

# Rioja Focus: Marqués de Murrieta and the Legend of Ygay

6 TASTING NOTES Wednesday, Apr 15, 2026



The tasting lineup of the six most recent releases of the Marqués de Murrieta Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial. (Jacobo García Andrade photos)

We're kicking off a new series at JamesSuckling.com on the heralded red wines of Rioja, with Senior Editor Jacobo García Andrade offering his perspective on vertical tastings he did at a number of estates in one of Spain's most iconic wine regions.

His first visit was to Marqués de Murrieta, where technical director María Vargas poetically referred to the character of their emblematic **Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial**, which is released only in exceptional vintages, as a wine that is **"built like an athlete, capable of crossing the frontier of time."**

Jacobo walked the Ygay vineyard with Vargas and tasted six of the most recent vintages at the property with Vargas: **2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012**. Following her analogy, the wines all shared a sense of endurance and longevity – each with its own different build and complexion. The 2012, released in early 2024, is the most recent Ygay. The next release – the 2016 – is expected to be released either later this year or in 2027. The wines, of course, are not cheap, with an average price on Wine-Searcher of more than US\$150 each.

Marqués de Murrieta is owned by Vicente Dalmau and located just south of Logroño, in the southern section of Rioja Alta. The estate comprises 300 hectares, divided into three terraces ranging from 300 to 485 meters in altitude. The first Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial was made in 1893, but the next didn't appear until 1908. To this day, it is only bottled in select vintages, when quality and style align with the house criteria.

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These are deeply colored reds, with marked but measured structure, which is never excessive. They undergo extended aging in wood, followed by further time in cement, and the greatest virtue of these wines lies in their strong sense of identity while expressing detail with precision and balance.

Vargas explained the winemaking philosophy behind the Ygay during the tasting: “We have to respect the acidity while maintaining the right phenolic balance so the wine can evolve slowly.”

While time remains an essential component of both the Gran Reserva and Reserva categories in Spain, it is not the sole determinant of a wine's quality. But these categories are important in understanding the vineyard within the context of winemaking and elevage.

Castillo Ygay is, above all, a wine characterized by the vineyard. It comes from a site known as La Plana, a 40-hectare, head-trained plot planted around 1950 in the highest section of the estate – at 485 meters on rocky clay-limestone soils. No herbicides are used, and the vineyard is pruned following regenerative principles.

The wine is a variable blend, based largely on tempranillo with a smaller proportion of mazuelo, the local Riojan name for cariñena or carignan. Tempranillo provides the body, while the sharper mazuelo, with its naturally



Marqués de Murrieta's technical director, María Vargas, laid out her winemaking philosophy during the vertical tasting.

higher acidity, brings structure as well as a subtle floral lift to the blend. The final proportions are determined through tasting, with tempranillo, in Vargas's words, only tolerating a limited amount of mazuelo.

Vargas likens the acidity in Ygay to salt in food: there is a precise point of balance, and it is easy to have too much or too little.

In the cellar, all the grapes are destemmed and fermented under temperature-controlled conditions, with two daily delestages carried out until the end of fermentation. Total time on skins ranges from 10 to 12 days, followed by a further period of around 10 days on the lees.

The wines are then aged in barrique for periods ranging from 26 to 34 months. Tempranillo is matured in American oak, while mazuelo tends to be more oxidative, so it prefers finer, less porous French oak.

After blending, the wine is transferred to cement, where it continues to age for an extended period – from around eight months in 2005 to as much as 20 months in 2012. As Vargas noted, each vintage behaves differently, and elevage is adapted to preserve balance. In more recent vintages, time in cement has been increasing.



Planted around 1950, La Plana is an old, head-trained vineyard of tempranillo and mazuelo, from which the Marqués de Murrieta Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial originates.

Rainfall in Rioja, particularly in the vicinity of Marqués de Murrieta, sits at the lower end of the limit for what is viable for viticulture, and the quantity of precipitation each year plays a defining role in the character of the wines. Harvest dates are equally critical, shaping both ripeness and balance in the final blend.

Despite relatively lower precipitation in 2012, the perfect-scoring **Marqués de Murrieta Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial 2012** was one of the most complete wines among the six that made up this mini-vertical, combining concentration with a clearly delineated core of dark fruit. It shows integrity and cohesion, with tannins, fruit, and acidity all in harmony.

The blend – 81 percent tempranillo and 19 percent mazuelo – includes a higher proportion of mazuelo than usual, which adds freshness to the blend. There is the depth expected from Castillo Ygay, but also a sense of vivacity and purity that gives the wine its balance and precision.

The growing season in 2012 was unusual, with a cool July and August followed by a warmer September and October that accelerated the harvest.

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The Marqués de Murrieta Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial 2010 shows a truly special sense of balance, plus it's more subdued in style, with a greater emphasis on elegance.

tempranillo and 14 percent mazuelo, it is more linear and discreet, with a finely detailed, almost ethereal expression in the context of the tasting. The vintage was particularly cool, with harvest extending well into October for both varieties. The wine shows slightly tarry notes alongside dried flowers, expressive yet marked by a sense of tension and austerity that makes it especially compelling.

The 2011 was one of the most concentrated wines in the lineup, offering a broader structure and greater density than both 2010 and 2012. A blend of 84 percent tempranillo and 16 percent mazuelo, it shows a firmer structure, with notes of rust, dried herbs and plums. Exceptionally low rainfall during the growing season (341 millimeters) led to smaller berries, resulting in more concentration and a more pronounced tannic framework.

This is a wine built for long aging, balanced but likely to appeal more to those who favor power and structure over finesse.

The oldest wine in the tasting was the 2005 **Castillo Ygay**, and it proved to be the most structured. It comes from a warm vintage, in line with conditions seen across much of Europe and

Spain that year. While winter was cold, the growing season was largely dry, with around 375 mm of rainfall – at the lower end of an already low spectrum.

These conditions resulted in wines with firm structure and depth. 2005 shows a more robust, tightly knit profile, with a pronounced tannic backbone that still frames the fruit. While it remains approachable, it shows a more structured expression of the vineyard and vintage.



The Marqués de Murrieta winery is located just south of the city of Logroño in Rioja.

The 2007 was equally concentrated; a loss of 50 percent of the harvest to mildew resulted in lower yields that led to more concentration. With a broader and darker expression of dark fruit.

The 2009 stood out for its current expression, with an expressive nose with floral notes, eucalyptus and a subtle smoky character. Harmonious and open, it can be seen as a more expansive and expressive counterpart to the more restrained and detailed 2010.



Marques de Murrieta owner Vicente Dalmau sits in the Castillo Ygay vineyard.

balance. All the wines are marked by their origin, showing vintage variation within the framework of the estate's winemaking and approach – each with its own particular sense of balance, and each with its own build and complexion.

*Jacobo García Andrade, Senior Editor*

The list of wines below is comprised of bottles tasted and rated by the JamesSuckling.com tasting team. You can sort the wines below by vintage and score. You can also search for specific wines in the search bar.

Expand All

Sort By

SCORE (HIGHEST TO LOWEST) 

MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA RIOJA CASTILLO YGAY GRAN RESERVA ESPECIAL 2012



MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA RIOJA CASTILLO YGAY GRAN RESERVA ESPECIAL 2010



MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA RIOJA CASTILLO YGAY GRAN RESERVA ESPECIAL 2009



MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA RIOJA CASTILLO YGAY GRAN RESERVA ESPECIAL 2005



MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA RIOJA CASTILLO YGAY GRAN RESERVA ESPECIAL 2011



MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA RIOJA CASTILLO YGAY GRAN RESERVA ESPECIAL 2007



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