

# THE ORGANIC WINES OF 'CHATEAU' SCHATZ

Linn journeys into the Sierra de Ronda to discover Málaga's first organic vineyard and what may be Spain's most miniscule micro winery, whose methods are nevertheless enjoying mega success.

Prince Alfonso von Hohenlohe's vineyard at Ronda is justly famous and has been featured previously in *AM*. However it was not the first in the area, nor is it the only one. There are several micro wineries in the Sierra de Ronda, one of the most interesting of which is a German-run project,

The Schatz family has been making wine in Württemberg since 1641 and in 1982, Friedrich Schatz bought a small country property near Ronda and started experimenting with different grape varieties. Many of these, such as Trollinger, Spätburgunder, Lemberger and Blaufränkinger had never been tried in Spain before, but together with Riesling, Chardonnay, Tempranillo, Syrah, Merlot and Cabernet-Sauvignon, now form the basis of Schatz's production.

## Nature's Way

The cultivation *chez* 'Chateau Schatz' is fully organic, with crops such as beans, clover and peas being grown and later ploughed into the earth to fertilise the vines. Natural means are employed to prevent disease, garlic extract, alcohol, yeasts and mineral oil being among the products used. Harvesting is done by hand and small crates are used for immediate transport to the pressroom so as to avoid the breaking of the grapes' skin as a result of undue pressure.

All this sounds like a great deal of work and indeed it is, but then the vineyard is only three hectares in size, probably the smallest mini of micro wineries in the country. Nevertheless - and in spite of keeping yields deliberately low so as to improve quality - Schatz still managed to produce 15,000 bottles of wine last year. Of these, 70 per cent were red wines, 25 per cent white and the rest *rosado*.

## Supply and Demand

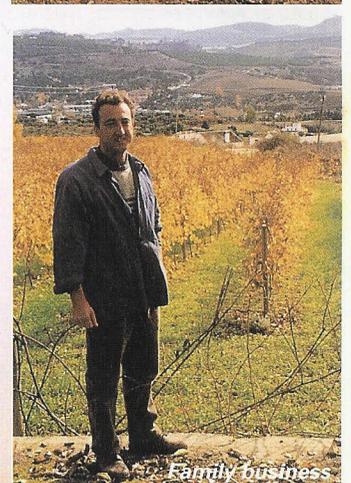
Of course, one problem common to all well-reputed micro wineries is that demand outstrips supply. This is hardly surprising, as the wine is extraordinarily good. People who maintain that organic wine tastes no better or worse than non-organic wine have almost certainly never had a one-to-one tasting, where the same grape and identical vintage from the same area are all compared. Although this is the only organic winery in Málaga Province, it certainly not be the last, so fast is the



Small but perfectly formed



The most wanted wines



Family business

market expanding throughout Europe. It may be possible to find some of Schatz's wines in specialist wine shops, but the only certain way is to visit the *finca* itself. In fact it makes a delightful day out, because if you visit the winery in the morning you can then go on to lunch in Ronda at *Tragabuches* (Málaga Province's only one-fork Michelin restaurant), where these wonderful wines are featured. **an**

Schatz wines have a simple pricing formula: all cost the same.