

WINES FROM SPAIN NEWS

Tempranillo:
The King of Spanish Wine
Wines of Rueda: an Ancient
Region Rediscovered
The Global Plate: Mexico
El Taburete: Laiola Restaurant
in San Francisco
Postmark:
Extremadura



88 POINTS

Martín Códax Albariño
2006 Rías Baixas

*"This white shows weight
and focus, with vivid flavors
of green peach, grapefruit,
wet stone and smoke."*

Wine Spectator

Jan 31, 2008



Martín Códax

www.martincodax.com

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Tempranillo's trip to greatness has been a bumpy one at times. Throughout its journey, Spain's own quintessential red variety has evolved and found a home, to critical acclaim, in a number of regions, from historic to ascendant. The common factor in all the regions? A willingness to explore the grape's full potential and adaptability to the place. Doug Frost reports on the history and many faces of this variety. Vinus Williams visited Rueda. Its wines, spearheaded by the Verdejo grape, feel like the new kid on the block for audiences looking for a different voice this part of the ocean. Ironically, the region has been producing wines for centuries and we may be witnessing more a resurrection than a renaissance. It's difficult to imagine a place outside of Mexico where Mexican flavors shine with more intensity and display their complexity with more ease than Frontera Grill. We asked sommelier Jill Gubesch to pair Spanish wines with Mexican food, and were rewarded with a match made in spice heaven. The San Francisco restaurant Laiola won us over right away with its unimposing approach to serving Spanish wines and its refreshing take on Spanish food, presented with a California accent. John M. Ward reports from San Francisco. Our last stop is Extremadura, where local wines are standing out in the company of well-renowned food products, from cheese to pimentón. Gerry Dawes reports.



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TEMPRANILLO: THE KING OF SPANISH WINE

By Doug Frost, MS, MW

Spain loves Tempranillo. There are more acres planted to this grape than to any other grape, except the Airen. But there is a lot less Airen wine by volume than all the wines made from Tempranillo.

Tempranillo is Spain's acknowledged king of wine and has too often been above reproach. But if Tempranillo is to continue as king, which Tempranillo will rule?

Is it the soft and spicy, dried fruits character of old Rioja? Or the massive intensity of some of the new internationally styled Tempranillos from Toro or Ribera del Duero? Despite the historical primacy of Rioja among Spanish wines, Ribera del Duero's most famous estate, Vega Sicilia, whose wines are also produced primarily from Tempranillo (known here as Tinto Fino), still occupies the pinnacle of wine for many Spanish wine lovers and has for a century or so.

But Vega Sicilia is only one estate; Rioja is a one hundred by twenty mile (nearly) contiguous vineyard, as long as you allow for the towns, mountainsides and un-plantable outcrops. Rioja has innumerable great vineyards and wineries. In its own region, Vega Sicilia had no peers until till thirty years ago.

Rioja has been Tempranillo's base of operations since at least the mid-nineteenth century. And Rioja is Tempranillo's most famous expression (we'll ignore for the moment that Rioja has traditionally mixed Tempranillo with a bit of Garnacha and other grapes). During the long night that was the 20th century, and the darkest pre-dawn that was the Franco era, Spain's most significant wine exports were Rioja and Sherry. Sherry was mostly a British fixation; Rioja sold its wares further afield.

Before democracy's arrival, Rioja was sculpted out of long aging in barrel. Even now, iconoclasts such as López de Heredia produce red wines that have slept in barrels for a decade, and white wines and rosés in barrel for nearly as long or longer. Today, that style of wine: mushroomy, soft, even delicate, complex, and perhaps far too funky for some, is no longer the dominant version of the grape.

Producing in the 1790's, the Quintana brothers proposed to improve the wines of the region by

fashioning wine solely from red grapes. At the time, most blended red and white grapes. Spicing your red wine with white grapes was typical in plenty of traditional areas, such as Chianti, even a few decades ago.

The Quintanas also requested to the local authorities to age their wine in barrels, but the authorities looked upon such wild-eyed revolution with disdain. Rioja, like the rest of Spain, offered perfectly drinkable wine from a blend of red and white grapes, and since aging in goat bladders and cow stomachs worked so well, why change now?

Things stayed as they were for another sixty or so years until the questioners included two *marqueses*: the Marqués de Riscal and the Marqués de Murrieta. Something about being powerful and wealthy can alter the outcome of such negotiations and used barrels began to flow from Bordeaux to Rioja, only a short jaunt across the Pyrenees.

Within twenty-five years, the Bordelais had reason to send more than used barrels. Phylloxera struck France. The American-born louse had invaded France's vineyards, and the bug was greedily chomping through Europe's vineyards.

Bordeaux had only just begun to recover from the two scourges of downy and powdery mildew in the 1860's; two fungal American émigrés as well. Unlike mildew, Phylloxera wasn't discouraged by spraying. The only solution was the expensive, time-consuming grafting of American and European vines.

Lots of Bordelais solved the problem by fleeing to Rioja, vines and winemaking methods in tow. Why Rioja? They were already selling wine barrels to Rioja's nascent wineries, now perhaps some time-tested Bordeaux expertise could improve the wines.

And they did. The Bordelais of the late nineteenth century bequeathed to the Riojans the winemaking techniques of their time: and barrels figured prominently in those practices. The idea was simple: if 19th century wines were shockingly tart and tannic, it was because the grapes were harvested unripe. Unripe was good, at least insofar as weather forecasts were spotty: perhaps it would rain tomorrow or at least this weekend. Who knew? Better to pick grapes as soon as possible and make as palatable a wine as possible from them.



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The Bordelais were no more skilled at weather predictions than the Riojans. But they recognized that tart wines could become round, complex and even softer after long slumber in barrel. How long? As long as the wine's fruit could last: for most barrels, that was only a year or two, and those wines were probably little more than common. Yet some wines would soften, gain richness, drop their shrill tartness and grow in stature. Those wines were special. They deserved a special name.

Today we would call those wines *gran reserva*. But nowadays *gran reservas* are rarely aged to that extent. Two-year minimums are all that is required of barrel-aged red *gran reserva* Rioja. The iconoclasts, such as López de Heredia, remind us of a time when great wines were expected to have slumbered in old cellars, so that they could be earthy and, perhaps contradictorily, otherworldly.

Maybe it's ironic that Tempranillo is the lynchpin of the 19th century, aged style of Rioja – the knock against it is that it is too low in acidity and usually that means it doesn't age. But that may also explain its longevity in the region; it might be the most likely to show its softer side, and to do so sooner.

Still, read the wine magazines and tasting journals today and no one enthuses over the mushrooms, fruitcake, prunes and dill notes of yore. Now it's intensity that rules the ratings, and color seems prized above all else, as if all wines should be judged alongside Petite Sirah and Malbec.

But again Tempranillo can change shape and, yes, well, color. The top Tempranillos of Toro and Ribera del Duero have color to spare. Ask the producers in these two ascendant regions and many will insist that their grape is something like Tempranillo, but a different animal: darker color, bigger tannins, crisper acids (at least in the latter), richer and more mouth-filling, capable of longer aging, though that aging takes place in a bottle, not in a barrel.

There are wines of remarkable brilliance and intensity in and around Ribera del Duero: Aalto, Abadía Retuerta, Alión, Arzuaga, Atauta, Carmelo Rodero, Emilio Moro, Condado de Haza, Mauro, Monasterio, Pintia, Pesquera, San Cristobal, San Román, Telmo Rodríguez, Torres, Teófilo Reyes, Valsotillo or Villacreces and many others. Pingus is one of the world's greatest wines.

Toro has its established and emerging stars: El Albar, Fariña, Estancia Piedra, Maurodos, Valduero, Numanthia. There's no question that Tempranillo is remarkable in these two regions, and sometimes remarkably long-lived. Vega Sicilia should provide all the evidence necessary. The 1962 Vega Sicilia Unico is still vibrant, if it's more of a whisper than a boast. The 1975 still has power worthy of Pavarotti and, unlike that singer, is still kicking.

Is Tempranillo a different grape in these two areas? I don't think so and most authorities tend to agree. Yes, Tempranillo in Toro can be more powerful than other Tempranillos, there is no doubt of that. But then I picture the Toro region, the plateau of vineyards sloping away from the town, and the beautiful Termanthia vineyard, a barely cresting limestone and sand hillock with century old vines (and a lot older). These stooped Tempranillo vines (here called Tinta de Toro) produce prodigious amounts of grapes, yields that would make a ten-year-old vineyard blush. The wine made from those grapes is dense, massive and still balanced. Is that the grape

or the vineyard talking? In this special spot, I think the vineyard is louder.

Vega Sicilia's old vines are beautifully aged and gnarled. But whereas exposition seems so ideal in Toro, the soils in Ribera del Duero are the more photogenic. At times they shine in the sun, looking more like powdered chalk than dirt. Here they call the Tempranillo grape Tinta del País or Tinto Fino. Okay, I'll admit that there is definitely a difference between the indigenous Tempranillo clones and the clones planted in Ribera del Duero that have been acquired from Rioja.

But not all the soils in Ribera del Duero are like this; soils and subsoils may be as divergent as the clones. Is there mostly chalk or younger limestone? Is the subsoil limestone or alluvial? Differing soils express differences in flavors; that's the mark of greatness. But is it the grape or the grape in this place?

Of course, like all such questions, it's beside the point. It's the grape AND the place, and in very careful concert. They're partners, the soil AND the grape, along with the grape's multivalent offspring.

They hold court in three elevated wine regions, all situated in or next to mountains in northern Spain, protected from the cold Atlantic: Toro, Ribera del Duero, and Rioja. Each offers incontrovertible evidence of Tempranillo's greatness.

But, like I say, Tempranillo is widely planted. So other places in the Duero Valley, such as Cigales, offer good to very good iterations of Tempranillo from producers such as Museum, Val de los Frailes, Sanz, and Telmo Rodríguez. Maybe they will shortly do far better; maybe not, we don't know yet.

In the south, it gets hotter and people turn to Garnacha, Monastrell, Bobal, all sorts of grapes. In the equally hot Meseta and in the best examples, Tempranillo plays second fiddle to some better known French fiddlers: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot, Syrah. Quality wine is little more than a decade old in the Meseta and Tempranillo there hasn't bested its competitors yet, if it ever will.

Moreover, no DO on mainland Spain is devoid of Tempranillo. From Catalunya to Galicia to Jerez, there are places and producers that offer either the mediocre epitome of a region's potential or a hint of greatness to come: Finca Elez as its own Castilla La Mancha Pago; Ercavio or Pinuaga near Toledo; Lorenzo Cachazo near Ribera del Duero; Guelbenzu in Navarra, Castell del Remei, Rimat, Tomas Cusine or Cerveles in Costers del Segre; Masia Vallformosa, Jane Ventura, Pares Balta and Mas d'Aranyo in and near Penedés; Abadal in Pla de Bages; Chivite, Eguren, Ochoa, Marco Real or Señorío de Sarriá in Navarra; Condesa de Leganza, Ayuso or Finca Antigua in La Mancha; Viñas del Vero, Pirineos and Eñate in Somontano. Like I said, Spain has a lot of Tempranillo.

Spain, with so many historical and varied vineyards, can bring a diverse group of excellent Tempranillos to market. And as the world's third most prolific wine producer, Spain can bring even more great Tempranillo to the world's markets, now that it has determined to do so.

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.



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A Grape by Any Other Name ...

Tempranillo:
used in Rioja

Cencibel:
used in La Mancha

Tinto de Madrid: used in
D.O. Vino de Madrid

Tinta del País: used in
D.O. Ribera del Duero

Tinta de Toro:
used in D.O. Toro

Tinto Fino: used in D.O.
Ribera del Duero

Ull de Llebre:
used in Catalunya



© Getty Images



RUEDA: ANCIENT REGION REDISCOVERED

By Vinus Williams

Angel Rodríguez bends over to display a Verdejo vine on his Martinsancho vineyard in the Spanish appellation of Rueda. Its thick, gnarled trunk and short stature indicate a very old vine. “Verdejo has been here forever,” Rodríguez says, adding that this particular vine is some 200 years old. “It could be older because we have no documentation,” he says.

53.5 million kg in 2007. From 1998 to 2007, exports increased from 1,841,441 bottles (750 ml) to 6,626,925. Exports to the US have mirrored that increase making it Rueda’s second largest client after Germany. Increased sales have resulted in greater name recognition too. A 2006 report done by The Nielsen Company found that Rueda had moved up a notch to become the sixth most recognized Spanish appellation. Today, there are 49 wineries, up from 36 just three years earlier.



Verdejo grapes

In a way, Angel Rodríguez’s old vines are emblematic of the region of Rueda itself. Though Rueda’s history goes back to the 11th century, it is being “discovered” by many who yearn for a distinctive white wine that pairs superbly with food, especially seafood, vegetables and a variety of tapas. In Rueda Verdejo, they have found it. And often at bargain prices as well since most Rueda wines fall into the \$9 to \$16 category. But that discovery was more precarious than most people realize. Some thirty years ago, Rodríguez refused to dig up his old vines when there was pressure to plant more productive but far less distinctive varieties. (For his Martinsancho label wines, Rodríguez gets about 2,000 kilos per hectare from those ancient vines, and not much more, 3,000 to 4,000 kilos from younger vines. Local regulations allow 10,000 kilos per hectare.)

Rodríguez’s steadfastness in protecting his old vines was more symbolic than practical since he remains a relatively small producer. What put Rueda on the radar screen of many more consumers was the arrival of Marqués de Riscal, the legendary Rioja producer. After scouring the wine regions of Spain and consulting noted French enologist Emile Peynaud, Marqués de Riscal opened its modern winery, called Vinos Blancos de Castilla, in 1970. “We looked all over Spain, including Rioja, and we thought this was the best place for white wines,” says Luis Hurtado de Amezaga Hamparzoomian, technical manager for the Rueda winery.

One of the factors that drew Marqués de Riscal to Rueda was its elevation. At altitudes of 700 to 800 meters, wines develop good acidity, particularly important in white wines. Another factor is the diurnal temperature difference, the difference between the highest daytime temperature and lowest temperature at night. In Rueda, the wide difference of temperatures is key to the balance between

Rueda’s breakthrough wasn’t exactly an overnight phenomenon, but it has been impressive. In the last 20 years, grape production increased five-fold to

About the author:

Vinus Williams is the pseudonym of a wine and food writer of over 20 years whose articles have appeared in such publications as The New York Times, The Star Ledger of Newark, NJ, and Food Arts magazine.

the sugar and acidity. Rueda is located in a central area of the depression formed by the Duero river. Its alluvial soils, rich in calcium and magnesium, provide good ventilation and drainage.

While 2007 was a “normal” year according to Hurtado de Amezaga Hamparzoomian, the terroir of Rueda was tested from 2002 to 2006, a string of five hot years. Despite Rueda’s reputation for naturally producing crisp wines, winemakers are allowed to acidify wines in especially hot years by the governing body, Rueda Denominación de Origen (DO).

Verdejo is the principle grape of Rueda and the primary reason why Rueda garnered its DO. Over 70 percent of Rueda’s white wine production in 2007 came from this varietal, more than double what it was 10 years ago. That startling increase is an indication of how winemakers have come to realize the uniqueness of Verdejo in the terroir of Rueda. Verdejo can trace its lineage back to the earliest days of winemaking in this part of Spain. Some speculate that the variety was brought from North Africa by Muslims.

Verdejo’s heartiness allows it to withstand Rueda’s long, cold winters and dry, hot summers better than other white wine varieties. And it flourishes in the stony soils (see cover) for which Rueda is known. Verdejo has an herbal and grassy quality much like Sauvignon Blanc with which it is often blended. There is abundant fruit in Verdejo wines, which is balanced by the characteristic acidity. Often one finds a pleasant bitterness on the finish. Sometimes a hint of fennel or licorice. Wines labeled Rueda Verdejo must have a minimum of 85 percent of that varietal, though typically such wines are 100 percent Verdejo.

Viura, Rueda’s second most planted grape, is an import from Rioja. Though the principle white wine grape in Rioja, in Rueda Viura (known as Macabeo in Catalonia) is almost exclusively used in blends where it contributes aroma, fruit and acidity. In white wines simply labeled Rueda, varieties other than Verdejo can make up to 50 percent of the blend.

Sauvignon Blanc is a relative newcomer to Rueda, having been planted for the first time in Rueda by Marqués de Riscal in 1974. Unlike the Loire Valley in France—the spiritual home of the variety—Sauvignon Blanc doesn’t have to struggle to achieve ripeness in Rueda. More abundant sun gives Sauvignon Blanc in Rueda a floral character that one doesn’t usually find in its cousins from the Loire Valley, though, as Jancis Robinson notes in her *Guide to Wine Grapes* (Oxford), Sauvignon Blanc can “taste oily when reared in too warm a climate.” Unlike Viura, which is almost never a stand alone varietal, 100 percent Sauvignon Blancs are becoming more and more common in Rueda. To be called Rueda Sauvignon, the wine must contain only Sauvignon Blanc grapes.

Rueda Espumoso is the DO’s sparkling wine. It must be made with 40 percent Verdejo for medium and medium-sweet wines, and 85% Verdejo for Brut and Brut Nature wines.

Though Rueda has been a DO for white wines for almost three decades, it wasn’t until 2001 that the DO was extended to red wines. So it’s not surprising that a mere 4 percent of the DO’s production comes from red grapes. Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Garnacha are the approved red varietals. Aging regulations for Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva reds are a variation on the national system.

The Palomino grape was introduced into Rueda in the 1930s with idea of making a fortified wine similar to Sherry. This requires purposefully oxidizing wines, which are aged under a layer of natural yeast or flor. Such wines are called Rueda Dorado and exhibit a golden color and a nutty aroma and flavor. While making Rueda Dorado is a legitimate technique that has brought great success to places like Jerez, it sends shivers up the spines of most modern winemakers in Rueda who want to make crisp, fruity wines with alcohol levels of 12-13 percent versus the 15 -16 percent for the fortified Rueda Dorado.

To preserve their freshness the vast majority of Rueda white wines are fermented in temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks. (Marqués de Riscal alone has 189 of these tanks with a capacity of 40,000 liters.) Harvesting is often done at night when the cooler weather helps to minimize oxidation. While the use of stainless steel fermentation to preserve the freshness of its white wines has been a major accomplishment in Rueda, that doesn’t mean that oak aging has been eliminated. But it does mean that oak aging has to be used judiciously. For its Limousin, Marqués de Riscal carefully selects from among four single-vineyard, old-vine Verdejos. These vineyards are located at higher altitudes, which provides maximum acidity needed to balance wood aging. The grapes are hand harvested, then aged on their lees in a combination of new and older French Allier oak for six or seven months.

DO regulations require that for wines to be labeled fermentado en barrica (barrel-fermented) they must be fermented in 225-litre casks—barricas—and rest on their lees for at least three months. The Jose Pariente Verdejo from Dos Victorias does that as well as daily battonage (lees stirring) to create a rich but beautifully balanced wine that retains varietal character.

Angel Rodríguez, however, remains old school. He still uses the original family bodega and ferments his wine in two, 20,000 liter glass-lined tanks. The wine is then racked into centuries-old oak vats (called bocoyes) prior to clarification and bottling. Doesn’t sound particularly modern, does it? But then who can argue with success?



© Cephus



DO Status Awarded

Rueda achieved DO status in 1980, the first in the region of Castilla y León. Located in south-central part of Castilla y León, Rueda (the DO and the town of the same name) is about a two-hour drive north of Madrid. Ribera del Duero is Rueda’s neighboring DO to the northeast. Cigales is due north. Toro lies to the northwest. Bierzo is the other DO in the extreme west of the region. Rueda has 7,336.5 hectares under vine.



THE GLOBAL PLATE: MEXICO



© Tim Turner

By Jill Gubesch

Wine with Mexican food? Not necessarily the first thing that comes to mind. We usually think about beer or margaritas. Convincing people to open their minds to the idea of wine with Mexican cuisine presents a challenge. The element of surprise is one thing working for me as wine director in a Mexican restaurant, as this is the last place customers expect to have a sommelier approach the table. Imagine pairing wine with the most complex and flavorful cuisine available. Welcome to my world! Here are some quick tips to help start you on your adventure into pairing wine with authentic Mexican cuisine.

First, and foremost focus on the sauce. If you ask someone in Mexico "what's for dinner?" the answer is mole negro or pipian verde, not chicken or pork. The sauce is the star of the show. This is where you begin your pairing.

The next thing to consider is what's the major player in the sauce? Some sauces use roasted tomatoes or tomatillos as a base, while moles can combine up to 30 different ingredients becoming more a complex layering of flavors. Many of our sauces are based on dried red chiles which are in the fruit family. Each chile has its own flavor profile. The ancho has milder, sweeter flavors of dried currants and cherries. This is one of the more wine friendly chiles, and can work well with many varietals. It is great with Tempranillo from Ribera del Duero. The pasilla chile has dark chocolate, espresso notes with building heat which means the more you eat, the hotter it gets. I like to pair this with old vine Garnacha, or a Zinfandel with soft tannins. The guajillo chile has tangy red raspberry and cranberry fruit with upfront heat. Syrah tends to balance the heat of the guajillo chile very well.

These are some of the same descriptors we use for wine. Think of wines which have similar flavor profiles and this will create a great pairing. I love to pair Mexican food

with wines from Spain because the Spaniards had a definite impact on the cuisine. You can see the influence of the Spanish ingredients in the state of Veracruz, particularly on the coast where the conquistadors first landed. Here you'll find the use of manzanilla olives, capers, and olive oil.

Rioja is a region known for its Tempranillo-based blends. One of the dishes these wines work well with is Pescado a la Veracruzana - fish in a roasted tomato sauce with capers, green chiles and manzanilla olives. The 2003 Reserva Marqués de Vargas, with its juicy red fruit and hint of sweet, dried herbs enhances the sweetness of the roasted tomato and balances the briny olives and capers in the sauce. This wine also matches beautifully with achiote, which is a spice used in the Yucatan for Cochinita Pibil-achiote marinated suckling pig slow roasted in banana leaves.

Next are the famous moles of Oaxaca because they're considered the most important. Contrary to popular belief, not all moles are made with chocolate. Mole verde has no chocolate at all, is light with a tomatillo base and is infused with fresh herbs. This sauce is wonderful with Gramona "Gessami," a dry Moscatel from Penedés. The floral, jasmine perfume of the wine enhances the delicate freshness of the hoja santa (which has a sweet, anise-like flavor) epazote and parsley in the mole. Because the herbs are not cooked, but are added at the end, they have a brighter, more predominant flavor.

Of the seven moles of Oaxaca, mole negro is considered king. It is the most complex of all the moles and the most difficult to make. It has up to thirty different ingredients combining the pasilla, mulato and rare chilhuacles negro chiles with a variety of other fruits, sweet spices, seeds, nuts and mexican chocolate. This type of chocolate is not a dark intense chocolate. It's usually blended with almonds, sugar, cinnamon and vanilla. It is not the main ingredient in mole, but used as a seasoning like you would salt or pepper. Mole negro achieves its black color by toasting each of the ingredients to the point of almost burning. Times thirty ingredients, this is no easy task.

Matching mole negro with wine presents a challenge, because of its intricate layers of flavor. The trick is to match the complexity of the mole with an equally complex wine. It's important to let the essence of each ingredient sing without making the sauce taste muddy. The Red wines of Priorat work with mole negro on different levels. This region has extremely steep, terraced vineyards. It's known for Garnacha and Cariñena vines that are over one hundred years old. These older vines produce fewer grapes, giving each

berry more concentrated flavor. These wines are rich and intense in flavor and exhibit the same complexity as the black mole. They have dark blackberry fruit, bittersweet chocolate and sweet spices with an underlying earthy tone. Daphne Glorian's "Laurel," paired with mole negro creates a symphony of flavors and textures. She is an extremely small producer, so if you have trouble finding her wine the Capçanes "Petit Cabrida" old vine Garnacha from Montsant can work as well.

Priorat also has one hundred year old vines of Garnacha Blanca which is extremely rare. The 2005 La Conreria D'Scala Dei "Les Brugueres" has a rich, fat mouthfeel with white truffle and mineral notes. It pairs well with ingredients of similar earthy flavors like mushroom filled empanadas or sunchoke soup.

Penedés is a well known region in Spain for Cava, a sparkling wine made from Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parellada grapes. One of my favorites is Cava Avinyó Brut, which Joan Esteve Nadal started fifty years ago in a small farmhouse to make wine for his family and friends. It pairs well with ceviche which is a tough dish to match, and the only time I would steer you away from having a red wine with fish. Ceviche is made from raw fish "cooked" in some type of acid such as lime juice and does funky things when paired with red wine. The lean citrus flavors in Cava can hold up to the tangy acidity of the lime, while bringing elegance to a classic Mexican seafood cocktail. In some ceviche you may use vinegar and olive oil instead of lime juice. If the amount of acidity is less intense, Lusco Albariño from Rías Baixas, Galicia works well.

Spain offers such a variety of regions and styles of wine that you can have fun experimenting with different varietals. Otherwise unknown regions are now on the radar of sommeliers throughout the country. Importers are tapping into and revitalizing areas at an exciting pace. Many old vines are now being sourced. Learning about wines and wine pairing comes from not only buying wines you know, but asking about those you don't know. I hope you enjoy exploring the vast world of Spanish wines, not only with food but for your everyday sipping pleasure.

Jill Gubesch came to Frontera Grill and Topolobampo restaurants as Wine Director in 2001. Her wine recommendations have been featured in numerous publications such as The Chicago Tribune, Wine Enthusiast and Coastal Living Magazine, as well as Andrew Dornenburg and Karen Page's book What To Drink With What You Eat. Last year Frontera Grill won the coveted James Beard Award for best restaurant in the country. Visit their website at www.fronterakitchens.com.



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LIVING MADRID

Spanish and California cuisine blend well at San Francisco's Laiola Restaurant

By John M. Ward



Laiola is located at
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Laiola is an archaic Catalan word meaning "small church." Looking for a name for his Spanish-themed restaurant in San Francisco, Joe Hargrave found the word online and liked that the French town of Laguiole – known for prestigious wine openers – is named after it.

"We're trying to downplay the religious connotation," Hargrave says.

Yet it fits perfectly, because Laiola is run by zealots. Chef Mark Denham calls himself a purist about Spanish cooking techniques, but he's also fanatical about local ingredients.

"What makes the food of Spain so good is it doesn't travel," Denham says. "Your experience in a little café there is great because they don't go far for food products. The olives are grown nearby. The lamb is raised out back, eating the local grasses. I know how I feel coming here from Barcelona, and that's how ingredients would feel. We are now about 95 percent indigenous California ingredients, other than things that don't grow here. We do get capers and pimentón from Spain."

Denham made his name at the now defunct San Francisco Mediterranean restaurant 42 Degrees. When Hargrave hired him to helm Laiola, Denham went at it whole-hog. Literally. "We bring in whole animals here – whole lambs, whole pigs," Denham says.

He makes charcuterie in-house, including a wild boar chorizo with great depth of flavor from the spice mix of coriander, nutmeg, cinnamon and white pepper. In addition to serving it on a charcuterie cutting board, he stuffs it into bacon-wrapped Medjool dates for a unique appetizer. Some menu items, like patatas bravas and olive-oil fried almonds, would not look out of place in a sleek Barcelona bar – in fact, that's what Laiola looks like, with its long bar, copper ceiling, large abstract painting in the front and convivial outdoor seating.

But there are other menu items, like local petrale sole a la plancha, that aren't likely to be found in their country of inspiration. And then there are dishes like Dungeness crab buñuelos that give a traditional Spanish food the flavors of northern California.

A Spanish chef would feel at home in the open kitchen, behind the back end of the bar, where patrons can literally rub elbows with Denham if they choose as he stands on the patrons' side of the bar facing the three cooks who execute his recipes. The kitchen has no open burners – instead, cazuelas (traditional clay cookware) containing dishes like gambas al ajillo verde are dropped onto the stove, then removed and served with the juices inside bubbling hot.

"The cazuela catches juices that might come out of the squid, for the chipirones," Denham says. "Flavors have a chance to intermingle. It's a very traditional Spanish way of cooking."

Denham picked up some of these ideas on visits to Spain, where he says, "I never asked to see a wine list. I said, 'Just pour me a glass of red, pour me a glass of white, give me a glass of Cava.' And everything I had was absolutely fantastic."

Hargrave wanted to get that spirit into Laiola's wine list. The restaurant offers 111 wines by the bottle, and 109 of them are from Spain. That's truly remarkable for a restaurant located fewer than 100 miles from the heart of California wine country.

"There's so much great wine coming out of Spain right now, but Spain hasn't invaded the United States yet," Hargrave says. "Even people who are in the wine business, they're intimidated. They don't know Spanish wines. In that sense, Spain reminds me of where the Rhone was 10 years ago." Hargrave is particularly excited about the value Spanish wines offer. He tips his cap to the big spenders in the restaurant's affluent neighborhood with 10 bottles over \$100, including well-aged Viña Valoria Riojas from 1968 and 1973 and current releases of Pintia and Numanthia Toro.

But, Hargrave says, "It is so unnecessary to spend \$90 on a Spanish wine in a restaurant. You'll get a great wine if you do. We do have some showstoppers. But there's so much great wine coming out of Spain that you can get at \$40 on the list. I think that's special." In fact, nearly half of Laiola's list – 50 wines – is under \$40.

"There's a table of six women over there," Hargrave says, pointing to a happy-looking dining party. "It would be easy to sell them one \$60 bottle of wine. But they'd only have one. I'd rather sell them a \$30 bottle of wine. They'll

About the author:

John M. Ward is an accomplished wine and food expert who has sat on numerous judging panels for wine, as well as for spirits. With a strong background in Asian cuisine, John has assisted in compiling restaurant guides to several international cities.





have two or three, they'll drink more wine, and they'll have a better time. They'll trust us to recommend value."

To familiarize his staff with the wine list before Laiola's July 2007 opening, Hargrave held a massive three-day wine tasting.

"Our philosophy was for everybody to have their favorites: five whites and five reds," he says. "We didn't want to get tied up in pairing every wine with every dish. Find a good rustic wine that goes with everything. And we only have one wine glass - not a separate glass for whites and reds. At the end of the meal, your table should be covered with glassware with greasy fingerprints on it. I don't want any formality at all."

One of Hargrave's go-to wines for matching

everything is the 2006 Gurrutxaga Txakoli (\$38), a crisp white with flavors of lime, kiwi and melon and some floral notes that's fantastic with seafood dishes. On the red side, the 2006 Peique Tinto Bierzo Mencía (\$36) has an earthy quality that's excellent with wild mushrooms roasted in a cazuela with a sunny-side up egg. "Bierzo's really coming up," Hargrave says. "Mencía is mind-boggling."

At the end of the meal, Denham offers a simple yet amazing dessert he saw in Spain: chocolate ganache with warm toasted bread, olive oil and sea salt. No matter what they tell you on Valentine's Day, I find chocolate to be deadly for most wines, but Hargrave has the answer: a late-harvest 2003 Bodegas Olivares Jumilla Monastrell Dulce. It's a sweet ending to a Spanish-inspired meal you can't find anywhere but northern California.





PJ's Spanish Wine Festival 2008

So many outstanding Spanish wines under one roof! Join **PJ Wine** and sample over 100 premium Spanish wines paired with sublime Spanish cuisine. Every major wine region will be represented, from **Jerez** to **Ribera del Duero** through **Priorat** and **Rioja**, not forgetting hot emerging regions like **Toro**, **Bierzo**, **Jumilla** and more. The event takes place on June 19 at **Landmark on the Park**, 160 Central Park West at 76th Street. For more information, visit www.pjwine.com.

The Wine Advocate Says Spanish Wines are al rojo vivo

The **Wine Advocate's** Feb. 29, 2008 issue reviewed Spanish wines and found hundreds of great values priced at less than \$20. Of the 1196 wines reviewed, 556 received more than 90 points and two received perfect scores of 100 points: the **Benjamín Romeo Contador 2005**, and the **Clos Erasmus 2005**. Most of the wines reviewed were from the 2004, 2005, and 2006 vintages. The Wine Advocate concludes that in general, "2004 seems to have produced riper, more aromatic wines while the 2005s are more structured and should have longer drinking windows," and the 2006 vintage resulted in "wines with lower alcohol and more elegance than power." With regard to the white wines reviewed, the Advocate found many food-friendly wines, including **Albariños**, **Verdejo** and **Godello**, and despite the weak dollar, almost all of them were under \$20 a bottle.

New Importer for González Byass

Gonzalez Byass, the Spanish family owned company that produces **Tio Pepe**, has appointed a California based company, **The San Francisco Wine Exchange** (www.sfwe.com) as its national importer for all sherries and wines. Gonzalez Byass also produces **Beronia** Rioja wines, **Altozano** Tierra de Castilla wines, **Vilarnau** Penedés wines and Cavas, and **Moncloa** Tierra de Cádiz wines. **Lepanto** and **Soberano** Brandy de Jerez and the anise liquor **Chinchón**, also brands of González Byass, will be imported by **Preiss Imports** (www.preissimports.com). For more information, contact Felipe González-Gordon Terry at fggordon@gonzalezbyass.es.

Expo Zaragoza: Water & Sustainable Development



From June 14th to September 14th, **Zaragoza** will host the **2008 International Expo**. This year's theme is **Water and Sustainable Development**. Part of the Ebro river bank is being developed into a space containing pavilions, most of them built to host international participants from over 100 countries. There are also some impressive architectural masterpieces like the **Water Tower of the Pavilion Bridge**, designed by **Zaha Hadid**. Zaragoza is right in the middle between Madrid and Barcelona, in just over an hour travel from either town by high speed train. If your travel plans this year include Spain,

do include a stopover to see the Expo. Zaragoza also offers some architectural wonders, from roman to muslim to roman, like the **Aljafería Palace** and **La Seo Cathedral**. For more information, please visit www.expozaragoza2008.es.

Great Wine Capitals Honors Marqués de Riscal

Rioja's **Marqués de Riscal** wine estate received one of only eight international wine tourism awards at the annual assembly of the **Great Wine Capitals** network held last November in Porto. The honor recognized Riscal's **Frank Gehry**-designed winery and hotel tourist complex, opened in 2006, which is integrated into the more traditional architecture of the town of **Elciego**. **Great Wine Capitals (GWC)** is an international organization that promotes the shared goals of tourism, education, and business services among its members.

Spain's sole representative is **Bilbao-Rioja**, recognizing the city as an international gateway to the fabled wine region. Started in 1999, GWC has four "Old World" members – Bilbao-Rioja, Bordeaux, Florence, and Porto – and four from the "New World" – Cape Town, San Francisco-Napa Valley, Melbourne, and Mendoza. The GWC limits itself to one "capital" per country, and is selectively adding additional capitals. Each year, one of the cities hosts the group's annual meeting, where best practices are shared, business issues explored, and successes recognized. The next assembly is in Cape Town in November 2008.

Bilbao held the event in 2003. Bilbao has had many incarnations in its long and storied history – quiet fishing village, stopover for pilgrims on the **Camino de Santiago de Compostela**, international seaport, manufacturing stronghold, and, more recently, as a tourist cultural destination. Now it adds "Great Wine Capital" to its legacy. Bilbao's official coordinator for the GWC is **Teresa de Que-rejazu** of the city's chamber of commerce, and **Thomas Perry** represents the **Rioja Wine Exporters' Association**. For more information, go to www.greatwinecapitals.com.

~ Roger Morris

Vinos de Madrid Seminars Smitten with Pink - Summer and Year-round

Just beyond the bustling, sophisticated urban center of Madrid lies a serene countryside where more than 44 wine producers make wines that are surprisingly delicious! A seminar and wine tasting, led by renowned Spanish wine expert **Gerry Dawes**, took place this April. The seminar and walk-around tasting were held at the **Rialto Restaurant**, **Charles Hotel**, Cambridge, MA and again at **The University Club** in Chicago. **Vinos de Madrid** was officially recognized as a D.O. in 1990. For more information please visit their website at www.vinosdemadrid.es.



Rosés have held a special place in my heart since I was seven, when my parents began offering me a small glass of slightly sweet, low alcohol pink wine during celebratory events. My tastes have since evolved and as an adult I've often flirted with vibrant rosés from the Mediterranean. Such wines were my liquid equivalent of fun summer flings. One day, a few years ago, I took my first sip of a very unusual **rosado** from Rioja and instantly fell in love. It was a **López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Rosado**. Made the old school way, with significant aging before it's released, Tondonia

Rosado is a singularly delicious **rosé** like no other. Ever since, I've continued to indulge in salivating **rosados** from all over Spain (particularly from Navarra and Penedes).

~ Pameladevi Govinda



The Great Match Wine & Tapas Tour



Wines from Spain announced plans for its annual **Great Match Wine & Tapas Tour**, which will visit five cities this year. More than 200 wines produced from versatile Spanish varietals, representing many of Spain's 67 denominations of origin will be presented. These comprehensive tastings, exclusively for trade and media, will provide a first-hand taste of the latest releases from Spain. On May 19, the tasting takes place at the **Camelback Mountain Resort** in **Scottsdale, Arizona**, from 1:30-6:00 pm. On May 22, it runs from 1:30-6:00 pm at **The Stirling Club** in **Las Vegas**. A tasting seminar on "**The Native Grapes of Spain**" will be presented by wine and spirits educator **Steve Olson** at both locations. Additional events will take place in Orlando, Dallas and New York City in October. (NYC will also include a consumer event). Watch for

more information in this magazine and visit www.greatmatch.org.

Wines from Spain Organizing Major Presence at Food & Wine Classic at Aspen This Summer

Wines from Spain, a division of the **Trade Commission of Spain** is a sponsor of the **Food & Wine Magazine Classic at Aspen, Colorado**, that will take place the weekend of June 13th - 15th, 2008. The Wines from Spain tent will continue to be the largest country pavilion in the **Grand Tasting** complex. Throughout the three-day festival, attendees will have the extraordinary opportunity to taste and experience Spain at the following seminars: **Spain's Great Reds**, to be presented by **Michael Bonadies**, and **Spain's Profound Whites**, presented by **Ray Isle**. The Aspen Classic is the nation's premier food and wine festival, open to both consumers, trade and press, and will again this year feature many culinary masters including Spain's charismatic **José Andrés**. For further information and to purchase tickets, visit www.foodandwine.com/promo/classic.

Albariño Wine Recipe Contest Set for July

The **Rías Baixas Albariño** campaign launches its annual **Recipe Pairing Contest** this July, 2008. Amateur cooks across the country are invited to put their culinary chops and Albariño's food-friendliness to the test by submitting their favorite original recipe for this year's wine and food pairing contest. One Grand Prize and three Runner-Up Prizes will be awarded to the contestants who enter the best original dishes that pair with this versatile, crisp white wine from Spain. The first major Rías Baixas Albariño tasting for San Francisco press & trade will take place on May 15, 2008. With a walk-around tasting featuring over 20 brands of Albariño wine, this event will include a seminar with a panel of esteemed producers from the region and noted author, Leslie Sbrocco. For further information, log on to www.riasbaixaswines.com.

Foods & Wines from Spain Shine at Starchefs.com Symposium

From September 14-16, 2008, New York City will be the site of a 3-day professional culinary symposium, **The International Chefs Congress: A Kitchen Without Boundaries**, organized by **Starchefs.com**. Some of the world's most influential and innovative chefs, pastry chefs, mixologists, and sommeliers will present the latest techniques and culinary concepts to their peers. Chef demonstrations, hands-on chef, pastry and mixology workshops, career counseling sessions, wine seminars, business seminars, and expert panels on current industry topics will ensure a stimulating event. The underlying theme of this year's Congress is **The Responsibility of a Chef**, with a specific focus on mentoring, sustainability, and community. **Juan Roca, Cándido López, Jordi Butrón** and **José Andrés** are some of the Spanish chefs who will participate. For more information please visit www.starchefs.com.

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POSTMARK: EXTREMADURA

By Gerry Dawes

Some of Spain's most exceptional products come from Extremadura in western Spain. Extremadura consists of just two provinces, Badajoz and Cáceres, but it has long been known to aficionados of Spanish culture and history as an unspoiled, evocative, rugged land that was once so harsh that it drove its native sons – Cortés, Pizarro, Balboa, De Soto and Orellana among them—off to even more inhospitable climes to explore and conquer whole New World civilizations. Now, some five centuries later, Extremaduran food products are making their names abroad with superb *jamon*es from Dehesa de Extremadura Ibérico *pata negra* pigs, wonderful ewes' milk cheeses such as Torta del Casar and Torta de la Serena, Iboreos goats' milk *quesos*, excellent extra virgin olive, wild Villuercas-Iboreos honey, succulent cherries and cherry jams, pastries and liqueurs from the beautiful Valle del Jerte, Ribera de Guadiana wines and smokey Pimentón de la Vera, considered by many top chefs to be the best paprika in the world.

Traveling in back-country Extremadura is an immensely rewarding experience. Meandering along the ancient north-south Roman Via de la Plata (the Silver Road) that runs from Sevilla to Salamanca and beyond, diverting to points of interest east and west of the road, not only provides historical and cultural adventures, it offers a treasure trove of culinary discoveries as well. Coming north from Andalucía, you can sample superb hams at Jabugo, then move on into Extremadura to sample hams and ewe's milk cheeses in villages such as Jerez de los Caballeros (Badajoz). In charming Zafra you can sample a range of excellent Extremaduran cheeses, hams and olive oil with dinner at the Parador de Turismo (in the 15th-century Dukes of Feria palace). Travelers will want to sample the legendary ewe's milk Torta de la Serena and superb Torta de Barros cheeses, www.tortadebarros.com, which come from regions northeast of Zafra. Then continue north to Mérida, with its splendid Roman theater, amphitheater, spectacular Roman bridge and the Rafael Moneo-designed Roman Museum. Dining at the Parador—at times in turn a Roman temple, mosque,

hospital, jail and convent—offers another opportunity to sample D.O. Dehesa de Extremadura jamón Ibérico de bellota (from acorn-fed pigs) and local cheese selections that may include the creamy, log-shaped Doña Inés *queso de cabra*.

Next I recommend a visit to a little-known hilltop town, Montánchez, famous for its hams and Ribera de Guadiana DO wines. The hermitage next to the castle is the perfect place for a picnic of local cured olives, Ibérico ham and chorizo, local cheeses, Montánchez wine and fresh figs. A short drive through the rocky countryside brings you to Trujillo, hometown of Francisco Pizarro (conqueror of Peru) and Francisco Orellana (a Pizarro kinsman who explored the Amazon River). The town is filled with photographic opportunities including the storybook town square where you will see the San Martín church towering over Pizarro's great equestrian statue; a number of fine palaces; and the castle. The D.O.P. Iboreos cheese headquarters is located in Trujillo, which hosts one of Spain's most highly regarded cheese fairs in the Plaza Mayor the first weekend in May.

To the northwest the great city of Cáceres beckons with its monumental old quarter, Torta del Casar cheese producers and Extremadura's top modern cuisine restaurant, the two-star Atrio, where chef Toño Pérez and his partner, José Polo, have earned international acclaim for their food, wine, service and the quality of their Extremaduran products. You may even find a spectacular ice cream made with Torta del Casar. From Cáceres, to the north the Via de la Plata beckons to Plasencia, where a turn to the northeast leads to the valley of the Jerte, a paradise for cherry lovers in springtime, and the de la Vera valley, home to all that great Pimentón de la Vera, one of the world's greatest paprikas

Gerry Dawes is a New York-based writer and photographer who specializes in Spain. He has published numerous articles on Spanish wine and food, and lectures frequently in the U.S. and in Spain on Spanish wine and gastronomy.

Where to Stay

In addition to the Paradores in Zafra, Mérida, Trujillo and Cáceres, Plasencia, de la Vera [Jandilla], Salamanca and Zamora, which can be booked on-line (www.parador.es), there are a number of fine renovated hotels in distinguished old palaces and olive oil mills.

Mérida (Badajoz)

Parador de Turismo, Plaza de la Constitución, 3
www.parador.es

Meliá Mérida Boutique,

Plaza de España, 19
www.solmelia.com

Zafra (Badajoz)

Parador de Turismo, Plaza Corazón de María, 7
www.parador.es

Casa-Palacio Conde de la Corte,

Plaza Pilar Redondo, 2
www.condedelacorte.com

Cáceres (Cáceres)

Parador de Turismo, Ancha, 6
www.parador.es

Meliá Cáceres Boutique,

Plaza San Juan, 11
www.solmelia.com

Trujillo (Cáceres)

Parador de Turismo, Santa Beatriz de Silva, 1
www.parador.es

NH Palacio de Santa

Marta,

Ballesteros, 6
www.nh-hotels.com

Finca Santa Marta,

Pago San Clemente,

Trujillo (formerly a farm with olive trees and an olive mill, 14 kilometers from Trujillo on the road to Guadalupe)
www.littlehotelssofspan.co.uk/santamarta.php

www.littlehotelssofspan.co.uk/santamarta.php

Where to Eat

All of the paradores in the cities listed above have fine restaurants—the one in Zafra is set up in a superb open-air Renaissance patio—that offer menus with regional dishes and products.

Mérida (Badajoz)

Altair, Avenida José Fernández López, s/n. Mérida's top upscale choice.

Casa Benito,

San Francisco, 3.

Cáceres (Cáceres)

Átrio, Avenida España, 30
www.restauranteatrio.com

One of Spain's best.

El Asador, Moret, 34.

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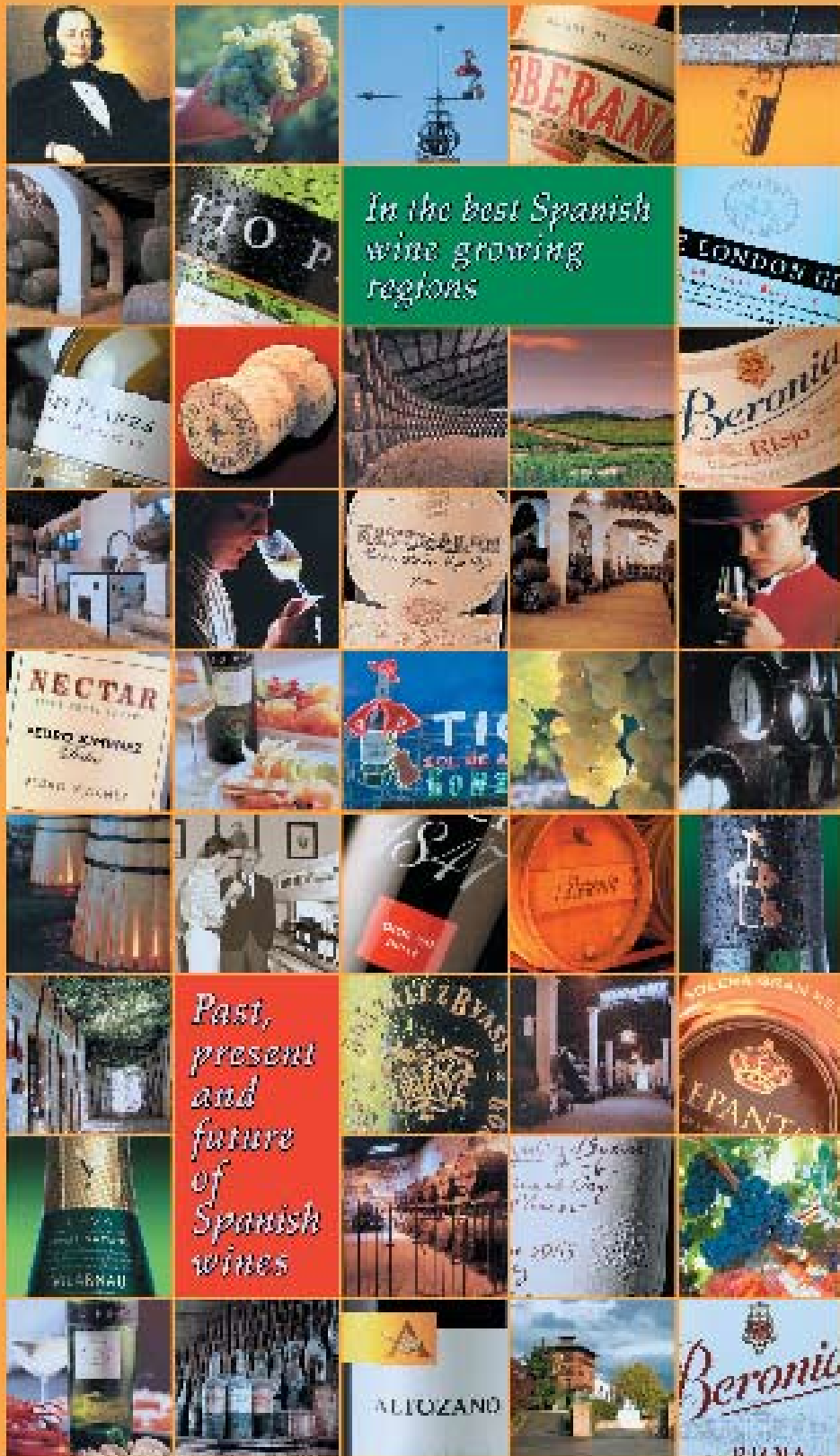


Faustino

A masterpiece waiting to be uncorked

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González Byass



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www.beronia.com