

Montsant

‘Consistency and character’: our judges found plenty to enjoy from this prime area of southern Catalonia, and there were many high-scorers and great value throughout

REPORT DAVID WILLIAMS

No matter how hard you try to ignore it, the question that haunts any tasting of DO Montsant wines is always: ‘How do these wines compare to those of Priorat?’ And the answer will invariably be something along the lines of, ‘better value, but not quite hitting the same heights’.

Founded as a DO in 2001, a year after Priorat was elevated from DO status to DOCa, Monstant almost entirely envelops the more famous region, both of which are set in the rugged hills of southern Catalonia.

The reasons for comparison are obvious enough: the two regions share much by way of climate, grape varieties and stylistic approach. Then again, Montsant is much more varied in its soils, elevations (from 50m to 700m), aspects and microclimates. In other words, while it may have kinship with Priorat, Montsant is – or should be – very much its own thing.

The best of the wines on show in this panel tasting had a distinct character, especially those that managed to avoid, in Luis Gámiz’s words,

‘looking to Priorat as a benchmark’ by eschewing obvious oak. ‘For me, the better reds tended to pull away from oak use, to focus on fruit and give a more energetic result,’ said Matthew Forster MW. ‘There were some quite soupy, middle-of-the-road wines that struggled to marry oak with Garnacha in particular.’

For Gámiz, too, the stars of the tasting were the ‘fresher, lighter and more mineral-driven Garnachas and Cariñenas’. All of us on the panel would certainly have liked to taste more of this style.

The whites also impressed, with the best examples showing ‘real authenticity and verve,’ noted Forster.

Ultimately, this was a tasting of wines of remarkable consistency and character, with just five wines tasted failing to make the 86-point (Recommended) cut. ‘The quality in the region is very good in general,’ concluded Gámiz. Looking down the list of prices, you’d have to say the value is very good, too. So, what was that about a certain region beginning with P...?

WHAT TO EAT by Fiona Beckett

Montsant, as this tasting illustrates, comes in two guises: lighter, fresher, more mineral styles and more full-bodied wines that are more similar to those of neighbouring Priorat. The former are generally more versatile – wines, like the value Tempranillo (see p136), that you could happily drink with tapas but also a good accompaniment for tomato-based sauces and grilled meats and vegetables, so good wines to crack open with a barbecue. You could also pair this style with a tagine or a paella (it would go well with the authentic Valencian style with chicken and/or rabbit). More full-bodied styles are the ones you would want to enjoy with slow-braised ox cheek, venison, wild boar or other hearty stews: classic cold-weather drinking.

The relatively small number of whites, which are mainly based on white Garnacha and Macabeo, are a natural match for robust seafood dishes such as grilled or roast hake, octopus, dishes with salt cod or with punchily seasoned salads that might well include olives, capers and artichokes.



THE SCORES 86 wines tasted

Exceptional 0 Outstanding 5 Highly recommended 38 Recommended 38 Commended 5

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their current-release still dry (or off-dry) red, white and rosé wines from DO Montsant

THE JUDGES



DAVID WILLIAMS is wine correspondent for *The Observer*, a regular contributor to *Decanter* on all things Spanish, and a widely published wine writer, author and competition judge



MATTHEW FORSTER MW is an independent wine consultant and education specialist, and founder of *The Wine Partnership*. A former director at the *Wine & Spirit Education Trust*, he has a particular passion for the food and wine cultures of Spain, Portugal and South America



LUIS GAMIZ is business and product development manager and Spanish wine buyer at *Indigo Wine*. He has extensive experience in the wine industry, having previously held positions at *Alliance Wine*, *The Knotted Vine* and *Vinoteca*

PHOTOGRAPH HIGH IMPACT PHOTOGRAPHY/GETTY IMAGES

Outstanding 95-97pts



Atavus Priorat, BK! Blanco 2022

David Williams 95
Matthew Forster MW 96
Luis Gámiz 94
atavuspriorat.com

As the name suggests, Atavus is a well-regarded Priorat-based winery. However, much of its regenerative, organic, biodynamic and natural-leaning production is DO Montsant, including this blend of 65% Garnacha Blanca from 30-year-old vines in Falset with 35% Macabeo from a 70-year-old plot in Masroig, the latter fermented with the skins. The wine is aged in stainless steel and in amphora for seven months. The BK! refers to the Catalan (*bo karma*) for ‘good karma’.

David Williams Marzipan and apricot amphora notes; a rounded and creamy palate with some weight and chew. A nicely refined, well-mannered style with so much character, including a burgeoning fruit flourish on the long finish. Matthew Forster MW Intense caramel, burnt butter and hazelnut aromas. Packed full of ripe guava and tropical fruit, with a deeply savoury undertow. Waxy but still fresh. Very complete. Luis Gámiz Complex nose, honey, oxidative notes, passion fruit, dried apricot. Phenolic texture, moderate tannin and acidity. Warming, with a savoury, slightly grippy finish. Drink 2025-2028 Alcohol 13.5%



Celler Gritelles, Siurana Brisat 2021

DW 95 MF 95 LG 95
gritelles.com
Celler Gritelles is based in northeastern Montsant, in a valley between two mountain ranges, Serra de la Gritella and Serra de Montsant. The wines showcase a collection of vineyards above 400m elevation, on a variety of soils (clay, limestone, slate and pebbles). This classic, 100% Macabeo, Catalan brisat (skin-contact) wine, which takes its name from the nearby Siurana river, gets a 28-day spontaneous fermentation in stainless steel tanks with indigenous yeasts, and is aged for one year in French oak. No sulphites are added.

DW Intense apricot and macerated herbs, plums; very Mediterranean. Brisk and tangy palate with just a touch of grip and savoury notes from lees contact; very good spicy-pithy length. MF Bright gold colour. Crab apple and pine resin aromas. Persistent baked pear, nougat and ginger spice on the palate. LG Pronounced aromas of hay, smoke and toast. Complex, with moderate, refreshing acidity. Round and elegant, building to a lovely, flinty mineral finish. Drink 2025-2029 Alc 12.5%



Celler de Capçanes, Cabrida 2021

DW 96 MF 95 LG 94
£35.99-£43.99 Alliance Wine, The Fine Wine Co
Formed by a small group of local grower-families in the 1930s, Celler de Capçanes has become one of Spain’s most forward-looking cooperatives, with a commitment to organics and a wide range that includes this upper-end Cabrida cuvée. A 100% Garnacha sourced from old (aged 60-110 years) vines, at 300m to 550m, the wine is aged in a new French oak foudre for 12 months and stainless steel for two more. DW Very expressive and evocative, with an attractive blood orange

character: tangy and wild. Mouthwatering tannins and dried citrus pithy bitterness interplay with red fruit, macerated herbs and pepper. A refined expression of Mediterranean solar power. MF Very fine concentration of succulent red berry fruit, dried orange peel, leather and white pepper. A sustained finish. LG Perfumed, red fruit and Sicilian blood orange; seductive, with sweet spice coming from new oak. Refined but on the technical side, refreshing acidity, fine, angular tannins, moreish, with a sweet length. Drink 2025-2032 Alc 14.5%



Celler Masroig, Les Sorts Vinyes Velles 2020

DW 95 MF 95 LG 95
£30 Bottle Apostle
Founded in 1917, Celler Masroig today manages 350ha of prime vineyard across Montsant. But it’s the up-to-the-minute winemaking skills, led by head winemaker Carles Escolar, that make it stand out on the Catalan scene. Masroig has always been committed to the quality of Carignan on red clay soils, and the variety dominates the blend of Les Sorts (with just 5% Garnacha in the 2020). After a traditional fermentation, the wine is aged for 17 months in new French oak and then 12 months in bottle before release.

DW Ripe, rich, maturing nose with creamy blackberry and a cut of orange pithiness and black cherry. Lots of tannin and extract, but enough fruit to carry through to more creamy blackberry on the finish, which contrasts with a rosemary- and-orange bitterness. MF Savoury black olive and bark characters, brooding black fruit. Succulent, with fine concentration and balance. LG Dark fruit, spice, great mid-palate concentration and intensity, firm, tight-knit tannins. Round and full-bodied but very good integration and a long finish. Drink 2025-2040 Alc 15% ▶



Terroir Sense Fronteres, Negre 2022 £

DW 95 MF 96 LG 94
 £20.70 Armit
 One of the leading lights of minimal-intervention Catalan wine, Austrian Dominik Huber is probably best known for Terroir al Límit, the Priorat winery he founded in 2001 with South African star Eben Sadie, and which he has run solo since 2012. Since 2018, Huber has also been making wines in Montsant under the Terroir Sense Fronteres brand. Negre, the 'house' red, is a 100% Garnacha sourced from vines up to 35 years old grown on clay and sandy soils at 300m-350m. Fermented with wild yeasts and aged in stainless steel tanks. **DW** Super-fragrant, pretty Garnacha that's unencumbered

with oak – very soft, almost gentle in approach, but with no lack of concentration and easeful cherry and strawberry fruit. A subtle tang on the resonant finish. **MF** Very precise and well delineated redcurrant fruit. Fresh and persistent. Svelte and elegant. **LG** Delicate floral aromas, with red fruit: cherries and raspberries. Clean-perfumed and moreish, with moderate, refreshing acidity, moderate, grippy tannins, and whole bunch-derived characters. A savoury finish that lacks a bit of length. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14%



Dominik Huber and head winemaker Tatjana Peceric, Terroir Sense Fronteres



Terroir Sense Fronteres, Vertebra de la Figuera 2022

DW 93 MF 92 LG 95
 £36 Armit
 Bright red fruit, rose petals and sweet cherry define this rustic yet elegant Grenache. High acidity, angular tannins and a mineral finish complement its herbal, toffee-tinged, vibrant and drinkable nature. **Drink** 2025-2034 **Alc** 14%



Vendrell Rived, L'Alieu 2021

DW 93 MF 93 LG 92
 £26 D Vine Cellars, Quality Wines
 Dense red cherry, redcurrant jelly and polished plum fruit with hints of orange pith, mace and black pepper. Refreshing acidity, grippy tannins, rosemary and tapenade lead to a macerated citrus peel finish. **Drink** 2025-2030 **Alc** 15%



Venus la Universal, Dido Blanc 2022

DW 90 MF 90 LG 95
 £18.60 Georges Barbier of London
 Aromas of pine resin. Rich caramel, honey, orange peel and spice. Tangy acidity, oxidative complexity and a long finish. Evolved, assertive and gastronomic – will be at its best with food. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 13.5%



Bell Cros, La Colina 2023

DW 92 MF 92 LG 93
 bellcros.com
 Savoury notes of tomato puree, resin and blade mace meet fresh red cherry and wild berries. Crunchy fruit, tangy acidity, moderate chalky tannins and a spicy olive finish with a vibrant bite. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



Celler de Capçanes, Els Pàjaros 2022

DW 93 MF 91 LG 92
 cellercapcanes.com
 Pleasant red cherry, orange peel and ripe blackberry with a citric lift. Elegant and refined, with balanced tannins. Rich, succulent fruit with a clean, polished and extended finish. **Drink** 2025-2034 **Alc** 14%



Celler Masroig, Masroig 2021 £

DW 93 MF 91 LG 92
 £16 Bottle Apostle
 Plush, youthful fruit with blueberry, lavender and blackberry. Fresh, with tangy acidity, ripe tannins and hints of rosemary and black olive. Elegant, balanced and savoury with a dark fruit-driven finish. **Drink** 2025-2034 **Alc** 14%

Highly recommended 90-94pts



Vinyes Domènech, Furvus 2022

DW 94 MF 95 LG 93
 £21.05 Carte Blanche Wines
 Elegant and complex, offering fragrant strawberry, raspberry and dark berry aromas. The palate balances refreshing acidity, structured tannins and layered red-black fruit with a long, ageworthy finish. **Drink** 2025-2036 **Alc** 14%



Dosterras, Naixement Vinyes Velles 2017

DW 92 MF 94 LG 94
 dosterras.com
 Boasts red cherry compote, bacon frazzles and dense, herb-etched, plummy fruit. Chewy tannins, taut structure and zesty orange acidity add verve to its earthy, savoury and a monumental finish. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



Josep Grau, La Florens 2022

DW 92 MF 95 LG 93
 £32 Davy's
 Bright redcurrant, cherry and cranberry, with orange pith and white pepper complexity. Vibrant, seamless and elegant, showcasing refreshing acidity, delicate florals, gentle tannins and a savoury, structured and drinkable finish. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



Coca i Fitó, Aloja Mare 2013

DW 93 MF 92 LG 92
 £28 Kultur Food
 Evolved and savoury, with leather, spice and delicate tobacco leaf. Cedar, fig and date add complexity. High acidity, resolved tannins and a silky finish blend with dried herbs and a graceful maturity. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



Coca i Fitó, Aloja Negra 2018

DW 92 MF 93 LG 92
 £23 Kultur Food
 Smooth coffee bean, confit cherry and dark berry fruit with spice, leather and a touch of liquorice. Moderate acidity, resolved tannins, creamy texture and a bold yet stylish and characterful finish. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



Josep Grau, Vespres Tinto 2022

DW 93 MF 92 LG 91
 £21.95 Davy's
 Vivid blueberry, damson and cherry with Grenache aromas and a touch of tapenade. Full-bodied yet balanced, with sandy tannins, sweet oak and a herbal-pithy tang on the refreshing, dry finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14%



Orto Vins, Les Comes D'Orto 2022

DW 93 MF 91 LG 93
 ortovins.com
 Fresh raspberry, Morello cherry and blackberry, along with a trace of white pepper. Elegant and balanced, featuring fine-grained tannins, juicy acidity, integrated oak and a polished, rosehip-bright finish. A refined, classy wine. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14%



Clos Maria, Blanc 2018

DW 90 MF 92 LG 90
 £27 Waud Wines
 Intense Marmite aromas with ginger, Turkish delight and complex, aromatic curry and funky oxidative notes. Full-bodied, opulent, spiced and powerful, with smoky bacon notes and a wild, alcohol-driven finish. **Drink** 2025-2030 **Alc** 14.5%



Comunica, La Pua 2021 £

DW 90 MF 91 LG 91
 £20-£21 Les Caves de Pyrene, Ten Green Bottles, The Bottle House, The Good Wine shop
 Ripe Mirabelle plum aromas, pronounced mandarin peel, oxidative complexity, tangy acidity and fresh red apple and juicy peach fruit. Lean and elegant with a subtle mineral finish. **Drink** 2025-2029 **Alc** 13% ▶

'WHILE IT MAY HAVE KINSHIP WITH PRIORAT, MONTSANT IS – OR SHOULD BE – VERY MUCH ITS OWN THING'

David Williams



91

Acústic Celler, Braó Vinyes Velles 2021

DW 92 MF 92 LG 90
 £29.95 Lea & Sandeman
 Juicy dark cherries, brambly fruits and sweet baking spice. Tangy acidity, firm tannins, dark fruit and a twist of anise bitterness on the long finish. **Drink** 2025-2035 **Alc** 15%



91

Can Blau, Blau Verd 2022

DW 91 MF 92 LG 89
 gilfamily.es
 Vivid raspberry, mandarin and vibrant brambly fruit with a plush yet firm-boned texture. Juicy dark fruit, aniseed, fig, spice and notes of roasting coffee. A chewy, characterful finish with woody herbs and dark chocolate bitterness. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



91

Can Blau, Can Blau 2021

DW 91 MF 92 LG 90
 gilfamily.es
 Bright, vibrant red and black fruit, tangy acidity, earthy grip and a slightly bitter tinge. Redcurrant jelly with medicinal, fine-boned tannins. Wafer-thin oak and a refreshing finish with wiry strength. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



91

Venus la Universal, Dido 2022 [£]

DW 91 MF 90 LG 92
 £13.40 Georges Barbier of London
 Cherry stone, apple-press and pine aromas with eucalyptus notes. Tangy acidity, grippy tannins and good concentration. Redcurrants, dark berries and olives, finishing with a dry, wiry and savoury profile. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 13.5%



90

Companyia Viticola Sileo, Costers de Cornudella Blanc 2022

DW 90 MF 89 LG 90
 en.viticolasileo.eu
 Green mango, apple/pear skin notes with fresh, complex stone fruit and hay. High acidity, well-integrated oak and a textured, savoury, food-friendly finish. **Drink** 2025-2030 **Alc** 13%



90

Vendrell Rived, Rebuf 2023

DW 91 MF 90 LG 89
 £19.50 Dvine cellars
 Pleasant quince, rhubarb and citrus with tropical hints and Mediterranean herbs. Fresh palate, with a touch of spice and toast. Soft and juicy apple flavours, floral tones, rounded body and a textured, savoury finish. **Drink** 2025-2028 **Alc** 13%



91

Can Blau, Mas de Can Blau 2020

DW 91 MF 89 LG 92
 gilfamily.es
 Tangy black cherry and vanilla spice with a trace of bitterness. Dense, inky plum, fig and rich black fruit layers. Balanced acidity, firm tannins and a long, stylish, fresh, fruit-driven finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 15.5%

'THE QUALITY IN THE REGION IS VERY GOOD IN GENERAL'

Luis Gámiz



91

Celler de Capçanes, Peraj Ha'abib Flor de Primavera 2022

DW 91 MF 91 LG 90
 £32.82-£39.99 Kedem Europe, The Fine Wine Co
 Concentrated red cherry with mocha, balanced by intense plum, jammy fruit and balsamic notes. Ripe tannins, moderate acidity, sweet oak, olive tapenade and long, satisfying depth. Spicy, with a bittersweet finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 15%



90

Acústic Celler, Auditori 2019

DW 91 MF 90 LG 90
 £49.95 Lea & Sandeman
 Rich, ripe cherry, intense Mediterranean character, good acidity with fruit tension and firm, integrated tannins. Positive development of leather, mulch and nutmeg spice with a bright, expressive finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 15%



90

Celler de Capçanes, Mas Collet 2023 [£]

DW 90 MF 90 LG 90
 £14.99 Alliance Wine
 Succulent red berry fruit with baking spice, bright blueberry and lavender. Juicy, crunchy, round and full-bodied with a glycerol texture. Generous berry compote fruit, supple tannins and a vivid, fresh finish. **Drink** 2025-2030 **Alc** 14.5%



90

Celler Laurona, Pythagora 2020

DW 91 MF 90 LG 90
 cellerlaurona.com
 Lifted leather and mulch aromas, with redcurrant and raspberry fruit with a savoury edge. Juicy candied cherry, plum and orange peel, with supple tannins, a slightly spirty finish and a long, perfumed, characterful aftertaste. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 15%



91

Celler Gritelles, Garnatxa Vinyes Velles 714 2021

DW 89 MF 92 LG 91
 gritelles.com
 Dense black cherry and blueberry fruit. Bold, concentrated bramble flavours, firm tannins, oak and a touch of alcoholic heat. Well integrated, with a long, layered finish. One for ageing. **Drink** 2025-2040 **Alc** 16%



91

Celler Vendrell, Serè 2022 [£]

DW 91 MF 92 LG 91
 £12 Iberian Drinks
 Slim red cherry, orange peel and nutmeg with concentrated, persistent flavours. Juicy plum, cherry and berry with blood orange pithiness. Tangy acidity, high tannins and a bright, slightly rustic finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 15%



91

Cingles Blaus, Selecció 2021

DW 92 MF 93 LG 88
 US\$18 VinoChampagne
 Intense pine resin, sandalwood and red cherry fruit with nutmeg and star anise. Savoury notes of tomato puree, olives, thyme and dried cherries, finishing with a wild, vermouthy, earthy touch. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



90

Clos Maria, Negre 2015

DW 90 MF 91 LG 89
 £27 Waud Wines
 Vibrant mint and eucalyptus aromas with chalky oak tannins. Black fruit, tertiary fig and dates, high acidity, macerated red and black fruit, paprika and bold alcohol on the finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 16%



90

Coca i Fitó, Jaspi Negre 2021

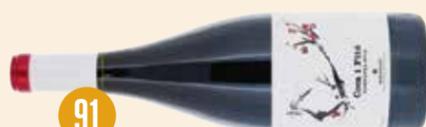
DW 91 MF 90 LG 90
 £23 Kultur Food
 Structured palate with firm tannins, concentrated raspberry pip, slate and black cherry fruit. Ripe, fleshy blue fruit, tangy acidity, sandy tannins and a vibrant, refreshing and characterful finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14%



90

Dosterras 2018

DW 90 MF 90 LG 89
 dosterras.com
 A fresh, vegetal style with a savoury edge and good complexity. Plum, ripe cherry, toast and sweet spice with firm tannins. Barnyardy notes, cherry acidity and a rustic but not overwhelming finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.6%



91

Coca i Fitó, Garnatxa 2014

DW 90 MF 91 LG 91
 £45 Kultur Food
 Evolved, with tobacco, cedar and forest floor notes. Meaty and savoury, with dried fig and charcuterie hints. Firm, unfolding tannins lead to a super-dry, truffled finish – drink up soon. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



91

Spectacle Vins, Espectacle del Montsant 2022

DW 92 MF 89 LG 91
 £120 Georges Barbier of London
 Pronounced red fruit aromas. Firm, powdery tannins with a trace of astringency are balanced by concentrated raspberry fruit and integrated oak. Builds to a controlled, warm, spiced and dry finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 15%



91

Terra de Falanis, Llenca Plana 2020

DW 92 MF 93 LG 89
 £16-£17.50 Vin Cognito, WoodWinters
 Black olive tapenade and savoury leather with high but integrated alcohol and plenty of extraction. Sweet oak, vanilla, blueberries and cola contribute to a meaty, earthy complexity. A rewarding palate with dried fig notes and good length. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14%



90

Estones, Coster d'en Fornós 2020

DW 90 MF 92 LG 89
 estones.cat
 Dark, inky fruit, plush kirsch aromas. Fleshy and warming fruit, with deep, brambly berries and chewy tannins. The palate offers crunchy blackcurrant and fine acidity, leading to a firm, focused finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



90

Estones, GS 2019

DW 90 MF 90 LG 89
 £25 Moreno Wines
 Intense red and black fruits with polished, edgy alcohol. Black cherries, high acidity and fine-grained, structured tannins. A ripe, modern style with a refreshing, balanced finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%



90

Josep Grau, El Pas de l'Estudiant 2022

DW 91 MF 90 LG 90
 £39 Davy's, Holy Spirits
 Restrained aromatics, with macerated-cherry fruit, a fleshy, medium-bodied palate and hints of spice from the oak. Chewy tannins, earthy grip. Dry and savoury, with a hint of olive on the finish. **Drink** 2025-2032 **Alc** 14.5%