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Galician wine in demand

Guest contributor Noah Chichester reports on the rush to snap up land in the north-west corner of Spain, where the cool, Atlantic-influenced climate gives a crispness to its wines that's getting harder to achieve in other Spanish regions. Above, the Avia Valley in Ribeiro.

‘Galicia está de moda.’ Speak to many a Galician winemaker and you’ll hear this phrase again and again. ‘Galicia is in fashion.’

They’re not wrong. This corner of north-western Spain is riding the crest of a wave that’s been building for decades, and the world is noticing. A global drop in red wine sales has seen juggernaut wine regions such as Rioja taking extreme measures to reduce surplus wine – going so far as to distil 17 million litres of excess red and rosé stock in an attempt to correct imbalances in supply and demand and stabilise plummeting grape prices. Meanwhile, demand for white wine continues to grow, and wineries are responding accordingly. More and more Spanish winery groups are diversifying their offerings by acquiring properties in Galicia, the cool Atlantic region best known for white wines made from grapes such as Albariño, Treixadura or Godello. (See the *World Atlas of Wine* map [here](#).)

What makes the region so attractive to these outsiders? For one, as the rest of the country grapples with the effects of climate change, the rain in Spain stays mainly in Galicia. ‘Galicia has an advantage over areas such as Catalunya, which are suffering from significant droughts’, says María Urrutia, marketing director of Rioja winery CVNE. ‘Its wines are fresh, Atlantic, mineral wines, which you don’t find in Rioja.’ In contrast to most Spanish whites, which tend to come from a continental or Mediterranean climate, Galicia’s whites are grown in an Atlantic climate, which gives its wines a freshness and natural acidity that are quite literally worth their weight in gold.

Just ask Vega Sicilia, which paid €200,000 per hectare to buy up vines in the Condado do Tea subzone of DO Rías Baixas – more than double the highest prices in better-known regions

such as Rioja Alavesa. Vega Sicilia is not alone: other winery groups from traditional red-wine-producing regions have established footholds in Rías Baixas, including Marqués de Murrieta, CVNE and Alma Carraovejas. Galicia's most well-known region is a logical choice for many groups to enter the white-wine game. Rías Baixas regularly generates high numbers in national and international markets – the price per litre of wine here hovers just under €7, almost €2 above the national average. In both Rías Baixas and the rest of Galicia, characteristic smallholdings of vines, many covering less than a hectare, also naturally limit production and raise costs.

‘These wineries come here because our white wines have great prestige, but let’s not forget that there’s money to be made, and they’re making money’, says José Antonio López. He’s been a constant presence in Rías Baixas since helping to establish the appellation in 1988, and in February 2024, he sold his third project, Tricó, to the Alma Carraovejas group. ‘I hope they’ll continue in the same line of quality, but only time will tell’, López says. He, like others in the region, worries that if large wineries begin planting huge areas of vineyards and churning out millions of bottles, Galicia will lose its reputation for high-quality wines.

Others are more optimistic. David Pascual (above), president of the Asociación Galega de Enólogos (Galician Oenology Association), believes the arrival of outside groups will help push Galician winemakers in the right direction. ‘It forces us to innovate, research and try to improve things – not only in the vineyard but also in the winery’, he says.

Most new arrivals also cite quality as the number one reason to look to Galicia, brushing off the idea that climate change and shifting tastes are behind their move north-west. ‘Long before we talked about climate change, Rías Baixas already had an ancient tradition which led us here’, says Pablo Álvarez, CEO of Tempos Vega Sicilia. ‘Including a new wine in our portfolio is driven by its quality and relevance, not by trends’, he insists. ‘Our commitment goes beyond trends’, says María Vargas, technical director of Marqués de Murrieta’s Pazo de Barrantes. ‘Marqués de Murrieta has always opted for great white wines for ageing and we’ve sought to consolidate this philosophy in our winery in Galicia.’

Not everyone feels the same way.

‘Of course we’re worried about climate change’, says Pedro Ruiz Aragonese, head of the Alma Carraovejas group. ‘Many of the decisions we’ve made over the last several years have been in the context of a changing climate.’ Among them, the decision to purchase three wineries in Galicia – one of the few regions in Spain that is expected to benefit from a warming climate, according to a [2024 study](#). ‘Climate change has helped Galicia in the sense that you can make

more balanced wines now than you could before’, says Ruiz Aragonese. ‘Although I think there’s a tendency to look only for freshness in wines, we’re looking for white wines that have freshness but also can age.’

The Avia Valley in DO Ribeiro in Galicia

To find those ageworthy whites, Carraovejas went to Galicia’s oldest wine region. The group was one of the first outsiders to look beyond Rías Baixas when they acquired Emilio Rojo and Viña Meín, two of the leading producers in DO Ribeiro, in 2019, and with time other groups have purchased wineries in Ribeiro. In 2024, José Pariente bought Vilerma, another foundational winery that helped to spark the region’s modern qualitative revolution. Notably, Pariente bucks the red-to-white wine trend: their home turf is Rueda, the number-one region in Spain for white-wine production. ‘The boom in white-wine consumption is something that we’ve been seeing for years, but in our case, it was something innate’, say siblings Ignacio and Martina Prieto Pariente. ‘We’re white-wine makers by nature. It was clear to us that any new project we embarked on would be fundamentally a white-wine project.’ As for Valdeorras, Galicia’s other bastion of white-wine production, the potential of its single-variety Godello wines has attracted star Rioja winemakers Telmo Rodríguez and Rafael Palacios, as well as CVNE, to set up shop.

‘Great wine entrepreneurs always have a “detector” to know what’s in fashion’, says Ribeiro winemaker Antonio Míguez Amil of Boas Vides. Juanjo Figueroa Treus (below), president of the Asociación Gallega de Sumilleres (Galician Sommelier Association), believes history is repeating itself. ‘I think we’re seeing a repetition of the Rueda phenomenon’, he says. ‘Wineries from Ribera del Duero and Rioja didn’t make white wines in their regions and suddenly went to Rueda to plant Verdejo. I think because Albariño, Treixadura and Godello have become more famous, now they’re coming here.’

Speculation is always a concern whenever a region becomes popular, and it’s no different in Galicia. ‘The problem with these groups coming here is that it creates a bubble’, says Pascual. ‘I think we’ll lose some viticultural and winemaking diversity because it will be difficult for smaller wineries to compete with the large ones for grape prices. The DOs could regulate prices, but it’s hard. And at a time as good as this, I don’t know who would want to be the one to turn off the music and stop the party.’

‘It could also be disastrous if the Galician government doesn’t set the house in order’, warns Amil. ‘If the hills are filled with vines and water resources are captured for the interest of a few,

it would be catastrophic. Everything would be in the hands of ten groups with thousands of hectares planted in the wrong places and no cultural, environmental or agricultural sensitivity.’

Rías Baixas grower Jorge Marcote Gil is more optimistic about the potential to add value. ‘Big companies act like a ship’s rudder in the market’, he says. ‘If the price of grapes goes up, the overall price of the wine will increase, too. And the producers I’m interested in – the small and medium ones who do the most to promote Galicia – are the ones who are growing their own grapes, not buying them.’

It seems clear that Galicia’s future will depend on a balance between long-term and short-term thinking – engaging with large wineries and responding to trends while protecting the small-scale-growing model that makes the region attractive to outsiders in the first place. ‘It’s important to think that these winery groups can create jobs here and attract young people back to the countryside’, says Figueroa, ‘as long as they’re respecting every part of the wine’s life cycle, from vineyard to winery to distribution.’

Pascual hopes smaller producers will wake up to the quality of their homeland. ‘From my point of view, the next step would be for us to maintain or recover the micro-plots and small vineyards that will be forgotten with the next generational change. We need to recognise the value of what we have. Galicians are very like that: we can’t see the value of our raw materials, our landscape or our environment. We need to believe in what we have and save things at risk of abandonment. But that always comes after these groups arrive.’

Photos of Ribeiro’s landscape at top and in centre by Angelo Ramos.

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