

Viña Salvana

An \$8 hit from the desert of Spain '01 Viña Salvana deliciously ripe, balanced wine to enjoy

By Edward Deitch
Wine columnist
MSNBC

Updated: 4:25 p.m. ET May 26, 2004

In wine, you never know what — or who — you'll run into, which is part of what makes it so exciting. Case in point: finding an unusually good, \$8 bottle of red on a recent evening was purely a matter of chance as I wandered into my neighborhood wine shop with no idea what I might walk out with.

As I looked over the shelves of wines from Spain at Martin Brothers in New York, a young man approached and started pointing out bottles he thought I should try. Among them was the 2001 Viña Salvana from Spain's Almería region. The man in the store, it turned out, was 26-year-old Patrick Mata, who represents and promotes Spanish wines that he discovers with a partner, Alberto Orte (you'll see their names in tiny type on the back label). Judging by Viña Salvana and a couple of others I've tried, he is worth watching. I remembered that we had spoken on the phone about a year ago about another good value, but because that wine had only limited availability, I decided not to write about it. In any event, Viña Salvana is better and has, says Mata, a growing distribution beyond the East Coast (you can call him at 917-335-7462 if you can't find it). Viña Salvana is made by Bodegas Agrosol, a 490-acre vineyard that is pretty much the only game in town when it comes to wine in Almería, a desert region in southeast Spain that no one talks about — yet. Wine like Viña Salvana should change that. The wine is bottled young (you'll notice "joven" on the label) and is aged in stainless steel tanks without exposure to oak. It is fruit driven but earthy and reminded me of Nebbiolo from Italy, although the grapes bear no relation. Viña Salvana is a blend — 50 percent Monastrell (known as Mourvèdre in France) and 25 percent each of Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon. The result is a deliciously ripe, balanced wine that has intense berry aromas and tastes that included blueberry, blackberry and even a hint of cranberry. It is softly tannic but has decent structure and will go well with any number of red-wine dishes. Patrick Mata explained that Monastrell does very well in the desert with a lot of sun, low humidity and little water. The grape, thought to have originated in Spain, is also an important player in the Rhône and other parts of southern France. Viña Salvana may be in the more obscure minor leagues of Spanish wine, but at all of \$8, it's a hit.

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