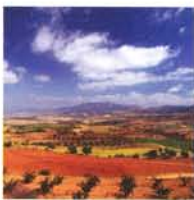


Influential Riojas of '82
Calatayud: Ready for Her Close-up
The Global Plate: Indochine
El Taburete: Mercat
Postmark: Ribeiro





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1982 Rioja is a vintage worth revisiting and in doing so Bruce Schoenfeld takes a moment to ponder the evolution of this wine region and winemaking in Spain during the past 25 years. Doug Frost focuses on lesser-known Calatayud, Aragón's second largest wine-producing region after Cariñena. He suggests that, with its soil, climate and people, great wines might soon be coaxed from its best sites. Would Spanish wines work with Vietnamese food? We wondered. Eunice Fried was quick to find the answer when she visited Indochine for the Global Plate, and the answer is a resounding Yes! Not far away, Pameladevi Govinda discusses *cuina de mercat* and wine in the heart of New York with the team behind Mercat. Last but not least, Michael Franz reports about Ribeiro, a small wine region tucked away in the northwest of Spain.

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Illustration by Brent Robertson

INFLUENTIAL RIOJA'S OF '82

By Bruce Schoenfeld

We're accustomed to them now. The unmistakable qualities of a heat-wave growing season, from early bud-break to a harvest that occurs weeks before usual, are no longer surprising in 21st Century Europe. We experience them on our sweltering summer trips across the Atlantic, then taste them in the bottle after the wines are released.

But 25 years ago, as the summer of 1982 unfolded, winemakers in Spain's Rioja region were still concerned about sourcing ripe grapes. Most large-volume producers – and there were few if any small producers in Rioja at that time – owned vineyards or vineyard contracts in all three of the area's viticultural zones, and often in numerous sub-zones within them. That spread of grape sources, uncommon anywhere else in the world besides Champagne, served as insurance against the vicissitudes of a typical vintage. If Rioja Alta's grapes were dodgy, spoiled perhaps by excessive August rain, it was likely that some of the vineyards in Rioja Alavesa fared better. If Rioja Alavesa was hit by hail or a cold snap, the Garnacha of Rioja Baja would prove vital to making serviceable wine.

"Ripeness was the issue then," says Isaac Muga. "Such heat wasn't normal." A partner and the winemaker at the family-owned Bodegas Muga, he remembers the summer of 1982 as the hottest he'd encountered. It was the first time he remembers grapes in the northernmost areas of the Rioja attaining true ripeness. How much have conditions changed? "Today," he says, "that's the best place to plant."

In that sense, 1982 was the first of Rioja's modern vintages. "It was the beginning of the crazy climate we have now," says Javier Salamero, Marqués de Riscal's enologist, and a minority shareholder in the winery. And Contino's Jesús Madrazo, who wasn't yet a teenager in 1982 but already had started tasting beside his father, sees that vintage as the dawn of Rioja's technological era. "By 1982, wineries were cleaner," he says. "Pneumatic presses were in use, and stainless-steel tanks, and controlled fermentation. All the things we take for granted now, they were new then."

Yet in other ways, 1982 stands as the climax of an earlier time, the last superior vintage in which Rioja was made in a style that aficionados from Hemingway to Franco would have recognized.

In 1982, a significant percentage of white Viura grapes was still routinely blended into the Tempranillo at most wineries, along with some combination of Garnacha Tinta, Graciano and Mazuelo, just as it had been for a century. Wine was aged primarily in old barrels, since the vast majority of properties couldn't afford to buy new ones annually. And it was aged a long time, as long as four years.

Tellingly, too, 1982 was the last great vintage in which the region's best grapes were earmarked for Gran Reservas, not single-vineyard cuvees or high-concept blends. By the time Rioja's governing Consejo Regulador graded another vintage "Excellent" 12 years later, Marqués de Riscal's Barón de Chirel was in the marketplace, boutique wineries had started to appear from Logroño to Haro, and the Spanish wine revolution had begun.

Accordingly, it seemed important on this 25th anniversary of the 1982s for me to revisit the vintage and the wines. I wanted to know how its Reservas and Gran Reservas were evolving. And I was curious to learn how winemakers and winery executives believe the uniformly richer, darker-colored, and fruitier wines that are emerging

from the most recent superb vintages in Rioja, 2001 and 2004, are likely to have evolved by the time they reach 25 years old in the late 2020s. I wondered if we should be celebrating these 1982s now not merely as textbook examples of well-aged Rioja, standout wines from the latest fine vintage to achieve full maturity, but as perhaps the last examples of their kind we are likely to encounter.



On my recent visit, I tasted nearly two dozen of the 1982s, mostly bottles in perfect condition that hadn't ever left their subterranean caches. I found many superb wines, classics of their genre: wines that shared attributes with older Bordeaux and – especially – Burgundy, but retained an essential Spanishness. I also tasted thin, weedy wines that had lost their fruit without gaining a compensating complexity. I came to understand that in 1982, just as today, viticulture and winemaking were the determining factors for the quality of the finished product. Many of the wines that disappointed to me today, I had a hunch, also would have disappointed in their youth.

Even the best of those wines seemed like the product of a different time, which shouldn't be surprising. The 25 years have been epochal in the Spanish wine industry. The 1982 Muga Gran Reserva, for example, hit the market in 1990, which was before Alvaro Palacios had released a single wine, before Peter Sissick had harvested the first grape for his Dominio de Pingus, before a single Alta Expresión Rioja had shown up on the shelves of an El Corte Inglés (Spain's ubiquitous department stores). Then, that Muga wine utilized just 10 percent new oak, all of it American. Barrels had an average age of about six years. The wine consisted of 75 percent Tempranillo, augmented by five percent of Graciano, slightly less than that of Mazuelo – and nearly 20 percent of Viura. No wonder the wine was already translucent, with an orange-tinted rim, on release!

Tasting that Muga today is like coming across a Depression-era issue of National Geographic at a yard sale. The size and format is the same, the range of articles on distant places and exotic tribes seems familiar, but its smell, its feel, and most everything else about it appears utterly dated, a product of the distant past. It is of interest more as a sociological artifact than a source of pleasure. In the same way, the '82 Muga informs more than it delights. "It wasn't until 1985 that we started to change our wines," Isaac Muga explains. "More structure, more body. Stricter selection. Better enology. Better equipment. Looking back at 1982, I'd say it was a miracle that wine came out at all."

At Marqués de Riscal, a half-hour drive away in Elciego, changes already had begun by 1982. In 1980, the winery had stopped co-fermenting the white grapes with the red and started earmarking cuvees made from old vines from the rest for use in the most important wines. Already the winery was looking toward quality and away from volume, a philosophy that would manifest itself at the end of the decade in the decision to make no wines below the Reserva level. But it wasn't until 1985 that a stronger selection of grapes started to be made, and the first sorting table at the winery didn't appear until 1994. By then,

the 1986 Barón de Chirel had been released as the first new-concept Rioja.

Riscal's wines, which in some vintages contained more Cabernet Sauvignon than Tempranillo, are famously long-lived. I recently tasted the 1945, 1947, 1956 and 1964, and all but the 1947 remained glorious. The 1982 is firmly on that same aging plateau that can last the better part of a century. Production that year was small, some 30,000 fewer bottles than a typical vintage of some 120,000, "and when you make only a little wine," Salamero says, "it had better be good." The 1982 Gran Reserva was remarkably good on release, and it remains so to the present day.

Viñedos Contino was only eight years old in 1982. At the time, it was one of the few Rioja bodegas that used all estate grapes, so its wines tended to be less consistent than the mass producers that sculpted a house style out of a range of raw materials. Contino's pocket of the appellation, just outside Logroño, received almost no rain that summer – 243 milliliters per square meter as opposed to the regular 414 milliliters. Nearly always, such strain on the vines will produce superior wine.

Despite that, and the official categorization of the vintage as "Excellent" by the Consejo Regulador, when the 1982 Contino Reserva emerged into the market it was perceived as a somewhat less important younger brother of the 1981, which had arrived with great fanfare. Month after month, comments in the winery's guest log confirmed that opinion. But slowly, as time passed, opinions started to change. "Nowadays, 1982 is incredible," says Madrazo, Contino's winemaker and the son of the founder of the estate. "It is still going up in quality, whereas 1981 has reached its maximum point and is beginning to decline." As a wine for the long-term, Contino's 1982 is now considered vastly superior. At least in that zone of Rioja, it turns out the Consejo Regulador was right.

Tasting CVNE's 1982 Contino and Viña Real side by side, it's possible to capture Spanish enological history in a snapshot. The Viña Real Gran Reserva smells like dried cherries and looks like five-year-old Burgundy. In its essence, it is a modern wine. Its fruit is gone now, but its tannic structure and an alcoholic kick remain, as though the winemaker at the time didn't quite know how to handle the heat. "It's a 'Wow!' wine," Madrazo says, and I can't disagree, yet I wonder if it will ever fully round into form as a mature bottling.

The Contino, a Reserva-level wine, is already fully evolved, all its reds gone to orange. In my mouth, it seemed even older than the Marqués de Riscal 1956 I'd tasted earlier in the day. But the wine retains enough acidic zing to keep it exciting, and its flavor profile fits with the great old Riojas of my past. With those two wines before me over the course of a long conversation, I reached for the Contino again and again. I felt an emotional tie to it that I didn't get from the Viña Real. Each bottle of wine that old shows different characteristics – but on that occasion, at least, it was the wine I enjoyed more.

If Spanish wine has changed fundamentally over the years since that 1982 vintage, it only mirrors the changes in

Eight great 1982 Riojas:

Contino Reserva – A delightful wine. Fully orange on the rim, but still brings enough zing to the mouth to give counterpoint to the sweet fruit. Perhaps the most expressive of the '82s I tasted. Made from 85 percent Tempranillo, 10 percent Garnacha, and a bit of Mazuelo and Graciano.

La Rioja Alta 890 – Still cherry-red, with only a little aging on the rim, this wine appears to not yet have reached its peak. There's a sophistication here that identifies it as world-class, and a persistence that speaks to well-selected grapes and superb winemaking. Firm, still tannic, with lovely secondary flavors and aromas as it opens.

La Rioja Alta 904 – A complete wine. Smells like old Bordeaux – is there really no Cabernet Sauvignon here? – with a softness in the mouth that's still backed by firm tannins. Not quite as exciting as the 890, but there's plenty more evolution to come.

Bodegas Corral Gran Reserva – A revelation from a bodega that's seldom grouped with these others as Rioja's best. Less nobility than most of the wines here, but absolutely irresistible in the mouth. Time isn't on its side, but the sweet fruit and soft tannins have hit their peak.

Viña Ardanza Reserva – Cranberries on the nose, and a similar bittersweetness on the palate, but a delightful wine driven by leather and spice more than fruit. Nearing the end of its drinking window, but will remain lovely for the next 2-3 years.

Marqués de Riscal Reserva – A big orange band on the rim announces a fully evolved wine, and the nose – all dust and orange peel – confirms the notion. Serious and elegant in the mouth, with more balsamic notes than fruit, but enough stuffing to stand up to a hearty meal. Not fading anytime soon.

Montecillo Gran Reserva – From its color (darker than many of these other wines were on release) and the intensity of its flavor, I'd guess this was a '94, not an '82. But it's at an awkward stage, not ready to relinquish its fruit, not yet evolved into a wine that offers much else. Long finish, which bodes well for the future.

Martínez Bujanda Gran Reserva – Smells and tastes like fresh cherry juice. Charming and understated, if a bit drying on the palate. Would perform even better with food.



Spanish culture as a whole. Perhaps no country has benefitted more from a united Europe. The standard of living today of urban Spaniards is equal to that of city-dwellers throughout Western Europe, and who would have predicted that in 1982?

Such economic success has given bodegas the luxury of buying expensive new equipment which can't help but push their enologists into modern times. New barrels are now the norm in most bodegas, at least for wines above the Crianza level. That's possible because the era of flooding the marketplace with millions and millions of bottles has passed. With Spaniards drinking less wine nowadays, Rioja's wineries are more interested now in quality than quantity. "As a region, we realized the road we were on was going to take us to bad places," Muga says. "Before, we sold bad wine and good wine. Today, people only sell good wine."

If the conditions of 1982 were replicated today, nearly everyone in Rioja believes, the wine produced would be decidedly different. And in this case, different means better. "Stricter selection," Muga says. "Better viticulture because we've learned that vines have to suffer. And it can't be forgotten that the new generation of enologists is 100 times more prepared than we were in the previous epoch. They've studied enology and viticulture. They've visited different countries, even worked there. They understand what the world is doing."

That wide exposure has engendered a new philosophy, which matches changes in the world marketplace. "Everything is changing," says La Rioja Alta enologist Julio Sáenz, "including the style of eating and the wines that people want with their food." Stylistic changes are evident even in wines such as Muga's Prado Enea that are meant to imitate the old style of Rioja – and so evident in Muga wines such as Torre Muga and Aro that the wines barely seem recognizable as Riojas. Today's Prado Enea, Muga agrees, has more volume in the mouth than the 1982 Gran Reserva ever did. And the Aro could pass for a densely-packed Ribera del Duero, even a new-world Syrah.

Almost uniformly, high-concept wines from around the appellation use French oak, mostly new. Tools such as micro-oxygenation and reverse osmosis are at the disposal of the winemakers. Bodegas charge as much as \$250 per bottle for these wines, so they earmark the best grapes of each vintage to make them. And that, Madrazo believes, may be the biggest change of all. "Why don't you find great Gran Reservas nowadays?" he asks. "And why does every winery have this marvelous Alta Expresión wine?" Part of it is the style, but perhaps all the best grapes are going into those wines. They have to come from somewhere."



Aging habits have changed, too. Unlike the 1982s, which were held for release until they were perceived to be ready, the best of today's Riojas are put on pallets and hauled away shortly after bottling. When wines are released early, they tend to be drunk early; whatever their aging arc might be, few bottles of today's Riojas seem destined to live to their 25th year. "Winemakers complain about that," says María José López de Heredia, whose family still runs its Haro bodega much as it did in 1982. "But if you think your wine is being drunk in a moment when infanticide is being committed, don't release it."

Her winery is one of the few that still holds wines until their prime. The current vintage of its *Viña Bosconia*, remarkably enough, is the 1981. López de Heredia wonders if the rest of Rioja retains enough institutional memory to be able to make wines like that even if it desired to. "So many new wineries have been born in the last 25 years," she says. "Of the 600 wineries in Rioja now, there might be 200 or even more than didn't even exist then. Are the winemakers at these wineries keen on making wines to age, or are they keen on making wines to be drunk soon? I think we know the answer."

For all those reasons, wines such as these noble 1982s may be gone forever. On my way out of Rioja, I ate lunch with the extraordinarily successful winery owners Marcos and Miguel Angel Eguren in Fuenmayor. Over *jamón de pata negra* and *croquetas*, I tasted three of their new-wave Riojas, the latest vintages of small-production gems La Nieta, Finca El Bosque and Amancio, one more rich and dense than the next. I had spent the previous few days drinking the 82s, so these wines came as a jolt, but they were undeniably delicious. Yet I couldn't help wondering if such wines would ever attain the liling quality of their predecessors. Not that anyone appears too worried about that: "Drink them now," is the consensus opinion, followed by. "We'll worry about tomorrow then. Surely there will be great wines to drink then, too."

It is undoubtedly a sound philosophy, an eminently logical way to approach a future that is uncertain for all of us, let alone a fragile bottle of wine. And as I walked out of the restaurant with the long finish of the Finca El Bosque 2004 lingering in my mouth, it struck me that Spanish wine is better right now than it has ever been. Wines from these extraordinary cuvees to the humblest *vino joven* are cleaner, fresher, more consistent, and of a higher quality. So why couldn't I shake the longing I had for wines such as those 1982s, inconsistent though they are, that we've known and enjoyed and will never come again?

Journalist Bruce Schoenfeld, who writes frequently about Spain and Spanish wines, is a regular contributor to *Travel & Leisure*, *Cigar Aficionado*, *Sports Illustrated*, and many other national and international publications.

CALATAYUD : READY FOR HER CLOSE-UP

© Mick Rock/Cephas

By Doug Frost

For a country with thousands of years of wine growing, Spain offers a curiously incomplete story. Rioja, Spain's benchmark red wine region, once seemed to offer wines carved in stone, but there is no longer anything consistent about Rioja's style; it may be light and fruity, powerful and dense, or complex and earthy from its long sojourn in barrels. Ribera del Duero today is ascendant; twenty years ago, only Vega Sicilia was internationally acclaimed. In 1985 Alejandro Fernández of Pesquera was despairing of a future for his winery. Today his empire stretches far beyond Ribera del Duero.

Twenty-five years ago, nothing interesting was happening in Priorat and few had even heard of the region. Today all that has changed in Priorat and these other wine regions, and the rest of the country is in tumult. Sixty-five DO's now dot the landscape. Once ignored areas in the Meseta, Spain's Central Plateau, and along its southern coast are producing surprising if not shockingly good wines. And with each of these DO's and Vinos de la Tierra, the style of wine is in flux. The best wines may yet await discovery; they might not have even been created.

Calatayud – awaiting discovery?

Books and newsletters rarely mention Calatayud. When they do, it's often conflated with other regions of Aragón, such as Cariñena and Campo de Borja. Cariñena and Calatayud share a thirty-mile border, and both share the Garnacha grape on limestone soils, as well as elevation levels of fifteen hundred feet. But the wines of these two neighboring regions are very different. Cariñena's wines are rich and powerful; they might be fifteen percent or higher in alcohol. Calatayud isn't quite as much of a heavyweight, and some of the vineyards crawl to elevations of nearly three thousand feet. And, perhaps most importantly, the rather uniform soils of Cariñena are replaced by something far more varied.

Calatayud's soils are limestone, clay and sand, much like Cariñena, but they harbor quartz

and chunks of slate. Slate has mysterious powers in places such as the Priorat, the Mittel Mosel in Germany, and in Portugal's Douro Valley, where Port is made. Whether it is the impact of slate, or some combination with other soil constituents, there is a distinctive stony and dusty aroma and finish to the wines of Calatayud.

Unique Soil Characteristics

In Burgundy, the northern Rhone Valley, Champagne, Germany's Mosel, and Priorat, among other areas, the impact of the soil forms a major part of the organoleptic identifiers of the best wines. Many people are willing to pay a great deal of money for the most distinctive wines of these regions. I'm confident that, at some point, people will begin to realize that Calatayud offers unique soil characteristics that cannot be found in other areas. When combined with skillful winemaking, the elevated spots in Calatayud, in particular, can offer a unique experience. Perhaps the wine buying public may seek out those wines and the current affordable prices for Calatayud may be history.

But for now, Calatayud is a place for absurdly affordable Garnacha, as well as a few Tempranillos. Commensurate with the prices, the style of wines is soft and fruity. Carbonic maceration may not be the norm, but whole cluster fermentation can create the same vibrant style associated with carbonic maceration.

Still, much of the winemaking is nearly old school: cement vats with epoxy liners outstrip the region's stainless steel tanks. Micro-bullage (micro-oxidation) is being employed to good effect in combination with oak chips. Snobs may turn their noses up at these techniques; many of those snobs are unaware that they drink and enjoy other countries' wines made by these methods.

With chips more common than barrels, prices in Calatayud offer exceptional value. Ironically, Cariñena's prices often surpass Calatayud's; the high-octane wines Cariñena can produce from

its lower elevation and rather hotter vineyards are celebrated by some of our more easily seduced wine critics.

Developing Great Wines

Alcohol may be everything to some people; southern French wine producers have shopped in Calatayud for a century or more in search of cheaper and more powerful blending wines. When phylloxera struck in Aragón in late 19th century, it was the Languedoc-Roussillon producers who offered rootstocks with which to replant the Aragón vineyards. It was hardly a selfless act; they were making certain that cheap, high alcohol alternatives would remain available.

Garnacha has always suffered from its success at creating high alcohol levels to prop up lesser wines. Since it functioned so well as a blender, as many have long believed, then it must be good for nothing more than blending.

The best known versions are cheap; that's the only word for them. Labels such as Viña Alarba, Altogrado, Esteban Castejón, Las Rocas San Alejandro, Bodegas y Viñedos del Jalón, Bodegas Virgen de la Sierra, Baltasar Gracián, Fígaro, Bodegas Albada, Yasa, Sipacha, Tres Ojos, and Bodegas Zabrin can offer remarkable value. That is to be expected; Calatayud's historical purpose is to make other wines taste better and its heritage has been to sell for less than the wines merit.

But exports have more than tripled in the last decade. Plantings of Tempranillo are increasing. Though Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah are popping up as well, Garnacha's dominance is probably not in peril. There is a new quality category called Calatayud Superior that will designate limited yield wines made from Garnacha vines of at least 50 years in age. And with this landscape, soils, environs and the right intent, even greater wines are likely to soon be coaxed from its best sites.

Doug Frost is one of the top wine and spirits professionals in the country. In 1991, he passed the rigorous Master Sommelier examination; two years later he became America's 8th Master of Wine.



THE GLOBAL PLATE: INDOCHINE

Exotic, Healthy Cuisine a Blissful Match with Spanish Wines

By Eunice Fried

The first image that greeted me was of another place in another time. A mural of giant banana leaves across one wall, banana-designed wallpaper on another. Tiled floor. Palm tree. Rattan. Ceiling fans. A tropical décor with a louche touch of French colonial chic.

Indochine opened its doors in 1984 when Vietnamese cuisine was still relatively rare in New York. Here was a restaurant that featured authentic Vietnamese dishes accented with the gastronomic influences of the colonial French. The French left Vietnam in 1954. Their culinary touches lingered on.

Tastes change and fashion is fickle but 23 years later, not only is Indochine still a draw but more than two dozen more Vietnamese restaurants have opened in New York. Why? Partly because with its medley of textures, contrasting flavors, freshness, exoticism and balance, Vietnamese cuisine is strikingly appealing. And partly because it is one of the healthiest cuisines in the world.

Vietnam is a long, thin country. In the north, there is the Red River Delta surrounding Hanoi. The south, home of Ho Chi Minh (formerly Saigon), has the fertile Mekong River Delta. And in the center is the mountainous spine that ties the country together.

With its long coastline along the South China Sea, fresh seafood plays a major role in the Vietnamese diet. So do fresh fruits and vegetables. Herbs and spices are extremely important, from Asian basil, mint and ginger to coriander, chili peppers and garlic. Lime is prevalent. And lemongrass, a tropical grass that adds a lemony tang to dishes, is ubiquitous across the country.

"Our foods are fresh and flavorful," Huy Chi Le, a co-owner of Indochine, says. Mr. Le comes from Saigon as do many of the dishes on Indochine's menu. "And they are fragrant because they're based on fresh herbs. But even with these many herbs, Vietnamese food is lighter and more subtle than other Asian cui-

sines – more so, for example, than Thai food." The Vietnamese stir-fry, steam, simmer, braise and grill their foods.

"And they use very little oil even when they stir-fry," Mr. Le notes. What they do use often, he explains, is nuoc mam. "It is a fish sauce, made from a blend of fermented anchovies and salt; we use it to flavor foods the way the Chinese use soy sauce."

It is in the South of Vietnam that the French left their deepest gastronomic imprint introducing for example, their love of fine cuts of beef and other meats and of course, wine.

Just as the French once brought wine to Vietnam, the Vietnamese have now brought their food to virtually every country of the world. And they have discovered that many of the world's wines, not only French, are ideal companions with their cuisine.

"I find Spanish wines in particular go very well with our foods," says Jean Luc Lamettrie, the man responsible for Indochine's winelist. "They have a complexity and spiciness that make them interesting. Vietnamese dishes are usually a combination of many items, many ingredients, many herbs and spices, and Spanish wines can pull these parts together; yet they don't overpower. That's why they go so well with Vietnamese food."

For example, he points out, Indochine's Spicy Shrimp sautéed with long beans, diced fresh tomato and Asian basil is an excellent match with Verdejo, the premier white grape of Rueda, which can deliver full aromatic flavors, particularly of apples and melon as the restaurant's Viña Sanzo 2005 does. "It has good acidity, like Sauvignon Blanc," Jean Luc says, "but it is rounder, softer, more spring-like than Sauvignon Blanc."

When Glazed Duck Breast is served, with long stem bok choy and a light baked Vidalia onion broth, Jean Luc suggests a 2003 Tempranillo and Garnacha blend from Javier

Asensio, Navarra. "The wine has good acidity and yet is not too aggressive. It can carry the slight sweetness of the onion. It marries well with this dish." And it can stand up to the richness of the duck.

Matching a wine to Spicy Beef Salad can be a challenge. A dish of thinly sliced filet of beef with Asian basil, mint, lemongrass, crisp shallots and a spicy oil-free dressing, it is a strong-flavored, aggressive and complex dish. But an elegant, savory Tempranillo-based Rioja with its own complexity can easily master it, Jean Luc feels. His choice: Lacrimus Crianza 2002, Pago del Encinar, from Rioja.

The French influence in Vietnamese dishes is especially apparent in Sliced Seared Filet Mignon served with grilled baby corn, carrots and asparagus. With it comes Vietnamese saté, an intricate sauce that combines many ingredients including peanuts, sesame seeds, coriander, ginger, scallion, nuoc mam, and myriad Asian spices, so well blended and balanced that no one flavor overtakes another. Here, Jean Luc suggests an equally well-balanced wine, the fine, aromatic 2003 Ribera del Duero of Valsanzo Selección, which, he says, can easily stand in for a Bordeaux.

Fresh, flavorful, French-accented Vietnamese dishes. Fragrant, well-made, high quality Spanish wines. Good to eat, good to drink, good for each other and good for us. That's nirvana. That's bliss.

Eunice Fried is wine columnist of *Global Traveler*; director of *Wines on the Wing*, the annual international airline wine competition; wine editor of *TravelClassics.com* and a regular contributor to *Preferred Lifestyles*. A frequent lecturer and judge, she is the recipient of the *Confrérie du Tastevin* "Wine Writer of the Year" award, *Wines & Vines* "Outstanding Wine Writer" award and *The World of Wine* "Writer of the Year" award.

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Photos:
top: David Seigal
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About the author:

Pameladevi Govinda lives in Manhattan. She has contributed to Decanter, Spain Gourmetour, Vibe, CITY, Zink, Beverage Dynamics and Cheers. Her travels have taken her to Spain where her favorite places are Madrid, Barcelona, Rioja and Seville. Her most recent memorable food experience was a simple, succulent and freshly cooked tortilla at Bodegas Izadi.

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Mercat: A Taste of Barcelona in the Heart of New York City

By Pameladevi Govinda

The best seat in the house at Mercat, New York's latest Spanish gastro establishment, is at the large marble bar upfront or at the chef's counter, where you can watch enticing ingredients sizzling *a la plancha*.

Inspired by the food stalls at the markets of Barcelona, Mercat meaning "market" in Catalan, lives up to its name. With an emphasis on fresh seafood, hearty meats, piquant flavors and authentic staples such as patatas bravas and a deliciously rich, inky plate of fideua negra [noodles tossed with cuttlefish], Mercat offers New Yorkers a taste of Barcelona. We spoke with Co-Executive Chef, David Seigal (who works with Chef Ryan Lowder) and wine director, Carl Wiseheart about the concept behind the restaurant and discovered that both have had a thing for Spain long before coming to Mercat.

Pameladevi: As the chef at Mercat, tell me about your connection to Spain.

David: My interest in Spain started in high school. I did an exchange program and stayed with a family in Gijón, in the Asturias province of Spain. I also majored in Spanish at college.

Pam: Do you have any food memories from Gijón?

David: The mother of the family I stayed with would cook lunch and dinner everyday and she was an amazing cook. I remember her making paella, even though paella isn't really from that region, and it had a blue lobster in it. I'd never seen a blue lobster before. Other than that she made great sepia and Fabada Asturiana, consisting of fabes (large white beans) cooked in a stock with morcilla, chorizo and usually a small slab of bacon. It's a delicious, hearty, smoky stew.

Pam: What is the idea behind the food at Mercat?

David: The concept behind this restaurant and the menu is to serve a lot of traditional food that you would eat at the Boqueria in Barcelona. It's a large market place that houses food stalls where you can eat. It's all very simple, mostly seafood cooked on the plancha. It is a two-fold concept here at Mercat really. Number one: we want it to be market cuisine and number two: we want it to be as representative as possible of Catalan cuisine.

Pam: How would you describe the food of Catalonia?

David: Very elemental. It relies heavily on olive oil, garlic, fresh seafood, salt and peppers. The seafood there is so fresh because they're right on the Mediterranean so the less you do to it, the better. A little olive oil, garlic, salt, maybe some chopped parsley and lemon juice and that's it. Some of the food is hearty; they eat a lot of beans, dried fruits, nuts and different salads. It's very Mediterranean.

Pam: How are you translating that way of eating in New York City?

David: Part of the excitement of this concept is that we are not only a Spanish restaurant but a Catalan restaurant. I think other places have failed because they try and adapt the dishes too much to New York. We really try and make it as close as possible and do not substitute for the most part. We only use Spanish olive oil, our sardines come from the Mediterranean and we get our shrimp from Spain. Luckily monkfish, which is used a lot there, is available here and we get that locally. There are a few exceptions – we do offer a hangar steak but the garnish is served with Escalivada, a traditional Catalan mix of roasted eggplant, red peppers and onions.

Pam: I noticed that the menu was split into two parts. Can you explain?

David: It is divided up between traditional Catalan classics, and *cua de mercat*, which translates into market cuisine and represents dishes using Catalan garnishes and flavors around seasonal ingredients. These are dishes that you might not necessarily find abroad. However, elements of the dishes reflect Catalan flavors and ingredients, using what is fresh from the market. This might be centered around a protein, or a vegetable or starch, for example, Arroz Bomba (a Denomination of Origin rice from Valencia) with a local fresh fish.

Pam: Let's talk about the wine list now. Carl, tell us what the main focus is here.

Carl: Every DO in Catalonia is represented on our list with a strong focus on Priorato since those wines are so well known and I personally love the wines of Priorato. It's difficult to find more affordable wines from this region but we've basically avoided the five big names in favor of more value-driven wines, not necessarily inexpensive but certainly wines that offer good value.

Pam: Are there any lesser-known regions on your list that you are excited about?

Carl: There's lots of good Tempranillo wines to be found in Navarra, Cigales and there's great wine coming out of Toro and Jumilla too. Not many people know about Bierzo and the Mencía grape. If someone likes Pinot Noir then they will probably like Mencía because it has that sort of elegance and body.

Pam: Small plates and tapas lend themselves to by-the-glass selections. What do you offer to diners that do not want to commit to a bottle?

Carl: I had to have two cava by the glass. One of them is a Blanc de Blanc and the other is a more



unusual cava that is a one hundred percent Pinot Noir rosé by a producer called Avinyo. Both are from Penedés. I offer five *rosado* wines by the glass, which not a lot of people are doing. I may cut down to two or three as the season cools. I've found a lot of interesting Spanish rosé has become available to us in the last four or five years. The Italians are nowhere near comparable when it comes to rosé. I'd say the Spanish are on par with the south of France in that respect.

Pam: Was it a challenge to find wines that stand up to the assertive flavors coming out of the kitchen?

Carl: The food here is solid. When you're doing food that is that flavorful and heavy on the salt and peppers you definitely want food friendly

wines. I've tried to develop the list to be compatible with that, as they do in Europe. The local wines always go with the local food.

Pam: When I recently visited Mercat, it was one of those brutal New York summer days, with temperatures soaring in the 90s. You offered me a thoroughly refreshing glass of *rosat* (Catalan for *rosé*) that had a slight prickle to it. It really hit the spot. What was it?

Carl: It was Pinord Reynal *rosé* from Penedés and is made with garnacha and tempranillo. The fizz is carbon dioxide that is produced during the primary fermentation of residual sugars from the grapes. Wines made this way that are naturally sparkling are known as either *vino de aguja* or pearl wines.

Pam: This is a question for David. I spotted you drinking white wine from a squat glass pitcher with a long spout, which you guzzled from directly with your head tilted back. There was an impressive distance between the spout and your mouth. What gives?

David: It's called a *porrón* and it's a traditional Catalan vessel used to drink wine. It is usually shared at a table among friends. We usually drink cava out of it in the kitchen!



Painting of the Mercat bar by Anna Maria Baeza.

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ELSACACORCHOS (SMALL SIPS OF BIG NEWS)



Rioja Roundtable

On April 24, 2007, wine writer **Chris Fleming** organized a roundtable discussion and tasting dinner which brought together many of Rioja's leading winemakers. The event was held at the smart, modern **Las Duelas** restaurant inside the historic **Hotel Los Agustinos** in Haro, La Rioja. Attending were: **Miguel Merino of Bodegas Miguel Merino; Jorge Muga of Bodegas Muga; Telmo Rodríguez; Jesús Madrazo of CVNE, which includes Contino, Imperial and Viña Real; María José López de Heredia of R. López de Heredia, Miguel Ángel de Gregorio of Finca Allende, Luis Valentín of Valenciso, Gonzalo Lainez of Roda and Luis Alberto Martínez of Bodegas Fernando Remirez de Ganuza.** These winemakers were chosen because they're at the forefront of terroir and winemaking in Rioja. The discussion covered terroir, the history of Rioja and quality wines, the impact of global warming, the U.S. market and how it perceives Rioja wines, the Rioja Consejo Regulador's fresh approach to marketing the dazzling array of Rioja wines and the future. As one participant noted, it was the general feeling of the group that now is one of the best moments for Rioja. The region has winemakers and bodega owners with great passion, as well as quality grapes to work with, advanced vinification techniques, and an industry with solid experience.

Wide World of Wines Weekend

Wide World of Wines principals **Elliott Staren** and **Hugo Linares** hosted an exciting Spanish wine weekend in Washington, DC. On June 8th, the **Third Annual Spanish Tasting** was held at the Residence of the Spanish Ambassador. This was a unique Spanish tasting of top quality importers including **Aurelio Cabestrero's Grapes of Spain, Chris Cnaan's Europvin, Folio Fine Wine Partners, Elite Wines and Gonzales Byass Limited Edition very rare Soleras.** On June 9th, the **Winemaker's Dinner at Café Atlántico** featured winemakers who visited tables of the many Spanish wine aficionados who attended. For more information, visit www.wideworldofwines.com.

Wine Academy of Spain and the Society of Wine Educators Traveling Seminars

As a follow-up to the successful debut tour that began in Monterrey, California last June, the **Wine Academy of Spain** and the **Society of Wine Educators** are hosting a traveling, in-depth, two-and-a-half-day seminar series on the **Wines of Spain**. The series will run in Las Vegas, New Orleans, Miami and Texas. For more information and dates for this resume-building program, please visit www.societyofwineeducators.org.

Global Warming & Wine, February 15 & 16, 2008

In its second edition, the **International Conference on Climate Change & Wine** will analyze what is climate change and its impact on the wine industry. The leading world experts, including **Al Gore**, will gather in Barcelona for two days to conduct seminars, lectures and discussion forums on current issues such as the impact and repercussions that climate change are having on the wine industry in the most important wine producing regions of the world. For more information, please visit www.thewineacademy.es.

Intervin, Alimentaria's Wine Exhibition

Alimentaria, the International Food and Beverage Exhibition, will take place next spring from March 10-14, 2008, in Barcelona. In this edition, **Intervin**, the exhibition devoted to wines and spirits, will bring together more than 1250 world-renowned wineries in 32,000 m² of exhibition space. To make the exhibition's commercial activity even more dynamic, Intervin will play host to **Vinorum**, with an extensive program of educational and tasting opportunities. For information, please visit www.alimentaria-bcn.com.





Fenavin Trade Fair Exceeds Expectations

More than 1000 wineries from Spain participated in the **National Trade Fair on Wine, Fenavin 2007**, that took place in Ciudad Real, Spain, from May 7-10. Practically all of Spain's Denominations of Origin could be found at the fourth edition of this event. More than 415 international purchasers from 32 countries attended. The next edition will take place in May 2009. For further information, visit their website at www.fenavin.com.

Duero/Douro: Celebrating a River Of Wine

Does a river stay the same regardless of which country it flows through and what name it is called? In recent years, the vineyards and wineries along the Duero in Spain and the Douro, as it is called downstream in Portugal, have flourished as producers of world-class table wines. Indeed, the Duero/Douro today is arguably the greatest wine river in Europe. In that spirit, a couple of years ago five Portuguese table winemakers, who call themselves the **Douro Boys**, invited seven Spanish colleagues to hold joint wine tastings at the Spanish embassy in Portugal, then at the Portuguese embassy in Spain. Next, the group – which is so informal it lacks a name – took its show on the road, first to Vienna and then to New York during the fall of 2006, to show the trade an unusual display of great wines and international cooperation. "Basically, it's a group of great friends with no rules," says **Javier Zaccagnini** of **Aalto** winery in the Ribera del Duero. "Once a year, we plan to go somewhere and show our wines." The other Spanish wineries are **Cillar de Silos** and **Pingus** from Ribera del Duero, **Belondrade y Lurton** from Rueda, **Leda** and **Mauro** from Tudela del Duero, **San Román** and **Bienvenida** from Toro, and **Telmo Rodríguez** representing multiple appellations.

~ Roger Morris

Sherry Cocktail Competition Officially Commences



The search for **America's Best Sherry Cocktail** was announced by **akawinegeek**, who heads the campaign for Sherry wines in the US. Competitors must submit a recipe using any style of Sherry from one of the following producers: **Domecq**, **Gonzalez Byass**, **Lustau**, **Sandeman**, or **Williams & Humbert**. They also need to explain when to serve and how to prepare the cocktail, and provide a photo of the drink (the winning contribution for 2005, **La Perla**, developed by **Jacques Bezuidenhout** of **Tres Agaves**, San Francisco, is shown at left). The prize will be cash and an all expense paid trip to Jerez, Spain. The deadline for entries is Sept. 15, 2007. For further information visit www.enjoysherry.com.

information visit www.enjoysherry.com.

Great Match Wine & Tapas Tour Showcases New Releases this Fall

Wines from Spain continues its annual **Great Match Wine & Tapas** tour this fall with tastings in NYC, Chicago and Miami, featuring over 200 new releases from more than 75 wine producers, which represent a broad variety of Spain's wine regions. The Great Match is the nation's largest walk-around Spanish wine tasting event. The New York City event, scheduled for Sept. 20, is the only one open to the public as well as to trade. Net proceeds from this tasting will benefit **City Harvest**. The Chicago event will also include a seminar led by noted writer **Bruce Schoenfeld** titled "**25 Years of Wines from Spain: Spain's Brightest New Stars**". For further information, please visit www.greatmatch.org.

Spanish Wine Classes in NYC at Instituto Cervantes

The **Instituto Cervantes**, the **Spanish Cultural Center of New York**, located in an historic building on East 49th St. in NYC, has a superb offering of wine-tasting classes this year. These classes are a great place to discover the wines of Spain and keep pace with the latest developments. Whether you are a wine novice, a connoisseur, or even a wine professional, Instituto Cervantes has a class for you. The program runs from September through June. For further information, visit their website at www.cervantes.org or call 212-308-7720.

Create the Unexpected with Albariño Wine Contest

Amateur cooks across the country have been invited to put their culinary talents and **Albariño's** food-friendliness to the test by submitting their favorite original recipe for this year's wine and food pairing contest. For further inspiration and to enter the contest, log on to the Rías Baixas campaign's website (www.riasbaixaswines.com). Three top entries will each receive a case of **Rías Baixas** Albariño wines and one grand prize winner will receive a gift card from **Williams-Sonoma** valued at \$1,000.

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POSTMARK: RIBEIRO

Treixadura's Place in the Sun
By Michael Franz

Ribeiro may be little-known outside of Spain but it is highly valued within, and this high-quality wine producing region is destined to make some real noise in export markets during the next few years. A recent swing through the strikingly beautiful area to visit an exemplary producer, Viña Mein, convinced me that Ribeiro is capable of achieving a greatness for Treixadura akin to what nearby Rías Baixas has achieved with Albariño.

Located in south-central Galicia in a valley formed by the Miño river, Ribeiro lies about 40 miles inland from the Atlantic ocean, with a southern boundary that is only 10 miles above Portugal. Grapes have been grown here at least since the Middle Ages, with most of the vines planted on impressive slopes running up from the Miño, Arnoia and Avia rivers. Many of the slopes are so steep that the vines can only be tended on terraces, which accentuate the impressiveness and beauty of the vineyards. An assortment of red and white grapes is grown, and while both can produce fine wines, the real stars at this point are the whites. As in the Rías Baixas sub-district of O Rosal, which lies just to the west, many of Ribeiro's whites are blends rather than single-variety wines. Albariño is a major grape, but Ribeiro also does very well with Godello, Lado, Loureiro, Torrontes and, especially, Treixadura.

Treixadura is also grown south of the border in Portugal, where it is called Trajadura, but Ribeiro is arguably the world's great sweet spot for the grape. Most vintners in the D.O. (which turns 50 years old this year) lead with Treixadura, though some use Lado for the core of their blends. Loureiro is tough to ripen in the area, and Albariño seems to produce more aromatic wines in Rías Baixas, but Treixadura

appears marvelously suited to growing conditions in Ribeiro. Those conditions combine a bit of humidity from the Atlantic with unusually high temperatures and low rainfall by Galician standards. Treixadura ripens slowly but fully in Ribeiro in most years — exactly the ripening profile that makes for the world's most complex wines — which results from a special synergy between grape and place.

Ribeiro whites based on Treixadura are marked by complex fruit recalling peaches and white melons, along with a subtle floral aroma and a bright, citrus-like tang that provides a refreshing edge. Nuances are often lent by the other grapes involved in a blend, and the region's alluvial and granite-based soils usually contribute interesting mineral notes. These descriptors are well suited to the exemplary Viña Mein 2006, which is a fresh, beautifully balanced wine made from 80% Treixadura, rounded out with dashes of Loureiro, Albariño, Torrontes, Godello, Lado and Albillo. A mineral tinge in the wine's finish is quite notable. When tasting on-site at Viña Mein, it is difficult not to ascribe that mineral character to granite, given that the winery is literally built around a colossal granite boulder.

During my recent visit I discovered that winemaker Ricardo Narruez Collazo also crafts a "Fermentado en Barrica" (barrel fermented) Ribeiro. It is made from the same basic mix of varieties, though from grapes that are the last ones harvested. Having loved Viña Mein's basic bottling for years, I wondered if the oak influence would overwhelm the delicate character of the fruit. Yet the wine was extremely impressive in its balance and restraint, offering yet another indication that Ribeiro is ready to challenge the world's top white wines.

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Michael Franz is a wine writer, educator and consultant based in Washington, D.C. He is editor of Wine Review Online, www.winereviewonline.com.



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