81 January-April 2011

SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

New Reds from Navarre

Dried Figs. The Philosopher's Fruit

Whites into the Wood

Rediscovering Fine Spanish Saffron

81
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SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Borges Extra Virgin Olive Oil

There is no set time to eat because we have quite another concept of time. It is a time rooted in the senses, but also in nature. Like knowing that it is the right time to collect the best olives, which, when blended together, will produce a lighter, purer and more balanced oil. A healthier oil. Borges Extra Virgin Olive Oil. Here to show you that mealtime is the start of a different kind of time: a time to live as they do in the Mediterranean.

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EDIT

Inspired by the New Year, we've made a few changes to Spain Gourmetour which, by the way, has just turned 25! The first issue appeared in 1986, the year when Spain joined the Common Market. We've come a long way since then!

We've reconfigured the Recipes section: still master-minded and test-driven by some of Spain's top chefs, you'll now find our recipes neatly positioned alongside articles about relevant products. And the chefs get their share of attention, too: we learn, close up, why they do what they do.

This issue's featured products are deeply rooted in Mediterranean (and particularly Spanish) tradition: saffron, introduced by the Arabs 13 centuries ago and still one of Spain's most prized local specialties today; and dried figs—a classic feature of the Christmastime table here in Spain—now much in demand in the rest of Europe and the US.

Mineral water from Spain? Er.... Few non-Spaniards would make the connection, yet Aguas de Mondariz exports over 10% of its production.

Wine from Spain? Obviously! Yet this issue's wine pages take you beyond the obvious with an introduction to the impressive red wines of Navarre (traditionally known for its rosés) and a guided tour of cask-aged whites. And talking of unexpected pleasures, New Yorkers in need of an apéritif or a quick lunch can now head to Western Chelsea for tapas served in true Spanish style.

Cathy Boirac
Editor-in-chief
cathy.boirac@icex.es

Editor-in-chief
Cathy Boirac

Publication Coordinators
Almudena Martín Rueda
Almudena Muyo

Photographic Archive
Mabel Manso

Editorial Secretary
Ángela Castilla

Design and Art Direction
Manuel Estrada Design

Maps
Javier Belloso

Color Separations
Espacio y Punto

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Advertising
CEDISA
pcyc@retemail.es

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Saffron

from La Mancha (Spain)

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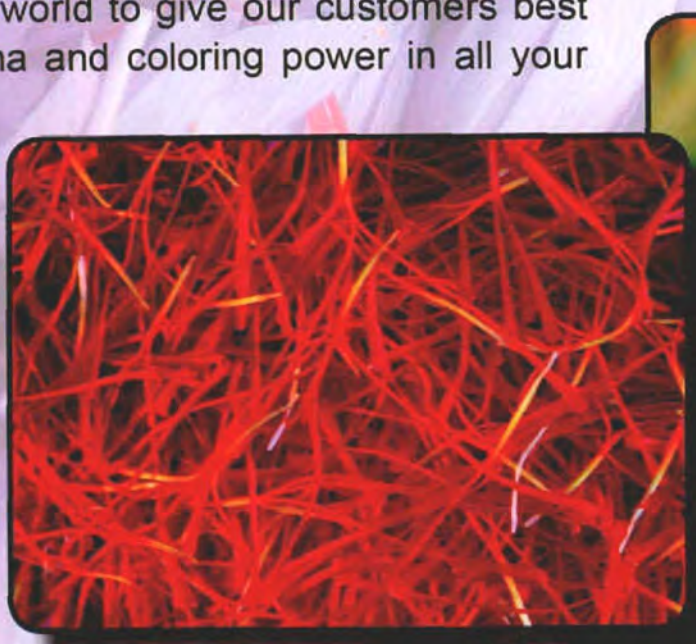

BEALAR S.L.
Phones: +34 969 18 01 56
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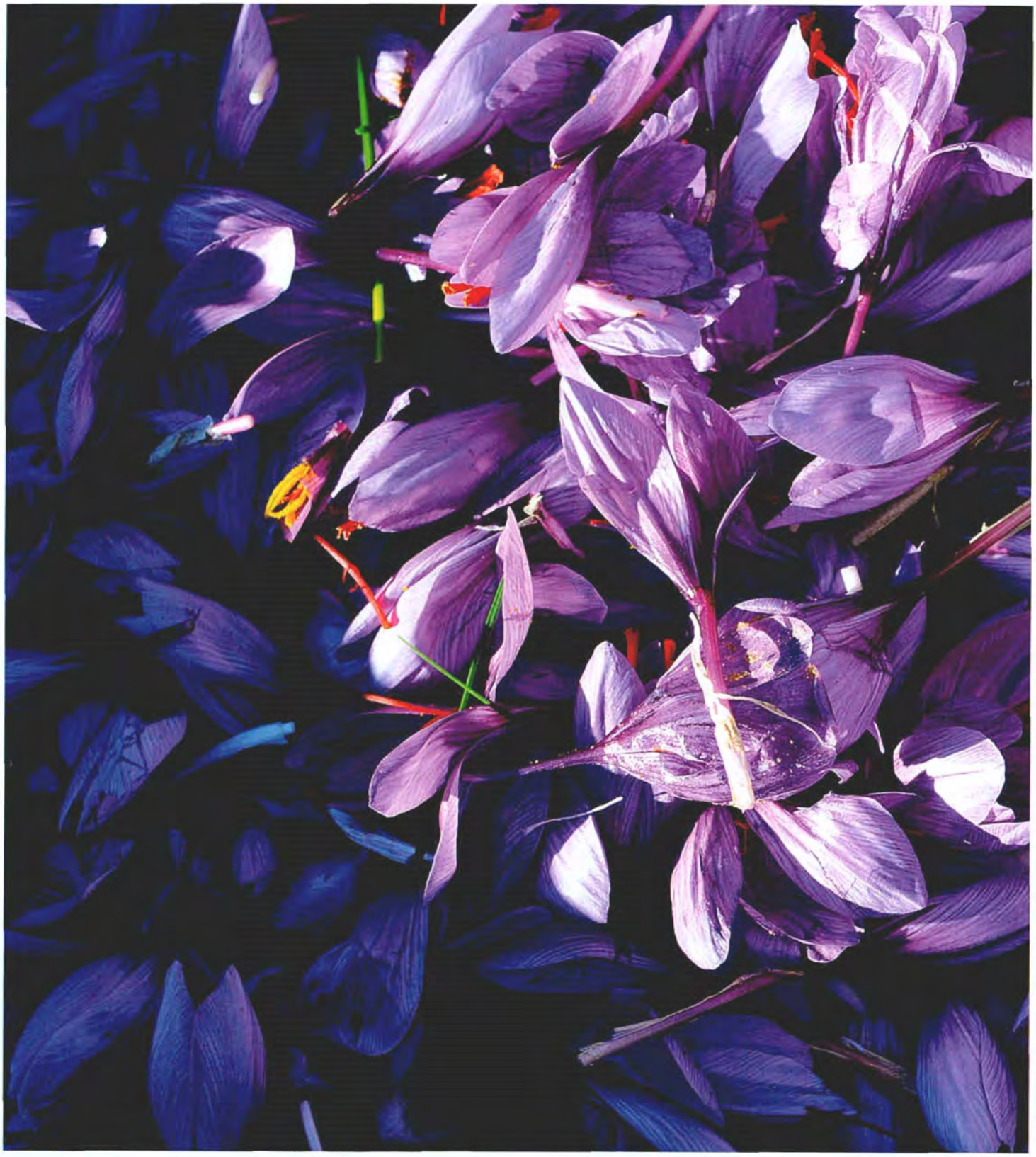


Rediscovering fine Spanish **saffron**

GOLD

standard

Not so long ago fine Spanish saffron was an endangered species, its very existence threatened by a cheap, inferior product from Iran. A decade after the birth of the PDO Azafrán de la Mancha, things are finally looking up. But there is still work to do, says Paul Richardson, before Spanish saffron wins back its true value—not just in the marketplace, but in the kitchens of the world.

TEXT
PAUL RICHARDSON/©ICEX

Saffron is a strange and precious thing, a product whose mystery and high price are amply justified by its legendary attributes. Among the world's great range of spices, this is the one of the few able to transmit not only flavor and aroma, but deep, rich color to food. In some cultures it is held in such high regard that it even possesses a religious significance: certain Eastern traditions regard the deep gold color of saffron as a symbol of wisdom. After the death of Siddhartha Sakyamuni (otherwise known as the Buddha), his followers chose saffron as the official color of their robes.

Part of saffron's special aura derives from its unique production process. The threads in which saffron is usually sold are in fact the red stigmas of the *Crocus sativus L.* flower, of which 250,000 are needed for a kg (2.2 lb). In its Spanish heartland of La Mancha (center of Spain), cradle of the world's finest saffron, the flowers are picked at dawn, when they are at their freshest. In the evening the stigmas are plucked from the flowers, in the painstaking artisan process known as *la monda*, and briefly "toasted" (*el tueste*) over the dying embers of a fire. Azafrán de La Mancha is in the Premier League of Spanish food products, up there with Iberico ham, *pimentón de la Vera* (a type of paprika from Spain), and Cabrales cheese (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73). The gorgeous yellow tint of saffron and its rich, piquant, faintly medicinal aroma looms large in the Spanish collective consciousness. It is one of the many paradoxes of this marvelous spice that it is by no means common in Spanish kitchens, yet still occupies a privileged place in the culinary life of the nation.

I arrive in La Mancha on a late-September day when the heat of summer has finally yielded to a sudden burst of rain. Water runs in the furrows of the ploughed fields, washing the dust off the vines. The rain augurs well for the saffron harvest, due to begin in three weeks' time: the crocus bulbs, which have spent the summer in a dormant state, will begin to take in nutrients, their hair-like roots pushing down into the soil (*embarbar* in the local agricultural jargon). By the end of October the violet flowers will begin to bloom, studding the landscape with patches of luminous color.

The office of the Regulatory Council for the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) La Mancha Saffron is to be found in the village of Camuñas (center of Spain) which, together with Madridejos and Consuegra, forms a triangle in which saffron is culturally present, if not very widely cultivated.

The annual Festival of the Saffron Rose in Consuegra (usually held in the last week of October, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 43) is a well-known date on the local tourist calendar, offering saffron-picking contests, poetry readings and an agricultural show. Madridejos is home to the region's Saffron Museum, housed on the first floor of a 16th-century convent. The museum offers a small but evocative collection of tools, baskets and other paraphernalia traditionally employed in the saffron industry. It provides an entertaining vision of saffron's role in Manchego life, especially useful for visitors from abroad who are unlikely to witness the various processes of harvesting, monda and tueste at first hand.

COLORS

Jiloca **Saffron**

For centuries, the county of Jiloca, in Teruel (Aragón, northeast Spain) was a reputed producer of saffron. (Towns associated with saffron production in the region include Muniesa, Campo Bello, Campo de Visiedo and Monreal del Campo; the latter has its own saffron museum.) Though as recently as 1970 the county still grew some 1,500 ha (3,706 acres), the surface area under cultivation has plummeted to just 8 ha (19.7 acres), with a total annual production of no more than 50 kg (110 lb). The good news is that Jiloca saffron is back from the brink. For years saffron farmer Miguel Rabanaque has been producing quality saffron bulbs for the use of other local farmers. The Slow Food organization has taken it under its wing as part of its Baluarte (Flagship) scheme. La Carrasca is making waves with their organic saffron, under the La Sabina brand. And local saffron is once again highly esteemed by chefs and pastry chefs. The chocolate and Jiloca saffron cream from Pastelerías Manuel Segura in Daroca (Teruel) is a delicacy worth seeking out.

Hanging by a thread

The PDO Azafrán de La Mancha is a relatively young one, surprisingly so for a product with such a high symbolic (as well as actual) value. Before 1999 there was no organism in Spain dedicated to the control and protection of Manchego saffron. Anyone could pass off foreign, inferior saffron as the genuine La Mancha article and get away with it. Added to which the decline in local saffron cultivation was almost complete. Another main problem was labor: no pickers, no young people willing to work in such a hard job. No-one was growing it on anything but the smallest back-garden scale; genuine Spanish saffron as a commercial entity had almost ceased to exist. Something had to be done. Enter Antonio García Martín-Delgado, owner of the Compañia Española Recolectora de Azafrán, based in Camuñas, who had spent the previous 15 years trying to set up a quality seal for Spanish saffron. The stated aim of the foundation of the Regulatory Council for the Protected Designation of Origin Azafrán de La Mancha is to "give prestige throughout the world to the saffron produced in the geographical area of La Mancha." Currently the PDO covers five companies: three in the province of Albacete, one in Toledo and one in Cuenca, but more are sure to follow, says Antonio, as the local saffron business slowly returns to something approaching commercial health.

While I wait for the President in his modest office, the DO's Director of Certification, María Ángeles Núñez Iniesta shows me some samples of the kind of thing they are up against: "Spanish saffron" whose resemblance to the real thing is purely coincidental. One is clearly adulterated, its color an unconvincing, homogenous scarlet. Another, bought in a foreign spice market, has something of the rich red tint of real saffron, but the threads have a fibrous look like

some kind of flower seed. A third, though it may be Spanish, is years past its sell-by date, its threads wizened and yellowish, its aroma almost non-existent. Like any kitchen spice, saffron must be kept in good condition, protected from the light, and ideally should be used within a year of production.
A small pot of saffron threads, of the kind you might buy in the duty-free shop at Madrid's airport, describes itself on the label as "Mancha Selecta"—a claim that, under the law, it is not authorized to make without the guarantees provided by the DO—although it does not bear the seal of the PDO. The contents of this pot, explains María Ángeles, are very likely to proceed from Iran.
Finally she shows me an example of real PDO La Mancha saffron. The threads are long and generously proportioned, with a range of color running from orangey-yellow at the base to an intense, vibrant red in the center and upper part of the stigma. The packet bears the PDO sticker with its stylized form of a mauve saffron flower and a Don Quixote figure, on horseback, lance in hand.
If there were ever a better argument for the value of a quality seal like the protected designation of origin, I have yet to encounter it.
It would take an investigative journalist and weeks of work, not to mention travel to some Middle Eastern destinations, to uncover the complex functioning of the saffron trade. The consumer who merely wants a few threads to add to her or his Sunday paella is probably unaware of the process by which these few shreds of deep red came to arrive on the supermarket shelf. Just as with any substance accorded a high monetary value, saffron has long been the object of fraud, adulteration, fakery and passing-off. The Saffron White Book, elaborated by several institutions of Spain, Greece and Italy in the course of the Saffron project within the INTERREG III C programme, documents the current woeful state of Europe's saffron industry and details the various ways in which the good name of Spanish saffron is commonly brought into disrepute. Saffron "additives" range from the relatively inoffensive (parts of other flowers such as carnation and calendula, ground red pepper, sandalwood powder and turmeric) to the actively unpleasant (threads of dried meat or colored gelatine, syrups and oils to add weight). Chemical colorings added to fake saffron include tartrazine, fuchsin, amaranth (E123) and ponceau 4R. The world of saffron is rich in ironies, mysteries, and statistics which can seem deeply surprising, inexplicable even, to anyone unfamiliar with the workings of the trade. An example: just 4% of saffron production takes place within the EU. The world leader by a huge margin is Iran. Yet, partly thanks to its historic involvement in the spice trade, Spain has always played the starring role in the saffron industry worldwide (exports from Spain are destined

mainly for the Gulf states: between 40-50% of the total; followed by the United States and Canada: 20-25%; and the European Union: 10-15%; saffron grown in the PDO area heads for the US, Germany, Mexico, Argentina, and the UK). However, according to the White Book, the region of Spain which consumes most saffron, by a long way, is not the Mediterranean coast of Valencia and Alicante, heartland of fragrant yellow rices like *paella* (rice-based dish) and *arroz a banda* (rice with fish, typical from Valencia), but the northern areas of Galicia, Asturias and León. Saffron is sometimes used in small quantities in *fabada asturiana* (a bean stew made with Asturian fabas, black pudding, pork fat and chorizo). Spanish chef Maria José San Román (see page 72), whose mother was Asturian, remembers saffron being used in local *empanadas* (stuffed bread) and casseroles. "In good households there was always saffron," she says. Neither of which would seem to account for the northwest's supremacy over the Mediterranean in the saffron users' league.

The return of Spanish saffron

As plotted on a graph, the progress of saffron growing in Spain appears as a long series of downward swoops, from 1930, when there were 12,000 ha (29,625 acres) under cultivation, to 2,000 ha (4,942 acres) in 1950. Production recovered slightly in 1970, but then tottered downhill until its virtual extinction at the close of the 20th century. These days saffron now covers just 220 ha (543 acres) of the Manchego landscape (88 ha / 217 acres of which are under the PDO), though the decline has finally stabilized and new plantings are on the way.

Saffron in La Mancha is still largely a cottage industry. Despite the value of the end result, the high labor costs involved in this delicate crop have tended to make it unviable. But with a price paid to the grower of 2,400 per kg (2.2 lb) of stigmas —higher than at any time in the last 12 years—, and with yields of between 8 and 12 kg per ha (17.6-26.5 lb per 2.5 acres), local farmers are once again seeing the advantages of saffron as a cash crop. According to Antonio García, the surface area under cultivation needs to grow "urgently", by a factor of 3 or 4, in order to satisfy demand. Such an increase will not be quick or easy, mainly because of the shortage of saffron bulbs or corms. The bulbs or corms (popularly known as *cebollas*, onions) are dug up, cleaned and separated every four years, when production of the flower begins to

web

www.doazafrandelamancha.com
Official site of the Regulatory Council of the Protected Designation of Origin (English, Spanish)

wane. At €4-5 a kg, and with 4,000-5,000 kg (8,818-11,023 lb) needed for a single hectare, a new plantation represents a hefty investment for the young farmer. The PDO plans to fund new plantings up to €30,000, provided the farmer agrees to eventually sell his saffron through one of the companies within the Protected Designation of Origin.
Meanwhile, an interest in high-quality products, natural and authentic and traceable, is trickling down through the market. The new gastronomic culture of the 21st century seems sure to work in favor of such "niche" products as real La Mancha saffron.

The spice of live

Foreign gourmets often wonder why saffron seems to have so discreet a presence in traditional Spanish gastronomy. The dishes of which it forms an essential ingredient are certainly few and far between: it is a very expensive spice to be used on a daily basis. Paella is the obvious example of a dish that owes much of its special character to the aroma and color of saffron. Other dishes that feature it are *gallina en pepitoria*, a classic Spanish casserole of hen (more usually but incorrectly, chicken) with a rich sauce of ground almonds, egg yolks and saffron, and the Catalan fish stew *zarzuela*. In the saffron zone of La Mancha, the precious threads were too valuable to use in everyday cooking. Traditionally, saffron was hidden away in caskets as one might keep gold or jewellery and used as part of a dowry, or as a form of currency when some special expense was called for, such as the purchase of land or farm machinery. Nevertheless, housewives in Madridejos sometimes use it in a hearty dish of rice with rabbit, or as part of the gravy for home-style *albóndigas* (meatballs).
If saffron is not used anymore in traditional cookery, the new Spanish cuisine is certainly making good use of it. The new generation of creative cooks in Spain is characterized by its restless exploration of ingredients and their possibilities in cuisine. Saffron is only one of the various traditional flavorings given a new lease of life by the experiments of trailblazing Spanish cooks.
At elBulli, Ferran Adrià has turned the searchlight of his powerful culinary intelligence onto saffron as a unique and undervalued spice, resulting in such extraordinary creations as Tempura of samphire with saffron and oyster emulsion and Polenta gnocchi with coffee and

Saffron and health

A powerful myth is attached to saffron, which throughout human history has been accorded near-miraculous healing properties. Historically it has been thought efficacious against asthma, chicken pox, scarlet fever, gout, disorders of the eye, insomnia, heart disease, flatulence, respiratory diseases, dysentery, and the common cold—though its most common role in popular medicine is as a carminative, or remedy for gas. By association with its bright yellow color, saffron was thought to be beneficial against the yellowing of the skin in cases of hepatitis. Modern science has tended to validate many of these beliefs. We now know for certain that saffron is indeed effective, for example, against digestive disorders, asthma and bronchitis, and is a potential source of anticarcinogens.

According to the information published by the Regulatory Council, "an excess may cause madness." Who knows—perhaps Don Quixote, man of La Mancha par excellence, had been partaking of too much saffron when the windmills loomed up like giants before him.

milk skin, saffron and capers.
In a recent visit to the great Manuel de la Osa, at Las Rejas, in the Manchego village of Las Pedroñeras, a couple of dishes on the summer *menú degustación* (tasting menu) featured the richly evocative aroma of local saffron. I especially remember a "spherification" in the Adrià style, a soft bubble that popped in the mouth with an explosion of saffron flavor. De la Osa told me he buys his saffron directly from a village market near his home, and describes it as the best he has ever tasted, with a color and intensity that are "somehow old-fashioned, with the subtle flavor that saffron used to have." As a child, he remembers his mother making the dumplings for *potaje* (legume and vegetable stew) with bread, eggs, parsley and saffron.
A family classic was the stew of chickpeas with mixed meats and partridge, which would be put on the stove in the morning and eaten in the evening, the broth simmered with a generous pinch of saffron threads. De la Osa believes that saffron is enjoying a revival in cuisine thanks to a growing realization of its power to transform a dish spectacularly, even in the tiniest dose.
Maria José San Román, chef de cuisine at the restaurant Monastrell in Alicante, would surely agree. For many years San Román has been engaged in a thoroughgoing study of the uses of saffron, giving her an unrivalled expertise on the subject. Investigators at the University of Castilla-La Mancha, source of an ongoing campaign of research into the properties of saffron, are in close contact with the chef, who acts as a kind of culinary spokesperson for their discoveries.
San Román is not the only one to be puzzled by the general lack of familiarity, in Spain, with one of the finest of all Spanish products. She believes the explanation is cultural and historical: it dates from the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the post-war period, when saffron was an unaffordable luxury and the culture of its use in cooking was lost. Nowadays, her view is that most consumers, and that includes experienced cooks, do not use it properly and especially not in the right quantities. The importance of freshness is not generally understood, for one thing. San Román recommends that it should be used within the year, before it loses its complex floral notes. (It can also be frozen, she suggests).
Recipes that call for "a few threads of saffron" are part of the problem, according to San Román, for a real understanding of saffron involves knowing how to administer it in the correct dosage. Too much saffron can ruin a dish, whereas even a minute amount can bring to it a whole new dimension of flavor. Nowadays she has it on hand in the form of a solution—250 cc (8 oz) of water per gram of saffron—with which she applies a discreet touch of saffron to as many as 60% of her dishes. She also adds saffron to sugar, using it widely in her patisserie and desserts, and to honey, butter and extra virgin olive oil. She has learned to regard the spice as a flavor enhancer to be used almost as you might use salt. "For example, if I'm making *gambas al ajillo* (prawns fried in extra virgin olive oil and garlic), I might say to myself, why not add a little bit of saffron?" she reveals.
The work of Maria José San Román harks back to the medieval era,

when saffron was much more widely used than it is today; indeed, as she attests, it is rare to find a dish in recipe books of the period that doesn't call for it. She now has as many as 200 dishes in her repertoire using saffron in some form or other. San Román's appearance at Madrid Fusión in 2008 brought to our attention her Seafood salad dressed with saffron vinaigrette, her Rice with snails and saffron, and her Almond and saffron meringues. A quick Google of her name and the word azafrán brings up such mouthwatering proposals as *Patatas bravas* (chunks of fried potatoes topped with piquant sauce) with saffron and hot pimentón (a type of paprika of Spain) allioli (garlic mayonnaise), Fish suquet with *picada de azafrán* (salsa with a base of almonds, pine nuts, fried bread, garlic, parsley and saffron), and Saffron ravioli stuffed with ricotta and pumpkin.

"Saffron is great with everything. It's hard to think of a dish you can't use it in," says San Román. "No wonder they call me the Saffron Queen!" she says with a laugh.
The innovations of Spanish chefs are giving back value to a product that had lost some of its charisma. But the saffron business could benefit from more innovation in every sense. We hear that machines are being developed to take the agony out of flower picking and the sting out of prohibitive labor costs. New ideas are in the air. What about saffron tourism? If the cherry-growing valleys of El Jerte (Cáceres, western Spain) can build a tourist industry around the spectacle of the cherry blossom in early spring, why shouldn't visitors come to see the fields of purple flowers and taste the saffron-inflected recipes of Manchego cuisine, both ancient and modern? A route taking in local restaurants, visits to saffron fields, and demonstrations of la monda is reportedly on the cards. As for new products, we can already buy saffron in the form of a handy little spray, courtesy of the Spanish spice trademark Carmencita. Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain, based in the "spice town" of Novelda in Alicante and one of the movers and shakers in the industry, has been enjoying great success in Middle Eastern markets with its saffron tea. According to Patrick de la Cueva, Marketing and Sales Manager of Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain, the company now has its own plantations of Crocus sativus in Pétrola (Albacete), guaranteeing supply for their high-end brand Zafferania.
But the other crucial factor, lest we forget, is consumer awareness. Which means you and me. If Spanish saffron is to have a bright future as well as an illustrious past, we could all benefit from a bit of consciousness-raising. Real Spanish saffron from the PDO La Mancha, bearing the sticker with the violet flower and the figure of Don Quixote, both merits our respect as indisputably the finest of its kind and deserves a front-row place in the spice racks of all our kitchens.

Paul Richardson lives on a farm in northern Extremadura. A freelance travel and food writer, he is the author of A Late Dinner: discovering the food of Spain *(Bloomsbury, UK, and Scribner, USA).*

"We would like to extend our thanks to the Regulatory Council for PDO Azafrán de La Mancha *for contributing their product to this report".*

María José
San Román*

Translation
Synonyme.net/©ICEX

Photos, recipes
Toya Legido/©ICEX

The wines have been selected by Carlos Domingo Lozano Álvarez, sommelier at Monastrell restaurant.

SCALLOPS WITH ALMONDS,

eggplant and smoked saffron air

(Vieiras con almendra, berenjena y aire ahumado de azafrán)

Scallops are not a typical Mediterranean produce, but they are one of the most popular molluscs. To make them more our own, I serve them with two products that are characteristic of the region: almonds and eggplant. In this case, the eggplant carries the aroma of the saffron smoke, which forms a great combination with the scallops.

SERVES 4

4 scallops; 15 g / 1/2 oz toasted almonds; 20 g / 1 oz roast eggplant skins.

For the eggplant cream: 400 g / 14 oz eggplants; 20 g / 1 oz soft Jijona *turrón* (a sweet paste made with almonds and honey); 10 ml / 2 tsp almond oil; 5 ml / 1 tsp lemon juice; 4 ml / 0.8 tsp saffron water (dissolved).

For the smoked saffron air: 100 ml / 1/2 cup roast eggplant juice; 5 g / 1/6 oz soy lecithin; 4 ml / 0.8 tsp saffron water (dissolved).

Roast the scallops in a non-stick frying pan.

Eggplant cream

Roast the whole eggplants in a Josper charcoal oven at 400°C / 752°F for 5 minutes.
Peel and put the juice to one side. Mix the eggplant pulp with the almond oil, turrón, lemon juice and saffron water.

Smoked saffron air

Mix the smoked juice of the roast eggplants with soy lecithin and saffron water. Emulsify with a hand blender.

Presentation

Pour the eggplant cream into a soup dish. Place the scallop to one side and cover one side of it with the smoked saffron air. Finish with the roughly chopped toasted almonds; the eggplant skins are used to decorate and add to the smoked aroma.

Preparation time

45 minutes

Recommended wine

As Sortes 2005 (DO Valdeorras), from Bodega Rafael Palacios, is a glossy straw-colored wine with a powerful aroma of ripe fruit, white flowers, refined cocoa and spices. The attributes of this 100% Godello wine, which has a fleshy, tasty and fresh sensation in the mouth, make it an ideal companion for this scallop dish.

*For a more in-depth look at the chef, see Close-up

CHEESE MILLEFEUILLE

with pumpkin, saffron and air of sage

(Milhojas de quesos con calabaza, azafrán y aire de salvia)

A simple vegetarian combination with few ingredients, yet very complex in terms of texture and taste. This dish is an exaltation of well-prepared simplicity and at the same time gives a nod to neighboring culinary traditions with which we have so much in common, and where herbs play a key role. The sage provides a Mediterranean touch.

SERVES 4

300 g / 10 1/2 oz pumpkin; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz ricotta cheese; 50 g / 2 oz parmesan cheese; 1 egg; 50 ml / 4 tbsp liquid cream; 25 ml / 2 tbsp saffron water (dissolved); 4 sheets filo pastry; 125 g / 4 1/2 oz natural yoghurt; 125 ml / 1/2 cup fresh milk; salt; pepper; edible flowers.

For the sage emulsion: 10 g / 1/3 oz fresh sage leaves; 60 g / 2 oz butter; 200 ml / 3/4 cups chicken stock with saffron; 10 g / 1/3 oz soy lecithin.

For the saffron water: 1 g / 0.03 oz saffron, in threads or ground; 250 ml / 1 1/8 cups water.

For the chicken stock with saffron: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz chicken skin; 1,500 ml / 6 1/2 cup mineral water; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz onion; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz carrot; 150 mg / 0.005 oz saffron, dried or in threads; extra virgin olive oil.

Saffron water

Infuse the saffron with water at 65°C / 149°F for 4 hours. Put to one side when cool, out of the light. Saffron water can be kept for 3 days in the fridge, or it can be frozen in ice cube bags and kept for 1 month.

Chicken stock with saffron

Clean and chop the onion and carrot. Place a bit of extra virgin olive oil in a 3-4 liter / 13-17 cup saucepan or pot. Fry the vegetables and the chicken skin until they brown slightly. Add the water and saffron and bring to a boil. Once it has boiled, leave it to cook at a very low temperature for 4 hours. Then strain and allow to cool. When it is cold, remove any remaining fat from the top.

Cut the pumpkin in the meat slicer on number 1. Mix the ricotta and parmesan cheese with the egg, cream and saffron water.

Prepare a 8 x 16 cm / 3.1 x 6.2 in rectangular tin, 8 cm / 3.1 in deep. Place the tin on a baking tray. Cut the sheets of filo pastry to the size of the tin and place a sheet of pastry at the bottom of the tin. Apply a thin layer of the mixture of ricotta and parmesan cheese with the egg, cream and saffron water with a basting brush, followed by a layer of pumpkin. Repeat this process alternating one layer of pastry and one layer of cheese until the tin is approximately 4 cm / 1.6 in full. To end, apply a final pastry layer. Whisk the yoghurt, fresh milk, salt and pepper together. When this is done, top the tins with the mixture. Bake at 170°C / 338°F for 35 minutes.

Allow to cool before slicing.

Sage emulsion

Blanche the sage leaves in boiling water and cool in ice water.

Mix in the Thermomix together with the chicken stock and saffron, butter and soy lecithin. Finally, whisk using a hand blender until obtaining a foam.

Presentation

Cut 2 x 8 cm / 0.8 x 3.1 in rectangles and serve two per person. At serving time, heat in the oven once more for 3 minutes at 160°C / 320°F. Soak the rectangles in 50 ml / 4 tbsp well-whisked sage emulsion with foam, and try to keep the air on top. Decorate with edible flowers.

Preparation time

60 minutes

Recommended wine

Vinya La Calma—100% Chenin Blanc—(DO Penedès), from Bodegas Can Ràfols dels Caus. The shiny yellow color, powerful aroma of ripe fruit, sweet spices, creamy oak and herbs, and the smoky, full-flavored, fresh finish, together with its pleasant sharpness, bring out the flavors of this dish.

MONASTRELL GRAPE SORBET

with sweet Monastrell sabayon and saffron crumbs

(Sorbete de uva monastrell con sabayon de monastrell dulce y migas con azafrán)

The grape harvest is now upon us and each year I visit the winery of some harvester friends, where I have discovered the delights of eating grapes fresh from the vine, whether they are Monastrell, Merlot, or Cabernet. On this occasion I have used the Monastrell or Mourvèdre grape, which is smooth, sweet and tastes of red berries, to make a sorbet that is almost sugar-free, accompanied by a sabayon made from the same grape once turned into Castaño Monastrell sweet wine, "without a doubt one of the best sweet wines we have in Spain." The saffron crumbs give this dish a crunchy texture and also connect it to some very traditional recipes from the area.

SERVES 4

Fresh Monastrell grapes; saffron xanthan gum (dissolved); flower petals.

For the Monastrell grape sorbet: 1 l / 4 1/4 cup Monastrell grape juice; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sorbet stabilizer; 20 g / 1 oz syrup.

For the Monastrell sweet wine sabayon: 200 ml / 3/4 cups Castaño Monastrell (Bodegas Castaño); 200 g / 7 oz sugar; 200 g / 7 oz egg yolks; 2 gelatine leaves.

For the saffron crumbs: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz bread; 1 clove of garlic; 50 ml / 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil; 25 ml / 2 tbsp saffron water (dissolved); 20 g / 1 oz sugar.

For the saffron xanthan gum: 125 ml / 1/2 cup saffron water; 375 ml / 1.6 cups water; 2 g / 0.07 oz xanthan gum.

Monastrell grape sorbet

Mix all the ingredients and process with a Pacojet. Freeze in four glasses.

Monastrell sweet wine sabayon

Make a *crème anglaise* from the wine, sugar and yolks. Then add the gelatine leaves, previously soaked in water. Allow to cool and siphon.

Saffron crumbs

Cut the bread in thick brunoise. Sprinkle with a spray of saffron water and dry in the oven for a moment. Once more, sprinkle with the spray and dry in the oven. The bread should turn an attractive yellow color. Confit the garlic clove in extra virgin olive oil. Once done, sauté the dried crumbs. Finally, add sugar and caramelize.

Saffron xanthan gum

Mix the saffron water with the water. Whisk 100 ml / 1/2 cup of the mixture with the xanthan gum and add the remaining liquid after. Allow to settle until it turns transparent or place in a vacuum bag to extract the air.

Presentation

Spread a spoonful of crumbs on a plate and place a quenelle of Monastrell grape sorbet and sweet wine sabayon to one side. Decorate with fresh Monastrell grapes, flowers and the saffron xanthan gum.

Preparation time

60 minutes

Recommended wine

Casa Cisca (DO Yecla), from Bodegas Castaño. The cherry color of this wine, with its deep red meniscus and its aroma of ripe fruit, refined cocoa and fragrant coffee, make it an expressive, elegant and complex choice that blends in perfect harmony with this dish. Mention should also be made of its spicy entrance in the mouth, with its fine, ripe tannins.

Ageing wine in oak *barricas*, or barrels (a process known as *crianza*) has been a tradition in Spain for centuries, but there's an increasing trend for white wines to be fermented as well as aged in the barrel. Spain's native white varieties are particularly suitable for this more subtle and gentle form of fermentation, and judicious ageing in wood can add great complexity to the finished wine. John Radford has been finding out how.

Into the **Wood**

OAKED WHITES

TEXT
JOHN RADFORD/©ICEX

PHOTOS
JUAN MANUEL SANZ/©ICEX

These techniques have come full circle: for more than 30 years white wines were routinely aged in oak, even when the resulting wine was almost impossible to sell outside its native region, presumably because oak had been seen to enhance red wines and the received wisdom was that it would do the same for whites. Fortunately, pioneering winemakers all over the country went on to re-examine the process of barrel ageing and barrel fermentation, with the resulting leap in quality and giving rise to some wines which are unique in the world.

But where do we start in our choice of barrel? American, French, Hungarian, Russian, or another type of oak? Old or new? And what size: 225 liters, 300, 500, 600, or giant oak vats (tinas)? All of these and more are in use in Spanish viticulture, and every winemaker has his or her own personal preference to get the best out of the grape. The favorite size for both ageing and fermentation seems to be the 225-liter barrica, simply because that's the size used all over Spain (and France) for ageing red wines, and the barrels are readily available and affordable thanks to economies of scale.

Traditionally, Spanish winemakers have used American oak, and principally Tennessee White Oak (*Quercus alba*)—a legacy of Spain's colonies in the Americas. The tree grows quickly in the southern climate and the wood is soft and easy to work, with relatively large pores which allow wines to mature gently but relatively rapidly. Many modern winemakers, however, are using French oak, and the most favored comes from the forest of Allier (*Quercus petraea*), which grows more slowly in the cooler climate and has finer pores, and a much higher price. Both main types of oak add their own "flavor profile" to the wine during the fermentation and ageing process.

So, having chosen your wood, the next question is toasting. A few winemakers use untoasted barrels, but most will specify low, medium or high toast: in the last stage of manufacture, before the top and bottom are fitted, the barrel is placed over a column of fire. This serves to caramelize the natural sugars in the oak, forming a "crust" around the inside and also sealing the barrel and making it watertight. For barrel fermenting white wines, a lighter toast is usually preferred as, during the process, the wine will pass through the crust and pick up flavors from the wood—mainly vanilla, but also nutty characteristics, often described as almond, coconut, and hazelnut, as well as some sugars from the toast. In the hands of a skilled winemaker, these trace elements can be combined to give the finished wine more softness, structure and complexity. There are also certain grape varieties which can be rather "neutral" if fermented and stored in modern stainless steel tanks, and these can be very much enhanced by the barrel.

Many white wines are fermented in a tank so that the winemaker can control the temperature of fermentation and keep it low; the wines are then transferred to the barrel for ageing. For fermentation, barrels tend simply to be kept in a cool place (an underground cellar is ideal) and the ratio of the volume of the wine to the surface area of the inside of the barrel helps keep fermentation under control.

A typical process for making *crianza* white wines in this way involves pressing the grapes in the normal way, fermenting under temperature control (typically in a

WINES

stainless steel tank) and then running the finished wine (sometimes still in the latter stages of fermentation) into the barrel. For barrel fermentation, the juice from the press is directly run off into the barrel, where fermentation begins naturally. New barrels will have a much greater effect on the finished wine than old ones, as the trace elements in the wood tend to have been completely used up by the time the barrel is about three years old. Once the fermentation is complete, there will be a sediment of the dead yeast cells in the wine (the lees). Many winemakers stir it up with a baton (a process known as *batonnage*) to keep the yeast in circulation and extract the complex flavors within it either in the tank or, more commonly, in the barrel. Subsequently, the wine is allowed to settle and may be run off into another barrel for further ageing or, for young, fresh *joven* styles, into a tank for bottling.

Probably the most widespread grape variety fermented in the barrel in Spain is Chardonnay, which lends itself to the process very well, although all too often it doesn't exhibit much of a sense of place. In recent years, however, Spanish winemakers have had increasing success using Spain's native varieties and, in terms of regional character, the finished wines really do have a "story to tell" about where they come from, the local climate, the soil in which the vines were grown, and the traditions of their home region. Some of the most popular wines are described below.

Albarín Blanco

This is a rare variety, grown in the far north of Spain (Asturias and Cantabria) and has no relation to the similarly-named Albariño, but is quite possibly a relative of the Moscatel. The style is very light and fresh with a hint of Muscat on the nose, and time spent on the lees adds to its complexity—rich but

Albarin Blanco

Albariño

ultimately dry. A good example is Nibias, from Bodegas Mengoba in the Vino de la Tierra (VdT) area **Cangas del Narcea** (Asturias).

Albariño

One of the great classics of Spanish white wine grapes, this is grown all over northwestern Spain, but its heartland is Galicia, and particularly the **DO Rías Baixas**. It has a lovely peachy fruit and takes on a delicious musky texture when fermented in barrel.
It is believed to have a common ancestor with Germany's Riesling, but has been grown in Galicia since at least the 10th century. Excellent examples from the DO Rías Baixas include: Condes de Albarei Carballo Galego (unusually, fermented in the local Galician oak); Finca Valiñas, Bodegas Mar de Frades; Organistrum (named after the traditional Galician hurdy-gurdy), Bodegas Martín Códax; and Granbazán Limousin (fermented in Limousin oak).

Albillo

Largely grown in the **DO Vinos de Madrid** (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 79) and also in the DO Ribera del Duero, where it's sometimes known as the Pardina (although they don't make DO white wines in that region), it's often seen as a "back-up" variety because of its perceived neutrality, although as a table grape it has delicious fruit and freshness. Oak, however, adds the complexity and aromas which the grape lacks, and a good example from Madrid is Cantocuerdas from Bodegas Bernabeleva, which is fermented in 2,500-liter oak vats by Raúl Pérez, one of Spain's dynamic young consultant winemakers.

Cariñena Blanca, Cariñena Gris

This can be confusing: Cariñena is a red grape, and is named after its birthplace, the town and DO region

Cariñena Blanca

Albillo

of Cariñena, although very little is actually grown there. It's planted in France, where they call it the Carignan, but its main home is Catalonia, and particularly DO Empordà, which is right on the French border in the top northeastern corner of Spain. The confusion arises because it's illegal under EU wine law to use the name of a DO wine area on a wine from a different area, so you'll find it under different names in Spain, including Samsó in Catalonia and Mazuelo in Rioja. The non-red versions of the grape come from bud mutations on the vine, and it's quite common for red varieties to produce the odd bunch or bunches of white (*blanca*) or dusky pink (*gris*) grapes, especially in cooler harvests. These simply used to be mixed in with the red, but some producers have actively selected the white varieties and propagated them to create dedicated white wine vines. The style tends to be smoky, herby, mouth-filling, perfumed and floral—in short, quite unique. Examples (both from the **DO Empordà**) include Masia Carreras from Celler Martí Fabra (both grapes) and Finca La Garriga from Castillo Perelada (fermented in Bordeaux oak).

Doña Blanca

This grape is mainly grown in northwest Spain, particularly Galicia, and it has been suggested that it might be a variant of the Merseguera, transplanted from Valencia, as one of its alternative names is Valenciana. In the past it was often used to make semi-sweet wines because it ripens well, but in recent years talented winemakers have teased out the delicate fruit, floral aromas and peachy fruit and an underlying mineral character. One of the best is Gorvia, from the Quinta de Muradella in the **DO Monterrei**: the winemaker

Garnacha Blanca

(Raúl Pérez again) ferments in 500-liter barrels of French oak.

Garnacha Blanca

If ever a grape was designed by Mother Nature for barrel ageing and fermentation, this is it. Garnacha has its origins in the province of Zaragoza (Aragón) and the red variety is widely planted there, in La Rioja, Catalonia and France (where it is called Grenache). The white variant is equally widely planted and probably arose as the result of bud mutation, as with the aforementioned Cariñena Blanca, and there is also a Garnacha Gris in much smaller quantities. It is one of the best white grapes of the DOCa Rioja (although in relatively small plantations) but does its most prominent work in the eastern half of Catalonia, from the DO Alella in the north, all the way down to the province of Tarragona in the south. The style varies from delicate, light and floral with honeysuckle aromas to musky, minerally, fruit-rich (but not sweet) wines with impressive warmth and length. This really is a grape which tells you where it comes from in the glass. Here are just a few of many suggestions:

DO Catalunya: Sentits Blancs, Bodegas Puiggròs (new French oak).

DO Empordà: Quinze Roures, Espelt Viticultores (French oak).

DO Montsant: Clos d'Englora, Baronia del Montsant (new high-toast Nevers oak); Petit Blanc from Joanne Cox, Celler Ronadelles (with 50% Macabeo, see below, 300-liter French oak. Joanne Cox is the English co-proprietor); Vall Selada, Coop. Agraria Els Guiamets (new Allier); Tretze, Mas de la Caçadora (600-liter open French oak barrels); Les Sorts Blanc, Celler El Masroig (new French oak).

DOCa Priorat: Gran Clos Blanc, Cellers Fuentes (with 45% Macabeo, new Allier, medium toast).

Viura

DO Terra Alta: El Quintà, Celler Bàrbara Forés (new Allier), Vi Dolç, Celler Bàrbara Forés (sweet, Allier oak); Edetària Blanco (300-liter barrels); Flor de Garnatxa, Celler La Bollidora (French oak); Llàgrimes de Tardor, Agrícola Sant Josep (new French oak); L'Avi Arrufi, Celler Piñol (French oak).

Godello

Godello (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 76) is, if you will, the "second" grape of Galicia, mainly grown in the DOs Ribeiro, Valdeorras and Monterrei, as well as DO Bierzo in Castile-Leon, albeit on a rather smaller scale than the Albariño in neighboring DO Rías Baixas. Its style is very delicate, perfumed and aromatic, particularly when grown on slate-based soils. The regulating councils have been actively encouraging growers to replant with Godello in recent years, and the wines show extremely well in international competitions. Because of the elegant nature of the grape, it is seldom fermented or aged in the barrel and sometimes has a minority of another variety to provide weight and power.
A few examples:
DO Valdeorras: Alan de Val Pedrazais (six months in oak); Pazos da Portela, Bodegas Valdesil (5 months in oak); Viña Somoza Selección (six months in oak).
DO Bierzo: Dominio de Tares Blanco (Allier oak); Soto del Vicario GO (with Doña Blanca, 4 months in oak); Mengoba blanco (with Doña Blanca, seven months in oak).

Malvasía

Used very often as a minority grape in white Rioja (see Viura), Malvasía is best-known for sweet wines in other DO zones. It has a natural, musky softness which lends itself well to ageing in oak and, of course, was the basis of the sweet, fortified "Canary Sack" of Shakespeare's time (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 80). Today it's still

Moscatel de Alejandría

a major variety in the Canary Islands and does its best work in sweet, fortified wines. Good examples from the **DO Lanzarote** include El Grifo Malvasía Dulce (fermented in oak plus four months) and Teiga, Bodegas Mozaga (fermented in oak plus three months).

Moscatel

There are two main strains of this variety: Moscatel de Grano Menudo, with smaller berries (known in France as the Muscat de Frontignan), and Moscatel de Alejandría (Muscat d'Alexandrie in France), which has larger berries and a sweeter natural fruit. Both have an aromatic, musky nose and the ability to make sublime sweet wines. Popular in Andalusia for fortified wines in DOs Jerez, Montilla and Málaga, it is also used further up the east coast as far as Empordà and, most recently, inland as far as DO Navarra and the Vino de la Tierra Valles de Sadacia, in La Rioja. Moscatel has high levels of grape-sugar when it's ripe, and has traditionally been vinified as a sweet wine to capitalize on this. In recent years, however, winemakers have been fermenting the grape out to complete dryness, retaining the musky, aromatic perfume and richness on the palate, but with a dry finish. This character lends itself well to barrel ageing and fermentation, and the grape is now made into delicate, dry whites and luscious sweet wines, including *vinos de licor:*

DO Málaga: Molino Real, Telmo Rodríguez (20 months in oak); Jorge Ordoñez Botani (fermented in oak plus two months); Ariyanas Terruño Pizarroso, Bodegas Bentomiz (six months in oak); Moscatel Guardia, Bodega Antigua Casa de Guardia (vino de licor, 24 months in oak).

DO Empordà: Flor d'Albera, Martí Fabra (fermented in oak plus 12 months).

Tempranillo Blanco

Picapoll

Picapoll

Considered native to Catalonia, this is also grown over the border in Languedoc, France, where it's known as the Picpoul or Piquepoul. It's a late-ripening variety which offers certain challenges in northeastern Spain, but its wine tends to be bright and perfumed, with good fruit and hints of pineapple. For this reason it's usually fermented in tank or blended with other varieties. It's mainly used in the DO Pla de Bages, but a good example of a very judicious use of oak (just 15 days) to add complexity, cream, vanilla and nutty, coconut flavors without taking away the delicacy of the grape is Solergibert, from the celler of the same name.

Tardana

This is a rare variety, found only in the DO Utiel-Requena (Valencia, east coast of Spain) and surrounding areas, where it's often known as the Planta Nova. One of the great joys of Spanish wine, however, is that there's always somebody who's willing to experiment and work with obscure native grape varieties to see what they can accomplish. One example is Bodegas Torroja, which claims to be the only winery in the world to make a 100% Tardana. It is called Sybarus Único and exhibits the kind of peachy fruit we know from the Albariño but with a hint of citrus, a honeyed aroma and a touch of vanilla from the oak; it is quite unique, as its name implies.

Tempranillo Blanco

Another unique variety: occasionally red grape vines produce a mutation of white grapes which are usually simply mixed in with the red (as with Cariñena Blanca, mentioned earlier), but a

Verdejo

few bodegas propagate the white strain to create a new variety, and this is the case here. Bodegas Valdemar in the DOCa Rioja claims to have the only plantation of the grape in the world and markets it as part of their Inspiración range. The wine is fermented in new French oak and offers a deliciously crisp, fresh palate with subtle oaky notes.

Verdejo

This is the classic grape of the DO Rueda and is regularly fermented and/or aged in oak to add a musky flavor to its herby, fresh fruit. It's also grown elsewhere in Castile-Leon, and sometimes blended with the Viura (described later) to soften the acidity and add a gentle richness to the finished wine.

DO Rueda: Palacio de Bornos, Bodegas Taninia (fermented in oak plus four months); Belondrade y Lurton (fermented in oak plus ten months); Selección Personal Carlos Moro Emina, Bodega Emina Rueda (fermented in oak plus six months); Marqués de Riscal Limousin (fermented in oak plus six months); José Pariente (fermented in oak plus five months); PradoRey 3 barricas (fermented in oak plus nine months).

DO Toro: Iduna, Bodegas Guareña (fermented in oak plus five months, lovely bottle, too).

Viura

Believed to have originated in Catalonia, this is now widely grown across north-central and northeastern Spain, especially in La Rioja, where it is the main white variety and widely fermented and/or aged in oak. Under its Catalan name Macabeo it is, perhaps, best known for being one of the main grapes in Cava (along with Parellada and Xarel.lo) but has always had a reputation for being rather neutral.

Godello

On its own it produces fresh, dry white wines which are sometimes described as "squeaky-clean", but with oak fermentation and ageing it reveals a musky, herby character with some complexity and the capability to age well. Traditional white Rioja has always had a majority of Viura, but more modern winemakers have also discovered its potential for ageing in oak. There are too may examples to list here, but some of the most prominent are detailed below, with La Rioja traditional and modern styles:
DOCa Rioja: Predicador, Bodega Contador (modern, with Garnacha blanca and Malvasía, fermented in oak); Iñigo Amézola, Bodegas Amézola de la Mora (modern, fermented in oak plus five months); Viña Berceo (traditional, with Malvasía); Beronia (modern, fermented in oak plus five months); Campillo (modern, with Malvasía, fermented in oak); Chobeo de Peciña (modern, fermented in oak); Izadi (modern, with Malvasía, fermented in oak plus six months); La Emperatriz (traditional, six months in oak); Luís Cañas (modern, fermented in oak plus six months); Muga (modern, fermented in oak plus one month); Murúa (modern, with Malvasía and Garnacha blanca, fermented in oak plus six months); Cosme Palacio (modern, fermented in oak plus six months); Plácet, Bodegas Palacios Remondo (modern, fermented in oak plus ten months, winemaker Álvaro Palacios); Erre Punto, Bodegas Remírez de Ganuza (modern, with Malvasía, fermented in oak plus six months); Óscar Tobía Reserva (traditional, with Malvasía, 12 months in oak); Viñas de Gain, Artadi (modern, fermented in oak); Allende (modern, fermented in oak plus 14 months, an iconic "new-wave"

Xarel.lo

style); Viña Gravonia, López de Heredia (48 months in oak, probably the most traditional white wine in La Rioja); Organza, Sierra Cantábria (modern, with Malvasía and Garnacha blanca, fermented in oak plus eight months); Viña Real blanco (modern, fermented in oak plus five months); Valserrano, La Marquesa (modern, fermented in oak plus six months).

DO Pla de Bages: Collbaix Anyada, Celler El Molí (with Picapoll, fermented in oak).

DO Conca de Barberà: Guilla, Celler Cercavins (fermented in oak plus five months); Saó blanco, Mas Blanch i Jove (fermented in oak plus six months).

Xarel.lo

Best known for its work in Cava (with Parellada and Macabeo), this variety has made massive strides in the past ten years as growers have come to terms with its idiosyncrasies. It used to be regarded as a "difficult" grape with "rooty, earthy" characteristics, but that turned out to be because growers were leaving the harvest too late in order to maximize sugar levels, which allowed the grape to deteriorate. Today it's harvested early, at lower sugar levels but with fresher acidity, and is turning out wines of exemplary freshness yet with a new weight and warmth and a lovely aromatic nose. Barrel ageing adds a delicious musky character to the wine. In the DO Alella it's known as Pansà Blanca.

DO Catalunya: Nerola, Torres (with Garnacha Blanca, fermented in oak plus six months); L'Equilibrista Blanc, Can Dez Mas (fermented in oak plus six months).

DO Penedès: Creu de Lavit, Segura Viudas (fermented in oak plus five months); Pairal, Can Ràfols dels Caus (fermented in oak plus four months); Clos Lentiscus, Can Ramón (fermented in Allier oak plus six months).

DO Tarragona: Adernats, Vinícola de Nulles (fermented in oak plus six months).

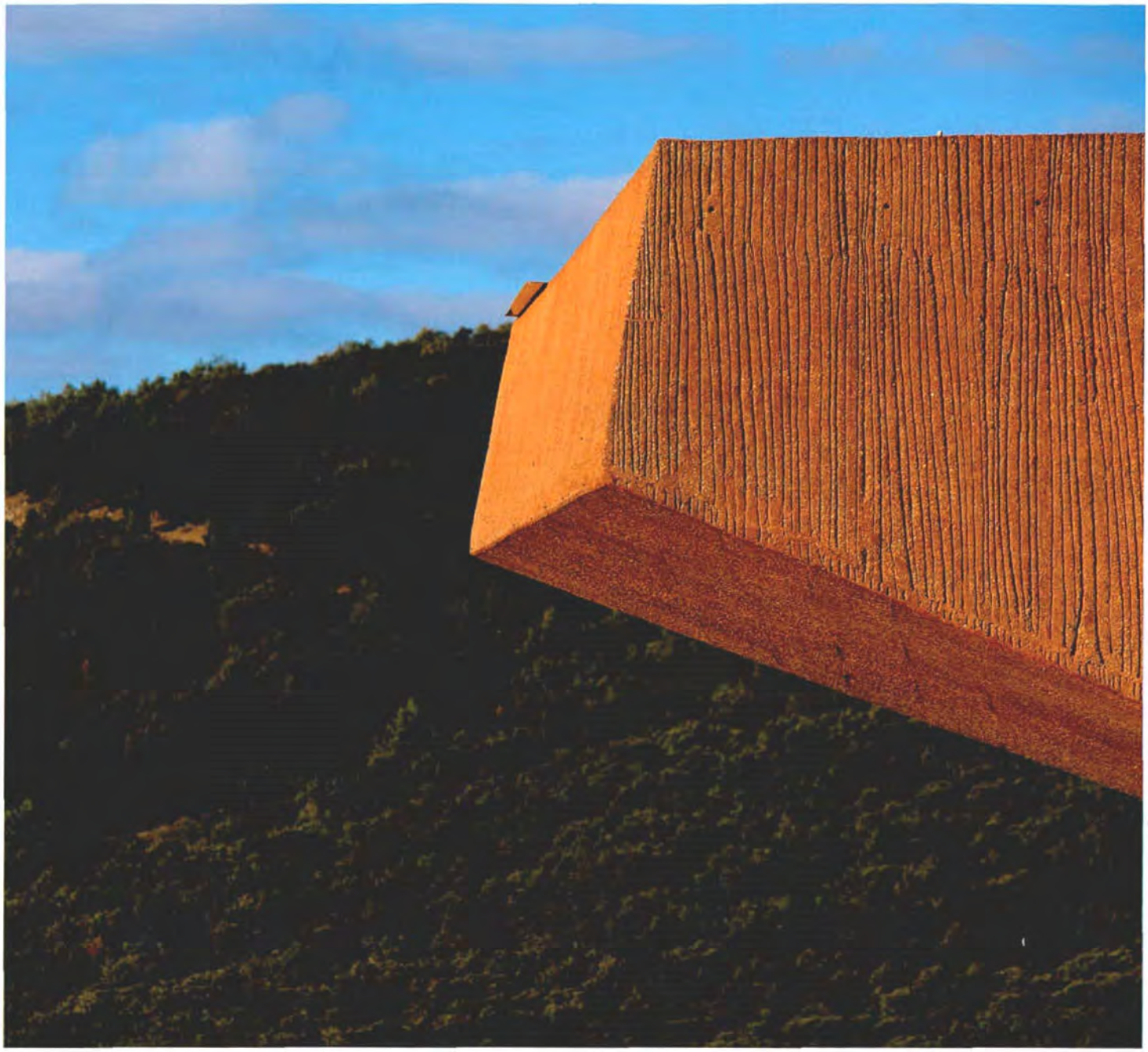
There are, of course, many, many more examples of how the winemaker's art of using oak to bring out the best in white wine grapes has developed over the past decade, and it's one of the great pleasures of Spain to discover the ground-breaking work that continues to surprise and delight wine lovers with a taste for exploration.

John Radford is freelance writer, broadcaster, lecturer, speaker and actor with a special interest in food, wine and travel and an informed interest in Spain. Author of the comprehensive book on Spanish wines The New Spain, *he is editor of* Yes Chef! *magazine and a regular contributor to wine and food publications in the UK and abroad.*

"We would like to extend our thanks to the wineries for sending bottles for the photo report. We would also like to thank the Madrid Institute of Rural, Agrarian and Food R&D (IMIDRA) *for providing grapes from the* El Encín *estate."*

New reds from **Navarre**

Navarre is a crossroads, a land where multiple influences, soils, climates and varieties give the DO Navarra a unique personality, with red wines that surprise with their elegant blending. My tour round some of its bodegas—some new, some renovated—reveals the plural personality of one of Spain's historic wine-producing areas.



Celebrating DIVERSITY

TEXT
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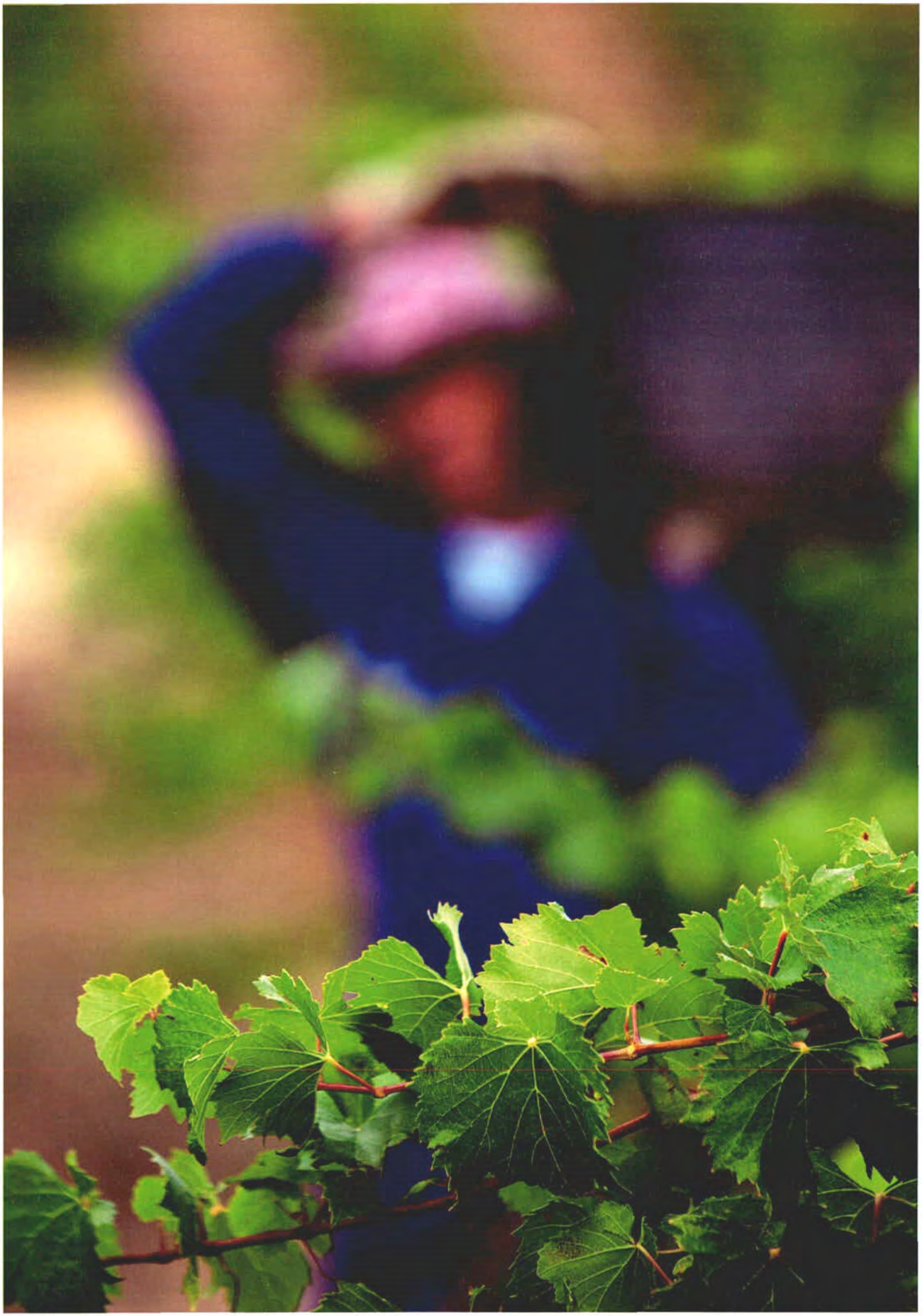
PHOTOS
JESÚS CASO/©ICEX

TRANSLATION
JENNY MCDONALD/©ICEX

Navarre is varied, making each visit a tour of discovery. It has been subject to criticism for opening up to foreign, or "continental" varieties as they are called by Jordi Vidal, Manager of the DO Navarra's Regulatory Council, rather than focusing on native, or "peninsular", varieties. But this is precisely one of its strong points: the adaptation and combination of different grapes in an area with different climates and soils. Before phylloxera came to Navarre, in 1890, over 80 types of grape, both peninsular and continental, were recorded here, so even then the area had great varietal diversity. But phylloxera in Navarre destroyed almost 50,000 ha (123,552 acres) of vineyards, leaving just 700 (1,729 acres) in 1905, in comparison with today's 15,000 (37,065 acres).
In the early 20th century, the decision was taken to replant vineyards, mostly with Garnacha, in principle an easy-to-grow and high-yielding grape. And in the 1980s, the Viticulture and Enology Centre of Navarre (Estación de Viticultura y Enología de Navarra, EVENA) took on the task of restoring Navarre's varietal diversity. It was determined to go back to the tradition of combining continental varieties, such as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, with peninsular varieties, such as Garnacha and Tempranillo.
Three decades have passed since then, but over the last decade Navarre has been fully exploiting its multiplicity, producing reds with personality that express their

terroir, with each of the Navarran bodegas orchestrating blends in their own way.
The DO Navarra is divided into five sub-zones, but the local experts explain to me that there are three main influences, both climatic and historical. The DO can be seen as the meeting point of three climates. In the south, warm, Mediterranean winds blow up the Ebro Valley. In the north, the mountain winds from the Pyrenees are sharp and icy, and in the west, Atlantic winds bring in moisture. Strangely enough, these three climates tally almost perfectly with the three main cultural and trade routes that have left their mark on the region. In the south is the Ebro, Spain's most voluminous river, which crosses the top third of Spain as far as the Mediterranean, carrying with it the Mediterranean wine culture. In the north, the main influence has been from France, which governed this territory during certain periods of history. And Navarre is also crossed by one of the world's most important pilgrim roads, the Camino de Santiago. These three climates and historical routes have had a great influence on the development of Navarre, generating the marked diversity visible in its wineries and wines. So where, then, should we look for the identity of the DO Navarra? It is precisely this diversity that allows each bodega to search for its own personal expression, that of each terroir and of each producer. The changing focus achieved over recent years by the Navarre enologists towards the place of origin, the actual vineyard, has been fundamental. Vineyards are living witnesses to climate and terrain and these can be expressed through the formula adopted by each enologist. Juan Magaña, owner of Viña Magaña, a winery that has been in operation since 1969, has a lot to say about this. When he started out in the world of wines, he became a nursery worker, bringing clones of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot from Bordeaux. Magaña is an expert who not only tended his own plants, but also carried out research on varieties, their clones, and the way they adapted to different types of soil. He provided plant material for such famous vineyards as Vega Sicilia (DO Ribera del Duero) and Contino (DOCa Rioja). Today he is studying unknown varieties such as the Vidao de Barillas, a local variety which so far has no official description and which he harvests with assistance from some of his sommelier customers in the US.



At his small, family-run winery, tradition persists alongside research. Each plot and each clone are vinified separately, using different methods for both processing and aging. From the Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot varieties, he sells four labels, all clearly bringing out their terroir. From the clones he imported in the 1970s, he is making a wine that has received one of the highest scores for a Spanish 100% Merlot wine in international guides. It is a very mineral Merlot, with clean tannins and the menthol and heathland aromas that are characteristic of this variety.

The Navarran Garnacha

Undoubtedly, the variety for which Navarre was best known in the past is Garnacha. Traditionally used for rosé wines with a bright color and very pleasant aromas, it is now going into top-quality reds. At Bodegas Nekeas, they understood its value from the start, and one of their wines, Chaparral de Vega Sindoa, is one of the best-known Spanish labels on the US market, having been present there for 20 years. Back then, Concha Vecino decided she wanted to produce a fine, elegant, warm wine, going against the trend at the time towards highly structured wines. And she has adopted this philosophy for all her wines, including her Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot Reserva. She suggests this wine's sweetness stems from her patience at harvest-time, which only begins once she is convinced the tannins are completely ready. Two lovers of Garnacha are the developers of the brand-new Domaines Lupier winery, which so far is making wines from this variety alone. Enrique Basarte is an agronomist engineer and was responsible for years for some of Spain's best-known wineries, such as Faustino, in the various DOs in which this company is present, and

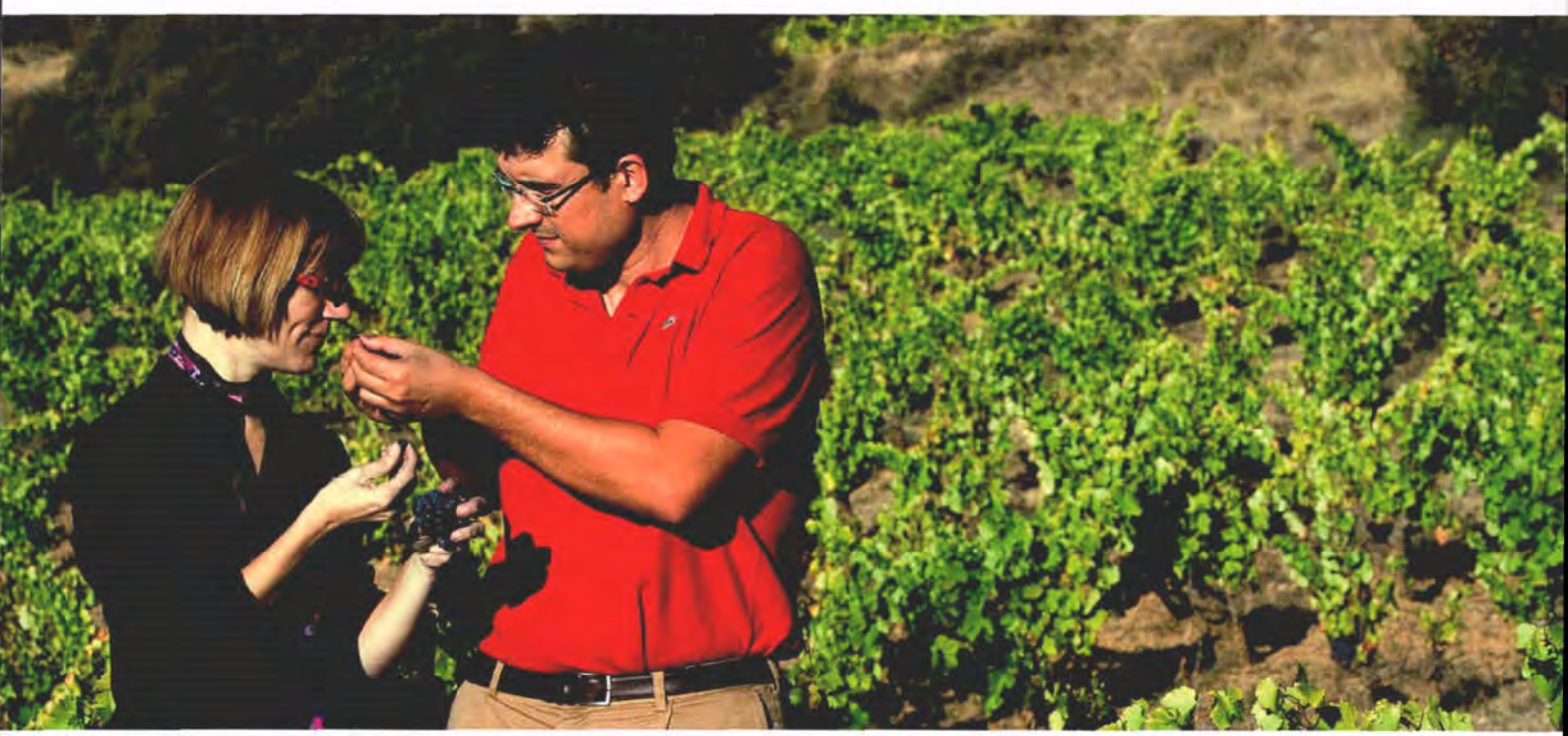
Chivite, in the DO Navarra. It was at Chivite that he met Elisa Úcar, who back then was in charge of exports. This was at the start of the century, when they began to buy very old Garnacha stocks from old clones, ending up with a total of 27 small plots at an altitude of 500 to 750 m (1,640 to 2,460 ft). They aim to achieve a multitude of nuances from these old Garnachas, which should be able to express the terrains in which they grew, with a low yield of 2,000 kg per ha. As we walked over rough ground towards one of his vineyards, Viña La Hornaz, Basarte suggested I take in the smell of some of the weeds we were treading on. "You can be sure to find the same aromas in the wine," he says. Clearly, viticulture is the backbone of this project, which has resulted so far in two wines. Terroir 2008, aged for 14 months in French oak, offers a very complex, earthy and herbal nose, and has elegance in the mouth with tannins that still need a little more time. Dama 2008 is much more perfumed, with black berries and flowery and lavender notes, and very stylish in the mouth, with just the right balance between the natural sweetness of the Garnacha and a delicate acidity.

The right formula

Balance is undoubtedly a characteristic that is shared by the new reds from Navarre. And diversity helps. Being able to

combine different varieties smoothes the way for enologists, but it is by no means easy to get it right. Kepa Sagastizábal, enologist at Bodega Inurrieta, works with Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Garnacha and Graciano in his red

Elisa Úcar and Enrique Basarte, Domaines Lupier.



wines. The family set up its winery in 2002, with the aim of making good wines from its own grapes. Manager Tomás Antoñana shows me the vineyards just beyond the windows of the tasting room. "This is what gives us a head start. The grapes reach us in perfect condition because the vineyard—264 ha (652 acres)—is very close by." In the words of Sagastizábal, their wines are based "not only on blended varieties but also on a combination of soils, maturation levels and aging times." We tasted two Reservas, both aged for 14 months in the barrel, that clearly illustrate this process of orchestration. Altos de Inurrieta is made mainly from Cabernet Sauvignon from the higher-altitude vineyards where the soils are stony, giving very obvious fruitiness on the nose and a touch of minerals in the mouth. The second Reserva comes from the Garnacha and Graciano varieties and is much more flowery, with plenty of taste and even some hints of licorice. We then went on to taste a varietal wine made from Graciano, Laderas de Inurrieta, which has a surprising depth of color, a bouquet reminiscent of herbs and some very pleasant sweet touches in the mouth. But our tasting session was brought to a close by Antoñana's uncle, Juan Mari, who came in to tell us the lunch he'd made was ready and waiting for us in the winery's restaurant.

So, from a family that is new to winemaking, on to another, whose surname is closely related to winemaking tradition in Navarre: the Ochoa family, which has been in the business since 1845. But tradition does not mean there has been no innovation. The winery's enologist, Adriana, was born into research. In 1998, her father, Javier Ochoa, was invested member of the Gran Orden de Caballeros del Vino (a prestigious association set up in 1994 by Wines from Spain in London, recognizing the people who have distinguished themselves exceptionally in the promotion of quality Spanish wines in the United Kingdom) for his contribution to the modernization of Navarran

wines. For decades, he was a researcher at EVENA, and he has passed on to Adriana the importance of research (for which the winery earmarks 1% of its budget). She is currently working, in collaboration with the CDTI (Centre for Industrial Development), on projects related to vineyards, processing and aging. Beatriz, her sister and the winery's marketing manager, is constantly handing over to her the requests she receives from the market. Bodegas Ochoa offers a wide range of wines with different styles, the idea being to suggest a different wine for each occasion—from their well-known Muscatel and Rosado de Lágrima, to reds made from Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon, Tempranillo, Merlot and Graciano. A little further north, and therefore under a greater influence from the Atlantic, is the outstanding Castillo de Monjardín, another family-run winery that also likes to play with varieties and soils. Although this article focuses on red wines, mention must be made of their splendid Chardonnay, the only Gran Reserva made from this variety in Navarre. The white grapes come from vineyards close to the winery at an altitude of 700 m (2,297 ft), whereas the red grapes are planted to the south. Some of this winery's red wines to be watched out for are its La Cantera, a young, very fruity

and sweet red made from Garnacha grapes coming from 70-year-old stocks, and a powerful Merlot called Deyo, with well-integrated wood, very ripe fruit and clear menthol aromas.

Tomás Antoñana, Bodega Inurrieta.

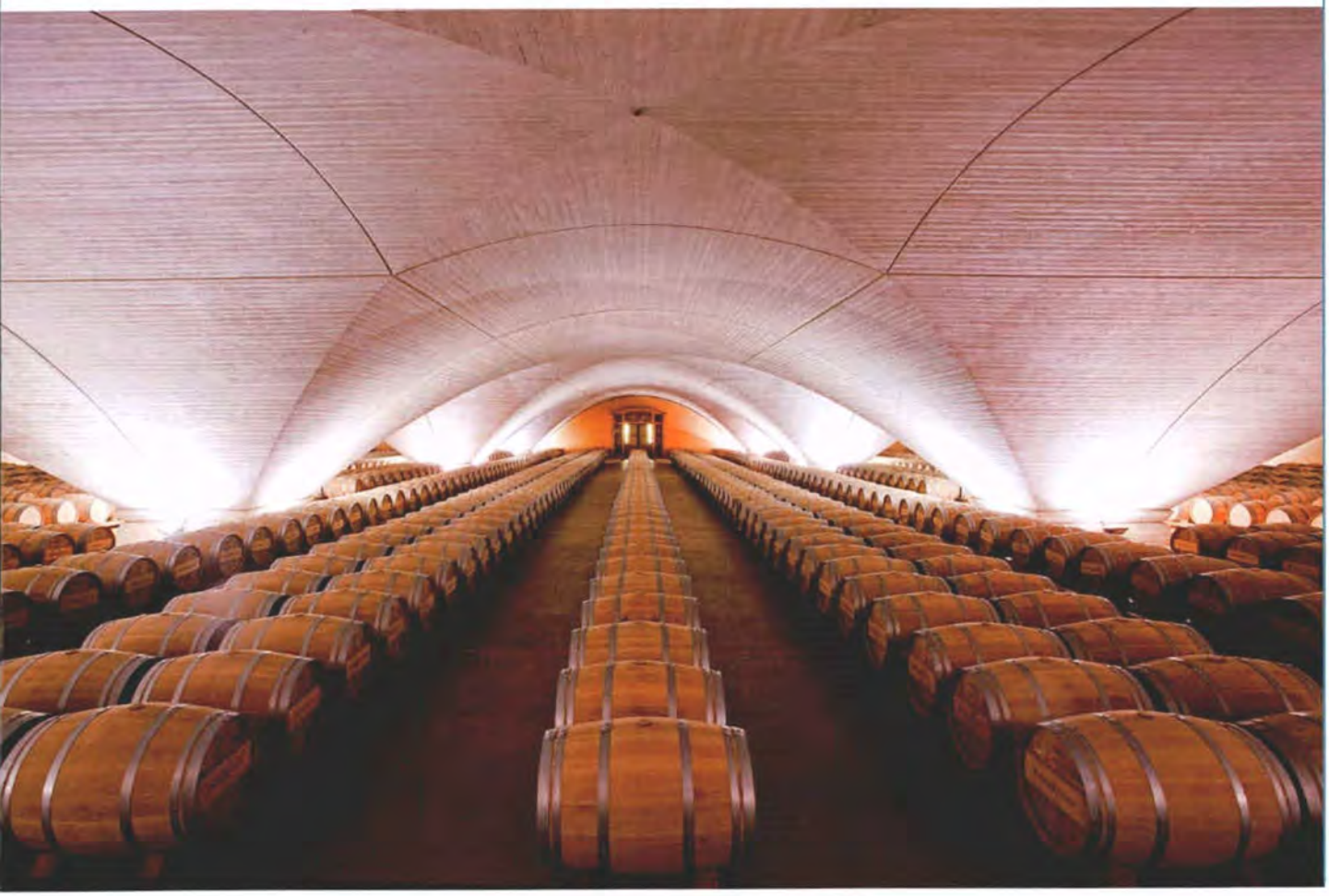
Two *Vinos de Pago* from **Navarre**

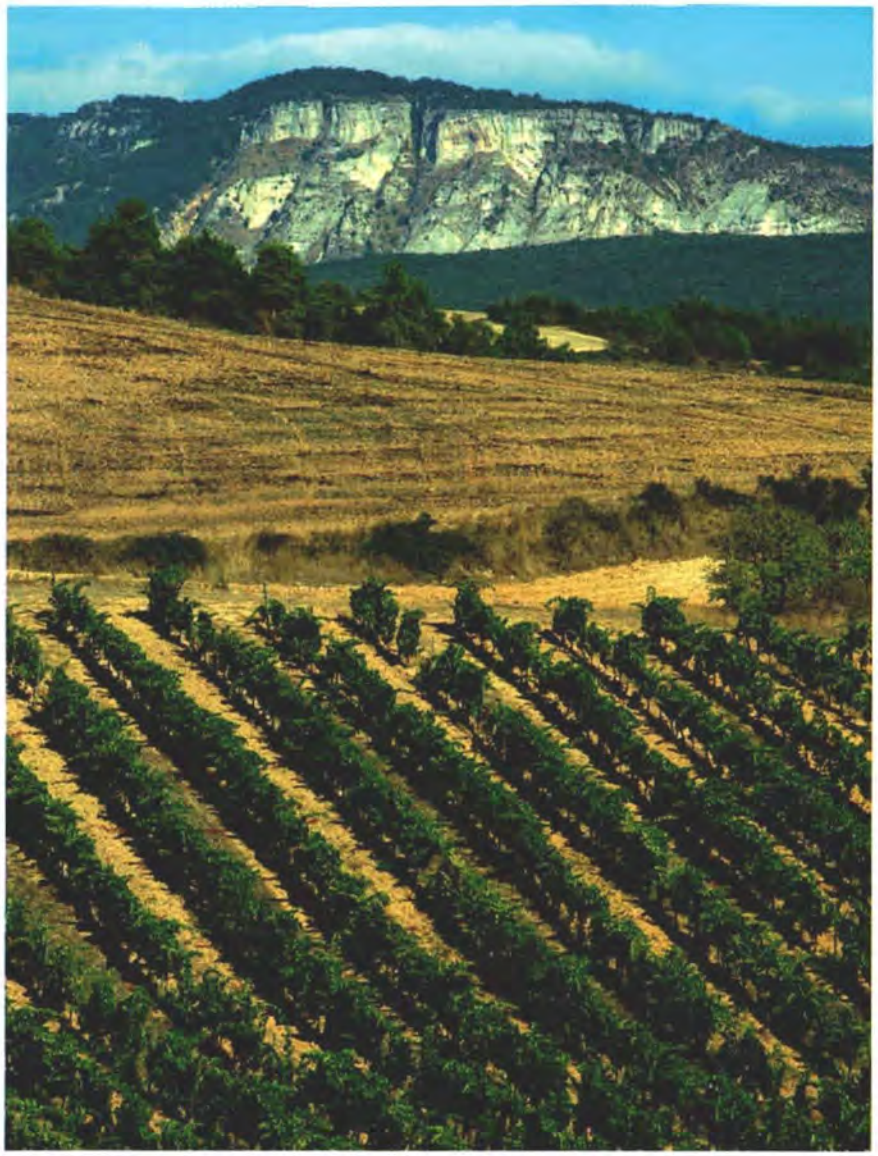
Within the DO Navarra, there are two estates producing wines classified as *Vino de Pago* (vineyard terrain wines). These are wines that come from locations with specific soil and microclimate characteristics that set them apart. To enter this category, the name of the vineyard must have been the usual market name identifying such wines for at least five years, and an overall control system must be submitted covering cultivation, processing, aging and bottling.

The first of these vineyard terrain wines to receive official recognition in Navarre was Señorío de Arínzano, belonging to the Chivite family, which has been producing wine for 11 generations in Navarre. At their world-class winery, designed by architect Rafael Moneo (Pritzker award for Architecture in 1996), they make, under the DO Navarra, the Chivite Colección 125 Chardonnay, Vendimia Tardía de Moscatel and the Reserva tinto de Tempranillo, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, all of which have been among the elite of Spanish wines for some time. But recently they have adopted organic growing methods on this estate, bringing out their first organic Merlot wine. The vineyard terrain wine is sold under the name of the estate and the 2000 vintage that I tasted was made from Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot and aged for 14 months in French oak. After ten years, this wine offers outstanding complexity on the nose, with very ripe black berries, spice, cocoa and nuances of tobacco. In the mouth, it is very stylish, with subtle notes of almost overripe fruit, creaminess and very round and mature tannins. A great wine that achieves

perfect harmony between the many characteristics offered by Navarre and the estate's microclimate.

On Spain's northernmost vineyard, on the Señorío de Otazu estate, I met Manager Javier Bañales. Here, magnificent results are being achieved by combining Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Tempranillo in red wines. On either side are the Perdón and Etxauri mountains, which hold in the extreme conditions brought by the north winds. The climate is definitely Atlantic (cool and moist) and this is apparent in their fine wines. Today they are producing 220,000 liters per year under the Otazu label within the DO Navarra and under the Señorío de Otazu vineyard terrain label. "Ten years ago, the market focused on powerful, super-structured wines, so at first it was difficult to explain elegance and smoothness. But we were determined to bring out the terrain while keeping the wine's personality," says Bañales, as we stand by two imposing sculptures by Xavier Mascaró from the winery's interesting collection. In fact, the wines share freshness and an aromatic complexity that has an increasing impact as we rise up the range. I was especially impressed by the Otazu crianza 2006, a combination of the three origins in equal parts, with a touch of menthol in the bouquet. "It's going down very well in Hong Kong and China," says Mascaró, "because it combines with their many sweet-sour dishes." But my top choice is Señorío de Otazu Vitral 2005, a Cabernet Sauvignon with just the right amount of Tempranillo. Though powerful, this wine offers a subtle combination of fruity and flowery aromas, a very pleasant creaminess in the mouth and structure that is perfectly backed by slight acidity.





Facts and figures for the DO Navarra (2009)

- **Production:**
  15,280 ha (37,757 acres) with 99,122,781 kg.
  Breakdown by variety is as follows:
  Red varieties:
  94% of production. Tempranillo (36.28%), Garnacha (26.43%), Merlot (14.37%), Cabernet Sauvignon (14.32%), Graciano (1.06%), Mazuelo (0.51%), Syrah (0.45%), Pinot Noir (0.08%). 0.38% for experimental varieties.
  White varieties:
  6% of production. Chardonnay (3.39%), Viura (1.70%), Small-grain Muscatel (0.77%), Sauvignon Blanc (0.18%), Malvasía (0.05%), Garnacha Blanca (0.02%).
- **Number of growers:** 4,425
- **Number of wineries:** 116
- **Production:** 70% reds, 25% rosés, 5% whites
- **Sales (2009):** 39,529,028 liters of bottled wine.
- **Export quota:** 35%
- **Main export markets:** Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, United States.
- **Website:** www.navarrawine.com English, German and Spanish.
- **Source:** Regulatory Council, Designation of Origin Navarra

On the road to Santiago

Close to the town of Puente la Reina, a key stopping-place on the road to Santiago, where the French and Spanish routes meet, there are three small wineries, each having its own working philosophy. Parallel to the A-12, the highway considered to be the road to Santiago, is a narrow track along which the pilgrims walk, passing in front of Bodegas Tandem. Completed in 2005, the modern building features a striking skylight that seems to serve as a beacon for walkers, just as the candles placed at monastery windows used to do. Tandem refers to the two partners in the winery, but the name was chosen also because in Latin it means "finally", indicating the longstanding determination of its owners. Alicia Eyaralar, enologist, and José María Fraile, sales manager, were keen to set up a winery that could combine technology with small harvests from selected vineyards. Like the founders of Domaines Lupier, Eyaralar and Fraile had extensive experience in large wineries in Navarre and in other parts of Spain. They were both fans of Navarre, its grapes and "the potential in Navarre for combining different varieties", acording to Fraile. They and the winery's other shareholders felt that viticulture was as important as the financial aspects, so they looked for a vine-growing partner for their business. As a result, they have exclusive access to 22 ha (54 acres) that grow equal amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon, Tempranillo and Merlot. From these, they make a total of 140,000 bottles of "Ars" wines: Ars in Vitro is a 50% Tempranillo and 50% Merlot wine, aged for two years in concrete tanks; Ars Nova is a combination of the three varieties and is aged for 7 months in 300-liter barrels; and

Ars Mácula is a Cabernet Sauvign on and Merlot blend aged for 18 months in the barrel so that the wood, as in their other wines, does not outbalance the fruit and herbal notes from the grapes and the soils in the nearby Yerri Valley.
Along this same valley and on a high lookout, Bodegas Aroa has built its new winery, having previously spent ten years making wines on the Bodegas Lezaun premises. Its organic growing methods are based on the environmentally-friendly tenets of Txus Macía and Kepa Larunbe, and the winery aims to be one of the first in Europe to achieve neutral CO_2 emissions. For this purpose, they have installed a mixed biomass boiler to provide power, they collect rainwater, carry out compensation studies (emission of CO_2 versus fixing CO_2 through their vines) and, since they are aware they are not yet able to achieve a positive balance, they make up for this by carrying out environmental projects with other crops and in certified forests. The 2010 vintage is to be produced in the new winery, but the wines we tasted were from previous vintages of organic wines from Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. The results are very expressive wines. One example is the Aroa Jaun 2005, a very pleasant crianza that brings out the fruitiness of the Tempranillo, the herbal notes of the Merlot and the structure of the Cabernet Sauvignon—a wine with balance and elegant acidity.
A narrow road took me up to the nearby location of Los Arcos, and the Alzania Winery, another recent project set up by a couple who, at the start of the 21st century, decided to go it alone. As I arrive at the gate, a group of pilgrims on bikes pass on their way to Santiago. "There may be as many as 300 a day in the peak summer months," says José Manuel Echeverría, the enologist and

owner, on the stairs leading to the small winery he designed himself. Echeverría tells of how, as a schoolboy in the neighboring town of Arróniz, he participated in the archaeological digs at Villa de las Musas (1st to 4th centuries AD), which included the remains of a Roman winery. He then trained as an agronomist engineer and, after working as enologist at a number of local wineries, in 2000 presented the first product from his own business. His aim was to achieve wines with personality, but he acknowledges that "in wine there are no recipes." The winery has 10 ha (25 acres) under vines—Merlot, Tempranillo, Syrah and Garnacha—and produces 40,000 bottles a year. He has gradually been able to define his own style, searching for wines that would be drinkable from the start, with structure but without harshness. Alzania Selección Especial 2005 has achieved all this. It has very full aromas of red berries and herbs and a subtle hint of wood, and in the mouth it reveals its complexity with very ripe tannins and structure and a taste that lingers. This is a flavorsome, fresh and long wine.

Downsizing

The DO Navarra also has some large bodegas producing millions of liters for an international market

that is looking for good value for money. A large proportion of the Navarran grapes are used in this range of pleasant, simple wines at reasonable prices. Some large-size businesses are making huge volumes of wine for this market segment in line with the prevailing quality standards. But these are wineries with great potential that know everything there is to know about the soil and the climate and are able, based on the strength afforded by their success in the mid-range, to also develop higher-range wines.
One example is Marco Real, a member of Grupo La Navarra since 1989, which not only produces wine here but also in the DO Toro and DO Rueda, as well as in the province of Mendoza in Argentina (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 74). Alongside the large winery producing the Homenaje range of simple, fruity, direct wines, the group has now built smaller facilities where it tends to its higher ranges, such as Marco Real Colección Privada and Reserva de Familia, and the label that has brought them fame, Señorío de Andión. The grapes are brought in from the best vineyards for fermentation in oak vats and malolactic fermentation in barrels. The aim is to achieve a more modern wine from Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Graciano. The 2002 vintage maintains a lot of ripe red berries on the nose, with some spice and toast from the barrel.
The finish gives some very marked menthol notes, making this a long, intense, stylish wine.

Pagos de Araiz belongs to the large Grupo Masaveu, which, in the field of wines, brings together Bodegas Fillaboa (DO Rías Baixas), Bodegas Leda (VdT Castile-León), Bodegas Murúa (DOCa Rioja) and what Mariannik Garel from the group's marketing section describes as the "favorite", Pagos de Aráiz in the DO Navarra. This winery is based on its 250 ha (617 acres) of vineyard, which again reflect the diversity that is typical of Navarre: Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, as well as Syrah, Graciano and Garnacha. From them, they produce a rosé and four Mediterranean-style reds, with ripe tannins, slight acidity and a touch of sweetness. These are delightful wines that are easy to drink.
The Mediterranean touch is more clearly reflected by the innovative winery set up by Bodegas Príncipe de Viana on the Albret estate to the south of Navarre, where they make their top-range Príncipe de Viana wines and the special Albret wines. They use technology to control all the processing parameters in fine detail. The vineyards are watched over by satellite to allow identification of the best plots. Sensors have been installed in the ground (to test for moisture), on the actual vines (to check for water stress) and on the foliage (for solar radiation, rainfall and wind). Enologist Pablo Pávez explains that they are using technology "to achieve a balance between what the market wants, character and the features considered typical of Navarre." We tasted two of the Finca Albret wines, the crianza 2005 and the Viña de Mi Madre 2004. Both have very ripe fruit and a powerful taste with toasty notes that are very marked in the crianza wine and a little more delicate in the Viña de Mi Madre, which also offers spices and minerals.
Some of the great winemaking estates are also to be found in Navarre. On the 1,300 ha (3,212 acres) of the Señorío de Sarría estate is the Bodega Sarría, whose vineyards and facilities occupy about 100 ha (247 acres). The winery dates back to 1980 and currently belongs to the Taninia group, which also has wineries in the DOs Ribera del Duero, Toro and Rueda. Señorío de Sarría has a traditional range of wines under this label, one of the best known labels of the 1980s and 90s, but in 2001 a change in the management brought a change in focus, with a series of monovarietal wines aged for just 6 months. Sarría now offers monovarietal wines made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Graciano and an unusual Mazuelo, one of the few wines made completely from this variety on the Spanish market.
So, Garnacha, Tempranillo, Graciano and Mazuelo, or Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah? Navarre is living proof that when varieties are carefully adapted to specific soils and climates, the result can be blends full of personality. All that is needed is the balance that emulates the plurality of Navarre.

Almudena Martín Rueda is publication coordinator of Spain Gourmetour

The Philosopher's Fruit

Dried Figs Stand The Test of Time

The Spanish saying *de higos a brevas* alludes to something that happens very infrequently. Taken literally, it refers to the ten-month interval between the two different crops of fruit that ripen on fig trees. But perhaps this saying also reflects the anxiety of fig lovers everywhere, who know how fleetingly these delicate fruits can be eaten fresh every year. Fortunately, Spain's long tradition of producing dried figs continues to flourish, making it possible to savor these honeyed fruits year-round, while creating different and more innovative ways for them to be enjoyed.

TEXT
ADRIENNE SMITH/©ICEX

PHOTOS
PABLO NEUSTADT/©ICEX

It is said that the ancient Greek sage Plato considered figs to be "the philosopher's fruit". Although it is not entirely clear what he meant, it seems a fitting attribution. In fact, the fig is somewhat of a riddle: a flower that isn't exactly a flower and a fruit that isn't exactly a fruit. Belonging to the genus *Ficus* in the *Moraceae*, or mulberry family, the soft, teardrop-shaped fig is known as a false fruit or syconium (from the Greek word for fig: *sykon*). The fleshy hollow form is filled with a cluster of flowers turned inward and surrounded by hundreds or even thousands of seeds, depending on the type of fig. Tear open a fig and you will see the blush of slender flower parts coming together in the center like an inverted sea anemone, each bearing a single seed. Fig trees also have two different crops of fruit. *Brevas*, as they are called in Spain, ripen in early summer on the previous year's shoot growth. They are larger fruit but diminished in quantity and aroma, and are only sold fresh. The main, second crop of figs develops on the current year's growth, ripening in late summer or early fall.

For thousands of years figs have been treasured throughout the Mediterranean for their honey-sweet flesh, rich nutritional properties, and sensual appearance. They were depicted in drawings in Egypt's pyramids of Giza, grown in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and appear in the writings of Aristophanes and Cato the Elder, to name a few, and in references to

Jesus Christ and the Prophet Mohammed. Additionally, they were lauded by the Romans and Greeks for their food and medicinal values. According to the Roman naturalist Pliny, "Figs are restorative, and the best food that can be taken by those who are brought low by long sickness." Hippocrates recommended figs for fevers, while ancient Greek physician Galen said that figs were the staple for athletes in the Olympic Games.

These ancient scholars were not far off. Despite being one of the sweetest fruits in the world, figs are extremely nutritious: high in fiber and antioxidants, and an excellent source of calcium, iron, potassium and vitamins. The fiber in these laxative fruits is thought to help prevent colon cancer and delay or reduce the absorption of cholesterol. High levels of carbohydrates make figs a source of energy recommended for athletes, children and pregnant women, while antioxidants help reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Historically, figs have also been used externally for treating boils and sore throats. Aside from their medicinal value, figs have also played a significant role in refining our knowledge of civilization's progress. In 2006, archeologists discovered nine 11,700 year-old dried figs in the Jordan and Euphrates Valleys. While wild fig trees require pollination by specific wasps, the cultivated common fig (*Ficus carica*) is parthenocarpic, meaning that it doesn't need pollination to bear edible fruit. Scientists have determined that these ancient figs were parthenocarpic, proving that they were being cultivated by humans some 5,000 years before wheat, making them one of the oldest cultivated crops in the world.

Role in Spain

In Spain, figs are among the earliest fruits mentioned in written records. In the 10th century Calendar of Córdoba, the Latin *ficus* (fig) was translated to the general Arabic word for "trees", indicating the prevalence of figs in this area. Malaga was the most important center for fig exports at the time; its dried figs were sold by Muslim and Christian traders in Baghdad, India and China. In more recent history, a 1901 US Department of Agriculture Bulletin indicates that, in the early 1800's, the province of Malaga produced 20,000 *quintals* (2 million kg / 2,204 tons) of dried figs. Large-scale commercialization

FOOD BASICS

of fresh figs has been historically limited by the fruit's short shelf life and sensitivity to handling. As a fruit that has to fully ripen on the tree, figs last for only 2-3 days in refrigeration, making shipping a challenge. Dried figs, on the other hand, can be stored and enjoyed throughout the year.

The dried fig market in Spain currently boasts an annual production of 12-13 million kg (13,230-14,330 tons), according to Jesús Jiménez, President of the OIAH (Interprofessional Food and Agricultural Organization for Dried Figs). Although these numbers make Spain one of the largest producers of dried figs in the world, it is still well behind the 80 million kg (88,185 tons) produced in Turkey. However, Spanish dried figs are unique in that they tend to be smaller and sweeter with much thinner skins than their Turkish cousins. Spanish producers trust in the superior quality of their figs and are focusing on the creation of new and innovative products, organic production methods, and expanded export markets. At the same time, they strive to maintain the traditional attributes of Spanish figs and their deep roots in the country's gastronomic history.

"The Land of Figs"

The center of Spanish fig production is the autonomous community of Extremadura. According to the OIAH, Extremadura accounts for approximately 5 million kg (5,511 tons) of dried figs a year. Located along the western border with Portugal, this area brings to mind images of Roman ruins, Iberico pigs, and, as the name suggests, an extremely hot and dry climate. Vast stretches of open land are dotted with olive and oak trees, vineyards, and large fields of tomatoes, tobacco, and barley. Within Extremadura, the province of Cáceres is the country's largest producer of dried figs. It is famed for the high-quality, gourmet dried figs made using the area's three most important varieties: Calabacita (or Pajarero), Cuello de Dama and Granillo. Calabacita figs are typical of the Almoharín area in southern Cáceres (western Spain), while Cuello de Dama and Granillo figs are more traditionally cultivated in the dramatically different landscapes of the Valle del Jerte and Losar de la Vera in northern Cáceres.

The town of Almoharín (pop. 2,200) is located 50 km (31 mi) southwest of Trujillo and 50 km southeast of Cáceres. It appears suddenly at the end of a road lined by endless groves of fig trees, their broad, dark leaves throwing shadows as you drive by. I had read that fig trees give off an unpleasant aroma and expected to be overwhelmed by it in this tiny oasis in a sea of figs. On the contrary, the smell was enticing, a barely noticeable green spice mixed with hot, dry wind. This town is famous throughout Cáceres for its dried Calabacita figs, its name appearing on menus and products with the pride of being identified with an area. Founded by the Moors in the mid-12th century, its identity is so closely tied to that of these figs that the road sign reads "Welcome to Almoharín, Land of Figs". Also called Pajarero, Calabacita figs are characterized by their very small size and greenish-yellow hue. Whereas Cuello de Dama figs number about 60-100 units a kg (2.2 lb), Calabacita figs are around 130-200 units a kg. Extraordinarily sweet and aromatic, these petite figs are marketed only in dried form because their very thin skins cause them to spoil quickly when fresh. Part of the reason that these figs are so highly valued both in and out of Spain can be attributed to the fact that their delicate skins do not alter their texture or flavor in any way. Once referred to as Calabacilla, the name Calabacita or "little pumpkin" was coined about 20 years ago by Juan Jesús Collado, who felt that the common Spanish diminutive *-ita* would be more marketable outside of Extremadura. Juan Jesús, whose family has lived in Almoharín for centuries, was an original founder of the local cooperative. In 2005 he started Ecoficus, an innovative, family-run company dedicated to producing organic dried figs. The difference between organic and conventional figs is apparent in their treatment in both the field and the factory. Organic agriculture does not use any synthesized chemicals on the

Gastronomic **Traditions**

Dried figs have been an integral part of Spanish gastronomy for centuries as a central ingredient in a wide variety of desserts and sweets. With their high nutritive content, figs are also a popular addition to breads and other dishes.

Pan de higo

One of Spain's most traditional fig recipes, *pan de higo* (fig bread, or cake) manages to satisfy all of the above. This typically round, flat cake is made with chopped dried figs, different types of nuts, and spices such as cinnamon, cloves, orange peel, anis and pepper. These are mixed with fennel water, brandy or liqueurs.

A typical holiday dessert that has been locally adapted all over Spain, many companies also market a version of pan de higo. Valcorchero, for example, sells both a traditional recipe and a version covered in chocolate called *pan de Cáceres*. Juan Jesús Collado uses dried figs, almonds, walnuts, honey and herb liqueur. He also markets this product internationally as fig bread, a highly nutritious, fiber-rich product recommended for athletes, pregnant women and children. The fig energy bars marketed by Antonio Corchero are essentially the same thing, individual versions of pan de higo labeled in five different languages.

José María Bague Salo, on the other hand, created his highly traditional product by "asking all of the very oldest women in town for their personal pan de higo recipes." He then experimented and added touches of his own before finding the perfect mixture of old and new.

During shortages or times of war, pan de higo was often substituted for nut stuffed figs, known as *bodas* or *matrimonios*, which were referred to as *turrón de pobre* (poor man's turrón, a sweet paste made from almonds and sugar) in some areas. Although not typically commercialized in most areas, Biovera has its own version of this traditional fare called *bocaditos* (bites stuffed with nuts), and *casamientos*, which consist of ground fig cake rolled into balls and coated with chopped nuts.

Bombón de higo

These holiday confections are made using dried figs that are traditionally injected with chocolate, praline, liqueur or nuts, and coated with chocolate. The large range in quality of these bonbons directly reflects the care and ingredients put into their making. At Ecoficus, figs are hand-stuffed with different fillings and then bathed in pure, real chocolate. According to Juan Jesús, workers fight to get a spot in this pristine chamber, both for the constant cool temperature and the heavenly scent that swirls around the curtain of melted chocolate. While chocolate covered figs are common to many companies, Antonio Corchero has also developed a line of unique chocolate covered bonbons made with ground, dried figs and aged sheep's cheese from Extremadura.

Biscuit de higo

Typically made from egg yolks, cream, sugar, water and figs, *biscuit de higo* is a classic dessert from Extremadura and parts of Avila. Similar to ice cream, it is not quite as cold, and has a creamier and more distinctive texture. At the Cáceres restaurant, El Figón de Eustaquio, Chef Alejandro Jarrones uses 120 kg (264 lb) of dried figs a year to make his own version of biscuit de higo. Jarrones soaks the figs in brandy before mincing and adding them to the mixture.

Sopa de Tomate* and *Jabalí

Not all fig dishes are desserts. In fact, it's hard to find a restaurant in Cáceres that doesn't feature the classic *sopa de tomate con higos* (tomato soup with figs) on its menu. According to Toño Pérez, Chef of the two-Michelin-star Atrio restaurant in Cáceres, this dish is a perfect example of typical cuisine from Extremadura, its roots deeply embedded in locally-grown products. A summer dish, this hot soup can be made using either fresh or dried figs. In the autumn and winter, Pérez often opts for using the "forest-like aromas" of dried figs as "accompaniments for game-based dishes such as *jabalí* (wild boar)." For him, "dried figs open up a completely new realm for understanding figs," and are, in fact, a completely different product."

trees and mostly-dried figs are hand picked off the ground on a daily basis. To this end, the ground under the trees is leveled at the beginning of the season to remove rocks and other objects. While conventional factories use chemical fumigation and disinfectant techniques, organic figs are prepared through natural washing and blanching processes and then placed in a deep-freeze chamber at -32°C (-25.6°F) for at least 72 hours. In other respects, however, the process of making dried figs in Extremadura is similar everywhere. Thanks to the hot, dry climate, the first step of the drying process occurs on the trees where figs are naturally dried for up to a month after fully ripening. After losing about 80% of their water content they fall to the ground, where they are collected and brought to the factories. These whole, dried Calabacita figs are initially hard, with a wrinkled skin and pale golden color. In the factory, they are sorted and treated for insects and then boiled and finally dried with fans before being cold-stored with their humidity closely monitored. While it seems rather counterintuitive to make dried figs by drying, rehydrating, and then drying them again, the process not only cleans and disinfects the figs, but also serves to soften and restore their juicy and yielding interiors. The finished figs have a maximum humidity level of 24%, as anything higher could cause fermentation. According to Juan Jesús, who owns one of Almoharín's largest fig plantations and buys most of the organic figs produced in

Extremadura, producing organic dried figs is much more expensive due to the varying requirements of different countries and the physical manpower needed to prepare the product. However, it is an effort that is paying off. In just five years Ecoficus has an annual production of around 80,000 kg (88 tons), of which 93% are exported to countries like France, Holland, Norway, Germany and the United States. Juan Jesús believes that this success is due to the fact that consumers like to know "the history of where their food comes from", and that it is important to respect traditions while also creating attractive new products. Despite the fact that figs are Almoharín's most traditional industry, Juan Jesús feels that they are still not consumed in this area on a regular basis. "Here, figs are traditionally eaten on the 1st of November for All Saint's Day and at Christmas. In November, children go around with linen bags called *talegas* asking for treats. They are given dried figs and nuts and then gather in the countryside to make *bodas* or *matrimonios* (marriages) by stuffing the nuts into the figs." Although they are popular local treats, these nut-stuffed figs are not regularly commercialized in this area like they are farther north in Losar de la Vera. Juan Jesús believes that this is due to both the larger cost and effort involved in their preparation, and the lack of a commercial tradition with this product. So, while focused on expanding the export market, Spanish fig growers in this area also hope to increase the year-round

DRIED FIGS

local consumption of figs—especially important in years that experience large fluctuations in the euro and dollar.
Just up the road in Valdefuentes, Antonio Corchero, of Higos y Derivados Extremeños/Valcorchero, is also seeking new ways to expand through a range of products made from dried Calabacita figs, which he considers to be some of the finest in the world. Antonio believes that "in a niche market like this one you have to constantly strive to invent new and innovative products to stay current." He also thinks that if the presentation, image and quality of a product are well cared for, then the market will grow. Additionally, he has started to use organic figs in many of his products, such as fig bonbons and fig bars, and now exports to Portugal, Holland, Germany, France and Switzerland.

Fig Valley

From the historic city of Cáceres, the road heads north past the picturesque reservoir of the Tajo River towards the walled city of Plasencia, which was founded on the banks of the Jerte River in 1186 by King Alfonso VIII of Castile. This river lends its name to the Jerte Valley, located about 20 km (12 mi) farther north, where it dramatically cuts through two granite mountains. This deep green, leafy valley is home to 11 small towns, famous throughout Spain for their cherries, whose blossoms turn the valley walls snow-white every spring. This fertile dale is also famous for its chestnuts, olives and of course,

the fig groves planted on steep terraces on either side of the valley. Located just below the town of Valdastillas, the Agrupación de Cooperativas Valle del Jerte is a massive cooperative that produces a variety of fruits including 800,000 kg (881 tons) of dried figs annually from 3,500 members and 16 smaller co-ops. The figs cultivated in this area are primarily of the varieties Cuello de Dama and Granillo, although special mention should be given to the less common variety, Pezón Largo, which is considered to be absolutely exquisite when dried, thanks to its very thin skin, rosy pulp and sweet flavor. Cuello de Dama figs are elongated and light green in color with white flesh, small seeds and a sweet and compact pulp. They also have a thicker, more resistant skin than both the Calabacita and Granillo varieties, making them ideal for eating fresh, as well as dried.
Fresh Granillo figs are inferior to the Cuello de Dama variety, but are ideal for drying due to their white flesh, intense aroma, high sugar content, and delicate skin.
According to the cooperative's Sales Manager, Benito Izquierdo, the area has a long tradition of consuming dried figs locally, as part of a subsistence economy. Benito believes that the national market will continue to expand as the use of figs in traditional gastronomy is revived, as will sales outside of Spain of dried figs and other gastronomic products. The co-op currently exports around 40%, or 300,000 kg (330 tons) of dried figs, of which approximately half go to Switzerland, while the rest goes to Germany, Denmark, Italy, France and Portugal.
One way in which the co-op and other companies have adapted their traditional products to appeal to a wider market is by offering gluten-free figs. In Spain, dried figs are traditionally rolled in flour before packaging to give them an attractive and consistent appearance. Benito believes that this practice stems

from the natural aspect of homemade dried figs that used to be stored in dark caves to last the year. During storage, the figs would form a whitish external coating. However, given the growing number of people with gluten allergies, producing gluten-free figs demonstrates how traditional products are also being modified to meet new market needs.
On the other side of the valley's eastern mountain range is the area known as "La Vera", famous all over Spain for its *pimentón* (a type of Spanish paprika), as well as for the immense fields of tobacco, corn and asparagus. The town of Losar de la Vera also has a long history of commercializing dried Cuello de Dama figs, which family-owned Productos Biovera has been doing for 40 years. With an annual production of around 800,000 kg (881 tons), the company buys all of its figs from local producers, and according to Iván Sánchez, son of owner Ángel Sánchez, "every year there are more and more acres of fig plantations in this area."

"The Philosopher of Figs"

Just 40 km (25 mi) away in the neighboring province of Avila in Castile-Leon, the town of Poyales del Hoyo bears mentioning. Poyales and its surrounding areas continue the age-old tradition of cultivating Cuello de Dama figs. The best person to ask about this history is Manuel Martin, the owner of the La Guaña fig company, and self-described as someone who has always had an intense curiosity for the world of figs. He is known by others as "the philosopher of figs" and as the person largely responsible for reactivating the fig trade in this small town that now celebrates an annual Fig Festival at the end of August. Founded in 1990, his company

produces around 1 million kg (1,102 tons) of figs a year, of which slightly less than half are dried. In general, Avila produces about 2 million kg (2,204 tons) of fresh figs and 1 million kg of dried figs a year, from only 5 or 6 cooperatives and 2-3 industries. Manuel's pride in the local history is contagious, as is his love for cultivating figs and respect for tradition. One story that he likes to tell is how one of his uncles spent the duration of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in prison, surviving exclusively on a diet of dried figs from Poyales.

Evolving traditions

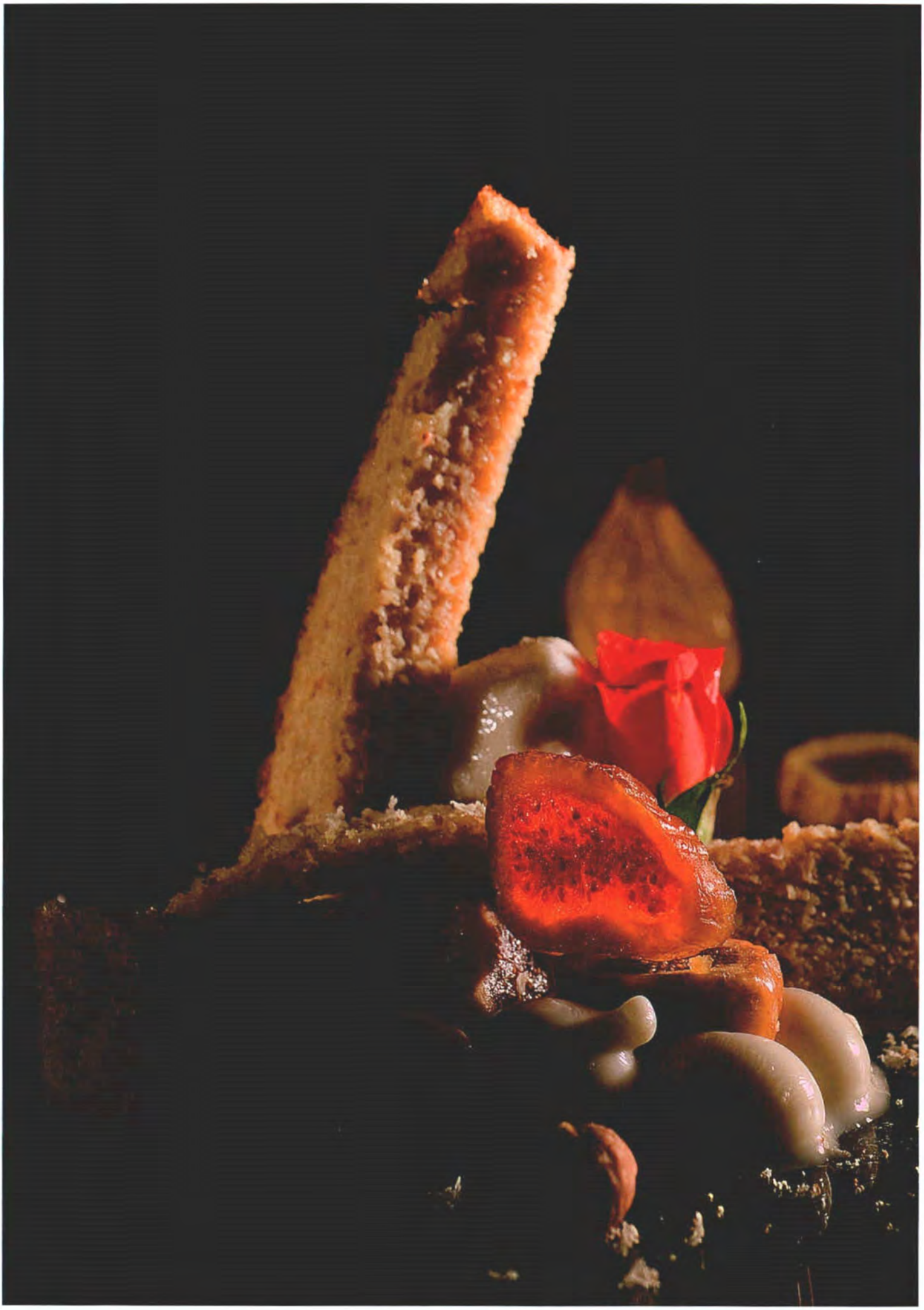
Cáceres and Avila are, of course, not the only places is Spain where high-quality dried figs are manufactured and sold today.
El Mirto, for example, in the Alpujarras region of Granada (southern Spain) produces approximately 20,000 kg (22 tons) of dried organic figs a year in a small microclimate known as the Contraviesa Alpujarreña. In addition, dried figs are produced in other parts of Andalusia, Murcia, Valencia, Castile-La Mancha, Aragón and Catalonia; and in certain areas the tradition of commercializing dried figs has existed for centuries.
One such place is Fraga, located in the province of Huesca in Aragón (northeast Spain). This area has long been known throughout Spain for its famous "Fraga figs". Unfortunately, the wetter climate makes drying figs a much more risky and labor-intensive process here than in Extremadura.

The figs cannot be left to dry on the trees, but, rather, they must be harvested and dried on tables in the sun for several days. Over the years many of the fig orchards in Fraga have been replaced with more profitable crops like peaches and nectarines, and figs still grown here are mainly sold for fresh consumption. Founded in 1961, Kiosco Casanova is a family company dedicated to the sale of gourmet dried figs and other products. Lacking in local raw materials, Kiosco Casanova is still able to produce its artisanal fig products by selecting and buying tree-dried Cuello de Dama figs directly in Cáceres. The figs are then shipped to Fraga for the drying and manufacturing processes. In this way, owner José María Bague Salo has managed to maintain Fraga's tradition of dried fig manufacturing, while simultaneously expanding a business that now exports about 50% of its products.

Despite the challenges of an evolving market, this innovation and adaptation has enabled Kiosco Casanova to continue to operate within its traditional sector. Whether in Extremadura or Aragón, this is a pattern that keeps repeating itself. Spain's long relationship with dried figs is woven throughout people's connection to the land, its gastronomy and its history.
Yet the manufacture of traditional products is now matched by an infusion of innovative uses and expansion into global markets. This ensures that the Spanish dried fig industry will continue to prosper and receive the international recognition that it richly deserves.

Adrienne Smith is a sommelier, chef and freelance writer. She has spent the last decade eating and drinking her way through Spain.

"We would like to extend our thanks to Ecoficus *and* Agrupación de Cooperativas Valle del Jerte *for contributing their products to this report."*



María José San Román*

Translation
Synonyme.net/©ICEX

Photos, recipes
Toya Legido/©ICEX

The wines have been selected by Carlos Domingo Lozano Álvarez, sommelier at Monastrell restaurant.

TIGERNUT HORCHATA ICE CREAM

with flour-free dried fig sponge cake

(Helado de horchata de chufas con bizcocho, sin harina, de higos secos)

How can an Alicante-bred woman like me, who loves horchata (beverage made with tigernuts, water and sugar) and tigernuts themselves, leave tigernuts out of her recipes? The truth is, I have eaten tigernuts since I was small, and they form part of my very Mediterranean culinary background. That is why I have prepared an ice cream based on horchata, to be accompanied by an impressive fig sponge cake, made entirely without wheat flour. There is hardly any added sugar, which makes it a dessert that is easy to eat and highly digestible, not to mention healthy. It is made from dry produce that can always be kept close to hand.

*For a more in-depth look at the chef, see Close-up

SERVES 4

4 dried figs; fresh tigernuts.

For the fig sponge cake: 200 g / 7 oz dry Cuello de Dama figs, previously soaked in water for 12 hours; 200 g / 7 oz ground Marcona almonds; 6 eggs; 6 g / 1/6 oz baking powder; 75 g / 3 oz sugar.

For the horchata ice cream: 1,000 ml / 4 1/4 cup fresh horchata; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz ProSorbet.

Fig sponge cake

Mix all the ingredients and cook in a 20 x 25 cm / 7.8 x 9.8 in tray at 170°C / 338°F for 15 minutes.

Horchata ice cream

Mix the ingredients and freeze in a Pacojet container.

Presentation

Serve two slices of dried fig sponge cake with one spoonful of tigernut horchata ice cream per person. Decorate with fresh tigernuts and dried fig fragments.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Recommended wine

Casta Diva Reserva Real, from the Gutiérrez de la Vega winery, is a golden-colored, 100% Moscatel wine that has a powerful aroma of crystallized fruit, herbs and withered flowers with honeyed notes. In the mouth it is tasty, sweet, fresh and has good acidity, making it the perfect counterpart to this horchata ice cream with dried fig sponge cake.

COLD ALMOND SOUP

with dried figs and Iberico ham

(Sopa fría de almendras con higos secos y jamón ibérico)

The traditional elements involved in this dish and the exceedingly high quality of each of them make it a sure hit at the table. One of its key ingredients is extra virgin olive oil. I use a magnificent monovarietal Hojiblanca olive oil from Priego de Córdoba to make this Andalusian culinary classic: a cold almond soup. I add ham stock, which makes the soup considerably lighter, and dried figs, which provide a sweet note that contrasts to the delicious flavor of Iberico ham. A really simple, nutritious and healthy dish.

SERVES 4

50 g / 2 oz Iberico acorn-fed ham cut in very fine slices; 50 g / 2 oz Pezón Largo dried figs.

For the cold almond soup: 460 g / 1 lb peeled Marcona almonds; 380 ml / 1.6 cups extra virgin olive oil Hojiblanca from Priego de Córdoba; 1,000 ml / 4 1/4 cup water; 1 clove of garlic; 100 ml / 1/2 cup sherry vinegar; salt.

For the Iberico ham consommé: 1 leg bone of Iberico acorn-fed ham; 5 liters / 21 cups water; 3 beaten egg whites; 200 g / 7 oz vegetables (celery, onion, carrot, green onion and parsley); 100 ml / 1/2 cup liquid saffron; 1 gelatine leaf.

Soak the figs in water for 12 hours.

Cold almond soup

Place all the ingredients in a Thermomix and blend until you reach a fine consistency. Pass through a cloth sieve and allow to cool.

Iberico ham consommé

Bake the bone in the oven for 20 minutes at 150°C / 302°F. Remove the fatty parts and place the bone in 5 liters / 21 cups cold water. Allow to cook for 2 hours. Once cooked, allow to cool and remove the fat. Take the cold stock, clarify it, then mix with the 3 beaten egg whites and brunoise-cut vegetables. Slowly bring to a boil and sieve through a cloth. Once sieved, add 25 ml / 2 tbsp liquid saffron per 1 liter / 4 1/4 cup of stock.

Heat 200 ml / 3/4 cups of stock and add 1 gelatine leaf, previously soaked in cold water.

Presentation

Cut the figs in slices, four per serving, discarding the stalks, and place them on the plate. Cover with the cold Iberico ham consommé. Place 4 slices of Iberico ham per plate on top of the Iberico ham gelée and, at the table, cover with the very cold almond soup.

Preparation time

40 minutes, assuming the Iberico ham consommé was prepared in advance.

Recommended wine

We accompany this dish with a 100% Palomino white wine, Oloroso Seco (DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry), from Bodegas El Maestro Sierra. This wine is deeply golden in color with an amber meniscus, intense aromas of spices and toasted almonds, and a balanced and flavorful palate, perfectly complementing this dish.

María José **San Román**

VITALITY and verve

Text
Almudena Muyo/©ICEX

Photos
Tomás Zarza and
Toya Legido/©ICEX

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

We know their names and some of their creations, we can often put a face to the name, but we don't know what goes on behind the scenes, how their creative processes work, what their everyday lives are like, and how they relate to their restaurants, to the physical space where their creations are first presented in public. This new section, called Close-up, aims to find out more about the people in the top ranks of today's culinary scene.

This closer look comes together with recipes devised by them in the product articles that appear in each issue. In some cases the chefs are experts on the subject and, in others, we ask them to work with products unknown to them, to experiment and reveal here the result of their explorations.

María José San Román, chef at Monastrell, is the first to be featured in this section, from which we hope readers will gain some insight into her cuisine. Her renowned expertise is in the use of saffron, so the saffron recipes given have been, are, or will be on her restaurant's menu. But dried figs were new to her, at least in a professional capacity, so the recipes given here are the result of her research and her creativity combined.

Switzerland, London, Australia, Jordan, Lebanon, the United States, and Italy are just some of the countries marking the life of María José San Román, all of them related in one way or another to cuisine. And her stay in Switzerland, at the early age of 15, was no exception. "Above all, my mother wanted us to learn foreign languages," says San Román. With a grant to study at the exclusive Miramonte school in Montreux, she spent her time "either in class or in the kitchen." It was her job to help prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner, and she admits that she used to find it embarrassing to talk about these early days. "But now I don't have to prove anything to anyone, and I feel proud of my beginnings and especially of my mother and her clear-sightedness. I spent most of my time preparing vegetables, but I learned about different foods and a way of cooking that was a world apart from how things were done back home in Spain." These quiet confidences came as we relaxed before lunch, after spending a busy, sunny fall morning together. But the morning had started out with a rush of energy when she welcomed me to the outdoor terraza of her newly-relocated Monastrell Restaurant, now on the ground floor of the Amérigo Hotel, in Alicante's city center (on the east coast of Spain). She was keen for us to get down to business and to tell me all about her latest experience, and recent rediscovery: extra virgin olive oil.

Extra virgin olive oil

"The Interprofessional Association for Spanish Olive Oil (a non-profit organization bringing together all those involved in the olive oil sector—growers, millers, distributors—and aiming to strengthen the position of Spanish olive oil in the world market) selected me to represent Spain at the 4th edition of the Beyond Extra Virgin International Conference, held in the Italian city of Verona (and organized in late September 2010 by the association of Italian producers of TRE-E high-quality olive oil, with the collaboration of the Culinary Institute of America, among others). They gave me access, over two months, to the leading experts and to over 40 varieties of Spanish virgin olive oil. During this total immersion, I confirmed that an Arbequina varietal oil from Córdoba is completely different to an Arbequina from Lérida. Depending on where the oil comes from, I found it could enhance or even spoil a dish. So I spent two months having fun with olive oil." What she calls having fun ended up as a practical presentation at the conference. "People get tired of seeing techniques. They prefer to see the product itself." Unlike the other speakers, she presented several dishes blended with Spanish monovarietal olive oils. "I produced an *ajoblanco* (cold soup made from almonds and olive oil and dressed with a splash of sherry vinegar) using Hojiblanca oil from Córdoba, in which everything blended, achieving perfect balance, in contrast with an Hojiblanca from Almería; a *coca* (a flat bread base topped with savory or sweet ingredients) using a Manzanilla oil from Cáceres; and salmon with mango dressed with Cornicabra oil from Toledo, in which the mango

phased out the bitterness of the oil and enhanced the other flavors." Her presentation was warmly received and she received, as I confirmed later, congratulations from the organizers.
There was plenty to talk about, but our conversation was constantly interrupted by phone calls, by a multitude of practicalities to be sorted out, even by a journalist calling her in her capacity as President of Alicante's Provincial Association of Hospitality Entrepreneurs. And meanwhile she kept her eye on her laptop not only to show me some stunning photos of her dishes, but also to answer the odd urgent e-mail. This huge energy, stemming from her enthusiasm for what she does, is the perfect definition of San Román. Without this vitality and perseverance, she probably would never have become such an important name on the Spanish gastronomic scene, especially considering she is a self-taught cook driven, above all, by her determination to never stop learning.

Hobby turned career

Although she had spent much of her life in the kitchen, it was only when her children grew up that she started to take things more seriously. Her husband, a hotel and catering entrepreneur, encouraged her. "I used to make fresh pasta, I loved baking, and I always had guests for lunch or dinner. I was so keen that my husband gave me the *Salvat Encyclopedia of Cooking* so I could learn about basic recipes from different parts of the world. Back then, there was not much available in Spain by way of culinary publications, and that book was partly to blame for my dedication to cooking." Something of a bookworm, San José tells me she has studied every page of the encyclopedia's ten tomes.
"I discovered I had a passion for cooking. Everyone eventually finds out what they love best, and I found cooking."

But, first, she spent time as a "disciple" of Jean-Louis Neichel, in Barcelona (whose restaurant, Neichel, had two Michelin stars at the time). "Every day at one o'clock I used to sit down for lunch with Jean-Louis and we tried everything on the menu and talked about what was going on in the restaurant. He even told me about his work on new dishes." Her eyes light up as she recalls the experience. "He had a huge library of cookbooks that must have been unique in Spain back then, mostly in English and French. And, since I was fluent in both languages, I used to spend hour after hour studying, sometimes making photocopies that I could take away with me." This bookishness is very much on show at Monastrell. One of its hallmarks is the large bookshelf at the entrance, offering information that ranges from the history of ingredients and cuisine to how to prepare the most delicate of dishes. A cup of coffee with a few drops of saffron water—to bring out the flavor of this really good coffee—served with a slice of dried fig cake (see page 69) interrupts the flow and brings her back to the present. "See, a little saffron, used in just the right quantity and in the most appropriate way can really enhance flavors. It's an essential component in my cooking. And see what you think about drizzling a little of this Arbequina olive oil from Catalonia on the fig cake..." Saffron inevitably comes up in the conversation. María José San Román is the queen of saffron (see page 10), not only in Spain but also in the US. Her knowledge of this product, one of the world's most ancient condiments, has now projected her onto the international scene. In May 2007, the *New York Times* devoted a full page article to her, describing her as a real expert. But she was only able to scale such heights by first making huge efforts to teach herself and also to learn in the kitchens of the Roca brothers (El Celler de Can Roca, Gerona, two stars in the "red bible"), the triple-starred Martín Berasategui (Lasarte, Guipúzcoa), and Arzak (San Sebastián).

Saffron, a turning point

So this is the background to a culinary style that is neither modern nor classic but, rather,

aims to be constantly kept up to the minute while searching for harmony and reflection. "I've never been at the forefront because my feet are firmly on the ground. I prefer to develop gradually, without going to extremes," she says, as she sorts out a minor problem with a Monastrell chef. Her enthusiasm for innovation, based on perfect knowledge of traditional cooking, and her firm defense of local produce, led the Department of Agricultural Chemistry at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (central Spain) and the saffron company in Alicante, Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 75), to invite her to participate in the saffron research they were carrying out. So she was able to experiment freely, working with solutions in water or fats, in stock, bread, egg, cream and syrup. "At Monastrell, I have saffron in every possible form: saffron honey, oil, salt, butter, xanthan, even as a spray. I now use it in almost all my dishes. The trick with saffron is to get the right quantity and to know when to use strands or the ground form." Soon, she will be bringing out a book explaining the results of her research. But before that, a pack of saffron bearing her name is to be launched on the market. "The marketing will be in tune with the highest-quality saffron harvested every year by Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain," she says, as she proudly shows me the new pack.

And saffron has played such an important role in her career that she even has a saffron flower tattooed on the inside of her left wrist. She smiles and explains, "I have a friend who is a tattoo artist. When she realized to what extent I was devoting my time and efforts to saffron, she designed a saffron flower and told me to tell her when I was ready for it. She always said tattoos should be a sort of ritual, done when the person has a special personal reason, and that I should only have my tattoo when I felt I wanted it. I never even considered the possibility until she phoned to say she was moving to India. I then decided the time had come, that I had plenty of reasons for wanting the tattoo, and here it is, an indelible part of me."

Creativity

All this detailed reflection on saffron forms part of the creative process she sets in motion when faced with a new challenge, with a product previously unknown to her. That was the case with the broad range of extra virgin olive oils that she was asked to work with by the Interprofessional Association for Spanish Olive Oil, and when *Spain Gourmetour* suggested she draw up two recipes featuring dried figs. "The process is always the same," she explains. "First I search through the documentation for information, then I analyze the product to explore the different possibilities, both alone and in combination with other ingredients. With dried figs the product spoke for itself. All I had to do was open them up. I found a food that we used to eat quite often as children, healthier than many other options." She refers, among other things, to the dried fig cake she makes without flour, using the fig fiber instead, thus making it healthier and suitable for celiacs. "But I still have a lot to learn. These figs have tremendous potential. You'd be surprised to see how textures and preparations you would expect to bring out the organoleptic characteristics, such as mousse, actually have quite the opposite effect."

So, for San Román, creativity comes after documentation, and inspiration from hard work. She acknowledges that when she goes into a kitchen without planning to work and sees some type of food there, she often starts to visualize it as part of a finished dish, so she calls in her team and puts her idea into practice. "I suppose I'm a bit anarchic. If I think of something, I'm quick to find a place for it on the menu." San Román always tries to note any progress or culinary ideas on the computer. "I've just started keeping a diary so I can write down everything that occurs to me during the day." She has several notebooks with old entries, but regrets that in the past she was not very systematic, so may have lost some interesting lines of development. But now she's trying to make up for this handicap by computerizing everything.

Tuning in

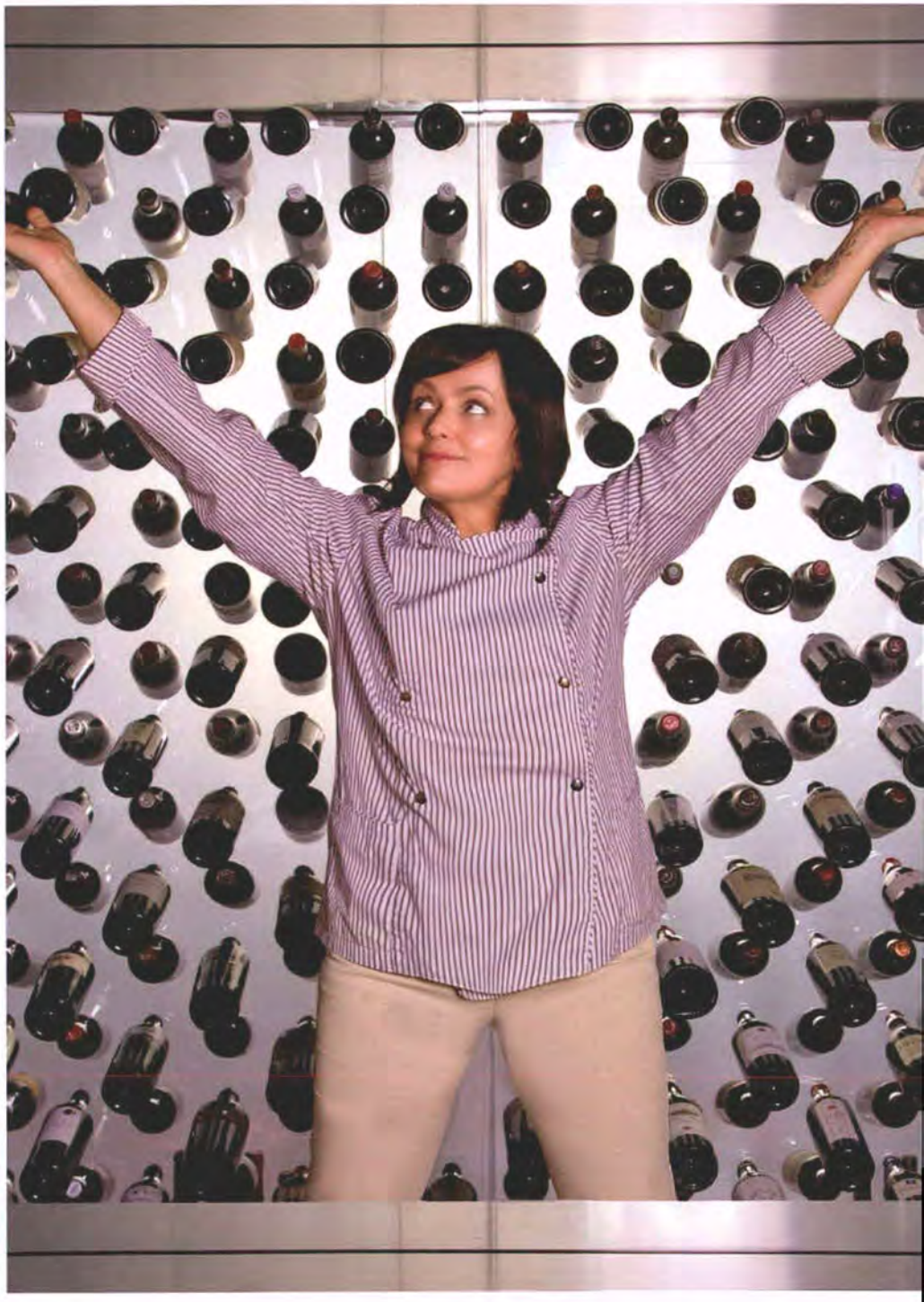
While she talks about Monastrell's presence on the main social networks and about how her team is all on the same wavelength —"we don't have a workshop but we still research whenever we can"—she gives careful instructions about how to cover the tips of the restaurant's table legs to prevent them from staining the floor with rust. Such versatility is possible now that she has created the post of executive chef, that is, her right-hand man in the kitchen. "This has given me time to think, and to deal with the family's other businesses. And it means that my top priority is no longer keeping Monastrell profitable, but creating and doing what I like and what gives me prestige."
This latest move has allowed her to indulge her love of travel and practice her linguistic skills. "About eight years ago, I was invited to Sydney (Australia)," she says, "to promote Spanish cuisine. For one month I was chef at the Wildfire restaurant, a landmark at the time on the city's culinary scene, one which served about 750 meals every night, at an average price of 100 euros. I found I had to instruct over 40 cooks. I observed the system and took it on board. First thing in the morning, I used to e-mail orders to the station chefs, then I supervised, visited the tables, met with the press..." Then she repeated this method wherever she went: Iceland, at the Food and Fun culinary

festival, where she was prizewinner in the fish category in 2008 with her dish of Croutons with Dublin Bay prawn and scallops; and in the US, when a group of chefs was invited by Michelle Obama to contribute to the fight against child obesity, for which José Andrés and María José San Román represented Spain and its Mediterranean diet.

Restaurants

Having made it clear that her cuisine, always with a Mediterranean imprint, has evolved as a result of a broad sharing of knowledge, she invited me to leave the terrace of the Monastrell restaurant to visit her other business project, La Taberna del Gourmet, an informal but stylish tapas bar run by her daughter María Eugenia. Here, the focus is on seasonal, local produce and, once again, on the balance that characterizes the Monastrell cuisine.
Before we leave, I take a last look inside the restaurant, which is decorated with carpets of the sort you might find in a nomad tent and a collection of paintings. Among these, of special interest are those by Antoni Muntadas (1942, winner of the Spanish National Award for Painting), with a version in blue of *The Last Supper*, and the panel by Carlos Bloch (1955, a Spanish painter) on the same subject, which was previously displayed in the Reina Sofía Art Center in Madrid. The exhibits lead me to reflect on María José's love of art—yet another passion. It becomes especially obvious on arrival at La Taberna del Gourmet, with its very minimalistic dining room on the first floor, which displays a collection of contemporary Spanish photography. As we walk to the Taberna, María José tells me that the former restaurant was designed by Javier García-Solera (1958, a Spanish architect and finalist in the Spanish National Architecture Awards for 2002), "but the customers didn't really understand it." Now, with the transfer to the Amérigo Hotel, the old restaurant serves almost as a private dining room attached to the Taberna, which customers reach by walking through the kitchen. "That they really like."
At the Taberna I confirm what I had already noticed at Monastrell. The devotion to art is also apparent in the presentation of the dishes.

María José is clear about it, "However exquisite a dish might taste, if it's not visually appealing, people will not be attracted to it." We are joined for lunch by the youngest of the daughters, Raquel, recently returned from Belgium and now also participating in the family business. Over a selection of dishes agreed on with María José, I note what I had already sensed at Monastrell: her cuisine is subtle, refined and sensible, the presentation is impeccable, and the flavors are distinct. What surprises me most are the sensory contrasts in the dishes and their lightness, the aim being also to offer healthy food, using organic products whenever possible. And this cuisine affords pride of place to seasonal, local produce, with products such as *turrón de Jijona* (a sweet paste made from almonds and honey), *ñoras* (dried red peppers) from Guardamar, red shrimp from Denia, pomegranates from Elche (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72) and rice dishes. As we say goodbye, María José confesses she couldn't hope for anything more from life. And I leave her to get on with her projects, and with her plans to take La Taberna del Gourmet to Arabic countries.



Almudena Muyo *is a journalist who has been specializing in international trade for over twelve years and currently is publication coordinator for* Spain Gourmetour.

www.monastrell.com
www.latabernadelgourmet.com

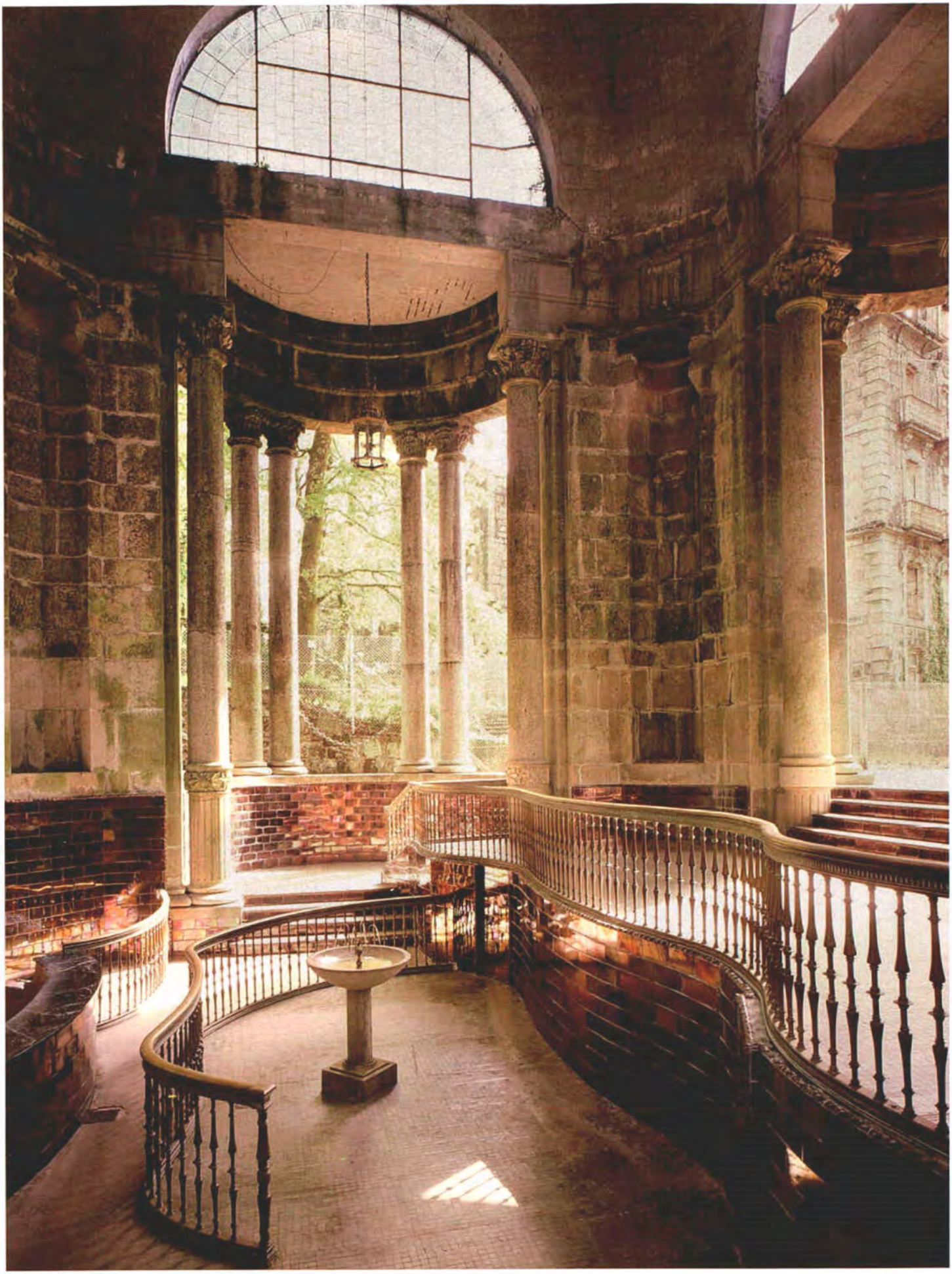
Text
Federico Oldenburg/©ICEX

Photos
Aguas de Mondariz

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

Liquid TRADITION

It was back in 1873, when spas were the height of fashion throughout Europe, that this company was set up. But the business, which describes itself as "proud to be Galician", has moved with the times. While its prime asset is still the quality and purity of the natural mineral waters from the Tea River springs, in Pontevedra (northwest Spain), today additional concerns are sustainability and the environment. With these priorities, Aguas de Mondariz has expanded abroad, and now sells its products in about 30 countries.



Today mineral water is often sold as a luxury product in designer bottles, and brands are doing their utmost to appear on the water menus offered by fashionable restaurants. But what about the actual contents of the bottles? Needless to say, not all mineral waters are the same, nor are they all covered by the same guarantees. Few of them have the credentials of Aguas de Mondariz, in terms of both its business track record and the organoleptic qualities and health benefits offered by its water. To see for yourself, take a glass of Mondariz water, note its transparency and the shine that comes from the granite rocks it flows through. The hallmarks of this water are no alien aromas, and a flavor with hardly any hints of minerals. Instant pleasure!
But, first, a little background.
The Aguas de Mondariz business has been bottling and selling the water from springs in the Tea River basin (in the Galician province of Pontevedra) since 1873. It was set up in parallel to the Gran Hotel Balneario de Mondariz, declared of public utility that same year and soon to become the favorite destination of Spanish high society. For more than a century, socialites came to these baths to "take the water" and to see and be seen. Or, rather, to drink and be seen.
But the Mondariz waters had been exerting their magnetic attraction on human beings since way before that, not only for quenching their thirst but also curing for their various ailments. There is evidence that the inhabitants of the Roman villa at Búrbida (3rd-4th centuries AD), close to today's Troncoso spring at the Mondariz spa, already knew of the benefits to be had from these waters.

First the spa, then the bottle

Now back to modern times, the first visionary to turn the Mondariz waters to good account was Dr. Domingo Blanco Lage (1809-1886). He observed that local inhabitants used the springs at the confluence of the Xabriña and Aboal streams to heal their dermatological problems, so he started to prescribe this wonderful liquid to his patients.
But it was Enrique Peinador Vela who had the foresight that this could be a business proposition, and in 1877 he set up a plant next to the spring and started to bottle water and sell it.
The fame of the water was undoubtedly boosted by the prestige of the Mondariz spa, which was visited by some outstanding personalities at the time: scientist and naval officer Isaac Peral (1851-1895), dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera (1870-1930), and the winner of the Nobel prize for Literature, José de Echegaray (1832-1916), who said: "This is not a spa: it's a Water Palace".
In the late 19th century, hydrotherapy was at its peak in Europe, sustained by the need of the wealthy to find alternatives to urban life in places close to nature where they could tend to their bodies and their minds, but without leaving behind the luxuries of city life. Back then, the concept of tourism as we know it did not exist, nor did today's fancy spa resorts, but people already felt the need to get away from it all.
So the idea of selling the spa water would today be seen as a smart marketing operation, because in addition to making the water itself available, the product had symbolic significance, with healthy, elitist connotations.
The atmosphere at the spa today still takes us back to the fashionable days of the 19th century, but the facilities have all been updated and Mondariz continues to be Galicia's most

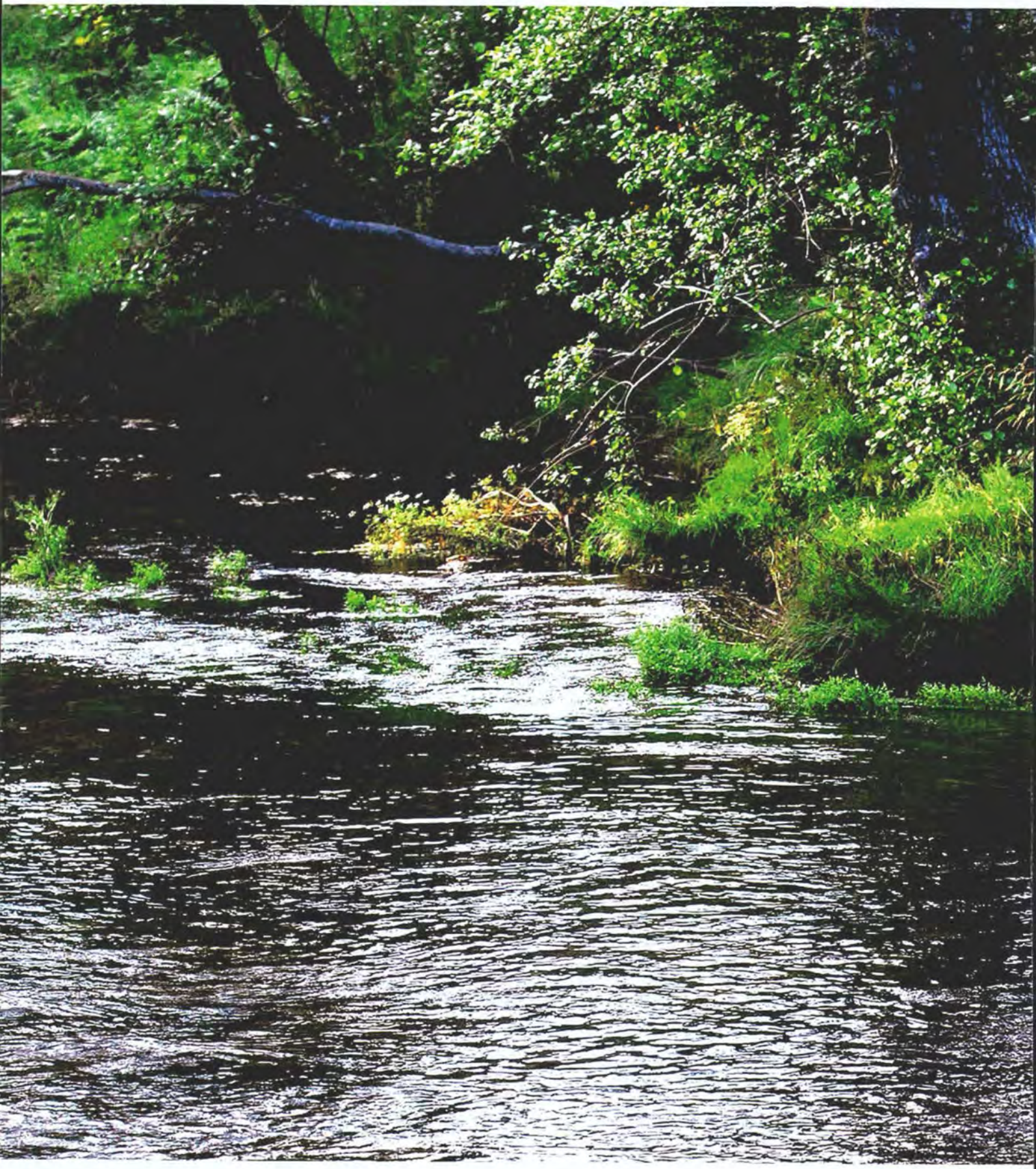
modern balneotherapy center, with all the latest techniques for treatment with mineral and medicinal waters—for sports injuries, nervous disorders, digestive problems, obesity, locomotor dysfunctions and just plain stress.
Altogether, the Water Palace occupies about 3,000 sq m (32,290 sq ft) on three floors, with all sorts of amenities: a huge central swimming pool, a children's pool, a hot water pool and saunas, as well as lounges for relaxation.

Vintage water

So why is it that the Mondariz waters attracted so many famous bathers, even monarchs (the company was the official supplier to the Spanish Royal Household during several reigns)? And why does this water continue to appeal to thousands of consumers, in 29 countries on four continents?
The fact is that the Mondariz water has plenty to offer. Firstly, it is natural mineral water. That is, the water comes from a single spring and its composition is determined by the type of rocks it filters through, the temperature in the aquifer and the time it remains underground.
Can mineral water really be considered to age, like a venerable "reserva" wine? Yes, and the Mondariz water is certainly aged, perhaps even "gran reserva", because it takes about 100 years to filter down, picking up minerals as it goes, through the different strata to the aquifer. This makes the water chemically and microbiologically pure, unaffected by pollution.
But these are not its only virtues. This water retains all its characteristics and qualities over time, so it has no expiry date.
Also, being a natural mineral water, not only does it contain salts and minerals, but it also has natural properties that come from the spring, which can be of enormous benefit for drinkers. One of these is the iron content. Two liters of Mondariz water a day give the recommended daily intake of 20%. And water also helps carry nutrients, regulate body temperature, dissolve body substances and eliminate waste.
The Mondariz water has zero calories and is bottled as it emerges from the ground, without any type of chemical or microbiological treatment. So it is a natural, absolutely pure product, one that is ideal for anyone wanting to lead a healthy, and properly hydrated, life.

Protected springs

The natural origin of water suggests that all the technical staff at Aguas de Mondariz has to do is collect the fluid from the spring and bottle it. But the process is not that simple. In order to achieve an annual production of 98 million liters, to be sent out all over the world in 140 million bottles, you need more than just a bucket or two. From the start, Aguas de Mondariz has been adapting and modernizing its systems for collection and transfer as well as its water tanks, which today are made from materials that guarantee the water retains all its properties.
Experience has shown, for example, that the conditions under which the water is extracted may have a decisive effect on its organoleptic characteristics. This means that the more superficial water must be isolated to ensure that the water composition is the same all year round, whether it rains a lot or not at all.
This technique also allows for the elimination of any unpleasant flavors coming from the higher layers of soil, as well as penetration to the deepest springs—where the water is better filtered, so it is clearer—and collection of water with a higher mineral content.



In order to optimize water quality and protect the flows, extraction must also be properly controlled and programmed. At Mondariz, constant checks are made on the flow from the springs and piezometric readings are taken to measure aquifer levels. Sustainable development criteria are applied to the automatic extraction systems, and a protection perimeter allows the springs to be exploited constantly.
Aguas de Mondariz is seriously committed to environmental protection. This philosophy led Mondariz to be one of the first Spanish companies to replace PVC bottles with low-weight, 100% recyclable polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which can be incinerated without emitting pollutants. Moreover, since the company produces its own bottles, it largely avoids the risks of water contamination.
In line with criteria for sustainability, in recent years Aguas de Mondariz has introduced changes in its production process, reducing the weight of its bottles by 31.6%, replacing paper labels with polypropylene and thus cutting back on the use of ink by 55%, redesigning packaging to achieve maximum logistics efficiency, and making bottle caps smaller to use 20% less plastic.
In 1998, this company was the first in Spain to use the ergonomically-designed Bericap HexaLite 29/25 cap, which makes life easier for thirsty drinkers and is also more environmentally-friendly.

As a result of these initiatives, Mondariz is proud to be one of the first Spanish bottling companies in the agrifood sector to obtain international certifications ISO 9001 (for quality management) and ISO 14001 (for environmental management). It is also registered with the European EMAS (Eco-Management and Audit Scheme), a scheme for companies that have adopted an Environmental Management System and are constantly improving their production processes, as verified by independent audits.

From Galicia to the rest of the world

Today, the company's two water products—Aguas de Mondariz and Fuente del Val (recommended for low-sodium diets)—bring in an annual 20 million euros approximately, with an annual volume of 98 million liters.
The company leads its sector in the northwest of Spain and has a staff of 112, rising to 160 during the summer months. Moreover 85% of the workers are from the local area, confirming the company's commitment not only to its environment, but also to the local inhabitants.
But the company's attachment to its home ground in Galicia does not prevent it from spreading its wings. It is currently present in 29 countries and is expanding into new markets. Over the last two years, the water that was once favored by the Romans and by 19th-century bathers has reached food stores in Dubai, the US, Hong Kong and South Africa, among other countries.
This should come as no surprise because purity is highly valued by all cultures.
All of which is cause for celebration, so how about a toast with a refreshing glass of Mondariz water?

Federico Oldenburg, is a Swedish/Argentinean journalist who has been living in Spain since 1989. He has written on gastronomy, wines, spirits and lifestyle in publications such as Vogue, Gentleman, Sibaritas, El Mundo, Diario 16 *and* El Economista. *His latest book is* 101 experiencias gastronómicas que no te puedes perder *(2010, Ed. Planeta).*

Aguas de Mondariz

Staff
average of 116
Gross turnover (2009)
23,853,181 euros
Export quota (2009)
10% to 29 countries
Products
bottled natural mineral water (Aguas de Mondariz and Fuente del Val)
Website
www.aguasdemondariz.com (English, Galician and Spanish)

Chris Fleming from

NEW YORK

Text
Chris Fleming/©ICEX

Photos
Tía Pol

Western Chelsea is one of New York City's most trendy and vibrant neighborhoods. In recent years, anonymous and desolate parking lots and warehouses have dramatically transformed into a thriving cosmopolitan destination peppered with art galleries, chic residences and smart restaurants. For over six years, restaurant Tía Pol has embraced Spain's lack of pretention. The narrow storefront is understated and tasteful: three floor-to-ceiling windows framed by red steel. Inside, exposed brick, butcher-block tables and metal bar stools create a comfy, "homey" feeling. The bar area's wood cubbies for wine bottles, built-in chalkboards listing specials, thick white marble bar top and bar-height tables all feel like a tapas bar in Spain's Logroño, Bilbao or Seville.

The staff combines warm hospitality with timely service, a rare blend for New York's trendy neighborhoods. On the convivial, "down-to-earth" vibe, owner Mani Dawes notes that she and co-owner Heather Belz are "both Southerners. Spain felt very familiar to me when I lived there. I saw many similarities to how I grew up in southwestern Louisiana." Chef Timothy Steele uses selected imported and fresh, local ingredients to craft dishes with "a real sense of Spain. Originally, our specials had more of a Basque tone, but now we borrow from all over the country," explains Mani. The experience of eating several tapas is a fun and interesting contrast to a large main course. A recent lunch with a friend started with *pimientos estilo Gernika*, blistered small green peppers tossed with sea salt. Piquant, playful and not too spicy, these have a caramelized flavor. The *ensalada de pulpo*, octopus and fingerling potato salad, points up the dish's fresh, snappy octopus flavors given added bite by lemon olive oil and fresh lemon juice. Crispy marinated whitebait fish, *chanquetes*, have the texture of perfect onion rings. Pimiento peppers and lemon put spicy fried flounder flavors into relief. Stomach and mind are intrigued by the varied textures and flavors, like *gambas al ajillo*, shrimp sautéed in olive oil and garlic. A pinch of *pimentón*, a type of Spanish paprika, lends a smoky depth to the shrimp's sweetness. *Pinchos morunos*, grilled lamb skewers marinated in Moorish spices, have a wonderfully opulent buttery-sweet texture, the outside nicely crisp from being

Have a Spanish **Break!**

seared and sea-salted. A yummy bocadillo or sandwich, *bocata de tortilla con boquerones*, contains marinated anchovies, sliced tortilla (Spanish-style omelet) and guindilla peppers on a thick baguette.
The peppers give hearty, fresh fish flavors an enticing crunch. *Chorizo con chocolate* is cured Palacios chorizo with bittersweet Zococoa chocolate served atop baguette rounds, an adept sweet-and-savory dance for the palate.
Assembled by Beverage Director Stephanie Mannatt, Tía Pol's jewel box of a wine list contains a Spanish wine lover's thoughtful selections with many regions and good value. There's a crisp, clean, strawberry-fruited 2009 Chivite Gran Feudo Rosado (DO Navarra). A 2001 Miguel Merino Rioja Reserva (DOCa Rioja) has aromatic, dense red and black berries that become silky and suave flavors in the mouth.
We request one more savory dish before the sweets, specifically *oreja de cerdo*, fried crispy pigs' ear with toasted garlic and sherry vinegar. My friend calls the flavor "super concentrated bacon." We finish with *torta de Santiago*, an intense dessert of moist almond cake over ice cream flavored with *dulce de leche* (caramel) and *turrón* (a sweet paste made with almonds and honey). Like a great piece of music, the meal builds to a finale that's fulfilling rather than tiresome.
Tía Pol's cuisine is constructed of layered flavors that are rich without being heavy, "comfort food" brought to a higher level.
It is my opinion and that of many reviewers that this is New York's most authentic tapas experience.

Tía Pol
205 Tenth Ave.
New York, New York 10011
www.tiapol.com

Chris Fleming is a freelance wine writer who has written for Wine Spectator, The World of Fine Wine, The Robb Report *and others. He is currently researching a book on Rioja. In 2008, he was Technical Advisor on a Rioja DVD produced for the Culinary Institute of America. Chris has taught wine classes and led tastings, and recently he was Internet Marketing Manager at fine wine importer Frederick Wildman & Sons in the US.*

Text
Samara
Kamenecka/©ICFX

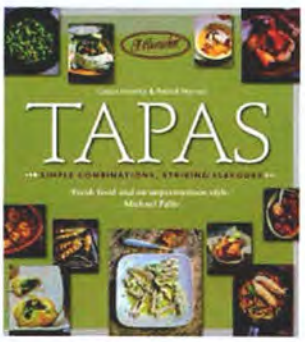
LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Ham. An Obsession with the Hindquarter

by Bruce Weinstein and Mark Scarbrough. English.
The authors travel far and wide (Spain, the Philippines, etc.) to explore the world of ham, for which they offer an exhaustive definition and then go into detail in each chapter, discussing different regions and types (from wet cured to fresh). The book is peppered with anecdotes—from stories about raising their own pig in rural Connecticut to trying to sneak a giant ham past airport security—and includes a selection of delicious recipes that any ham lover would devour (and tempt any vegetarian to switch teams). Jerky-style ham and pineapple tamales, Deviled eggs with ham, and Prosciutto-wrapped meatloaf with a vinegary tomato sauce are just a few suggestions. But be warned: after eating (and laughing) your way through this book, you too could develop a ham obsession.
(Stewart, Tabori & Chang, www.abramsbooks.com/stc.html)

Seasonal Spanish Food

by José Pizarro and Vicky Bennison. English.
Chef Pizarro knows one thing for sure: Spanish food brings together some of the world's best ingredients for cooking: spicy chorizo, extra virgin olive oil, Manchego cheese, Iberico ham… the list is endless. His three London-based tapas bars, Brindisa, celebrate Spanish cooking at its best. His recipes are organized by season and include short texts on topics such as eggs, mushroom hunting, and saffron. He also includes a section on wines, a list of Spanish food and wine stockists, and a measurement conversion chart. One look at the recipes (Ceps with prawns and Serrano ham, Sautéed black pudding with mint oil, Venison burgers with date salsa) and it's no wonder his restaurants are enormously popular. After one look at this book, you'll commit to making every single recipe, and your taste buds will be eternally grateful.
(Kyle Cathie Limited, www.kylecathie.co.uk)

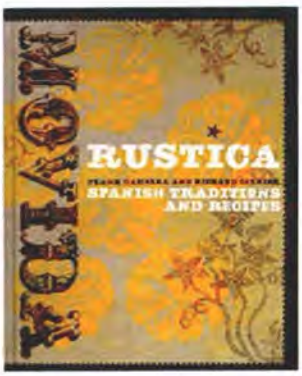


Tapas. Simple Combinations, Striking Flavors

by Carlos Horrillo and Patrick Morcas. English.
What started out as a simple venture between two best friends has turned into a successful restaurant in Surrey, England. Through hard work, talent, teamwork and a passion for Spanish tapas, El Parador opened its doors to the public. The theme has been and always will be the same: food that is "unfussy, uncomplicated, and easy to cook". In addition to tips on advance preparations, equipment (frying pans, etc.), olive oils, and sauces, the book offers a great overview of their straightforward classic recipes: try the Deep-fried squid rings, or the Warm smoked haddock salad with beans, chicory and roasted cherry tomatoes with a lemon and olive oil dressing. They have a knack for bringing Mediterranean ingredients together in a delicious way.
(Kyle Cathie Limited, www.kylecathie.co.uk)

El principio. La revolución de la gastronomía española desde sus certamenes de cocina

(The Beginning. The Revolution of Spanish Gastronomy arising from its Cooking Contests) by Cristino Álvarez. English, Spanish. This text offers a retrospective on gastronomy competitions, which took off in the 1980s as a way for industry professionals to share ideas and disseminate information. The masterminds behind Zaldiaran, a leading restaurant in the Basque Country, were movers and shakers behind theses initiatives. The text specifically discusses cuisine in Ávala and Victoria-Gasteíz, as well as the major role played by Zaldiaran in the contests, how the events took place, a selection of winning recipes (Green apple crystals, and Norway lobster papillon with mesclun chiffonade, for example), and takes a closer look at the chefs and other people involved behind the scenes. After all, Euskadi is just another word for good food and cooking. *(Restaurante Zaldiaran, www.restaurantezaldiaran.com)*



MoVida Rustica. Spanish Traditions and Recipes

by Frank Camorra and Richard Cornish. English. This cookbook pays homage to Spanish cuisine's great diversity. The author traveled extensively to collect traditional and innovative recipes, tapping on the kitchen doors of everyone from "the chefs of Madrid to the widows of Galicia". He focuses on the cornerstones of Spanish cuisine as he takes a closer look at ingredients and preparation techniques and the ways in which the food is grown, prepared and eaten. His suggestions are organized into chapters entitled: Tapas (try the Marinated sardines on crisp bread wafers); Sherry, salt and fish; The ham phenomenon; Red food (Sheep's cheese mousse with quince, anyone?); Catalan traditions; The green coast (Corn pie with baby scallops, mmm); the Basque kitchen; and The Moors' great legacy (Did somebody say Prawn and nettle tortilla?). *(Murdoch Books Pty Limited, www.murdochbooks.com.au)*

Tapas en estado puro. Revision actualizada de la tapa tradicional

(Tapas in Their Purest State. Updating the Traditional Tapa) by Paco Roncero. Spanish.
To paraphrase Roncero: the best way to enjoy the good things in life is in small portions; therefore, miniature cuisine is the essence of fine dining. His dedication to tapas and creative variations thereof are evidenced in this 60-recipe book, which includes information on the appropriate season to prepare each one and wine suggestions. Chapters include cold tapas (Anchovies with black olives and basil); hot tapas (Galicia-style octopus skewer with potato foam); bread and sandwiches (Leeks and brie on toast); Iberico ham (Iberico pork cheek with beet purée); and even desserts (Orujo cream). Roncero is a dedicated pioneer in the field, constantly pushing himself and redefining the limits of tapas cuisine. Taste his efforts here. *(Editorial Everest, www.everest.es)*

Natura

by Albert Adrià. English, Spanish.
Albert Adrià, a major influence behind world-famous elBulli, took two years to put together this book, dedicated entirely to desserts and patisserie-related techniques. All of the 49 spectacularly photographed desserts have been served at the restaurant, and include examples such as Chocolate ice cream with cocoa sand, lime skin puree, muscovado sugar gelatin and mint cloud moss, and Raspberry croquant carnation crowning lychee sorbet with grated pistachio, vanilla yogurt, rose caviar and tomato couscous.
The author also discusses how he embarked on this project, how it evolved, and where he finds his inspiration. The book comes with a CD containing the same photos and text. The dishes are absolutely astounding and they will give your dessert-making skills a real run for their money. *(RBA Libros, www.rbalibros.com)*

Enoturismo en el Camino de Santiago. Guia para el viajero

(Wine Tourism on St. James' Way. A Traveler's Guide) by the Government of Navarre. Spanish.
St. James' Way offers much more than just a spiritual journey and pilgrimage to the world-famous cathedral. This book provides travelers with the resources to take advantage of other sites and scenes on the way, specifically, wine tourism. The text offers a comprehensive look at the towns and villages on the *Camino* (from Aurizberri-Espinal and Olloki to Puente La Reina and Lorca) and informs on cultural heritage, traditions and, most importantly, wine. It covers places to stay, restaurants and wineries to visit, and the best wines to try. So if you're looking to further your already-unique experience, hit up the bodegas and quench that walking thirst with a nice glass of *tinto*. *(Asociación Turística de Bodegas, Empresas, y Entidades de la Ruta del Vino del Camino de Santiago, www.rutadelvino-caminodesantiago.com)*

Comida para pensar, pensar sobre comer

(Food for Thought. Thought for Food) by Richard Hamilton and Vicent Todoli. English, German, Spanish.
elBulli. The most famous restaurant in the world. Winner of countless Michelin stars on consecutive occasions. But why is eating there like no other culinary experience anywhere? How does Ferran Adrià do it? This book takes a close look at the creative process at elBulli. It includes more than 1,000 photos of the dishes served at his restaurant and delves deep into the philosophy behind the venue. It offers a compilation of letters from diners and texts on debates and round table discussions which feature not only chefs but also art critics, artists and gallery owners. This is a comprehensive look at what goes on behind the doors of elBulli from a myriad of perspectives, and it serves up a whole lot of food for thought. *(Actar-D, www.actar-d.com)*

BCNVanguardia

by Xavier Agulló. Spanish.
This book covers everything that went down at the BCNVanguardia international gastronomy conference, now in its 4th edition. A lot was covered (take a look at the agenda) and the format was highly unique: all presentations were accompanied by tastings and everything was interactive; the themes were listening, learning, eating, tasting, savoring. This is a different type of conference: the auditorium becomes the dining room, the seats become student desks, and what you see on stage you see on the plate. A wide range of topics were covered, including products, sustainability, business models, marketing, and haute cuisine. The text includes photos, commentaries from high-ups in the industry, chef biographies, and recipes (Miso and oyster soup, "Rising sun", and Olive oil popcorn with Raf tomatoes). Open the book and it's *almost*, almost as if you had been there. *(www.grupgsr.com)*

El libro de los platos de cuchara

(The Soup Cookbook) by Simone and Inés Ortega. Spanish.
Spanish cuisine is multifaceted and full of surprises; it has its traditions, but it ventures into the unknown as well. This book, however, highlights one of its most important components: soups and soup derivatives. Inés and Simone Ortega offer a cookbook stocked with almost 250 recipes, including broths, stews, hot and cold purées, hot and cold soups, and gazpachos. They also provide a historical look at soup and advice on recipe presentation. Suggestions include cream of celery, chestnut purée, apple gazpacho, lentil stew with cream and mustard, and an endless assortment of soups, including shark's fin, sweet almond, strawberry, curry and coconut, and liver. You'll be inspired to break out the bowls and spoons and get to cooking. *(Alianza Editorial, S.A., www.alianzaeditorial.es)*

10,000 Spanish consumers have chosen FRAGATA SNACK 'N OLIVE as "PRODUCTO DEL AÑO 2010", a consumer product award that identifies the best annual innovations in FMCG and is voted on by a nationally representative sample of consumers.

The consumer survey has been conducted in Spain by the leading research company TAYLOR NELSON SOFRES E-Access Panel ® in October 2009 on a selection of innovations in FMCG and was voted on by 10,000 Spanish consumers that fairly represents the country's population.

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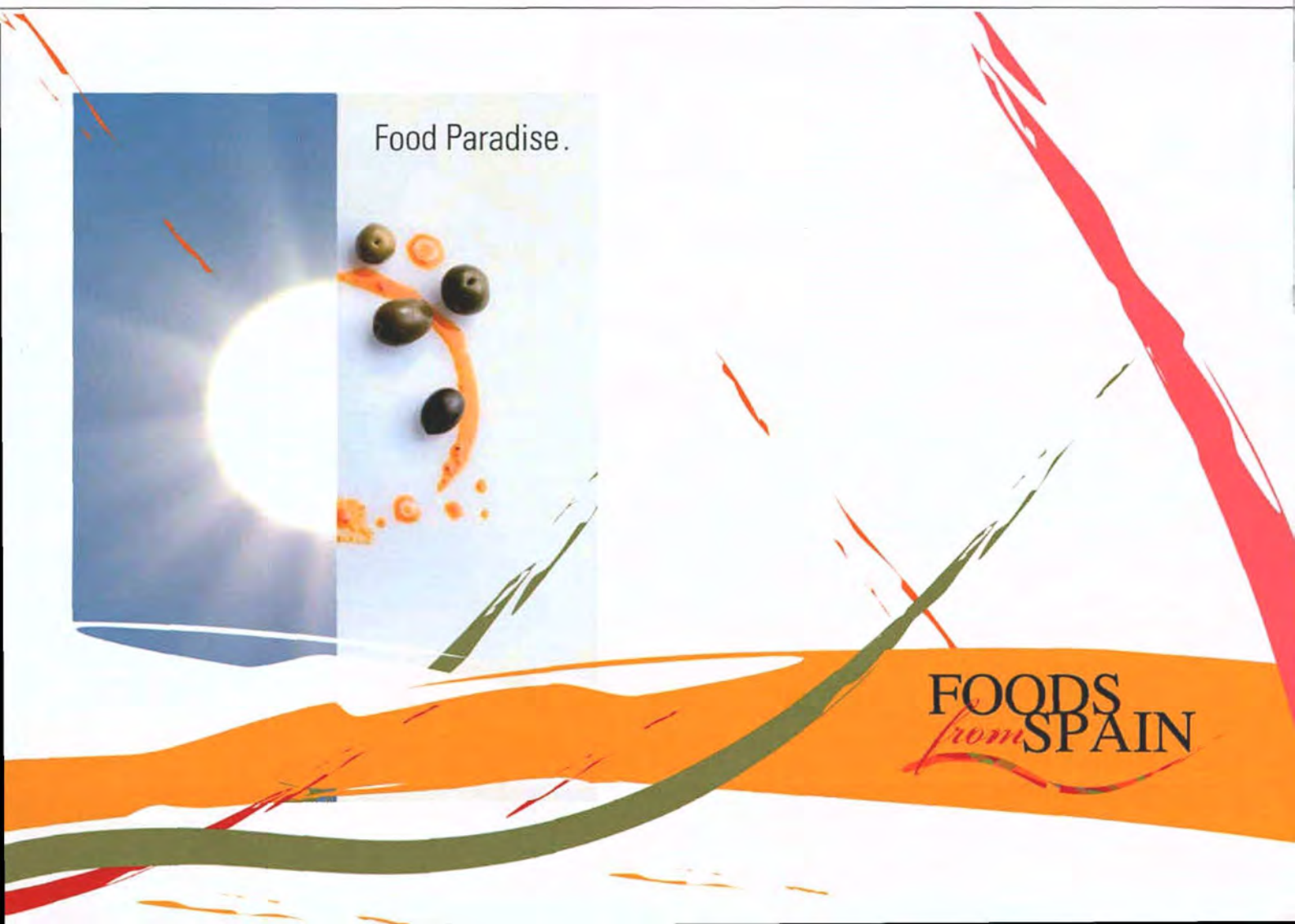

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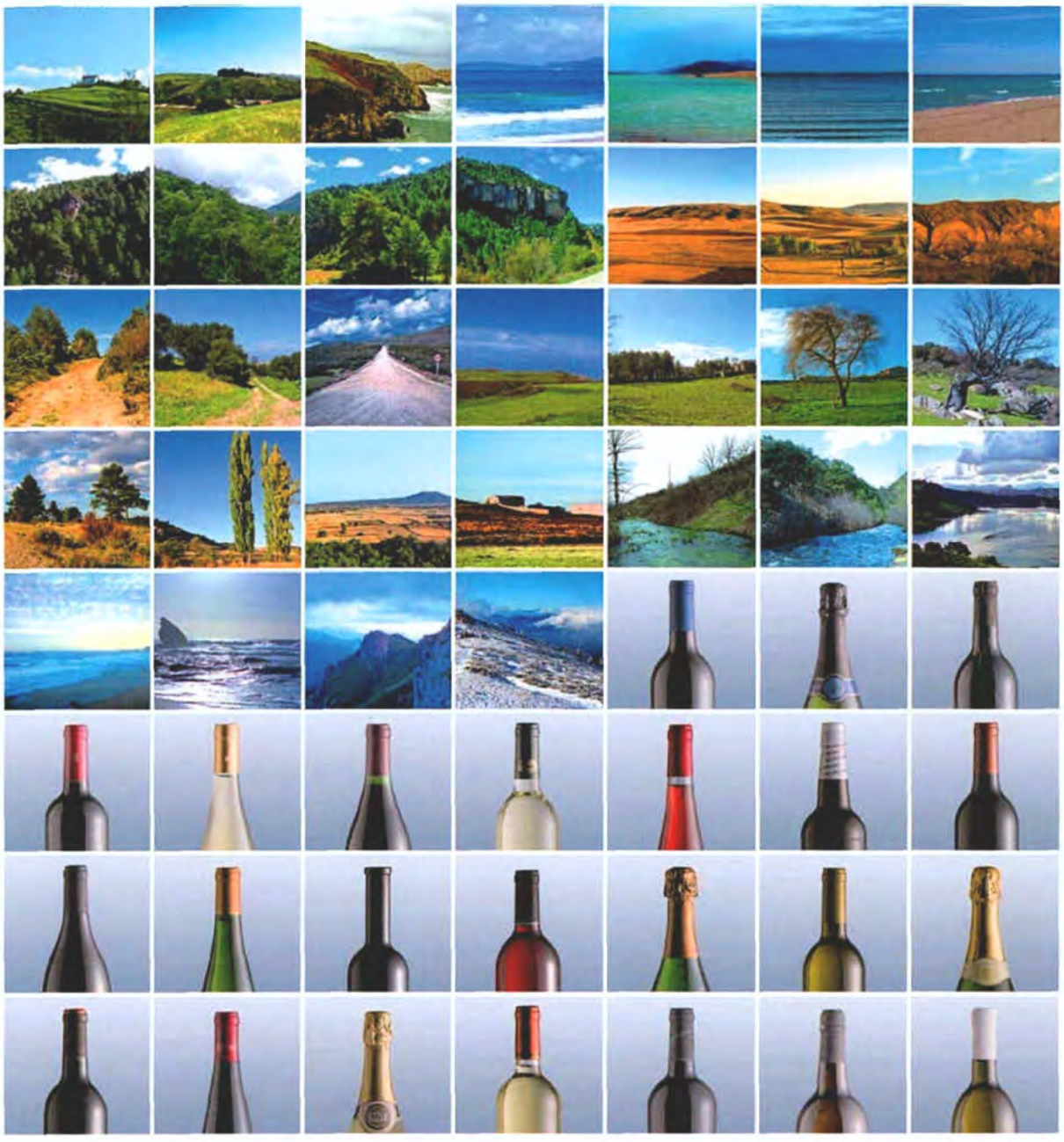

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WINES *from* SPAIN

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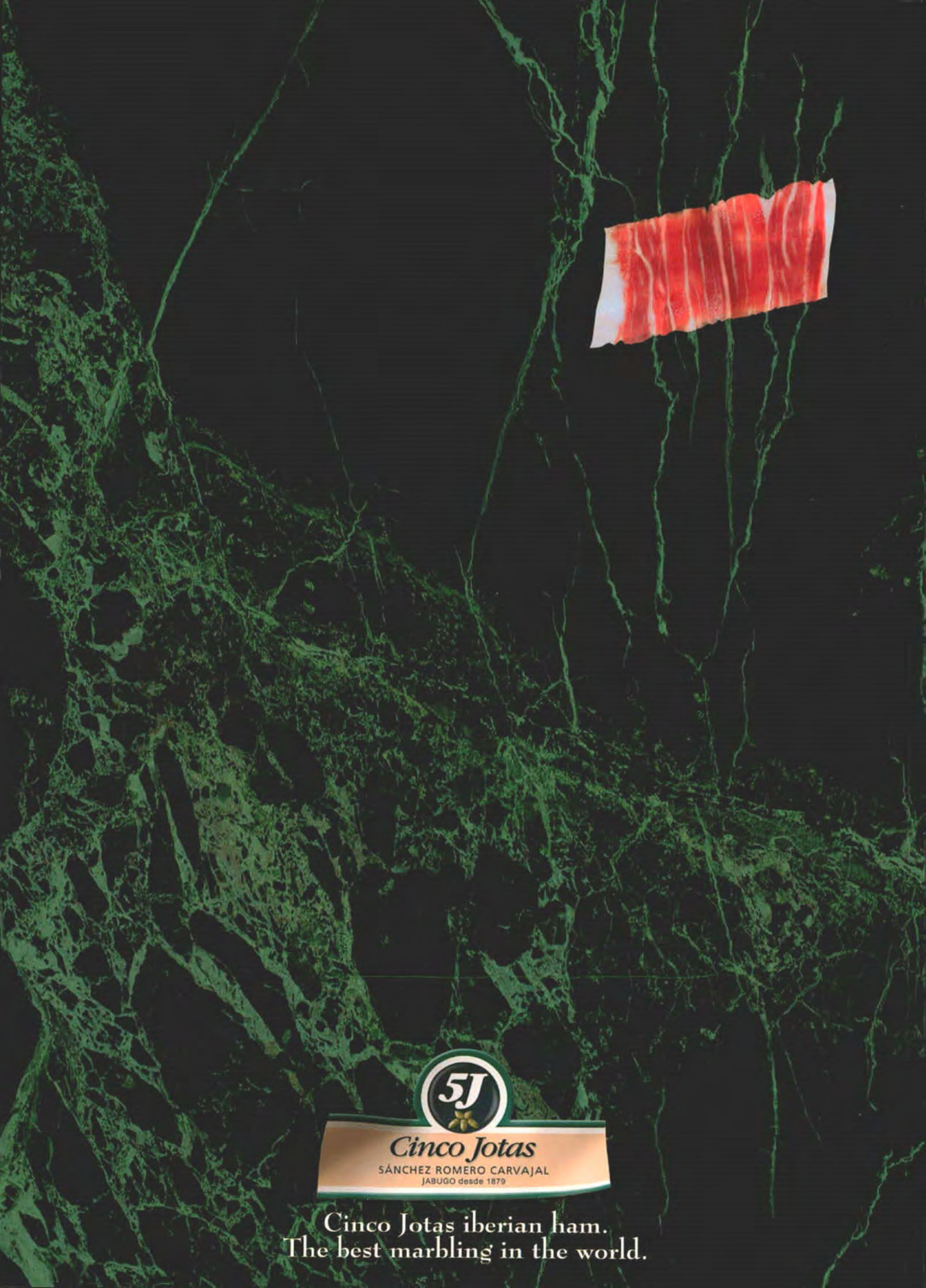
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