

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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Issue Thirty-Five

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**RECENTLY TASTED SPANISH WINES
GREAT OLD RIOJA AND AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES
FROM OUTSIDE THE MAINSTREAM REGIONS**



As has been the case for the last few years, my annual feature on recently tasted Spanish wines is primarily comprised of new releases from the young and very classically-oriented Spanish wine importer, José Pastor, a nice selection of off the beaten path wines from another US importer, Doug Polaner, the new releases from López de Heredia and bottles of older Rioja wines that I have drunk over the course of the last twelve months or so. There are notes on a few other Spanish wines sprinkled in here and there throughout the article as well, but I generally do not cast my net too wide when it comes to tasting new releases from Spain outside of the realm of a couple of select importers here in the states, as there is an awful lot of over-oaked, over-extracted Spanish red wine out there on the market these days that I find a sad commentary on the sorry state of affairs in the world of Spanish wine today. While many of these wines have their famous journalistic champions, embracing the “Mediterranean” roots of Spanish wines that somehow today translate into high octane, coarse and uninteresting internationally-styled wines struggling to support their (very Mediterranean?) blast of new French oak, it is my distinct impression that these journalists are simply apologists for the trend of many bodega owners in the most famous Spanish wine-producing regions to turn their back on their own rich tapestry of wine-making traditions, seeking to ingratiate their wines with a few arbiters of taste who really

have no clue about traditional Spanish wine styles and simply applaud the wines that pack the most voltage to cut through their well-meaning, but patently fatigued international palates.

I am sure that my current approach to tasting Spanish wines misses quite a few gems that deserve attention, but I am reasonably content to side step having to taste a lot of sad and anonymously international wines in exchange for not reviewing a few old favorites. American wine importers with a decent portfolio of Spanish wines seem to carry both a few of the great old school bodegas such as Cune, La Rioja Alta and the like to go along with a much larger number of the more ham-fisted modern stuff from the “Mediterranean” camp of Spanish wines, so I tend to steer clear of controversy by not searching out a lot of samples from these folks. I would love to offer subscribers a more comprehensive look at the contemporary Spanish wine landscape in these reports, but it seems that a bit of good news on the wines off the beaten path these days, as well as notes on all the great old Rioja that still seem to pop up with some regularity in the market is a lot more enjoyable to read than a lot of disappointed notes on alcoholic and leaden wines of heavy lumber and dubious futures. While I have a sense that the stylistic pendulum in many wine regions around the globe is beginning to swing back a bit towards more classically balanced wines, I still have the impression (rightly or wrongly) that there are too many new owners of bodegas in the top Spanish wine-producing regions who are inextricably locked into their current business models of heavily-extracted wines of painfully high alcohol and plenty of new French *barriques* that this style will continue to predominate in regions such as Ribera del Duero, Rioja and Priorat for many years to come. So much as I do with my coverage of California wines, in Spain I will continue simply to focus on the wines I find the most interesting from the country, in the hopes that readers will also find these wines intriguing if they search them out.

The following wines have all been tasted in the last twelve months or so, with many of the older bottles hailing from my own cellar. I have tried to arrange the notes by varietal for most of the white wines and by region for the red wines, with thumbnail sketches of the various red wine regions preceding the notes. The red wine notes start with the various island wines and then try to progress geographically from south to north, with my favorite region of Rioja saved for last in the listings. I was fortunate to be invited out in early June to San Francisco to participate in a fine tasting of old Rioja organized by the Rare Wine Company of Sonoma, who put together a superb lineup of wines from the vintages of 1976 all the way back to 1956. What was fun about this tasting was that several of the bodegas at the tasting were less well-known estates today that happened to make really lovely, old school Rioja back in this era and whose wines were a great treat to taste. I have been remiss in not including a visit to Spain in the past year or two of travel and really hope that I can arrange one for next year’s tasting schedule, as I am embarrassed not to be tasting at the in the cellars of the estates of my favorite traditional producers and discovering some of these lovely producers from far-flung regions that José Pastor and Doug Polaner keep pulling out of regions I am generally unfamiliar with, as in most cases these are really unique and compelling wines. But be that as it may, in the interim here is a report on some of the lovely Spanish wines that have crossed my paths in the past year- with a promise to one day soon get my feet wet scaling the Tierras de Cangas, facing down the steep slopes in the Ribeira Sacra or sampling the best new wines on the island of Mallorca and hitting a few tennis balls with Rafael Nadal on his home clay courts.

White Wines

While I am generally quite pessimistic about the near future of many red wines from Spain hailing from the best known regions, the white winemaking world in Spain seems to be getting better and better with each passing vintage. I am a great fan of the best examples that I am tasting made from such compelling grapes as Verdejo, Godello, Albariño, Rueda and Viura, and I hope that we will continue to see more and more estates focus in on these truly unique and exciting varietals, rather than give into the temptation and plant more chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. So many Spanish wine regions seem to be at the same crossroads that Tuscany was at a couple of decades ago and one hopes that they will learn from the mistakes that the Tuscans made in trading their rich and deep wine traditions for a facile and rather sterile take on wine modernity.

Albariño

2010 Albariño- La Val (Rias Baixas)

The winery of La Val is located in the Condado do Tea zone of Rias Baixas, which is a bit inland from the ocean and lies along the Mino River. The vines are all more than thirty years old for their Albariño. The 2010 offers up a lovely, fresh and vibrant nose of grapefruit, lime, salty stoniness, a touch of green olive and a topnote of limepeel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and tangy, with a good core, lovely transparency and excellent cut and grip on the long finish. A lovely bottle of Albariño and a terrific value. 2011-2015. **89.**

2008 Albariño- O Aforado (Rias Baixas)

The winery of O Aforado was founded by Daniel Alonso Gonzalez in 1974, but the bodega did not begin bottling their own wines until 1989. Today the estate is run by Signore Gonzalez' two sons, who continue to harness the production from their seven and a half hectares of vineyards for their two high quality bottlings of Albariño. Neither wine is fully one hundred percent Albariño, as there is just a touch of caiño blanco and marques in the field blends in the vineyards. Their standard bottling of Albariño is lovely in 2008, as it offers up a beautiful and classic nose of lime, green apple, stony soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and classy, with fine length and grip, a fairly ripe fruit profile and a round, vibrant and long finish. This is just a tad riper in profile than the single vineyard, Sobre Lias bottling, and consequently should probably be drunk up in its relative youth. 2011-2013. **89.**

2008 Albariño- Adega Pedralonga (Rias Baixas)

The standard bottling of Albariño from Pedralonga is just lovely in 2008, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of grapefruit, lime peel, stony soil tones, a bit of straw and a topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and rock solid at the core, with crisp acids, lovely focus and very impressive length and grip on the snappy finish. This is not tremendously complex, which keeps its score down a touch, but in terms of brightness, bounce and expression of underlying minerality, there is an awful lot to like here. 2011-2015. **88.**

2008 Albariño "Ingrexario de Saiar"- Benito Santos (Rias Baixas)

The estate of Benito Santos is one of my favorite producers in Rias Baixas, as he bottles his various cuvées of Albariño as single vineyard wines, rather than blending wine from his various holdings. The bottling from the Ingrexario de Saiar vineyard is his basic bottling and the 2008 is a lovely wine, offering up a classic and lively nose of apple, lime peel, a bit of sea breeze and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and stylish, with solid mid-palate depth, bright acids and very good length and grip on the bouncy finish. A lovely value. 2011-2015. **88.**

2008 Albariño “Sobre Lias”- O Aforado (Rias Biexas)

The 2008 Sobre Lias bottling from O Aforado is a truly superb bottle of Albariño. The deep, very complex and classy nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of grapefruit, lime, saline notes, a kaleidoscope of stony minerality and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and intensely flavored, with exceptional purity and focus, crisp acids and great length and grip on the racy and soil-driven finish. A simply superb bottle of Albariño. 2011-2020+. **93+**.

2007 Albariño “Barrica” - Adega Pedralonga (Rias Biexas)

The Barrica bottling of Albariño from Adega Pedralonga is aged in five year-old French oak barrels from the forest of Alliers, the 2007 Barrica is a really lovely bottle of Albariño. The nose is deep, complex and perhaps shows just a touch of botrytis in its mélange of lemon, lime, a whisper of honeycomb, beautiful, stony minerality and a very gentle touch of vanilla. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very crisp, with a fine core of fruit, superb focus and balance and a very long, complex and refined finish. A very classy bottle. 2011-2016. **92**.

2007 Albariño “Pago de Xoan”- Benito Santos (Rias Biexas)

The 2007 Pago de Xoan single vineyard bottling from Benito Santos hails from the oldest parcel of Albariño vines that the family owns, as this ocean-facing vineyard is fully eighty years of age today. The 2007 is a beautiful wine that is just now entering its plateau of peak drinking and shows every likelihood of drinking splendidly for another decade. This is a very high class Albariño, as it offers up a deep, subtle and complex nose of lemon, quince, sea salts, lovely, stony soil tones and an intriguing, herbal topnote that recalls a bit some of the botanicals found in Chartreuse. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very intensely flavored, with crisp acids, lovely focus and balance and a very long, complex and elegant finish. Albariño does not get much better than this! 2011-2020+. **93**.

2006 Albariño “Pago de Bemil”- Benito Santos (Rias Biexas)

The 2007 Albariño from the Pago de Bemil vineyard is drinking splendidly and fully underscores how relatively long-lived these top two single vineyard bottlings from Benito Santos can be, as this is nowhere near tiring at age five and looks likely to continue to drink beautifully for at least another ten years. The deep and complex nose soars from the glass in a great mélange of lime, a touch of mango peel, pear, salty soil tones, a bit of green olive and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and very minerally in profile, with excellent focus, a fine core of fruit, bright acids and a very long, classy finish that closes with great grip and mineral drive. A beautiful bottle of Albariño. 2011-2020+. **94**.

2006 Albariño “Barrica” - Adega Pedralonga (Rias Biexas)

I never thought that a bit of French wood (even from older barrels) would be a happy marriage with Albariño, but the 2006 Barrica bottling from Adega Pedralonga has really blossomed into a stunning bottle of white wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and utterly refined, with the older wood giving just a touch of vanillin framing to the blend of candied lime, paraffin, smoky notes, a touch of anise, beautiful soil tones and citrus blossoms. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and magically complex, with lovely secondary layers of flavors, a rock solid core, perfect focus and balance and a very, very long, poised and wonderfully refined finish. There are still adequate acids to carry this several more years, but this lovely wine has reached its apogee and is a beautiful drink right now and I cannot see any reason to defer gratification. A great wine. 2011-2016+? **94**.

2006 Albariño “Vendetta” - Adega Pedralonga (Rias Baixas)

The Vendetta bottling from Miguel Alfonso, owner of Adega Pedralonga is a bottling of Albariño that hails from the estate’s oldest vines, which are planted on soils that contain the most granite. It is a very limited production bottling (only five hundred bottles produced), which is raised in stainless steel tank for two years *sur lies* before bottling. The 2006 Vendetta delivers a great and stunningly complex nose of pear, limepeel, white flowers, gentle leesy tones, incipient notes of beeswax, orange oil, beautiful soil tones and every citrus blossom known to mankind. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and utterly pure, with great mid-palate depth, seamless structure, laser-like focus and brilliant length and grip on the still youthful finish. This will clearly develop further layers of complexity with another couple of years of bottle age. One of the greatest Albariños I have ever had the pleasure to taste! 2011-2020+? **96.**

2005 Albariño “Vendetta” - Adega Pedralonga (Rias Baixas)

The 2005 Pedralonga Vendetta is even a bit less evolved than its 2006 counterpart and more obviously influenced by the granite soils of its vineyards. The wine offers up a brilliantly complex and pure bouquet of tart orange, pear, candied limepeel, complex, stony minerality, musky floral tones, hints of the beeswax to come, just a touch of anise and a few botanical overtones just beyond the reach of description. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and light on its feet, with the depth and intensity to Grand Cru Chablis, a beautiful base of soil, lovely, gentle acids, laser-like focus, gem-like complexity, impeccable balance and simply brilliant length and grip on the still fairly primary and utterly seamless finish. The wine closes with a lovely note of limepeel and complex soil tones that just lingers and lingers. I have simply never tasted a such ambitious rendition of Albariño. 2012-2020+? **97.**



Godello

2008 Godello “BGB”- Guímaro (Ribeira Sacra)

Pedro Pérez’s Guímaro winery is best-known for its stunning renditions of that inimitable red wine grape, Mencía, that makes the Ribeira Sacra region one of the most compelling in all of Spain today for traditionalists, but his 2008 Godello “BGB” is a superb white wine that deserves equal billing with his outstanding Mencías. The nose on the 2008 offers up a great, smoky mélange of lime, tart orange, slate, a touch of petrol and a very beguiling note of smoked meats. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and transparent, with vibrant acidity, lovely focus and balance and fine cut on the long and classy finish. This is a lovely example of why many long-time Spanish wine lovers often cite Godello as the most promising white wine grape in the country. 2011-2020. **92.**

2010 Godello- Finca Os Cobatos (Monterrei)

This is a pretty, middleweight that offers up good value. The nose is deep and complex, offering up a vibrant blend of limepeel, green apple, lovely minerality, citrus peel and a nice touch of straw. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and quite soil-driven, with good acids and fine length and grip on the finish. It is not the most concentrated wine, but for bounce and complexity, it is a lovely bottle. 2011-2014. **87.**

2008 Godello- Galgueira (Valdeorras)

This is one of Spain’s true “garage wines”, as German Rodriguez literally vinifies his small production wines in his garage. This is an old vine bottling of Godello and the 2008 is excellent, jumping from the glass in a complex blend of apple, melon, a touch of honeycomb, lovely soil tones and a topnote of candied lemon peel. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and round on the attack, with crisp acids, fine focus and balance and very good length and grip on the complex and classy finish. Just a lovely bottle of Godello. 2011-2016+. **91.**

Verdejo

2009 Nosis (Verdejo)- Buil y Giné

The 2009 Nosis from Buil y Giné is a truly terrific bottle of Verdejo. The nose is deep, really complex and vibrant, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of lime, sea salts, green olives, fresh herbs, a touch of orange peel and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and intensely flavored, with bright acids, lovely focus and a very long finish that closes with a very appealing note of wild herbs. Just a lovely bottle of Verdejo. 2011-2015+. **92.**

2008 Verdejo- Bodegas y Viñedos Ossian (Rueda)

Ossian is a new venture put together by Javier Zaccagnini (of Aalto fame) and well-known Burgundian oenologist, Pierre Millemann (who lends his expertise to some of the very best estates in the Côte d’Or). The goal is to take advantage of a great old vineyard of Verdejo, much of which is planted on ungrafted rootstocks that date back well over one hundred years. The very oldest vines are reserved for the reserve bottling, called “Capital”, but the regular Verdejo is also made out of very old vines and it is an excellent wine in 2008. The wine is still on the youthful side and a bit marked by its new oak, with notes of apple, grapefruit, lovely soil tones, dried flowers and iodine accenting the very Coche-Dury-like accents of new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and tangy, with great focus and balance, very good mid-palate depth and fine length and grip on the finish. A very fine wine that will benefit from a bit of bottle age. 2010-2020. **90+.**

2008 Verdejo “Capital”- Bodegas y Viñedos Ossian (Rueda)

The Capital bottling is the reserve from the Ossian estate, which is produced from the oldest vines in the small vineyard from which the domaine produces both its bottlings. These are the 150 to 200 year-old, ungrafted vines, which are located in the finest section of *terroir* and the wine is aged in thirty percent new oak. The 2008 Capital offers up a deep and very classy nose of apple, iodine, lime zest, lovely minerality and a fine framing of classy new wood. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and beautifully focused, with great mid-palate expansion than the regular bottling (from the very old vines?), laser-like focus and impressive, nascent complexity on the very long, racy and perfectly poised finish. This is a very high class bottle in the making, but I would give it a year or two in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to emerge and its new wood to be more seamlessly woven into the body of the wine. 2012-2022+? **94.**

2007 Verdello- Viñátigo (Tenerife)

The 2007 Verdello from Viñátigo is a fine bottle for current drinking, as it offers up a complex nose of pink grapefruit, lemon peel, gentle grassy tones, a touch of beeswax and a nice base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and well-balanced, with good framing acids, a vein of fresh herbs running through the mid-palate, fine focus and very good length and grip on the classy finish. This is a delicious bottle of wine for drinking over the next couple of years, but it does not look to be as potentially long-lived as the Vyariejo Blanco from Viñátigo. 2011-2014. **89.**

2007 Verdejo “Capital”- Bodegas y Viñedos Ossian (Rueda)

The 2007 Capital, which tips the scales at 13.8 percent alcohol, is the first wine that the estate produced from these very old vines and it is excellent. With the additional years' worth of bottle age in comparison to the 2008, the wood has very nicely woven itself into the background of the wine. The 2007 Capital offers up a deep and complex nose of tart orange, green apple, a touch of Meursault-like iodine, lime peel, complex, sandy minerality and a gentle framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with lovely focus and fine length and grip on the cool and dancing finish. This wine is impressively light on its feet. A great bottle of Verdejo. 2011-2017+. **94.**

White Wine Blends and Other White Wine Varietals

2010 Xarel-lo- Fermi' Bohigas (Catalunya)

The Fermi' Bohigas lies just outside of the Penedes region, about a forty-five minute drive from Barcelona. Their primary focus in their outstanding Cava bottlings (please see below), but they make a small amount of still white wine from the Xarel-lo grape as well, which they use extensively for their fine sparklers. The nose on the 2010 is a pretty and discreet mélange of lemon, white flowers, a touch of green olive, pretty white soil tones and a bit of dried flowers in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, crisp and complex, with an easy-going core, but sneaky length and grip on the finish. Nice juice. 2011-2014. **87.**

2009 Malvasia- Los Bermejos (Lanzarote)

The 2009 Malvasia from Los Bermejos is a fine bottle of bone-dry white that packs excellent depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The deep and classy nose jumps from the glass in a blend of Granny Smith apples, limepeel, green olive, wet stones and a nice touch of fresh herbs in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and impressively transparent, with fine complexity, bright acids and lovely focus on the long and vibrant finish. Good juice. 2011-2014. **89.**

2009 Malvasia “Diego”- Los Bermejos (Lanzarote)

The reserve bottling from Los Bermejos, this is a superb bottle of white wine. The deep and complex nose offers up a classy mélange of orange, lime, stony minerality, a bit of *Chablisienne* straw tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully focused, with a fine core of fruit, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. A lovely bottle. 2011-2015. **91.**

2009 Breto Doña Blanca- Mengoba (El Bierzo)

The Breto Doña Blanca is actually a single varietal wine made from the Doña Blanca grape, but as this is the only one hundred percent Doña Blanca wine that I tasted in preparation for this article, it has been lumped in the blended white wine section of notes. This is a grape I am unfamiliar with, excepting the lovely blends with Godello that are produced by the winery's owner, Gregory Pérez. The 2009 Breto Doña Blanca is a terrific wine that really shows how fine the wines can be from this little known grape, as it jumps from the glass in a complex and vibrant nose of lime, lemon, a touch of beeswax, stony soil tones and a gentle topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is medium-full, very pure and zesty, with superb transparency, great focus and balance and excellent grip on the very long and racy finish. A beautiful bottle. 2011-2020+. **92+.**

2009 Txakoli Blanco- Urki (Getariako Txakolina)

The grape that Txakoli Blanco is made from is Hondarribi Zuri (you can see why they label the wine under the much easier name of Txakoli ☺) and in my brief experience with the wines from Urki, they make a beautiful example. The 2009 is bottled with a synthetic cork, which sadly demands that the wine be drunk up quite briskly, but what is under the cork is outstanding, offering up a very refined nose of lime blossoms, pink grapefruit, wet stones, tart orange and sea salts. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and beautifully transparent, with lovely focus, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the complex finish. I would guess that this suave and racy thoroughbred (only eleven percent alcohol!) would age nicely for five or six years under Diam, but will have to be drunk up over the next eighteen months or so to be prudent with its plastic cork. 2011-2013. **90.**

2008 Viña de Martín “Dos Pasas Blanco”- (Ribeiro)

The Dos Pasas Blanco is comprised of a blend of Treixadura, Albariño, Lado and Torrentés and hails from the region of Ribeiro, which is a very stony region with most vineyards planted on a combination of slate and granite. The 2008 Dos Pasas Blanco is a very pretty wine, offering up a vibrant nose of lime, tart orange, salty, stony minerality and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and easy-going, with crisp acids, fine focus and very good complexity on the bouncy backend. I would love to see just a touch more mid-palate stuffing here, but this is still a lovely wine that is light on its feet and long on style. 2011-2014. **87.**

2008 Godello and Doña Blanca- Mengoba (El Bierzo)

The 2008 blend of Godello and Doña Blanca from the Mengoba winery is still a tad on the young side and could do with a year or two's worth of bottle age to fully unwind. The nose is deep, young and still quite primary in its mix of pear, beeswax, lovely soil tones and citrus peel. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and snappy, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and balance and impressive length and grip on the still very young and inexpressive finish. Give this very promising wine at least another year in the cellar to fully blossom. It will be a very fine follow-up to the excellent 2007 if a bit of patience is exercised. 2012-2020. **91+.**

2007 Godello and Doña Blanca- Mengoba (El Bierzo)

I very much like the wines across the board from Mengoba, and their 2008 blend of Godello and Doña Blanca is a terrific bottle of wine that is now wide open and drinking very well indeed. The deep and complex nose offers up a mélange of melon, lime peel, beeswax, smoky overtones and a lovely base of chalky minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very suave, with bright acids, lovely focus and great length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. Lovely juice. 2011-2016. **92.**

2007 Viña de Martin “Escolma”- Luis Rodriguez Vazquez (Ribeiro)

This wine is a similar blend to the Signore Rodriguez’s Dos Pasas Blanco of Treixadura, Albariño, Lado and Torrentés. It is aged in some new Allier oak barrels (I do not know the percentage of new wood used). The nose on the 2007 is flat out lovely, as it wafts from the glass in a classy blend of lemon oil, apple, a touch of paraffin, orange zest, lovely soil tones, spring flowers and just a whisper of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and zesty, with lovely focus and balance, excellent mid-palate depth, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the classy finish that closes with distinct notes of beeswax and lemon peel. A very classy and complex wine that is now at its apogee, but shows years of potential longevity. 2011-2017+? **91.**

2006 Vyariejo Blanco- Viñátigo (Tenerife)

The 2006 Vyariejo Blanco from Viñátigo is really a lovely bottle of wine, that reminds me quite a bit of a medium-aged, high quality white Graves. The nose is deep, still quite fresh and complex, as it offers up scents of fresh fig, apple, petrol, lovely, almost salty soil tones, orange peel and a mild herbaceousness. On the palate the wine is deep, impressively full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with a fine core, good, framing acids, lovely focus and a very long, still very fresh and complex finish. I very much like the way this wine closes with a slight touch of bitterness, that works just beautifully with food. At thirteen percent alcohol it is poised and perfectly ripe, without going over the top or losing any focus or structure. A very fine bottle of wine that seems quite likely to continue to age gracefully for several years to come. 2011-2016+. **92.**

2004 Viña de Martin “Escolma”- Luis Rodriguez Vazquez (Ribeiro)

This 2004 Escolma wine is also a blend of Treixadura, Albariño, Lado and Torrentés. It is aged in some new Allier oak barrels (I do not know the percentage of new wood used) and weighs in at thirteen percent alcohol. The nose offers up a complex and stylish blend of pineapple, lemon peel, stony soil tones, just a hint of green olive, citrus blossoms and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, impressive acidity for a 2004 and good length and grip on the finish. The wine closes with a nice mix of lemon peel and olive that echoes the nose and is most pleasant with food. Good juice that shows every indication of drinking well for several years to come. 2010-2015+? **91.**

2001 Viña de Martin “Escolma”- Luis Rodriguez Vazquez (Ribeiro)

The 2001 Viña de Martin “Escolma” is getting towards the back end of its plateau of maturity, but has not given up the ghost and is still a very intriguing bottle of white wine. The paraffin aspect that is evident in the young 2007 is more prominent in the 2001 with the additional six years of bottle age on both the nose and palate, but the wine remains quite fresh and intriguing. The nose is a blend of the aforementioned paraffin, as well as notes of lemon oil, fresh herbs, a touch of petrol, lovely soil tones, and a bit of buttery oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just starting to show a bit of fraying structurally, but still with a nice core, good soil signature and impressive length and grip on the finish. I would drink up the 2001

Escolma over the next year or two, and plan to drink both the 2004 and 2007 a bit on the younger side. 2011-2014. **87.**

Rioja Blanco

1976 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco “Gran Reserva”- López de Heredia

I had the pleasure of sharing this bottle of the '76 Viña Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva with Neil Beckett, Editor of The World of Fine Wine, while he was visiting New York in February of this year, and the wine showed brilliantly. The wine offers up a still quite youthful aromatic mélange of oranges, incipient white cherries, beeswax, salty soil tones and a topnote of citrus peel. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and focused, with a great core of fruit, outstanding balance, nascent complexity and exemplary length and grip on the snappy and absolutely poised finish. This wine is really still a tad too young for drinking (hard as that is to believe) and will cruise along for decades to come. 2011-2040. **93+.**



1973 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco “Gran Reserva”- López de Heredia

The 1973 Viña Tondonia Blanco is just beginning to really drink at its apogee and should cruise along beautifully at this apogee of peak maturity for another couple of decades. The complex and classy nose (which really benefits from a half an hour in decanter) offers up scents of oranges, salty soil tones, beeswax, candied lemon peel and sweet almonds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and complex, with a fine core, lovely focus and balance, crisp acids and excellent length and grip on the perfectly mature finish. A superb wine. 2010-2030+. **94.**

1970 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco “Gran Reserva”- López de Heredia

It has been two years since I last crossed paths with the '70 Tondonia Blanco and time seems not to have touched it whatsoever. Not surprisingly, the 1970 Viña Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva is still a tad on the young side and really needed a bit of air to fully blossom. The wine is really brilliant at age forty-one, offering up a deep and complex nose of lemon, beeswax, salty soil tones, hints of passion fruit and a topnote of dried violets. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, very pure and still quite tangy, with a rock solid core of fruit, great grip, beautiful complexity and laser-like focus on the long, refined and zesty finish. Viña Tondonia Blanco is one of my absolutely favorite dry white wines produced anywhere in the world and knowing that wines like the 1970 are still out there makes it a lot easier to absorb the repeated blows of premox in other regions that specialize in long-lived dry white wines. The 1970 Viña Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva still has decades of life ahead of it. 2011-2040. **93.**

Cava

Bohigas Brut Reserva NV (Catalunya)

This is really a lovely bottle of sparkling wine. The grapes for this bottling are all hand-harvested and the secondary fermentation takes place in bottle *à la* Champagne. The deep and complex nose offers up a vibrant blend of apple, grapefruit, great minerality, lovely leesy tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite crisp, with lovely complexity and focus, reasonably refined *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the refined and minerally finish. This is a really lovely bottle of Cava that shows every sign of being able to age gracefully for a decade in the cellar. 2011-2020+. **91.**

Espumoso Brut Nature NV- Los Bermejos (Lanzarote)

Los Bermejos is located on the island of Lanzarote, which lies just off the coast of Morocco in the band of islands that includes Tenerife and Gran Canaria. Their non-vintage bottling of Espumoso Brut Nature is produced entirely from Malvasia grapes, is made in the classic *Methode Champenoise* and aged *sur lies* for nine months prior to disgorgement and bottling. The current release offers up a lovely nose of bread dough, lime, dried pears, citrus zest and a lovely stony minerality. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and bone-dry, with fine bubbles and quite good length and grip. Good juice. 2011-2016. **88.**

Bohigas Brut Rosat NV (Catalunya)

The Bohigas Brut Rosat is a fairly dark-colored bottle sparkling Brut rosé which is done at the dry end of the Brut scale, with only six grams per liter of *dosage*. The nose is deep and quite “winey” in style, offering up scents of cherries, a touch of blood orange, dusty soil tones and a topnote of dried roses. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and just a touch coarse in terms of its *mousse*, but with lovely depth and complexity and impressive length and grip on the finish. This is decidedly a Brut rosé Cava that will show at its best at the table. Good juice. 2011-2015. **88.**

Musava Sparkling Wine (Valencia)

This is a really charming sparkler made entirely from muscat grapes. The nose is bright and complex, offering up scents of pears, oranges, acacia blossoms, minerals and a lovely topnote of spice. On the palate the wine is fullish, crisp and quite transparent, with fairly moderate *mousse*, lovely balance and a nice touch of residual sweetness on the fairly long finish. This is not the most complex wine, but it delivers all of the succulent goodness of muscat in a fresh and sparkling format. Delicious wine. 2011-2014. **87.**

Rosado

2009 Rosé- Los Bermejos (Lanzarote)

The 2009 dry Rosé from Los Bermejos is a really superb bottle, as it jumps from the glass in a complex blaze of dried cherries, oranges, salty soil tones and a lovely, smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and impressively soil-driven, with very good mid-palate depth, bright acids and fine balance on the long and classy finish. Really a sophisticated bottle of dry Rosé. 2011-2014. **91.**

2000 Viña Tondonia Rioja Rosado “Gran Reserva”- López de Heredia

The 2000 Viña Tondonia Rioja Rosado is a great example of this fine bottling, offering up a deep, complex and still quite youthful nose of white cherries, tangerine, Rioja spices, salty soil tones and a topnote of orange rind. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and really lovely in its focus and balance, with a fine core of fruit, lovely purity and crisp acids adding brilliance on the very long and classy finish. A beautiful bottle of Rosado that is still a baby. 2011-2030. **93.**

Dessert Wines

Malvasia Dulce- Los Bermejos (Lanzarote)

The late harvest Malvasia from Los Bermejos is really a delightful bottle of dessert wine. The deep and classy bouquet offers up a very stylish mélange of peaches, pears, nutskins, orange peel, salty soil tones and honeycomb. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, crisp and impressively light on its feet, with bright acids, fine focus and excellent length and grip on the complex finish that closes with a lovely mix of sandy soil tones and orange peel. A very impressive dessert wine. 2011-2020. **92.**

Red Wines

Canary Islands

Lying off the coast of Morocco, one would hardly believe that this is an up and coming wine-producing region, but José Pastor has unearthed some outstanding gems from these islands. The following wines are from Gran Canaria, and the other islands’ producers’ wines are listed separately.

2009 Tinto Tradicional- Tajinaste

Tajinaste is located on the island of Tenerife, the largest of the Canary Islands, and I have been very impressed with the quality of their wines in the past. The 2009 Tinto Tradicional is another absolute winner and a superb value, as it delivers a complex and pure bouquet of black cherries, pomegranate, balsamic tones, *garrigue*, coffee and soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and sappy at the core, with modest tannins, good acids and fine length and grip on the smoky finish. This is really a fine bottle of wine that is drinkable now, but will gain in complexity and blossom a bit more on the palate with another year or two’s worth of bottle age. 2011-2020+. **90+.**

2008 Tinto “4 Meses en Barrica”- Tajinaste

The 2008 reserve bottling from Tajinaste is really lovely, as its four month sojourn in oak barrels has rounded off the wine very nicely and given it even a bit more complexity than the Tradicional bottling. The bouquet is deep, complex and very classy, as it jumps from the glass in a refined blend of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, fresh herb tones, soil and just a hint of

vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and very elegant, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe tannins, sound acids and fine grip on the very long and classy finish. This is another very fine bottle from Tajinaste, with just a bit more polish from its stay in oak barrels. 2011-2025. **91+**.

All three of the bottlings that I tasted from Frontón de Oro in the Canary Islands showed a fair bit of pyrazines, and for those who do not care for this characteristic in their reds wines, they will probably like these wines decidedly less than I did. I have a fairly high tolerance for pyrazines in my reds and consequently, I found all three of the Frontón de Oro, which is located on the island of Grand Canary, quite interesting and unique, as none of them is short on complexity, dried spice tones or soil nuances. The cuvées move up decidedly in terms of depth and fruit complexity as one ascends in their quality hierarchy, but all three bottlings share a similar finish that closes with a botanical tone that recalls a bit many of the bitter aperitifs drunk throughout France and Italy. All three have length, complexity and lovely tangy personalities, and for the intrepid, they will deliver an awful lot of complexity for the price.

2009 Gran Canaria Tinto- Frontón de Oro

This is a light ruby colored and a very interestingly spicy middleweight. The nose is quite defined by its spice tones, as it offers up scents of dried mustard, cloves, desiccated cherries, orange peel, a bit of dusty soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, bright and bouncy, with modest tannins, tangy acids and very good length and grip on the spicy and slightly bitter finish. The herb and spice tones of the nose carry through on the palate, and I am sure that this type of wine will not be to everyone's taste, but it possesses very good balance and impressive complexity. I like this very much in its most unique style. 2011-2018. **86**.

2008 Gran Canaria "Malpais" Tinto- Frontón de Oro

The Malpais bottling from Fronton de Oro is aged for four months in barrel and the wine has more fruit contribution to the aromatic and flavor profiles than the very spicy basic bottling of Tinto. The nose on the 2008 Malpais is excellent, as it offers up scents of black cherries, woodsmoke, dried herb tones, cloves, dusty soil tones, a bit of pepper and a complex topnote of botanicals that recalls very much some of the bitter aperitifs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and tangy, with good mid-palate depth, modest tannins, sound acids and fine length and grip on the complex finish. Again, this closes with a slightly bitter note that is quite nice. 2011-2020+. **87+**.

2008 Gran Canaria "Tintilla" Tinto- Frontón de Oro

The Tintilla bottling from Frontón de Oro has the most depth and complexity of these three bottlings, and the 2008 is quite deep and classy on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a spicy mélange of red and black cherries, dried berries, smoke, herb tones, soil and botanicals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and well-balanced, with very good complexity, tangy acids, moderate tannins and fine focus on the long, soil-driven finish that again closes with a note of bitter botanicals. This has really lovely depth and backend grip, but the flavors and aromatics are not for everyone. Good juice. 2011-2025. **88**.

Lanzarote

The most northeasterly of the band of islands off the coast of Morocco, which includes Gran Canaria.

2008 Tinto- Los Bermejós

The principal red wine grape found on the island of Lanzarote is Listán Negro, from which both of these tinto bottlings from Los Bermejós are produced. I do not know anything about this grape variety except that it is producing very good wines in the hands of the folks from Los Bermejós. The 2008 Tinto offers up a very pretty nose of cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of hazelnuts, lovely soil tones and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and complex, with a velvety palate impression, modest acids and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. Good juice. 2011-2015. **88+**.

2008 Tinto “Maceración Carbonica”- Los Bermejós

The carbonically macerated version of Listán Negro from Los Bermejós is even better than the regular bottling, offering up a deeper and more vibrant bouquet of cherries, strawberries, orange zest, lovely soil tones and a topnote of nutskins. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and classy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine focus, bright acidity and most impressive length and grip on the complex finish. 2011-2016+. **90**.

La Palma

La Palma is one of the smallest of the seven islands that form the Canary Islands and the most northwesterly.

2008 Tinto Negramoll- Bodegas Carballo

The 2008 Tinto Negramoll from Bodegas Carballo is a deep and meaty red that is long on complex black fruit tones, a fine base of soil and a fair bit of structure. The really fine bouquet offers up a complex blend of black cherries, a bit of juniper, French roast, a bit of woodsmoke, herb tones a touch of road tar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a good core of fruit, moderate tannins and very good length and grip on the botanical finish. This is still a tad more primary on the palate than it is on the nose and should age very well indeed. A seriously complex, nobly rustic wine of lovely personality and verve. Good juice. 2011-2020+. **89+**.

El Hierro

The smallest and most westerly of the Canary Islands. Tanajara is the only producer I have ever tasted from El Hierro, but if their 2007 is any indication of the potential here, this is a place to watch!

2007 Vijariega Negro- Bodegas Tanajara

The 2007 Vijariega Negro from Tanajara is quite a ripe wine, weighing in at a full fourteen percent alcohol, but it is impressively transparent and light on its feet for its octane. The beautiful nose offers up a complex and quite soil-driven mélange of cherries, pomegranate, fresh oregano, mustard seed, coffee, beautifully complex soil tones and a touch of cedar. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and intensely flavored, with a very vibrant core of fruit, tangy acids, modest tannins and excellent focus and grip on the long and classy finish. Lovely juice. 2011-2020+. **92**.

Tenerife

The DO of Tacoronte- Acentejo lies in the far northeasterly end of Tenerife and was the first official wine-producing region recognized by the Spanish government in the Canary Islands. The soils are fairly rich and ruddy, and the vineyards here comprise twenty percent of all the vineyard land on the island. The DO of Ycoden Daute Isora lies at the western end of Tenerife on volcanic soils, as most of the vineyards are planted on the extinct volcano of Teide. While this is the hottest wine-producing region on Tenerife, it is still cool enough in the winter to have frost. The variety of Tintilla is considered one of the best for red wines on the island. The DO of Abona is on the southern side of the island and these vineyards are also planted on the lower slopes of the extinct volcano of Teide.

2009 Tierras de Aponte “Vendimia Seleccionada” (Abona)

The 2009 “Vendimia Seleccionada” from Tierras de Aponte reminded me quite a bit of a good Cru Beaujolais bottling, as it offers up a stylish nose of cranberries, cherries, stony soil tones, woodsmoke and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and tangy, with a faint touch of pyrazines on the backend, a good core and fine length and grip on the very modestly tannic finish. The wine closes with a distinct note of bitter almond that works great with food. Sadly, it is bottled with a synthetic cork and will need to be drunk up young, but the underlying structure here seems like it would have been sufficient to carry the wine seven or eight years in bottle with a good closure. Good juice. 2011-2013. **89.**

2008 Monje Tradicional (Tacoronte- Acentejo)

The 2008 Monje Tradicional is a very good middleweight, with impressive complexity on both the nose and palate and a fine, tangy personality that really works well with food. The nose offers up a vibrant blend of red cherries, a bit of blood orange, spice tones, woodsmoke, soil and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and bouncy, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins, bright acids and lovely focus and grip on the impressively long finish. Good juice, with a backend persistency of flavor that is very fine. 2011-2025. **88.**

2007 Tintilla- Bodegas Viñátigo (Ycoden Daute Isora)

Ycoden Daute Isora is the DO for the western end of the island of Tenerife (as if this was not complicated enough already for those of us not recently island hopping!) and Bodegas Viñátigo is one of the best producers here. The 2007 Tintilla from Bodegas Viñátigo is a dynamite bottle of wine, with very impressive depth, complexity and refinement to its intensely flavored personality. The nose is very expressive, as it soars from the glass in a very deep and pure mélange of cassis, black cherries, dark chocolate, smoke, soil and a touch of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and stunningly focused and balanced, with a sappy core of fruit, ripe tannins, tangy acids and stunning length and grip on the complex and palate-staining finish. A great bottle of wine from a region I had not even heard of before sampling this wine! 2011-2031+. **93+.**

2000 Monje de Autor Reserva (Tacoronte- Acentejo)

The 2000 Monje de Autor Reserva is still a fairly young wine, but at age eleven has begun to develop some lovely, savory layers of secondary development on both the nose and palate. The complex bouquet offers up scents of dried cherries, a touch of poblano pepper, woodsmoke, a touch of espresso, fallen leaves, herb tones and dusty soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus, melting tannins and fine length and grip on the complex and still quite tangy finish. Good juice. 2011-2025. **89+.**

Mallorca

The island of Mallorca, most famous for producing the superb Spanish tennis stars of Carlos Moya and Rafael Nadal, is also home to some very good vineyards. Good, solid and nobly rustic reds are produced here for the most part- or at least these are the wines from Mallorca that I have been introduced to by the efforts of José Pastor.

2009 Mantonegro- Gozalez-Suñer

The 2009 Mantonegro from Gozalez-Suñer is really a lovely bottle, as it offers up a nice combination of ripe, but not overripe fruit, lovely soil tones and a lovely mélange of spice and herb tones. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of coffee, complex spice tones, a bit of game and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and well-balanced, with moderate tannins, sound acids and very good length and grip on the spicy and meaty finish. Good juice. 2011-2020. **88+**.

Jumilla

Jumilla is found in the southeastern edge of Spain, just below Valencia, in a group of wine-producing demarcated areas that includes Almansa, Yecla, Bullas and Alicante. Jumilla is the best-known of these contiguous regions and is the furthest inland, making it a warm climate for grapes and truly one of the “Mediterranean” sections of Spain. In the past, I have had some very good, solid everyday reds from Jumilla, but in an age of global warming and pushes to excessive ripeness in many viticultural corners of Spain, many of the recent examples I have tasted from this region have been decidedly uninteresting. The wine below is a very happy exception to my recent experience.

2004 Escudo de Plata “Gran Reserva”- Bodegas Fernandez

The 2004 Escudo de Plata “Gran Reserva” from Bodegas Fernandez is a beautiful bottle of wine and a great, great value. The deep, complex and really lovely nose jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, plums, lovely spice tones, gamebirds, smoke, fresh herbs and a fine base of almost “salty” soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, ripe and spicy, with lovely focus and balance, modest tannins and impressive complexity on the long and classy finish. A really superb bottle of Jumilla. 2011-2020. **90**.

Bullas

The higher elevations in Bullas tend to produce wines with a bit “cooler” fruit profile than in neighboring Jumilla, and Monsieur Chidaine’s first vintage from vineyards here is most promising.

2010 Bullas “Trés P”- François Chidaine

This is the first vintage of this lovely red wine from Montlouis’ famed François Chidaine. Bullas is one of the highest elevation wine regions in Spain and Monsieur Chidaine’s vineyards lie at 800 meters above sea level, keeping the growing season on the cool side and allowing the wines to emphasize elegance and purity. The wine is a blend of sixty percent Monastrell and forty percent Tempranillo and is raised in stainless steel for eight months prior to bottling. The 2010 weighs in at 14.5 percent alcohol, but seems quite “cool” both in terms of aromatics and flavors, as it offers up a complex bouquet of black berries, pepper, espresso, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and youthfully chewy, with a good core

of fruit, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the focused and quite classy finish. A very exciting first release. 2011-2020+. **89+**.

Alicante

Alicante lies along the Mediterranean coastline at the same latitude as next door Jumilla. The region is most famous for its “Fondillon” wines, which are like a hypothetical cross between a vintage Port and a Madeira in style and are often made by the solera method. The estate of Primitivo Quiles is renowned for the quality and age of their soleras.

2008 Cono 4- Primitivo Quiles

The 2008 Cono 4 from Primitivo Quiles is a lovely, old-fashioned red that offers up a pretty nose of cherries, oranges, raisins, new leather and autumn leaves. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and nobly rustic, with very good depth and length and just a touch of oxidation in the backend of the palate. I do not know a lot about this style of wine, but suspect the touch of oxidation is part of the traditional style of these wines, as this is probably exposed to the heat of the region during its elevage. 2011-2015. **85**.

2004 Raspay Tinto- Primitivo Quiles

The Raspay bottling from Primitivo Quiles is aged in six to ten year-old American oak barrels and buried underground during fermentation to keep it away from Alicante’s torrid heat. The 2004 Raspay is a dynamite bottle of wine, offering up a lovely nose of chocolate, coffee, dried red fruit, woodsmoke, soil and a nice topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, tangy and beautifully focused, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the complex and classy finish. A beautiful bottle of wine. 2011-2020+. **91**.

1948 Fondillon- Primitivo Quiles

The 1948 Fondillon from Primitivo Quiles is a beautiful wine that offers up superb complexity on both the nose and palate. The superb bouquet jumps from the glass in a blaze of dried cherries, raisins, orange peel, coffee, beautifully complex soil tones and a touch of toffee in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and surprisingly dry on the palate (I was expecting a fair bit of residual sugar, given the aromatics), with great focus and complexity, very little tannin and wonderful length and grip on the very classy finish. Just a beautiful wine that I would opt to serve like an Amarone, after the main course with cheese. 2011-2020+. **93+**.

Utiel-Requena

Utiel-Requena lies just to the north of Jumilla inland and alongside the wine-producing region of Valencia. This is a higher elevation region than Jumilla and generally produces lower octane wines as a result.

2009 Bobal- Tempermento

I have been impressed in the past with the examples of Bobal I have tasted, which often strikes me as a grape varietal that offers up a wine with a bit of a resemblance to old school Petite Sirah that one used to see back in the 1970s. Tempermento’s vineyards lie at a very high elevation of three thousand feet above sea level, making this an impressively “cool” climate example of Bobal. The 2009 offers up a deep, vibrant and complex nose of black cherries, a touch of chocolate, fresh herb tones, a bit of leather and a nice touch of hung game. On the palate

the wine is fullish, deep and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, very little tannin and lovely length and grip on the bouncy and nicely focused finish. This is really a lovely wine, and at 13.5 percent alcohol, impressively low octane for a Spanish red wine today. 2011-2017. **89.**

Valdeorras

2009 Mencía- Galguiera

I really love the Mencía from Galguiera, which is made from old vines, tank fermented and bottled unfiltered. The 2009 weighs in at a very civilized thirteen percent alcohol and this is about as good a Mencía as I tasted for this report and is a superb value. The deep and truly excellent nose jumps from the glass in a blaze of black cherries, a bit of tree bark, espresso, woodsmoke and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and complex, with a fine, sappy core, lovely intensity of flavor, excellent focus and balance, modest tannins and outstanding grip on the very long and palate-staining finish. A complete and utterly refined bottle of Mencía. 2011-2020+. **93.**

Ribeiro

Ribeiro lies in the southwestern corner of the region of Galicia, just above the Portuguese border and not far inland from the Atlantic Ocean. Based on what I have tasted in the last couple of years, there is an awful lot of good things starting to emerge from this region.

2008 Viña de Martin “Dos Pasas Tinto”- (Ribeiro)

The Dos Pasas Tinto from Louis Rodriguez’s Viña de Martin winery is a blend of the indigenous grapes of Caino, Ferrol and Brancello (none of which I have any previous experience with outside of the wines from Signore Rodriguez), which are fermented in stainless steel, rather than wood. The 2008 is a very lovely wine, offering up a vibrant and black fruity nose of dark berries, espresso, woodsmoke, dark chocolate, lovely minerality and a touch of game. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very athletic in style, with a fine core of fruit, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. Good juice. 2011-2020. **89+.**

2007 A Torna Dos Pasas “Escolma”- Luis Rodriguez Vazquez (Ribeiro)

I am assuming that the 2007 A Torna Dos Pasas is made from the same blend of grapes as the 2008 Viña de Martin Tinto, but I am not sure and it is too close to deadline to check in with José Pastor. In any event, the wine is very good, as it offers up a deep and youthful nose of black cherries, a bit of cranberry, balsam bough, espresso, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and still quite youthful, with a rock solid core of fruit, ripe tannins, fine focus and balance and excellent length and grip on the superb finish. This needs a few years to fully blossom, but will prove to be a superb bottle. 2014-2030. **91+.**

Monterrei

Monterrei also lies right on the Portuguese border, inland from Ribeiro and is the hottest and driest of the wine-producing regions of Galicia. Soils here are predominantly based in clay, rather than in the slate of nearby Ribeira Sacra and the wines tend to be a bit richer as a result. There are some very good things going on in Monterrei these days, after the region having been traditionally best-known for very simple table wines produced from more than generous yields.

2009 Mencía- Benaza

The 2009 Mencía from Benaza is a pretty ripe example of the varietal, as it weighs in at a full thirteen percent alcohol. The nose is deep, poised and quite classy, as it offers up scents of dark berries, bitter chocolate, coffee bean, a touch of bonfire, tree bark, fresh herbs and a stony signature of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and complex, with lovely focus and balance, solid mid-palate depth and a long, tangy and intensely flavored finish. This is really an excellent bottle. 2011-2020. **92.**

Rias Biaxas

The ocean front region of Rias Biaxas, situated on the Atlantic coast right above Portugal, is best known for the superb quality of its Albariño wines, but, it is also home to a few very nice, middleweight red wines that are really a fine choice in the warmer weather.

2006 DoUmia- Adega Pedralonga

The DoUmia bottling from Miguel Alfonso's Adega Pedralonga is a beautiful, light on its feet red wine blend produced from a mix of Mencía, Caiño and Espadeiro and weighs in at an extremely civilized twelve percent alcohol. The deep and complex nose jumps from the glass in a mix of dark berries, black cherries, woodsmoke, fresh bay leaf and a lovely base of dark soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and well-balanced, with very little tannin, fine focus and very good length and grip on the low fat finish. This is still young and will no doubt develop a bit more complexity with further bottle age. A lovely middleweight. 2011-2020. **88.**



The incredibly steep and nearly inaccessible vineyards of Ribeira Sacra towering over the Sil River.

Ribeira Sacra

Ribeira Sacra, with its perilously steep, slate vineyards hugging the rivers Sil and Miño just north of the Portuguese border, is one of Spain's most exciting wine-producing regions today. Given that it is also one of Spain's youngest officially delimited wine-producing regions, having only been formally established in 1997, its rise to prominence on the backs of its lighter-styled wines is probably a very good indication that at least in some circles, Spain's love affair with over the top, over-oaked and alcoholic "Mediterranean" wines is beginning to run its course. Mencía is the red wine grape variety that is king in the region and most fans of Mencía attest that the finest examples currently produced in Spain hail from the steep and terraced vineyards of Ribeira Sacra.

2009 Mencía- Guímaro

The 2009 regular bottling of Mencía from Guímaro is a lovely bottle that is still a tad on the young side- though aging primarily on its lovely acidity, it is quite approachable with a bit of time in decanter, but will really be a better drink with a couple of years in the cellar. The nose offers up a lovely and very pure blend of cherries, nutskins, pomegranate, coffee bean and a complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full and very intensely flavored, with a good core, tangy acids and a very long, sappy and primary finish. Quite a bit more complexity will emerge both on the nose and palate with further bottle age and I would not be surprised to see my score a bit conservative when this wine fully comes into its own. High class Mencía from Pedro Pérez. 2011-2025. **90+**.

2008 Mencía "B1P"- Guímaro

The "B1P" bottling of Mencía from Pedro Pérez hails from a vineyard of old vines that lie at the highest elevation of his fifteen plots, with the wine fermented in open *foudres* and without destemming. The 2008 B1P is a dynamite bottle of Mencía that offers up a deep and compelling nose of blood orange, cherries, raw cocoa, nutskins, complex soil tones and a nice touch of grilled meats. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and very sappy at the core, with great intensity of flavor, vibrant acids and outstanding length and grip on the bouncy and nascently complex finish. This is a step up from the regular bottling of Mencía (which is by no means a slouch!) and should age beautifully. 2011-2025+. **92+**.

2008 Mencía "B2M"- Guímaro

The "B2M" bottling of Mencía from Signore Pérez is also from one of his oldest plots of vines, but from a vineyard that lies at a lower elevation and which he completely de-stems prior to fermentation and which he ages in old, Burgundy barrels. The wine is outstanding in 2008 and even better than the excellent "B1P", as it soars from the glass in a vibrant mélange of black cherries, pomegranate, espresso, woodsmoke, lovely soil tones, a bit of youthful medicinal nuances in the upper register that recall young Nuits St. Georges. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and again very intensely flavored, with modest tannins, a sappy core of fruit, tangy acids and outstanding length and grip on the finish that closes with a fine note of bitter chocolate. This is high-powered juice! 2011-2025+. **94**.

2007 Mencía "Alodio"- Enológica Temera

Enológica Temera is owned by Jorge Gonzalez and his Alodio bottling is his basic cuvée of Mencía. The 2007 is evolving beautifully and is a better drink today than when it was released two years ago, as it offers up a deep and complex nose of blackberries, cherries, chicory, a bit of Bandol-like tree bark, pepper and a nice botanical topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and slightly medicinal, with lovely focus and complexity, still very good acids and

impressive length and grip on the smooth as silk finish. There is a nice touch of bitterness on the backend that recalls a bitter aperitif from Italy or France. A lovely food wine drinking beautifully today. 2011-2015+? **89.**

2007 Mencía- Guímaro

This is a very nice bottle of Mencía that shows just a touch of volatile acidity on the nose when it is first opened, but with a bit of time in decanter this blows off and the wine drinks very nicely indeed. The nose eventually delivers a complex and black fruity mélange of black cherries, medicinal overtones, tree bark, espresso, stony soil nuances, cracked pepper and woodsmoke. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and intensely flavored, with lovely focus, soft tannins, sound acids and very good length and grip on the complex finish. A lovely bottle, just give it a bit of time to aerate and settle in after opening. 23010-2017. **91.**

Tierras de Cangas

Tierras de Cangas lies in the northwestern corner of Spain- about equidistant between the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the northern frontier with Portugal which lies to the southwest.

2009 Joven- Monasterio de Corias

The Monasterio de Corias is located in the mountainous region of Cangas, and their Joven bottling is made up of a field blend of Mencía, Carrasquin and Verdejo Negro, fermented with indigenous yeasts and bottled unfiltered. The 2009 Joven offers up a fine and vibrant nose of cherries, new leather, bitter chocolate, gentle game tones, complex soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with fine freshness and bounce, good mid-palate depth and fine balance on the long and complex finish. The focus here is not world class, but in terms of depth of flavor and complexity, there is plenty to like here and the price is a real bargain. 2011-2020. **88.**

2007 Monasterio Tinto- Monasterio de Corias

The 2007 Monasterio Tinto bottling from the Monasterio de Corias is a lovely, light ruby red that offers up a bright and tangy nose of strawberries, cherries, a touch of white pepper, mustard seed and sandy soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, complex and juicy, with very good focus, tangy acids and just a touch of tannin perking up the intensely flavored finish that closes with an enticing note of cherry skin. A lovely middleweight. 2011-2016+. **89.**

2007 Corias de Guilfa- Monasterio de Corias

The Corias de Guilfa is the reserve bottling from the Monasterio de Corias and the 2007 is quite good. The nose offers up a decidedly more red fruity interpretation of the region's varietals, delivering scents of cherries, red berries, orange zest, nutskins, lovely soil tones and a topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is fullish, wide open and quite tangy (with just a touch of VA). The wine shows off very good mid-palate depth, fine complexity and a long, meltingly tannic finish. A very pretty middleweight that is drinking splendidly now, but should continue to drink well for at least another decade. Without the bit of VA, this would rank a few points higher, as the depth and complexity are lovely. 2011-2020. **89.**

El Bierzo

El Bierzo lies just to the west of Tierras de Cangas, and the Mengoba estate of Gregory Pérez, while located in El Bierzo, actually has vineyards that straddle five distinct regions. All the reds are produced exclusively from Mencía, with the vineyards ranging from twenty-five to

eight years of age. As is the case with the Mengoba white wines, these are truly exceptional reds of great personality and terroir and are amongst the finest examples of Mencía that I have had the pleasure to taste outside of the region of Ribeira Sacra.

2009 Breto Mencía- Mengoba

The Mengoba bottling of Breto Mencía is made from younger vines and is fermented in stainless steel tanks, rather than wood, as it is designed to offer up immediate appeal. The 2009 is really a lovely wine, as it jumps from the glass in a blaze of cherries, dark chocolate, coffee, leather and a lovely base of stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and juicy, with lovely intensity of flavor, fine complexity and very good length and grip on the tangy finish. A really lovely wine for relatively near-term consumption. 2011-2016+. **89+**.

2007 Mencía “Vieilles Vignes”- Mengoba

The Mencía vines for this bottling are all in the seventy to eighty year-old range and the wine is a stunning example of this superb varietal. These old vines are barrel-fermented and raised in “two wine” barrels to minimize the impact of the oak and is bottled after ten months of elevage. The 2007 offers up a superb nose of black cherries, new leather, pomegranate, espresso, woodsmoke and a beautifully complex base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and dancing, with the great transparency of Mencía very much in evidence. The core is sappy and the finish is long and beautifully focused, with very modest tannins, lovely grip and bright, bouncy acidity. This is just a lovely example of this grape and a very good place to start if one is curious about what all the fuss is these days about Mencía. 2012-2030. **93**.

Tierras de Leon

Tierras de Leon is located in the northwestern corner of Spain, above the Portuguese frontier and not far from Tierras de Cangas. Soils here are mostly clay, making for ample wines of lovely depth of fruit that offer up good value. The primary red wine grape planted here is the indigenous Prieto Picudo, which also makes lovely Rosado.

2007 Prieto Picudo- Preto

The 2007 Prieto Picudo from bodega Preto is a beautifully balanced red that is really starting to drink well at four years of age. The deep and succulent nose offers up scents of black cherries, orange peel, chocolate, stony soil tones and just a touch of gamebird. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite impressively soil-driven in personality, with a good core of fruit, a nice touch of *sauvage* personality, with very little tannin and lovely length and grip. Good juice. 2011-2020. **87**.

2007 Finca la Silva Prieto Picudo- Preto

This is the reserve bottling of Prieto Picudo from Preto and it is a very classy bottle of red wine. The bouquet is deep, complex and flat out superb, as it jumps from the glass in a complex mélange of red and black cherries, dark chocolate, a touch of nutskin, lovely soil tones and espresso. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still nicely reserved, with a fine core of fruit, great length and grip, modest tannins and excellent focus on the well-balanced finish. Just a lovely bottle. 2012-2030. **92+**.

Priorat

Great old vines in this re-discovered ancient wine-producing region in southwest Catalonia, coupled to the unique terroir here of black slate and quartz have the potential to

make some of Spain's greatest red wines. In fact, Priorat is the only wine-producing region to be ranked alongside of Rioja at the very head of the class of wine-producing regions in Spain, with a qualification as a DOCa (the highest ranking- equivalent to a grand cru region). That said, the rise to prominence of Priorat wines in the 1990s has generally been accompanied by very high alcohol and forceful wines, which to my palate have not always been particularly convincing. I have no doubt that the terroir in Priorat is special, but I cannot think of the last example from here that I really enjoyed, as the alcohol is always a big issue for my palate.

2008 Giné Giné- Buil & Giné

The 2008 Giné Giné is one of the best recent examples that I have tasted from the Priorat, as almost everything I taste from there these days is simply too high in alcohol for me to derive any pleasure from. The 2008 Giné Giné is listed at fourteen percent and is probably a tad higher than that, but it reins in its alcohol better than the lion's share of wines I taste from this region. The nose offers up a ripe and ready blend of jammy raspberries, *garrigue*, toffee, cherries, hot stones and cedary wood. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite jammy, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and fine length and grip on the impressively balanced finish. The ripeness here steals a bit of the wine's focus and precision, but at least there are no overt signs of alcohol sticking out on the backend. A good wine from a region that really needs to come up with a comprehensive strategy to deal with excessive ripeness, as there is some great *terroir* to be harnessed here. 2010-2020. **89+**.

Barrica Montsant

Barrica Montsant lies on the border of the much better known Priorat region.

2010 Seré- Vendrell Rived

The 2010 Seré from Vendrell Rived is a lovely red comprised of a blend of eighty percent Garnacha and twenty percent Samsó (Carignan), with the vast majority of the vines forty years of age. The winery and vineyards fall in the southern end of Barrica Montsant, very close to the Priorat border. The 2010 Seré, which tips the scales at a very moderate fourteen percent alcohol, offers up a lovely nose of red and black raspberries, meaty overtones, a fine base of stony soil, woodsmoke and a nice touch of coffee grounds. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with just a touch of backend tannin, lovely focus and mid-palate depth and a very long, classy finish. Really a lovely bottle. 2011-2017. **91**.

Cigales

Cigales lies along the Duero River between Toro and Ribera del Duero, and the estate of Lezcano-LaCalle lies at the highest elevation in the region at eight hundred meters above sea level. Their vineyards have a high concentration of limestone interspersed with gravel, and the wines are aged in older, American oak casks to produce a lovely, old school style. The vineyards were all replanted in the decade of the 1980s and are now just beginning to hit a "good age" for producing high caliber wines.

2008 Maudes "Crianza"- Lezcano-LaCalle

The 2008 Crianza from Lezcano-LaCalle is made up of a blend of eighty percent tempranillo, fifteen percent merlot and five percent cabernet sauvignon, but despite the inclusion of a couple of very "international" grapes in the *cépages*, this is a really lovely and quite

classically styled bottle of Spanish red. The wine tips the scales at a very civilized 13.5 percent alcohol (no doubt taking advantage of the vineyards' higher elevation) and offers up a superb bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, herb tones and a nice touch of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with fine-grained tannins, lovely focus, a good core of fruit and superb length and grip on the well-balanced finish. High class juice. 2011-2025. **90+**.

2005 Maudes "Reserva"- Lezcano-LaCalle

The 2005 Maudes "Reserva" from Lezcano-LaCalle is a beautiful wine. It shares the same blend of grapes as the Crianza, but is aged eighteen months in older wood, rather than the fourteen for the Crianza and then given an additional year and a half of bottle age in the cellars prior to release. The 2005 is a beautiful wine in the making, jumping from the glass in a complex and very classy nose of black cherries, dark berries, bitter chocolate, a nice touch of fresh nutmeg, lovely soil tones and a deft framing of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very long, with fine mid-palate depth, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the poised and still slightly youthful finish. While this is eminently approachable today, I would tuck it away in the cellar for at least the next three or four years and really let its secondary layers of complexity emerge. A beautiful wine. 2014-2030+. **93.**

Ribera del Duero

Having cut my teeth on the very first vintages of Pesquera and always having loved the wines from Vega Sicilia (except for a couple of hiccups in the mid-'90s), I am always sorry that Ribera del Duero is currently one of the centers of the modern school of Spanish winemaking, as I really did like the old school wines from this region. As the superb, traditionalist and very serious wines from Bodegas Federico so clearly demonstrate, the region of Ribera del Duero is not exclusively a hapless victim of global warming required by Mother Nature to produce wines here that are over the top, heady examples of pedestrian jam juice, as the Federico wines of today are every bit as fresh, pure and classically proportioned as the great Ribera wines of yesteryear. One wonders if the reason so many Ribera del Duero wines are over the top fruit bombs contorting in sordid dances with the lumberyard is simply because that is the way the proprietors want the wines to be styled- not because global warming has forced the producers' hands. Bodegas Federico is owned by Federico Hernandez, the brother of Pesquera's Alejandro Fernandez. When the brothers split up the family patrimony in 1986, it was Federico who received the family's vineyard holdings, so perhaps this why I find such a great affinity between those earliest Pesqueras and today's wines from Bodegas Federico. These are simply terrific examples of Ribera del Duero.

2008 Roble- Bodegas Federico (Ribera del Duero)

The Roble bottling from Bodegas Federico is Señor Fernandez's basic bottling of Ribera and the 2008 was not showing as well as the 2007 did at a similar stage. There was a touch of volatility to the 2008 Roble that kept its score down a bit, as the wine offers up scents of cherries, blood orange, nutskins, spice tones and cocoa. On the palate the wine is medium-full, juicy and a bit simple on the backend, with reasonable length and grip, but a bit of VA plaguing the finish. Perhaps this was just the bottle, as everything else I tasted from Bodegas Federico was really singing. ???

2005 Tinto Crianza- Bodegas Federico (Ribera del Duero)

Bodegas Federico's 2005 Crianza is another outstanding bottle of Ribera del Duero, and at 12.5 percent alcohol, it has to be one of the coolest examples that I have tasted from this region in several years. It had been nearly two years since I last tasted this wine and it has blossomed beautifully, offering up a deep, complex and very classy bouquet of red plums, lovely spice tones, blood orange, cocoa powder, a beautiful base of soil and a deft touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep, complex and nicely structured, with very fine length and grip on the complex finish. High class juice. 2012-2025+. **90+**.

2004 Tinto Reserva- Bodegas Federico (Ribera del Duero)

The 2004 Tinto Reserva from Bodegas Federico was held back a year in the cellars here, while the lovely 2005 was released ahead of it, and I can see why this great bottle of Ribera was allowed an additional year's worth of bottle age to more fully blossom. Ribera del Duero does not get much better than this wine today, as the glorious nose soars from the glass in a superb mélange of cherries, plums, blood orange, raw cocoa, nutskins, a really strikingly complex signature of soil and a judicious base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and still nicely reserved, with a great core of pure fruit, ripe tannins and stunning length and grip on the seamless and utterly refined finish. A great bottle. 2014-2035. **94.**

2001 Tinto Gran Reserva- Bodegas Federico (Ribera del Duero)

The 2001 Gran Reserva from Federico Fernandez is one of the best young examples of Ribera del Duero that I have tasted in decades. It has continued to blossom brilliantly since I last tasted it and today it is very clear that I underrated this beauty back in the summer of 2009. The bouquet is deep, pure and utterly brilliant, as it offers up a perfumed mélange of red plums, cherries, blood orange, cocoa, woodsmoke, stunning soil tones, fresh nutmeg and a touch of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and flawlessly balanced, with fine-grained, ripe tannins, lovely acidity and laser-like focus on the hauntingly complex and suave finish. A brilliant, brilliant wine. 2015-2050. **96+**.

Rioja Tinto

2009 Rioja- Señorío de P. Peciña

This is a young, ripe and beautifully balanced bottle of basic Rioja. The nose offers up a vibrant mix of black cherries, a touch of pomegranate, herb tones, spice, soil and a bit of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is fullish, juicy and tangy, with a good base of soil, a solid core, moderate tannins and a long, tasty finish. This is not the most complex glass of Rioja one is going to find, but for the combination of young and succulent fruit, fine signature of soil and very good balance, it is hard to beat at its price. No doubt more complexity will come with a bit of bottle age. Good juice. 2011-2020+. **87.**

2009 Rioja "Vendemia Seleccionada"- Zuazo Gaston

Zuazo Gaston is a relatively new and modern, family-owned winery in the Rioja Alavesa region, but the Gastons are committed to producing traditional Rioja from their fifty hectares of vines. The Vendemia Seleccionada is their entry level bottling and it is quite tasty in 2009, offering up a fine nose of dark berries, cigar smoke, soil and just a touch of Rioja's spicy soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and tangy, with a good core of fruit, just a whisper of tannin and not bad length and grip on the finish. There is not a whole lot of complexity here, but the wine is fresh, focused and non-spoofulated. 2011-2020. **87.**

2008 Rioja “Crianza”- Zuazo Gaston

The 2008 Crianza from Zuazo Gaston is a lovely step up from their basic bottling, with the additional aging in old, American and a bit of French oak cooperage adding depth and dimension to the wine. The nose is deep, complex and classically black fruity in the style of the higher elevation Alavesa region of Rioja, offering up scents of black cherries, cassis, Rioja spice, coffee, fresh herbs and just a touch of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and classy, with bright acids, a bit of backend tannin, a very good core and fine length and grip on the poised and classy finish. Good juice that is accessible today, but will be even better with a few years of bottle age. 2011-2025+. **89.**

2006 Rioja “Cirson”- Bodegas Roda

The 2006 Cirson is a very fine follow-up to their 2005 version. For readers that may not recall, this is Roda’s specially selected, old vine cuvée of one hundred percent tempranillo that I suspect is designed to be Rioja’s version of Vega Sicilia or the like. The 2006, like its 2005 counterpart is quite ripe at 14.5 percent alcohol, but shows no signs of heat on either the nose or palate. The bouquet is deep, pure and quite modern in its inspiration, offering up beautiful fruit tones of plums and black cherries, a bit of raw cocoa, fresh herbs and plenty of very sophisticated new vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and voluptuous on the attack, with a fine core of fruit, impeccable focus and balance, fine-grained tannins (that build a bit with air) and outstanding length and grip on the still very primary finish. I would be very interested to taste this wine ten or fifteen years down the road to see how its complexity builds with bottle age. As was the case with the 2005, the 2006 Cirson is an impeccably well-made, modern wine that really shows virtually no Rioja character. 2017-2035? **92+.**



2005 Rioja Crianza- Señorío de P. Peciña

Though the bodega of this former vineyard manager at La Rioja Alta is far from a household name amongst Rioja lovers, Señorío de P. Peciña is clearly one of the very top traditionalist Rioja producers today and their 2005 Crianza is lovely. The wine offers up a very pretty nose of cherries, raspberries, a touch of nutskin, gentle notes of cocoa powder, Rioja spice and a gentle hint of coconutty oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, bright and juicy, with sound acids, soft tannins and lovely focus and balance on the long finish. A classic Crianza for quaffing over the next decade. 2011-2020. **88+**.

2005 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Roda

Though this wine states that it is fourteen percent alcohol on the label, it seems just a bit headier on the label. The nose is not bad at all, as it straddles the line of *sur maturité* in its blend of raspberry jam, a touch of fresh apricot, fresh herbs, gentle notes of Rioja soil and a fair bit of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is fullish, young and a bit “pinched” by its new wood, with a surprising lack of focus, solid mid-palate depth and a fair bit of tannin to resolve on the moderate finish that closes with a bit of chocolaty dullness that suggests a slightly higher octane than fourteen percent. I have had some very good vintages of the Roda Reserva, but the 2005 will need a serious metamorphosis to ever attain the level one expects from this wine. 2015-2030? **82+?**

2005 “Roda I” Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Roda

The Roda I Reserva, which is made entirely from tempranillo, rather than with a small percentage of other Rioja grape varieties, is quite good in 2005. The nose is deep, complex and shows off lovely balance in its mélange of black cherries, black raspberries, woodsmoke, a bit of balsam bough, chocolate and spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and nicely focused, with a fine core, ripe tannins (with of course a few derived from the new French oak) and very good length and grip on the finish. The balance here is very good and even a bit of Rioja soil makes a cameo appearance on the backend. Good juice from the modern school of Rioja. 2016-2040. **90+**.

2004 Rioja “Limited Edition”- Bodegas Lan

I was served this perfectly solid wine double blind and never once did it occur to me that I was tasting a Rioja. The wine offers up a modern and well-crafted nose of cassis, woodsmoke, a bit of tariness, some anonymous soil tones and a generous dollop of toasty new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and a bit four-square, with moderate tannins and a long, straightforward finish that shows a bit of residual sugar. Not a bad wine, but I would love to serve a classic and traditional bottle of Rioja to these good folks just to show them what is missing in this perfectly fine and quite neutered wine. 2011-2025. **85**.

2004 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Roda

The 2004 Roda Reserva is a decided step up from the unfocused 2005 version, as it offers up a ripe and intriguing nose of black raspberries, black cherries, a bit of Rioja spice, chocolate and plenty of spicy new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, concentrated and jammy, with a fair bit of ripe tannin, very good focus, a fine core and very good length and grip on the finish. The backend does close with a closing note of *sur maturité*, but this wine delivers a lot more promise than the slightly muddled 2005. Still, I would love to see this wine picked a full degree lower in alcohol. 2014-2030+. **87+**.

2004 “Roda I” Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Roda

The 2004 Roda I Reserva is a bit riper than its 2005 counterpart, as it offers up a slightly overripe nose of red and black raspberries, hung game, chocolate and aggressive oak spice tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite powerfully built, with good balance, a fine core and very good length and grip on the chewy, slightly overripe finish. Higher alcohol wines always soak up more wood tannins from their new oak, and this is in evidence with the 2004 Roda I in comparison to the 2005, and I wish that winemakers might take this into account when they are deciding how much new wood to age a new vintage in- it seems highly preferable to me to throw out a half a dozen new oak barrels (despite their high price tags) than compromise the overall balance of a new wine by using up all of the new wood in the cellar if the vintage’s characteristics will not carry the wood gracefully. This is still an okay wine, but it is not great. 2015-2025+? **88.**

2003 Viña Bosconia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia

The 2003 summer was hot in Spain, but perhaps not quite as atypically torrid as was the case in France or Italy in that year. In any case, the 2003 Viña Bosconia Reserva is a very ripe wine, but not one that suffers at all from any signs of overripeness in terms of aromatics or flavors of *sur maturité*. The very stylish nose offers up scents of plums, black cherries, a touch of chocolate, woodsmoke and fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite velvety, with a good core, low acids, sound complexity and very good length and grip on the backend. The vintage’s fingerprints here might be in a slightly less precise expression of Bosconia, but this is a still a very tasty bottle for relatively near-term drinking. 2011-2020+. **88.**

2003 Rioja Crianza- Señorío de P. Peciña

The 2003 Crianza from Señorío de P. Peciña is another impressive result from this vintage, as the wine offers up a ripe and impressively complex nose of plums, cherries, a bit of venison, nutskins, lovely soil tones, woodsmoke, fresh herbs and a touch of chocolate. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite plush on the attack, but with impressive freshness for the vintage. The finish is long, focused and velvety, with a nice closing note of chocolate. A very good result from one of the very best producers in Rioja today. 2011-2018. **87.**

2002 Viña Bosconia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia

The 2002 Viña Bosconia Reserva is a lovely bottle of wine that is already drinking well at age eleven, but will continue to improve with further bottle age. The deep and very classy nose offers up a fine mélange of cherries, orange zest, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, spicy soil tones and just a touch of coconutty oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and tangy, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and lovely complexity and grip on the long and velvety finish. A lovely Bosconia Reserva in the making. 2011-2030. **90.**

2001 Castillo Ygay Rioja Gran Reserva- Marques de Murrietta

The 2001 Castillo Ygay is a very nice wine that still has the lion’s share of its inspiration firmly placed in classical Rioja, but it does show just a touch of French *barrique* spice on the nose. The wine these days is raised in new French wood for ten months and then is racked into old, American oak barrels for an additional two years. The bouquet is deep and complex, as it offers up scents of cherries, blood orange, Rioja spice tones, a lovely base of soil, cinnamon and a bit of cedary new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and tangy, with lovely focus and mid-palate depth, a touch of wood tannin and fine length and grip on the complex and tangy finish. Good juice, but I do not see what the French oak adds to the equation. 2010-2025+. **90.**

2001 Viña Tondonia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia

The 2001 Viña Tondonia Reserva is a beautiful example of this vintage, but this wine is still could do with a few more years in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. The bouquet is deep, vibrant and pure, as it delivers scents of cherries, raspberries, woodsmoke, sandy soil tones and plenty of clove-like spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very pure, with nascent complexity, a fine core, ripe tannins and very good acidity and grip on the long and elegant finish. This is destined to be a dynamite year for López de Heredia, and I look forward to tasting the Gran Reservas from 2001 when the time is right. Lovely bottle. 2012-2030+. **91.**

2001 Rioja Reserva- Señorío de P. Peciña

The 2001 Rioja Reserva from Señorío de P. Peciña is a great classic in the making and a wine that should be on the shopping list of every lover of old school Rioja. The superb nose soars from the glass in a complex mélange of cherries, plums, cocoa, woodsmoke, spicy soil tones and a nice touch of coconutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, young and very classy, with a fine core of fruit, moderate tannins and outstanding complexity and length on the refined and focused finish. Really a dynamite bottle of Rioja, I would give the 2001 Rioja Reserva from Señorío de P. Peciña at least another year in the cellar to allow its secondary layers of complexity to fully emerge. 2012-2030+. **92+.**

2001 Rioja “Vendimia Seleccionada”- Señorío de P. Peciña

The 2001 Vendimia Seleccionada” from Hermanos Peciña is an absolutely classic example of Rioja Alta fruit and *terroir*, as the wine offers up a stunning bouquet of plums, cherries, cocoa, complex soil tones, lovely spice elements and a beautiful base of toasted coconut from its old American oak barrels. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with great focus and balance, tangy acids, lovely mid-palate depth and absolutely superb length and grip on the youthful and very pure finish. A great bottle of Rioja in the making, I would love to cross paths with this wine again in ten or twenty years. 2014-2035+. **93+.**

2000 Castillo Ygay Rioja Gran Reserva- Marques de Murrietta (magnum)

In comparison to the very good 2001, the 2000 Castillo Ygay is a tad more advanced than the one year’s difference in their ages might suggest, as this is a wine that is really starting to show signs of secondary layering on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a mature blend of black cherries, plums, woodsmoke, herb tones, tobacco and soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex and quite ready to drink, with only moderate structural integrity, a solid core and good length on the velvety, soft and gentle finish. Given how tangy and structured most old vintages of Castillo Ygay remain, it is a bit disorientating to cross paths with a ten year-old vintage of this wine and see it already soft and in need of drinking up over the mid-term. I do not find the same contribution of oak spice from French wood in the 2000 Ygay, which makes me wonder if the transition took place only with the 2001 vintage. This is a perfectly solid bottle of Rioja, but for a bottling with the pedigree of Castillo Ygay, this is moderately disappointing. 2010-2020. **88.**

2000 Rioja Reserva- Señorío de P. Peciña

The 2000 Rioja Reserva from Señorío de P. Peciña is a very nice bottle of wine, but the style of the vintage seems to have taken away a bit of the aromatic and flavor precision that are the hallmarks of this fine Rioja bodega. The bouquet offers up a fine mélange of black cherries, nutskins, a bit of *sous bois*, dusty soil tones and spice. On the palate the wine is medium-full and nicely balanced, with a slightly four-square personality and an impressively long, silky finish.

This is not a bad wine by any stretch of the imagination, but in the context of the very high level of quality of virtually every wine that I have tasted from Señorío de P. Peciña, this is a modest disappointment. 2011-2016+? **88.**

1998 Rioja Gran Reserva- Señorío de P. Peciña

The 1998 Rioja Gran Reserva from Señorío de P. Peciña is an absolute classic in the making. The deep, pure and flat out great nose soars from the glass in a classic blend of plums, cherries, orange zest, coffee, beautiful soil tones, smoke and toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and very velvety on the attack, with a sappy core of fruit, lovely soil inflection, modest tannins and lovely, tangy acids revving up the long and beautifully focused finish. An absolutely stellar bottle of Rioja. 2012-2040. **94.**

1998 Rioja Reserva- Remírez de Ganuza

To the best of my recollection, this is the first wine I have ever tasted from Remírez de Ganuza, which I found decisively mediocre in quality. The deep, modern and boring nose offers up scents of roasted cherries, leather, a bit of barnyard, salty soil tones, spice and a generous blast of new wood. On the palate the wine is medium-full and a bit “pinched” by its new wood, with tangy acids, respectable depth and a fair bit of uncovered wood tannins drying out the finish. Is this really supposed to be cutting edge Rioja these days? Wow, I am unimpressed. 2011-2020+? **81.**

1990 Rioja Viña Real Gran Reserva- C.V.N.E.

The 1990 Viña Real Gran Reserva from Cune is still a tad on the young side, but is starting to really drink well. This is a riper vintage, which shows more on the nose than the palate of this particular bottle, as the bouquet is a deep and youthful blend of black raspberries, coffee bean, damp soil tones, charred wood, a nice touch of Rioja spice, celery seed and a hint of oxidation. On the palate the wine is fullish, suave and focused, with lovely complexity, good mid-palate depth, melting tannins and good length and grip on a finish that closes with just a whisper of pruniness. This reminds quite a bit of the 1982 and shows that the ripest vintages in Rioja are not necessarily the best. 2011-2020+. **88.**

1989 Monte Reäl Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1989 Monte Reäl Gran Reserva is a beautiful bottle of old school Rioja that strongly suggests that the recent introduction of French oak into the barrel regimen here was a big mistake. The bouquet is deep, pure and superb, offering up scents of cherries, fresh nutmeg, cinnamon, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of coconutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite ripe in style, with a fine core of fruit, a silky palate impression, modest tannins and lovely length and grip on the beautifully focused and dancing finish. This is not the greatest vintage of Monte Reäl, but the wine is drinking splendidly and will have no difficulties cruising along for a couple more decades. 2011-2035. **92.**

1981 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

It had been a couple of years since I last crossed paths with the 1981 Viña Bosconia Gran Reserva and, as this is a wine that I am happy to drink anytime or anywhere, I was very pleased to see it cruising along beautifully at its zenith of peak drinkability. The deep, complex and utterly classic nose soars from the glass and a vibrant mélange of cherries, red plums, Rioja spice tones, new leather, orange zest, nutskins, a touch of saffron and a beautiful base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and very intensely flavored, with a sappy core of fruit, superb soil inflection, modest tannins and outstanding length and grip on the tangy and perfectly focused finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Rioja that will continue to delight for decades to come. 2011-2040+. **95.**

1978 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

1978 was a very ripe year in Rioja and I have always thought of this vintage as producing very good wines that do not quite reach the heights of zestier years such as 1981. The '78 Bosconia Gran Reserva is a very pretty wine that is now fully mature, offering up a complex bouquet of ripe cherries, cloves, spicy soil tones, smoke and nutskins. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with the ripeness of the year translating into a slightly chunky style (particularly for Bosconia, which is perhaps Rioja's most elegant cuvée), with melting tannins and very good length and grip. A very pretty wine, but not the best vintage of Bosconia one can find out there these days. 2011-2035. **89.**

1976 Rioja Imperial Gran Reserva- C.V.N.E.

I had previously tasted the 1976 Viña Real Gran Reserva from Cune and loved the wine, but this was the first time I had the pleasure of tasting its stable mate, the '76 Imperial Gran Reserva. Not surprisingly, it too is a really lovely example of the vintage. The nose is deep, complex and quite lovely in its chocolaty mélange of desiccated berries, woodsmoke, a touch of coffee, nutskins and a beautiful base of soil. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids and very good length and grip on the focused and classy finish. If one were to nitpick, this wine is just a touch flat on the palate (despite its good acidity), which may be indicative that it is time to start drinking it up- or it may simply be that our quite lovely bottle was not one hundred percent pristine. In any event, bottles of the '76 Imperial such as this one should be drunk up over the course of the next decade. 2011-2020. **90.**

1976 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

The 1976 Viña Bosconia Gran Reserva is a beautiful bottle at its apogee of peak maturity, soaring from the glass in a beautifully complex nose of blood oranges, cherries, cinnamon, sandy soil tones, a deft touch of coconut from the old American oak, classic mature Rioja nuttiness and a lovely topnote of fresh herbs. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, very pure and tangy, with outstanding intensity of flavor, impressive complexity and outstanding length and grip on the perfectly focused and dancing finish. The last time I crossed paths with the '76 Bosconia Gran Reserva, it was newly shipped into New York and not showing quite as well as this exceptional bottle. This is a Rioja of unrepentant Burgundian sensibilities and an absolute joy to drink today, but it has decades of life still ahead of it and may yet improve with further bottle age! 2011-2040+. **93+.**

1976 Monte Real Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

I love the Monte Real bottling from Bodegas Riojanas, and the 1976 Reserva is at a very lovely place in its evolution for current drinking, as it has evolved into a lovely and velvety middleweight of lovely aromatic complexity. The mature and classy nose offers up a classic mélange of cherries, orange peel, cloves, woodsmoke, spicy soil tones and a topnote of mustard seed. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and silky, with sound and well-integrated acids, quite respectable depth and lovely length and grip on the complex and fully resolved finish. This is not one of the greatest vintages of Monte Real, but the wine has aged very well indeed and is drinking at its peak today. 2011-2025. **90.**

1975 Viña Pomal Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Bilbainas

The Rare Wine Company tasting in San Francisco in June was the first time that I had ever tried any wines from Bodegas Bilbainas and I was quite impressed with the quality of these oldies from the estate. The 1975 Viña Pomal Crianza was still drinking pretty well for a wine that was clearly meant to be consumed not long after its release back in the last 1970s, and

though it was on the cusp, there is still a fair bit of pleasure to be had here. The complex and pretty nose shows just the first vestiges of oxidation, along with notes of dried cherries, orange peel, nutskin, lovely soil tones and a nice touch of toasted coconut from American oak. On the palate the wine is medium-full, suave and complex, with a cuspy touch of imminent oxidation hanging over the wine like a shroud, but with still more than a vestige of silky and complex drinking to be had here. Drink up. 2011-2015. **86.**

1975 Viña Real Rioja Gran Reserva- C.V.N.E.

This particular bottle of Cuné's 1975 Viña Real Gran Reserva was just a touch plagued by volatile acidity, which kept its score down a bit. The nose is deep, ripe and complex, offering up a fine blend of black cherries, a touch of raisin, woodsmoke, herbs, damp soil and the aforementioned bit of VA. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite complex, with a lovely core of fruit, fine focus and balance, little remaining tannin and a slightly volatile finish. I assume that the volatile acidity issue was just with this particular bottle. 2010-2025. **87.**

1975 Viña Albina Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1975 Viña Albina Reserva (which is the cuvée from Bodegas Riojanas that is designed for early drinking that the Monte Real) is a lovely middleweight that clearly has been mature for many years, but continues to drink at its apogee and still has plenty of life still ahead of it. The deep and very lovely nose wafts from the glass in a very complex blend of plums, orange peel, coconut, chocolate, woodsmoke, a touch of chicory and an almost "salty" base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, mature and intensely flavored, with beautiful balance, still quite good depth and lovely length and complexity on the silky finish. This does not quite have the backend drive and grip of a great wine, but its beautiful complexity still makes it a very enjoyable bottle of mature Rioja. 2011-2030. **89.**

1973 Rioja "Royal" Gran Reserva- Franco-Espanolas

Franco-Espanolas is another bodega that I did not have much experience with prior to our Rare Wine Company tasting, and though this bottle of '73 Royal Gran Reserva was a bit over the hill and getting a touch oxidative, a couple other of their older bottles were quite pretty. The nose on the '73 Royal offers up scents of dried cherries, woodsmoke, fresh nutmeg, forest floor and incipient oxidation. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, suave and complex, with the first signs of overt oxidation poking out on the backend, but still with a bit of length and grip on the finish. As I have little prior experience with this wine, I do not know if this bottle was a bit more advanced, or if the wine has just now entered into its gentle decline down the far side of the plateau. Given the bit more pop in a few of the older wines from Franco-Espanolas at this tasting, I suspect this wine was just slightly advanced. 2011-2016? **85?**

1970 Viña Real Rioja Gran Reserva- C.V.N.E.

Cune really made splendid wines in the 1970 vintage and the Viña Real Gran Reserva is drinking at its apogee at age forty-one. The deep, complex and very classy nose jumps from the glass in a classic mélange of cassis, cloves, smoke, fresh nutmeg, toasted coconut, coffee and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with still a fairly youthful profile, lovely mid-palate depth, a bit of melting tannin and great length and grip on the perfectly focused and tangy finish. Just a classic vintage of Viña Real Gran Reserva. 2011-2040. **94+.**

1970 Imperial Rioja Gran Reserva- C.V.N.E

The 1970 Imperial Gran Reserva is not far off the pace set by the beautiful Viña Real and is drinking at its absolute peak at the present time. The deep, pure and utterly enchanting nose wafts from the glass in a fine mélange of plums, cherries, a touch of fresh nutmeg, a lovely base of soil, Rioja spice tones and coconutty oak. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and beautifully transparent, with a fine core, impressive complexity and breed and excellent length and grip on the focused and *à point* finish. A beautiful bottle of fully mature, classic Rioja, the 1970 Imperial Gran Reserva still had plenty of life ahead of it. It is a touch more elegant than the 1970 Viña Real Gran Reserva, but does not possess that superb wine's same depth and complexity. 2011-2035. **92.**

1970 Rioja "Bordón" Cosecha Especial Crianza- Franco-Espanolas

The 1970 Bordón Cosecha Especial is really still drinking beautifully for a Crianza with more than forty years of bottle age on it, as the wine offers up a really lovely and complex nose of cherries, toasted coconut, nutmeg, classy soil tones, fresh herbs and woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, tangy and nicely focused, with very good balance and length, very little remaining tannin and a long, silky finish that closes with a nice, savory note of celery seed. A very lovely middleweight that is getting towards the far side of its plateau, but still remains vibrant and well-balanced. 2011-2020. **88.**

1970 Monte Real Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

To date, the two greatest vintages of Monte Real that I have ever tasted are the 1991 and the 1970, and this particular bottle of the '70 Gran Reserva was singing in San Francisco in June. The nose is deep, pure and very refined, as it offers up scents of black cherries, plums, chocolate, cloves, coconut, a nice dollop of fresh herbs and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish and quite velvety on the attack, with a very good core of fruit, tangy acids, impeccable focus and balance and a very long, complex and intensely flavored finish. A very suave bottle of Rioja at its apogee. 2011-2035+. **93.**

1968 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

The 1968 Rioja vintage is really drinking well at this point in time and the Viña Bosconia Gran Reserva is clearly one of the wines of the vintage. The celestial nose offers up a brilliant mélange of cherries, plums, new leather, fresh nutmeg, thyme, dusty soil tones, blood orange, nutty old Rioja notes and incipient notes of forest floor. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and tangy, with a great core of fruit, beautiful focus and delineation, stunning complexity and great length and grip on the tangy and perfectly balanced finish. This is one vintage of Viña Bosconia that is at its absolute summit of drinking perfection. 2010-2030+. **95.**

1964 Rioja "Clarete Fino" Gran Reserva- Bodegas Bilbainas

The 1964 Bodegas Bilbainas Gran Reserva from Bodegas Bilbainas is a very pretty and delicate old bottle of Rioja that continues to drink very well, despite quite obviously having been fully mature for decades. The complex and perfumed nose offers up scents of dried cherries, orange peel, gentle spice tones, sandy soil and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, silky and complex, with low acids, gentle remaining structure, but sneaky length and grip on the refined finish. A lovely wine for drinking over the next few years, but do not lose it in the cellar. 2011-2017+? **88.**

1964 Rioja “Excelso” Gran Reserva- Franco-Espanolas

The 1964 Excelso Gran Reserva from Franco-Espanolas was showing beautifully in June, offering up a very pretty and perfumed nose of cherries, dried red berries, coffee, orange peel, nutty tones, smoke and soil. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, complex and really very tangy, with lovely complexity and balance, but a slight touch of blurriness on the backend that keeps the score down just a touch. In terms of complexity and intensity of flavor, this is a first class example of the 1964 vintage, but it does not quite possess the precision on the palate of the very top '64 Rioja bottlings. 2011-2030+. **90.**



1964 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia

The 1964 Viña Bosconia Gran Reserva is a beautiful, mature bottle of Rioja that is in full bloom and, amazingly, still has a bit of tannin to resolve on the backend! The bouquet is deep, complex and tertiary, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of bitter cherries, tobacco ash, fresh herbs, gravelly soil tones, citrus peel and a potpourri of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and classy, with a fine core of tangy red fruit, lovely soil inflection, moderate tannins and superb length and grip on the focused and tangy finish. Just a beautiful bottle of Rioja at its apogee. 2010-2030. **94.**

1964 Castillo Ygay Rioja Gran Reserva- Marques de Murrietta

The 1964 Ygay Gran Reserva is a beautiful bottle of Rioja that is fully at its apogee, but shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon. The bouquet is deep, complex and vibrantly red fruity, jumping from the glass in a blaze of cherries, blood orange, Rioja spice tones, a touch of orange peel, a beautifully complex base of soil and a topnote of rose petals. On the palate the

wine is fullish, bright and tangy, with excellent complexity, a sappy core of red fruit, superb focus and balance and lovely grip on the bouncy and very refined finish. I love old vintages of Ygay and the '64 still hails from what were the glory years for this fine bottling. 2011-2030. **93.**

1964 Rioja Monte Real Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1964 Monte Real Gran Reserva is a beautiful bottle of old and silky Rioja that still has plenty of life ahead of it. The deep, complex and tertiary nose offers up scents of cherries, coffee, woodsmoke, autumn leaves, a fine base of soil and a bit of almost Italianate herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, fullish, very complex and beautifully balanced, with good acidity, still a whisper of remaining tannin and lovely length and grip on the classy finish. Good juice. 2010-2025+. **91.**

1960 Imperial Rioja Gran Reserva- C.V.N.E

The 1960 Imperial Gran Reserva from Cune is probably the first good, non-Port wine I have ever had from my birth year. Many thanks to subscriber Peter Joseph for digging it out of his fine cellar during dinner one evening this summer, when he heard that I was “blessed” with 1960 as a year of birth. The wine is deep, complex and still quite vibrant in its mélange of cherries, cocoa powder, Rioja spice tones, nutskins and a lovely base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and still very complex, with a bit of tannin hanging on, lovely focus and balance and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. A lovely bottle of fully mature Imperial and a total surprise from my birth year. Many thanks Peter! 2011-2020. **90.**

1959 Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodega Fuenmayor

I had never tasted a single bottle for Bodega Fuenmayor prior to crossing paths with the 1959 Gran Reserva out in San Francisco, and the wine was quite delicious, though to my palate, pretty clearly a product of a solera, rather than all from the single vintage of 1959. The nose is deep, sappy and old-fashioned in the best sense of the term, offering up scents of cherries, blood orange, cocoa powder, lovely soil tones and a bit of Rioja nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, fresh and tangy, with lovely complexity, a touch of blurriness and really fine length and grip on the impressively youthful finish. I cannot imagine that this wine was not topped up on occasion with a bit of younger juice, but it is still a very tasty drink and retains plenty of potential longevity. 2011-2030. **90.**

1959 Rioja Gran Reserva “Castillo Ygay”- Marques de Murrietta

The 1959 Castillo Ygay is a very pretty wine, with lovely depth and complexity, but not quite the focus and precision that one hopes for from this great bottling. Perhaps this character was simply a reflection of our particular bottle. The nose is complex, spicy and red fruity, offering up scents of raspberries, cloves, coffee, orange rind, a touch of game, a lovely base of soil and a nice touch of old Rioja nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and complex, with a lovely core of fruit, very little remaining tannin, tangy acids and good length and grip on the slightly muddled finish. With the customary focus of Castillo Ygay, this would be a 93-94 point wine. 2010-2025. **89.**

1959 La Rioja Alta “Gran Reserva” 890

The 1959 “890” from La Rioja Alta is a beautiful example of the vintage that has clearly been at its peak for decades, but shows no signs of imminent decline. The beautiful and still very vibrant nose offers up scents of backed raspberries, singed tobacco, orange rind, coffee, cinnamon and an exotic topnote of saffron. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and very pure, with a sweet core of red fruit, beautiful soil tones, melting tannins and superb length and

grip on the velvety and wonderfully complex finish. This is just a classic example of old La Rioja Alta, which will continue to dazzle for at least another decade and a half. 2009-2025+. **93.**

1956 Rioja Viña Albina Gran Reserva- Bodegas Riojanas

The 1956 Viña Albina Gran Reserva is a beautiful example of the vintage that retains plenty of life to it, despite its having been at its plateau of maturity for probably three decades at this point in its evolution. The deep, complex and tertiary nose offers up a lovely mélange of dried herbs, a touch of plum, raw cocoa, spices, nutskin and a rather delicate topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, medium-full and beautifully focused, with still a bit of mid-palate depth, melting tannins, sound acids and very good length and grip on the complex and classy finish. A gorgeously perfumed middleweight with years of life still ahead of it. 2011-2025+. **91.**

1954 Rioja Viña Real “Gran Reserva”- C.V.N.E.

The 1954 Viña Real has always been one of my favorite vintages for this great Rioja bottling, and this most recent bottle was cruising along beautifully. The bouquet is deep, pure and absolutely stunning, as it offers up a fine mélange of cherries, raspberries, Rioja spice tones, a nice touch of nuttiness, coffee, soil and a delicate touch of leather. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and rock solid at the core, with great focus and balance, melted tannins, superb grip and outstanding length and complexity on the velvety finish. A beautiful bottle, and a tad more red fruity in personality than the last couple ‘54s that I have tasted. 2010-2030. **94.**

1935 Rioja “Reserva Especial”- Bodegas Palacio

This was another venerable old bottle of Rioja from the cellar of Peter Joseph and it was drinking beautifully this past summer. The nose is deep, pure and transparent, offering up scents of cherries, blood orange, nutskins, lovely spice tones and a fine base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, pure and tangy, with impressive depth for its age, a silky palate impression and very good length and grip on the complex and classy finish. I do not know anything about the history of Bodegas Palacio back in this day and age, so I am not sure if they utilized a bit of a solera system with their oldest wines back then, but this bottle was drinking splendidly. 2011-2025. **92.**