in Montsant, it is essential to understand the sometimes harsh conditions of the area and learn to adapt to them. The vineyard is now installing an irrigation system which can be a good solution to this problem in the future.

First wines are now on sale!

Bell Cros has launched two red wines and one white wine onto the market. More are due to be launched during 2020. It is expected that the vineyard will be able to produce no less than eight different wines totalling 75,000 bottles a year. These will be red, white and rosé wines, although the main focus will be on red wine production. Peter tells us “Our winemaker, Joan Asens, has presented us with 20 or so samples from our most recent harvest. We could see from the look in his eyes that he was very pleased with what we were about to taste. And he was right. The wines were beautifully fresh, crispy and aromatic. The low harvest yield last year has rewarded us with an excellent grape quality”.

Bell Cros in Sweden and Spain

We are delighted to announce that we have just entered partnerships with two highly competent distributors; Rewine AB in Sweden, www.rewine.se, and Muxinach, www.muxinach.com, in the province of Barcelona.

www.bellcross.com

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The logo for Bell Cros features the words "BELL" and "CROS" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, stacked vertically. To the right of the word "CROS" is a thick, bronze-colored diagonal slash that extends downwards and to the right.

HOW THE BRAND WAS CREATED

Bell Cros' brand was developed in partnership with a Spanish advertising agency. Catalonia has a history of rich tradition and the brand wants to share the history of the vineyard's region. The brand also reflects the character of the wines, which are elegant, contemporary and fresh.

Once the brand image was created, it was decided that the name “Bell Cros” best describes both the vineyard and the wines. The name alludes to the vineyard's beautiful surroundings and is Catalan for “beautiful valley”. The vineyard also has a logo that graphically symbolises the three attributes. The simple bronze-coloured slash “/” is a stylisation of a row of vines seen as a line. The inspiration comes from the glorious days in autumn when the vines are starting to slumber after the harvest and their leaves gleam like bronze.