

WINE News

Travels in Spain with K&L's Spanish wine department.



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Spain: More than Rioja (Although the Riojas are Still Pretty Good!)

By Joe Manekin

The diversity of Spanish wine is off the charts. There are more inspired young producers working in a greater variety of regions and terroirs than ever before. Another observation I've made is that Spanish winemakers' old models for making great wine (Bordeaux, Burgundy and Rhône), while still relevant, have given way to greater exploration and appreciation of wines that now feature more prominently in the country's best wine shops and restaurants: Jura wines, traditional Barolo, and even some of the more avant California producers are all

in play in Spain. This only helps to expand winemakers' palates—and palettes—to create ever more exciting and diverse wines. That said, we are still in Spain, so tradition reigns. Nowhere in the world is the tradition of producing wine that is patiently aged for long periods of time in barrel and bottle stronger than in Rioja. As usual, Rioja is the lead actor in this newsletter, but we encourage you to explore, as there are some notably delicious supporting roles among other regions.

2016 Adegas Valtea Albariño Rías Baixas (\$14.99) Our Direct Import Albariño from Adegas Valtea is a customer favorite for good reason. Not surprisingly, given the abundance of amazing seafood along Galicia's coastline, this is a classic with any shellfish, especially Dungeness crab!



2014 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos Crianza Rioja (\$12.99) Casa Juan's wines are somehow spicy and very drinkable, yet also structured and fresh in a way that few classic Riojas are. The 2014 vintage brings great structure and heft to this wine, with a depth of flavor and build that suggests some ageability.



2011 Miguel Merino "Vitola" Reserva Rioja (\$19.99) A richly fruited, generous Vitola. Given that we are in Briones, Rioja, however, the wine also has intensity, chalky minerality and the authority of Rioja Alta fruit from mature vines. Do not be shy about popping this open now, though it will certainly continue to improve and hold well for at least another five years.



The New Standards: Tradition and Craft Thrive in Northern Spain

By Joe Manekin

There is a common sentiment among frequent travelers to Spain: it's all about the north and the south. Not to discourage anyone from exploring the treasures in the heart of the former Iberian kingdoms of Castilla, Leon and Aragon—great food and wine, bustling small cities and beautiful villages abound in the interior—but that said, for anyone who has visited Rioja wine country, Asturias or San Sebastian up north, Cádiz, Sevilla and any of the dozens of “pueblos blancos” in Andalucía, it's hard to think that anything other than coastal living is the best. Focusing on the north alone, there is simply so much to explore, from caves in Cantabria to the world's best restaurants in Basque country, snow-capped, alpine-like scenery in the Picos de Europa mountain range, to relaxed, coastal towns teeming with artisanal anchovy canneries (quick aside—even while my teenage self would have been disgusted, make no mistake: top-quality Cantabrian anchovies are one of our great culinary treasures!)

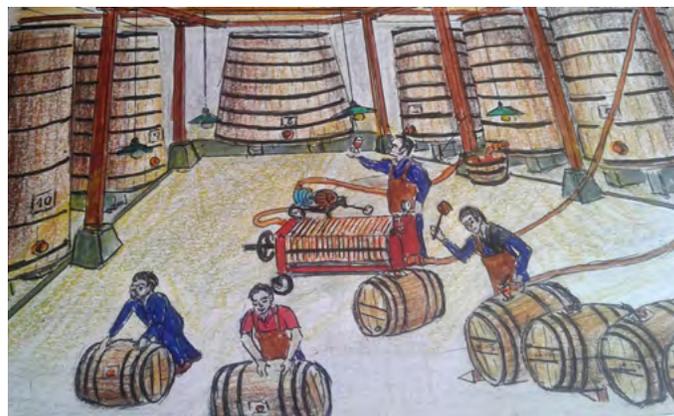
No, I do not work for the Spain tourism board or collect a dime from any promotional entity in the Spanish government. I do, however, encourage travel to Spain whenever given the opportunity to do so, whether in person or when given a platform such as our newsletter. Spain is still the most affordable of the major wine-producing countries in western Europe—both in terms of travel and wine. When traveling there, it is impossible not to notice the great pride taken in artisan traditions and craft.

The wines (and cider!) below represent tradition's prominent—resurgent, even—role in the current Spanish landscape. All of these (except the Bierzo) are Direct Imports, for maximum value impact on these delicious, traditionally crafted products.

Zabala Natural Cider Pais Vasco (\$9.99) Produced from a few dozen local varieties of Basque cider apples, this is the quintessential chef's tippie—at least it is if I'm cooking. This award-winning cider is naturally fermented from pressed apples and aged in a combination of stainless steel and traditional, large chestnut vats. Tart yet still fresh and appley, it's only 6% alcohol by volume, refreshing, and incredibly food-friendly as well. I particularly love it with ripe, runny cow or sheep milk cheeses.



Can Mayol Loxarel “Reserva Familiar” Brut Nature Classic Penedès (\$19.99) I recently took a minute to insert the designation “Classic” before Penedès on all of Can Mayol's wines. Classic Penedès is a relatively recent Catalan Denominación de Origen (D.O.), which focuses on some of the top-quality producers in the D.O. who are farming organically (a requirement of the Classic Penedès D.O.). Featuring some of the property's oldest, most prized parcels of Xarel-lo grapes, the Reserva Familiar sees over six years on its lees. This is very impressive bubbly that we can honestly say gives a lot of Champagne at twice the price a real run for its money.



One of Ezequiel “El Brujo” Garcia's drawings.

2014 Honorío Rubio “Lías Finas” Blanco Crianza Rioja (\$29.99) These days, outside of López de Heredia (whose whites are increasingly difficult to find) and the odd older bottles of Ygay blanco, traditional white Rioja is tough to find. That's why we are so excited to be selling the wines of our newest DI producer, Honorío Rubio. Based in the high-altitude Rioja Alta village of Cordovín, Honorío Rubio has spectacular Viura and Malvasia vine holdings, planted in poor, but iron-rich clay soils, and chooses to turn them into classic, traditional white Rioja.



2016 Raúl Pérez “Ultreia St-Jacques” Mencía Bierzo (\$17.99) El Bierzo, the winemaking D.O. closest to the city of León, straddles the northwestern edge of Castilla y León, and topographically almost serves as a bridge between the parched *meseta* to the rolling hills and lush green mountain scenery of Galicia. This is a fantastic example of the savory, mineral and bright, almost northern Rhône Syrah, St-Joseph type of fruit that Mencía is capable of producing when in the best of hands—and winemaker Raúl Pérez is a living legend. Highly recommended.



2011 Los Autores “El Brujo” Reserva Rioja (\$24.99) This is the last wine ever made by Rioja legend Ezequiel “El Brujo” García, former winemaker at Cune in the winery's golden era of the 1960s and 1970s. Here we have a timeless, traditionally styled Reserva wine: primarily Rioja Alta fruit from long-time contracted mature vineyards in top sites, fermented in tank, racked into seasoned barrels generally 8–10 years of age where the wine stays for 36 months prior to blending; a long rest in tank and then aging in bottle. 82% Tempranillo, 8% Mazuelo, 8% Garnacha and 2% Viura. Think somewhere in between La Rioja Alta “Viña Arana” and López de Heredia “Viña Tondonia” in aromatic and palate profile, though released just a little bit younger. **90 RP**



The Excellent Laventuras of Bryan MacRobert

By Ivan Diaz

South African winemaker Bryan MacRobert knows terroir. After a childhood spent on farms, and years in the winemaking business in his native country, he has an ingrained sense for viticulture that serves him extremely well in his Rioja project, Laventura. After apparently falling in love with a Spanish woman from the region, MacRobert also quickly fell in love with Rioja's terroir, and now lives there in the town of Logroño. Ever since, he has been at the forefront of Rioja's "new school" of winemakers, crafting fine wines from some of the best vineyards in the region.

Winemakers like Bryan would be hard-pressed to start a profitable new winery in Rioja using traditional, or "old school" aging techniques, since it would require holding onto each bottling for several years at a time before release. So instead of abiding by the old Rioja standards of aging (Crianza, Reserva, Gran Reserva), Laventura is opting to forego such traditions in favor of placing more attention on the quality of the fruit coming from the vineyard.

2015 Laventura Viura Rioja (\$19.99) Of the two whites released in 2015, the Viura is the more classic style for Rioja blanco, though this one is quite different than most inexpensive, "drink now" white Rioja. With its pears and honey, subtle beeswax, fresh herbs, and medium body, it's almost Chenin Blanc-like in texture and style, and its potential to age seems comparable. **92 RP**

2015 Laventura Malvasia Rioja (\$24.99) Showing more white floral aromatics, stone fruit, zippy acidity, crisp texture, and a touch of matchstick minerality, this Malvasia upends the common expectations

for this important grape, which has historically played a part in Viña Tondonia blanco and other great traditional Rioja white wines. **91 RP**

2015 Laventura "Lanave" Rioja (\$14.99) A blend of 50% Tempranillo and 50% Garnacha, the Lanave is a fresh and fun entry-level bottling that showcases the beautiful balance that these two varieties can achieve, with the Tempranillo bringing the fuller, darker aspects—black cherries, licorice, tree bark—and the Garnacha cutting it with higher-toned strawberry, green herbs and juicy acidity. **90 RP**

2015 Laventura Garnacha Rioja (\$19.99) Indeed, when isolated the Garnacha shows all the brightness and energy only hinted at in the Lanave. Fresh strawberries, bracing acidity, hints of cocoa and compelling texture provided by the rocky, chalky minerality make this a thorough experience, and extremely versatile with food. **92 RP**

2015 Laventura Tempranillo Rioja (\$19.99) Bryan's take on the primary grape of Rioja is similarly fresh and bright, but is special for its ability to express a very pure form of Tempranillo untouched by the flavors that accompany extended oak aging. Plum, black cherry and cassis coat the palate, followed by Herbs de Provence, warm baking spice and spicy tree bark. A little tight in the glass right now, this would react very well to a couple of years in the cellar, or a few hours in a decanter before serving. **91 RP**



Mas Codina: Organic Value in Penedès

By Chantel Carroll

The Garriga family has been growing grapes for three generations in Puigdàlber, in the Penedès region, southwest of Barcelona.

Antoni Garriga decided in the mid-1980s to bottle wine from their own grapes, which at the time was still unusual for a smaller grower in the region—typically, they would sell to one of the larger houses. Mas Codina is now led by husband-and-wife team Toni and Imma Garriga. Toni made the decision in 2014 to go organic, utilizing their own compost and vine treatments, even keeping bees on-site to aid in the health of their vines. Their respect for nature, I think, absolutely shows through in their wines. The 2017 vintage is the first vintage they are actually certified organic.

I'm happy to welcome back **Mas Codina Brut Rosé Cava Penedès (\$13.99)**. This sparkling rosé is hand-riddled and made from Pinot Noir grown in the chalky soils of their own estate. The Garrigas pick the grapes in late summer to ensure lower sugar and high acid. The wine spends two years on its lees, to give it that somewhat creamy, toasty element we crave in Champagne. This lovely sparkling wine carries a lot of the classic characteristics we love in Pinot Noir-based bubbly: beautiful red cherry, chalk and mouthwatering acidity. Every time I taste this wine it blows my mind that we sell it for under \$15.

We have two new additions to the Mas Codina family.

2016 Mas Codina Xarel-lo Penedès (\$14.99) is produced from 100% Xarel-lo, (pronounced Char-el-oh), a grape indigenous to Catalunya that is a key variety in Cava production, along with Macabeu and Parellada. Xarel-lo is aromatic, high in acid and phenols, and contributes elegance to Cava. It is also vinified and aged as a white wine. Mas Codina's Xarel-lo is so intriguing, absolutely lip-smacking, and delicious! Not at all lacking in depth, this wine shows sweet stone fruit, salted Marcona almonds, a mineral element, racy acidity and juicy peaches lingering on the palate.



2015 Mas Codina Cabernet Sauvignon Penedès (\$9.99) is arguably the best Cab under \$15 in the store. Lush, ripe black cherries, cassis and sandalwood on the nose. The palate has a nice balance of acidity and silky tannins. As I drink these wines I fall back into my daily daydream of visiting the Garriga family at Mas Codina. I imagine hanging out with the family, enjoying the views of the Montserrat mountains in the background and the buzzing of Toni's bees.



Bodegas Miguel Merino: Getting the Best from Rioja's Old Vines

By Joe Bruno

Twenty years ago, wine exporter Miguel Merino endeavored to create a small bodega of his own. In the Rioja Alta village of Briones, Merino found what he was searching for: steep vineyards of old-vine Tempranillo, chalky soil, and a climate tempered by an Atlantic influence.

Today, while Bodegas Miguel Merino is one of the younger wineries in Spain (first vintage in 1994), the wines continue to be among the most heralded in the country.



The man, the myth, the Miguel Merino.

A great example of Miguel Merino's style is the **2014 Mazuelo de la Quinta Cruz Rioja (\$21.99)**, a cool climate 100% Mazuelo (aka Carignan or Cariñena) that really shines. In Rioja Alta, the Mazuelo vineyard is planted in stony soil and grown with a meticulous nature that allows the grape to reach its full potential. The end result is a wine that possesses an abundance of verve and freshness, crunchy fruit flavors, and earthy spice notes.

A lively and truly unique Rioja. Rated **95** points, Tim Atkin MW.

The **2011 Miguel Merino Reserva Rioja (\$29.99)** is my favorite on current release. The wine is both approachable in its youth and also has characteristics that lend it to aging potential down the road. The style is classic but contains modern influences. American oak flavor is predominant, with the barrel program on this wine having American oak staves, while French oak heads give a sense of richness. The structural balance and silky tannins are the standouts of this Reserva Rioja, as are its inherent food pairing applications.

With the **2011 Miguel Merino "Unnum" Rioja (\$34.99)** the vineyards are the true stars. The fruit sources for this wine are two single vineyard sites: La Loma and Mendiguerra, both over 80 years old. La Loma is typified by steep terraces and limestone soil and the Mendiguerra vineyard is quite pebbly, with only olive trees and vines persevering. Along with a barrel regimen of exclusive French oak (about 40% new), the wine has a lot of depth and lively acidity. This is a fine choice for a cellar collection, and I would recommend holding it for at least another three to five years to allow for maximum potential to develop in bottle. Rated **93** points, Tim Atkin MW.

The **2009 Miguel Merino Gran Reserva Rioja (\$39.99)** is the oldest Miguel Merino selection upon current release, and is also sourced from the oldest vineyards in the portfolio. This winery's Gran Reserva wines are only made during the most lauded vintages. The wine is complex and layered, with the depth of flavor apparent the longer you drink it. A fantastic food wine, this would be perfect for special occasion dinners like Thanksgiving or Christmas. Decanting this wine allows maximum enjoyment to be had by all.

While now exporting to more than 30 countries, Bodegas Miguel Merino has continued to stay true to their roots of making wine that has a strong sense of terroir, pays homage to both traditional and modern winemaking styles, and can be enjoyed on its own or with food. As Miguel has said, this only encourages them to grow, not in quantity, but by constantly improving their style and getting the best from each grape and each barrel.



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