

**Jumilla: Diverse and Bursting with Style**  
**Spanish Wines for the Holidays**  
**The Global Plate: Nuevo Latino in the Lower East Side**  
**El Taburete: Casa Mono**  
**Postmark: Navarra**



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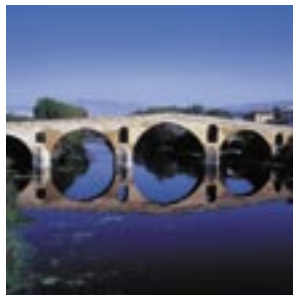
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A rushed visit to an ancient wine shop in the heart of Spain once brought an unforgettable red to Bryan Miller's holiday table. Twenty years later, with Spain undergoing a modern-day wine renaissance, he reassesses the options. What should he serve the turkey with? Gerry Dawes reports from the arid mountain valley of Jumilla, home of powerful wines made mainly with the indigenous Monastrell, while in fertile Navarra Michael Schachner sips not only the region's famous rosés but awe-inspiring reds. In New York, Anya von Bremzen visits Casa Mono to discover how the no-joke wine list plays with the wine-friendly food that echoes Barcelona counter-top kitchens. Next, we head down to the Lower East Side to enjoy Aarón Sánchez's Latino creations and discover how he pairs them with Spanish wines.



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**Cover photo:** © Gerry Dawes. Castillo de Jumilla overlooking colorful houses, a now-famous image which has become emblematic of the region of Jumilla.



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# JUMILLA

## DIVERSE AND BURSTING WITH STYLE

by Gerry Dawes

Jumilla, a region whose powerful wines produced from the indigenous Monastrell grape have historically been used for blending, has now come into its own. No longer the rustic country bumpkin, Jumilla now produces wines that are finding a growing audience for fans of ripe, fruity, full-flavored wines that are reasonably priced and compare favorably to those from warm-country growing areas such as California and Australia.

Located in an arid mountain valley, some 50 miles inland from the Mediterranean Coast of Alicante, southwest of Valencia in the province of Murcia, Jumilla's 100,000-plus acres of vineyards are planted at altitudes that range from 1,300 to nearly 3,000 feet above sea level. Temperatures here can be extreme, soaring to more than 100 degrees on summer days and dropping to well below freezing in winter. Jumilla gets some 3,000 hours of sun per year and only about 16 inches of annual rainfall, but roots of traditional old vines burrow deep in search of moisture and now most modern vineyards are fed by drip irrigation. The brownish soil (with underlying chalk) and arid conditions in Jumilla are inhospitable to the phylloxera bug that devastated Europe in the late-19th century. So inhospitable that many old Monastrell vineyards in Jumilla are planted on *pie franco*, or ungrafted French rootstock. In contrast, the vast majority of vineyards in Europe had to be grafted long ago onto American, phylloxera-resistant rootstock.

But don't be fooled by the climatic conditions in Jumilla. Like many other regions in Spain (the second most

mountainous country in Europe), the secret behind making successful, balanced wines in areas that would seem to be too warm to make seriously good wines, is altitude. The vineyards' thermostats may be cranked up during the daylight hours in summer, but at night temperatures at these altitudes cool down dramatically. This allows the vines a good night's rest to buttress themselves for the coming day and is the secret behind Jumilla's emergence from near obscurity. The grapes get properly ripe, but still have enough acids because of the cool nights to carry the hefty weight of the wines they produce.

Monastrell is derived from an indigenous grape variety, sometimes called *Mataró* or *Murviedro* in Spain, but known to the rest of the world by the French name *Mourvèdre*. In Jumilla, Monastrell is the most important authorized grape variety and accounts for 90% of the wine produced there. To be labelled 'Monastrell,' a Jumilla wine must contain at least 85% of the variety. Other red varieties authorized in the Jumilla *denominación de origen (D.O.)* are *Garnacha Tintorera*, which makes a powerful, deeply colored blending wine; *Garnacha*, the great grape of Navarra, Aragón and Priorat; *Cencibel-Tempranillo*, the main grape of neighboring La Mancha; *Cabernet Sauvignon*; *Merlot*; the exceptionally promising French *Syrah*; and *Petit Verdot*, authorized since 2003, which also shows great promise (Casa de la Ermita makes an exceptional example).

Though white grapes are insignificant at this stage, these varieties are also authorized: *Airén* (widely planted in La Mancha); *Macabeo*, known as *Viura* in



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La Rioja; Pedro Ximénez of Montilla-Moriles fame; the ancient Mediterranean white variety, Malvasía; and Moscatel Grano Menudo (small berry Moscatel, an important grape of neighboring Alicante and Valencia). This last grape was approved in 2003, along with Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. While not yet officially approved, Viognier may have promise in Jumilla as well, though few bodegas make wines from it.

A number of Jumilla bodegas have had considerable success in the American market, most notably Bodegas Agapito Rico, which is widely distributed by Classical Wines of Seattle, WA [www.classicalwines.com](http://www.classicalwines.com). Agapito Rico's Carchelo Monastrell, a very reasonably-priced wine made from old vines Monastrell, blended with small amounts of Syrah and Merlot, has enjoyed steady sales for many years in the U.S. Carchelo Monastrell is an unoaked, bright, full-flavored, balanced wine with delightful ripe red fruit—plums, cherries, red currants—that is a good match for grilled meats, pizza, paella and pasta. Agapito Rico makes just over a thousand cases of Canalizo, an intense 100% Syrah wine that spends 18 months in oak and needs several years in bottle to fully develop. They also produce Allico Monastrell-Syrah, a powerhouse blend that is aged for ten months in French oak.

Mayoral, from Bodegas 1890 (founded in 1890), has also had considerable success in the U.S. with their balanced, richly flavored, inexpensive Jumilla wines. Wines from this bodega include the unoaked Mayoral, a blend of 60% Monastrell and 40% Tempranillo; a crianza (12 months in oak), which contains 70% Monastrell; and a reserva with Monastrell, Tempranillo and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. They also make a Cabernet Sauvignon (100%), Syrah (100%), and Mayoral Selección (a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Monastrell and Tempranillo), all of which spend just four months in oak.

One of the most successful bodegas in Jumilla, Bodegas Bleda, produces the well-known Castillo de Jumilla brand and exports 85% of its production. These relatively inexpensive wines are well-made and show attractive, easy-drinking peppery, black currant, blackberry and chocolate flavors. All these well-made, balanced wines — even their bright, fruity rosado — are made with a minimum of 55%-60% Monastrell, 40% Tempranillo, and sometimes 5% Merlot. There is also a Castillo de Jumilla Monastrell (100%) and the first-rate Divus, made with 90-95% Monastrell and 5-10% Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot.

Finca Luzón is an impressive estate vineyard planted en espaldera (on wires), which is surrounded by stark, grey mountains. They produce well-made wines, including several Monastrell-based (50%) blends of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Tempranillo that are aged in new French and American oak. They also make a delicious Monastrell rosado; a rich, sweet 80% Monastrell Finca Luzón; Castillo de Luzón, a crianza (aged one year in oak) with 75% Monastrell; and their top-of-the-line Altos de Luzón, a blend of Monastrell from 50-year-old vines, Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo.

Casa de la Ermita, another impressive small winery that overlooks a vast valley of vines, is drawing attention with their 100% Viognier; a young red that is a blend of Monastrell, Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah; a crianza with a predominance of Monastrell and Tempranillo, laced with Cabernet

Sauvignon; an organically farmed Ecológico Monastrell (100%); and a set of Monasterio de Santa Ana monovarietals — Merlot, Monastrell, and Syrah — all of which spend three months in oak. However, the Casa de la Ermita wine that is drawing attention from Spanish wine aficionados is their 100% Petit Verdot, aged 12 months in new American (75%) and French oak.

The Jumilla winery that has earned the most kudos from both the Spanish and international press is Julia Roch e Hijos Casa Castillo. Their success is based on some splendid old vines vineyards, some of which are well over 50 years old, planted on ungrafted French rootstock in soils that show pronounced terroir. Many of the Casa Castillo wines contain some of the best Monastrell in the Jumilla D.O. The Casa Castilla 2001, blend of 50% monastrell and 50% tempranillo, was a rich mélange of sweet blackberry, currant, chocolate and licorice with a graphite mineral finish. The Casa Castillo Monastrell (85%) was sweet and rich with blackberry and currant flavors. The Casa Castillo Crianza, a Monastrell with 10% Syrah, showed even more of those rich blackberry, currant, chocolate and licorice flavors, again laced with an intriguing mineral finish. Their Las Gravas, a concentrated blend of 70% Monastrell, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon and 15% Syrah, was a tannic wine crammed with cherry, currant and blackberry flavors. The now legendary Pie Franco, a 100% Monastrell wine made from vines planted in 1941 on ungrafted rootstock, is another towering powerhouse that is loaded with soft fruit and has an engaging silky finish. Casa Castillo also produces limited quantities of a top-notch, well-balanced, sweet, late harvest Moscatel de Grano Menudo.

Olivares makes the big, ripe Altos de la Hoya Monastrell table wines from ungrafted old vines. Their red table wines are intense and mineral-laced, but still a bit rustic. However, it is their Monastrell-based sweet wines that are some of the most exciting in the emerging genre of Spanish dessert wines. Olivares can't make these late harvest wines every year, but when they do the results are superb. Olivares Monastrell Dulce, made from low-yield, old vines fruit, is a deep, black wine with currants and exotic spices in the nose and rich, sweet blackberry, coffee and chocolate flavors on the palate. The Olivares Viejísimo 1930 is a very dry Fondillón, an unusual, compelling rancio wine with a cornucopia of flavors — coffee, tobacco, dates, dried citrus peel. But these magnificent, once nearly extinct wines from Murcia and Alicante are a subject deserving of an entire article to themselves.

Many of the better wines of Jumilla are exported. Indeed, some bodegas export 90% of their wines and new wineries like Hijos de Juan Gil with their new brand, Wrongo Dongo, made by an Australian winemaker, are almost entirely aimed at the American market. Aficionados of Spanish wines are discovering the joys of Jumilla wines, and, given the excellent price-quality ratio of many of these Monastrell-based wines, those who are looking for wines that deliver a lot of bang of their buck may find their nirvana in these flavor-packed wines.

**Gerry Dawes** was awarded Spain's prestigious Premio Nacional de Gastronomía (National Gastronomy Award) in 2003. He writes and speaks frequently on Spanish cheeses, wine and gastronomy. He was a finalist for the 2001 James Beard Foundation's Journalism Award for Best Magazine Writing on Wine.



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# SPANISH WINE FOR

by Bryan Miller

Back in the early eighties I was a student in the historic city of Salamanca, about two hours Northwest of Madrid. To say I was a wine neophyte at the time is being generous. When the first holiday season rolled around, three American friends and I decided to prepare a Thanksgiving feast in the heart of old Castilla, if nothing else but to soothe our homesickness after nearly a year away.

Turkeys were in short supply – and, for reasons I never understood, frightfully expensive – so we bought the biggest chickens we could find, two big bruisers that weighed in at nearly 5 pounds each. I was designated the sommelier, in charge of finding wines that matched, or that at least did not trash the fowl. Just off of the magnificent Plaza

Christmas and New Year's dinners I often look to the Penedés, where the easy drinking wines are at home with (non-spicy) soups, vegetables (even sweet potatoes – sans marshmallows) and cranberries. In reds, world-renowned Miguel Torres is a winner with its bright and fragrant Viña Sol, as well as its vanilla accented Gran Viña Sol. Jean León, a small vineyard now owned by Torres, produces a full bodied, nicely balanced Chardonnay as well as light and fruity reds like, of all things, Merlot. Rueda now also offers some gobler-friendly whites, zesty and clean, using Verdejo, Viura, and Sauvignon Blanc. A shining example is the Bodegas de Crianza de Castilla la Vieja. At the time I was living in Spain, Rioja produced precious few whites – real men drank red. And those that were sold packed more wood than a Louisville slugger. Today, however, you can

# THE HOLIDAYS

Mayor, I found an ancient looking wine shop with a stone floor, dark wood shelves, and a wine merchant who was reading the sports section and clearly had no interest in me. "Señor," I inquired. "Busco unos vinos por una fiesta de Americanos. Comemos pollo." He looked up languidly, and pointed to a 10-foot wall of red wines. Well, at least I had narrowed it to a wall; now was the real challenge. I examined that daunting display for ten minutes, essentially looking for a nice name. Worse, there were no prices. Exasperated, I reached for a bottle that had caught my eye because it was ornamented with silver netting. Marqués de Riscal. Sounded good enough to me, so I placed three bottles on the counter and hoped for the best (it was only \$5 per bottle).

We set out our Thanksgiving banquet on the kitchen table – including carrots, potatoes, spicy onions, and, for dessert, an almond-anise cake, a specialty of the region. I proudly pulled the cork. You didn't need a degree in enology to appreciate that this was a big, fighting bull of a wine. Looking back, that powerful Marqués de Riscal would have been better suited to a Christmas dinner featuring lamb or beef. Nonetheless, we were delighted by the choice, and in the coming weeks I recommended it heartily as one of my favorite holiday selections.

Poultry is best complemented by a medium bodied, lightly oaked white – not too light, or you will find little other than refreshment. Reds do the job as well if they are light, fruity and not too tannic. For Thanksgiving,

find beautifully balanced whites from houses like Marqués de Murrieta and R. López de Heredia. Finally, there are dry rosés, which are perfect holiday aperitifs, and are terrific with poultry. Spain, in my view, makes the best dry rosés in the world. Some of my favorites are Navarra Rosado Vega Sindoa, Marqués de Cáceres, Señorío de Sarría, Muga Rosado and Rosado Julián Chivite.

I could not have said this 20 years ago, but Spain now produces countless lighter reds that pair with holiday spreads. Here are a few to look for: Casa de la Ermita, Gloria de Ostatu, Rioja Alavesa, Bodegas Borsao Tres Picos, Santa Digna Cabernet Sauvignon, Marqués Casa Concha Cabernet Sauvignon.

Recently I visited a New York wine shop to look for something uncommon for Christmas dinner. In the Spanish section of the store something caught my eye, way up on the top shelf. Posing imperiously was a bottle of red wrapped in lacy silver tinsel – a 2000 Marqués de Riscal. Looking at that vinous Marlowe's ghost, I could almost taste its vanilla essence when we served it at our Salamanca Thanksgiving dinner so long ago. To be sure, nostalgia is the most successful wine aging process.

**Bryan Miller** is a food and wine writer based in New York City. He has written and co-written ten books on the subject. Currently he writes about wine for Knight Ridder newspapers, *The Wine Spectator*, and *Money* magazine. He is a former restaurant critic for *The New York Times*.

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## THE GLOBAL PLATE : NUEVO LATINO HECHO A

by Aarón Sánchez

I thank my mom for many things all the time ~ for sharing with me her love of food and the importance of how it reflects our family history and culture. I also thank her for making New York our home. And for the dusty Franklin Mountains of El Paso, Texas, choosing as my place of birth a place so special to me that will forever be "mi tierra." What a contrast with the blinding pace and light of New York. My formative years were spent exposed to so many incredible Latino cultures, each leaving a lasting imprint on my life, and affecting the way I cook every day. The most resonant aspect of those Latino cultures was for me the cuisine and people's dedication to cooking dishes from their native countries. They cooked for their families at home in a very loving way, preserving such an important part of their identity. In my house, there was no question that food was supreme in the way we came together. Almost everyone in my family is a good cook. When I came of a certain age, I ventured out and ate in neighborhoods all over the city. I found similarities between many of the homes and restaurants I had the privilege of eating at and my family's home.

What is it about Latin food that I love so much? Is it the constant inflection of rhythm, passion and color that is almost always represented in the food? I guess one can make that argument for all aspects of Latin culture, including the music, art, and movies that have become so popular. Or is it the honest sincerity or the humble origins that the food inspires? Could it be the automatic link people make to their upbringing or childhood when they see a bubbling cauldron of beans or plantains being fried or tortillas being pressed? Or is it the spiritual and cultural contributions that are present in Latino food?

But these are also present in cuisines all over the world. The ingredients of these foods have traveled far beyond their places of origin. Examples of their reach are as follows: The tomato that graces so many Italian restaurants, the hundred different varieties of potatoes from Peru, the creamy flavor of papa amarillo. Squash — whether autumn with orange color flesh, or summer squash, with names from the new world, like spaghetti, calabaza and zucchini. The fresh beans such as cranberry or fava, that are destined to be dried and paired with rice. These are just a few examples of the enormous contributions that have influenced so

many of the great foods of today.

When speaking of Latino cooking, I think it would help to define some concepts. Many times, when people speak of Latin food, they are referring to it as "Spanish" food, which is incorrect. Spanish food hails from the country that bears that name. These are some categories that epitomize the kinds of Latin foods I find in New York. First, I look at the cooking of the Caribbean, which in my mind is the food of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba. The diet is based on rice, beans, plantains, tropical fruits, whole roasted meats, mojos or marinades and sauces that are used with pork (*pernil* and *lechón asado*). Pork is not shunned by Latinos for religious reasons so, worldwide, they are a huge consumer of it. My friend Alex García is a great chef, also credited with helping to launch the Nuevo Latino movement here in New York. Alex, who is Cuban by birth, spent a good portion of his youth in Puerto Rico. I think the perception is that in Latin households, women do all of the cooking, and that is true the majority of the time. But there is the phenomenon of the backyard barbecue that men seem to revel in. Alex's father is a gregarious man whose specialty is the famous whole roasted pig



© J. Guerra

## MI MANERA CON LA RUMBA DE NEW YORK

(also known as *lechón asado*). After the beast is roasted slowly in a rub of annatto paste, garlic and sour orange for several hours, he would present it whole on a bed of newspapers. To demonstrate how tender the pork had become, he would cut the pork with a plate instead of a knife. And everyone would be quiet so as to hear the crackling of the crispy skin. Truly delicious!

The African influence on Latino cuisine should not be ignored. Plantain, yucca and cassava, peanuts and okra all are constants in Latino food today. The African influence has even reached places as far away as Brazil and Veracruz, Mexico. Caribbean-Latino food has a very visible presence here in New York in areas such as Spanish Harlem, the Lower East-side, where I live and my first restaurant Paladar is located. Sunset Park (Brooklyn), Washington Heights (Manhattan) and Jackson Heights (Queens), are just a few more areas where you can have an awesome Latino meal. Another enduring story comes from a Caribbean-Latino staple called calabaza. This is a variety of pumpkin, also called West pumpkin. The Essex Street market located in the lower East Side of New York

City possesses a gamut of Latin ingredients and caters to a Latin consumer base. They cut the calabaza into smaller, manageable pieces, and sell it accordingly, as calabaza can range from 2 to 20 pounds in size! Stories and little *dichos* or sayings are important to the whole experience of cooking food at home because these verbal reminders are passed down just as recipes are.

There are two great gastronomic influences in the New York Latin state of mind, which are the Caribe Latin presence and the Mexican explosion. Some exciting recipes and wine pairings are inspired by these two cuisines. One of my favorite ingredients is salted cod, or *bacalao*, an enduring staple that has found its way throughout Latin America primarily by the fact that it doesn't spoil easily. *Bacalao* is cod that has been heavily salted and allowed to air dry as a way of preservation. It was very important in the diets of sailors making cross-Atlantic voyages and sailing to other ports around the world. In the New York idiom of Latin cooking you find that *bacalao* encompasses not only northeastern cod, but its Spanish counterpart hake, or *merluza*, and you also see haddock and pollack in salted form.

Here are some of my favorite dishes (recipes can be found in *La Comida del Barrio*), along with Spanish wine recommendations, just to whet your appetite!

**Ensalada de bacalao.** Pair with Dona Rosa, Maior de Mendoza, or Martín Códax (Albariño).

**Fish in Coconut Sauce.** Pair with Aldor 2004 (Verdejo), or Chardonnay from Navarra or Penedés (Castillo de Monjardín or Milmanda de Torres).

**Birria-Braised Short Ribs with Ancho Chile Broth.** Pair with J. Palacios (Petalos) Bierzo or Rioja (Coto de Imaz), Elia Mora (Toro) or Pesquera Reserva (Ribera del Duero).

Former co-host of Food Network's 'Melting Pot', **Aarón Sánchez** introduced the nation to his interpretations of classic Latino cuisine. His food can be sampled at his acclaimed New York City restaurants Paladar and Centrico. Today, Aarón is a restaurateur, television personality, consultant and author. His book, *La Comida del Barrio*, was published in May 2003. In 2004, he was named one of People Magazine's most beautiful people.



Photos top to bottom:  
Nancy Selzer and Andy Nusser.  
**Casa Mono** is located at 52 Irving Place, NYC, between 17th and 18th Streets. Tel: 212-253-2773.

#### About the author:

**Anya von Bremzen** has been writing about Spanish food for over a decade for publications such as *Travel+Leisure*, *Food & Wine*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Her cookbook, *The New Spanish Table*, has just been published by Workman Publishing.



## Casa Mono: a charming bit of Spain in New York City

Anya von Bremzen interviews Andy Nusser and Nancy Selzer

For a restaurant that tiny—only a handful of tables and a counter around a pocket-sized open kitchen — Casa Mono on New York's Irving Place packs oodles of flavor and cozy charm. In fact, after just one sip and one bite, the place becomes positively irresistible: the comprehensive wine list that brilliantly showcases the best Spanish bottlings, the clientele of committed foodies who think nothing of ordering coxcomb, the lusty small plates-centered menu that runs to things like supernally crisp bacalao *croquetas* with orange *allioli*; deliciously messy cockles with scrambled eggs; robust *cazelitas* of chick peas, chorizo, and tripe; and the best sweetbreads you'll ever taste in New York. Along with the even tinier Bar Jamon next door, Casa Mono is a collaboration between über-restaurateur Mario Batali — the force behind such Italian hits as Babbo and Esca — wine wiz Joe Bastianich, and the burningly talented chef Andy Nusser who has lived and traveled in Spain. Opened in early 2004, the place is a loving tribute to the produce-driven kitchen counters of Barcelona, giving even that city's most popular haunts a run for their olives. Recently, we sat down to chat with Nusser and Casa Mono's general manager Nancy Selzer, who helped shape the restaurant's awe-inspiring wine list.

ANYA: What was the idea behind Casa Mono?

ANDY: When we opened, Spanish cooking wasn't really represented in New York, which is kind of odd when you think of it. And so Mario Batali and I decided to do for Spanish cuisine what Mario's other restaurants have done for Italian food. We wanted a place with an open kitchen that would be inspired by my favorite dining counters in Barcelona: Cal Pep and Pinotxo at the Boquería market. As a kid, I lived in Spain...

ANYA: Wow, I didn't know that. When was this, and where?

ANDY: I lived in Spain when I was 12. It was around 1972, then returned when I was 18. We were in Cadaqués, in Catalonia. My dad chose it. He was a painter but was retired by then.

ANYA: Any food memories from 1972?

ANDY: Man, you could get amazing chicken, fries, and cava — for just 35 pesetas! And of course, all those tortillas, churros, chocolate,...

ANYA: Well, that chicken meal would now cost 35 euros! And so, how did the menu at Casa Mono come together?

ANDY: My idea was to have great ingredients

and not mess with them. Pulpo, sepia, sardines, just thrown on the plancha so the place would be filled with these awesome smells. But I didn't want to reproduce the recipes like a slave. If I can't get the same clams they serve at Pinotxo, I wasn't going to freak out about it. I'd just substitute New Zealand cockles. Some people appreciate the concept, others say "you're not really Spanish", to which I answer, "well, we are in New York." But the inspiration was from those Barcelona countertop kitchens, places with no written menus where you just plunk yourself down on a bar stool and get treated to incredible food.

ANYA: Did you go anywhere else besides Barcelona for your research?

ANDY: San Sebastián was incredible — right now this is Spain's greatest food mecca. You can go from a traditional pintxo (tapas) bar to super-creative Michelin-starred places like Arzak and Akelarre. I haven't been to El Bulli but I read all of Ferran's books.

ANYA: Are you influenced at all by the "new" Spanish cuisine. Do you have any interest in how modern Spanish chefs are fusing tradition and innovation, in the new vocabulary of techniques, such as cooking at low-temperature?

ANDY: My food is not really cerebral, I don't want people to be surprised that they actually like the dishes. I want stuff that's just simple and delicious, no foam.

ANYA: But in Spain, even the traditional tapas bars do foam these days. For instance, one of your faves, Cal Pep in Barcelona, does an espuma version of crema catalana (a Catalan burnt sugar custard).

ANDY (laughs). Guess you can call me a traditionalist. I don't have any desire to belong to the avant-garde clique. Our concept is great ingredients, plus heart, soul and artistry.

ANYA: What do you want people to get out of dining at Casa Mono?

ANDY: We want to convey our excitement and knowledge of cooking, the pleasures of good food. We're like a bunch of grandmothers cooking behind the counter, happy to make people happy with great food.

ANYA: That really comes across. But food is only part of the story. Your wine list is a pretty *serious* document. How did it come together?

NANCY: When Joe Bastianich [the brain behind Mario Batali's wine lists] and I started talking about



the wine list for Casa Mono, we agreed that wine should be a huge part of the restaurant's personality, just as it is at Babbo. We are located near a school, so we're not allowed to do cocktails, and that was just fine by us: only wines! Before we opened, Joe and I made a scouting trip to Spain, which was incredibly exciting. When we came back we contacted all the distributors and reps and did a marathon 5-hour tasting, aiming to put all the best Spanish wines available in America on the list. Currently we offer some 350 bottles.

ANYA: Any highlights from that first trip?

NANCY: So many! For instance, it was thrilling to visit La Rioja and go from a winery as traditional as López de Heredia to the completely modern cutting-edge bodegas right across the road. The range in Spanish wine-making today is extraordinary.

ANYA: Your Riojas are subdivided into *moderna* and *tradicional* sections. Is the distinction that clear-cut to you? How do you choose?

NANCY: Well, we define the difference by flavor profile, for sure, but also technologies. Obviously if a bodega is using stainless steel fermentation or French oak, it would fall under "modern".

ANYA: Your list is very fashionable—two pages of Priorats, your up-and-coming Bierzos and Jumillas.

NANCY: I don't want to think of us as "trendy". Our aim was to represent the full range of Spanish wine-making, to offer a great balance

between tradition and innovation, to reflect what's happening in Spain today.

ANYA: You've got some pretty blue chip selections. Do you have many people ordering \$500 bottles of Vega Sicilia Unico or Ermita or Pingus with their \$12 cazuelitas of tripe or their *croquetas*?

NANCY: New York is full of wine connoisseurs. Some of our guests are in the wine and food trade, some are wine-savvy guys from the finance world who know what they want, some just want to impress a date. Mario's restaurant group already has a huge reputation for wines, so we have people coming in who might have ordered magnums of Sassicaia at Babbo and want something comparable that's Spanish. Then again, we wanted our wine list to be truly representative. People are excited to see \$500 bottles but there's no sticker shock here. Our prices are fair and we also have plenty to offer in the \$25 to \$50 range.

ANDY (laughs): I've been thinking about it myself, our food is so incredibly reasonable, the most expensive plate is fifteen bucks. But it's also really wine-friendly, so if people feel like splurging on a bottle of Unico, they're in the right place.

ANYA: So how do the food and wine come together?

ANDY: There's so much great wine in Spain right now. With my food, I love the fino sherries, the Albariños and the Txakolis to start. Then a traditional Rioja to follow. And I think everything goes great with cava. We even have our own house cava, Cava Mono.

NANCY: What can I say, Andy makes beautiful food and we wanted to make sure we've got beautiful wines to go with it!

ANYA: And how do you educate both guests and staff about Spanish wines?

NANCY: Good question. Some people apply for jobs here and admit that while they've had experience with French or Italian wines, Spanish wines are still new to them. We guide the staff very carefully, transmitting to them all our knowledge and passion. Every day, especially during dinner, there's a person on the floor dedicated to wine, ready to answer any question. With a 350-bottle list, you must be prepared! If the guest wants to have a detailed wine discussion—great. On the other hand, we're not a school and we're not out to lecture people. If clients come in just wanting to drink something simple and pleasant, that's OK, too.

ANYA: So what's the future for Spanish wine? Any region you've been excited about lately?

NANCY: The Spanish wine scene is an open book; the sky's the limit. I'm so impressed by how many young people there are out there willing to experiment with new technologies, with different varietals in different parts of the country. It's what Italy felt like 20 years ago. The possibilities are endless. Montsant, I feel, is really exciting. When you know what it takes to make a great Priorat, you understand the high prices. Montsant wines, on the other hand, offer a great value. Much of the excitement today is in the reds. I'd love to see the same happen to whites.



## Spanish Wines a Major Presence at New York Wine Experience

Eight prestigious Spanish bodegas were represented at the 25th edition of the New York Wine Experience, one of most important wine events organized by The Wine Spectator magazine, that took place during the weekend of Oct 20-23 at the Marriot Marquis in New York City. Press, trade and consumers gathered to taste the best wines of the world, all of which had received a minimum of 90+ points by The Wine Spectator, and to meet the winemakers who graciously agreed to pour their wines. The eight Spanish wineries were: from D.O. Ribera del Duero: Bodegas Alión (Alión 2001), Bodegas Alejandro Fernández (Pesquera Reserva 2002) and Bodegas Vega Sicilia (Unico Gran Reserva 1994); from D.O.C. Rioja: Bodegas Muga (Torremuga 2001) and Vinos de Los Herederos del Marqués de Riscal; from D.O. Toro: Bodegas Numanthia Termes (Teranthia 2003); from D.O.C. Priorat: Bodegas Alvaro Palacios (Finca Dofí 2003) and from D.O. Conca de Barberá: Miguel Torres S.A. (Grans Muralles 1999).

## Save the Date: Rías Baixas Wines Come Out of the Cold

A core component of the campaign is a major seminar and tasting planned for January 2006. Nineteen wineries from Rías Baixas will travel to New York to showcase their wines. Two seminars will be presented. One will explore terroir and winemaking techniques in Rías Baixas, highlighting the different styles from the separate sub-zones within the region. Another, presented by Leslie Sbrocco — noted author and wine journalist — will demonstrate the versatility of the Albariño grape with Asian foods. For more information on the wines from Rias Baixas, please visit: [www.riasbaixaswines.com](http://www.riasbaixaswines.com).

## 2005 Harvest Report

The weather was quite dry this year, allowing for good concentration and quality in the fruit harvested in most regions of Spain in 2005. Drought conditions in some regions caused a 20% reduction of crop, compared to production figures from 2004. The dry conditions caused even smaller harvests than expected in Spain's normally arid areas such as La Mancha and Valdepeñas, with losses of 35%, and Jerez, down by 40% from last year's harvest. The sole exception to this result was Rias Baixas, with the second highest production level of its history. Yet, winemakers such as Alvaro Palacios from Priorat welcomed these "dry farm" conditions that produced less fruit but of a better quality and concentration. Drought also eliminated the possibility of any fungal diseases and promoted shorter maturation cycles, pushing harvests

to start up to 10 days ahead of schedule. An excellent vintage was declared by the Consejos Reguladores of Rias Baixas, Navarra, Rueda and Toro, while a very good quality vintage was declared by Priorat, La Mancha, Valdepeñas, Jumilla and Yecla. At press time, Rioja had not finished harvesting, but grapes showed good maturation and color levels.

~ *Silvina Guinle and Félix Yáñez.*

## Madrid Fusión Focuses on Spain's Varietal Paradise

From January 17-19, 2006, the International Summit of Gastronomy, also known as Madrid Fusión, will hold its fourth annual event in Spain's capital city. This conference looks at the latest gastronomic trends in the world, bringing together top chefs from many countries, including this year, the US, UK, Peru and Holland as well as Spain. Wine is an important subject at the Fusion event. This year, organizers focus on Spain as a varietal paradise, España el paraíso de los varietales. One highlight of the Summit will be the tribute to the founders of American Cuisine, Mark Miller, Paul Prudhomme, Norman Van Aken and Alice Waters, and a tribute to American media who have contributed to the renewal of the new American gastronomy. Seminars, tastings, luncheons, conferences and awards ceremonies will make an exciting event for three non-stop days. For further information, visit their website at [www.madridfusion.net](http://www.madridfusion.net).



## Ferran Adrià offers you the chance of owning your own vineyard

Ferran Adrià, the owner of Spain's famous restaurant El Bulli, [www.elbulli.com](http://www.elbulli.com), has launched a new project called Cal Celdoni under the slogan "buy a vine" (*compre una viña*). Cal Celdoni offers you the chance of owning a part (specifically, 20 vines) of the vineyard Clos Peguera, located in Catalonia's Conca de Barberá D.O., for as little as \$59/month. Moreover, the vineyard owners will receive

42 personalized wine bottles per year and several wine culture-related services, such as special events at the Cal Celdoni castle and winery, vine growing training and the chance of taking part in the cultivation of the grapes and the subsequent winemaking process. For more information, please visit the Cal Celdoni website at [www.calceldoni.com](http://www.calceldoni.com).



## Biodynamic Wines

Spanish wines - more than 20 labels in the opening wine list - are the perfect companion to the food choices at Cookshop, a new restaurant in west Chelsea, New York City, which champions organic ingredients. They are located at 156 Tenth Ave., NYC. Tel: 212-924-4440.

## Barça Opens in NYC

New York has a new Spanish restaurant called Barça 18, which opened in October. Stephen Hanson of B.R. Guest Restaurants (Ruby Foss, Dos Caminos, Blue Fin, Fiamma, Blue Water Grill and a number of others), reading the explosion of interest in Spanish food as something whose time has come, has teamed up with star New York chef Eric Ripert, of Le Bernardin fame. The owners are billing the cuisine as Spanish with Mediterranean and Catalan influences. Ripert was raised in Andorra, so he is no stranger to Catalan food. Barça 18 will serve tapas and an extensive Spanish wine list. The restaurant is located on the site of Hanson's now-defunct Park Avalon, 224 Park Avenue South (18th Street) in Manhattan (tel: 212-533-2500).

## Web site Resources

Wines from Spain related web sites:

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

## LABODEGA (INSIDE WINES FROM SPAIN)

### Rias Baixas Exceptional with Everything. Or Nothing.

The campaign's recently created theme and logo highlights the food friendliness of Rias Baixas Albariño wines. Either alone as an aperitif, or with a wide range of dishes—from sushi to Indian curry to Thai spring rolls or even salsa and chips—the Albariño variety has the right mixture of sassy acidity and complexity to pair beautifully with different flavors. The first leg of the campaign included a satellite media tour hosted by food and wine authority Leslie Sbrocco who gave easy entertaining tips with Asian take-out foods and Rias Baixas Albariño wines. The East-Meets-West wine segments reached over 5 million viewers nationwide. The official kick-off for the campaign will be a major tasting on January 24th in New York City where nineteen campaign participants will showcase their Rias Baixas Albariño wines at a trade and media event.

## Vibrant Rioja at Worlds of Flavor



The "Vibrant Rioja" campaign by CRT/tanaka continued its 2005 efforts by aligning the wines of the region with The Culinary Institute of America's "Worlds of Flavor" 2005 International Conference & Festival on November 3-5, 2005. As a Bronze Sponsor, a branded Vibrant Rioja table featuring various Rioja wines appeared in the event's marketplace and Chair of Center for Professional Wine Studies Karen MacNeil gave a series of seminars entitled "Rediscovering Rioja." Additionally, the first US press orientation to Rioja took place from November 7-11, and a "Vibrant Rioja" lounge was created for the New York-based GenArt event on November 8. The [www.vibrantrioja.com](http://www.vibrantrioja.com) web page is ready for visitors with additional exciting content to come.

## Spain Wine Intensive at the Culinary Institute of America, Greystone

Join Karen MacNeil as she explores Spain through an extensive wine tasting and seminar program. Learn about all of Spain's leading regions, including Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Priorat, Penedés, Rias Baixas, and Jerez, as well as many of the up-and-coming appellations, discovering what makes each unique. Experience the delicious marriage of Spanish wine and food. The class is held at the Culinary Institute of America, Greystone in St. Helena California. The Spain Wine Intensive will take place on November 28-30, 2005 and April 10-12 2006. Please visit [www.ciaprochef.com](http://www.ciaprochef.com) to learn more about the Professional Wine Studies program.

## Wines from Spain Sponsors 2006 South Beach Wine & Food Festival

The 5th annual South Beach Wine and Food Festival, affectionately known as the SOBE Festival, will have some exciting Spanish flavors in 2006. Not only will Wines from Spain be a major sponsor, but the event will honor the incomparable Spanish chef Ferran Adrià, of the restaurant El Bulli, at a special tribute dinner. The festival, located in Miami, FL, will run from Feb. 24-26, 2006. Organizers expect from 15,000 to 18,000 attendees. Also participating will be Luis Amézaga, winemaker for Marqués de Riscal, who will conduct an exceptional tasting of the top vintages of Marqués de Riscal Rioja wines of the past century. Many more wine personalities and culinary superstars will be there, and seminars, dinners, and a variety of



tastings will make this a memorable weekend for both trade and consumers. Visit the festival website at [www.sobewineandfoodfest.com](http://www.sobewineandfoodfest.com) or call 877-762-3933.

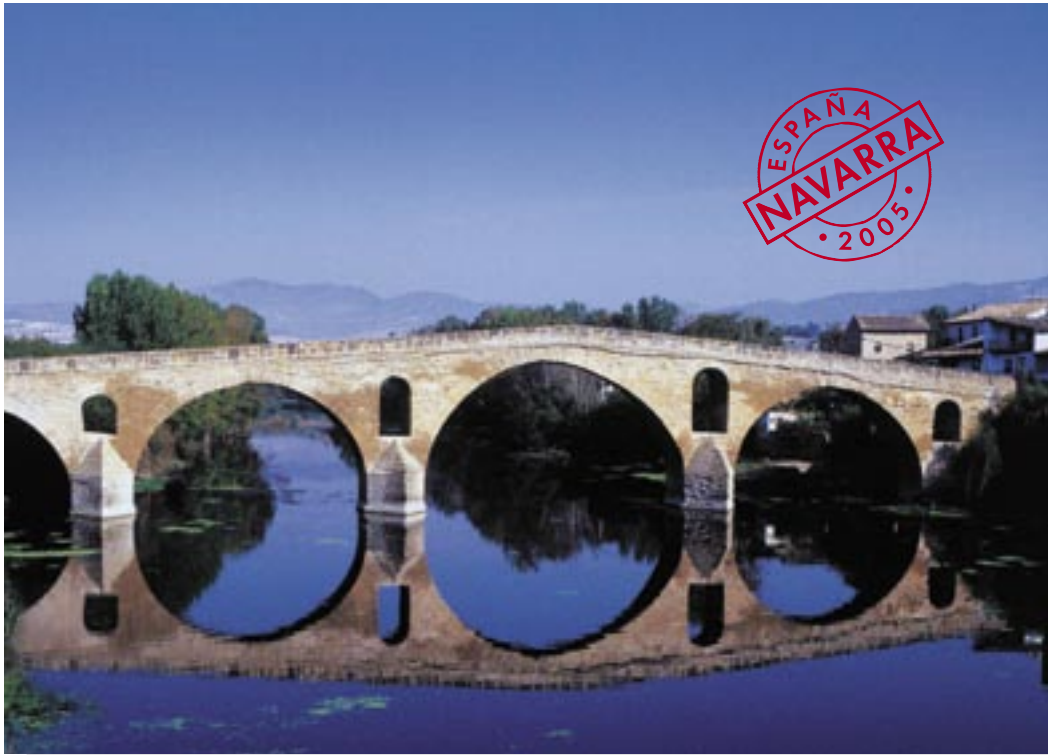
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# POSTMARK: NAVARRA

by Michael Schachner

Sitting down to lunch in the Parador de Olite with winery owner Javier Ochoa and Sonia, my host from the Navarra wineries association, we dig into a plate of succulent ham rimmed by the region's famed white asparagus while discussing the essence of this once autonomous kingdom.

We speak, of course, about the annual festival of San Fermín and the accompanying Running of the Bulls through the narrow streets of Pamplona, Navarra's main city; we talk about the region's Basque influence as well as Navarra's proximity to the Pyrenees and its historic status as an important stop-over for pilgrims trekking to Santiago de Compostela. We even dish some dirt on the local soccer team, Osasuna, which is off to a great start this season but has done nothing for quite some time.

But mostly we talk of the lushness of the region, how Navarra is a green, river-fed oasis of valleys and hills that starkly contrasts Spain's predominant hot and dusty plains. The Spaniards go so far as to label Navarra as Spain's "agricultural breadbasket", as it is the country's prime source for wheat, peppers, artichokes, those unparalleled *espárragos blancos*, and last but certainly not least, a range of winegrapes capable of being turned into some quite delicious wines.



One of those particularly pleasing Navarran wines is the rosé, or should we say *rosado*, made by Señor Ochoa at his winery just south of Olite. This 100% Garnacha pleaser is emblematic of a top Navarran rosé. It is fresh and crisp, a reflection of the region's rather northerly place on the map. The climatic influence on this Denominación de Origen is staunchly Atlantic, not Mediterranean, and as a result the wines tend to be a bit more austere than those from Spain's warmer regions.

An exception to that rule, and there is always at least one exception to every rule, are the wines made by Bodegas Julián Chivite at the family's Señorío de Arinzano estate in Estella. This 750-acre property, which the family acquired in 1988, yields richer, deeper grapes than do most Navarran vineyards, and the result is Chivite's excellent Colección 125 line of wines, including a white made from Chardonnay and a red that blends Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. In high-quality years such as 2001, these wines rank among Spain's very best. In addition to these wines, other Navarran producers to keep an eye on include Castillo de Monjardín, Otazu and Vega Sindoa/Nekeas.

And beyond wine altogether, spirit lovers can sing the praises of a unique Navarran liqueur called Pacharán. This Basque spirit carries a pink hue and is made by macerating wild sloe berries in a neutral distillate. It tastes a little like fruit, a little like licorice, and after dinner — on ice — it's as Navarran as it gets. You can bet Papa Hemingway drank plenty of Pacharán while spending time in Pamplona in preparation for writing *The Sun Also Rises*. It would only have been natural.

**Michael Schachner** covers Spain and South America for *Wine Enthusiast Magazine*.

## NOT TO MISS IN AND AROUND THE NAVARRA REGION

**OLITE:** The Parador de Olite, housed in a wing of a medieval castle, sits about 25 miles south of Pamplona. It features stunning stained glass, lavish rugs and wall hangings, and wood-beamed ceilings. Air conditioned throughout and exceedingly comfortable, this classic inn offers a fine restaurant that showcases traditional Navarran fare like stuffed red piquillo peppers and fresh local trout. And while you're staying in the once-walled town of Olite you can visit the Ciudadela (old fortress) and other remnants of the town's historic past.

**PAMPLONA:** *Restaurante Rodero* on Calle Emilio Arrieta near the Plaza de Toros is exactly the type of restaurant that defines Spain's culinary new wave. Family run, with Koldo Rodero running the creative kitchen, Rodero is everything an international foodie is looking for. Expect elaborate tasting menus, professional service, and very good Navarran wines. The restaurant is located at C/ Emilio Arrieta 3, 31002 Pamplona, tel: 948-228-035. [www.restauranterodero.com](http://www.restauranterodero.com).

**CINTRUENIGO:** *Maher* on Calle Ribera is the restaurant (and hotel) run by progressive chef Enrique Martínez, a specialist in seasonal Navarran fare. Maher's menus, which are focused solely on regional ingredients, are in a constant state of flux based on which fruits, vegetables and meats are available. The restaurant is located at Ribera 19, Cintruénigo.



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