



future vineyard (yes, literally; he says he could tell how good it was by eating it), Schatz bought a small country property near Ronda, Finca Sanguijela, and started experimenting with different grape varieties. Many of these, such as *Trollinger*, *Spätburgunder*, *Lemberger* and *Muskattrollinger*, 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.

Actually the Ronda area has a long history of winemaking going back two thousand years, thanks to a climate providing 300 millilitres of rainfall and just the right amount of sunshine hours at the desired temperature. In fact, Schatz sees the next 20 years as giving it the opportunity to become one of the great regions of Europe. There are now nine wineries in the immediate area, and each one is producing interesting new wines that the drinking public seems to like.

Schatz's cultivation is totally organic, with crops such as beans, clover and peas being grown and later ploughed into the earth to fertilise the vines. Natural means are used to prevent disease - garlic extract, alcohol, yeasts

and fennel oil being among these. Harvesting is by hand, and small boxes are used for immediate transport to the *bodega* to avoid breaking the grapes' skins by undue pressure.

Why did he go the organic route? Does that really help sell wine? Schatz's explanation is that he is *cabezota* - he likes doing things his way. But it must be more than this, as he even generates electricity by a small wind pump and uses solar power for the installations. So to put it another way: are his wines difficult to make? Unquestionably yes, with the *rosado*, surprisingly, the hardest of the three options of white, red and *rosado*. The white is the next most difficult, and the red is relatively easy.

The *rosado* is made from the exotic *Muskattrollinger* grape, and barrel-fermented in French oak where it remains for five months on its lees. None of Schatz's wines are filtered. A *Chardonnay* grape (one of

the 100 different varieties, Schatz points out) is used to make the white, and this is also barrel-fermented; only new barrels are used, adding to the expense of the production method, and the three reds are from *Lemberger* (*Acinipio*), *Pinot Noir* and *Petit Verdot*, aged for 12/13 months in the wood.

All this sounds like a lot of work - and indeed it is - but then the vineyard is only three hectares in size, probably the most micro of micro-wineries in the country. And, in common with all organic producers, the grape yield per vine is minute, between a kilo and a kilo and a half each vintage. Nevertheless, and in spite of keeping yields deliberately low to improve quality, Schatz still managed to produce 30,000 bottles of wine last year - 70 per cent red, 25 per cent white and the rest *rosado*, and - yes, you've guessed it - demand far outstrips supply.

Which 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 tried a one-to-one tasting, where the same grape and the same vintage from the same area are all compared.

You will find some of Schatz's wines in specialist wine shops, such as the *Vinacoteca La Cartuja* in Marbella, and it is increasingly putting in an appearance on restaurant wine lists in this area, and in Ronda, of course, *Tragabuches*, for one.

An average bottle from *Bodega F Schatz* costs in the region of €24. **CONTACT**

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WINE PEOPLE

MÁLAGA'S FIRST ORGANIC VINEYARD ►

When I first visited the Schatz vineyard in 2001 there was precious little winemaking going on in the Sierra de Ronda. Prince Alfonso von Hohenlohe's vineyard had been started and there were a couple of micro wineries in the Sierra de Ronda, but that was it. At that time, all wine from the area had to be sold as *vino de mesa*, since there was no *Denominación de Origen*.

HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED... ►

The Hohenlohe winery was bought by a multinational corporation a couple of years ago, and is, regrettably, now a shadow of its former self as far as the wines are concerned. But the big news is that the new DO, *Málaga y las Sierras de Málaga*, introduced in 2002, covers the entire wine-growing region around Ronda. The Schatz winery is the first organic one in the area.

The Schatz family has been making wine in Württemberg since 1641, and in 1982 Friedrich Schatz started looking for a suitable *finca* in southern Spain. He did not want any of the northern winegrowing regions as he likes warm weather, and he was prepared to start from scratch. Having eaten the earth of his chosen

