

# WINE News

*Iberian summer: classics new and old from Portugal and Spain.*



## AUGUST 5, 2019 FEATURES

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## Tempranillo Reimagined

By Kirk Walker

**We are in an exciting time for wine.** There are winemakers all over Spain, as in the rest of the world, who are reexamining everything that goes into the wine they are producing. They are spending more time in the vineyards, in some cases just looking for new, old, or forgotten vineyards. They are questioning winemaking traditions, and evaluating new techniques of vinification and cellaring. The result of all this time and energy is that there are more opportunities for everyone who enjoys wine to see the world in new ways. Right now, I want to present an opportunity for us to look at Tempranillo from this perspective. While it is not the most widely planted red wine grape in Spain, Tempranillo has

an outsized importance to the wines of Spain, and has been important to my knowledge of the wines of Spain. Of course, it isn't just the grape that drives the expression of these wines—it's also all the local factors of viticulture and winemaking. Rioja, Ribera del Duero, and Toro reflect three different personalities of Tempranillo: Rioja, with its prolonged elege in oak—famously, American oak; Ribera del Duero, with its dark and powerful wine; and Toro, also famously muscular and extracted. These are the classic, or historical styles, that inform our introduction to Spain's Tempranillo. The following wines present us with new interpretations of the classic regions they call home.

### 2017 Sierra de Toloño Rioja (\$19.99)

Made from small parcels of Tempranillo grown in the very foothills that give the winery its name. Sandra Bravo wants to make fresh wines that speak specifically of where they come from. The elevation, the limestone in the soil, and the cooling winds from the Toloño mountains give the fruit clarity and depth. Less than a year in older French barrels helps soften the tannin and focus the fruit. **90 RP**



### 2018 Quinta Milú Ribera del Duero (\$14.99)

A small project of winemaker Germán R. Blanco, who is actively moving away from the region's traditions. The fruit comes from several smaller plots, all more than 40 years old, and located around the village of La Aguilera. This wine only sees old oak, and although deeply colored, has a liveliness and a freshness that is unexpected. The flavors are Ribera del Duero, but the experience is not.



### 2016 Alvar de Dios "Aciano" Toro (\$24.99)

The Toro region came to fame in the '90s, with wines that were dark, extracted, and oaky. Alvar de Dios Hernandez inherited a small parcel in this famed region about a decade ago. Alvar is more interested in elegance and expressiveness. The classic, dark fruit is lifted and enhanced, and the richness is balanced with freshness as opposed to oak. **94 RP**



## In Portugal, the *Other Iberia*, Douro Reds Are Not Just for Port

The Douro river valley, which is one of Portugal's most exciting regions for dry red wine, is better known for its sweet, fortified wines. It's also known for the dramatic appearance of its vineyards, planted in steep slopes of granite and schist (just do a quick image search and look at those vineyards—wow, that is what some people call “heroic” viticulture!). But, in addition to being delicious in their own right, Douro's dry reds also have something to teach you about port, the reason why those vines were planted in the first place. There are numerous wine grape cultivars here that are planted almost nowhere else, and vintners employ a wide range of winemaking styles. The nuances and character of the following wines illuminate that classic style of wine.

**2016 Quinta Vale do Meão “Meandro” Douro (\$19.99)** A previous vintage of Meandro was the wine that made me reevaluate the dry wines from the region. This wine showcases the fruit and the complexity of the region, and has just the right amount of winemaking polish. What jumps out to me is that this wine speaks of the region, not of the winemaker. The 2016 vintage is an exceptional vintage for the region, giving fruit with intensity and purity. **91 WE**



**2013 Quinta do Pôpa Douro (\$18.99)** This shows us what the dry wines from the region are capable of expressing with a little time in the bottle. It is mainly a blend of Touriga Franca and Tempranillo (Tinto Roriz), and is built around a bright structure that has had a chance to soften its youthful edges. It now has softer acidity and tannins, and the subtle depth that maturity brings, while still possessing the expressive aromatics and brighter, lighter fruit that you would expect from these varieties.

**2017 Luis Seabra “Xisto Ilimitado” Douro (\$24.99)** Luis Seabra is one of the most exciting producers in the valley. His efforts are aimed at capturing and expressing all the facets that the wines from this region can possess. The wines are lighter and more graceful than the more traditional producers of the Douro. He balances the wild, bright, floral fruit of the valley against the savory and lingering minerality of the soils (xisto). He mixes old school foot trodding in granite *lagares* with modern stainless steel tanks and old wood barrels. He and his wines are neither rustic nor flashy—they are simply a delicious bridge from the traditional to the modern.



## Also, It's Not Just All About the Vinho Verde

One of my favorite things about wine is the discovery. It could be that I watched Indiana Jones movies too many times when I was a kid, but I love discovering the “new” in the wine world. Although I will never be the first to find them, new regions, new grapes, and new wineries keep this industry evergreen for me.

Portugal is a treasure hunter/archeologist/wine nerd's paradise. The richest, easiest hunting, especially when the weather warms up, are the white wines. One of the most exciting things about the country is that many of the vineyards are planted in granite and schist soils, which tend to make the wines sparkle a little more with their inherent minerality. Grab a glass—and your whip—and let's go on an adventure.

**2017 Quinta da Saudade “Palato do Côa” Branco Douro Superior (\$18.99)** When you think of the Douro valley you don't think of white wine. You most likely think of port, and probably not white port. White port can be fantastic, especially with tonic, but that is for another review. White grapes like Viosinho, Rabigato, and Còdega do Larinho have long been planted here, but most of us have never heard of them. This is one of the things that I love about Portugal. Grown in yellow schist soils and vinified in stainless steel tanks, this wine delivers the classic white expression of the valley. It is medium-bodied, with fresh acidity. Floral, with mineral notes and fresh fruit, it has all of the qualities of the reds—and just a hint of something wild.

**2017 João Cabral Almeida “Camaleão” Minho Alvarinho (\$19.99)** Minho is the name of the region in which Vinho Verde is located. While Alvarinho is planted in many of the subregions of the appellation, it is most famously grown in the northern zone nearest to the Spanish border. What is exciting about this bottling is that it hails from the more southerly, interior zone of Amarante, where it has the region's famous granitic soils, but it is more sheltered from the coastal weather patterns. This wine basks, like the lizard on the label, in the sun. It has a little more richness and expressive fruit, but all the racy acidity and minerality that you expect from Alvarinho. **90 RP**

**2017 Herdade do Esporão “Esporão” Reserva Branco Alentejo (\$21.99)** Not all whites from Portugal are light and crisp. Coming from the warmer interior of the Alentejo region, this wine has a richness and fullness that you would expect, but is balanced with freshness and minerality that suggest the schist and granite-rich soils. The wine is made from organically grown Arinto, Antão Vaz, and Roupeiro in the Reguengos subzone. Vinified in a mix of oak and stainless steel tanks, the wine has clean, bright fruit, texture, and spice from oak and lees aging. This speaks of more famous French wines but with the warmth and openness of its native Portuguese accent. **90 WS**



## In Rioja, Old Friends Are the Best of Friends

The first subregion of Rioja that I became obsessed with was **Alavesa**. It is the smallest region, tucked into its own corner, and the two key facts about it that I glommed onto were that the soils there had more limestone in them, and that it was politically Basque. While those are still important facts, thankfully, my understanding and appreciation of the region has grown. It is a very dynamic region with many very old vineyards. Historically, it has the most Tempranillo planted of all of the Rioja regions. It has some of the highest vineyards of the region, nestled in the foothills of the Sierra Cantabria and the Sierra de Toloño. But more importantly than facts, the wines in that region do have a distinctive taste. I would like to think that it is partly due to the limestone, and also due to the obsessiveness of the producers.

**2012 Remelluri Reserva Rioja (\$39.99)** Remelluri balances the modern and the traditional in a way that few other producers do in this very traditional region. This wine has modern polish without feeling manipulated. This Reserva meets all the legal qualifications, but it puts to shame almost all other wine that carries “Reserve” on the label.



Aromatically and on the palate, this wine displays an integrated mix of fruit, tobacco, spice, fruit, and minerality, all those elements playing both with and against each other. I do not know if it is the organic farming, or the blend of Tempranillo, Garnacha, Graciano, and Manzanillo (it has to be both), but the dark red fruit is both distinctive yet also so typical for the region. Complex, aromatic, rich, and long, this is a great bottle of wine. **93 RP, 93 VN**

**2005 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos Gran Reserva Rioja (750ml \$29.99; 1.5L \$59.99)** From one of K&L’s oldest direct import producers in Spain, this is a wine that speaks to the winemaking traditions of Rioja as much as it does to the distinctive flavors of Alavesa. Winemaking involves native yeast, concrete, both American and French oak barrels that are used for up to seven years, and the most important ingredient to traditional Rioja, time: 38 months in barrel and many more in bottle. This is their current release! This is textbook for what Gran Reservas should deliver—the mix of developed fruit tones with some quite youthful tones, the spice and seasoning of oak, and that unmistakable earthy minerality that is the region’s calling card.



## Ubiquitous, Uncommonly Delicious Garnacha

**Grenache is the most widely planted red wine grape in Spain.** There is, in fact, more Grenache (Garnacha, in Spain) planted in Spain than is planted in France—it just doesn’t seem that way based on the larger number of Grenache-based wines from the South of France that we sell at K&L. Over the last several years I have become more aware of the depth and versatility of varietal Grenache. It was the wines from the Swartland in South Africa and the Garnacha from around Madrid that were the catalyst for my awakening. The finesse, purity, and complexity these wines was hard to ignore, and although some of these wines were expensive enough to rival their southern Rhône competitors, they also had more of all that I wanted in a wine: complexity, freshness, and balance. More importantly, Garnacha has something for just about everyone. The varietal wines, and heavily Grenache-based blends, tend toward medium-bodied wines with softer tannins, good fruit, and a touch of spice—it could be the perfect red to pair with food. Not too big, not too light, with lots of character, this is a wine that rewards the producer who really wants to show off where the wine comes from.

**2017 Cooperativa Cristo Del Humilladero “Granito del Cadalso” Garnacha Vinos de Madrid (\$15.99)** The Sierra de Gredos was not on most drinkers’ wine maps a decade ago. This range of mountains is located about an hour west of Madrid. The relatively high elevation



and granitic soils are a perfect starting point for delicious Garnacha. Throw in the light touch of winemakers Daniel Landi and Fernando Garcia, and the equation is complete. This is a high-toned Garnacha with lifted, pure aromatics and a hint of mountain herbs. The texture and weight of the wine are surprising, given the wine’s delicate hue. A versatile red that also surprises. **92 JD**

**2016 Celler de Capçanes “Mas Donis” Old Vines Montsant (\$12.99)** Montsant has long been overshadowed by the region it surrounds, Priorat. While it’s common to make Châteauneuf or Côtes du Rhône comparisons—and for simplicity it does work, especially given the price point differences—the comparison starts to fall apart when you find that the best wines of Montsant have similar elevations and exposures to those of Priorat, and similar vine ages. But because they have different and less consistent soils types, the wines are harder to market. This is a wine that has never had that problem. A stalwart in our Spanish section, the Mas Donis old vines is a blend with 85% Grenache, and the balance being Syrah. This has always been good, and this just could be the best it has ever been. Fuller, darker, richer than it has ever been, bigger than some of the Priorats that we have on the shelf—but I’m not comparing the two! This is a wine that overdelivers on its already very good track record. **94 JD**





## Just Don't Call It Ribera del Duero

Some of the biggest surprises for me about the wine industry in Spain are the continuing stories of rediscovery. When I first started in the business, Priorat was being rediscovered, reimagined, and presented anew to the world. Shortly thereafter, there was Bierzo. These are old regions, each with a deep winemaking history, but they had become all but forgotten. The key to their renewal is that they have very old vines, planted in dramatic locales, but which require tremendous efforts to farm. They were revitalized by younger winemakers who were excited by the vines they found in these relatively isolated, rugged regions. It is one of the most romantic parts of the industry.

What is surprising to me, in the case of Galia, is that this can happen within one of the biggest, most well-known regions in Spain—Ribera del Duero. This is like saying that someone in Bordeaux or Burgundy has just found an old, neglected vineyard. Galia is a passion project from winemaker Jerome Bougnaud, who has worked at Pingus and Quinta Sardonía, some of the greats of the region. He has acquired tiny parcels all over, and just outside, of the region, which is why he labels his wines VdT Castilla y León. His goal, which I believe that he has met, is to make elegant expressions from old vines. K&L is very proud to offer a small selection of these special wines (due to arrive in October) that showcase this great region's history and potential. Just read these scores and reviews by Luis Gutiérrez of Robert Parker's Wine Advocate:

**2015 Galia "Villages" Tierra de Castilla y León (PA \$39.99) 95 RP:**

"It has an intoxicating, perfumed and really attractive nose full of flowers, wild herbs and spices. The palate is medium-bodied and has the elegance and poise the nose was pointing out, with ultra refined tannins, great balance and freshness. It has to be one of the most elegant

wines produced from the Ribera del Duero zone, and it doesn't show any of the heat from the warm and dry 2015 vintage. They included the white grapes from their vineyards in Piquera, Fuentelcesped and Trigueros, so the estimated breakdown of the blend is 88% Tempranillo, 10% Garnacha and 2% Albillo—and 100% produced in their own, brand new winery. All this must have contributed to a more relaxed wine, with perfectly integrated oak and a sense of harmony and elegance despite the 15% alcohol and relatively high pH (3.8). It fermented with indigenous yeasts, with some full clusters and aged in oak barrels and vats of different sizes for some 20 months...I was really blown away by this."

**2015 Galia "Le Dean" Tierra de Castilla y León (PA \$54.99) 95 RP:**

"It has the elegant style of the house reds along with the minerality from the limestone soils and the old vines from a north-facing slope close to Vega Sicilia. This has a personality that justifies keeping it separate even though there are only 758 bottles of it. They used some 20% full clusters for the native fermentation, and the Tempranillo was co-fermented with the approximately 1% of white Albillo existing in the old vineyard."

**2015 Galia "Clos Santuy" Vino de la Tierra de Castilla y León**

**(PA \$69.99) 96 RP:** "The 2015 Clos Santuy is produced with the grapes from an ungrafted, head-pruned 1.12-hectare vineyard in the village of Piquera de San Esteban in the province of Soria, just outside the limits of Ribera del Duero...This is a textbook elegant and fresh Ribera from the cooler part; it's ripe and powerful but really in balance and includes some 10% of white Albillo grapes that surely add to the silky texture and the fresh sensation on the palate. What a portfolio Galia showed in 2015, and this jewel of the crown filled some 1,073 bottles in September 2017. Bravo!"

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