

# **SPAIN** **GOURMETOUR**

FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

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**Ribera del Duero**

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**THE ALTERNATIVE**

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## SPAIN SHAPES UP

**I**t is still only three months since Spain's entry into the EEC and the likely effects of this move on her various producing sectors remain uncertain. But the wine sector, for one, can contemplate the future with equanimity. Spanish wines are facing the challenge of consolidating their position on the European market whilst at home a battle for quality is in full swing. The genuine effort that many of Spain's winegrowing areas are putting into modernising their bodegas and production methods is clearly discernible and it is paying off. Many winegrowing areas traditionally regarded as second-rate are now producing first class wines. Spain has an important role to

play on the international wine scene; a role which, because of mistakes from within and prejudice from without, has not been played well enough in the past. Her wine-producers can depend on top-quality raw materials and, in many cases, elaboration methods, which guarantee end products which belong well up on the quality scale achieved by the rest of winegrowing Europe. But one problem remains to be tackled. Marketing. Image. Until very recently, Spanish wines have had a poor market image if any, and the time has clearly come for this to change. It is going to be quite a challenge, and one which Spain may well manage to bring off.



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# DOÑANA

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## THE OASIS

**Despite being steeped in the ancient history of unknown civilisations – Atlantis and Tartessos, Ligures and Celts, Doñana is still very much alive today. It is like a great oasis in the dryness of Andalusia, teeming with wildlife, where Nature is very much in evidence. José Carlos Capel tells us about it.**

**D**ownstream from Seville, the slow and majestic progress of the Guadalquivir reaches its estuary, its right bank tracing the edge of an ecological paradise.

In this great flat area of seemingly limitless horizons, the natural forces of sand and wind, sea and river, have combined over the centuries to produce a curious range of ecosystems.

To the south, on Doñana's seaboard, the virgin sands of the Atlantic have been carried inland by capricious seabreezes to form trails of dunes which run parallel to the coast and which engulf any vegetation standing in their

way. Their potentially menacing progress is halted by a sequence of lakes fed by rainwater which drains from the dunes themselves. Inland from here, the terrain is of sandy scrubland, populated by aromatic xerophytes, plants which thrive in dry conditions—savins, jara,

rosemary – which peter out in the soggy areas near the river. This is where the marshland environment starts, at once pastoral and curious; the delta of the Guadalquivir, whose waters carve out an intricate web of freshwater channels and lakes. With the seasons,



**A landscape which can change with the seasons from a vast stretch of water to a desolate mudflat.**

# DOÑANA

## THE OASIS

the land-scape changes dramatically from a vast stretch of water to a desolate wasteland. It can be a vast reed-reflecting lake in winter, a sea of tall grasses in spring and a cracked mudflat in summer.

Despite being flooded by the overflowing river and heavy down-pours in the rainy seasons, the marshland's clay varies in degree of salinity, and this affects its wildlife accordingly.

The vegetation is made up of the vast woods of cone-bearing pines at the river-mouth opposite Sanlúcar, and La Vera, where marsh and mountain meet and patches of bracken and pasture alternate with ash, willow and poplar.

This ungovernable and intransigent landscape is home for over two hundred species of vertebrate—lynx, fallow deer, eagle, mongoose, viper—all living and breeding at sea-level.

A link between two continents and a vital stopping place during migration, Doñana is also a bird sanctuary and winter haven where, protected by the marshland's vegetation, tens of thousands of birds collect from Europe and Africa.

### TARTESSOS AND DOÑANA

In some unknown place, now buried deep beneath the Guadalquivir's banks, lie the remains of one of the most legendary civilisations of our earliest history. A water-travelling civilisation, so Juan Carlos Alonso tells us in his excellent book *Tartessos*, which established itself alongside the river-banks, like Egypt's on



**This natural landscape of untamed terrain is home for over two hundred species of vertebrate, living and breeding at sea level.**



the Nile and India's on the Indus. Tartessos, land of the Pheacians mentioned by Homer, the Tarshish of the Bible, The Garden of the Hesperides, Atlantis... all these were probably one and the same, the Mediterranean civilisations' notion of a paradise in the mythical west, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, past what we know today as the Straits of Gibraltar.

From 1923 to 1925, archaeologist Adolf Schulte with Professor George Bonsor and General Lammerer carried out a fruitless dig in Cerro del Trigo, right in the heart of the Doñana, in ground bulging with axes, Iberian votive objects and assorted relics. Theirs was a vain search for that mysterious western land where the Phoenicians obtained their precious metals - tin, gold, silver - and where the first urban culture of the late Bronze Age flourished. Tartessos was the name given to the river and to a city, which has never been found, supposedly situated at its mouth and reigned over by an hereditary monarchy.

Why, one wonders, should this remote area be graced with the name of Doñana? Was it really named after Ana Gómez de Mendoza, the Princess of Eboli's daughter and wife of the seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia, for whom the somewhat primitive Palace of Doñana was built in the 17th century? Perhaps so, but then again the suffixes 'ana' and 'ina' - Guadiana, Rociana, Doñana, Rocina - crop up very frequently in the south west of the Peninsula.

In his *Tesoro Cávaro*, Gerard de Sede claims «...the ancients called the people of Tartessos by the nickname of "The Duck People". They used as their emblem a webbed foot, representing an oar, and near Tartessos was a river called by the Latin name for duck - *anas-anatis*.» (Estrabón III).

Could the place-name be explained by the presence of large numbers of ducks in the area?

The foot of the goose, a bird sacred to the ancients, represented by three lines radiating from a central point, was incorporated into the trident, weapon of Poseidon who was the god of the mythical Atlantis, later transubstantiated by the Latins into Neptune. If, as is generally accepted, the people of Tartessos were seafaring and came from the Atlantic, is it possible that they were survivors from Atlantis? Amid all the controversy surrounding Tartessos, all the ancient sources coincide in making reference to a lake Lingusticus which stretched from Seville to the mouth of the Guadalquivir and which, down the centuries, gradually silted up with deposits from traffic and floods into terraced layers. Could the Ligures have been the pre-Celtic people who received the Atlantans in Tartessos? Among the Ligures, prophets, like the Celtic Druids, were considered to be descendants of the Dé Danan tribe, the tribe of the Mother Goddess. So where does the name Doñana come from? Danna, Danan, or Ana?

In olden times, the area of today's reserve was held to be a field of supernatural force, a spiritual focus, where

# DOÑANA

THE OASIS



**Because of its biological and climatological characteristics, Doñana has never really been worked or inhabited except in a rather sporadic and limited way.**



the female deity was worshipped – the moon, the goddess-woman, first Danan, later Astarte, later still Venus. Currently, the site of a temple to the Roman goddess is being excavated in La Algaida, just at the mouth of the Guadalquivir. After the reconquest of the area by Alfonso X, The Wise, the tradition, by now Christianised, persisted as the cult of the Virgin of the Dew.

## HUNTING, SHOOTING AND FISHING

Given its climatological and biological characteristics, the Parque de Doñana has never really been used or inhabited except in a rather sporadic and limited way.

King Sancho IV made a gift of it to Don Alfonso Pérez de Guzmán, son of Guzmán the Good, in 1309, and from then on until relatively recent times, the Doñana Forest was a hunter's paradise. Down the centuries, Austrias and Bourbons, including Alfonso XIII himself, rampaged around the marshes, hunting relentlessly, accompanied by the leading figures of their day. Goya is said to have painted his Naked Maja in the Palace of Doñana, using as his model his mistress the Duchess of Alba.

Quirks of fate intervened in the ownership of Doñana. In the late 19th century the grandfather of the present Duchess of Medinasidonia lost it in a card game to the Duke of Tarifa.

Nowadays, there are odd concentrations of people living on the reserve, and making their living from it in various

ways. Their white-washed adobe huts, thatched with reeds, give the tiny settlements a prehistoric look. Opposite Bonanzo, near Muelle del Rey, in the shadow of the pine-woods, live people who live off hunting, timber, pine-cones and charcoal. The charcoal, which fetches high prices in Europe, is produced in furnaces from dune-engulfed pine trees, heather and savins. Another famous product is the fine jara and thyme honey produced by various bee-keeping cooperatives.

But traditionally, Doñana's richest resource is fish. The fresh-water lakes and channels like La Salinilla, El Hurraco, La Higuera and the Arroyo de Santa María abound in barbels, black-bass and carp,

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known on the Reserve as *panarras* and, above all, eels. The eels are either sent fresh to Levante or to factories in central Europe for smoking. Curious, this, in that Doñana offers some of the earliest evidence of large-scale fish-smoking in Spain. In the late Middle Ages, fish cured by smoking and salting was sent to be sold in Seville, in the Calle de los Humeros, between Puerta Real and Puerta San Juan.

Even today, the occasional sturgeon turns up in fishermen's nets in Doñana. A sad and vestigial reminder of the Seville caviar that Ibarra used to produce in the '30's from the plentiful sturgeon which then swam up the Guadalquivir.

Whilst on the subject of unusual fish, mention should also be made of leech-gathering which,

whilst therapeutic bleeding was a prevalent medical practice until the turn of the century, was an extremely profitable business.

The area around Doñana has become more significant since the 1940's Colonisation Plan to revitalise certain areas of Spain. The vast rice-fields around Seville today produce enormous quantities of *Camberus affinis* Say, American crayfish, which are distributed around the world from the factories in Villafranco del Guadalquivir.

I must give a special mention to the Hinojos marsh lamb. Lamb fed on this salty pasture for six to eight months has a wonderful and unmistakable flavour—genuine *mouton pré salé*.

**José Carlos Capel**

## **THE AWARD WINNING WINES OF BODEGAS MONTECILLO**

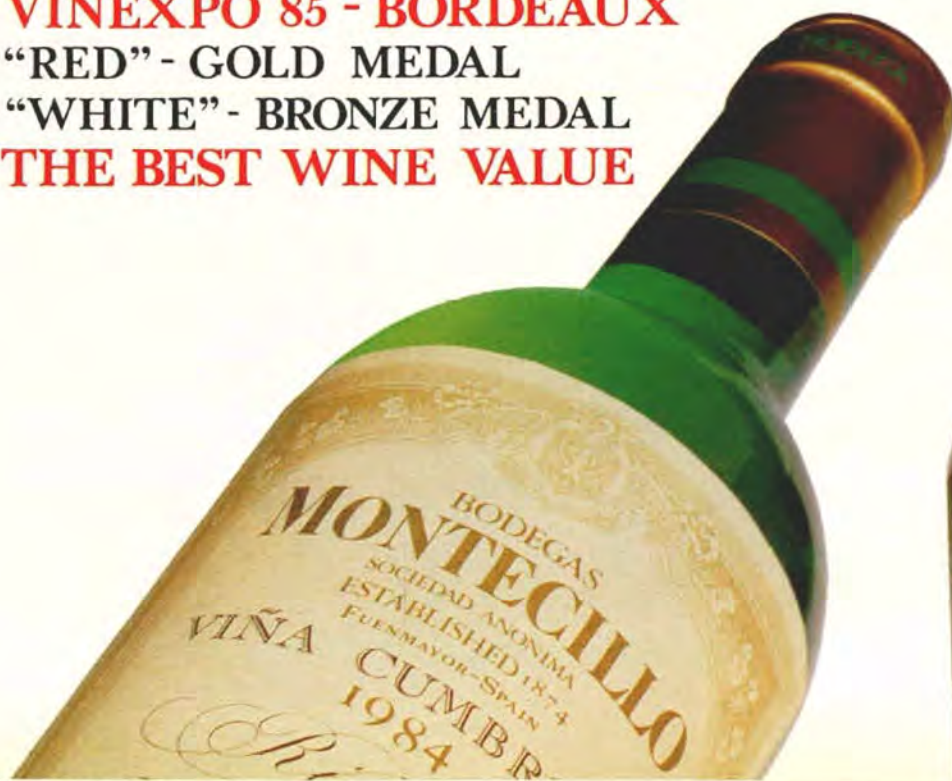
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# LOS REMOS

## THE IRRESISTIBLE RISE OF ANDALUSIAN CUISINE

«I always claim that my mother gave birth to me in the kitchen», says Alejandro Fernández Gavilán as he leads up to telling us the background story of his restaurant, Los Remos, on the Bay of Algeciras.

Born in 1940, his apprenticeship started at his mother's knee. By the age of eighteen he was already in charge and had decided that better use could be made of the family boarding house—they used to let rooms above what is the

restaurant today. With this in mind, he travelled constantly, attending cookery courses, gastronomic events and so on.

It was when he got married to Natividad Mateos that the restaurant venture really took off. At the time, Natividad, a trained nurse, hardly knew how to handle a saucepan. Thanks to her mother-in-law's teaching and her own genuine interest in cooking, she soon picked up the necessary skills.

Being so close to the



### SOME OF LOS REMOS' RECIPES

#### GUADARRANQUE ESTUARY CRAYFISH

Serves 4

**Ingredients:**  
1 kg. crayfish  
1 litre sea-water  
1 branch of bay  
The rind of a lemon  
Salt

#### Method:

Bring to the boil the water, lemon rind and bay leaves in a pan of a suitable size, covered. Put in the crayfish and cook for 3 minutes. Remove them and place them in a dish with sea-salt and crushed ice. Serve very cold.





sea and relatively far from any big town, Los Remos has been able to experiment freely in developing its own style. It is singularly well-placed, especially for fish. The Bay of Algeciras provides a vast range of fish and sea-food, and access to such excellent raw materials has helped Natividad and Alejandro to turn Los Remos into one of Spain's best fish restaurants.

It has just a few tables, both on its delightful terrace, which is canopied in the summer, and its charming winter dining-room. An open fireplace has just been installed here so that anticipation and subsequent digestion are made even pleasanter. They also have a private room for parties.

The menu is an exciting one and shows off the Fernández-Gavilans' skill and imagination. Here are a few highlights:

Creamed seaweed and mussel soup; seaweed and shrimp fritters; monkfish with walnuts; Los Remos clams; fillets of sole with rosemary; oysters and seabass; baked grouper in its own juices with two sauces (seaweed and Dublin Bay Prawn); plaice in anchovy sauce; Cadiz dessert with kiwis and cream.

The wine-cellar is equally impressive; it contains 15,000 bottles representing a wide range of Spanish wine-growing areas as well as some outstanding foreign ones.

The Fernández-Gavilans also own and run another restaurant, the Marea Baja in Algeciras itself.

**F. L. C.**

#### **PLAICE IN ANCHOVY SAUCE**

Serves 4

##### **Ingredients:**

2 kg. plaice  
100 g. smoked anchovies  
2 cloves garlic  
50 g. parsley  
1/4 litre fish fumet  
oil  
salt  
4 scallops  
100 g. baby eels  
8 steamed potatoes

##### **Method:**

Clean the fish, removing head and bones and use them to make the fumet. To the fumet add the anchovies, garlic, parsley, oil and salt. Whizz the mixture in the blender and then sieve it. Lay the plaice fillets in an oven-proof dish and pour the sieved sauce over them. Add the scallops and the steamed potatoes and put in the oven for 15 minutes. Add the baby eels just before serving. Serve very hot.

#### **SEAWEED AND SHRIMP FRITTERS**

Serves 4

##### **Ingredients:**

200 g. flour  
1/8 litre water  
50 g. seaweed  
50 g. shrimps  
salt

##### **Method:**

Make a creamy paste of the flour and water, beating it well with a wooden spoon. Add the shrimps and the puréed seaweed and allow to stand for an hour.

Slowly heat two fingers' depth of oil in the frying pan and when hot, pour in a tablespoonful of the mixture, spreading it in the pan. Fry until golden.

N. B. If seaweed is hard to come by, use onion and parsley instead.





# WORLD'S END

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## GALICIA'S RIAS

**T**he three southern-most *Rías*, or estuaries, take the names of the chief towns on their shores: Vigo, Pontevedra and Vilagarcía de Arosa. These three *rías* enjoy a microclimate different from the rest of Galicia, described by geographers as «damp oceanic, with very dry summers». In practical terms, this means beach-going

**The two unmissable ports – of – call for any tourist planning to visit Galicia are Santiago de Compostella and the Rías Bajas. These are unquestionably Galicia's tourist highlights, and anyone with only a couple of days to spare should certainly opt for these. But if you have more time in hand, or if you are paying a return visit, there is a wealth of other treasures waiting to be explored.**

weather for 90 % of the summer.

Vigo is Galicia's biggest urban centre, with nearly 300,000 inhabitants and all the usual services and tourist attractions of a big town. A good place to start your visit here would be up at El Castro, the old fort, now set in a lovely park, with wonderful views over the estuary. There is also the zoo at Madria.



Visit the Old Town, around La Piedra market, Calle Real and El Berbés. This is the best place for drinks and *tapas*, bar-food which the Spanish do so well. Then, heading southwards out of town, you come upon the beaches - Samil, Coruxo, Bao and Canido.

If you only have time to fit in one excursion, opt for taking the coast road to A Guarda. This will take you first past Playa América, Galicia's most beautiful beach, between the ancient Paxón arch, part of a 7th century chapel, and the Romanesque San Telmo bridge, built over the

Ramallosa in the 12th century. The church of Bayonne dates from around the same period. This city of kings, the first port in Europe to hear the news of the discovery of America, has one of Galicia's finest *cruceiros*, carved stone crucifixes, in this case 14th century ogival. Also worth visiting are the ancient fortress of Monte Real, its 16th century walls still intact, and the palace of the Condes de Gondomar, now a tourist parador hotel.

Exceptionally for Galicia, the coastline from the point at Silleiro to A Guarda is boring, straight and beachless,

as far as the mount of Santa Tegra, on the summit of which are pre-Roman ruins. A good road leads to the top, from where there are excellent views over the mouth of the Miño. En route, one passes through the best-preserved Celtic township in Galicia.

The Cíes Islands, declared a Nature reserve in 1980, are among the few idyllic places on Spain's coast to survive unspoiled. Passenger boats to take you there leave from the Estación de la Ría in Vigo. A few bars, restaurants and camping sites open up there in summer, and

there are beautiful beaches and walks, though access to them may be limited. This is to protect the ecosystem, some aspects of which—its bird life, for example—are unique in peninsular Spain.

Pontevedra is the monumental town which presides in its stately way over the second ría. From Marín to the point at Udra on its southern shore stretches a sequence of lovely beaches, leading to the delightful cove at Aldán, with its famous *cruceiro*. From Bueu, you can take the boat for the day to Ons, an unpopulated island. The only possibility of an overnight stay is to use the campsite. Boats also leave from Sanxenxo and San Vicente do Mar on the El Grove peninsula.

There are two magnificent vantage points over the Ría de Arousa, the hills of Lobeira and Curota which lead up out of Vilagarcía and Caramiñal respectively. Both look out over breathtaking views of this incomparable coast. The island of A Toxa (La Toja) is a high spot of tourist Galicia, lying alongside El Grove, that

paradise for lovers of sea-food. Cambados, historic town and «capital» of the area which produces the exquisite Albariño wine, will inspire you to explore its manor houses, and Salnes' Romanesque buildings, and the monastery of Armenteira where the legendary don Ero spent three hundred years listening to the song of the nightingale.

Following the northern coast of the Ría and rounding the point at Corrubedo, one skirts vast beaches and dunes. Then the landscape changes. This is the Ría de Muros y Noia, which should always be called by its full name to give equal credit to both of its main towns. Noia is a town of historic monuments dating from the 14th century when, under Archbishop Landoira, construction of its churches and noble houses began. This is a must on any cultural itinerary. Muros is a typical busy fishing port, with innumerable little sea-front bars serving fresh fish and sea-food. Nearby are the excellent beaches of San Francisco, Louro and Lariño. Then comes Carnota, with its outside *hórreo* (a typical Galician storehouse-on-legs), set in Galicia's widest and loveliest sandy bay. Over it looms O Pindo, a hill held sacred by the Celts, with curious outcrops of pink granite. At Exaro, the river Xallas cascades into the sea.

Finisterre, or *Fisterra* as it is known locally, makes its presence felt from about the twin towns of Cee and Corcubión. To look out from this westernmost point of the Continent is to understand the classic description «where the land ends and the sea



Losing one's way here can be a pleasure. One can be sure of pleasant surprises, like a typical fishing harbour, a picturesque light-house, a pretty cove or stretch of sand.

begins». If you visit Finisterre, do not miss the Romanesque church of Santa María and the picturesque square in Ara Solis.

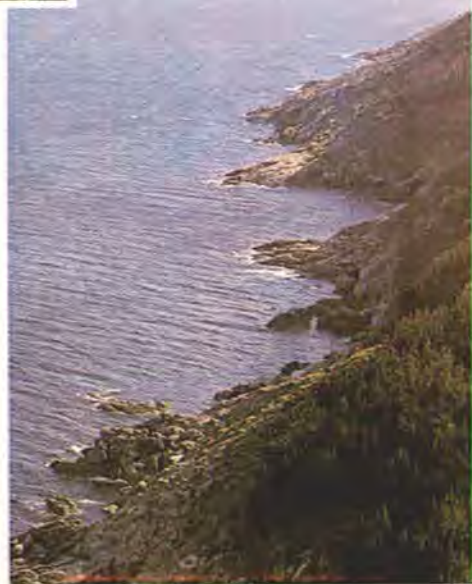
The stretch of coast from Finisterre to the Sisarga islands near La Coruña is known by the unfortunate name of *La Costa de la Muerte*, The Coast of Death. Hardly justifiable, this; this part of the coast has seen no more shipwrecks than any other comparably busy maritime area. Indeed, this is the richest stretch of Atlantic coast in Europe for beaches and abundant vegetation, as yet unspoiled by tourism. Here one can potter about happily, heading nowhere in particular and without the aid of maps, and be confident of ending up somewhere delightful—a fishing port, a picturesque light-house, a little cove or stretch of dunes. Try not to miss Muxía's pilgrimage church of *Nosa Señora de Barca* or the Pedra de Abalar—an enormous rocking stone.

And you must try to manage a stroll through the winding whitewashed streets of Camariñas to see the nimble-fingered lace-makers at work, and to visit the Cabo Vilán, a

designated area of outstanding natural beauty which extends from Camelle to the point with its amazing light-house.

The Ría de Corme y Laxe leads us into the gentler territory of Las Mariñas. Laxe is a small whitewashed village set on a beautiful beach. In Corme, try the excellent goose barnacles (*percebes*) and sea-food from the Roncudo area of the coast. Between these two, at Cabana, are the dolmen of Dombate and the Borneiro encampment. Before reaching La Coruña, it is well worth dropping in to Malpica de Bergantiños. I still have fond memories of this fishing harbour, bobbing with brightly-coloured boats, and the flavour of the excellent fish stew—*caldeirada de abadexo*—I ate there.

Las Mariñas are a curious geographical phenomenon formed by the four Rías of La Coruña, Betanzos, Ares and Ferrol, which debouch towards the same point, marked by the little island of Marola, opposite the Tower of Hercules. This is the only Roman lighthouse (updated in the 18th century) which is still operational. In La Coruña, as well as going to the top of the light-



house tower, visit the Old Town with its lovely churches, like the Romanesque Santa María and Santiago, the Baroque Santo Domingo and the picturesque Bárbaras. Then there are the palaces of Cornide, which is Baroque, Capitanía, Neoclassical, and to complete the tour of this historic quarter, the bulwark of San Carlos, now made into a garden.

Las Mariñas' other monumental town is Betanzos. This has its Old Quarter built around a fortress, and the 14th and 15th century churches of Santiago, Santa María and San Francisco, the last of these containing the monumental tomb of Fernán Pérez de An-



**The La Coruña, Betanzos, Ares and Ferrol rías debouch towards the rocky islet of Marola, under the steady gaze of the Tower of Hercules.**

drade. The bridge across the river Eume which gives Ponte-deume its name was built by Alfonso X, The Wise, and was, until quite recently, the longest bridge in Spain. This is a land of Romanesque churches, castles and monasteries. One of the most interesting castles is the one at A Nogueirosa from where the Andrades controlled the surrounding territory. Of the monasteries, Caaveiro's deserves a special mention. Tucked away in the woods, this would be a good place to stop off whilst exploring the shady banks of the Eube. There are at least two Romanesque churches which should not be missed. One is in Cambre, a fine example of the Compostellan style with three naves and five apses, dating from the 12th and 13th

centuries, and the other stands on a hill at Brearno and is outstanding both for its design and situation.

On seeing the Ría de Ferrol, William Pitt is said to have enthused: «I should build a silver wall around it if it were English.» It can be seen in all its beauty from the 16th century hermitage of Chamorro, en route for the lovely beaches of San Xorse and Santa Comba. The Ferrol coast is known for its vast stretches of sand and dunes; you might enjoy long walks along the beach at Doniños and A Fouxreira in Valdoviño, or watching the waves breaking at Porto Novo or Rodo.

The lovely little Ce-deira estuary has an extraordinary beach at Villarrube; then there is the light-house on Punta Candelaria and the Sierra Capelada cliffs. There are good tracks for exploring the Sierra, on one of whose steep slopes down towards the sea are perched the shrine of San Andrés de Teixido and the vantage point of Vixiá de Herveira, jutting out over a sheer 600 metre drop to the water below.

The landscape of the Ría de Ortigueira is widely considered to be the loveliest in Galicia. Woodlands reach right down to the beach in some places, and in summer, young people from all the Celtic nations join in lively festivals held in Santa María.

The point known as Estaca de Bares was, in 1933, the first part of Galicia to be officially declared a site of outstanding natural beauty. A road leads from the picturesque harbour of Barquero through dense woodlands up to the most northerly point of



the peninsula. This is where the Cantabrian coast begins, at Vicedo's Arealonga beach. The Ría del Barquero is formed by the estuary of the Sor which flows down from the Sierra Faladoira through lush plantations of camelia and azalea. The Phoenicians traded in tin from here, building the harbour in Bares in the 7th century B.C.

The sea off the Cantabrian coast is milder in temperature than the Atlantic by a couple of degrees. This part of the coast is known as Mariña Luguesa, and its chief point of interest is the town of Viveiro with its well-preserved walled Old Town. Cervo is known for its Sargadelos ceramics, then, arriving at Foz, you come to another lively seaside resort with big beaches. Try to fit in a short trip inland to visit Mondoñedo, one of Lugo's most monumental towns, with its superb 12th and 13th century Oigival Romanesque cathedral. Finally, head for the top of Monte Santa Cruz above Ribadeo for a fine view of the town and this last of the Rías.

**Xosé L. Laredo Verdejo**



## WINES WITH A FOLLOWING

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### WHITE WINES FOR EUROPE

**O**rense is the best-organised of the Galician provinces. It can claim as its own not only some of Galicia's greatest wines, but also its two Denominations of Origin and the pioneering Jesús Nazareno cooperative bodega, founded in El Barco in 1957. The Ribeiro cooperative bodega was formed in 1945 and the Rúa one, also in Valdeorras, in 1970. The other major source of Galician wine is Pontevedra, more specifically Salnés—the peninsula between the Pon-

**This is the part of Spain which produces European-class white wines. Throughout Spain, those of a bacchic or dionysian disposition have discovered the delights of its Albariños, Ribeiros and Valdeorras, without the aid of any high-flown marketing policy. Its Albariños attract as many pilgrims to Galicia as do its cathedrals; homage is similarly paid to its Ribeiros, while its Valdeorras are attracting more and more devotees, charmed by the powers of the Godello and Pingadelo grape. Then there are what could be described as the hermits-wines which inspire profound devotion without ever venturing far from home, like Amandi, Condado de Salvatierra, Monterrey and Ulla. As the local sage Cunqueiro once put it: «One can travel round my homeland of Galicia, glass in hand.»**

tevedra and Arosa estuaries—and El Rosal, which produce exceptionally fine whites. The appellation of Denomination of Origin Albariño for Salnés is still pending agreement between central and regional administration.

Antonio Casares, self-confessedly using the same method as Rojas Clemente and Botelou, in his catalogue of the vine varieties grown in Galicia lists among the whites: Comprao, Verdello or Parpal, Verdejo (Godello), Treixadura, Terrantes or Torrontés,

Albariño and Oubiña. Among the reds he mentions: Albarello (Uva Negra, Uva Gallega or Broncellao), Castellana or Ollao, Nouratón or Negreda, Brencellao, Caiño Arnoés and Caiño Rubio, Carnaz or Dozal or Cachicho (María Ardoña, Merenzao or Bastardo), Nobal, Tinta Femia and Espadeiro. He also includes Pica el Pollo, Revoleiro, Moza Fresca, Nápar, Columbrazo, Miñon and Serradela as being among the thirty varieties registered in Pontevedra alone.

Phylloxera —«vines heaped up for firewood in the houses of the poor farmers; bodegas closed through failed crops; land uncultivated and abandoned...» was how Fernández Crespo described it— put paid to that abundance of native varieties. A few did survive and have become re-established, like the red varieties Brencellao, Caiño, Tinta Femia and Espadeiro, and the white Albariño, Godello, Torrontés, Treixadura, while other foreign varieties, introduced early, have adapted well and are currently giving excellent results in varietal and coupage wines — Mencía is a good example.

The tradition of wine-making in Valdeorras dates back, some claim, to the first century A. D. In Lucas Lebrada's *Descripción Económica del Reino de Galicia* (An Economic Description of the Kingdom of Galicia) (1804) the area's wines are described as being of high quality, attributable, according to José Miramontes Caballero of the Casa Grande in Viloiira, to the abundance of Albarello grapes. Of all the varieties listed by Casares,

only Albarello and Mouratón are mentioned in relation to Valdeorras; Albarello has now largely been replaced by Alicante and Mencía for making reds.

The Administration's exciting new scheme for «the recuperation of the wines of Valdeorras», known as «Revival», has encouraged fostering these surviving varieties and using them in combination with non-native ones. Fernández Crespo lists the varieties which featured mainly in the vineyards of the area: the red Mouratón or

Valdeorras currently has 5,000 hectares under vine, concentrated in two main centres, El Barco and La Rúa, supported by Villamartín, Petín, Laroco, Viana del Bollo, La Vega, Carballeda and Rubiana. The leading varieties are the red Alicante, Mencía and Mouratón and the white Godello and Jerez (Palomino), in this winegrowing area whose climate combines the Atlantic and the Continental. This particular climate is a decisive factor in the quality of wine produced here. The valley



**Wines in winter in the winegrowing area of Ribeiro.**

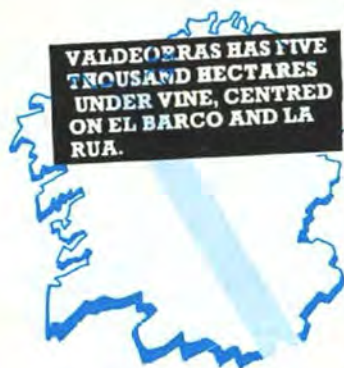
Negreda (France's *Malbec*), Brencellao or Albarello (*Sirat* in France), Tinta de Tobo (known as *Trobal* in Cataluña, and a member of the French *Pinot* family), and white Godello (*Gentil* in France and Germany), Valdeorras or Valencia and Carnaz or María Ardoña.

and its bordering territory, in the extreme north-east of the province close to its border with León, enjoys a lot of sun and mild temperatures. This is the Sil valley, well-protected by mountains partly given over to terraces which are excellent for vinegrowing though difficult to cultivate mechanically. Its soil is slaty (similar to the Champagne area of France and parts of Germany) and fertile,

and produces intensely coloured blood-red or cherry-red wines which are aromatic and fresh, well-rounded and with a pleasant level of astringency. The choice whites (Godello and Moza Fresca) have a harmonious palate, fruity aroma and a slight pétillance. Don Vicente Risco spoke with foresight when he said: «The wines of this area could rival and even surpass those of Bordeaux, if only the growers would take the necessary trouble during elaboration.» Well, they are getting there.

Few wines can have experienced the loaves and fishes miracle as often as Ribeiro. If everything sold as Ribeiro really were Ribeiro, the bounds of credibility would be stretched indeed.

Local production is estimated at 30 million hectolitres, yet some 100 million hectolitres of wine are sold as Ribeiro. The 6,000 hectares of vineyards simply do not produce that much. Whilst it is true to say that alchemical mixing has been allowed to go on unchecked, the consumer, too, must take



part of the blame for accepting poor imitations served in bars and restaurants, without complaint.

The Regulatory Council was set up in July 1945. Ribeiro, having proved that it bottled wine—and here credit is due to the producers who were pioneers in opting for marketing it in this form—found its way into the export market. Yet it has failed to protect itself from «colonisation» by Castille. The Council's President is confident that no adulteration of wine goes on in the bodegas under its jurisdiction. The sixty or seventy million litres of pseudo-Ribeiro are turned out by bodegas and depositories, unrelated to the D. O., which either bottle bulk wines or sell them loose. The Administration is starting to take steps, and the Regulatory Council is also tackling the problem. Its inspectors try to control not only deliveries of unsuitable grapes but also the use of tanks. These can cover a multitude of sins, even in well-known bodegas; there must be many cases of quiet self-

congratulation going on in this area.

The last three years have seen an encouraging new concern of elaboration. The Cooperativa de Ribeiro, under the management of Manolo Cabezas, has introduced the innovatory scheme of producing quality wines typical of the area, like Viña Costeira and Bradomín, despite the handicap of having to charge a relatively high price for current year wines. The Campante, Ribera and Cosecheros bodegas, the last of which markets *Ouro*, are already following along the same lines, as are some other smaller concerns.

The process is underway of reviving the varieties of vine cultivated by the monasteries of Oseira, Melón, Arnoia and San Clodio in the Middle Ages. According to the bibliophile Antonio Odriozola, the first written mention of Ribeiro dates back to 1532 in a sequence of couplets by Alonso de Toro, written on parchment, in praise of wine: «... in Orense and Ribadavia/Wine flows like water/Red and angelic white», whilst various contemporaries of Cervantes, and Tirso de Molina himself, make appreciative mention of Galicia's most famous wine.

The tendency nowadays is for whites to be made from Palomino (Jerez), and Torrentés and Treixadura, both native high-quality varieties which are becoming firmly re-established and which, along with Godello, contribute a great deal to the appeal of Ribadavia's wines. The incipient opening of its Oenological Centre—after a fifty year de-

lay—should do a lot to ensure that what is sold as Ribeiro is everything it claims to be.

### PONTEVEDRA'S ALBARIÑOS

Whilst the characteristic method of cultivation in Orense's winegrowing areas is the terraced slope, this method is used alongside vineyards on the flat, or following the land's gentle contours, in Pontevedra. Consequently, especially in Salnés, where over half the area under Albariño is concentrated, vine-growing is on the



**Pontevedra, and particularly El Rosal, produce highly-acclaimed Albariños.**

increase, not just because of the high prices this wine fetches but also because of the new «cordón simple» method which is taking over from the traditional pergola method of planting. All told, monovarietal production of Albariño is growing fast.

There are various accounts of how the vine was introduced into Ga-

licia, the most widely-accepted of which is that it was brought in from the Rhine by the monks of Cluny in the 12th century. It is also suggested that it was introduced by Raymond de Bourgogne, French husband of Queen Urraca of Castille. Then on the other hand, they might simply be native strains. Whatever the truth may be,



these grapes have very individual characteristics which make a really good Albariño unbeatable.

A hunt around the area's family bodegas is still the only way to find the best Albariños.

Tracking them down to source, or at least to *tabernas* which buy in from various small suppliers, can have all the thrill of the chase. But organised marketing of these wines is only just around the corner. The increase in production has brought modernisation in its wake. The pioneering Agrupación de Cosecheros de Sainés, established as a cooperative in 1977, now produces branded representative wines of a quality well above the average, as do some smaller modernised bodegas. The individuality of these wines, which are very aromatic, fruity and have a singular fragrance, militates in my view in favour of backing small producers. One could then hope to preserve the personality of the best wines, and those differences of taste and aroma which

reflect the area's different microclimates.

Yet even now, a battle is going on between the who favour preserving arch-conservationists the ancestral system of elaboration, storing and selling, despite all the attendant risks, and those who favour the scientific approach to winegrowing. This latter category includes Santiago Ruiz, leader in his field in the other Albariño area of status, El Rosal. The Albariño grape grows here in quantity, though the area itself, on the banks of the lower Miño, is small. But the wines produced here are *coupage* wines with Treixadura and, in the best cases, Loureira. Santiago Ruiz – his is a somewhat lone voice hereabouts – typifies the new approach to wine-making, and he makes the only wine which travels well. His wines are

lighter than the Salnés ones and are also generally fruitier, with a more pronounced pétillance.

There are, of course, those rare wines which achieve perfection quite unaided. But these small up-to-date bodegas are demonstrating how the element of chance can be eliminated from Albariños without loss of their typical characteristics. The Regulatory Council of the D. O. Albariño is about to be formed, so this delicate wine will be more firmly controlled from now on. It is vital that the future of this outstanding varietal wine should be in responsible hands.

Within the province of Pontevedra, other small winegrowing areas – Io (Cangas) and Sotomayor (Ría de Vigo) – produce Albariños which are good and individual, but in quantities too small to



THE BATTLE GOES ON BETWEEN CONSERVATIONISTS OF ANCIENT METHODS AND THE INNOVATORS.

make commercialisation worthwhile.

The Salnés valley produces popular but poor quality reds made, in the main, from hybrid grapes. The planned reintroduction of Espadeiro, Caiño and other native varieties will hopefully mean a return to the sort of wine which so impressed José María Castroviejo.

The so-called «país», or country wines made around the Lerez valley are pleasant. They are acidic and low in alcohol and made from local hybrids and imported Palomino.

Overall the trend is towards the pre-phyllloxera varieties. Shortly, Pontevedra's white wines will be made from Albariño, Treixadura and Lourreira, and its reds from Caiño, Espadeira and the happily-adapted Mencía alongside other survivors such as Tinta Femia, Pedral, Castañal, Picapoll, Collon de Gallo and Náparo.

The range of varieties is even richer in the winegrowing area of Condado del Tea (Salvaterra de Miño) where one of the most widely-imitated white wines is

made. The genuine article is rich in colour and body and is an intensely flavoured wine; what is to be found commercially is almost invariably an imitation. This area's reds are, for me, the best in coastal Galicia, especially the ones from around Rubiós and Meder. But you have to be very lucky to come across them since they are made on a very small scale and are not available commercially.

An area of provincial Orense which deserves a mention is the Verín and Monterrey valley. A sort of poor relation, this, caught somewhere between Galicia's fruity wines and Castille's drier ones. Indeed, the Castilian system of growing the grapes close to the ground is used here, though the wines are not dissimilar to Valdeorras', with a rather dry tang.

Passing through Los Peares, the Sil nourishes two winegrowing areas in Lugo. The better-known of these is Amandi, which produced the Mencía-based reds which, originally involving other varieties too, are said to have been favourites of the Roman Emperors. With production of quality wines at around 10,000 hectolitres, still made by the ancient method, here again you have to hunt for them. Lugo's other wines are the lighter Quiroga and the similar Chantada.

Of the Galician provinces, La Coruña produces the least wine. It shares with Pontevedra the winegrowing area of Ulla with its thin, acid wines, and is also the source of Galicia's most northerly wines, from the winegrowing area of Betanzos.

**Guillermo Campos**



## THE WINES OF GALICIA

### WINE-TASTING

**W**e assembled twenty three Galician wines for a Club de Gourmets tasting aimed at assessing, in terms of consumer appeal, their basic characteristics: colour, smell, taste and overall effect. With this in mind, over-technical assessments were discouraged, despite the fact that the panel included some of Galicia's top oenologists, winegrowers and wine writers.

This, then, was the brief. It should also be mentioned that the tasting was held early in the year, in April, so that the results could appear with other reports from Galicia. Consequently, some of the wines involved, particularly the Albariños, whose elaboration process is almost artisan, were not yet fully developed.

The wines to be tasted were divided into four groups - Ribeiros, Albariños, Valdeorras and reds (the last categories overlapping on occasion), with a separate category of three whites, one from each region, which were not current year wines.

#### SEVEN RIBEIROS

The highest-scoring Ribeiro of the seven tasted was a *Rivera* with an outstanding bouquet and delicate start, but rather vague finish. *Bradomin* and *Costeira* were the next choices.

In the Albariño section, Cosecheros de Salnés' *Albariño* was conspicuous by its absence, not having arrived in time for the tasting. Of the six which were tasted, *Carballal* was judged to be the best for

its intense natural flavour and lovely corn colour.

Both the Valdeorras whites were from the A Rua Cooperative. *Brisel* made with mostly Godello grapes, fresh and still developing, nicely balanced and with an alcoholic strength of 13° - won the day over *Amavia*, which is made with a high proportion of Palomino grapes.

Before tackling the reds, three '83 whites were tasted. The *Rivera*, a pale yellow Ribeiro, noticeably better than its younger relative, was the best from its area. Santiago Ruiz's *Rosal* and the O Barco Cooperative's *Godello* were slightly oxidised and were disqualified.

The five reds represented the winegrowing areas of Valdeorras and Ribeiro. Well ahead of the field in the Valdeorras reds came the A Rua Cooperative's *Pingadelo*, with the O Barco Cooperative's *Mencino* a poor second. *Pazo* was selected as the best Ribeiro red, followed by Bodegas Campante's *Adeus* and the Ribeiro Cooperative's *Allén*.

The tasting was held in Santiago de Compostella, in a private room of the Casas Vilas restaurant. The members of the panel were rewarded for the rigours of the tasting by Paco Vilas'

d'oeuvres of cured ham followed by a delicious pasta and chicken dish, then lamprey cooked in the house style, then the meat course... Thoroughly wine and dined, we then sampled the exquisite *aguardientes*, or *eaux-de-vie*, for which Casas Vilas is justly famed.

## VALDEORRAS

### PINGADELO

Made with two-thirds *Mencia* and one-third *Mouratón*. A well balanced and harmonious wine in terms of aroma, acidity and smoothness, lively in the mouth and with an elegant and fruity finish.

### MENCIÑO

Organoleptically harmonious, its rather dry finish is perhaps the result of its being a monovarietal wine made from *Mencia* grapes. From the O Barco Cooperative.

### BRISSEL

This wine, made with a high proportion of Godello grapes, has a penetrating aroma and a slight sharp pétillance in the mouth and finish. It is greenish yellow in colour. Bottled by the same cooperative.

### AMAVIA

This pale yellow wine is noticeably over-acidic. It has a fresh and persistent flavour of Jerez and Moza Fresca grapes. Made by the A Rua Cooperative (Orense).

## RIBEIRO

### RIBEIRO RIVERA

Bottled by the same cooperative, this wine is made from a selection of varieties native to this demarcated area which give it body and roundness. It retains a certain fresh quality despite being last year's wine.

### BRADOMIN

A pale yellow white wine, fine and delicate on the palate and with a flowery aroma. Made by the Cosecheros del Ribeiro Cooperative.

### PAZO

This well-known red, made by the same bodega, an intensely coloured wine, has now improved in flavour, the acid balance

and a certain lack of definition having been corrected.

## VIÑA COSTEIRA

This wine is of an intense yellow colour, and its flavour is equally intense, attributable to dry extract. Made by the Cosecheros del Ribeiro Cooperative.

### ADEUS

This red wine is a nice cherry colour, fresh on the palate and a bit short on aroma. Bottled by Bodegas Campante.

### ALLEN

This is a new red from the Cosecheros del Ribeiro (Ribadavia, Orense), made with native varieties like *Sousón*, *Caiño* and *Tintilla*. Very intense, almost black, in colour, it is rather short in the nose and light in the mouth.

### PAZO

Another white in which the influence of Palomino/Jerez is very easily discernible. A pleasant yellow colour, it is rather low on aroma and taste. Bottled by Cosecheros del Ribeiro.

## LUGAR DE FERREIROS

This is not strictly speaking a Ribeiro, being the product of a quality area near Orense. Young and fruity, it is somewhat lacking in body.

## VIÑA REBORDA

This aromatic wine shows its youth in a rather astringent edge and also, more positively, in its freshness. Greenish yellow in colour. Bottled by

Bodegas Campante (Barrantes, Orense).

## EULALIA DE LIANS

Being young, this very fresh and aromatic wine leaves a slightly astringent aftertaste, though it promises to develop well. Made by Bodegas Campante.

## ALBARIÑOS

### CARBALLAL

Golden yellow in colour, and relatively clear, this wine is fruity in aroma and true to its origins in flavour too. Made by Benito Vázquez García of Outeiral-Barrantes (Ribadumia, Pontevedra).

### CASTRO-MARTIN

A pale yellow, clean wine, slightly astringent and fresh with a rather elusive nose. Made by Bodegas Castro-Martín (Ribadumia, Pontevedra).

### CASTEL DE FORNOS

A delicate golden yellow, with more body than fruit, this wine is rather short on aroma though longer in flavour. Bottled by Bodegas Chaves, Barrantes (Ribadumia, Pontevedra).

### PIÑEIRO

Fruity and full-bodied, this wine has a rather feeble nose. Well-balanced golden colour. Bottled by Piñeiro, Cambados (Pontevedra).

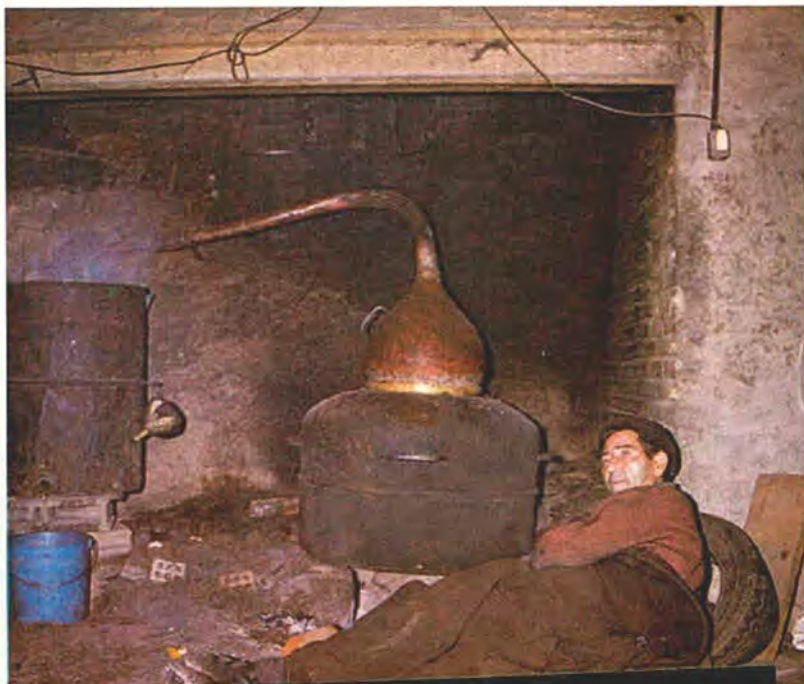
### VIÑA DOZO

Also bottled by Piñeiro of Cambados, this wine is not such a good colour as the previous one, but wins on aroma. Its fruity flavour has a slightly rough edge.

### BOUZA DO REY

Although its pale yellow colour is just right, this is a rather aggressive wine in the mouth and finish, though rather feeble on aroma. Made by SAT Bouza do Rey, Outeiro-Ribadumia (Pontevedra).

Throughout Galicia, aguardiente is part and parcel of myth and ritual. We use it for everything – any time, any place.



In my part of the world, Galicia, we tend to play with words, to give things and people nicknames, to introduce an element of fantasy.



## AQUA ARDENS

### PANACEA FOR ALL ILLS

**A**guardiente – the word literally means «burning water» – is hardly ever asked for by that name in bars or restaurants. We might instead order a glass of *pais*, *canha*, *pinga* or *agua bendita* with coffee. One friend of mine who runs a bar, for which I count my blessings daily, refers to it affectionately as *Varon Dandy*, a now rather old-fashioned after-

shave. *O tempora, o mores*.

Despite the vulgar insistence of T.V. advertising, there is certain core of good things from which we never waver, and aguardiente is one of these. Alcohol, the accepted drug of western Christian civilisation, welcomes us into the world and sees us off from it. In Galicia, the first delicate distillation magically produced

from the domestic *pota* used, until recently, to be given to the children. Then there is evidence from Germany in the words of the song «...the last word he spoke was *schnapps!*», and the story of the Scotsman who refused to die until he had finished his drink.

A Brazilian colleague, Sergio de Paula Santos, relates a gem of information about the origins

of *aqua vitae* or *aqua ardens*. Apparently, the Arabs used to boil up a mixture of black powder and water to make eye make-up for the dusky beauties of the harem. It was known as «*khol*». When, in the early Middle Ages, they began distilling wine, because of the similarity of the process, they called the results «*al khol*». He goes on to suggest that the sybarites of the



Christian world should unite in erecting a statue to the inventor of the still. Just think that of all the commemorative monuments we have there is not one to the inventor of magical quintessences and their attendant euphoria and hangovers.

The first candidate that one can put a name to was one Khalid Ibn Yasid, alchemist turned distiller, who, in defiance of the Prophet's prohibition, became the first man to get drunk on spirits. Whether this is myth or history matters little. His name would certainly do to grace the podium of the proposed statue. I inaugurate the fund today, with a quid of my own; all contributions will be gratefully received.

Throughout Galicia, aguardiente is part and parcel of myth and ritual. We use it for everything—toothache (swish it around the offending tooth), aches and pains (rub into the affected part, it works best if applied by a

**The market for good aguardientes, despite the promotion they get from popular fiestas, is almost exclusively local.**

young lady). And aguardiente fetches incredible prices, on a par with matured whiskies, and provokes equally impassioned qualitative assessments, though its distribution is usually on a very small scale. After all, who deserves the sublime spirit better than its maker? Omar Khayyam could not understand winemakers who sold their wine. «What better thing will you buy with the money?» he asked.

One way we drink aguardiente in Galicia is to sprinkle it into our coffee, with miraculous effects, and there is a nice rhyme about the people of Palmeira (La Coruña) who drink theirs from the shell of the *vieira*,

Santiago of Compostela's scallop trade-mark. Consider, too, the sensible inhabitants of Betanzos. Summoned to the plaza one day by their chief magistrate who had heard rumours of discontent, they were asked: «People of Betanzos, what is it that you want?». And they answered unanimously, with a categorical and Cartesian clarity, revealing as they spoke their excellent scale of values: «For the price of bread to go up and aguardiente to go down!».

The famous priest who took a daily tot of local aguardiente with a large glass of water on the side may well have been a Betanzos man. Only after his death, when confessional confidence could be broken, was it revealed that the tot was the water. The aguardiente was in the big glass.

Galicia was once part of Portugal and there are many similarities in their languages wines and aguardientes. The Portuguese have wonderful matured aguardientes, known as *velhas*, which can compare with the best spirits in the world. Taking the Galicia-Portugal connection a step further to Brazil, we find there *caçapa*, distilled from sugar-cane, which stimulates song, heightens emotions and excites all the senses. Anyone who has drunk two or more *caipirinhas* or *batidas* on the beach at Ipanema or Cabo Frío will know exactly what I mean.

Then there is the *queimada*, an elaborate ritual of flambeing a mixture of aguardiente, sugar, wine and other mysterious ingredients to the accompaniment of incantations. This is a



modern invention, though it is sometimes attributed to the Normans or Vikings. Despite having been used recently in his public relations by Sr. Fraga, the Leader of the Opposition, the *queimada* is a deeply poetic and convivial ritual. It is said to be vitally important to have an effective sorcerer officiating so that the *meigas*, or witches, invoked, are pleasantly disposed ones rather than the nasty sort.

Hemingway recounts, in an immortal poem, how he rode his white horse throughout the land in search of happiness and finally found it, beneath the shade of a pomegranate tree, in eyes of a dog that loved him. Quite a dog! Less extravagantly, and steering clear of high-flown phrases, we Gallegos have a humble rhyme which says it all. Roughly translated, it goes something like this:

«Give a man a smoke, a glass of aguardiente and a kiss from a pretty girl, and he's happy.»

**José Posada**



The marron glacé is the chestnut at its most sophisticated.

## CHESTNUTS

### A FORGOTTEN TREASURE

**Every year, Spain grows around 50,000 tons of sweet chestnuts. Over half of these go unharvested. Nearly all the rest are sold abroad or used as animal feed. Yet in pre-Columbian Spain, chestnuts were as important a crop as potatoes are today. Indeed, they were a dietary staple throughout Europe. Nowadays they are a forgotten fruit, despite giving one of the most expensive and exquisite of sweets — the marron glacé.**

They say that once upon a time the whole of northern Spain, from Galicia to the Bay of Rosas, and down from the northern border as far as Huelva, was covered by vast chestnut woods. Perhaps the unexpected chestnut groves of modern-day Ronda, a lush touch in an ever-dessicating Andalucía, are last vestiges of those times. The Ronda chestnut trees are always the first to fruit.

It is also said that oak and chestnut played an equally important role in

Celtic druidic ceremony. The religious and quasi-magical associations of the chestnut, both tree and fruit, known to have figured largely in pre-Roman sylvan rites, are still with us today.

November 11th is San Martín's Day, and traditionally time to slaughter the pig. The pagan Winter Solstice. The fields and hillsides of Galicia and Cataluña glow all night long with fires around which young and old gather for a ceremony whose ori-

gins are mysterious and centuries old — roasting the year's first chestnuts in the embers. A few days later, the roast-chestnut stands start appearing on street-corners all over Spain.

Roman soldiers lived on *bullote*, a mush made of chestnut flour. They must surely have supplemented it with the spoils of their forays for few could have survived years of campaigning sustained by chestnuts alone, however sturdy their support of the Roman standard.

In civilian life the chestnut did not loom so large, but it was still eaten a great deal though in rather more sophisticated ways. There was even a celebrated difference of opinion about chestnuts. Whilst Pliny advocated them raw or boiled as a warming autumn dish, Pliny, rather more practically, preferred them roasted.

For the first few centuries of the modern era, the whole of Europe would have been heavily wooded with chestnuts. Useful for the Roman legions having tack so readily to hand. And just as useful for the Barbarian hordes who ousted them.

In Rome, where gastronomy had entered the realms of the bacchanalian, chestnuts appeared in far more subtle guises. Martínez Llopis, in his *Historia de la Gastronomía Española*, tells us that after their conquest, the ancient Gauls took up cake-making. Their confections were based on flour and chestnuts to which they added cream cheese, honey and fruit. Quite a different matter.

#### DISEASE STRIKES

Dense populations of chestnut survived in the north of the Iberian Peninsula until relatively recent times. As they did in the United States until, in the space of ten years, they were completely destroyed by the ravages of canker. Ever keen to export, the Americans conveyed the disease to Europe and the epidemic spread through half the Continent destroying its chestnut woods, including Gerona's.

Helped on by farmers and official bodies, the

epidemic reduced Spain's chestnut population to a bare minimum, concentrated today in Orense and Extremadura. Thanks to forest fires and the Spanish Nature Conservancy's reafforestation policy, chestnuts are returning at a mere 7% a year.

In Portugal, Greece and Turkey, chestnuts still appear on the humblest of tables. With their 400 calories per 100 grammes and high vitamin, carbohydrate and sugar content, they are a rich energy source.

When the potato arrived from America, the fact that it was to become a staple crop was unsuspected. Not only did it supplant the chestnut; it also brought with it certain economic advantages. In Galicia, for example, the locals refused to pay tithes on their potatoes arguing that they were not grown on the landowner's soil but *under* it.

So the chestnut has gradually waned in importance over the years and now only crops up occasionally in the form of a purée or soufflé to accompany game, or occasionally in desserts. Juan de Altimiras in his book on confectionery *Arte de Repostería*, gives a recipe for preserved chestnuts — none other than *marrons glacés*— and he also mentions chestnut compôtes. They are also mentioned in Angel Muro y Picadillo's recipe books. And, of course, they have never fallen out of favour in the mountain districts of Huelva and Extremadura where, in the form of pig-food, they help produce their excellent hams.

Apart from that, they are little used. Thanks to



The decline of Spain's chestnut population is irreversible. Nowadays, much of their fruit is used as animal feed.

#### SNIPE WITH CHESTNUTS

##### Ingredients:

*Snipe; fresh chestnuts; onions; garlic; parsley; saffron; boiled eggs; wild mushrooms; lemon.*

##### Method

Lightly brown the snipe with chopped onion, garlic, parsley and a little saffron. Then remove the giblets and set them aside in a mortar. Separately, boil the chestnuts and soften the chopped mushrooms, onion and parsley in a little oil. Place all these and the hard-boiled eggs in the mortar and mash with the pestle, seasoning with lemon. Stuff the birds with this mixture, then return to the pan to cook in the original pan juices. Carmen Parada says that any bird can be cooked in this way.

#### WILD BOAR WITH CHESTNUTS

##### Ingredients:

*1 kg. wild boar meat; 1 kg. peeled chestnuts; 2 onions; 1 litre red wine; 3 cloves garlic; 1 sprig each of fennel, rosemary, thyme*

*and parsley; 2 bay leaves; 4 gr. black pepper; 50 gr. beef dripping; 4 cloves; 1 dessertspoon flour; 1 glass olive oil; salt.*

##### Method

Cut the meat into pieces and place it in a pot with the red wine, garlic, fennel, rosemary, bay, thyme, cloves and salt. Leave it to



marinate in a cool place for 48 hours. Heat the oil in an earthenware casserole and cook the chopped onion until golden. Add the well-drained pieces of meat, turning them over and over. Season with salt and pepper and add half the marinade. Allow to cook over a low heat for three quarters of an hour. Then add the peeled chestnuts and allow to continue cooking for another hour. Remove the meat and chestnuts and thicken the sauce with the flour and dripping and cook it for about 5 minutes. Pour the sauce over the meat which you have arranged in the centre of the casserole surrounded by the chestnuts, or on a heated serving-dish. We would recommend an Amandi wine to accompany this Galician dish.

#### DON GAIFEROS' PARTRIDGE WITH HUNTSMAN'S SAUCE

Manolo Martínez Souto, who owns and runs the «Don Gaiferos» (Rua Nova, 23. Santiago de Compostela. Tel.: 58 38 94) uses chestnuts as a garnish with all his game dishes, especially partridge.

##### Ingredients (serves 6):

*2 chopped onions; capers; 100 gr. chopped cucumber; 1/2 kg. chopped mushrooms; bay leaf; salt; black pepper; thyme; mixed fresh herbs; dry red wine; rich brown stock.*

##### Method

Make a sauce with the above ingredients. Brown the partridge in a casserole, preferably earthenware, then add the sauce and allow to cook over a low heat. The trick is to get the timing just right so that the sauce reduces just enough without overcooking the partridge.

Boil about a kilo of chestnuts in their shells, then peel and purée them and serve as an accompaniment.



The San Miguel is the only Galician restaurant that still features chestnuts on the menu, despite the fact that there are plenty for everybody.

## SAN MIGUEL

The San Miguel has been classified by Gourmetour among Spain's hundred best restaurants, and described as the ideal place for weary pilgrims to recover from the Castilian plain or, heading the other way, to treat themselves to a good meal before leaving Galicia behind them. This is no idle compliment. It gains a mention here as being the only restaurant whose menu permanently features chestnuts, once a Galician staple and now almost forgotten in her culinary repertoire.

The San Miguel was founded in 1951 by Julio Martínez, father of the present owner, Santiago, who has inherited the family skills in cooking and fine judgement in selecting his raw materials. He runs a highly professional restaurant; four cooks with the unbeatable pedigree of Soutomaior and Mondariz, and good and efficient dining-room service. Behind the scenes is outstandingly well-equipped for these parts (parking facilities, a laundry-room, soon-to-be-expanded kitchen). The main dining-room has been modernised, losing something of its character in exchanging venerable old wood for a more functional

decor. Then there is a charming and cleverly-furnished terrace-cum-dining room, with a roof that opens in summer and closes in winter, a third dining room for parties and another private one.

The menu features traditional Spanish dishes, classically prepared, with a leaning towards Galician regional food. Round about now the menu will be changing to incorporate the produce available with the new season. Santiago is helped by his right hand man, Gonzalo Abelairas, his wife and on-the-spot adviser Pili Alonso, and his eleven year old son who is already planning to study cooking abroad. With their help, Santi Martínez mans the helm, planning and controlling the daily menu, the cigar list, and an impressive wine-cellar — impressive in both size and content — which backs one of the most splendid wine-lists in Galicia.

In its dining-rooms and separate bar, the San Miguel aims for up-to-date authenticity, deliberately making use of half-forgotten local ingredients like chestnuts or increasingly-popular wild mushrooms, and successful inventions like glasses of

mint-flavoured cream with hot chocolate.

**Guillermo Campos**

### SAN MIGUEL-STYLE RABBIT WITH CHESTNUTS

#### Ingredients (serves 6):

2 rabbits; 1/2 kg. boiled chestnuts; 250 gr. cured ham; 2 cloves garlic; 1 onion; 2 carrots; 1 gr. saffron; 1 glass brandy; 1 glass dry sherry; cornflour; white stock; salt.

#### Method

Lightly brown the rabbit, cut up into pieces, in a casserole. Add the ham, garlic, onion, carrots and saffron chopped and mixed together. Once these have softened, add the brandy and sherry, and the cornflour mixed with stock. Allow to cook for forty minutes, check for seasoning, then add the chestnuts. Leave to rest for a few minutes, then serve.

This is a nicely-balanced dish in which the slightly tangy flavour of the chestnuts is discernible but not dominant.

Sanmiguel, 12-14. Orense. Tel.: 22 07 95.

a leaflet written by the indefatigable José Posada, we know of dishes like Chestnut Soup, Chestnut Stew, Wild Mushrooms with Chestnuts, and Chestnut and Vegetable Ragout, but they remain untasted since few restaurants put them into practice. The same can not be said of French cuisine which has several dishes in which chestnuts are the main ingredient. Spain does not even boast any chestnut desserts, though they lend themselves well to sweets and ice-creams. Galician restaurants are extraordinary in this regard. This area of Spain, where the most chestnuts are produced, is where you are least likely to find them on the menu. The North Americans, despite having lost their trees, still eat chestnuts as a classic ingredient in the stuffed turkey always served at Thanksgiving. In Switzerland they make delicious *vermisselen* with chestnuts, vanilla and chantilly.

### MARRON GLACE — THE FINEST OF SWEETS

There are dozens of different varieties of chestnut. In Spain, the commonest are known as *raigona*, *negral* and *pared*. Each type is used differently, some to be eaten fresh, others in purées and creams, and the best of all for *marrons glacés*. *Negral* are generally used for Spanish *marrons*, though a hybrid variety from Extremadura is also used.

The delights of the *marron glacé*, its exquisite melt-in-the-mouth smoothness, its rich sweetness, are not widely known. We seem, in

Spain, to have inherited Old Castile's self-denying Christian attitudes, preferring to embed the teeth in a dry chestnut to indulging ourselves with the frenchified *marron glacé*.

The courts of Renaissance Italy and France made these exquisite sweetmeats fashionable.

The subtlety of their flavour and aroma is such that the women who handle chestnuts during manufacture are forbidden to wear perfume and even, in some instances, nail varnish. The *marron glacé* is a highly sophisticated product. Witness the manufacturing process. In Cuevas y Cía's Orense chestnut factory, the only one in Spain, 3,000 tons of chestnuts are processed annually, of which only 15 emerge as *marrons glacés*. Only 10% of the fruit pass an initial selection process before being further sorted for the final selection of just 30 tons, 1% of the total. In the course of processing — peeling (the first peeling is done by machines specially developed at the factory), cooking, infusing in syrup, final glazing — half of these will be spoiled.

It is a slow and labour-intensive process. The final peeling is done manually, as is the selecting, whilst glazing, the successive dipping in syrup of an ever-decreasing quantity of chestnuts, is only partly mechanised. The final sorting into batches is also done by hand. No two chestnuts are the same, and the selection in each box has to be reasonably homogeneous. With nimble hand and expert eye the women sort the sweets into batches similar in size and colour, wrap them

**Cuevas y Cía. are the biggest chestnut processors in Spain, yet only 60 per cent of their output is bought by the home market.**



individually and pack them in boxes. These are Spain's *marrons glacés*. Imports apart, nearly all those sold on the home market come from this Orense factory. Some confectionery companies in Cataluña and Madrid buy the ready-glazed chestnuts here, give them a finishing touch and sell them under their own names. Nevertheless, the Spanish market takes up only 60% of the annual 15 tons, and most of the output of chestnuts preserved in water or frozen is exported to France, Japan, the U.S. and Britain.

French *marrons glacés* are bigger and are made in small factories. You can tell the difference, because their chestnuts are often richer in natural sugars. What are generally considered to be the best *marrons glacés* in the world are sold in Fauchon. There is no denying that they are better than the Spanish ones. But the rest are much the same. After all, we learned the recipe from them.

**I. Medina**

## KING OF THE MARRON GLACE

Cuevas y Cía. was founded in 1940 by José Posada's father and his associate, Mr. Cuevas. They started off simply harvesting Galician chestnuts, then used only for animal feed, and shipping them to Brazil.

«Through exporting them, they came to know the different varieties. Then a little gap opened up in the French market, and from there they learned what the French did with chestnuts. Gradually, they started processing chestnuts for them so that all they had to do was pack them. Then finally they moved into making the end product.» Thus José Posada's potted version of 40 years' work. He also mentions that he has invested 200 million pesetas in new premises equipped with cold-rooms so that chestnuts can be stored frozen and provide the factory with raw material all the year round.

José Posada is a known devotee of Galician food and wine. Author of the «Manual de vinos y aguardientes de Galicia», a guide to local wines and eaux-de-vie, he has also been a great populariser of the wild mushrooms which grow so close to his

own crop. That he has succeeded in exporting Galicia's *ribeiro* wine to Angola says all that needs to be said about his commercial skills. Nonetheless, he has not succeeded in changing Galician restaurateurs' attitude to chestnuts. «Apparently, they make more money serving lobster and spider-crab than dishes which need more preparation. Some have really gone too far and no longer bother to make soups or stews, let alone use chestnuts.»

Cuevas y Cía. handle 30,000 tons of chestnuts a year. 15 tons end up as that most exquisite of delicacies, *marrons glacés*. José Posada makes no bones about their being «a luxury product. They're hard to make and hard to sell!»

He needs to sell 20 tons of *marrons* to cover the costs of new equipment in a business whose whole future depends on replanting. At the moment, the chestnut population is dwindling rapidly and the regional authority is doing little about it. Cuevas y Cía. have had to take matters into their own hands and are financing new plantations themselves, starting from scratch as in 1940.

**T**he Hotel Ampurdán and Josep Mercader are always mentioned in the same breath. He was a man who expressed his particular genius through cooking and was generally recognised as the moving spirit of this restaurant until the day he died. It was a shrine for lovers of nouvelle cuisine, as well as attracting its fair share of assorted geniuses. Josep Pla was an almost daily customer, enjoying the double pleasure of good food and the company of his «circle».

Thus, a kind of mythology grew up around Josep Mercader. He started off as a kitchen boy at the age of nine, motivated not by love of cooking but, in those post-war days, the need to earn the living. This was in the seaside resort of Port Bou, on the Franco-Spanish border. His master there was Pedro Granollers, chef of the Hotel Paris in Monte Carlo during the first world war.



**Jaume Subirós is a worthy successor to Josep Mercader, pioneer of nouvelle cuisine in the Hotel Ampurdán.**

Later, Mercader went on to learn his trade at the Lasalle school, followed by a stint at the Hotel Arábriga in San Feliú de Guixols, owned by a Swiss company aiming at the trade generated by the beginnings of the Spanish tourist boom. After several winters in restaur-

ants and hotels in Switzerland and England, Josep Mercader returned to Figueras in 1961 for the opening of the Hotel Ampurdán, in association with the same Swiss owners of the Arábriga. His accumulated experience was now to come into its own.

Mercader based his

cooking on two principles, one a logical progression from the other: using local produce and reflecting the changing seasons.

For the rest of the story, over to his successor, the current manager of the Hotel Ampurdán, Jaume Subirós, who started work there as a

## THE HOTEL AMPURDAN

### JOSEP MERCADER'S RESTAURANT

**There is no shortage of good restaurants and eating-places in Empordá, the area of Gerona poised between the bustling activity of the coast and the Catalan Pyrenees. Nonetheless, the Hotel Ampurdán stands alone. It represents a tradition of fine cooking raised above the rest by a touch of the same Catalan genius expressed by Dalí, Josep Pla and Dolofeu.**

bell-boy at the age of eleven.

«Josep Mercader», says Jaume Subirós, «was an immensely experienced man and a thinking man. He created a new style of cooking, *nueva cocina*, though it wasn't then known as such, which brought the whole approach to food up to date and changed the pattern of eating and the ceremony that surrounded it at that time».

Jaume Subirós has been a worthy successor to him. Many thought that Mercader's death would mean the end of the Hotel Ampurdán. But events have proved otherwise, and Jaume Subirós who has been in the influential Mercader environment since he was eleven years old, has succeeded not only in maintaining his standards but in pushing them still further. His restaurant is not just one of the best in Cataluña but is among the ten best in the whole of Spain. Jaume brings new ideas and a nice touch to cooking, as in his delicious turnips with Roquefort, his splendid turbot and basil soufflé, and extraordinarily good salted or deep-fried anchovies. And he manages to keep prices impressive-

## CHESTNUT GATEAU

### Ingredients:

1 deep sandwich sponge.  
600 gr. chestnuts.  
350 gr. sugar.  
75 gr. butter, worked until soft.  
1 dessertspoon rum.  
1 litre water.  
10 marrons glacés.  
300 gr. chocolate glaze.  
300 gr. toasted almonds.

### Method:

Boil the chestnuts in water. Meanwhile, make a syrup with the rum, 250 grs of sugar and a litre of water. Divide the sponge cake horizontally into three and soak each piece with syrup. Once the chestnuts have cooked and cooled, peel them

and set 100 grs. of them aside. Cream the remaining 500 grs. with the softened butter and a little of the rum syrup. Spread this cream over each syrup-soaked layer of cake. Next, crush together the reserved chestnuts and the toasted almonds to make a topping, and sprinkle it over each layer, as you place them one on top of the other, concentrating on the top one. Chill in the fridge for an hour. Prepare a chocolate glaze and pour it, very hot, over the gâteau, covering it completely. Allow to cool. Decorate the top with ten marrons glacés, dusted with cocoa powder if desired.

ly low given the quality of the food.

## CHESTNUTS IN OCTOBER

The seasonal use of chestnuts in the Hotel Ampurdán's kitchen exemplifies Mercader's principles nicely. Subirós recalls that they featured for the first time as a purée to accompany game dishes such as braised venison, then later as croquettes coated in almonds. These are still served with certain dishes from the end of October on, just the time of year when the locals hold the traditional chestnut roasts after All Saints Day.

But chestnuts are used only as an accompaniment hereabouts, specifically, in the Ampurdán at least, with game. They use them more in desserts, though, as marrons glacés, chestnut gâteau and various compotes, ice-creams and soufflés besides.

The Hotel Ampurdán has made quite a speciality of chestnut desserts. One favourite is an old recipe of Josep Mercader's: *Tarta de Castañas*, a sort of Chestnut Gâteau.



**I**t is, of course, one of the Crown Jewels of French cuisine. But whatever they may claim, it is not exclusively French. No one would dispute that *pâté de foie gras* is a prime example of great French food. For reasons both historic (but more of that in a moment), and semantic (*pâté de foie gras* does not translate well into other languages), and for its long tradition of excellence, there is a tendency to consider this delicious and original delicacy as being thoroughly French. The truth is otherwise, though it is not surprising that the French should claim it as their own given their close associations with it and their chauvinistic tendency to monopolise good things.

I would be the first to recognise the superb quality of the incomparable pâtés of Strasbourg and Toulouse, the undoubted skill and exper-



## VIVA SPANISH FOIE GRAS!

### FATTENING UP IN AMPURDAN

**Much as they would like to think otherwise, the French have no exclusive claims on *pâté de foie gras*. The Spanish make it very well, too, in Ampurdán and Navarra. According to the writer of this article, it compares very favourably with pâtés he has eaten in some of the best restaurants in France. You can also get whole fresh duck livers, just as in France but with one big advantage – price.**



tise of the French *foie gras* producers and the delicious uses to which our French neighbours put the delicacy in their cuisine. But, as I shall now proceed to explain, the French did not invent *pâté de foie gras* nor are they the only ones who know how to make it.

Its history dates back a long way, and it originates in another part of the world. In an Ancient

Egyptian royal tomb in Sakkara dating back to the Fifth Dynasty – around 2500 BC – is a *bas relief* depicting slaves feeding geese by much the same method as is used today in Périgord. The Egyptians apparently first introduced the rearing of geese, among the first creatures to be domesticated by man. At some point, they discovered that feeding the birds on figs

*Engorged  
goose  
liver, soaked in  
milk and honey  
was an Ancient  
Roman  
delicacy.  
France simply*

*revived the  
delicacy which  
had fallen into  
oblivion during  
the Middle  
Ages.*

---

**The ducks used in Spain are Barbary – the original dumb duck. They arrive when they are just a day old, without ever having eaten.**

## BASQUE FOIE GRAS

A few years ago, Miguel Goñi set himself up in the same unusual business as the Ampurdán cooperative – rearing and fattening ducks for *foie gras* – in the Navarra town of Aranaz, some 25 kilometres from Irún.

His interest began eight years ago when he was working at a country inn near the Spanish-French border post of Echalar. For the next few years, he read whatever he could lay his hands on related to the subject and, whenever possible, visited rearing-farms in neighbouring France. He also experimented at home on



**By stroking its throat, the rearer helps the duck accept being force-fed boiled maize.**

a small scale, and became thoroughly expert. He now runs a two-farm business, using all the la-

test techniques whilst retaining the essentially artisan approach to *foie gras* production. Modern

incubators and an advanced mechanical system for feeding the ducks operate in conjunction with other ancient devices and the small but essential manual labour force.

Very soon, his initial annual production of 1,500 units a year was insufficient to cope with growing demand, and Goñi was obliged to stop supplying his French customers and concentrate exclusively on the top-class Basque restaurants. He has doubled production this year and hopes by the end of next year to be producing 5,000 units annually.

fattened them up rapidly and, furthermore, overdeveloped their livers and gave them more flavour. The same surprising but effective treatment was also known and used by the Greeks. It may well be that they passed the method on to the Romans, but it is also possible that *foie gras* was a spontaneous Roman discovery. Some historians even go so far as to put a name to its inventor – the Consul Scipio Metellus. Be that as it

may, engorged goose liver was considered a great delicacy in ancient Roman cuisine, a fact which is recorded in literature by, among others, Horace, Juvenal, Martial and Apicius. Geese were plentiful in Gaul at the time, and the Romans imported them from there. It seems that great flocks of French geese made the long journey to Rome on foot. Having arrived at farms in the countryside around Rome, they were

systematically fed with figs, kept in warm, dark places and allowed to drink unlimited quantities to quench the thirst that the diet caused. By these rather barbaric means, the weight of the geese increased from the normal five or six kilos to ten or twelve, and their livers fattened up accordingly. They were slaughtered after about forty days and their livers then soaked in milk and honey thus converting the hepatic organ of the goose into one of the finest delicacies of Roman cuisine. Still in Roman times, figs were replaced as the fattening-up food by pearl barley and wheat flour, much later to be supplemented by maize, after the discovery of the New World, and this is still used today.

During the Middle Ages, the delicacy fell into oblivion, to be revived in France in the late 18th century. At that time, and even later, the term «*foie gras*» was ap-

plied to the liver of various birds: chickens, ducks, capons, geese. Only from 1850 on did the term apply exclusively to goose or duck livers artificially engorged by special diet.

### PIG? CERTAINLY NOT!

*Foie gras* is now a very specific term, applying only to the fattened livers of geese and ducks. There is no such thing as pig *foie gras*, for example.

France produces both goose and duck *foie gras*. Goose enjoys a finer reputation for its smoothness and delicacy, but duck is cheaper and is becoming more and more readily available. This is no bad thing; duck liver pâté is delicate and delicious in its own right.

Did I mention that *foie gras* is not exclusively French? In Spain, we have only started making this delicacy rela-

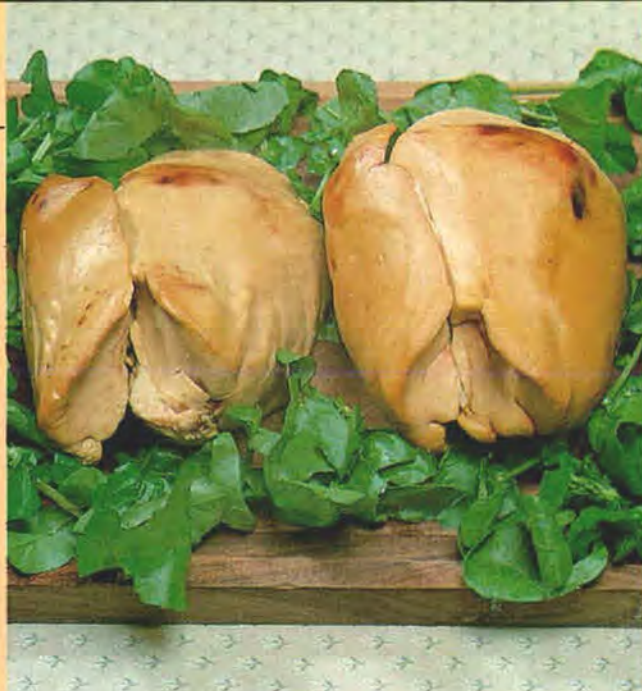
*The first mouthful is traumatic for the ducks, who try to get away. The hand-rearer manages to*

*calm them and they eventually get used to the torture of having to be stuffed with food without appetite.*

tively recently and its production is not widespread. But we *do* make it, in the Ampurdán in Gerona, for example. In the area around Garrigás, eleven duck rearers formed a cooperative two or three years ago, and currently slaughter a total of 150 ducks a week, giving 75 kilos of *foie gras*.

In the Ampurdán cooperative's eleven farms, the rearing and handling of ducks rigorously follows the traditional artisan methods of *foie gras* production. Barbary ducklings – the original dumb duck – are imported from France, where they are bred chiefly in the south and south-west. The ducklings are a day old when they arrive and have never eaten. They are put in a warm environment to recuperate after the journey. They will then be reared in pens for about three and a half months, during which time they are fed on barley, soya and maize, with the addition of vitamin supplements in the first few weeks. By this time they will weigh about four and a half kilos.

When they are a hundred days old, the birds are transferred



from the pen into little indoor cubicles where, for the next twenty days they will undergo the stepped-up fattening process which will increase the weight of each one by about a kilo. This is the toughest part of the process for the bird and the most delicate operation for the artisan producer of *foie gras*. Twice a day, at regular times – generally 7 a.m. and p.m. – the ducks are force-fed by inserting into their throats a long funnel connected to a machine which presses boiled maize mush down through it. The first forced feeds must be traumatic and the birds struggle and even try to

hide to avoid it. But they say that one gets used to anything in this life, and the ducks eventually resign themselves to the unwelcome stuffing. The rearer treats them gently and helps the maize down by stroking their necks. The ducks get used to him and this helps them accept the torture of having to eat with no appetite.

«It's important, if you are to produce a good *foie gras*, to reduce the trauma of force-feeding as much as possible, so that the liver develops normally», explained Gregorio Solá, who traded the tensions of city life in Barcelona for a more peaceful existence here on his farm in the Ampurdán.

Over the twenty days of force-feeding, the ducks take in eleven kilos of boiled maize and large quantities of water. The bird builds up fat in its body, including the liver. When they are slaughtered, not all the livers are the same size, but Gregorio Solá calculates that the livers produced by his cooperative weigh 500 gr. on average. The ideal weight for a *foie gras* varies from 450 gr. to 550 gr., though some

## VIVA SPANISH FOIE GRAS!

consumers, including restaurateurs, prefer them smaller and others larger. My personal observation is that these Ampurdán-produced livers are of a quality which compares very favourably with the *foie gras* I have been served in France, including in some of its best restaurants. I am also pleased to report that Spanish prices are lower. The Coll-Verd cooperative sells 500 gr. livers at 2,000 pts. Whole livers, that is, straight from the duck and entirely untreated; an excellent raw material, quite uncontaminated and undiluted. *Foie gras* is a gastronomic treat, and as such has long been a pillar of French cuisine. But we make it in Spain, too!

**Luis Alonso**

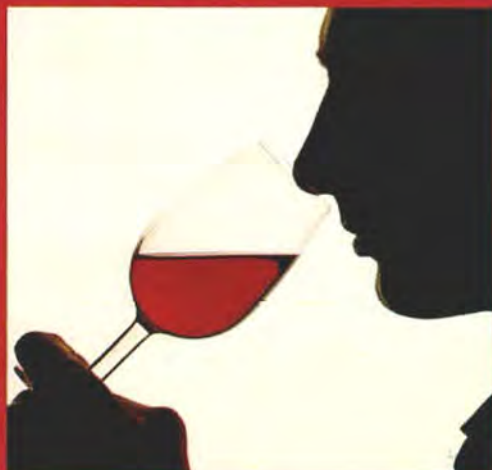
*The ideal weight for a foie gras is between 450 and 550 grammes, though some prefer them smaller. The*

*Coll-Verd cooperative in the Ampurdán produces foie gras whose average weight is 500 grammes.*

**These Ampurdán livers are of excellent quality, certainly on a par with French-produced ones. A unique product.**

A practical guide for wine professionals and all lovers of the

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*Las  
Recetas  
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### **MONKFISH SALAD**

(Serves 6)

#### **Ingredients:**

1/2 kg. monkfish in one piece  
1 lettuce  
2 endives  
1 bunch watercress  
100 g. strawberries  
100 g. carrots  
100 g. French beans  
mayonnaise  
vinegar, salt, pepper, a bay-leaf

#### **Method:**

Wrap the piece of monkfish in a cloth to keep it juicy, and poach it for 5 minutes in water flavoured with vinegar, salt, pepper and a bay-leaf. Cook the carrots and beans and when cool, arrange on a dish with the strawberries, lettuce, watercress and endives. Dress with oil, salt and a good quality wine vinegar.

Cut the monkfish into medallins and place them on top of the salad. Thin down the mayonnaise with a little single cream and flavour it with a dash of orange juice or brandy. You could also add some caviar or lumpfish roe. Pour the sauce over the fish and serve.

### **FILLETS OF GROUPEL WITH LOBSTER SAUCE**

(Serves 6)

#### **Ingredients:**

1 kg. grouper fillets  
1 lobster weighing 300 g., boiled  
100 g. butter  
1 shallot  
2 glasses white wine

#### **Method:**

Poach the grouper fillets in the white wine with the butter and chopped shallot, then transfer them to a serving dish and keep moist. To prepare the sauce, crush the shell and claws of the lobster very thoroughly using a pestle and mortar and stir it, with the finely-chopped tail meat, into the fish liquor. Reduce the sauce, season to taste, then pour over the fish. Serve with lightly poached vegetables.

### **POTATO STEW WITH CLAMS AND RICE**

(Serves 6)

#### **Ingredients:**

250 g. rice  
1 kg. potatoes  
400 g. clams  
2 onions  
2 leeks  
garlic, parsley and olive oil  
1 glass white wine

#### **Method:**

Poach the finely chopped onions and leeks in water, then add the potatoes cut into sizeable chunks. Bring to the boil, add the rice and allow to cook for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, prepare a marinère liquor with the other ingredients and cook the clams until they open. Add them and their sauce to the potatoes and rice and season to taste. Top with finely-chopped fried onion.

### **MUSHROOM-STUFFED SCALOPES**

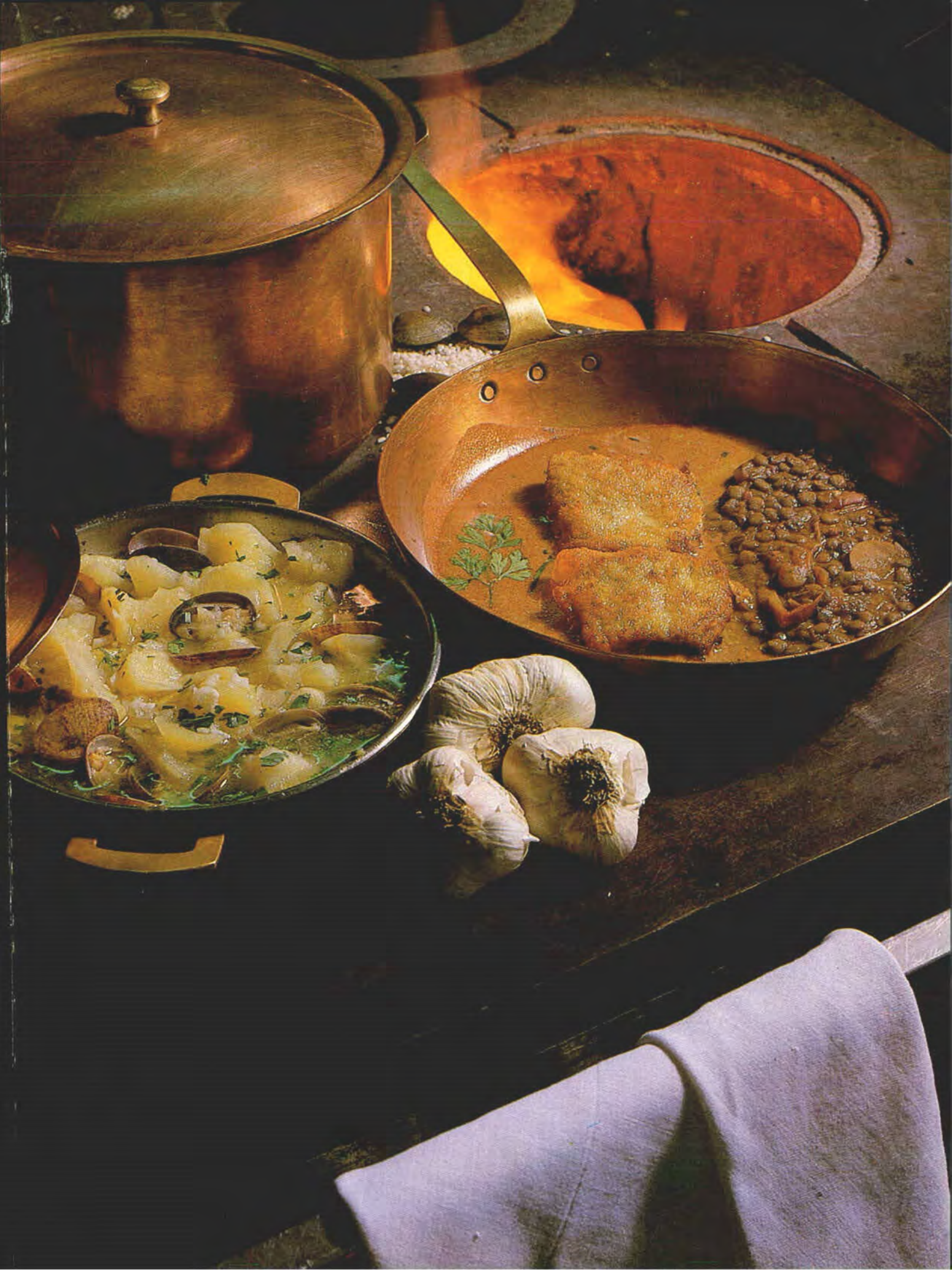
(Serves 6)

#### **Ingredients:**

1 kg. veal escalopes  
300 g. wild mushrooms  
2 glasses wine  
1 glass port  
2 eggs  
flour and bread-crumbs  
1 shallot  
garlic and parsley and a little cream

#### **Method:**

Sauté the mushrooms with a little chopped garlic, shallot and parsley and season with salt. Wrap each escalope around a spoonful of mushrooms. Dust with flour, then dip in egg and breadcrumbs and fry in a little oil. Make a sauce by adding the wine and port to the pan juices, then stirring in a little cream. Brown lentils or other pulses make a good accompaniment to this dish.



### TUNA WITH TOMATO AND PISTO SAUCE

(Serves 6)

#### Ingredients:

1 kg. fresh tuna  
5 tomatoes  
1 courgette  
1 aubergine  
1 onion  
1 green pepper  
vinegar, salt  
sparkling wine

#### Method:

Clean and bone the tuna, then poach it in sparkling wine with a dash of vinegar and some salt for 5 minutes, making sure not to overcook it. Place it on a serving dish and keep moist.

Peel and chop the tomatoes and cook them until reduced by about a quarter. Make a pisto, or fine ratatouille, with the onion, aubergine, courgette and pepper, then add the tomato. Pour over the fish. For extra richness you could spread a thin layer of mayonnaise on the fish first.

### MEDALLIONS OF SIRLOIN WITH MUSTARD

(Serves 6)

#### Ingredients:

1 kg. beef sirloin  
1 egg  
flour  
butter  
1/4 litre top-of-the-milk  
or single cream  
1 shallot  
1 tsp. coarse Dijon  
mustard.

#### Method:

Prepare 3 thin medallions of sirloin, coat in flour, dip in beaten egg and fry in a little hot oil.

#### Sauce:

Soften the chopped shallot in butter, then flambé it with a little brandy. Add the cream and mustard. Season to taste and allow to reduce for 10 minutes over a low flame. Pour over the meat and serve with a purée of red peppers, a creamed vegetable and poached onions.

### CUSTARD WITH FRESH FRUIT

(Serves 6)

#### Ingredients:

5 eggs  
1/2 litre milk  
1 mango  
1 kiwi  
50 g. raspberries  
3 oranges  
100 g. strawberries  
1 stick cinnamon  
lemon peel

#### Method:

Infuse the cinnamon and lemon peel in the milk and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat and add the beaten egg yolks. Using a double boiler or bain-marie, return the mixture to the heat and stir slowly and constantly until the custard thickens. Leave to cool, then strain it into a serving dish. Arrange the finely-sliced fruit around it and decorate with sprigs of mint.

### ALMOND CREAM MILLEFEUILLES

(Serves 6)

#### Ingredients:

1 kg. puff pastry  
250 g. almonds  
100 g. butter  
200 g. flour  
1 litre milk  
3 eggs

#### Method:

Toast the almonds. Roll out the pastry and cut into 6 vol-au-vent shapes. Paint with egg yolk and sprinkle with crushed almonds, then bake at 180° C for about 20 minutes.

To prepare the almond cream, mix the melted butter and flour then add the boiling milk and crushed toasted almonds, stirring constantly in a bain-marie, until it thickens.

Fill the vol-au-vent cases with this cream and serve very hot, topped with a light strawberry or raspberry syrup and sprinkled with icing sugar and powdered cinnamon.

Recipes: **Javier Otaduy**, chef de cuisine at the «Peñas Arriba» restaurant where the dishes were photographed.

Photography: **Francisco Ontañón**.

Coordination: **María Sendagorta**.



*Las  
Recetas  
de Gourmets*

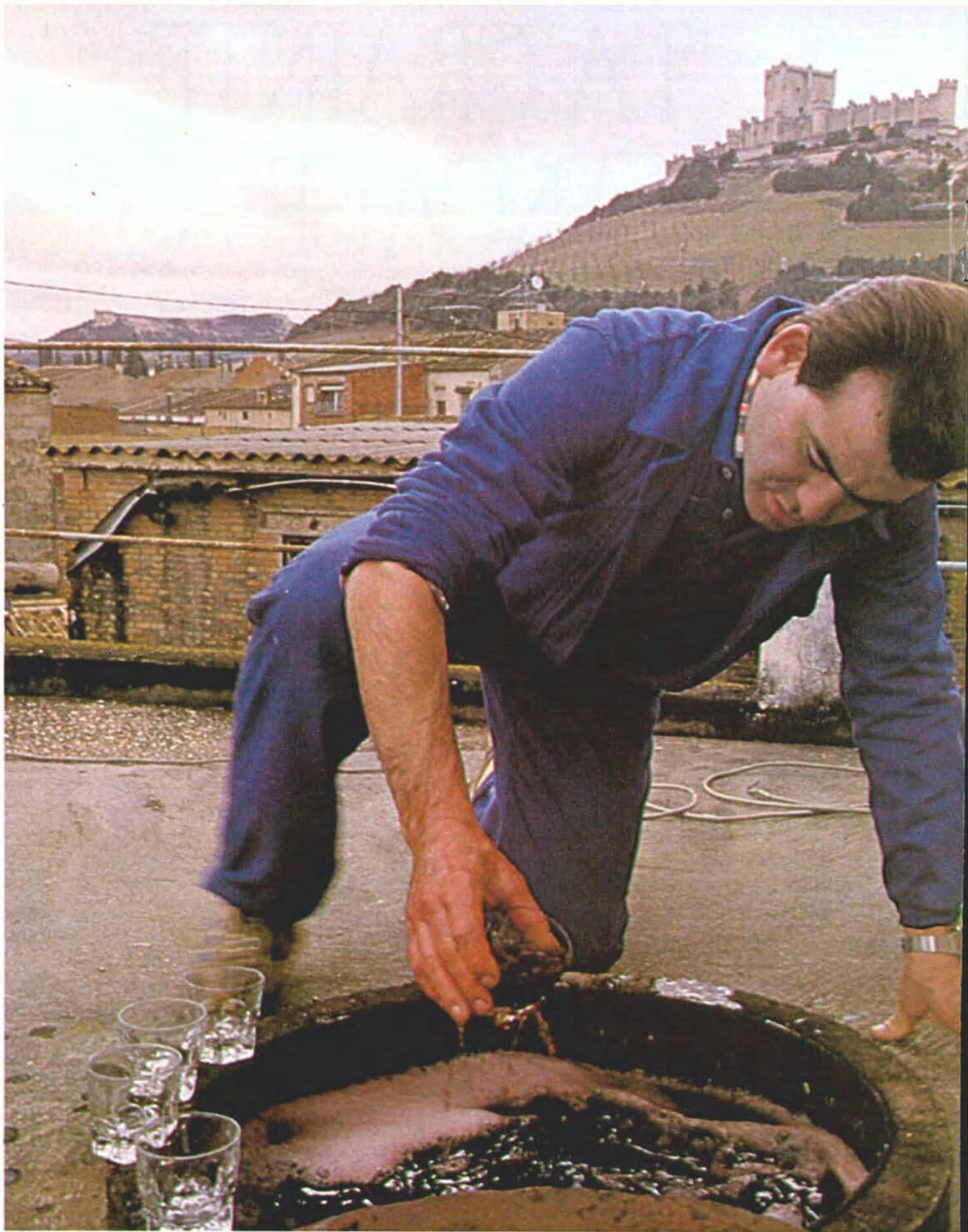


“LA CRAINTE  
FRANÇAISE AU  
VIN ESPAGNOL  
EST ABSOLUMENT  
JUSTIFIÉE”

(Monsieur Courtot, presidente del CIVB,  
Consejo Interprofesional del Vino de Burdeos, en Cambio 16).



VIÑA MONTY  
The pride of being Rioja



# THE ALTERNATIVE

## RIBERA DEL DUERO

Ribera del Duero is seen by many as the great alternative to Rioja as a source of quality wines. After visiting the area, Javier Rueda is of much the same opinion, but with reservations. Fine grape varieties, a perfect climate and ideal soil conditions are not enough in themselves to make it a viable alternative. The number of bodegas with the capacity and inclination to meet the required standards is very small, and even here elaboration methods are in serious need of updating.

**O**f the 12,500 hectares of vineyards covered by the D. O. Ribera del Duero, relatively few supply bodegas such as Peñalba López, Vega Sicilia, Hermanos Pérez Pascuas, Pesquera, and the Cooperativa Ribera del Duero in Peñafiel. There are some other small wine producers around La Horra whose wines show signs of quality, but not a lot more.

With the exception of Vega Sicilia, all the bodegas mentioned above have had to make tremendous changes and indeed still need to sustain the effort. The switch to modern technology is by no means complete, and elaboration methods still need to catch up with the times. Starting with the next vintages to be released onto the market, the positive effects of reducing cask-ageing in favour of longer bottle-ageing should be discernible. This technique had never been used in this area until a year or so ago.

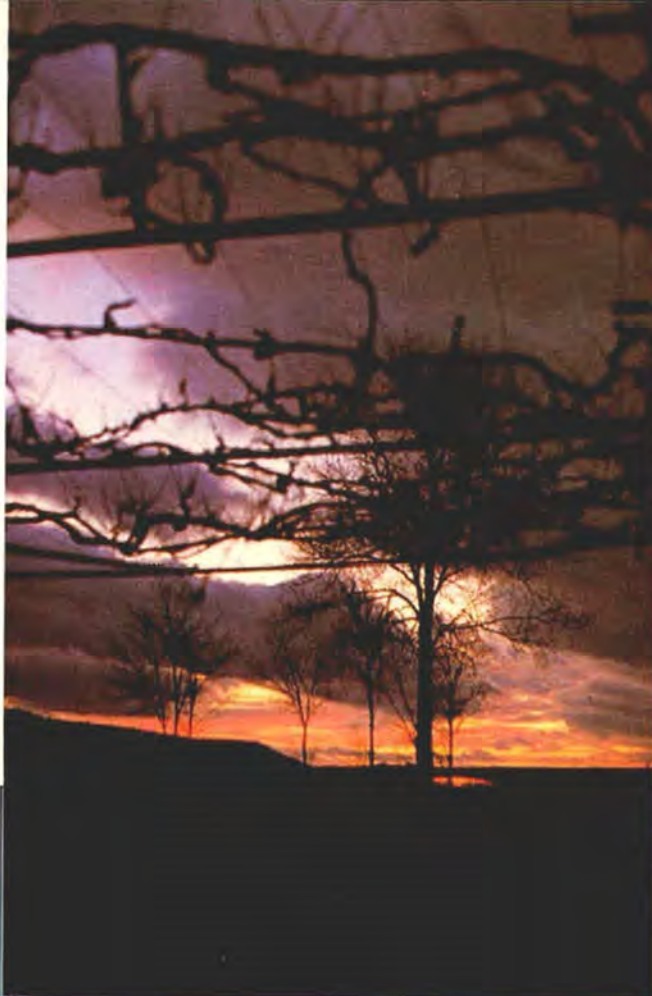
Vega Sicilia's fine reputation is long established; now Pablo Peñalba's dynamic approach, the consistently



Cooperativa Ribera de Duero's new plant will get rid of their wine problems.

high quality achieved by Alejandro Fernández's Bodegas Pesquera and the strides being made by Hermanos Pérez Pascuas are bringing their names into prominence, too. Then there is the rather contradictory approach of the Ribera del Duero Cooperative which is modernising its plant but still producing a large volume of wine using old-fashioned methods which adversely affect the final products.

Despite its long history, one of Ribera del Duero's least traditional



## THE ALTERNATIVE

RIBERA DEL DUERO

Ribera del Duero is seeing radical changes in elaboration methods.

### A PROMISING D. O.

The D. O. of Ribera del Duero lies along both sides of the River Duero, extending into the provinces of Segovia in the south, Valladolid in the west, Soria in the east, with its central and northern parts in Burgos.

This winegrowing area contains some 12,500 hectares under vine, with soils varying from alluvial alongside the river to clayey-ferrous in the parts which lie at altitudes of between 700 and 1,000 metres. These factors, in conjunction with dense and persistent winter mists and a continental climate (cold winters and hot, dry summers) with a strong Atlantic influence, all combine to make this a particularly suitable area for viticulture.

The predominant varieties grown here are

Garnacha, Albillo and Tinto Fino which, in combination, produce highly typical wines with consistent common characteristics and lots of personality.

This has always been an outstanding winegrowing area, formerly known mainly for its fine claretes, though these are now being superseded by young reds to keep pace with current consumer demand.

This recently-designated D. O. embraces over 30 cooperatives on either side of the river Duero, from Tudela de Duero (Valladolid) to Burgos de Osma in Soria, and also covers some of Valladolid's most important privately-owned bodegas.

Big names like Pesquera, Peñalba López,

Pérez Pascuas and Vega Sicilia all work alongside one another, all meeting the same requirements and following the same code of practice, the aim being to ensure that the wines they produce bode well for the future prosperity of the area. Bodegas Vega Sicilia, originally not included in the D. O., are a unique case in being exempted from the prescribed methods of elaboration and ageing.

New plantations of Tinto Fino along with the occasional French variety like the currently fashionable Cabernet Sauvignon, and the great wave of modernisation which is sweeping through most of the area's bodegas, are the foundations on which it is building its future. Its wine will be attracting a lot of attention in the next few years.

bodegas in its elaboration methods is Peñalba López. In barely nine years this bodega has achieved a high standard in red and clarete wines, 30 % of which are sold abroad. Its fine reputation has grown around wines made from the variety Tinto Fino with small proportions of the other two typical varieties of the area, Garnacha and Albillo.

Pablo Peñalba is currently adding a 5,000 square-metre bay next to the existing one. This will house the ageing-vault and a large area for laying down bottled wine for further ageing, a facility the bodega did not have before.

At the moment, 200 litres of the 500,000 litres of Tinto Fino based wine obtained from the '84 vintage are developing in one of the bodega's tanks. The entire production of this young wine - 13° of alcohol, an intense violet-tinged purple, with a delicate blackberry aroma and exquisite palate - will be consigned to some of the 3,400 American oak casks stacked in every spare corner of the bodega. One hopes that after undergoing the required period of oak-ageing it will be allowed to age further in the bottle before appearing on the market as reserva or gran reserva wine.

Pablo Peñalba is a sort of irregular in the wine world. His business interests, aside from the small family bodega, have generally been in the construction business. Nine years ago, he bought the Torremilanos bodega from the Seijas family, and has succeeded in building up this prestigious but run-down operation so that he now scills 150,000

Alejandro Fernández's Pesquera de Duero wines are a good example of the sort of quality on offer from Ribera del Duero.



Alejandro Fernández is a good example of the way the most traditional winemakers are updating their views. The Peñalba vineyards are the foundations for a promising future.

cases a year. His own hard work and the technical advice of Manolo Ruiz of the Haro Oenological Station, advisor to several bodegas in the area, have produced these and other, older, wines of excellent quality, among them a special reserva which a well-known wine club is angling to buy.

#### UP-DATING PESQUERA

Alejandro Fernández's bodega is a fine example of the way in which modernisation is taking hold in Ribera del Duero. Bodegas Pesquera have made a complete break with classical elaboration methods. This is a bode-

ga with a production capacity of 100,000 to 150,000 litres, and a stock of 1,500 American oak casks. Until just two years ago, Alejandro's method was to ferment the must with stalks and skins for the entire 28 days of the process. This elaboration method, already abandoned by the other winegrowers in the area, gives very densely-coloured and over-astringent wine. Ageing in the cask turned out highly individual but essentially uncommercial wines. And Alejandro Fernández liked them that way. «I like a wine that gives me a good mouthful of flavour», he told us during our visit to his bodega. Nevertheless, he has seen the wisdom of planning his future output along different lines and has introduced modern technology. A chilling-line for controlling fermentation, a new filter-

ing system, a de-stalker and stainless-steel lining for the fermentation tanks and all the channels along which the must passes after pressing are some of the measures which will make the elaboration process much less haphazard from now on and produce better-balanced wines.

Since 1982, nearly all the wine produced by this bodega has been elaborated without stalks. Its Tinto Pesquera, after three years in the cask will spend some three months ageing in the bottle. It used to be placed on the market immediately after bottling.

The '76 Tinto Reserva will also spend a few months in the bottle (the exact period always depends on market demand) after its eight years in oak.

Alejandro Fernández has clearly realised how much bottle-ageing improves his wines, and that they do best on a longer reductive process in the bottle and a shorter oxidative process in the cask. This gives a better-rounded and more harmonious wine. The walls of the bodega are now lined with rows of bottles which show that the experiment is under way.

#### ALTERATIONS IN PEÑAFIEL

Levelling off the approach area and putting a few finishing touches to the masonry were all that remained to be done to the new Cooperative bodega in Peñafiel at the time of our visit.

Some eight kilometers of tunnels burrow into the hillside on top of which stands the Castillo de Peñafiel. The building work and new

Vega Sicilia's wines are released onto the market in small and rationed quantities.



## THE ALTERNATIVE

RIBERA DEL DUERO

### A LEGENDARY AURA

An aura of myth and legend dating back to the last century still surrounds the vineyards of Vega Sicilia. They lie on either side of the Valladolid to Soria road on what looks like almost desert terrain, reaching the river Duero in the north, the Peñafiel estate in the south and east, and land belonging to the Quintanilla local authority in the west. The 200 hectares of land the bodega originally owned over a century ago were first used for grazing cattle and growing fruit trees. Vines took over as the most important crop from 1864 on, when one of the estate's first owners, Don Eloy de Lecanda y Chaves, began importing French varieties. Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot and Pinot Noir were grown alongside Garnacha and Tinto Fino, the same varieties which grow today on the pinewooded hills which shelter the Duero valley.

Strange legends persist in the Spanish wine-grower's lore. It is said, for example, that when the European phylloxera epidemic showed signs of gaining ground in Spain, this estate created a scheme to divert water

from the Duero so that the vineyards could be flooded if threatened by the disease.

In 1882, Vega Sicilia was awarded a national prize for services to agriculture for «acclimatising to Spanish conditions exotic plants of recognised utility».

In 1917 the firm, then in the hands of Hijos de Antonio Herrero, was taken over by Don Domingo Garramiola, a major wine-maker who, after several attempts, hit on an excellent wine whose special characteristics and individuality began to attract a great deal of attention.

With the Civil War, everything ground to a halt. Garramiola died in 1944 and from then on the firm was to change hands many times, from private individuals to foreigners to big financial concerns. Currently, it belongs to a Valladolid-based multinational. The estate has grown. It presently extends to some 1,000 hectares, 125 of them under vine. Some of the vines are sixty years old and, with the help of good organic manure, still going strong.

J. R.

equipment have, between them, cost over 100 million pesetas.

The bodega has a final capacity of 4 to 6 million litres, with space for 6,000 oak casks. For the moment, the aim is to produce 2,500,000 litres, using 2,000 casks, 600 of them new. Six stainless steel vats, each of 6,000 litres capacity, and a chilling system have been installed, so this bodega's reds should soon be making a name for themselves.

The contrast between this new bodega and the old one down the road exemplifies nicely the way that the Cooperative is developing. Whilst visiting the old premises, we took the opportunity of tasting the new '84 vintage, not yet ready but light and fruity if a little low in alcohol. Here, they still use Tinto Fino on its own rather than in combination with other varieties. Depending on the quality of the harvest, the musts are developed in various ways. Once it is in the cask, a wine which shows signs of developing well will be used for Protos and Peñafiel 5.º año, and will spend a period ageing in the bottle, a process recently adopted by this bodega. Young wine will market as Ribera de Duero 2.º año without undergoing any ageing process.

These three types are smooth, fine wines, but it must be said that the problem of the much commented-on musty-muddy taste, most discernible in the Peñafiel 5.º año and the Protos, remains unsolved. That damp smell and the hint of soggy cardboard in the flavour are by now a constant in this bodega's output. I feel strongly that they are not going to get rid of them until the

new plant comes into action. In my opinion, any wine stored in or passed through the old tanks will inevitably pick up that taint and stand in the way of these wines' getting the attention they truly deserve.

What with the impending purchase of 60 Ha. of vineyards, good managerial administration and the sustained efforts of its 240-plus members, this cooperative super-bodega clearly means business.

### VEGA SICILIA IS UNIQUE

It was evening by the time we approached the gracious old façade of Bodegas Vega Sicilia. One gets a strange feeling of anticipation as one rings the bell. We are welcomed by a young, bearded man. This is Mariano García, oenologist and progenitor of the wines marketed by this bodega in recent years. As he shows us around, the new methods he has instigated are much in evidence.

About 40% of the vines in this bodega's vineyards are Cabernet Sauvignon, with the other 60% shared among Tinto Fino, Garnacha, and the French varieties Malbec, Merlot and Pinot. They are all grown in limy and clayey-calcareous soils and yield some half million kilos of grapes which then start the long, slow process of becoming Valbuena or Vega Sicilia, with every harvest being studied for lessons to be learned.

A major part of the process are long periods of «resting». The '81 vintage, for example, will all be used for Vega Sicilia Unico. It will spend ten years in casks, disturbed only for

**Mariano García, Vega Sicilia's oenologist, controls the wines marketed by this bodega.**



occasional racking-off, the only means of clarification used.

The method for Valbuena is different. After fermenting in 20,000-litre vats, it is transferred to 6,000-litre butts and then into oak casks, where it is «fined» or clarified with egg-white, then bottled in its third to fifth year. For over a year,

now, they have been laying down bottled wine for further ageing. Throughout its long history, this bodega had never followed this practice, placing the wine on the market immediately it was bottled after long years in oak.

Meanwhile, they are increasing their output.

«At the moment, we are planting Cabernet», explained Mariano «and we've built a new ageing vault, almost opposite the old bodega, on the other side of the road». Dug into the hillside, the new vault has 4,500 oak casks, 600 of them limousin, all in perfect order, ready and waiting. Their present rate of sale of 200,000 bottles is expected to increase. Once on the market, 10% of the total production will go for export, and of the remaining 90% which stays in Spain, 60% will go to private individuals and the rest to shops and businesses who have to wait long and patiently to be allocated an annual quota of cases.

They are experimenting with the espalier system of cultivation. The method itself is old, and was much used in the vineyards of Bordeaux. It consists in training the vines along supported wires so that they are raised some 50 centimetres above the ground. This provides better ventilation for the grapes and produces higher quality must, though given that these vineyards are on a hillside, the crop will be smaller.

**Javier Rueda**



## A RIBERA DEL DUERO WINE-TASTING

**I**n making the selection for this tasting, we opted for wines with a reasonable market presence. We chose four outstanding bodegas of the region (Vega Sicilia, Pesquera, Torremilanos and the Cooperativa de Peñafiel) whose wines are available throughout Spain. We also included one smaller bodega (Hermanos Pérez Pascuas, of Pedrosa de Duero), not so long established, but among the area's best.

The final conclusions were favourable, with reservations. The average quality of the wines tasted was high, but there were some defects too serious to be overlooked. Ribera del Duero's great potential is undeniable; climate, soil and grape varieties are all just right to make this a leading winegrowing area in the not-too-distant future. However, there are some wrinkles to be ironed out first.

Obsolete traditional methods, such as fermentation with the stalk, must be abandoned in favour of new technology if they are to produce top quality wines. Their commercial policy also needs to be rethought. Ribera del Duero's wines have, on the whole, a poor market presence. Then presentation also need improvement. The corks and capsules are generally acceptable but the labelling is often disastrously bad.



MIKEL ALONSO

### ROSÉS

#### **Viña Pedrosa, 83**

A well-made and successful wine. Good, fruity nose, though with some traces of residual sulphur. Round in the mouth without sharpness. Fresh, clean and fruity with a delicate hint of wood.

#### **Ribera de Duero, 82**

Better in the nose than on the palate. The clean, intense fruitiness of the aroma loses something in the mouth where it becomes rather rough and acidic. The aftertaste regains something of its good aromatic qualities.

#### **Torremilanos**

A poorly balanced wine. Decidedly off in the nose, with dirty, sedimenty aromas. Acid and astringent in the mouth.



**Wines**  
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 fresh rosé wines with  
 a sweet bouquet  
 and smooth red wines  
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 REGULATORY COUNCIL RIBERA  
 DEL DUERO**

**Héroes del Alcázar, 4 Telf. 20 96 75  
 Burgos (Spain)**



## MATURE AND RESERVA REDS

### Viña Pedrosa, 82

A clean, purplish cherry red wine. Tinto País predominates in the aroma, with nice oaky overtones. Well-structured in the mouth, still with some astringency which is not unpleasant and in fact bodes well for further ageing. A highly successful wine, its potential fully realised.

### Torremilanos Reserva Especial

A cherry red wine with brick hues. Pungent and intensely spicy aroma. Slightly astringent in the mouth, with the flavour well-balanced, generous and nicely structured. A harmonious, full and rounded wine.

### Viña Pedrosa, 80

A ruby red wine with brick hues. Complex and powerful nose with aromas of fruit, oak, vanilla and spices. Full-flavoured, well-rounded and harmonious. Very slightly tannic.

### Valbuena 5.º año

A dense ruby red wine with brick tinges; rather raisiny in the aroma but improving considerably in

the mouth though this is a hard wine, acid and astringent. It is full and meaty but its roundness is spoiled by the harshness conferred by fermentation with the stalk.

### Torremilanos, 79

A ruby/brick red wine with a clean and complex aroma. Well-balanced and nicely-structured palate which is clean, rounded and silky. A long, delicious finish and strong aftertaste.

### Torremilanos, 76

A cherry-red medium-density wine with slight tinges of brick. Aromas of oak-ageing. Full flavoured in the mouth; intense but rather short.

### Pesquera Reserva

A nice wine. Good appearance and complex aroma, with hints of raisin. Well-balanced in the mouth with broad flavour and very potent aftertaste. Slightly astringent, though not disagreeably so. Pleasant though not rounded.

### Ribera de Duero, 82

A dense purplish cherry-coloured wine, rather lacking in brilliance. Fruity aromas with hints of cement. Acid, rough, astringent and hard in the mouth, though the aftertaste improves. Unsatisfactory palate; not a well-balanced wine.

### Pesquera 4.º año

Its best qualities are its appearance and nose, which is fruity and oak-aged. Excessively tannic in the mouth, its astringency masking a nice balance of flavours.

### Pesquera Reserva Especial

Similar in its characteristics to the previous wine, with noticeably increased acidity.

### Peñafiel, 78

Spoiled. An intense aroma of cement and mould which become even more pronounced in the aftertaste. Worse yet, it is bitter, tannic and earthy in the mouth.

## GRAN RESERVA WINES

### Vega Sicilia Unico, 65

The best wine of the whole tasting. A dense, deep cherry-coloured wine with brick tones. Complex, delicate, broad and particularly intense nose. Well-balanced in the mouth with a broadly-structured flavour and generous aftertaste. A round, velvety wine with a very long and persistent finish. Despite its age it has the lively quality of a great wine.

### Vega Sicilia Unico, 72

Of similar characteristics to the '65, though less elegant and slightly hard in the mouth. For its age it should be rounder on the palate.

### Protos, 64

Not a winner. It has the serious defect of a cementy-mouldy smell which is also noticeable in the aftertaste. Intense flavour, but lacking in delicacy. Given the defective aroma and despite the fact that it improves in the mouth, this seemed to us to be very poor value for money at over 5,000 pesetas a bottle, bodega price.

### Ribera Duero, 74

Intense aromas of cement, mould and sulphur. Disqualified.

Hay Rioja para años.



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