

SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

Cider:
The Wine from
the Cold

Hard
Cheeses

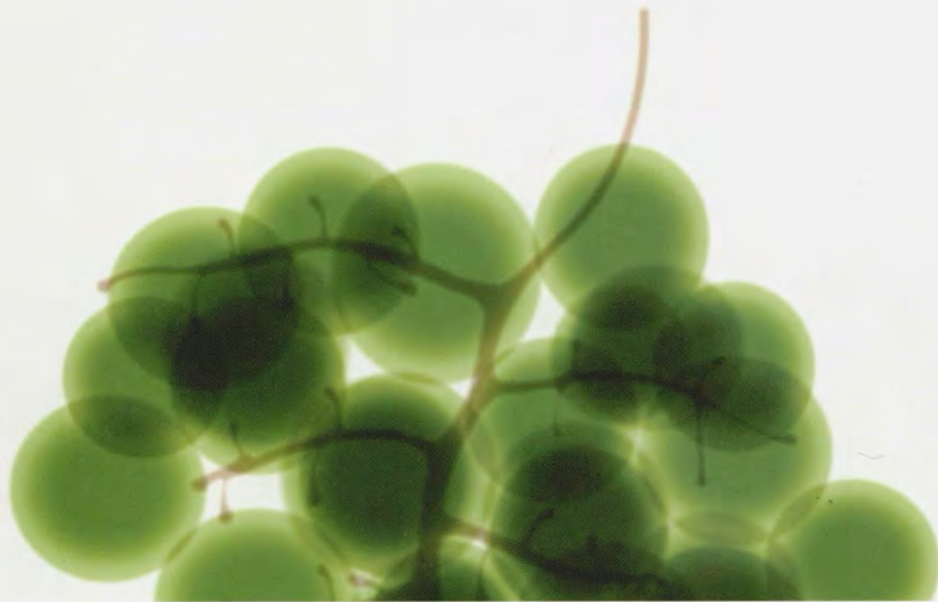
21st-century
DOs

Women
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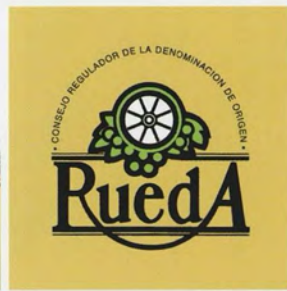
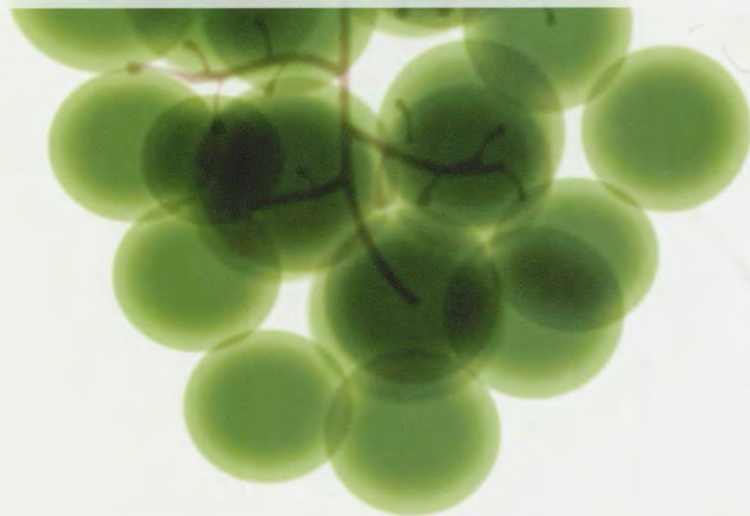


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EDITION

The disparaging reputation—full of garlic, too much oil—given to Spanish food by the Romantic travelers of the 19th-century is now well and truly a thing of the past. This year, 14 young chefs from Germany, Denmark, the US, Japan and Switzerland were thoroughly won over by the freshness of our products, the creativity and enthusiasm of our chefs (their teachers), and the astonishing diversity of our cuisine. Twenty-one new recruits are expected in September—three of them from China—all of which are sure to become persuasive ambassadors of Spanish gastronomy, just like the women chefs in our “Over a Hot Stove” series, more of whom are featured in this issue (see “Pots, Pans and Pizzazz”). Meanwhile, our survey of 21st-century DOs focuses on Castile-Leon—famous wine territory, and steeped in history.

Join us on our bikes for the last leg of our exploration of secret Spain—those unspoiled places that not many people know about. Perhaps the Romantic writers did us a favor after all! And we have further revelations: cider is not a drink that many readers will associate with Spain... Normandy, yes; Somerset, of course; but Spain? Come with us to Asturias. Where do most of the world's artichokes come from? Meet Blanca de Tudela. And can you name a hard cheese from Spain other than Manchego? Our report “The Hard Stuff” brings you up to speed.

Enjoy!

Cathy Boirac

Editor-in-chief



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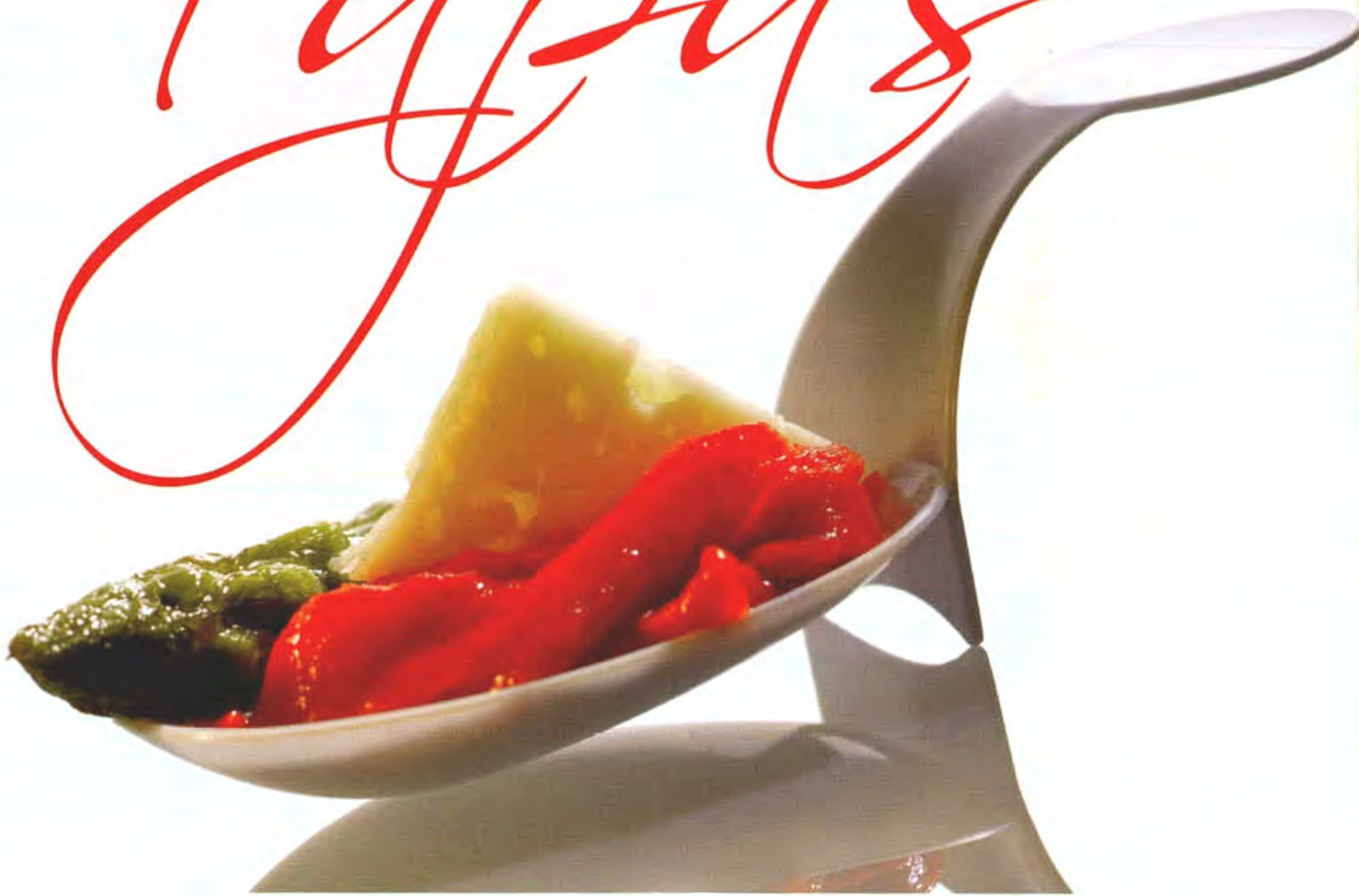


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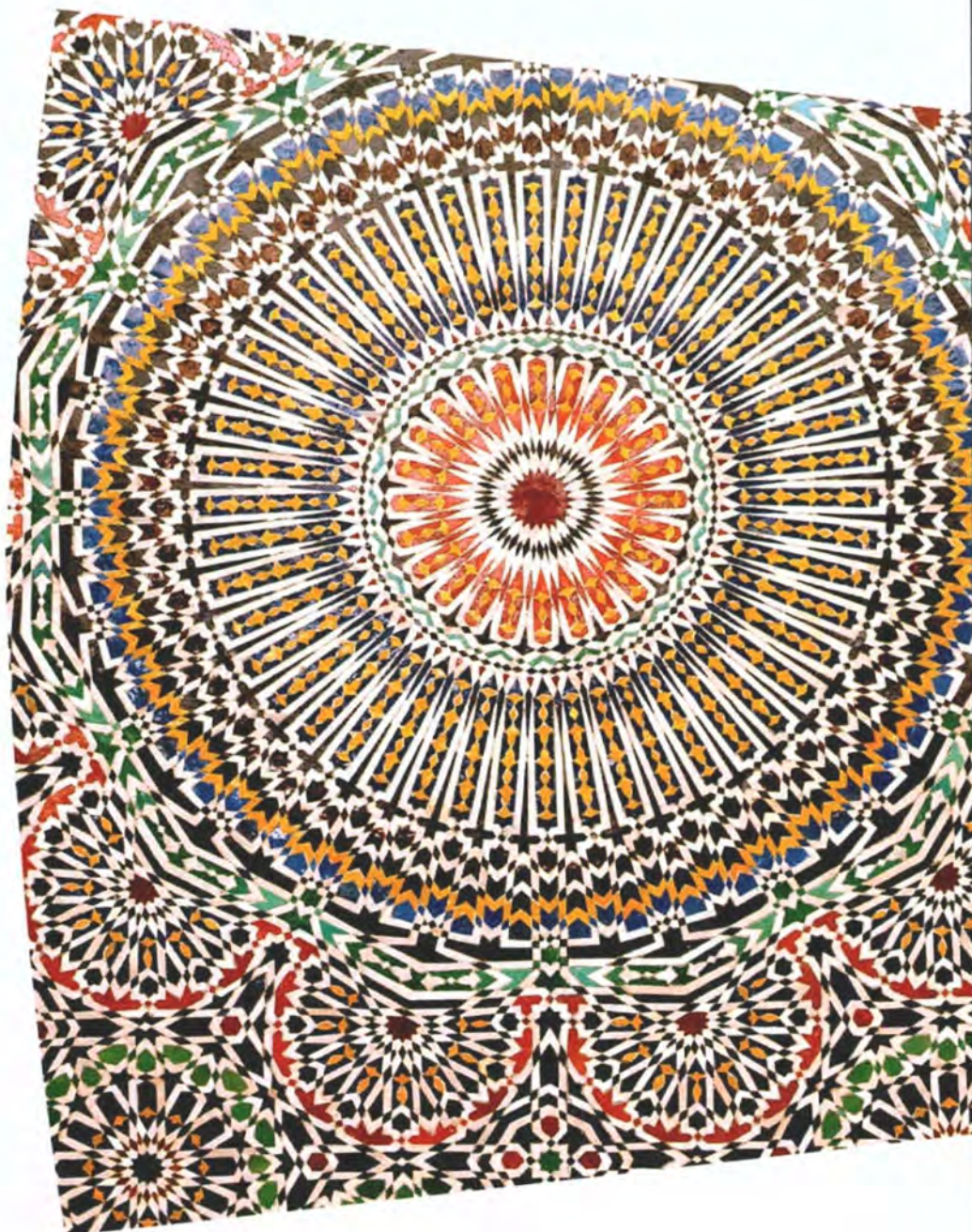
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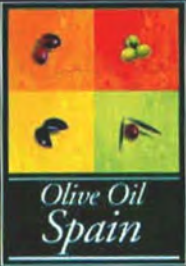
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CIDER

The Wine from the Cold

As the social trend towards lower-alcohol, natural drinks becomes even more widespread, cider sales are enjoying an unprecedented boom. New markets are opening up for the drink that would barely have been aware of its existence ten years ago, yet now are gradually making it their own. In Spain, cider is made in the north, principally in Asturias, where it is widely drunk and is an integral element of the local culture. It has the added appeal of a quality guarantee in the form of Protected Designation of Origin status: PDO Sidra de Asturias.



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In antiquity, the early Hebrew word *šēkāt* ("intoxicating liquor") served as a blanket term for all fermented fruit juices (beer, obtained from germinated grain fermented by malting to transform its starch into sugars, was also known). In the Mediterranean Basin, cradle of Western cultures, the fruit that gave rise to the best drink of this kind happened to be grapes, and this "cider" soon became differentiated from the rest and took on a name of its own, the equivalent of "wine". Strictly speaking then, the drink that we might refer to as "raspberry wine" should really be called "raspberry cider", since the word "wine" applies exclusively to a drink derived from grapes. Having made that pedantic point, and conceding that the whole purpose of language is to make ourselves understood, it has to be admitted that the concept of cider as an apple wine (though it was also often made of pears, and still is in Cantabria) is a useful one.

To give you your geographical bearings, Spanish cider is produced in the northwestern parts of the country, in the provinces that border the Cantabrian Sea (the northeastern extreme of the Atlantic Ocean) which washes the coast of France and of northernmost Spain, including the autonomous communities of the Basque Country, Cantabria, the Principality of Asturias and Galicia. Unlike others zones among Europe's colder regions, these are also wine-producing areas, albeit only vestigially in the case of the coldest of them. Examples include Asturias, which recently acquired the qualification *Vino de la Tierra de Cangas*, and the coastal parts of the Basque Country, where its famous green wine, *txacoli*, is made (Revivals and renovations, page 26). Also in the Basque Country, but much



further inland, is La Rioja Alavesa, home of the famous wines of DOCa La Rioja. In Galicia, the DO winegrowing areas of Monterrey, Rias Baixas, Ribeira Sacra and Ribeiro lie inland and face the Atlantic, namely in the most southern part of the region. The pattern in Europe is that grapes are grown in the hottest parts and apples in the coldest (Germany, Austria, Brittany and Normandy, northern Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). The reason for this is obvious bearing in mind that, until a thousand years ago, the climate of northern Europe was extremely cold and, except for in river basins with benign microclimates such as those of the Rhine and Mosel in Germany, not even the Romans succeeded in acclimatizing the *Vitis vinifera* plant there. The population therefore made its drink from other, cold-resistant fruit such as apples.

The Spanish word for apple—*manzana*—derives from *Mala mattiana*, a variety of apple famous for being the favorite fruit of Roman agricultural treatisist Caius Matius (1st century BC). Hence, too, the use of the epithet "malic" for the type of acid that occurs more prolifically in apples than in any other fruit. *Apropos*, alcoholic and malolactic fermentation occur simultaneously in cider (unlike wine,

in which they take place separately)—a fact that, in days gone by, was sometimes responsible for cider being rendered undrinkable by botched attempts to speed up the process so as to get it into the marketplace more quickly. Malic acid is unbearably harsh and bitter in the mouth, but becomes smooth and silky once transformed into lactic acid. Before the adoption of climate control by modern cider mills, this transformation would have taken almost six months, since the two fermentations needed the milder temperatures of spring to achieve completion. This explains why ciders produced near the coast were ready for drinking earlier than the rest. These days, the process takes no more than two months because cider houses are heated to speed up fermentation, thereby solving the aforementioned problems.

A brief history of cider

For the Celtic cultures, the apple was the fruit of knowledge, science, magic and revelation. Mythological tales tell of gods enduring epic experiences sustained by a single apple; self-regenerating apples from the orchard of the Hesperides endowed with the power to assuage hunger, thirst, pain and disease in those who ate them were presented by the god Lug to the three sons of Tuirean in compensation for the murder of their father, Cian. Both the apple and its tree are a recurrent feature of Celtic legend, as in the otherworld realms of the Irish *Emain Ablach* (Fortress of Apples) and the Welsh *Ynys Afallach* (Island of Apples), in the lore of Brittany, and in the British Arthurian tradition in which they are associated with Merlin's magical powers.



The apple is also symbolic of beauty and immortality. Gervasius, chronicler of the life of Alexander the Great (356 BC–323 BC, King of Macedonia) reports Alexander's discovery in India of apples that kept priests alive for 400 years. Likewise, in Scandinavian mythology, the gods ate apples that would keep them youthful and sprightly until Ragna Rök, the end of the current cosmic cycle. Solomon, King of the Israelites (966 BC–926 BC) used the apple as a symbol of beauty in his *Song of Songs* when, describing

first himself and then his beloved, he declares: "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men" (Cant. 2,3); then, more erotically: "I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the branches thereof: now also your breasts shall be as clusters of vine, and the smell of your breath scented like apples" (Cant. 7,8). These examples undermine the theory maintained until a few decades ago that the apple was disseminated throughout Europe by the Romans.

Further contradictory evidence is provided by remains of the Neolithic lake-dwelling cultures of Switzerland and Italy that reveal them to have been consumers of apples and, probably, of cider. Pliny the Elder (23 AD–79 AD, Roman philosopher, writer and naturalist) reported that the inhabitants of coastal Cantabria were cider drinkers, and even made a distilled liquor (probably an *aguardiente*, or marc, obtained by chilling) which rendered them invincible and which they downed in celebratory fashion before and after battle. Author Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat makes a more contemporary reference to Spanish cider in her *Natural and Moral History of Foods* (1987): "...although Normandy is the world's leading cider-producing region, followed by Germany, England, Ireland, the US, Switzerland, Austria and Luxembourg, the best cider—which has been in existence for at least 15 centuries—is that of Asturias, which retains the delicate scent of apple blossom".

APPLE VARIETIES IN PDO SIDRA DE ASTURIAS



The best apples for making cider do not include eating varieties because they lack the necessary acidity. In fact, the Regulatory Council of PDO Sidra de Asturias expressly prohibits the use of eating apples: its regulations actually specify acceptable and unacceptable varieties for making cider covered by PDO Sidra de Asturias. Varieties permitted because of their organoleptic qualities include the following:

Sharp: Durona de Tresali, Blanquina, Limón Montés, Teórica, San Roqueña, Raxao, Xuanina and Fuentes

Sweet: Verdialona, Ernestina

Bitter/sharp: Regona

Bitter: Clara

Bitter/semi-sharp: Meana

Sweet/sour: Coloradona

Semi-sharp: Carrio, Solarina, De la Riega, Collaos, Perico, Prieta and Perazosa

Semi-sharp/bitter: Panqueirna

For further information about PDO Sidra de Asturias, visit www.sidradeasturias.es (English, Spanish).

Cider types and PDO Sidra de Asturias

In 2002, Asturian cider obtained long-awaited Protected Designation of Origin status under the name PDO Sidra de Asturias. Labeling is obligatory nowadays, but the percentage of bottles in the marketplace that actually bear the back label issued by the Regulatory Council is, for the moment, small. This is due mostly to the fact that much of the cider produced in Asturias is made from apples brought in from other regions, and it is an absolute requirement for all designations of



origin that the raw material for their products be of local provenance. This council recognizes three types of cider: **Traditional Natural Cider:** This is the type of cider historically made in Asturias, cider for pouring from a great height (the traditional way of serving, explained below) and marketed unfiltered. This is the kind referred to throughout this article.

“New Expression” Natural Cider: An experimental product which has yet to find its place in the market. This new type is a dry, slightly carbonated cider that does not require the high pouring technique, and is designed for drinking with food in upmarket restaurants.

Cider: This type traditionally used to be known as “champagne” or “champenois” cider, though those terms have now been prohibited by European legislation to avoid any confusion with DO Champagne. It is a carbonated drink with a hint of

sweetness, produced mainly for consumption outside Asturias, primarily in other regions of Spain. This type most resembles ciders made in other countries.

PDO Sidra de Asturias’ regulations stipulate that the Regulatory Council’s label can only be applied to ciders made exclusively from apples of permitted varieties, grown in Asturias, in orchards registered with the council. There are many apple varieties suitable for cidermaking, most of them native to the region.

The town of Villaviciosa in Asturias is the seat of SERIDA (Regional Agri-Food Research and Development Service), a public body attached to the Asturian Regional Government, which is conducting R&D into growing and reinstating native apple varieties. Outside of the PDO, but still in Asturias, other types of cider are produced, some of which are very interesting. Examples include *duernu*

and *volador* ciders. A *duernu* is a wooden trough in which apples were crushed in the old days; the cider known by that name today is a semi-fermented must, which is delicious because it tastes of apple juice but with certain cider-like characteristics and the added bonus of being reputed to keep you regular; it is therefore widely drunk, even for breakfast. *Volador* cider is naturally fizzy, which is achieved by bottling it halfway through fermentation. Both *duernu* and *volador* types are completely artisan and are sold only in rural markets, private homes and smaller cider mills where they are made for their own consumption. Meanwhile, a private group of cidemakers has launched an attractive new group of ciders known as *Manzana Seleccionada* (Selected Apple), intended to be top-of-the-range while still observing traditional standards, and pitched accordingly to the buying public.

How to judge a good cider

This is not the place for a crash course in sensory analysis, but there are certain parameters that one needs to have at one's command when judging the qualities of a *palo* (batch bottled from a specific cask and therefore different from the contents of other casks in the same cellar). Traditional natural cider is deep yellow in color with very slight beads of tiny bubbles which form a star shape on the surface for a few seconds after being poured from a height. Its clean floral scent is reminiscent of green apples, with a slight hint of wood in some cases. It is bone dry in the mouth, slightly astringent and acidic, with a faintly bitter aftertaste, although a powerful fresh, fruity, acidic apple aroma predominates throughout. This type should have a long finish so that one is left with an enduring impression of acidic, scented fruit—a luscious aftertaste that can last for many minutes.

Folk customs and new cider bars

For any visitor to Asturias, one of the most eye-catching first impressions, apart from its dizzyingly steep mountain landscapes so close to the sea, is the local custom of pouring cider from a height of 1 1/2 m (5 ft) into a wide, superfine glass without spilling a drop. This process is known as *escanciar* and is entertaining in itself, performed thousands of times on the outdoor terraces of any number of quayside bars. Each serving of cider poured in this way is known as a *culín*, and is intended to be quickly downed in one gulp. Locals enjoy watching

non-locals attempting the high pour and failing dismally, even from a height of just 1/2 m (1 1/2 ft). The purpose of this traditional conjuring trick is primarily to trigger a brief release of carbon dioxide in the serving of cider; for a few seconds, it is turned cloudy by millions of micro-bubbles which are perceived in the mouth as a delicate freshness.

The custom is to leave a little cider in the glass and throw it on the floor, the idea being that this cleans the rim of the glass, which is traditionally then handed on to the next drinker. This clearly calls for special arrangements such as effective drainage and cleaning systems; the residual cider would otherwise quickly re-ferment and cause damage—the shoes of a professional *escanciador* rot within a month, and even nearby furniture is affected. This explains why cider has to be served in the type of bar or restaurant known as a *sidrería* (cider house) or *chigre*; conventional dining rooms just aren't equipped to deal with the effects of such pouring.

A picturesque story attaches to this use of the term *chigre*. A sailor that fell in love with a young barmaid in Gijón was distressed to see how opening bottles with a spiral corkscrew hurt her hands. He set about adapting a piece of maritime equipment for twisting rope (known at sea as a *chigre*) into an automatic corkscrew. This novelty attracted people to the *sidrería*, who come especially to see it, and it became known as “the *chigre* cider bar”. The device worked so well that it was eventually manufactured industrially, and nowadays all *sidrerías* use wall-mounted mechanical corkscrews.

Espichas are another long-established tradition in Asturias, dating back to the days when, in spring, cidemakers



would invite their friends to taste the new cider. This they would extract from the barrels by means of a tap known in Asturian as an *espicha*. To avoid getting drunk as they tested the contents of barrel after barrel, each participant would take along some food—hard-boiled eggs, Spanish omelets with herring, chorizo, cheese and so on—with the result that the tasting turned into a full-scale party. The events themselves became known as *espichas*, and were so much fun that cider houses gradually began to stage them commercially; nowadays they are a classic way of celebrating birthdays, bachelor parties, leaving school and even weddings. There are also organized visits to cider mills with an *espicha* lunch as part of the program—highly informative and with delicious food as a bonus. Until barely 20 years ago, *sidrerías* were places where neighbors got together to share a few bottles of cider. Some of them would have served popular dishes, tapas, seafood (delicious, and relatively cheap, in Asturias) and perhaps the occasional fish caught off the rocks. Eventually, more and more of them appeared, and these days in places such as Gijón (one of the biggest cities in Asturias), most



OTHER CIDERS AND BY-PRODUCTS

There used to be a tradition of cidermaking all along Spain's Cantabrian coast. Nowadays it is made principally in Asturias with a tiny amount in Cantabria and some in Guipúzcoa (the Basque Country). It is the custom in the Guipúzcoa province to drink cider from the *kupelas* (barrels in Euskara) during the months when it finishes fermenting, between Christmas and Easter. Basque cider houses, known as *sagardoteguis*, welcome visitors; they serve char-grilled steaks and fish and provide each customer with a glass which he can use to drink as much as he likes, as in the Asturian *espichas* (for which the Euskara word is *txotx*). In bygone days, cider was

the traditional drink of the people, but with the advent of bottled wine it virtually disappeared. Today, the tradition (known as *potea*) is gradually being revived to the extent that one can now do the local equivalent of a tapas outing from cider bar to cider bar, while some restaurants have also started to serve cider.

An important by-product of cider is a distilled liquor similar to Normandy's Calvados. It can be made either from the *magaya* (apple remains after fermentation) when it is known as *orujo*, or simply by distilling clear cider to obtain *aguardiente de sidra*, generally looked upon as the more elegant of the two.

eating places are *sidrerías*—bastions of the most traditional local specialties with occasional flashes of new cuisine. On the strength of their success, new ones opened that made quintessentially Asturian décor a special feature, capitalizing on all the paraphernalia that attaches to the region's richly appealing folk mythology and providing their clientele with a youthful, approachable, relaxed and highly-entertaining atmosphere. All Asturian towns and villages of any size now have modern designer *sidrerías*; the most spectacular ones are in Oviedo, Gijón, Avilés and Villaviciosa.

Cooking and eating with cider

Cider can be used in cooking to great effect. *Sidrería* menus often include fish cooked *a la sidra*, namely stewed deliciously with onion, garlic, potato, tomato and perhaps some shellfish, in a stock to which cider contributes flavors, aromas and structure. That said, cider does have specific characteristics and needs to be handled with care when cooking—don't make the mistake of using it as you would white wine or you may spoil your dish. Though low in alcoholic content at around 6%, cider is very acidic (we already discussed its malic acid content earlier); when the liquid reduces during cooking, the acidity does not evaporate but actually becomes concentrated and can produce unpleasant bitter flavors unless the chef takes evasive action. Dishes described as *a la sidra* (typically fish and poultry) tend to contain a touch of tomato sauce, which contains sugar that neutralizes the acidity of the tomatoes, extending its effect to the cider, too, though one still has to be careful. Chefs are currently exploring





the dessert potential of cider and are producing splendid results in the form of ice creams, foams and sorbets. Although in Asturias cider tends to be drunk at the bar rather than at the table, it does in fact go well with most foods because of the way its freshness and astringency cleanse the palate and tone down dominant flavors. This effect works particularly well with foods containing *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain), such as the chorizo and morcilla sausages so typical of Asturian cuisine, and other smoky flavors that tend to ride roughshod over the fine tuning of reserva red wines. Traditional cider also has an important advantage over beer and cava: it contains little more than a token amount of carbon dioxide and is therefore much less bloating than gassier drinks. The one big drawback to drinking cider is the custom of *escanciado* with its need for dexterous delivery in surroundings which are purpose-protected against corrosive splashes of the drink. These

limitations are gradually being addressed by the emergence of a new generation of top-flight table ciders known as "New Expression" Natural Cider, already available on the market. In terms of their organoleptic properties, and of not needing *escanciado*, these are designed to be drunk—and poured—like wine. Spain's two classic food matches for cider come straight from Asturias' regional repertoire: *fabada* (a stew of dried white beans with pork belly, morcilla and chorizo sausages, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 13) and Cabrales cheese (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 17). Both are piquant, fatty foodstuffs that cry out for the balancing effect of an acidic drink to cleanse the palate and refresh the mouth. Cider's delicate flavor also makes it an excellent companion for char-grilled or baked fish, especially oilier ones such as *ventresca* (belly cut) or *bonito* (tuna) which tend to be cooked with garlic, thereby making it difficult to find a wine to match; cider behaves well in

these circumstances. The most surprising revelation has been cider's versatility on the international front: it turns out to be an excellent foil for the hot and/or exotic flavors of Indian, Turkish, Mexican and Chinese food. In fact, Asturias has started to export to China which, once a consumer base is established there, is expected to be a hugely important market.

Spanish food writer **Pepe Iglesias** is the author of several books and a regular contributor to Spain's leading food and wine publications. He won the national Alvaro Cunqueiro Prize for Food Journalism in 1988, and an award for Spain's best gastronomic website in 2006. He is president and founder of the *Cofradía de la Sidra* (Cider Fraternity).



In the first part of this report we talked about the newest Designations of Origin in the Castile-La Mancha world of wine. This time we turn north, to the rich lands of Castile-Leon, with incursions into a tiny vineyard in the Basque Country that unexpectedly turns its back on the coast, and parts of Catalonia and eastern Majorca that have a clear Mediterranean heritage.

DOs

21st - CENTURY (II)

Revivals and Renovations



TEXT

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Castile-Leon is the largest region in Spain, occupying 18.6% of its total land surface but in just sixth position for population. Born out of the relatively recent union of the historic territories that gave their name to the former kingdoms of León and Castile, it is located in the

north of the Castilian plateau where the main reference is the Duero River. The river basin largely accounts for the region's focus on farming in general and vine-growing in particular, to the extent that today it has nine Designations of Origin: the well-established Ribera del

Duero, Bierzo, Cigales, Rueda and Toro, and the more recent Tierra de León, Arribes, Tierra del Vino de Zamora and Arlanza.

Historic vineyards

Just 200 km (125 mi) north of Madrid, in the province of Burgos, is the ducal town of Lerma, base of the DO Arlanza. The DO's growing area mostly follows the route of the Arlanza River, a tributary of the Pisuerga which, in turn, flows into the Duero. Cutting through the high limestone moorland, it leaves behind deeply alluvial, limey soils full of stones known locally, because of their size and consistency, as "bombs". Although not on well-trodden tourist routes, some of the towns in the area—Covarrubias and Santo Domingo de Silos (home of the famous Benedictine monastery with its chanting monks)—have played an enormously important role in the history of Castile and explain the exceptional monastic and architectural wealth to be found amidst this stunning landscape. This is the location of some of the world's largest savin forests (*Juniperus sabina*), which provide a large reserve for rare and protected species such as the wolf, roe deer and beaver. But the real star of the DO Arlanza is undoubtedly Tempranillo—or its specific clone, known locally as *Tinto fino* or *Tinta del país*. At the tremendous altitude of over 1,000 m (3,280 ft), this variety achieves excellent, mature phenols giving its wines exuberant tannins and a unique sensory depth, even without ageing in oak. Growing



alongside Tempranillo on the 400 ha (988 acres) covered by the DO and allowing it to reach the approximately 600,000 bottles that bear the DO label are Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot and a Mencía that has traditionally helped make up the local rosés, together with a few remaining white varieties such as Albillo and Viura, although today they must be made with a regulatory minimum of 50% Tempranillo. The district is made up of 67 municipalities, of which 54 belong to Burgos and 13 to the neighboring province of Palencia, which is struggling to emerge from its historically unjust position in the viticultural shadows. In one of the Palencian municipalities, Torquemada, Vitivinícola Ladrero has set up operations. Its young oenologist, Rubén Montero, is working on obtaining sufficient quality from a vineyard of just over 6 ha (approximately 15 acres) to attract not just national but international attention. In 2007, they produced about 32,000 bottles of their single brand, Señoría de Valdesneros, with an outstanding rosé full of the characteristics that are typical of this area, and a 2006 red aged for six months in the oak that displays a powerful but balanced Tempranillo fruitiness. Another Palencian wine, produced by the Pagos de Negredo winery in Palenzuela, comes with a formidable mineral content, making it one of the main references for Palencia. But it is in the Burgos part of the DO Arlanza where the newest quality features are to be found. The wines



from the Bodega Buezo, whose premises are still under construction, have been showing great promise since their first appearance on the market in 2004, with their unusual varietal expression including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot. These varieties have acclimatized so well to this Atlantic-facing territory that they have already exceeded the quality heights of Tempranillo, offering balsamic and damp earthy touches and expanding the organoleptic characteristics associated with these Burgos wines.

The lion's share

The landscape of cereal crops and vineyards stretches unbroken 200 km (124 mi) westwards across the high lands of Palencia. Again straddling two Castilian provinces, this time those of León and Valladolid, is Valencia de Don Juan, home of the DO Tierra de León, whose vineyards grow around the crossroads of two pilgrim roads leading to Santiago de Compostela: the *Vía de la Plata* or Silver Road (originally a trade route linking Merida with Astorga) and the better



known *Camino de Santiago* (St. James' Way). This too is an area in which rosé wines have been key, especially in the Valdevimbre-Los Oteros district in the center of the province of León, which produces *rosados* (also known in Spanish as *claretes*, because of their light color, the result of using a large percentage of white grapes). These are fresh, fruity wines, with a touch of sparkle or carbonic notes left behind by the production process which adds whole grapes to the fermenting must. The main characteristic of wine production in this zone is the use of an unusual grape variety, the *Prieto picudo*. *Prieto* in Portuguese means black (Portugal is just 120 km / 75 mi away) and *picudo* refers to the pointed shape of the grapes. This variety gives a poor yield and tight bunches producing wines that are powerful and concentrated and have survived, strangely enough, thanks to the local cooperatives. But the main selling point of this region is not its rosés but its reds, for which the Regulatory Council allows the use of not only *Prieto picudo* and *Mencia*—a variety which has boosted the international recognition of wines from the other end of the province of León in the DO Bierzo (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 16)—but also of *Tempranillo* and *Garnacha* in a supporting role. And the white varieties—*Verdejo*, *Godello* and *Albarin*—are there not only to add bulk, but because great hopes are placed on them. *Albarin* originally came from the mountainous area around Cangas

del Narcea in Asturias in northern Spain, but has adapted well to the milder climate of León. Although a number of cooperatives (Cooperativa de Vinos Ribera del Cea in Valderas, Bodega Cooperativa Los Oteros in Pajares) and privately-owned wineries (Bodegas Villacezán, Viñedos y Bodegas Pardevalles, Bodegas y Viñedos Casis) have been achieving notable quality, it is a winery in the district of Gordoncillo that is reaping the greatest praise for its overall concept and the quality of its wines. Bodegas Gordonzello—which has taken the town's ancient name—is above all a project to revive the area and its vineyards and to drive progress, devised by a group of young locals in the mid-1990s. One hundred and one partners (now 137) set up a limited company with 305 ha (754 acres) to help settle the local population and discourage them from leaving the countryside for the cities. In fact, one of the wines under their single brand *Peregrino*, the *Peregrino 14* (named after the number of months in the oak), is to be the first reserva coming onto the market bearing the back label for this DO which, like *Arlanza*, dates from the summer of 2007.

Vineyards on the pilgrims' road

Continuing westwards we reach the province of Zamora, home of a vineyard in which the vines have the highest average age for the whole of Spain. This well and truly justifies

the use of the *Tierra del Vino* label, perhaps even more so than for the neighboring *Tierra de León*. Some of the vineyards are over 200 years old and, like those in León, have also witnessed the passing of pilgrims on their way to Santiago. The DO *Tierra del Vino de Zamora* covers 46 municipalities in the province of Zamora plus ten in Salamanca. This is another a case of cross-frontier organization, but there are more points in common with the other DOs covered by this article. One is the long-established abundance of white varieties (*Malvasia*, small-grain *Muscatel*, *Verdejo*, *Albillo*, *Palomino* and *Godello*), and another is the possibility of producing *claretes* and rosés by adding the red *Garnacha* and *Cabernet Sauvignon*, providing they contain respectively 30% and 60% of the ubiquitous, high-quality *Tempranillo* (*Tinta del país*). The main difference from other nearby designations lies in the export figures: last year no less than 42% of the region's wines were sold outside Spain.

There are plenty of reasons for this flourishing picture, but an essential one is quality. If we take a look at the *Guía Peñín* (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 17), we see that 11 of the wines tasted from this DO scored an average of 89 points (out of 100), with 94 being the highest and 85 the lowest. There are now some new cooperatives such as *Viña Escuderos* in *Villamor de los Escuderos*—with its single *Gavión* brand—which, in the expert hands of *Eulogio Callejo*, produces a wide range of wines (*Verdejo* white, rosé, young red, oak-

aged red and crianza), all of them of monumental quality, although their limited presence in international markets (such as Korea and Belgium) with just 5% of their production, is hardly an indication of their potential. Another is the cooperative Bodegas el Soto in Villanueva de Campeán, where the DO's Regulatory Council is based, which has a single brand on the market, Pago de Campeán. It focuses on reds with powerful, concentrated fruitiness, the result of harvesting grapes from centuries-old stocks, and an excellent structure, verve and potential. And their whites combine what seem to be sweet yet dry notes with a sound base of citric small-grain Muscatel.

Cenit and other certainties

While still in the Zamora vineyards, mention should be made of a few wineries that have been upholding the DO's average quality and its export figures. One example is Alizán Bodegas y Viñedos which, in the skilled hands of oenologist Benito de Castro, has achieved a balance between the values of traditional winemaking and the excellent fruit and characteristics of the old Zamora vines. Juan Miguel Fuentes Sardón, an outstanding winemaker from the town of Cabañas de Sayago, whose affection for his land and vines is unique—and was rewarded by his election as the first president of the newly-created DO—is not only the

soul behind his own winery, Bodegas Teso Blanco with its Brochero label, but also behind a project shared with two partners, named Alter Ego Bodega de Crianza. Its Dominio de Sexmil label carefully combines the fruit, structure and minerals that are the

quintessence of the Tierra del Vino de Zamora. Yet another is Viñas del Cenit, a winery run by New Zealander Amy Hopkinson and the Zamoran Almudena Alberca, which has given birth to the greatest labels from these lands—Venta de Mazarrón, Cenit, Tritón and the as



yet unnamed Viñas del Cenit, known so far only as VDC. More than 70% of these wines have gone to markets outside Spain, although we are still talking in small figures because the total production is just over 300,000 bottles.

The far reaches of the Duero

In the new DO Arribes, again the Duero is key to the expansion of atypical varieties. On the steep granite slopes along its banks, before we cross the frontier into

Portugal and in an area including parts of both Zamora and Salamanca that has been known since the Middle Ages as "Arribes" or, more explicitly, as "La Vinatería", there is an exceptional trio of red varieties: Juan García, Bruñal and Rufete. These find their ideal growing conditions along the narrow valley between the Zamoran town of Fermoselle and the Salamanca towns of Pereña de la Ribera and Corporario. As with the other new designations covered in this article, it took about a decade for these Vinos de la Tierra to achieve DO status. Meanwhile, the wines were able to make a clear statement of their intentions based on quality and variety, abandoning the previous formula of random blends and focusing on monovarietals. The Abadengo label by Bodegas Ribera de Pelazas is the proud torchbearer of the Juan García grapes. The Bruñal grapes are featured under the Bruñal label, and the geographically explicit Arribes de Duero cooperative makes monovarietals named Arribes de Vettonia using Malvasia for its whites, and Juan García for its reds. But Arribes doesn't only produce rarities. An exceptional Tempranillo can be found in the Durius Hacienda Zorita from the Haciendas de España group, undoubtedly the best promoters of the DO Arribes abroad, where 50% of the production is sold. Another new arrival with noteworthy quality is the Terrazgo label by Terrazgo Bodegas de Crianza, which brings Juan García and Rufete together in





an exclusive wine of which just 3,000 bottles are produced.

Basque whites

Now back to Burgos and the district of Pancorbo, a rocky natural pass between Castile and the Basque Country leading us into the province of Álava, which since 2001 has held the third DO for txakolí, Txakolí de Álava/Arabako Txacolina. The Basque word txakoli (chacolí, in the Spanish transliteration) expresses the idea of a "homemade" product, one reminiscent of the typical Basque Country farmhouses often found along the coastline where the Getaria and Bizkaia DOs are located. Txakolí is a fresh, white wine with carbonic touches and a predominance of green apple fruitiness and occasional tropical and citrus notes. Its sharpness makes it especially refreshing in the mouth. In the case of txakolí from Álava, the growing area is limited to the Ayala district, with vineyards in just five municipalities—Aiara, Artziniega, Amurrio, Laudio and Okondo. These areas share the

common characteristic of an Atlantic climate and the presence of native varieties, *hondarribi zuri* and *hondarribi beltza*, Basque names meaning, respectively, white and red from Fuenterrabía, a Basque town on the French border. The real driving force behind today's Designation of Origin was an association set up in 1988, when the growing surface area, which at the beginning of the 20th century measured about 100 ha (247 acres), had shrunk to just 5 (12 acres). Ten years later, and under the *Vino de la Tierra* label, the Álava txakolí was coming from 20 ha (50 acres) and reached production of about 70,000 bottles. Today the vineyards cover 60 ha (148 acres) and 350,000 bottles are produced every year, 95% of which are sold within Spain, and just 5% are exported to America (the US, Mexico and Cuba), Portugal and Germany. By the end of 2008, the Arabako Txacolina Designation will embrace six wineries: the three existing ones—Arabako Txacolina (with its Xarmant, Maskuribai and Kostako brands), Beldio Txacolina (Beldui)



and Txomin Solaun (Mahatxuri)—and three new ones, Okondo Txacolina, Artomaña Txacolina and Txakoli Garate.

The sea and mountain miracle

The DO Montsant in the province of Tarragona has two main distinguishing features: the location of its vineyards sheltered by a C-shaped mountain range that protects them from bad weather and provides a variety of microclimates, and its determination to export (68.8% of its bottles are sent abroad). Montsant is a miraculous recent initiative that is achieving absolutely outstanding quality. During the last quarter of the 20th century, this area was a rather remote, dark sub-zone of the DO Tarragona which created a sort of ring around the prosperous DO Priorat (as yet without its DOCa designation), and where the soils lacked the slate that marks the Priorat terrains. Nevertheless, its wines today offer a unique mineral touch that blends with their weighty fruitiness and exceptional balsamic, varietal expression. But if there is a single key to the high average quality of Montsant, it is perhaps the young age of most of the professionals working in the DO's small wineries and of its oenologists. Most of them also work for other wineries—generally within the DOCa Priorat—and maintain their activities in Montsant purely for pleasure or for nostalgic reasons, which means that bottles are



generally produced in small numbers. The DO Montsant has two enormous cooperatives: the dynamic Celler de Capçanes, whose main labels are Cabrida, Mas Donís, Flor de Primavera and Costers del Gravet and which is unique in its defense of quality (the payments made to growers include over 80 price segments based on different quality parameters), and the Agrícola Falset-Marçà, with its Ètim brand. Working alongside these are two wineries showing an exceptionally intelligent approach to winemaking. The first is Vinyes Domènech, an environment-friendly winery which is being built according to sustainable development criteria, with a special focus on the use of renewable energy sources. Its wines, Furvus (60% Garnacha, 40% Merlot) and Teixar (100% Garnacha), display the deep mineral character they receive from the stony soils on the high Capçanes vineyards at an altitude of 550 m (1,804 ft), an extraordinary height, considering the sea is just 30 km (19 mi) away. They also offer the concentrated, fresh fruit of a Garnacha that is different not only in age (sometimes the stocks are over 70 years old) but also in its description as *peluda* (hairy), also known as *Garnacha gris*, which results in less color and alcohol but adapts better to the local climate. The second is Bodegas Acústic, a very personal project set up by Albert Jané (from the exquisite Jané Ventura winery under



the DO Penedès) and his wife, oenologist Nuria Ruiz. They produce blends of Garnacha and Samsó (the name given locally to Cariñena) for their Acústic brand and a second label, Braó. The two brands are based on the same blend but Braó is made from grapes coming from the oldest vines. This is the result of a “naked truth” philosophy which aims to recover traditional methods—nothing but very high-quality grapes and thoughtful use of winemaking technology. Mention should also be made of other wineries and labels (the latter figuring between brackets) which we consider to stand out among those tasted recently, with wines easily scoring 90 out of 100 for palates everywhere, proof positive of the sensory precision, originality and wealth of nuances in this new DO: Venus La Universal (Dido, Venus), Can Just Viticultors (Nubac), Vendrell Rived (L'Alieu), El Masroig (Les Sorts), Magi Baiget (Cingles Blaus), Vermunver (Gènesi), Joan D'Anguera (Finca L'Argata, El Bugader), Mas Perinet (Perinet,

Gotia, Clos Maria), Celler Sant Rafel (Solpost), Portal del Montsant (Sant Bru Vinyes Velles) and Mas de L'Abundància (Mas de L'Abundància, Flvmins).

Seaside vines

The DO Pla i Llevant takes its name from its district on the island of Majorca and literally means, in the Majorcan dialect, “plain and east”, in reference to its location on the east coast of the island. Approved in March 2001, the DO covers the vineyards in 18 municipalities (107 growers and 12 wineries) with just over 300 ha (741 acres)—although it grew in 2004, increasing its surface area by almost 30%—just under half the area of the neighboring DO Binissalem-Mallorca, the other DO on the island. The harvest brings in almost twice as many red as white grapes and results in almost exactly the same proportion of wines produced, with just over 600,000 liters of red and 300,000 of white. About 150,000 liters of rosé are also produced, mostly to serve the island's prosperous tourism sector. Recent plantations have given up the native Callet variety in favor of the now

preferred foreign varieties, especially the French trio of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, which have adapted best to conditions on the Spanish mainland and on the island. While this is no surprise in the case of Syrah, which comes from the Mediterranean-facing slopes of the Rhône, the Bordeaux varieties that are accustomed to an Atlantic climate might seem to be at a disadvantage on these islands, but in fact flourish in the mild winters and hot, dry summers on Majorca, the key factor being proximity to the sea.

One of the best-known wineries is undoubtedly that of Jaume Mesquida, who received good reviews for both his Cabernet Sauvignon—especially the excellent 2004 vintage—and his Prensall white, this being a variety that has found its ideal growing environment in the Balearic sun. The experts are also showering praise on Toni Gelabert at Vins Miquel Gelabert for his exercise in monovarietals (even with the very difficult Pinot Noir) and Miquel Gelabert, especially for the Torrent Negre label made from Syrah. Then there is Miquel Oliver who has been achieving the sort of quality required by international markets. His Aia (a Merlot monovarietal) and Ses Ferritges (a blend of the French trio mentioned above with the local Callet variety) have been awarded a number of prizes in the demanding German market at fairs such as ProWein and Mundusvini. Another of the distinguishing features of the Pla i Llevant vineyards is organic farming, facilitated by their proximity to the sea and the cool sea breezes

which help fight plant disease. Of special interest is Can Majoral—organic farming pioneers on the island—with their brands Galdent and Butibalausi, Armero i Adrover, and Can Coletó made from Negre Virat.

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KEY FIGURES

	Region	Date of DO	Surface area	Sales (3/4 liter bottles)
Arlanza www.arlanza.org	Castile-Leon	2007	400 ha (988 acres)	600,000 Exports 3%
Tierra de León www.dotierradeleon.es	Castile-Leon	2007	1,600 ha (3,950 acres)	1,832,000 Exports 14%
Tierra del Vino de Zamora www.tierradelvino.net	Castile-Leon	2007	802 ha (1,980 acres)	350,000 Exports 42%
Arribes www.vinoarribesduero.com	Castile-Leon	2007	750 ha (1,850 acres)	600,000 Exports 5-7%
Txacoli de Álava www.txacolidealava.com	Basque Country	2002	60 ha (148 acres)	350,000 Exports 5%
Montsant www.domontsant.com	Catalonia	2002	1,800 ha (4,450 acres)	4,800,000 Exports 68.8%
Pla i Llevant www.plaillevantmallorca.es	Balearic Islands	2001	333 ha (820 acres)	1,269,920 Exports 5.5%

Source: Regulatory councils
Websites in Spanish



Text
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Translation
Hawys Pritchard/©ICEX

Photos
Grupo La Navarra

From Navarre to the Andes

GRUPO LA NAVARRA

Belasco de Baquedano wines come from Argentina—more specifically, from Agrelo (Luján de Cuyo department, in the west of the Mendoza province). This fact represents a fantasy fulfilled for Juan Ignacio Velasco, chairman of Grupo La Navarra, a Spanish company that owns four wineries, a distillery and a liqueur factory in Spain (A long story, page 39). Juan Ignacio is an oenologist and a lover of fine wines, particularly wines of the kind that evoke their provenance as they pass through one's lips. Translating what started as a personal ambition into a

feasible business scheme required him to cross the Atlantic and then track down long-established vines, the type that can be relied upon to provide flavor-packed fruit. The decision to site his venture in the southern hemisphere was not taken lightly, but Juan Ignacio believes that this is where the best Malbecs, known for their distinctive personality, come from. It's a trademark variety in the area where Grupo La Navarra set up its venture, and gives wines that are eloquently expressive of where they come from and who made them.

Argentiniens are said to have got off the boat bearing stories and enthusiasm. Wine know-how was clearly part of this baggage, too: immigrants who settled in the Luján de Cuyo area successfully transformed the Mendoza Desert into a wine-growing territory that is one of the best in Argentina today, and whose products enjoy international fame. Their vineyards thrived and wineries were set up, one of which was Spain's Grupo La Navarra's venture. Juan Ignacio volunteered to tell us the story behind the company's Mendoza winery, Belasco de Baquedano: "I used to take trips every year, looking for a suitably wine-orientated location. I came to Argentina in the 1990s and made Mendoza my base. Exploring Luján de

Cuyo and tasting the local wines, I fell in love at first sight with both its landscape and its Malbecs. Then and there I decided that one day I'd make wine with these intensely-flavored grapes." It took a while for his vision to come true. Like winemaking, it was a long, slow process, but it gained momentum in 1996 and 1997. Those two years, both poor vintages in Spain, provided the catalyst that crystallized mere preliminary professional interest into an actual project that would involve the company in winemaking on two continents, dealing equitably with any contingencies and transmitting the Spanish bodega's winemaking expertise to Mendoza. Its financial experts realized that parity between the peso

and the dollar would not be sustained indefinitely. They recognized Argentina's economic crisis in 2001 as an opportunity to take action and bought an estate in Agrelo, Luján, planted with 70 ha (173 acres) of Malbec vines dating back to 1912. The intention was to concentrate exclusively on this variety: this region's Malbec vines are among the best in Argentina, giving grapes of superb quality, particularly so in the case of vines over 60 years old. Although there are variations of terroir within Luján de Cuyo depending on location, they all generate lots of color, good tannin levels, notable acidity and excellent ageing potential. Finding the estate when they did was something of a coup. Plantations of Malbec had been

uprooted in the 1970s to make way for the Criolla variety. The old approach to winegrowing, preoccupied as it was with achieving high grape yields, has now been left behind thanks to a vast qualitative leap. The first step in achieving this was distinguishing different grape varieties, identifying what there was in existing plantations, and planting pilot vineyards. Different vineyards and terroirs were analyzed for their oenological potential, and the importance of what went on in the vineyard was recognized as an essential element in winemaking. Belasco de Baquedano employs vineyard level studies of this kind in its Spanish properties and in the plantations it now owns in Argentina from which most of its wines derive. Their first vintage in 2004 was produced in the Las Compuertas and Vistalba districts of Luján.

Trademark variety

We asked Juan Ignacio about his decision to concentrate solely on Malbec. "It's because Argentina and Malbec are virtually synonymous—Malbec is its trademark wine," he answers without hesitation. Having found the ideal vineyards, the company decided to build its new winery right in the heart of the estate, with the Andes mountain range just a few miles away. The bodega was purpose-designed to produce top-quality wines that would eventually compete with world market leaders. Although the winery is already functioning, the formal opening ceremony has not yet taken place. It is planned for October and will be attended by the president of the regional government of Navarre, the Belasco family's home patch. It is enough to stroll through the building to realize that the company has invested heavily in technological equipment. The benefits of long-term experience are also evident in the project's design, whose every detail serves a purpose. One idiosyncratic

feature is that it is built on different levels; this is no mere architectural quirk, but in actual fact an effort to capitalize on the force of gravity to avoid using pumps, thereby safeguarding grape and must quality. Hygiene standards are strictly enforced because, as Juan Ignacio explains: "Cleanliness begets cleanliness and that translates into good wine." This explains why much of the equipment, from pipes to tanks, is stainless steel. The winery also has a cask room for malolactic fermentation, another for ageing wine in French oak casks, and another specially outfitted for bottle ageing. The winery has a capacity of 700,000 liters in its stainless steel tanks, plus the oak casks. The bodega's approach is much in evidence throughout the winemaking process, the finer points of which include a double grape selection line and cold rooms in which the temperature of the grapes can be brought down to 8°C (46.4°F) in four hours. "We do that because grapes must be handled with care: if they're not, the palate detects it," he declares proudly. The latest addition to the winery, a response to Mendoza's growing tourism industry, is a restaurant serving the Mediterranean cuisine the boss loves, with plenty of vegetables, together with a meatier, more typically Argentinian menu.

The human factor

Another of this company's basic principles is that its employees should be integrally involved in the business, starting with family members. This is reflected in the way that the agronomist refers to "my estate", and the oenologist to "my wine". Despite the fact that it is fully automated, the winery is populated by staff, and temperature and density checks are carried out manually, often twice a day. Experience-based human judgment is irreplaceable, and it is applied across the board. "Wine derives from grapes and the vineyard skills that produce them, and the winery processes then

make their contribution. Unless these are closely monitored, potential elegance veers subtly into vulgarity. It would be miraculous otherwise, and I don't believe in miracles! I am a vital link in the chain. The old Spanish saying "El ojo del amo engorda el ganado" (the cattle gets fatter when the boss is watching) still rings true today. I absorbed a passion for winemaking from my early childhood on; in winter, I used to take refuge from the cold in my father's distillery. It was full of fumes wafting up from the distilling process; I never drank a drop, but I did absorb the smells. My palate was educated little by little. One's first taste of wine tends to be an unpleasant experience, but they used to give me water with a dash of wine in it at the family table when I was just a little boy. I tasted wine properly when I was 12, from then on I used to take part in liqueur tastings, and now I'm an oenologist! And I'm just as involved in this winery as I am in our Spanish facilities. I manage this by traveling to Argentina the first week of March each year, timing the visit so that I can observe how the vines are developing and make decisions about how much water we need to use, and so on." He is accompanied on these visits by Spanish oenologist Santiago Ajona, who shares duties with his Argentinian counterpart, José Ponce. The group is





later joined by Bertrand Bourdil, a major figure in Bordeaux, who acts as adviser to the winery. He arrives in time for the first week of the harvest, during which he observes the process and programs the plots, returning again during the last week to allocate fruit to the various product ranges.

Making a name

With each successive vintage, Belasco de Baquedano wines have consolidated their reputation and consistently represented good value for money. This reflects another of the group's principles: its policy is that any rise in costs should be absorbed by a reduction in profit margin rather than in production standards. It is significant that the growth of the Argentinian wine sector was triggered in part by price increases in Europe: "We must avoid making the same mistake," declares Juan Ignacio. A proportion of Belasco de Baquedano's output is sold in Argentina, but it also has a market presence in the US, Mexico, the whole of Europe, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South America. Juan Ignacio radiates enthusiasm as he mentions the wines by name, and he describes them animatedly, starting off with the bodega's premium wine, Swinto Malbec. He explains that the name is a play on words: his surname, Belasco, means "crow" in Basque (official language of Navarre, jointly with

Castilian); "crow" in Huarpe (the indigenous language of Luján) is *swinto*. We tasted Swinto, which is aged in new oak casks for 16 months and in the bottle for 18. Purple in color with violet tinges, it has intense, complex, and very fruity aromas; it is meaty in the mouth, with wood-derived hints of plum and chocolate and a long aftertaste. This is a wine for sharing with friends. We moved on to Ar Guentota Malbec (the name means "soul of Cuyo" in Huarpe), which is aged for 12 months in oak and an additional 12 in the bottle. This is a complex wine, rounded, pleasant and eminently quaffable, with a very long finish. Llama Malbec Roble, aged in oak for six months and a further eight in the bottle, is a good foil for Argentina's famous meat. Moncagua Malbec (Monte Aconcagua), 10% aged in oak for six months and in the bottle for eight, is intensely fruity in character and is a dependable everyday wine for drinking with meals. Can we expect an Argentinian white, we wonder? "We're looking into Torrontés, the classic native white variety." The plan is to produce white wines where the terroir is most propitious, which will involve a move north to Salta where conditions are ideal for growing Torrontés. It's a new scheme in the making, another opportunity to establish new links

and bring people together. Wine does it so well!

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A LONG STORY

Grupo La Navarra's history stretches back almost 200 years. It started off as a distillery: in 1831 Don Buenaventura Velasco y Suso bought an *aguardiente* (high proof grape spirit) factory, the nucleus that developed into Destilerías Viana, a distillery company producing *pacharán* (a liqueur made by macerating sloes in aniseed-flavored *aguardiente*). Subsequent generations carried on the tradition with unflinching enthusiasm, and the company today known as Destilerías La Navarra still makes *pacharán* and other distilled liqueurs. The Baquedano side of the family, Juan

Ignacio's mother's side, were vine-growers and can be credited with having contributed the passionate interest in wine. Juan Ignacio has managed to combine the ambitions of both families in the company he now heads: Grupo La Navarra consists of Destilerías La Navarra and Familia Belasco, this latter being the winemaking arm of the business, consisting of wineries in different parts of Spain. These are: Marco Real and Señorío de Andión, in DO Navarra; Viñedos de Villaester, in DO Toro; and Viña del Sopié, in DO Rueda. The family tradition is still going strong. To learn more about the group, visit www.grupolanavarra.com. (Spanish).

Some are the doyennes of their profession, some are at their personal and creative peaks, and some are applying their top-notch training in restaurants in hopes of becoming the great chefs of the future. As a group of professionals, they are playing an important role in the evolution of cuisine in Spain on the Mediterranean side of the country. Though their culinary philosophies are similar because of their devotion to local recipes and ingredients, each has her own personal style. Watching them work, it's clear that there is no difference between them and their male colleagues.



Carme Ruscalleda

WOMEN

CHEERS^(II)

Pots, Pans and Pizzazz

Text
Raquel Castillo/©ICEX

Photos
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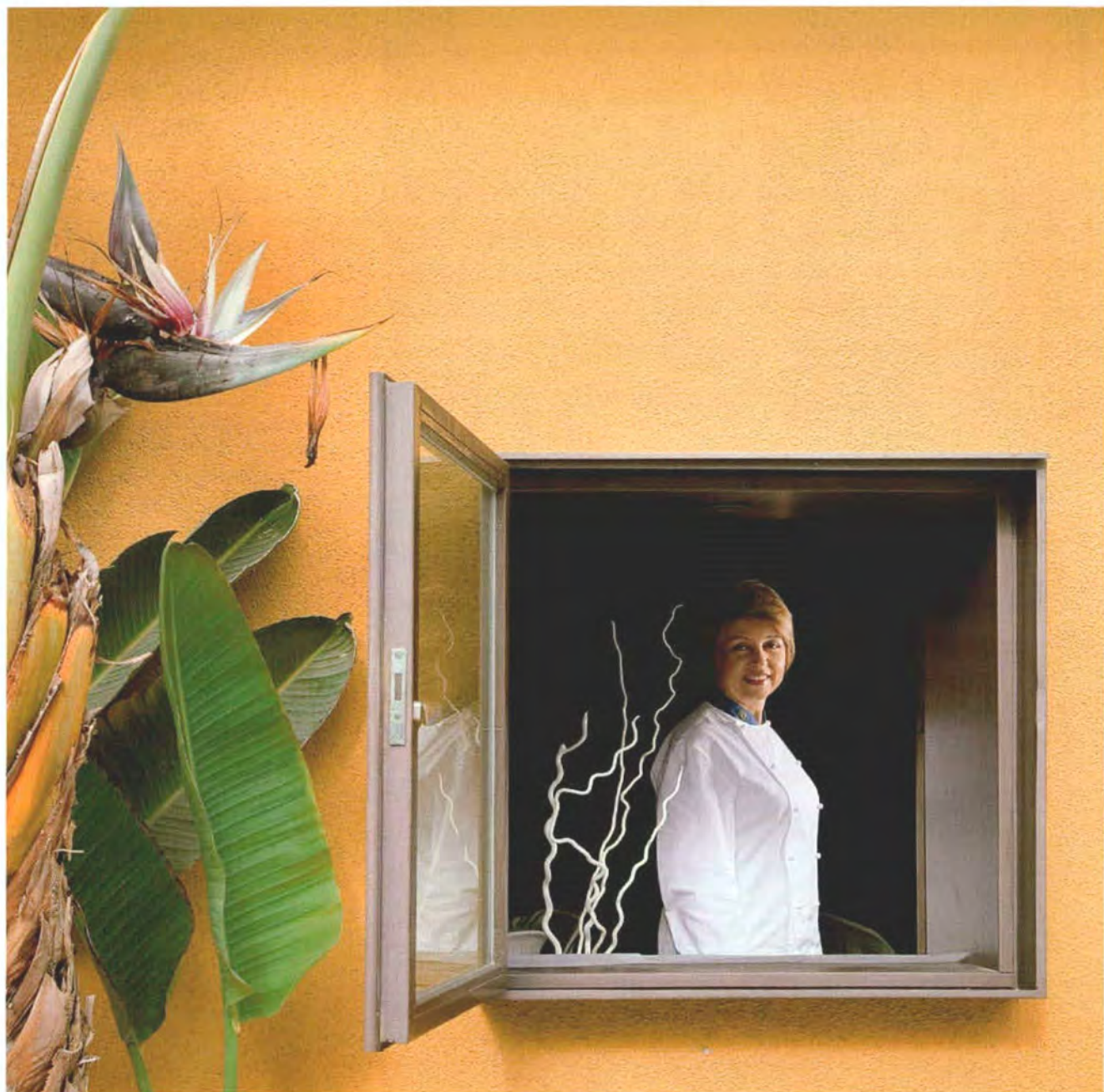
Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX



At a time when gender equality and life-work reconciliation are hot topics, consideration of the role of women in professional cuisine is very relevant. We already referred to this subject in the previous issue (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73), taking it as an excuse for testing the current state of Spanish cuisine in which women have made important contributions. Though not under the media spotlight

as much as their male counterparts and therefore less well-known, their work cannot be passed over in a study of culinary affairs in Spain today. In addition to Marisa Sánchez, Atxen Jiménez, the Hartza sisters, Seri Bermejo, Pilar Idoate, Pastora García, Toñi Vicente, Ana Gago, Manicha Bermúdez and Elena Arzak, all of whom are located on the Atlantic side of Spain, there are other women of

equal importance, women who cook and run restaurants, in this case, in the eastern, or Mediterranean, part of Spain. One of the veterans is **PEPA ROMANS**, based in her restaurant Casa Pepa, in pleasant premises surrounded by olive and citrus trees and perfumed by orange blossom and herbs in the Alicante town of Ondara, close to the Mediterranean. Hers is an



unusual story: she began her career at the age of 42, after bringing up her five children, and two of the girls—Soledad and Antonia—now work with her in the family establishment. Having started out cooking at home, once she became a chef, her professional activities were based on her culinary memories and her love of cooking. “I just get carried along by it,” she says. Seven years ago the *Michelin Guide* granted her one star,

and described her cooking as “extremely varied, very traditional but also modern”. Though tradition is her starting point, she is happy to use technology when it helps to achieve optimum results. Her rice dishes are renowned—both the traditional versions which she is loath to adapt, and the new ones she creates. She shows that there is still scope for invention, for example, with her rice

with rocket, red mullet, razor clams, and monkfish. Her menu offers many fresh fish dishes, with fish straight from the Mediterranean, cooked with care and common sense.

The province of Alicante is unusual in that, with the exception of Quique Dacosta, a real international winner with three Michelin stars, and Kiko Moya (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72) with one, the chefs who are most likely to

TRADITION THAT NEVER GOES OUT OF FASHION



Two of the most singular women chefs are the REXACH sisters from the restaurant Hispania in Barcelona's Arenys de Mar district. After no less than 56 years at the helm of a restaurant that started out in a small garage where their parents served meals to truck-drivers, PAQUITA and LOLITA have a wealth of stories to tell. From hearty breakfasts of eggs with *butifarra* (a typical Catalanian pork sausage), they moved on to simple meals offering the best local produce: tomatoes from Montserrat, fine peas from Llavaneras, fish from Arenys (all nearby locations in the Maresme district, close to Barcelona) and baby octopus. At Hispania, the years have passed and so have generations of customers, but diners can still rely on a menu featuring chicken soup with meatballs, *fricassee* of meat and eggplant, *suquet* (fish stew) and cuttlefish with potatoes. Their cuisine is simple, straightforward and takes us back in time. It is 100 percent Catalanian, with a focus on the ingredients and on their mother's teachings. They admire today's avant-garde cuisine but are clear that their path is a different one. They were pioneers before people knew what gastronomy meant, and complain that traditional cuisine is not afforded the respect it deserves, largely because food writers show little interest in "well-made, family-style cooking of the sort that is increasingly difficult to find". And at 73, Paquita clearly feels that flavor is not as appreciated as it should be. "People no longer seem to care about eating well, and are often happy to eat just anything. You can't eat well and cheaply. It's impossible." They are certain that they will continue cooking until the end of their days, in spite of the terrible working hours at restaurants in Spain, which they describe as "the worst in Europe".

Paquita Rexach



be spotted at global gastronomy congresses are all women; alongside Pepa Romans are Susi Díaz, María José San Román and María Carmen Vélez (Reinterpreting alioli, the Mediterranean sauce par excellence, page 48). The latter two of them do not yet hold Michelin stars but they have been receiving very high grades in Spanish guides and culinary rankings, and there is also another

young and very promising woman chef, Anna María Santoyo. **SUSI DÍAZ** and her husband set up their restaurant La Finca in 1983 in the town of Elche in Alicante. Susi came from a completely different sector, the world of fashion, but her husband had been running a very successful bar so they took the plunge. She started out as maitre d', but gradually became more and more

involved in the restaurant and eventually decided that was where she wanted to be. That was 11 years ago, and last year they were awarded the much-coveted star. Her cuisine is meant to be enjoyed, and her approach is simple and based on good local products although, as she explains, "I also use items from other places because what matters in cuisine is coherence, not frontiers."



Her inspiration comes from the past, from traditional recipes, and from ideas passed on by her grandmother, but she likes to take what interests her and adapt it to her own style. The result is updated traditional cuisine using modern techniques but not technology, which she fears might distance her from her customers. "I want them to enjoy the aromas, flavors and appearance of what I serve."

While Susi stands out for her reinterpretation of age-old flavors, **MARÍA JOSÉ SAN ROMÁN** is the queen of saffron, not only in Spain but also in the US. Her knowledge of this product, one of the world's most ancient condiments, has brought her international renown. A full-page article in *The New York Times* in May 2007 described her as an authentic expert, which couldn't be more accurate.

Her vocation for cooking meant that as a housewife she used to enjoy baking bread and making fresh pasta for a constant stream of guests. Then her children grew up and, with the support of her husband, a catering entrepreneur, she set up a restaurant specializing in haute cuisine. Although her extensive reading had given her a wealth of knowledge ("I speak three languages, and that makes things much easier"), in



1990 she went to work with Jean Louis Neichel in Barcelona (whose restaurant, Neichel, had two Michelin stars at the time), with from whom she learned the ins and outs of classic French cuisine. She then did the same with the Roca brothers (El Celler de Can Roca, Gerona, two Michelin stars) and with the three-star Martín Berasategui (Lasarte, Guipúzcoa) and Arzak (San Sebastián).

Monastrell, her restaurant in the city of Alicante, has been open since 1996. She is a technical, sensible chef whose cuisine is easy to understand and is based on what is close at hand and has flavor and quality. The dishes are simple, with few ingredients, and in them her concern for nutrition and balance is clear. Simple yet modern and without unnecessary sophistication: these traits are difficult

to achieve in cuisine and these are her trademarks. "Monastrell is not what brings in the money," she explains, "but it is where I investigate, where I am free to be creative and do what I like, and it gives me prestige." Her saffron connections started out when a saffron company in Alicante, Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain, turned to her. They needed someone to develop the culinary potential of saffron to

complement the scientific research that was being carried out in the school of agricultural chemistry at the University of Castile-La Mancha (in central Spain). The company supplied her with saffron from Greece, Iran, Morocco, the Himalayas and Spain—in her opinion, the best comes from the DO La Mancha—a luxury considering the price saffron fetches on the market, and the reason why it is also known as “red gold”. They provided it in all the different varieties: crushed, in strands, from different harvests and different growing areas. All this allowed her to experiment, to dissolve it in water and fat, in broth, bread, egg, cream, syrup. María José states, “At home I have saffron in every form and shape: saffron honey, oil, salt, butter, xanthan (a thickening agent), in a spray, etc. It’s an element I use most often for experimenting in the kitchen.” She even offers her customers a menu with saffron in everything, even the desserts. It’s a real hit.

Finally, mention should be made during this trip around Alicante of Anna María Santoyo, a chef who, at just 25, has taken on the challenge of managing her own restaurant in Elche, El Misteri d’Anna. She will be discussed in more detail later in connection with a group of young women chefs who are fast making the grade.

Catalonia, women’s territory

MEY HOFMANN belongs to the elite of restaurateurs in Catalonia. Her classic haute cuisine with creative touches has been dazzling her Barcelona customers since 1992, when she opened her restaurant, Hoffman, now in a new location in the Born district (on the seafront in Barcelona and now one of the city’s fashionable areas). Her goal has always been

threefold: to work with local products, to search for the roots of Mediterranean and Catalan cuisines, and to ensure her customers enjoy what they are eating. At the age of 56, she continues to be vivacious, hard-working and a traveler. She has not lost the interest in patisserie acquired at the German boarding school where she spent her summers as a child. Mey went on to study economics and interior design, with cooking as a hobby at home, but she was good at it so decided to get some proper training in Paris, where she was awarded the Cordon Bleu Grand Diplôme. After working with some leading French chefs and specializing in desserts, she returned to Spain and set up a professional catering school, the first in Barcelona, which after 27 years continues to offer training in all the different aspects of restaurant life (cooking, service, wine, nutrition, gastronomy and languages). When asked about women’s and men’s skills in the kitchen, she sees things from both the chef’s and the teacher’s points of view. “Men and women work equally well; however, as students, girls tend to be more hard-working and persevering. In the end, however, the results are the same.” She is aware that women chefs have not received the same recognition as men, adding “Still, all the world’s great chefs learned from their mothers.”

Leaving the medieval center of Barcelona and traveling to the town of Olot in Gerona (in the eastern Pyrenees), we meet **FINA PUIGDEVALL** at her restaurant Les Cols, located in a beautiful 13th-century Catalan farmhouse. The first surprise comes just as soon as you enter, with the extremely original décor combining steel and glass. The dining room is flooded with light and looks out over the vegetable garden and its hens, roaming freely. The

MARÍA CARMEN VÉLEZ was meant to become a lawyer. She had no vocation for cooking, only for eating well, but she eventually became next in line in the family business. Her mother was an enterprising woman who ran a number of fish stores and set up a restaurant offering excellent, Andalusian-style fried fish. Mari Carmen had to help out on weekends and gradually fell in love with what she was doing. “Now I can’t do without the stress of working in the kitchen,” she says.

La Sirena, in the Alicante town of Petrer, has undergone a thorough transformation since it first opened up in 1984. It is still a family-run establishment (her husband is maître d’, and her sister Lola is pastry chef), but Mari Carmen is responsible for the contemporary atmosphere and brings tons of common sense to the operation. Part of the menu is traditional, with rice dishes, suquets and simply-cooked, top-class ingredients, but the other part is more innovative and personal, with light, carefully-balanced creations offering plenty of nuances.

One of her newest contributions is a reinterpretation of alioli, the Mediterranean sauce based on garlic and extra virgin olive oil, which appears throughout the cuisine in Catalonia and the eastern coast of Spain. She was determined to devise lighter, more delicate dishes so she started to investigate and to introduce changes into a sauce that was traditionally strong and rather heavy. “We noted that alioli is an emulsion with a continuous and a discontinuous phase, so we started looking at emulsifiers and experimenting with flavors and concepts.” Her aliolis are made not only from the usual raw garlic but also from cloves slowly cooked in oil, roasted, boiled, and toasted; she also uses a variety of oils (all the varieties and flavors of extra virgin olive oils including neutral oils, as well as palm, grapeseed and sunflower oils) and emulsifiers such as egg yolk and soy lecithin. Flavor is added with herbs and spices. Sometimes she includes fruit (citrus, cherries, raspberries), or truffle, foie gras, or cheese, “always establishing a link with the dish the sauce is to accompany”. But serving as a sauce is not its only purpose. She also uses alioli to thicken broth, and takes almond milk alioli to form the basis of a delicious suquet. Her aliolis may be served hot or cold, in a frothy or creamy version. One of her latest creations is a chocolate alioli that accompanies scallops with red berries.

REINTERPRETING ALIOLI. THE
MEDITERRANEAN SAUCE PAR EXCELLENCE



María Carmen Vélez



kitchen is ultra-modern and there is a wonderful golden room opening onto the garden where a very long table invites guests to share their gastronomic experiences. It comes as no surprise to hear that the design, by RCR Architectes, has received a number of awards, including Contractworld 2005. But aesthetics are by no means the whole story. The cuisine offered by Fina (owner and

chef) is full of sensitivity, flavor, and respect for the products of the La Garrotxa region (north of Catalonia in inland Gerona), with its potatoes, beans, poultry and ducks, pigs, pork products, mushrooms, game, herbs, etc. With such a well-stocked pantry, inspiration and know-how, she delights her guests by serving them country cooking with well-known local flavors. The cheese trolleys,

loaves of crusty bread and extra virgin olive oils on offer are some of the details that help define the philosophy of Les Cols.

Fina, who opened her restaurant in 1990, received her Michelin star in 2005, but she is still doing things in the same way, perhaps focusing even more on local products and especially on "nutrition and light food, with portions that are not too big". Hers is a



personal style and her aim, in her own words, is "to offer happiness".

Further inland in Sort, a village in the Lerida Pyrenees, **ZORAIDA COTONAT** and her husband run the restaurant Fogony. It all started by chance 15 years ago. Initially, they had a small bar where they offered tapas. As a self-taught cook who had never studied catering, she then started to serve traditional dishes, salads and

char-grilled meat. As she gained experience, read and traveled, her cuisine gradually grew. She insists on using only the best produce and, though she likes to use modern techniques, she restrains her creativity because she feels customers are a bit tired of innovation. Zoraida tells us that she used to prepare more modern dishes, more deconstructions and the like, but now she keeps more to

classic, home-style cooking. "Many of the modern techniques, such as liquid nitrogen or spherification, require lots of helpers, so in my restaurant they're out of the question." Her explanation is a modest one, but the fact is that her cuisine is modern in conception and evolution; she likes to play with flavors, especially those stemming from traditional Catalan cuisine, but in a way that is easy to understand.



Montse Estruch

MONTSE ESTRUNCH

Inspiration from flowers

MONTSE ESTRUNCH had little alternative but to take up cooking. Her parents ran a village hostel and she had to help out, largely against her will. But then she decided she had better learn, so off she went to study with Ferran Adrià, Alain Ducasse...and soon, to her surprise, she fell in love with her profession. She now offers her skills and sensitivity at El Cingle in the Barcelona district of Vacarisses. Her cuisine is modern, original and different. She defines it as "full of life and memories, very aromatic, feminine, and personal". There can be no doubt that it reflects her personality, her admiration for the local landscape (the Mediterranean and the Montserrat Mountains northwest of Barcelona), nature and human beings.

Montse was one of the first in Spain to use flowers in her cooking, more than 10 years ago. She had the idea because she was keen to include a spot of color in her dishes, to breathe life into them. She uses an enormous range of edible flowers and is a connoisseur. Those from aromatic plants and herbs such as sage, parsley, thyme, rosemary offer subtle aromas; texture can be given by nasturtiums or pansies; peach sage is refreshing; aloe vera flowers are full of water and delicious, exploding in the mouth. Her green thumb helps her grow hundreds of flowers in the field next to the restaurant. She has even created a line of dishes for the dessert menu that are like edible gardens (for winter, summer, Valentine's Day)—mini works of art that are full of aromas. Flowers appear on the menu in a variety of dishes, from young salad shoots with flowers to a dish she calls "Three fish, three vegetables, three flowers", a delicate touch in a cuisine that undoubtedly bears the mark of the woman behind it.

She feels equally at home with Pyrenees beef or cheeses, Galician lobster or Mediterranean fish. After receiving her first Michelin star two years ago, at 43, she has a great future ahead of her.

Names for today and tomorrow

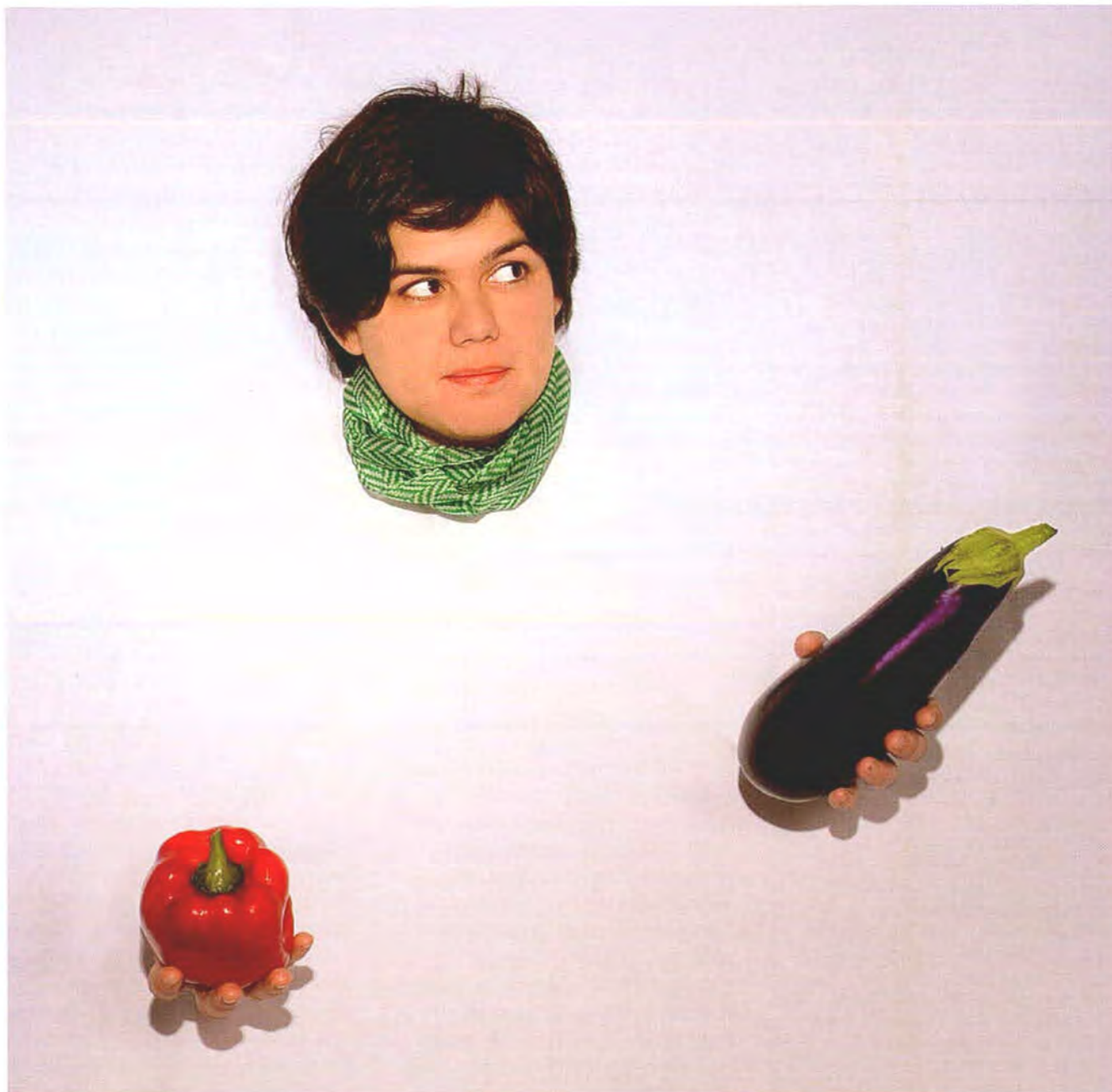
ISABEL JUNCÁ is another self-taught Catalan chef. She works in her parents' business, the restaurant Ca L'Enric in Vall de Bianya (at the foot of the Catalan Pyrenees), where she started out making tapas. Then she got hooked and started doing new things, changing the food offered by her parents. Now she produces home-grown cooking. She likes to work with clean lines and clearly-defined flavors, enhancing the simplicity of the dish. Some of her creations are updated versions of classics, while others are more innovative, but she always takes care to offer a balanced menu. The result is a combination of classic and auteur dishes, but nothing avant-garde. "I don't do spherification because what my customers want is personalized cooking based on local produce." One of her favorite ingredients is woodcock, an exquisite game bird. The options include a soup in which she binds the broth made from the bones with bread, a rice dish using the head and wings, a casserole made with the thighs, and char-grilled breast served as a canapé with the livers.

She combines personality, elegance and common sense. Her vision of cooking has won her a Michelin star, and many more surprises can be expected in the future.

Many miles along the coast, down in southern Spain, we meet CELIA JIMÉNEZ. Though from Córdoba, she has spent most of her career in Málaga (in Andalusia, on the southernmost

part of Spain's Mediterranean coastline). She studied at the La Cónsola catering school, training ground for many top chefs. Then, after gaining experience in a number of Málaga restaurants, she landed in El Lago in 2002. In 2004 she took charge of the kitchen and two years later was awarded her first Michelin star. Last April, she decided she had reached a turning point in her career and returned to her home town of Córdoba where she has taken on the renovation and updating of the gastronomy offered by the Cordoban catering group, Bodegas Campos. This is an ambitious project as she has also started giving classes at the Córdoba catering school and is gradually building up a space for the sharing of gastronomic knowledge. "We are hoping to place Cordoban cuisine at the forefront of cooking today. We're starting out in a practical way, by renovating traditional dishes, and the theoretical parts are being covered through training of new professionals. We are keen to create a landmark center for gastronomic culture." She defines her cuisine as "creative, Andalusian, and contemporary". Her main focus is on top-quality local produce, especially fish, and she uses techniques that help bring out the best in her ingredients. She is on the front line of cuisine, using procedures and techniques developed at elBulli to complement her cooking, but without letting them overshadow her own ideas.

She makes no distinction between men and women in the kitchen, preferring to talk about professionals in general. She does believe that women are perhaps more disciplined, "but this makes no difference when it comes to being creative". Just 32 years old, her sound background, mastery of techniques and experience suggest that we will be hearing more



about her in the future.

The last and youngest of them all is **ANNA MARÍA SANTOYO**. Hers is a clear case of an early vocation. At 8, she knew how to slaughter a rabbit and had learned how to cook them from her grandmother, and she loved to watch Carlos Arguiñano (a famous Basque chef with a popular TV cooking program). At 11, she used to make the family's Christmas dinners,

and at 15 she began her professional culinary training at Mey Hoffman's school. By 20, she was chef in a restaurant in a village in Alicante and two years later set up her own restaurant, El Misteri d'Anna. Her life has seen a quick, upward succession of events—she is married, has a son and is the chef and owner of a spacious, charming restaurant in a house outside Elche in Alicante (on the east coast of

Spain), which she started up with the help of her parents. Now 25 years old, she favors classic dishes which she likes to interpret in a modern way. Her restaurant is happy to offer both a cheese and a drinks trolley. She likes "old school" cooking, rice dishes, and seasonal vegetables. She is especially proud of her egg in an extra virgin olive oil confit with truffle, Ibérico pork cheek stuffed with mushrooms,



and her semi-liquid of almonds. She is another woman from Alicante to join the group of Spanish women chefs that display immense sense and sensibility, but not because it is inherently a female quality—they've all made that more than clear—but because cooking is an art that requires it. Their personal visions, traditional or innovative, born from family memories and from an age-old cultural tradition,

have made their way to Spain's culinary scene. And they have had to fight with great bravery and perseverance to find their place and receive the recognition they so deserve.

Raquel Castillo is a food and wine writer. She heads the gastronomy section of the financial paper Cinco Días, and writes regularly for specialist journals

such as Vino y Gastronomía, Vivir el Vino, Vinoselección and Sobremesa, among others. She is also co-author of the book El aceite de oliva de Castilla-La Mancha (The Olive Oil of Castile-La Mancha) and the restaurant guide Comer y Beber en Madrid (Eating and Drinking in Madrid).

CARME RUSCALLEDA. A SPANISH WOMAN CHEF AMONG THE GODS



She is an example to be followed—for women and for men—having achieved what seemed impossible. She was the first female haute cuisine chef in Spain to hobnob with the stars, all of whom were men until she came along. But when it comes to stars, **CARME RUSCALLEDA** is in a class of her own, featuring in the *Michelin Guide* with no less than five: three for her restaurant Sant Pau in San Pol de Mar in Barcelona (the third was granted in 2006), and two for Sant Pau in Tokyo (the second this year, 2008), which

she has been running from a distance (it is not owned by her) since it opened in 2005.

There are only four women in the world with three stars: Anne-Sophie Pic from France, and Nadia Santini, Luisa Valezza and Annie Feolde from Italy, but Carme is the only one to have five. It is a truly amazing achievement.

Her petite, rather fragile figure is transformed once she starts talking about food. The language she uses is almost poetic, allowing

her to captivate her audience immediately and turning her into the impersonation of her cuisine, her love of nature and her environment. She explains her philosophy, transmitting her passion through a flow of words about taste, aroma and flavor. There is almost no need to try her creations. Just hearing her speak is a sensation in itself.

She believes a kitchen should be “a place where you are provoked, not just a place for eating. You come to a restaurant like Sant



The only woman in the world with five Michelin stars

Pau to turn off, to enjoy moments of happiness, so dishes should be fragrant, beautiful to the point of seductive, enticing you to try them. But my customers remember my dishes because of their flavor, never because of their beauty. Their soul lies in the flavor."

This year, Sant Pau is celebrating its 20th anniversary, having become an unrivalled culinary shrine, the prototype of the avant-garde in Spanish gastronomy. Her dishes are very creative and imaginative, taking cuisine to extremes of sensuality. Carme always says her cuisine is modern Catalan, "Catalan because of my training and the location—what I sell is my local district, the Maresme (north of Barcelona), at its best; modern because of the concept, the technology, the way I play with products—always with the utmost respect."

She believes there is no difference between men's and women's cuisine because cooking is a question of producing a

gastronomic discourse with a team of helpers behind the scenes, so it is impossible to make a distinction. Is there any specific feminine contribution? "No, only the message that we too can make it. Women understand that they need the same as men do: a team providing support, clear ideas and a family that can breast the tide. You don't need to be as strong as an ox to lift 50-gallon pans. That's why we are on an equal standing with men. Ferran Adrià expressed it perfectly when he said: 'If women want to reach the top, first they have to get down to work'. That's how I see it. It's very important to not set yourself apart. I've always been in this 'man's world' but I've never felt inferior. I do the same work as they do, I buy my products at the same prices as they do and I pay the same wages to my team as they do. My customers are not going to excuse me if I make a mistake because I'm a woman. So where's the difference?"

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All CHEFMANAGE



Turnaround Time After a Year of Culinary Excitement

They were the first on a training program that is here to stay. A year ago, 14 young chefs came to Spain to learn the secrets of Spanish haute cuisine. Before returning home with their suitcases full of memories, they met up with the next batch of ICEX gastronomy interns. To add spice to the hello and goodbye party, a contest was staged—a cooking competition combining tradition with the latest Spanish culinary ideas.

Text

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Photos

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Translation

Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

The surname Koch (meaning "cook" in German) seems like a declaration of principles, though unintended. Or perhaps it was a stroke of destiny. What is true is that Magdalena Koch is about to say farewell to what has been her most intense experience so far as a chef. She left Germany 12 months ago to take up a professional, linguistic and personal challenge which, she assures us, has left an everlasting impression. Her case is a rather special one among the participants on the ICEX Gastronomy Internship Program. First, at 19, she was the youngest, and second, she worked throughout the 11 months in a geographical context that has its own well-established culinary personality: the region of Castile-La Mancha in central-southern Spain, homeland of the country's best-known literary

character, Don Quixote. "I've had the opportunity to get to know the two best restaurants in La Mancha, Las Rejas (Las Pedroñeras, Cuenca) with Manolo de la Osa, and El Bohío (Illescas, Toledo) with Pepe Rodríguez Rey, and to see how their avant-garde cuisine is based on local ingredients and traditional regional recipes." Among the many memories she will be taking home are the local products. "My favorites are the purple garlic from Las Pedroñeras, saffron, Manchego cheese, rabbit and partridge. And I wasn't accustomed to using so much extra virgin olive oil for cooking and for giving the finishing touch to dishes." Her memories will be colored by the landscape of this part of Spain. "After almost a year here, I feel very attached to La Mancha and love its huge plains, stretching as far as the eye can see."

All the participants on this first ICEX training course have plenty to take home with them. They are all devoted young chefs and, when you ask them about their impressions, many of them inevitably speak of ingredients, culinary techniques and food-related experiences. Anton Glasner, also from Germany, spent six months at the restaurant Café de París in Málaga (Andalusia) and another six in Madrid at La Broche. Both offer haute cuisine, but their styles are very different. "What I loved at Café de París was seeing the fishermen coming along in the morning with super-fresh fish and shellfish," he says with a broad smile. "And I will always remember my visits to food markets in Spain. The explosion of aromas and colors they offer is something I had never seen



back home." Were there any special delicacies that you discovered in Málaga? "There were many of them, but perhaps what I enjoyed most was the paella made for the kitchen staff by José Carlos García's mother (owner-chef of Café de París)." The change from Málaga to Madrid was noticeable; from a relatively compact city on the sea to the bustling Spanish capital, and from a kitchen where it was impossible to squeeze in more than four cooks to La Broche, where there were over 12. The restaurant had just changed



hands. The previous chef, Sergi Arola, had set out on his own and Ángel Palacios, who had been working alongside him for years, had just taken over.

Apart from some initial nervousness, Anton coped admirably with the change. "Ángel is a splendid chef, and the whole team at La Broche was very kind to me." And it just so happened that last April Ángel Palacios won the Spanish Chefs Competition and will represent Spain at the Bocuse d'Or. While working alongside him, Anton learned how to work with textures using the latest techniques and to use seaweed, an ingredient from Galicia that is very much in vogue in Spanish avant-garde cuisine.

Innovation and local produce

All the young chefs were especially interested in the innovative techniques being used in Spanish

restaurants. This is partly the result of the international fame and influence of Ferran Adrià. Ronny Emborg, a 28-year-old Danish chef, was able to gain firsthand experience by working first at La Hacienda de Benazuza (Sanlúcar la Mayor, Seville), and then at elBulli (Roses, Gerona), with a two-month period in between at Mugaritz (Rentería, Basque Country), alongside Andoni Luis Aduriz.

After their period of training, these young chefs have gained an overview of the techniques being devised, used or interpreted by Spain's best chefs. Rasmus Leck Fischer, also from Denmark, was placed on the team of Martín Berasategui (three Michelin stars) in the Basque Country, where he learned, among other skills, the vacuum technique for preparing new chocolate textures.

His experience with the Basque chef enabled him to learn about ingredients that he had never

previously thought of, such as fish offal. "I was most impressed by Martín's style. His cuisine is authentic, original, full of flavor and modern, yet its roots lie in traditional Basque cuisine." And not only that, but Rasmus also had the opportunity to work in the laboratory, the restaurant's testing kitchen, which he described as "very exciting".

To what extent do you think this experience will *(continued on p. 64)*



LARS LUNDO,
A TOUCH OF DENMARK IN SPAIN



Eight months ago you arrived in Spain. Everything was new, even the language. How did you feel at the beginning? Were you looking forward to working and getting to know Spanish cuisine?

If people don't admit that they were a bit lost and scared at first, they're lying—there was the language barrier, a different culture and nothing but unfamiliar faces! But fortunately I made friends from the very beginning and felt at home quite fast. And of course I was looking forward to coming here—the amazing tour of Spain, sampling the best sampler menus and visiting important gastronomic sites, going to work every morning at a world-renowned restaurant with the chefs you admire, and the possibility to explore a new country and its cultures... who wouldn't look forward to that?

How would you describe your experience at El Celler de Can Roca?

My time here at the restaurant has

been superb and has given me a lot of unforgettable experiences. I enjoyed the unique working atmosphere in the kitchen, where everyone is encouraged to be very serious, precise and professional about cooking and what goes on the plates, while at the same time taking things slowly in order to do everything right and to learn things you didn't know before. Photo shoots for books and magazines, exclusive private dining sessions, local artisans showing their produce at the back door... every day was different!

Some time ago El Celler moved into a new place. What is your opinion about the "new" Celler?

The popularity and gastronomy of the Orcas have long outgrown the setting of the original restaurant, and the relocation to a much worthier place comes at just the right time. And needless to say I find the new place amazing! The kitchen is sleek, modern and stocked with every imaginable piece of equipment with which you would want to experiment.

Have you had the chance to explore and discover Catalan traditional cuisine?

I have to confess that, even though I'm right in the heart of Catalonia, I haven't been exploring the traditional cuisine as much as I would've liked. But the things I've tried so far have all been great! I've had a slow-cooked *suquet* (fish stew) in a cozy restaurant on the Costa Brava, the *mar y montaña* (surf and turf) classic of grilled chicken and lobster in the hills just north of town and, of course, the typical *llesca* (slice of crusty bread) with all kinds of toppings: *lomo* (loin), anchovies, shrimp—you name it!

Which memories of your Spanish experience will you never forget?

I'll never forget the many new friends I've made during my stay—the other ICEX chefs, the dozens of people at the restaurant and of course the incredible Roca family. With all the people I have met and gotten to know, I now have a unique network of colleagues which spans not only

Denmark and Spain, but the entire world.

You traveled a lot all over Spain during three weeks in September 2007. Which places and cities did you enjoy the most? Have you explored any more after that?

Of all the wonderful places and cities we visited and all the people we came across, I won't hesitate to say that I had the best time with the wonderful family of Lucía Dominguín and Carlos Tristancho. We stayed at the beautiful Hospedería Rocamador in the

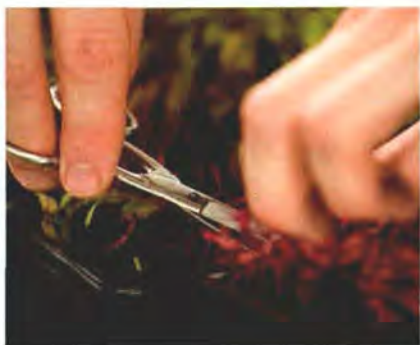
Badajoz countryside, surrounded only by thousands of happy, grunting Ibérico pigs and the oak trees that provide them with acorns. Carlos and his wife invited us to be part of their family for a few days, treating us to a traditional *matanza* (slaughter, where the killing of one of the pigs allowed us to enjoy grilled *presa* (a cut of Ibérico pork), while the *señoras* taught us how to make *salchichones* and *chorizos* (types of sausages) and *perrunillas* (sweet lard pastries typical of Badajoz). It was truly memorable!

Will all the things you learned at EI

Celler help you in your future? Do you think you will use Spanish products and avant-garde techniques when you work in other restaurants in Denmark?

Spain has an incredible amount of unique products which I'm sure I'll be using in the future. I wouldn't want to be without the wines, vinegars, hams, cheeses, mushrooms, olives and spices, to mention just a few. What I'm most happy to take with me though is the "Spanish way" of thinking about food and providing your customers with a great experience.





(continued from p. 61) be useful for you in the future? "I'm quite convinced it will be essential. Initially I learned to cook under the influence of French cuisine but now, when I am devising a new dish, my notes reflect ideas that I've picked up for techniques and ingredients used in Spanish, French and Danish cooking." These young chefs are fascinated by the culinary avant-garde, but what about traditional cuisine? Rasmus is certain: "My favorite dish is *kokotxas al pil pil* (hake cheeks with garlic and olive oil)." Magdalena chooses Spanish tortilla, and Anton Eff, another of the course participants, selects a typical dish from Catalonia, where he was stationed for the 12-month period: *buñuelos*, a type of fritter made from a batter of flour, water, milk and eggs, fried in plenty of hot oil and filled with savory or sweet ingredients. Anton's mentor during his training period was Santi Santamaría at the three-Michelin-star Can Fabes restaurant in Sant Celoni, inland from Barcelona. Here the culinary

philosophy is clear: to preserve the real flavor of products and, whenever possible, to obtain the raw materials from local suppliers. Anton's experience was a real immersion in the culture of Catalonia and in the local produce used in the restaurant: "I really enjoyed working with locally-grown vegetables such as asparagus, and the mushrooms and truffles collected from the local woods have tremendous culinary value." He also has fond memories of an ingredient he discovered while there, the strawberry fruit (from the strawberry tree, widely grown throughout the Mediterranean area).

A whole range of emotions

The near future for these young chefs is mostly a big question mark. Some of them plan to continue traveling to expand their gastronomic horizons, whereas others will be returning to their home countries to continue training

or to work in top-tier restaurants. And some, like Takayuki Kikuchi, the only sommelier and Japanese participant on the course, found the year in Spain too short.

Before he was selected to participate in the ICEX program, Kiku worked at Tokyo's most prestigious Spanish restaurant, Sant Pau, under Carme Ruscalleda (two stars in the 2008 edition of the *Michelin Guide*). He had already been to Spain and knew a lot about Spanish wines, but his year in La Rioja, at El Portal de Echaurren (in Ezcaray) under Francis Paniego, enabled him to deepen his knowledge of Rioja culture.

"In Japan," he says, "it was impossible for me to gain much insight into winemaking. I mean the way the vines are tended, what goes on in the winery and all the steps wine goes through before it reaches the table in the restaurant." The healthy balance maintained in the DOCa Rioja wineries between tradition and modernity is one of the factors that Kiku, with his inquiring

personality, valued most. "Many of the Rioja wineries, including the youngest ones, are experimenting and searching for new profiles for new customers. I learned something new every day, and was delighted to be able to transmit some of that to the customers."

There were some key moments for Kiku during his stay in La Rioja. One that he will never forget was the New Year's Eve celebration in Echaurren. The Paniego family and the restaurant team were keen for Kiku to participate in the Spanish Christmas traditions, and he did. "At midnight, I did what most Spaniards do. I swallowed a grape with each of the bells ringing in the New Year, a total of 12. It was a very emotional experience."

His year in Spain offered him many surprises. At Madrid Fusión in January 2008, he had the opportunity to meet sommeliers from all over the world and to form part of the jury during a tasting session. One week later, on a trip to Extremadura, he visited one of the shrines of Spanish gastronomy, the restaurant Atrio in Cáceres. After a chat with sommelier José Polo and chef Toño Pérez, he received an invitation that he could not refuse: two weeks working at Atrio, where he discovered its outstanding cellar, the winner on several occasions of the Grand Award of Excellence granted by the American journal *Wine Spectator*.



New arrivals

September 2008. The time has come for the changeover. The pioneers make way for their successors, 20 young chefs who have come to Spain to take in as much information as they can about Spanish gastronomy. The end-of-course party and the inauguration of the new course have

a common venue: Sigüenza, a beautiful medieval town in the province of Guadalajara (Castile-La Mancha), just an hour and a half by car from Madrid. The scenario is the Spanish Gastronomy Institute, a new initiative offering training in gastronomy, oenology and nutrition. The event, hardly a surprise, is a cooking (continued on p. 71)



COMMENTS BY THE CHEFS AND INTERNS

At the end of the first edition of ICEX's gastronomy internship, the participants were well deserving of praise. The next few pages feature comments from Spain's top-flight chefs and their students, the young cooks who inaugurated this training program, after almost an entire year packed to the brim with experiences and a whole lot of flavor.



Manuel de la Osa – Las Rejas

"Magdalena has been a great help at Las Rejas during her time with us. She's a great professional and, if she continues with such energy and enthusiasm, she's likely to go far in gastronomy."



Magdalena Koch

"My internship in Spain was fantastic and a real experience. I will always remember the beautiful landscape of Castile-La Mancha, the delicious Spanish food and all I learned in the time I spent with Manolo de la Osa and Pepe Rodríguez."



Pepe Rodríguez Rey – El Bohío

"It's been a very enriching experience, on both professional and personal levels. The result was a very interesting cultural exchange, one we should repeat and of which we are proud."



Lars Lundo

"The Roca family and Catalonia have captured my gastronomic heart. To participate in this program was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and it has provided me with experiences and memories for the rest of my life. I'll be back in Spain soon."



Joan Roca – El Celler de Can Roca

"Quite sincerely, Lars Lundo has been one of the best interns we have had in our kitchen, in his academic training, his interest, his commitment and his abilities. I think this is a fantastic program. It's the best way of making our cuisine and our products known abroad. I hope it can be expanded to include more countries."



Matthew Lightner

"The time here has been filled with many different feelings: amazement, excitement, brotherhood and a little sadness. At Mugaritz I found not only good chefs but also good people, a good family. But working at Mugaritz is not just a job or an internship, it's living in a whole world that revolves around food companionship and lots of hard work; it is truly a special place. I met and saw people and places I hope to never forget."



Andoni Luis Aduriz – Mugaritz

"Sharing the tough times and hard work as well as the excitement and pleasure of working in a kitchen brings people closer, just like those expeditions when adventurers sailed the seas searching for the end of the world. Matthew Lightner came to see what we do here and he gave us a lesson in honesty and commitment that we will never forget. He will soon be a great chef, an outstanding ambassador for Spanish cuisine and products but, above all, he will be one of those friends that will always be there."



Mie Bostlund

"During my time at Arzak's restaurant, I saw a result of the fusion between the 'laid-back' Basque mentality and one of the most experimental and avant-garde cuisines in the world."



Marcos Morán – Casa Gerardo

"One of Gian's best characteristics is that he is tremendously interested in gastronomy and is delighted to learn about new ingredients and recipes. We were very happy with his work and with his contributions to the team. These internships will be very beneficial for Spain because we are not only cooking and creating in the restaurant kitchens, but we are also demonstrating the serious, professional work and research that is being done."



Gian Durisch

"I had a really positive experience here in Spain. Thanks to the program, we were able to travel all over the country, which was absolutely fantastic, and I also had the opportunity to learn a beautiful and important language. Without the support of ICEX, I probably would not have come to Spain for on-the-job training."



Toño Pérez – Atrio

"It's been a pleasure to work with Gian Durisch. I'm convinced he will become a great professional because he's interested and enthusiastic and has received very good training."



Ramón Freixa – El Raco d'en Freixa

"Having Brenda with us was very valuable from a gastronomic point of view because she taught us about the styles and products of her country. Our experience with her was one we will be happy to repeat so that we can help train future ambassadors of Spanish cuisine."



Brenda Ramírez

"The past 11 months in Spain have been incredible! The program has given me the opportunity to learn first-hand about Spain's wonderful cultural and culinary diversity. Traveling around the country and working at Akelarre and El Raco d'en Freixa have been very rewarding experiences."



Pedro Subijana – Akelarre

"Brenda is a delightful young person with a very positive attitude towards her culinary training. Her pleasant demeanor, courtesy and friendliness meant that she got on very well with her colleagues."

"Rene is a very professional young chef, with extensive knowledge and great willingness to learn about everything going on in a top-level kitchen."



Rene Frank

"What was most impressive for me was to learn about cooking from a different perspective, from an innovative and particularly clever way. This will make my work much easier than before."

COMMENTS BY THE CHEFS AND INTERNS



Rasmus Leck Fischer

"Every day I see new products and techniques. This flow of inspiration fuels my urge to cook, and makes my stay in Spain an unforgettable experience."



Martín Berasategui – Martín Berasategui

"People always say that what is most important in a student, whatever the subject being studied, is willpower and keenness to learn. And in cooking, it is essential to pay attention at all times so that you are constantly picking up new information. Rasmus did all of this. I believe in hard work, modesty and sacrifice, and I think Rasmus shares these ideas. Not only is he a good working partner but he's always smiling, and I'm sure this philosophy will take him far, in both his personal and his professional lives."



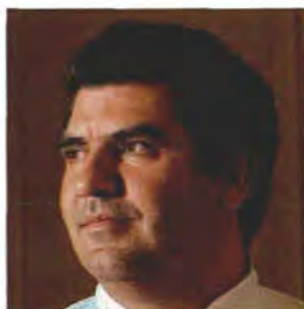
Ángel Palacios – La Broche

"Participating in this project has been a great experience. Anton is an outstanding person. He's hard-working and dedicated, and has made plenty of contributions to La Broche."



Anton Glasner

"I've really enjoyed my time in Spain. I've discovered new products and modern culinary techniques. I was impressed by the markets with their top-quality fresh produce and, in general, I liked the people, the language and the climate."



Paco Roncero – La Terraza del Casino

"The months with Nic have been very gratifying. He reminded me of my passion for work when I started out in my first kitchen. I think there should be more programs like this one, involving not just work and training but also a variety of gastronomic activities."



Nicolai Tram

"Spain is an authentic country. I had the opportunity to be in Madrid which today is the center of Europe because of all the cultures that come together there. I'm grateful for the support and guidance I received from Paco Roncero, who made it easier for me to be away from home and provided me with experiences I had never even dreamed of."



Santi Santamaría – El Racó de Can Fabes

"Anton Eff has been a willing, responsible worker who has shown a high degree of professionalism and seriousness. It has been a pleasant experience for us and we are delighted to have participated in this training program."



Anton Eff

"It has been interesting and educational, but also a lot of fun, a true privilege."



José Carlos García – Café Paris

"It has been a special experience working with Anton Glasner. I've learned as much as he has from his work with the team at Café de Paris. He's not only a great professional but also a great person. I would also like to stress that this internship program is one of the best that I've had the opportunity to participate in."



Juan Pablo Felipe – El Chaflán

"What I try to teach the young chefs coming here is how to organize their work. A kitchen is like a clockwork that has to function to near perfection and, if any one part fails, the clock stops. Working in haute cuisine is very martial, and Max has benefited from one of those rare opportunities that arises in life."



Maximilian Denk

"I've been able to gather experience, not only in the kitchen, but also in my daily life. It was good to see different ways of thinking. In these aspects, I think Spain is a great country."



Xabier Pellicer – Àbac

"This program is an exquisite way of showing how we interpret gastronomy. The experience is proving to be very positive from all points of view—personal, professional, technical and emotional. Max quickly fit into our team. I hope he has good memories of his time at Àbac."



Francis Paniego – El Portal de Echaurren

"Kiku has won himself a place in the Echaurren family. He has given us much more than we were able to offer him. He has been careful, serious and very hard-working. We will not forget him, and I hope to visit him one day."



Takayuki Kikudú

"I'm happy because, although I knew about the Spanish wine culture before I came, over the last year I've been able to talk to vine-growers and wine producers. I'm sure everything I've learned will help me in the future."



Ferran Adrià – elBulli

"The great work being done by this gastronomy internship program can be seen in the sensitivity of all the interns, in their excellent performance and in their keen interest in learning and forming part of the elBulli family. All the students who have passed through this kitchen have made a contribution in some way, helping to make elBulli the restaurant that it is."



Ronny Emborg

"At each of the top restaurants I worked at in Spain, I was able to see how they work hard to improve every day."



THE FOUR CORNERS OF SPAIN

Two years ago, when the ICEX gastronomy internship program for young foreign chefs was just an idea, I was asked to set up the introductory course. I'd always thought this was a great idea, and at last it was taking shape. Clearly, my 20 years working on the editorial team of *Spain Gourmetour*, getting to know all about promoting Spanish food products and gastronomy, was considered a good starting point, so I was delighted to be invited to work on the project.

First we spoke to the Spanish chefs to gather their opinions, suggestions, and advice on the internship in general. Then we got down to the details. Before the young chefs traveled to their assigned restaurants, they were to be given a sort of cultural and gastronomic "immersion" in Spain so that they could get to know more about the country and its "reality", beyond avant-garde cuisine and Ferran Adrià, the most familiar references for them. That was my job in my capacity as director of the "Introductory course to Spanish culture and gastronomy". I was starting from zero and there was so much to teach them in just 30 days!

We had to show off our gastronomic jewels and they had to taste them, they had to get to know the producers, eat in taverns and in Michelin-star restaurants, listen to the experts at round table sessions and conferences, visit the most trendsetting and the oldest wineries, and talk to both innovative and traditional cooks. But they also had to see the green Spain in the north and the yellow plains of Castile, then go southwards to the Mediterranean shores and visit some of our most notable monuments. They went to Guetaria, on the shores of the Cantabrian Sea, to visit the farm where Jaime Burgaña grows exquisite herbs and vegetables for the top Basque chefs. They also attended a lecture on sherry by the director of the CRDO (Designation of Origin Regulatory Council), they saw how an Ibérico pig is slaughtered with the Extremaduran pasturelands as a backdrop in all their splendor, they met Adrià in his sanctuary at Cala Montjoi, and they shared a roast suckling pig at the Cándido restaurant at the foot of the Roman aqueduct in Segovia, to mention just a few of the most outstanding

activities. It's impossible to summarize the 30-day crash course, considering its goal was to cover the whole of Spain, its products and its people. In short, the project aimed to offer what was to be a unique experience in the professional lives of the young chefs, one that they would find hard to forget once they returned home.

For me, it was a great challenge and I am delighted to see the positive results. I trust that the work done in preparing for the first edition will help those taking responsibility for the course from now on. Meanwhile, I propose a toast to the 14 young chefs who participated in the program.

Sonia Ortega was coordinator of Spain Gourmetour for 20 years. She is now working on ICEX's future gastronomy portal and is coordinating www.spaingourmetour.com.

(continued from p. 65) competition.

The panel of judges is made up of top chefs, food writers and gastronomy professionals. Each of the teams includes members of the first and second courses, alongside some of the chefs who received them in their restaurants. The challenge is to devise a dish based on both traditional and avant-garde aspects of Spanish gastronomy. The prize is well worth the effort: a pleasure trip for the five senses, also known as a fully-paid weekend trip to the Basque Country, with lunches and dinners in the region's best restaurants.

It's a great goodbye for those finishing and a warm welcome for the new arrivals. A number of changes have been made in the program to help perfect what is a groundbreaking, unique, global initiative. Javier Sierra, director of the training program, lists some of the measures adopted for the second edition. "We have increased the number of places to 20, with chefs coming from Germany, Denmark, the US, Japan, Switzerland and a new country for us, China. We have signed collaboration agreements with some of the top catering schools in these countries, such as Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts in China and the Culinary Institute of America in the US, which will be helping us select participants."

At the suggestion of the students, the three-week introductory course in Spain is to include one more practical module. The basic structure will remain the same, with a combination of talks, round table discussions, oil and wine tasting sessions, presentations by experts on Spanish gastronomy and trips all around the Spanish culinary world, but there is to be a new session at the Spanish Gastronomy Institute in Sigüenza. The idea is to polish up the interns' skills before they get down to work in their assigned spots.

The list of prestigious Spanish restaurants has also been expanded to include some notable new names. All the chefs who acted as gastronomic tutors in the first edition will be repeating, but there will now be some other Michelin star-holders. These are the restaurants that appeared in the red guide for this first time this year: Kursaal and Guggenheim (both in the Basque Country and members of the Berasategui Group), Calima under Dani Garcia in Marbella (Andalusia), and one of the revelations on the Barcelona scene, Alkimia with Jordi Vilà.

Other new participants will be LAlezna with Pedro Martino (Asturias), Adolfo (Toledo, Castile-La Mancha), Santceloni with Óscar Velasco (Madrid), and Casa Solla with Pepe Solla (Pontevedra, Galicia). Finally, Oriol Balaguer will no longer be the only representative of Spanish avant-garde pastry-making. He has now been joined by Paco Torreblanca (Elda, Alicante) and the world's only desserts-only restaurant, Espai Sucre, captained by

Jordi Butrón (Barcelona).

The internship program family continues to grow with new students, restaurants and collaborating institutions. The goal is ambitious but more than worthwhile: to give enthusiastic young chefs the opportunity to get to know Spanish gastronomy, products and wines, and to work hard in haute cuisine. They are the real stars in this initiative.

Rodrigo García Fernández writes for www.spaingourmetour.com.



WEBSITES

Las Pedroñeras
www.lasrejas.net

El Bohío
www.elbohio.com

Café de Paris
www.rcafedeparis.com

elBulli
www.elbulli.com

Martín Berasategui
www.martinberasategui.com

Can Fabes
www.canfabes.com

El Portal de Echaurren
www.elportal.com

Atrio
www.restauranteatrio.com

Instituto Español de
Gastronomía
www.iedeg.com



VÍAS

Text
Anke Van Wijck Adán/©ICEX

Photos
Juan Manuel Sanz/©ICEX

Picture
Perfect

From a sea of olive trees dotted with white *cortijos* (rural country home, typical of southern Spain) to rare autochthonous orchids, from flocks of sheep to cherry and chestnut blossoms, from storks and cranes to fortresses, each stretch of our next journey is worthy of a million pictures. In the two previous issues, we took you along some of the Vías Verdes or Greenways of northern and eastern Spain; in this last article, we will travel two emblematic routes in the south and southwest. The Vía Verde del Aceite takes us westbound from Jaén in Andalusia crossing through seemingly endless



VERDES (III)

sloping olive groves, the uncontested kingdom of the Picual. It also offers us some of the most magnificent vestiges of the three cultures that left their legacy here. From there we will head northwest to reach the Vía Verde de las Vegas del Guadiana y las Villuercas covering part of Badajoz and Cáceres in Extremadura. It will take us across a wide variety of landscapes from the age-old dehesa (a mélange of woodlands and meadows), through rice fields and orchards to the rock rose-covered, bee-buzzing hills of the Sierra de Guadalupe.



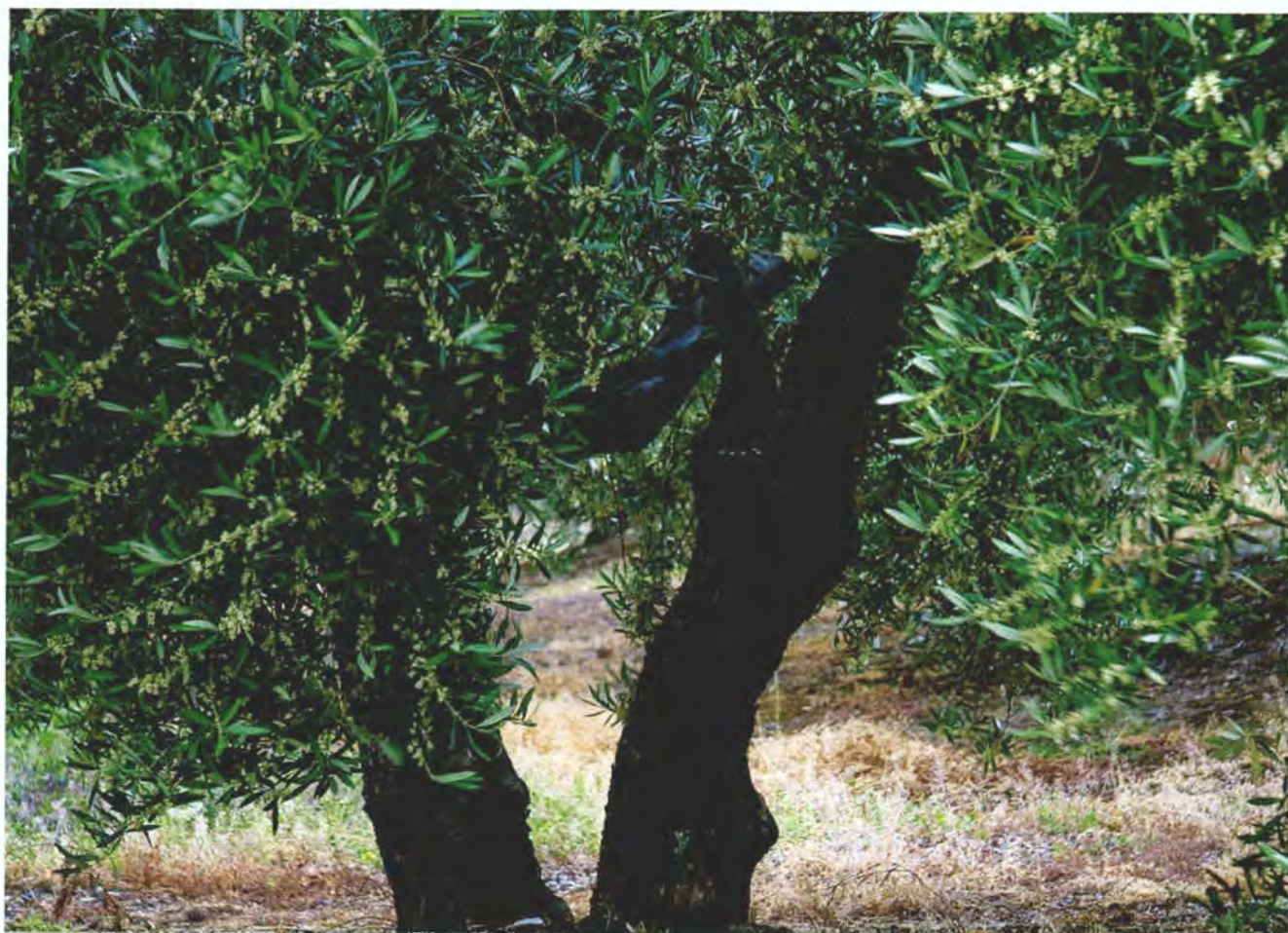
For further details on the Spanish Greenways, we refer to our previous articles, as well as to their website (Central and southern routes, page 85). Yet, as we will once again see here, every new Via Verde traveled is another example of how a simple but bright idea can have an extraordinary impact both on the social fabric of adjacent localities, and on the propagation of the largely undiscovered treasure trove of interior Spain among a new generation of health-oriented and nature-loving national and international travelers. Under the auspices of the Spanish Railroad Foundation (Fundación de Ferrocarriles Españoles), all throughout Spain and away from noisy cities and crowded beaches, obsolete railroad tracks have been and are being converted into comfortable, well-signaled, and non-motorized walking and cycling paths, in most cases also accessible to the physically impaired. Let's don

our backpacks and see where the tracks lead us now.

The interior paradise

In many a mind, Andalusia epitomizes the very image of Spain: flamenco, sherry, the Costa del Sol, the Ryder's Cup...yet not only Spain, but also Andalusia is far more than that. If in our first article we mentioned that the country is a small continent, in and of itself a metaphor for its amazing natural and cultural variety, this is also what Andalusia—with its eight provinces (Almería, Cádiz, Córdoba, Granada, Huelva, Jaén, Málaga and Seville), the second largest autonomous region in Spain—stands for. It comes as no surprise then that authorities in Jaén, which has no coast, appropriately dubbed their territory "paraíso interior" (interior paradise). Very few of the Spanish Greenways actually start off in a capital city, so

the best place to initiate our present trip is at the city of Jaén's summit, or more precisely, at the Castillo de Santa Catalina and the adjacent Parador de Jaén. Generally speaking, the *Paradores* (Spanish heritage hotels, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 69) are located at especially representative sites, and words do not suffice to explain the splendid views these vantage point offers. You will just have to find out for yourself by spending the night and drinking in the different shades of light: the ribbons of haze that envelop the city down below in the morning, the unbelievable width of the countryside at midday, the golden hue at dawn, and at night, the live postcard picture with the beautifully-lit Cathedral of Jaén in the center. The Parador is also an excellent opportunity to make our first acquaintance with regional cuisine, following the advice of chef Alberto Avila, who says that Jaén, as of old, is a territory of passage where travelers



would stop over to eat and to replenish their strength. Indeed the very name Jaén is said to proceed from the Arab word *Yayyan* or *Geen*, meaning “passage of caravans.” Here you will be welcomed with a glass of *amontillado* (fortified wine from the DOs Jerez and Montilla-Moriles, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 69) and some nicely seasoned *gordales* (large olives, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 70). On the extensive menu, regional dishes are specifically indicated, like the *pipirrana* (coarsely chopped onions, tomatoes, cucumbers and green peppers in a broth of egg yolk, vinegar, and olive oil and topped with vinegar-cured anchovies), or *conejo en salsa camuñas* (an adapted shepherd’s dish made of rabbit stuffed with spinach and Ibérico ham, in a sauce of fried bread, almonds, rabbit liver and cumin—*hammūn* in Arabic). Right next to the Parador is the Castle of Santa Catalina, the last of the fortresses built on this 760 m

(2,490 ft) high natural rock outcropping that has served as a privileged stronghold for its many successive dwellers and invaders: Iberians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, reconquering Spaniards, and even the French. The city of Jaén itself is eminently walkable and after a visit to the magnificent and extremely well-kept Renaissance cathedral, it is nice to just stroll beside a number of interesting monuments that invariably bear witness to the confluence of the three cultures (Arab, Christian and Jewish) that have enriched these lands. But before we continue on our journey, we drop in at El Bodegón in the quaint Plaza del Pósito. In a building that used to be a grain depot, we find an old-fashioned grocery store. Here you can buy a portion of their excellent selection of cold cuts and cheeses or a can of roasted peppers, clams, mussels, etc. and take it downstairs to the old bodega where it is suitably prepared

for you. Any drink you order will come with a small tapa, “mandatory in Jaén” as the owner, Angel Millán, affirms. Local color at its best! And if you have some space left in your backpack, you should buy some delicious homemade pastries at one of several convents that traditionally bake them in an effort to raise extra money. “They are made daily following old, traditional recipes, with all natural ingredients and without any preservatives,” says Sister Carmen of the enclosed Carmelite Order of Santa Teresa. Customers will have to put in their order and pay at a small wooden revolving door that will turn out the neatly-packed pastries followed by a veiled “God bless you.”

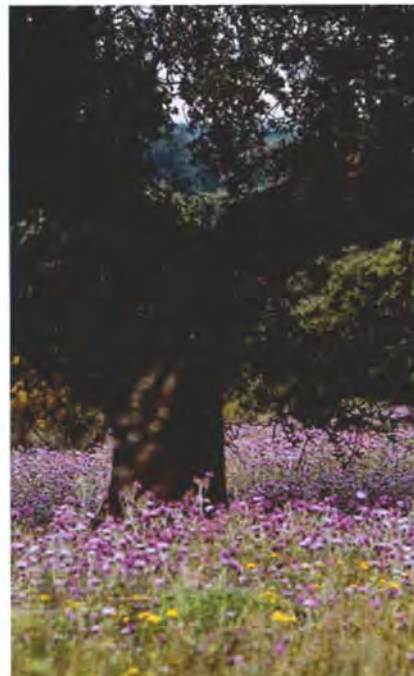
Cleaving the waves

Like the previously visited Greenways, the former railroad—part of which is now the 53 km (33 mi) long Vía Verde del Aceite—transported

ore. However, its primary purpose was the transportation of olive oil to the markets of southern Spain and the port of Málaga, hence its name (*aceite* comes from the Arab *az-zeyt*, or olive oil). Our actual route starts right next to a modern sports complex, Las Fuentezuelas, which features a magnificent swimming pool accessible to everyone. As early as 9 am, the Greenway is absolutely packed with walkers, many of them mothers who have just dropped off their kids at school. "The Vía Verde has stimulated the habit of walking enormously," says Juan García, who's in charge of maintenance. Yet not only locals enjoy the Vía Verde. "We are seeing an increasing number of foreign tourists who leave their car or caravan at any of the stations from which the route is easily accessible, especially in spring," explains García. Although our Greenway has a minimal incline of at most 3%, the surrounding landscape, from beginning to end, is dominated by endless—at first gently, then steeply—sloping olive groves, the proverbial "sea of olive trees", interspersed only here and there with picturesque white cortijos that

seem to be cleaving these grey-green waves like ocean liners. Many olive trees grow on improbably steep hills and it boggles the mind as to how they might be picked. Apparently, it seems more difficult than it really is. Nets are held up by hand so as to level them horizontally. But even so, you might vow to come back at harvest time to personally witness this feat. Harvesting takes place on and around the Greenway in the fall. José Carlos Marzal, director of Fundación del Olivar, explains that the province of Jaén alone makes up for around 50% (some 1,100,000 tons) of Spain's total olive oil production. Roughly 60-70% of it comes from the Picual, a variety with a high level of natural antioxidants that allow the oil to be raised to higher temperatures more often before it degrades. Furthermore, Jaén counts five Protected Designations of Origin: Jaén Sierra Sur, Sierra de Cazorla, Sierra Segura, Sierra Magina and Campiñas de Jaén. Since 1990, the foundation organizes Expoliva, the widely-attended International Olive Oil and Related Industries Fair, as well as an

impressive number of different activities aimed at the scientific, technological, commercial, and gastronomic promotion of olive oil. It also has had a seminal role in the planning of a 4,000 m² (43,000 sq ft) technological park in nearby Mengibar devoted to every possible aspect of olive growing and sustainability.





Of church bells and watch towers

At some 12 km (7.5 mi) from where we began we find the Túnel del Caballico, the first of two long well-lit tunnels that were built to warrant both a leveled and rectilinear railroad. Even more spectacular are the Greenway's peculiar viaducts; all nine of them are made of mecano-like metal structures, unsurprisingly reminiscent of the Eiffel Tower as they were built by the same engineering firm, Daydé et Pillé. In this huge agricultural expanse, urban spaces are few and far between. The erstwhile rural villages have grown into small semi-industrial towns based largely on transformation activities, but also on some traditional handicrafts.

With over 300 years of family experience in Levante (eastern Spain), in 1881 Maria del Mar's great grandfather established his foundry in Torredonjimeno after falling in

love with a local girl. Now that her father has retired, she is the only one of her siblings to continue the tradition, together with some young new partners. "I've lived it all my life," she says "it's an art." Their custom-made bronze bells, recognizable by a small salamander imprint (the universal symbol of fire), toll in all of Spain, and also in such faraway places as Connecticut, Tokyo, and South America. In keeping up with the times, they now also offer everything from maintenance to electronic bell-activating devices. "We have a priest in Las Alpujarras (Granada)," she laughs "who controls the bell towers of four different villages over his cell phone."

Now the *Vía Verde* starts meandering, a means to gain height with the least possible incline, and we will cross the highway at several spots either underneath or over specially built footbridges. The Peña de Martos, another rock formation

topped with the ruins of a fortress, will slowly draw nearer. Paying close attention, all throughout the area we notice that once the landscape was fully controlled from stone watchtowers, all of which were within sight of one another. They were extremely important as warning posts in times of battle, to alert the population to temporarily take refuge in the nearby fortresses. The *Vía Verde* enters the town of Martos, which features a number of interesting monuments, especially the 16th-century town hall. And, in case you have already polished off your Carmelite pastries, you can stock up at the famous Madres Trinitarias convent nearby which offers a wide assortment. All along the *Vía Verde* we will see occasional signs pointing to the intersection with a number of other nature and theme routes like the Route of Castles and Battles.



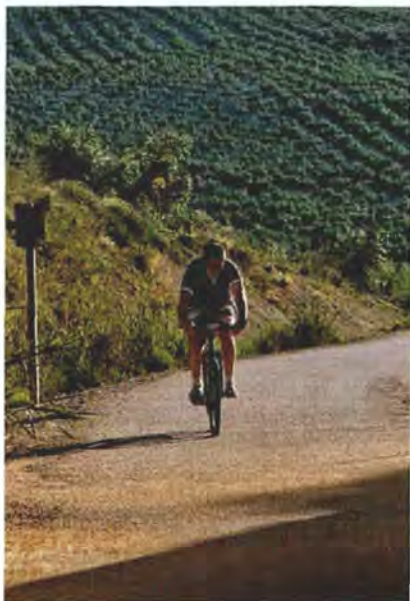
Meeting point: the *vía verde*

On our way to the old station of Vado-Jaén, we are likely to see people foraging for wild asparagus, young fennel sprouts, wild chard, and other edible greens and herbs. This is another welcome aspect of the Greenways, as they enable people to comfortably get to little-transited areas where these species abound. The station features a rest area that has been beautifully landscaped with native varieties like the *árbol del amor* (*Cercis siliquastrum*), oleanders, almond and fig trees, etc. About 400 ornamental trees have been planted along the *Vía Verde*. Roberto Aybar, who is responsible for this Greenway on behalf of the council of Jaén, points out that every third Sunday in May, a two-way 8 km (5 mi) march (4 km / 2.5 mi for wheelchair participants) is organized at this station, which culminates in a collective meal of

traditional *migas* (Versatile crumbs, page 79) for about 400 hungry walkers. The week prior, they also stage a yearly 67 km (42 mi) cycling tour, starting at the Castle in Jaén, all the way to the station of Alcaudete, where a gigantic *paella* is awaiting the roughly 300 participants from all over Andalusia. These events are just additional evidence that under the leadership of enthusiastic and dynamic people like Aybar, and with full support of local and regional administrators, the Greenways are making a growing difference in the local population.

Just before we reach our end destination in Alcaudete, nature lovers will be particularly rewarded by the beautiful Laguna Honda lagoon, at the center of a nature reservoir that is the temporary home to a variety of migrating water birds, such as moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*), coots (*Fulica atra*), and swans (*Anas platyrhynchos*). We now are approaching the end of our route

that takes us to the *pièce de résistance* set among nine metal bridges: the 200 m (656 ft) long viaduct over the Guadajoz River which marks the frontier between Jaén and Córdoba. On the other side, the *Vía Verde de la Subbética* continues over 56 km (35 mi) into the olive groves of Córdoba. We, however, will head northwest to join a different route. Not to be missed however is Alcaudete itself. It is a pretty town and it is worth strolling along its main street, which is lined with rehabilitated townhouses leading up to the main square, where Loli Garcia runs a small store stocked with regional and ecological food products. From there it's a short climb to the magnificent castle and adjacent Church of Santa Maria: a new vantage point offering splendid views. Alcaudete is also home to Doña Jimena, a renowned brand of traditional Spanish—mostly almond-based—pastries, *turrón* (a sweet paste made with almonds and honey) and



for example, typical *albóndigas*, small meatballs made of shredded turkey and chicken breast, Serrano ham, breadcrumbs and egg, and seasoned with garlic, parsley, black pepper and saffron. Served in a light broth they are absolutely unforgettable.

From mill to mill

How could we possibly leave the area without visiting an *almazara*, or olive oil mill? Only a few miles on our way out of Alcaudete, we find Cortijo "El Tobazo" in the midst of some 600 ha (1,482 acres) of olive groves. Since 1815, the Soler Romero family has grown olives

here, and in 2000, they took an important step: the family decided to build their own *almazara* on the premises. Outfitted with advanced technology, it allows them to stay fully in control of the oil producing process, and thereby obtain a top-quality extra virgin Picual olive oil. But that wasn't all. They simultaneously decided to go ecological. Francisco Vázquez, the technical director, explains that it didn't mean a big change, as they already were using proper agricultural practices with regard to soil conservation, natural weed and pest control, fertilization, and residue management. As a result,

marzipan, as well as chocolates and pralines. Jerónimo Jiménez, Doña Jimena's president, explains that the greatest demand comes from Latin America. Yet their products, featuring a modern, distinctly Spanish image, can be found in no less than 57 countries around the world.

Now before we hit the road, why not let Jaén tempt us one last time? La Cazuela Andaluza, lies on both the Vía Verde and the Route of Caliphates. It is the perfect place for another taste of genuine regional cuisine, which is always featured on the daily menu. Their *ensalada de naranjas y bacalao*, a salad made of coarsely-diced oranges topped with thin threads of salt cod and crumbs of hardboiled egg, lightly tossed in extra virgin olive oil, successfully plays with the palate-tickling, taste-bud arousing effect of binary opposition—sour and salty, moist and dry—employed in gastronomy for ages. For the main course there are,

V E R S A T I L E C R U M B S

Villarabajo, literally "the village down below," lies in a deep valley just over the hills surrounding the Vía Verde near Alcaudete.

Victoria and Josefina are neighbors and have lived here all their lives. Even though they may quibble over details, they share their love for food and are happy to share their passion with others. It is a unique opportunity to sample orally-transmitted recipes for traditional peasant dishes. One such dish, probably one of the most ubiquitous and most versatile in Spain, is *migas* (breadcrumbs). Simple only in appearance and with an endless array of versions, the most well-known are made from bread, but they can also be prepared using flour, as in the recipe here.

To prepare *migas* for four people: cover the bottom of a frying pan

with olive oil, add a handful of flour and stir until slightly toasted. Add 1/2 l (2 1/6 cups) of water and some salt. As soon as it starts bubbling, add 1/2 kg (1 lb 2 oz) of flour and then patiently stir until it hardens and breaks into crumbs.

First recommendation: eat them directly from the pan! Second recommendation: you decide! According to the season, availability, weather, time of day, and personal preferences, you can accompany *migas* with fruit, salted cod or sardines, chorizo, fried eggs... You can eat them for breakfast, lunch or even dinner. "We would always have them getting home from olive picking," recalls Victoria. Josefina adds: "My grandkids love them with melted chocolate." Let's all move to Villarabajo!

they are now entitled to label their bottles with EU, JAS (Japanese Agricultural Standard), and USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) organic certificate seals and are exporting 85% of their production to top-of-the-line distributors, especially in Japan, Korea and the US.

If we end our first route with a tightly-run ecological operation, why not start the next one with what could be called a “boutique approach”? It just underscores Spain’s versatility and constant innovation in the field of top-quality olive oil. There are very few areas in the country that do not grow olives and, much like in wine, we see parallel efforts, on the one hand, to experiment with new varieties and blends and, on the other, to recover, maintain, and improve upon autochthonous varieties. It all just adds to the excitement! During a trip to Tuscany, Fernando Sánchez-Molina, owner of Cesma, S.L. in Guareña (Badajoz) fell in love with the Frantoio olive. Today his 500 ha (1,235 acres) property features plantations of primarily Picual and Arbequina, but also of Koroneiki, Frantoio, Manzanilla Cacerena, and Cornezuela (some of the trees are over 100 years old and still in full production). Their brand is Naturvie, through which they commercialize a specially selected 10% of their total production in numbered black bottles of mono-varietal oils, as well as a “black label” *coupage* of first picked and processed Arbequina (30%) and Picual (70%) oil. Naturvie also features a line of products based on the fruity Manzanilla: herbs and orange seasoned olives, a tapenade, and a

surprisingly original and delicious marmalade. They are mentioned in Judy Ridgway’s (an English journalist and author, and an expert on olive oil) *Best Olive Buys Round The World* and they just won the Olivasia 2008 bronze award. About 70% of the Naturvie line is exported to Europe, Asia and the US.

A home for storks and cranes

Only a few miles from here we enter Villanueva de la Serena from where the *Vía Verde de las Vegas del Guadiana y las Villuercas* unfolds. As its name indicates, we will first cross the fertile plains alongside the Guadiana River, pass through picturesque *dehesas*, and then head towards the mountainous region of Villuercas. To acolytes of Spanish gastronomy, the name “de la Serena” undoubtedly rings a bell. It designates the region where *Torta de la Serena* (PDO *Queso de la Serena*), one of Spain’s exceptional and widely sought after sheeps’ milk cheeses, is produced. The next article in the comprehensive series on Spanish cheeses featured in *Spain Gourmetour* will provide full details. It is also in Villanueva where we find the small, newly-built *Bodega Cerro de la Barca*, owned by Juan Sojo and Angel Luis González, who produce young mono-varietal DO Ribera del Guadiana wines. Gone are the times when Extremadura would sell off most of its grape production in bulk or transform it into vinic alcohol. Thanks to the contribution of young entrepreneurial oenologists like Sojo and González, things are changing fast. They work exclusively with two growers, one traditional, one



ecological, carefully controlling growing and harvesting procedures. They are of course personally in charge of vinification and maturation, and have put a special emphasis on up-to-date design for labels and bottles. In 2004, they launched their first production of Montepozuelo, a 100% Tempranillo country wine (*Vino de la tierra de Extremadura*) and the very next year presented *Vegas Altas Selección*, an Eva or Beba de los Santos white DO wine that immediately received the 2006 International Silver Bacchus Award. Next in line was the *Vegas Altas Selección*, ecological Tempranillo. With the support of ICEX (Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade) they have been exporting from the very beginning. “It wouldn’t have been possible without them,” says Sojo gratefully.

As soon as we continue on our way on what certainly is the straightest of the *Vías Verdes*, we are surrounded by vast rice fields. Due to recent



droughts in Andalusia, Extremadura—with some 27,000 ha (66,720 acres) has just surpassed it as the largest producer of rice in Spain. Towards the end of May, after the soil has been prepared and sowing—by either tractor or plane—has been completed, the lands are flooded with a shallow layer (6-7 cm / 2-3 in) of unpolluted water from the Guadiana River (at no point along its course does it run close to large industrial areas). It's not surprising then that the area also attracts thousands of migrating birds, especially cranes and storks, although many of the latter no longer migrate. Now they are a familiar sight and sound all year round. Along our Greenway we will see hundreds of nests on every available pole, turret, or chimney. Manuel Rodríguez explains that even though rice was not traditionally cultivated here, the *Plan Badajoz* (an ambitious program from the 1960s involving gigantic hydraulic works in the form of

pipelines and dams in the Guadiana River to allow irrigation throughout the area) attracted a number of farmers from Valencia and Murcia (east and southeast Spain, where rice is traditionally grown) with the necessary expertise. Rodríguez, a permanent member of the advisory committee on rice at the EU, is the president of *Extremeña de Arroces*, a large, high-tech cooperative plant in *Miajadas*. Two production lines process the raw material into mostly long grain (*Thaibonnet* and *Gladio*), white (10,000 tons), and parboiled (40,000 tons) rice. The high demand for parboiled rice is due to the fact that it is not only easy to cook and does not stick, it also is healthier, as husks are not removed until after the parboiling process, during which time the nutrients they contain infiltrate the kernels, hence its soft amber color. Approximately 30% of their production is exported to Portugal, France, and northern Europe.

The sweet charm of acorns

Rice and corn fields gradually give way to fruit plantations and, for a few miles, we ride among neatly-lined pear, plum, and peach trees. After passing underneath one of the pretty stone viaducts, at km 18 we find a nice rest area with two footbridges reaching into a small pond in the shade of tall eucalyptus trees. This is also an area with a wealth of wildflowers, among them the rare *Serapias perez-chiscanoi*, an endangered green tongue orchid that, according to Casper Venhuis, a Dutch scientist at the Institute for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Dynamics who has extensively studied and catalogued the few remaining populations, is thought to be unique to Extremadura. In contrast, we also get a glimpse at one of the huge pipelines built in the 1960s. Sebastian Cabanillas vividly remembers how, as a little boy in a

farmhouse on what is now the Vía Verde, he would watch the train bring in the pipes. While our route continues in a straight line, the landscape gradually changes into the gently sloping, holm oak (*Quercus ilex*) strewn pastures of the majestic dehesa, the home to free-ranging cattle, sheep, and pigs frequently bred for the three meat quality certifications in Extremadura (PGI Ternera de Extremadura for veal; PGI Corderex for lamb; and PDO Dehesa de Extremadura for the famous

Ibérico ham, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 50). At several old stations we see outlandish looking terraced stone structures once used to embark livestock onto the train. It is not unusual to see partridges hop over the Greenway, as hunting in the area is rife.

Close to the abandoned station of Zorita, two of the mentioned dams and corresponding lakes of Jubilar and Rucas come within our reach. A sign points to a path off the Vía Verde leading there. Needless to say,

views are invariably picture perfect and it is a bird-watcher's paradise. Francisco Serrano, responsible for maintenance of this Greenway, explains that the owners of surrounding dehesas receive an allowance from the regional government to compensate for the voraciousness of cranes. In winter they far outnumber pigs and rival them for acorns, which are essential to the pig's diet and accordingly to the quality of Ibérico ham. A little further ahead, among small creeks,

THE INTERIOR PARADISE IN SAN SEBASTIÁN

In November, within the context of the increasingly famous *Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía Congress* (The Best in Gastronomy) held yearly in San Sebastián, ten chefs from all over the world will compete at the sixth edition of the Jaén: Paraiso Interior contest sponsored by the Council of Jaén to recognize the best olive oil-based dish. But not just any olive oil! Emilio Molero from the promotional department at the council explains that first a jury of experts holds a blind oil tasting to select a varying number of that year's best

olive oils from Jaén. Then, cooks from around the world travel there to show their culinary skills preparing dishes based on the selected oils. The top ten will have to prove their abilities once more at the congress in San Sebastián, but the final winner will walk away with €18,000, not to mention the opportunity to shake hands and share a bit of fame with many of today's top food gurus. Talk about synergies!





oleander, and broom, we suddenly catch sight of a small but perfectly intact Roman bridge, and then it's on to Logrosan, the gateway to the mountainous region of Villuercas, often named together with the adjacent Ibores, home to the PDO Queso Ibores (The hard stuff, page 95). It is here where our current Via Verde ends, but plans are under way to continue rehabilitation of the original railway right through to nearby Guadalupe and even beyond. On our way there, it is worth taking a small detour to the village of Navezuelas where, under the brand name Miel Navezueleña, José Sánchez produces the traditional DO Miel de Villuercas-Ibores honey. The surrounding rock rose-covered hills with oak and chestnut tree forests and patches of cherry trees offer the perfect environment for apiculture. Besides the more ubiquitous golden *Mil flores* (thousand flowers) spring honey, this area produces the rarer *Miel de melada*, a very aromatic bronze colored fall honey with just the right touch of bitterness and a malt-like flavor. *Melada*, as Sánchez explains, is the substance secreted by the fruit of oak and chestnut trees,

which also infuses this honey with a higher mineral content. On our way to Guadalupe we soon notice a number of sloping vineyards. The area is increasingly attracting producers of top-quality wines, like Anders Vinding-Diers, son of the world famous oenologist and cousin of Peter Sisseck (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 68), author of the legendary Pingus (DO Ribera del Duero) to which Parker gave 100 points. In the world of wines, one probably cannot get a better introduction, but Vinding-Diers is a consummate expert himself. Wine lovers better continue to keep an eye on developments in the area!

The grand finale

Just before we enter Guadalupe, the final leg of our long journey, we catch sight of the delicate yet magnificent viaduct that once signaled the grand finale to the railroad track. The town is the seat of the impressive Royal Monastery of Santa Maria de Guadalupe, a World Heritage Site since 1993. For hundreds of years now, every September 8th, pilgrims stream in to

worship the black virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Extremadura, often using the *Vía Verde* to make the journey easier. The picturesque village is full of little restaurants and stores displaying local products and handcrafts. A charming place to have an afternoon tea is Atrium, where you can also enjoy some of the delicious traditional pastries made in their own *obrador* (bakery). The dilemma comes when we have to decide where to spend the night: at the *mudéjar*-style (artistic style from the 13th and 14th century





developed in Christian Spain and including Arab influences) Parador with its beautiful courtyard in the shade of citrus trees, or at the Hospedería del Monasterio, which is far more austere but no less inviting. Both places will delight you with a wide selection of regional cuisine, but whatever you order, try the chestnut flan, it will be a truly delicious memory from your trip. Here our route comes to an end, and with it our journey along a number of Greenways in all of the country's cardinal points. We can only hope that your interest was

sparked enough to follow our trail and venture out into the heart of Spain. Let the Vías Verdes entice you with their breathtaking and constantly-changing landscapes, let them transport you back to times long gone with their myriad of well-preserved and well-documented historic sites, let them delight you with their rich gastronomic offers, and moreover, let the charming people along the way beguile you. So adiós for now, but let's meet again on any of the Vías Verdes. Oh, and don't forget your camera, your friends would never forgive you.

Anke van Wijck Adán is a sociologist and has a Master's degree in gastronomy from Boston University. Her articles have appeared in The Boston Globe.



CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ROUTES

Of the 64 Vías Verdes in Spain, below is a list of those in the best conditions for hikers and cyclists, specifically focusing on routes located in central and southern Spain. To get more detailed and up-to-date information, visit the official website: www.viasverdes.com

ANDALUSIA

Vía Verde del Amanzora

1.6 km / 1 mi in Olula del Río (Almería).

Natural environment: Mountains covered with thickets of esparto, southernwood, rosemary, thyme, broom, lavender, sage, zahareña (land grass), asparagus, thistle, hawthorn and albaída.

Cultural heritage: Ruins of an Andalusian fortress. Church of Saint Sebastian (18th century). Church of the Concepción (20th century). Palaeolithic archaeological site.

Vía Verde del Aceite

55 km / 34 mi between Jaén and the Guadajoz River (Jaén).

Natural environment: Olive groves and Andalusian mountain ranges.

Cultural heritage: Jaén historical monuments. Medieval Castle of Alcaudete. Medieval Viboras Bridge. Torreónes archaeological route.

Vía Verde del Linares

6 km / 3.7 mi between Linares and the Linares-Baeza Station (Jaén)

Natural environment: Olive groves and riverbank

vegetation.

Cultural heritage: Linares historical monuments. Cástulo ruins. Mocho Bridge.

Vía Verde de la Campiña (I)

28 km / 17 mi between Córdoba-Valhillón and La Carlota (Córdoba).

Natural environment: Cereal-producing countryside and Guadalquivir riverbanks.

Cultural heritage: Córdoba historical monuments. Baroque architecture in La Carlota.

Vía Verde de la Subbética

56 km / 35 mi between the Guadajoz River and Las Navas del Sepillar (Córdoba).

Natural environment: Typical Mediterranean vegetation, especially holm oak and gall oak, also maples and European Hackberry. Laguna del Conde Nature Reserve.

Cultural heritage: Luque, Zuheros, Doña Mencía, Cabra and Lucena city centers.

Vía Verde Sierra Norte de Sevilla

15 km / 9 mi between the Cazalla-Constantina station and Cierro del Hierro (Seville), plus 4 km / 2.5 mi connecting the railway station with the Greenway.

Natural environment: Sierra Norte de Sevilla Nature Reserve. Mediterranean forest with holm oak, gall oak and cork oak. Riverbank forests.

Cultural heritage: Mining settlement and archeological site. Englishmen's houses in San Nicolás del Puerto.

Vía Verde de la Sierra

36 km / 22 mi between Puerto Serrano and Olvera (Cádiz and Seville).

Natural environment: Guadalete riverside woodland. Peñón de Zafra Magón Nature Reserve.

Cultural heritage: Churches, castles and archaeological sites in the various towns.

Vía Verde del Guadiana

17 km / 10.5 between Puerto de La Laja and Mina La Isabel (Huelva).

Natural environment: Mediterranean forest. Complex orography with rivers that are extremely entrenched in their descent towards the Guadiana.

Cultural heritage: Chapel of Nuestra Señora de Piedras Albas (El Almendro).

Vía Verde de Molinos

36 km / 22 mi between San Juan del Puerto and Valverde del Camino (Huelva).

Natural environment: Countryside, pine forests, holm oak pastures and eucalyptus reforestation.

Cultural heritage: Ethnographic collection of the water wheels in Beas. Englishmen's houses in Valverde del Camino. Roman mines and remains of Roman roads.

CASTILE-LA MANCHA

Vía Verde de la Jara

52 km / 32 mi between the Calera and Chozas stations and Santa Quiteria (Toledo).

Natural environment: Tajo Valley and Azután reservoir. El Arco pastures. San Martín Valley. Altamira mountains. Cistus (rock rose). Granite terrains.

Cultural heritage: Basque city ruins.

Vía Verde de Poblete

4 km / 2.5 mi between Ciudad Real and Poblete, plus 1 km / 0.6 mi along the AVE tracks (Ciudad Real).

Natural environment: Cereal-producing countryside.

Cultural heritage: Ciudad Real historic monuments.

Vía Verde de Sierra de Alcaraz

13 km / 8 mi between El Jardín and El Robledo (Albacete).

Natural environment: Alcaraz mountains. Jardín River Valley. Arquillo Lagoon, natural monument. Ojos de Villaverde Lagoon (important nesting area for Grey Heron).

Cultural heritage: Albacete, Chapel of Nuestra Señora de la Encarnación (16th century) in Robledo. Windmills and wells on the Jardín River. Alcaraz city center. Cortes Sanctuary.

EXTREMADURA

Vía Verde de las Vegas del Guadiana y las Villuercas

56 km / 35 mi between Logrosán (Cáceres) and Villanueva de la Serena (Badajoz).

Natural environment: Holm oak pastures between the Campolugar and Madrigalejo (popular crane area). Ruedas and Guadiana Rivers.

Cultural heritage: Logrosán, Church of San Mateo (16th century), Chapel of la Virgen del Consuelo, Rollo, Alcomocal Park. Tesoro de Berzocana (Roman and pre-Roman ruins).

MADRID REGION

Vía Verde del Tren de los 40 días

13 km / 8 mi between Carabaña and Estremera.

Natural environment: Countryside.

Cultural heritage: Church of Estremera. Tajuña windmills.

Vía Verde del Tajuña

49 km / 30 mi between Arganda del Rey and Ambite (Madrid).

Natural environment: Windmills and gardens. Tajuña Valley.

Cultural heritage: Town churches. Perales Castle remains. Caveman remains. Ambite Palace.





ARTICHOKES

A Tender Heart in a Tough Exterior

“The artichoke with a tender heart dressed up like a warrior...”. So begins *Ode to the Artichoke* by Nobel Prize in Literature winner Pablo Neruda. The simile is an apt one—it is indeed an “armored” vegetable, with tough, scale-like outer leaves providing protection for its tender core. We know from contemporary accounts that the ancient Greeks and Romans enjoyed the delicious, silky juiciness of artichoke hearts. Artichokes were introduced as a crop on the Iberian Peninsula by the occupying Arabs, and were eaten at aristocratic tables throughout Europe during the Renaissance. Perhaps prestige attaches to artichokes because they combine gastronomic and diuretic properties. They occur, in countless varieties, all over the world. Spain’s most widely-grown variety is Blanca de Tudela: its distinctive qualities give it enormous gastronomic potential, which has yet to be fully explored. Artichokes are grown all over the country, but Benicarló (Castellón, eastern Spain) and Tudela (Navarre, in the north) are the growing areas with the longest tradition; their artichokes come with quality guarantees in the form of Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographic Indication (PGI), respectively.



Text
Andrés Ramírez/©ICEX

Photos
CRDOP Alcachofa de Benicarló
CRIGP Alcachofa de Tudela

Translation
Hawys Pritchard/©ICEX



The artichoke (*Cynara scolymus*) is rightly described as a vegetable, although it is actually a flower. Artichoke “heads” are the flower buds of the artichoke plant, a distant relative of the common thistle, from which it has evolved under human guidance in the course of centuries of cultivation. It would have been grown as a crop when farming was in its infancy. Its origin is uncertain, though it might have come from Egypt or northern Africa, definitely from somewhere within the Mediterranean Basin. The plant was known to the Greeks and Romans as *Cynara* and highly regarded because of the diuretic and medicinal properties attributed to it. Its introduction into the Iberian Peninsula is not well documented, and various different versions have been postulated. One school of thought believes it to have been introduced as a crop into northern Europe by the Visigoths, though it is more generally accepted that the Arabs were responsible for planting it systematically. Be that as it may, artichoke eating is known to have been all the rage during the Renaissance, the trend possibly having been set by the Queen of France, Catherine de Medici (1519–1589), whose belief that they

were an aphrodisiac made them a favorite in the French court. Hundreds of artichoke varieties have emerged down the centuries, almost always linked to a particular region and with very diverse characteristics as regards appearance, texture and flavor. Prominent among the most widely-eaten varieties are: Macau, or Camus de Bretagne, which has very big, rounded heads; Violet de Provence, whose heads are conical and purple; and Spinoso Sardo from Italy, which has thorny bracts. The most widespread variety in Spain is Blanca de Tudela, which accounts for 95% of production. This green artichoke is smaller than its French and Italian cousins; flat-bottomed and compact, it has an idiosyncratic indentation in its top. This is also a crisper artichoke, with fleshier, tenderer bracts than other varieties.

With an annual production figure of 300,000 tons, Spain is the second biggest producer of artichokes in the world, after Italy, and the world’s leading artichoke exporter. The crop is grown all over Spain: a third in Murcia (in the southeast), another third in the Levante area (on the east coast) and the rest shared between Andalusia (south) and the Ribera del Ebro area

(Navarre, La Rioja and Aragón, in the north). Although Tudela (Navarre) and Benicarló (Castellón) are minority contributors to Spain’s artichoke production, they have been growing them for longer than anywhere else. The provenance and quality of their artichokes are guaranteed by Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Alcachofa de Benicarló and Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) Alcachofa de Tudela.

Tudela, capital of La Ribera

The part of Navarre (northern Spain) known as La Ribera is one of Spain’s most renowned vegetable producing areas. The landscape here is one of open plains through which the Ebro River and its tributaries, the Mediavilla and the Queiles, wind. From their banks stretch vast areas of irrigated land that enjoy a Mediterranean climate with continental influences: high summer temperatures and low winter ones, albeit without major frosts. In recent years, the surrounding hillsides have acquired numerous wind turbines to capitalize on the *cierzo*, the cold dry north wind that is a local feature and blows frequently across the plains. Despite lowish temperatures,



the area has little rain and enjoys many sunny days each year. The well-tended fields indicate immediately that this is a farming area. Long rows of black plastic protect Navarre's famous asparagus as it grows, while neighboring fields are ready to welcome other equally prestigious crops such as *pimientos del piquillo* (little pointed red peppers) and *cogollos de Tudela* (lettuce hearts). Tudela, the capital of La Ribera, also lends its name to Spain's most widely-grown variety of artichoke: Blanca de Tudela.

The name is significant. Although artichoke production is not especially high in Navarre (barely 1,000 tons a year), almost all the artichokes produced in Spain come from plants grown in this region: it supplies many producers with artichoke cuttings or scions, thereby guaranteeing the continuation of this species. The method used for reproducing artichokes is rather surprising: although certain varieties are reproduced from seed (those grown in the US and Latin America, for example), by and large the prevalent method is to plant cuttings. When the plants are uprooted at the end of the season in early July, the grower retains part of the stalk. What looks like a

dried-out stick measuring 10 to 15 cm (4 to 6 in) long will be planted again in mid-August and provide the basis of a new crop. This method guarantees abundance and quality of harvest and also helps avoid many diseases. Additionally, and especially in the

southern areas, most farmers practice rotational cultivation, alternating artichokes with other vegetables to avoid exhausting the land. Juan Ignacio Macua is an agricultural engineer who studied the adaptation of 36 different varieties of artichoke for

T H E M E D I C I N A L P R O P E R T I E S O F A R T I C H O K E S



The artichoke's appeal is more than just gastronomic; it possesses medicinal properties that have been known since antiquity. Roman doctors prescribed drinking the cooking juices from artichokes as a treatment for gout and other ailments.

Recent research has shown that cinarine, a substance present in artichokes, has choleric properties: this means that it stimulates liver cells to increase the output of bile—in other words it acts as a natural liver medicine, helping in the digestion of food and preventing digestive upsets such as acid stomach and a feeling of being too full. Increased bile production also helps bring

down cholesterol levels by facilitating its expulsion from the body and reducing the amount of cholesterol that the liver produces. By the same token, artichokes also help protect against hepatic diseases such as liver failure.

They are also packed with diuretic components that eliminate liquids from the body. Their rich acid and mineral content, in combination with cinarine, increases diuresis (the quantity of urine eliminated). This effect is not only highly beneficial in cases of water retention, but it also makes artichokes a popular ingredient in weight-loss diets. Because they are high in fiber, they contribute to a feeling of satiety, thereby making it easier to avoid other, more calorific foods—another benefit for people aiming to slim down.

his doctoral thesis. These days, from his office at Navarre's Instituto Técnico de Gestión Agrícola (Technical Institute for Farm Management, better known as ITG), he does research into growing artichokes and other vegetables and provides a consultancy service to growers.

"Artichoke plants have a tendency to degenerate, which is caused by natural mutations; this is why plant selection is such an important job," he explains. In fact, although Tudela's relatively small artichoke production is

attributable in part to the low temperatures that render the plant unproductive during the winter months, the cold is precisely what ensures greater stability within the plant's genetic material. "In Murcia and Levante, where the biggest plantations are, the heat accentuates degeneration and they suffer big losses as a result." That is why the majority of farmers from the south and southeast visit Tudela on a regular basis to renew their planting stock. "We carry out a very rigorous selection

each year and eliminate atypical plants. That way we can guarantee that cuttings obtained from Tudela are top quality."

A traditional crop

When I visit Benicarló in late April, the harvest is already in its final throes. On the outskirts of town, artichoke fields are interspersed among lettuce and other vegetable fields and, inevitably (for this is the Levante), countless orange trees, the scent of whose

CANNING AND BOTTLING: ARTICHOKE ALL YEAR ROUND

Like most vegetables, artichokes are seasonal, available as a fresh product for only a few months of the year. Reaching for a can or jar is an easy and affordable option, though you should first check that you are buying a quality product that accords artichokes the respect they deserve. Canned and bottled artichokes bearing the PGI Alcachofa de Tudela stamp are guaranteed to be comparable in flavor to the fresh equivalent.

The process for canning and bottling artichokes is basically still very artisan, even though machinery is now involved in different phases. The only processing that artichokes undergo before being canned or bottled is scalding. The heads are submerged in boiling water for about 20 minutes: "Just what you would do when cooking artichokes at home," points out Lourdes García, head of quality control at Conservas Anko, the biggest producer of canned and bottled artichokes within the PGI. After scalding, the inedible outer leaves are cut away, leaving only the artichoke hearts. The

final phase of the process is completely manual: the hearts are examined one by one and any hard or damaged parts are removed with a knife. They are also placed in the cans by hand.

The main difference between ordinary canned and bottled artichokes and those covered by PGI Alcachofa de Tudela is in the liquid, generally brine, with which the container is filled. In a run-of-the-mill product, this will contain citric acid: this helps preserve artichokes but also changes both their flavor and color substantially, turning them acidic and yellow, unlike the natural product. The regulatory council prohibits the use of citric acid in canned and bottled products covered by the PGI, thereby guaranteeing that the flavor of its own product is as close as possible to that of a recently cooked one. "How long they keep is a trickier issue, but is managed by strictly controlling the temperature and duration of sterilization," she explains.

"Our production approach is more labor-

intensive and more expensive, but it's the only way of guaranteeing a natural product, made by a traditional method, that provides flavor and texture identical to those of a fresh artichoke," contributes Anko's manager, Javier Prat.





blossom hangs deliciously in the spring air.

Juan José Melet is a farmer and the president of the Regulatory Council of PDO Alcachofa de Benicarló. In his opinion, what differentiates an artichoke from his part of the country from the rest is primarily "...its tightly packed leaves. Being more compact, it retains its qualities for a longer period after being cut. And besides, it's much tenderer."

Artichoke growing calls for a balance between cold and heat. Frost does damage, reducing the quality of the artichoke and darkening its leaves. Benicarló benefits from its proximity to the Mediterranean, whose effect protects its crops from major temperature swings and provides moderate winters—just the conditions an artichoke needs to grow firm, round

and compact. "Artichokes can be grown within the strip between the sea and 4 to 5 km (2.5 to 3 mi) inland. Further inland than that, it gets too cold and the product gets spoiled by frost. It's a fine line—it needs to be as cold as possible without actually freezing. The climate is very important." Too much heat makes the artichokes open too quickly and become hairy inside. For that reason, the best time to eat them is from November to April when low temperatures give a compact, crisp product that is full of flavor. These dates will, of course, vary according to region: the further south you go, the earlier the harvest. In Tudela, where springtime is cool, the season lasts well into May.

It's late April now and the season is all but over. "Most of what we harvest

from May onwards is canned or bottled," José Senar Caldés informs me. José has been an artichoke grower all his adult life; although the family farm, Senar-Caldés, is now run by his four daughters and two sons, he still keeps a close paternal eye on things. Artichokes are planted during the summer months: "Around the 15th of July," he specifies, with an authority born of many years of experience. The first few months are the trickiest time when growing artichokes: "You have to make sure that the plant takes, watch the watering and be on the lookout for blight. A good harvest later on depends on it."

The first artichokes can be cut from the middle of September onwards. In Benicarló, peak production occurs in the winter months, January and February. At that time, day laborers



work their way around the fields, at the ready to cut the artichokes when they reach just the right point of maturity. The plant's irregular shape means that harvesting has to be done by hand. The artichoke heads are cut off one by one; they will be selected and sorted later. Only those that qualify as *extra* or *primera*—the biggest, most compact and best quality ones—will be canned or bottled under the PDO label. The remainder may go to the canning industry, which absorbs about 70% of Spain's artichoke production. Tudela's Regulatory Council allows canning and bottling producers access to Protected Geographic Indication coverage, thereby guaranteeing that their product is natural and still has all its

attributes intact (Canning and bottling: artichokes all year round, page 90).

A foodie's delight

Over the centuries, artichokes have earned themselves a prominent position in the Mediterranean diet with their healthy, varied and balanced approach to eating. Their delicate flavor and texture have inspired countless recipes, ranging from traditional dishes to which they contribute a touch of luxury right up to ultra-modern inventions.

In Navarre, artichokes are an essential ingredient in *menestra de verduras*, a medley of poached local vegetables that is a regional classic. In Levante, the simplest and most traditional way

of eating artichokes is a dish called *torrá*: the artichoke is squashed flat, seasoned with a slosh of oil and a little salt, then simply cooked on a grill over the fire. "They're delicious prepared this way," declares Manuel Rico, proprietor of the restaurant El Cortijo in Benicarló. He knows empirically that artichokes have enjoyed an upsurge in popularity over the last few years. "Whereas we used to use about 100 kg (220 lb) of artichokes a year in the restaurant, we now get through 4,000 to 5,000 kg (8,800 to 11,000 lb)!" Artichokes are now trendy, a phenomenon for which the delicious rice dish with baby cuttlefish and artichokes that he serves me for lunch may well be partly responsible.

Artichokes are a versatile vegetable: they can be eaten raw in salads, to which they contribute fresh crunchiness and a slightly bitter edge or, at the other end of the scale, dipped in batter and fried—a local delicacy. Ricardo Gil, who runs the restaurant Treintatrés in Tudela, finds this adaptability appealing. "That tender texture is quite magic; you can do whatever you like with it, you can cook it in so many ways," he explains. Ricardo attributes the quality of their Blanca de Tudela variety to its having grown slowly in the cold of winter. "Because they remain on the plant for a long time, the heads gradually take up nutrients from the soil and this makes them very juicy and flavorful." Another plus is that the leaves of Blanca de Tudela artichokes spring from the heart itself rather than from the flower stalk as in other varieties. "As a result, the heart is bigger and more compact so that it has much greater culinary potential than other varieties whose hearts falls apart when you cut into them."

Artichoke hearts provided Iñaki

Rodaballo with the basis for his invention "Alcachofa gold", one of the star *pinchos* (tapas-on-a-stick) at Café Niza in Pamplona. The management of this historic café aims to turn it into an unmissable gastronomic destination in Navarre's capital, using the seductive strategy of serving a wide and beautifully-prepared repertoire of dishes, *pinchos* and tapas—or "miniature cuisine" as Iñaki calls it. Alcachofa gold, the delicious tapa that won him a prize during Navarre's *Semana del Pincho* (Pincho Week), consists of a fried artichoke, a bit of foie gras and little else. "By frying a cut-in-half artichoke at 180°C (356°F), you get different degrees of crunch within the same mouthful; the outer leaves are harder and crunchier whereas the interior has poached slightly and become quite sticky," he explains. He sprinkled the prizewinning end product with gold dust which, while not affecting the overall flavor, lent aesthetic tone, much like gilding a rose. "A little foie gras rounds out the tapa and provides



a finishing touch. Having said that, it could just be an extra served on the side as far as I'm concerned; the artichoke is delicious on its own and doesn't need anything to set it off," declares this young chef. "The flavor is so intense and the texture so juicy. You can do so much with an artichoke."

Andrés Ramírez Soto is a journalist. He has worked for the France Presse Agency and in the Economic and Commercial Office of the Spanish Embassy in Rabat. He has completed a journalism internship at Spain Gourmetour.

WEBSITES

PGI Alcachofa de Tudela

www.denominacionesnavarra.com/es/denominaciones-navarra/alcachofa-tudela

This is the website of ICAN (Navarre Institute of Agri-Food Quality). It provides comprehensive information relating to the PGI Alcachofa de Tudela Regulatory Council: the growing area within its ambit, a botanical description of the artichoke, how it is grown, its nutritional properties, and suggestions about how to eat it. It also contains a list of companies (producers of both fresh and canned and bottled artichokes) affiliated with PGI Alcachofa de Tudela, plus business news and recipes.

PDO Alcachofa de Benicarló

www.alcachofabenicarlo.com

The website of the PDO Alcachofa de Benicarló Regulatory Council traces the history of artichoke growing in this area, and provides information about how artichokes are farmed today, their nutritional properties, artichoke-inspired gastronomy and a list of producing companies. It is also a good source of information about the artichoke festival held each January.

Flavors, Aromas and Textures Galore

Spanish writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1888–1963), inventor of the *greguería* (surrealist aphorism), declared that “Cheese is milk made immortal”. Like all successful metaphors, this condenses a quintessential truth into very few words. The original purpose of making cheese was to prolong the useful life of milk; it was when cheesemakers learned to harness the nutritional, dietary and gastronomic qualities acquired as it matures that it took on prestige.



CHEESES

The Hard Stuff





TEXT

ISMAEL DÍAZ YUBERO/©ICEX

PHOTOS

FERNANDO MADARIAGA/©ICEX

TRANSLATION

HAWYS PRITCHARD/©ICEX

Although no one knows how or where cheese originated, the earliest known references to it describe its solid parts as an accumulation of nutrients. References dating from biblical times speak of “slices of milk” and indicate how useful a property “sliceability” was once milk had solidified sufficiently.

In nearly all the Latin-based languages, the word for cheese derives from the Latin *caseus* (hence “casein”), itself a composite of the two Latin words *carere suerum* (“without whey”). There are, however, important exceptions to this rule. The terms used in French (*fromage*), Italian (*formaggio*) and Catalan (*formatge*) are derived from the Greek word for the receptacle, or “form”, in which curds were molded to give the end product its shape—the method still used in cheesemaking all over the world today.

With a few notable exceptions, the cheesemaking process seeks to create a firm, relatively solid product. This is achieved during the ripening, or maturation process, when water is lost and nutrients become concentrated and undergo changes. Sugar content decreases as sugars are consumed by

microorganisms which will enable proteins to shorten their chains, fats change their structure, and new components emerge as a result of physical, chemical and biological processes that will change and improve flavors and aromas owing to the presence of new chemical products (various esters, ethers, aldehydes, ketones, and so on). Furthermore, the cheese’s nutritional value increases insofar as it becomes more digestible, and microbiological synthesis of certain vitamins occurs. Its texture also changes, generally becoming firmer, though some cheeses become less dense after a certain stage of ripening, turning more fluid as the casein chains break. The vast majority of the Spanish cheeses available in the marketplace are hard cheeses. This overall term encompasses many different consistencies and Spain’s range is quite varied, made even more so by the fact that some cheeses are marketed at different stages of maturity and, consequently, almost infinitely varying degrees of firmness.

This article focuses on cheeses of this type, particularly hard cheeses that are covered by Protected Designation of

Origin (PDO) status, but not forgetting others without that guarantee whose quality makes them worth seeking out (Plenty more, page 106).

Nodicia de Kesos

The copious evidence that has come down to us, from the most ancient cultures, about how different types of cheeses were made and eaten attests to the fact that cheese has been an important product throughout human history. Roman philosopher, writer and naturalist Pliny the Elder (AD 23–AD 79) dedicates a chapter of his book *Natural History* to describing and evaluating the cheeses of his time. He notes the different characteristics of highland and lowland cheeses, makes a clear distinction between Apennine cheeses and Alpine ones, speaks highly of those from Bitinia (modern Turkey), and expresses a personal preference for French cheeses from Nimes, albeit regretting volubly that they are made in such a way that they lack firmness and texture and need to be kept cool. Spain’s first known written example in the Romance language (the precursor of Castilian) occurs among the *Glosas Emilianenses*—annotations in Latin,



Romance and Basque handwritten in the margins of the late 10th and early 11th-century Latin codex known as *Aemilianensis 60*. The next example in chronological terms was believed to be a text composed in 1236 in the monastery San Millán de la Cogolla (La Rioja, northern Spain) by Gonzalo de Berceo (the first known poet writing in Castilian) on the subject of the benefits of a glass of wine. Now, however, this has been ousted from its position by the recent discovery of a document known as *Nodicia de Kesos* (List of Cheeses) dating from around 974. This records a married couple's donation of a villa to the Monastery of San Justo y Pastor in Ardón (León); written on the reverse of the document in Visigothic

script, which is similar to Greek, all in lower case and in the same handwriting and the same color ink, is a list of cheeses given in payment for work carried out in the monastery. We have cause to be grateful to whoever was responsible for preserving this document: it constitutes indisputable evidence that cheeses served as currency, from which we can deduce they were not perishable but long-lasting—in other words, hard cheeses. What those cheeses were like is another matter: some of today's are almost certainly their descendants, while others have been lost, as is the case of the colostrum ("first milk") cheese, traditional to Armada, and which

continued to be made there until the 1950s when that part of León was flooded to build a reservoir. It is interesting to observe that our most traditional foods, foods that have remained part of our diet throughout history, are still made in much the same way as they always have been. Machinery may have progressed, but in-depth understanding of the fermentation process is the implement that permits the characteristics of the end product to be fine-tuned by manipulating temperature, timing and shape. The principles are identical and the raw materials the same: this applies to bread, wine, salted meats, cheese and other foods, all of which exemplify our apparent need to keep certain ancestral elements in our diet, to eat what our forebears ate.

Depending on their degree of maturity, some cheeses can be classified as either hard or soft: well-known examples include Arzúa-Ulloa and Tetilla from Galicia, and L'Alt Urgell and La Cadenya from Catalonia. These will feature in a later article along with other soft cheeses categorized as such either because they are not matured or



MANCHEGO CHEESE

La Mancha

Manchega sheeps' milk

Cylindrical. Bears the imprint of the braided esparto band on the sides and the mark of the mold on the top and bottom.

Approximate size: 3 kg (6.6 lb)

Organoleptic properties: multifaceted flavor, pungent aroma and granular texture that turns smooth in the mouth.



because proteolysis has taken place during the ripening process and broken the casein chains (as in Torta del Casar, La Serena and Montes de Toledo goats' cheese). Yet another group consists of cheeses that undergo induced secondary fermentation (among them are Tupí from Catalonia and Gaztazarra from the Basque Country).

Sheeps' milk: the taste of tradition

After the United Kingdom, Spain's ovine flock is the second biggest in the European Union and encompasses diverse milk-giving breeds, some of which are primarily reared for their milk while others are kept for both

milk and meat. Spain's sheep breeds are not particularly productive in quantitative terms, their yield being considerably lower than that of Germany's Milchshaf and Israel's Awasi. However, this is compensated for by the fact that, because of its higher protein and fat content, their milk is highly suitable for cheesemaking. Most of this rich raw material is obtained from Lacha, Rasa Aragonesa, Castellana, Churra and Manchega sheep. Certain other breeds are occasional milk-givers, for just a few days immediately after giving birth; among these is the Merina, whose small quantities of milk represent a rich contribution to cheese. Most of Spain's cheeses—the best-known ones, the hard cheeses—are made from pure sheeps' milk and have a typically pronounced flavor which emerges in the course of sufficiently long maturation.



RONCAL CHEESE

Roncal Valley, Navarre

Lacha and Rasa sheeps' milk

Cylindrical. Smooth brown rind and ivory white interior.

Size: medium

Organoleptic properties: buttery cheese with a pronounced flavor, sparsely salted, with a hint of piquancy.



IDIAZÁBAL CHEESE

Valleys of the Basque Country

Sheeps' milk

Cylindrical. Small cheese, ivory white in color.

Approximate size: 1 kg (2.2 lb)

Organoleptic properties: rich, delicious flavor, suggestive of walnuts or hazelnuts, elegant aromas, smooth and compact textures.

Manchego

Manchego is the best-known, most widely imitated and most traditional of Spain's cheeses. As required by the PDO's regulations, it is made exclusively of milk obtained from Manchega sheep and only in La Mancha. Because its behavior during



maturation is understood well and the cultures needed to effect fermentation are available, Manchego can also be made from pasteurized milk. However, the best cheeses of this type are those made with raw milk on which native microbiological flora—untamed and therefore uncultivated—act directly, creating a gamut of aromas and flavors that are vital to the end product. Manchego cheeses can be matured for periods of varying duration with the result that they come in a wide range of presentations ranging from semi-mature (perfect for salads, aperitifs, and snacks) to mature and extra-mature. These last types, with their multifaceted flavor, pungent aroma and granular texture that turns smooth in the mouth as it begins to dissolve, enjoy well-deserved prestige.

More mature cheeses should be savored alone, accompanied by nothing more than a slice of white, preferably rustic bread and a glass of local wine with plenty of body, alcohol and kick. They are versatile in that they can be eaten straight at any time of day and used in cooking for enriching the flavor of sauces, for example, or in au gratin dishes, particularly pasta. Every Manchego cheese, cylindrical in shape and weighing around 3 kg (6.6 lb), bears on its flanks the imprint of the braided esparto band used in the pressing process and the marks of the flower or the molds on its top and bottom. The more modern industrial cheesemakers use plastic molds instead of this ancestral equipment, though it is still in use in the small

artisan cheese factories of Castile-La Mancha (central Spain).

Roncal

Roncal was the first cheese to be granted PDO status. It is made in the seven municipalities of the Roncal Valley in northern Navarre, on the border with France. Roncal is made with milk obtained from Lacha sheep (a breed that has adapted well to an environment with high rainfall and abundant vegetation) and Rasa sheep (a highly adaptable rustic breed that copes well with all kinds of weather conditions and can take full advantage of the sparse grazing available in the semi-desertic natural conditions of Navarre's Bardenas Reales (northern Spain) during transhumance).

Roncal cheeses are cylindrical, medium-sized and have a smooth brown rind and ivory white interior. In organoleptic terms, this is a buttery cheese with a pronounced flavor, sparsely salted but with an intriguing hint of piquancy that contributes to its personality. It is usually released onto the market after long maturation, though semi-mature Roncal cheeses are also available. With good reason, this cheese is generally eaten to round



ZAMORANO CHEESE

Cereal-growing plains of Zamora
Churra and Castellana sheeps' milk
Cylindrical.

Approximate size: 1 - 3 kg (2.2 - 6.6 lb)

Organoleptic properties: very aromatic cheese with an elegant, long-lasting flavor, buttery yet firm, compact in texture.



off a meal, but it can also be used very successfully in cooking.

Idiazábal

The Basque Country (northern Spain) is a region of many valleys—Urbia, Urbasa, Aralar, San Donato and so on—all of which traditionally used to produce artisan cheeses. These were primarily sold on feast days at the church door—at the Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Aranzazu (Oñate), for example—and at specific markets, such as the one in Ordizia. Every shepherd, generally also a cheesemaker on the side, made cheese in his own idiosyncratic way and sold it to a specific and regular clientele. In 1969, when Spain's Ministry of Agriculture issued the first *Catálogo de Quesos* (Catalogue of Cheeses), the name Idiazábal was chosen to cover this fragmentary group. It was a successful choice and some years later PDO status was attached to the name: the unification of production methods resulted in a cheese whose fine, uniform quality has gone on to earn itself gourmet status. Weighing around 1 kg (2.2 lb) each, Idiazábal cheeses are relatively small; they are sometimes smoked and

sometimes not, and the color of the rind varies accordingly. The interior is compact with occasional eyes or none at all, and bright, or less bright, ivory white in color. The rich, delicious flavor can be suggestive of walnuts or hazelnuts, the aromas are elegant and the texture smooth and compact. Idiazábal is a feature of an *amarretako* (a hearty Basque breakfast) and is also eaten as a dessert or a snack.

Zamorano

For many years, virtually the whole of sheep-rearing Spain used to produce a type of cheese that resembled Manchego in its presentation, production method and characteristics. The climate and vegetation of the cereal-growing plain

of Zamora (northwestern Spain) are conducive to the presence of specific microorganisms that are directly influential on the maturation process; in combination with traditional methods, enhanced by the use of cutting-edge technology, they account for the fact that Zamorano cheese has found itself a market niche, is increasingly in demand, and possesses interesting distinguishing characteristics that have earned it PDO status.

Zamorano cheese can be made with pasteurized or raw milk obtained from Churra or Castellana sheep, and is matured for relatively long periods of four to six months. The cheeses are cylindrical in shape and weigh between 1 and 3 kg (2.2 and 6.6 lb), though when intended for a long



QUESUCOS DE LIÉBANA

Western Cantabria

Friesian cows' milk, sometimes Tudanca cows' milk and very occasionally sheeps' or goats' milk.

Cylindrical.

Size: varies, but always less than 1/2 kg (1.1 lb)

Organoleptic properties: small and of varying maturities, buttery and deeply aromatic.



maturation they are made extra large. Zamorano is a very aromatic cheese with an elegant, long-lasting flavor, and is buttery yet firm and compact in texture. It is a multipurpose cheese which can boast the distinction of never disappointing, whether eaten just as it is or as an ingredient in various dishes.

Cows' milk: source of smoothness

Hard cheeses made from cows' milk are produced predominantly in northern, "green" Spain—namely Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria and northern Castile-Leon. However, they are also made in the Aragonese and Catalan Pyrenees and in Menorca (Balearic Islands).

Cattle-rearing has always gone on all over Spain. All breeds would have fulfilled the triple functions of providing work, meat and milk, though there were major variations in the priority given to each of these. Nowadays, working animals are no more than relics of the past while milk production has been given over almost entirely to foreign breeds, particularly Friesian. Consequently, native breeds—both thoroughbreds and crossbreds—have been raised almost entirely for their meat.

Mahón-Menorca

Mahón-Menorca was the first cows' milk cheese to be awarded PDO status. Evidence suggests that it was already being produced at the time when

MIXED MILK CHEESES

As a general rule, cheeses made of a mixture of the milks of different species do not tend to be particularly prestigious, yet some hard cheeses of this type are excellent. Just as many great wines are the product of the combined qualities of different grape varieties, mixed milks can give richly aromatic and flavorful cheeses. One example is the Canary Islands' *Flor de Guía*, or *Guía*, one of the most interesting cheeses in the world, for which cardoon flower is used as a setting agent. *Herreño* cheese, which takes its name from the Canary Island of Hierro where it is made, has an astonishingly fine flavor—lactic, pronounced and with a touch of sweetness. Other noteworthy examples include *Peñamellera* from Asturias, *Calahorra*, made in the area around Guadix (Granada) from sheeps' and goats' milk, *Quesucos de Guriezo* from Cantabria, and *Mallorca*, a mixed sheeps' and cows' milk cheese from the Balearic Island of the same name.

Sheeps' milk features in many mixed milk cheeses, including famous ones such as Cabrales, *Picón-Bejes-Tresviso* and *Gamonedo/Gamoneu* (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73); interestingly, the best cheeses from these PDOs are those in which sheeps' milk is used.



MAHÓN-MENORCA CHEESE

Menorca

Menorca cows' milk

Square blocks with rounded edges, with a dark rind that sometimes bears the imprint of the cloth in which they are wrapped for pressing.

Organoleptic properties: close-textured with very few eyes or none at all, flavor and aroma vary in intensity depending on its degree of maturity.



Menorca was an Arab-occupied territory (around 903) and that, many years later, it was a favored product with which to pay taxes. It is also known that Italians bringing goods to trade on the Balearic Islands exchanged them for local products, among which were Mahón cheeses.

During the period when the island was under British rule (1798–1802), bulls were introduced from northern Europe and interbred with the native breed, giving rise to the present-day Menorquina breed. Mahón-Menorca cheeses are shaped like square blocks with rounded edges



and have a dark rind that sometimes bears the imprint of the cloth in which they are wrapped for pressing. The interior is close-textured with very few eyes or none at all; its unfailingly pleasant flavor and aroma vary in intensity depending on its degree of maturity, which can range from fresh, known as *mitja salera* (half salt), to extra mature, the latter being characterized by very pronounced sensory properties.



NATA DE CANTABRIA CHEESE

Cantabria

Friesian cows' milk

Shaped like a flattened cylinder. The rind is smooth and bright yellow and the interior is almost white or pale yellow.

Size: 1 - 3 kg (1.1 - 6.6 lb)

Organoleptic properties: elastic, pungently aromatic, it has a buttery flavor with an engaging hint of sweetness.

Quesucos de Liébana

The foothills of the Picos de Europa in the westernmost part of Cantabria are the source of Quesucos de Liébana—little cylindrical cheeses of varying weights, though as a rule not exceeding 1/2 kg (1.1 lb), made from the milk of Friesian and sometimes Tudanca cows and, very occasionally, sheeps' or goats' milk. Firm, very buttery and deeply aromatic cheeses, they are sold at various stages of maturity ranging from fresh to extra-mature, this latter type sometimes being smoked. Some are produced all year round and others seasonally; consequently, and because every



SAN SIMÓN DA COSTA

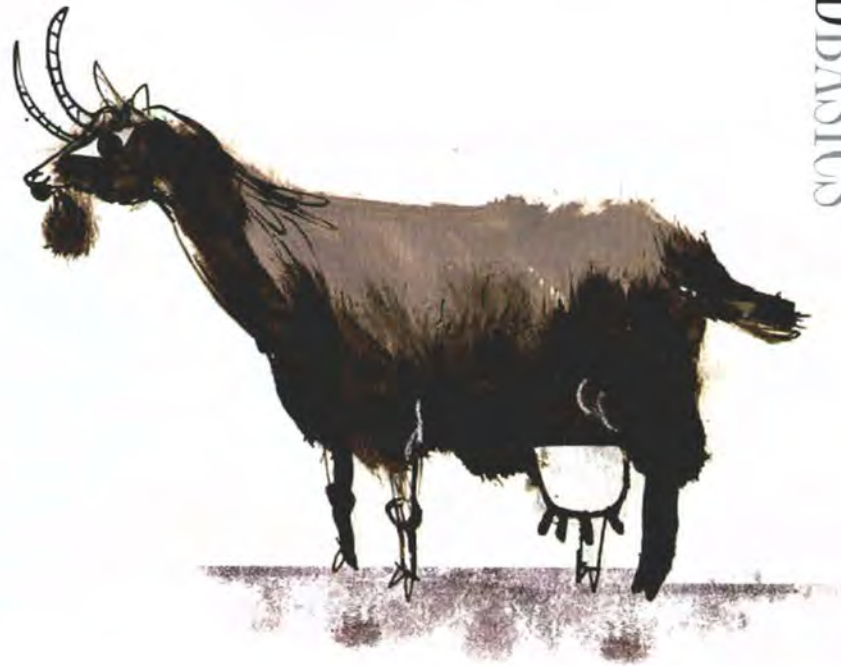
Terra Cha district (Lugo)

Friesian, Alpine Brown or Rubia Gallega cows' milk

Spinning top or mortar bomb. Smoked with birch wood. Yellow-reddish in color.

Size: up to 1 1/2 kg (3.3 lb)

Organoleptic properties: buttery with a slight zing of piquancy.



cheesemaker has his own individual approach, they present a fascinatingly varied range of characteristics, comparisons among which reveal enough different aromas, flavors and textures to stock a varied cheese board. As a general rule, these *quesucos* are known by the name of their place of provenance (Áliva, Lebeña, Potes, Brez, etc.).

Nata de Cantabria

Nata de Cantabria cheese has always been widely made within its area of provenance and still is today. Popularly known as *pasiego prensado*, its original *raison d'être* was to make use of surplus milk, though it was later to become a delicacy. Written references to how it was made have come down to us from the 17th century, by which time its sphere of trade already extended beyond Cantabria's regional boundaries: it was sold throughout Castile, La Rioja and the Basque Country, and was known to be a favorite at the Royal Household. Nata de Cantabria cheese is made from Friesian cows' milk; shaped like a flattened cylinder, it comes in varying weights of between 1 and 3 kg (2.2 and 6.6 lb). The rind is smooth and

bright yellow, the interior is almost white or pale yellow, and is elastic in consistency. Pungently aromatic, it has a buttery flavor with an engaging hint of sweetness.

San Simón da Costa

Although San Simón da Costa cheese is made throughout the Terra Cha district of Lugo (northwestern Spain), it takes its name from the little parish of San Simón de la Cuesta where it is reputed to have been made originally by the Celts. This cheese can be made with milk obtained from Friesian or Alpine Brown cows but is at its supreme best when made with that of the Rubia Gallega. Shaped like a

spinning top (or mortar bomb), it undergoes careful smoking over birch wood which turns it a reddish-yellow color. The required maturation period for smaller cheeses is at least 30 days, increasing to 45 days for larger ones, which can weigh up to 1 1/2 kg (3.3 lb). The discernibly smoky flavor is deliciously buttery with a slight zing of piquancy. This is an excellent dessert cheese but is also a benign presence in salads and sauces.

Goats' milk: depth of flavor

Although goats' milk is used in conjunction with cows' or sheeps' milk for certain cheeses (blue cheeses are a fine example), goat rearing is



IBORES CHEESE

Ibores and Las Valluercas districts (Cáceres)
Verata and Retinta goats' milk

Cylindrical

Approximate size: 1/2 kg (1.1 lb)

Organoleptic properties: interior is smooth and buttery with pronounced goats' milk aroma and flavor.



concentrated in Spain's drier regions. These parts of the country produce cheeses for whose depth of flavor and aroma there is a growing market. The Canary Islands, Extremadura, Andalusia and Murcia are the autonomous communities in Spain with the largest goat flocks, and they make—and consume enthusiastically—the most traditional goats' cheeses.

Ibores

Ibores cheese is made in the Ibores and Las Vallueras districts of the Cáceres province (western Spain) with milk obtained from Verata and Retinta goats. These cylindrical cheeses, quite small at around 1/2 kg (1.1 lb), come in several presentations, the rind being

rubbed with *pimentón* (Spanish paprika), oiled, or left natural. The interior is smooth and buttery with a pronounced goats' milk aroma and flavor.

Murcia and Murcia de Vino

Murcia's goat population is notable for the quantity and quality of its milk yield, and the cheeses traditional to this province, with their intense flavor, characteristic aroma and smooth texture, have many devotees. Murcia cheeses are cylindrical in shape with a white rind and weigh about 1 kg (2.2 lb), though there is an increasing trend towards making them smaller. This same region also produces another matured cheese: kid-

derived rennet macerated in wine is used to coagulate the milk, and individual cheeses are qualitatively fine-tuned by repeatedly salting them and moistening them with wine. For obvious reasons, this type is known as Queso de Murcia al Vino. Nowadays, both Murcia and Murcia al Vino are desirable components of any great cheese board.

Majorero

Majorero is a splendid cheese made in Fuerteventura (Canary Islands) with milk obtained from indigenous Majorero goats, to which up to 15% of sheep's milk can be added (this technique works well for cheeses intended for long maturation). These cheeses are cylindrical in shape, flattish at about 8 cm (3.1 in) high, and can be up to 35 cm (14 in) in diameter, though this may vary. They weigh between 1 and 5 kg (2.2 and 11 lb) and their rind, which bears the imprint of the braided palm band used to form them, is either ochre in color or, if it has been rubbed with *pimentón*, reddish. The flavor is very pleasant, smooth and elegant, the aroma strong but never aggressively so, and the texture compact.



MURCIA and MURCIA AL VINO CHEESE

Murcia
Murcia goats' milk
Cylindrical. Macerated in wine.
Approximate size: 1/2 kg (1.1 lb)
Organoleptic properties: intense flavor and smooth texture.



Palmero

Palmero cheese, made on the Canary Island of La Palma, is usually marketed as a semi-mature cheese, although it is sometimes eaten fresh and other times matured for long periods. It is made with milk obtained from Palmero goats: today's improved, very sub-divided,

strain of this originally pre-Hispanic Berber breed is perfectly adapted to its environment. The diversity and quality of the available grazing are reflected in its exceptionally rich milk. Cheese production is almost entirely artisan and subject to rigorous quality control. These are big, cylindrical cheeses weighing up to 7 kg (15 1/2 lb) and are

generally smoked. There is a tantalizing smoky tang to Palmero's very pronounced flavor, while the aroma is very clean and the texture excellent. The fresh, unsmoked version of this cheese is used for making *almogrote* (a cheese, pepper, tomato and garlic spread eaten with bread) and *mojos* (red or green pepper and vinegar sauces), both integral features of Canary Island cuisine.

The diversity of different milk types, coagulation and maturation methods and environmental conditions that go into the cheeses of Spain create a vast choice, all offering the subtleties of aroma, flavor and texture of a product that has moved on from its functional beginnings and evolved into a gastronomic treasure.

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MAJORERO CHEESE

Fuerteventura (Canary Islands)

Majorero goats' milk

Cylindrical, flattish and wide. Marked with braided palm band on the sides.

Size: 1 - 5 kg (2.2 - 11 lb)

Organoleptic properties: pleasant, smooth and elegant flavor, strong but smooth aroma, compact texture.



PALMERO CHEESE

La Palma (Canary Islands)

Palmera goats' milk

Cylindrical. Usually smoked.

Size: up to 7 kg (15 1/2 lb)

Organoleptic properties: very pronounced, fresh flavor with tantalizing smoky tang, excellent texture.



P L E N T Y
M O R E

Spain also produces many different cheeses not yet backed by PDO status but of such excellent quality that they merit inclusion here.

Sheeps' milk

Castellano, La Bureba, Arribes del Duero and Sahagún, from Castile-Leon, are members of the same family as that region's Zamorano and are all significant cheeses. They appear in Castile-Leon's Inventory of Food Products, each with an entry in its own right on the strength of its individual characteristics and flavor.

Other sheeps' milk hard cheeses worth singling out include Calahorra, which is made in the area around Guadix (Granada province) on the lower slopes of the Sierra Nevada where sheep of the Segureña breed graze. Their milk gives cheese of unexpectedly smooth texture and pronounced flavor. The Maestrazgo district, on the border between Teruel and Castellón, still produces a cheese whose long history is attested to by the fact that it is mentioned in Don Quixote: Tronchón has a very unusual shape, much like a flattened globe with its upper and lower surfaces indented towards the middle. Although they do not actually meet to form a hole, this cheese is sometimes also known as Rosco after the ring-shaped cake it resembles. It has a

strong flavor, and is quite fatty and inelastic. Aragón produces two cheeses of this type: Tauste and Cinco Villas are small, long-matured and very close-textured with just the occasional eye.

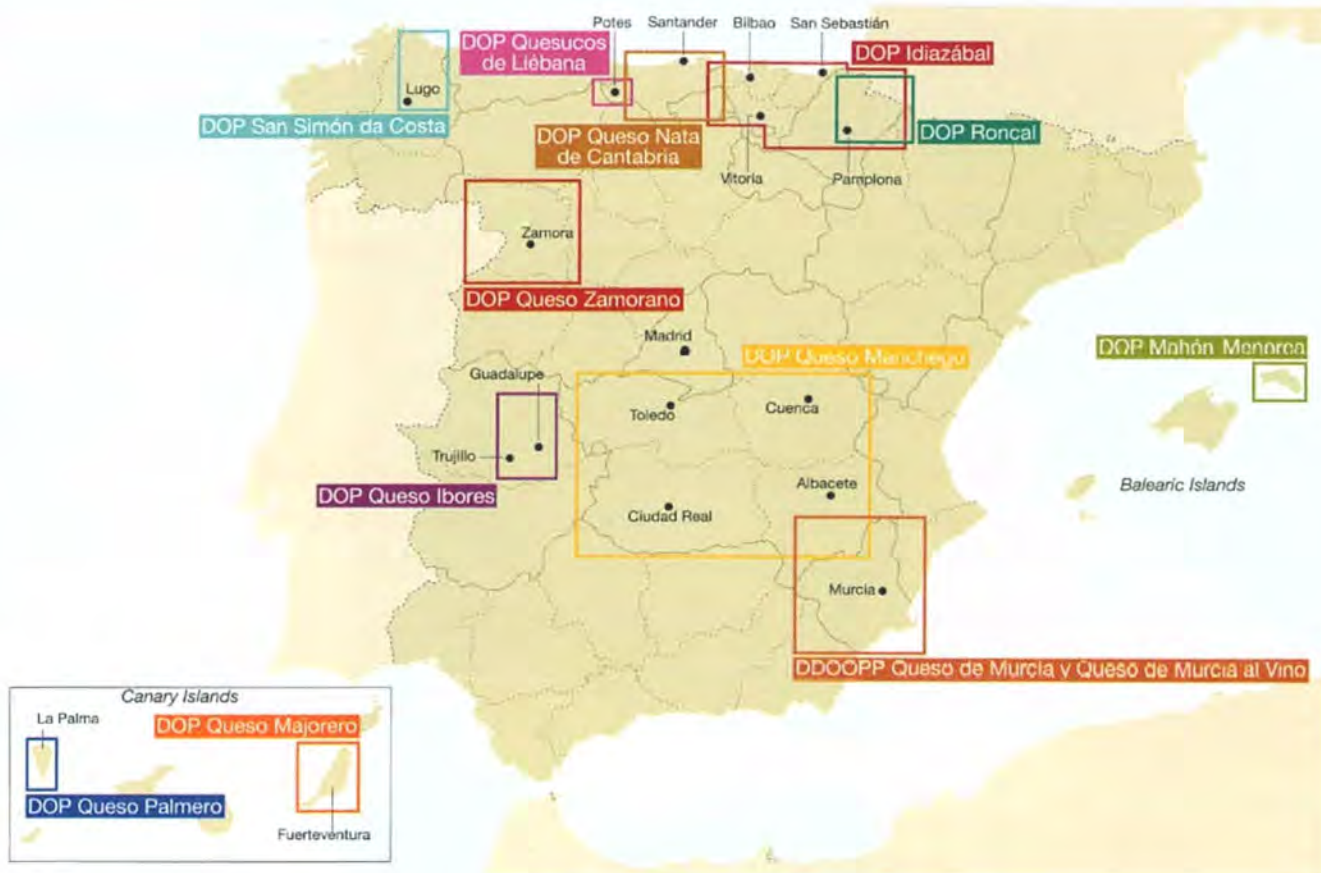
Oropesa cheese is made in the area of Castile-La Mancha where western Toledo meets Extremadura, and Valle de la Alcudia comes from where Ciudad Real province borders with Córdoba and Badajoz. Further south, the Valle de Pedroches (Córdoba) is the source of a cheese of the same name with characteristics reminiscent of old-style La Serena cheeses from Extremadura. Madrid province is the home of Campo Real, an excellent cheese with a fine reputation; like those mentioned above, it is influenced by Manchego but possesses distinguishing characteristics all its own.

Cows' milk

Huesca (northwestern Spain) is home to Benasque, a cylindrical cheese with a compact, smooth texture. For the most part these are small cheeses though on occasion they can weigh up to 2 kg (4.4 lb). Cheeses of similar characteristics, though often considerably larger, are made in the nearby Ansó and Hecho Valleys. Traditionally, these three Huesca cheeses—Benasque, Ansó and Hecho—were made seasonally during the summer months, the time of year when high

mountain grazing is plentiful. They bear a certain resemblance to France's Ariège cheeses and are in great demand on both sides of the border; as a result, production is no longer seasonal. In Catalonia's Vall d'en Tenes, a newly-created, semi-mature cows' milk cheese of the same name has already built up a devoted following.

Despite consisting of just one province, Asturias is the autonomous community that can lay claim to the most varieties of cheese. Although these are often made seasonally of a blend of all three milks, cows' milk cheeses predominate. Some, like Xinestoso—a small, cylindrical, very strongly-flavored cheese weighing around 1/2 kg (1.1 lb)—have a long history. Another example is Los Oscos, a cheese that originated in the Benedictine Monastery of Villanueva de los Oscos; it is now has a neighbor in the form of newcomer Taramundi, which is sold fresh, semi-mature, with walnuts and in various other novel presentations. In El Concejo de Caso, cattle of the Casina breed are raised; the cows are small and their milk yield relatively low, yet the milk they do produce is of superb quality. It is used for making Casin cheese, whose solid interior crumbles when cut and has a very strong, piquant flavor. Ahumado de Pria is made of cows' milk enriched with sheeps' milk butter to give it more flavor; Vidiago, a prism-shaped cheese, has a very



WEBSITES

pronounced flavor. There are also other, very local cheeses, some of which are made by one sole producer: **Parrés**, **Valdesano** and **Valle del Nancea** all are fine examples of this autonomous community's rich and varied repertoire of cows' milk cheeses.

Goats' milk

PDO status is currently in the pipeline for cheeses from the **Sierra de Cadiz** and **Sierra de Ronda**. Both these mountainous areas have traditionally produced cheeses of the same type (albeit with slight differences in shape, size, and maturation) known by the name of their place of provenance—Ronda, Málaga, Cádiz, Grazalema, etc. They were often goats' cheeses, though some were a mixture of goats' and sheeps' milk. The highly traditional **Alpujarreño** cheese from the Alpujarras is usually eaten straight or incorporated into local dishes such as legume-based *potajes*, or stews. **Cazalla** cheese from Seville's Sierra Norte is eaten semi-mature and often preserved in oil.

Each of the Canary Islands produces a goats' cheese. Those from **La Gomera**, **Gran Canaria**, **Tenerife** and **Lanzarote** all share the characteristic of being well-made, top-quality cheeses while possessing their own, individually distinctive flavors.

Catalonia produces several goats' cheeses, some of them traditional in the region; nearly

all of them are in debt to the creative intervention of unrivalled Spanish cheese pundit, **Enric Canut**.

Montsec, **Baridà**, **Ossera**, **Borredà**, and a few others are minority cheeses, some to the extent of being experimental, and they are very hard to come by. A rare chance to taste them all together is provided by the fair *El País de los Cien Quesos* (The Country of One Hundred Cheeses) held within each edition of *Alimentaria*, Barcelona's marvelous international food and drink fair.

Significant cheeses from Extremadura include **quesaillas** (pungently smelly yet delicately flavored), **Gata-Hurdes**, **Acehuche** and **La Vera**. Castile-Leon's **Tietar** also deserves a mention: it comes in two versions, traditional and modern, and is a top-quality cheese in which French influence is discernible. In Madrid, **Fresnedillas de la Oliva** is an outstandingly good, skillfully-made cheese.

www.quesomanchego.es

PDO Queso Manchego (English, French, Spanish)

www.denominacionesnavarra.com/es/denominaciones-navarra/queso-roncal/
PDO Roncal (English, Spanish)

www.quesoidiazabal.com
PDO Idiazábal (Euskara, Spanish)

www.quesozamorano.com
PDO Queso Zamorano (Spanish)

www.quesomahonmenorca.com
PDO Mahón-Menorca (Spanish)

www.alimentosdecantabria.com/certificados_calidad/certificados.php?id=2
PDO Quesucos de Liébana (Spanish)

www.alimentosdecantabria.com/certificados_calidad/certificados.php?id=1
PDO Queso Nata de Cantabria (Spanish)

www.sansimondacosta.com
PDO San Simón Da Costa (English, Galician, Spanish)

www.quesoibores.org
PDO Queso Ibores (Spanish)

www.quesosdemurcia.com
PDO Queso de Murcia and PDO Queso de Murcia al Vino (Spanish)

www.quesomajorero.es
PDO Queso Majorero (Spanish)

www.quesopalmero.es
PDO Queso Palmero (Spanish)



Introduction
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10 RECIPES

The approach adopted by Enrique Martínez, sometimes described as evolutionary cooking, is to take traditional cuisine from Navarre and update it, focusing on the special idiosyncrasies of the ingredients and applying the latest techniques and precepts to his dishes. One of his main fields of interest is vegetables, which he has studied scientifically, analyzing the chemical composition of the cooking water and the best way of preserving their distinct flavors. Those served in his restaurant are grown by the Martínez family on their own property and in concert with local farmers. But vegetables are not the whole story. All of Enrique's ingredients pass through the filter of complex creative conception. His insight and technical know-how allow him to combine the different raw materials so that they reach the table with all the purity of their primary flavors, the result of delicate, well-informed, minimal handling. Until mid-September, his cuisine was on offer at the Spanish pavilion at Expo Zaragoza 2008. The wines featured here were selected by the restaurant's sommelier, Matías Jiménez Jiménez.



Artichokes and octopus char-grilled over vine wood with a garlic shoot mousseline

(Alcachofas con pulpo a la brasa de vid y muselina de ajetes)



The idea of this dish is to show how well artichokes go with seafood even though it might seem a surprising combination. One of my favorite ways of cooking fish is to finish it over coals, generally vine wood, which gives it a very characteristic, velvety aroma of smoke.

SERVES 4

For the artichokes: 12 artichokes; 5 l / 21 cup water; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz flour; salt.

For the octopus: 400 g / 14 oz cooked octopus; extra virgin olive oil.

For the garlic shoot mousseline: 4 fresh garlic shoots; 80 g / 3 oz free-range egg yolks; 400 ml / 1 3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil; 1 splash water; 30 g / 1-3 tbsps butter.

For the artichokes

Wash the artichokes in the usual way, leaving the long stems on. As you prepare them, place them in water with some flour to prevent them from going brown. Lemon has the same effect as flour but should be avoided as it adds acidity. When all the artichokes

are ready, place in a pan of salted, boiling water and keep boiling. Cook them a little less than usual so that they do not overcook when placed on the grill.

For the octopus

Sear the whole piece of octopus on the grill, sprinkling with a little extra virgin olive oil to give a smoky flavor. Remove and cut into portions.

For the mousseline of garlic shoots

Wash the garlic and place in a skillet with the butter. Fry gently until soft, then remove and blend with the water and egg yolk. Strain through a fine chinois and mix in a siphon with the extra virgin olive oil. Attach two cartridges and set aside in a bain-marie.

To serve

Place the artichokes on a bed of octopus pieces. Add the garlic mousseline and garnish with fresh herbs.

Preparation time

60 minutes

Cooking time

10 minutes for the artichokes + 5 minutes for the octopus

Recommended wine

Instead of a wine, we suggest Keler 18 lager (Damm). This is a high-quality, elegant beer, made in San Sebastián since 1890. Its multiple aromas freshen up the dish without intruding on the perfect partnership formed by the artichoke and the octopus.

Artichokes with Valdorva truffle and Ibérico ham slivers

(Alcachofas, trufa de Valdorva y láminas de jamón ibérico)

Artichokes are the stars of Navarre's truck farms. Their characteristic flavor and texture make it difficult to substitute them with anything else. The unmistakable aroma of artichokes cooking is engrained in my memory from the days when I was studying with María, who in turn had learned from my grandmother Sabina. Among many other things, she taught me that if artichokes are to be really good, they must grow in rich soil with the right weather conditions and, of course, the plant must be top quality.

SERVES 4

For the artichokes: 24 artichokes; 5 l / 21 cup water; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz flour; salt.

For the sauce: 10 g / 1/3 oz purple garlic; 20 g / 1 oz Ibérico ham; 15 ml / 1 tsp Almazara del Ebro extra virgin olive oil; 10 g / 1/3 oz flour; cooking water.

Others: 40 g / 1 1/2 oz Ibérico ham; Valdorva truffle slivers (Navarre).

For the artichokes

Wash the artichokes in the usual way, then place in salted boiling water. Cook, then remove from the heat and leave to stand until completely cooked.

For the sauce

Fry the thinly-sliced garlic in the Almazara del Ebro extra virgin olive oil until lightly browned. Add the Ibérico ham in julienne strips, then sprinkle with the flour. Fry gently and add some of the artichoke cooking water. Strain through a fine chinois, then add the artichokes and stir to blend the flavors.

Cut a few wafer-thin slices of Ibérico ham and Valdorva truffle.

To serve

Place the artichokes at the center of the dish with the stems pointing upwards. Arrange the Ibérico ham on top and decorate with a few thin slices of Valdorva truffle.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

10 minutes

Recommended wine

This dish would go well with a Palacio de Bornos Verdejo 2007 (DO Rueda), by Bodegas Palacio de Bornos. This is a fresh white wine with a pale yellow color. Its sharpness tones down the acidity of the artichoke.



Artichokes stuffed with spider crab, served with txacoli caviar and a licorice and orange vinaigrette

(Alcachofas rellenas de txangurro, con caviar de txakolí, vinagreta de regaliz y naranja)

Artichokes are particularly versatile: they can be boiled, roasted, grilled, fried, etc. In the area of Navarre where our featured restaurant is located (Cintruénigo), they are often served stuffed—a delicacy that everyone should try at some point in their lives.

SERVES 4

For the artichokes: 12 artichokes; 3 l / 13 cup water; 75 g / 3 oz flour; salt.

For the crab: 1 small spider crab; 1 bay leaf; gray salt; 5 l / 21 cup water; ice.

For the txacoli caviar: 200 ml / 3/4 cups Txakoli Ameztoi Primus (DO Getaria); 2 g / 0.07 oz agar agar; 20 g / 1 oz sugar; 100 ml / 1/2 cup water; 200 ml / 3/4 cups sunflower oil.

For the licorice vinaigrette: 50 ml / 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil; 1 licorice stick; 15 ml / 1 tbsp Modena vinegar; 5 ml / 1 tsp soy sauce; rind of half an orange.

Other: Salad sprouts.

For the artichokes

Wash the artichokes in the usual way. Cut off the stem forming a flat base so they can stand upright. During preparation, place in a pan of water with a little flour to prevent them from turning brown. When all the artichokes are ready, place in boiling salted water. When cooked, use a melon baller to remove the heart, forming a hollow in the center.

For the spider crab

Heat the water with the bay leaf and salt. When boiling, insert the crab and cook. Remove and place in ice water to prevent overcooking. Shell and remove all the flesh. Set aside.

For the txakoli caviar

Place the txacoli in a pan over low heat and reduce to half. Add the agar agar and boil for 10 seconds, stirring the entire time. Remove from the heat and transfer to a dropper bottle. Squeeze out drops onto a pan with the very cold sunflower oil to form tiny spheres. Refrigerate.

For the licorice vinaigrette

Mix all the ingredients and refrigerate for 12 hours.

To serve

Fill the artichokes with the crabmeat. Top with the txakoli caviar. Beside them place the seasonal salad sprouts and finally drizzle over a little of the licorice and orange vinaigrette.

Preparation time

120 minutes

Cooking time

10 minutes for the artichokes + 15 minutes for the crab

Recommended wine

The chosen wine is Marqués de Riscal Sauvignon (DO Rueda), by the Marqués de Riscal winery. This is a fresh, slightly sharp white wine that contributes some interesting flowery aromas to the dish.



Artichoke broth, vegetable micro-wafers, broad beans and peas

(Caldo de alcachofa, microláminas de verduras, habitas y guisantes)



One of my culinary obsessions is that not only should all vegetables be used when in season to ensure the flavor is authentic, but they should also preserve as many of their vitamins and nutrients as possible. I try to achieve this by ensuring both the cooking time and the temperature are minimal, which is why in this recipe they are served raw.

SERVES 4

For the artichoke broth: 5 artichokes; 1 1/4 cup water; 10 g / 1/3 oz salt.

For the vegetable micro-wafers: 2 wild asparagus spears; 2 white asparagus spears from Navarre; 50 g / 2 oz pumpkin; 50 g / 2 oz carrots; 50 g / 2 oz green beans.

For the peas and broad beans: 50 g / 2 oz teardrop peas; 50 g / 2 oz young broad beans; black pepper; extra virgin olive oil; salt.

For the artichoke broth

Place the peeled artichokes in the Gastrovac with the water and salt and cook in the oven for 20 minutes at 65°C / 149°F. By cooking under pressure and in the absence of oxygen created by the Gastrovac, cooking temperatures are drastically reduced, preserving the texture, color and nutrients of both the artichokes and the cooking water. Set aside the artichokes for the time being. Strain the broth and set aside.

For the vegetable micro-wafers

Wash the vegetables well and cut into wafers using a vegetable peeler. Then cut into julienne strips.

For the peas and broad beans

Peel and season with a little salt, black pepper and extra virgin olive oil.

To serve

Place all the strips of vegetables in a glass dish. Add a few raw peas and broad beans. Serve with the artichoke cooking water.

Preparation time

50 minutes

Cooking time

20 minutes for the artichokes

Recommended wine

The best partner for this dish, with its intense flavors and acidity, is not wine at all but mineral water from Lanjarón, a natural spring in Granada's Sierra Nevada. Not only does this water have a pleasant taste and no smell, it also has mineral and medicinal properties, serving as a diuretic and helping keep blood pressure down.

Tempura of artichoke stems and young leeks with cream of Mahón-Menorca cheese

(Tallos de alcachofas y puerrinas en tempura, con crema de Mahón-Menorca)

The combination of Mahón-Menorca cheese with artichoke stems in tempura, fried in extra virgin olive oil from Navarre, is a wonderful blend of flavors which brings out the very best from one of our most highly-valued gastronomic products. This oil, currently awaiting Protected Designation of Origin status for Navarran olive oil, comes from the different varieties of olive that grow locally so it offers a range of flavors, colors and aromas that I consider unbeatable.

SERVES 4

For the tempura: 200 g / 7 oz tempura flour; 200 ml / 3/4 cups cold water.

For the vegetables: 8 artichoke stalks; 8 young leeks; 1 pinch salt; 1 pinch black pepper; extra virgin olive oil.

For the cream of Mahón-Menorca cheese: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Mahón-Menorca cheese; 200 g / 7 oz cream.

For the tempura

Mix the flour and water in the blender. Strain through a fine chinois and set aside.

For the vegetable tempura

Carefully wash the young leeks, removing any traces of sand. Peel the artichoke stalks and cut into sticks about 80 mm (3.1 in) long. Season the leeks and artichoke stalks and dip in tempura. Fry in extra virgin olive oil at 180°C / 356°F until golden. Remove and drain on absorbent paper.

For the cream of Mahón-Menorca cheese

Heat the cream, add the cheese and blend. Strain through a fine chinois.



To serve

Arrange the vegetables in tempura on the plate and accompany with the cream of Mahón-Menorca cheese. Drizzle with some Arróniz extra virgin olive oil. This is a very pleasant, aromatic oil with vegetable, artichoke and tomato leaf notes and a slight bitterness and pungency.

Preparation time

60 minutes

Cooking time

2 minutes

Recommended wine

Inurrieta Cuatrocientos Crianza 2004 (DO Navarra), from the Inurrieta winery. This medium-colored red has a freshness that helps balance the acidity of the artichokes.



Creamy artichoke rice with clams and Manchego cheese

(Arroz cremoso de alcachofa, almejas y Queso Manchego)

Rice and cheese form a perfect duo, especially when accompanied by some excellent clams from the Cantabrian Sea, and artichokes, which should be excellent whether they come from Tudela (PGI) or Benicarló (PDO). Good cooking must be based on the best raw materials so, provided that the ingredients are top quality, the end result should be delicious.

SERVES 4

For the stock: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz rockfish (or a mixture of small fish); 1 shallot; 1 leek; 1 carrot; 1 head garlic; 25 ml / 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil; 2 l / 8 1/2 cup water.

For the rice: 50 g / 2 oz onion; 1 clove purple garlic; 1 splash extra virgin olive oil; 320 g / 11 oz Bomba rice; 8 artichokes; 50 g / 2 oz Manchego cheese; 8 chives; 12 clams; spring flowers.

For the soy sauce: 10 ml / 2 tsp soy sauce; 60 ml / 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil; grated rind from 1/4 lime.

For the stock

Gently fry the shallot in olive oil. Once it turns brown, add the leek, carrot and head of garlic. Then add the rock fish and cover with water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 2 hours until reduced to 1 1/2 l / 6 1/2 cups of stock. Strain through a fine chinois and set aside.

For the rice

Chop the onion and garlic and fry gently in the olive oil. When soft, add the clams and cover. When they open, remove and extract the flesh. Wash the artichokes, add to the onion mixture and cook for 30 seconds. Then add the rice and pour over the fish stock. After 17 minutes, bind the rice with grated Manchego cheese. Finally, add the clams and warm, without letting them dry out.

For the soy sauce

Mix all the ingredients and set aside.

To serve

Start with a bed of rice and top with the artichokes. Add a little soy and the lime rind and finish with the chives and spring flowers.

Preparation time

60 minutes

Cooking time

20 minutes

Recommended wine

This time the selected wine is García Burgos Vendimia Seleccionada 2005, from the García Burgos winery (DO Navarra). This is a well-rounded red with a long finish and berry aromas.

Soufflé of Roncal cheese, asparagus from Estella, smoked eel and thyme flowers

(Soufflé de queso Roncal, espárragos de Estella, anguila ahumada y flor de tomillo)

I am always amazed by the texture of a soufflé when it comes out of the oven. This recipe gives a fluffy yet creamy soufflé as a result of the blend between the free-range eggs and the Roncal cheese, which contrasts with the texture of the crisp asparagus. The final touch is given by the thyme flowers, which always take me back to my childhood in the countryside around Cintruénigo.

SERVES 4

For the asparagus: 10 white asparagus spears from Estella (Navarre).

For the Roncal cheese soufflé: 70 g / 2 1/2 oz butter; 55 g / 2 oz strong flour; 580 ml / 2 1/2 cup milk; 175 g / 6 oz Roncal cheese; 5 free-range eggs; 1 pinch salt; 1 pinch white pepper; 4 sprigs flowering thyme.

For the eel: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz smoked eel.

For the asparagus

Peel the asparagus, set aside the tips and cut into four along the length of the spears.

For the cheese soufflé

Slowly melt the butter, add the flour and cook for 5 minutes. Gradually add the milk, stirring to make a fine, smooth béchamel sauce. Grate the cheese and gradually stir into the béchamel sauce. Beat the egg whites until stiff. Beat the yolks and add to the whites. Gently fold the eggs into the cheese sauce. Season with salt, pepper and thyme.

Grease some soufflé dishes with butter. At the bottom place a piece of smoked eel and the raw asparagus tips. Fill the dishes halfway with the soufflé mixture. Bake at 200°C / 392°F for 10 minutes.

To serve

Carefully remove the soufflés from the oven and top with a few thyme flowers.

Preparation time

2 hours

Cooking time

15 minutes to pre-heat the oven + 10 minutes to cook

Recommended wine

We recommend partnering this dish with a Gran Feudo Chivite Chardonnay 2007 (DO Navarra), by Julián Chivite, a fresh white wine with hints of apple.



Cheese board (Zamorano, Ibores, Palmero, Liébana) with tomato jam and wild rosemary (Tabla de Queso Zamorano, Queso Ibores, Queso Palmero, Quesucos de Liébana con mermelada de tomate y romero silvestre)

A small cheese board is a must after a good meal, especially in Spain where we have so many top-quality cheeses.

SERVES 4

For the cheese board: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Zamorano cheese; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Ibores cheese; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Palmero cheese.

For the tomato jam: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz tomatoes; 30 g / 1 oz sugar; 100 ml / 1/2 cup water; ice.

For the cheese spread: 60 g / 2 oz Liébana cheese; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz cream; 1 sprig rosemary.

Others: Mint leaves; basil sprouts.

For the cheese board

Cut the Zamorano cheese into a cube shape and hollow out the middle using a melon baller. Cut a cylinder of Ibores cheese using an apple corer, then cut in half crosswise. Cut a rectangle of Palmero cheese. Refrigerate until use.

For the tomato jam

Blanch the tomatoes in boiling water for 10 seconds, then place immediately in ice water to cool down. Peel and seed. Cut into a brunoise and mix with the other ingredients in a pan. Cook for 30 minutes over low heat.

For the cheese spread

Bring the cream to a boil, remove from the heat and add the sprig of rosemary (washed). Leave to infuse for 2 hours. Remove the rosemary and strain the cream through a fine chinois. Add the cheese and blend until smooth. Refrigerate for 12 hours.

To serve

Fill the cube of Zamorano cheese with the tomato jam. Make a stripe of cream of Liébana cheese on the plate and top with the filled cube. Add a cylinder of Ibores cheese. Caramelize the rectangle

of Palmero cheese using a blowtorch, then add. Decorate with a few mint leaves and basil shoots.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

30 minutes for the tomato jam

Recommended wine

Alzania 2002 (DO Navarra), by Bodegas y Viñedos Alzania. This crianza, with its bright red color and plenty of body, complements the cheeses with aromas of vanilla, red berries and spice.





Warm Cebreiro cheese soup, scallops with salt and borage sprouts

(Sopa tibia de Cebreiro, vieiras a la sal y brotes de borraja)

Cebreiro is a cheese with a personality that makes a good partner for vegetables, especially borage, and the addition of scallops with salt results in an explosion of flavors, both surf and turf.

SERVES 4

For the borage: 1 bundle borage; 5 l / 21 cup water; 1 pinch salt; 50 ml / 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil; 10 g / 1/3 oz Ibérico ham; 5 g / 1/6 oz purple garlic.

For the scallops with salt: 4 fresh scallops; 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz sea salt; 2 g / 0.07 oz black pepper; 1 bay leaf; 1 ginger root.

For the soup: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Cebreiro cheese; 50 ml / 4 tbsp freshly-milked cows' milk (or whole cows' milk); 1 pinch salt.

For the pumpkin purée: 50 g / 2 oz pumpkin; grated rind of 1/2 orange; 30 g / 1-3 tbsp butter.

Other: Baby vegetables.

For the borage

Carefully wash the borage, removing any outside leaves and threads. Cut each stem into sticks about 7 cm (2.8 in) long. Soak in cold water to remove any remaining soil. Bring the water to a boil, add salt and the borage. When

cooked, drain and place on a tray. Mix the olive oil, garlic and Ibérico ham and pour over the borage.

For the scallops with salt

Mix the salt, pepper, bay leaf and ginger and place in the base of a pan. Carefully wash the scallops. Place the scallop flesh on top of the layer of herbs and spices, then cover with another layer of sea salt. Bake in the oven at 180°C / 356°F for 10 minutes, then remove and leave to stand for 2 minutes.

For the warm soup

Cut the Cebreiro cheese into pieces and add to the milk. Bring to a boil, then remove from the heat and blend. Strain through a fine chinois.

For the pumpkin purée

Roast the pumpkin at 200°C / 392°F until cooked. Mash and add the butter and grated orange rind.

To serve

Form a base of pumpkin purée and top with the borage. Remove any surface salt from the scallops, dip in the warm Cebreiro soup and place on top of the borage. Garnish with baby vegetables.

Preparation time

120 minutes

Cooking time

10 minutes for the borage + 5 minutes for the scallops + 25 minutes for the pumpkin purée

Recommended wine

Príncipe de Viana Chardonnay 2007 (DO Navarra), by Bodegas Príncipe de Viana. This balanced, persistent wine offers aromas of butter and flowers, making the perfect partner for this dish.

Smoked Idiazábal cheese, Pontigo peppers, breadcrumbs and an Empeltre olive oil bubble (Queso Idiazábal ahumado, pimientos del Pontigo, migas de pastor y burbuja de empeltre)

Pontigo peppers, a member of the *Capsicum annuum* family, are a variety grown in Cintruénigo and take their name from Pontigo, a fertile area along the banks of the Alhama River, a tributary of the Ebro. They are elongated, smallish, not very fleshy peppers which, when fully ripe, are a deep red color. They are at their best grilled over wood coals and dressed with a little gray salt, a few slices of garlic and a splash of extra virgin olive oil.

I love this dish because it brings together several of the essentials in my cuisine and the cuisine we offer at Maher restaurant—breadcrumbs, Pontigo peppers, extra virgin olive oil and, of course, smoked Idiazábal cheese.

SERVES 4

For the Pontigo peppers: 2 Pontigo peppers; 1 pinch gray salt; 1 clove garlic.

For the breadcrumbs: 50 g / 2 oz stale bread; 1 pinch pimentón (a type of Spanish paprika); 1 small piece chorizo; 15 ml / 1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil.

For the Empeltre olive oil bubble: 20 ml / 1 heaping teaspoon extra virgin Empeltre olive oil; 10 g / 1/3 oz cocoa butter; 1 sprig thyme; 1 sprig rosemary.

For the smoked cheese cubes: 50 g / 2 oz smoked Idiazábal cheese; salad sprouts.

For the Pontigo peppers

Grill the peppers over hot coals. Peel, remove the seeds and dress with salt, garlic and extra virgin olive oil. Lay out on a flat dish and freeze. When frozen, cut into rectangles 30 mm x 80 mm (1.2 x 3.1 in).

For the breadcrumbs

Brown the garlic in the olive oil then remove. Add the chorizo and pimentón. Cut the bread into small cubes and stir in the oil for a few seconds over a high heat until brown but still moist on the inside.

For the Empeltre olive oil bubble

Fill semi-spherical molds with extra virgin Empeltre olive oil and place in the freezer. When frozen, turn out and join two semi-spheres to form a sphere. Insert a stick and return to the freezer. Warm the cocoa butter and infuse the thyme and rosemary in it for 12 hours. Strain, then dip the frozen olive oil brochettes into the mixture to coat. Refrigerate.

For the cheese cubes

Cut the smoked Idiazábal cheese into 5 x 5 mm (0.2 x 0.2 in) cubes.

To serve

Place a slice of Pontigo pepper on the base of the plate. Add breadcrumbs and top these with the Empeltre olive oil bubble. Decorate with the Idiazábal cheese cubes, some gray salt, a splash of extra virgin olive oil and some salad sprouts.

Preparation time

120 minutes

Cooking time

30 minutes for roasting the peppers

Recommended wine

Viña Aliaga (DO Navarra), a select wine from Bodegas Camino del Villar. It is a bright red reserva wine that marries well with the breadcrumbs and Pontigo peppers.



Conservas RAMÓN PEÑA

A Taste of the Atlantic

Nely Concheiro's Ramón Peña preserved seafood from the Rías of Galicia are changing the way gourmets and gastronomy experts think about delicacies from the sea. Chefs around Spain, from Pontevedra's Pepe Solla to Barcelona's Quim Pérez of the legendary Quimet & Quimet tapas delicatessen, to Juanjo López of Madrid's La Tasquita de Enfrente, have all rhapsodized about *Línea Gourmet* (the gourmet line) for the sheer quality—the taste, texture, and presentation—of the morsels that emerge from the handsome Ramón Peña gold-and-black packages and disk-shaped cans.



TEXT
GEORGE SEMLER/©ICEX

PHOTOS
ANTONIA PEÑA/
CONSERVAS RAMÓN PEÑA



Hidden away among Ribadumia's ubiquitous Albariño grape vines which cling to their overhead trellises, Nely is not very difficult to find. Around the wide expanse of the Ría de Arousa, everyone seems to know exactly who she is and how to locate the Conservas Ramón Peña canning factory.

Justly proud of her environment, this prizewinning force of nature (EVA Prize for Women of Achievement from the Government of Navarre, and the Royal Spanish Academy of Gastronomy's Marqués de Busianos Award for the Worldwide Promotion of Spanish Gastronomy) spares no superlatives in describing the source of her products. "Seafood from Galicia's rías is like no other. The currents, the mixture of fresh and salt water, even the winds that help create eddies, back currents, and sediments contribute to the richness of the plankton and the natural nourishment," explains Nely, chief executive of Conservas Ramón Peña, gesturing toward the Xunta de Galicia (regional government) chart framed on one of her office walls. On the other wall are posters showing the different strains of mussels,

cockles, shrimp, clams, razor clams, sea urchins, scallops, crabs, anchovies, sardines, squid, octopus and fin fish found around the Spanish coastline.

Unique environment and seafood

According to Nely: "There's nothing like it. You open a can of cockles or mussels and it smells like the ocean, it tastes like the ocean. The organoleptic characteristics of the shellfish and seafood of the Galician rías—the fragrance, taste and texture—are absolutely unique. All we try to do is treat these products with the respect they deserve and pack them in olive oil or brine with no additives or preservatives so that they reach the consumer in perfect condition."

The rías of Galicia have long been the subject of marine geological studies that analyze the reasons behind the organic wealth that these estuaries and tidal zones continue to produce. The 2002 Prestige tanker oil spill, for example, seems to have been completely neutralized by the hydrodynamic processes that flush

out and renew the Rías Baixas: the Rías de Vigo, Pontevedra, and Arousa.

"Last year was the best year I can remember," she continues. "The size and abundance of everything was astounding. If anything, the sardines were too big. The *sardinilla* (small sardine) has to be just the right size, so that when you pack them, you can start with smaller ones around the bottom, then place the larger ones across the center and then go back to the smaller ones at the top. Otherwise you end up with a sardine that's too big around the curve of the can, causing it to break."

Nely is a perfectionist about every detail of her factory. Her two dozen workers who, like her, are currently awaiting the arrival of the *sardinilla*, know that at Conservas Ramón Peña everything is done in a certain way. Correct clothing (in line with legal regulations) for entering the refrigerator unit, how to close the door on the way out (with your hands, not with your feet), how much time is allowed for hanging around the punch-in clock: all of these matters are specified in bold print and prominently displayed



around the cannery.

A tour of the extraordinary Conservas Ramón Peña factory, about the size of four tennis courts, reveals spotless conveyor belts, sorting machinery for separating shells from their contents, brine tanks for immersing cockles (“without the brine they would lack taste”), and a small kitchen for frying mussels and boiling clams, as “...everything is done by hand; we cut out the mussel strings, known as the beard, one by one, and cook the *guisos* (the stews and sauces) right here in this kitchen. The only thing done by machine here is the sealing or closing and labeling.”

An artist at heart, the presentation and appearance of her product is of paramount importance to Nely: “You eat with your eyes, too!” Whether the can contains seven mussels arranged around a laurel leaf or cockles meticulously placed in neat rows with all the orange beaks headed uniformly east, Conservas Ramón Peña seafood packers, working at two eight-person tables, know that their job is to put together something that will be beautiful to see, smell, and taste when it is opened.

“If anything, we put in more than the legal weight, to make sure the

cockles or mussels are packed solidly and remain firmly in place during shipping. Can you imagine what would happen with extra space in the can? Everything would be all over the place. Our cans can be opened, plated and eaten straight from the tins with no problem at all. In fact, if you dumped them out, the presentation would be lost.”

Masters of creativity with preserves

Quim Pérez of Barcelona’s Quimet & Quimet, a widely-recognized master of the creative use of preserved and canned goods, concurs. “What I love about the Conservas Ramón Peña product,” explains Quim, “is the guaranteed first-rate quality every single time: the best raw materials, prepared as naturally as possible, arranged in flawless order and symmetry, and you don’t need to add a thing. The natural juices or the sauce in which the product has been cooked all work perfectly. There’s no need to dress it at all: sea urchins, razor clams...everything is ready to serve.”

As Nely points out, “Beluga caviar is a canned food too, a preserve, and no one has ever hesitated to treat caviar as a luxury item. The same

should be true for top-of-the-line canned seafood. But it’s not easy to change the generalized perception of tinned seafood as a second-tier product, as a product that isn’t good enough to be consumed fresh. This can only be done by showing people what we do and how we do it. With a look at the care and selection that goes into the preparation of every one of these cans, you might not consider it so expensive. We package our seconds in our line of oval-shaped cans, at lower prices, and they are still perfectly good, but for one reason or another—usually a question of size—they are not considered good enough for the gourmet line so rather than throw them out, we pack them and sell them for less.”

Driving along the coast on our way to Pepe Solla’s restaurant in San Salvador de Poio, just outside of Pontevedra (northeast Spain), Nely points out the beaches of Sanxenxo, the chic summer resort with sandy strands that the more protected Ria de Arousa completely lacks as a result of the tremendous tides that, on a low moon tide, can move the waterline as many as 8 km (5 mi) away. “That, of course, is no good for beaches but perfect for the *marisqueros*, the shellfish gatherers



who have a vast fertile area to work with." She seems completely connected with the entire process, from the sociology and medical profiles of the gatherers ("The *lumbago*, or backache, is chronic; after hours of raking for clams and cockles, older marisqueros can't even stand up straight"), to her relationships with buyers and distributors ("We're a team, after all. We depend on each other, and it's all about everybody being happy at the end of the day, isn't it?").

During lunch at Solla, overlooking lush green gardens with miniature chapel-like granaries and traditional stone farmhouses, Nely outlines her plan to publish a book of recipes for her products, with contributions from the great chefs of Spain as well as France and Italy, where Conservas Ramón Peña products have been exported with success. "I want these items to become something you can rely on for, say, a dinner party that suddenly arises unexpectedly. You can take out some squid in its ink and cockles and mussels and serve up a splendid meal without leaving the house."

Pepe, whose mastery of simple, fresh produce, from baby carrots (under a chunk of hake) to a tepid pea soup with a powerful aroma of freshly-

shelled peas (provided by a raw pod cut in half through the middle) is another unconditional admirer of Ramón Peña products and their creator. "The added value of Nely's product, as I see it, is the aging process that takes place in the package. Many of these products are better after months or even years in the can, gaining in organoleptic qualities, much like a good wine aging in the bottle or Ibérico ham aging in its drying vaults." "That's my goal," adds Nely. "I want to develop these products into prized items that will be recognized, like a good cheese or wine, as something you might open up for a special occasion."

George Semler, who is based in Barcelona, writes about travel, food, and wine for numerous publications including Saveur, Sky, Forbes Life, Travel & Leisure, and Condé Nast's epicurious.com.

CONSERVAS RAMÓN PEÑA



Date of foundation: 1920

Activity: Production of artisan fish and seafood preserves

Workforce: 22 employees

Preserved products produced

per year: 700,000 units

Turnover for 2007: 2.9 million euros

Export quota: 30%

Main export markets: France, Germany, Lithuania, Portugal, Switzerland and the UK

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On the Move

TEXT

ALMUDENA MUYO/©ICEX

TRANSLATION

JENNY MCDONALD/©ICEX

ILLUSTRATION

JAVIER VÁZQUEZ

Lizarran opens shop in the US

Lizarran has disembarked in the United States in the company of the master franchisor for California, Mickey Arzaga, chairman of Caltapas LLC. Their declaration of principles states: "We want to bring the tapas culture and the rich variety of Spanish gastronomy to California. The idea is also to help improve North American eating habits by offering a gastronomic alternative that is healthier and lighter, based on the much-acclaimed Mediterranean diet. Our menus will be almost exactly the same as those in Spain," says Joan Manel Gili, director of brand development at Comess

Group, the owners of the brand. Lizarran's plans to grow in the US include the opening of 50 restaurants over the next four years in the most significant parts of California—first in the south and then in San Francisco. "We are convinced our catering concept will fit in well with the culture in this part of the US and, after California, we hope to take our tapas to the east coast," he adds. In addition to the US market, Lizarran continues expanding its operations in Europe and has just opened its second establishment in Paris, close to the Gare du Nord, bringing the total in France to six. "Our target is to consolidate our position as the international leaders in Spanish tapas bars. So far, we have been able to adapt the concept of pinchos and tapas perfectly to the different markets in which we are working. This is due to our innovative presentations, new creative suggestions and a high level of

investment in R&D&I, all of which have improved our menus considerably," he concludes.

Date of foundation: 1988

Activity: Spanish pinchos and tapas restaurants

No. of establishments: 175

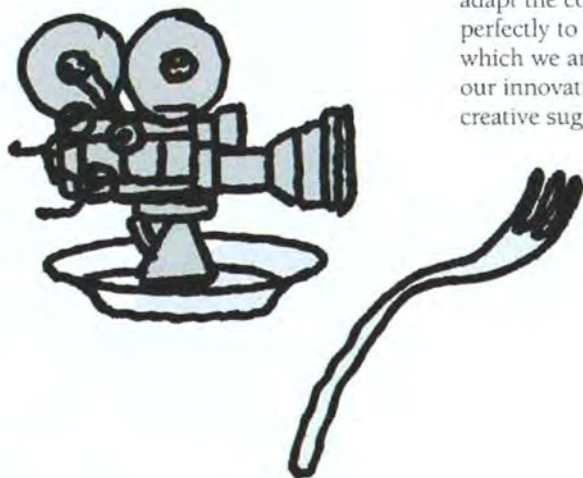
No. of establishments outside Spain: 32

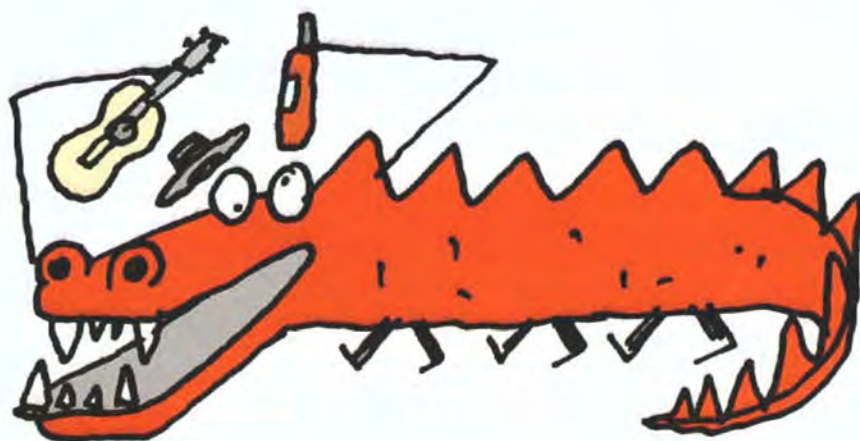
www.grupolizarran.com

Market Plaza, Spanish gastronomy in China

A series of gastronomic demonstrations held against a background of flamenco and with a focus on extra virgin olive oil and even nitrogen highlighted the grand entrance into China of the Spanish agri-food sector through España Market Plaza, the platform for the exhibition and sale of Spanish food in China.

The event was organized by Óscar Manresa, chef at Torre Altamar (Barcelona), who was accompanied by Sergio Fernández from the Madrid Catering School, José Luis Tarín from the Seville Catering School, and the chefs from the Catalonian restaurants El Magatzem del Port, Cal Pinxo and Red Lounge. Together they prepared more than 11 varieties of different tapas, including salmorejo (an Andalusian vegetable soup), tuna grilled over vine wood, and crema





catalana (caramelized custard). The visitors included Wu Hong, director of the SIPAC economic office at the Suzhou business park, the owner of the La Verbena restaurant in Shanghai, and importers such as Susana Liu from Summergate Fine Wine.

España Market Plaza is a trade platform and permanent exhibition of Spanish products covering 20,000 m² (215,000 sq ft) in the Suzhou trade center. Located just 80 km (50 mi) from Shanghai, Suzhou is one of the business hubs on the Yangtze River Delta with an area of influence covering over 40 million inhabitants.

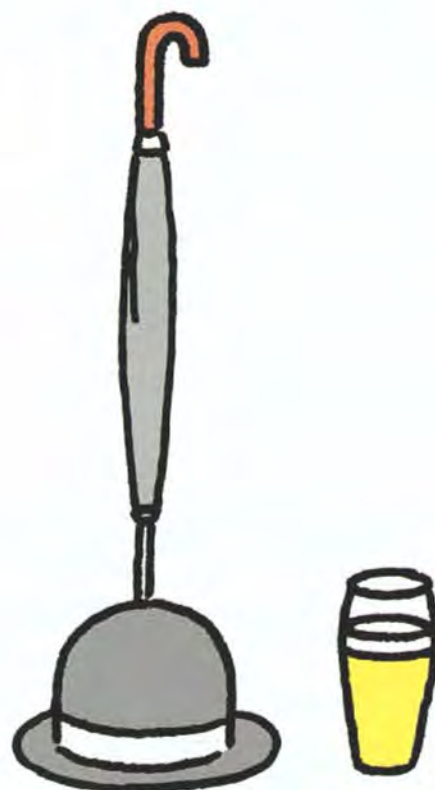
Date of foundation: 2007
Activity: Trade platform and permanent exhibition of Spanish products in China
Surface area: 20,000 m² (215,000 sq ft)
Workforce: 200 employees
www.marketplaza.es

Cañas y Tapas enters the United Kingdom

Cañas y Tapas, a brand belonging to Zeno Grupo de Restauración, has opened its first establishment in the United Kingdom, in the High Cross Quarter shopping center in Leicester. With a floor space of 400 m² (4,300 sq

ft), it is the first of the six restaurants in the Spanish company's expansion plan for the East Midlands region of England over a period of four years. "The company Koncept UK will be responsible for setting up Cañas y Tapas in Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, and Nottingham. For other parts of the UK, we are currently negotiating the entry of another local franchisor interested in opening up restaurants in and around London," reports Jaime Sáez, head of expansion for Cañas y Tapas. The Cañas y Tapas concept is based on the development of classic bars offering traditional Spanish tapas and dishes. Sáez states, "The menu ranges from huevos rotos (fried potatoes with scrambled eggs) to toast with a range of toppings, Ibérico pork products, shrimp with garlic, and entrecôte. The idea is to consolidate the brand in the United Kingdom and become a point of reference for Spanish food." Europe is the main destination for Cañas y Tapas, which will soon open its second bar in France in the Créteil Soleil shopping center in Paris. Another is already open for business in the Val d'Europe shopping mall, within the Eurodisney complex. The company also has two bars in Portugal, in Lisbon and Porto.

Date of foundation: 1999
Activity: Catering and restaurants
Turnover in 2006: 42 million euros
www.tapaspain.com



Text
Carlos Tejero/©ICEX

Photos
Pablo Neusdtadt/©ICEX

Translation
Hawys Pritchard/©ICEX

Unsung
Heroes

Fabián Martín

Would you go to a restaurant recommended by Ferran Adrià? Fabián Martín's pizzeria is one of the famously open-minded Catalan super-chef's favorite places to eat. Fabián is a *pizzero* and proud of it. This innovative cook's revolutionary new take on what has always been a down-market fast food has elevated it to the realms of haute cuisine. It has been a huge success—even in Naples, where they know a thing or two about pizza!

No matter where you are, opening a new restaurant is no picnic these days. Doing so in a little village in the Catalan Pyrenees makes it that much more difficult. If you're charging 100 euros to eat there, the chances of your restaurant surviving become remoter still. And if your menu is comprised of salads and pizzas, people will take you for a practical joker rather than a serious entrepreneur.

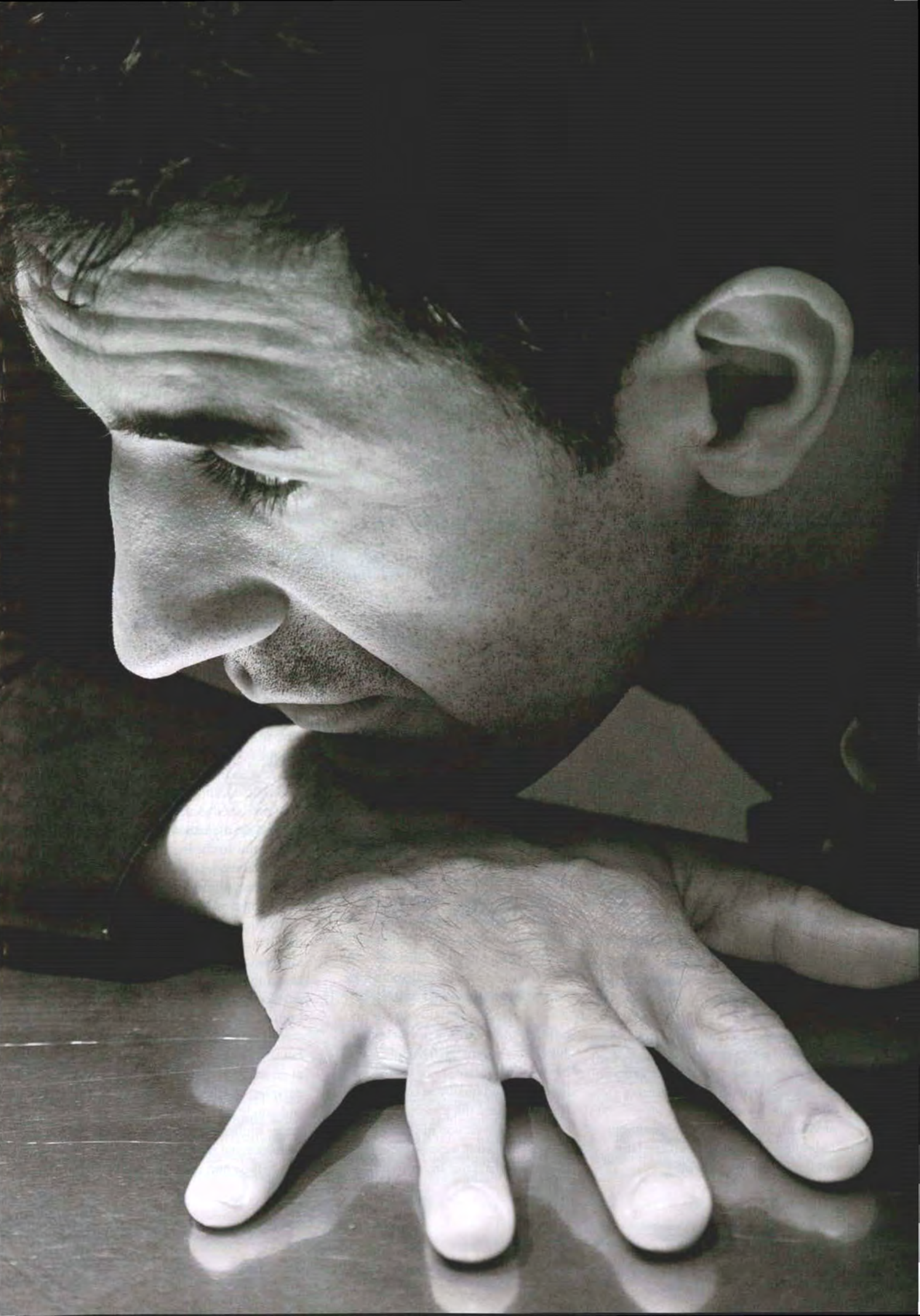
Fabián Martín did all of the above in a little town named Llívia (1,300 inhabitants, Gerona province). Now, four years on, he has demonstrated that far from being a recipe for business disaster, his venture has been a classic example of determination and creativity making an apparently impossible dream come true. On the strength of his success, he recently opened a new 700 m² (7,500 sq ft)

locale in one of the poshest parts of Barcelona, with all that it entails in terms of expenditure on real estate, equipment, employing staff, and so on. An astonishing 400,000 euros has been spent on the kitchen alone.

"You have to recognize the difference between the impossible and the merely difficult: for example, there's no way you could walk to the moon, but you just might end up dating Miss World." Fabián has proven that, though it's not easy, it's not impossible to persuade customers that it's worth traveling 765 km (475 mi, the distance between Madrid and Llívia) to eat pizza and pay between 50 and 100 euros for the privilege. It's hard to believe, but hoteliers in this little Gerona town will assure you it's true: they have all been left dumbfounded when their guests have told them where they have come

Unassuming

UNKNOWN



from and for what.

Fabián is 40 years old. Slight of build, he looks fit though by no means bulgingly muscular. You would never guess that he used to be one of Spain's top welterweight boxers. Granted, he does have a broken nose ("It's been broken so many times—the first time was even before I was a boxer!" he jokes) but it isn't badly out of true. Fabián was part of Spain's Olympic Selection at the Atlanta Games (1996), although in the end he was prevented from taking part by a serious car accident that truncated his sporting career. Spain may have lost a boxer but the world gained a pizzero. He has won various international pizza championships, both for acrobatic dough hurling and for the quality of the final product. He won his latest, and most prestigious, title last year when he was declared world champion at the New York Pizza Show for his edible gold pizza.

This and other successes are features of the fascinating life story of this self-made man.

Fabián was born into a modest family in Almería. Every summer, like so many Andalusian men, his father would head for France in search of work, eventually getting a permanent job at a coal mine in the region of Perpignan. Fabián spent his childhood between these two towns, often passing through Barcelona, the big city where the family broke up their journey on the way to and from France. Some time later, Fabián's parents separated and his elder brother, a professional boxer, became his guardian. Fabián left school early and moved from place to place with his brother. They spent some time in Paris and elsewhere, doing whatever work they could get to earn enough to tide them over. At one point, Fabián almost became a *churro* vendor—a friend offered him a van kitted out for producing the fried tubular doughnuts and selling them at local village fairs, but the idea didn't take off.

Discovering the pizza

It's 1996 and Fabián has just started dating Piedad, who works in a pizzeria. Before long, Piedad decides to open her own home-delivery pizzeria in Puigcerdá (Gerona). She makes the pizzas and Fabián delivers them, which he combines with work as a doorman at a nightclub. In 1998, their son Pablo is born. Piedad gives up work to look after the baby and Fabián leaves the club to concentrate on the pizza business. At this juncture, with impeccable timing, Fabián's compensation for the car accident that put paid to his boxing ambitions three years earlier comes through. He decides to invest the money in a 20 m² (215 sq ft) locale in the town center. Fabián hires an employee to make the pizzas and carries on delivering them himself. Towards the end of the year, however, the employee leaves and Fabián has no option but to get kneading. It's his first time cooking. "I noticed when I started making pizza that some days they turned out well, other days okay, and other days awful. I wondered why that was, because it seemed to me that I was doing the same thing every time. I started to analyze the process and realized that a spoonful of salt, flour, oil, etc.—the sort of measurements we all use when we cook—isn't precise enough at a professional level. It's neither here nor there when you're cooking at home, but when you multiply the difference between one spoonful and another by 20, the difference in quantity can be considerable. Similarly, when a recipe calls for lukewarm water, what does 'lukewarm' mean exactly? How many degrees does it have to be to stop being lukewarm and qualify as cold or hot?" Having realized the importance of method and precision in cooking, Fabián enrolled in a patisserie course "...because bakeries are very strict—15

mg means 15 mg, not a spoonful". He decided to apply the same standard of precision to making pizza. This logical step gave good results and Fabián's take-away pizzas started to build up a fan base in Puigcerdá and the region. "In the days before I started actually making pizzas, all I was concerned with was getting them to the customer within half an hour of ordering. I couldn't have cared less about the quality," recalls Fabián, horrified in retrospect. "Afterwards, it was quite the opposite: what was important was to make a top-quality pizza, regardless of whether it took 45 minutes or an hour." Fabián's approach worked well and business boomed. In 2002, buoyed by success, he entered the Spanish pizzamaking championship. He came in last. Two months later he entered the European championship and won. He is nothing if not a quick learner. "However good you may think you are, if you enter a competition and come in last it's not because there's a world plot against you, but because there's something you're not doing right. You have to be humble and self-critical." Europe's champion top-flight pizza maker, a Spaniard? No one could believe it. "And of course the media took no notice at all." Instead, they focused on the Italian, settled in Spain, who had won the far more attention-grabbing acrobatic dough-hurling heat of the championship. With a view to mastering the art rather than occupying the limelight, Fabián asked the champion to teach him the skills involved, but he was refused. "Then I heard about a guy (now his business partner) who was former dough-hurling champion of Spain and had owned several pizzerias in Barcelona but then lost nearly everything because of an accident that had left him paraplegic." He gave Fabián lessons and taught him all the tricks of the trade, while another friend of Fabián's, a professional magician named Honest, also helped him improve his manual



dexterity. Cooking a good pizza and doing flamboyant things with dough are two very different, and not necessarily complementary, things. In fact, the dough used in the acrobatic hurling heats of championships isn't made of flour at all, but of a special latex with the same texture. Needless to say, it isn't edible.

Fabián's pizzeria was a great success. In 2004, he decided to sell up, head for his native Almería and invest his savings in a centrally-located locale with a view to opening a pizzeria-restaurant. "I had decided to go ahead and do it. Then, while I was telling a friend about it in a bar, an acquaintance overheard our conversation and said: 'There's a place available in Llívia (just 6 km / 4 mi from Puigcerdá) that would make an ideal restaurant for pizzas as good as yours'. I went to see it just out of curiosity and I thought: This is the place for me." Fabián bought the premises and set up the restaurant—the pizza restaurant—that was to bring him national, and eventually international, fame. He perfected his technique in Llívia, experimented with surprising

ingredients, and tried out new textures.

Fabián is self-made and self-trained. His library contains over 2,000 cookbooks, and he is more knowledgeable than he admits. "I'm a pizzero, I make pizzas. I have nothing to be ashamed of!" He has revolutionized the whole concept of the pizza and is highly respected in Naples for having done so. He went there to present his book *Las mejores pizzas del mundo* (The best pizzas in the world, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 72) and to do a few demonstrations as well. The president of the Pizza Makers Association of Naples declared: "Fabián is the best *pizzaiolo* in the world... but from 2030".

It's all in the dough

Fabián won the world championship for quality pizza making at the New York Pizza Show in 2007 with an edible gold pizza he had previously served in his restaurant in Llívia. In this competition, contestants take part not as individuals but as national representatives. Each country sends its best delegate, except for Italy which is

authorized to send two, one of them being Neapolitan, in recognition of the fact the Naples is the birthplace of pizza. Fabián had originally planned to make a Coca-Cola pizza; however, that called for a small-diameter dough base, while the competition regulations required it to be at least 30 cm / 12 in. "So I decided to make the simplest pizza there is—a Margherita—but to cover it in edible gold leaves. I added some extra zing to the tomato and quite a lot of basil, but the gold contributes no more than a certain aesthetic tone; it doesn't add to or subtract from the flavor of the basic pizza. So the jury, which was largely comprised of Italians, was really judging the quality of a classic Margherita pizza."

But the secret of Fabián's success had traveled with him in his suitcase: a disc of "master" dough he made in Spain using own his special mixture of flours and yeast, to provide the basis of several more batches of dough which would share the same attributes as regards flavor, texture and so on. But a customs officer had come close to scuppering Fabián's plans: "They made me open my suitcase at the airport. In addition to the master dough for making pizzas, it contained other latex doughs to be used in the acrobatic kneading competition. The official told me that I couldn't bring in foodstuffs. I tried to explain that they weren't food, but demonstration material made to look like dough, but as I don't speak English he couldn't understand what I was saying." So there and then, to the astonishment of the customs official and the line of people waiting to show their passports, Fabián gave a demonstration of dough acrobatics. "Okay!" said the official. "Good luck!"

Journalist Carlos Tejero has been a contributor to Spain Gourmetour since 2003.

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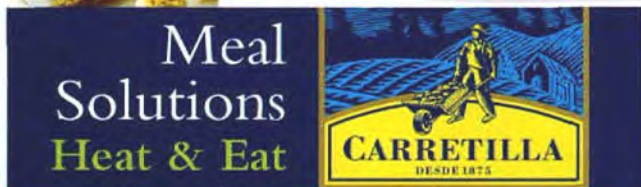
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