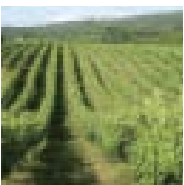


# WINES FROM SPAIN IN NEWS

**Green Galicia:**  
**Land of Spain's Most Envied Whites**  
**The Global Plate: Cairo on the Hudson**  
**Postmark: Rioja**  
**Rhapsody in Red:**  
**The 100 Definitive Wines of Spain**  
**El Taburete: Tía Pol**



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*Viña Real*

CONTINO

*The Prestige of Rioja*



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With new format and sections, we continue our tour of Spain's most vivid wine regions. Green ~ as seen through the eyes of Jordan Mackay ~ was the color that set our summer trip in motion, but who could have foreseen that a visit to Rioja or sitting with Bruce Schoenfeld through the ultimate tasting of Spanish reds could become as refreshing as the coolest albariño? In New York, Adrian Murcia explored Middle Eastern cuisine, Spanish wine in hand, while Andrea Strong sat down with the team behind Tía Pol to discover their goals for bringing good food and wine together and capturing the feeling of a *madriño* bar on Tenth Avenue, NYC.



Cover photo: Islas Cies, Galicia. © Turgalicia.

## WINESFROMSPAINNEWS

Summer 2005

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Art Director: Brent Robertson  
Associate Editor: Carole Cleaver  
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### Wines from Spain, USA

Director: Katrin Naelapaa  
Associate Directors: Jean Bracamonte, Jose Guerra  
Marketing Assistants: Sara Abad, María José Besada, Silvana Guinle  
Market Analysts: Ricardo Junco, Félix Yáñez

Wines from Spain News is a free publication sponsored by the Trade Commission of Spain, New York. The publication makes every effort to verify the accuracy of its contents and does not assume responsibility for any omissions or inaccuracies it may contain.

Wines from Spain News is published three times a year by Wines from Spain, a division of the Trade Commission of Spain, New York, located at: 405 Lexington Avenue, 44th floor New York, NY 10174-0331

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# GREEN GALICIA

## LAND OF SPAIN'S MOST ENVIED WHITES

By Jordan Mackay

Last fall, as the grapes for Bodegas Terras Gauda in the Rías Baixas were coming in, the walls of the winery were glowing with a luscious shade of green. Here in this wine region in Spain's northwest corner, I thought at first that this radiance was the result of grapes being splattered on the walls of the winery. But in fact it was simply the clear Atlantic light reflecting off the churning masses of impossibly luminous, ripe Albariño grapes.

Green is nothing if not the color of life, and likewise the wines here are nothing if not lively. Bodegas Terras Gauda was a hive of activity, from the pickers bringing in bins of bright green grapes, to the crushers spraying citrus perfume into the air, to the fermenting tanks that smelled like sweet chamomile and green tea. These incipient wines seemed to be instilled with the sense of irrepressible vibrance that infects the whole region.

I soon found out that green is not only found on the walls in Rías Baixas; it's everywhere. To drive west from Madrid to Galicia is to go from the arid, iconic Spanish dry lands to what feels like tropical rain forest. And, likewise, the wines here are the antithesis of everything you've ever thought about Spanish wine. This familiar image includes potent reds like the impenetrable, inky Ribera del Dueros or earthy, scarlet Riojas. In Rías Baixas, however, the wines are light and sharp. They're technically white, but, if you look closely into your glass, you're likely to see greenish flecks. (In fact, the

white wines of northern Portugal, just miles south of the Rías Baixas are called Vinho Verde, or green wine.) If the popular (and misguided) perception of Rioja seems earthy and tired, Rías Baixas wines vibrate with the energy of something that's alive. Their aromas bring to mind everything that grows with leaves, from apricots and peaches to white flowers. In the mouth, they hum with bright acidity and they drink cool like morning dew on grass. And nothing is a better match for the fish and the clams and the shrimp that are always being pulled out of the many long estuaries that stamp the area.

Though this is a multifaceted and complex region, there is no disputing that the star grape variety is Albariño. No one in Galicia is quite sure of Albariño's provenance, but three general theories prevail. One is that Albariño is derived from Riesling, which was brought by German pilgrims on the path to Santiago de Compostela. Another theory has it that French monks from Burgundy introduced it in the 12th or 13th century. It is well known that monks from other parts of Europe had a profound effect on Spanish winemaking. Furthermore, Santiago de Compostela, a holy city located in Galicia, has been a powerful magnet for religious pilgrims from all over Europe. Thus, it makes sense that wines in this region could be influenced by religious travelers





Whatever its origins and whichever grapes it may be related to, at its best, Albariño offers a unique mélange of flavors: the mineral fluidity of Riesling, the floral aromatics and fleshiness of Viognier, and the bright acidity of Pinot Gris. A greenish-skinned berry, Albariño has a surprisingly thick skin that allows it to weather the cool, rainy and humid conditions of this coastal region. One can find it growing in high-acid, granitic earth to sandy soils, the former making a more mineral and structured wine, the latter making a softer, rounder one.

The most common method of training Albariño vines is in a style the Italians call pergola but in Galicia is known as *espaldera*. The vines grow from the ground up to wires suspended at about seven feet overhead, forming a ceiling-like canopy. The ripening grape bunches hang down underneath the leaves and are harvested by pickers reaching up overhead with their shears. Local growers say this trellising allows breezes to flow through the vineyard, reducing mildew and mold in the cool, rainy climate, but time will tell if this method will ultimately be the best for Albariño. Tests are underway at a few forward-thinking wineries such as Terras Gauda in O Rosal, using classic French-style wire trellising that exposes the grapes to more sunlight and allows leaf growth to be controlled more easily. As one viticulturist told me, "We're very happy with the wines we are making, but at the same time have curiosity that they could even be better."

To show Albariño's dominance, the official denomination was created specifically for this variety. But in 1988, the name was changed to Rías Baixas when Spain entered the European Union, whose laws do not recognize a D.O. named for only one grape. Rías Baixas is actually composed of five subregions: Ribeira do Ulla and Val do Salnés in the north, Sotomaior in the middle, and O Rosal and Condado do Tea in the

south, close to the border with Portugal. Here many bodegas still produce blended wines. Treixadura is a blending grape found mainly in Condado do Tea, while Loureira is a speciality in O Rosal. Still, 95 percent of production is Albariño and if a label has Albariño on it, it must be 100 percent. On the other hand, if the label reads "Rías Baixas, Condado do Tea," it is understood that the wine is a blend of Albariño and Treixadura.

Due to their southern location, Condado do Tea and Sotomaior tend to make riper and richer wines that are also lower in acidity. In the Val do Salnés, the climate is cooler and wetter, so wines made exclusively with local fruit tend to be crisper on the palate. However, the problem with this kind of generalizing is that the big wineries and co-operatives often buy grapes from different parts of the denomination, blurring distinctions between them.

To get an idea of the extent to which this can be blurred, it is helpful to know that, though the entire region encompasses only 2,800 hectares, there are 6,000 discrete growers within it. The average individual vineyard is only 200 square meters in size. Of 190 total wineries, only 30 produce more than 100,000 bottles. Even with so many players, the region's fortune and fame has been growing, along with its export levels, which climb every year. But with so many producers and growers, no wine can possibly be static, and that is certainly the case with Albariño. The biggest question facing Rías Baixas is: In which direction will the wine evolve? The dominant—and many would say correct—style of Albariño in Rías Baixas is a wine fermented and aged in stainless steel to preserve its crisp, lucid fruit and its charged acidity. This





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method produces a clean wine of a familiar linear structure—luscious Albariño, to be sure. But it's not surprising that there are those that want to take the grape further.

Isabel Salgado is the winemaker at Bodegas Fillaboa in the Condado do Tea sub-region. I visited on a warm and sunny fall day during harvest, and in her white lab coat she led me on a tour that followed with a tasting under the arbors behind the winery. After the vibrant and fluid Fillaboa 2003 Albariño, she poured a wine called "Selección Finca Monte Alto." Compared to the standard version, this 2002 wine was more round and full, without losing its linear structure and verve. As I tasted it, Salgado said, "this wine could represent the a future of Albariño. It's more full and complex than the normal wine, and it ages better." The difference between this and standard Albariño? After fermentation, this wine had been left on its lees (the dead yeast cells remaining after fermentation that accumulate at the bottom of the tank), which had been stirred for nine months. A classic Burgundian technique typically performed with Chardonnay, lees-stirring was being employed in Rías Baixas by Salgado in an attempt to elevate the grape. It's a method that winemakers typically use to add roundness and complexity to a wine. The wine was inarguably more complex and intriguing than the typical tank-fermented Albariño. At Pazo de Señorans, Marisol Bueno produces a special selection (Selección de Añada Blanco) wine that is similarly held in tank for anything up to three years on its lees. Using highly selected grapes from the vintage, the resulting wine is delicious: fruity, while yet also minerally and complex.

Another experimental technique involves the use of wood. At Fillaboa, Salgado also showed me a barrel-fermented Albariño that produced a soft wine full of vanilla and spice. Again, this was a drastically new style of winemaking in the region. While these techniques

were interesting to experiment with, Salgado said, "the real future for the grape will come with improvements in the vineyard." While she doesn't believe that changing from *espaldera* to the European systems of trellising will be important, "what will transform the region will be the work done in the vineyard. By this," she says, "I mean the green harvest. Keeping yields down will be the most important thing we can do to improve our vines."

The winemakers at Terras Gauda agree. That's why they're experimenting with alternative trellising methods, as well as many of the same winemaking techniques that Salgado is using. The Terras Gauda 2002 O Rosal is a blend of 70% Albariño, 20% Loureira, and 10% Caiño Blanco that has been aged on the lees and fermented in wooden barrels. The result is something strikingly rich and complex for a region that had seemed to be satisfied with clean, bright, albeit rather simple, wines. "We are going for something that can age and that might attract the attention of the world," the winemaker told me. "We can show that Albariño is one of the world's great grapes."

To this writer, straightforward, simple Albariño is wonderful and the best possible wine to accompany the mind-blowing seafood bounty of the region. Rías Baixas wines left to age on the lees are a step up in complexity and an intriguing evolution. New oak, however, and its flavors of vanilla and caramel, seem to conflict with the citrus and bright flavors of the wine. If the winemakers of Rías Baixas want to attract the attention of the world, they needn't worry: They already have. But to keep it, they should proceed with caution, making the wines that taste the best, even if the techniques seem simple and unexciting. After all, what could be more simple than shrimp and a cold glass of Albariño on a greener-than-green hillside overlooking the sea? And what could be more exciting?

#### About the author:

**Jordan Mackay** has written about wine for *Wine and Spirits*, *Food and Wine*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He is the wine and spirits editor of the metropolitan magazine *7x7* in San Francisco, where he lives.



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# POSTMARK:RIOJA

**RIOJA IN THE USA: A personal point of view**  
by Katrin Naelapaa

It has been 14 years since my first trip to the Rioja wine region, from which I returned a devoted and committed believer. Over the intervening years I have returned on many occasions with American wine companions in tow, with one single purpose in mind: to allow Rioja to work its magic on them as it had on me. Last month, I had the chance to return to Rioja following a two year hiatus. As before, I witnessed Rioja cast its magic spell over the people in my group and knew then that Rioja has nothing to lose and everything to gain by the current explosion of interest in Spanish wine in the US market.

Over the last two decades, Rioja wines have quietly gained followers among the American wine drinking population and become the benchmark for Spanish wine in the US. Those in the know have always valued Rioja for its quality, affordability and food-friendliness. But the majority of the general wine drinking population remained ignorant of the virtues of the tempranillo grape, the wines of Rioja and the notion of Spain as a quality wine producer. To them, Rioja wines were a novelty item at best and sampled only if recommended by a trusted friend, sommelier or salesperson. However, if one did drink "Spanish", it was most often Rioja.

Much has changed in the last several years. While the market for Rioja wines has steadily grown, Spanish wine sales overall have exploded. With the interest of top international wine critics firmly focused on Spain and the new wines emerging from there, Spain has become the one to follow. Aided by extensive media coverage of the high image chefs behind the *Nueva Cocina Española*, cutting edge Spanish design, architecture and style, the sophisticated consumer is finally taking note of Spain.

There is no question that the current interest in the new Spain is to Rioja's benefit. Spain is finally becoming part of the everyday wine drinker's vocabulary and a popular travel destination for the wine lover. With more wine-savvy Americans traveling to Spain, Rioja is sure to become a not-to-be-missed stop on their route.

With its historic hilltop villages, sweeping vistas of vineyards framed by the Sierra de Cantabria and Sierra de la Demanda mountains, ancient monasteries filled with medieval treasures, cutting edge modern winery architecture and masterfully created wine and food at almost every turn, Rioja is ripe for discovery by the traveling wine enthusiast. I am certain it will capture their hearts the way it did mine.



# THE GLOBAL PLATE: CAIRO ON THE HUDSON

## A NEW YORK FORAY INTO THE SENSUOUS HARMONY OF MIDDLE EASTERN CUISINE AND SPANISH WINE

By Adrian Murcia

Mirroring similar developments in Western Europe, the current near ubiquity of Middle Eastern cuisine in America is essentially the product of a rich cultural exchange over forty years in the making: the gradual transfer of traditional home cookery—the faithfully passed-down legacy of countless generations—from expatriate kitchens to neighborhood eateries across the land. Owing to a heightened awareness of the perceived health benefits of the Mediterranean diet, to the cuisine's relative affordability, and to the sensuousness of its ingredients—the vibrant array of spices, herbs, and vegetables that form the building blocks of most of the region's cookery—restaurants helmed by Turkish, Israeli, Lebanese, Egyptian, and Moroccan proprietors have flourished in the US, while intrepid neophyte home cooks, with the help of a growing library of cookbooks on the subject, have been increasingly tempted to create their own versions of the lively and deeply satisfying dishes of the Levant and Mahgreb.

Finding the right wines to pair with these dishes demands a cultural exchange of a different sort. While the Middle East boasts an impressive history of wine production (the region is, after all, the birthplace of wine) and indeed produces some very fine wine (the remarkable reds of Chateau Musar from the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon come to mind), a generally hot climate and, especially, the proscription against wine consumption under the laws of its dominant religion, Islam, have kept serious winemaking in the region to a minimum. Regional food and wine pairings are therefore difficult to arrange.

Still, it is a cuisine that calls out for wine. The robust, earthy flavors of vegetable purees and the nuanced spice combinations used to season roasted meat (usually lamb, sometimes goat, almost never pork) are well suited to the interplay between fruitiness and acidity found in wine, to the power and ballast provided by prodigious reds. In the early years of Islam (roughly the 7th century to the 9th century, AD), before a strict official adherence to the doctrinal injunction

against wine took hold, a tradition of Bacchic poetry among the privileged classes extolled the virtues of wine and outlined the rituals of its consumption, often in highly erotic terms. The enlightened palace of the Abbasid Caliph Harun-al-Rashid (768-809) in Baghdad was the site of legendary banquets, spectacularly elaborate and inventive feasts about which a highly sophisticated class of artists and scientists would compose celebratory prose and verse. At a time when Europe was mired in the Dark Ages, the most famous of these proto-food writers, Masudi, was instructing the aristocracy of Baghdad on the finer points of connoisseurship in his book, *Meadows of Gold*.

It is around the same time, the onset of the Golden Age of the Islamic Empire, that the emirate of Córdoba in Al-Andalus experienced a similarly enlightened cultural flowering that likewise celebrated the art of good eating. And it is precisely in Spain that today we find our ideal wine match for Middle Eastern food. The legacy engendered by eight centuries of Moorish occupation runs deep in contemporary Spanish culture—in its language, architecture, and in the flavor palette of its cuisine. (Consider, for example, the popularity of lamb, or the importance of paprika and saffron in the national cuisine, or even the conceptual similarity between small plates of mezze and Spanish tapas.) Winemaking in Spain has developed around this local cuisine, and today, some thirty years into a Spanish wine revolution—a development that has brought about an exponential boost in quality, the rediscovery of long underutilized wine-producing regions, and an unprecedented variety of styles now available on these shores—we have a rich Spanish wine inventory to choose from when planning a home-cooked Middle Eastern feast or browsing for a bottle to bring to any number of BYOB neighborhood Middle Eastern restaurants.

Cultural affinities aside, the harmonious relationship between Middle Eastern food and Spanish wine is really about the flavor. A recent foray into a handful of Middle Eastern restaurants and markets in New York City, armed with a broad sampling of Spanish wine, demonstrated just

that, producing a number of extraordinary pairings that sacrificed nothing of each component's individual character, even as a third element emerged: that beautiful, elusive slam-dunk confluence of flavors that once inspired songs of praise in the courts of Caliphs.

Middle Eastern cuisine is admittedly a broad category, covering a huge expanse of territory and distinguished by myriad local variations based on ancient traditions and available resources. Still some generalizations are possible, commonalities reflected in the fact that, with the exception of Moroccan and Turkish restaurants, most establishments serving the region's cuisine in this country define their fare as such: Middle Eastern, as opposed to strictly Egyptian or Lebanese.

In a typical restaurant or market, platters of salads and vegetable purees in vibrant colors adorn the shelves of see-through refrigerated cases, allowing for the all-important inspection of what looks best. A few of them you can pretty much count on seeing: tabbouleh, bulgur wheat tossed with lemon juice, parsley and mint; hummus, the silky chickpea puree flavored with lemon, garlic, and tahini (a sesame seed oil-based sauce); and babaganoush, the sister puree of hummus, made with roasted eggplant and similar seasonings. Also ubiquitous is the humble and delicious falafel, fried spheres of spiced chickpea or fava bean paste (each country has a preferred base legume; the Israeli all-chickpea flour version dominates in this country). Fish is usually served either broiled or fried whole where it is available, drizzled with olive oil and lemon. And then there's lamb. Whether ground, seasoned, and fried; slow-roasted; baked; stacked into shawarma and turned on the rotisserie; made into kebabs; or simmered with fruit and spices as in Moroccan tagine—lamb is everywhere.

One of the virtues of Middle Eastern salads, especially in summertime, is their ethereal lightness. Served slightly chilled, they make an ideal midday snack on a sultry summer day. The only way to improve the experience is to pop open a bottle of Spanish white wine. But take note: although these salads are light, they are not





# THE 100 DEFINITIVE WINES FROM SPAIN

By Bruce Schoenfeld

Wine-tasting isn't science, but sometimes it demands laboratory conditions. With journalists from around the world gathered for the third edition of the Madrid Fusión gastronomic conference in January, it seemed the ideal time to sample the best wines Spain produces, as chosen by ratings and scores in the domestic and international press.

We weren't pairing bottles with food and charting their evolution over the course of a meal, which is how I prefer to drink wine. Instead, we filed into a conference room at Madrid's Palacio de Congresos early one morning, arranged our pens and notebooks like scientists do, and tasted in clinical fashion. As soon as one wine was on the table, the next was poured. From every flight, I pulled two or three glasses off to the side and rested them on paper napkins with the name of the wine scrawled beside. My table space came to resemble an air-traffic control center, but I didn't care. First impressions aren't always best with wines that come straight from the bottle.

The selection wasn't perfect—where was Capçanes Cabrida? Clos Erasmus? Contador?—but it provided a terrific basis for discussions that periodically segued into arguments. By the end, we'd each formed a mental snapshot of the state of Spanish wine. Lovers of Spain's wines to start with, most of us found ourselves infatuated all over again—but with even stronger opinions about where the industry stands, and where it's headed. It should be no surprise that the best wines we tasted were red.

Despite centuries of history producing sweet and fortified wines and a white-wine industry decidedly on the rise, Spain remains a country of meat-eaters' reds. Nearly every one we tasted was worthy of mention.

Surprises came from several appellations. A Lautus 1999 from Bodegas Guelbenzu made a strong statement for Navarrese reds, and a Blecua 2001 did the same for the underappreciated appellation of Somontano. The Blecua, a singular blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Garnacha, Merlot and Tempranillo, didn't exude any particular Spanishness, but it showed cherry in the mouth and an evolving palette of flavors that made me long for two hours with the wine and a plate of lamb chops to see where it would go.

I barely had the chance to appreciate it because the wine that followed was a piercingly fresh Corullón Villa 2001 from Alvaro Palacios' winery in Bierzo. Bierzo may be the most exciting appellation in Spain before long, and Descendientes de J. Palacios is its flagship producer.

Soon after, Palacios' Finca Dofí from 2003 appeared during a run of Priorats, right after the 2002 Clos Mogador and 2002 Vall Llach. All three were tremendous wines, and I literally carried them out with me during our brief break to taste them with a bite of Jamón Serrano. The Clos Mogador emerged as the most profound, a wine with decades of

# RHAPSODY IN RED

potential that offered up different glimpses of its personality with each sip. The Dofí was more fun, brighter, and more easily accessible, with raspberry flavors blended with a streak of dark fruit, as well as the best nose of the flight. I couldn't help thinking that the Vall Llach, a wine that seems to be getting better with every vintage, held secrets we'd never know, not given the time constraints of this tasting.

The Rioja appellation has reacted to the stylistic debate between traditional and new-styled wines in fascinating fashion. Most major properties have added to their lines a *Vino de Autor*: a dark-colored, extracted wine that may or may not augment its Tempranillo with Cabernet Sauvignon, but features plenty of new oak and double-weight glass bottles. If you want the traditional *crianza* through *gran reserva* from wineries such as Marqués de Riscal, Marqués de Murrieta, Muga, Beronia and Bodegas Lan, to name just a few, you can get them as easily as ever. But if you want this new manifestation of the winemaker's art, Rioja as seen through a different prism, the winery will offer its version, too.

This tasting showed that several bottlings that seemed overoaked and unsubtle in their first vintages in the mid-'90s have greatly improved. Cune's *Viña del Olivo* 2001 had a smokiness to it that wouldn't have been out of place in a *Côte Rôtie*. Just as good, in its own way, was the newest incarnation of *Culmen de Lan*, which has lowered in price from more than 100 Euros a bottle to half that. The 2001, a traditional blend of mostly Tempranillo, some Mazuelo and a little Graciano, showed a nose of blackberry jam in a cedar box, and a polished, showy style that contrasts with Lan's restrained *Reserva* and *Gran Reserva*. *Finca Allende's Calvario* is a wine that I have always preferred to the pricier *Aurus*. This 2001 had a eucalyptus nose—I might have blind-tasted it as Australian—and sleekness and femininity on the palate. The *Torre Muga* 2001 was equally smooth, yet utterly different. A traditional Rioja that had been buffed to the point of brilliance, it lacked that grip in the mouth that often signifies an old-world wine — yet the flavor profile was absolute Rioja.

From my first sip of the 2001 *Cirsión* from Bodegas Roda, I knew it would be my favorite of the Riojas. It was closed and compact, with a more restrained nose than the previous wines, but latent power. It had absolute pol-



ish—drinking it was like sliding along a teak floor—but so much more waiting beneath the surface. I was wowed. Perhaps no appellation showed better over the two days than Ribera del Duero. One wine after the next displayed the typicality of roasted meat on the nose, great structure, and a flavor profile of intense Tempranillo. With the planting of so many new vineyards having lowered the average vine age of the region precipitously, I'd figured these would be difficult years for the area, but that hasn't proved the case.

I loved *Matallana* from Telmo Rodríguez, and the *Neo Punta Esencia*, and the Syrah-like *Sed de Caná* from Bodegas y Viñedos del Jaro, all from the 2001 vintage. The *Alión* 2000, a profound wine of great depth, belied the initial *Alión* concept of a wine to drink while the gems from the Alvarez family's other property, *Vega Sicilia*, spent a decade and more aging. This *Alión* could have used a decade or so, too. The *Pago de los Capellanes Parcela El Picón* 1999 was a finished wine, smooth and round in the mouth and ready to drink. The *Malleolus de Valderramiro* 2002 from Emilio Moro sat at the other end of the spectrum. A young wine, it teemed with unresolved tannins, fruit flavor, oak, a savage character, and the promise of future brilliance.

I've never understood *Pingus*, Spain's most famous garage wine. I won't even bring up its cost, which exceeds that of Bordeaux's first-growths. Just working with what's in the glass, it's a wine that always seemed sterile to me, though I understand that proprietor and enologist Peter Sisseck (whose *Hacienda Monasterio* wines I greatly enjoy) works only with three particular old-vine vineyards in Ribera del Duero. Tasting the 2001 in this company, I found it highly textured and full of sweet tannins, but betrayed by a short

finish. It was balanced, certainly pleasurable, but a brittle wine, with less evident connection to the land than others. Some of my colleagues agreed. Others called it the wine of the day.

I found the final two wines of the tasting to be the most compelling. The 1994 *Vega Sicilia Único* came into the glass so well-integrated that it was impossible to separate out the distinct components in the mouth. The wine was clean, fresh, bright on the palate (far brighter than a typical *Unico* a decade into its life), and continually evolving. There is a unique quality to *Vega Sicilia's* wines — *Valbuenas*, *Unicos* and *Reservas Especiales* — that emerges even in lesser vintages, and 1994 is one of Spain's best of the last century. Fifty years from now, people will be drinking this and calling it classic.

What could be better? Only *L'Ermita*, *Palacios's* tour de force from the steep slopes of the *Priorato*. His 2002, from only a passable vintage, offered a nose of wild strawberries, along with slate and other mineral notes. The wine hit the palate with smoothness and depth and never let up, ending with a lingering finish that left me wanting to put nothing else in my mouth, lest I'd ruin the sensation. It wasn't as elegant as his 2001, but perhaps a shade more complex: an old-world wine made in a modern style with a rustic underpinning. *Palacios* has proven beyond any doubt that he is Spain's premier enologist, and when the vintage is taken into account, this wine is one of his most impressive achievements. I'm eager to chart its evolution in the bottle. My top wines of the tasting were *L'Ermita*, *Cirsión* and *Vega Sicilia Único*, wines from three different appellations — with *Toro's Termanthia* right behind. Quite a range for a country that until recently offered only *Vega Sicilia* and a handful of Riojas on the world-class level.

It was only a snapshot. Prolonged exposure to these wines, with food and time in the glass, might have yielded different results. That isn't likely to happen, so I'll be satisfied with the glimpse I was afforded at one of the more memorable tastings I've attended. Even a snapshot can be a work of art.

*Bruce Schoenfeld, journalist, is a connoisseur of Spain and a regular contributor to magazines such as the New York Times Magazine, Sports Illustrated and Travel & Leisure. This article is an abridged version of a longer article which appeared in the summer issue of Spain Gourmetour.*



## Jose Guerra Joins Wines from Spain

Wines from Spain is pleased to announce the appointment of Jose Guerra as Associate Director. Jose joins us from Foods from Spain, where he was responsible for many innovative marketing programs, as well as their flagship newsletter.

## CUNE Selects New Importer

**Pasternak Wine Imports** has been selected as sole agent and importer for **CUNE** wines in the U.S. CUNE, the renowned Rioja producer, comprises three bodegas: **Viña Real**, in the Alavesa region, makes cutting edge wines in its



new cellar by architect Philippe Mazieres; **Contino**, a 153-acre single estate created on the model of Bordeaux chateaux and producing classic-style Riojas; and **CUNE**, located in the Rioja Alta region, producing a wide range of traditional Rioja wines in addition to its premiere **Imperial** brand. Pasternak, a New York company, distributes its products in all 50 states. For more information, visit [www.pasternak.com](http://www.pasternak.com).

## Tío Pepe Selects A.V. Imports

**A.V. Imports** has been appointed as US importer for the **González Byass** winery and its leading brand of fino sherry, **Tío Pepe**. Recently awarded its third Gold Medal at The London International Wine Challenge, Tío Pepe is the only fino sherry to receive this prestigious award. A.V. Imports takes pride in representing not only the finest quality but also outstanding value for the consumer.



A.V. Imports looks for products that are unique in style, appellation and packaging. For further information, visit [www.avimports.com](http://www.avimports.com).



## Highlights and mentions

Designer Roberto Verino's new ecological winery, **Gargalo**, is a personal project of the international Spanish fashion designer Roberto Verino. The modern winery joins high tech with traditional methods. Within a short period of time, Gargalo will introduce its "Ecological Wines". The white is exceptional and was elected as the best Spanish white wine imported in UK and the reds, crianza and vintage, are unique due to their blend of Tempranillo and Cabernet Franc.



## Alimentaria 2006

Alimentaria 2006 is set to occupy 110,000 square metres of exhibition space, 6% more than in 2004, the last time the fair was held. Nearly 5,000 of the leading food and drinks manufacturers and distributors from 70 countries will be showing their products in Barcelona, turning the city for a week into the world's food capital. The organizers, Alimentaria Exhibitions, expect 150,000 professionals - a third of them from abroad - to visit Alimentaria 2006 - its 30th anniversary year.



## Spanish Wine Reviews: Wine Spectator's rating of Best Value Wines: 100 Wines for \$15 or less.

— May 15th, 2005 issue

### Whites:

#### Score

- 88 Viña Godeval 2003, D.O. Valdeorras
- 87 Naia 2003, Viña Sila, D.O. Rueda
- 84 Palacio de Bornos Verdejo 2003, Bodegas de Crianza de Castilla la Vieja, D.O Rueda

### Reds:

- 88 Marqués de Vitoria 1999 Crianza, D.O.Ca. Rioja
- 87 Tres Picos Garnacha 2003, Borsao, D.O. Campo de Borja
- 87 Clos de Torribas Crianza Tempranillo 2001, Bodegas Pinord, D.O. Penedés
- 86 Sumarroca Tempranillo 2002, D.O. Penedés
- 85 Alaia 2001, Dehesa de Rubiales, V.T. Castilla y León
- 85 Bodegas Riscal Tempranillo 2001, V.T. Castilla y León



### Stars Shine Bright at Per Se

One of New York City's hottest restaurants was merely a back-drop for a star-studded event on March 30, where five of Spain's top winemakers presided over a luncheon and winetasting hosted by Wines from Spain and the Trade Commission of Spain. The winemakers included Carlos Falcó, Alejandro Fernández, Mariano García, Sara Pérez and Telmo Rodríguez. The New York region's top wine and food media attended this unusual tasting at Thomas Keller's Per Se, located in the celebrated Time Warner Center.

These winemakers have been extremely influential in the growth and development of Spanish wines, both domestically and internationally. Each has searched for old vineyards and vines, exploring far and wide to discover whether long-neglected grape varieties and vineyards could be revived and made to produce superb wines. It is safe to say that they all have succeeded admirably! The once nearly forgotten regions of Toro, Priorat, Bierzo and La Mancha have now, thanks to these innovative winemakers, become the regions to watch in Spain. As one attendee wrote of this marathon tasting, these winemakers wanted to "identify old untended vineyards that needed the equivalent of a prince's kiss to revive."

The wineries featured were: Dominio de Valdepusa with its own D.O. in the La Mancha region (Carlos Falcó); Dehesa la Granja in Zamora and El Vínculo in La Mancha (Alejandro Fernández); San Román in Toro, Bodegas Aalto in Ribera del Duero and Bodegas y Viñedos Paixar in Bierzo (Mariano García); Mas Martinet and Cims de Porrera in Priorat, Bodegas Mustiguillo in Utiel Requena, and La Universal in Montsant (Sara Pérez); and for Telmo Rodríguez, through his Compañía de Vinos Telmo Rodríguez, wines produced in Rioja, Rueda, Alicante, Málaga, Ribera del Duero, Toro and Valdeorras.



Carlos Falcó



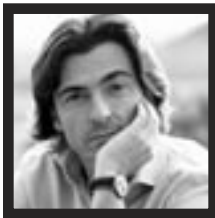
Alejandro Fernandez



Mariano Garcia



Sara Pérez



Telmo Rodriguez

### Upcoming Great Match Events 2005

The Great Match: Wine & Tapas in New York (May 19) and in Santa Monica, CA (June 6) was part of a national tour to promote the quality and versatility of Spanish wines. Additional events will take place in Chicago (September 22), Boston (October 11), Las Vegas (September 29), and Miami (October 27). For information on The Great Match and on Spanish wines in general, log onto [www.GreatMatch.org](http://www.GreatMatch.org) or [WinesFromSpain.com](http://WinesFromSpain.com).

Spanish wines are making headlines throughout the country, thanks to the innovations of Spain's pioneering winemakers, who are producing wines in regions where vineyards lay dormant for many years. They are carefully restoring these historic vineyards and varietals, and are bringing to the marketplace wines of significant quality and international style. For anyone who wants to experience Spain's new wave of wines first-hand, The Great Match provides the most comprehensive tasting opportunity anywhere.

**Chicago** (Trade/Press/Consumer)  
Chicago Union Station  
**Thursday, Sept. 22, 2005**

**Las Vegas** (Trade/Press)  
The Stirling Club  
**Thursday, Sept. 29, 2005**

**Boston** (Trade/Press/Consumer)  
The State Room  
**Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2005**

**Miami** (Trade/Press)  
The Biltmore Hotel  
**Thursday, Oct. 27, 2005**



### The Spanish Wine Cellar & Pantry

The Spanish Wine Cellar and Pantry at The Great Match, New York, provided a showcase of up-and-coming wine and food producers who are seeking representation in the U.S. The Spanish Wine Cellar & Pantry was located in an adjacent room to the Great Match, and featured 40 wine tables representing more than 150 wines from regions such as Rioja, La Mancha, Penedés, Ribera del Guadiana, Priorat, Navarra, Rueda and Valdepeñas. In addition, 15 food tables featured Spain's renowned olive oils, sherry wine vinegars, Serrano ham, chorizo, seafood, piquillo peppers, preserves, sweets and more.



#### Web site Resources

##### Wines from Spain related web sites:

[www.spanishwinecellar.com](http://www.spanishwinecellar.com)  
[www.enjoysherry.com](http://www.enjoysherry.com)  
[www.greatmatch.org](http://www.greatmatch.org)  
[www.winesfromspain.com](http://www.winesfromspain.com)  
[www.winesfromspainnews.com](http://www.winesfromspainnews.com)

##### Foods from Spain related web sites:

[www.thespainishpantry.com](http://www.thespainishpantry.com)  
[www.cheesefromspain.com](http://www.cheesefromspain.com)  
[www.foodsfromspainnews.com](http://www.foodsfromspainnews.com)  
[www.oliveoilfromspain.com](http://www.oliveoilfromspain.com)

##### General Information:

[www.spainbusiness.com](http://www.spainbusiness.com)

## Andrea Strong chats with Mani Dawes and Alexandra Raij of Tía Pol.



Photos top to bottom: Mani Dawes, Alexandra Raij and Heather Belz

### About the author:

A lover of all things edible, **Andrea Strong** is a freelance writer covering food, wine, restaurants, chefs, and all aspects of eating, drinking, and being merry in general. She is the creator and author of THE STRONG BUZZ—a weekly electronic newsletter/blog ([www.thesstrongbuzz.com](http://www.thestrongbuzz.com)) devoted to New York City's food scene. Andrea writes for *New York Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Time Out New York*, *The New York Post*, *Real Simple*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Food & Wine*, *Gourmet*, and *Organic Style*. Andrea lives and eats in Manhattan.

It is a Thursday night at Tía Pol—an irresistibly hip tapas bar on the western edge of Chelsea in New York City—and, as usual, there's not much room to move. The sexy crowds are pressed up against the white marble bar, spilling out through the tall French doors and onto the street. The wine is flowing, tapas are passed around, and the room, a slim rustic space with an urban vibe, is alive with a buzzing energy. In the front of the restaurant, two stunning young women greet guests as they wedge their way through the lively masses. They take names and pour glasses of Cava. If you notice they are glowing, it is because Tía Pol is their restaurant—a dream-come-true for Mani Dawes and Heather Belz—a pair of friends from the University of New Orleans who fell in love with the food, the wine, the people, and the spirit of Madrid while living there—Mani for three years and Heather off and on for months at a time—after graduating from college.

When they moved to New York City, they knew they had to bring a little piece of Spain with them. And in July 2004, Tía Pol—named for the darling cat of a family Mani visited often in Málaga—was born.

In the year since it opened its doors, Tía Pol's chef, Alexandra Raij, who has cooked at restaurants like Prune, The Tasting Room, and Meigas, under chef Luis Bollo, has developed a cult following for her authentic regional menu of tapas that includes signatures like *xatonada*—silky sheer slices of salt cod topped with *frisée*, anchovies, bonito, and romesco; *txipirones en su tinta*—tender braised squid a rich inky sauce over rice; and *pinchos morunos*—melting cubes of luscious lamb skewered into a baguette base for soaking up the sweet, meaty juices. Raij shares credit for the menu with her husband and sous-chef Eder Montero, a serious talent who has worked in Barcelona at Talaia Mar, at Mas Pau in Figueres, and with chefs like Sergi Arola, and Oriol Balaguer. Montero is a master of many dishes, but his *patatas bravas*—hot and crispy wedges of potatoes doused a spicy lip-licking alioli—are impossible to resist.

But the crowds come to Tía Pol for more than the food. They come for the total experience of standing shoulder to shoulder, snacking on tapas, drinking sherry and experimenting with new Spanish wines. They come to share the energy and passion of Spain—and to have a night that Dawes hopes is very "Madrileña." On a steamy afternoon in June, I sat down with Mani and Alex to talk about Spanish food and wine, and the creation of their gem of a restaurant, Tía Pol.

### Andrea: What was your vision for Tía Pol?

**Mani:** When we moved to New York in 2000, there weren't any tapas bars that captured what was going on in Spain, specifically in Madrid. There were these institutions like El Cid, but they didn't get into the *movida*, the Almodóvar of the 90s—the nightlife and the excitement of what was happening in Spain post-Franco. The 80s were such a reaction to years of oppression, and in the 90s so many young people started opening businesses and tapas bars. You would go from tapas bar to tapas bar and eat one thing at each bar. You would know to have the best *patatas bravas* here, and the best *almejas* over there, and you navigated your night that way. The idea with Tía Pol was to bring that energy back, and to have a casual place that captured that sort of exuberance and excitement.

### Andrea: What's the idea of the menu at Tía Pol?

**Mani:** We wanted to present the wonderful tradition of tapas. A lot of our tapas are regional in focus, and we try to preserve their traditional style, but we also have that insurgence of creativity and some are more modern. But we always try to preserve tradition and try not to go too far away from that.

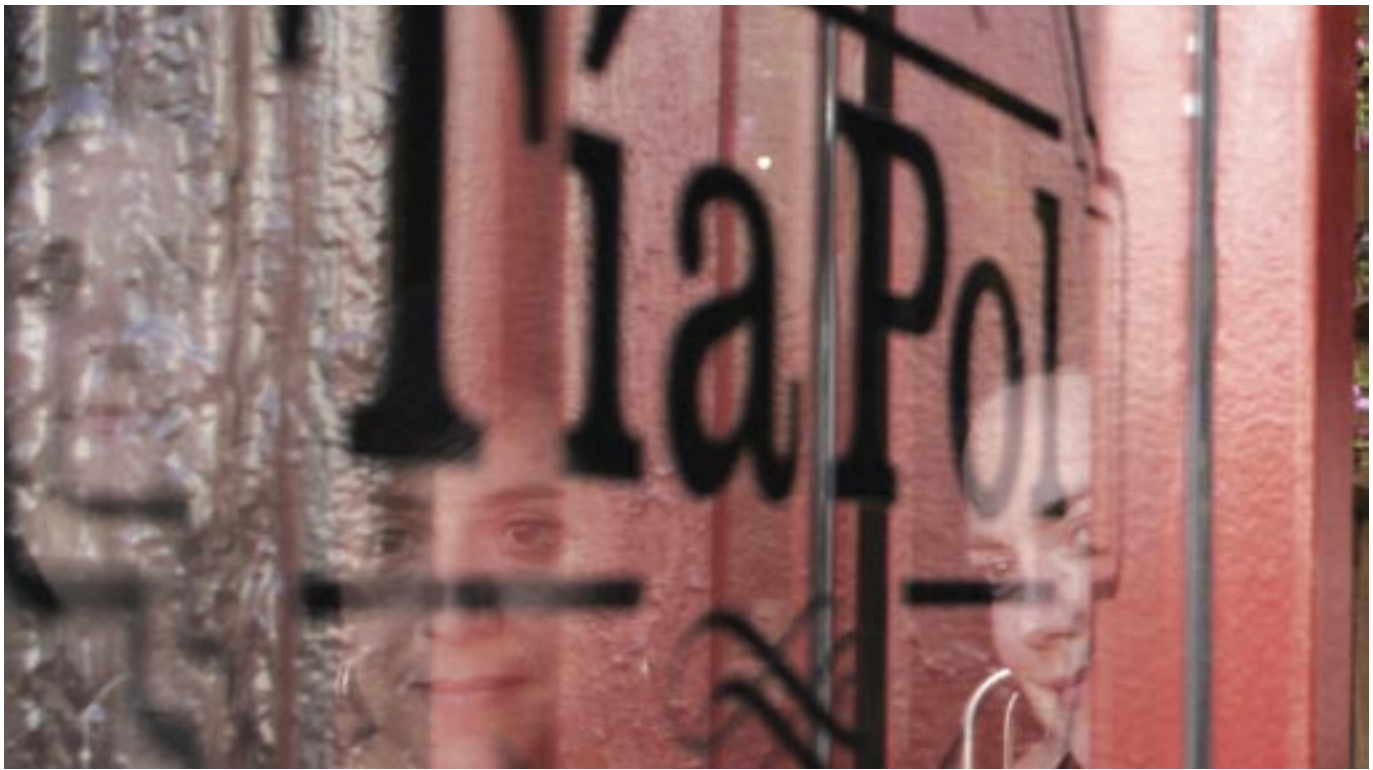
**Alex:** The menu is sort of a summary or a conclusion of years of eating and traveling and thinking about Spanish food. We provide a traditional set menu as the foundation, and then we get more contemporary and creative with specials, like *Mar y Montaña de Ternera con mayonesa de Bonito*—which refers to the frequent use of surf and turf combinations in Cataluña, but that is inspired by *Vitello Tonnato*, the classic Italian dish. Another example is *Mar y Montaña de Sepia y Conejo "Parpadelle al Coniglio."* This is a dish that pokes fun at Parpadelle with Rabbit sauce—I cut sepia into wide noodles and fold in red wine braised rabbit. My rule with creating specials is that it either has to be a traditional Spanish dish made with American seasonal ingredients, or an American product treated in a Spanish way. We have a po' boy sandwich on our lunch menu, but we make it with fried calamari, like a typical *bocadillo de calamares*.

**Mani:** It's as good if not better than some of the best po' boys in New Orleans, and it represents where we come from.

### Andrea: That sounds delicious. I'm going to have to come in for lunch for sure.

**Alex:** At lunch we also do a *Menú del Día* like they have in Spain that includes a first course, a second course, and dessert, which can be fruit with a knife, just like in Spain, or a yogurt or flan.





**Andrea:** I am getting hungry. Let's talk a little about wine. Tell me about your wine list.

**Mani:** Our wine list is all Spanish, and it is priced by the glass at \$7-\$9, and by the bottle its average is \$35, the range is \$28-\$66. First and foremost we want the wines to be great food wines—wines that are crisp and dry with bright acidity and that complement our menu. There are so many incredible values in Spanish wine and there's a lot to choose from so it makes it hard to have a small wine list, but I like to think we have a short, concise and accessible list. Right now we have about 22 bottles of wine (cava, rosé, red, and white), plus six Sherries.

**Andrea:** What about the role of the wine list. How does it promote Spanish wine and fit into the food and concept of Tía Pol?

**Mani:** I feel like the food here really tells a story, and I wanted to pick wines that told a story too. I feel very intimately connected with Spain and the wine list was designed to take people on a little trip and to take them to appellations that they have never heard of before. People want Rioja or a Ribera del Duero by the glass because that is what they know, but we don't offer those by the glass. Instead we serve lesser-known wines from Navarra, Zamora, and Bierzo to force people to try something new. These are places that people have not heard of, and they are up and coming regions and

grapes that we want to introduce people to and get them excited about. [Mani goes to the bar and comes back with a bottle of red wine—Albares (2003)—which she opens and pours for us to taste. It is medium bodied, smooth and juicy with bright fruit, and is very nicely balanced with a slight tartness. As the interview continues, we will drink the entire bottle. This is a certainly a great way to work.]

**Andrea:** Wow, that's really good.

**Mani:** (Smiling). I love this wine. It is from Dominio De Tares in Bierzo, an appellation in Castilla-León, and it hasn't gotten much attention because there is such a focus on Rioja and Ribero del Duero. It is made from a grape varietal grown there called Mencía, which is thought to be a precursor to cabernet franc, and Dominio is making some really extraordinary wines with this grape and bringing some attention to it. We also offer small producers, and focus on wine makers using organic practices. For instance, the Viña Sastre Crianza (2001) from Ribera del Duero is a family run winery owned by two brothers—and they have some of the oldest vineyards in that region. I like knowing who makes the wine and where the vineyards are and how old they are and the stories they tell.

**Andrea:** How do you teach your staff about the wines?

**Mani:** Every time we introduce new wines we have staff training. We give them tasting

notes from the producers, but also come up with our own tasting notes that reflect what we think about the wines—not just words like leathery, or fruity. And it's great for the staff. It helps them sell the wine if they get excited about it. I also encourage the staff to give unlimited tastes of different wines to our guests. In that way people can learn more about different Spanish wines. People come in with certain ideas of what they like, like Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, or Cabernet Sauvignon, and we try to take people away from their comfort zone and ask them what they like about those wines. And then we show them something different, so they can learn about a new wine.

**Andrea:** What do you hope people get from dining at Tía Pol?

**Alex:** Really, my intent with the menu is to share a generosity of spirit that you get in Spain. I hope that people understand that food should be a nourishing thing that satisfies your soul and enhances the time you have with the people you are with.

**Mani:** Our goal is to capture the experiences we had in a country we are very passionate about. We want to share that with our community here, because it is really special and personal to us and it's our creative way of introducing a lifestyle that we love.

Tía Pol is located at 205 10th Avenue (between 22nd and 23rd Streets), 212-675-8805. Hours: Dinner 7 days; Lunch, Tuesday-Friday; Brunch, Saturday and Sunday. Average tapas: \$7.

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