

WINES *from* SPAIN

NEWS

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**WOMEN SHAPING
THE SPANISH WINE
WORLD**

**TRACKING THE
ELUSIVE
TEMPRANILLO**

**VOS & VORS
SHERRY**



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Editor-in-Chief, Lavinia B. Miró
Managing Editor: Rory Callahan
Associate Editor: Carole Cleaver

WINES FROM SPAIN, USA

Director: Katrin K. Naelapaa
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WOMEN Shaping the Spanish Wine World

By Leslie Sbrocco

Spain has been compared to a vinous sleeping giant, but that's no longer true. The giant is awake, ready to take on the world, and embracing his feminine side. Little more than a decade ago women working in a Spanish wine cellar were a rarity. Today, however, more and more female faces are gracing winery boardrooms and cellars.

According to Concha Vecino, winemaker at Spain's Bodegas Nekeas, "When I started in wine 15 years ago, many wineries had no women. I think that what's changed in Spain is that the first women to work in the business, the 'pioneers' as I call them, did a very good job opening the doors for those who followed."

According to Barbara Sebastián Caumel, the technical director for Osborne's Malpica de Tajo winery in central Spain, the country in general has experienced an enormous change as women now outnumber men in college (58% were women in 2003). While interviewing the women for this article, it became apparent those older than 35 were in the minority during their oenology degree studies, while the current trend is completely opposite – females account for the majority of students.

Increased feminine influence is evident not only on the industry side,



Cristina Forner, CEO and Export Director of Rioja's Marqués de Cáceres



Barbara Sebastián Caumel



Victoria Pariente and Victoria Benavides Agúndez



Almudena de Llaguno



Elena Adell

but also with consumers. Though Spanish wine consumers are still primarily male, women are enjoying wine more and drinking better bottles. As Cristina Forner of Rioja's Marqués de Cáceres notes, "In the past decade women's attitude towards wine has changed. Their interest has increased as has their knowledge of wine."

This is an exhilarating time in Spanish wine and the following females are helping to generate that buzz and excitement. From recognized names to new faces, these fascinating women share one thing in common – a passion for wine.

PERFECT PARTNERSHIPS: TEAMS WITH A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE

Bodega Dos Victorias: Victoria Benavides Agúndez and Victoria Pariente

After years of working at government jobs in the wine sector, agricultural engineer Victoria Benavides Agúndez and chemist Victoria Pariente made a bold move. They focused their energies on creating their own project, a winery named Dos Victorias. Begun in 1998, the two Victorias have gained an international reputation for high quality, affordable wines that express true Spanish character. Their stellar white from Rueda and reds from the up-and-coming Toro area are classic wines with a modern touch.

Q: You two belong to the modern movement of wine in Spain. How does it feel to be an inspiration for others?

A: Victoria Benavides Agúndez

"I remember in 1989 beginning in the wine business and

there were very few women who even entered a wine cellar. Now that has all changed and it's exciting. Sometimes we're called role models, but we're lucky. We've worked hard to make our dream come true."

A: Victoria Pariente

"We had a lot of friends in the business who gave us a friendly, but almost patronizing pat on the back when we started our company. We weren't really taken seriously, but now we're taken almost too seriously!"

The Fernández Sisters of Bodegas Pesquera: A Winning Combination of Talents

When Alejandro Fernández speaks, the wine world listens. An icon in the business, known for his famous Pesquera and Condado de Haza wines, he has raised the quality bar for wine across Spain. Now it's his daughters who will take the family's four wineries to the next level.

Lucía Fernández Rivera, Olga Fernández Rivera, Maricruz Fernández Rivera, and Eva María Fernández Rivera handle public relations, legal and financial matters, winery management, and winemaking duties, respectively. They were all raised in the wine business and feel truly at home working as a team. The proud papa is delighted with his daughters' involvement, "Things are fine when women are in charge, actually they're much better."

Q: Have women now found their voice in the Spanish wine industry?



Ana Olivera Ortega



Maricruz Fernández and Alejandro Fernández



Mireia Torres



Gloria Collé

A: Maricruz Fernández Rivera:

“I think that women have always known how to carve out their own future thanks to their determination, perseverance, and work, and they are earning a good place in a world that up to just recently was dominated by men. We have always tried to combine tradition with modernity, attempting to maintain all the good that tradition brings us, and culture together with the benefits of new technological advances.”

A: Lucía Fernández Rivera

“Yes. I believe that the world of women in the working world has changed a lot in all fields. Men especially always dominated the world of wine since it is a profession that is linked to the field. Before it was not logical or it was not acceptable for women to work in the field, but all of this has changed. I work with my family and with a group of marvelous people that give us support and trust, and the work that we do is valued and many people enjoy it.”

Classical Wines: Almudena de Llaguno

The story of the Fernández women would not be complete without mention of another female force, Almudena de Llaguno. A native of Madrid, she and her husband Steve Metzler co-founded Classical Wines, an import company based in Seattle, Washington. From the beginning they believed in and spread the word of the genius of Alejandro Fernández and his family's wines.

Q: Was it a challenge to bring about awareness of Span-

ish wines in this country?

A: “We started our business totally against the current twenty years ago. In those days, our wines were slightly higher in price than the Spanish wines previously in the market. I vividly remember being asked if we really were planning to make a living selling *only* Spanish wines, and not French. But, enough people found our wines interesting and little by little they started coming out of the darkest corners of wine shops to reach the front lines of the industry. The challenge is still alive and it's especially rewarding to have a chance to show the richness and diversity of the culture of my country through its wines.”

A LITTLE R&R: TRADITIONAL RIOJA AND TRENDY RIAS BAIXAS ARE HOT SPOTS FOR WOMEN IN WINE

When most people think of Spanish wine, Rioja is the first thing that comes to mind. Home to wine production for more than 1,000 years and the first appellation granted the classification Denominación de Origen Calificada, the Rioja region oozes tradition.

Juxtapose that with one of Spain's youngest D.O.s, Rías Baixas, which sports the highest concentration of female winemakers. Located in the coastal region of Galicia, the area's gentle maritime climate and lush landscape is an ideal backdrop for the red-hot white variety, Albariño, to shine.

Bodegas Montecillo: María Martínez-Sierra

María Martínez-Sierra is a role model for women in Spanish



María Martínez-Sierra of Bodegas Montecillo

wine. Since 1976 she has been the head winemaker at Bodegas Montecillo in Rioja. After falling in love with wine in college, she pursued enology much to the chagrin of her mother. It was her father and boyfriend Pedro (now husband) who gave her the needed support. "I'm a fighter, and I fought a lot at the beginning to gain the respect and admiration of others in this profession," she said. But it has all paid off. Her winemaking gift, energy and intellect have helped to make her one of Spain's most respected winemakers.

Q: How do you balance tradition with innovation in your job?

A: "When you love wine, it is easy to think creatively about it, and this passion is my motivation to stay abreast of

new developments in the industry. I feel that all winemakers in general must possess creativity in order to make the best wine possible, even in difficult vintages."

Q: As a mentor, what advice would you give to those who desire to enter the wine business?

A: "Embrace your passion. Think independently and apply your own ideas to your work. To women who wish to succeed within this industry, I want to encourage you to go after what you want and to always remember that, when you make an effort to acquire something that you have wished for, you are that much closer to achieving your goal. If you enable yourself to feel empowered, I am sure you will succeed!"

Bodegas Marqués de Cáceres: Cristina Forner

Known for her business acumen and passion, C.E.O. & Export Director of the highly-regarded company, Marqués de Cáceres, Cristina Forner's duties range from planning strategy and marketing to blending wines. Originally she worked at her family's winery Château Camensac in Bordeaux after completing her studies in 1976, but later moved to Rioja to work at her family's newly-acquired Marqués de Cáceres. Cristina admits it was a challenge to adapt to cultural differences, but thrived while helping to raise the awareness and reputation of Rioja.

Q: To what do you attribute the recent recognition of Spanish wines on the world stage?

A: "Though wine in Rioja and in other regions of Spain dates back a thousand years, the arrival of Spanish wines is perceived as a recent phenomenon, if compared to our counterparts in Europe. This is logical, if we consider the history of the Spanish economy, which had not targeted the export markets until the arrival of democracy. In a little more than two decades, Spain advanced by leaps and bounds, searching for new export markets and strengthening its distribution channels on an international scale. To a certain extent, Spain has benefited from this phenomenon by becoming one of the wine-producing countries that is both traditional but modern at the same time."

Bodegas Juan Alcorta: Elena Adell

Elena Adell has the right idea. As winemaker at Bodegas Juan Alcorta in Rioja, her goal is to make “singular wines with their own personalities that invite another glass during a meal or conversations with friends.” Responsible for creating the well-known Campo Viejo wines, she has been involved in winemaking since 1985. Her love of viticulture inspired her to study agronomy at the University of Córdoba at a time when oenology degrees were few and far between. Now she is a mentor for others.

Q: What do you see as the future of women and wine from both a consumer and industry standpoint?

A: “From a consumer point of view, I believe that women occupy a privileged position. In families it is usually the woman who is in charge of preparing the meal, choosing the dishes and the wines. It is also the woman who has a decisive influence on the children regarding wine culture. In the industry, we still have some specific positions to conquer. It is now fairly common to see women in marketing, public relations, administration and oenology positions, but there are few women in operations and production.”

Bodegas Terras Gauda: Ana Oliviera Ortega

Rías Baixas may be an emerging region, but it has a rich past. Legend has it that German monks brought Riesling to Galicia centuries ago and the now native Albariño is a relative. One of the star producers of Albariño-based wines is Terras Gauda, which was founded in 1990 and is located in the scenic O Rosal Valley near the border with Portugal. Ana Oliviera Ortega is one of two enologists for the winery and is a native of Galicia. After studying enology at the University of Madrid, this energetic woman of wine wanted to return home to help put wines from Rías Baixas on the map.

Q: What is the most exciting part of your job?

A: “Working with native white grape varieties such as Albariño, Caiño Blanco and Loureira to make unique wines. I try to take the best of both worlds by using these authentic grapes combined with modern techniques. Since I was born in Galicia I’d like to try to rejuvenate red varieties here too,

like Mencía. It’s such an exciting time to work here.”

Bodegas Fillaboa: Isabel Salgado de Andrea

Similar to the French region of Burgundy where individual vineyards tend to be very small, those in the Rías Baixas D.O. are generally a patchwork of tiny planting. But, the beautiful Fillaboa estate is one of the area’s largest in terms of contiguous vineyard holdings. This gives them great control in the quality of their wines, something their dynamic young oenologist Isabel Salgado de Andrea relishes.

Not only is she an agricultural engineer with a master of oenology from the University of Madrid and Fillaboa’s head winemaker, but also the first female Presidente of the Consello Regulador da Denominación Específica Orujo de Galicia, an organization that oversees the production of the famed local brandy. “This is such a new place in terms of modern winemaking so the history of the D.O. can really be influenced by women,” she says with pride.

Q: What is your philosophy of winemaking?

A: “The idea of using our traditional grape varieties and letting them express their authentic character is what I try to do. It has been an arduous journey, however for this region to embrace modern techniques even though we’re a fairly new D.O. With the locals it was always that the ‘homemade’ way is better, but now we have achieved acceptance at home and abroad. We’re a small region, but known world wide.”

ALL IN THE FAMILY: FROM FAMILIAR NAMES TO FRESH FACES

Miguel Torres S.A: Mireia Torres

The legendary first family of Spanish wine with roots back to the 17th century is known for ventures that span the globe from their home base in Catalonia to their lauded Marimar Torres Estate winery in California and operations in Chile. Family members oversee all arms of the business and currently Miguel Torres’s daughter Mireia, who has chemical engineering and oenology degrees, is the technical director for Miguel Torres S.A.

Q: What has been the greatest obstacle, if any, that you’ve encountered as a woman in the wine business?

A: “Though wine has been a constant in my life as all my family members have worked in the business, I think for many

women winemakers, including myself, the greatest obstacle is to reach a balance between work and family during the harvest season.”

Q: What does the future hold for women in wine?

A: “The prospects for women in the wine business are very good. A clear example is the wine competition held by the Australian magazine *Good Taste*. From a total of 500 different wines, the three first prizes were awarded to wines by women: Kate Goodman and Natalie Fryer on the white and sparkling wine categories and Sue Hodder gold medal for the best red wine.”

Freixenet S.A.: Gloria Collell

Gloria Collell’s passion for wine was inspired by her childhood memories. As the international wine manager for still wines of the famed company Freixenet, she has brought her family’s history full circle.

Q: How did you get into the wine business?

A: “I was born into a family dedicated to wine. My grandfather was a “bota” or wineskin-maker by profession. He handmade the leather pouches in which wine was stored in Spain in those days. At that time (in the 1920s), wine in Spain was all sold wholesale and bottled wine did not exist. My father fervently believed that the future of wine was in the bottle and not in wineskins so he created a territorial distribution of bottled wine and opened two stores specializing in wine. Therefore, my childhood memories revolved around wine: the aroma of the bodega when we would fill my dad’s barrels with wine from the wholesaler; the wine fairs where, even as a child, I helped my parents show wine and most of all, the tastings we conducted at home.

At age 18, I decided to study to become a lawyer, but I soon found out that being trapped in an office was not for me. Soon thereafter, my father proposed I study

oenology in order to carry on the family business. Over the years, I’ve seen that the benefit of having a wine industry career is the memories of all the great moments you’ve lived.”

Caves El Cep: Maite Esteve

Though her family has been involved in wine for generations, this young woman is still excited by the prospects of the wine world. As general manager of her family’s Cava business, which produces the highly regarded Marqués de Gelida brand, Maite Esteve wears many hats ~ from being involved in the winemaking process to sales and marketing.

Q: As a young woman in the business did you ever encounter any obstacles?

A: “In my generation, men and women studied together in the university and therefore, it was not considered uncommon to work side by side in business as well and to have women in managerial positions. So I’ve not experienced difficulties due to my gender. I would have to say that the greatest obstacle I’ve encountered is trying to balance the demands of family life with the responsibilities of being general manager of a winery.”

Q: What brings you the greatest joy in your job?

A: “The concept that you are creating a product directly from the soil, sun and rain in a natural process that brings pleasure to the consumer is probably the most satisfying part of the wine business. For all the technological advances and improvements we have made we are still attached to the soil and the whims of nature. For me this is the most romantic aspect of my work.”



Maite Esteve

Leslie Sbrocco is the author of *Wine for Women: A Guide to Buying, Pairing and Sharing Wine* (William Morrow). The Sonoma, California-based writer pens a regular column for the *San Francisco Chronicle* and appears on television and radio programs such as the **Today** show and **CNN**.

Tracking the ELUSIVE Tempranillo

Tempranillo vineyards ©CEX

By Michael Franz

The remarkable recent renaissance of Spanish wine has intensified worldwide interest in Spain's most famous red grape: Tempranillo. With Tempranillo-based reds from regions like Rioja and Ribera del Duero rising to challenge the best bottlings from Bordeaux and beyond, the grape is destined for comparisons with the world's top red varieties.

Indeed, it already seems clear—at least to me—that only five varieties grown anywhere in the world are comparable to Tempranillo in potential greatness: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese and Syrah. And once Tempranillo is included in such elite company, the questions naturally arise: What are Tempranillo's prime characteristics and capabilities? Can we identify its essential nature?

Although these questions arise naturally, when we try to get a grip on Tempranillo, they turn out to be very difficult to answer. Tempranillo is a remarkably complex variety with an amazing array of facets and features. It is clearly one of the

world's greatest cultivars, but it is also one of the most elusive. We can indeed discern certain important essentials that give us a sense of the grape's distinctive characteristics, but only after encountering a lot of complications in the course of the search.

TEMPRANILLO HAS TRAVELED TO MANY DIFFERENT PLACES within Spain, and has done so under a variety of names. In fact, it is only in Rioja and Navarra that the grape is called Tempranillo with relative regularity. In Valdepeñas it is known as Cencibel. In Penedés it is called Ojo de Liebre (in Spanish), and Ull de Llebre (in Catalan). Within the region of Castile-León alone, it travels under at least three different names: Tinto (or Tinta) del País in Cigales, Tinta de Toro in Toro, and Tinto Fino in Ribera del Duero. Here and there, one also hears it called Tinto Madrid or Tinto de la Rioja. It is known as Tinta Roriz in Portugal, and as Tempranilla in Argentina, but since the nomenclature is already sufficiently

VARIETAL FOCUS / TEMPRANILLO

confusing just within Spain, we'll keep our focus there.

This hodgepodge of names wouldn't necessarily pose grave difficulties for understanding if the grape produced strongly similar wines from these various places. But it doesn't. For example, Rioja, which is surely the world's most famous rendition of Tempranillo, has traditionally been characterized as a light- or medium-bodied wine, prized for complexity and prettiness much more than power. At the other end of the spectrum, wines from Toro tend to be massive and very intense, packing a wicked wallop of alcohol and lots of gutsy tannin.

These differences in profile indicate that Tempranillo is sensitive to different climatic conditions from region to region. Yet, that shouldn't prove too confusing, right? We should expect lighter, leaner wines from cool climates and richer, more robust renditions from warmer regions. That much is certainly true, but the complexities don't end there, because the variations we see in finished wines aren't simply the result of different climates having different effects on a single grape variety. In fact, the different climates in which Tempranillo is grown have actually gotten into the variety itself, in the sense that the vines have adapted to different growing conditions



Top: tempranillo leaves; middle: tempranillo cluster on vine; bottom: harvesting tempranillo. © ICEX.

over many centuries.

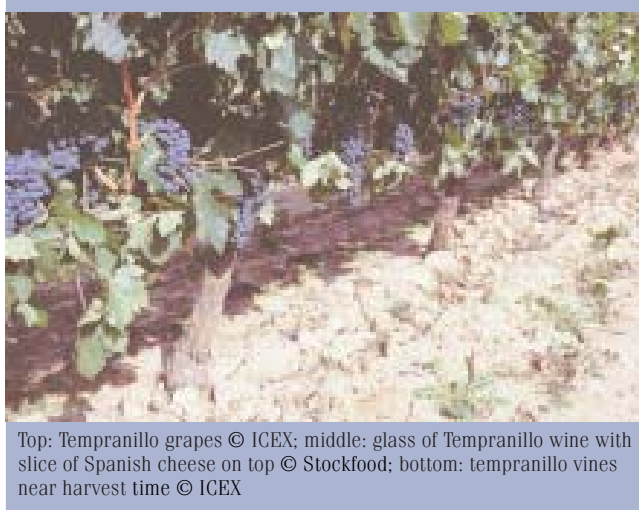
Localized adaptations complicate our effort to get a grip on Tempranillo, since they create sub-types within the variety. However, the adaptation process itself is easy enough to understand. It has two key elements, a spontaneous one arising from nature, and a deliberate one stemming from human viticulture.

The natural element is genetic mutation, which occurs randomly in all sorts of organisms including grape vines. Most mutations aren't advantageous to a vine, but some are. For example, some mutations will enable a vine to resist drought or mildew, or to produce more fruit or ripen it earlier. When growers notice such advantages in a mutant vine, they can use cuttings to replace other vines, or even propagate many new plants to establish entire vineyards with vines that are clones of a single parent.

Use of clones for large commercial vineyards didn't begin until the 1920s, but replacement of vines with cuttings from plants altered by adaptive mutations has been practiced for centuries. Over time, particular regions have ended up with quite distinctive strains of particular vine varieties, and Toro provides an important case in point.

The Toro region near Zamora is very dry during the growing season, with sandy soils and wide temperature swings from day to night, largely due to vineyard altitudes between 2,000 and 2,400 feet. These are very challenging conditions for Tempranillo vines, but, over hundreds of years, Tempranillo has adapted to meet these challenges. After centuries of mutations and selective replantings, Tinta de Toro vines have unusually deep-running roots to help them seek water, as well as leaves that grow in a way that helps the plants retain moisture. And, perhaps most importantly, Tinta de Toro grapes are extremely small. Since the components holding color, aroma and flavor in wine grapes reside principally in the skins, the low ratio of juice to skins in the Tinta de Toro gives it the potential to yield wines of great depth and intensity.

This is of course great news for wine lovers, but not such great news for those hoping to get a grip on Tempranillo. It means that we must not only track it to many different places under different names, but must also recognize that our elusive quarry has transformed itself into several sub-types wherever it has settled. Moreover, our search for Tempranillo's essential nature is complicated by the



Top: Tempranillo grapes © ICEX; middle: glass of Tempranillo wine with slice of Spanish cheese on top © Stockfood; bottom: tempranillo vines near harvest time © ICEX

fact that, in all of these different places, the human beings who grow the grapes and turn them into wine do so differently, further muddying the waters.

For example, if asked whether Tempranillo produces light or heavy wines, we would really need to respond with multiple answers. Based on the factors we've already considered, we'd need to say that a Tempranillo-based wine will be heavier if grown in a hot climate, but lighter if grown in a cool one, and heavier if it is Tinta de Toro being grown, but lighter if the vines are high-yielding commercial clones. And after considering the influence of the viticulturalist, we'd also need to add that the wine will be heavier if yields are restricted by pruning and crop-thinning, but lighter if yields are increased by fertilizers and irrigation.

For this reason, it is no longer possible to say flatly that Rioja, for example, is a relatively light wine. Yes, it can be as light as cool-climate Pinot Noir, but it can also be as syrupy as Shiraz. A significant number of producers in Rioja have severely cut the crop loads from their vineyards to make "high expression" wines that can compete with the world's richest, meatiest reds. Winemakers have gotten into the act as well, replacing many

VARIETAL FOCUS / TEMPRANILLO

big old casks with barrels that are much smaller and replaced much more frequently, adding much more frequently, adding spice and tannin to their wines.

On top of all this, many wines from regions traditionally associated with Tempranillo actually incorporate significant proportions of other grapes. Sticking with Rioja for a moment, many producers seeking richer wines are not only decreasing yields but also blending in larger percentages of Graciano. And in Ribera del Duero, where Tinto Fino makes rather muscular wine on its own, some producers are seeking even bulkier bottlings by adding as much as 25% Cabernet Sauvignon to their blends.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE all of these intricacies and complications, yet we can nevertheless identify some real threads of continuity that help us get a fix on this great grape. By comparison to other red varieties, Tempranillo ripens relatively early. Indeed, its name derives from *temprano*, which means early in Spanish.

Early ripening helps us understand why Tempranillo is so widely planted. It grows well in rather hot climates like Valdepeñas, but can also thrive in cool zones, ripening before the autumn chill shuts down



Top: Vineyard in La Mancha ©Mick Rock/Cephas; middle: tempranillo grapes on the vine © ICEX; bottom: baskets of tempranillo grapes in Valdepenas © Mick Rock/Cephas.

the growing season in places such as Rioja Alavesa. Similarly, its short growing cycle enables it to deal with the rigors of growing conditions in Ribera del Duero, which has an annual weather pattern that a grower once described to me as “one month of summer and eleven months of hell.”

Although Tempranillo wards off cold weather problems in autumn by ripening early, it does not avoid spring frost problems by sending out its buds particularly late in spring. This sometimes poses problems for growers, who can suffer serious crop losses if spring frosts kill young buds or shoots emerging from the vines. Frost damage is a particular problem in the north-central Spain. In some cases, however, what growers regard as a problem turns out to be a boon for consumers. Spring frosts reduced crops dramatically in Toro and Ribera del Duero in 2001, and this mandatory yield reduction contributed significantly to the density of wines from this vintage, which many observers and winemakers regard as the greatest in a generation.

Another characteristic that enables Tempranillo to grow in cool climates (where it can produce particularly refined wines) is that the grapes are lower than normal in acid-

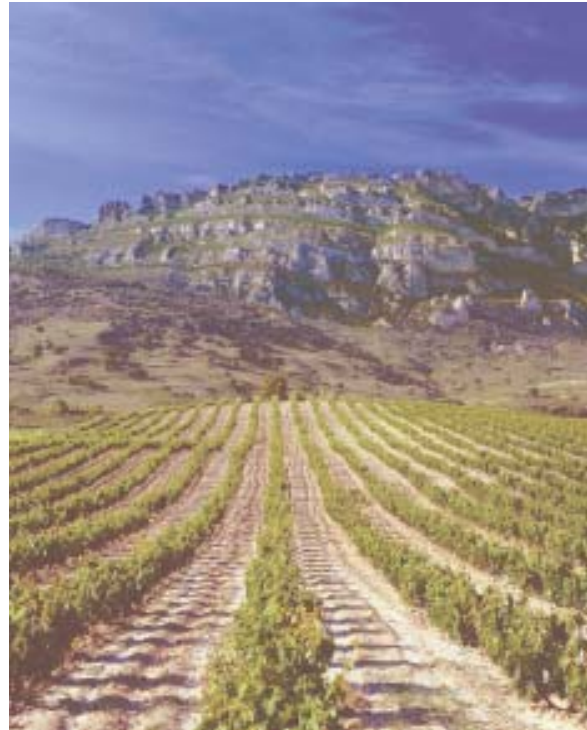
ity. This is especially helpful in growing seasons that are lacking in sunshine and warmth, and hence marginal for ripening. Whereas more acidic grapes would produce tart, angular wines in such a year, the more forgiving Tempranillo provides more balanced results.

Relatively low acidity is not a straightforward advantage in warmer regions, but neither is it a clear disadvantage. In hotspots like La Mancha or parts of Castile, Tempranillo's low acidity is not well suited to making ageworthy wines, yet the flip side of this is that bottlings of varietal Tempranillo from these places are wonderfully soft and accessible at a very young age.

Finally, with regard to aromas and flavors, some critics have maintained that Tempranillo is lacking, or that, at a minimum, it lacks a strongly defined identity. One version of this criticism contends that a lack of aroma explains the historical frequency with which Tempranillo has been lavished with oak. (Oak ageing directly furnishes notes of spice and vanilla, and indirectly lends leathery notes over time due to oxygen passing through the wood's pores and between the staves). Another version of the criticism holds that Tempranillo's lack of assertive aromas and flavors explains why it has so often been blended with grapes like Garnacha and Graciano.

In my view, neither of these criticisms can stand up to close scrutiny. Both are virtually refuted by the recent rise of wines that are composed entirely of Tempranillo and only minimally oaked. Many of these wines are designated as *Vino de la Tierra de Castilla*, but *Ribera del Duero* also produces Roble wines in this style, and *Rioja* makes Joven wines that fit the profile.

In most cases, these wines are neither lacking nor indefinite in aroma or flavor. On the contrary, many are very



Vineyard on the slopes of the Sierra de Cantabria near Alava (Rioja Alavesa)
© Mick Rock/Cephas

expressive, featuring notes of red and black cherries, strawberries, or blackberries, with flavors so appealing that one begins to wonder why so much Tempranillo has been submerged under so much oak over the years.

I believe there are at least two answers to that question. The first points to the influence exerted by winemakers from Bordeaux, who migrated to northern Spain after oidium and phylloxera devastated their vineyards in the second half of the 19th century, and who brought their proclivity for oak ageing with them.

Second, the practice of ageing Tempranillo in oak had the effect of altering consumer expectations, which in turn constrained

producers in how they could vinify Tempranillo. The practice of designating wines by reference to oak ageing (*Crianza*, *Reserva* and *Gran Reserva*) contributed to the impression that more time in oak is simply better than less time, and over the decades the notion that Tempranillo needs wood to be interesting hardened from a novelty into a tradition, and ultimately into something like a dogma.

Today, however, the dogma has receded, and we now see a wonderful welter of diverse renditions of Tempranillo from all over Spain. In the absence of a ruling orthodoxy regarding how Tempranillo must be crafted, the little nuances lent by its various genetic strains and far-flung vineyard locations are being revealed more fully with each successive vintage. As this process continues into the future, we are certain to enjoy many years of friendly debate regarding which styles—and which regions—stand as the ultimate expression of Tempranillo.

Michael Franz is wine columnist for *The Washington Post* as well as a wine educator and restaurant consultant. He also hosts "The Grapevine," a live, interactive show scheduled on washingtonpost.com's "Live Online" at noon on alternate Wednesdays.

VOS & VORS: A New Classification for Old Sherry

A close look into the process of making the noble wines of Jerez is but a glimpse into the annals of history. The vineyards in this southern Spanish region, planted by Greeks, Romans, and Carthaginians, survived and even blossomed under the Moorish invasion and its centuries of Koranic prohibition. Sherry wines were the first wines to circumnavigate the globe with Magellan in the sixteenth century, and they were the most popular wines in the world for over a century.

By the late 18th century, a movement was underway to provide bodegas the opportunity to store and age wines of different vintages. This movement gave birth to the Solera and Criadera systems that identify Sherry as the unique wines that they are today.

Amontillado, Oloroso, Palo Cortado and Pedro Ximénez Sherry take decades of maturation and precise blending in the solera system to develop their distinctive characteristics. Wine for bottling is drawn off of the oldest butts in the Solera in extremely limited quantities. This wine is replaced by wine from younger butts, creating a blend that assimilates the young wines into the old gradually. It is a dynamic process that involves a methodical, fractional blending of wines to create consistent bottles of long-aged wine. Yet the length of time inherent in this critical process was never conveyed to the consumer of fortified wines ~ until now. These aged styles of Sherry are finally receiving the recognition they have always deserved, and once held throughout the world. In being designated VOS or VORS, Sherry enters the age-dated fortified wines market alongside Port and Madeira, which have long benefitted from age classifications. VOS (Very Old Sherry) appears on labels for Sherry with a minimum 20 years in the solera, while VORS (Very Old Rare Sherry) labels appear on bottles with more than 30 solera years. And because all Sherry is a blend of different vintage wines, these wines actually have an average age far beyond their label designation.

In 2000 the Consejo Regulador of the Denominacion de Origin *Jerez-Xérès-Sherry y Manzanilla* agreed to begin classifying wines of exceptional quality and long age with a guarantee of age on the bottle. Though the law currently classifies the categories VOS and VORS, for minimum 20 year and minimum 30 year Sherry, respectively, in the future the classifications may be expanded to include 15 year and 12 year

Sherry as well.

The classification is changing little by way of the production of aged Sherry, but rather is finally attracting attention to the unique process. By declaring a minimum age on a bottle of Sherry, the wines from Jerez will have a better opportunity to compete in the marketplace with vintage Port and Madeira. Now, consumers will know the minimum age of the Sherry just by looking at the bottle. VOS will also contain the words “minimum 20 years”, while VORS will have “minimum 30 years” printed directly on the label. These designations are also exciting to the trade, who have long known and respected Sherry’s unique properties and intricate aging process. VOS and VORS label statements will provide authenticity, by certifying the age of the wines, making it easier to convey the spectacular characteristics of the wines to the consumer.

For the bodegas producing the wines, however, the new designations carry substantial responsibility. In order to have Sherry classified as VOS or VORS, the Bodega must present a sample of the wine to the Consejo Regulador (Regulatory Control Board), which inspects the wine, the storage methods, and the facilities. The Consejo then seals the barrels. When the wine is ready for bottling, a tasting committee assesses the wine. If approved, a special stamp provided by the Consejo is placed on each bottle to guarantee the minimum age designations for VOS and VORS wines. As if this is not enough, the soleras have been subjected to carbon date testing to prove their authenticity. In addition, as a clear example of the government’s desire to preserve the heritage of the soleras, only a limited amount of wine is allowed to be drawn from each solera to be sold in any given year. Each bottle is registered with the Consejo to track the quantities until the wine sells out.

These recent laws from the Consejo Regulador are only the latest chapter in the remarkable history of Sherry production. By authenticating the age of old Sherry, the consumer is sure to regard them as truly noble wines.

Steven Olson teaches, lectures, and writes about wine, beer, spirits, and sake. His writing has appeared in such industry publications as *Food & Wine Magazine*, *Wine & Spirits*, and *Santé*. He has also consulted on acclaimed restaurants in New York, Connecticut and Atlantic City. Olson was selected as *Santé Magazine’s* Spirits Professional of the Year for 2003.

25th Anniversary Celebration of Robert Parker's The Wine Advocate

Wines from Spain was one of the hosts of the celebration honoring **Robert M. Parker, Jr.** on the 25th anniversary of his seminal newsletter, **The Wine Advocate**. On October 22, vintners from Spain and many other wine-producing regions poured their best wines at "100 Vintners from Around the World," a walk-around tasting at the **Culinary Institute of America**, Napa Valley, Greystone campus. The following evening, a Grand Banquet in honor of Mr. Parker was held at the spectacular Legion of Honor in San Francisco. The Spanish bodegas participating in this event were **Bodegas Muga** (D.O.C. Rioja), **Bodegas Sierra Cantabria** (D.O.C. Rioja), **Bodegas Finca Allende** (D.O.C. Rioja), **Bodegas Numanthia-Termes** (D.O. Toro), **Finca Sandoval** (V.T. Tierra de la Manchuela), **Hacienda de Susar** (D.O.C. Rioja), **Clos I Terraces** (D.O.C. Priorat), **Aalto Bodegas y Vinedos** (D.O. Ribera del Duero), **Bodegas Mustiguillo** (V.T. El Terrerazo, and **Celler Mas Doix** (D.O.C. Priorat). Other events that weekend included a seminar tasting led by Mr. Parker in the CIA's EcoLab Theater and a guided tasting of wines rated a perfect 100 points by *The Wine Advocate*, led by Mr. Parker, held at the home of **Ann and Gordon Getty** in San Francisco. Proceeds of \$350,000 raised from the weekend events will be used to establish an endowment for **Robert Parker Wine Advocate Scholarships for Professional Wine Studies** at the CIA's Rudd Center at Greystone.



From left, Spanish winemakers Marcos Eguren, Ramón Llagostera, Juan Muga, Katrin Naelapaa (Wines from Spain); Robert Parker; Antonio Sarrión, and Javier Zaccagnini. © Michael Coon.

Great Match Wine & Tapas Wraps up Fall Tour

Wines from Spain recently completed its annual four-city **Great Match: Wine and Tapas Tour**, with stops in New York, San Francisco, Dallas and Miami. Now in its 11th year, The Great Match offers both consumers and members of the restaurant and wine trade the opportunity to experience the versatility of Spanish wines with a variety of cuisines, as well as add the words *Tempranillo*, *Garnacha*, *Cariñena*, *Albariño* and *Verdejo* to their vocabularies. A comprehensive tasting of more than 200 Spanish wines representing many of Spain's 63 denominations of origin were paired with an



Left: Great Match at the Biltmore Hotel in Miami; below, in Dallas

international menu of tapas, created by leading local chefs in each city, including **Joanne Bondy**, **Ciudad d.f.** and **Joseph Gutierrez, Rouge**, in Dallas; **Martin Castillo**, **Limon-SF** and **Michael Mina, Michael Mina** in San Francisco; **Dan Silverman**, **Lever House** and **Andy Nusser**, **Casa Mono** in New York; and **Arthur Artiles**, **Norman Van Aken's Mundo** and **Douglas Rodriguez, Ola**, in Miami.



This year, the Great Match events raised over \$40,000 for hunger-relief charities. One hundred percent of the admission proceeds were donated to partner charities in each city: **North Texas Food Bank, Dallas**; **Food Runners, San Francisco**; **City Harvest, New York**; and **Daily Bread Food Bank, Miami**.