

The origin of the family

Whilst the origins of viticulture at Can Vendrell go back to the middle ages, it was not until 1903 that the Albet family established itself at the estate. Joan Albet i Rovirosa came to Can Vendrell to oversee the replanting of the estate after the Phylloxera plague. This process involved planting American rootstock and grafting the desired variety onto that rootstock. After replanting the vineyards he stayed on as manager of the 210 hectare estate of which 90 hectares were vineyards.

It was the fourth and current generation, Josep Maria Albet i Noya, that introduced organic farming methods to the vineyards. Josep Maria took over the management of the estate after his father's death in 1972 and at the end of the seventies started producing his first organic wines. With the success of that first wine produced specifically for the Danish market, they gradually moved the entire estate over to organic farming.





ALBET i NOYA

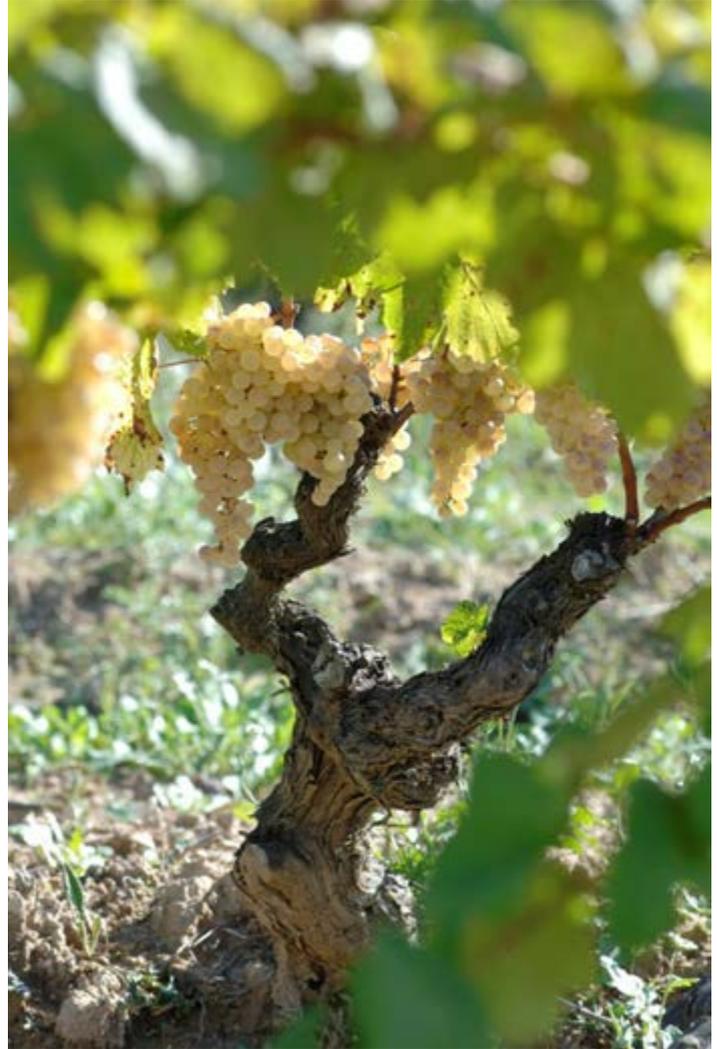
PIONERS EN VINYES I VINS ECOLÒGICS

Organic Farming

Organic wine is largely wine from organically grown grapes, but the regulations primarily limit the quantity of sulphur dioxide that can be used, approximately half the levels permitted in a conventional cellar. This means that the Can Vendrell cellar is required to maintain a level of hygiene far superior to that of a conventional cellar. Nonetheless, once more we can see that the key to making great wines lies in the quality of the raw materials: the grapes.

By working only with grapes in optimum sanitary conditions, Albet i Noya are able to work largely without using SO₂. We use autochthonous yeasts from the Albet i Noya vineyards, selected from the Xarel·lo variety and we are working in the selection of other yeasts for the remaining varieties.

The fermenting vats have an inert gas system (a mix of nitrogen and CO₂) to prevent potential alterations in the wine. Once again, the emphasis is on prevention rather than cure: as the wine cannot be chemically corrected, the hygiene of the cellar is the key to avoiding disappointments. The cellar equipment is cleaned using high pressure hot water (up to 90°C) instead of chemical products.



All of our wines & sparklings fall under the control of the CCPAE (Consell Català de la producció agrària ecològica). This is a public watchdog responsible to the Ministry of Agriculture of the Catalan Government. This organisation undertakes regular inspections and certifies that the terms of the European Regulation 2092/91 on organic produce are adhered to.

The quality of an organic wine (even more than for a non-organic wine) starts in the vineyards. The principal characteristics of organically grown grapes are the lack of chemical residues and ideal sanitary conditions. If you add to that low yields in the vineyards, you not only improve the quality of the grapes, but also improve the sustainability of the vineyards as the vines are naturally more resistant to plagues. Organic regulations therefore prohibit any kind of treatments with synthetic chemical products (Herbicides, pesticides or fertilisers).

The following treatments are applied at Can Vendrell:

- Green compost: The organic material recycled from the composted cellar residues and shredded vine shoots maintain the soil's balance. Every autumn we sow a mixture of five grasses between the vines that contribute a balance of nitrogen, carbon and cellulose. These grasses are cut in the spring, and after being left for a fortnight to decompose, they are ploughed back into the soil.
- Although organic regulations still permit the use of copper sulphate - the traditional "bordeaux mixture" (limited to 4kg of active components per hectare) at Can Vendrell we use Copper hydroxide, which has a lower copper content and is more active at low doses. Nonetheless, Albet i Noya is increasingly substituting these treatments for biodynamic mixtures of sulphurous clays, equisetum (horsetail) extract, nettles and marine seaweeds. These mixtures have proved effective against mildew but also indirectly help prevent botrytis.

As in all organic treatments, timing is of the essence. To ensure these treatments reach the grapes, the vines are green pruned, removing excess leaves to give the grapes sufficient ventilation and exposure to the sun. This process also improves the quality of the grapes as with increased exposure to the sun, the skins produce more pigments, giving the resulting wine more color and more mature tannins. Finally the grapes are selected during picking ensuring only the healthiest grapes enter the cellar.



Our vineyards

Of the 145 hectares they control, 80.5 are given over exclusively to the cultivation of vines. The estate vines cover the western slopes of the Ordal mountain range known as "Costers d'Ordal", following the curves of the terrain in stepped terraces or on slopes exposed to the midday sun. As in all good wine-growing land, the soil in Can Vendrell has low organic content, with a variable content of clay and sand on a bed of calcareous stone, a permeable base with good moisture retention.

Leaving aside for a moment the suitability of the land for wine growing, there are other factors which intervene in the selection of the most suitable vines for cultivation, such as the lie of the land, the hours of sun, the humidity and altitude of the terrain.

The white varieties are Chardonnay (1.1ha), Macabeu (9.7ha), Xarel·lo (19.1ha), Parellada (10.5ha), Moscatell (0.4ha), Viogner (1.5ha), Sauvignon Blanc (0.3ha), Riesling (1.5ha), Garnatxa Blanca (0.2ha) and 4 experimental varieties (0.8ha).

The red varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon (10ha), Tempranillo o Ull de llebre (8.3ha), Merlot (5.4ha), Syrah (6ha), Garnatxa negra (2.2ha), Pinot Noir (2.9ha), and 6 experimental varieties (0.8ha)

Whilst the Xarel·lo, Macabeu and Parellada are the varieties traditionally planted in the Penedès region, the others had been lost at the end of the 19th century with the Phylloxera crisis and the growth of cava, until their reintroduction to Can Vendrell by the Albet family in the early eighties.

