

Proper Rioja?  
The Reinvention of a Classic, Again  
Year of the Goat  
The Global Plate:  
Spanish Wines with Thai Food  
El Taburete: Restaurant Toro  
Postmark: Valdeorras



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Valdeorras

As invigorating as Madonna in her multiple reincarnations, Rioja reinvents itself yet again, seducing old friends and new wine lovers alike. John Radford reports on developments in that region. Mikel Urmeneta of Kukuxumusu, the cover artist this month, describes his artwork: "In love with Rioja. We used a grape leaf, a grape, a bottle ready to be opened, a corkscrew, glasses. The only thing left is to make a toast. A 'chin chin' from the heart." We keep on toasting, this time with cowgirl chef Paula Disbrowe. She remembers a season in Rioja hiking through the valleys and toasting with friends at the end of the day. In Texas she continues to pair wines with foods, and focuses on goat for this issue. From calle Laurel in Logroño we move to Khao San Road in Bangkok and join Jim Clarke for a delicious tango of Spanish wines and Thai flavors. On this side of the ocean, Sandy Block heads to Ken Oringer's Toro in Boston, and discovers one of the most thrilling tapas restaurants in the northeast, with a superb list of wines. Last but not least, back in Spain, Michael Schachner succumbs to Godello in little-known Valdeorras.



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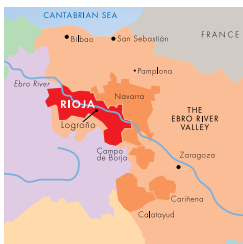


*Viña Salceda*  
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# 'PROPER' RIOJA?

## THE REINVENTION OF A CLASSIC, AGAIN



John Radford traces the development of a traditional wine region which has reinvented itself yet again.

"You won't hear any English spoken here - or if you do, it'll be someone from the wine trade, here on business". So said my host as we sat at the plain wooden tables of the Restaurante Terete waiting for our *cordero asado*. "This place is not on the tourist trail." That was around twenty years ago and now Terete, just behind the brown stone town hall in Haro, is very much on the tourist trail. Haro is the very heart of Rioja, its wine capital, if you like. To the north are the highlands of the Rioja Alavesa with their cool Tempranillo vineyards; to the east the city of Logroño, capital of the region and the financial centre for Rioja wine business, but it is Haro which keeps the flame, and some of the region's best known traditional bodegas, including La Rioja Alta, Muga, Paternina, Bilbainas, CVNE and the ultra-traditional López-Heredia, as well as one of Rioja's most modern, mold-breaking bodegas: Roda.

Terete still serves traditional Riojan food - *morcilla*, *chorizo*, and *menestras* alongside the *cordero*, and their own excellent Rioja Reserva. Diners still sit on long benches at wooden tables, but they do provide a square of checked table-cloth so that you know which bit of the table is yours. Apart from that, little has changed in fifty years.

At the other end of Haro, inside the 14th-century magnificence of the Hotel Los Agustinos, chef Juan Nales of Las Duelas uses the same ingredients: lamb, *embutidos* and fresh vegetables, but in a creative, post-modern fashion, elegantly presented and in a style that wouldn't be out of place in one of Spain's big cities. Haro has a population of just 9,000 and four restaurants in the Michelin Guide. The difference

between Terete and Las Duelas is, perhaps, something of a metaphor for Rioja itself, and particularly for the way its wines have developed over the past twenty years.

Everyone's familiar with the cliché view of the wines from hereabouts: heavily (often much too heavily) oaked, to suit a market consisting of customers who habitually bought wine and matured it in their own cellars for many years. This market began to fade away from the mid-1970s and the ageing regulations were reduced around 1980 to make the wine more attractive to the sort of buyer who buys today and drinks next week, which is most of us.

The reaction against oak had started in the 1970s with Marqués de Cáceres, a smart, modern bodega in Cenicero and the first to install stainless steel tanks and winemaking equipment. Predictably, the traditionalists announced 'the end of Rioja as we know it', but when Cáceres started to make its mark (and it's now one of the best-known and best-selling wines from the region) it wasn't long before 'new technology' - as we called it then - found its way into most bodegas in the region.

It didn't stop there, however. Vineyard techniques and winemaking styles evolved when, towards the end of the millennium, a new generation was taking over the winemaking function, new ideas were coming to the fore and, as ever, the market was looking for something new. We wine writers like to think that everybody is as fascinated by technicalities, regulations and oddities as we are, but we're wrong. The vast majority of people who drink wine just want to know what it tastes like and whether they'll enjoy it and, indeed, why not? It's their money after all.

Below: detail of entrance to Ysios, designed by renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava.





About the author:

John Radford's book **The Wines of Rioja** (Mitchell Beazley) won the 'Best European Wine Book' prize at the Livre Gourmand Awards in Versailles in 2005.

So what is Rioja? The customer will say something like "it's a big, fruity (raspberry/strawberry) wine with hints of oaky vanilla, ready to drink when you buy it, and good value for money" which is an enviable (and true) reputation. But, of course, Rioja is much more than that. In the spring of 2000 I was at the annual 'Los Grandes de la Rioja' tasting and conference in Logroño, and one of the visits was to the 'new wave' Bodegas Roda in Haro where the winemaker treated us to tastings of cask samples of his '\$100 wine' and his '\$300 wine' (in reality, even today Roda I and Roda II sell in the US at about \$55 and \$35 respectively), and a friend and colleague Jeremy Watson, former director of Wines From Spain in London, was heard to remark 'these are magnificent wines but they're not proper Rioja.'

So what is 'proper' Rioja? In 1852 Luciano de Murrieta made wine in the 'Bordeaux' style for the first time, and his neighbours laughed. Why? Well, it wasn't 'proper' Rioja. The export market, however, disagreed, and sales boomed, especially when France fell prey to the dreaded Phylloxera, which devastated vineyards across western Europe. When Cáceres introduced stainless steel, no doubt the critics had the same opinion... Until they followed suit. When the 'new-wave' producers came up with 'high-expression' wine in the late 1990s this caused another frenzy of arm-waving, panic and dire predictions that this was 'the end of Rioja as we know it'. It wasn't, of course.

How to enjoy? The ancient and beautiful walled city of Laguardia has tiny, labyrinthine streets with bars serving old-style Basque Rioja: young, fresh, purple and from the most recent vintage, it's drunk in flat-bottomed tumblers as a cool thirst-quencher, rather in the manner of Beaujolais Nouveau in its heyday, and with a fine disregard for the food on offer: fish, meat, vegetables, salads - it goes with everything and glugs down magnificently. Classic Rioja is still the stuff of traditional roasts, the gran reservas particularly with their aromas of the cigar-box and gentile, vanilla overtones.

And what about the 'new wave' wines which have caused such controversy since the mid-1990s? These tend to be big

wines with lots of fruit up front, extraction, power and strength and also - carrying on a long tradition - usually ready to drink as soon as they're released. The reactions of some of the traditionalists has been astonishing, from worried frowns over where Rioja is heading to outright condemnation of the new styles as some kind of heresy.

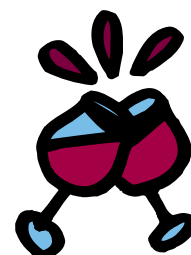
Interestingly, even some of the more traditional bodegas has started to bring out a 'high expression' wine in addition to their regular range, and even at 21st Century prices (Roda's Cirsión, for example, sells at \$200-\$250) there seems to be a ready market for them. And history has shown that nothing invigorates a sector more effectively than a ready market.

What is 'proper' Rioja?, well there are those of us who believe that it's wine made from (mainly) Tempranillo grapes grown on vines in Rioja soil. After that you can select the bunches, or not; you can focus on 'expression' or not; you can age in oak (typically, but not exclusively, American and French) or not. The end result is that there's more choice now available from this relatively small area of north-central Spain than there has ever been. If you're an aficionado of the old classics, the modern, less-oaky styles, the 'off-the-wall' super-modern wines or, let's face it, a good solid, reliable, everyday wine for under \$10 a bottle, Rioja has it all on offer. The choice is there and Rioja is going through an unprecedented period of success, especially given the quality of recent vintages: 2001, 2004 and 2005 have all been classified as excelente, and there's also been a shift in perception or, at least one is under way as we speak. In some quarters Rioja had become seen as a bit boring: reliable, yes, good quality, certainly, and value for money undoubtedly, but not, well, exciting. That reputation is rapidly fading as consumers discover the new styles, reacquaint themselves with the classics and, in many cases, find something they weren't expecting. Rioja has done the impossible: reinvented itself (for the third time since the 1850s) without losing touch with its roots and its traditional enthusiasts; pushed the boundaries of what it can achieve whilst maintaining its reputation for reliability and value for money; and consolidated its position as Spain's premier red-wine region. That is truly the mark of a great wine.



CURIOS FOR MORE?

Take a tour through [www.vibrantrioja.com](http://www.vibrantrioja.com) to experience the rich history, culture, flavors, textures, time and terroir that flood your senses when you open a bottle of Rioja



# YEAR OF THE GOAT



Farmer with herd of goats near Zamora. © Michael Buselle/Getty Images.



Patatas a la riojana [Riojan style potatoes]

**A season in Rioja ignited a passion for everything Spanish. Now in Texas, the author ponders why Spanish-style cabrito might be the next big thing.**

By Paula Disbrowe

I have a favorite photograph that was taken during the summer that I lived in Rioja. I'm standing on the outskirts of Sorzano, a tiny village outside of Logroño, with two diminutive widows--older women in black dresses and stockings--on either side of me. As I am tall and blonde, wearing funky tortoise shell glasses and a traveler's ensemble from the Gap, the widows and I make comic partners. Physically, I stuck out in Sorzano. But when it came to hospitality and welcome, I might have been somebody's daughter.

That photograph was taken 10 years ago, when I left New York to spend a couple of years cooking in Europe. Ostensibly I was in Spain as a tourist--a young food writer enhancing her culinary education. I'm lucky enough to say that I lived in Rioja because of the generosity of a friend who invited me to spend some time with her family. As luck would have it, my friend happens to be María Martínez Sierra, winemaker for the Osborne bodegas, including the renowned Bodegas Montecillo. She is one of Spain's most prestigious winemakers.

Had I been on my own, I might have been a typical 20-something traveler passing through Rioja en route to a beach destination. Instead, thanks to my expert tour guide, I enjoyed a deeper experience in Spain's most famous wine region. I went to small village festivals for revered Saints, where María and I sipped glasses of tinto, luscious red wine, as gypsies broke into sad, haunting melodies. We

went to bodega feasts each Friday night and devoured home-cooked meals held in the wine cellars of friends in Sorzano. Late in the evening, after the feasts, we sipped Pacharán, an herbaceous local liqueur made from juniper berries. Once a week I helped out at the family restaurant in Logroño (which translated to standing in the corner of the kitchen, snacking on Serrano ham and bread, and trying not to get in the way). I even sang karaoke to a bar full of hunters and got a haircut in a friend's living room.

And I put plenty of miles on my Birkenstocks. I've always been a passionate hiker, and there couldn't have been a more scenic spot to explore. Each day, I walked from Sorzano to Sojuelo, another ancient village a few miles away, which gave me unfettered time to absorb the landscape, a patchwork quilt of rolling mountains, olive and peach orchards, lush vineyards, crumbling stone walls and grazing sheep. I slowed down enough to notice lizards darting across the steps of an ancient chapel. In other words: I fell in love with the place.

Then, of course, there was the food. If not for María, I would never have tasted local wild mushrooms sautéed with garlic and olive oil, pimientos del piquillo (sweet and smoky red peppers), and chuletas de cordero al sarmiento (baby lamb chops grilled over grape vine clippings). I would have missed the best pinchos at tapas bars. And I certainly wouldn't have ordered the asado de cabrito, moist, tender baby kid goat roasted in a wood-burning oven.

These days I live in Texas Hill Country, which shares a physical resemblance, and more than a few food and wine traditions, with Rioja. As in Rioja, Tempranillo grapes are grown in local vineyards. Rural highways are flanked by peach

#### About the author:

Paula Disbrowe is a freelance writer who divides her time between Austin and the Nueces Canyon of Texas, where she lives with her husband and menagerie of animals. Her cookbook, **Cowgirl Cuisine**, will be published by HarperCollins in February 2007.

orchards and even olive groves. And in roadside taquerías, hip urban restaurants, and at ranch barbecues, it's not uncommon to find cabrito on the menu.

In Rioja, cabrito is simply seasoned with salt and aromatics (onions, garlic, herbs) and roasted in a wood-fired oven. It might be served alongside potatoes (often fried with red chorizo oil), or a local vegetable. The most familiar South Texas preparation draws its inspiration from Mexico (cabrito is a specialty of Monterrey). This goat is seasoned, spiced with red chile and/or marinated, and cooked in an insulated oven or foil packet over a low fire, or in an underground pit. Cabrito can become dry and stringy if cooked incorrectly; a cooking vessel that retains its juices helps keep the meat moist. The warm, shredded meat is served simply, with warm tortillas and salsa.

Cabrito aficionados prize young goats (anywhere from 28-40 days old and 8-12 pounds) that have only fed on their mother's milk. The result is a rich but delicate flavor (think dark turkey) that some chefs feel needs little more than salt and pepper. Once young goats begin to graze, the meat can take on a stronger mutton flavor—though this means that the meat can stand up to a stronger spice profile. At Los Barrios, a home-style Mexican restaurant in San Antonio, cabrito is cooked like pot roast, and flavored with garlic, onions, oregano, cumin, salt, and pepper. The cooked meat is wrapped in foil and finished on the grill, which adds a final smoky note. Like venison and young lamb, kid goat is lean (with less cholesterol than chicken), and must be handled with care. That usually translates to a long, slow braise that retains juices.

Given its affinity for rustic and Mediterranean preparations—and wine—it seems to me that cabrito warrants a broader audience on wine bar, tapa, and taberna menus. Although “broader audience” is a relative term, goat is in fact the most popular meat in the world and the fastest growing meat in the United States, according to a spokesperson for the International Boer Goat Association. Currently, most of the meat goat raised in the U.S. is sold to a minority market—Muslims and Hispanics are the biggest purchasers. On the rare occasion when goat appears in a glossy magazine article, it's typically stewed in a Jamaican-style curry.

“I love cabrito and would love to see some chefs do more with it,” says June Naylor, the food editor of the *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*. “It's long been thought of as such either a peasant dish or a staple in a taqueria. But now that game has become such a fixture in finer dining, why not cabrito?”

In fact, some of the best chefs—in top restaurant cities—are reconsidering its possibilities. New York is an example. Gabrielle Hamilton, the chef at Prune, a popular bistro in the east village of New York, recently featured Roasted Goat with Wild Leeks and Goat Cheese. “It was supposed to be a little joke or a little poetry, depending on your point of view,” she said recently, “the goat, the grass it ate, and the cheese made from its milk.” Uptown in Times Square, Chanfana de Cabrito (braised goat in red wine), is on the menu at Tintol, a Portuguese tapas bar that opened in January. Scott Conant, the chef at L'Impero, an upscale Italian restaurant in midtown, serves Moist Roasted Vermont Capretto, or pasture-raised baby goat, with spring pea, speck, and potato groestle. Onera, a new Greek restaurant on Manhattan's upper west side, serves an “open” moussaka, made with round slices of eggplant, layers of ragù, and braised goat.

“When some customers hear goat, they might be turned off. It's like when they hear tripe,” says Lanny Lancarte II, the chef of Lanny's Alta Cocina Mexicana, a fine dining restaurant in Fort Worth. “But cabrito is not overly gamey,” he continues. “And depending on what it's braised in it can be really spicy, or really straightforward and brothy.” Lancarte serves warm cabrito in its juice on Lavash crackers as an amuse, and over seared scallops or sea bass as a first course. The chef buys his meat from a Hill Country purveyor. “Cabrito is really rustic, like barbacoa, which makes it a challenge on a fine dining menu,” Lancarte says. “But it's really tender and flavorful.”

Both Rioja and I have changed a lot—and not very much—in the last 10 years. In the last three years alone, imports to the US have grown significantly, from 5,434,119 liters (2003) to 6,560,640 liters (2005). Famous architects have designed stunning new wineries: Frank Gehry (of Guggenheim Bilbao fame) created the visitors' center at Marqués de Riscal and Bodegas Julián Chivite brought in Rafael Moneo (think Madrid's Atocha station). The opportunity to sip wine in those sleek modern tasting rooms has me thinking it's high time I return. I won't even mind being less of a “daughter” and more of a tourist. Besides, it's high time that I take María out to lunch, and eat some more wild mushrooms and cabrito and get to the bottom of what wine works best. Does cabrito pair perfectly with her beloved Rioja reds? Or is the meat's delicate flavor ultimately better suited to a rosé from Navarra or even an Albariño? That's up for debate, and a matter of preference. After I hit the hot spots, I'll return to Sorzano, where I'll slow down enough to watch the shepherds and lizards and look for my old friends. I'm hopeful that things there will not have changed a bit.



Photos this page: from top: roast cabrito; mushrooms with olive oil and garlic; bocadillos at Calle Laurel; sign outside Calle Laurel; bottom left, kid roasting over an open fire in Rioja.

#### Chefs Wine Recommendations:

Chef **Michael Psilakis** of the restaurant **Onera** typically serves Greek wines, but suggests a Rioja reserva as a delicious accompaniment to a dish which includes goat meat.

**Richard Pelz**, the chef at **Tintol**, opts for a Rioja reserva with Chanfana de Cabrito (goat braised in red wine and served with a carrot and potato puree). **Scott Conant** of **L'Impero** would happily drink C.V.N.E. (**Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España**) **Imperial Gran Reserva**, Rioja 1995, or **Bodegas Muga Torre Muga** Rioja Reserva 1994, with his dish. **Gabrielle Hamilton** of **Prune** suggests **López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Rioja Reserva** 1998 for her goat-and-cheese pairing. **Lanny Lancarte** chooses a Rioja crianza or reserva.



# THE GLOBAL PLATE: SPANISH

Two Nations Whose Culinary and Wine Traditions Might Seem Incompatible Find Common Ground

by Jim Clarke

It's not immediately apparent, but Spain and Thailand have a few things in common. For example, both nations share their peninsula with neighboring countries. On a culinary level, both countries have long coastlines – making for a strong seafood tradition – as well as lots of interior land which adds various sorts of meat to their respective national diets. Furthermore, both national cuisines have become increasingly popular in the U.S. in the past decade or so.

However, the popularity of Spanish food in the U.S. has been accompanied by – perhaps even preceded by – the popularity of their wines. Thailand can hardly say the same; when it comes to beverages they are known more for tea than anything grape-derived. They do have a few wineries, most notably Chateau de Loei and Siam Winery, but it is an adolescent industry at best. Thailand's new winemakers could probably learn a couple of things from Spain – how to grow quality wine grapes in a hot climate, for example.

Meanwhile, Thai wine drinkers could also learn something from their Spanish counterparts: how wine and food works together at the table. The tourist industry in Thailand has created a demand for staff that is knowledgeable about wine and hospitality, and locals are also beginning to take an interest. However, Pairach Intaput, the country's leading sommelier and wine consultant, says most of his countrymen still pick out wines independently from their food choices. High import taxes make wine a definite luxury item for most Thais. Intaput notes that, so "Thai consumers recognize wine with food as secondary, while a heavy, stunning wine that's easy to appreciate on its own is the priority. The wine they love will always make them happy," regardless of pairing considerations.

It's a strange attitude when you consider how much traditional Thai cuisine focuses on balance. Most classic recipes are meant to blend together the so-called five flavors: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and hot, and chefs focus on managing these elements when building their recipes. Low acid and/or high tannin wines in particular can disrupt this balance; Intaput mentions that many Spanish wines are difficult with his country's spicier cooking style for just this reason.

Nonetheless, it is surely no accident that when I first contacted Intaput he was visiting Vinoble Jerez, and had just attended TopWineSpain in Huelva, dedicated to Spanish reds. Obviously Spain has something to offer at the Thai table.



Khao San Road. © Jose Guerra

Intaput says Verdejo (an aromatic white wine, well-known from the Rueda region) is a good varietal choice for two of Thailand's most popular dishes, pad thai and panang. The chilli spice in a traditional pad thai is well served by the wine's aromatics and acidity, which also matches well with the egg, chicken and shrimp in the fried noodle dish. Panang is a red curry dish, thickened with coconut milk. Here a Verdejo's acidity cuts the thick, slightly sweet note of the coconut while the aromatic notes still help tone down the heat of the curry. Panang is traditionally made with beef, but can be made with other meats as well, even chicken; a reminder that the sauce of a dish is sometimes even more important than the protein in choosing an appropriate wine.

In the U.S. and England, however, Albariño seems to be the first Spanish wine that comes to mind for Thai cuisine. At King and I – the godfather of the bustling South Asian restaurant scene in Minneapolis's bustling South Asian restaurant scene – sommelier Geoffrey Trelstad says that Rías Baixas is his favorite match for pad thai and many of their appetizers. Jean-Georges's Vong in New York City, known for high-end, Thai-inspired food, has a list heavy on Rieslings, but Beverage Director Bernie Sun says the Nora Albariño was very popular with guests as part of their wine-by-the-glass program. Perhaps there's a connection; many authorities say Albariño is a variant of Riesling, brought to Spain by French monks via the pilgrimage trail to Santiago de Compostela.

# WINES WITH THAI FOOD.

David Thompson's London restaurant Nahm is the city's top Thai destination. Sommelier Troy Sutton has extensive experience pairing wines with spicy, aromatic dishes. He, too, favors the "lively, fresh, floral notes of Albariño." One of his favorites is Ana Quintela's take on the grape at Pazo Señorans. He says that: "The wine, being crisp and dry, yet rich and unoaked, has the requisite body to hold it's own next to even the most challenging dishes like the spicy green curry of monkfish with Thai aubergines and wild ginger, or the fiery salad of grilled long horn beef with long leaf coriander and shallots."

Gewurztraminer may not sound typically Spanish, but some producers in the Somontano DO of Aragón have made a specialty of the grape. Sutton says it works "supremely well" with Thai food. The grape's floral, perfumed, character and typical aromas of lychee, roses, and spices "seem to mirror the aromas of Thai food." Additionally, "high levels of glycerol and residual sugar in this particular varietal tend to dumb-down the effects of chilli, effectively sweeping it away" and offering a respite from the heat.

Conventional wisdom says that a wine's acidity should match that of the dish, but Sutton argues that the fruit-derived acidity of many Thai salads actually "lifts the flavors" of Gewurztraminer, which is generally considered a low-acid grape.

Americans have a love-hate relationship with the heat of Thai cooking. Thai chefs are concerned with balancing the five flavors, but the American stereotype of Thai cuisine is "hot and spicy" – often too hot and spicy. Fruity aromatics and high acidity can help, but a little sweetness and glycerol will really do the job in turning down the heat. Off-dry Gewurztraminer may be one answer, but Sherry is probably the most classically Spanish wine that can work with Thai food this way. Trelstad features the Lustau Los Arcos Amontillado and the Dios Baco Oloroso at King and I, and actively encourages guests to try them during their meals and not just as aperitifs or digestifs. He says that sherry's complexity and mix of nut and fruit aromas means it has something to offer all five flavors of the cuisine. As always, the rich texture of Sherry also makes it especially suitable for soups like tom kah kai (chicken coconut soup) or tom yam koong (hot and sour soup with shrimp).

Asian meals are often a communal affair, with dishes being shared and passed around the table. This calls for a wine that can pair with all sorts of dishes, and Cava is extremely popular for its ability to clean the palate and work well with a variety of dishes. In fact, if there's only one Spanish wine on the list at a Thai restaurant, it's likely to be a Cava. At the Thai Gourmet Cooking House

in Scottsdale, Arizona, husband-and-wife team Michael and Praparart Sturlin teach classes on cooking Thai food at home, often demonstrating a number of different dishes in a single session. Wine is not the focus of the classes, so they aim for something affordable that lets the dishes shine through on their own. Michael says they "can't go wrong" with Cava, which "acts like a sorbet," cleansing the palate and between bites and courses, and "goes with everything, even holding up to marinated meats."

The King and I restaurant serves several Cavas, including the Montsarra Brut and the Mont

Marçal Rosado. Trelstad says he prefers Cava to other bubbly because it has earthy, smoky, or even funky notes underlying the more usual fruity aromas, and he feels that these help bring forward the similar elements in the dishes. He also finds that more and more guests are willing to try a sparkling wine as the accompaniment to their meal, rather than solely as an aperitif or toasting wine.

What about red wines? Michael Sturlin of the Thai Gourmet Cooking

House says "Reds are often too tannic," but others single out Spanish reds, especially Riojas, for their suitability. Kittichai, in New York City, has two Riojas on the list: the Pagos del Encinar Crianza 'lacrimus' and the Cune 'Imperial' Reserva. Wine Director Jean-Luc Lametrie says the Crianza style works well with many of the appetizers on their menu such as the northern-style Thai beef salad or the chocolate baby back ribs. The Reserva suits a few of the meatier entrees, including a chili-smoked hanger steak with a lemongrass-pepper sauce.

Nahm's Troy Sutton says the reason that some Riojas and other Tempranillo-based wines work well with Thai meat dishes is that they retain fine tannins and a fruit-driven profile, despite oak-aging. He contrasts them with Bordeaux and New World Cabernets, whose "big tannic structures tend to interfere with the spice profile of any dish they accompany." He particularly likes slow-cooked, braised meats like a geng mussaman beef or duck curry with these wines.

Trelstad actually features Bodegas Borsao as his house red, praising it and Spanish wines on the whole for their price-to-value ratio. He, like Thai sommelier Pairach Intaput, also spent some time traveling around Spain. What impressed him the most during his time there, he reports, was wine's everyday role at the table, and what it brought to a meal. It's not a point Spain and Thailand share in common (yet), but it's certainly something the two nations could chat about – over a glass of wine.

**Verdejo is a good varietal choice for two of Thailand's most popular dishes: pad thai and panang curry**



Photos this page: Before the pairing: Preparing tom ka gai. © Jose Guerra

About the author:

Jim Clarke is a freelance writer based in New York City. He serves as the Wine and Spirits Editor for the online magazine **StarChefs** and has written for the **New York Times**, **Imbibe**, **Time Out New York**, and elsewhere.

# ELTABURETE (CHEFS & SOMMELIERS ON WINE)



Chef Ken Oringer and  
Sommelier Erin O'Shea.  
© Clio

By Sandy Block, Master of Wine

Seven pm on a warm Tuesday night in Boston's South End and Restaurant Toro is already pulsing with a hip, urban, convivial energy that is indelibly Spanish. The stainless steel-topped bar is full, the scene is spilling out onto Washington Street and sweet smoky aromas are in the air as diners pass pinxtos around the table to share with one another. At this restaurant, star Chef Ken Oringer's recently opened incarnation of the Tapas dining experience with a stylish twist, there is something happening that is new and exciting in the city of Boston. Not that it's New England's first ever Spanish restaurant of quality. But sitting in this warm and inviting, rustically furnished place, you could close your eyes and easily believe it was Barcelona. There's a natural flow, with the highly creative food, the wine and the casual but friendly service forming a seamless whole. And it's completely participatory: the small plates and opportunities to sample a wide variety of different dishes over the course of dinner help create a rhythm of conversation that's all about flavor and texture: What's this like? How does that taste? Toro provides an adventure that before this you could only get by crossing the Atlantic.

**"The Jumilla wines we have on the list work really well with our food. They're inexpensive but they're really beautiful."**

Oringer's passion for all things Spanish was kindled during what he estimates have been eight visits over the past ten years. "I don't know who doesn't fall in love with the restaurants when they go to Spain," he says. Although he traveled the entire country, Oringer was particularly impressed by what he experienced in Catalonia and in the Basque Country, citing Barcelona and San Sebastián as special culinary influences. As his vision of what he wanted to do at Toro developed he defined the main ingredients as "something very authentic but with some creativity along the lines of the modern style; that has a building that could be 200 years old but still is very modern; with recipes from grandmothers as well as creative new ones; a restaurant that is still very reasonably priced that anybody can eat at." Everything is made in house, including the salt cod and the morcillas (blood sausages). Tripe is a specialty, as are the mouthwatering boquerones (a marinated white anchovy appetizer), angulas (baby eels), grilled shrimps, bacalao croquettes, sea urchins, fried peppers and succulent garlic-accented patatas bravas. "We have a whole collection of pinxtos which you don't see very often in the U.S." Oringer says. "The key is that the ingredients have to be pristine and the bread has to be great."

The wine list is one hundred per cent Spanish and offers a great snapshot of what is contemporary on the country's dramatically changing wine scene. Given the explosion in quality of Spanish wine over the past decade and the bewildering array of denominations, this takes most diners out of their comfort zone. Although exports to the US have been rising at a steady pace, American wine drinkers by and large show little awareness of Spain's diverse regions and grape varieties. The vast majority of Spanish wine in the US appears to be sold by retailers excited about the incredible value and the uniquely rendered local flavors, so most of the information available to consumers comes from this sector of the business.

Restaurants have lagged behind in introducing Spain's wines to their clientele outside of a handful of familiar names such as Rioja and Sherry. But Toro, Oringer says, has experienced "no resistance whatsoever from people looking for French or American wines. The key is being able to train the staff to offer alternatives. Guests here have an open mind. And the price points are great too. I've got some wines that are under \$20 a bottle so people are willing to try new things."

Erin O'Shea, the sommelier at Oringer's Clio restaurant, is responsible for selection of all beverages. An enthusiastic and knowledgeable communicator, she also trains the staff. When asked about which regions have her excited, her face lights up: "Rueda! And Jumilla," she says. "Some of the Jumilla reds are incredibly over-oaked, jammy and over the top, but the ones we have work really well with our food.

They're inexpensive but they're really beautiful." One selection, a delicious 2004 Monastrell Syrah blend from Bodegas Olivares called Panarroz, is listed at only \$15 per bottle. O'Shea also cites Penedés as a source of some of her favorite white wine values on the list. "I think people here tend to think of that region overall as being low quality uninteresting sparkling wines and



© Toro

# Toro, Toro, Toro!

also uninteresting still whites, but I've been really impressed with the whites. They're very Chablis-esque." A Chardonnay from Bodegas Naveran is only \$18, and a Xarello blend from the region, Huguet De Can Feixes Blanco Selecció is \$35. The Chardonnay is an exception in that of the 57 Spanish wines Toro features, only four are made exclusively from "French" varieties. There are three other Chardonnays and one Syrah. None are by the glass. "If people are looking for California Chardonnays," O'Shea says, "we recommend white Riojas aged in wood. We sometimes recommend Albariños to people looking for Sauvignon Blanc or even Riesling. Verdejo I think is a kind of a cross stylistically between Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc." The Oro de Castilla Verdejo is available at \$5 per glass.

One of the other white varieties that interests O'Shea is Godello from Valdeorras. Toro pours the Bodegas Señorío "Val de Sil" by the glass (\$8), and also offers the Godeval by the bottle.

As far as the reds go, there is a larger, more geographically diverse selection, with little known regions such as Zamora and Manchuela repre-

sented alongside the Riojas, Ribera del Duero and Priorats. There is a wonderful wine from Toro, the 2004 Prima from Bodegas Maurodos (\$35). "One of the most interesting winemakers I met in Spain was a woman from New Zealand making wine in Toro," O'Shea says. "She's making Tempranillos that are much better than some of the Riojas. And much less expensive. There are

**"I don't know who doesn't fall in love with the restaurants when they go to Spain."**

really interesting things going on there and you don't have to spend a fortune." Which could serve as a slogan for the whole Toro dining experience. O'Shea cites three importers in particular who are most attuned to her palate. "Ole Imports' Patrick Mata. I really enjoy his wines and part of that is I enjoy his passion. He picks really high quality. Also Eric Solomon and European Cellars. And, of course, Jorge Ordóñez."

There is a Reserve List available at Toro featuring some of Spain's most prestigious "blue chips" (Clos Erasmus 2002, Vega Sicilia Único 1994) and some venerable bottles from great vintages of the past (Montecillo Rioja Gran Reserva Selección

Especial 1982 and 1994) as well as some limited production discoveries that are at the cutting edge of Spanish winemaking today (Numanthia 2003 from Toro and Aquilon Garnacha 2002 from Campo de Borja). There are also great dessert wines, including a selection of amazingly rich and luscious Pedro Ximénez Sherries that are so thick you can eat them.

**Toro provides an adventure that before this you could only get by crossing the Atlantic.**

Toro has been very busy since opening in late 1995. The only problem has been the limited seating (space for about 60), but that actually helps keep the atmosphere intimate and cozy. When asked to summarize the secret of his success, Ken Oringer smiles. "When you set foot in the restaurant you have a real sense of adventure. It looks like

a restaurant that people haven't really been to and the combinations and authenticity of the ingredients, unless they've been to Spain, people haven't had either. It's creative and so reasonably priced that people want to come back." All in all, Toro presents a winning formula that showcases Spanish wine in its most appropriate context, with authentic food, and has had the city of Boston abuzz since opening day!





## Spain's 10: Cocina de Vanguardia in New York

Ten of Spain's top chefs will be in New York City for three days this October for some special events. Titled **Spain's 10: Cocina de Vanguardia**, the weekend will spotlight the chefs, their progressive culinary techniques and premier wines and foods from Spain. The ten chefs will include **Ferran Adrià**, **Juan Mari Arzak**, **Martín Berasategui** and seven other luminaries. On Oct. 12 they will participate in the **James Beard Foundation's** Gala Dinner and Auction (212-627-2308; open to the public). On Oct. 13, they will take part in a celebration to inaugurate **The International Culinary Center**. The weekend concludes on Oct. 14th with a festival modeled after the prestigious **Madrid Fusión** conference, open to the public, at **Guastavino's** (409 E 59th St., NY). Attendees will be able to learn about the 10 visiting chefs' latest techniques, as well as about Spanish wines and foods, via demonstrations and the **Marketplace**. Tickets are available online at [www.spains-10.com](http://www.spains-10.com) or by phone at 1.877.772.4610. Spain's 10: Cocina de Vanguardia is hosted by the International Culinary Center (home of the French Culinary Institute), in partnership with the **Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX: Foods & Wines from Spain)**, the **James Beard Foundation** and **Madrid Fusión**.

## Folio Fine Wine Partners Launches Spanish Wines Portfolio in the US

Michael Mondavi, founder of **Folio Fine Wine Partners** in 2004, announced an exclusive marketing agreement with four Spanish wineries: **Cims de Porrera** from Priorat; **Clos Dominic** from Priorat; **Cellers Capafons-Osso** producer of wines from both Priorat and Montsant; and **Mas de l'Abundancia**, from Montsant. Folio Fine Wine Partners, located in Napa, California, is an importer, agency and producer of wines from the world's premier and emerging wine regions. Mr. Mondavi notes that he has "enjoyed the delicious wines from Spain for many years. Their balance, style and finesse complement foods in a very exciting way."

## Star Chefs International Chefs Congress in New York City this Fall

From September 19-20, 2006, **Star Chefs.com's** inaugural **International Chefs Congress** will take place at the Covenant House, New York City. This two-day culinary symposium provides an opportunity for attendees to see the world's most influential and innovative chefs, who will present the latest techniques and culinary concepts. Present will be **José Andrés**, **Sergi Arola** and **Albert Adrià**. Also offered are chef demonstrations, hands-on workshops, wine tastings, and expert panels on relevant industry topics. The **Chef Products and Wine Fair** will feature the latest kitchen equipment from leading manufacturers and food and beverage products from the US and abroad. Other activities will include the Congress Cocktail Reception and the New York Rising Stars Revue, a gala and awards ceremony to honor New York's top up-and-coming culinary talent. For information and tickets visit [www.star chefs.com/events/icc/2006](http://www.star chefs.com/events/icc/2006).

## United Wineries USA Selects New Distributor for New York and New Jersey

**United Wineries USA**, the import company of **Arco Bodegas Unidas**, has selected **Domaine Select Merchants** as their exclusive distributor from New York and New Jersey for their **Berberana**, **Marqués de la Concordia** and **Durius** brands. For more information about these products email [ds@domaineselect.com](mailto:ds@domaineselect.com) or call 212-279-0799.



## CIA's Worlds of Flavor to Focus on Spanish Wine and Food

From November 2-4, The **Culinary Institute of America** at Greystone, in St. Helena, CA, will stage the largest and most comprehensive conference ever held in the United States on Spanish food and wine. Chaired by José Andrés, the conference, called **Spain and the World Table: Regional Traditions, Invention and Exchange**, will bring together a conference faculty of more than 50 top chefs, food writers, winemakers, food producers and other experts from Spain, countries that have been influenced by Spain, and from across the United States. For more information see [www.prochef.com/WOF2006](http://www.prochef.com/WOF2006).

## Winemaker's Dinner

This June, **Wide World of Wines** principals **Elliott Staren** and **Hugo Linares** hosted a knockout Spanish wine weekend in Washington, DC. At the **Winemaker's Dinner**, held on June 9th at **Café Atlántico**, with over thirty winemakers attended, including: **Mariano** and **Alberto García de Mauro**, **Sara Pérez** of **Clos Martinet**, **Isaac Fernández Montaña** of **Palomero** and **Conde, Alejandro Fernández** of **Pesquera**, and **Victoria Benavides** and **Victoria Pariente** of **Dos Victorias**. With at least one winemaker per table, diners asked questions and joked with many of the finest winemakers in Spain in a relaxed manner. The **Second Annual Spanish Barrel and New Releases Tasting**, held on June 10th at the Madison Hotel, was a landmark Spanish tasting with an impressive array of quality importers like **Aurelio Cabestrero's Grapes of Spain**, **Steven Metzler's Classical Wines**, **Christopher Canaan's Europvin** and **Laurent Givry's Elite Wines**. Over 100 wines from 32 producers were poured. The soon-to-be-released 2004s showed intense fruit, powerful structure and tannins while the 2005 barrel samples showed characteristically charming, "easy-to-like," classic aromas and fruit. ~ *Chris Fleming*



Photos above, clockwise from top left: Alejandro Fernández, Sara Pérez, Victoria Benavides, and Mariano García.

## Codorníu Appoints Bronco Wine Company as U.S. Importer

The **Bronco Wine Company**, well-known as the producer of the Charles Shaw "Two buck chuck" line of wines, has been selected as the exclusive importer and distributor of **The Grupo Codorníu's** range of Cava and Spanish table wines in the U.S. Public relations, consumer events and brand development will continue to be overseen by John Dougherty, USA Director for Codorníu Cava & Estates (561-748-6747). For information contact [fgwinery@forrestglenwinery.com](mailto:fgwinery@forrestglenwinery.com) or call 707-265-4060.



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## Wines from Spain Launches New Print Campaign for 2006

**Wines from Spain** recently launched a new print campaign targeting the media, trade, and consumers to run in fall publications. The idea behind its "Liquid Sunshine" campaign, under the global umbrella "Far from Ordinary" is to lead with Spain's strengths – what everyone perceives Spain to be – an enlightened land offering the world the benefits of its geography, culture, style and upbeat attitude, available in a bottle. The campaign emphasizes that every glass of Spanish wine has a bit of the sun, excitement and culture of Spain in it – just taste and find out. Additionally, the surreal graphical style is meant to communicate and confirm Spain's longstanding tradition of world-class art and artists, including Picasso, Miró and Dalí, to name but a few.

## The Great Match: Wines & Tapas Fall Series

**Wines from Spain's** fall series of wine and tapas tastings known as **The Great Match** will appear in New York City at the **Metropolitan Pavilion** on September 21 (for trade and consumers), in Washington D.C. at **Zaytinya Restaurant**, (for trade only) on October 4; and in Miami at **The Biltmore Hotel** (trade only) on November 8. For 13 years, The Great Match has toured the country offering both consumers and wine and food industry professionals a unique opportunity to experience the versatility of Spanish wines with a variety of cuisines. Guests can taste more than 200 wines from many of Spain's 64 denominations of origin, making this event the largest showcase of Spanish wines in the country. For more information please contact María José Besada ([mariajose.besada@mcx.es](mailto:mariajose.besada@mcx.es)) or visit [www.greatmatch.org](http://www.greatmatch.org).



## S Rated: Recent Ratings of Top Spanish Wines

Over 100 Spanish wines received ratings of 90 and above in recent issues of *Wine Spectator* and *Wine Enthusiast*. These superb wines, from regions all over Spain, are produced by both long-established and modern bodegas. Below is a listing of the top 14 of these wines. For the full listing please visit [www.winesfromspainnews.com](http://www.winesfromspainnews.com).

Wine	D.O.	Rating
López de Heredia Viña Bosconia Gran Reserva 1981	Rioja	95
Lustau Escudrilla Rare Amontillado Solera Reserva	Jerez	94
Félix Callejo Gran Reserva 1999	Ribera del Duero	94
Montenegro Crianza 2001	Ribera del Duero	94
Félix Callejo Reserva 2001	Ribera del Duero	93
Legaris Reserva 2001	Ribera del Duero	93
Matarromera Gran Reserva 1999	Ribera del Duero	93
Emilio Moro Malleolus de Valderramiro 2002	Ribera del Duero	93
Pérez Pascuas Viña Pedrosa Reserva 2001	Ribera del Duero	93
Terras Gauda Abadía de San Campio Albariño 2004	Rias Baixas	93
López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva 1987	Rioja	93
Lustau Emperatriz Eugenia Very Rare Oloroso Sherry	Jerez	93
López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Reserva 1988	Rioja	92
Mauro 2003	V.T. Castilla y León	92



Rural as Valdeorras is, lodging and dining options are limited:

**WHERE TO STAY:**

Pazo do Castro in O Barco is a classic country inn housed in a building from the 17th century. It features spacious rooms, a restaurant, a garden for strolling, and a carriage museum. (34) 988-347-423

**WHERE TO EAT:**

Not technically in Valdeorras, but instead in nearby Ponferrada (León), is Mesón El Lagar de Montejos, a good asador with the best wines from Valdeorras and neighboring Bierzo. (34) 987-402-029

Photos: Left, Valdeorra vineyards with village of Larouco beyond © Mick Rock/Cephas; below: 100-year-old vine in vineyard of Bodegas Valderroa; hillside Godello vineyard owned by Viña Godeval; the author with María Añibarro, sales manager for Bodegas Valderroa (last three images © M. Schachner).

# POSTMARK: VALDEORRAS

By Michael Schachner

Valdeorras is hardly a household name. But this sparsely populated region located in Spain's northwest corner has long held importance as the primary link between dry and dusty Castile and lush, verdant Galicia.

Entering rugged Valdeorras from the more maritime western portion of Galicia, one immediately takes notice of this region's diversity. Deep valleys have been cut by a series of meandering rivers—the Sil, Xares and Bibei—while tree-covered mountains rise as visual backdrops. There are vineyards of Godello and Mencía grapes almost everywhere you look, yet most eye-grabbing is the fact that unlike any place else in Spain, black slate tiles cover the rooftops of nearly every home, warehouse and factory. Which makes perfect sense: slate, what the locals call pizarra, is the region's primary natural resource.

After the ubiquitous slate, a.k.a. "black gold," viticulture is next in terms of importance. Valdeorras has been a governed denominación d'origen since 1945, and while the native Godello almost fell into extinction about 30 years ago as growers turned to more vigorous, less complex varieties, it is back with a vengeance courtesy of three decades worth of tireless work put in by those convinced that this fragile but lusty white grape should not go by the wayside.



Today there are more than 2,000 individual growers in Valdeorras, almost all of whom are specializing in Godello. Yet that doesn't make Valdeorras a booming wine region; to the contrary, there are fewer than 40 wineries in the Valdeorras, with only a handful exporting to the United States. Of the wineries that have targeting the U.S., one of my favorites is Viña Godeval, founded by the leader of all Godello reclaimers, 75-year-old Horacio Fernández; other quality producers include Guitián; Bodegas Valderroa, which makes the lovely Val de Sil and the affordable Montenovo; and Rafael Palacios, whose brand new wine, dubbed As Sortes, is akin to a fine Burgundy.

"This is where we will make Spain's first great white wine," Palacios told me during a visit in early June. The weather was hot then, the land already dry in advance of summer, yet the surroundings still green as an emerald forest. "We are a little bit continental in climate, with poor soils rich in minerals. It is perfect for Godello."

Despite Palacios' bold proclamation, labeling Valdeorras a two-tune region is neither an insult nor an exaggeration: it's the plain truth. Slate drives the economy, while grapes give the region stature and a will to thrive. And let's face it, for a small area with a population of only about 30,000 inhabitants spread throughout just nine towns, the largest of which is O Barco de Valdeorras, that's enough.

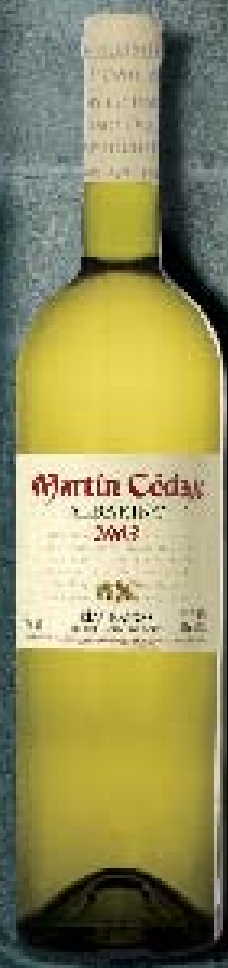
Which isn't to say that there's nothing in Valdeorras besides slate mining and grape growing. There is white-water rafting and fishing; hiking and trekking; and the knowledge that you are walking on the same grounds as Roman settlers and once-starving pilgrims. And if that thought draws a thirst, rest assured that it can be quenched with a glass of crisp, citric, mineral-laced Godello.



Michael Schachner is a contributing editor to Wine Enthusiast Magazine. He specializes in the wines and cultures of Spain, Chile, Argentina and Italy.



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