

Albariño's NEW WORLD

SPAIN'S COOL-CLIMATE
VARIETY FLOURISHES ON
CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL COAST

by Wendy Thies Sell

Winemaker Christian Roguenant is "bullish" on Albariño, making cases of Tangent Albariño, entirely estate-grown at Paragon Vineyard—the largest planting of this variety on the West Coast.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PARAGON VINEYARD

AMERICA'S FIRST EVENT TO SHINE A SPOTLIGHT ON ALBARIÑO attracted 200 enthusiasts to Paso Robles to celebrate the Spanish white wine varietal that is gaining ground in the United States. The 2016 Albariño Summit, held at Brecon Estate Winery in June, featured two dozen Central Coast Albariño producers; the al fresco vineyard tasting was synchronized with the sunset and appropriately paired with tapas and flamenco guitar.

Among the winemakers featured was California's first lady of Albariño, Louisa Sawyer Lindquist, who became smitten with Albariño three decades ago while selling it in a Long Island wine shop. "I just really fell in love with the aromatics and the minerality and the brightness. It's just a beautiful wine," she said. "Albariño speaks to a different consumer than chardonnay might, and it seems to be taking hold."

So strong is her allegiance, Lindquist planted a block of Albariño in 1996 at Ibarra-Young Vineyard in California's Santa Ynez Valley, crafting her first Albariño in 1999. Lindquist released the subsequent vintage under her Verdad Wines label, the Santa Maria artisan winery specializing in Spanish wine varietals. (The former Havens Wine Cellars in Napa Valley was the other winery to produce California's first commercial vintage of Albariño.)

Verdad Albariño reflects both varietal character and place, sourced from two vineyards in San Luis Obispo's Edna Valley AVA: Paragon and nearby Sawyer Lindquist, the certified biodynamic hillside vineyard that Lindquist co-founded with her winemaker husband, Bob Lindquist of Qupé. Several Paso Robles wine estates now grow Albariño, but most Central Coast Albariño producers purchase fruit from the cooler Edna Valley, located five miles from the ocean. Successful Albariño plantings are close to the sea, explains Burgundy native Christian Roguenant, who oversees winemaking for Niven Family Wine Estates, owner of Paragon Vineyard. As an Albariño Summit panelist, his passion for the varietal was unmistakable. "In Spain they call Albariño, *el vino del mar*"—"the wine of the sea"—because it has that briny/salty quality which we have in the Edna Valley," Roguenant explained.

"The main flavor you'll see in our wine is first, turpentine/pine needles and then, secondly, banana and some floral notes of rose petals, and also at the end of the taste, you have more of those esters, such as pear, peach, maybe a little hint of green apple." Roguenant produces 7,000 cases of Tangent Albariño, entirely estate-grown at Paragon—the largest planting of Albariño on the West Coast.

"We've been very bullish with it," he said on establishing 48 acres of Albariño in a maritime valley known for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. "We really were so excited about Albariño that we decided to make a huge financial commitment. We thought, people are getting more interested in new varieties, why don't we try to be a leader in one of those new categories? And 12 years later, here we are!" SJ

Brecon Estate Albariño was poured at the first Albariño Summit, held at the estate.



Louisa Sawyer Lindquist presented her Verdad Albariño at the event.

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