

# WINE News

*You don't have to hike Holy Mountain to find great Spanish and Portuguese wines!*



## MARCH 28, 2016 FEATURES

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## What's New from Spain and Portugal

By Joe Manekin

**We have a lot to look forward to from Spain this year.** Starting with Rioja, there are still plenty of 2009 Reservas. And soon, Gran Reservas will slowly become available this year and next. As in Bordeaux, 2009 was a fantastic year for this region. Arguably even better, the 2010 vintage represents a watershed moment for Rioja. We hear all about 2010 Brunello, and yes, those wines are very good. But how about wines that are every bit as good, at lower average prices, and are just starting to be released? Many top critics and publications have highly reviewed 2010 Riojas, including British Master of Wine and Rioja specialist Tim Atkin, whose reviews we are including in this newsletter and beyond. Look forward to more 2010 Rioja offers on our website and in your in-boxes! There will be many great cellar candidates.

Now is also a good time to remind everyone of our Direct Import program. In addition to our core Rioja DI producers, whose single village, terroir-marked styles set them apart from many others in the region, direct importing enables us to do things like sell delicious Txakoli for under \$13, authentic, old school-inspired Ribera del Duero Reserva for under \$35, and a top producer's spectacular Penedès sparkling wine for under \$20. Finally, we have a few potential new Rioja producers we are researching for inclusion in our fall inventory. Also, Portugal may finally be represented in our DI portfolio this year!

Please see below for some popular values that are in good supply, and read on for an in-depth look at some of our favorite Spanish and Portuguese wines.

**2014 Zudugarai "Amats" Rosé Getariako Txakolina (\$12.99)** Last call for this Basque customer favorite! Amats is both the brand name as well as one of Zudugarai's vineyards. It's a beautiful vineyard, with the Cantabrian Sea in full view to the north. Produced from Hondarribi Beltza grapes, this rosé shows a lovely balance between fresh red berries, hints of watermelon, a very subtle, pleasant bitterness and a fizzy quality. It's delicious with cured cheeses (something slightly smoky like Idiazabal works really well), charcuterie, anchovies or your favorite cured ham.

**2013 Casa Castillo "El Molar" Garnacha Jumilla (\$15.99)** Spain does Garnacha (Grenache) as well as anyone. There is a wealth of this grape variety planted throughout the country, and top examples such as this do not necessarily have to cost an arm and a leg. With its juicy red cherry fruit and fresh, limestone soil-inflected minerality, this Garnacha is one of our best from either Spain or the Rhône Valley—compare with Châteauneuf-du-Pape (but be sure to lower the price by 50%! 93 points RP.

**2014 Bodegas Abanico "Hazaña Viñas Viejas" Rioja (\$10.99)** Aromas of macerated cherries and plums also show some secondary savory notes with a subtle, complex, underlying damp soil component. Juicy, fresh fruit on the palate screams 2014—a vintage where young and unoaked as well as minimally oaked wines like this should really shine. 92 points RP.



## The Future is Bright in Rioja for Past Vintages: 2005 and 2010

By Randy Hagerman

It has been well documented here and elsewhere that the 2005 vintage in Rioja was a classic. These wines have sold well already and I don't expect them to hang around much longer. Fortunately for you, we still have some fantastic offerings from this dynamite vintage available in our inventory!

**2005 La Rioja Alta "904" Gran Reserva Rioja (\$44.99)** A cornucopia of aromas leap from the glass as this wine hits the air. The red cherry, black plum, tobacco, spice, leather and licorice aromas entice you into the glass. On the palate, this full-bodied red remains perfectly poised, confirming red and black fruits and spice, while driving to a finish that goes on and on. This wine is drinking very well at 10 years old, but you can keep it for many decades to come. 95 points JS, 96 points RP, 92 points WS, 94 points VN.

**2005 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos Reserva Especial Rioja (\$29.99)** A fifty-fifty blend of Tempranillo and Mazuelo (Carignane), this smells of red and black cherries, black raspberry, balsamic, spice, and mocha. The fruit is confirmed and brighter on the palate, with plenty of mid-palate weight, and a crisp, spicy finish.

The 2010 vintage in Rioja has been declared excellent by Rioja's Consejo Regulador. Although slightly cooler than '05, the warm, dry

summer led to perfect ripening conditions, as the grapes accumulated sugar gradually while maintaining their acidity.

**2010 Marqués de Murrieta Reserva Rioja (\$19.99)** The complex nose offers black cherry, red currant, spice, and a floral note. This medium-bodied red dances on the palate, feeling equal parts elegant and energetic. The bright cherry, raspberry, and herbaceous notes are moved along by a racy acidity, winding up in a long, softly tannic finish, with a lingering vanilla note. 94 points JS, 94 points TA\*, 93 points RP, 90 points WS.

**2010 Palacio del Burgo Reserva Rioja (\$17.99)** The nose contains slightly sweet-smelling dark cherry, black plum, and a hint of oak. On the palate, this wine is soft and dangerously drinkable, confirming gobs of brambly berry fruit and vanilla. This medium-bodied red concludes with flashy, blood orange acidity that delivers plenty of length and soft tannins. Enjoy this now! 93 points WS, 91 points VN, 90 points W&S.

\*Tim Atkin is a well respected Master of Wine and wine critic who focuses on Rioja.



## Not All is Sweet in Portugal

By Heather Vander Wall

Portugal is a great source not only for fine Port wines, but for hearty, meaty, dry red table wines with plenty of class and distinction. One of the best wine growing regions in Portugal is the Douro Valley. Producing just as much dry red as it does fortified wine, this region is home to a number of regional varietals that lend these wines a rich depth of spice and savory character not to be found elsewhere.

### Niepoort

One of the better port houses in the Douro, Niepoort makes some dry wine as well as world-class fortified wines. The **2013 Niepoort "Vertente" Tinto Douro (\$23.99)** is a great example of the polish and class the dry red wines of Douro can achieve, even at a younger age. Showing the typical intensity and concentration of the Douro region, this Tinto also achieves a very elegant, clean profile, with beautiful black fruit, fig, and meat smoke aromas. On the palate it shows lifted acidity with fine-grained tannin and clear, polished fruit under a layer of spice and earth.

Quinta do Popa had its first harvest in 2007, and the winemaking is overseen by Luis Pato, one of the more famous winemakers in Portugal. The **2011 Quinta do Popa Tinta Roriz Douro (\$32.99)** shows gorgeous, dark color with intense aromas of huckleberry, pine, and wood smoke. Although this is a big wine, with plenty of fruit and alcohol, the structure of tannin and acidity shapes and highlights the bulk, creating a well-integrated whole: tangy, rich and full.

### Luis Pato

Luis Pato (Pato meaning duck in Portuguese) owns and operates a winery under his own name in the Bairrada region, where he champions the local grape variety "Baga."

Pato's **2012 Luis Pato Vinho Tinto Beiras (\$11.99)** explores the gamut of expression the Baga grape is capable of—deep ruby saturation of color, with full aromas of meat, game, pitch, black pepper, and red fruit. On the palate, crisp acidity and a refined tannin structure balance the array of flavor on the back—mostly rustic, earthy, pine and red plum. The finish is very savory, smoky and meaty.

Pato really shines in his Vinhas Velhas bottling. The **2011 Luis Pato Vinhas Velhas Beiras (\$29.99)** takes the rusticity of the Tinto, with its crazy range of flavors, and makes sense of the whole picture. Similar in color and saturation, it shows aromas of peppered salami, bacon, black plum, boysenberry, and a hint of green cedar. On the palate, the acidity and tannin are well integrated. Incredibly unique in expression, the wine shows good depth with a wealth of savory, gamy qualities, chief among them bacon fat and salted pork. The fruit is hardly overt, but still present, underlining the savory nature of the wine. Certainly an argument for the power and beauty of the region!



# Rioja and Cava—Direct to You

By Diana Turk

If you're a seasoned visitor of local K&L retail locations, you may have been browsing the aisles and found bottles marked with prices that are seemingly too good to be true. Aged wines from stellar vintages and reputable properties for under \$20? (I'm looking at you, 2005 Lesmos Reserva.) Or perhaps you're more of an online shopper and received an email singing the praises of a wine you haven't heard of, from a region you know to be pricier than what you see on the screen. Maybe you've also experienced the flip side of this, and fallen in love with a previously unknown wine only to find that once sold out, there is depressingly no more to be had. These idiosyncrasies (and shopping scores) are the result of our Direct Import (DI) program. This is not supermarket wine, these are gems, sometimes only available in limited quantities, discovered by our intrepid buyers who create such strong relationships with producers that they're able to bring in their spectacular product and present them directly to you. This usually translates to both bargain and quality.

There is a village-specific nature to our Rioja program, which enables us to better understand the character of wines from slightly different terroirs. This approach to our smaller bodegas contrasts with most larger bodegas' preference—and given their volume, need—to blend from multiple areas. The slight difference in location—Merino in Briones, Puelles in Abalos, Casa Juan in Laguardia—proves apparent when drinking the final product.

Our latest roundup are compelling, high-caliber releases from producers you may not find elsewhere and won't want to go without.

## Direct Out of Rioja

### 2013 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos “Cuarteto” Rioja (\$9.99)

This value-driven red has been a hit with the staff in our Hollywood store, with at least one person taking home a bottle weekly. The price is right (barely ten bucks!), but the main draw here is the leaner, younger style. Lesmos devotees already know that bright cherry fruit will be up front, but this release lacks the leather and caskiness of its aged brethren. Rather, it doesn't see any oak and goes through carbonic maceration, creating a light, easygoing wine that keeps Tempranillo's crowd-pleasing qualities while adding peppery interest. While we await the container of more classic Lesmos Rioja, this cheerful addition to the lineup is here to enjoy. Constantly.

**2008 Miguel Merino “Vitola” Reserva Rioja (\$19.99)** Modern style meets Rioja heritage: intensely fruit-driven without being overbearing, the 2008 Vitola shows plummy elegance and lush, Parkeresque sensibilities with enough acidity to balance. Merino delivers a delicious, versatile crossover Tempranillo.

**2010 Miguel Merino “Unnum” Rioja (\$39.99)** Dark cherry fruit with velvety texture and a touch of oak, Unnum is a plush, impressively layered release from what's turning out to be a stellar vintage. I wouldn't be surprised if Parker devotees love this delicious, fruit-driven side of Rioja-style wine, but there's a balance here that doesn't alienate fans of cooler climate Tempranillo. A thoroughly enjoyable offering from a classic producer. 95 points TA.



Enjoying some vineyard bubbly with Josep and Cristina at Loxarel.

## Sparkling Wine from Penedès

Longtime Cava fans know that the Spanish bubbly scene can be something of a roller coaster ride. Initially winning favor as being cost-effective for méthode champenoise (*método tradicional*) and aged at least nine months on the lees, the “Cava” designation has been undermined by mediocre sparklers being produced far from the traditional region, Penedès.

Can Mayol Loxarel is leading the charge to avoid confusion, labeling their releases as “sparkling Penedès” rather than Cava to emphasize their terroir in the Penedès D.O. The fact that they farm organically (though not technically certified), never use dosage, and work with low levels of added sulfites makes for incredibly natural and beautifully crafted wines. These commitments have earned Josep Mitjans a reputation as a talented, albeit eccentric, winemaker.

**Can Mayol Loxarel “999” Rosat Brut Nature Penedès (\$12.99)** While this wine doesn't feature the native Trepat that sometimes makes it into Loxarel's rosados, it is no less of a rustic sparkler. Bright red fruit with an exuberant effervescence, gorgeous mousse texture, and a singing dry finish—the 999 shows a shocking complexity, given the price.

### 2009 Can Mayol Loxarel “Gran Reserva de Familia” Brut Nature

**Penedès (\$19.99)** Mitjans' mad scientist persona really shines through with this beauty, a magical wine that both surprises and wins fans immediately. Crafted from grapes that include 70-year-old Xarel-lo vines, this is bright but still shows the gorgeous lees qualities without any hint of reduction. There's sophistication here and a subtle salinity with a dry, beautifully chalky finish. I love everything from this producer, but the 2009 Brut Nature is especially lovely and bargain-priced to boot—a favorite that continues to impress even Champagne lovers.

We'll soon be receiving a new Blanc de Noirs sparkler that should add softness and glamour to this already amazing collection.





*Polyculture at Joan d'Anguera.*

## New Heights in Montsant and Priorat

By Joe Manekin

Last July I had the good fortune to spend a week in Montsant and Priorat, the mountainous Catalan regions located about an hour and a half drive inland from Barcelona. For some more historical context, recent trends and D.O. information about Priorat, please check out an [On the Trail](#) blog post I wrote last month. In this space I'm going to focus, most importantly, on what's in the bottle!

The main grape varieties in both Priorat and Montsant are Garnacha and Cariñena (Carignane). Other common red grape varieties include Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. In general, while Montsant vineyards tend to be lower elevation, with soil types ranging from decomposed granite to calcareous clay and sand, Priorat's vineyards tend to lie higher up: from 1,200 to 2,000 feet above sea level. They are typically composed of poor, schist soil (known locally as llicorella) and are cultivated either in single row terraces (old school), machine-made "bancales" (two rows per terraces), or staked on steep "costers" (Côte-Rôtie style). There are delicious wines made in both Montsant and Priorat. Here are some tasty examples:

**2012 Zerran Montsant (\$10.99)** A blend of Cariñena, Garnacha and Syrah, this custom cuvée is generously blue and purple fruited, with the smoky Syrah definitely playing a strong supporting role as does a short stint in oak barrels. 90 points RP, 91 points VN.

**2014 Joan d'Anguera "Altaroses" Montsant (\$18.99)** The wines made by brothers Joan and Josep d'Anguera in their home village of Darnos are among my favorite Spanish wines. Altaroses is relatively younger vine Garnacha, farmed organically (Demeter certified Biodynamic), and picked relatively early. Trodden by foot periodically for a few days, fermented with its own yeast, and allowed to age in old barrels, there is a delicacy, purity and freshness to this wine—so drinkable and a perfect window into the style.

**2012 Noster "Inicial" Priorat (\$14.99)** Here is a Priorat that is not at all shy or trying to hide its Mediterranean origins, a richer, fuller bodied style—especially considering its modest price. This is on the darker-fruited side, generous and slightly savory, a well-balanced, tasty blend of Garnacha, Carignane, and just a tiny amount of Cabernet Sauvignon.

**2014 Mas Doix "Les Crestes" Priorat (\$24.99)** A cool, fresh vintage combined with vineyards located in one of the cooler villages, and some higher elevation vineyards in Poboleda, makes for this beautiful, purple-fruited wine. Scrumptious, delicious fruit! Snatch these up before a likely big review causes this to quickly sell out.



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