

# WINE News

*It's a new spring for our wines from Spain.*



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## Goodbye Old Friend, Hello Old Friends

By Kirk Walker

**It's the end of an era here at K&L.** Our longtime friend and wine buyer for the Iberian Peninsula and South America, Joe Manekin, has left to start his next adventure. Buena suerte, Joe! Yet all endings are just new beginnings, and this is the start of my adventure as buyer for these regions. I am really excited to take you along with me. At the beginning of my journey I think it is appropriate to start with my old friend, Rioja. The Rioja region and its signature red wine grape, Tempranillo, are the starting point for almost all conversations about Spanish wine.

In Rioja, old traditions and classic styles of wines, aged for a long time in barrels, meet their modern, fresher contemporaries. Here, too, are producers who want to meld both traditional and new styles. In a way, this reminds me of the greatest thing about wine: sharing old wines with new friends—and new wines with old friends! There is always an old friend in wine, and there will always be new friends that we find. With that, let's toast to friends, old and new, with some top picks that are in stock today!

### 2005 Bodegas Puelles Gran Reserva Rioja

**(\$19.99)** This wine represents one of the most unique and fascinating things about this region: aged wines at a reasonable price, that are direct from the winery. Grown in great terroir in the La Rioja Alta region, this is mostly Tempranillo, with a little Garnacha, Mazuelo, and Graciano, and is aged in mostly older barrels (French and American oak). Maturing, but still youthful, this wine delivers classic Rioja character: savory, dark fruits infused with spice, leather, and earth. **90 RP**



### 2014 Bodegas Muga "Selección Especial" Reserva Rioja

**(\$39.99)** This is a modern re-interpretation of a classic Reserva. There is a restrained opulence to this wine. The fruit is ripe, dark and lush... it basically jumps out of the glass. The new oak enhances the full-bodied yet very accessible palate. Underneath are layers of oak spice, subtle coffee, fine leather, and iron-rich mineral tones. This wine does everything you expect a Rioja to do but with more volume and more generosity. This is a wine for now or much later. **94 JS, 93 RP**



### 2014 Honorío Rubio "Lías Finas" Blanco Rioja

**(\$29.99)** The limestone-rich vineyards of Honorío Rubio are located at a higher elevation, in a Rioja Alta district that is famed more for its white wines and rosatos than reds. This re-imagining of a traditional Rioja white wine creates a crisp wine with great depth of flavor, and a rich but not heavy texture. The secret is lots of lees aging in a mixture of concrete and large oak containers. This is 100% Rioja but unlike any other. **92 RP**



# Adventure and Fortune: The Life and Wines of Bryan MacRobert

By Will Blakely

**The philosophy of Bryan MacRobert and his Laventura wine boils down to one word: marriage.** Or perhaps, “unity.” MacRobert seeks to unite Old World traditions with modern sensibilities. The name of the label itself is a portmanteau of “aventura,” meaning adventure, and “ventura,” referring to venture or fortune. Bryan also splits his time and projects between his native South Africa and his current home in Rioja, having grown up and studied in Swartland before working for Eben Sadie in Priorat. Then, most poetically, Bryan fell in love with and married a winemaker from Rioja.

In some ways, the focus on resurrecting age-old practices through the lens of our contemporary ideals is a trend the wine world over. Organic and sustainable farming sounds like a noble goal today, but for much of history, it was the only way to work the land. Still, Laventura’s passion for showcasing terroir and maximizing the potential of their fruit is a relatively new idea, and they succeed admirably. Using minimal intervention, native yeast, conscientiously ecological practices, and creative aging in oak, concrete, and steel, Laventura creates something of a hybrid between classic Rioja and the cutting edge of artisanal wine.



*Last time we saw Bryan MacRobert, he was found, not lost, amid the vines of Rioja.*

This union bears wine that is fresh, fruit-driven and focused, while still offering finesse and complexity that can only come from high-quality grapes. Forgoing the classifications that have come to rule Rioja’s perception worldwide, these efforts represent a modern take on what wine may have tasted like before it was restricted to specific blending and aging.

**2017 Laventura Viura Rioja (\$19.99)** Viura, known in other parts of Spain as Macabeo, makes up the vast majority of white grapes planted in Rioja. Laventura’s latest release comes from Viura vines 500 meters above sea level in limestone-rich soils of Rioja Alavesa. Aged for a year in oak on its lees, it marries



ripe apple and pear with tones of citrus, peach, and apricot. Subtle notes of brioche and almonds follow, culminating in a long, mineral-driven finish. Medium weight and ample acidity throughout make this a versatile and immensely satisfying white.

**2015 Laventura “Lanave” Rioja (\$14.99)** Lanave delivers exceptional quality for the price with a 50-50 blend of Grenache and Tempranillo which serves as a vibrant entry into their impressive reds. Each of these two principal Rioja grapes are fermented on their skins before the Grenache spends a year in concrete and the Tempranillo a year in 500-liter oak barrels. The final blend harmoniously melds bright strawberry and dark cherry with savory earth, gentle spice, and supple wood tannin. A portion of whole cluster inclusion yields just a hint of green herbs that adds contrast and dimension. **90 RP**



**2015 Laventura Tempranillo Rioja (\$19.99)** Sourced from 40- to 80-year-old Tempranillo vines and aged for 12 months in 500-liter oak barrels, this wine strikes a masterful balance between fruit and wood influence. Flavors of ripe cherries, blackberries, and plums make up the primary focus, while toasted vanilla, nutmeg, and baking spice play a brilliant supporting role. Firm tannins and palpable acidity make this a fine candidate for aging, but it is immensely enjoyable right now. **91 RP**

**2017 Laventura Garnacha Rioja (\$24.99)** Their most recent vintage of this stunning Grenache comes from parcels 600 meters above sea level made up of rocky sandstone soils in Rioja Baja. After spending one year in 600-liter oak barrels, this lighter-bodied red features exotic floral aromas and bright red berry flavors. Cranberry, raspberry, strawberry, and cherry paint a vivid picture, with fine details of toasted brioche, vanilla, and cinnamon around the edges. The texture is at once lush and finely pointed. This is truly a delight to all of the senses.



**2015 Laventura “Barranco de San Ginés” Rioja (\$59.99)** This exquisite wine is made from a single vineyard 600 meters high that was planted in 1935. The white limestone soils of Laguardia in Rioja Alavesa grow some of the finest grapes in Laventura’s portfolio. Aged for two years in wood, this wine develops magnificent depth and tannic structure that makes it ideal for aging. Dark dense berries, bramble, and black currant form a decadent base upon which layers of toasted oak and rich figs build. Undercurrents of forest floor and savory earth form an elegant counterpoint with a mouthwatering finish. With sufficient time in a decanter, this is a treat now, but bottle age will only improve on its already remarkable complexity.





## Ribera del Duero: Where Tempranillo is King

By Elsa Baez

While Ribera del Duero may be considered one of the younger appellations in Spain, it has built a reputation of producing some of the top wines in the country. The early ripening Tempranillo grape thrives in the extreme continental climate, and so do the winemakers. With the ideal elements of soil and climate combined with producers who are passionate about their winemaking techniques, the full-bodied, complex, and sometimes exotic and savory wines pair so well with many foods. Anyone seeking a wine with complexity, elegant structure, and power, should definitely try the wines from Ribera del Duero.

Located in the northern portion of Spain, and roughly two hours south of Madrid, Ribera del Duero got its *Denominación de origen* (D.O.) status in 1982. Before then, growers were selling to co-ops, and the wine was sold in bulk (although the iconic Vega Sicilia is located in the heart of Ribera del Duero, and has produced high-quality wines since the 1860s). Growers who firmly believed in the potential of the region rallied to gain D.O. status.

Bodegas Lambuena was founded by three siblings in 1989, in the town of Roa. Their **2017 Lambuena Roble Ribera del Duero (\$12.99)** is vinted from fruit grown in vineyards that are over 20 years old. The flavor profile of this wine is full and rich, yet there is a restraint, in that it's not so plush on the palate. The color is a very intense cherry red, and the wine shows floral, licorice, and ripe black fruit aromatics. With aging for only four months in new and semi-new American (70%) and French (30%) oak, the wine is sufficiently structured, complex, and fleshy. The toasty notes from the barrels come through beautifully integrated, too! I would easily pair this with a lamb or beef dish.

The **2014 Lambuena Crianza Ribera del Duero (\$19.99)** has notes of licorice, sweet spices



intermingling with dark cherries, and finishes with a great body. It has a more balanced structure than the Roble, and with some bottle aging, the characteristics of this wine will only improve. This is a serious wine and such a great value.

Also located in the town of Roa is Bodegas Pinna Fidelis, whose name pays tribute to its town of origin, Peñafiel. The winery opened in 2001 and produces Ribera del Duero in both Crianzas and Reservas.

The **2015 Pinna Fidelis Crianza Ribera del Duero (\$19.99)** is an exceptional example of the winery's tradition of approachable and innovative young wines. This bottling is 100% Tempranillo (known as Tinto Fino or Tinto in Ribera del Duero) and has so much going on, from nose to palate. The ripe black fruit, savory notes of cured meat, and exceptionally balanced oak tannins make this full-bodied wine versatile when it comes to food pairings. Grilled chicken, beef dishes or cured meats — Iberico ham if you're lucky — will enhance the experience of this wine.

Pinna Fidelis also offers a selected vintage (*vendimia seleccionada*) bottling that received 90-plus points from both *Decanter* and James Suckling. The **2012 Pinna Fidelis Vendimia Seleccionada Ribera del Duero (\$39.99)** is produced from grapes grown just south of the Duero river where the soils are rich in limestone. The limestone gives the fruit ample time to ripen, allowing acidity to take shape, and giving the wine opportunity to age. After a long fermentation and post-fermentative maceration for approximately 40 days, it ages in the barrel for 16 months. The final product is a fine and focused wine with coffee and cherry notes that intermingle with ripe, dark fruit, finishing with great texture and balanced tannins. Its long and powerful finish will pair great with beef stews, grilled lamb chops, or Manchego cheese.





*Watch the seas: Our latest delivery of fresh, enticing wines from Spanish regions including Getariako Txakolina is currently en route to the Port of Oakland. Pictured: not the Port of Oakland, but the Spanish seaside wine town of Getaria.*

## On the Slow Boat to Summertime Refreshment

By Kirk Walker

**While the world has become smaller and we have become more easily connected, there is still that tricky issue of getting physical things from one location to another.** To put it another way, here are the wines that are on the slow boat. While they will not be here by the time you read this, know that they are on their way, in a container on a boat bound for Oakland. They will be ready for you as the days start to warm.

**2018 Pedro Martinez Alesanco Rosado Rioja (\$9.99)** It just isn't summertime at K&L without this wine. Made in the "clarete" style, this is a lighter pink, with orange tones, rather than the bolder pink of some other producers of rosé wines. This wine is all bright red berries, juicy blood orange, and ripe citrus fruit. Mouthwatering, delicious, and terrifically priced, this is a rosé for any occasion.

Txakolina, the wine and the region, perfectly reflect one another. The cool, verdant, wind-swept vineyard hillsides that overlook the Cantabrian Sea are translated into bright, almost green-inflected wines with bracing acid and a subtle effervescence. Every bottle seems to capture the moment when you first step into ocean surf from the beach—you experience a quick chill that quickly fades while you are tickled

with popping bubbles and surrounded by faint saltiness. OK, that's my experience, but you get where I am coming from. This traditional Basque wine is a culinary treasure. I love the region and its wines.

**2018 Zudugarai "Amats" Getariako Txakolina (\$14.99)** This is textbook Txakolina. It is light in body and high in acid, but that simple description fails this wine. This wine is green and lively—think subtle green apples and lime zest, sprinkled with a very fine, sea salt mineral quality. This wants to be paired with anything that comes from the sea, ranging from shellfish to apex predator steaks. But really, it goes with anything, from land or sea, or even nothing at all.

**2018 Zudugarai "Amats" Rosé Getariako Txakolina (\$14.99)** Made from 100% Hondarrabi Beltza, this is everything that its pale sibling is, and more. Tasting of tart and crunchy red berries, subtle watermelon with a mix of citrus from lime to mandarin, this has the same culinary applications, but now we can play with more fatty and spicy cuisines. This, and charcuterie, is a done deal. This will also be waiting for all of the French rosé drinkers when they get into a rut—that is, if the rest of us don't drink it all before then.

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