

Wine Spectator

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RIOJA

CATCHING UP WITH THE DYNAMIC SPANISH REGION

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Rioja Reigns in Spain

The wines of Spain, including those of its iconic Rioja region, have long been the subject of an annual tasting report in the pages of *Wine Spectator*. They also feature prominently on many of our trademark lists, including the Top 100. In 2020, Bodegas Marqués de Murrieta, one of the founding wineries in Rioja, was awarded the Wine of the Year honor for its Tempranillo-based red Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial 2010 (96 points, \$139). However, the last time that we took a deep dive and focused specifically on Rioja on our cover was Oct. 15, 2012.

Given the excitement over the 2021 vintage in Rioja and the fact that the region is coincidentally celebrating 100 years since its formal recognition in 1925, I dispatched senior editor Alison Napjus, lead taster on the wines of Spain, to pay a visit. For this issue's cover story, she shares what she discovered throughout a week of tasting, touring and meeting with many wine producers, 10 of which are profiled in greater depth.

"My recent trip and my tastings in the past year really pushed the boundaries in my mind of what I consider 'Rioja.' I think top traditional bodegas are offering wines in an expected style but with unexpected depth and subtle distinction. At the other end of the spectrum there are many new wineries and winemakers influenced by travel to Burgundy, Rhône and Germany," she says.

Napjus paints Rioja as a dynamic region with an expanding range of wine styles and ever greater quality. You can learn more about Rioja's traditional designations along with the emerging focus on *terroir*, reflected in more site-specific bottlings, including single-vineyards, beginning on page 32.

For her formal tasting report, beginning on page 50, Napjus blind-tasted more than 300 wines from Rioja in our New York office. Because cellar aging is a common practice for the region, they span vintages across two decades. But the quality of the 2021 vintage eclipses any previously reviewed by *Wine Spectator*, earning a classic rating of 97 points overall. These are wines you don't want to miss.

The news is equally bright from Bordeaux, where senior editor and lead taster James Molesworth rates the newly released 2022 vintage 95 points on the Left Bank and 97 on the Right Bank. It's a reminder of how quickly fortunes can turn, following on the heels of a dismal 2021. Having blind-tasted and reviewed nearly 400 wines for his report, Molesworth writes that the overall strength of the 2022s is clear, crowned by his "wine of the vintage," Cheval Blanc, earning 99 points. This achievement is even more impressive considering its production of 6,845 cases and reasonable price



of \$670. Bordeaux fans will find many more reasons to celebrate across Molesworth's list of recommended wines from this beautiful vintage, beginning on page 66.

Not to be outdone, Chile also chalks up its best vintage in recent memory. Having tasted more than 140 wines from the 2021 vintage overall, our lead taster on the wines, senior editor Aaron Romano, rates the year 95 points. A trio of newly released 2021s top this report's list of recommended reds from the vintage, all three scoring 95 or more points and priced at \$170 or less. Romano also looks at some 2022s, another year showing excellent potential.

Finally, I am happy to welcome chef Tom Colicchio back to our pages with a handful of recipes from his new book. I think you will find them perfect for spring and to pair with many of the exceptional wines in this issue.

Marvin R. Shanken
Editor and Publisher

REDISCOVERING

RIOJA

The village of Elciego is home to Marqués de Riscal's original 1860 bodega and Frank Gehry's 2006 City of Wine addition (right).

TRACKING THE EVOLUTION OF SPAIN'S ICONIC REGION AND ITS WINES

By Alison
Napjus

Across Spain's many appellations and wine styles, bottlings from the Rioja region are far and away the most familiar to Americans. Rioja arrives to U.S. shores in volumes that ensure its presence on store shelves and restaurant wine lists. It's the only Spanish wine type that ranks among America's most consumed foreign wines, in a group with New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and Italian Chianti.

And bottlings of Rioja offer incredible breadth, with versions ranging from easy-drinking to complex and ageable, and price tags from \$10 to \$1,000 per bottle.

Rioja's success in the U.S. is largely based on recognized winery names offering wines of generally consistent quality and at volume—not an easy feat to achieve. That dependability is attractive to consumers, especially for those purchasing outside of their usual comfort zone.

Rioja's stylistic consistency may come at a price. Innovation and experimentation in the vineyards and cellars are present but implementation sometimes takes a back seat to meeting the expectations for consistency. Detractors argue that Rioja has lost its soul, becoming a brand more than a dynamic wine representing a distinctive tapestry of soils, people and places.

In the past 10 to 20 years, the wine world as a whole has



Telmo Rodríguez, longtime advocate of *terroir*-driven wines, produces his Bodegas Lanzaga's top bottling from the 4.7-acre Las Beatas vineyard.



increasingly embraced *terroir*-driven examples, with wineries offering more single-vineyard or even single-parcel bottlings. The movement lends weight—or at least additional attention—to the claim that Rioja, known for blending grape sources from throughout the region to achieve scale, is more commodity than artisanal product. But producers in Rioja are far from untouched by the trends of other leading wine areas around the world.

An overhaul of labeling regulations in 2017 now allows wineries to give emphasis to Rioja's subregions, villages and even *cru* vineyards. Producers large and small are looking for abandoned vineyards to resuscitate and ways to prolong the life of Rioja's wealth of old vines. Microvinifications of single plots or parcels are widespread in the region's wineries, for edification before blending but also increasingly for bottling as solo wines. And a new wave of boutique producers determined to map Rioja's *terroirs* is bringing dynamic energy to the region as a whole.

The fight for Rioja's soul is less of a pitched battle with a winning and losing side than it is an expansion of Rioja as we've known it in recent decades. Although it's happening slowly and heralds change, this expansion offers greater granularity and definition to the region, giving consumers more to explore and enjoy. It's an evolution, not a revolution, and the moment for wine lovers to rediscover this rich wine realm should start right now.

THE BEGINNING AND BORDEAUX

Alongside some of Rioja's old-vine vineyards, visitors can find *lagares*, stone cisterns for wine production introduced by the invading Romans in the second century BC, a testament to the longevity of wine production in the region.

In more recent history, records indicate a thriving wine industry in the 16th through 18th centuries. Archives show that the 1580 production from what is today Rioja Alta, the region's western most subzone, totaled the equivalent of nearly 600,000 cases. Small, underground cellars were common in Rioja's villages, with as many as 250 cellars for 300 growers in the 1600s.

Telmo Rodríguez is one winemaker who has put Rioja's historical infrastructure to use for his modern needs. Rodríguez left Rioja and his family's La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remelluri winery in the 1990s to explore winemaking in different parts of the world. He returned to Rioja in 1998 to found his own Bodegas Lanzaga estate, with aging of some of the winery's labels completed in an underground cellar in the village of Ollauri.

"I came to Ollauri because I wanted to understand what was the origin of Rioja—what was the *terroir*; I wanted to see the old, traditional cellars," recalls Rodríguez. "I saw this cellar and I realized it was perfect, with many of the components mimicked by modern cellars today," he says, highlighting the cellar's natural temperature and humidity control and its gravity-fed workflow, among other features. The cellar, which

was abandoned in the 1970s, additionally still supports abundant natural yeast, allowing Rodríguez to eschew inoculating with cultured yeast strains during winemaking and potentially capturing more of Rioja's historic flavors.

Rodríguez is one of the forerunners of Rioja's movement toward more *terroir*-driven wines, through the lens of connecting the region's past with one of its potential future paths. He founded Lanzaga to create "a wine from a village" akin to those winemakers of the 1700s.

Taking that expression a step further, in 2011 Rodríguez bottled his first single-site wine from the 4.7-acre Las Beatas vineyard (2021: 95 points, \$375). "What is traditional Rioja? The blend?" poses Rodríguez. "Champagne is a blend," he says, chuckling, "but we find Clos de Mesnil quite interesting," acknowledging Krug Champagne's revered single vineyard as a successful exception among a tradition of blending.

Rodríguez seeks to recover what he considers Rioja's heyday, an interpretation that recalls the region's wines during the 17th and 18th centuries. But for most students of wine, today's Rioja—both wine style and industry infrastructure—has its origin in the late 19th century, heavily influenced by France's Bordeaux.

Two of modern Rioja's founding fathers spent time in Bordeaux to study advances in winemaking during their exile from Spain due to the political turmoil leading up to Queen Isabel's ascension to the Spanish throne in 1844. Upon returning to Spain, each man began wine production using Bordeaux's "modern" techniques, including fermentation and aging in oak.

Luciano de Murrieta García Lemoine, the Marqués de Murrieta, produced his first wine in 1852, then later established a

winery estate at Ygay, south of the town of Logroño. From 1850 to 1860, D. Guillermo Hurtado de Amézaga, later the Marqués de Riscal, constructed a bodega in the village of Elciego, including chambers for barrel aging à la Bordeaux; the winery's first vintage was 1862.

"In Rioja and at Marqués de Riscal, the 19th century was very tightly tied to Bordeaux," says Hurtado de Amézaga's descendant Luis Hurtado de Amézaga, head winemaker and technical director at the winery today. "The Marqués de Riscal lived in Bordeaux for 40 years; Jean Pineau, from Bordeaux, was the first winemaker at Marqués de Riscal; and we continued the tradition of French winemakers until my grandfather [assumed the position]."

In 1867 the vine louse phylloxera swept through France, devastating the country's vineyards and further integrating Bordeaux's relationship with Rioja as the French region's wine merchants turned to Rioja.

"Rioja's historic wineries were created to be substitutes for high-end Bordeaux, when phylloxera meant there was no Bordeaux," says Maria José López de Heredia, who is the fourth generation helming her family winery, R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia, with siblings Mercedes and Julio.

Founded in 1877, López de Heredia was one of many new bodegas to ride the incredible boom, especially in the town of Haro in northwestern Rioja, where a railway connecting the seaport of Bilbao, on Spain's northern coastline, facilitated export to France.

Bordeaux's technique of oak fermentation and aging became firmly entrenched in Rioja. A large cooperage was built in Rioja, and the American colonies provided a less-expensive alternative



Founded in 1877, R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia thrived during the Rioja wine boom that resulted in part from a lack of Bordeaux wines during France's phylloxera outbreak. At the time, most Rioja wineries adopted Bordeaux techniques of oak fermentation and aging, leading to the region's age-based classification system, which Tondonia retains.

to French oak. The use of oak would ultimately spur a classification system that would come to define the region's wines, basing release dates and labeling on the length of time the wine was aged—*crianza*, *reserva* and *gran reserva*.

CREATING AN IDENTITY

Despite Rioja's historical ties to Bordeaux, today the structure of the region's wine industry shares many similarities with that of France's Champagne.

Rioja's 13,500 growers drastically outnumber the 750 wineries producing and selling wine commercially, mirroring Champagne's symbiosis of vine growers and *grandes marques* houses. Blending grape varieties and vineyard sources allows both Champagne's and Rioja's wineries to produce at a large scale, under a few well-recognized labels. A regulated aging regimen is applied to all of Champagne's wines and to many examples

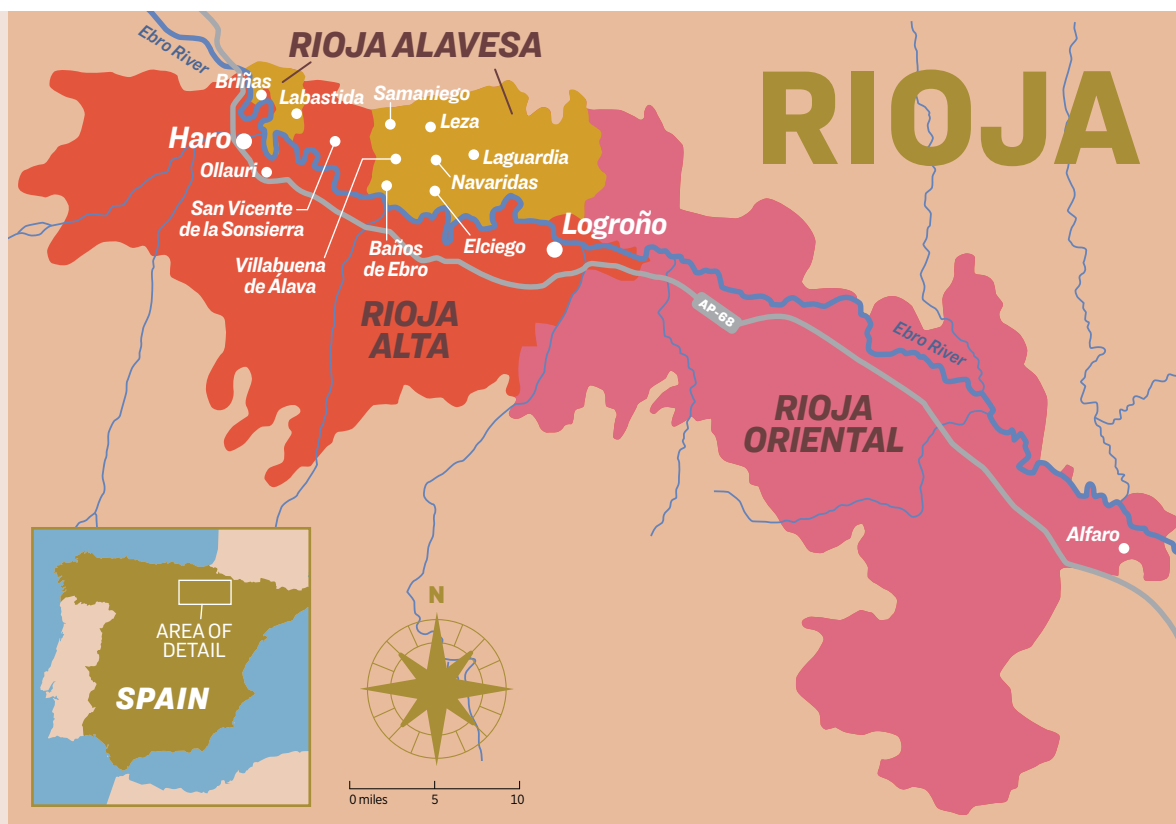
from Rioja, resulting in larger wineries in both regions that store millions of bottles at a time in their cellars. And historically, wineries in both regions strived to produce a recognizable house style, although Rioja achieves this without the multi-vintage blending approach of Champagne.

"The big challenge is to make the same style of wines for many years to come. [It should be] that in 20 years' time, the 2024 will taste the same as the 2004 does today," says Juan José Diaz, head winemaker at family-owned Bodegas Faustino. The 2004 Gran Faustino I Gran Reserva (93, \$100) is an entirely new label released to the market for the first time this year. It's a selection of barrels originally vinified for the winery's I Gran Reserva bottling (2016: 92, \$37), elaborated as the separate Gran Faustino label due to the success of the 2004 vintage.

Faustino, established in 1861, is the region's biggest vineyard-holder with over 2,000 acres of vines; they also purchase grapes

Mapping Rioja

The Rioja DOCa (*Denominación de Origen Calificada*, or denomination of qualified origin) spans more than 60 miles from its eastern to western limits, separated into three subzones: Rioja Alta, Rioja Alavesa and Rioja Oriental. As a whole, Rioja's geography is defined by the Ebro River, with its tributaries forming seven valleys, and the Sierra Cantabria mountain range. The mountain foothills provide elevation for the region's vineyards and protect against significantly cooler, wetter weather from the Atlantic Ocean just to the north.



TOTAL VINEYARD ACRES: 163,612

RED GRAPES: Tempranillo (88% of plantings), Garnacha, Graciano, Mazuelo and Maturana Tinta

WHITE GRAPES: Viura (66%), Tempranillo Blanco, Verdejo, Sauvignon Blanc, Garnacha Blanca, Chardonnay, Malvasía, Maturana Blanca and Turruntés

VINEYARD ALTITUDE RANGE: Primarily 1,000 feet to 1,800 feet, with plantings up to 2,950 feet

SOIL: Varied, with a predominance of limestone but incorporating clay, iron, alluvial components

ORGANIZATION: 571 wineries across 144 villages

Rioja Alta

ACRES: 68,841 | **VILLAGES:** 18

Rioja's westernmost subzone encompasses vineyards typically situated at higher altitude than the region's other two subzones. The terroir layers clay with iron and limestone, and at lower elevations, closer to the Ebro River, alluvial soils are common. On average, the area's Atlantic climate offers even-keeled temperatures throughout the year and moderate rainfall. These factors combine to promote wines that are generally more elegant in style, with brighter acidity.

Rioja Alavesa

ACRES: 32,549 | **VILLAGES:** 77

Rioja Alavesa is made up of two non-contiguous areas, both north of the Ebro River and located northeast above Rioja Alta. Clay-limestone soils

dominate the vineyards, which are often terraced and/or divided into small parcels. Conditions are more humid and cooler on average in Alavesa, and the resulting wines offer vivid acidity and more definition.

Rioja Oriental

ACRES: 62,222 | **VILLAGES:** 49

Rioja Oriental, or "eastern" in Spanish, was formerly known as the Rioja Baja for its generally lower-elevation vineyards. The area lies east of the city of Logroño, primarily to the south of the Ebro River, and it benefits from a Mediterranean climate that supports the wide plantation of Garnacha (versus Tempranillo's dominance in Alta and Alavesa). Oriental's predominantly clay-, iron- and alluvial-based soils, warmer and drier climate and lower-elevation vineyards produces wines with fruit-forward character and more weight and structure.



Bodegas Faustino is Rioja's largest vineyard holder, with more than 2,000 acres of estate vines. Its vast cellars hold some 60,000 barrels and up to 9 million bottles, with a focus on *gran reserva* bottlings.

from growers to meet 20% of their production needs. In relative terms to Champagne, they might be considered Rioja's Moët & Chandon. The winery is also a staunch traditionalist, upholding Rioja's aging regimens for much of its lineup of wines. They boast roughly 60,000 barrels and 9 million bottles in the cellar at any given time.

The impact of longer aging in oak undoubtedly benefits Faustino's implied goal of equalizing flavor profile and structure from vintage to vintage. Common elements include baked and dried fruit, tobacco and spice flavors, supple tannins and lively acidity. In the hands of a skilled winemaker long oak-aged Riojas can be incredibly nuanced and profound.

Yet Rioja's use of an aging regimen to define and in many ways epitomize its wines has been far from an unqualified success.

The aging terms prevailed as identifiers for the wines during many difficult historical periods: the collapse of Rioja's export market in the late 1890s when the Bordelais returned to the wines of their own vineyards; World War I, the Spanish Civil War and World War II; poor vintages; other economic and political upheavals; and the influence of technologically driven, often industrialized winemaking common in regions around the world during the 1960s and 1970s.

Not all wineries were able to successfully navigate these challenges, and

lesser-quality wines from poor vintages or high-yielding vines, for example, didn't benefit from long or over-aging. Such examples served as more of a detriment to the Rioja appellation's name and image.

FOLLOWING FASHION

Lesser-quality wines aside, in the later part of the 20th century Rioja's traditional style fell out of fashion. Napa Cabernets, heralded vintages from Bordeaux and super Tuscans were ascendent, popularizing fruit-driven wines of power and richness.

Marqués de Riscal was the first Rioja producer to offer an alternative in a similar camp. "It was tough in the '70s and '80s in Rioja," says Hurtado de Amézaga. "Riscal decided to launch a new wine in 1986, the Baron de Chirel, the first 'special wine' of Rioja." Conceptually it diverged from traditional Rioja: aged only two years and in new French oak, a focus on grape sourcing from select top vineyards and the inclusion of about 15% Cabernet Sauvignon with the Tempranillo. "It was the idea of our American importer at the time, to produce something a little thicker, a little new oak, a little more structure."

A wave of producers came to the fore in the 1990s offering wines in a newer, what was considered "modern" at the time, style, including Finca Allende, Bodegas Roda, Abel Mendoza, Artadi, Rodríguez's Bodegas Lanzaga, Bodegas

Aging Rioja

Rioja was established as an official Spanish DOCa (appellation of origin) a century ago. Labeling terms based on aging were common beginning in the 1900s, but an official system wasn't standardized until 1980. It's still the primary system used by most of Rioja's historic bodegas and this strong association has helped to define the region's wines.

To the region's benefit, the classification terms *crianza*, *reserva* and *gran reserva* are relatively easy to understand. Every bottle of Rioja includes a color-coded label strip on the back of the bottle with the term *cosecha* (harvest), and the vintage year next to the DOCa emblem. If applicable, *crianza*, *reserva* or *gran reserva* is listed above *cosecha* and may also appear on the main front and/or back label.



Crianza

BRIGHT RED APPELLATION STRIP

Aged a minimum of two years, with at least one year in oak barrels for red wines and six months for white and rosé wines.



Reserva

DARK RED APPELLATION STRIP

Aged a minimum of three years, with at least one year in oak barrels and six months in bottle for red wines. Aging for white and rosé wines is a minimum of two years with at least six months in oak barrels.



Gran Reserva

DARK BLUE APPELLATION STRIP

Aged a minimum of five years, with at least two years in oak barrels and two years in bottle for red wines. Aging for white and rosé wines is a minimum of four years with at least six months in oak barrels.



Cosecha

GREEN APPELLATION STRIP

All other still table wines from Rioja bear the term *cosecha* and the vintage date on the appellation strip, without an indication of aging. These wines are collectively known as "generic" wines or "cosechas." They encompass everything from easy-drinking, early-release bottlings from bodegas otherwise labeling under the aging system to more serious versions from wineries opting to label under an origin-based system. (See "Defining Rioja," page 39.)



Bodegas Muga was among the first wave of producers to introduce wines in a then-modern style, including its Torre Muga in 1991. In general, such wines sought riper fruit at harvest and aged in new French oak à la Napa Valley.

Fernando Remírez de Ganuza, Viñedos del Contino and more. The Eguren family, owners of the more traditionally focused Bodegas Sierra Cantabria, launched Señorío de San Vicente, a single-estate wine produced exclusively from 44 acres of vines in the La Canoca vineyard and aged for two years in primarily French oak. Bodegas Muga released the first vintage of their modern-styled Torre Muga bottling in 1991 and Aro bottling in 2000.

Collectively these wineries and their wines were more focused on specific vineyard sources for a bottling, even if they were not yet labeled as such. The winemakers largely adopted techniques common to Napa and Bordeaux at the time: seeking riper fruit at harvest, extending maceration and aging in new French oak as opposed to Rioja's traditional use of American oak. And although Baron de Chirel was originally labeled as a *reserva*, many of these versions eschewed Rioja's classification system of aging. They bottled under a generic back label for young wines, *cosecha*, but charged prices that outpaced many of the region's *gran reservas*.

At first Rioja's new wave wines were well-received, living harmoniously for the most part alongside the region's traditional examples. But in the mid-2000s the wine world's palate began to shift again, with critics decrying examples from Rioja and many other regions as over-oaked fruit bombs. Although Rioja's producers didn't abandon the new approach altogether, they softened it: less canopy management in the vineyard, limiting extraction, cooler macerations, less toast on their oak and the use of larger or more neutral oak vessels.

"We see that classic in Rioja is always the same wines, but modern keeps on changing," says Guillermo de Aranzabal, managing director of traditionalist bodega La Rioja Alta. In the 1990s La Rioja Alta joined other new wave Rioja producers with the establishment of their Torre de Oña estate outside the village of Paganos in the Rioja Alavesa subzone. Since 2005 they have conducted extensive soil studies at the property, leading to the release of the winery's single-vineyard Finca Martelo bottling (2019: 91, \$40). "Torre de Oña is a *terroir*-driven philosophy, while La Rioja Alta seeks a consistent style," summarizes de Aranzabal.

FORGING AHEAD

Rioja's exploration of style in the 1990s and early 2000s paved the way for yet another evolution, across all the region's offerings. For traditional wines, this means a new spin to bring them more in line with today's palates.

"I think we are improving the wine.

It's a little softer in color, a little bit more vibrant," says La Rioja Alta winemaker Julio Sáenz, speaking about the winery's introductory Viña Alberdi bottling. "But also we're looking for fruit character. And with all of our wines we're working with wood, but less present, more integrated. [The Viña Alberdi] is aged for only two years, but it still has great aging capacity.

And that same pursuit of brighter wines with more fruit and elegant depth has also found application to a growing number of *terroir*- and site-specific examples. Like Champagne's *récoltant-manipulants*, or grower producers, Rioja's small growers produce wines primarily from family vines that they own and tend themselves. While the wines of Rioja's small growers can't compete with larger-volume offerings widely available in the market, they're rapidly adding depth and dimension to the region as a whole.

"Nowadays, we want wines that are pure, without any makeup. We prefer a finer style, more acidity, more fruit. We want wines for pleasure," says Arturo de Miguel, who helms his family winery Artuke with his brother Kike.

"From 2009 through 2015, my mind was very conditioned by my studies. I used a lot of oak, 20 to 25 days maceration. I had

"NOWADAYS, WE WANT WINES THAT ARE PURE, WITHOUT ANY MAKEUP. WE PREFER A FINER STYLE, MORE ACIDITY, MORE FRUIT. WE WANT WINES FOR PLEASURE."

—Arturo de Miguel

Defining Rioja

After decades depending primarily on the aging classification system on labels to distinguish a winery's lineup (see "Aging Rioja," page 37), the Consejo Regulador, Rioja's regulatory council, announced an alternative based on a wine's origin in 2017, with amendments in 2024.

The aging classification system works best for wineries producing wines that source fruit from a broader geographical range of vineyards to create wines in a consistent style, often at larger volume. The new origin-based system closely follows Burgundy's model, with labeling encompassing everything from wines sourcing fruit from a subregion through to single-vineyard bottlings.

Prior to the new regulations, producers utilizing more specific grape sources for their wines were not legally able to indicate that source on the label. This caused widespread discontent, particularly as the trend toward single vineyard and *terroir*-driven examples has been gaining momentum in the broader world of wine.



Zone Wines: Labels listing one of Rioja's three subzones—Rioja Alta, Rioja Alavesa and Rioja Oriental—indicate a wine produced entirely from grapes sourced within the given subregion.

Village Wines: Labels listing one of 144 approved municipalities indicate a wine produced entirely from grapes sourced from vineyards in and around the municipality. This category was first identified as *Vino de Municipio* in the regulatory council's 2017 changes, reflecting the governmental term for the area around a given village. The classified term was updated to *Vino de Pueblo* ("village wine") in 2024 to highlight a more *terroir*-driven approach to classification. Labels can read both *Vino de Pueblo*, indicating the classification, as well as an indication of the vines' location via the term *Viñedo en* ("vineyard in") plus a village name; for example, *Viñedo en Labastida* ("vineyards in the village of Labastida").

Single Vineyard Wines: Labels listing a delimited vineyard recognized by the regulatory council, along with the term *Viñedo Singular* ("single vineyard"), indicate a wine produced entirely from grapes sourced from the specified vineyard.

a lot of discussions with my father, who was very traditional," says de Miguel, who finished his enological studies and experience working at other wineries before joining his father in 2009. Beginning with the 2016 vintage he revamped his approach, producing what he calls "a more traditional style," vinifying white and red grapes together and utilizing old barrels, and later including single-parcel bottlings in their lineup. "[During my travels to other wine regions] I saw the possibility of producing other styles of wines, with the inclusion of other grapes, using stems and with other types of barrels."

"Today winemakers travel much more than they did 30 or

40 years ago. And when you see the best, you feel compelled to try and reply," says Eduardo Eguren, son of Marcos Eguren, who owns a number of leading Rioja estates with his brother Miguel Ángel (Sierra Cantabria, Señorío de San Vicente and Viñedos de Párganos). In 2018 Eduardo Eguren established his own winery, Cuentaviñas, producing wine from 27 acres of vineyards, a combination of acreage inherited from his maternal grandfather as well as sites he leases from his father and uncle.

"I said to myself, 'What do I want in my life: a new project, or to follow the family path?'" explains Eduardo Eguren. "I decided I wanted to do a project to show how different soils produce different stories in wine." Eguren produces one white and five red Rioja wines (plus one from Ribera del Duero), including four single-vineyard bottlings. The Rioja Los Yelsones 2021 (94, \$300) from the La Rad vineyard is a top example.

"Now in Rioja, there's something happening, there's going to be a big change, with a change in the generations," enthuses Eguren. "For me, change began in the 1990s with my family and others building up quality. But then it stagnated. From 2015, 2016, change began again with young producers. It's changing the landscape of Rioja."

Jose Gil, whose first vintage was 2016, produces six wines with his wife, Vicky, under their Vignerons de la Sonsierra label, including two village wines and three single-vineyards from 42 acres of vines, about a third of which they own. Previously, Gil worked at his family winery, Bodegas Olmaza. "It was incredible learning from my grandfather, my father and uncle. But when I saw some vineyards mixed in the tanks with others—incredible vineyards—it was my dream to be able to bottle these separately. It's a dream I share with Vicky, to show these vineyards, to make wine with humility," says Gil.

Diego Magaña Tejero, who only started his Rioja project in 2021, also used experiences working at his family winery, Bodegas Viña Magaña in the neighboring region of Navarra, to inform his future direction. The first stop was northwestern Spain's Bierzo, where he produces wine under his Dominio de Anza label. But making wine in Rioja was always the dream.

"In Bierzo, I'm more free. But here in Rioja, there's a legacy. You have to do your own vision, but with respect," says Magaña, who produces his six wines from 11 acres of vines, from sources he owns and purchased fruit.

"It's not always about buying vineyards," he clarifies. "It's also about buying the grapes and telling the story of this area. Maybe if I don't buy these grapes now, we'll lose the vineyard, we'll lose the patrimony." Magaña touches on the fact of Rioja's aging population of vine growers, many without a new generation to take over the family vineyards, spurring Rioja's small growers and large bodegas alike to take up the work.

And it is not only a younger generation leading the charge from the vineyards.

"I feel like for many years we were pushing against a door, and now, finally, the door is opening a little bit more," says Maite Fernández, who owns Bodega Abel Mendoza with her husband, Abel Mendoza.

Mendoza decided to redirect his family's bulk wine business in 1988. Even at the young age of 17 he had been considering a



Maite Fernández and Abel Mendoza of Bodega Abel Mendoza have increased the number of individual bottlings they make without upping overall production, sourcing 40 plots across 57 acres of vines.

different path for several years. “More isn’t better. Less is always better. Every year is a blank page, and to make the picture, you take the different components and you paint your own interpretation,” says Mendoza. Although production volume at the winery hasn’t increased over the years, the number of bottlings has, as Mendoza makes wines that he feels express Rioja in its many facets—both its soils and its styles.

“From 40 different plots spread over three different villages and 57 acres of vines I can usually make 18 to 19 different bottlings,” he adds. “For us this project is a form of life. Now we are an example, with some young people following our behavior.”

“More and more, Rioja is focused on vineyards. For us it has always been like this, but now you can find young people very focused [on this aspect] of Rioja. It’s a new wave that’s diversifying Rioja’s panorama,” says Carmen Pérez-Garrigues.

Though Pérez-Garrigues first commercial release of her 2018 and 2019 Villota wines (bottled under Viñas del Lentisco)

was only in 2021, she and her family have played an important role in Rioja’s history. Her father—Ricardo Pérez-Villota—and Mateo José Madrazo Real de Asúa, father of Viñas del Lentisco’s current winemaker, Jesús de Madrazo Mateo, formed a partnership with CVNE winery in the 1970s that created the Viñedos del Contino estate on 400 acres of land owned by the Pérez-Villota family. In 2013, looking to the future, Pérez-Garrigues convinced her father to leave the partnership with CVNE, taking with them about 280 acres of land, including 240 under vine.

“My father thought I was mad at first. But I knew if I was going to continue, I wanted to continue in a different way,” explains Pérez-Garrigues. The new path includes production of the single-vineyard Viña Gena bottling (2022: 92, \$60). “So we are not the new, young blood, the young people. But I really like their bravery,” says Pérez-Garrigues.

“Even if we are older than they are,” says winemaker de Madrazo Mateo, “We have the same passion.”

Telmo Rodríguez, frustrated by Rioja’s labeling regulations that would not allow him to express on the label the wine in the bottle, its source and *terroir*-driven expression, addressed the situation with not quite legal lengths for some of his wines. For Bodegas Lanzaga, he highlighted *terroir* by redacting “Lanziego” from the phrase “Viñedos Propios in Lanziego” on the front labels of his Lanzaga and LZ bottlings. (Lanziego is still clearly readable under the black redacting mark.) And since the inception of his Lindes project, produced at his family winery La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remelluri, Rodríguez willfully included the village name on the labels. The range of Lindes’ six wines focuses on the distinctive expression of the fruit sourced from vines in and

around the named village.

In 2017, Rodríguez and others were able to finally push through new regulations for Rioja’s labels. Producers can still use the classic *crianza*, *reserva* and *gran reserva* terms if they so choose. But they can also highlight Rioja’s subzones, its specific villages and single-vineyard sites.

Rodríguez’s labeling efforts were not about marketing, but about finding a way to identify for consumers the work he had been doing for decades to showcase Rioja’s *terroir*. “We have *grands crus* in Rioja. [In the past] we abandoned the best places for more fertile land at lower, [more accessible] elevations. It all starts here, in the vineyard. To talk about a place, to talk about a taste, to talk about a profile.”

“I think the key now is the new generation,” says Rodríguez. “We have the *terroir*. We have the market—a consumer who is ready for quality wine. We’re going to rebuild a map that understands the beauty of Rioja—in all its diversity and different places.” □

RIOJA'S LEADING LIGHTS

WINEMAKERS BRINGING THE REGION'S *TERROIRS* TO THE FORE

By Alison Napjus



Sandra Bravo

Sandra Bravo

Born and raised in Rioja, owner-winemaker Sandra Bravo, 42, traveled widely after studying first in Rioja then Toulouse, France. Working in wineries in Bordeaux, Chianti, Marlborough and California added breadth and experience to her view of wine and winemaking. But it was a seven-year stint as a vineyard manager in Spain's Priorat region that had the most influence on Bravo.

"Working in Priorat ... gave me an open point of view to see Rioja, my home, with other eyes, [to show] all the potential from the amazing vineyards that we have," says Bravo. She worked in particular with Ricard Rofes, a winemaker known for his meticulous plot-driven approach at Priorat's Scala Dei winery.

In 2012, it was time to return to Rioja. Bravo started working 2.5 acres of rented vines in the village of Rivas de Tereso. The small plots of old vines, planted in calcareous soils and located at an elevation of 2,130 feet, recalled her experiences in Priorat but within the framework of Rioja.

Bravo's budding winery grew quickly, with locals offering her additional vineyards

Photographs by
Markel Redondo

to rent and farm for her project. Today she owns 25 acres of vines, farming organically and incorporating many biodynamic practices. The 4,600-case production occurs at a rental facility in Villabuena de Álava. Bravo's lineup includes nine wines, with three reds incorporating aging in clay amphorae, a rarity in Rioja.

"Sierra de Toloño is my life project. It was very hard in the beginning as a young woman in a very traditional place as is Rioja," reflects Bravo, looking back. But then, looking forward, she adds, "Rioja has the best conditions to make great wines ... It's time to show all that potential, with new projects from people that have studied, have traveled and that are prepared to make great quality wines. That's the future of Rioja."

BODEGA SIERRA DE TOLOÑO

92	Rioja White Nahikun 2023	\$38
91	Garnacha Rioja La Dula de Altura 2022	\$30
91	Rioja Camino de Santa Cruz 2021	\$45
91	Rioja Raposo 2021	\$28
90	Rioja White 2023	\$21
90	Tempranillo Rioja 2022	\$21

Eduardo Eguren

Most winemakers like nothing better than talking about their *terroir*. But Cuentaviñas owner and winemaker Eduardo Eguren is a serious rock jock, easily tracing 65 million years of history to explain the soil below his feet.

Eguren, 39, comes by it honestly; his father, Marcos Eguren, with brother Miguel Ángel, began exploring site-specific expressions from Rioja 30 years ago. After completing enological studies and stages at Artadi in Rioja, Domaine de la Côte in California and other wineries, Eguren worked at his family's estates in Rioja and neighboring Toro. But in 2018, when he inherited three plots of old vines from his maternal grandfather, he felt the drive to create his own expressions of *terroir*.

"I wanted to do a project to show how different soils produce different stories in wine," says Eguren, who named his new winery Cuentaviñas, a play on the Spanish word for storyteller, *cuentacuentos*. "We're trying to push, to move things, to be different. Great wineries—my family, the Mugas, for example—are doing their own great work. But for all the rest of us, this kind of *terroir*-driven situation is giving new breath [to Rioja]."

From the initial 6 acres of inherited vines, Eguren has expanded to 27 acres, some of which he leases from his father and uncle. His wife, Carlota, is a partner in the winery, which produces one white and five red Rioja wines, including four single-vineyard bottlings, and one Ribera del Duero from 9 acres of vines. The Rioja wines are produced at a winery in Logroño but aged in the village of Peciña, where Eguren's grandfather was born, and where he hopes to eventually move all aspects of the winery's production.

"The most important thing is to create your own identity," Eguren sums up. "I don't want to make a copy of anything else, but to express the real identity of where I work."

CUENTAVIÑAS

94	Rioja Los Yelones 2021	\$300
93	Rioja El Tizado 2021	\$350
92	Garnacha Rioja CDVIN 2021	\$90
92	Rioja Alomado 2021	\$80

Marcos and Miguel Ángel Eguren

Brothers Marcos and Miguel Ángel Eguren might well be labeled Rioja's original *terroirists*. After growing and selling grapes for three generations, their father, Guillermo Eguren, founded the family's Bodegas Sierra Cantabria winery in 1957, later bringing his sons into the fold. Today the brothers helm the winery as winemaker and general manager, respectively.

But in 1991, Marcos, now 66, and Miguel Ángel, now 61, made waves with the establishment of their Señorío de San Vicente winery. Rather than sourcing grapes from numerous locations, blending, aging and bottling multiple labels under Rioja's established aging classification system, the new winery released just one wine from 44 contiguous acres of vines. It was the first commercial example of a site-specific wine in Rioja's history.

"We're pioneers in single-vineyard wine production in Rioja,"



Eduardo Eguren

says Marcos, unabashedly. "San Vicente was a pure revolution when it came to the market—a totally different concept. After it was accepted by the market, we classified all our vineyards by quality and changed production to be based on this."

That meant adapting work in the vineyards to each site's specific needs and employing different materials in the winery to best elicit distinct expression from the fruit character of each site, ranging from stainless steel to concrete to multiple types and sizes of oak vessels. Today Sierra Cantabria's 15-wine lineup includes bottlings that follow Rioja's traditional blended approach, but also five single-vineyard wines, including the winery's prestige cuvée, Amancio, from the old-vine La Vegailla vineyard.

And after the success of Señorío de San Vicente, the Eguren brothers doubled down in 1998 when they chiseled out two plots from the family holdings for production of wines for a new winery, Viñedos de Párganos. The 4.4-acre La Nieta vineyard is the source of grapes for the winery's flagship bottling of the same name, while the El Puntido vineyard supports production of three additional labels.

"Rioja has lots of diversity—the soils, the microclimates," reflects Marcos Eguren. "It allows for many different styles and if you work well in the vineyards and in the winery, you can get beautiful complexity and freshness."

VIÑEDOS DE PÁGANOS

96	Rioja La Nieta 2021	\$275
95	Rioja El Puntido 2021	\$70
94	Rioja El Puntido Gran Reserva 2013	\$120
92	Tempranillo Rioja Calados del Puntido 2020	\$55

SEÑORIO DE SAN VICENTE

94	Rioja 2021	\$85
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BODEGAS SIERRA CANTABRIA

96	Rioja Amancio 2021	\$180
95	Rioja Finca El Bosque 2021	\$190
95	Rioja Mágico 2021	\$1,000
93	Rioja Gran Reserva 2016	\$50
92	Rioja Reserva 2017	\$39
92	Rioja Única Reserva 2020	\$42
91	Rioja Colección Privada 2022	\$65
91	Rioja White Organza 2022	\$44
90	Rioja Crianza 2021	\$25
90	Rioja White 2024	\$27
88	Rioja Rosado 2024	\$20

Jose Gil and Vicky Fernández

In just five years, husband-and-wife team Jose and Vicky (Fernández) Gil have rapidly expanded their nascent Vignerons de la Sonsierra winery from its 500-case production in 2020 to 2,500 cases today. Winemaker Jose Gil attributes the growth to production from 17 acres of vineyards they rent in addition to the 12.5 acres the couple owns, but also to practical concerns. Both Jose, 34, and Vicky, 35, left secure, salaried positions behind after the 2020 harvest; it was time to make their joint side project official.

Vicky's background is in hospitality in Bilbao and in Madrid, where she met Jose in 2018. Jose spent a decade working at his family's Bodegas Olmaza winery, but began experimenting during that time using the grapes of two parcels owned by his grandmother to produce wine in an ancient cellar in the village of San Vicente de la Sonsierra. The first official vintage was 2016, and today the winery's lineup includes six wines: a white, two village-based versions and three single-vineyards.

Jose's travels prior to joining the family winery ultimately informed his decision to focus on *terroir*-based wines of his own.

"I studied winemaking and viticulture in Rioja, but then I

traveled a lot, especially in Burgundy and in Germany," explains Gil. "I love their way of life, of working the vineyard, of selling your wine and explaining different *terroir*, and I think we have that possibility here."

For production, which takes place at a facility in Briones, Gil favors whole cluster or partial destemming, and fermentation in stainless steel or concrete vessels. He tries to delay malolactic fermentation to the extent possible so that it can take place at lower temperatures, "to capture more fruit, color and depth in the finished wines," says Gil. Aging occurs in the cellar in San Vicente de la Sonsierra. After initially utilizing 225-liter barrels, Gil tried 300-liter casks in 2018 before settling on 500-liter barrels in 2020. "It's just the right size for our wines."

VIGNERONS DE LA SONSIERRA

93	Rioja Jose Gil Paraje La Canoca 2022	\$74
92	Rioja Jose Gil Paraje El Bardallo 2022	\$74
91	Rioja Jose Gil Viñedos en Labastida 2022	\$52
91	Rioja Jose Gil Viñedos en San Vicente de la Sonsierra 2022	\$52

Diego Magaña Tejero

"If I need to put a one-word explanation on my life, I can say that from age 21, it's 'WINE,'" says Diego Magaña, now 42. That singular focus took Magaña to work at Bodegas y Viñedos O. Fournier in Ribera del Duero, Vieux Château Certan in Bordeaux and his family's winery in nearby Navarra, Bodegas Viña Magaña. In 2014, he began producing under his own label, Dominio de Anza, in northern Spain's Bierzo appellation.



Vicky Fernández and Jose Gil



Diego Magaña Tejero

But in 2016, Magaña bought 2.4 acres of vines, with part of the site originally planted in 1900, located outside the village of Laguardia in Rioja. “[The San Ginés vineyard] was the first I was able to buy. Always, it had been my dream to be in Rioja.”

Since then, Magaña has rooted himself in Rioja, slowly expanding his vineyard holdings to just over 11 acres. He also purchases grapes to reach his 2,500-bottle production, considering it an imperative not only for his growing business but also for the support of Rioja’s grapegrowers and his own understanding of the region’s *terroir*.

“It’s unlucky when you are not in a situation to inherit vineyards. But it’s lucky because this means I can find and buy exactly what I want to buy,” says Magaña, explaining that he always vinifies plots separately. “Even if I need to [blend vineyard sources] to fill a vat, I keep a separate barrel of each parcel, just to understand [its attributes.]” He bottled San Ginés separately for the first time with the 2020 vintage, when he truly felt there was something distinctive to show from the site. “After four years, you really know how [a plot] performs, irrespective of vintage character.”

Magaña works in tight quarters, rented garage space just outside of Laguardia, to produce this young winery’s range of six wines: one white and five red. Although he adapts winemaking to the site and to the vintage, a percentage of whole-cluster fermentation is common, always in large, open-topped oak vats, with aging primarily in neutral 500-liter French oak barrels.

DIEGO MAGAÑA TEJERO

93	Rioja Anza Carramonte 2022	\$75
92	Rioja Anza San Ginés 2022	\$52
90	Rioja Anza CDVIN 2022	\$52
89	Rioja Anza 2022	\$30

Abel Mendoza and Maite Fernández

For Abel Mendoza, changing directions at his family winery was not only a compulsion, it was a must.

“My grandad made wine for bulk sale, it was a way to survive in a rural village,” recalls Mendoza, now 64. “But at 17, I was not sure what to do. Previously, a big winery reneged on the payment of a bulk wine contract, [then my father was suddenly very ill] and so I had to change my life. I had to stop playing soccer and I had to take over. We had a new house, we had required payments. It was very difficult times.”

Despite his uncertainty in the moment, Mendoza felt more confident in the potential of his family’s vineyard holdings in and around his home village of San Vicente de la Sonsierra and the villages of Ábalos and Labastida. He decided to begin commercial production from his own vines, establishing his namesake winery in 1988.

“I thought that if I was right—if things went well—I knew it would be because of me, not because of anybody else. If things went wrong, I would have only myself to blame.”

In 1989, Mendoza married Maite Fernández, now 62, who

joined him in his fledgling winery, learning enology while Mendoza focused on the vineyards. Today, each of the 40 different plots among the winery's 57 acres of vines is vinified separately, requiring a wide variety of fermentation and aging vessels, both in size and material, in the winery. The husband-and-wife team typically produces almost 20 different wines each vintage, showcasing Rioja's local red and white grape varieties beyond Tempranillo and eschewing the traditional system of labeling wine under the aging classification system.

Among the white wines, 5V is a blend of five different grapes, but the winery also bottles single-variety versions of each grape and skin-contact examples. The reds include the introductory Jarrate labels and the Selección Personal bottling, the best Tempranillo plot each vintage. And the Grano a Grano labels are produced from a selection of the best grapes from multiple plots, individually destemmed by hand, berry by berry.

BODEGA ABEL MENDOZA

93	Graciano-Garnacha Rioja Grano a Grano 2020	\$100
92	Graciano Rioja Grano a Grano 2020	\$100
92	Rioja Selección Personal 2019	\$65
92	Rioja White 5V 2021	\$65
92	Rioja White Fermented on Skins 2022	\$55
92	Tempranillo Rioja Grano a Grano 2020	\$100
91	Tempranillo Blanco Rioja 2022	\$55
91	Torrontés Rioja 2022	\$55
90	Garnacha Blanca Rioja 2021	\$55
90	Malvasía Rioja 2022	\$55
90	Rioja Jarrarte 2017	\$40
90	Viura Rioja 2022	\$55
89	Rioja Jarrarte Carbonic Maceration 2020	\$20
89	Rioja White Jarrarte 2022	\$20

Arturo and Kike de Miguel

In 1991, after decades selling grapes to large bodegas, fourth-generation grower Roberto de Miguel decided to produce and bottle his own wine for sale from his 40 acres of vines. He rode the wave of change in Rioja at the time, leaving behind not only the traditional bodegas but also the traditional classification system based on aging.

“Many years ago we decided to leave behind *crianza*, *reserva*, *gran reserva*. For us it was more important to show our vineyards,” recalls Roberto’s son, Arturo de Miguel. Arturo, now 43, who began working with his father in 2009,



Arturo de Miguel (left) and his father, Roberto de Miguel

would ride another wave of change, taking the winery fully to the production of *terroir*-driven examples. Today he and his agronomist brother Kike, 37, who joined the family winery in 2010, bottle seven wines from 69 acres of vines located primarily in Baños de Ebro, with additional holdings in San Vicente de Sonsierra, Ábalos and Samaniego. The lineup includes two village wines (one from 100% carbonic maceration), a white wine, two single-vineyard bottlings and, finally, two single-plot versions.

Arturo admits the path wasn’t always a clear one, given the influence of his enological studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when maximum extraction via long maceration periods and 200% new oak were all the rage. But beginning in 2009, a three-year soil study of the winery’s 32 plots helped to change his mind about how his winemaking could best express *terroir*.

“We decided to elaborate each plot separately. If the style of the finished wine was similar [to another], we put it in the village wine. If the wine was a little higher, [a little more distinctive] we made a single-plot bottling,” says de Miguel.

The first single-plot wine from the Finca de los Locos vineyard was produced in 2012, and in 2016 Arturo transitioned winemaking to something more traditional in style. Today he partially destems fruit, maceration periods are shorter and cooler than when he started, and he uses stainless steel or oak for fermentation and aging, depending on the wine, with limited or no new oak.

BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS ARTUKE

94	Rioja Paraje El Meadero El Escolladero 2022	\$80
93	Rioja La Condenada Paraje Camino del Ciego 2022	\$80
92	Rioja Finca de los Locos Paraje Peñaescalera 2021	\$60
92	Rioja Paso Las Mañas Paraje El Chorro 2022	\$41
91	Rioja Pies Rotos 2022	\$23
91	Rioja White Trascuevas 2021	\$45
89	Rioja Artuke 2023	\$16

Carmen Pérez-Garrigues

First released in 2021, Viñas del Lentisco's Villota wines are relatively new additions to Rioja's offerings. But owner Carmen Pérez-Garrigues, 56, remembers playing and climbing trees during her childhood with Villota winemaker Jesús de Madrazo Mateo, 60, on the Finca San Rafael estate, where Pérez-Garrigues's great-grandfather settled in 1930.

The Finca San Rafael estate later became CVNE's Viñedos del Contino winery, established as a partnership between the Pérez-Villota family and CVNE in 1973. Contino was the first bodega in Rioja to produce wine from a single estate instead of multiple fruit sources from throughout the region. But as Pérez-Garrigues' father, Ricardo Pérez-Villota, approached retirement, Pérez-Garrigues looked ahead and saw a different path.

In 2013, the father and daughter left the Contino partnership to found a new project, Villota. They took with them 280 acres of land from the original 400-acre estate, of which 240 acres are planted to vineyards on three levels located on a meander in the Ebro River.

"As we look for the personality of Villota, and why we started a new project, you have the expertise of many years of working this estate. But you open your mind and think, 'Where are we now?' [in order] to look with new eyes on a landscape. [You give] a new interpretation, with our personality, to this place."

It was Pérez-Garrigues's grandfather, an agricultural engineer, who transitioned Finca San Rafael's land from cereals and other products to vineyards, with vineyard plantings ranging from 1930 to 1990. From this wealth of old vines Pérez-Garrigues produces six wines for the U.S. market, three reds and three whites, using grapes from only 126 acres of vines and

selling the rest of the fruit. De Madrazo Mateo, formerly the winemaker at Contino, vinifies varieties for each bottling separately in stainless steel; depending on the wine, he utilizes 225- and/or 500-liter French oak for aging, from 10% to 20% new for the Villota labels, up to 50% new for the single parcel Viña Gena bottling.

VIÑA DEL LENTISCO

92	Rioja Alavesa Villota Viña Gena Viñedo Singular 2022	\$60
91	Rioja Alavesa Villota 2022	\$37
91	Rioja Alavesa Villota Selvanevada 2022	\$25
91	Rioja White Alavesa Villota 2022	\$37
89	Rioja White Alavesa Villota Selvanevada 2022	\$25

Telmo Rodríguez

"I've been doing things a little bit illegally the whole of my life," states Telmo Rodríguez, 63, winemaker at his own Bodegas Lanzaga winery and his family's La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remelluri estate in Rioja. It's a color-outside-the-lines mindset that has bolstered Rodríguez during his multi-decade career advocating for the exploration and production of wine from Spain's great *terroirs*.

At first that vocation took Rodríguez away from Spain. He studied enology at the University of Bordeaux, then spent time at wineries in Burgundy, the Rhône and beyond. When he returned to Spain in the 1990s he established Compañia de Vinos Telmo Rodríguez with his friend Pablo Eguzkiza, producing wine from old vines in Valdeorras, Málaga, Toro and other then-virtually unheard of parts of Spain.

Rodríguez returned to Rioja in 1998 and founded Bodegas Lanzaga. He was determined to employ a Burgundian model for his wines, decrying the loss of Rioja's connection to its specific *terroirs* amidst the blending and long aging in wood common under the aging classification system.

"We don't have a very clear idea of what Rioja is. It became a brand, and in a way we lost the contents—it became a transparent logo," says Rodríguez. "We need to bring back all the contents that we lost—what was a vineyard, what was a village."

Despite the fact that listing village or vineyard names on a Rioja label was illegal until Rodríguez and others pushed through changes to the region's labeling regulations in 2017, he opted to redact the information from Lanzaga's labels. (It's still clearly visible.) Today the winery's lineup includes three village wines and four single-vineyard bottlings, all fermented with



Carmen Pérez-Garrigues and Jesús de Madrazo Mateo

natural yeast in concrete or open-topped wooden vats and aged in neutral oak barrels.

In 2009 Rodríguez took over winemaking at his family winery, Remelluri, working with his sister, viticulturist Amaia Rodríguez Hernandorena. Shortly thereafter, the siblings launched their Lindes project, a range of six wines produced in partnership with local growers to express the character of specific villages. All were labeled with the individual village name; again, not exactly legal. And although the estate's primary bottlings are labeled as *reserva* and *gran reserva*, since its founding in 1967 by Rodríguez's father, the wines were notably always produced entirely from vineyards surrounding the winery outside the village of Rivas de Tereso as opposed to blending distant sources.

"All my life I've been restoring, not inventing," muses Rodríguez. "My country has so much inside [to show]."

LA GRANJA NUESTRA SEÑORA DE REMELLURI

94	Rioja Gran Reserva 2015	\$140
93	Rioja Lindes Peciña 2020	\$51
93	Rioja Reserva 2016	\$56
93	Rioja White Alavesa 2021	\$140
92	Rioja Lindes Salinillas de Buradón 2020	\$51
91	Rioja Lindes Ábalos 2020	\$51
91	Rioja Lindes Rivas de Tereso 2020	\$51
91	Rioja Lindes San Vicente de la Sonsierra 2020	\$49
90	Rioja Lindes Labastida 2020	\$37

BODEGA LANZAGA

95	Rioja Las Beatas 2021	\$375
93	Rioja La Estrada 2021	\$140
92	Rioja Tabuerniga 2021	\$125
91	Rioja Lanzaga 2020	\$50
90	Rioja LZ 2022	\$35

David Sampedro and Melanie Hickman

For husband-and-wife team David Sampedro, 49, and Melanie Hickman, 48, owners of Bodegas Bhilar, it's all about the vines.

After formative years spent working with his uncle in the vineyards around the village of Elvillar, Sampedro studied oenology and agronomy before returning to Elvillar to found his own winery in 1999, working 7 acres of vines. In 2006, Sampedro began introducing his organically farmed vines to biodynamic practices, virtually unheard of at the time in Rioja.

"I started to practice [biodynamics]," says Sampedro, remembering that it was slow going at first. "[But then] I felt more natural acidity in my wines; I saw the [cover crops] in our vineyards change. That is when I became a believer."

In 2008, Sampedro met American Hickman, a serious enophile then working as a pharmaceutical sales representative in Hawaii. The couple later wed and Hickman joined Sampedro at the winery.

Over the years, total acreage has grown to 42 acres, always in Elvillar. "It might be arrogant, but after working in Burgundy, in Germany, I came back here and said, 'Elvillar has enough *grands crus* to make separate, distinctive wines, without blending

anything.' " Though Elvillar boasts few wineries, historically its grapes and bulk wines commanded top prices in the region. Among Bhilar's 33 parcels Sampedro cites the variation he finds in soil type, microclimate and elevation (1,310 to 2,300 feet).

Of the 42 acres, Hickman owns almost 20 acres independently, producing her own wines bottled under the Bodegas Bhilar winery with the addition of her signature to the front labels and referred to as the Eterea Kripani line. Separately, Sampedro produces bottlings from unique *terroirs* throughout Spain under his DSG Vineyards brand.

After years vinifying the wines in their garage, the couple inaugurated an eco-conscious winery on the outskirts of Elvillar, powered by wind and solar energy only. Utilizing concrete tanks for fermentation and primarily 225-liter and 500-liter French oak *barriques* for aging, Bhilar's current lineup includes four single-vineyard bottlings and six village wines, with three white wines in the mix.

BODEGAS BHILAR

92	Rioja Phincas 2020	\$33
92	Rioja White Bhilar 2022	\$21
90	Rioja Phinca Hapa Elvillar Melanie Hickman 2021	\$42
89	Rioja Bhilar Viñedos en Elvillar 2022	\$21



David Sampedro and Melanie Hickman

RIOJA

SPAIN'S SIGNATURE
WINE REGION IS
THRIVING, OFFERING
BOTH TRADITIONAL
AND DYNAMIC
MODERN BOTTLINGS




RISING

By Alison
Napjus



Photograph by
Lucy Schaefer



La Rioja Alta winemaker Julio Sáenz makes up to three *gran reservas* in the best vintages.

The days are sunny but cold on a January trip to Rioja. The vines are bare, and the landscape's patchwork of soils is now clearly visible. Deep red, iron-laced plots fade into others of a dark-rose hue, indicating more limestone; vineyards of pure white calcareous soil sit alongside parcels of gravelly, dark brown alluvial earth. The Ebro River and its tributaries wind through the vineyards; the Sierra Cantabria mountains rise beyond.

Rioja is visually stunning, and its diversity and majesty are reflected in the region's wines.

In the past year I've reviewed more than 320 wines from Rioja, about 85% of them reds. These included many examples from bodegas long-established in *Wine Spectator's* blind tastings. Most are bottled and labeled according to Rioja's traditional classification system, based on oak- and bottle-aging regimens. But this special report additionally focuses on bottlings that eschew the traditional classifications; many of these versions are *terroir*-driven examples, sometimes labeled with their subzone, village or vineyard names. It's a fascinating array of wines that reveals the breadth that Rioja's winemakers are capable of today.

Showcasing the enticing possibilities of that breadth, 10 wines in this report earn classic ratings of 95 points or higher on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale.

Rioja is traditionally known for its elegant reds classified by age as *crianza*, *reserva* or *gran reserva*. (For more about these terms, see "Aging Rioja," page 37.) Standouts include La Rioja Alta's graceful Rioja 890 Gran Reserva 2010 (95 points, \$275) and Bodegas Marqués de Murrieta's sophisticated Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial 2012 (95, \$280).

Rioja producers that classify their wines by age typically blend multiple vineyard sources and strive for a consistent style from vintage to vintage. This is very much the case at La Rioja

"2021 IS A TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF RIOJA. THE WINES SHOW A SPECIAL, FRUIT CHARACTER TYPICAL TO THE FRESHER, NEW STYLE OF RIOJA."

Julio Sáenz

Alta, where the cellars hold eight vintages' worth of inventory; their in-house cooperage makes 4,000 barrels a year.

The 890 Gran Reserva 2010 blends Tempranillo (95%) and Mazuelo (2%) from estate-owned vineyards in the villages of Briñas, Labastida and Villalba with Graciano (3%) from the winery's Montecillo vineyard in Fuenmayor. The wine was aged from spring 2011 to spring 2017 in 225-liter American oak barrels and then in bottle for an additional five years prior to release, spread out in batches over four years. It is La Rioja Alta's prestige cuvée, one of three *gran reservas*, and only made about three times per decade. The first bottles of the next 890, from the outstanding 2011 vintage, will be released later this year.

"[Compared to our other *gran reservas*,] the 890 should always be a very structured wine in style, long and tannic and textured [on the palate]," says La Rioja Alta winemaker Julio Sáenz. "890 is velvet, the 904 is silk," compares managing director Guillermo de Aranzabal.

In 1852, Luciano de Murrieta García Lemoine, the Marqués de Murrieta, was the first to produce what was then known as a Bordeaux-style red, a blend aged in French oak barrels. But today fruit for the winery's flagship bottling, Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial, is sourced entirely from the 98-acre La Plana vineyard, planted in 1950. For the 2012 vintage, Murrieta winemaker María Vargas separately vinified and aged the

Tempranillo (81%) and Mazuelo (19%), but both aged for almost three years in 225-liter oak barrels; American oak for the Tempranillo and French for the Mazuelo. After blending, the wine aged an additional 20 months in concrete tank before being bottled in 2019 and released in the U.S. in 2024.

In the 1990s, several prominent Rioja producers felt constrained by the traditional classification system at a time when the international palate was leaning toward wines of greater concentration and weight, something that long-aged *reservas* and *gran reservas* couldn't deliver. Bodegas Muga was among those who sought to answer the call of this then-modern style, launching the Torre Muga label (2020: 93, \$140) in 1991 and Aro in 2000.

The Rioja Aro 2021 (96, \$450) shines for its depth and focus, effortlessly integrating rich flavor and muscular tannins. Aro's power is amped by the inclusion of 30% Graciano, buttressing the Tempranillo. The Tempranillo is sourced from several vineyards, while all of the Graciano comes from the Baltracones vineyard, a cool, high-altitude site (1,500 feet). Aro is only made in vintages that allow full maturation of the late-ripening Graciano. "Baltracones is a high-altitude site planted by my grandfather," says Muga head winemaker Isaac Muga. "It used to be three times per decade [that the Graciano] ripened enough; now it's more like five to six times per decade."

Wines classified by aging regimen lie at one end of the Rioja spectrum; Muga's blends lie somewhere in the middle. At the other end of the Rioja spectrum are wines defined by origin and *terroir*. Most of this report's highest-rated wines are products of this relatively new site-specific philosophy. And thanks to new regulations announced in 2017, some of them now label their wines with recognized vineyard names, or *viñedo singular*. (See "Defining Rioja," page 39.)

The first of this group is Álvaro Palacios' Rioja Oriental Quiñón de Valmira Viñedo Singular 2022 (96, \$550), an enticing wine that shows great purity and seamless integration. The 100% Garnacha is sourced entirely from the 7.4-acre Valmira vineyard near the Bodegas Palacios Remondo winery in Alfaro, on the eastern edge of the Rioja Oriental subzone.

Famed Priorat winemaker Álvaro Palacios took the helm at his family's Palacios Remondo when his grandfather died in 2000. He set about revitalizing the estate and, as he'd done in Priorat, fermenting different sites separately in order to better understand their potential.

"Álvaro was working very hard to find an icon wine from Rioja," says Isabel Palacios Osua, Palacios' export director, explaining that Palacios was sure Rioja had within it a site to be a sister wine to his signature L'Ermita bottling from Priorat.

"He saw Valmira," says Lola Palacios, who joined her father about a year ago after completing her studies and internships in California and France. "And he has this superpower to see the quality of the wines by looking at the vineyard."



Marqués de Murrieta's Vicente Dalmau Cebrián-Sagarriga and his longtime winemaker María Vargas crafted one of this report's top-rated *gran reservas*.

Palacios fermented the fruit from Valmira separately for more than a decade before bottling it for the first time with the 2014 vintage; its first official commercial release followed with 2015. Prior to 2014, the Valmira wine was blended into Palacios Remondo's Propiedad label (2021: 94, \$55).

Another Rioja vigneron searching for potentially iconic vineyards was Telmo Rodríguez. He looked first to Rioja's old terraced properties, typically found at higher elevations. Many such vineyards were abandoned in the second half of the 20th century in favor of more fertile, easier-to-work locations. "They're the *grands crus* of Rioja," suggests Rodríguez of these high-altitude old vineyards.

In 1990 he purchased the 4.7-acre Las Beatas vineyard, planted to a field blend of several dozen varieties. "I found this vineyard," says Rodríguez. "It was very inspiring."

Situated at about 1,800 feet in elevation, above the village of Briñas in Rioja Alta, Las Beatas was likely originally planted around 1900. Rodríguez's restoration of the property has included a replanting program employing a *sélection massale* from the original vines.

When Rodríguez founded his Bodegas Lanzaga winery in 1998, he blended Las Beatas into other wines for more than a decade before creating a standalone bottling in 2011. The 2021 Rioja Las Beatas (95, \$375) is a testament to Rodríguez's belief in the unique vineyard, offering concentration and structure,



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but with a sense of poise and fine integration.

This report's remaining top single-vineyard wines come from brothers Marcos and Miguel Ángel Eguren. Three are from their family's original winery, Bodegas Sierra Cantabria, established by their father in 1957, and two from their smaller Viñedos de Párganos winery, founded in 1998. Today the siblings own almost 400 acres of vineyards, allowing them to utilize only estate-grown fruit at their three primary wineries. (In addition to Sierra Cantabria and Párganos in Rioja, the Eguren family also owns Señorío de San Vicente, the Dominio de Eguren négociant business and Teso La Monja in Toro.)

From Bodegas Sierra Cantabria, the Rioja Finca El Bosque 2021 (95, \$190), from the 3.7-acre, 50-year-old vineyard of the same name, shows finesse and fluidity. The 100% Tempranillo spent about 18 months in new oak *barriques*. The 2022 Finca El Bosque (94, \$200) was also rated for this report.

Also from Sierra Cantabria are two single-vineyard wines that do not include the vineyard name on the label, the statuesque Rioja Amancio 2021 (96, \$180) and the refined and focused Rioja Mágico 2021 (95, \$1,000).

Amancio sources its 100% Tempranillo fruit entirely from the 41-acre La Veguilla vineyard, planted between 1966 and 1981. Mágico is a field blend from the 2.9-acre El Vardallo vineyard, first planted more than a century ago. The blend is primarily Tempranillo (60%) with 20% Garnacha, other red varieties and about 10% white varieties. Originally the varieties were fermented separately and used for other wines, but in 2010 winemaker Marcos Eguren vinified them together and found the resulting wine to be "magic."

Viñedos de Párganos was founded with the goal of highlighting two exceptional vineyards, La Nieta (4.4 acres) and El Puntido (62 acres), each planted in 1975. Both sites are clay with limestone over a base of sandstone, but La Nieta also layers up to a foot of sandy top soil. The 2021 Rioja La Nieta (96, \$220), aged 18 months in new French oak *barriques*, is rich and expansive; the 2021 El Puntido (95, \$70), aged 16 months in new French oak, shows concentration and lovely equilibrium. The 2022 La Nieta (94, \$300) was also rated for this report.

The 2021 vintage is the common thread among this report's top wines. We'll have to wait for the vintage's *reservas* and *gran reservas*, but wines such as the Aro, as well as the many *terroir*-driven examples and even Rioja's easy-drinking reds and whites are evidence that 2021 is one of Rioja's best



When Priorat star Álvaro Palacios took over his family's Palacios Remondo in Rioja in 2000, he revitalized the estate with a focus on more site-specific winemaking.

vintages yet in the 21st century. "It's a miracle vintage," says Eguren, echoing several producers I spoke to about 2021.

Following a hot, dry 2020, water reserves were restored during the ensuing winter when snowstorm Filomena dumped 10 feet of snow in some parts of Rioja. Budding began in early April and conditions were good, with little rainfall through May.

A series of strong rainstorms during flowering, at the end of May and into early June, raised mildew concerns. "But it never made an appearance in 2021," says Eguren. July and August were extremely dry, although late-September rains renewed fears of rot.

"In October, the climate changed radically—very cold, very sunny, no rainfall—which slowed down but extended the ripening," says Eguren. "It was glorious to see all the grapes coming into the winery in perfect condition; beautifully ripened and in perfect health. We went from fear to joy—a miracle vintage."

"It's the kind of vintage that all of us want, every year," says Lola Palacios. It's a sentiment derived from the quality of the fruit at harvest and the character of the resulting wines. But producers were also happy with a slightly larger crop in 2021, about 5% to 10% above average.

La Rioja Alta winemaker Julio Sáenz holds the outstanding 2001 and classic 1964 vintages up to 2021 for comparison. Although he prefers 2001, he feels the

Rating Red Wine Vintages in Rioja

Year	Score	Notes	Drinkability
2021	97	Warm, dry summer and cool, clear conditions at harvest yielded harmonious wines with depth of flavor, polished tannins and a sense of finesse	Drink or hold
2020	93	A hot year with a reduced crop; excellent conditions during harvest resulted in elegant wines with good tension and restraint	Drink or hold
2019	92	Stable conditions led to focused wines with aging potential	Drink or hold
2018	89	Cooler weather produced fresher wines; some inconsistencies	Drink
2017	87	A difficult growing season led to inconsistent wines	Drink or hold

Vintage ratings: 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended
Drinkability: "NYR" means most of the wines of the vintage are yet to be released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature.

character of 2021 fits the modern-day profile of the region's wines.

"2021 is a turning point in the history of Rioja," says Sáenz. "The wines show a special, fruit character typical to the fresher, new style of Rioja."

The vintage has already yielded many highly rated wines that collectors should seek, and 2021 will continue to do so over the next decade or more as longer-aged examples reach the market. But the already clear overall strength of the vintage means consumers can buy with confidence and, in many cases, prices have held steady for these higher quality wines, creating good value opportunities.

At 94 points and under \$100, Bodegas Palacios Remondo's silky Rioja Oriental Viñas Viejas de la Propiedad 2021 (\$55) is a baby version of the winery's highly rated single-vineyard wine; it's all about precision and harmony. The Señorío de San Vicente Rioja 2021 (\$85) is a counterpoint, initially muscular and compact but opening in the glass to show a lovely range of fruit, mineral and savory aromas and flavors.

Under \$50, look for Bodegas Muga's sculpted Rioja Reserva 2021 (92, \$39) and Bodegas Artevino's fragrant, structured Rioja Orben (91, \$45).

Many of Rioja's best values are found among the traditional bodegas' *crianzas* and *reservas*, examples that partner consistent quality, good availability and solid pricing. A trio of 90-point wines offers fine versions in this vein: The Bodegas Beronia Rioja Crianza 2021 (\$15) is well-balanced and animated; the Bodegas Izadi Rioja Reserva 2021 (\$20) is sleek and savory; and the Bodegas Sierra Cantabria Rioja Crianza 2021 (\$25) is fresh and fruit-driven.

Outside of the 2021 vintage, a trio of Rioja *reservas* at 93 points also offer good availability and high quality. Look for CVNE's Rioja Imperial Reserva 2020 (\$52), Bodegas Roda Rioja Roda Reserva 2020 (\$55) and La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remeluri Rioja Reserva 2016 (\$55). For less than \$30, try the 2017 Rioja Gran Reserva (92, \$28) from Bodegas LAN, the Rioja Pies Rotos 2022 (91, \$23) from Bodegas y Viñedos Artuke and the Rioja Reserva 2020 (90, \$23) from Baron de Ley.

Although the lion's share of this report's wines are red, Rioja's white wines are increasingly intriguing. This is true for the wine drinker, but also for Rioja's winemakers, many of whom are showing greater interest in the category. Among smaller producers, that might mean bottling a white for the first time; for the larger wineries, that interest is manifesting in expanding lineups of white wine labels.

"There's great potential for the whites from Rioja," says Arturo de Miguel, winemaker at Bodegas y Viñedos Artuke, which he runs with his brother Kike. "The really good thing is that



Brothers Marcos (left) and Miguel Ángel Eguren account for five classic-scoring single-vineyard wines in this report, from two of their family wineries. With 400 acres of vines, they use only estate fruit across their lineup.

we have a lot of really old vineyards for the whites."

Historically, Malvasía was Rioja's favored white grape, although many of the old vineyards that de Miguel refers to are field blends. Viura is the leading white variety today, typically dominating the blend or bottled solo. But de Miguel warns that this growing interest in Viura may come at a cost. "In the last five to six years, a lot of people have planted white vineyards, and they will be in the market in the next five to six years. It could be a very dire situation [if wineries rely only on] the quality of the young vineyards."

Future issues aside, consumers should expect to find a spectrum of wine styles among the whites as well. It's a benefit for those who want to explore and experience different expressions, but a challenge when faced with an unfamiliar wine. Traditional examples employ long aging in oak while more straightforward examples are fermented and aged briefly in stainless steel. In between are examples utilizing *bâtonnage* and lees contact to bolster textural richness and expression, skin-contact versions, and oak-influenced bottlings.

Standout examples range from the long-aged R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Rioja White Viña Gravonia Crianza 2015 (94, \$49) to the bright, snappy and easy-drinking El Coto de Rioja Rioja White 2024 (86, \$12). Also look for Bodega Sierra de Toloño's firm and focused, mineral-driven Rioja White Nahikun 2023 (92, \$38) and Bodegas Valdemar's rich, oak-aged Rioja White Conde Valdemar Finca Alto Cantabria Viñedo Singular Old Vines 2023 (91, \$44).

Rioja is poetically known as "The Land of 1,000 Wines." With a wide variety of styles, a broad range of vintages and distinctive expressions from wineries large and small, the time for wine lovers to rediscover Rioja is now.

Senior editor Alison Napjus is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Spain.

Alison Napjus’ Top Recommended Wines From Rioja

More than 300 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at [WineSpectator.com/RiojaAlpha053125](https://www.winespectator.com/RiojaAlpha053125). WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
BODEGAS MUGA Rioja Aro 2021 Rich, enticing core of blackberry coulis and plum sauce, mouthwater-ing acidity and muscular tannins. Tempranillo and Graciano.	96	\$450
VIÑEDOS DE PÁGANOS Rioja La Nieta 2021 This gorgeous red delivers a tapestry of cherry preserves, blackberry paste, tangerine peel, tar, black licorice, tobacco and chai spices.	96	\$275
ÁLVARO PALACIOS Rioja Oriental Quiñón de Valmira Viñedo Singular 2022 Enticing and elegant, with pureed raspberry and strawberry, plus a pronounced mineral presence. Focused and fragrant.	96	\$550
BODEGAS SIERRA CANTABRIA Rioja Amancio 2021 Classy, broad-shouldered and statuesque, fleshed out by blackberry coulis and crushed mulberry fruit with dark chocolate accents.	96	\$180
BODEGA LANZAGA Rioja Las Beatas 2021 Poised and perfumed, with lovely rosemary and blood orange peel ac-centing the concentrated blackberry, plum skin, tar and black olive.	95	\$375
BODEGAS MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA Rioja Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva Especial 2012 Sophisticated, with plum compote, raspberry fruit and espresso notes balancing generosity with finesse. Tempranillo and Mazuelo.	95	\$280
VIÑEDOS DE PÁGANOS Rioja El Puntido 2021 Offers a rich profile of blackberry paste, plum sauce and black licorice, with nutmeg, graphite and dried thyme notes.	95	\$70
LA RIOJA ALTA Rioja 890 Gran Reserva 2010 Aging gracefully, integrating tobacco and loamy earth with sculpted tannins. Enticing through the plush finish.	95	\$275
BODEGAS SIERRA CANTABRIA Rioja Finca El Bosque 2021 Rich and expressive with steeped black cherry, raspberry ganache, oolong tea and mineral flavors. Sculpted by dense, fine-grained tannins.	95	\$190
BODEGAS SIERRA CANTABRIA Rioja Mágico 2021 Refined tannins offer a taut frame for currant, mandarin orange peel, rooibos tea, loam and dark chocolate. Tempranillo blend.	95	\$1,000
BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS ARTUKE Rioja Paraje El Meadero El Escolladero 2022 Seamlessly knits supple tannins and blood orange peel acidity with an enticing range of ripe blackberry and black cherry fruit.	94	\$80
VIÑEDOS DEL CONTINO Rioja Viña del Olivo 2021 Rich, with tobacco and ground coffee aromas and black cherry coulis, loamy earth and cocoa powder on the silky palate. Tempranillo blend.	94	\$163
CUENTAVIÑAS Rioja Los Yelsones 2021 Seamless, with raspberry ganache, warm cherry and fresh earth. Glides effortlessly across the palate, revealing depth and focus.	94	\$300
CVNE Rioja Imperial Gran Reserva 2018 Harmonious, with lush mulberry and cherry fruit nicely trimmed by plum skin acidity and fine, sinewy tannins. Tempranillo blend.	94	\$100
R. LÓPEZ DE HEREDIA VIÑA TONDONIA Rioja White Viña Gravonia Crianza 2015 A traditional white, with dried white cherry, Marcona almond, baked pineapple, vanilla, fern and lemon thyme notes. Long and distinctive.	94	\$49
BODEGAS MUGA Rioja Prado Enea Gran Reserva 2016 Powerful but poised, with dense tannins around focused baked black plum, green olive, fig cake and ground coffee. Tempranillo blend.	94	\$110
LA GRANJA NUESTRA SEÑORA DE REMELLURI Rioja Gran Reserva 2015 Leads with elegant baked cherry and currant fruit, revealing layers of sweet tobacco, mocha and loamy earth. Tempranillo blend.	94	\$140
MARQUÉS DE RISCAL Rioja Frank Gehry Selection 2019 Shows concentration and subtle power, with a beam of black currant alongside fresh, loamy earth, dried mint, olive and dark chocolate.	94	\$668
SEÑORIO DE SAN VICENTE Rioja 2021 Muscular, revealing a concentrated range of ripe black currant and black cherry fruit, with a fleshy hint of green olive.	94	\$85
BODEGAS FAUSTINO Rioja Gran Faustino I Gran Reserva 2004 Aging gracefully, with remarkable vibrancy and focus to creamy baked cherry and sweet tobacco flavors. Tempranillo blend.	93	\$100
BODEGAS LAN Rioja Edición Limitada 2022 Fresh and focused, with ripe cherry and currant fruit flavors meshed with dense, fine-grained tannins. Tempranillo blend.	93	\$60
DIEGO MAGAÑA TEJERO Rioja Anza Carramonte 2022 Stylish, with chalky underlying tannins and flavors of black raspberry paste, pomegranate puree and black olive.	93	\$75
BODEGA ABEL MENDOZA Graciano-Garnacha Rioja Grano a Grano 2020 Bright acidity enlivens a dark core of blackberry paste, mountain herbs and black olive in this integrated red. Graciano and Garnacha.	93	\$100
BODEGAS MARQUÉS DE MURRIETA Rioja White Capellanía 2019 This intriguing white broadens to reveal layers of toasted almond, honey, tangerine peel, baked pear, dried mint and beeswax.	93	\$120
LA GRANJA NUESTRA SEÑORA DE REMELLURI Rioja White Alavesa 2021 Lovely, layered white with a rapierlike spine of acidity enmeshed with creamy patisserie pear, green fig and persimmon fruit flavors.	93	\$140
BODEGAS RODA Rioja Roda I Reserva 2019 Long, supple and harmonious, with ripe black cherry and currant laced with cocoa powder and dried thyme. Tempranillo blend.	93	\$78
VIGNERONS DE LA SONSIERRA Rioja Jose Gil Paraje La Canoca 2022 Fragrant herbs and spices are layered with baked mulberry and cherry fruit in this concentrated red with muscular, fine-grained tannins.	93	\$74
VIÑEDOS DEL CONTINO Rioja White San Gregorio 2021 A sleek, graceful white, with well-honed acidity defining a rich range of quince paste and dried apricot flavors.	92	\$54
BODEGA ABEL MENDOZA Rioja White SV 2021 Refreshing acidity and flavors of dried pear, almond skin and moun-tain herbs, plus a racy streak of salinity. Shows focus and length.	92	\$65
BODEGAS MIGUEL MERINO Rioja White 2022 Vibrant, with lip-smacking acidity and layers of poached apricot, tan-gerine peel, Marcona almond and vanilla. Viura and Garnacha Blanca.	92	\$45

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
BODEGAS PALACIOS REMONDO Rioja Oriental Viñas Viejas de la Propiedad 2021 Silky, with pinpoint balance and harmony to boysenberry, baked cherry, dried lavender and star anise notes. Supple, fine tannins.	94	\$55
LA GRANJA NUESTRA SEÑORA DE REMELLURI Rioja Reserva 2016 Bright and buoyant, with macerated blackberry and black plum skin flavors and fragrant leather and dried flowers. Tempranillo blend.	93	\$56
BODEGAS SIERRA CANTABRIA Rioja Gran Reserva 2016 Lovely, with weight and concentration to the creamed black cherry, plum skin, mineral and lavender notes. Tempranillo and Graciano.	93	\$50
BODEGAS BHILAR Rioja White Bhilar 2022 This silky white offers flavors of raw almond, mandarin orange peel and dried white cherry. Viura and Grenache Blanc.	92	\$21
MARQUÉS DE CÁCERES Rioja Gran Reserva 2016 Warm spice and licorice notes lace chopped cherry, green olive, sweet tobacco and vanilla flavors. Tempranillo blend.	92	\$40
BODEGAS FAUSTINO Rioja I Gran Reserva 2016 Leans to tradition without forsaking concentration or fruit. Fragrant with tobacco, vanilla and milled white pepper. Tempranillo blend.	92	\$37
BODEGAS LAN Rioja Gran Reserva 2017 Aromatic, with star anise, dried thyme and mocha winding through a core of ripe black cherry and boysenberry. Tempranillo and Graciano.	92	\$28
BODEGAS HERMANOS PECIÑA Rioja Señorío de P. Peciña Reserva 2016 Fresh and harmonious, with enticing, savory underpinnings of leather, sweet smoke and eucalyptus. Tempranillo blend.	92	\$35
BODEGAS RAMÍREZ Rioja Ramírez de la Piscina Selección Reserva 2020 Reveals fragrant dried flowers, eucalyptus, star anise and mocha, with flavors of plumped cherry and baked plum.	92	\$40
BODEGAS TOBÍA Rioja Selección de Autor 2019 Plush and aromatic, with generous ripe black currant, dried thyme, co-coa powder and mineral notes. Tempranillo blend.	92	\$30
BODEGAS ARTEVINO Rioja Orben 2021 Hints of black licorice, violet and tobacco offer a fragrant overtone for this structured red. Well-spiced finish.	91	\$45
BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS ARTUKE Rioja Pies Rotos 2022 Enticing, with appealing aromas and flavors of black raspberry coulis, warm fig, violet and mountain herbs. Tempranillo and Graciano.	91	\$23
BODEGAS RAMÓN BILBAO Rioja Gran Reserva 2016 Fresh and fluid, this well-spiced red shows flavors of pureed mulberry, black olive, game, vanilla, toast and singed alder.	91	\$37
CVNE Rioja Cune Reserva 2020 Integrates creamy tannins and orange peel acidity with baked cherry, fig cake, dried thyme and warm brown bread. Tempranillo blend.	91	\$29
BODEGAS LAN Rioja Reserva 2019 Ripe black cherry and black plum fruit are laced with lavish hints of vanilla, tar and cedar. Tempranillo blend.	91	\$22
VIÑA DEL LENTISCO Rioja Alavesa Villota Selvanevada 2022 Pleasingly plump chopped black plum and raspberry flavors are reined in by sinewy, fine-grained tannins. Tempranillo blend.	91	\$25
BODEGAS REMÍREZ DE GANUZA Rioja Fincas de Ganuza Reserva 2016 A fragrant, focused red, offering a pure, juicy beam of dried raspberry and cranberry fruit. Creamy, spiced finish.	91	\$40
LA RIOJA ALTA Rioja Viña Alberdi Reserva 2020 Hints of tobacco, smoke and vanilla are a fragrant thread winding through the baked cherry and raspberry fruit.	91	\$25
BODEGAS VALDEMAR Rioja Conde Valdemar Reserva 2018 Plush, with saturated cherry and boysenberry fruit flavors accented by vanilla, licorice, iron and cured tobacco notes. Tempranillo blend.	91	\$30
BODEGAS BERONIA Rioja Crianza 2021 Vivid and appealing. Crackles with lively acidity and flavors of yellow peach, passion fruit and smoked almond.	90	\$15
BODEGAS IZADI Rioja Reserva 2021 A sleek, savory style, with firm tannins and a sanguine underpinning of iron and loamy earth, plus a touch of black licorice.	90	\$20
BARON DE LEY Rioja Reserva 2020 Fresh and elegant, with a lively mix of wild cherry, pomegranate pu-ree, rose hip and red licorice flavors. Tempranillo blend.	90	\$23
BODEGA SIERRA DE TOLOÑO Rioja White 2023 Vivid and appealing. Crackles with lively acidity and flavors of yellow peach, passion fruit and smoked almond.	90	\$21
BODEGA SIERRA DE TOLOÑO Tempranillo Rioja 2022 Balanced, offering supple tannins enmeshed with a lively range of brambly blackberry and mulberry fruit flavors. Spiced finish.	90	\$21
BODEGA ABEL MENDOZA Rioja White Jarrarte 2022 Lively guava and pineapple fruit flavors underscored by a savory thread of dried sage and smoke. Bright and creamy. Viura blend.	89	\$20
BODEGAS OLARRA Rioja Cerro Añon Crianza 2021 Balanced and well-knit, layering fine tannins with creamed black cherry and plum sauce notes. Tempranillo blend.	89	\$18
BODEGAS ONTAÑON Viura Rioja 2021 A creamy, leesy mix of poached peach, almond pastry, lemon curd and thyme with a tang of salty minerality.	89	\$20
BODEGAS MONTECILLO Rioja Crianza 2020 Easy-drinking, with light tannins and a well-spiced mix of ripe cherry and plum fruit accented by licorice. Tempranillo and Garnacha.	88	\$14
BODEGAS MUGA Rioja Rosado 2023 This pale pink rosé is fresh and appealing, with delicate hints of ground ginger and white blossoms. Garnacha blend.	88	\$18
BODEGAS HERMANOS PECIÑA Rioja White Señorío de P. Peciña 2021 A salty white, with snappy acidity. Hints of cinnamon, anise and rose-mary lace flavors of persimmon, dried white cherry and vanilla wafer.	88	\$18
EL COTO DE RIOJA Rioja White 2024 A snappy, easy-drinking white, offering star fruit and peach skin fla-vors, with lemon thyme, floral and vanilla hints. Viura blend.	86	\$12