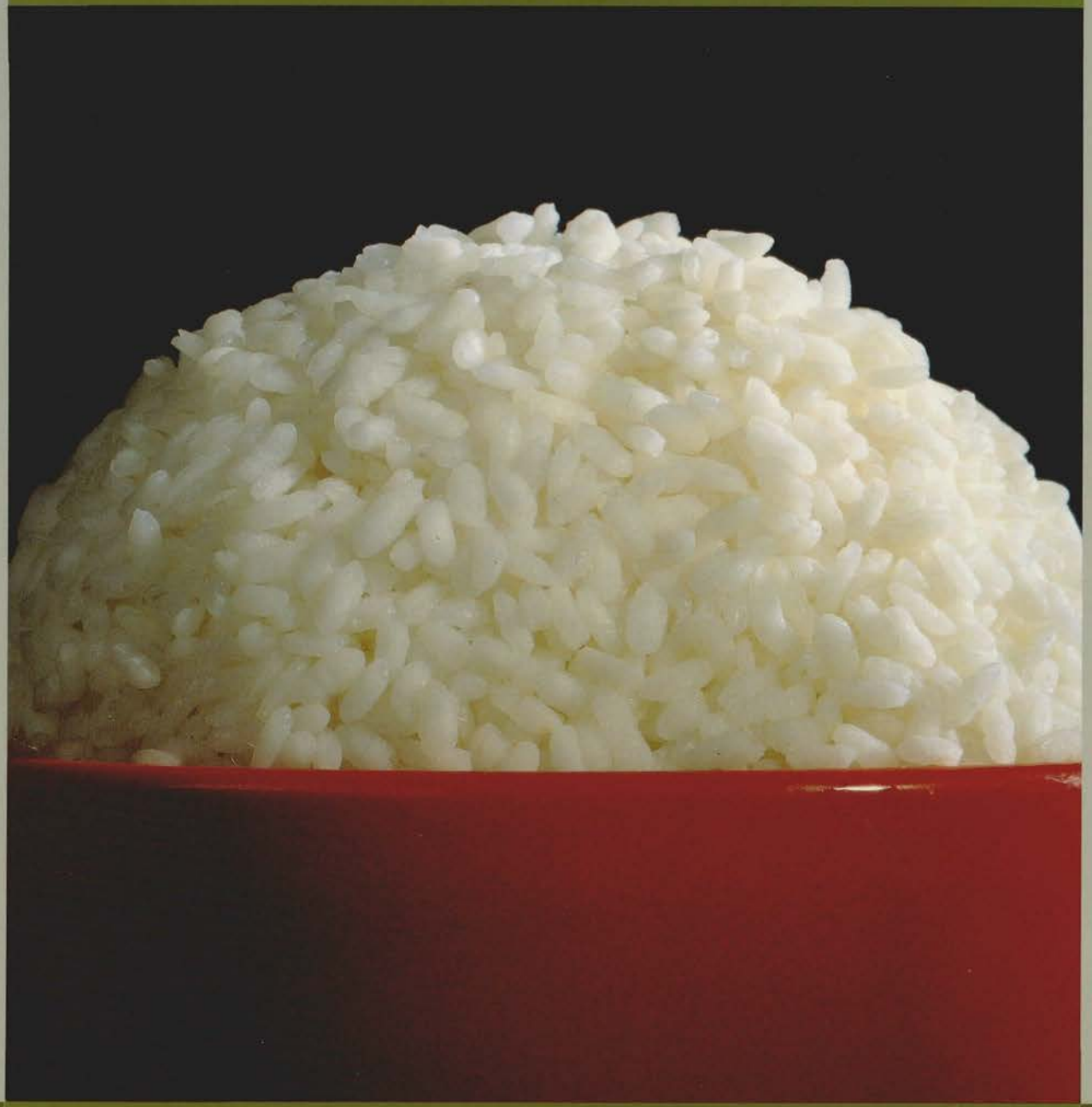
SPAIN GOURMETOUR

FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE



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THE GRAIN OF LIFE

SPAIN'S ROYAL HERITAGE: LA GRANJA AND RIOFRIO
WINEGROWING LINKS BETWEEN THE AMERICAS AND EUROPE

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SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Rice, one of the perennial staples of the human diet, occupies a very important role in Spanish cooking. Since it was brought into Spain by the Arabs many centuries ago, it has been widely grown here, particularly in the eastern coastal strip known as Levante. As one might expect, that is where the best rice dishes are to be found. There are literally hundreds of them, in which rice is combined with vegetables, meat, fish, pulses... paellas, stews, casseroles... Rice is one of the simplest ingredients there is, yet it is endlessly versatile.

The Arabs can also be thanked for much of Spain's traditional confectionery, particularly the sweets like *turrón* and marzipan which are eaten at Christmastime. But Castile's huge wheat-growing meseta, historically dubbed «Spain's Granary», has its own indigenous traditional products which have provided the basis of an important biscuit-making industry. Its range extends from the simple Marie biscuit, familiar breakfast and teatime fare, to the far more sophisticated.

The area of El Bierzo, to the north-west of the central meseta, enjoys a microclimate which makes it a rich source of food: its vegetables and charcuterie are known throughout Spain. It is also a wine-growing area whose output, hitherto absorbed by the local market, is now gaining a reputation farther afield. This issue's wine section assesses its qualities.

Our travel feature wanders far off the beaten track to the unspoiled villages and countryside of El Maestrazgo, a little microcosm where time seems to have stood still.

COVER
Photography by Antonio de Benito
Still Life by Menchu Artime
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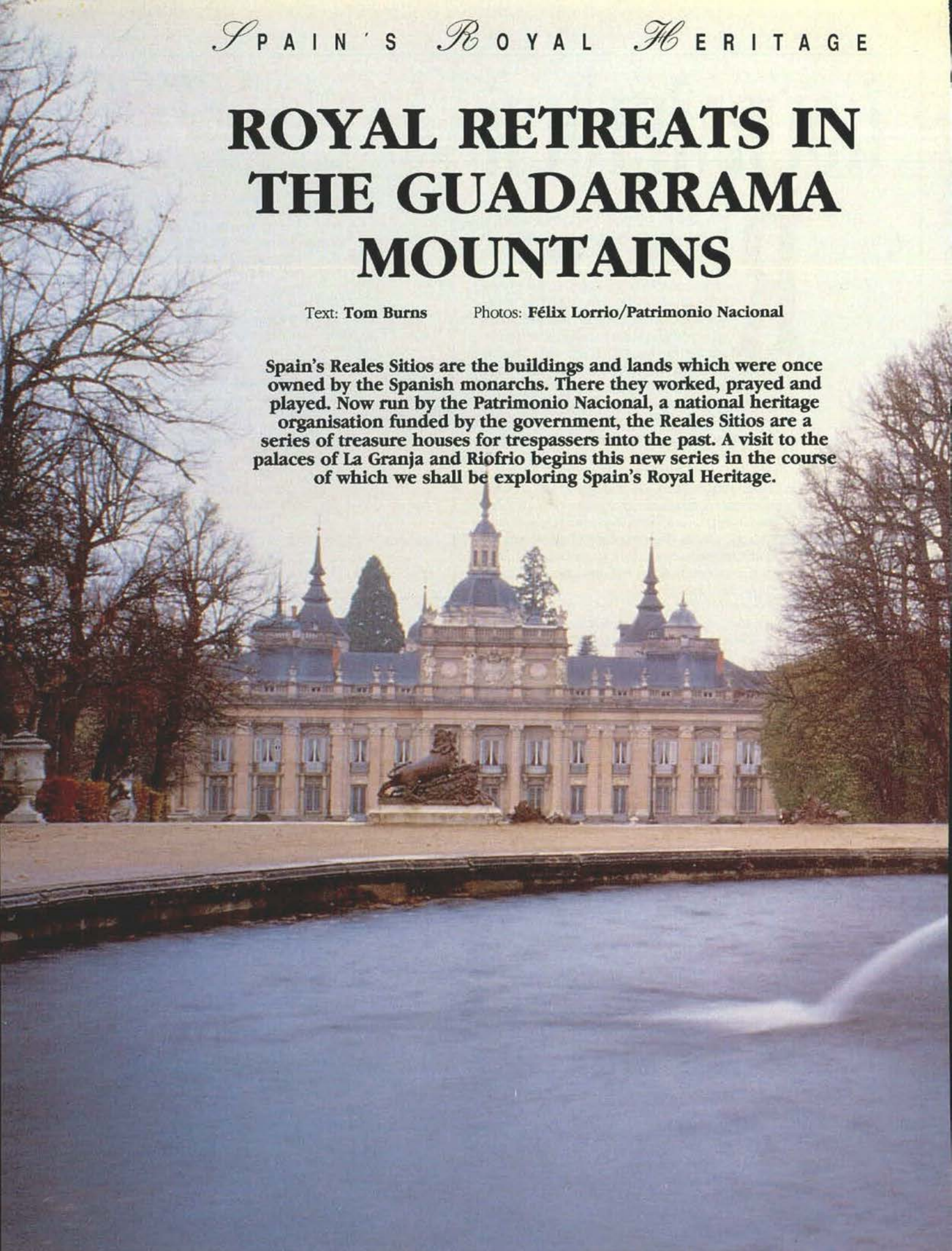
ROYAL RETREATS IN THE GUADARRAMA MOUNTAINS

Text: **Tom Burns** Photos: **Félix Lorrio/Patrimonio Nacional**

Spain's Reales Sitios are the buildings and lands which were once owned by the Spanish monarchs. There they worked, prayed and played. Now run by the Patrimonio Nacional, a national heritage organisation funded by the government, the Reales Sitios are a series of treasure houses for trespassers into the past. A visit to the palaces of La Granja and Riofrio begins this new series in the course of which we shall be exploring Spain's Royal Heritage.



At Madrid's royal palace, the Palacio de Oriente, the monarchs worked. At convents such as Las Huelgas in Burgos, or those of La Encarnación and Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid, which were all endowed and inhabited by dowager queens and unmarried infantas, they prayed. At the monastery — come-palace of El Escorial, the monarchs worked and prayed. At La Granja, a palace built around a church and looking out on to ornamental gardens, they prayed and played. At Riofrio, a palace set in a rolling deer park, it was mostly play all the way.

Historical voyeurs visiting the Reales Sitios may examine, for example, how royalty sought to ensure a safe passage in the next life for their immortal souls. The collections of relics at El Escorial and the Convento de la Encarnación are eye openers in this respect. At the palaces of La Granja and Riofrio the sentiment is a different one. The two represent the pursuit of pleasure, the appreciation of beauty and the love of hunting.

La Granja and Riofrio are buildings that were erected not by the austere and God-fearing Habsburgs but by the French Bourbon dynasty that came from the sophistication of Versailles to occupy the Spanish throne. Both palaces lie close to each other in the northern folds of the Guadarrama Sierra and a day trip to the two is a perfect outing for the modern day traveller seeking to escape Madrid's big-city stress. The itinerary presents no problems.

The gardens are a bucolic pagan stage, populated by classical stone and bronze figures that emerge from the greenery and by a uniquely extensive complex of ornately sculpted fountains.

GETTING THERE

The best way to approach the excursion from Madrid is to take a roundtrip visiting first La Granja and then Riofrio. The drive out should be along the N-601 which crosses the Guadarrama mountains at the 1,800 m (5,900 feet) high Puerto de Navacerrada mountain pass and leads straight to Segovia. The village of San Ildefonso, home of La Granja, lies 10 km (6 miles) from Segovia.

After touring San Ildefonso and its Real Sitio, the traveller should continue some 4 km towards Segovia and take a well signposted right turn to the Real Sitio de Riofrio which lies close to the village of Navas de Riofrio. The return trip from here takes the N-603 which meets the A-6 motorway to Madrid at San Rafael.

Between visiting the two Reales Sitios, travellers can stop for lunch at a long established and rightly famous roadside inn at Valsain called Casa Hilaria where specialities include Eresma river trout, *Judiones de la Granja,* a bean stew that is as hearty as a blazing log fire on a winter's evening, and, naturally, the roast lamb and suckling pig for which Castile is celebrated. Similar fare is to be had at El Zaca, a tiny restaurant in San Ildefonso that stands in a narrow street close to the Ayuntamiento in the village's main square. Those who

prefer to bring their own food will come across an excellent picnic area called La Boca del Asno on the banks of the Eresma river. It lies on the N-601 at the bottom of the descent from the Puerto de Navacerrada and before reaching Valsain.

ROYAL HUNTING GROUNDS

The village of Valsain, minutes away from La Granja and the turn-off point for Riofrio, is a suitable appetiser for the sightseeing that lies ahead. Approaching it from the Navacerrada pass, twisting and turning down the mountain side's hairpin bends and thick pine forests, Valsain has the effect of suddenly emerging out of a series of tunnels into daylight. It is a logging settlement set in expansive meadow land beside the gurgling Eresma.

It was here that Spain's monarchs began hunting regularly in the late 14th century. Nearly 200 years later Philip II, the founder of El Escorial, had a full-size palace added on to the original Casa del Bosque hunting lodge built by his ancestors. All that remains of Philip's palace is a roofless brick and granite ruin where kids play hide and seek and rooks build their nests. The palace burnt down just as Charles II, Philip's epileptic great — grandson and the last of Spain's Habsburg dynasty, was leaving Valsain after a hunting sojourn to return to El Escorial.

The presence of Royalty in Valsain's Eresma valley was however far from over. Philip V, the grandson of France's «Sun King» Louis XIV and Charles' Bourbon successor chose to build a palatial country retreat at San Ildefonso, just 5 kilometres (3 miles) from the gutted Casa del Bosque.

A village had developed at San Ildefonso around an original shrine honouring the saint that had been erected by the 14th century monarch Henry III in gratitude for a narrow escape while hunting. Later, in 1477, Isabel and Ferdinand, the Catholic monarchs, brought Jeronymite monks from Segovia's monastery of El Parral out to San Ildefonso and gave them land on which to build a farm, in Spanish a *granja*.

S.R.M.

It was the ornamental gardens that converted La Granja into an altogether peerless estate devoted to aesthetic sensations.

FROM FARM TO PALACE

Philip V decided that the Jeronymite farm

which, by the time he came to the throne, boasted numerous outhouses including a handsome hostelry, would be an ideal retirement home. He acquired the whole property when in 1724 he chose to abdicate the throne in favour of his heir Louis I and off to La Granja he went with his Italian wife Isabel of Farnese and a reduced staff.

It could have been in Philip V's mind to imitate the example of the greatest of Spain's Habsburgs, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V who, after abdicating in favour of his son, Philip II, retired to a life of piety at yet another Jeronymite complex, the monastery of Yuste in desolate Extremadura. The Bourbon Philip also appeared to have the Habsburg Philip in mind when he ordered La Granja's church to be rebuilt and his retirement apartments to be built around it on the church-within-a-palace pattern that Philip II employed in the building of El Escorial.

At all events fate intervened: the young king Louis I died in the first year of his reign, Philip V after a few months of pious oblivion was obliged to return to the throne he had so recently abdicated and La Granja's character changed entirely. With Philip back at his kingly duties, the hoped for monastic hideout in the sierra was to become the cool summer retreat for the court. As a result it would be vastly more luxurious than had been originally envisaged.

Fate intervened as well when in 1734 Madrid's Alcazar, the royal household's headquarters, burnt down and the Sicilian architect Filipo Juvara was commissioned to build what is today's Palacio de Oriente in its place. Juvara, a true believer in the need to temper baroque exuberance with classical sobriety, arrived in Madrid with a team of disciples and he took time off from his Palacio de Oriente commission to design the enlargement of La Granja with a majestic façade overlooking the gardens. The palace was to become one of the royal family's main out-of-town residences.

S.R.H.

In some places the gardens approach the natural look of the best of English landscape gardening or the French model. But overall La Granja's gardens are Italian.

Juvara's finished palace was a mini-Versailles, certainly imposing but also domestic and with features that belonged wholly to its sierra environment. The trees, cedars, giant chestnuts, beeches, are stunning as they blend with the sierra's pines.

TAPESTRIES AND FOUNTAINS

Juvara's finished palace was a mini-Versailles, certainly imposing but also domestic and with features that belonged wholly to its sierra environment. The two storey high façade is grandly held together by a central triad and balustrade and also by giant orders that hold the edifice together from top to bottom. The French windows introduce domesticity however and the mix of the sierra's granite and of the pink pastel-hued stone mirrors the gentle summer evenings of the Guadarrama mountains.

If the overhauled palace could now hold its own with the finest grand houses in 18th century Europe, it was the ornamental gardens that converted La Granja into an altogether peerless estate that was wholeheartedly devoted

to aesthetic sensations. In some places the gardens are ordered into courtly terraces on the French model and in others, where the gardens blend against the pine-covered slopes of the sierra, they approach the natural look of the best of English landscape gardening. The trees, cedars, giant chestnuts, beeches, are stunning as they blend with the sierra's pines.

But overall La Granja's gardens are Italian. The gardens are a bucolic pagan stage, populated by classical stone and bronze figures that emerge from the greenery; the whole carefully contrived *mise-en-scène* is brought triumphantly to life by a uniquely extensive complex of ornately sculpted fountains.

There will be visitors to La Granja who will opt for the luxurious fixtures

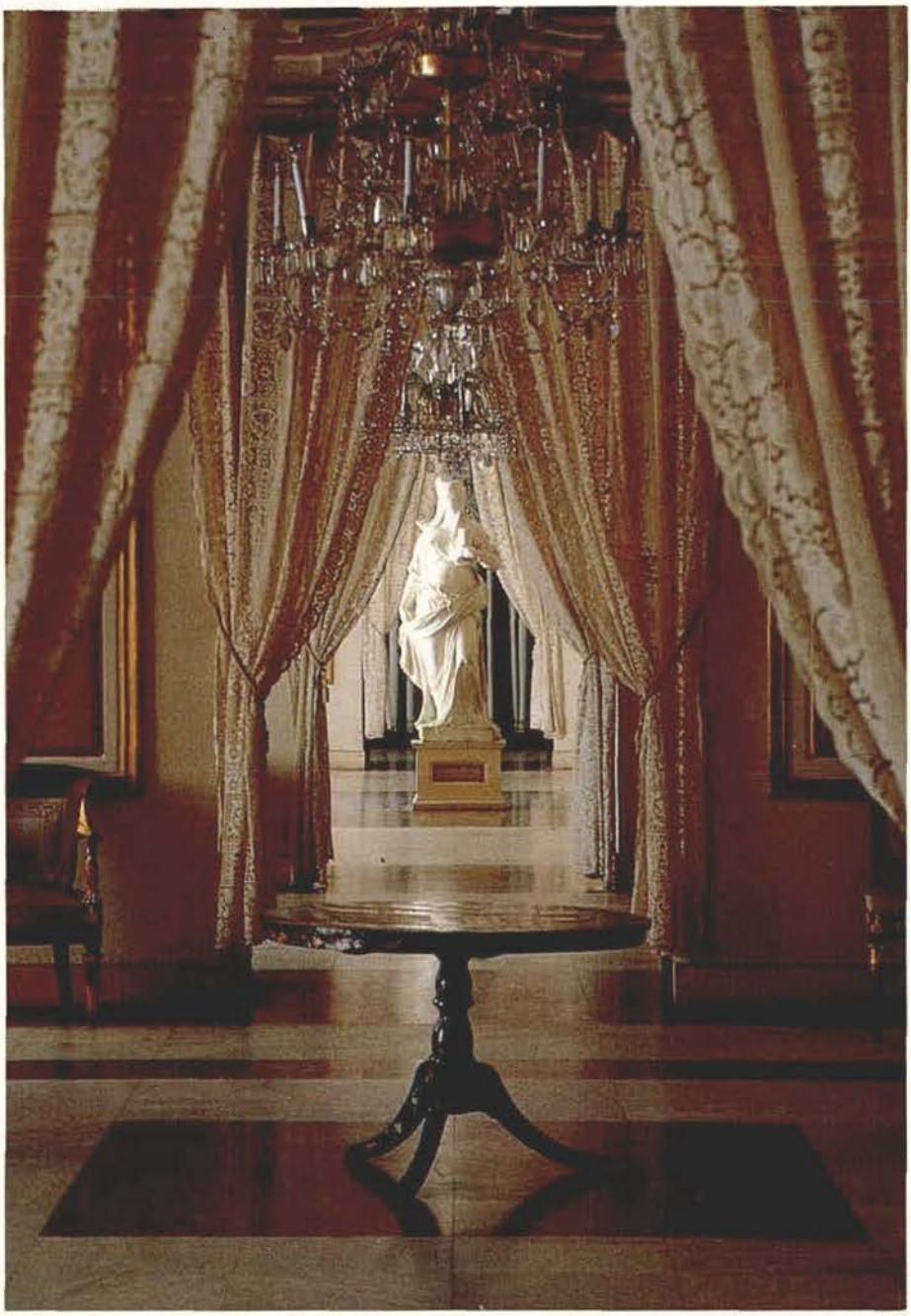
and fittings of the palace's state-rooms, and delight in the chandeliers, in the clocks, in the furniture and in the carpets. Enthusiasts of the chandeliers should not miss a visit to San Ildefonso's glass museum which occupies what used to be the glass-making factory that was purpose built in the 18th century to fill the Real Sitio with every glass ornament imaginable. Serious students of tapestries will be amazed and enthralled by the tapestry museum which is the high point of the guided tour of the Palace.

The museum incorporates the finest hangings of the royal collection. There is a 15th century Flemish tapestry of St Jerome with a mean looking lion eyeing the saint's scarlet cloak that is quite memorable. A series of 17th century set of tapestries on the theme of the creation of man and inspired by the book of Genesis is likewise entrancing, not

least because of the birds and beasts that are lovingly woven into the fabric.

Other visitors will prefer the gardens. The best idea is to first walk up the slope to their highpoint where the sierra's pine forests and its rugged natural beauty commence. There is an artificial lake here, called El Mar, The Sea, whose chief purpose is to supply the fountains and that originally was also used as a fish farm.

At five in the afternoon every Sunday a number of cascading fountains are set successively in motion and the effect, as the crowd moves from one water theatre location to another, is exhilarating. But far greater pleasure can be had in the solitude of an autumn morning when the gardens are redolent with romanticism; as the visitor steels up to an intricate set-piece of mythological fountainry, such as the one that has a sculpted Diana bathing,



Besides the gardens, the visitors to La Granja can enjoy the luxurious fixtures and fittings of the palace's state-rooms, and delight in the chandeliers, the tapestries, the clocks, the furniture and the carpets.

attended by nymphs and looked upon by satyrs and by Pan, then, in such motionless moments, a real live deer might startle from the gloom of a yellowing beech tree.

A QUEEN'S FOLLY

In order to see scores of deer the visitor should move on to Riofrio, a palace that is intimately linked to La Granja for it was built in 1752 by Isabel of Farnese, Philip V's widow, following the death of the monarch. Like La Granja, this second palace is a refined example of mid-18th century classical architec-

ture. Not for nothing was Riofrio, a large three-storey square block mixing pink pastels with granite, designed by Juvara's fellow Italian and pupil Virgilio Rabaglio. But there the similarities end.

Riofrio, located well back from the sierra's deep slopes, is a free-standing building built in isolation on a gentle mound that commands impressive views over acres of holm-oaks and cistus bushes. There are no ornamental gardens and fountains here. This is open hunting country. The palace may be the epitome of gracefulness but its surrounding parkland is wild and challenging.

A more important difference is that Riofrio never became, as La Granja did, a family summer home for Spain's royal family. Isabel, who is buried together with Philip V in La Granja's church, never inhabited the palace that she had ordered for herself. The widowed queen died in the palace of Aranjuez, another Real Sitio south of Madrid, shortly after Riofrio was completed. Her son Charles III, who was a fanatic hunter, used Riofrio as a base for his shoots but preferred to stay at La Granja.

Charles never pursued his mother's plans to attach a theatre, a barracks for the royal guard and even a Franciscan monastery to the Riofrio palace. Decay inexorably set in. Riofrio's estate continued to be the location of royal shooting parties but already by the late 18th century the palace itself had become little more than a storeroom that

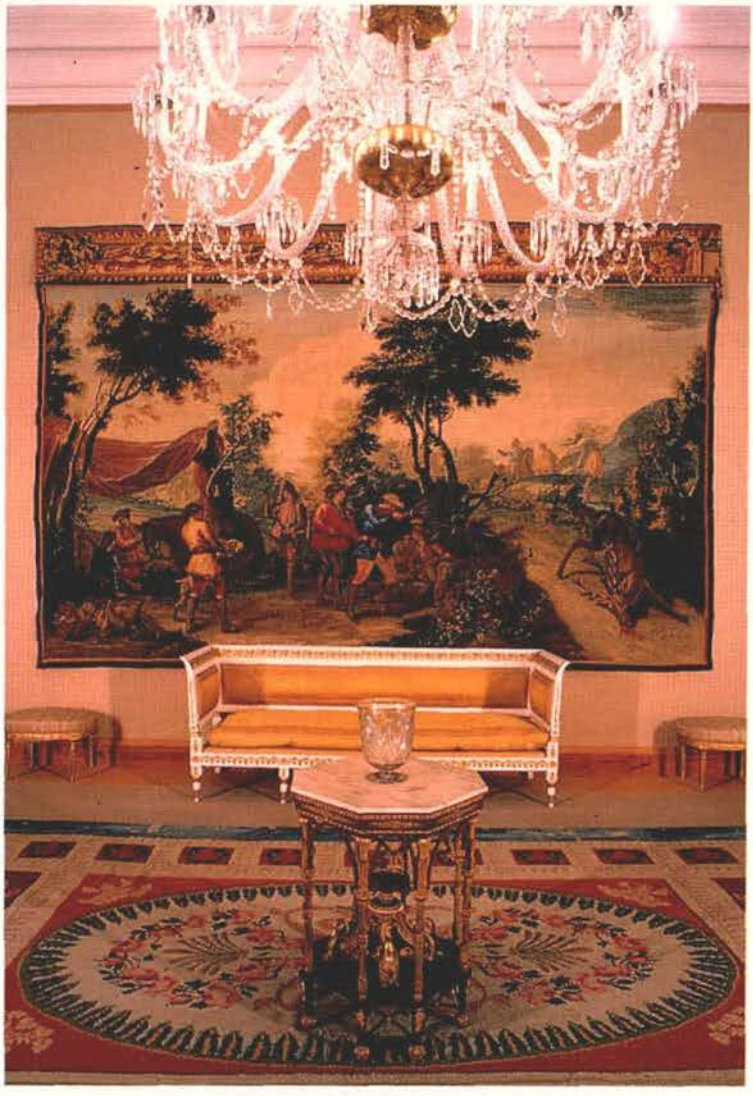
In Riofrio, located well back from the sierra's deep slopes, there are no ornamental gardens and fountains. This is open hunting country. The palace may be the epitome of gracefulness but its surrounding parkland is wild and challenging.

housed the furniture overflow from other royal residences. Alone among the Reales Sitios it can be said that Riofrio was, in its conception, a monumental folly.

DECADENCE AND RESTORATION

Riofrio enjoyed a brief and sad moment of royal grace and favour in the summer of 1878 when King Alfonso XII, stunned by the death of his young queen, retired to it for a few months so as to mourn her in solitude. Subsequently Riofrio withdrew once more into itself and returned to a melancholy decline that was punctuated every season by the odd shoot. Extensive restoration work was required in the 1960s when, in a praiseworthy display

Extensive restoration work was required in the 1960s when, in a praiseworthy display of administrative enterprise, it was decided to install a hunting museum in the palace and to open it to the public.



of administrative enterprise, it was decided to install a hunting museum in the palace and to open it to the public.

The hunting museum occupies almost an entire wing of the building and it consists of trophies, some of them shot by reigning monarch King Juan Carlos, hunting artifacts down the ages and what are known as dioramas — stuffed animals, in this case deer, wild boar, red-legged partridges and other game pursued by Spanish sportsmen, which are artfully set in reproductions of their natural habitat. Those who dislike blood sports will find the museum as ghoulish as the chamber of horrors in Madame Tussauds but children, who normally tire quickly of exhibitions, tend to enjoy it thoroughly.

The rest of the public rooms in the palace have been lavishly redecorated in the style of the late 19th century and constitute an excellent example of what gracious large country house living was all about a hundred years ago. Hunting themes are, not surprisingly, well represented in the palace's collection of pictures and tapestries. There are also a number of portraits of Alfonso XII and of his son Alfonso XIII, born posthumously by his second wife, who was the grandfather of today's king Juan Carlos.

S.R.H.

In Riofrio everything is related to hunting and, not surprisingly, hunting themes are well represented in the palace's collection of pictures and tapestries.

Alfonso XII's bedroom and study are arguably the most interesting rooms in the residential part of the palace. They look as if the heartbroken monarch had just vacated them. Together with the tiny combined bedroom and study that Philip II used in El Escorial, Alfonso's private apartments in Riofrio offer as good an insight into the intimate life of real royals as any historical voyeur could wish for.

Tom Burns, London 1948, first came to work in Spain as a Reuter correspondent in 1974. A former *Washington Post* and *Newsweek* magazine correspondent, he is a director of *Spanish Trends*, a business newsletter he helped to found in 1985, an associate editor of Lookout, a long established English monthly that deals with travel, food and lifestyles in Spain and a frequent contributor to London's *Financial Times*. He was chief writer of *A Day in the Life of Spain*, a photographic book published by Collins in 1988, general editor of the *Everything Under the Sun* series of guidebooks on Spain (Novatex, Harrap, Passport Books) and he has contributed to a number of other publications among them the Penguin Guide to Spain.

It must be the best smelling village in Spain. The irresistible scent of baking hits you as soon as you arrive in Aguilar de Campoo. The small town at the edge of the wheat fields of Castile-Leon is known as the cookie capital of Spain. Its products are steeped in tradition, but finding a new identity in the changing marketplace.

SMART COOKIES

SPANISH BAKERS ADAPT TO CHANGING TASTES

There are 12 big bakeries on the high plains of Castile-Leon, three of them in Aguilar de Campoo, which supply almost all of Spain's cookies, or biscuits as the British call them. This is a land of winter wheat fields, ringed by scarlet poppies in the spring and bordered by the deep green Cantabrian Mountains.

In the summer, broadfaced sunflowers fill the fields, providing vegetable oil for the cookie makers. This region, northwest of Burgos, is the land of the legendary Spanish fighter El Cid. His warrior's character could easily have been formed by the unrelenting climate of the plains, harshly cold in winter and scorching hot in summer.

This is the «bread-basket» or grain belt of Spain and has been for centuries. The region was so important to the country's economy that in the 1700s a network of canals was built to help move the grain north towards the port of Santander, although the final leg of the journey still had to be made over the mountains by road.

Along these canals a ruling class of grain merchants developed, known as «flour-crats». They grew rich in the 1800s through speculation and by creating monopolies, but finally the people rebelled against them in bread riots throughout the region in 1865.

By the end of the century the monopolies had been broken and an important export market vanished with the loss of Spain's last colonies. The resulting surplus flour was used to make cookies and gave birth to a new baking industry.

COOKIES FOR BREAKFAST

While many of Spain's cookie manufacturers began as small bakeries or pastry shops in this region, they have grown into a huge industry, producing 195,000 tonnes a year with annual sales of $550 million.

Dozens of varieties of cookies are baked here, sandwich cookies, wafers, tea cakes, chocolate covered, etc. But the big star of these ovens is the Maria, a simple, round cookie that Spaniards are wild about (see inset). Marias are made by every company and account for 44 % of all the cookies sold in the country.

Much to the bewilderment of foreigners, who consider cookies a snack food or dessert, Marias are eaten in Spain for breakfast. They are a quick and delicious alternative to toast or cereal and a custom that is easy to get used to.

For the past several years Spanish cookie makers have been gearing up for the unified European market in

Text: **Deborah Luhrman**
Still Lifes: **Menchu Artime**
Photos: **A. de Benito/ICEX**

1993. Substantial investment in modernization has been made throughout the sector. In Aguilar de Campoo for example, the Fontaneda company is in the midst of a $10 million project to install new high-tech production lines, while down the street the Gullón company has just completed a brand-new plant. Spanish cookie manufacturers already have the highest productivity in Europe, producing 45,000-50,000 kg a year per worker, compared to an average of 30,000 kg a year per worker elsewhere.

With the best technology in place, attention is turning to the marketplace where Spanish cookies are under a double-pronged attack from foreign companies. First, upmarket imported cookies have captured nearly 7% of sales and forced supermarkets to expand their cookie sections to two aisles, one for the big variety of imported brands and the second for the traditional favourites like Marias. Also on the attack are breakfast cereals, which are winning a huge new acceptance in Spain. Sales of breakfast cereals jumped 46% from 1991 to 1992.

The cookie manufacturers' association, APROGA, is urging its members to diversify. «We make some of the best cookies in the world, with the best raw materials and sell them at the best prices», said president Miguel Jerez, «But it's like any food, if you ate the best chops everyday, the last thing you would want to buy is more chops».

SURVIVAL FOOD

Cookies were first invented during the golden age of navigation as food for sailors on the long voyages. According to archives, Christopher Columbus sailed off to discover the Americas with his three ships laden with wine, water, bacon, and barrels of hard biscuits. Water was to be rationed, but plentiful supplies of biscuits could help prevent mutinies or problems aboard ship, wrote Columbus.

Later, refinements such as sugar and flavourings were added to make the cookies more palatable. But their original advantages to early sea captains are still valid: cookies do not take much space, they stay good for 2 years with no special storage, and they provide a quick and easy source of energy.

For those reasons Spanish cookies have reached the far corners of the globe. The first Spaniard ever to climb to the summit of Mount Everest, Martin Zavaleta, carried a package of Marias as survival food in his back-

MARIAS

The Taste of Tradition

It was to be the wedding of the year. The Grand Duchess Maria of Russia was marrying the Duke of Edinburgh —the year was 1875. All England was abuzz with talk of the big event, the dress was made, the cake was ordered and an elaborate feast was planned. To commemorate the occasion and honour the new member of the royal family, the small baking company Peek Frean Ltd. invented a sweet new biscuit. It was crisp, thin round with a delicate decoration and the word Maria stamped on top.

The cookie was a hit in England and its popularity spread throughout Europe, taking Spain especially by storm. Even in his wildest dreams the inventor of the Maria could never have imagined his creation would one day become Spain's favourite breakfast food, with annual production topping 90,000 tonnes.

Marias were first produced in large quantities in Spain around the turn of the century, but it was not until after the Spanish Civil War that they became an integral part of the national culture. The long, harsh years of the war plunged Spain deep into poverty, turning even a simple loaf of bread into a luxury. When the war was over and General Franco set about stabilizing his victory, the government's top priority was planting wheat so that every Spaniard would be able to have bread. The wheat campaign was so successful that soon there were surpluses and Spain's bakers began turning out box after box of Maria cookies. They were cheap and plentiful. In those post-war years, every coffee shop or roadside restaurant always had a plate of Marias on the counter and customers were invited to help themselves. It was a happy sight, the first sign that Spain was pulling out of its misery and on the way towards recovery.

In the same way, as soon as family economies improved, housewives began serving Marias for breakfast instead of government-produced bread. It was a simple luxury and a statement that they were moving up in the world.

Babies in the fifties and the sixties were often served Marias softened in milk as their first solid food and they grew up singing the jingles of Spain's big baking companies, whose Maria cookies sponsored the most popular soap operas and game shows on radio and television.

They are as comforting as a trip to grandma's house and as familiar as a favourite teddy bear, little wonder that Spanish families polish off huge boxes of Marias for breakfast and snacks each week.

The important thing to remember about this traditional Spanish cookie is that it must be dunked. It can be dunked in milk or coffee or even tea, depending on preferences, but it is not supposed to be eaten dry. Dunking is the only way to bring out the full flavour of a Maria cookie, say the bakers solemnly. Millions of Spaniards of all ages agree.

About 44% of all the cookies produced and eaten in Spain are Marias. Every commercial baker makes them and they are generally the biggest money earner, representing over $165 million in annual sales.

The only Spanish cookie that comes close to the popularity of the Maria is its cousin the Tostada. The main difference is that the Tostada is rectangular and baked slightly longer. Tostada and Marias together account for nearly 70% of all the cookie sales in Spain. They come in large boxes of one or two kilograms and the two varieties generally take up an entire aisle in the supermarket.

Just as you can buy dozens of varieties of breakfast cereals there are now several different types of Marias to suit every taste: butter flavour, extra-crisp, extra-flaky, whole wheat, high-fibre, honey and of course the original version. Since breakfast cereals have started gaining popularity in Spain (see accompanying article) manufacturers have even come up with a Maria breakfast cereal made from miniature versions of the famous cookies.

Every Maria, even the tiny ones, still come stamped with a delicate design and the name Maria written on top.

Isn't it lucky for Spain that the old Duke of Edinburgh did not marry a woman named Gertrude or Svetlana.

COOKIE PRODUCTION AND EXPORTS

	1990	1991
Total Production (in metric tons)	220,000	195,000
Total Exports (in metric tons)	7,000	16,132
Export Sales (in millions of ptas.)	2,000	3,033

Source: APROGA.

pack. Likewise, the Gullón company has sent to developing countries in Africa a special high-protein survival cookie it produces in co-operation with international relief agencies.

FUTURE STRATEGIES

Most visitors to Aguilar de Campoo find the cookie smell so irresistible that they line up outside the Fontaneda factory to buy several different varieties before heading home. What looked like a year's supply, would probably only last a few weeks after being shared with relatives and friends back home, one family told me.

The factory itself is a treat to see. Dough is funnelled through tubes in the ceiling onto production lines, where a steel drum presses out endless rows of freshly minted Marias. Another machine pushes big sheets of cream-filled wafer cookies under a blade, where they are sliced into perfect squares, while on the next line, sandwich cookies are being smothered in chocolate.

Inside the office of Fontaneda's young marketing manager Rafael Ocón Berango, an entire wall is lined with shelves filled with samples of the competition. There are new Spanish cookies and imported varieties, breakfast cereals, and salted crackers.

The planners who try to predict which kind of cookies to make for the future are following two trends. The first is the trend towards healthy eating. To this end, Spanish bakers have been switching from the use of animal fats to poly-unsaturated vegetable oils and creating varieties of cookies that feature whole wheat, fibre and honey. General Biscuit's Lu brand whole wheat Marias and Fontaneda's Fibramel Marias are just two examples of this trend.

New biodegradable plastic packing materials are being used to appeal to health and environment-conscious consumers.

Nutritionally even traditional Marias compare favourably to other breakfast foods such as toast or cereal. Fifty grams of Marias (7 cookies) contain about 200 calories, 3 grams of protein and 4 grams of fat. Significant amounts of B vitamins and folic acid are also present. They are included as part of a balanced breakfast for all ages in the Spanish health ministry's recommended diet.

The other big consumer trend is towards more sophisticated «boutique» cookies, especially fresher varieties with fruit or cream fillings. Spain's big manufacturer, Cuétara, is getting ready to launch a high quality

SPAIN'S CHRISTMAS SWEETS

Edible Tradition

Once the pages of the calendar have been turned to December and the end of the year is in sight, Spain's traditional Christmas sweets start making an appearance. Year after year, these delicacies, whose origins date back many centuries, are an essential part of the celebrations which mark the end of the cycle and the start of the new.

In many cases, it is easy to trace these sweets back to their Arab, Jewish or Christian beginnings in Spain at a time when all three cultures coexisted there. Some, however, date back still further and are a relic of the pagan rites practised by the Romans when they ruled Spain.

Turrón, marzipan, *roscones de Reyes, mantecados, alfajores roscos de vino, glorias, marquesitas, neules:* these are just some of the Christmastime sweets and cakes which, with their countless local variants, constitute one of the widest traditional sweet repertoires in Europe.

The Semitic origin of many of these is unquestioned. Their very ingredients —nuts and honey— are a major clue in themselves. The parts of Spain in which they are produced provide still more, for they coincide with the independent Arab kingdoms, or *taifas*, into which the mighty Caliphate of Córdoba disintegrated from the 10C on.

As Spanish polymath Gregorio Marañón (1887-1960) points out, their miraculously long survival would have been impossible had it not been for the closed religious orders. Many of their convents adopted sweet-making as a craft and have continued using and perfecting the same ancient recipes over the centuries. Indeed, these sweets could be seen as symbols of the complex cultural heritage of the Spanish people, for many of them are far from Christian in origin.

Though nowadays it is eaten on the Christian feast-day of Epiphany, 6 January, the sweet ring-shaped loaf known as *Roscón de Reyes* is actually a relic of pagan times, and as such it is the oldest of all these survivors. Until Julius Caesar's reformation of the calendar in 46 BC, the Roman new year had begun on 1 March. The pre-Julian calendar reflected the natural annual cycle, beginning as it did at a time when trees and plants were beginning to show signs of new life, grass was reappearing, and the land was ploughed and sown.

EPIPHANY

Later, the Christian Church gradually stamped out pagan festivals by superimposing its own. Thus, the winter solstice rituals became transformed into a celebration of the birth of Christ, and the symbolism of its Roman festivals was incorporated into features of the Christian calendar, such as the feast-days of St. Anthony, Candlemas (the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple), and St. Blaise.

One symbolic event of the Saturnalia, as the Ancient Romans December celebrations were known, was the making of round cakes in each of which a dried bean was hidden. The cakes, made of figs, dates and honey, were cut up and handed out to slaves and plebeians. Whoever found the bean was declared «king of kings» and allowed a brief spell of power.

This sort of playing with ambiguity and paradox typified the leisure activities of the decadent high society of Ancient Rome. Additionally, in this particular case, there were erotic connotations attached to the bean: the Pythagoran school of philosophy famously prohibited the eating of beans, which were believed to have aphrodisiac properties.

By around the year 1000, many centuries later, the Christian Church had succeeded in suppressing the original spirit of this festival completely. In parts of France, the concept of the *roi de la fève*, the «bean king», survived, but his role had changed significantly: the poorest child in town would be sumptuously dressed and feted, and presented with money donated by the populace. The bean king had become the baby king. The Ethnologist Julio Caro Baroja informs us that in 14C Navarrete, the custom was for the Three Kings to choose the child who would be presented with money and wheat for his family.

With the passage of time, the ceremony came to be held on a family scale. In French homes, whoever found the bean in his piece of the ring-shaped cake that rounded off the Epiphany lunch was declared king of the feast. The ring-shaped cake, symbolising a crown, is still with us in Spain today.

In Catalonia, the Epiphany cake is known as the *tordell de Reis*, and it is served as the last gastronomic event of Christmastime festivities. Not many years have passed since the dried bean hidden in its dough was supplanted, as in other parts of Spain, by a little wooden or clay figurine. In the Catalan tradition, though, it is bad luck if you find the bean, for you have to pay for the cake. In Barcelona, finding the bean singled you out to represent the whole family at church on the Plaza del Pino.

Today, the origins of its symbolism forgotten, the *roscón de Reyes* is a ring of sweet bread encrusted with crystallised fruits and a little glass or pottery surprise hidden inside.

For children and grown-ups alike, Epiphany, the day when presents are exchanged in Spain, just wouldn't be the same without the *roscón* (see *Spain Gourmetour*, No. 21).

TURRON AND MARZIPAN

Equally inseparable from the Spanish Christmas are *turrón* and marzipan. The most exquisite of Spain's Christmas treats, these belong in a category all their own. For centuries, they have provided the finishing touch to Christmas meals and endless late night chats. Opinions vary as to the origins of *turrón* and marzipan, but they are clearly a legacy from ancient, sophisticated and cultured forebears.

Various parts of Spain lay claim to their invention, and legend, etymology, and historical events are all cited in justification, often in direct competition with other parts of Europe.

Within Spain, Catalonia and Alicante are the main claimants, and both can call on documentary evidence dating back to the 14C and 16C. References in guild regulations, official letters, royal decrees and cookery books at least prove long historical connections.

Though its exact origins are not known, *turrón* is a direct descendant of two other very characteristic Spanish types of sweet: *alfajores* from Andalusia, and *alajú* from Cuenca, both mixtures of chopped nuts, honey and aromatic spices. Though they appear in many guises, strictly speaking there are only two basic types of Spanish *turrón:* Alicante and Guirlache.

The Alicante type could be nothing but Arabic in origin: something very like it is described in *The Arabian Nights*. It has been known as «Imperial» since it was awarded the title in the 19C, during the reign of Ferdinand VII, after a competition among confectioners from all Spain's mainland and overseas provinces.

The Guirlache type, a mixture of caramel and nuts sprinkled with aniseed, seems to be a legacy from the Mudejars, Muslims who lived and worked in the Christian areas of Spain. It used to be known as *nuegada* (note the similarity to *nougat*), derived from the Spanish word *nuez*, meaning «walnut», since in the Kingdom of Aragon this type of *turrón* was made with walnuts rather than the more typically Arab almond.

Though at first sight the Jijona type of *turrón* might appear to be a third category, it is really just a finely ground up version of Imperial. Other types —egg-yolk, coconut, fruit— are nothing more than variants of genuine marzipan.

Venice and Toledo were both in their day important focuses of trade and culture, and lay claim to the invention of marzipan. Military sieges, religious rites and pure chance (dating back as far as the 13C) are all put forward as explanations of how this delicious mixture of sugar and almonds first came into being.

What is unquestionable is that the various types of *turrón* and marzipan that appear on Christmas tables in Spain today are originally Arab and Jewish luxuries. But other Christmas delicacies are equally unquestionably Christian, since one of their essential ingredients is pork lard.

CHRISTIAN CONFECTIONERY

Classic Christian contributions to the range of Spain's Christmas confectionery —*mantecados, polvorones, cortadillos de cidra, hojaldrines, roscos de vino, roscos de aguardiente*— are still artisan- made in the two Andalusian towns of Estepa (Seville Province) and Antequera (Malaga Province).

They are all originally by-products of the traditional annual ritual of the *matanza,* the pig slaughter, carried out at the beginning of winter. They were a creative way of using up the lard, a fact that makes them Christian fare by definition, since both the Jewish and Arab communities were forbidden to eat pork by the Talmud and the Koran.

Polvorones are feather-light little cakes which crumble at a touch, as their powdery name suggests. They are a simple mixture of toasted flour, pork lard and icing sugar, to which flavourings such as toasted sesame seeds, aniseed or cinnamon are sometimes added.

Mantecados are made to almost the same recipe, though the ingredients are used in different proportions and beaten eggs are added, so they are moister and fattier in texture.

All these Christmas sweets are essentially very simple, so the quality of their ingredients and the skill with which they are made are instantly discernible. This is why, even though they are now made industrially, traditional methods are closely observed.

Whereas the main producing areas are those around the three key points of Estepa (Seville), Sonseca (Toledo) and Jijona (Alicante), many other parts of Spain —Antequera (Malaga), Calamocha and Alcañiz (Aragon), Agramunt (Lerida)— are also founts of Spain's ancestral Christmas sweets.

José Carlos Capel

line and is branching out into salty snack crackers.

Packaging plays an important role in the success of sophisticated cookies. Spain's cookie makers will be using smaller packages and more elaborate protective wrappers to showcase their high quality lines, according to APROGA president Miguel Jerez. Consumers want to buy something special, he says, and they are increasingly willing to pay 200 or 300 pesetas for a small package with six or eight cookies, while passing up a larger and more economical box of the same product.

THE GLOBAL COOKIE JAR

As the cookie shelves at home are filling up with foreign brands, Spanish manufacturers are also fighting back by putting a greater emphasis on exports.

The variety, quality and price of Spanish brands are competitive in any part of the world, but consumer buying habits make European markets especially atractive. The annual consumption of cookies in Britain, for example, is 12.2 kg a year per person, exactly double the 6.1 kg per person consumed annually in Spain. The French, with 9 kg a year, and the Belgians and Dutch, with 8.8 kg, are also big cookie eaters.

Germans, on the other hand, eat the same amount as the Spanish, but in their case 70 % of the cookies consumed fall into the category of sophisticated and expensive.

Spanish cookie makers exported 16,132 tonnes of cookies in 1991, more than double the exports of the previous year, but it still represents a mere 8 % of annual production.

Most of the exports go to the United States and Europe, especially to areas with large Hispanic populations. Africa is a market for the basic «survival» cookies, while luxury Spanish assortments are finding new fans in Japan, a country with little baking tradition.

«The increase in exports is the most positive trend I've seen in recent years», said Sr. Jerez, «Yet Spain is currently importing more than it exports. The cookie makers have to clearly understand that exports are essential, that it is a matter of life or death, and with this idea they can reach all the corners of the globe».

Deborah Luhrman was born and educated in the United States where she worked as a television news producer before moving to Spain in 1989. She is now a freelance journalist, writing about Spanish food, wine and travel for several publications.

Scarce resource.

Traditionally, choice and selectivity have always been key ingredients in the wines of Bodegas Montecillo. And traditionally, demand has always exceeded supply. Particulary so this year. We're presenting our 1985 vintage. A year the experts classify as «Very Good». Viña Monty 1985. SCARCE RESOURCE.

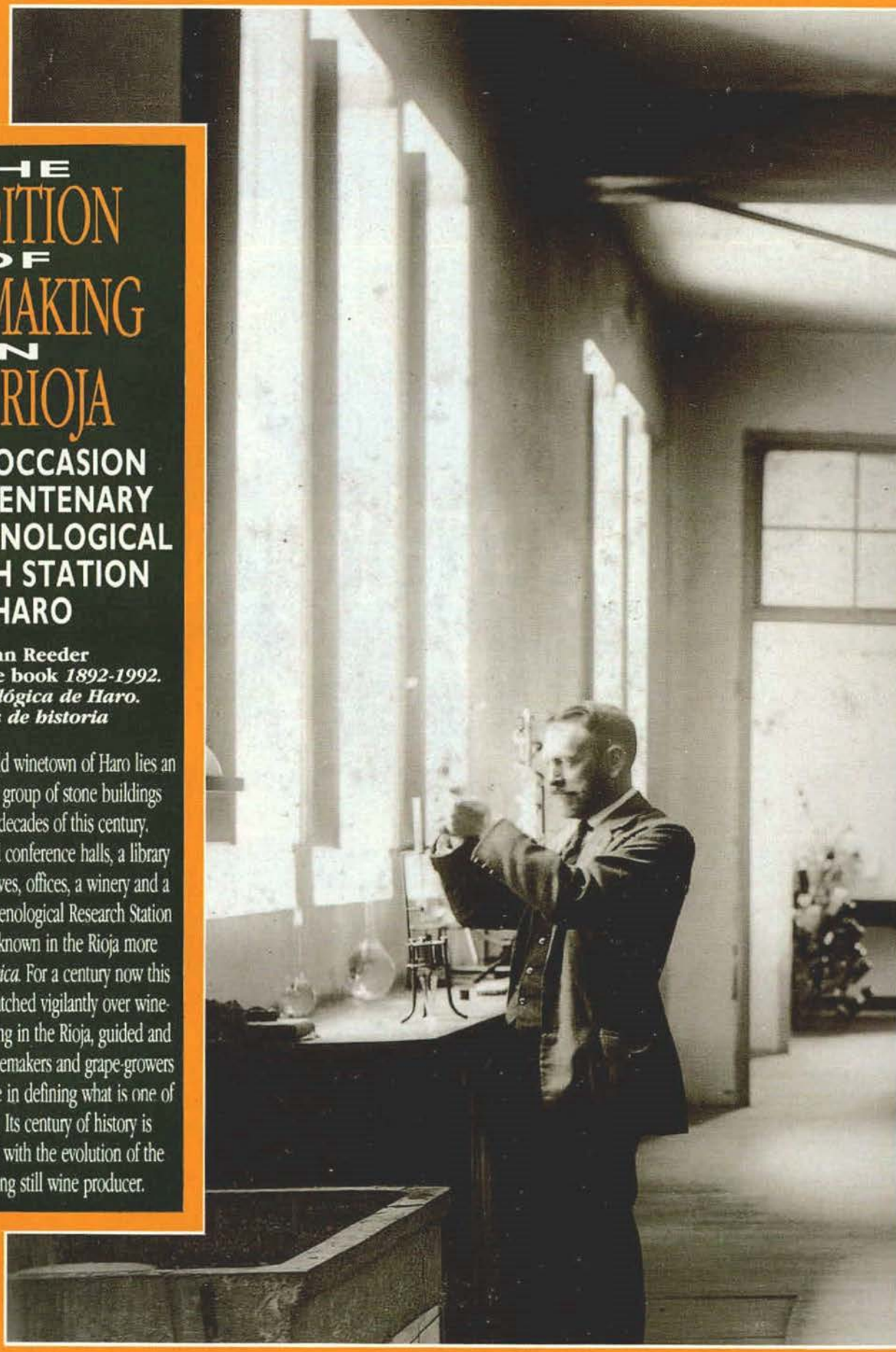
BODEGAS MONTECILLO.
THE PRIDE OF RIOJA.

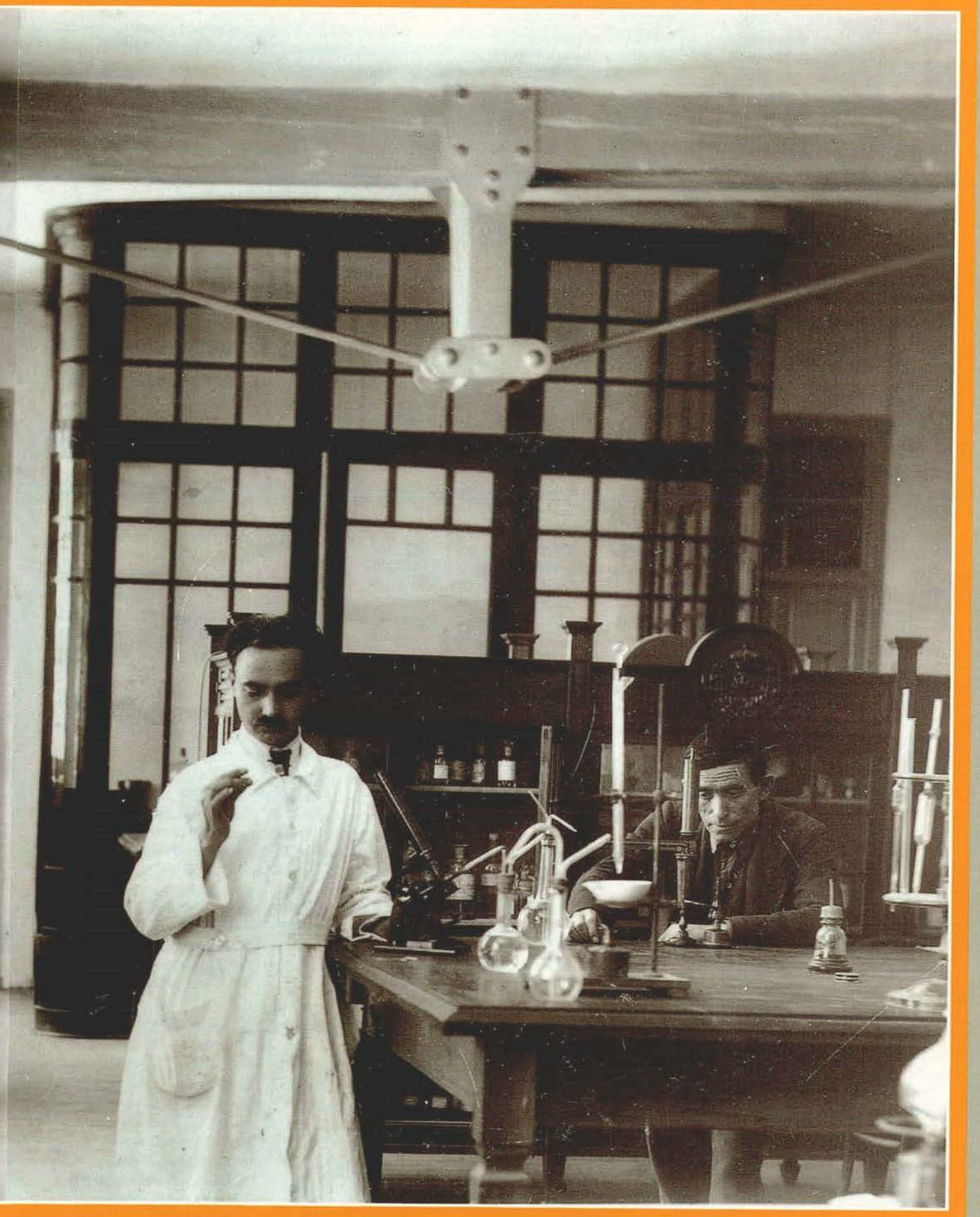
THE TRADITION OF WINEMAKING IN THE RIOJA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE OENOLOGICAL RESEARCH STATION AT HARO

Text: **John Reeder**
Photos: **From the book *1892-1992. Estación Enológica de Haro. Cien años de historia***

On the outskirts of the old winetown of Haro lies an elegantly proportioned group of stone buildings dating from the first decades of this century. Laboratories, lecture and conference halls, a library and reading room, archives, offices, a winery and a museum make up the Oenological Research Station (Estación Enológica), known in the Rioja more colloquially as *la Enológica*. For a century now this august institution has watched vigilantly over wine-making and grape-growing in the Rioja, guided and instructed the Rioja's winemakers and grape-growers and played a leading role in defining what is one of Europe's finest wines. Its century of history is inextricably intertwined with the evolution of the Rioja as Spain's leading still wine producer.





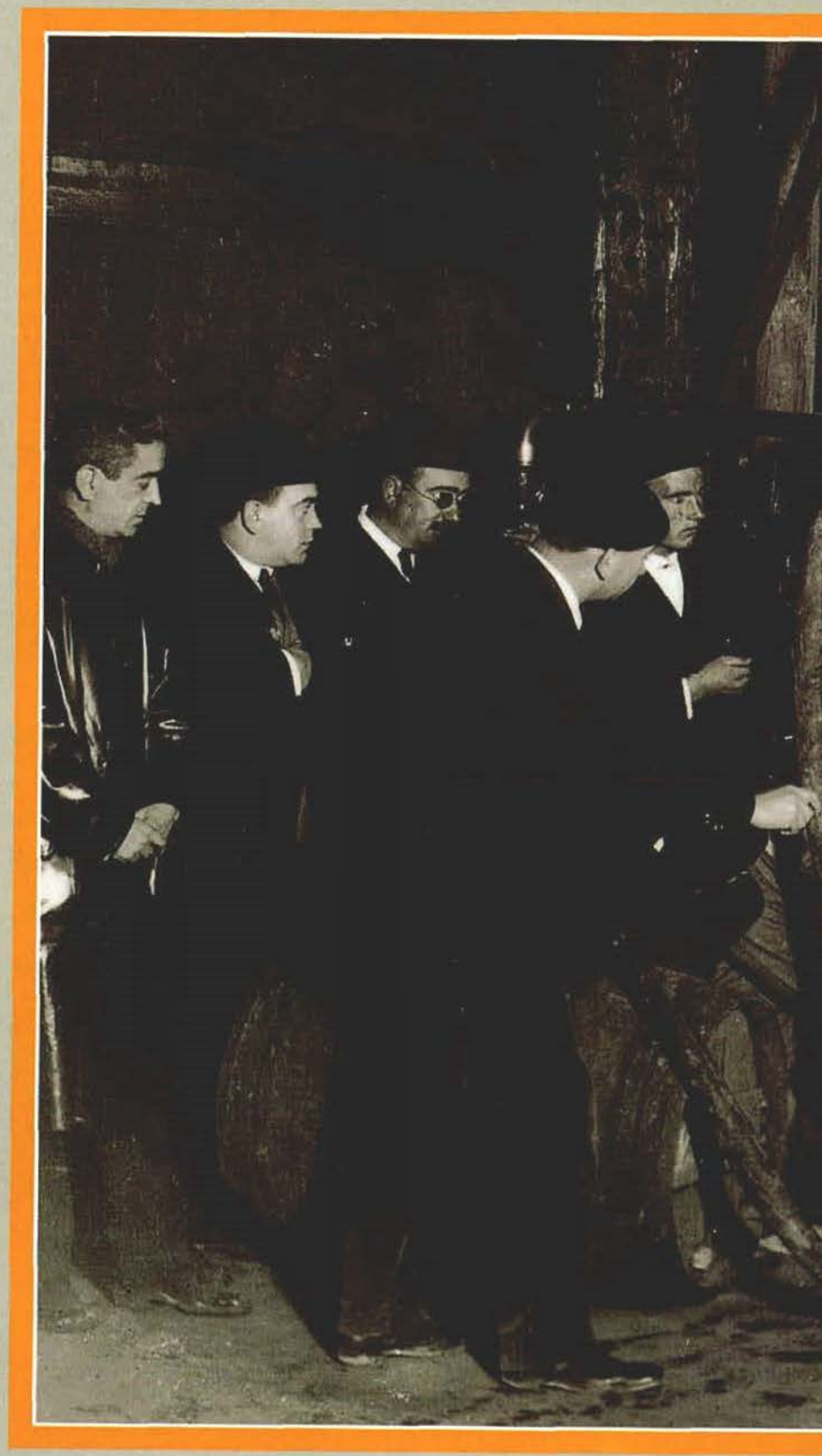
1892 did not of course mark the beginning of a tradition of fine wine-making in the Rioja, but rather a new departure, the start of a new, scientifically-based, more thoughtful and careful approach to the problems of growing noble grape varieties and making and maturing fine wines.

At this point, therefore, we should perhaps look back and trace what we might call the prehistory of the traditions of fine wine-making in the Rioja.

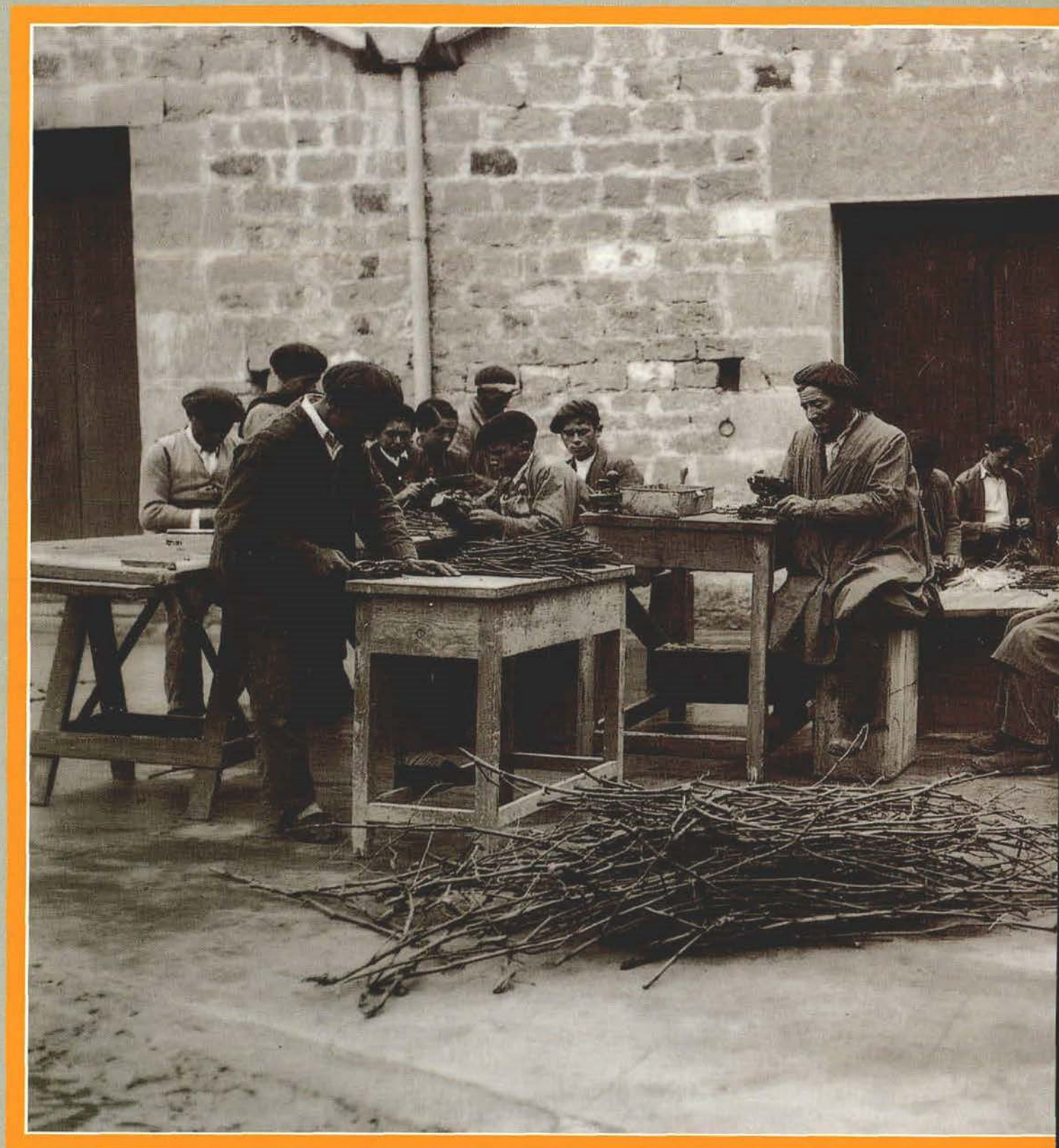
LEGIONARIES, MONKS AND PILGRIMS

The identity of who exactly first introduced the vine into Spain must forever remain a mystery —Phoenician merchant? Greek settlers? Who knows? We do know, however, that the Romans recognised the favourable local climatic and soil conditions of this part of the valley of the Ebro for wine-making because the remains of a sizeable first century Roman winery have recently been discovered a few miles from San Adrian in the Rioja Baja. With an estimated productive capacity of around 75.000 litres a year, its wine was probably destined to supply the legions locally based at Calahorra.

In the Middle Ages the Pilgrim's Way to the shrine of St. James in Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, that most important of medieval tourist routes, ran along the Ebro valley through the Rioja. Monasteries and travellers' hospices sprang up along the Way, together, we may be sure with a host of taverns and inns, all anxious to help the pilgrim slake his thirst with a little local wine. It has been plausibly suggested that the affinity which exists between the most important of the Rioja's noble black grape varieties, the *Tempranillo*, that grape which lends elegance and breeding to the Rioja's red *reservas*, and the Burgundian Pinot Noir, is the result of French Benedictine monks bringing from



By means of public lecture programmes, publications and discussion meetings, the Oenological Research Station carried out its task of dissemination of new perfected production methods amongst winemakers and grape-growers.



their native Burgundy their own grape varieties and planting them in their monastic vineyards in the Rioja.

By the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, with the decline of the monasteries and the waning of the popularity of the cult of St. James, the Rioja's wines were largely destined to be consumed either locally or in the adjoining Castilian and Basque provinces of Spain, in the cities of Burgos, Vitoria and Bilbao. What were these wines like? Probably unstable, highly variable, young wines for immediate consumption, kept and transported in wine-skins, mostly whites due presumably to the appeal to grape-growers of the higher yielding, less delicate white grape varieties. Famous locally was a claret, the *clarete de Rioxa*, a light red wine made by blending red wine in with the white to lend colour and body. Unpretentious wines, designed for local consumption.

At the end of the eighteenth century, two brothers, a retired infantry officer and a priest, Diego and Manuel Quintano from the Riojan town of Labastida, fascinated by recent developments in wine-making and barrel-ageing in Bordeaux, introduced from France the new techniques into the Rioja. In 1787, Manuel visited extensively wineries in the Bordeaux region and in a picturesquely entitled and eccentrically spelt little treatise, the *Recipe for making Bordeaux wine —Receta pa hazer el Bino de Bordeus*— set out the basics of the new French technology: oak barrel ageing, the periodic racking of the wine, the destalking of the grapes before pressing, the use of sulphur in fermentation. This first attempt at scientific wine-making was, however, destined not to take root. Although the brothers actually made wine according to the new Bordeaux canons and indeed exported it to Mexico, bureaucratic obstacles and, above all, the Peninsular War, put paid to their experiments. The transfer of technology from France was, however, to be an idea for the future.

After the phylloxera louse, the wholesale replanting of the vineyards took place and new grafting techniques were perfected with the support of the *Enológica*. In the photo, workers preparing pegs for grafting.

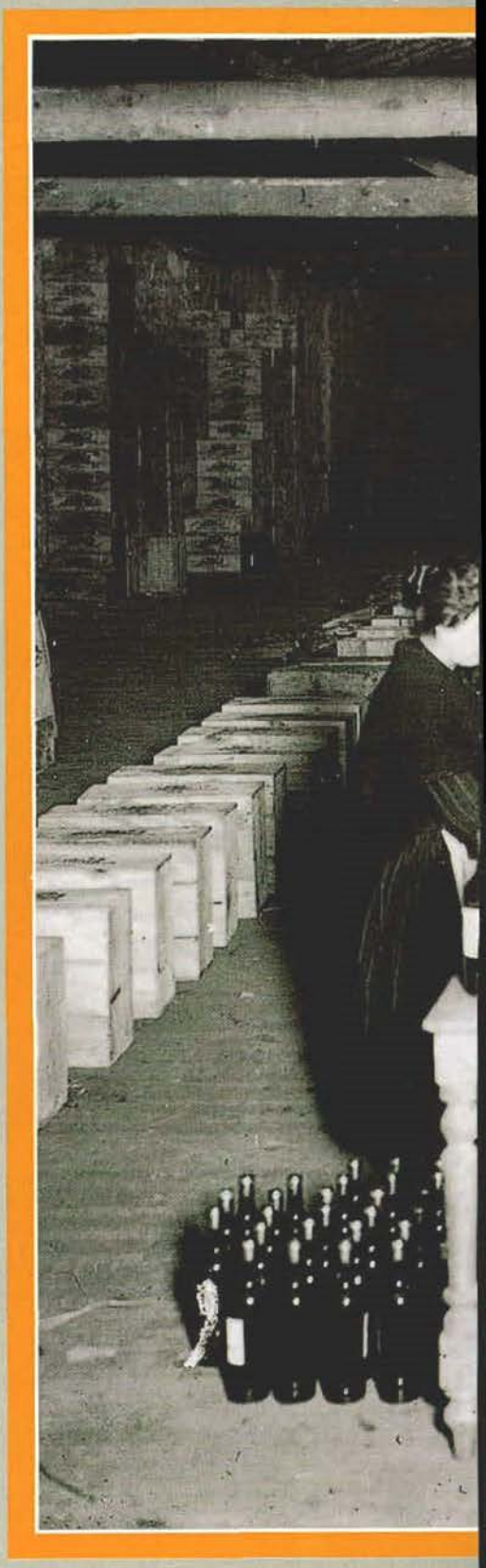
OIDIUM, PHYLLOXERA AND THE RAILWAYS

The true origins of the transformation of Rioja wines from relatively undistiguished young wines for immediate consumption into the meticulously made cask-matured vintage *reservas* of European fame we associate with the name Rioja today are to be found not in the worthy experiments of the Quintano brothers, but in three momentous and inter-related events which occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century: the outbreaks of those twin scourges of the vine, *oidium* and *phylloxera* in the vineyards of Bordeaux, the coming of the railways to the Rioja, and the setting up of the Oenological Research Station at Haro.

Between 1860 and 1880 in the Rioja, a region still largely dedicated to cereal production, the area under vine expanded by 40%. The reason is to be found in increasing exports of wines, principally to France. For many years the *Bordelais* had bought the dry red wines of the Rioja to be used in what they described as *coupage*, that is to say, to body out thin Bordeaux wines in years of poor vintage. Repeated outbreaks of *oidium*, a disease which affects vine leaves, between 1852 and 1862 had severely curtailed harvests in Bordeaux, forcing the great *négociants* to look for alternative suppliers of the red wines they needed for their domestic and export markets. They settled on the Rioja and a technology and capital transfer took place on a scale undreamt of by the Quintano brothers, which was to transform the region. More careful grapegrowing, grape selection and identification methods, more sophisticated winemaking techniques, *limousin* oak barrels, a massive influx of French capital and entrepreneurial skills, and access to wider French and European markets all followed on the arrival of the Bordeaux winemen. The appearance of the American vine louse, *Phylloxera vastatrix* in the Bordeaux vineyards in 1867 only served to accentuate the trend. Many of the classic Rioja bodegas can trace their origins to this golden age: Marqués de Riscal founded in 1860, Marqués de Murrieta in 1872, López Hereida in 1877, CVNE in 1879. The Rioja was thereafter to become synonymous with a specific style of wine, the dry red *reserva* wine aged in oak cask, in the style of pre-phylloxera Bordeaux, a tradition of wine-making which the Rioja was to maintain long after it had been abandoned by most Bordelais.

Looking northwards out from the Oenological Research Station over the valley of the Ebro, you can see the other station which has had such a profound influence on the Rioja —the railway station. The opening of the railway line linking in 1880, the Rioja with Burgos, the cities of Castile and Madrid meant access to larger domestic markets of consumers which were to prove so vital when the Rioja lost its key French export market at the turn of the century when the *Bordelais* withdrew and returned home. Around the railway station in Haro grew up the largest concentration of bodegas in the Rioja at the end of the nineteenth century: CVNE, Bilbaínas, La Rioja Alta, López Heredia, Franco-Españolas, Riojanas.

This remarkable period of prosperity —wine exports made up 40% of the total of all Spain's exports between 1879 and 1888— was to come to an end in the decade of the 1890s, precisely the moment of the setting up of Haro's Oenological Research Station. Thanks to imports of phylloxera-resistant American vine stocks on to which were grafted shoots of the indigenous local varieties, the Bordeaux vineyards had returned to full levels of production by the 1890s and the French winemakers and entrepreneurs withdrew *en mase* from the Rioja. Adding insult to injury, following a series of fine vintages in Bordeaux, the French government promptly imposed heavy tariffs on imported wines thus definitively curtailing any exports from Spain. At the same time 1899 was to see the



By the turn of the century only some bodegas bottled their wine. The usual way was to move the wine to its destination in large barrels. Afterwards, workers from the bodega would move there to bottle the wine.

long-dreaded arrival of the phylloxera vine louse in the vineyards of the Rioja.

THE 'ENOLOGICA'

The Oenological Research Station at Haro was born then in 1892, into difficult times for the Rioja, into a world of declining exports and the decapitalisation of the wine-producing firms. To give some idea of the depths to which the economic recession reached in the region at this time we have only to look at the fall in the market value of wine produced in the Rioja. Estimated at thirty million pesetas in 1890, by 1910 that figure had been reduced to around two and a half million pesetas.

Athough popularly known in the Rioja as the *Enológica*, the new Research Station during its early years was at least as much concerned with the problems of vine-growing as with and testing wine-making techniques. The years 1899 to 1912 were, of course, dedicated above all to coping with and finally eradicating the phylloxera louse, following which the *Enológica* played a major rôle between 1910 and the early 1920s in organising the massive replanting programme in the devastated vineyards of the Rioja.

Under the energetic leadership of its first director, Manso de Zúñiga, who was to hold the post for nearly thirty years, an ambitious programme of re-educating grape-growers was undertaken, new grafting techniques were perfected, and the wholesale replanting of the vineyards took place, without which the future prosperity of the Rioja as a major wine-producing area could not have been assured.

Paradoxically perhaps, the chief economic beneficiaries of the phylloxera were the larger bodegas. Replanting required capital which most small grape-growers / wine-producers —the so-called *cosecheros*— did not possess. Many smaller wine producers were therefore eliminated in the aftermath of the phylloxera leaving the market increasingly in the hands of the larger, established bodegas.

The 1920s saw the finishing off of the replanting programme —between 1909 and 1925 23,500 hectares of vineyard were replanted and the gradual stabilisation of the area under vine in the Rioja at around thirty-one thousand hectares took place. Wine prices, however, did not substantially recover in Spain during the 1920s and 30s, a reflection of the depressed nature of world agricultural prices —only in 1935 did the value of the country's agricultural produce manage to regain levels previously attained in 1890.

Interrupted by the hiatus of the Civil War of 1936-1939, the Second World War and the long period of Spain's international economic isolation, markets did not begin to properly recover until the end of the 1950s.

The Oenological Research Station carried out during these long years its dual task of research into wine-making techniques in close collaboration with the bodegas, and the dissemination of new perfected production methods amongst winemakers and grape-growers, by means of public lecture programmes, publications and discussion meetings. The laboratory, the public lecture hall, the published research paper or practical instruction manual, these are the tools with which the *Enológica* has through the years done its job. The great revival of Rioja wines, both on domestic and international markets, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, and their continuing prestige is the living testimony to how successfully that job was done.

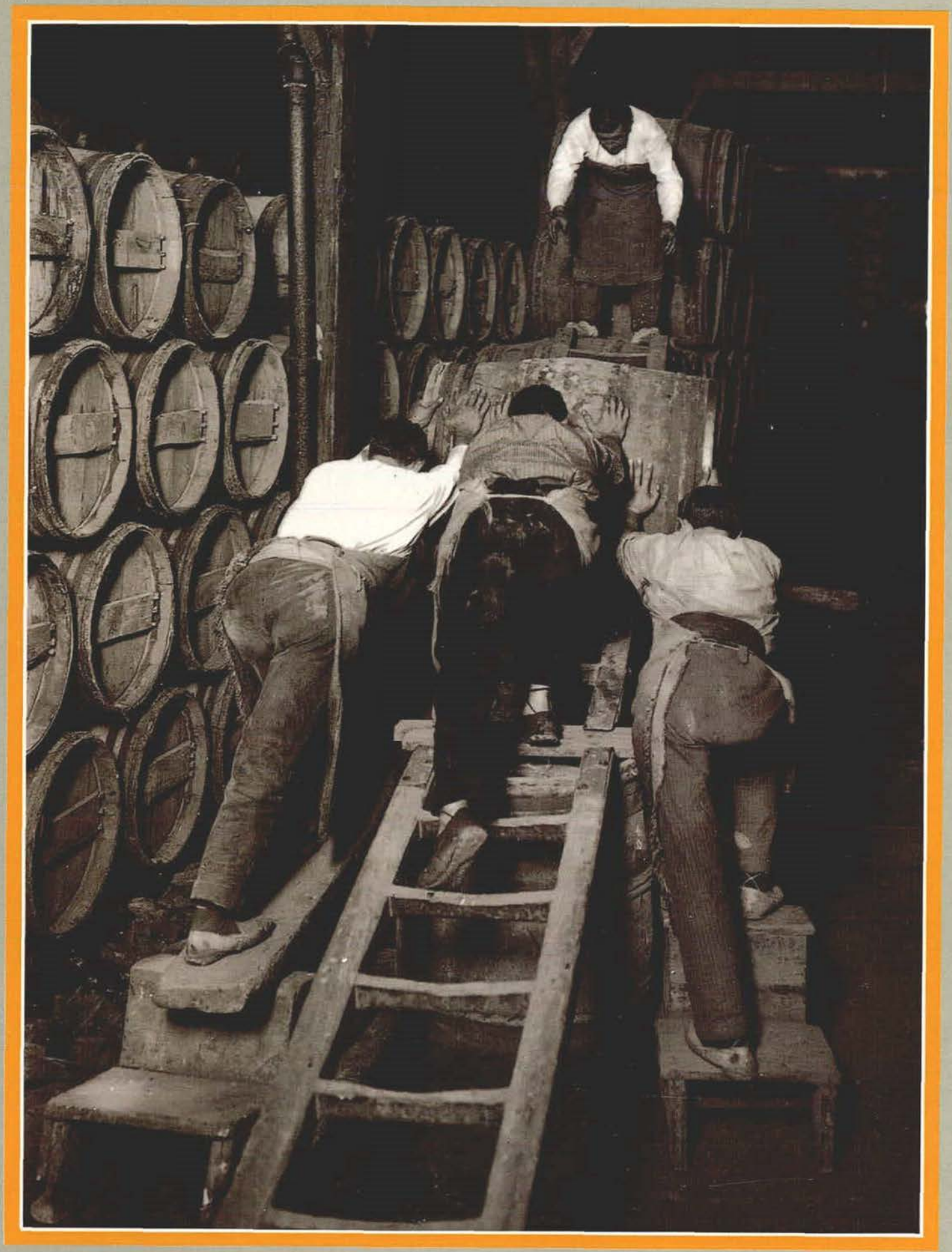
The complementary body in many ways to the *Enológica* is the *Consejo Regulador*, the regulatory council of the Rioja *Denominación de Origen* (Denomination of Origin). First established in 1926, it acts as the Rioja's watch-dog, set up to guarantee the authenticity and character of Rioja wine. The Oenological Research Station at Haro has played a key role in enforcing the strict code of regulations set out by the *Consejo Regulador* and today, apart from research and close co-operation with both wine-makers and grape-growers (see *Spain Gourmetour* no. 15) in resolving day-to-day technical problems, the principal task of the *Enológica* is constantly to analyse and test the wines of the Rioja to ensure that they come up to the extremely stringent requirements set out by these regulations, to make sure that when you open a bottle of Rioja, say a fine old red *gran reserva*, you can trust implicitly the description given on the label and back label.

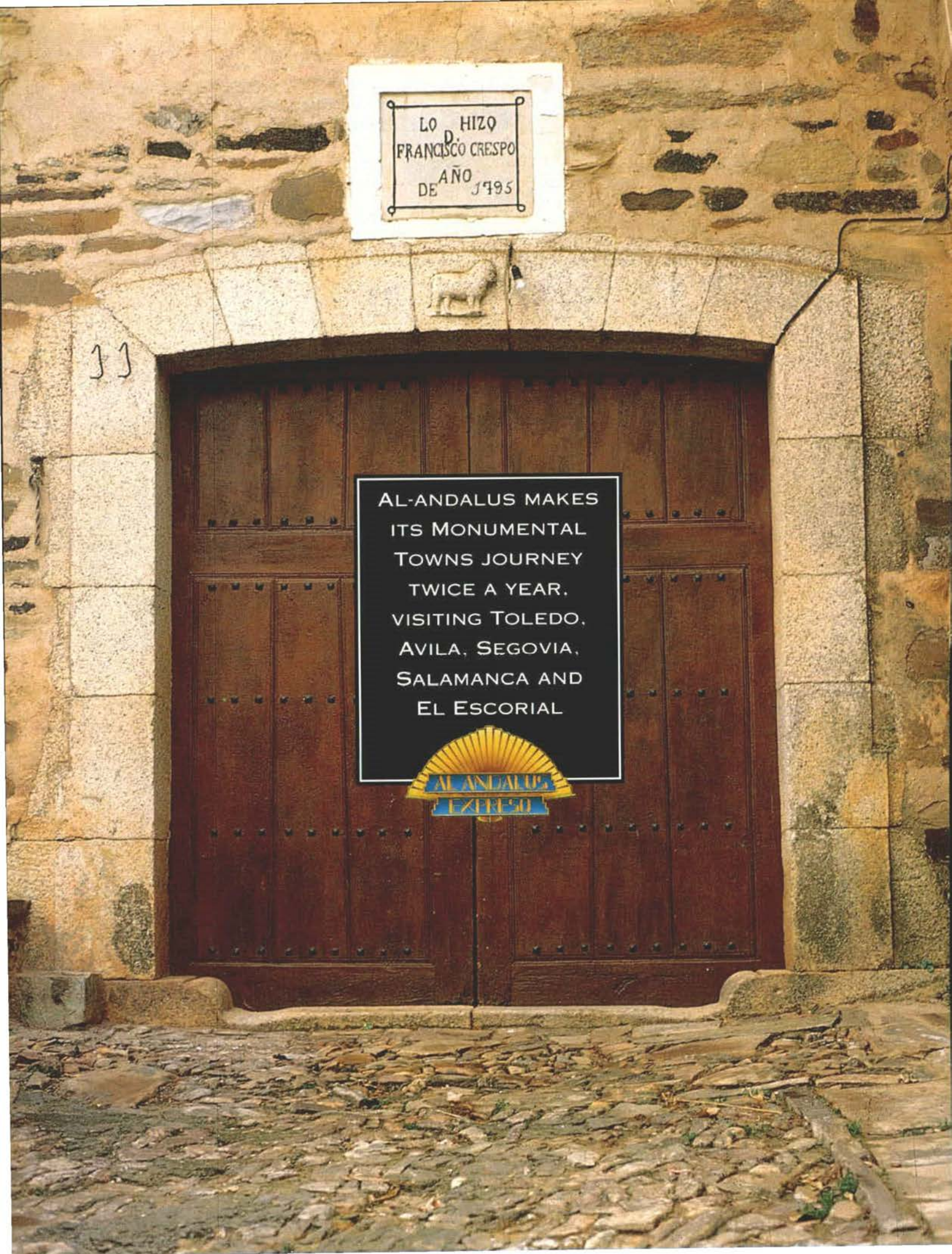
TODAY'S RESEARCH

It was mid-June and unusually for the Rioja at this time of year, it was raining quite heavily. The rain had been coming down now since late May and in Haro at the *Enológica* it was giving some cause for concern. Together with two oenologists we were discussing one of the Research Station's latest projects: how exactly ageing in the wood affects the wine. Trying to answer questions like what chemical substances does the wine absorb from the wood during cask-ageing? How does the wood modify the taste of the wine? What kinds of wood have differing effects or different kinds of wine? How important to these changes wrought by the wood on the wine are factors such as how the wooden barrel-staves are cut, whether barrels should be new, pre-cured or simply aged with the wine itself. We had got around to cask-aged white wines, their characteristics and the fraught question as to whether they would ever enjoy a return to favour when someone rang in to report a case of botrytis in a vineyard. The meteorological forecast was of continuing rain. On with the rubber boots. One more day's problems in a history reaching back a century.

John Reeder is a wine writer who has published in the most important English and Spanish wine journals. He is associate professor at the University of Madrid, where he lives.

Many smaller wine producers were eliminated in the aftermath of the phylloxera leaving the market increasingly in the hands of the larger, established bodegas.




LO HIZO
D. FRANCISCO CRESPO
AÑO
DE 1795
AL-ANDALUS MAKES
ITS MONUMENTAL
TOWNS JOURNEY
TWICE A YEAR,
VISITING TOLEDO,
AVILA, SEGOVIA,
SALAMANCA AND
EL ESCORIAL
AL ANDALUS
EXPRESS

Early morning, Chamartin Station in Madrid: the hustle and bustle of a major terminus, announcements over the loudspeakers, people running for trains... this is the scene to be found in any capital city, anywhere in the world.

Waiting quietly at a side platform is "Al Andalus", Spain´s luxury cruising train. The Andalusian Express is the pride and joy of RENFE, Spain´s national railway company. Meticulously restored carriages from the golden age of rail travel, the 1920s and 1930s, are linked with modern shower cars, galley, generator cars for the air conditioning and electric power, and the whole train is pulled by the latest diesel engines. "Al Andalus" is a happy combination of tradition and history with the technology and comforts of the 1990s. A journey on this train takes passengers into the historic past of Spain, while enjoying up-to-the-minute comfort and luxury.

Today, "Al Andalus" is being readied for its journey around the Monumental Towns near Madrid. On this early morning, chefs are already at work in the galley preparing the breakfast which will welcome its guests on board; room stewards are putting the final touches to the sleeping compartments - the soft towelling robes for each passenger, the toiletries, the flowers in each cabin. An at the reception desk, smartly uniformed hostesses await the passengers.

"Al Andalus" is ideally suited for small business groups. Whether companies choose to reward their top executives on an incentive trip, or to select the train as an unusual -but effective- venue for small, high level conferences or board meetings, they find the atmosphere highly conducive to creating a close social or business ambiance.

"Al Andalus" can accommodate 80 passengers, in double compartments with wash-basin and vanity in each, or in luxurious double suites each with its own shower, toilet and basin. Its two restaurant cars, spacious bar car and the quiet club car, offer plenty of space for the wining and dining which is so much a part of the "Al Andalus" experience, along with the pre-dinner cocktail hour, and the lively late evening entertainment -or the peaceful reading, card-playing, or gazing out of the window that are also part of a train journey. Incentive groups, top producing executives with their wives -or husbands!- could hardly enjoy a more congenial atmosphere.

"Al Andalus" can be chartered for large groups, or can accommodate smaller groups on its normal itineraries.

The train moves out towards El Escorial, on this itinerary, where experienced guides take passengers for a tour of this splendid palace. Rolling on towards Avila, lunch is served - a superb feast of Spanish specialities, accompanied by the fine wines of the region. A walk around the fortified city of Avila is the highlight of the afternoon before "Al Andalus" turns towards Salamanca.

For incentive groups, relaxing on board the train is the order for the day; for those who are there for conferences or board meetings, the participants will probably make themselves comfortable in the "Medina Azahara" car. This elegant, club-like carriage has small, leather-topped tables and comfortable chairs for small group discussions; at the far end of the carriage, theatre-style seating, with a television/video screen makes an ideal location for small meetings and audio/visual presentations. Before long, it will be time for a glass of chilled "fino", and contemplation of the fine cuisine which will be served in the "Alhambra" and "Gibralfaro" dining cars. Here, seated at tables for two or four, meetings can continue - but it´s more likely that the atmosphere will lead to more social conversations, even to more romantic conversations... and after dinner, when the music begins in the "Giralda" bar car, relaxation, dancing and singing may go on till the small hours.

A JOURNEY ON AL-ANDALUS TAKES PASSENGERS INTO THE HISTORIC PAST OF SPAIN, WHILE ENJOYING UP-TO-MINUTE CONFORT AND LUXURY

And this is just Day One of the Monumental Towns journey: on the second day, a visit to Salamanca, Spain's university city, will enthrall the passengers. For those on incentive or business trips, a private lunch can be organised in this charming town, perhaps in a typical Spanish restaurant or tapas bar, before "Al Andalus" travels on towards Segovia.

Overnight stops enable passengers on board the "Al Andalus" to sleep peacefully in their compartments; the two shower cars on the train, each with a high-powered hot shower, dressing room, power points and toiletries, and serviced by a staff of attendants, add to the comfort of a journey on the Andalusian Express.

Segovia and Toledo are on the programme for Day Three of "Al Andalus" journey around the Monumental Towns; all passengers are taken on fascinating walking tours around these cities by multilingual, knowledgeable guides.

On board the train once again for dinner, group organisers may like to arrange "something special" with the chef. With advance notice, the chefs on "Al Andalus" can create special menus, perhaps with selected wines to complement the choice; a fitting last night aboard the train before the final day´s journey via Toledo en route to Madrid.

As a venue for incentive, business or social groups, "Al Andalus" can offer something very special. The atmosphere on board this extraordinary train creates a warm feeling of sharing and enjoying a unique experience; group organisers realise that by keeping their party together, closer relationships between those who work together can develop, to the benefit of their company.

"Al Andalus" makes its Monumental Towns journey twice in 1992, and will repeat it in early 1993. Other journeys cover Andalusia, visiting Seville, Cordoba, Granada and Ronda, linked with Spain´s new high speed train on the Madrid/Seville/Madrid sectors; and in 1993, the train will follow the Way of St. James, between Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela, during the high summer months, and will introduce a new Wines Tour across the far north of Spain, during July.

EXCALIBUR HOLIDAYS OF DISTINCTION (61b Seamoor Road, Westbourne, Bournemouth BH4 9AE, England - tel: 0202 751844) is the general sales agent for "Al Andalus", and will also tailor-make detailed itineraries in Spain incorporating a journey on the train.

SEGURA DE LA SIERRA

RENAISSANCE AMONG THE OLIVE GROVES

Text & photos: **Diego Díaz/ICEX**

So far, this series about Spain's relatively undiscovered treasures, little towns and villages off the beaten tourist track, has concentrated on the north. There, the slate, ochre and grey of the buildings match the landscape, combining to produce the austere kind of beauty typical of this hillier, more restrained part of the country. We now head south for a complete change of scene, in which bright whitewash is the dominant note.

We're off to Andalusia, though not to the wine-drinking, bull-fighting, flamenco-dancing Andalusia that so many foreigners mistakenly believe to be the «real» Spain. Not only is it not the real Spain, it is only part of the real Andalusia. This is a vast region of many internal contrasts: up in the mountains, for example, the lifestyle is far more rigorous than down on the coast. Our destination is Segura de la Sierra, which refuses to fit into any stereotype. A border town, it strikes a happy balance between the severity of Castile and Andalusian *alegría*.

Visitors to Segura cannot help noticing a certain neatness and harmony about it, two qualities which —let's be honest— are not all that common in Spain. The town stands perfectly poised on a crag, like a falcon on a mountain peak, its white wings spread over the rocks on which it stands. Its beak is a battle-scarred castle, its plumage white-washed houses, and its breast is adorned with noble escutcheons. For this is no ordinary little town: it was once a kingdom, and its walls bear witness to a rich artistic heritage. There are survivals from the Renaissance around every corner, and such is the elegance wherever you look, that you begin to feel like an aristocrat yourself.

My advice is just to explore the town at random, enjoying the flower-filled patios from which cats stare out at you; looking up at the sound of voices to witness a balcony-to-balcony conversation between neighbours, responding to the «*Buenos días*» of the tiny dark-haired housewife busily sweeping not only her doorstep but the whole patch of road in front of her house — there are no pavements here.

Up on her high throne, Segura is queen of all she surveys. You can see for miles around, and nothing can approach without being spotted from this stronghold built on an eminence as a classic defensive strategy. It is a quiet town uninvaded by coaches, campsites, sunshades or big hotels. There are no abandoned houses and no building

sites. The people seem to be happy as, and where, they are. From the heights of Onte Yelmo, one can somehow feel that the Mediterranean is down there somewhere, yet at the same time the dry climate and clean-sweeping winds remind us firmly that we are in mountain territory.

On this trip, the town of Segura was just one of our reasons for visiting the area. There was also the Sierra de Cazorla National Park, the biggest in Spain and officially declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. And, indeed, other equally fascinating towns such as Hornos and Cazorla. Not to mention the excellent local food. As we drove back to Madrid, a hallowed silence reigned in the car: that's how delightful this visit turned out to be. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

UPS AND DOWNS

In steeply sloping Segura, you're always going either up or down. We started off upwards. Puffing slightly, we passed through the Puerta Nueva, an originally Gothic arch which leads into the town. We decided to look for someone to show us round, and found just the person —«Señor Miguel», Justice of the Peace— in the Town Hall. Miguel opened up the church and came round it with us. The outside is as it should be, but the interior was completely destroyed when it was set on fire by Napoleon's troops during the Peninsular War, and had to be completely rebuilt. It is still well worth a visit, though: there is an exquisite Gothic alabaster figure of the Virgin Mary and another lovely figure of the recumbent Christ. We accompanied Miguel up the bell-tower, still blackened by the historic fire, where he wound the church clock.

Having enjoyed a bird's-eye view of the whole town, we followed Miguel's instructions and headed for the bar where the key to the castle is kept. You are loaned the key in exchange for your passport as a deposit — an ingeniously simple but foolproof system. And it allows you the thrill of actually handling the enormous iron key and opening the vast door, like a medieval knight entering his fortress. That's the sort of simple but inimitable thrill that only little towns such as this can provide.

The Christian castle was built in the 10C on the site of an earlier Arab fortress. Though its sober solidity makes few concessions to aesthetics, it nevertheless emanates a certain proud, severe beauty. The view from the battlements of the keep is panoramic, taking in mountain ranges, neighbouring villages, and geometrically laid-out olive groves which stretch as far as the eye can see. Few could better the description which has come down to us from Arab politician and poet Ibn Ammar, who describes this stronghold as «such a high place that, if it dared, the heart could use it as a stepping-stone to the clouds». If you focus your eyes keenly, you can make out a sequence of towers strung out along the valley. They are Arab *alcazabas*, or watch towers, which, centuries ago, served the function of the modern telegraph. Sentries posted in them would light torches to warn the castle of approaching enemy —Christian— troops.

We went back to the bar. They also keep the keys to the Arab baths there. Though the baths are well preserved, they are of more anthropological than artistic interest.

The view from the keep of the castle is panoramic, taking in mountain ranges, neighbouring villages, and geometrically laid-out olive groves which stretch as far as the eye can see.

Give your imagination free rein, and imagine what they must have been like in the days when bodily cleansing was a collective practice and the baths were a social centre where people went for company, conversation and general cossetting.

Though the steam has long since dried out their ancient walls, the street that leads to the baths is the loveliest in Segura so they still provide a spiritual, if not a bodily, balm. The street is called Caballeros Santiaguistas (Knights of St. James), and its many fine features include a couple of Renaissance façades, the typically Arab medieval street itself, and —best of all— the Cavalcavia Arch, halfway along the street, through which one glimpses Monte Yelmo Magnificent.

On our way back, we stopped for a drink at the Imperial Fountain of Charles V (dating from 1511, and in the elaborately decorative Plateresque style) while its gargoyles looked on enigmatically. To round off our exploration, we walked up Calle Maestre Don Rodrigo. Among its several Renaissance houses is one in a particularly attractive setting, the former home of Rodrigo Manrique, father of Jorge Manrique (1440-1479) one of Spain's great classical poets. The death of Don Rodrigo inspired the poet's masterpiece, an elegy charged with nostalgia and melancholy which reflects on the hopelessness of human aspirations, the brevity of life and the way in which «it always seems to us that the best is in the past». On that retrospective note, now for some of the history of Segura de la Sierra.

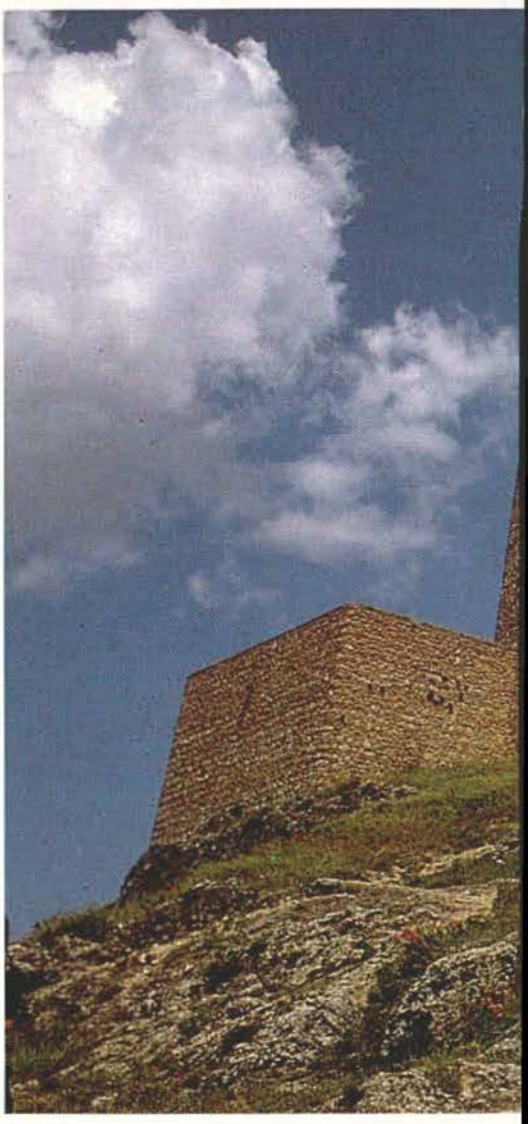
SWINGS OF FORTUNE

In the course of its history, Segura has been known by various names, all of which make some reference to its singular location. The Phoenicians, its founders, called it *Tavara* («high place»); the Greeks *Orospeda* («hill that has to be climbed on foot»); and for the Romans it was *Castrum Altum* («high fortress»). Segura earned its place in the history books under the Romans, who established several colonies in these highlands and mined their seams of silver.

A major event of the Second Punic War between the Romans and Carthaginians took place here, when Roman generals Publius and Gnaeus Scipio died at the hands of Hasdrubal of the Carthaginian cavalry. Publius was run through by a lance and Gnaeus was burned to death inside a tower when he refused to surrender. The local people allied themselves with the victorious Carthaginians, offering false refuge to fleeing Roman soldiers and then killing them. However, the Carthaginian victory was short-lived, and the Romans emerged the ultimate victors when Publius Cornelius Scipio avenged the death of both his father and uncle and laid these territories to waste. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Segura was occupied by the Visigoths (a period of little relevance here) and resisted invasion by the Muslims until 781. It was as part of the Arab dominions, however, that it was to reach its peak of importance.

In a rebellion against Abderraman I, Caliph of Cordoba, the Arab *wali,* or governor, of Segura, Abul Asward, was defeated

***Segura de la Sierra is a quiet town, uninvaded by cars, campsites, sunshades or big hotels. A border town, it strikes a happy balance between the severity of Castile and Andalusian* alegría.**



The Imperial Fountain of Charles V (right), in the elaborately decorative Plateresque style, dates from 1511. The Christian castle (below) was built in the 10C on the site of an earlier Arab fortress. It emanates a certain proud, severe beauty.

and subsequently imprisoned. On being taken out for a walk in the sunshine after eighteen years in a dark dungeon, he pretended to have gone blind. From then on, guards relaxed their vigilance and the cunning Abul eventually managed to escape. He again waged war in an attempt to seize power but was again defeated, this time with fatal consequences.

In 904, Segura was taken over by another Arab clan, the Almoravids, who had entered the Iberian Peninsula to take part in the Muslim war against the Christians. They established the independent emirate of Murcia, and Segura became one of the key strongholds of this new state. In 1171, Ibrahim, governor of Murcia, rebelled against the emir and founded his own kingdom in Segura.

Its independence was short-lived, however. Internal strife reduced its capacity to repel the advance of the Castilian troops, and the kingdom fell in 1214 to the Order of Santiago, an organization created originally to provide protection for pilgrims along the route to Santiago de Compostela, but which had evolved into a powerful

army. The town was granted many privileges as an incentive to repopulation by Christian settlers after it had been «cleansed of Mohammedans», as the Decree states. But the Black Death epidemic of the 14C was to impoverish the *sierra* (the highlands), and depopulate it still further.

Fortunately, better times were to come. Sheep-breeding flourished in Castile, and with it the practice of transhumance, the seasonal moving of flocks to new pastures. The unused land around sparsely populated Segura provided excellent grazing, and the local people found employment as shepherds. The area's huge, uninhabited woodlands became its second source of wealth. Particularly after the Discovery of America, the Spanish Empire was in constant need of timber in large quantities for naval ship-building.

Segura took full advantage of this period of prosperity, which is why it is so rich in artistic treasures dating from the 16C. But the sierra's resources were exploited to the point of exhaustion, especially after 1748 when this inland region was, amazingly, declared a «maritime province». This gave the Naval Ministry the right to wrest control of the region's resources from its local authorities and private individuals in the «national interest». The profits from the mindless over-exploitation that ensued were certainly not enjoyed by the local people, now reduced to working as *gancheros* (loggers who worked from fragile rafts wielding hooks to keep felled trunks moving freely down-river) or woodcutters.

This was the beginning of a long period of decline, exacerbated still further by an appalling event which qualifies as one of history's dirty tricks. Segura had long prided itself on the fact that during the hostilities in the 16C between Emperor Charles V and France, it was a local man, Rodríguez de Quesada, who had taken François I prisoner. When Napoleon's troops invaded Spain in the early 19C, they took their revenge. Segura put up stout resistance, but paid a high price for it. The French were implacable. In 1810, they sacked the town and destroyed, among other treasures, its archives and documents. The town's historical records went up in smoke, lost forever along with the lives of many of its defenders.

The Spanish Empire was in ruins. Spain became a backward, impoverished and uncultivated country. In Segura, livestock now provided bare subsistence and its woodlands were used only to provide locals with firewood. Its geographical location, so advantageous in earlier periods, now became a handicap.

In the course of its history, Segura has come under different influences. It was as part of the Arab dominions, however, that it was to reach its peak of importance, and the town still shows in its streets the Arab influences.

By the turn of this century, the Sierra de Segura area was an isolated backwater with record levels of illiteracy and poverty. Even so, the long dark years of isolation can be thanked for the fact that the area is so unspoiled today, and therefore attracts only the sort of visitors likely to respect its natural environment. Its woodlands were given time to recover from the despoliation and are now back to their former glory. It is interesting to observe —and this is perhaps a universally applicable principle— how periods of crisis often create the conditions needed for recovery, and vice versa.

PARADISE LOST

From Segura, we made for Hornos, a little village high on a rocky outcrop which juts, island-like, from the plain around it. Seen from the road, it looks like a rocky pedestal placed in the middle of the valley, its little white houses like a crown resting on a stone cushion. But despite its undeniably spectacular location, Hornos's past is not as glorious as Segura's, a fact that its relative lack of artistic heritage reflects.

After lunch in Hornos, we headed for the National Park. A little road takes one to the dam across the Tranco Reservoir. The dam is at the gate to the park, manned by official staff who monitor vehicles entering. They make a note of

EL CORTIJO DE RAMON OLIVARES

As usual in this series, I am dealing with the subject of food separately. This time, my recommended restaurant is very much out of the ordinary. To get there, you take the road from Segura to Sierra de Cazorla National Park as far as a place called Cortijo Nuevo. There, you take the little road which leads up the Beas to Segura. An unsurfaced turn-off about 3 km along this road leads to the Cortijo de Ramón Olivares. A *cortijo* is a farmhouse, and that's just what this is, right in the heart of the country. It's the home of Clementa Fernández.

Mrs. Fernández and her children have cleverly realised the appeal of their little white house, the cool shade under the trees around it, the marvellous view and Clementa's excellent cooking. Clementa isn't yet used to dealing with journalists. When we were introduced (she was flanked by her sons, who run the business side), her face betrayed a mixture of suspicion and pleasure. She was clearly uncomfortable in the limelight.

The Cortijo's formula is simple but effective. The menu concentrates on just a few regional specialities, which she cooks divinely, and the restaurant consists of a few tables set out under the trees.

We called there out of season, and the restaurant was closed, so were lucky enough to eat with the family. This meant that we couldn't sample all her specialities, but we agreed on *gachas-migas,* which was superb (see recipe). However, the original and highly delicious chocolate croquettes she served us for dessert remain a Fernández exclusive. Clementa's lips were sealed on the subject of the recipe. It seems fair enough. No one else could make them as well as she does, anyway.

RECIPE

Potato cake
(Gachas-migas)

Serves 4:

1/2 kg potatoes
olive oil for frying
1 egg
150 g flour
1 l water
1 tbsp milk
1 tbsp virgin olive oil
salt

Slice the peeled potatoes into rings and fry gently in olive oil. Mix the beaten egg and the flour together in a large bowl, them beat in the water, milk and olive oil. Pour the mixture over the potatoes in the pan and cook over a medium heat until it sets — the potato cake shouldn't be runny, but not dry or burned either. It is served with fried chorizo sausage and black pudding (blood sausage), and fried peppers, and with slices of cucumber and melon and a few grapes on the side to refresh the palate.

Clementa Fernández runs the "Cortijo de Ramón Olivares" with a simple, but effective formula. The menu concentrates on just a few regional specialities, which she cooks divinely.

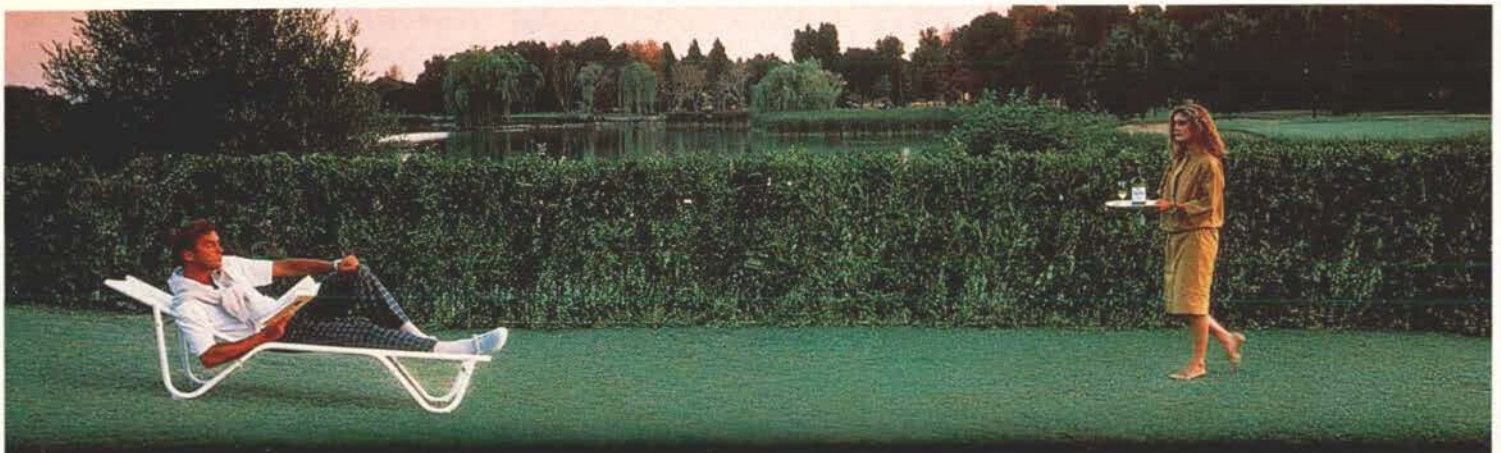
your car licence number and ask if you are staying overnight. If you are, they provide useful information. There is excellent accommodation of all sorts within the park, ranging from a beautifully situated National Parador and attractive, welcoming hotels in the upper-middle bracket, to bungalows and well equipped camp-sites for tents and caravans.

The road follows a discreet route through the vast, 215,000 hectare park. Otherwise, there are only unsurfaced tracks along which to explore one of Europe's biggest natural woodland reserves. Since the height above sea level within the park ranges from 650 m (ft) to 2,000 m (ft) at the highest points, it encompasses many different types of landscape and climate. And two of Spain's principal rivers, the Segura and the Guadalquivir, have their sources there.

As you would expect, the park is rich in wildlife. Hunters and fishermen love it. There are five larger game species, all in considerable numbers: red deer, fallow deer, mountain goat, moufflon (wild mountain sheep), and wild boar. Most of the rivers are good for trout, while the reservoir has barbel, bogue, cachuelo and black bass.

Visitors who are content to spot wildlife, as opposed to setting about it with rod or gun, can expect to see, in addition to the species mentioned above, squirrels, various animals and birds of prey, over a hundred bird species, and what many consider to be Europe's most beautiful butterfly, the *Graëllsia Ysabelae.* Habitués of the park recommended a visit in late summer during the deer mating season: hearing the stag belling at nightfall is apparently an unforgettable experience.

For landscape artists and botanists, this densely wooded park is an inexhaustible source of inspiration. As is usual in Mediterranean countries, the predominant species of tree is the pine, but the full range ot its flora embraces 1,300 species in all, many of them endemic and including the Cazorla violet, a relic of the Tertiary Period.



The world's most civilized aperitif.

La Ina
DOMECQ

Particular beauty spots? My favourites include La Cañada de las Fuentes (where the Guadalquivir begins), and the source of the River Mundo, just outside the park. But if you follow the course of any of the many rivers and streams, you are guaranteed to come upon picturesque gorges and waterfalls. Another favourite is the Laguna de Vadeazores. And then there's a magical island in the Tranco Reservoir, inhabited by deer and with a ghostly ruined castle.

All in all, it's a little piece of Paradise Lost.

After the Discovery of America, Segura lived a period of prosperity thanks to its woodlands which supplied timber for naval ship-building. That is why Segura is so rich in artistic treasures from the 16C.

GUIDELINES

Gastronomy: As well as *gachas-migas*, be sure to try *galianos* (puff pastry pies filled with hare, partridge and wild mushrooms), and *talarines*, which are similar.

Trout, game and garlic-based dishes are generally excellent throughout the area.

This is not wine-growing territory. Choose the best you can find from other regions of Spain.

In Hornos, the game dishes at Restaurante Raisa are highly recommended.

El Cortijo de Ramón Olivares, being so tucked away, opens only during the «season». Check by telephone first: 53 - 496236.

Sierra de Cazorla National Park: For information about hunting and fishing licences, campsites, etc., call 53 - 720102.

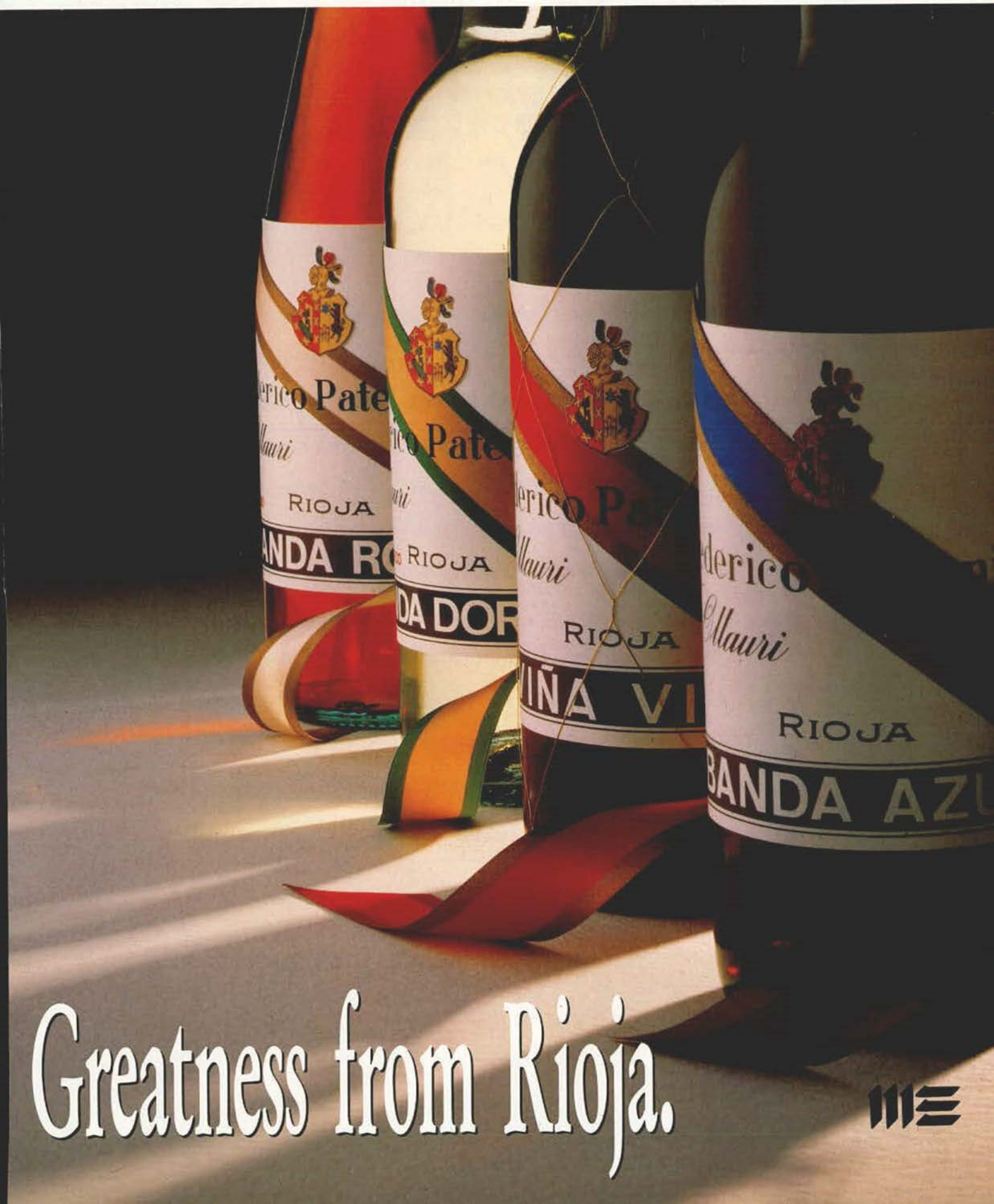
Best buys: Superb virgin olive oil, excellent for salads.

Accommodation: In Puente Génave: Hotel Sierra Segura (excellent). In Orcera: La Montería (OK). In Segura: Hostal de Santo Domingo — a Renaissance house. (Modest accommodation, but reportedly good food.) Within the National Park: El Adelantado National Parador: (The perfect place to stay, though we didn't manage it. It has only a few rooms, so you need to book in advance: 53 - 721075.)

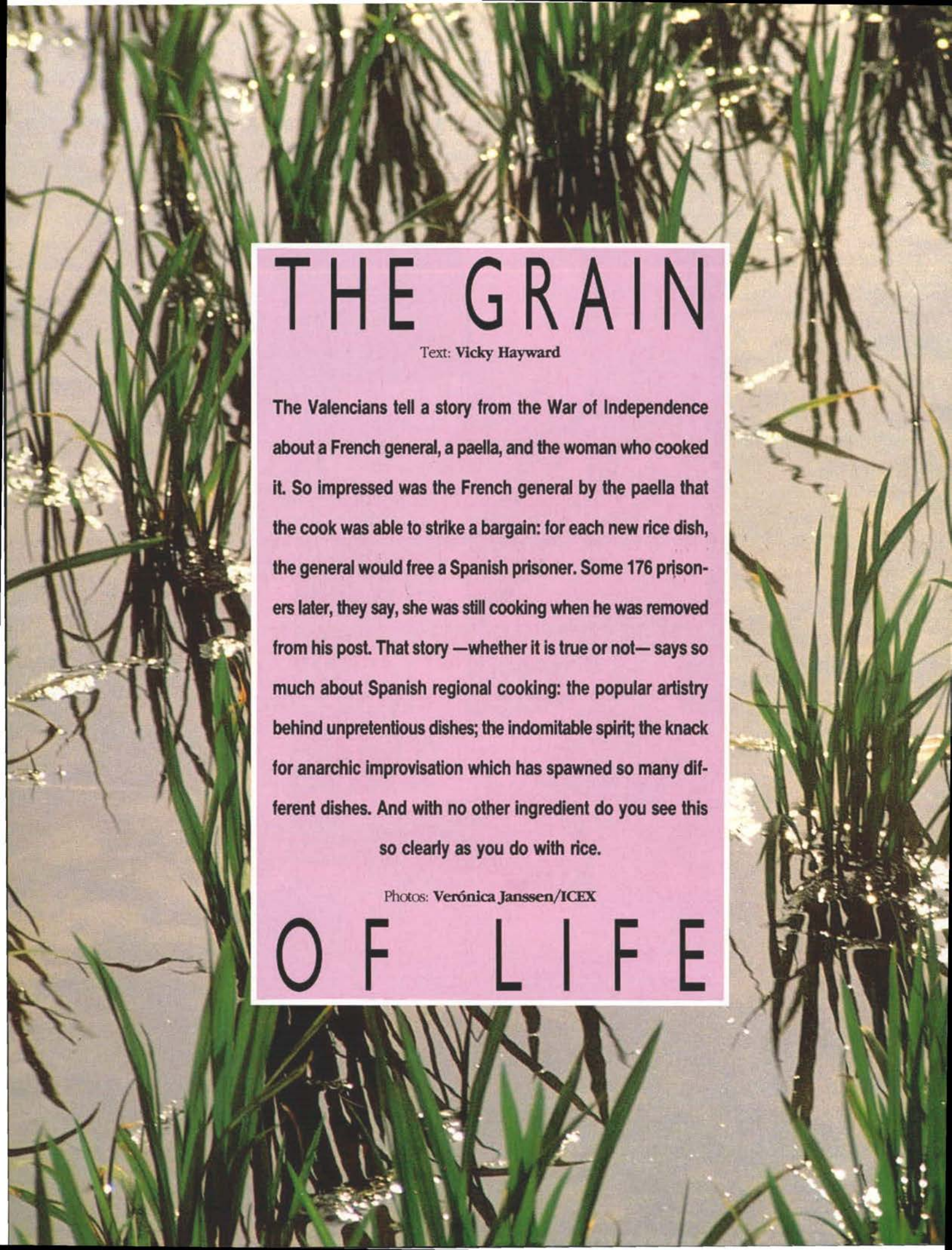
Getting there: A car is essential for this trip. You have to travel considerable distances, and alternative means of transport are few and far between. If you are driving from Madrid, take the route via Ciudad Real.

When to go: My golden rule is to avoid the high season, particularly August. June and September are good months. The rest of the year, you run the risk of finding lots of places closed, though the Park is open all the year round as it attracts more visitors. There again, try to avoid high summer. Even so, this region is never over-run by tourists.

Paternina



Greatness from Rioja.



THE GRAIN OF LIFE

Text: **Vicky Hayward**

The Valencians tell a story from the War of Independence about a French general, a paella, and the woman who cooked it. So impressed was the French general by the paella that the cook was able to strike a bargain: for each new rice dish, the general would free a Spanish prisoner. Some 176 prisoners later, they say, she was still cooking when he was removed from his post. That story —whether it is true or not— says so much about Spanish regional cooking: the popular artistry behind unpretentious dishes; the indomitable spirit; the knack for anarchic improvisation which has spawned so many different dishes. And with no other ingredient do you see this so clearly as you do with rice.

Photos: **Verónica Janssen/ICEX**

As with so many of the food plants that took root in Spain through the Arabs, rice —like its name *arroz*, from the Indian Dravidic *arruzz*— has a much longer history in the east.

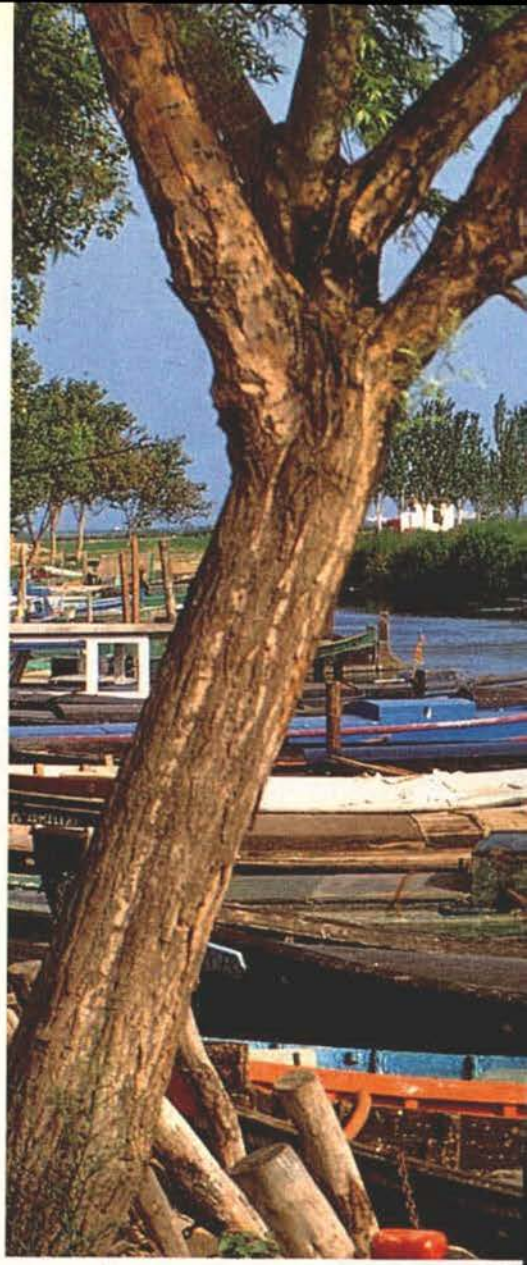
Gathered from the wild in the river deltas of south-east Asia, rice was first cultivated around the year 3,000 BC. From there, its planting travelled south and west to India, where it was used as a fertility symbol in religious ceremonies —hence the custom of throwing rice over newly-weds— and then to the Mediterranean with Alexander the Great. Here it remained an exotic, used by the Greeks and Romans for medicinal waters and milks similar to those drunk in Valencia today.

It is thought that the Byzantines brought rice seed to Iberia, but it was the Moslem Arab conquerors of the 8C who first seriously planted it as a food crop. Highly skilled in intensive agriculture, they expanded existing Roman irrigation systems into finely-tuned networks of canals, wells, dams and water-wheels. In north Africa, they had already perfected rice growing. Abu Zakariyya explains in his 12C *Book of Agriculture* that they planted two types —one aquatic, around coastal wetlands, the other upland, in river valleys— and that they sowed both directly into the flooded fields, avoiding stagnant water.

The extent of this planting is speculative, but certainly there were paddy-fields around the freshwater sources feeding into the inland sea of the Albufera, near Valencia, and the smaller wetlands near Gerona, Denia, and in Mallorca; inland, in the fertile river lowlands around Jativa (south of Valencia), Orihuela and Calasparra in the valley of the Segura, and Cordoba and Seville in the Guadalquivir.

The Arabs' legacy remains fundamental today. Many of their water-courses survive; in Calasparra, for example, they are almost unchanged. So, too, does their communal government of water-rights. The most picturesque example is the Tribunal de las Aguas, a 10C water-disputes court, with no written record, which meets in Valencia city once a week. But more powerful are the Comunidades or Sindicados de Regantes —literally Syndicates of Waterers— elected by the rice growers, who administer the irrigation of each area on the principle of equal shares, turn and turn about, introduced by the Arabs.

Above, the Tribunal de las Aguas, a 10 C water-disputes court, with no written record, which meets in Valencia city once a week. The other photos show the Albufera, where details of the traditional way of life still survive.



LAND OF TEARS

For 500 years after the 13th century Christian reconquest of the Mediterranean rice-lands, cultivation remained small-scale. The 15C. expulsion of the *moriscos* —Moslems converted to Christianity— meant the loss of expertise and labour. More damaging still was the growing problem of marsh malaria, which for centuries was blamed on the rice rather than the water it was grown in. This led to intermittent royal bans on planting, accompanied by heavy fines and even, for a brief period from 1448 under Pedro IV, the death penalty.

Away from the controlling eye of the cities, these bans were often ignored, but they made rice a risky business until 1860, when it was finally legalised subject to licence. And it was anoth-

The Albufera

Immortalised by novelist Blasco Ibáñez in his novel *Cañas y Barro*, the 19C Albufera was a self-contained world linked to Valencia city by Latin-sailed ferries which plied back and forth to the clumps of *barracas*, whitewashed and cane-roofed houses, that had sprung up on reclaimed islets. Now, the rice fields are broken by telephone and electricity wires, roads carry commuters into the city and holiday-makers out to the beaches, and light industry in its turn has encroached on the rice fields.

Rice-growing methods have also changed. The *tancats* —or enclosed groups of fields sharing a water tap— are fitted with pumps; the size of both landholdings and the Comunidades de Regantes has grown to save costs; varieties have shifted from short to medium grain. Yields, between 7 and 8 tons a hectare, are the highest in the country.

But the old structure remains: eight major canals, the old land measurements *(hanegadas)* —a third of a hectare, the Sindicatos de Regantes and, above all, the lake itself— 3,000 hectares of shimmering gunmetal water. Since 1985, a large surrounding area is preserved as Parc Natural to protect the wetland fauna —in particular, 260 species of birds— which is threatened by industrial pollution. Within this falls a large area of rice fields, in which the use of pesticides is banned.

Details of the traditional way of life survive too. Horses can occasionally be seen working in the fields. Of the old villages, El Palmar has a few steep-roofed *barracas* splashed with blue and cobalt, but the small riverport of Catarroja is less touristy.

Here, you can eat not only Albufera *paella* —made with some duck and snails— and *all-i-pebre* (braised eel) but also *espardanya* (rabbit with eels and potatoes) and *cangrejos* (crabs), a pest here because of the way they eat the ditch-banks.

Fiestas survive too. At the end of July, a mass is held to Abdon and Senen, the patron saints of rice, at the Ermita dels Benissants de la Pedra near Sueca; they are given rice sheaves, and their statues are carried off to town to bless the rice crop against rain, hail or other possible blights. In September, a big paella competition is held in Sueca.

In Valencia, the Tribunal de las Aguas takes place at midday on Thursdays outside the cathedral Apostles' Doorway (it's usually over in 5 minutes so arrive early). Stalls outside the splendid Modernist market sell a good range of paella pans and burners.

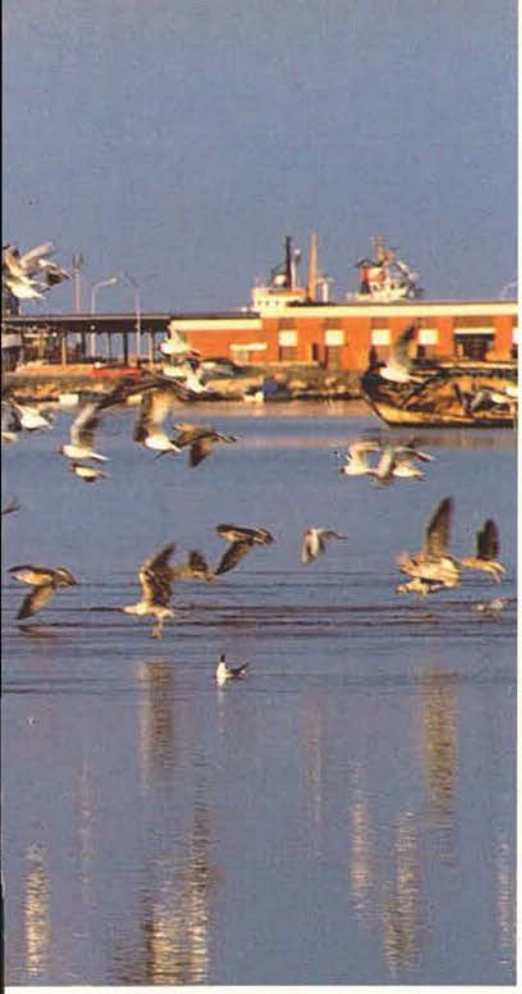
The Ebro Delta

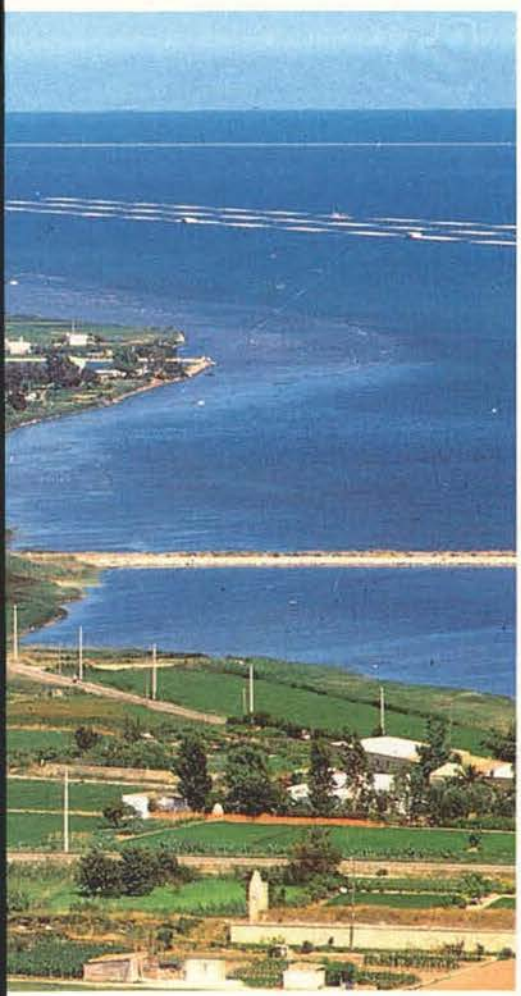
Rice was a latecomer to the watery delta-land of the Ebro —which for centuries produced only leeches, salt, bullrushes and caustic soda— but quickly became the sole pivot of the local economy after planting began in the 1860s. Today, 32 million litres of water pass through the delta's irrigation canals every day.

Of all the rice-growing areas, the delta is the most interesting to visit because of local efforts to conserve both wildlife and customs. Freshwater lagoons, sandy bays and spits, islets, salt-marshes, plus the rice-fields, make up a unique ecosystem now protected for the rarity and abundance of its aquatic plants and 300 species of birdlife

(Serveis Turistics Parc based in Amposta, arranges guided visits). Dotted between the rice fields and canals are scattered *masías* or stone farmhouses, and flowery villages. Most of their traditional cane-thatched and clay *barracas* disappeared in the 1960s, but a few of the fishermen's huts, low-roofed against the winds, survive in the salt-marshes. At San Jaume, you can take the ferry across the river or a longer boat-trip up the Ebro; Sant Carlos de Rapita keeps the grandiose buildings of Carlos III's stillborn dream-port, its saltbeds and a late afternoon fishmarket; inland, the excellent museum in Amposta traces the history of the area from the first Iberians to rice-growing.

Cases de Alcanar has the best local reputation for seafood, while L'Estany, by the Encanyissado lagoon, serves old delta dishes such as *arroz con pato* (rice with duck) and *ortigas de mar* (sea-nettles).





er half-century before researchers proved that it was stagnant water which was responsible for marsh malaria.

By then, cultivation had expanded enormously in the delta lands under the pressure of population growth and the need for an alternative to wheat. As the 18th century wore on, the rice fields encroached on Valencia city, moving southwards to Alcira and spreading around the irrigated lands of Jativa. The epic task of draining and filling in the Albufera's marshes passed from generation to generation, the fields «devouring the water and gnawing into the woods», as Blasco Ibañez wrote, leaving behind a beguiling green lushness, hiding terrible malnutrition and poverty. Most years, deaths outnumbered births, generating passionate political debate.

After the draining of the Ebro Delta by the Canal Dret —or right-bank canal— in 1860, rice-planting began there in earnest too. Land was given free to smallholders, provided they planted it within a number of years; the best was called *mamelleta de monja,* or nun's breast. Again, crop failure as well as illness took a terrible toll; at the end of the century, over 90 % of the population had marsh malaria. A local saying ran, «*Terra de arros, terra de plos*». Land of rice, land of tears. However, the way of life in the rice fields forged a strong communal spirit. Not only the water was shared; so, too, were fishing and hunting rights, tasks in the fields, horses and tools —and everyday suffering.

TRADITIONAL CULTIVATION

In those days, rice was a more delicate and demanding crop. Preparation of the fields began in February or March with ploughing, then levelling for the shallow flooding. Once raked over, the wet soil was ready for the rice, which by the 19C was transplanted as seedlings rather than sown broadcast. The men worked in gangs, moving backwards across the fields to ensure straight planting lines, a bundle of seedlings under one arm; this was back-breaking and skilled work which needed two to five years' apprenticeship.

In the initial weeks, the water level was maintained to keep up the temperature, to drown out weeds and to prevent the wind moving the water. But once the

EVOLUTION OF THE SURFACE AND RICE PRODUCTION IN SPAIN

SURFACE IN THOUSANDS OF HECTARES	
1989	58.5
1990	90.4
1991	93.5
PRODUCTION IN THOUSANDS OF TONS	
1989	341.8
1990	571.3
1991	586.6

Source: Min. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Of all the rice-growing areas, the delta is the most interesting to visit because of local efforts to conserve both wildlife and customs. Every day, 32 millions litres of water pass through the delta's irrigation canals.

plants were well-rooted, the fields would, by common consent, be drained to spread guano, or to weed, to strengthen the roots and lower the water temperature.

Meanwhile, the rice would sprout in rows like combed hairs on a bald man's head, then thicken into emerald rugs: the deeper the green, the healthier the rice. As the grain followed flowering and the fields turned gold, all eyes turned to the sky. At this stage, a rain or hail storm could destroy the entire crop. Everything stopped for harvesting. Scythed like wheat, the trimmed sheaves of cut rice would be propped up and left to dry for several days in the field before being collected by boat and built into stacks on the threshing grounds.

Much of the work of threshing and winnowing was done by women and children. The rice would be laid out in a spiral on the threshing ground and trodden by horse, then the grain separated from the chaff, and the chaff taken off with wooden forks. Finally, the grain in its husk —called *arroz verde* or green rice— would be spread out in lines running east to west to avoid the sun's shadows, and left to dry for two to three days before being sacked up for weighing.

Harvesting by no means marked the end of the year's work. There was the final hurdle of bargaining with the mills' buyers. And after the fields were drained in the autumn, there were banks to be mended and ditches to be cleaned, winter crops to be planted in upland irrigated areas, and delta-lands to be washed free of salt by reflooding.

SPANISH RICE COOKERY

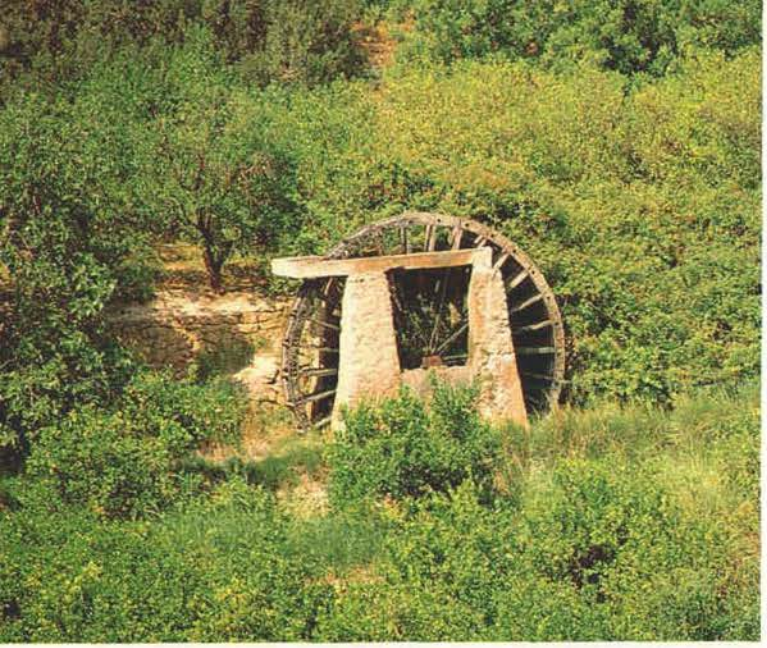
It was alongside the boom in rice-growing, first in Valencia and then in Catalonia, that its cookery proliferated into a huge, ever-extending family of dishes.

Calasparra has been famous for its rice since medieval times and, recently, in 1986 adquired Europe's only* Denominación de Origen *for rice. All the rice is now sold with numbered labels attached to cotton sacks. Over 25% is exported.

SPANISH RICE EXPORTS EVOLUTION BY MARKETS

1989	Thousands of ptas.	Tons
Belgium and Luxembourg	2,221,715	28.141
Iran	2,104,782	50.894
Portugal	1,173,093	18.500
United Kingdom	975,322	14.338
France	841,538	14.503
Italy	790,152	15.788
Turkey	581,964	12.679
Lebanon	365,160	7.007
Germany	229,947	3.091
Reunion	193,844	5.486
1990	**Thousands of ptas,**	**Tons**
Belgium and Luxembourg	3,605,510	48.139
United Kingdom	1,710,412	22.311
Netherlands	1,262,460	17.091
France	753,008	12.361
Portugal	655,955	10.190
Yugoslavia (OLD)	460,767	11.999
Germany	446,302	6.260
Finland	444,583	10.808
Iran	435,432	12.052
Turkey	274,754	8.198
1991	**Thousands of ptas,**	**Tons**
Belgium and Luxembourg	4,552,924	59.427
Netherlands	2,494,353	32.512
United Kingdom	1,906,998	22.339
Germany	1,537,125	20.009
Portugal	1,484,999	20.151
France	1,393,196	22.335
Finland	1,334,367	8.717
Italy	754,197	10.018
Algeria	373,434	10.049
Mozambique	280,635	8.666

Source: ICEX.



Calasparra

Sitting high in the frontier territory between the spectacular Murcian *sierra* and the lush Segura river valley, Calasparra has been famous for its rice since medieval times.

Its quality in part from the mountain geography: cold river water and cool summer temperatures slow down ripening, reduce disease and give a dry rice with high absorption, while the upriver site has also allowed irganic production. The flow of water limits quantities to a tiny 2 million kilos a year.

Agricultural techniques also play a role. Small, self-contained irrigation networks running directly back into the rivers allow fine control of water levels, while crop rotation (traditionally with mulberry and corn, but now with wheat and pulses ploughed back in) gives the soils a high nitrogen content.

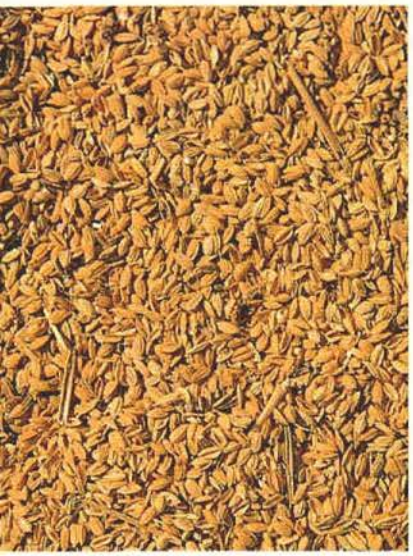
On this basis, and because of a long-running problem of forgery, Calasparra acquired Europe's only *denomonación de origen* for rice in 1986, its boundaries following the banks of the Rivers Segura and Mundo into Castile-La Mancha. All the rice —wholegrain, semi-wholegrain, organic wholegrain and white, and Bomba (see «Varieties» box)— is now sold with numbered tickets attached to cotton sacks. Over 25 % is now exported.

Calasparra and the Segura valley make a good journey into the past. A dozy little town, it has small shops selling the rice (as well as good local cheese matured in wine), a Roman aqueduct, the Iglesia de los Santos —dedicated to the Persian rice saints Abdon and Senen— and the Santuario de la Virgen de la Esperanza, whose restaurant serves local rice dishes. In the Palacio de Ecomendat, the seat of the Knights of St John of Malta who governed the torn, there is also a display of old rice-workers' tools. From here, there is a great route along the Segura valley, leading through rice fields and a dramatic gorge (access by foot only) into lush fruit orchards which clearly bear Arab traces.

Nutrition

Within nutritional medicine, wholegrain rice is a complex carbohydrate containing 7 % protein, 4 % unsaturated fat, and 89 % carbohydrate. Its minerals and vitamins —phosphorus, potassium, vitamins B_1 (Thiamine) and B_2 (Riboflavine)— as well as 15 % of its protein are concentrated in the bran and underlying fatty aleurone layer. Washing rice before or after cooking partially removes them.

For the same reasons, the introduction of industrial milling and polishing led to widespread nutritional deficiency, and the disease beri-beri, in areas of the world where rice was the main foodstuff (it remains so for one in six of the world's population). The exception was India, where



some rice was parboiled, or *siddha*, before sun-drying: that is, soaked in hot water, with the husk, so that the inner part of the grain remained coated with the aleurone layer and impregnated with the vitamins. This process was adapted to industrial milling and widely adopted elsewhere for long-grain rice, especially in the USA. Parboiling gives a light tawny colour (the vitamins) and a slightly rubbery chewiness (the aleurone layer). Reheating it does not destroy its vitamins.

Within nutritional medicine, rice is a staple ingredient for allergy and cancer treatment, certain stomach complaints and all macrobiotic diets, because it contains no purines, no gluten and no sodium.

«Be it for the climate or complexion of the inhabitants», wrote an astonished Ministry of Finance official in the 18C, «neither the workers nor the artisans can suffer the fatigue of their labours without this food. A family of five persons maintains itself with a pound or rice, which may cost them from four to five quartos: it is condimented in half an hour. The poor man using four garlics and a little oyle, those of middle income with lard and scraps of pork, and those of means with kid, hare or chicken, all are equally fed.»

All Spanish rice dishes take their cue from just one idea: the rice grain as a sponge for the flavours of the ingredients cooked with it. Out of this simple seed of wisdom —planted by the Arabs— grew two different tradition of medieval dishes. Court recipes used fine white rice to suck up sweet flavours for *menjar blanc* —a sweetened milk and stock cream thickened by rice flour— and *arroz con leche*,the cold creamed rice

Varieties and the search for quality

Although there are literally thousands of varieties of rice *(L: Oryza sativa)*, they are loosely classified within three main groups: short-grain, or *japonica;* long-grain, or *indica;* and hybrids, known as medium-grain. Spain has traditionally produced short-grain *(redondo,* round) rice, which is better adapted to cooler climates and shorter daylight hours than to tropical regions.

In 1913, after repeated harvest loss due to disease, a government research station opened in the Albufera in 1913 to develop new varieties with more resistance. The work was long and slow, since each new hybrid took a decade to reach the stage where they could be planted. But the results have shown. The new varieties, such as Bahia, Senia, Balilla, Sequia and Sollana are easier to germinate, resistant to disease, responsive to fertilisers, strong-stalked to withstand bad weather, and with a grain that resists the milling machinery, and have helped raise Spanish yields to the highest in the world, with the exception of Australia some years.

Alongside this, long-grain varieties have been imported, mainly from California (Theibonnet) and Italy(Lemon), and older varieties have

faded out: the upland rices planted by the Arabs, for example. A notable exception is Bomba, which is tricky to cultivate and low-yield, but refuses to disappear because its starch structure, opening out like an accordion, makes it highly absorbent and yet almost as firm-grained as par-boiled rice. As a result, it is in constant demand by chefs. Such is demand that a Valencian rice company is now investing in seed research to recuperate a pure Bomba seed.

still much loved by Spaniards. On the other hand, Levante's everyday popular rice cuisine grew out of hand-to-mouth *morisco* cooking. Originally based on rice pounded by hand (what we would call today semi-wholegrain), these poor-man's dishes were flavoured with whatever was hunted, fished or came to hand —originally, small bits of water-rat, snails, eel, duck and rabbit in the rice fields— and eaten straight out of the pan. With the 18C splurge in both cultivation and consumption of rice, the number of dishes became uncountable: those for winter and summer, Lent and fiestas, for the top of the stove and the oven, wet or dry, varying in the ingredients from one geographical pocket to another.

It was in the 19C that paella emerged among these, at first as a symbol of regional pride, to be celebrated in plays and even poetry —»A liberal dish in which a grain is a grain, as each man is a vote», wrote Valencian poet José Pamán (19C)— and later as a financial asset, for colour-loving tourists. Locally, there's also something of an obsession with scale: this year a new world-record was set with a paella for 100,000 cooked in Valencia —the pan for which is now being used by skateboarders.

Spain has traditionally produced short-grain rice, whose starch structure gives a much moister, stickier finished consistency to that of long-grain. Traditional Spanish rice dishes developed around the absorbency of short-grained varieties which were flavoured with whatever was fished, hunted or came to hand.

MODERN TIMES: INTO A WIDER WORLD

Today, while the amphibious landscapes of the old rice-fields keep a timeless quality, rice as a business is transformed. The first radical change came in the early decades of the century, when smallholders began to form co-operatives, allowing them to cut out the middleman, share modernisation costs, and so compete with the Far Eastern rice flooding the market. Now, the co-operatives handle 90 % of rice from the Ebro delta and Calasparra, and an estimated 70 % of the total market.

Technology

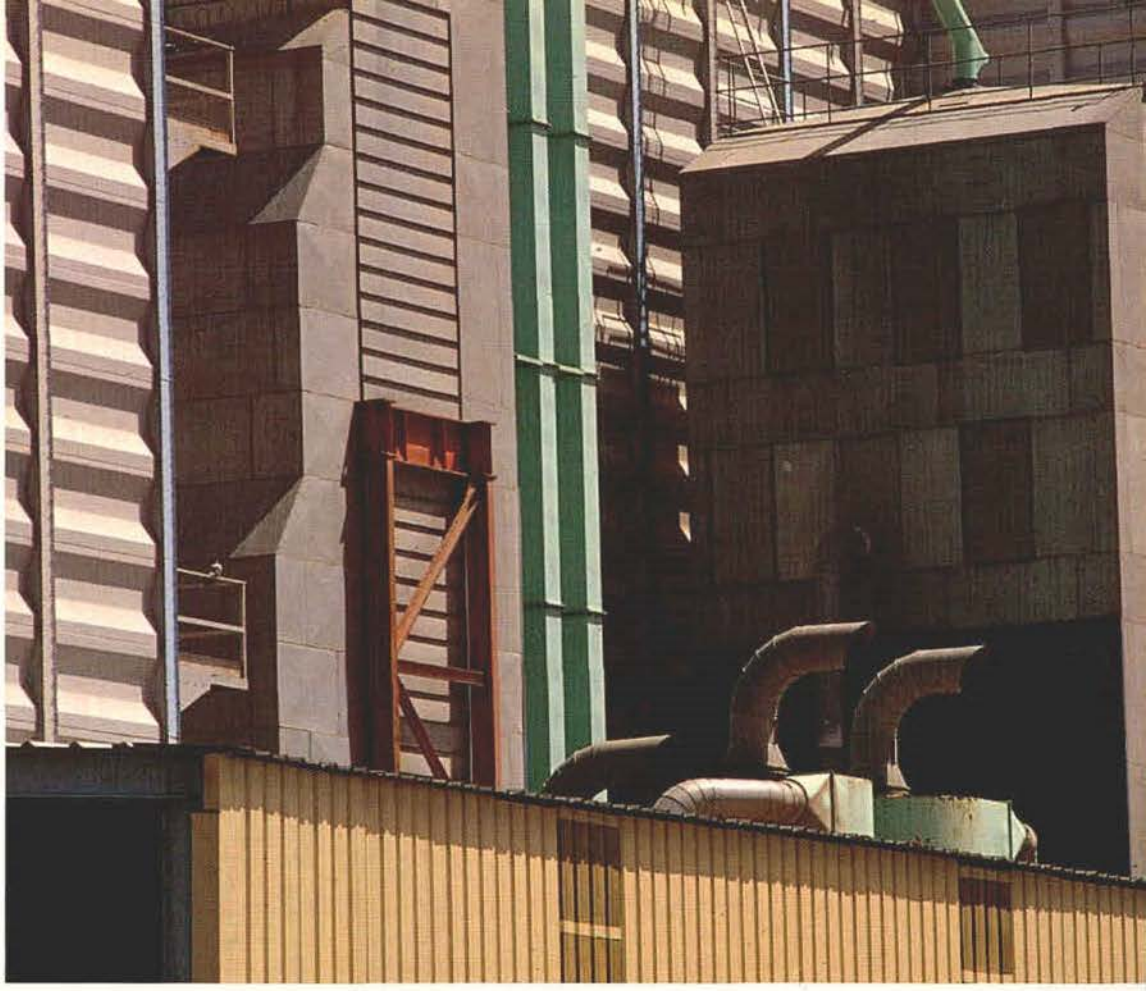
Since the mid-sixties, rice growing has changed more than it did in the previous millenium. The revolution began when the tractor replaced the horse, in one fell swoop making possible direct sowing —now sometimes even done by plane— the widespread use of pesticides, and mechanised weeding and harvesting.

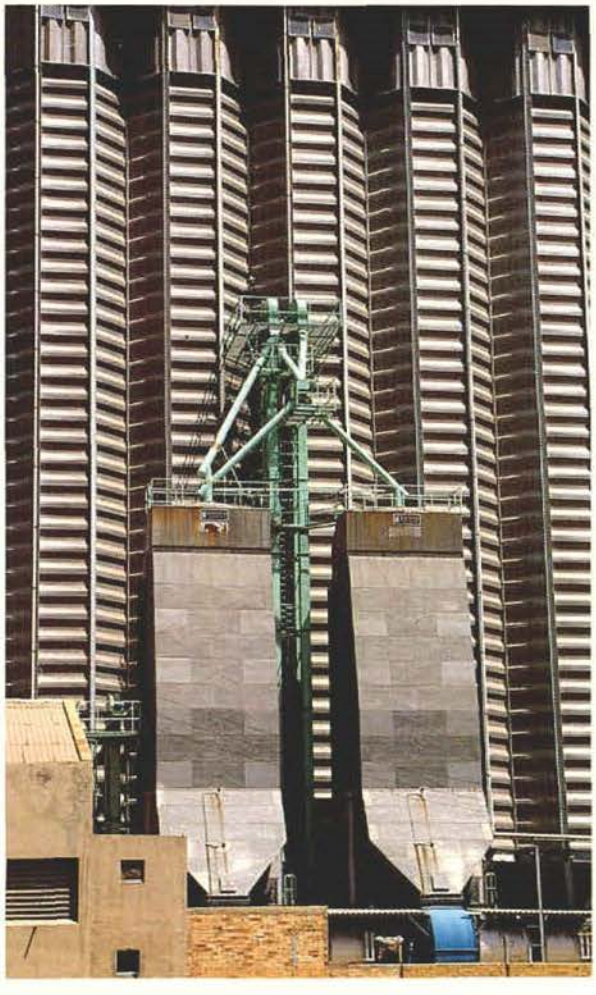
At the same time, sun-drying began to be replaced by hot air-dryers lowering the grain's humidity to the 14 degrees necessary to prevent fermentation within a matter of hours. In the Ebro delta, where the harvest is especially vulnerable to bad weather, the largest cooperative is now able to process 4 million kilos within 24 hours in this way.

Changes in milling came first in speed and scale. The rice grain follows through the traditional stages —sieving out of stones, removal of

husk, double-milling between stone cones and a rubber belt, and final polishing— but today the large mills handle 10,000 kilos an hour in a continuous computer-controlled process ending with the filling of the final packet. Nevertheless, the process is still essentially one of friction —no chemicals are involved— and for the best quality rices, mechanical adjustments tailor polishing to different markets' —even customers'— requirements.

Today, the focus of change has shifted back to the fields: levellers use laser-technology to ensure the slopes of the fields do not exceed more than one in a thousand. Other developments, such as the development of new pesticides, reflect the surfacing of ecological issues such as lowering water tables and pollution.





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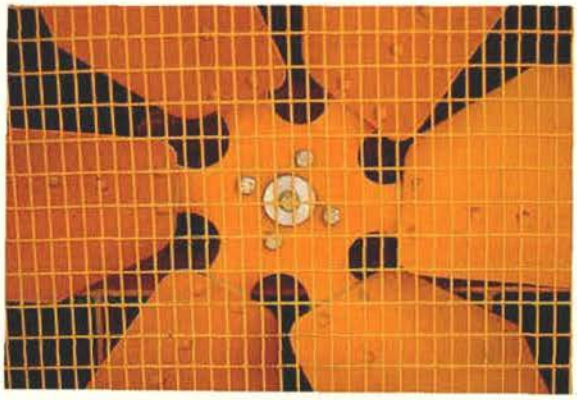
Even greater changes have taken place in the rice-growing zones. While in the 1930s Valencia produced two-thirds of the national total and the Ebro delta another fifth, both areas have diversified into more profitable market-gardening and citrus fruit, and are now outstripped by Andalusia and Extremadura, which have boomed since the 1950s around the successful planting of long-grain rice for the European market.

Andalusia first broke traditional patterns: landholdings are large, growers have individual control of pump-operated irrigation, production is geared towards exports and there is major foreign investment in the rice mills. But all areas are now transformed by the technological revolution since the sixties (see «Technology» box).

Membership of the EC brought further changes: price stabilisation schemes,

standardised quality grading, a massive short-term boom in the subsidised planting of long-grain rice, and a similar long-term switch to production of parboiled rice (see «Nitrition» box). The next growth sector at this industrial level will be the production of ready-prepared meals, again initially aimed at the European rather than domestic market.



Of the small rice-growing areas, it is Calasparra which has adapted most successfully to modern times. A mountain area in Murcia renowned since the times of Philip V (18C) for the high quality of its rice —very dry, highly absorbent and with a firm grain— it keeps a secure specialist market prepared to pay the higher prices made necessary by the tiny scale of production. Organic rice-growing, largely for export and subject to the quality-control schemes of each country, has also highlighted another potential specialist market.

«Many of the smaller rice-producing areas, such as Denia's Marjal —which once set prices throughout Spain for its quality— have disappeared before finding a niche within new specialist markets. All that remain are the eras, or threshing grounds, along with shut-up mills —and the local repertoires of rice cookery, going today as strong as ever. For in the wake of regional cooking's revival in the last ten years, the Spanish themselves have rediscovered the lesson learnt by the French general— that paella is only one of many cousins in a huge extended family.»

Vicky Hayward lives in Madrid and is writing a book about Spanish food. She works as a freelance feature journalist, travel writer and book editor.

RICE IN THE KITCHEN

Traditional Spanish rice dishes developed around the absorbency of short-grained varieties. Its starch structure, with a higher proportion of amylopectin, gives a much moister, stickier finished consistency to that of long-grain. Spanish rice cooks generally regard it as heresy to substitute long-grain since it doesn't suck in as much flavour, open to give the same almost spongy grain or produce the same *socarrat,* the browned, crunchy bottom crust of paellas.

Long-grain rice gives a less flavoursome effect, but doesn't pass the cooking point so quickly and some people prefer its firmer grains. Parboiled long-grain rice absorbs still less flavour and gives an almost rubbery final texture.

Wholegrain or brown rice gives a less bland background to other ingredients, but introduces a nutty element that works well in some dishes. In fact, semi-wholegrain is very similar to the hand-pounded rice originally eaten in the growing areas.

Spanish rice is sold in two qualities, defined by the percentage of broken grains: Extra with 4 % and Primera with 7 %. Rice chefs go to the trouble of buying custom-milled rice with no broken grains at all. Ideally, rice should be kept in a cool, dark place in material that breathes.

COOKING TIMES AND QUANTITIES

The tricky aspect of short-grain rice is that once it has passed its ideal cooking point, the grain breaks open quickly and the dish converts into a sticky mess. Bear in mind that there are no absolutes: cooking times and quantities of water always need to be adjusted by trial and error to the size and material of the cooking pan, intensity of the heat, variety of rice and hardness of the water as well as the finished texture of the dish.

For paellas (or other dry rices) made with short-grained varieties, the rule of thumb is double the rice's volume in water, remembering that meat needs extra water to cook while fish and vegetables release some during cooking. In fact, it often needs more, and Calasparra rices, especially Bomba, will need up to four times the amount of water. Whether you are adding rice to water or vice versa, the water should always be boiling. Cooking time is usually 16-18 minutes, but varies with the hardness of the water; rice cooks slower in soft water). Allow 25-30 minutes for Calasparra.

Allow around 25 minutes and three times the amount of water as a starting point for long-grain rice. As a rough guide, brown short-grained needs 45-50 minutes and roughly four times its volume in water, but semi-wholegrain needs only fractionally longer than white rice. Wet rices can need anything up to five times the quantity of water.

The traditional Valencian two handfuls of rice per head translates to 75-100 g, depending on other ingredients.

POTS AND PANS

The utensils used for cooking rice are fundamental to the finished dish.

The best paella pans are made of iron, which should be washed the first time in vinegar and rice, then soap and water to remove any flavour or taste of metal. After use, they need to be dried well and washed and oiled on the inside to prevent rusting; the best substitute is the lowest-sided frying pan of the same size, which allows the rice to spread to a minimum of depth.

Assuming you don't have a *paellero de gas,* or free-standing double-ringed gas burner, you can use a barbecue (with burning coals) or keep a paella pan moving around over several rings of a domestic oven. However tempting, don't try to cook more rice than appropriate for the size of the pan and heat source. On a domestic oven, it is difficult to make a paella for more than 6.

Diameter	Number of servings	or Weight of dry rice
30 cm	4	400 g
34 cm	6	600 g
38 cm	8	800 g

Many other rices are traditionally made in flameproof earthenware casseroles: dry rices in flat-bottomed dishes, wet rices in deeper dishes with curving sides. The earthenware gives a gentle heat and helps to control the evaporation of liquid. Any flameproof casserole will serve well, although you will probably need to reduce the water slightly.

MUSEO NACIONAL DE ARTES DECORATIVAS, MADRID.

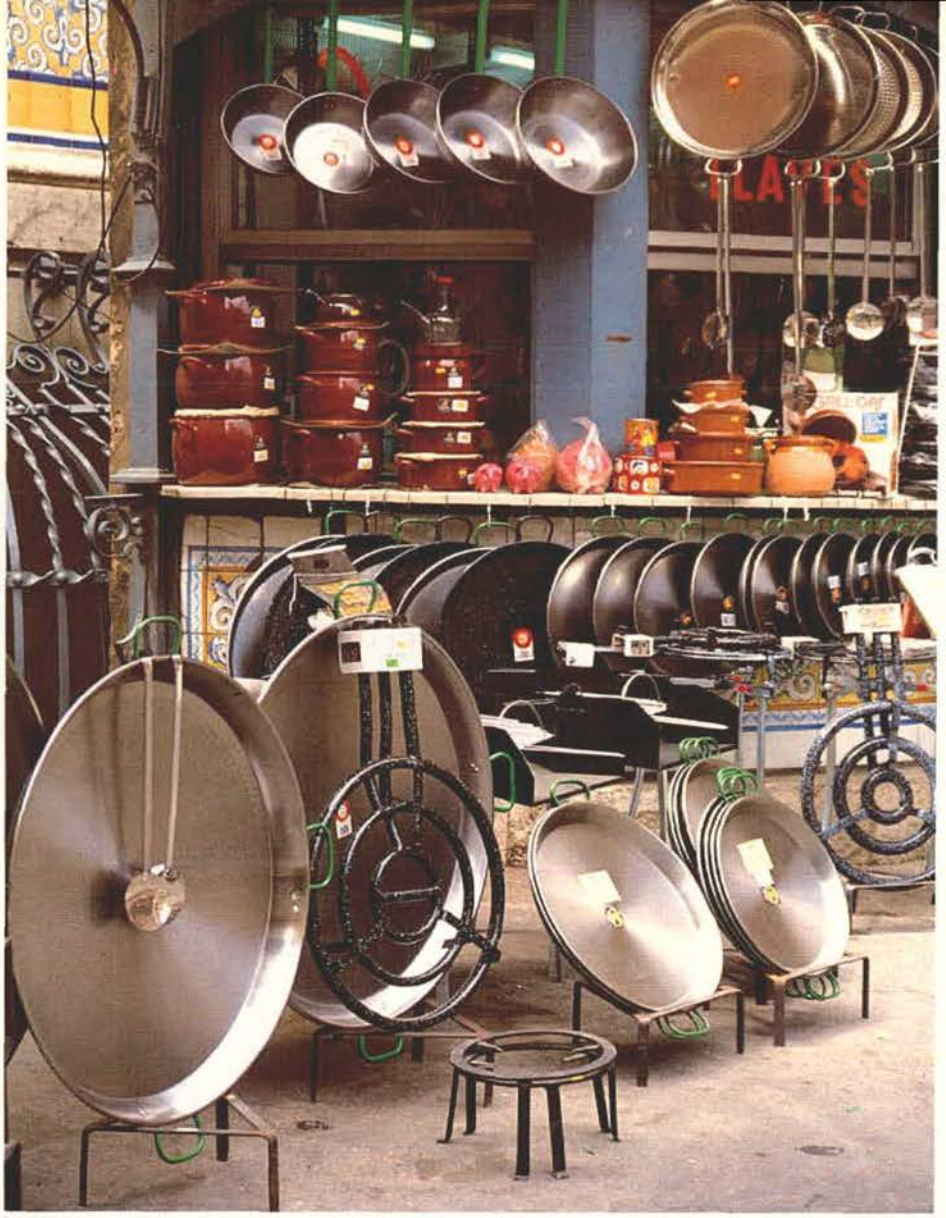
Above, 18 C Valencian kitchen, decorated with Manises tiles. Below, flameproof earthenware casseroles.

SLEIGHTS OF HAND

The key to the separate rice grains for a paella is a fast unbroken boil that steadily slows during cooking. Drying paella off in the oven is a restaurant trick to give an even dryness without burning; so is putting it briefly over a hotplate to encourage the *socorrat* or brown crust given by a wood fire.

Sautéeing the rice briefly before adding the water, as done in Alicante and Castellon, gives rice greater firmness.

For dry rices that have begun to stick or the water evaporated before the rice is cooked, leave the pan off the heat, covered with a damp paper so the rice can



The utensils used for cooking rice are fundamental to the finished dish. The best paella pans are made of iron.

suck up the moisture. Leaving the pan on a wet paper helps lift the crust off the pan.

To be sure of achieving a *meloso* rice, make sure there is a source of meat fat or fish oils in the dish.

TYPES OF RICE DISHES

When a Spaniard describes a rice dish, he usually tells you three things in one breath: the pot or pan it's cooked in, the flavouring ingredients and the consistency of the finished rice.

The type of pot or pan is considered so basic it's usually part of the name of the dish. Apart from the obvious paellas there are metal *calderos* (literally cauldrons) or *rustideras,* and heavy frying pan used in some areas of Murcia. Another whole family of rices are cooked in earthenware: for example, low-sided *cazuelas* (or *cassolas, ressejadoras* and *bandejas),* or the fat-bellied deep *pucheros* (also known variously as *perols, perolas* and *ollas).*

A professional rice cook will usually next tell you the finished consistency —*seco* (dry), *caldoso* (wet or soupy) or *meloso* (syrupy, with a thickened liquid clinging to the grains)— since that also reflects the cooking technique. Paellas and *arroz a banda* are the stars of the dry rices; rice with beans and turnips is the aficionados' pick of the wet ones; and Murcian *caldero* a prime example of an inbetween *meloso.*

When it comes to flavouring ingredients, the combinations are so endless that it is pointless to think much further than fish and shellfish; meat, poultry and game; vegetables and pulses. The bran-tub effect of the tourist mixed meat and shellfish paellas, with red peppers and green peas thrown in for colour, break the two cardinal rules: don't overload the rice with other flavours and always leave the rice as the main protagonist.

RECIPES

Since Levante is the heartland of Spanish rice cuisine, the recipes below have been chosen from the hundred found there. Another article will give a taste of rice dishes from other regions.

Rice with Fresh Tuna and Prawns
(Arroz con atún fresco y gambas)

This fishermen's rice recalls the twin fishing traditions of Alicante: the fat white tuna caught with the net trapping system of the *almadraba,* and the red prawns brought into Santa Pola. The recipe comes from Francisco Henarejos, head chef at the Delfin restaurant for 30 years, who explains that the first brief sautéeing of the rice leaves the grains firmer than in a Valencian paella.

Serves 4:

350 g Calasparra rice
1 kg rock fish
1 ½ l water for the stock
salt
3 medium tomatoes
1 coffee cup of olive oil
1 *ñora* (dried sweet red pepper)
400 g slab of fresh tuna, cut from the centre
8 large red prawns in their shells
200 g peeled red prawns
1 head of garlic

Make a fish stock with the rock fish and salted water. Put in the tomatoes for the

Rice with Fresh Tuna and Prawns.

first 15 minutes of cooking time, after which they can be taken out and skinned.

Put the paella pan over the heat, heat the olive oil and fry the *ñora* (without its seeds), then the tuna, cut into four large chunks, and finally, briefly, the prawns in their shells. Remove the *ñora,* fish and shellfish from the pan.

Peel the head of garlic. With a pestle and mortar (or food processor), crush the *ñora,* add half the head of garlic and crush again. Once everything is pounded, add half the tomatoes. Chop the other half of the head of garlic with the prawns. The dish can be prepared ahead of time up to this point.

Put the paella pan back over the heat and fry the prawns and garlic together. Add and briefly fry the rice, add the fish stock and then the picada of *ñora* and garlic. Put the chunks of tuna and the whole prawns on top of the rice. Leave to cook over slow heat for approximately 15 minutes, and to rest for 5 minutes before serving.

Murcian Cauldron
(Arroz en caldero murciano)

The inland sea of the Mar Menor has been fished since Roman times and this is its fishermen's dish —first cousin to *arroz a banda* —made with the inshore grey mullet, gilthead bream and the Mediterranean tuna, which go into this two-course dish. First comes the rice, given a *meloso* consistency by the oils from the blue fish and brickish colour by the *pimentón;* then come the fish slices cooked in the same stock. This recipe comes from ex-fisherman Inocencio Hernández Albadalejo, better known as El Rubio, who has run the Casa de la Mar in Lo Pagán for fifteen years.

Murcian Cauldron.

Serves 6:

600 g Calasparra rice
5-6 kg fish (*), which should include red gurnard and grey mullet, seabream and tuna (others can be substituted, provided there is a mix of blue and white fleshed fish)
7-8 *ñoras,* seeds removed, or 8 heaped tsp *pimentón* or paprika 1 head of garlic, skinned
4 litres water
1/2 kg seedless, skinned tomato - chopped

Separate the fish into the firm-fleshed and whole pieces to be served after the rice; and the heads, tails and other trimmings plus smaller rock fish for the stock.

Saute the *ñoras* and garlic cloves, pound them in a mortar or food processor and put them into a pan large enough to take the water. Add the fish for the stock, chopped tomato and salt, bring gently to the boil and simmer for 30-45 minutes. This can be prepared ahead of time.

Add the large fish for the final 5 minutes of simmering, reheating the stock first if you have prepared it beforehand. Remove just over 2 ¼ l of the stock to cook the rice, and check for salt. Leave the remaining stock, with the fish keeping warm in it, to one side.

In a large heavy-bottomed pan —a cast-iron *caldero* is used in Murcia— bring the stock to the boil and add the rice. It will need 15-18 minutes cooking to reach its final, slightly sticky consistency. Once it is ready, leave to rest for 3 minutes. The fish is served, in thick slices on the bone, with a little of the stock as a sauce.

(*) **Note:** This is the quantity of fish used, which may seem a lot. Some people economise although it would give less flavour to the rice.

Rice with Vegetables.

Rice with Vegetables
(Arroz en paella con verduras)

Vegetables paellas —also called *huertanas,* or from the market garden— are especially associated with the fertile, lush river valley of the Segura in Murcia. The combinations of vegetables vary, but are always restrained, so don't be tempted to fling in too many types for colour or flavour as the rice will lose its subtlety. This is the recipe of Juan Francisco Arroni Toledo from the Las Coronas restaurant of Murcia city's Siete Coronas hotel, where local people go to eat the rices at Sunday lunchtime. Preserved green garlic shoots sold in jars substitute well for fresh ones, or spring onions can be used as second best.

Serves 4-5:

500 g Calasparra rice
little olive oil
1/2 cauliflower, cut into very small pieces
1 green pepper, very finely chopped
8-10 fresh garlic shoots, both white and green parts
500 g fresh tomato

4 artichoke hearts (fresh or frozen), halved
100 g young broad beans, podded
50 g green beans, trimmed
50 g unsoaked salt-cod, very finely shredded
750 ml stock or water
salt

Heat the olive oil, sauté together the chopped vegetables, and when they are tender, add the slat-cod, and gently fry until the fish is golden. (Some people prefer to fry the vegetables separately.) This may be done ahead of time.

Add the stock or water (use less if you're not using Calasparra) and simmer for 5 minutes. Check for salt, then add the rice. When it is nearly ready, remove from the heat and leave to rest for 5 minutes.

Rice-Stuffed Peppers
(Pimientos rellenos)

The rice to fill these stuffed peppers, which are typical of the mountain towns of Alcoy and Bocairent, cooks in the sweet juices from the tomato and pepper. This recipe comes from Etelvina Tomás of the Pensión Mariola, a family inn in Agres, tucked under the Sierra Mariola.

Serves 4:

500 g short-grained rice
2-3 tbsp olive oil
4 large red peppers
2-3 tbsp olive oil
1 small red pepper, chopped
1/2 onion, chopped
1/2 tomato, skinned and chopped
150 g minced/chopped pork or 75 g salt cod
saffron
chopped fresh parsley
salt

Cut off the stem ends of the peppers, keeping them as lids to replace later, and scrape out the inner membranes with a teaspoon.

Heat the oil, sauté the red pepper slowly until it is tender and remove. Fry the onion

Rice-Stuffed Peppers.

until tender, add the meat and brown it lightly, adding the tomato after a few minutes, then put back the cooked pepper, and stir in the raw rice, saffron and parsley. Salt to taste.

Fill the peppers carefully and lay them on their side in an ovenproof dish, being careful the filling doesn't fall out (you can wrap them in tinfoil to help hold them together). Cover the dish and put it in a hot oven for about 1 ½ hours. The rice cooks in the juices from the tomato and pepper. If the peppers are thin-skinned, you may need to add a little stock towards the end of the cooking time.

Pebbled Rice
(Arroz empedrat)

This dry rice, found mainly in Castellon province, may be made with white beans or chickpeas. Flavourings vary: chips of *chorizo* may replace the salt-cod, whilw in Calasparra they add fresh tomato and green garlic, but you always have the whole head of garlic, nicknamed the partridge, in the centre, from which you can suck out the nutry flesh if you want. Ideally, the depth of the rice should be little more than that of a paella.

This recipe comes from El Plat, a Valencian restaurant with over 400 rice recipes.

Serves 4:

400 g short-grained rice
150 g dried white haricot beans, soaked for 12 hours in 1 ½ l cold water
1 head of unskinned garlic, wiped clean
saffron
salt
2 cloves of garlic, skinned and chopped
100 g tomato, skinned, seeded and chopped
50 ml olive oil
1 tsp mild *pimentón,* or paprika

Cook the beans with the soaking water and the head of garlic until soft (a pressure cooker considerably reduces the time). Towards the end of the cooking time, add a few strands of saffron and salt. Reserve the cooking liquid.

Chop the garlic cloves and the tomato. Heat the oil in a frying pan, saute the garlic, then the tomato and, right at the end, the *pimentón.*

When you're ready to eat, pour a litre of the bean stock into a wide-bottomed flameproof casserole, which will take the rice

Pebbled Rice.

and beans. Check the seasoning, adding more salt if necessary. Bring to the boil, add the rice —making sure it is evenly spread— and cook uncovered over medium heat, at a rolling boil, for 10 minutes. Add the beans, and continue cooking for 8-10 minutes more, until the rice is done. Serve onto warm plates, and leave to rest for a minute or two.

Rice with a Crust
(Arroz con costra)

This curious baked rice with an egg crust, which comes from Elche and Orihuela, is one of the oldest of the region. A remarkably similar recipe appears in the 14th century *Libre del Coch,* by Ruperto de Nola —who some think was Valencian. In his recipe, it is cooked over direct heat, with ashes on the lid of the pan, a method which still survives in the countryside around Elche and Orihuela, but usually the dish is made in the oven.

The recipe comes from La Granaina, in Elche, run by Raúl Martínez Casares, and his sons Ramón and Pedro.

Serves 4:

400 g Calasparra rice
1 teacup olive oil
250 g chicken, cut into chunks
250 g rabbit, cut into chunks
1 ripe tomato
1.25 litres white chicken stock, or water
250 g salchichas, black pudding *(butifarra negra)* and white pudding *(butifarra blanca),* thickly sliced
pinch of saffron
50 g chickpeas - soaked and cooked (optional)
12 eggs
salt

Rice with a Crust.

Heat the oil in a large ovenproof casserole, fry the chicken and rabbit, add the tomato and simmer slightly. Add the stock and let it boil for a few minutes until the meat is tender.

Spread the meat over the bottom of an ovenproof casserole, add the dry rice and saffron. Check the salting of the stock or water and pour it over the rice. Bake, uncovered, in a medium oven until the rice is almost dry.

Remove from the oven, and arrange the slices of sausages (raw or fried) over the top. Beat the eggs lightly with a little salt, pour them over the rice and put the casserole back into the oven for 8-10 minutes. This gives a rich, thick egg layer; if you want a thinner crust, use half the eggs.

Valencian Paella
(Arroz en paella a la valenciana)

A true Valencian paella's ingredients come from the produce of the fertile coastal strip: rabbit and chicken, tomato, plus several local varieties of green and dried beans and white *vaqueta* snails after rain (they shouldn't be substituted by other varieties). After that there is no clear agreement. Some insist on rosemary and others dislike it; *pimentón* is usually, but not always, added alongside the saffron.

This recipe comes from Levante, a restaurant in the small town of Benissanó (Valencia), which began serving paella accidentally twenty-five years ago as an extension of the family's Sunday lunch. Since then, it has grown into one of the most respected paella restaurants in the Valencia region. Rafael Vidal, the third generation

A true Valencian paella's ingredients come from the produce of the fertile coastal strip: rabbit and chicken, tomato, plus several local varieties of green and dried beans. After that there is no clear agreement, but for considering a wood fire an essential part of the recipe.

in the kitchen, stresses that their recipe is not entirely orthodox; since today's chicken falls off the bone if simmered in the old way, it's only fried.

He does, however, like most *valencianos,* consider a wood fire an essential part of the recipe, as much for the flavour of smoke as the intense heat which produces the *socarrat,* or crunchy brown crust. This is Rafael Vidal's recipe for a paella over a wood fire, in appropriate quantities. The wood for the cooking of the rice is traditionally orange and vine shoots, but in any case should be fine (pine is too smoky).

Serves 10:

1 kg short-grained rice

1/8 l olive oil
1 free-range chicken, weight approx 2 kg
1 rabbit, weight approx 1 kg
3 ripe tomatoes, skinned and grated
1/2 kg green runner beans *(bachoqueta de herradura)*
1/4 kg flat white butter beans *(garrafóns)*
rosemary, optional
3 ½ l water
salt
saffron

Build up the wood fire. Heat the olive oil in the paella pan. When it is very hot add the chicken and rabbit, cut into small chunks, plus its offal. Fry very well until the meat is golden brown. Add the tomato and the vegetables over the same high heat, and saute them briefly with the meat.

Add the water and build up the fire to give a steady rolling boil over the whole pan. After a few minutes, over very high heat, add the rice, salt and saffron. At this point the fire should be at its strongest; then slowly spread it out, allowing it to die down during the cooking to give an even *socarrat.* Leave to rest off the heat in the pan for 5 minutes before serving.

The snails need to be put in cold water and brought gently to the boil before cooking. If you want to use rosemary, which many consider essential without the snails, cook a long sprig in the water for the rice before adding it to the pan.

Rice with Langoustines
(Cazuela de arroz con langostinos)

Cooking rice with langoustines may seem wasteful, but their flavour is so amplified by the cooked rice and stock left clinging to it, that the final dish is well worth it. The recipe comes from Cases de Alcanar, one of the fishing ports of the Ebro delta known for its langoustines and, more specifically, from El Pescador restaurant, where Angelina García Fons has been cooking for seventeen years.

Serves 4:

300 g short-grained rice
3 tbsp olive oil
1 medium onion, skinned and finely chopped
2 medium fresh squid or cuttlefish, finely chopped
2 tbsp chopped skinned and seeded ripe tomato
3/4 l water
16 small fresh langoustines (Dublin Bay prawns)
8 fresh prawns
salt
saffron

In a flameproof casserole of 2-2 ½ litre capacity —earthenware if possible— gently fry the onion and squid, adding the fresh tomato for the last few minutes. Stir the rice around in the *sofrito* for a minute or two. Meanwhile, bring the water to the boil. You can prepare the dish ahead up to this point.

Pour the water over the rice and add the shellfish, salt and a few strands of saffron. Keep the heat high enough that the water remains at a gentle boil till the rice is nearly done; it should keep some liquid even after standing away from the heat.

Rice with Beans and Turnips
(Arroz con judías blancas y nabos)

This earthy winter dish, known locally as *arros amb fesols i naps,* is considered by many Valencians to be «the king of rices», but it is hard to find away from local home cooking. Originally a dish from the *huerta* for fiestas, it is an almost soupy dish designed to keep out the cold cooked in a *puchero,* or curvy earthenware casserole.

Serves 6-8:
200 g short-grained rice
200 g dried white haricot beans, soaked for 12 hours in cold water
250 g pig's trotter or ear
50 g fat bacon
2 l water
50 ml olive oil
2 heads of garlic
1/2 tsp mild *pimentón,* or paprika
400 g yellow turnips, peeled and chopped
250 g *morcillas* (black pudding)
4 cloves of garlic, skinned
saffron
salt

Put the beans, pig's trotter or ear and fat bacon in a large pan, cover with the water over gentle heat, bring to the boil and simmer gently (if you like, use a pressure

Rice with Beans and Turnips.

cooker). Meanwhile, fry the whole heads of garlic in the olive oil, adding the *pimentón* at the end, and add them with the chopped turnip to the beans.

Cover and simmer gently until the beans are cooked, salting to taste towards the end of cooking time. Take out the meat, and when it is cool enough, cut it into pieces for serving and put it back in the casserole. The dish can now stand for several hours.

Add the black pudding and a little saffron to the warm beans. Check the seasoning, add the rice and simmer for a further 16-18 minutes, until the rice is done. Remove from the heat and serve.

Rice a Banda
(Arroz a banda)

A plain, smudgy yellow plateful of *arroz a banda* may not look very appealing next to flashier options, but one mouthful justifies its reputation. A fishermen's dish found all around the Mediterranean coast, it varies from one area to another in details of the fish and *sofrito,* but the basic idea remains the same: all the flavours are sucked into the rice.

Originally it was eaten as a first course, followed by the fish used to flavour the cooking stocks —the name literally means «rice apart»— but it is now normally eaten alone, which allows the stock to be made with smaller and more economical rock fish. If you can, try to find one of the scorpion fish. This recipe, from Pepe Peiera of El Pegoli in Denia —the mecca of *arroz a banda*— is based on that assumption.

Rice a Banda.

Serves 6:

600 g short-grained rice

For the stock:

2 ½ kg fish, including small rock fish, gurnard or rascasse, mackerel and octopus, prawns, lobster shells, etc.
2 *ñoras* (dried sweet red peppers) or 5 tsp *pimentón*
1 head of garlic
3-4 tbsp olive oil
2 ¾ litre water

For the *sofrito:*

2 tbsp olive oil
1 fresh squid or cuttlefish, very finely chopped
little coarse *pimentón,* or mild paprika

The fish stock and the *sofrito* can be prepared ahead of time. For the stock, fry the *ñoras* (without their seeds) and garlic, pounding them together in a mortar. Put the fish in a large pan with plenty of cold water and simmer gently, adding the *ñoras* and garlic when it comes to the boil. Leave to simmer for 1 ½ hours and when cool enough, pass through a sieve.

Make the *sogrito* in a paella pan, frying the squid in the oil and adding the *pimentón* right at the end.

To finish the dish, add the rice to the paella pan, and cover with a measured 2 ½ l stock. Allow 15 minutes cooking time and another 5 minutes for the rice to rest. The final rice should be as dry as a paella.

Restaurants usually serve this with *alioli,* a garlic mayonnaise.

Baked Rice
(Arroz al horno)

This recipe, typical of home-cooking in the Marina Alta comarca in Alicante province —although you find slightly different versions all over Levante— comes from the Reus Torres family who run the Corral del Pato restaurant in an old farmhouse in Gata de Gorgos (Alicante). It's also sometimes called *arroz passejat,* meaning rice that has gone for a walk —because it was taken to the baker's oven for cooking. Until recently, this was always made with the Bomba rice grown behind Denia, which gave the grains a firmness and much greater texture.

Serves 4:

500 g short-grained rice

Baked Rice.

just over 100 ml olive oil
650 g mixed chicken and rabbit joints, and lean pork, on the bone and cut into small chunks
1 red pepper
3 ripe tomatoes, 1 grated and 2 halved crossways
200 g chickpeas, soaked for 12 hours in cold water
1 head of garlic
salt
pimentón or mild paprika
saffron
about 1 litre water

Heat the oil and fry the pieces of meat until they are golden. Add the red pepper, cut into three or four pieces, and the grated tomato. This may be done ahead of time.

Heat the oven to high. Bring the water to boil. In a 2 ½ litre capacity casserole, make a bottom layer of the rice mixed with the saffron; next put in the meat fried with the tomato; then the chickpeas arranged between the pieces of meat. Pour over the boiling water (using slightly less if the dish is not made of earthenware).

On the top, put the whole head of garlic in the middle and, around it, the red peppers and the remaining two tomatoes, halved crossways. Check for salt and put the dish in the centre of the oven for 25 minutes. It should simmer slightly and may appear to be dry earlier, but will need the full cooking time. Leave to rest for 15 minutes.

Signed Originals

Our four masterpieces,
each wine individually conceived and created.
An original worthy of our family signature.

F. Chivite

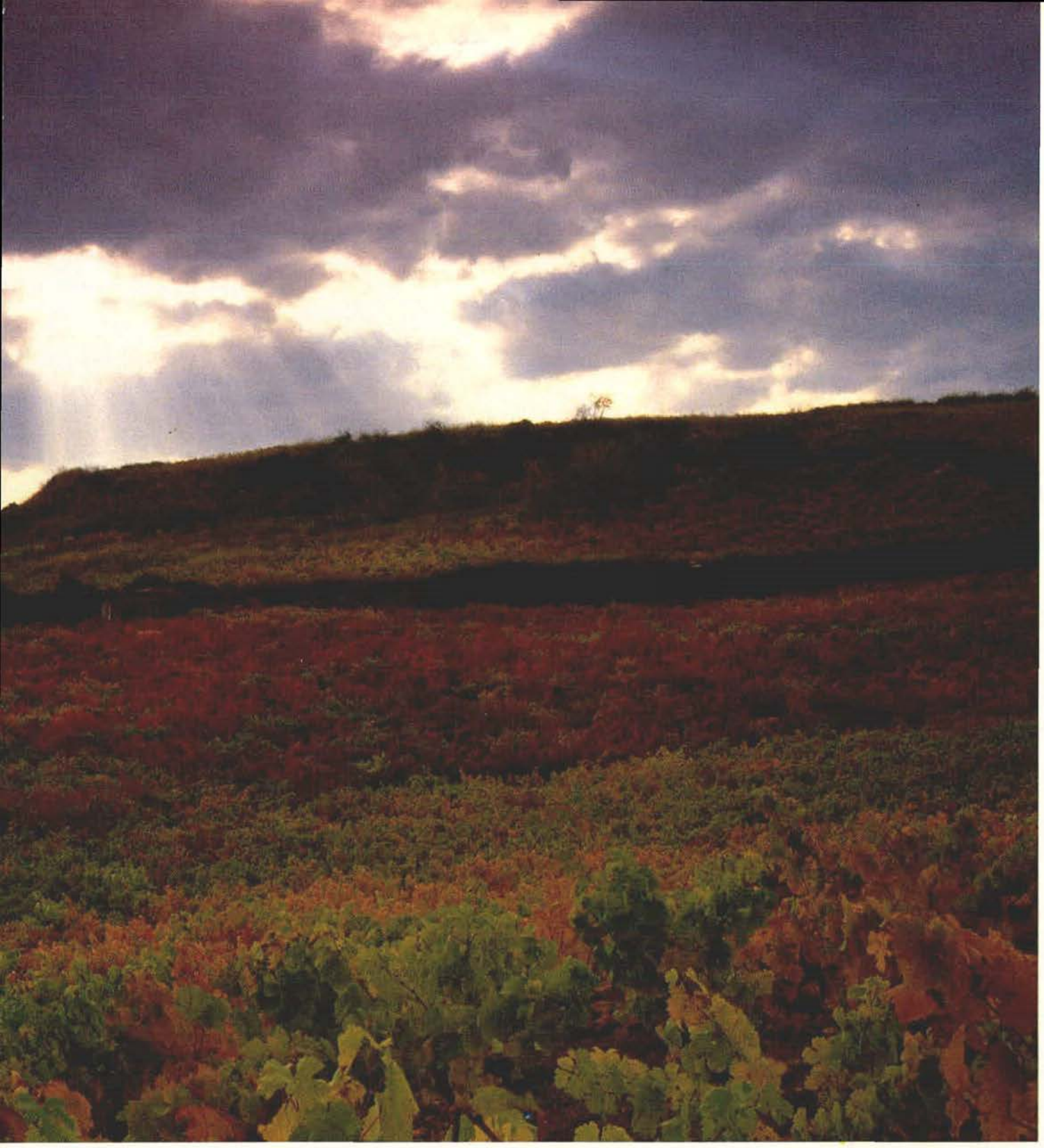
F. CHIVITE Oenologist

Julián Chivite
Bodegueros-viticultores since 1647

THE WINES OF EL BIERZO

THE WINES OF EL BIERZO

Text: **Víctor Rodríguez**
Photos: **Antonio de Benito/Sobremesa**



The future looks promising for the wines of El Bierzo, particularly the reds. They seem all set to make a niche for themselves among Spain's quality wines.

They have a lot going for them, not least their region of origin. Formerly a province, and earlier still an earldom, El Bierzo now occupies the northwest of the administrative region of Castile-Leon. Arriving in El Bierzo from further south, you are aware that though you have not yet reached the Celtic mist of neighbouring Galicia, you have left the aridity of Spain's central meseta behind you.

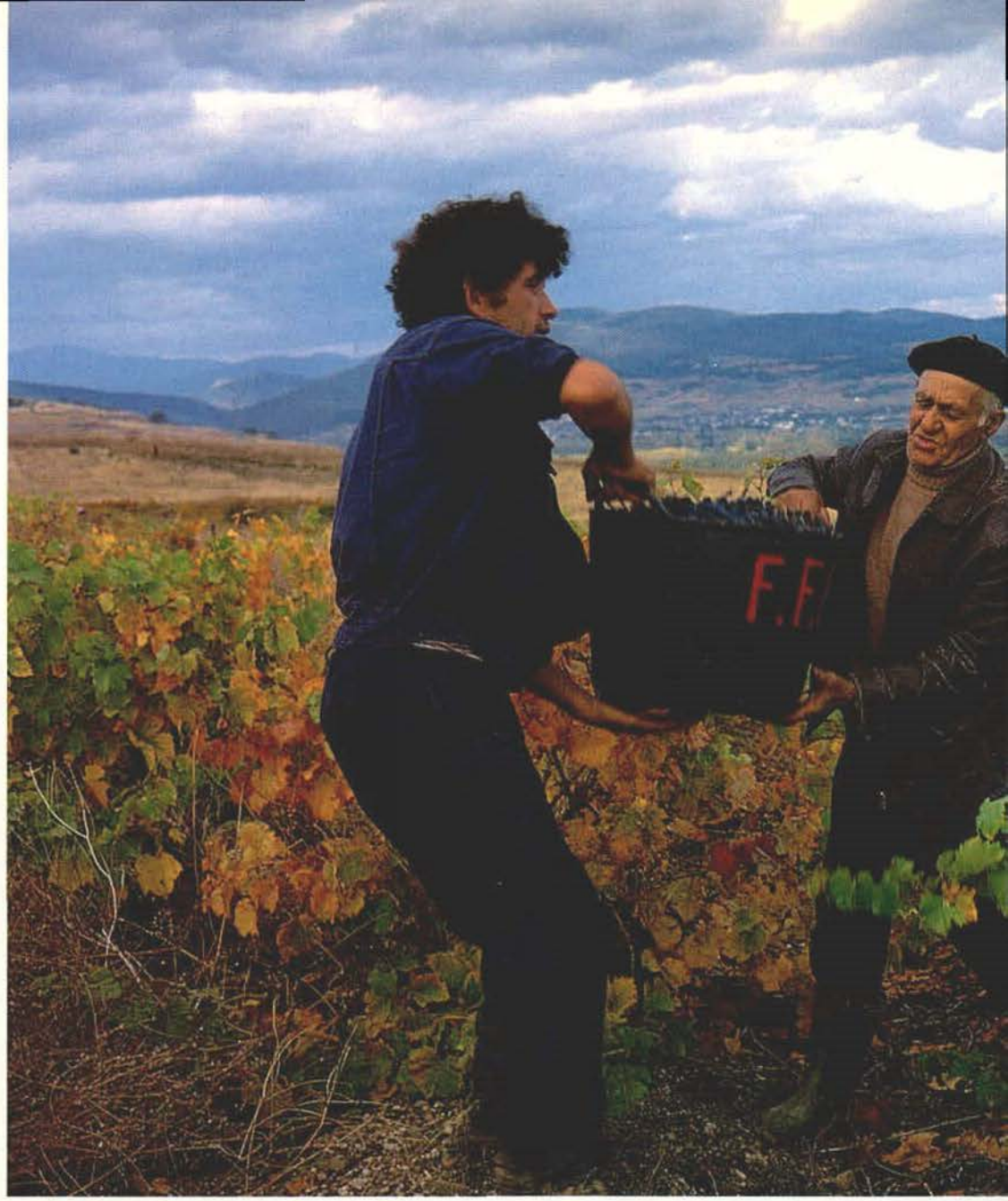
Another advantage enjoyed by this fledgling D.O. —it acquired Denomination of Origin status in December '89— is the fact that most of its vineyards are planted with black Mencía. Spain has two winegrowing regions whose names are inextricably associated with the finest reds in the country: Rioja and Ribera del Duero. Both owe their success to one grape variety, albeit known by different names: Tempranillo, or Tinto Fino. This explains in part why well-informed wine drinkers are currently taking such an interest in Mencía. Though a long established variety in Spain, its emergence from the ranks and ascent into the quality category would broaden the traditional spectrum of Spanish reds considerably.

Spain's great red wine producing areas have been doing so for so long that their names are firmly etched in the national consciousness. Priorato, Cariñena and Toro have been synonymous with red wine since the Middle Ages, as has El Bierzo's Cacabelos. Even a teetotal Spaniard can tell you that Cacabelos is famous for its ancient winemaking tradition. It is hardly surprising, then, that this area should now start producing interesting reds; everyone has always known that the basics were there. Behind El Bierzo's three years as a Denomination of Origin lie two thousand years of winemaking experience.

The ancient winegrowing area of El Bierzo lies within a hollow contained by the Ancares and Caurel mountain ranges and the highlands of Leon. Vineyards occupy the lower hillsides and the fertile valley floors through which the tributaries of the River Sil flow.

The Sil itself has forged a south-westerly passage, which allows the influence of the Atlantic, though considerably tempered, to be felt in the area. The fact that the trees adorning the landscape include both huge, spreading chestnuts and ancient gnarled olive-trees illustrates the curiously in-between nature of the climate here, a cross between the dry meseta and the lush countryside of Galicia.

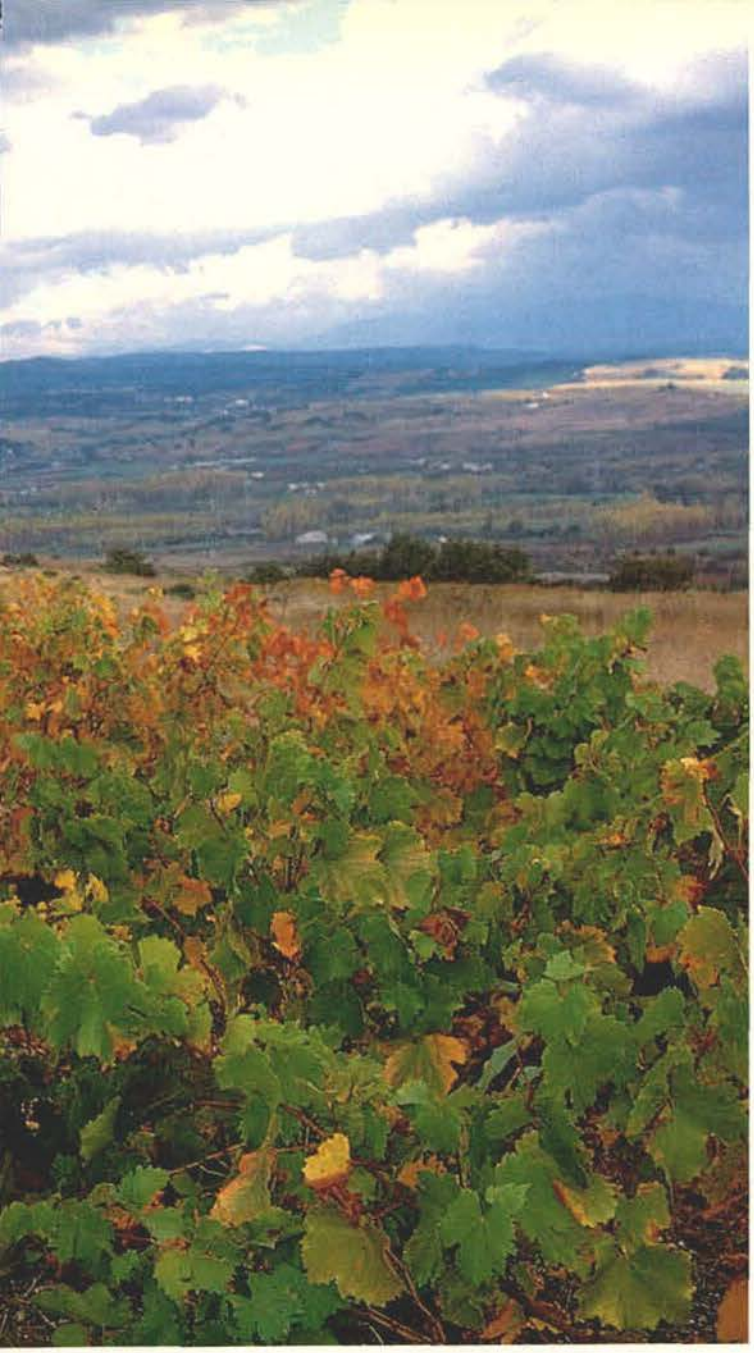
For historical reasons, El Bierzo, the largest of all Leon's subzones, has a local identity very much its own. It is also the most geographically varied part of Leon: El Bierzo Bajo (Lower Bierzo), between 400 and 800 m above sea level, is devoted mainly to agriculture, while El Bierzo Alto (Upper Bierzo) is predominantly a mining area.

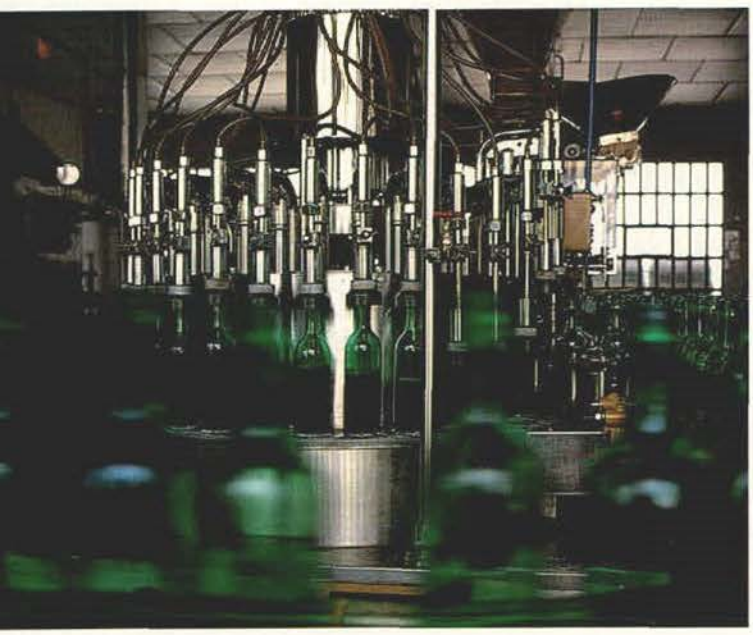


MENCIA - A LOCAL VARIETY

El Bierzo lies along the path of the historic pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, and the impact of the consequent cultural and religious influences which entered Spain from across the Pyrenees was felt there. In the course of the Late Middle Ages, some twenty five monasteries and Templar fortresses were built in El Bierzo. Some of the religious foundations belonged to the Cistercian Order, whose contribution to Spanish winegrowing in the form of vine varieties imported from Burgundy, where the Order originated, is generally recognised. The influence of so many French settlers in El

An average harvest in El Bierzo gives wines which reach about 12° of alcohol. The variety's "family connections" suggest that it might well age without the problems of quick oxidation suffered by certain other Spanish varieties.





Bierzo in general, and of the Cistercians in Carracedo in particular, is evident in the fact that one of the grape varieties introduced there during that period was known locally as *Borgoña* (Burgundy).

By the 18C, 66 % of the hillside land and 13 % of the valley floor were planted with a black grape which was almost certainly Mencía. This represented a total area under vine of over 7,000 hectares —approximately the size of the El Bierzo's present-day D.O.

It would appear, then, that Leon's sound reputation for red wine can be attributed largely to Mencía. Fortunately, Mencía is abundant in El Bierzo where it has withstood the challenge posed by other, less noble, varieties over the years.

An average harvest in El Bierzo gives wines which reach about 12° of alcohol. Flowering occurs late, an advantage of which is that setting occurs at a time when there is less risk of frost. The variety's «family connections» suggest that it might well age without the problems of quick oxidation suffered by certain other Spanish varieties.

The vineyards of El Bierzo lie between the Rivers Sil and Burbia, which flow through the D.O. area. The regulated area encompasses the districts of Bembibre, Borrenes, Cabañas Raras, Ponferrada, Camponaraya, Cacabelos, Villafranca, Arganza, Carracedelo, Carucedo, Castropodame, Congosto, Corullón, Cubillos del Sil, Fresnedo, Molinaseca, Noceda, Priaranza del Bierzo, Puente de Domingo Flórez, Sancedo, Vega de Espinareda and Villadecanes-Toral de los Vados.

The wines covered by the D.O. are made exclusively of Mencía and Garnacha Tintorera (reds), and Doña Blanca, Malvasía, Palomino and Godello (whites).

The grape harvest generally begins in El Bierzo around 22 September. The climate is mild continental, with a maximum annual temperature of 32° C and a minimum of —1° C, and an average annual rainfall of 670 mm.

The soils in the valley floor area are sedimentary: alluvium, sand and clay. The hillside soils contain decomposing slate, a factor known to be beneficial to wines grown on that type of soil

DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN BIERZO

Modern wine-growing offers no prizes —at least for red wines— for varieties that do not age well in wood. So far, Mencía has not been tested thoroughly enough for us to know whether it has the making of reserva reds. Ageing in wood is, furthermore, a delicate business: oak, and particularly new oak, might easily overwhelm the intrinsic characteristics of El Bierzo-grown Mencía.

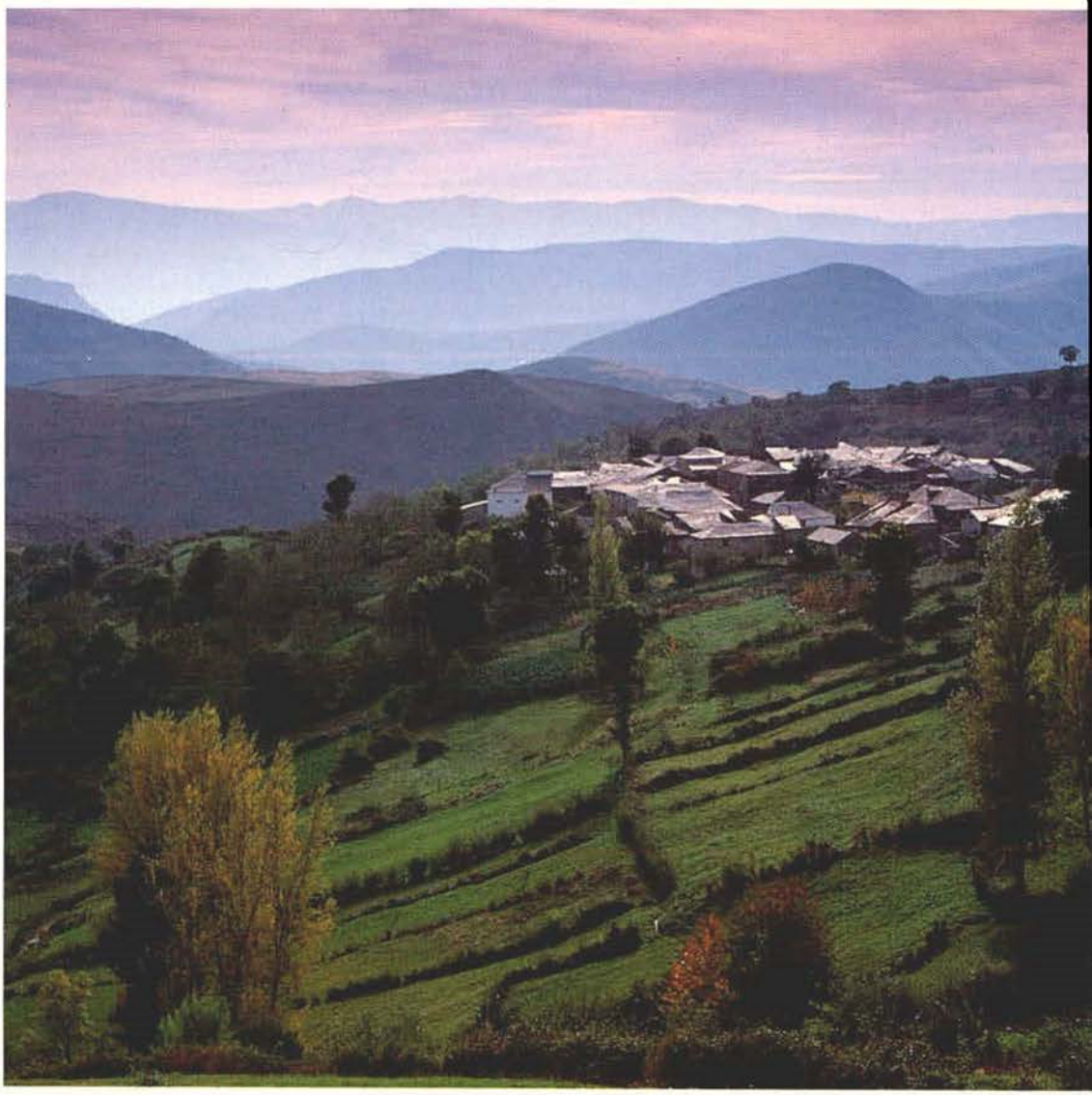
The quality of the grape is

clear in young varietal Mencía reds: they are usually ruby-to-cherry red with purplish tones, aromatic and harmoniously balanced, and velvety on the palate. They can turn out rather bland in over-sunny years.

It is far from certain that Mencía has the qualities necessary for an attractively sturdy wine. It is undeniably delicious but it is also short: it has a nice freshness and a character that is pleasant, but with few clearly defined features. Some wines, obtained from old-established Mencía vines, have aromas of ripe fruit —raisins or dates— and a concentration of rather sweet flavours related to the celery and liquorice range. They are often meaty in the mouth, with a blackberryish fruitiness.

A wine's ageing capacity can be assessed by measuring the polyphenol content of the grapes from which it is made. Trials carried out so far suggest similarities in this regard between Mencía and France's Cabernet Franc and Portugal's Prieto Picudo.

In comparative analyses with Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo, El Bierzo Mencía emerges more similar in taste to the former than the latter. Bordeaux Cabernet Sauvignon has a typically pungent, tannic



taste which gives a pleasant freshness, in contrast with the neutral tannic effect of Riojan Tempranillo. Mencía rates somewhere between these two extremes. Furthermore, the wonders of modern technology can create conditions in which, during its development in the bottle, a Mencía wine evolves so as to resemble Cabernet Sauvignon still more closely in aroma and flavour.

Although El Bierzo is clearly moving in the right direction, certain obstacles lie in the path towards the quality it is aiming for. One of these is an inheritance from a thriving bulk wine trade with the neighbouring regions of Asturias and Galicia, whose effects on El Bierzo's vineyards and wineries are obvious. The varieties grown in the valleys of El Bierzo echo those of Galicia. Some of them, such as Mencía and white Go-

The winegrowing area of El Bierzo lies within a bollow contained by mountain ranges and the highlands of Leon. The climate here is a cross between the dry meseta and the lush countryside of Galicia.

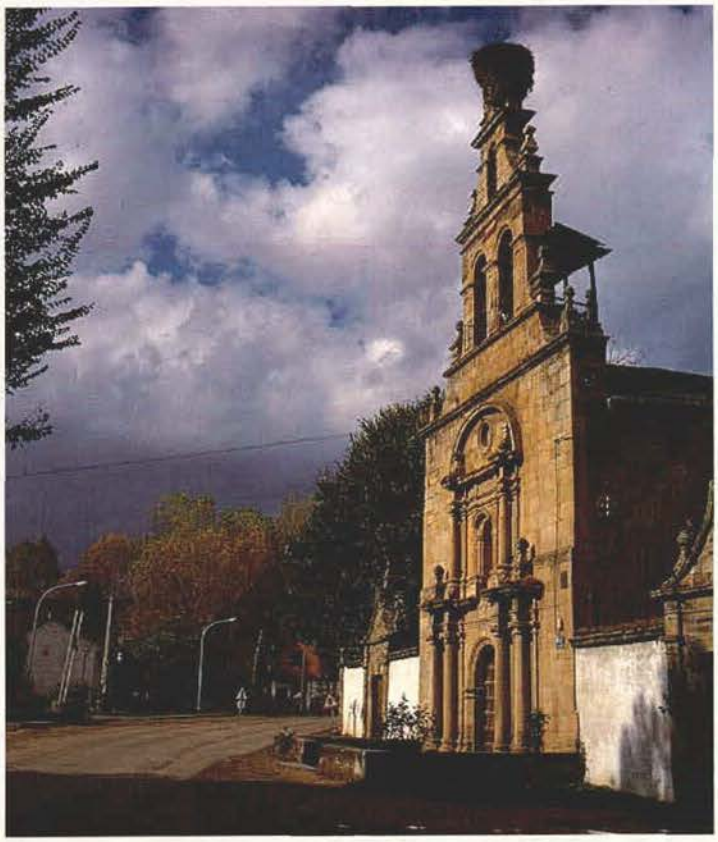
dellos and Doña Blanca, are quality varieties which are also grown in Galicia's Valdeorras, Ribeiro and on both the Galician and Portuguese side of the River Miño. Others, however (Palomino, Valenciana and Garnacha Tintorera) are mediocre varieties planted for their productivity rather than quality. These have been the source of several characterless whites, with a slightly fruity aroma during their early months and low acidity, and of many current-year *claretes* and reds. Mainly directed at the local market, they were traditionally advertised by hanging a white banner over the door of the winery when ready for sale, any surplus being absorbed by the apparently insatiable Galician market.

As if in symbiosis (for this was also the pattern in Galicia), the El Bierzo's valley floor vineyards began to take precedence over the hillside plantations. In these fertile lowland vineyards, the growing cycle is accelerated and the grapes lose aroma and appeal. Growers aiming for quality are currently trying to re-establish the hillside plantations where the yield is lower and whose soil, which contains decomposing slate, has a beneficial effect on the end product. The top producers in California's Napa Valley have been doing much the same thing.

Galicia is no longer the bulk buyer it once was: winegrowers there are now concentrating on improving local specialities made from Albariño and Treixadura. The repercussions for El Bierzo are obvious, and it is rethinking its strategy. Mencía may well emerge triumphant from what might have been a crisis.

That said, however, though some growers are forging ahead, others are resistant to change. Reluctance on the part of some co-operatives —and this is a D.O. where the co-operatives still dominate in quantitative terms— is making it difficult for quality standards to be regularised.

What El Bierzo is currently experiencing is typical of other late arrivals in the modern wine market: it lacks known names and individual entrepreneurs prepared to back the area's specific appeal.



BODEGAS

Antonio Guerra was a man before his time, who launched a brand name and promoted El Bierzo back in the 1940s. His «Vinos Guerra» advertisement was one of the earliest neon signs to appear in Madrid's Puerta del Sol. He subsequently went broke.

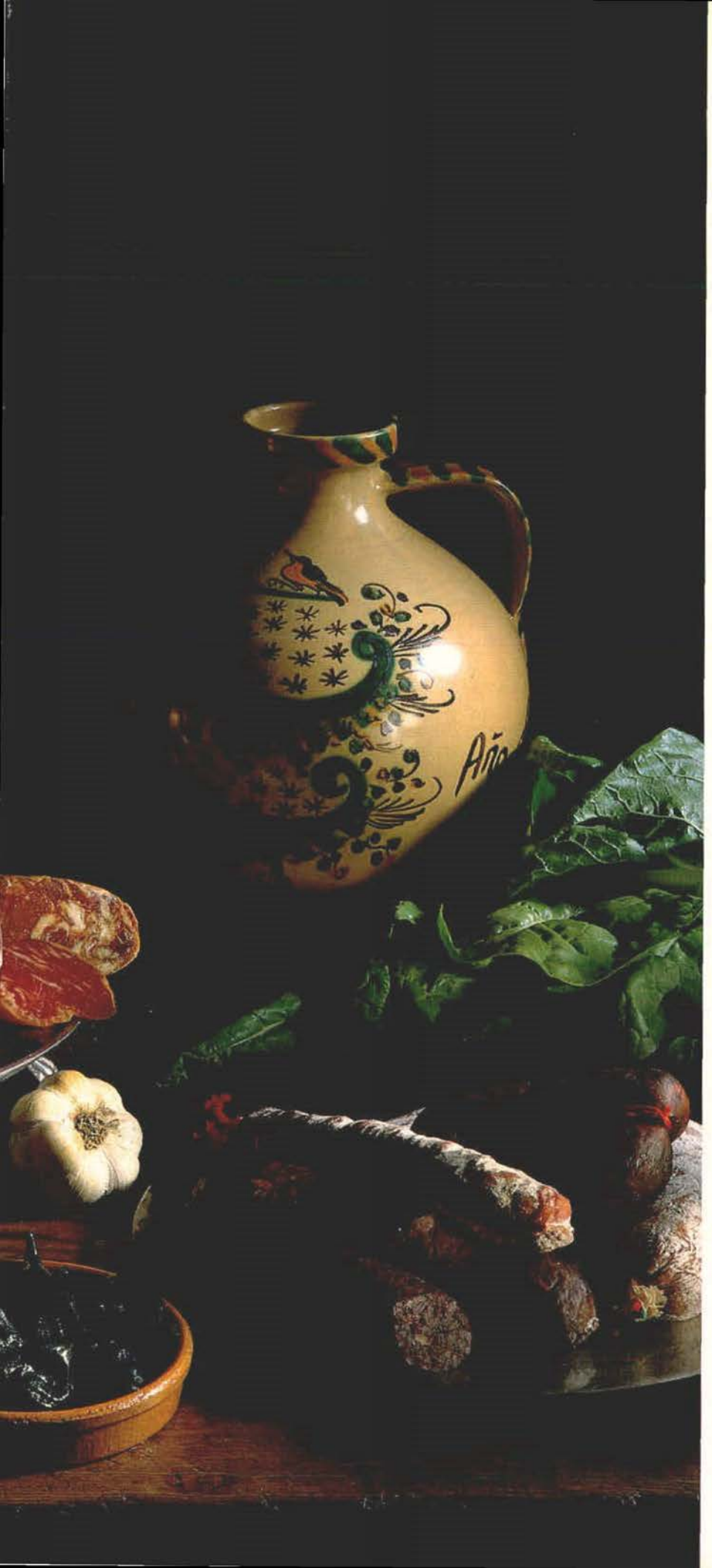
A present-day equivalent has emerged in the enterprising person of José Luis Prada, currently president of the Regulatory Council of the El Bierzo D.O. and prepared to stake his all in the attempt to make his, and its, mark. A native of Cacabelos, Prada is a defender of artisan skills and of ecological awareness. His marketing motto is «*Prada a Tope*!» (Prada's the Tops!), and it emblazons his wide range products: preserves, such as baked peppers, cherries in marc, chestnuts in syrup, pears in wine; various kinds of marc; and now wine, produced in his bodega in the little village of Canedo, near Cacabelos.

Prada bought the land and manor house of the Señorío de Canedo, an aristocratic estate whose bodega had a production capacity of 30,000 litres in the 18C. Alongside the manor house, he has now built a house-cum-bodega, technologically modern but, with its slate roofs and a lovely wooden-balconied frontage, designed to blend into its rural surroundings. Along with vineyards, he has also planted oak and chestnut trees on the estate, and he also grows blackberries and apricots.

Prada describes his Tinto de Canedo, a Mencía-based varietal red, as robust but smooth, lively and full of character. Though an avid supporter of Mencía in its own right, he is experimenting with mixing it with Cabernet and Tempranillo to see whether —and it seems not unlikely— El Bierzo's speciality improves in combination with other varieties.

Of the D.O.'s other bodegas, those most worthy of mention are: Luna Beberide, for its experiments with Riesling and Chardonnay, and Bernardo Alvarez, a tiny, ancestral bodega which has introduced modern methods and produces Viña Migarrón. Casar de Sampiro and Vega del Sellar are two other Cacabelos brands to look out for. Viña Fenita and Casar de Valdaiga are other quality wine producers in Villafranca. The best co-operative wines are Fontousal, Xesteira, Cabañas Oro and Padorniña.

Víctor Rodríguez is a journalist who specialises in food and wine. A regular contributor to the Spanish press and radio, he is also a former editor of Restauradores magazine.



RUSTIC DELIGHTS

Text: **Felipe Robla Ortiz**
Still Lifes: **Menchu Artime**
Photos: **Antonio de Benito/ICEX**

So far, this series on the regional charcuterie of Spain has dealt with the Mediterranean area, Andalusia, Extremadura, and Cantabria. For this last chapter we go to Castile-Leon, source of some of Spain's most classic sausages and cured meat products.

Castile-Leon, the biggest of Spain's administrative regions, is predominantly rural. The River Duero flows across it from east to west and, with over a third of its territory mountainous, its climate is continental. The region's economy depends heavily on farming and food production and its rural population still embraces tradition closely. All these factors play their part in making Castile-Leon a source of classic Spanish charcuterie.

Pork has been a staple of the local diet since earliest times. The splendid Romanesque portico of Leon's 11C church of San Isidoro el Real is decorated with a calendar, each month of which is illustrated by a scene typical of that time of year. The scene for October includes a rotund pig, which is seen being slaughtered in November.

THE MATANZA

The vast variety of products featured in this series all stem from a key annual event: the traditional *matanza*, or pig

slaughter. The term *matanza* covers both the killing of the pig and the subsequent preparation of its meat and offal into various edible products. But these are just the practical facets of a rite which, over the centuries, has evolved into a fiesta. Medieval connotations are still discernible even today. When one considers that, in earlier times, the *matanza* provided an essential and durable stock of food which would sustain the family throughout the ensuing year, it is hardly surprising that it should have become invested with elements of ritual and celebration.

The domestic *matanza* takes place in winter, between 11 November (St. Martin's Day) and 2 February (Candlemas), the coldest period of the year being the obvious best time to prepare sausages and cured meat so that they last as long as possible.

It is still an annual milestone for many country dwellers and its rituals are still closely respected. Two key figures in these are the (male) *matanchín* and the (female) *mondonguera,* both immensely skilled at their craft. The *matanchín* does the butchering, and his status is that of a high priest officiating at a pagan ritual. He ensures that the animal does not die until it has bled as much as possible, and then cuts up the carcass. The *mondonguera* is in charge of making the various sausages and cured cuts and her skills, handed down from generation to generation, guarantees the flavour and durability of the products made from the slaughtered pig.

The whole affair is a busy and festive one in the villages of Castile-Leon. It used, until recently, to last two to three days depending on the economic and social status of the family carrying out the *matanza.* It was an event whose importance was on a par with Christmas, with which it was sometimes timed to coincide.

In days gone by, the peasant population of the region relied almost exclusively on the annual pig slaughter for their meat supply. Meat was a scarce resource which had to be carefully preserved and eked out by the women of the house so that it lasted until the next *matanza.* And this, of course, is the origin of charcuterie: it was invented so that the available meat would last the whole year round, providing both a rich source of nourishment for people involved in heavy manual labour and the making of festive food for special occasions.

Nowadays, the vast majority of the sausages and cured meat we eat are factory made. But though the charcuterie industry uses the most modern technology, it still respects tradition. Genuine village matanzas are still very much an annual feature of country life, so customer standards are high. Not for nothing does the charcuterie industry stress the traditional approach in its advertising material and product presentation. Similarly, restaurants in areas where home-made charcuterie is still available and sought-after offer special *matanza* menus at the appropriate time of year. The town of Burgo de Osma (Soria Province), for example, puts on special gastronomic events at weekends during February and March. Elsewhere, celebrations are even organised at institutional level: every year for the last 20 years, the civic authorities of Bembibre (Leon Province) have staged a festival charmingly entitled the «*Festival Nacional de Exaltación del Botillo*» (National Festival in Honour of the Botillo Sausage) on the Saturday before Ash Wednesday.

THE PIG

The pig, source of *chorizos, morcillas,* hams and other delicacies has always been a staple of the local diet in this region.

Broadly speaking, there are two characteristic types of pig in Spain which are suitable for use in charcuterie. One is the Iberico pig, fed during a particular phase of its development on grass and acorns. This type of pig is killed and processed in charcuterie factories mainly in Salamanca Province, and gives top quality hams and sausages which fetch high prices in the marketplace. The other type of pig, which is fattened for domestic slaughter in the villages of this region as a whole, belongs to no particular breed but invariably meets the requirement of a high proportion of body fat. This is achieved by feeding it on a particular diet and by killing it later than pigs which are raised for fresh meat. Nowadays, pigs rarely end their days where they started, so their diet is not consistent throughout their lives. Even so, for the last three months before the slaughter, they are fed the traditional fattening diet of cereal, bran, potatoes, beet, acorns (in Salamanca) and chestnuts (in El Bierzo), often cooked.

Pork fat has always been an important feature of the region's traditional peasant diet, and with good reason. Peasant farming is hard work and bacon, which gives 90 calories per gram, provides a lot more more energy than ham, which gives little more than 40. Though it is hard to believe today, such considerations were essential at one time, and people used to trade ham in exchange for fat bacon.

Calorific considerations have been a determining factor in the composition of home-made charcuterie. Its wide variety can be attributed in part to the quest for different ways of making the fatty parts of the pig palatable. There is a lot of fatty bacon on a pig, and there are two traditional ways of ensuring that it lasts as long as possible and of balancing the proportion of fat to lean meat. One is to chop meat from the loin and even the ham and incorporate it into sausage mixture, thus giving superb quality sausages. The other way of increasing the lean meat content is to incorporate a certain amount of beef into the *chorizo,* which then need a high proportion of fat so as not to go too hard. Sometimes the better cuts of beef are used in the highlands of Leon to make delicious *cecina* (dried beef), at which we look more closely later on.

THE RANGE

In broad terms, charcuterie is the art of preparing and preserving pork meat, either alone or mixed with its fat, and adding seasoning and spices to make a wide range of products which are both delicious to eat and highly nutritious.

Pork products were a vital source of calories in the basic diet of Castile-Leon in times when its inhabitants lived by working on the land, particularly in the intense cold of the long winter months. The traditional taste for these products lives on in the region, although its predominant labour patterns have now changed radically for the most part. In consequence, the thriving local industry which produces traditional «country» pork products today constitutes a key sector in the regional economy. Far from losing sight of traditional methods, the industry has, if anything, used modern technology to improve on traditional standards overall.

One of Spain's most prestigious sources of charcuterie is the area around the village of Guijuelo, in Salamanca Province. Guijuelo cured ham, made from Iberico pork, has been awarded Denomination of Origin status.

It is interesting to note that ham was the first known pork product ever made. The process of salting is one that has rarely

Castile-Leon is predominantly rural. Its economy depends heavily on farming and food production and its rural population still embraces tradition closely. All these factors play their part in making this region a source of classic Spanish charcuterie.

TERUEL HAM

Simply Delicious

Text: **Manuel Angel Lej Martín**

York, Westphalia and Parma are all traditionally associated with ham. Within Spain, the equivalents are Trevelez, Jabugo, Guijuelo and Teruel. Spain's finest cured ham —Ibérico ham— is produced in Jabugo and Guijuelo and made as it is from acorn-fed, peak condition Ibérico pigs, it is luxury food. And, like any commodity in short supply, it is expensive.

But ham obtained from pigs of a lesser pedigree can also be excellent as long as the animals are carefully selected, fed and monitored. One outstanding example is Teruel ham which, officially known as *Jamón de Teruel,* now has Denomination of Origin status. The long local artisan tradition of rearing pigs and curing hams in natural conditions is now governed by Regulations which, applied by a Regulatory Council, guarantee the quality of the end product.

OPTIMUM CONDITIONS

Teruel Province is in the Aragón region of north-east Spain. It is bounded by the southern extreme of the Ebro Valley, the Sistema Ibérico mountain range, and the lowlands of El Maestrazgo. The province enjoys a cold climate, a dry and relatively unpolluted atmosphere, and encompasses large expanses of pine woods. In combination with its altitude, all these provide ideal conditions in which meat can be allowed to cure naturally.

It is still traditional in the countryside for each family to slaughter its pig every year and to make the fullest use of every possible part of it. Some fresh cuts and offal are eaten boiled, roasted or fried: other parts are made into sausages of various kinds (Aragón Regulations also specify the breeds of pig from which the hams may be derived: Landrace, Large-White and Duroc. Both Landrace and Large-White belong to the same family as the Segorbino and Morellano types which were traditionally bred in this area for family consumption, while Duroc, an American import, is a descendant of the Ibérico.

The pigs are fed on specified foodstuffs, and there is a more specific authorised diet which has to be adhered to during the forty days before the slaughter. No medical treatment can be administered during the last two weeks.

Hams are made from the hind legs of pigs which have between four and seven centimetres' thickness of fat at fourth rib level. Males must have been castrated and females must not be in heat when slaughtered. Pigs for slaughter must be between 115 and 130 kilos live weight, and they must be at least eight months old: for the first month and a half they are milk-fed, and are then fed on prepared feed for the remaining six and a half months.

When they reach the solid food stage, animals which are to be used for ham are marked with the initial JTE, the breeder's identification number, and the week and year of marking. There is a further selections process in the abattoir, and legs for use as hams are marked with a stamp controlled by the Regulatory Council. The stamp is cancelled if the ham is disqualified for some reason during the ensuing process, in which case the hoof is also removed. These are useful clues in recognising a Jamón de Teruel. If it has no hoof or if it weighs less than seven kilos, it is not genuine.

The process which transforms a hind leg of pork into a *Jamón de Teruel* must be carried out in parts of the province at least 800 m (2,624 ft) above sea level: the town of Teruel, the provincial capital, is about 1,000 m (3,280 ft) up. The process consists of two phases —curing and maturing— and takes at least nine months in all. The curing phase should last no longer than 90 days and involves:

— Salting, with common salt, for a maximum of 20 days.

Teruel province enjoys a cold climate, a dry and relatively unpolluted atmosphere, and encompasses large expanses of pine woods. In combination with its altitude, all these provide ideal conditions in which meat can be allowed to cure naturally.

— Washing, in warm water.
— Drying. During this part of the process, natural fusion of some of the fats in the adipose layer occurs.

Hams are then hung in the moisture and temperature conditions of the natural environment for the maturing phase. This is declared complete when the Regulatory Council issues the ham with a numbered «bracelet» and hot-brands it with the word TERUEL and a star symbol. For clearance by customs, consignments of Teruel hams need a Denomination of Origin certificate issued by the Regulatory Council which conforms to the INDO standard.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

All these Regulations must be complied with to obtain the definitive qualification which guarantees standards of both quality and hygiene. Many Teruel ham producers, especially those working on a small, artisan scale, still apply inherited wisdom and traditional techniques in their work. A cellar phase follows the maturing phase: hams stored in half-light gradually develop a finer flavour and the outer surface forms a thin coating of white or grey-blue mould which protects and preserves the hams for several months. These traditional ham-makers select the best and healthiest pigs, supplement their feed with fresh natural ingredients, use a minimum of salt in the salting process, hang their hams to dry where they will absorb natural, wind-borne aromas and allow the process to take its course slowly. They trim and prepare their hams one by one, exercising an ancient craft.

SLICING AND SERVING

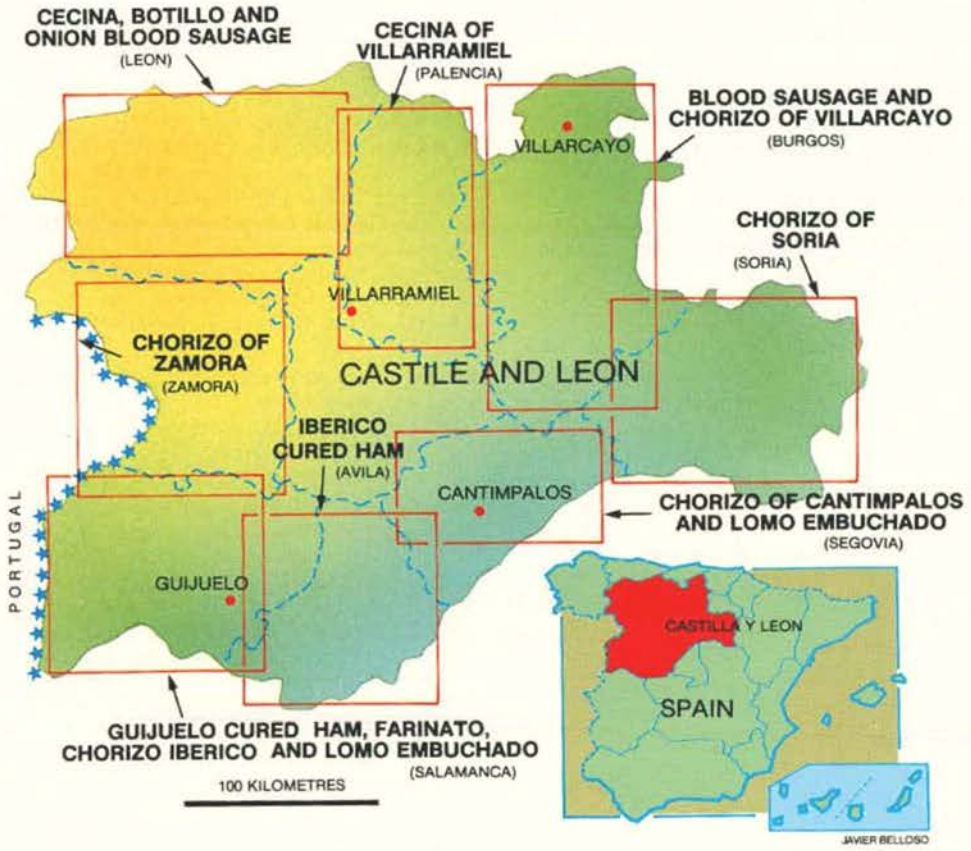
Even the best *Jamón de Teruel* can seem coarse unless it is properly cut and presented. Slicing ham is not difficult as long as you have a firm base (the special boards fitted with a clamp are ideal), one very sharp, long, narrow knife and another short-bladed double-edged one (for trimming the ham before carving). Cured ham should be hand cut into very thin slices which contain both red and white meat: they look lovely and smell delicious. There is one unbeatable way of serving this type of ham, and it could not be simpler. Take a thick slice of fresh or toasted country bread; rub it with a cut ripe tomato and a cut garlic clove, sprinkle with olive oil and top with a slice of ham. It's even better with a glass of wine.

changed at all since it was first used well before the Christian era. Salt triggers off certain biochemical processes and exerts a bacteriostatic effect, which means meat is preserved for considerable periods of time, particularly in dry climates and at low temperatures.

But ham is more than just a preserved meat. It is a luxury product whose quality depends on various factors. Among these are its place of origin and the curing method applied; the breed and age of the pig from which the meat was obtained, and what it was fed on. Iberico pigs, for example, are fed on acorns, and the essential oils of these give the meat a particular aroma and flavour. The Guijuelo ham undergoes a two-phase curing process. The first phase lasts from eight to nine months, during which time the hams are hung for natural drying in mountain air. Once this phase is complete, they are transferred to dark cellars where, much like quality wines, they are matured for a period of at least nine months. Avila ham, an accredited product also made from Iberico pork, is cured in natural dryers for about a year.

In addition to cured hams and shoulders of pork, the salt-cured meat products of this region include *cecina*, which is very typical of the upland areas of Leon Province. Considered a delicacy, it is made from best cuts of beef which are salted and spiced (and sometimes also smoked) and then cured in natural dryers for about six months. Villarramiel, a town in Palencia Province, is known for a speciality *cecina* made from quality cuts of horse-meat.

While salt-curing is the oldest known method of preserving meat, sausage-making is also an ancient skill which has long been considered the best way of preserving the products of the *matanza*. *Morcilla*, blood sausage, was probably the earliest type ever made. It makes use of the blood of the slaughtered animal (to which special properties were attributed), and the recipe has changed little over the centuries, as extant 12C documents prove. Pig's blood is mixed with pork fat and spices, and the mixture is then stuffed into a length of large intestine and cooked for three quarters of an hour. The most typical sausages of this type from Castile-Leon are *morcilla de Burgos*, which includes rice among its ingredients, and *morcilla de León*, which is 70 % onion. *Morcilla* is delicious fried, roasted or boiled, and it is also a flavour-contributing ingredient in classic chick-pea or bean country stews, such as *cocido* and *fabada*.



Sausages which use paprika are all relatively «modern», since this was one of the spices which was brought to Spain from the New World.

Spain's archetypal paprika sausage is the *chorizo,* of which there are many variants, all descendants of Salamanca's *longaniza. Longaniza* is made with a lower proportion of lean meat to fat than *chorizo,* but both are cured sausages whose basic recipe is the same: lean and fat pork, common salt, paprika, garlic and marjoram. There are *chorizos* from Cantimpalos (Segovia Province), Villarcayo (Burgos Province), Soria (these can contain up to 15% beef), and Zamora — and these are just a few examples of Castile-Leon's vast range. The links are either straight or U-shaped, depending on their size. Like *longanizas,* they can be eaten raw, boiled, fried or roasted and are all equally delicious. *Cular chorizos* made of pure Iberico meat, Iberico loin chorizos made in Salamanca Province, and Segovia's famous loin chorizos are all invariably eaten raw. All these are thick sausages, stuffed into lengths of large intestine.

REGIONAL SPECIALITIES

There are two singular charcuterie products in the region: *farinato,* a Salamanca

RECIPES

Salamanca-style Broad Beans
(Habas a la Salamantina)

Serves 4:
1 kg shelled broad beans
200 g chorizo
150 g cured ham
olive oil
paprika, black pepper, salt

Boil the beans in salted water to cover. Skin the chorizo, slice or chop it, dice the ham finely, and fry both together gently. Remove from the heat and add the paprika. Drain the beans, leaving a little liquid with them in the pan, and set aside to cool slightly but not to get cold. Add the chorizo and ham mixture to the pan, stir in, and bring to the boil before serving.

Zamora-style Rice
(Arroz al estilo de Zamora)

Serves 4:
500 g rice
3 cloves garlic
500 g onion
250 g turnip
6 thin slices belly pork or streaky bacon
1 pig's foot
1 pig's ear
1 pig's snout
250 g cured ham
2 tbsp pork dripping
1 tsp paprika
small bunch parsley
1 sprig thyme
2 tbsp olive oil
salt

Clean and trim the ear, foot and snout and scald in boiling water for a few minutes. Drain, then place in a pan with the thyme, and cover with salted water. Bring to the boil and simmer gently for 3 hours or until tender. Pour off the cooking liquid and set aside. Remove the meat from the pig's foot and cut into chunks along with the ear and snout.

Heat the dripping and olive oil in an earthenware casserole and add the finely chopped onion, the peeled and sliced garlic cloves, the chopped parsley and the peeled and sliced turnips. Cook all these ingredients together gently until they begin to turn golden, then add the chopped ham and the other meat ingredients. Add 1 1/2 l of the reserved cooking liquid and simmer gently until the turnips are done. Stir in the paprika, add the rice and check for salt. If necessary, add more stock so that there is twice as much liquid as rice. Cook for 10 minutes, then arrange the belly pork/bacon in thin slices on the top. Place the casserole in a pre-heated oven for about 10 minutes or until the topping is beginning to brown.

Remove from the oven and set aside for 10 minutes before serving directly from the casserole.

Chopped Savoury
(Picadillo)

Serves 4:
1 kg lean pork
100 g cured ham
250 g fat bacon
1 onion
1 tomato
1 clove garlic
1 hard-boiled egg
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp paprika
salt

Cut the pork, bacon and ham into small dice and place in a frying pan. Sprinkle with the paprika and then the oil. Chop the garlic, onion and the peeled and seeded tomato, and add to the meat. Season, then add half a cup of water and cook, covered, over a gentle heat until the meat is tender. Garnish with chopped egg before serving.

El Bierzo Pasty
(Empanada berziana)

Serves 4:
500 g yeast dough
50 g pork dripping
1 botillo sausage (750 g)
1 egg
2 potatoes
2 large onions
2 tomatoes
1 cooked red pepper
oil, salt and black pepper

Work the pork dripping into the dough as if making puff pastry, dotting it over surface of the dough then folding it over and rolling gently. Repeat the process until all the dripping is used up. Meanwhile, peel and cut up the potatoes into thin half-rounds and fry them gently, covered, in plenty of olive oil. In another pan, fry the finely chopped onions and the peeled and chopped tomatoes and pepper. Season with salt and pepper. When the ingredients are soft, add the botillo, skinned and cut into pieces, and mix in gently.

Divide the dough in half. Roll out one half and spread it on a greased and floured baking sheet. Place a layer of potatoes in the middle and on top of this a layer of the botillo mixture. Roll out the remaining dough and place on top. Seal the edges and form a pasty, making a slit in the top to let out steam. Paint with beaten egg and bake until the pastry is crisp and golden.

Sweet Dripping Buns
(Bollos de manteca)

Serves 4:
1/2 kg pork dripping
1/2 l olive oil
1/2 kg sugar
aniseed
cinnamon
1 glass white wine
1 glass marc
juice of 2-3 lemons
flour

Heat the dripping in a casserole. Remove from the heat, then add the oil, cinnamon, sugar, aniseed, wine, marc and lemon juice. Beat all these ingredients together and when they are thoroughly mixed, add enough flour, little by little, to form a reasonably firm dough. Knead well then roll out to scone thickness and cut out shapes with a mould or shape buns with your hands. Place the buns on a greased and floured metal baking tray and bake in the oven for 45 minutes.

(Recipe from *La matanza del puerto* by Teresa de Santos and Ignacio Sanz)

speciality, and *botillo* from El Bierzo in Leon Province. *Farinato* is made with breadcrumbs, oil, pork fat and flour, flavoured with common salt, paprika and onion. Marrow, aniseed and marc are sometimes included. It is made into U-shaped links, and eaten fried or raw.

The *botillo* is an El Bierzo classic. It is made of chopped tail, rib and jowl of the pig, all these cuts being rich in lean meat since they come from the muscular parts of the animal. The meat is macerated in salt, sweet and hot paprika, garlic and marjoram, then stuffed into a bag made from intestine or the stomach, and then smoke-cured. *Botillo* is eaten boiled and, accompanied by cabbage or turnip greens, is traditionally served at carnival time in El Bierzo.

All the charcuterie products mentioned here are just some of the better-known ones from the Castile-Leon region. There are countless other local and family recipes, all of them responses to the challenge of how to preserve meat effectively and palatably. All are healthy and nutritious forms of food, and all are of the humblest origins, based on the nutritional needs of peasant workers who had only the simplest ingredients at their disposal. Today, they have risen to gourmet status. The hospitable country people of Castile-Leon still maintain the charming custom of keeping their larders well stocked with good local charcuterie for special social and family occasions.

Felipe Robla Ortiz is a Veterinary Surgeon. An expert in agriculture and food production, he was formerly Director of Leon's Municipal Veterinary Services, Technical Director of the City of Leon Municipal Abattoir, and Director General of Agriculture and Agricultural Trade of the Regional Government of Castile-Leon. He is currently Provincial Director for Leon of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

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Castellblanch · Dos Lustros

Castellblanch have been producing Cava since 1908, always with the maximum possible care and attention to detail. This stretches even to developing their own strain of yeast, something evident in the bouquet and taste of Dos Lustros.

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Josep Masachs · Carolina de Masachs

Josep Masachs was founded in the early 20th Century and now produces 2,000,000 bottles annually, many of the grapes coming from their own vineyards located near Vilafranca in Barcelona province.

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Reserva is an exceptional vintage Cava produced from the three traditional white grapes. 1988 was a good growing year with the grapes from prime vineyards being pressed immediately after picking. The cuvee of 265,400 bottles released in September 1992.

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The Monistrol family has been producing wines in the village of Monistrol de Noya since 1882. In 1980 the company was purchased by Martini and Rossi who have continued the tradition of the family.

Masia Vallformosa · Brut Vintage

Masia Vallformosa is an independant family-owned estate making high quality Cava wines. Their estate has 6 vineyards covering 300 hectares from which the grapes for Brut Vintage are selected.

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Parxet · Extra Brut 1988

Parxet began making Cava wines in 1920. The new production plant was established in 1981 and is equipped with the latest examples of advanced technology. This is reflected in the excellent quality of the wines.

Raimat · Chardonnay Brut

The Raimat estate of 3000 hectares was bought in 1914 by Manuel Raventos and has been transformed from a wilderness into magnificent vineyards with an impressive bodega.

Segura Viudas · Aria

Segura Viudas Winery began to make Cava commercially in 1969. Using grapes from their own estate and the best technology available, they recently created the renowned vintage 'Aria' Cava.

CAVA
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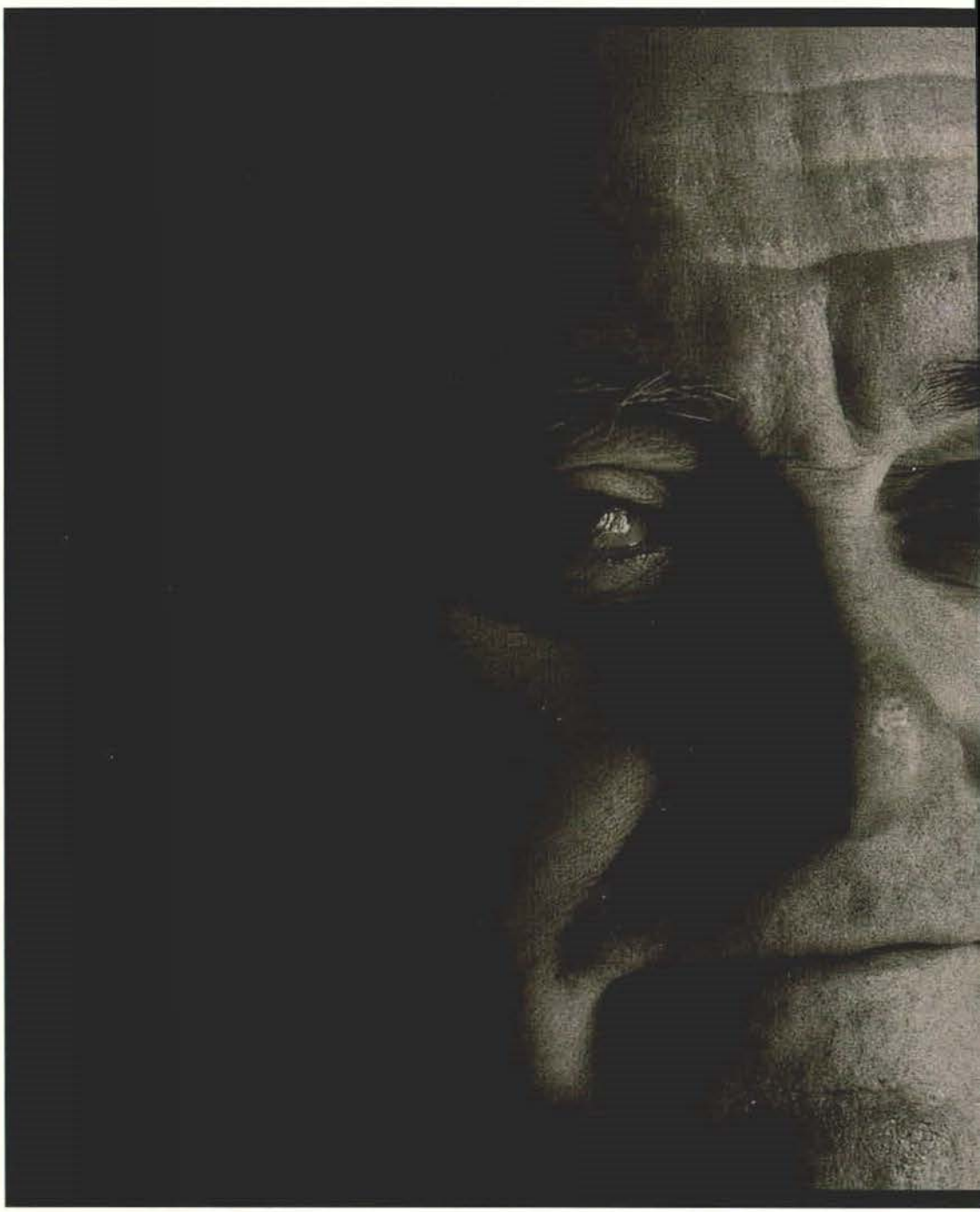
Wines From Spain (ICEX-UK), 66 Chiltern Street, London W1M 1PR

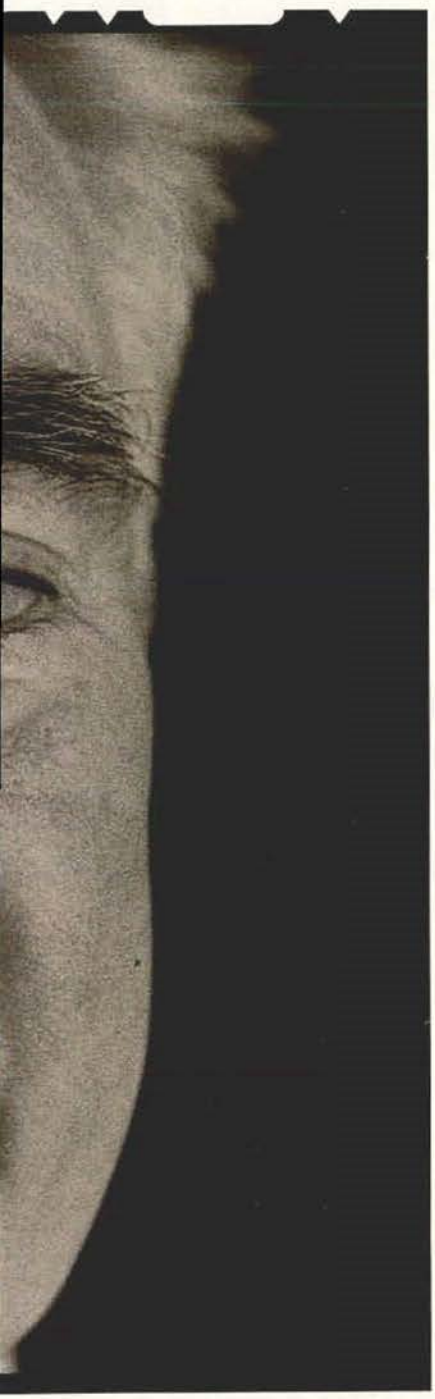
HEART OF OAK

The bodega of R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia stands beside the railway, just outside Haro, wine capital of the Rioja. Founded in 1877, this family business is the third oldest in La Rioja. It is headed today by Pedro López de Heredia, grandson of the founder and something of a controversial figure, known as a champion of traditionalism even in this most traditional of winegrowing areas. As I sat in the Dickensian reception room of this famous firm, surrounded by sepia-tinted portraits of distinguished figures from its past, I steeled myself for what promised to be a challenging encounter.



PEDRO LOPEZ

Text: **Hawys Pritchard**



DE HEREDIA

Photos: **Pablo Neustadt/ICEX**

Photographs in wine magazines and his reputation for outspokenness had led me to expect someone large, glossy and booming. It took me some moments to realise, therefore, that the small, smiling softly-spoken figure who edged into the room was Don Pedro himself. Tousled of hair and surprisingly blue of eye, López de Heredia is not a man who dresses to impress. His slate-blue suit was tailor-made, but for discretion and endurance rather than style, and his plain black tie spoke more of traditional than sartorial priorities.

Through the window, one could see across the yard the family house which is an integral part of the picturesque bodega complex set up by the enterprising Rafael López de Heredia Landeta in 1877. In every reference to this bodega I have ever read, it is described as 'Art Nouveau'. It isn't. If one were forced to put an architectural label to the tower which is its trademark, its pointed brick gables crisply outlined in fretted wood, Victorian Railway with Mudéjar influence would be nearer the mark. Be that as it may, this is where Pedro López de Heredia was brought up and it is the source of his earliest impressions. He played in the bodega as a small child, 'helping' the workers: «I was probably a terrible nuisance, but I loved it. I loved the whole atmosphere, and doing what the grown-ups did.»

NATURE'S WAY

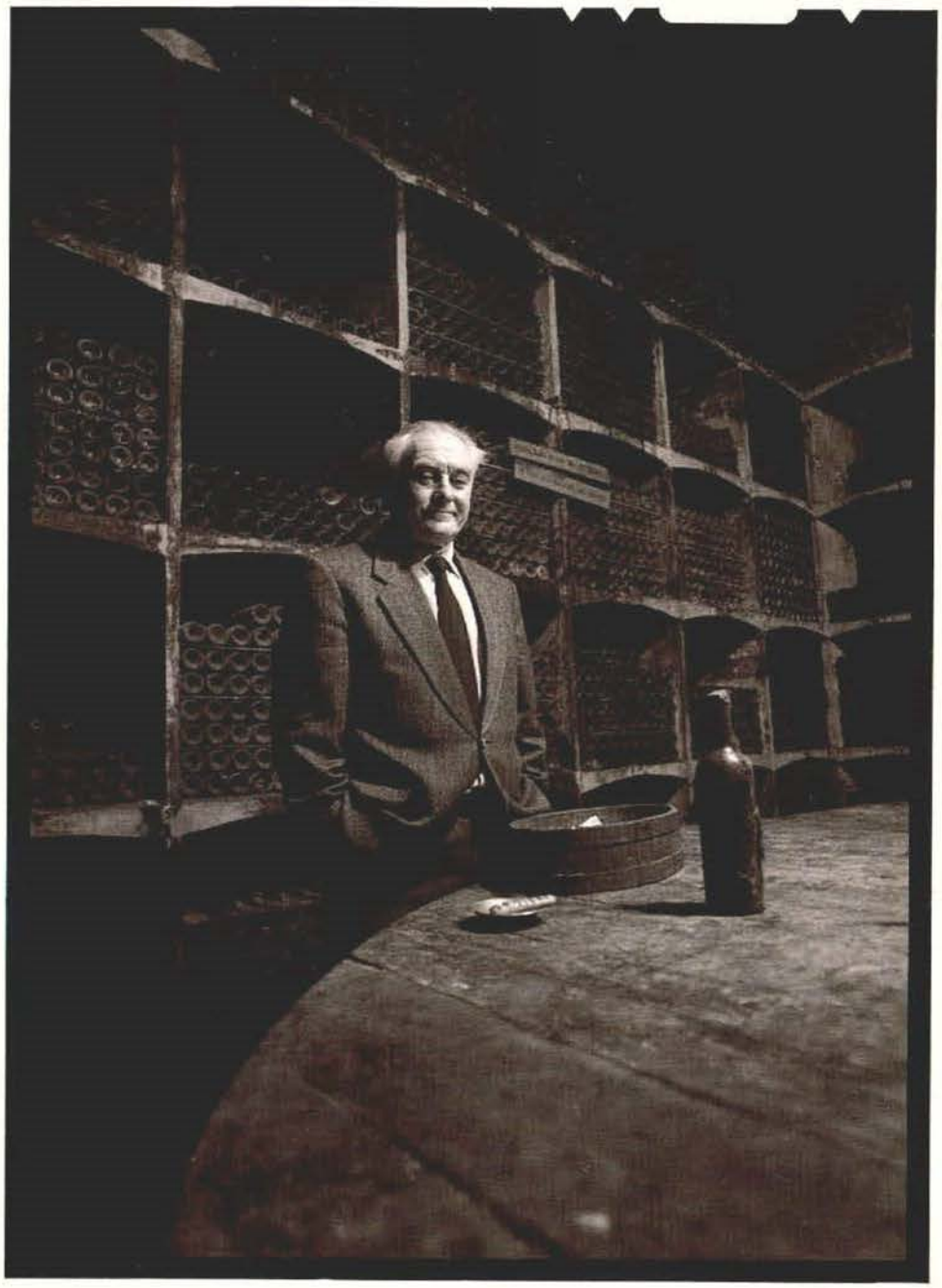
From the age of about eight on, he was gradually introduced into the subtler mysteries of wine by his father, also named Rafael. «He'd pour wine into a silver cup and say 'Look Pedro. See the difference in colour... that means it's starting to mature'». His father worked very much by eye and nose, and passed on his empirically acquired skills to his son, much as he had learned them himself. Along with them he transmitted a profoundly traditional approach which is still the lodestone of this bodega, despite the Rioja boom of the 1970s, the subsequent New Wines of Spain phenomenon, and all the innovations that these have entailed.

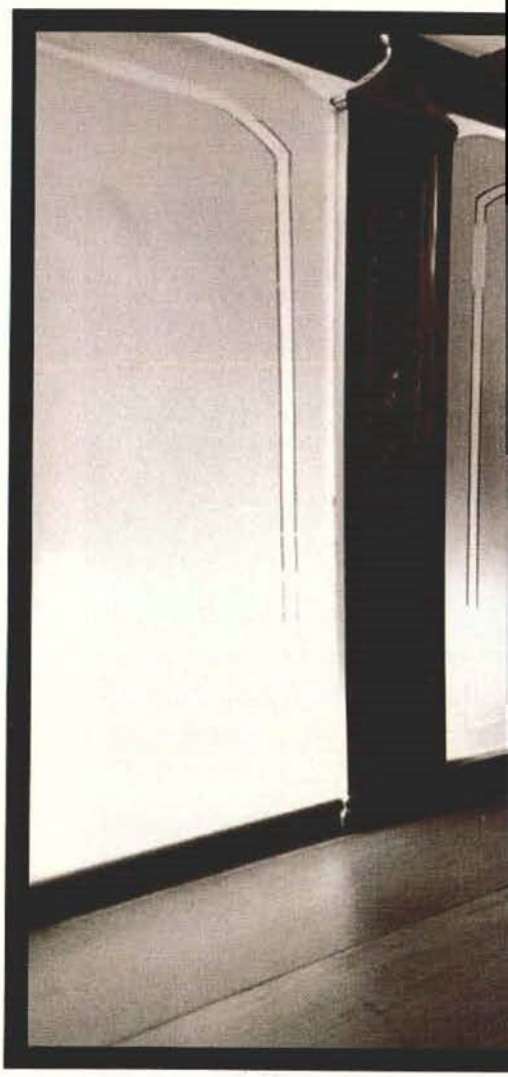
Holidays from boarding school in nearby Logroño, and later from Madrid University, were spent helping with the grape harvest, working in the bodega, going up into the woods to choose timber for casks, watching, listening, asking questions, consulting text-books... learning the business from top to bottom. His father left his choice of career to him (though it must have been clear by that time that Pedro, unlike his elder brother, was hooked). He did, however, advise him that he need not study chemistry if he was thinking of going into winemaking. Indeed, he added, it might even prove to be more of a hindrance than a help, since he might fall for the idea that chemistry could be used to manipulate a wine's development. This was not only a false premise, but also a fraudulent practice. Pedro studied Law, and joined the family business in 1955.

To call Pedro López de Heredia a defender of traditional values is like calling Margaret Thatcher a Conservative. The companies describe themselves as *'Cosecheros, Criadores y Exportadores'* (Growers, Maturers and Exporters). The word *'criador'* derives from the verb *'criar'* which in the oenological context means 'to mature', but it is also the everyday Spanish word used for 'breeding, nurturing bringing up', as applied to animals, and children. This ties in well the essence of the family philosophy, namely that wine is a living, natural, and biological substance. To create good wine, Don Pedro explains, you need good grapes. These call for good land and good vineyard care. In clean, traditional bodega conditions, nature does the rest. The skilled winemaker simply allows the wine to develop naturally, selecting for quality but not altering its biological and biochemical progress in any way. 'My predecessors

created the bodega and imbued us with their convictions. We have a duty to maintain them.'

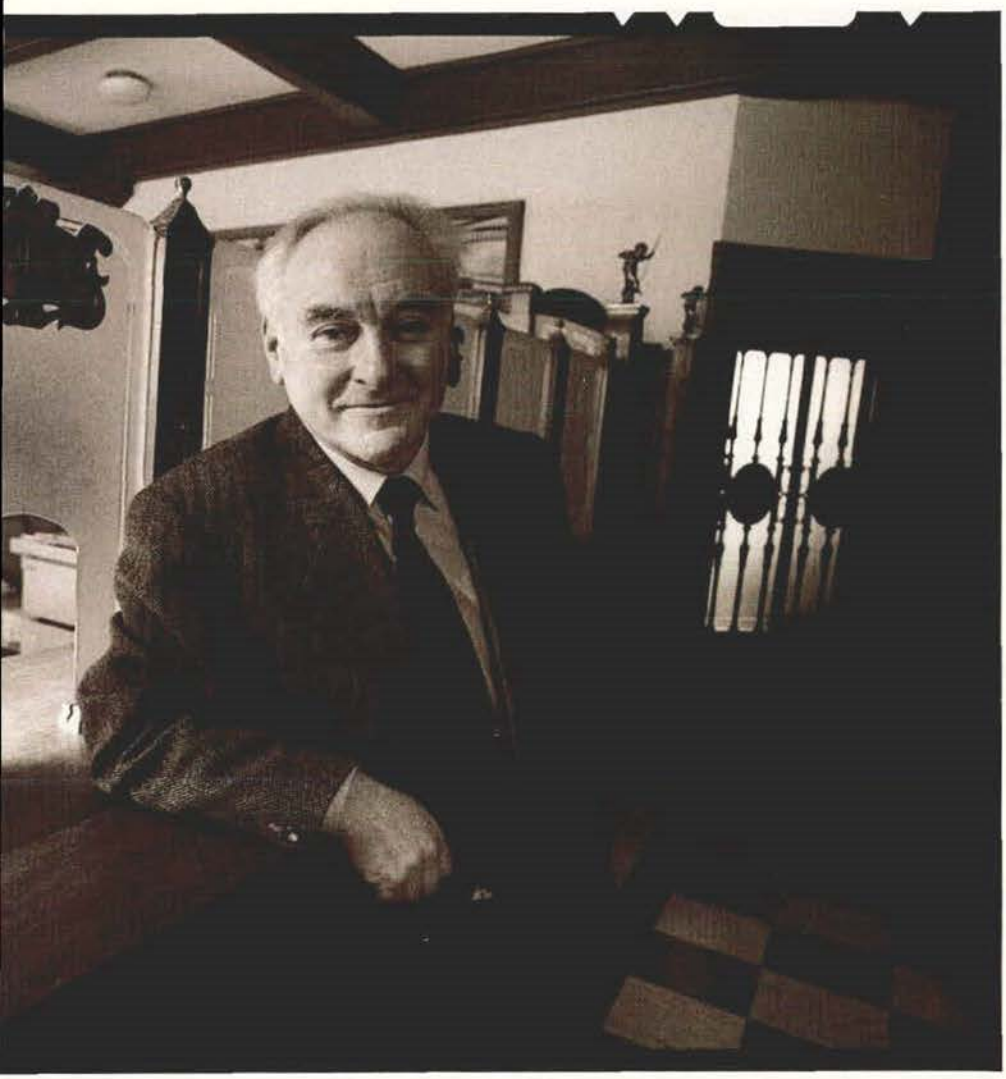
This is all very poetic and seductive, I observe, but isn't it rather romantic in this day and age? Surely, Spanish wine has a lot to thank new technology for? He waxes metaphorical, his mild tone taking on verve by the minute. 'I remember a time when one used to see some really ugly women around. Nowadays, you hardly ever see an ugly woman. They diet, they make themselves up and dress well, and though they may be much of a muchness, they all look quite pleasant. But there have always been true beauties, women of character, who don't need that sort of artificial help, and there always will be.' (A four hour train journey and a heavy shower had not left me looking my best, but I reminded myself what I was there for, and soldiered on.) 'And wine's the same. There used to be some appalling wine around. Nowadays you hardly ever find that. New technology has improved average quality, but it's also imposed uniformity. There's plenty of demand for wine of that sort, but it's not what *our* customers want. They want what we make: fine Rioja wines, and that means oak-matured. Our customers are addicts.' And there seem to be plenty of them: some 80% of López de Heredia's considerable sales are within Spain.





WOOD IS GOOD

Truly traditional wine-making takes lots of time, manpower and space, and in this day and age all these cost money. López de Heredia's range of wines belongs firmly at the top of the price-range though, as Don Pedro points out, they are not the most expensive in La Rioja. They are made from grapes from their own famous vineyards supplemented by some grapes brought in from selected local growers. The varieties are the Rioja classics: Tempranillo, Garnacho, Mazuelo and Graciano for reds, and Malvasía and Viura for whites. So determinedly traditionalist are they that their own grapes are still transported from vineyard to bodega in *comportas*, old wooden hods which hold 100 kg (220 pounds) of grapes and in which the fruit survives the trip virtually undamaged. Today, in winegrowing Spain as a whole, *comportas* have been replaced by trailers



«The skilled winemaker simply allows the wine to develop naturally —Don Pedro explains. My predecessors created the bodega and imbued us with their convictions. We have a duty to maintain them.»

which carry 2,800-3,000 kg (6,160-6,600 pounds) at a time. Though the economic advantages are obvious, it is equally obvious that the grapes are far more susceptible to damage en route.

Just after the bodega celebrated its centenary in 1977, a new building was added, incorporating modern reception bays for trailer deliveries («We just have to buy in grapes, so there was no alternative»). It also houses 40 stainless steel tanks lined with epoxy resin which are used for the initial fermentation phase of the wine pressed in that part of the bodega. After 6 to 10 days, the wine is transferred to wood until it is ready for bottling.

Otherwise, the bodega remains impervious to modern technology —even bottling is done by hand. It still has its own workshop where a team of five coopers make new oak casks and vats and repair and maintain the vast stocks that occupy its huge vaults. The craftsmen work with tools and methods that seem impossibly simple for the precision work they do. The oldest of the team, now in his 50s I would guess, learned his skills in his native Jerez starting at age 13. The youngest, a local lad of 25, already has 10 years experience as a cooper at López de Heredia. However, even they recognise that theirs is a craft on the brink of extinction.

For Pedro López de Heredia, wood is good. «When you put your head in an oak *tina* after it's been washed out, it smells marvellous. It smells of wine. The best you can hope for in a steel or concrete tank is that it won't smell of anything at all.» But aren't modern materials much easier to keep clean and control? Haven't the improvements in standards of hygiene and homogeneity they have introduced been a major step forward for Spanish wine? «At a certain level, yes. And of course you can make disgusting wine in wood if it's not looked after properly. But lack of hygiene has never been much of a problem here in La Rioja. You see wine, oak and cork are all noble substances —they belong together. What would you prefer to have around you? Old wood or stainless steel?»

«But...» I start, meaning to protest that, not being a grape, I am not strictly speaking a relevant point of comparison. But Pedro López de Heredia is in his oratorical stride. Oak creates atmosphere. Six centimetre thick oak provides protection from both heat and cold. Wine that is fined with beaten egg-whites and racked annually by hand retains what it needs and 'excretes' the rest naturally. Not for nothing are lees known as *heces*, or faeces, in Spanish. You can clarify wine by high-speed spinning: it's quick and cheap. But it's like giving it a laxative —it flushes the good out with the bad. Natural methods call for supervision by a skilled *bodeguero*. Oenologists and scientists belong in laboratories, not in bodegas. No one believes that modern methods are an improvement on the old traditional ones, properly applied. What they do achieve is higher, quicker productivity and a cheaper product, but no one who uses artificial methods to alter or speed up wine's natural development processes can justifiably call himself a *criador*. He's a wine manufacturer.

The López de Heredia bodega employs 44 workers. Others in La Rioja produce a far higher output with a staff of 10. Don't so many manual processes mean more risk of human error? Lifelong experience has taught him that people who work closely with wine know their job through and through. And, of course, he keeps a close personal eye on everyone and everything, at all levels of the business.

ENDURING VALUES

For historical reasons, La Rioja still feels a strong alliance with France. It owes much of its traditional prosperity to having supplied the French market in the mid-19C when France's own vineyards had been devastated by the phylloxera epidemic. Meanwhile, the more enlightened growers of La Rioja, Rafael López de Heredia Senior among them, were adopting the most advanced winegrowing methods of their time from their French counterparts.

I wondered how Don Pedro felt about the more recent impact of Californian research and experience on Spanish winegrowing. He recognises its contribution

The bodega still has its own workshop where a team of five coopers make new oak casks and vats and repair and maintain the vats stocks that occupy its huge vaults.

—even the French have adopted Californian techniques for young fruity wines— but points out that Haro's Oenological Station (which celebrates its centenary this year (see article on page 24) was already experimenting with Cabernet Sauvignon («And I mean *Bordeaux* Cabernet») early this century. The archives show that it was found to give a low yield in local conditions and that it had no useful contribution to make to the sort of wine La Rioja was best at. Pedro López de Heredia believes that these conclusions are still relevant today.

It comes as no surprise to learn that Pedro López de Heredia is a traditionalist in other areas, too. He admits that he would probably have been happier in the Middle Ages, though not as a serf. Food, for example, just isn't what it used to be. The recently modernised local bakery is now much easier to keep clean and though it turns out much more bread, it's lost that special taste it used to have.

But surely demand has changed, too? Yes. There's call for young, fruity whites nowadays and there are plenty of them on the market. His distributors have suggested that López de Heredia should include one in their range, and though he is considering it, he is not really convinced. Having said that, they dropped their Zaconia, a slightly sweet oak-aged white, four years ago because of waning demand. He suspects that shifts in taste are often triggered off by vested interests and poorly informed trend-setters (food and wine journalists received a special mention here), who create fashions that will come and go. The company has no advertising or marketing policy, except for showing customers around the bodega and allowing what they see and taste to do the persuading.

His hobbies, on the rare occasions when he takes time off, are equally traditional. In his youth, he played *pelota* (a tough Basque version of handball), but his favourite way of relaxing these days is going off into the countryside small-game shooting with a group of fellow enthusiasts. He rarely travels abroad and likes to combine business trips within Spain —to buy cork, for example— with exploring little-known parts of the country and enjoying the local architecture. The very thought of holidays en masse makes him shudder.

How does such a committed traditionalist see the future? He beams as he admits to having done his best to indoctrinate his four children with the family approach. The three older ones, already into their professional training, have all chosen careers relevant to the business. Does he see change on the horizon? 'When our customers stop buying, we'll know it's time to change. Meanwhile, we seem to be doing all right.'

Hawys Pritchard is a writer and translator who lives and works in Spain. She is a regular contributor to Spain Gourmetour and other periodicals.

THE SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL GOURMET CLUB SHOW

Madrid, 23, 24, 25 and 26 April 1993

THIRD WINE FORUM

What is the Gourmet Club Show?

It is the event where product manufacturers, elite gastronomes, artisans and industrialists can meet the owners and chefs of the best restaurants, head buyers from hotel chains and large select food chains, special shops and experts which are lovers of a good table (members of wine clubs, readers of magazines for gastronomes and users of tourist and good food guides).

Access to the Show is only through invitation or as a professinal. Under no circumstances are those under 16 years of age admitted.

Activities and conferences

During the period of the Show, a number of talks will be given related to quality products and good food, among which the THIRD WINE FORUM stands out.

The results of the Sixth Show

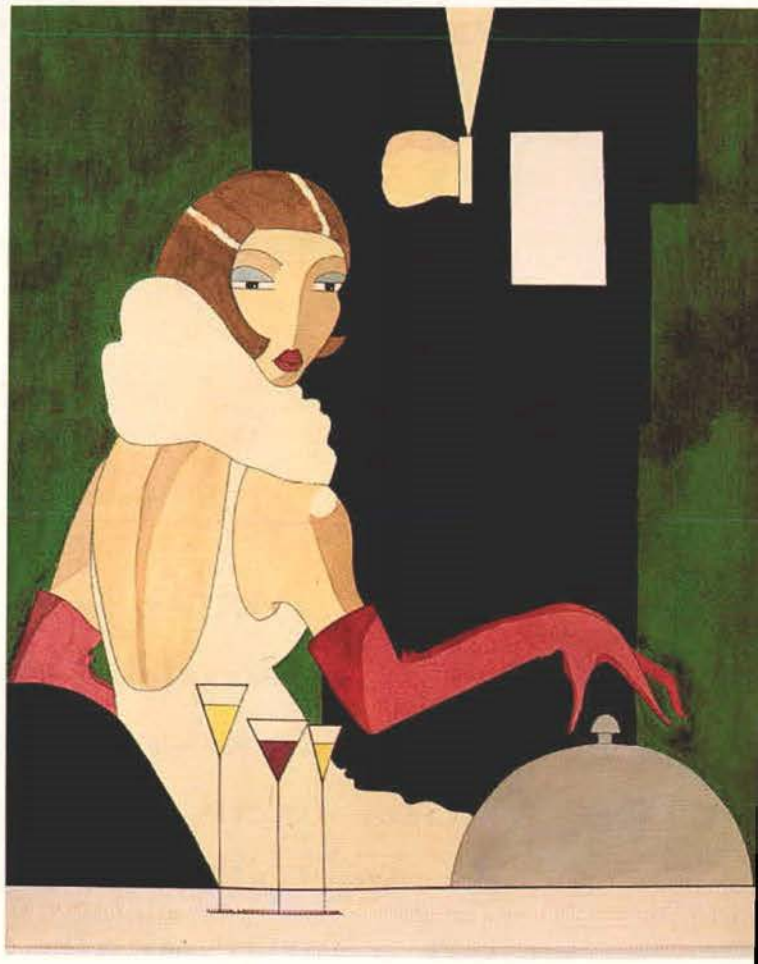
The Sixth Show occupied a total net area of 4,500 m^2 with 252 stands shared among the 197 companies which were exhibiting —of which 55% were from the food sub-sector annd 45% from the drinks sub-sector. Throughout the four exhibition days almost 23,000 professionals visited the show.

Forecast for the Seventh Show

Exhibitors: 300
Professional visitors: 25.000

Products to be shown

Wines, spirits and liqueurs
Sweet, chocolates and biscuits
Codiments, spices, oils and vinegars
Apéritifs and beers
Cheeses
Meat, fish and vegetable conserves
Charcuterie
Patés, foie-gras and duck and goose by-products
Accessories for the table (china, glass, linen, etc.)
Various (kitchen utensils, books, specialized magazines, etc.)



For further information about the Gourmets Club VI Exhibition, send this coupon to Progourmet, S.A. C/. Velayos, 4, bajo. 28035 Madrid (Spain). Tel.: (1) 373 60 42. Fax: (1) 373 60 77.

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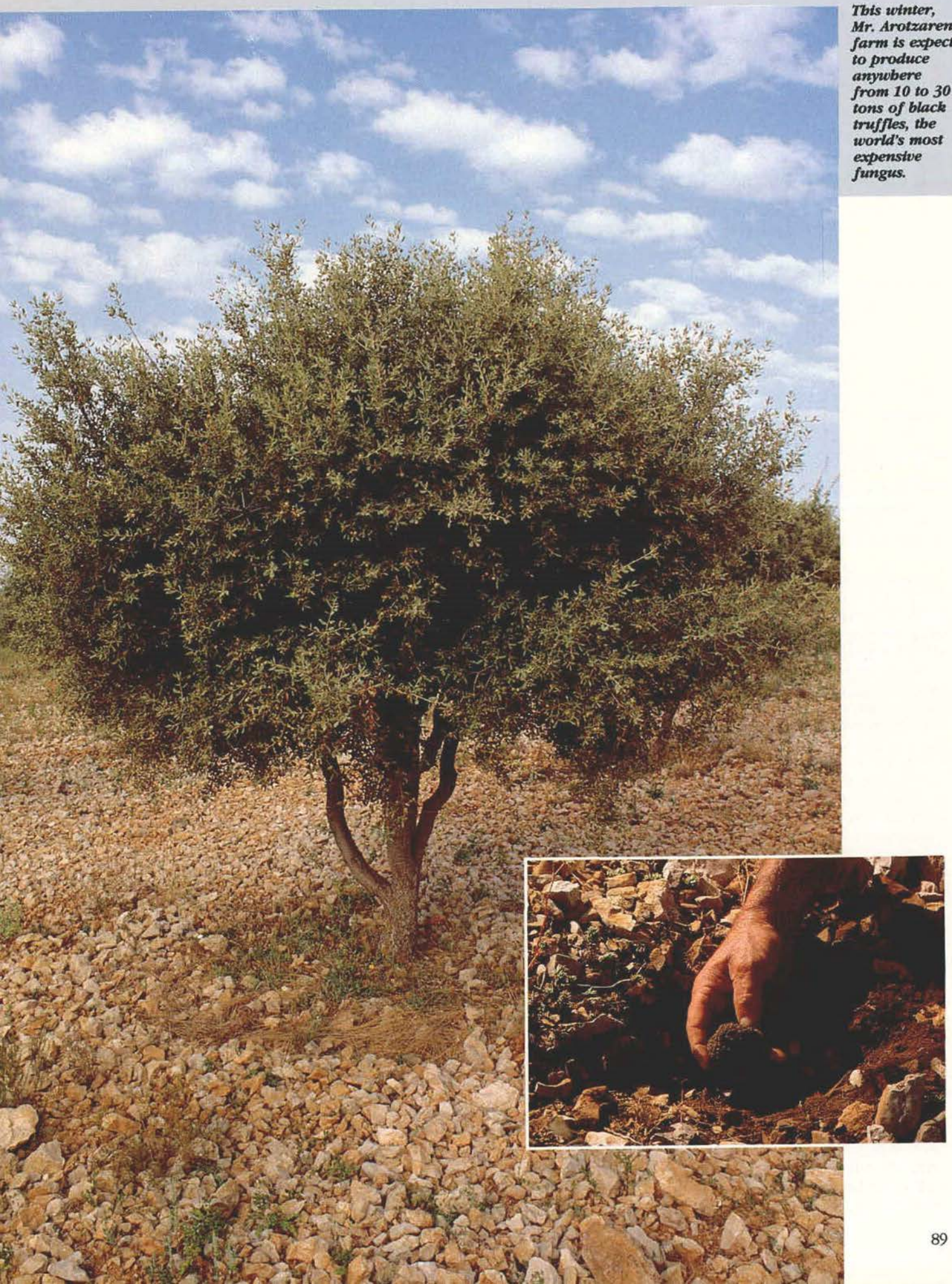
CULTIVATED BLACK TRUFFLES
A DREAM COME TRUE

Text: **Ana Westley**
Photos: **Miguel Pérez Pardo/ICEX**

Black truffles are considered to be one of the world's most exquisite —and expensive— condiments. The mysterious little black aromatic balls have proved almost impossible to cultivate on a large scale and prices can swing wildly, depending upon quirky weather conditions. But, truffle lovers rejoice, for a Spanish company has unlocked the fungus's cultivation secrets and will produce over half the world's production this winter. Any competitor will have to wait 20 years to catch up. The story of truffle production is the story of one man's dream, a dream that is about to come true.



This winter, Mr. Arotzarena's farm is expected to produce anywhere from 10 to 30 tons of black truffles, the world's most expensive fungus.

Twenty one years ago Salvador Arotzarena bought 680 hectares of rocky hills.

He planted 300,000 evergreen oak trees and fenced off the land. Everybody thought

he was crazy, but he kept his mouth shut and waited for the fruits of his "madness".

Twenty one years ago, local farmers and Spain's forest engineers thought Salvador Arotzarena was crazy when he quietly bought 680 hectares of rocky hills and sweeping lonely steppes, near Soria, a sparsely populated province in northern Spain. He got permission from ICONA. Spain's conservation authorities, to clear the land of scrubby vegetation consisting of a few hardy junipers and some scraggly trees. He baffled neighbours further by grinding up the rocky surface, which in this area contains sea fossils, and planted 300,000 evergreen oak tress, or holm oaks, near a remote town whimsically called Villaciervos, which in Spanish means «Deer Village».

Agricultural engineers said the trees would never take root in the poor rocky soil. They themselves had tried reafforestation with sturdier pines and evergreens in the bleak and barren highlands to no avail. But they admired anyone extravagant enough to plant trees.

Mr. Arotzarena fenced off the land, crushed tons of stone, planted his saplings, and kept his mouth shut. But eventually, the mystery began to leak out, especially after locals noticed that wild boars went into drooling frenzies trying to break into the plantation that vaguely resembled some sort of mega bonsai experiment gone awry. To complicate the mystery further, French spy planes were allegedly spotted overflying the tree farm.

UNIQUE IN THE WORLD

This winter, Mr. Arotzarena will see his dream come true. The strange mystery farm is expected to produce anywhere from 10 to 30 tons of the world's most expensive and exquisite fungus — black truffles. That is about half of the world's black truffle production and it will be coming from only half of the farm. Within the next five years, Arotz S.A. will double its output, literally flooding the world market with the legendary fungus, if all

goes well. Truffle lovers, rejoice, because a reliable supply will take the edge off wild price swings, or even lower prices. The gourmet delicacy will soon be introduced around the world and should become more accessible for the family meal budget.

«Any competitor will have to wait at least 20 years before they can even hope to near our production», chuckles Mr. Arotzarena who sold a 50 % stake of his canning company, Arotz S.A., which owns the farm, to Ebro Agricolas, Spain's largest agroindustrial company, in 1989. «The farm is truly unique in the world, one of a kind», boasts Peter Cleary, Director of the Food Group of Ebro Agricolas, which is controlled by the Kuwait Investment Office (KIO).

«By 1988, the farm was no longer that much of a secret, although there was a lot of mystery surrounding it... Arotz was already a major player on the truffle export market», Mr. Cleary, an Irishman recounts. «The canning company, which exports gourmet fruit, vegetables, wild mushrooms and truffles, was sound and we were impressed by the company's heavy involvement in research and development of such a unique food item that has a specific international market niche. We thought the farm was a very promising and interesting project to finish», Mr. Cleary explained.

Ebro Agricolas paid 2,000 million pesetas (roughly $20 million) for its stake and then pumped in an additional 1,500 million pesetas (about $15 million) matched by Mr. Arotzarena for further investment, mainly a costly water reservoir and irrigation system. Mr. Arotzarena had not counted on what Mr. Cleary termed «haywire climate» caused by prolonged droughts.

WILD BOARS AND TWO-LEGGED POACHERS

«Still, we are talking about a very low overhead operation here with only nine employees and 25 dogs for the farm», Mr. Cleary added. Extra workers —and dogs— are hired at harvest time which begins in December. Once the truffles begin to grow, the only plagues to worry about are wild boars that go into fits just smelling their favourite delicacy from the other side of the fence. Once in a while they manage to break in and then pig out. But boars are not the only pests. «Two-legged Sunday poachers are also becoming a problem», Mr. Arotzarena warns.

Black truffles sell on the wholesale market for approximately 40,000 pesetas/kilo or about $171.81/lb. At these prices, the fungus is about the most expensive condiment in the world, after saffron. But truffle harvests, and prices, are haphazard: prices can double during bad years. One hectare (2.471 acres) on the Arotz farm is expected to produce anywhere from 30 to 100 kilos of the little black aromatic balls, depending on weather conditions. That adds up to an awful lot of truffles from 680 hectares. It is a mind-boggling calculation for any gourmet cook.

Mr. Cleary claims that demand will remain greater than supply on the world market that is still largely untapped. There is no danger of saturating the market with Arotz's sudden jump in production. At the turn of the century, production was 300 times what it is today, according to studies that Ebro Agricolas investigated. Forest destruction after the first World War and dwindling rural populations have reduced wild truffle collection to a mere fraction of what it once was. (See chart.)

«We think it is going to be a great business», adds Raouf Sabet, the French chairman of Arotz S.A. since the merger. At present, Arotz is already a world leader in truffle exports, combining its own harvest with wild truffles bought in the area. The company is responsible for 50 % to 80 % of Spain's entire production, and over 80 % of this is exported to France alone, the biggest consumer by far.

DOGS INSTEAD OF PIGS

Last season was a bad year, both in France and Spain, due to unusually cold weather at the wrong time. (See chart.) But 1992/1993, the first season in which roughly half of Arotz's 300,000 tress start full production, promises to be a good year. «We hope to round off the steep ups and downs on volatile truffle prices with our farm», explains Miguel Angel Escribano, the general director of Arotz S.A. for the past eight years. But he warns that harvesting will remain costly and cannot be mechanized.

In the old days, pigs were used to sniff out the delicacies that then had to be snatched away before the frenzied animals devoured them. Nowadays, trained dogs have replaced the traditional pigs. «Dogs are much better because they have a keener sense of smell, are more manageable, and work for a reward that is

not a truffle», Mr. Escribano explains. Pigs smell out the fungus because it is their favourite food. «Try controlling a 200 pound hog that is having a fit to begin with, and then try snatching the truffle away before the animal gobbles it up... The pigs would beat you to the truffle half the time», Mr. Arotzarena recounts. Dogs, fortunately, do not even like truffles, but are experts at locating them.

PASSION FOR TRUFFLES

«The story of Arotz S.A. is really the story about one man's dream and determination», Mr. Escribano explained with obvious admiration. Mr. Arotzarena, now 64, remembers with fondness how he got started. A Basque from northern Spain, he had grown up in southern France.

«There I became familiar with wild mushrooms and truffles and knew that they grew in parts of Spain as well», he recalls. He studied micology and gradually developed an irresistible passion for truffles. Truffle cultivation soon became an obsession. «I knew that if I studied the fungus enough, there would be a way to duplicate, and even enhance the conditions in nature that produce wild truffles.» It was a long process and Mr. Arotzarena was wary of revealing too much, even though anyone trying to copy his techniques would have to wait 20 years to near his production.

Black truffles, known as Perigord truffles, have never been cultivated successfully on a large scale. The legendary fungus thrives only in quirky soil and weather conditions that are not easily reproduced. The 10 to 15 year waiting period for the first truffle is enough to discourage even the most patient farmer. A few attempts at cultivation have been reported in France on small one or two hectare family farms but they are of no commercial significance. Black truffles, by definition, have always been wild.

The Perigord truffle *(Tuber melanosporum)* is found only in certain areas of France, where the fungus gets its name, Spain, and to a lesser extent in Italy and former Yugoslavia. In the latter two countries, the white variety *(T. magnatuum)* is more common. A bluish black truffle *(T. aestivum)* is also found in England, but is considered to be less desirable — at least by the French.

SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

The fungus is roundish and has a rough semi-hard pitted surface. It is usually about the size of a golf ball (or a dog's nose, says Mr. Arotzarena) but can grow much bigger. «Our record was a truffle that weighed 800 grams», Mr. Arotzarena adds. The larger truffles are just as aromatic but are less commercially desirable as they then have to be chopped to fit into cans.

The aromatic fungus grows in chalky soils in association with tree roots in a symbiotic relationship. Truffles are believed to help roots assimilate certain chemicals from the soil, although this mechanism is largely unstudied. In France, truffles can be found among hazelnut tree roots. In England, the fungus grows around beech tree roots, and in Spain, the truffles seem to grow among the roots of certain evergreen oak trees or *encinas* in Spanish.

Without giving up his secrets, Mr. Arotzarena insisted that his cultivation method is derived from careful study of areas in Spain where truffles are found naturally. For the land, he picked a mountain and highland steppes adjacent to a mountain where wild truffles are found. The area was even mentioned in the poetry of Antonio Machado (1875-1939), who undoubtedly must have savoured the delicacy during his stay in Soria.

The area Mr. Arotzarena picked was famous for summer hailstorms. Strangely enough, it turns out that rapid drops in temperature are good for truffles —and bad for just about everything else. Then he studied different varieties of the Spanish evergreen oak tree *(encina)* and picked one that was native to the area, but crowded out on the rocky terrain by sturdier junipers.

The acorns were treated with truffle spores and other ingredients. Once the plant had sprouted, the main vertical root of the tiny seedling was snipped off to allow shallow horizontal roots to proliferate in a special preparation of treated soil, fertilizers, and truffle spores.

Several years later, these stunted and slow-growing scrubby trees were then planted in the farm, on southern slopes, and spaced far apart. Finally the soil was covered with crushed stones to prevent other vegetation from growing and to retain moisture. The dwarf trees are pruned like upside down Christmas trees to allow for maximum sunlight exposure.

FAITH, HOPE, AND PATIENCE

So great was Mr. Arotzarena's faith, that he even allowed for a future airstrip for planes to ship fresh truf-

The acorns were treated with truffle spores and other ingredients. Once the plant had sprouted, the main vertical root of the tiny seedling was snipped off to allow shallow horizontal roots to proliferate in a special preparation of treated soil, fertilizers and truffle spores.

fles directly to France at harvest time. At present, it takes a little imagination to visualize a busy landing runway. «The worst part was the waiting», he confessed. He had to wait for years and pray for hailstorms. «It was almost like a religion», he explained earnestly. «You had to have faith, confidence, hope, and a lot of patience.»

Patience paid off, and eleven years after buying the land, in 1980, Mr. Arotzarena harvested his first truffle with his caretaker, Bienvenido Pérez, a man who had unshakeable faith in the project. «We put it in formaldehyde», Mr. Arotzarena recalled, «and the second one we ate».

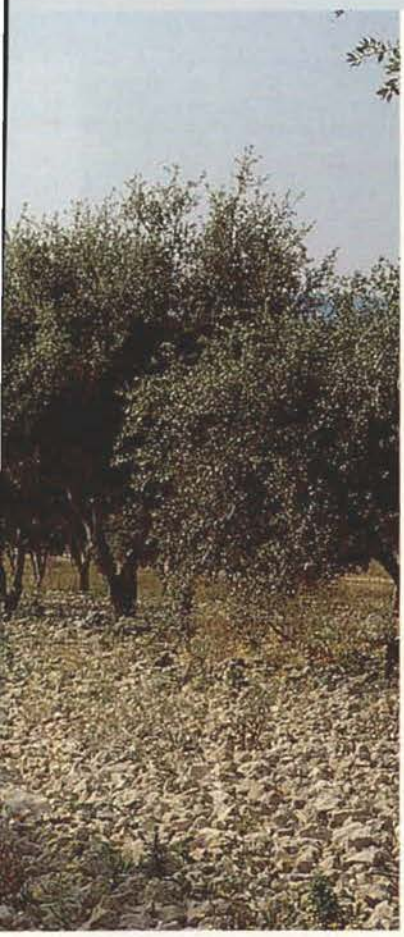
It takes about eight years for the sapling to produce the first truffle, but then, if conditions are right, the fungus steadily multiplies as the roots expand. This process can go on indefinitely as green oaks live to be hundreds of years old. This is a clear advantage over hazelnut trees where truffle production tends to slack off after about 12 years.

Now nearing retirement, Mr. Arotzarena has another dream: he would like to go to America where his father, a poor Basque shepherd immigrant in Idaho, made his fortune before returning to Spain and eventually settling in France. «Who knows, maybe this experiment could be repeated in America», he wonders. But Mr. Cleary of Ebro Agricolas points out that truffles have never been found in America. That doesn't discourage a man like Mr. Arotzarena.

In any case, Mr. Arotzarena hopes he may some day be remembered as the man who democratized truffles. «I love truffles and would like everyone to try them without a loss of quality. They are simply exquisite.»

In the old days pigs were used to sniff out the truffles that then had to be snatched away before the frenzied animals devoured them. Nowadays, trained dogs are used: they have a keener sense of smell, are more manageable and work for a reward that is not a truffle.

Ana Westley is the Spain correspondent for *The New York Times*. She has also been the correspondent in Spain for the U.S. weekly news magazine *Businessweek* since 1988. Previously, from 1982 to 1988, she was the correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*. She has also contributed regularly to various other publications, including *The Boston Globe, The San Francisco Examiner, The Denver Post, The Christian Science Monitor,* and *Lookout*, an English language publication in Spain.



RECIPES

COURTESY OF RESTAURANTE EUROPA - PAMPLONA

Vegetable Truffle Puree
(Puré de verduras con trufa)

Serves 4:

1 leek
1/2 medium size onion
200 g green beans
2 medium size carrots
4 large potatoes
40 g thinly sliced truffles *(Tuber melanosporum)*
salt and pepper to taste

Chop vegetables and boil in about 2 litres of water with salt and pepper for about 30 minutes. Puree to fine consistency.

Meanwhile, keep the sliced truffles in its juice from the can, and add a jigger of Madeira or Oporto wine (optional).

Serve very hot, adding the truffle slices decoratively. Sprinkle some of the truffle juice over puree.

Dice size cubes of fried bread can also be added for decoration.

Fresh Pasta with Truffles and Poached Egg
(Pasta fresca con trufas y huevos escalfados)

Serves 4:

250 g fresh pasta (spaghetti, macaroni, etc.)
40 g of truffles *Tuber melanosporum)*
50 g butter
30 g diced onion
liquid cream
5 g salt
5 g black pepper
2 dcl oil
4 poached eggs

Bring a large pot of water to boil, then add salt and oil, and the pasta. Return to the boil and maintain for another 8 minutes. Drain with cold water.

On a slow burner, heat the butter and 1 deciliter of oil. Sautee the diced onion. Add thinly sliced truffles and liquid cream and boil for 5 minutes. Add the drained pasta and stir until heated.

Just before serving, add a poached egg per serving. Sprinkle pepper.

Preparation of poached eggs:

Bring water to the boil. Add salt and some oil.

When in full boil, crack egg into the water. Cover for 3 minutes.

Remove poached egg and place on paper towel to drain.

Scrambled Eggs with Truffles
(Huevos revueltos con trufas)

Serves 4:

8 eggs
20 g butter
40 g truffles *(Tuber melanosporum)*
5 g salt
5 g pepper
a jugger of Madeira or Oporto wine (optional)

Beat eggs, adding salt and pepper.

Heat the butter in a frying pan, then add thinly sliced truffles. Stir for about 2 minutes and then add wine (optional).

Add beaten eggs to the pan and stir continually until cooked.

Serve with two slices of toasted bread.

BLACK TRUFFLE PRODUCTION

(In metric tonnes)

Year	Spain	France
1910	—	2,000 *
1979-1980	40	20
1980-1981	30	45
1981-1982	40	20
1982-1983	40	33
1983-1984	30	13
1984-1985	12	10.6
1985-1986	5	25.5
1986-1987	20	20
1987-1988	30	60
1988-1989	8	30
1989-1990	45	14
1990-1991	30	17
1991-1992 (estimate)	7	8

(*) Truffle production has fallen dramatically since the turn of the century. After Word War I, forests were cleared for farmland. Of those that remained, people no longer lived in them. Truffles need sunlight, which reached the forest floor when trees and underbrush were pruned for firewood, according to Salvador Arotzarena's theory.

Source: Ebro Agricolas.

By the time Ponce de León was discovering the virtues of youth,

In 1513, Ponce de León searched high and low for the Fountain of Youth. He discovered Florida instead. Back home in Spain, another great discovery was 600 years old—distilled wine spirits. These historical spirits were the ancestors of today's noble brandy.

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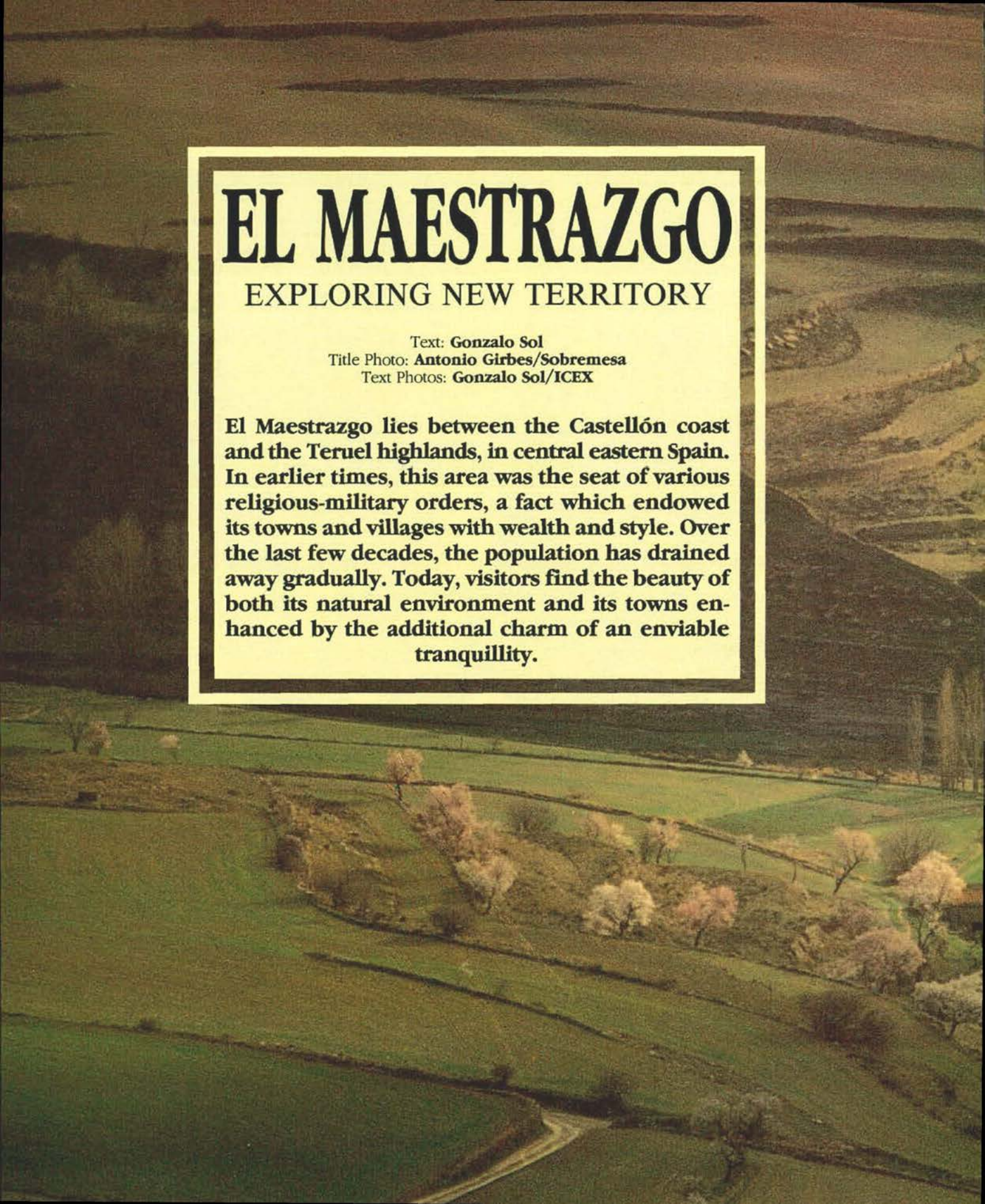


EL MAESTRAZGO

EXPLORING NEW TERRITORY

Text: **Gonzalo Sol**
Title Photo: **Antonio Girbes/Sobremesa**
Text Photos: **Gonzalo Sol/ICEX**

El Maestrazgo lies between the Castellón coast and the Teruel highlands, in central eastern Spain. In earlier times, this area was the seat of various religious-military orders, a fact which endowed its towns and villages with wealth and style. Over the last few decades, the population has drained away gradually. Today, visitors find the beauty of both its natural environment and its towns enhanced by the additional charm of an enviable tranquillity.

Historically speaking, the *Maestrazgos* were territories which fell under the jurisdiction of the Superior, or *Maestre,* of a military or chivalric order. The most famous of these in Spain were the Orders of Santiago, Alcántara, Calatrava, Montesa and the Knights Templar. This latter, more properly entitled the Order of the Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, was founded at Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem in 1118. It developed into a highly powerful organisation which wielded considerable influence and owned a great deal of property throughout Europe. Threatened by its power and covetous of its wealth, King Philip IV of France eventually succeeded in suppressing the order in the early 14C.

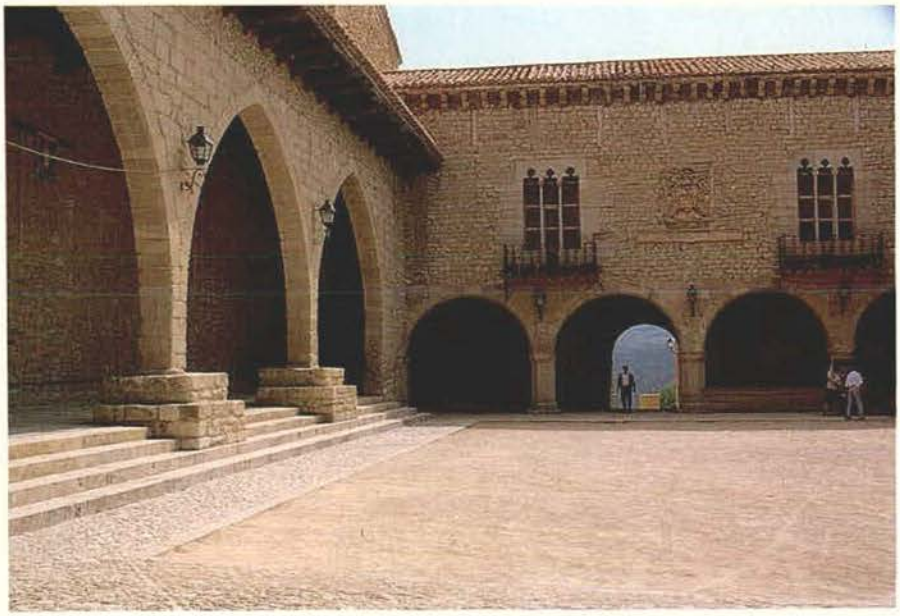
In Spain, James II of Aragon (1264-1372) founded the Order of the Knights of Santa María de Montesa in an attempt to fill the void left by the suppression of the Templar Order and to boost the forces available to defend the Valencian coastline from frequent Muslim attacks. In 1311, the new order received official recognition from Pope John XXII.

The area of Spain known today as El Maestrazgo is made up of territories in Castellón Province which were owned by the Montesa Order from the 14C up until the State appropriation of Church property during the reign of Isabel II in the 19C, plus other territories in Teruel Province, once the seat of the Orders of Calatrava, the Temple, and San Juan de Jerusalén. In 1972, Castellón and Teruel joined forces to create a sort of federation of these territories so that the whole area could be more effectively promoted as a tourist attraction. The area is now officially known as the *'Mancomunidad Turística del Maestrazgo'.*

Artificial though the creation of this 'touristic unit' has been, artifice has been carried no further. The attractions of El Maestrazgo reside in its unspoiled natural beauty and in its history, so firmly rooted in the Medieval period and so closely allied to the fascinating and evocative phenomenon of the Military Orders. Evidence of them is everywhere, with each little village endowed with imposing churches, tucked-away hermitages, solid castles, thick encircling walls, and aristocratic houses emblazoned with elaborate heraldic shields. The setting for all this is one of the loveliest and most varied areas of countryside in the whole of Spain, a country famed for the contrasts and beauty of its natural environment. Here in El Maestrazgo, meadows dense with flowers alternate with deep gorges, wild crags, stretches of arid land, wide rivers, lush forests of pine, juniper, holm and kermes oak... This is heavily accidented terrain, so its roads are intricate and difficult to negotiate. Not for no-

Cantavieja is a classic example of a Maestrazgo township, perched up along a ledge in the mountainside over a vertical drop to the river.

thing was this the battle-ground on which the Carlist Wars were fought — one can easily conjure up scenes of pitched battles and guerrilla fighting in this setting. It has been celebrated in literature (Pío Baroja's *La Venta de Mirambel,* for example), and its undeniable beauty must surely have inspired many a moment of romantic passion. There are few parts of Spain where one can lose one's sense of the present so completely or immerse oneself so thoroughly in the natural environment and the history of the people who once worked its soil. I have never met a single Spaniard who does not enjoy El Maestrazgo, and people who don't yet know it are always keen to do so.

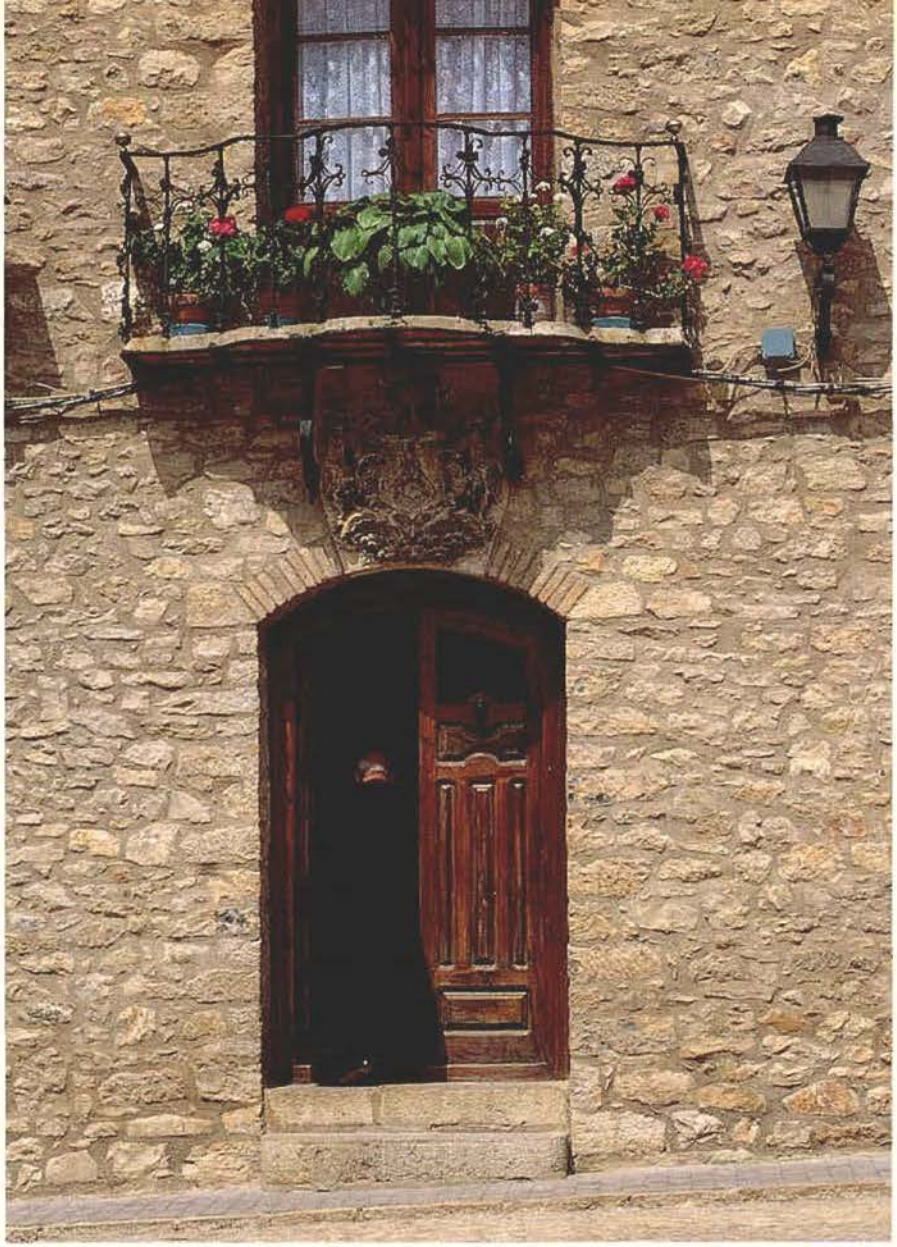


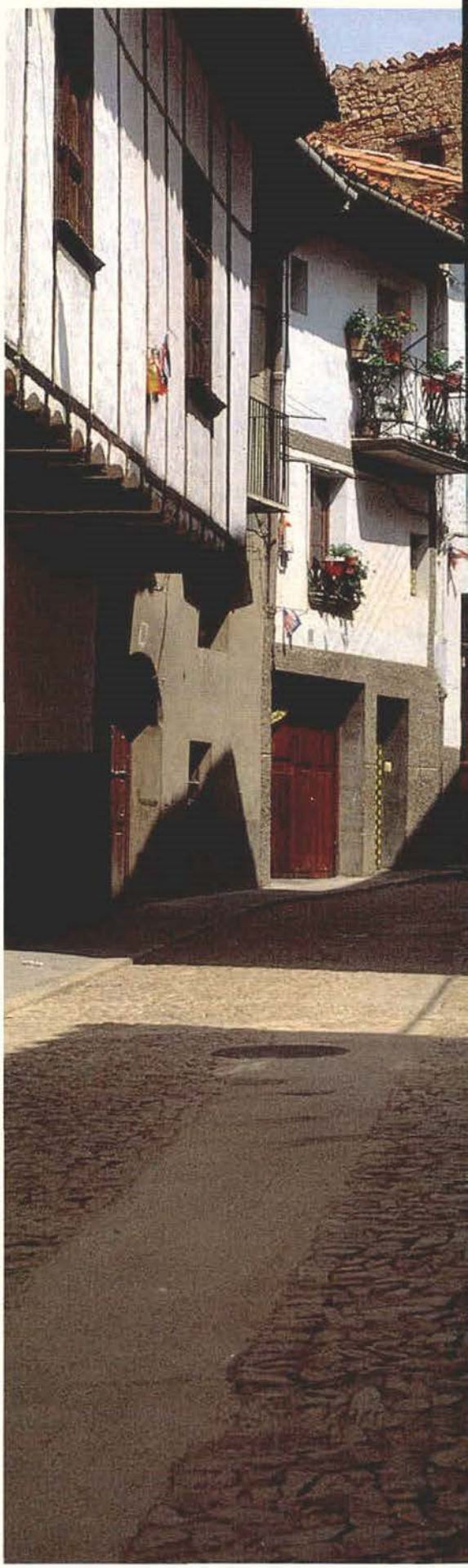
Cantavieja has a lovely arcaded main square where one of the arches serves as a marvellous vantage point from which to look out over the valley below.

HOW TO REACH IT

The best roads into the area are: from the north the N-420 and the N-231 from Tarragona and Lérida, respectively; from the west, the N-211 from Madrid and Zaragoza; from the south-west, the N-420 from Teruel; and from the east, the N-232 which starts on the coast at Vinaroz and leads in through the flat eastern lowlands. To explore El Maestrazgo, you have to branch off these on to small local roads. The best psychological approach to these is the positive one: think of them as excellent tracks rather than poor roads. My itinerary began in Villarluengo, a good point of departure for visitors arriving in the area from the west.

Villarluengo, at 1,119 m (3,671 ft) above sea level, is one of many villages in El Maestrazgo which, perched on a crag, seem to be suspended between sky and land. It is perhaps the biggest of them, and the first sight of it as you round a bend in the winding road is spectacular. Its white houses seem to be clustered around the church so as not to fall into the River Cañada flowing through a deep gorge below. The Hostal La Trucha, eight kilometres (5 miles) away, stands right on the bank of the fast-running River Pitarque, a fisherman's paradise. This pleasant, 55-bedroom hotel is an interesting building, adapted from a former bank-note factory. In this secluded setting, the only sounds to be heard are of water and wind among the rocks. It has its own small-holding, a fish-farm just a kilometre away, and even its own natural spring, which supplies the mineral water served in the restaurant. The food is very much a reflection of the products of the Teruel countryside and rivers. Typical examples include *migas* (savoury fried breadcrumbs mixed in with garlic and charcuterie), *sopa de ajo* (garlic soup) and *trucha a la almendra* (trout with almonds). They also serve a local speciality, *jamón de Teruel,* the only cured ham in Spain which has been awarded Denomination of Origin status despite not being obtained from Ibérico breed pigs. It owes





In the 14C, Cantavieja was the seat of the Knights Templar and there is still evidence of its former importance. Here, besides, you can eat beef from the large Charolais herds which are bred and graze on the lush meadows round about.

its success to excellent manufacturing and to local temperature and moisture conditions at altitudes above 800 m (2,624 ft), which are ideal for curing.

Some 20 or so kilometres (some 15 miles) away is Cantavieja. The winding road that leads there is flanked by posts tall enough to mark its route when buried under heavy winter snows. On either side of the road, the meadows are traversed by stretches of fencing placed at frequent intervals to prevent snowdrifts. The road takes one through a strangely mixed landscape whose air is laden with woodland scents of rosemary, grass and lavender. Cantavieja is a classic example of a Maestrazgo township, perched 1,060 m (3,476 ft) up along a ledge in the mountainside over a vertical drop to the river from which the village takes its name. In the

14C, this was the seat of the Knights Templar, and its strategic position enabled them to withstand a year (1307) of attacks by King James II. In the 19C, the town was the capital of the sup-

porters of Don Carlos, pretender to the Spanish throne, during the Carlist Wars which broke out on the accession of Isabel II in 1833 and continued intermittently for over half a century. There is still evidence of its former importance: it has a lovely arcaded main square on which the Town Hall stands (one of the arches serves as a marvellous vantage point from which to look out over the valley below), charming streets, and a good little restaurant called Buj. Buj is impeccably clean and its food is excellent and amazingly cheap. It uses immediately local products — vegetables, wild mushrooms, game, and particularly good beef from the large Charolais herds which are bred here and graze on the lush meadows round about. The restaurant's menu is brief and changes every day, but it always features home-made charcuterie, delicious stews and light desserts.

RELICS OF ANOTHER TIME

Along the road to Morella, just 18 kilometres (11 miles) down river from Cantavieja, you come to Mirambel, an important little town which extends lengthways between the road and the river. In 1982, it won the Europa Nostra Prize which is awarded each year for the most successful rescue of some endangered element of Europe's cultural heritage: a mountain, a church, a cathedral, a castle, a river, a tree, or a row of houses. It is amazing to find so many major buildings in a little town in the back of beyond: a Town Hall, a Parish Hall, a closed order convent, aristocratic houses, balconied façades, all contained within town walls entered through five gateways. Near one of the gates, outside the walls, is a solitary, well-tended vineyard: «It's Hilario's», piped up a local resident apparently taking a midday snooze in the spring sunshine, forehead resting on his hands folded over the

In 1982, Mirambel won the Europa Nostra Prize for the successful rescue of the town.

pommel of his firmly planted walking-stick. «There used to be lots more in the old days but then people gave them up; the birds always used to get at the grapes before they could be harvested.» In fact, the people of El Maestrazgo gave up on a lot more than their vineyards. Many also gave up on their houses, their villages and most of their cultivated land. Many of the hillsides round about are terraced, some almost to the top, each terrace supported by meticulously built stone walls. They have been empty for years, but they are relics of a time when this was a thriving area and every inch of cultivable land was put to good use. The local inn, the Guimerá, is busy at weekends when its large dining-room (country soup, chick-pea stew, roast lamb, preserved pork...) fills to capacity. Its eight guest rooms often do too, so there are plans to add eight more. There is also a little *tasca* —an informal bar-cum-restaurant— called Las Tejas, run by a pleasant young team. It's a good place to stop for a drink and a simple meal of charcuterie, grilled meat, bread and Tronchón cheese.

Since the beginning of this century, the overall population of this area has dropped by almost 50%. Tronchón is not an exception. Tronchón cheese is famous, and has been the salvation of its place of origin and, consequently, of itself in genuine form.

Tronchón stands uphill from the turn-off which you come upon just outside Mirambel for Olocau del Rey. At these altitudes —1,096 m (3,600 ft)— the climate can be harsh, which probably explains why the village was established on a steep, south-facing slope where it would benefit from most sunshine and warmth. Tronchón is another example of the depopulation of the area in general: the overall population has dropped by almost 55% since the beginning of this century. «There used to be nineteen of us at school when we were kids», says cheese-maker Carlos Bravo, «and now there's only me left. And that's because I couldn't stand life in Madrid, so I came back to work at cheese-making». Tronchón cheese is famous, and has been the salvation of its place of origin and, consequently, of itself in genuine form. The fact that Carlos and his wife Pilar didn't take to life

in the capital can be thanked for the survival of real Tronchón cheese. Nowadays it is also made, in quite different microclimatic environments, in certain villages in Valencia and Catalonia, though the only true similarity is in its unmistakable, ancient traditional shape —a cylinder, with one or both bases indented with a sort of miniature volcanic crater. The flavour and texture of the original are, however, inimitable. Today, only the Bravos make the genuine article. It can be made of either sheep's milk (the native breed is the Ojinegra), or goat's (the original local breed of goat no longer exists: today's are cross-breeds known as «Del Terreno»), or of a mixture of the two. You can only buy it in Tronchón itself and one or two nearby villages, because the output is so small. There isn't enough milk to produce more, and there's no-one to look after larger herds...

Though Tronchón and Mirambel are barely 30 kilometres (18 miles) from Morella, anyone exploring El Maestrazgo thoroughly will need to retrace his steps. Indeed, you have to do so quite frequently in this mountainous terrain where distances measured as the crow flies are no indication of the quickest route.

The road from Cantavieja to La Iglesuela del Cid (1,227 m / 4,000 ft) is frequently shrouded in cloud and mist. This is the last of the Maestrazgo villages in Teruel Province, and the whole village qualifies as an historic monument. Its architectural sophistication is explained by the fact that it was once an important textile and military centre. It is completely surrounded by defensive walls, only one of whose original four gates survives, inside which are fine examples of noble doorways, elegant houses whose façades are adorned with heraldic shields, a Templar stronghold-monastery, a tower known as the Torre de los Nublos, and a Town Hall.

Typical local dishes include slices of cured ham soaked in milk and then stewed in a tomato sauce; lamb chops grilled over an open fire and served with alioli sauce; a type of sausage known hereabouts as *cabeza de cerdo* (pig's head); and a dessert known as *pastel de alma* (bun filled with... *cabello de ángel*, a preserve made from a squash called *cidra*).

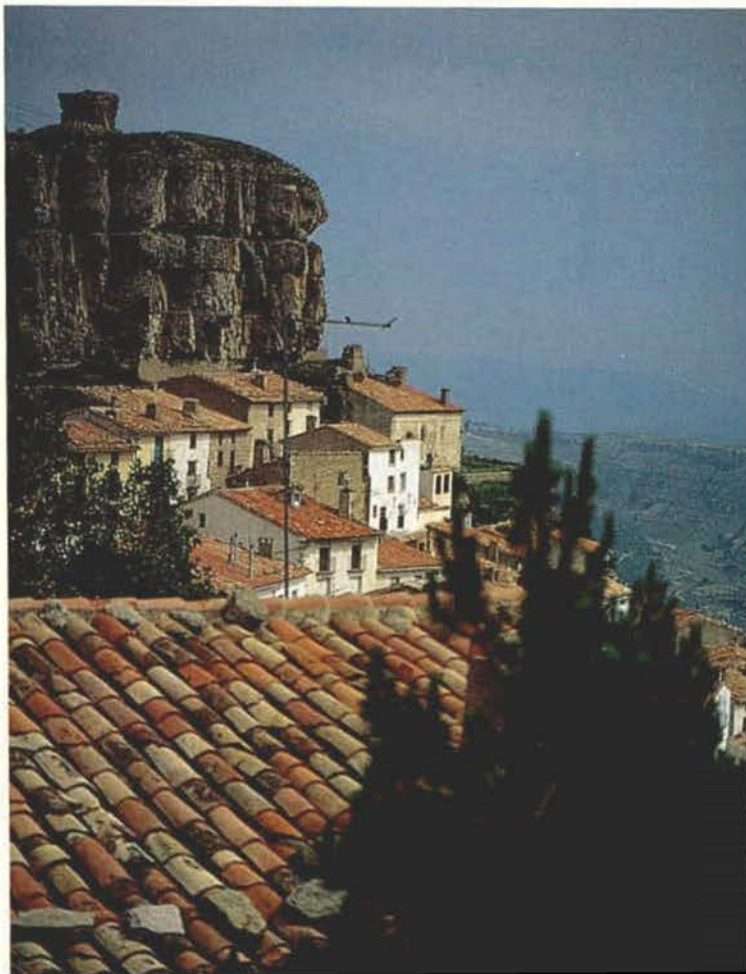
Above, Olocau del Rey, between Mirambel and Tronchón. Below, Ares del Maestre, at 1,200 m., is the highest village in the locality. It is an amazing sight, perched on a rocky outcrop crowned by the ruins of a tower.

MEDITERRANEAN INFLUENCE

After so much uphill travel, the horizon suddenly widens before one during the short drive (about 10 kilometres or 6 miles) between Iglesuela and Villafranca del Cid, in the course of which the altitude drops almost 150 metres (490 ft). Villafranca del Cid, in Castellón Province, is an important centre of population which grew up on the broad subplateau separated from the Mediterranean by mountain chains. Clever exploitation of its agricultural resources and its textile tradition have made this a prosperous area. The food here is quite different from what we have sampled so far in the highland areas. The local inns and bars can be relied on for classic examples of dishes in which Mediterranean influence is already discernible: *sopa de picadillo* (ham-bone soup with finely chopped ingredients), oven-cooked potatoes, *ternasco con caracoles* (veal with snails), junket, pumpkin pie...

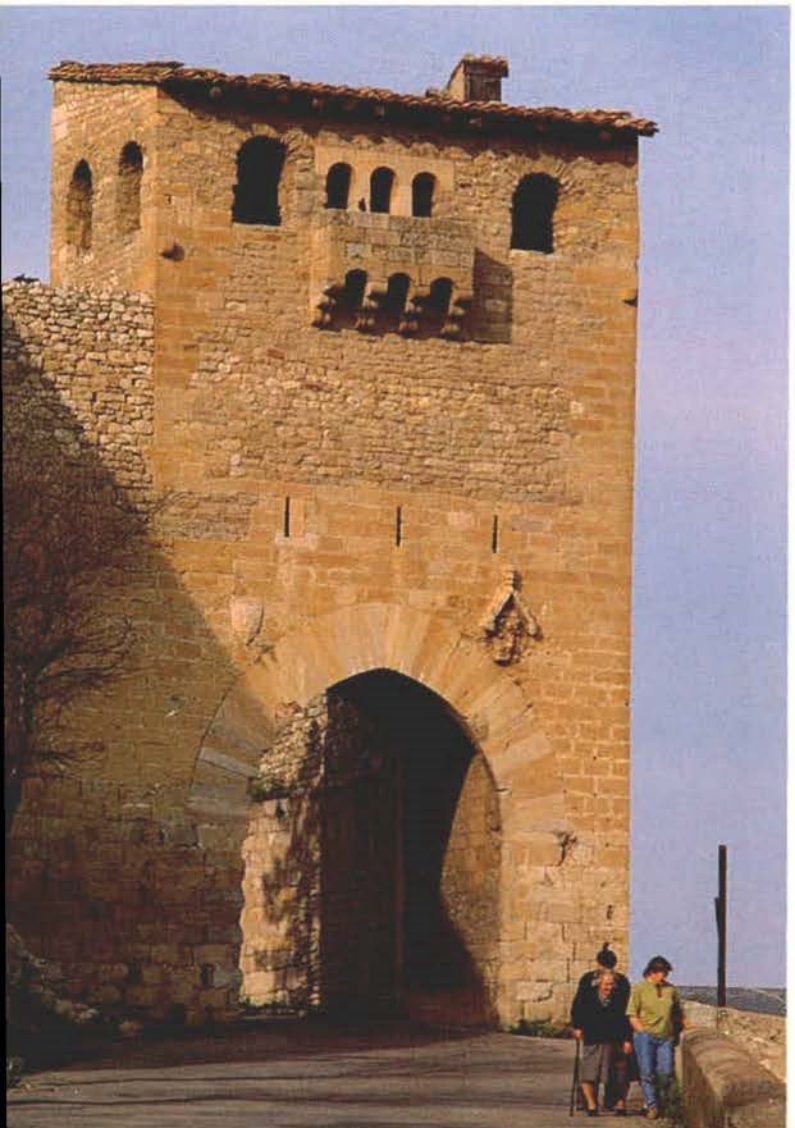
Less than 20 kilometres (12 miles) along the Albocácer road is the little village of Ares del Maestre, at 1,200 m (4,000 ft) the highest in the locality. It is an amazing sight, perched on a rocky outcrop crowned by the ruins of a tower once occupied by the high command of the Order of Montesa. The site has been a natural refuge for humankind since earliest times, as important cave paintings discovered there show.

Thirty kilometres (18 miles) along a road which gradually descends 600 m (2,000 ft) on its way to the coast, stands Albocácer. This town is the 'capital' of the Upper Maestrazgo, and consequently has an historic little town centre that is well worth

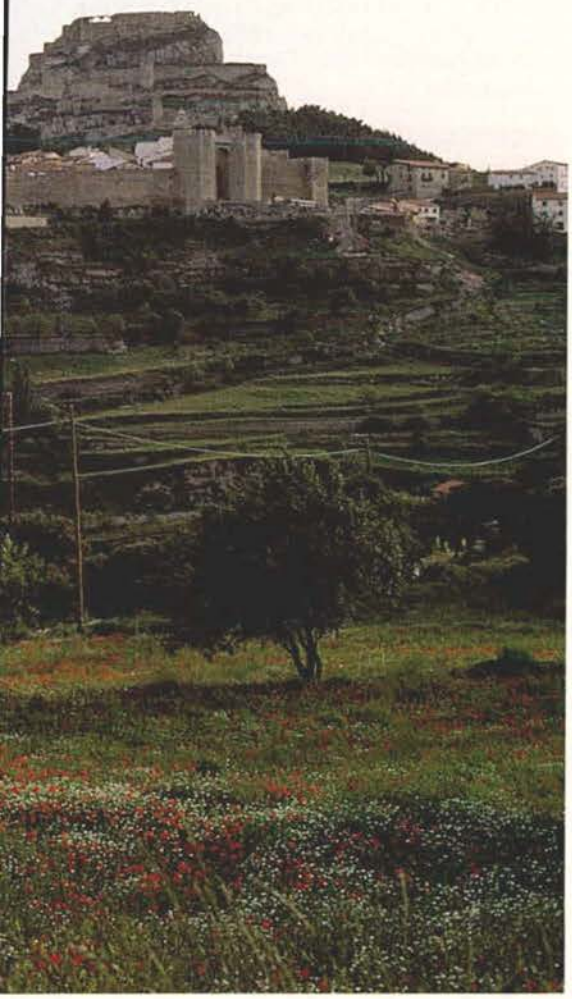


exploring. From this core, the rest of the town has grown gradually as it flourished economically. Setting aside occasional torrential downpours and rushes of flood water which cover the fields and destroy their crops from time to time, Nature, in Mediterranean mode, has shown benevolence to mankind here for thousands of years. Again local cave paintings, arguably the finest in the whole of eastern Spain, tell us as much. The food, too, is Mediterranean —Valencian, with no hint of Teruel— featuring rich one-pot stews, *butifarra* sausages, meat grilled over an open fire and dressed with garlic-flavoured oil, almond macaroons...

San Mateo (325 m / 1,066 ft) is 25 kilometres (15 miles) to the north, in the heart of a valley where the fact that we are now in a thriving agricultural area becomes more obvious still. The landscape has been becoming increasingly more fertile in aspect since before we reached Albocácer. Now we are surrounded by almond trees, vines, fruit trees, vegetable plots, olive groves... all of which provide the life-force of the area, both in terms of employment and of domestic and foreign trade. The local olive groves belong to the huge, 20,000 ha. (49,240 acres) Maestrazgo de Castellón plantation, in which the predominant varieties grown are Farga and Regués. Though this area could, in theory, produce excellent olive oil, the quality is generally not high at present because of inadequate processing and, particularly, harvesting methods. Local vinegrowing, on the other hand, is undergoing drastic changes with a view to raising quality standards. The hybrid varieties that used to be grown here are being replaced by plantations of Tempranillo, Macabeo and Moscatel. The existing bodegas need only to be updated in equipment and approach to provide a perfectly sound infrastructure for producing quality wines. Recommended local dishes are *arroz engravat* (rice with cod, tomato and broad



Morella is probably El Maestrazgo's best known town. One sees it first from quite far off: its spectacular outline is visible on the horizon, crowning a huge hill which stands alone in the middle of the wide valley.



beans) and, if you are lucky enough to be offered it, *olla de calabaza* (pumpkin stew). For dessert, try the excellent *buñuelos* (tiny fritters), accompanied by *fondillón* wine. Though not strictly speaking local (they actually come from Alicante), these unusual sweet wines are readily available here, and throughout the Valencian Region.

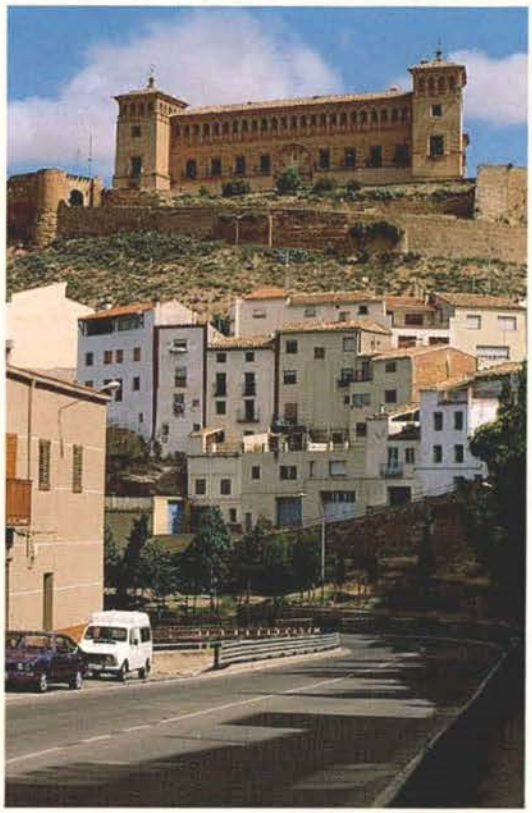
San Mateo is a charming town, imposingly aristocratic in its architecture (some of the big houses are now occupied by banks) and once famed for its gold and silver smiths. It has important Romanesque and Gothic buildings, and was once the home of the Grand Master of Montesa and the political centre of the Kingdom of Valencia. Here, in 1429, solemn ceremonies were held which brought an end to the Western Schism symbolised by the existence of rival popes in Rome and Avignon, and which had posed a threat to the very existence of the Roman Catholic church since 1378.

On the way from San Mateo to Morella, the road frequently skirts wide waterways whose banks are sometimes so rectilinear that they look like man-made canals gouged out by mechanical diggers. At other times, the road overlooks deep, narrow gorges, waterless now but eroded by rivers now empty but full of remnants of tragic floods from the past. The local landscape has been very much moulded —sometimes, though not always, advantageously— by water coursing down from the uplands of El Maestrazgo further inland.

MORELLA AND THE TRUFFLES

Morella is probably El Maestrazgo's best known town. One sees it first from quite far off, from the height of the Puerto de Querol pass. Its spectacular outline is visible on the horizon, crowning a huge hill which stands alone in the middle of the wide valley. It has a castle, a Gothic church, mighty 14C town walls (almost 2,500 m / 8,201 ft around) with 14 towers and six gates (this was an impregnable stronghold against Isabel's loyal troops during the first Carlist War)... The whole town, clinging to the hill's southern slope is an impressive sight. Morella has, erroneously, come to be considered the capital of El Maestrazgo despite the fact that, until the inter-provincial amalgamation, it did not fall within its area. But it is now the most frequently visited and most widely known of all its towns. At weekends, particularly in spring and summer, its intricate web of shaded narrow streets (they follow the line of the hillside, either horizontal or steeply sloped, often with little steps to make the climb more manageable), is thronged with visitors exploring its historic buildings and browsing in its many food and souvenir shops, many of whose goods are often far from local.

Alcañiz is dominated by a castle of the Calatrava Order, built in 1179, to which an Aragonese style palace was added in 1728. Today it is a Parador.



The food in Morella is typical of this traditionally cereal-growing area: good bread, good vegetables, delicious olives, a wide range of charcuterie, rabbit, lamb, partridge, wild mushrooms, almonds and almond confectionery, cheese... It also has special delicacies of its own: excellent, flavourful black truffles. An extensive natural truffle area embraces the area known as Els Ports de Morella and extends southwestwards into El Maestrazgo towards Mora de Rubielos

The Alcañiz Parador must surely qualify as one of the hotels with most space per guest in the world, since it has only 12 bedrooms, despite its huge building. Its restaurant is good, with local regional recipes and wines.

I recommend three: Mesón del Pastor, Casa Roque, and the Hotel Cardenal Ram. Their range of dishes includes *sopa de buñuelos* (soup with dumplings), *recapte* (ox-meat stew), and others based on local game and fresh produce. Desserts include traditional pine-kernel confectionery such as *piñonates* and *carquiñols*. Truffles are used most commonly in local food in combination with chicken, rabbit and veal.

The N-232 runs for most of the 60 km (37 miles) from Morella to Alcañiz along the crest of a long mountain chain, so that you have views to both right and left over a varied landscape of gorges, valley and plains. To the east, the mountains which separate Teruel from Tarragona provide a backdrop. This wild countryside, criss-crossed by narrow valleys, is punctuated by some of El Maestrazgo's major centres of population, such as Beceite, Valderrobres, Cretas and Calaceite.

A PARADOR IN A CASTLE

Alcañiz (we are back in Teruel Province) nestles within a dramatic meander of the River Guadalope. The town is dominated by a castle of the Calatrava Order, built in 1179, to which an

and into Cuenca Province. Morella plays an important role in exploiting this natural resource, and is the headquarters of the local truffle co-operative, the Cooperativa Trufera del Maestrazgo. Truffles are gathered, mainly in autumn, by local experts assisted by highly expensive dogs trained to sniff them out. From early winter on, auctions are held, though these fascinating events are hard to pinpoint (there seems to be a local conspiracy to keep the availability secret so as to protect prices). The buyers are wholesalers and occasional up-market restaurateurs from all over Spain and France. Tourist town that it is, Morella has lots of restaurants and other eating places though it does not, in general, make the most of the gastronomic resources it has readily to hand.

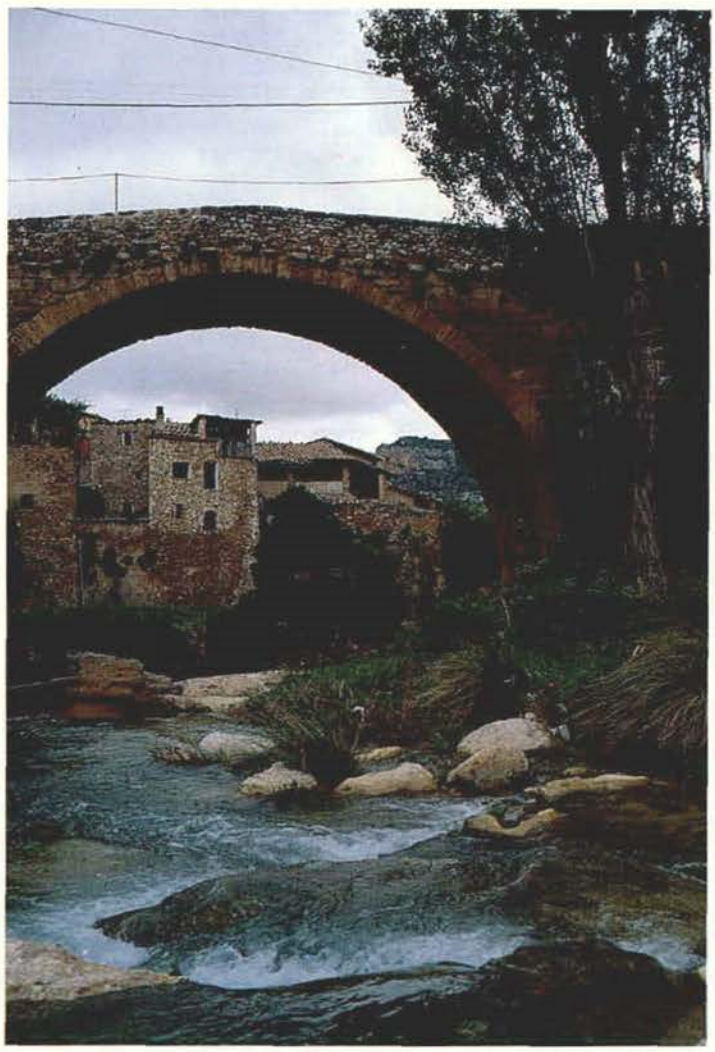
Aragonese style palace was added in 1728. Today it belongs to the Spanish Tourist Parador chain, and must surely qualify as one of the hotels with most space per guest in the world, since it has only 12 bedrooms. Its restaurant is good, with a menu that succesfully incorporates local regional recipes and wines. The town's star historic building is its colossal 18C collegiate church with a stunning Baroque façade on a par with that of Murcia Cathedral, but it also has a beautiful 15C market building and a picturesque Plaza Mayor.

As you arrive in Alcañiz, you become aware, as in so many Spanish villages, of a strong smell of good virgin olive oil. Alcañiz is the capital of Teruel's top olive-oil producing area, the Bajo Aragón Turolense, two sub-zones of which fall within El Maestrazgo. These are Alcañiz-Valderrobres, which produces the finest oils, and Montalbán, in the far west of the oil-producing area, whose oils belong lower down the quality scale. The area given over to olive groves amounts to 30,000 hectares (74,000 acres), and the predominant variety grown is Empeltre. It gives oils which range from pale to old gold in colour and are very fruity in flavour. Oil made from early harvested olives are slightly bitter, as are the olives themselves, sweetening as the harvesting date advances. These highly fragrant olive oils are particularly good for use as dressings. The cuisine of Alcañiz is, predictably, more middle-class than that of the rest of El Maestrazgo, using the ample range of local ingredients typical of Aragon with an added zing of Valencian, Catalan (you hear Catalan spoken from Cantavieja on), and even Navarrese influence. *Sopa de pastor* (shepherd's soup), plum white asparagus, Alcañiz's version of *cocido* (chick-pea stew), lamb, snails, and traditional almond and honey cakes all feature on the menus of the town's restaurants. The best, apart from the Parador, are Meseguer and Calpe.

The road from Alcañiz to Calaceite, the N-420, is excellent and seems even better when it is compared with the long 600 kilometres (372 miles) haul travelled so far from Villaluengo to Alcañiz. Calaceite is a thriving town whose history of agricultural prosperity dates back to earliest times. You can examine the remains of an Iberian settlement, on the other side of the road near the shrine to San Antonio. The main crops hereabouts are, unsurprisingly, olives and almonds. The countryside seems to attract thrushes, and they feature in some of the best local dishes, with rice or in cassoulets. Other specialities include *paella de la huerta* (savoury rice with fresh vegetables), *bacalao con alcachofas* (cod with artichokes), game stews, and soused partridge.

The road from Calaceite to Valderrobres, 21 kilometres away, leads gradually into the mountain territory of the Sierras of Montenegredo and Miranda (the River Ebro lies beyond them), through pretty countryside where olive groves predominate. Large numbers of young trees show that growers are still confident that a crop that has been cultivated for the last 2,000 years still has an optimistic future. Cretas, halfway along this road, has a splendid 16C fortified church and the remains of an Iberian settlement, providing further evidence of how long ago the natural resources of the area made it a desirable place in which to live.

Valderrobres is a sizeable town in a sheltered, leafy setting on the banks of the River Matarraña. Agriculture concentrates on grape-growing, and there are



Calaceite (center) is a thriving town whose history of agricultural prosperity dates back to earliest times. Beceite (left) is a sheltered, unpretentious little country town, once a Templar trading centre.

EL MAESTRAZGO

Where to eat and Where to stay

ALBOCACER
PENSION-RESTAURANTE LA PERDIGANA
Partida de San Pablo
Tel.: (64) 42 80 08

ALCAÑIZ
* CALPE
Ctra. de Zaragoza, s/n.
Tel.: (74) 83 07 32
* MESEGUER
Av. Maestrazgo, 9
Tel.: (74) 83 10 02
* PARADOR LA CONCORDIA
Castillo de los Calatrava
Tel.: (74) 83 04 00

BECEITE
FONDA RODA
Villanueva, 19
Tel.: (74) 85 02 54

CALACEITE
FONDA ALCALA
Av. Cataluña, 49
Tel.: (74) 85 10 28

CANTAVIEJA
* RESTAURANTE BUJ
Av. Maestrazgo, 6
Tel.: (64) 18 50 33

FORCALL
MESON DE LA VILLA
Pl. Generalísimo, 7
Tel.: (64) 16 02 50

IGLESUELA DEL CID
FONDA-RESTAURANTE AMADA
Fuente Nueva, 10
Tel.: (64) 44 11 55

MIRAMBELL
* FONDA GUIMERA
Agustín Pastor, 28
Tel.: (64) 17 82 69
* TASCA DE LAS TEJAS
Arrabal de las Eras, s/n.
Tel.: (64) 17 82 71

MORELLA
* CASA ROQUE
Segura Barreda, 8
Tel.: (64) 16 03 36
* H. CARDENAL RAM
Cuesta Suñer, 1
Tel.: (64) 16 00 00
* MESON DEL PASTOR
Cuesta Jovani, 5
Tel.: (64) 16 02 49

SAN MATEO
HOTEL LA PERDIZ
Historiador Peti, 9
Tel.: (64) 41 60 82
MESON VIRGEN DE LOS ANGELES
Ermitorio V. de los Angeles
(2 km. outside the village)
Tel.: (64) 41 60 07

VALDERROBRES
HOSTAL QUEROL
Av. Hispanidad, 14
Tel.: (74) 85 01 92

VILLARLUENGO
* HOSTAL LA TRUCHA
Las Fábricas, s/n.
(6 km. out of town, beside the river)
Tel.: (74) 77 30 08

* Mentioned in the text.

some 700 hectares (1,730 acres) of vineyards. Of these, 400 are given over to the Garnacha peluda variety, 100 to Garnacha blanca, and the rest to a motley assortment. They are the source of the local wine, known as Valderrobres and drunk throughout El Maestrazgo though it has not yet achieved Denomination of Origin status. The town's finest historic building is its 14C castle with a grand hall and Council Chamber, and a huge kitchen where the most typical dishes of the area —veal, rabbit, partridge, almond sweetmeats— were probably cooked much as they are today many centuries ago.

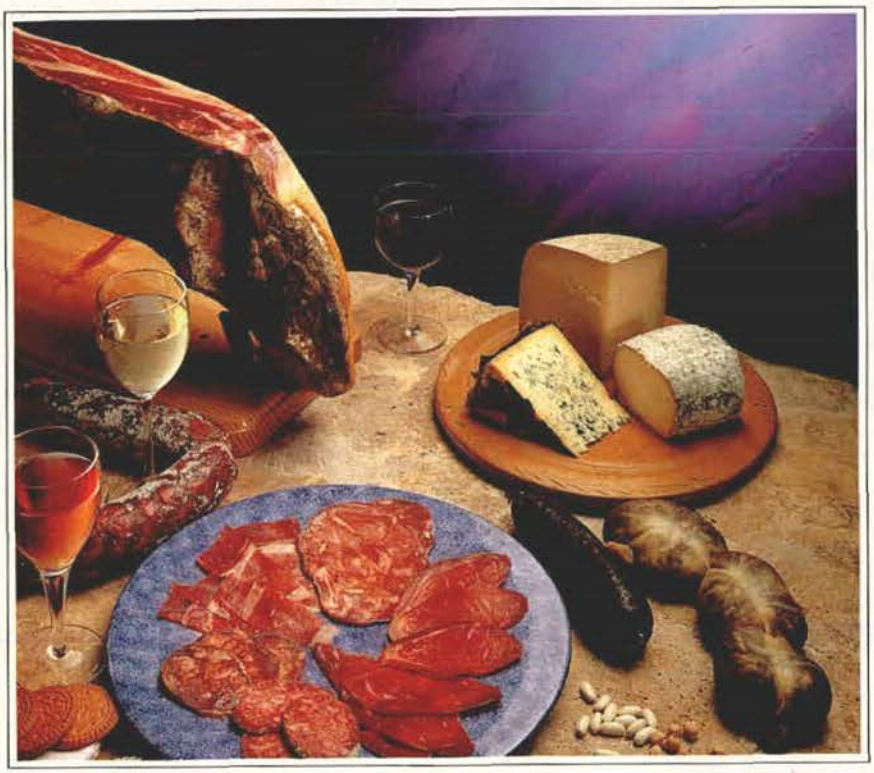
Beceite, a few kilometres south, is a sheltered, unpretentious little country town. Once a Templar trading centre, it stands on the banks of the River Matarrañas which has its source just a little higher up in the heart of the stunningly beautiful El Parrizal Natural Park, habitat of mountain goats and eagles. The very name of the town (aceite means oil) and the presence of a public weighbridge in a little square just beside the bridge spanning the river that rushes through the town are major clues as to the basis of the local economy. There used to be a forge, too, and wickerwork articles were also made here. The local cuisine is rice-based, with rabbit, veal and larger game featuring importantly. If you are lucky, you can also sometimes find delicious home-made *turrón,* the dense almond and honey sweetmeat that the Spanish traditionally eat at Christmas.

Limitations of space have obliged me to leave many towns and villages out of this report. Some are large, some small, but all are important: Pitarque and Fortanete in the central area; Vistabella del Maestrazgo and Puertomingalvo in the south; Culla, Benasal, Catí, Puebla de Benifasar, Herbés, Peñarroya de Tastavins in the east; Forcall, Villores, Zorita, Palanque near Morella; and Castellote, Molinos, Castell de Cabra, and even Montalbán in the far north-west.

Gonzalo Sol is a food writer, a regular contributor to television, radio and the press; a member of the Academia Española de Gastronomía and of Bordeaux's Commanderies des Vins. He has edited several books about food and won various prizes for journalism, among them Spain's National Gastronomy Prize for 1988.

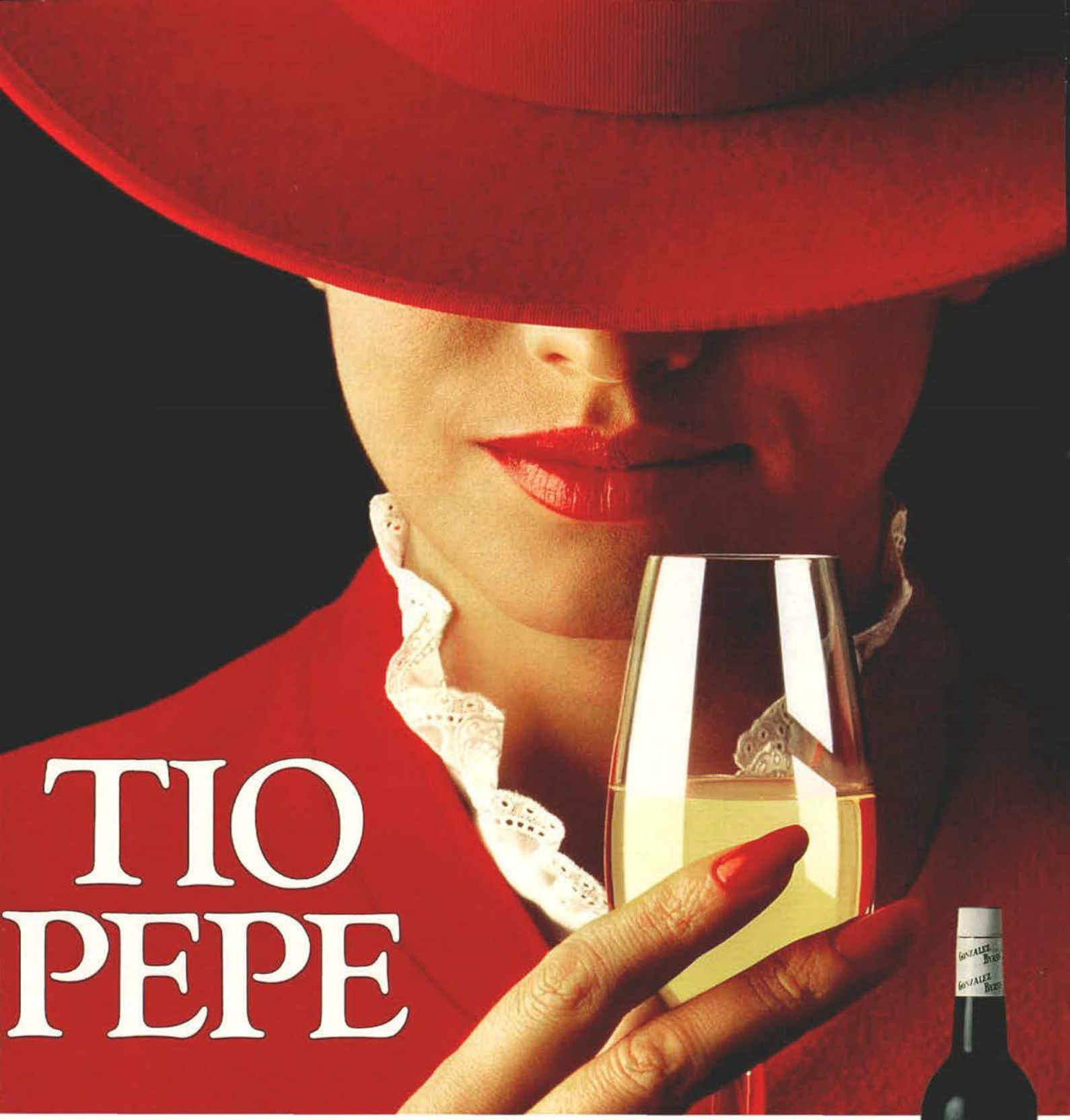
Temptation

Temptation proceeds from Castile and León. Seductions cultivated without haste and favoured by the climate: kidney beans from El Barco de Avila. Dishes fit for the gods that are a provocation. Iberian lomo, red sausage from Cantimpalos, cured ham from Guijuelo... the pleasures of the flesh. And what cheeses. Fresh, cured. From Valdeón, from Villalón, from the Tiétar goat... A little bite of very cured sheep's cheese: impossible to say no! And for original sins, the wines of Castile and León. From Rueda, from Cigales, from Toro, from El Bierzo and from the Ribera de Duero. For all tastes. Temptations with certificates of origin. To taste them is to surrender to their charms. The fact is that there are temptations... that are natural.



RUEDA · BIERZO · RIBERA DEL DUERO · TORO · CIGALES · Guijuelo · CANTIMPALOS

ALIMENTOS DE CASTILLA Y LEON TRADICIONALES



THE NATURAL APERITIF

VERY DRY FINO SHERRY

Producto de ESPAÑA Jerez - Xérès - Sherry

GONZALEZ BYASS

As new territories were conquered, settlers immediately set about trying to grow their own grapes. America's vineyards occupied terrain as varied as Andean valleys and pampas.

P. NEUSTADT/SOBREMESA

WINEGROWING LINKS BETWEEN THE AMERICAS AND EUROPE

For Spain, 1992 has been a year of major commemorations and events, among them an international wine conference.

In May, the IOV (International Office for Vine and Wine) held both the 20th World Congress on Vine and Wine and its 72nd General Assembly in La Rioja and Madrid.

It was particularly suitable that Spain, in the year which marked the fifth centenary of the Discovery of America, should host a Congress which celebrated an event so relevant to the history of winegrowing throughout the world: the introduction of European vines into the American Continent.

Centuries later, Europe would turn to America for help during the phylloxera disaster which destroyed its vineyards. Exchange works both ways.

Text: **José Serrano Cuadrillo**

Ever since winegrowing was first introduced into the New World, American growers have maintained close, and sometimes mutually beneficial, links with Europe.

The earliest Spanish conquistadors and missionaries and their Portuguese counterparts were the prime movers in the introduction and spread of both vinegrowing and wine production throughout a geographical vast area even by present-day standards. In so doing, they laid the foundations in America for a vinegrowing tradition that was to thrive and develop widely in its own right.

The relationship between winegrowing America and Europe, closer at some periods of its history than at others, took on particular importance during the latter part of the 19C. At a time when the vineyards of most of Europe's wine-producing areas were destroyed by phylloxera, the American Continent provided the solution to a desperate situation. The late 19C was also a time of large-scale immigration to America from Europe, and the immigrants took with them new and enriching contributions to American winegrowing. By today, winegrowing in Latin America has reached a very interesting stage: not only is it dynamic, but it is also developing in sometimes surprising directions.

TROPICAL VINEYARDS

America's vineyards occupy terrain as varied as sun-drenched coastal areas, high plateaux, Andean valleys, pampas... all of which provide suitable climatic conditions with marked seasonal differences. But we are now also seeing —and this is where the surprise comes in— strenuous efforts being made to establish large-scale winegrowing in areas where the climate is tropical. Despite the fact that, in principle, vines do not thrive in tropical areas, special growing techniques are being developed to make it possible.

Consumers were just about becoming used to wine and allied products (fresh grapes, raisins, distilled liquor, and the like) from areas of America such as Argentina, Chile and California and recognising their contribution to world-wide wine production both quantitatively and qualitatively. Now, other Latin American countries such as Uruguay, Mexico, Brazil and Peru are beginning to claim attention as sources of the same sort of products.

That being the case, it was fully justifiable that the 20th Congress on Vinegrowing and Wine Production held in Madrid and La Rioja (the event was combined with the 72nd General Assembly of the IOV from 18-26 May, 1992) should concentrate particularly on American winegrowing. Under the overall title of «500 years of American Winegrowing and its Links with Europe», the Congress took advantage of the fact that 1992 was the 5C of the Discovery of America to commemorate the introduction of vinegrowing into the American Continent.

The paper dealing with the Congress' general theme, presented by Spanish expert Professor Hidalgo (Professor of Viticulture at the Polytechnic University of Madrid and Adviser on Ibero-American Development Programmes), considered American winegrowing past and present. I have incorporated some of the fascinating information it presented into this article.

Wine was a vital commodity during the epic events of the initial hispanicisation of America. Not only was it a staple of the everyday diet back on the Iberian Peninsula, but it also served various medical purposes. It was an essential to the first conquistadors. Though barrels of wine were included in the cargo of Spanish galleons making the long and hazardous voyage to the New World, their contents were often spoiled by the time they arrived, and what was still palatable was very expensive for the average pioneering settler.

As new territories were conquered, settlers immediately set about trying to grow their own grapes, but unsuitable soil and still less suitable climate doomed many of these early efforts to failure. Nevertheless, in areas whose latitude and/or height above sea level offered more suitable climatic conditions (such as some upland areas of Mexico and Peru), or which were further away from the equator, such as Argentina, Chile and California, the early settlers' vineyards flourished and they went on to produce their own wine.

As early as 1493, when Columbus made his second voyage to America, vine shoots were taken from the Canary Islands with a view to planting them in the lands it was hoped to discover. The first attempt to grow vines in America was actually made on the island of Hispaniola —today's Dominican Republic and Haiti— but the experiment failed because of the climatic conditions there.

In New Spain (modern-day Mexico), however, conditions were more favourable and for the first time in history, vines from Europe not only 'took' successfully in the New World but also provided the raw material for wine of acceptable quality. The year was 1522. Within a very short time, in 1524, Hernán Cortés issued a set of decrees which included incentives for vinegrowing. All new settlers with Indians in their charge were obliged to plant a minimum of a thousand vine stocks, and non-compliance with these requirements was punished with heavy fines.

Early winegrowing success was also achieved in the highlands of Peru. Plants introduced from the Canary Islands were already growing there by 1547, and the cultivation of vines as a crop soon became widespread as a result. Peru was to develop —by 17 and 18C— into something of a regional winegrowing nexus, with over 35,000 hectares of vineyards, and it played an important role in establishing the viability of vines as a crop. Later in its history —19C— however, this once thriving tra-

In 1868, there were outbreaks of phylloxera in two areas of France. Four years later, the phylloxera was in Spain, and by the turn of the century almost all of Europe's vineyards were badly infected. Luckily, the American Continent provided the solution to a desperate situation.

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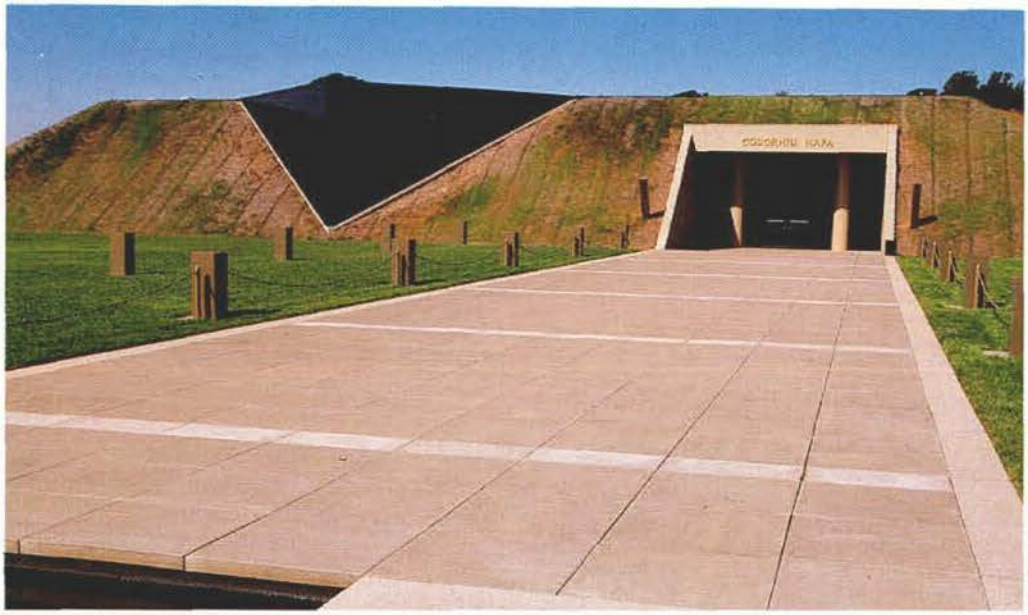
dition waned to such a degree that vinegrowing almost died out completely.

Vines were introduced into Chile from Cuzco, in southern Peru, in 1554, and from there, in 1556, into Santiago de Estero in the north of present-day Argentina. From there, vinegrowing spread rapidly through the north, centre and south of this vast territory, laying foundations on the strength of which Argentina would later become the leading wine-growing country in the New World. Vines had actually been planted earlier in the Buenos Aires area of present-day Argentina, but they had died out when the first settlement in the area failed. Nevertheless, vines from there were the first to be planted in Asunción (Paraguay) in 1541.

CHRISTIAN RITUAL AND WINEGROWING

Late in the 16C, Philip II imposed a ban on vinegrowing in conquered



territories in an attempt to protect wine production and trade in the Iberian Peninsula. Even so, vinegrowing continued to spread rapidly throughout the American Continent. Religious orders cultivated grapes and made wine in Honduras from the early 17C on, and Augustine missionaries introduced the vine into Bolivia from Lima in the mid-16C. At around the same period, table grapes were also being grown in Uruguay, though wine-producing varieties were not introduced until 1726 when some 25 families from the Canary Islands founded Montevideo and planted vine stocks they had brought with them.

The Portuguese made a first attempt to introduce the vine into Brazil in 1532 with plants imported from Madeira, in the Azores. Growing conditions in this new environment were so unfavourable that the experiment was a total failure, but by 1551 experiments in more suitable areas were meeting with success.

The Jesuits took the vine to Colombia in the early years of the conquest, and there is evidence to suggest that it was also being grown as a crop in Ecuador during the same period. The Jesuits who established the first mission in Baja California (Mexico) in 1697 also planted vines, thus extending America's vinegrowing territory northwards and establishing the basis for the Californian vineyards which have since made such a name for themselves. In 1769, they founded San Diego and extended their sphere of influence to other townships in the valleys along the Pacific coast.

In addition to his missionary role in California, Franciscan friar Junípero Serra also made a contribution to vinegrowing in the region by introducing vine varieties from his native Balearic Islands. Earlier, in the mid-17C, other Spanish missionaries had also grown vines in Texas, now part of the United States.

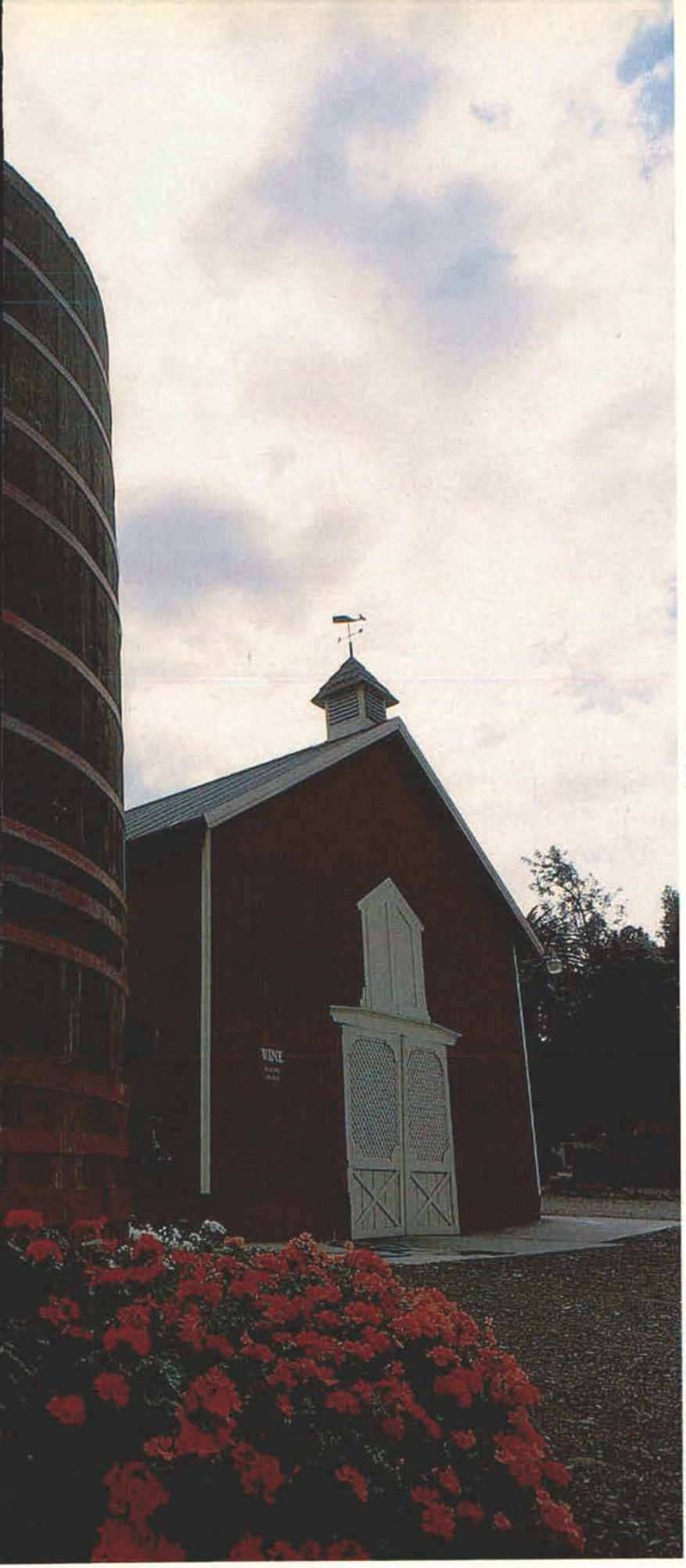
Clearly, then, the religious orders which played so prominent a role in the hispanic presence in the New World from the earliest phases of its conquest also played an important part in establishing winegrowing there, to meet the needs of the Christian liturgy.

As their sphere of evangelical influence expanded geographically, missionaries scattered ever further from their initial settlements. Whereas these latter might well be more or less self-sufficient in producing wine for use in Communion, it was essential that each new outpost produce its own.

The vineyards of the New World were created from cuttings, plants, and grape or raisin pips. Even today, Argentina, Uruguay, California, Mexico, Peru, Brazil and other countries still grow considerable quantities of thriving vine varieties which were brought in at that time. These descendants of the very first plantings are known locally by names such as Criollas, Uva Aceituna, Albilla, País, Mosteles, Quebrantas, Cereza, Malvasías, Mission, Pedro Ximénez, Verdelho...

Immigration of European settlers, which began in the mid-19C and grew to massive proportions early this century, marked a second important phase in the introduction of European vine varieties into the Americas (from France, Italy, Spain, Germany...). Generally speaking, the var-

The Jesuits extended America's vinegrowing territory northwards and established the basis for the Californian vineyards which have since made such a name for themselves. Now, some important Spanish bodegas —such as Codorniu, left above— have their own vineyards in California.



P. NEUSTADT/SOBREMESA

ieties were ones which, grown in their native soil, produced quality wines which these new, impoverished settlers were loath to declare a thing of the past.

Obviously, of the wide range of varieties introduced during that period, only the more readily adaptable to the new and often difficult ecological conditions of the New World have survived.

Among the survivors are today's Cabernet Suavignon, Merlot, Malbec, Barbera, Palomino, Riesling, Torrontés, Chardonnay, all of which are very widely grown in the most significant and dynamic winegrowing regions of the Americas.

GIVE AND TAKE

It is impossible to assess the relationship between winegrowing America and Europe without recognising the essential and definitive contribution made by New World varie-

JAVIER BELLOSO

DATES WHEN VINEGROWING WAS INTRODUCED INTO THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

ties to solving the worst catastrophe that winegrowing Europe has ever had to face.

The latter part of the 19C saw the vineyards of Europe crippled by a spate of phylloxera, a tiny plant louse native to North America, which attacks vines at the root, weakening and ultimately killing them. It brought almost the whole of winegrowing Europe to its knees. Suitably enough, given that the culprit was American, America also provided the solution. The story, in brief, is as follows.

In 1868, there were outbreaks of phylloxera in two areas of France: Côtes du Rhone, and Bordeaux, on the right bank of the Garonne. The pest had accidentally entered the country with American vines imported from North America by enterprising local growers for experimental purposes.

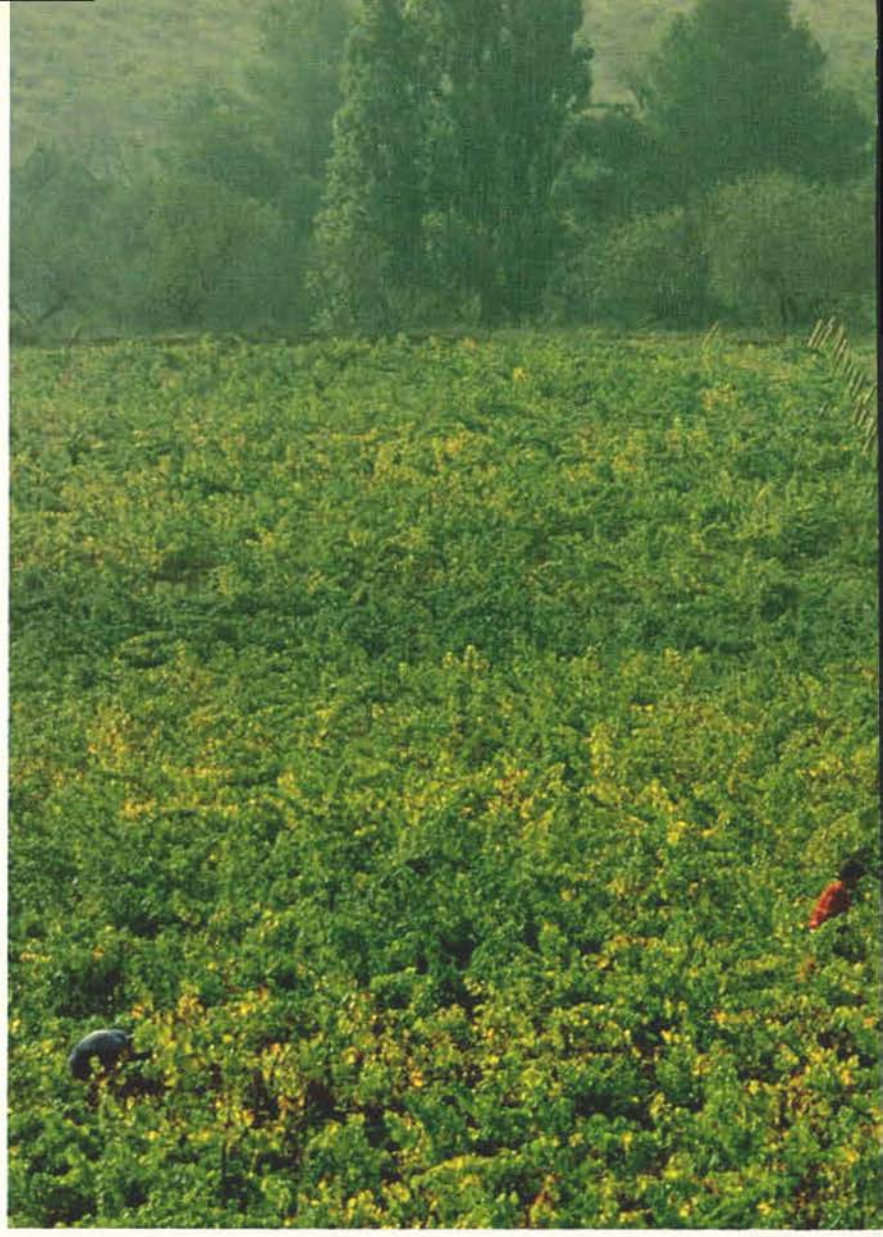
From these two areas, the blight spread inexorably in all directions. By 1879, thirty nine of France's winegrowing regions were affected; by 1884 over a million and a half hectares had been destroyed or severely damaged; by 1900, almost all of France's vineyards were badly infected. In general, the blight spread more slowly through the northern regions where lower air and soil temperatures and a wetter climate provided conditions less favourable to phylloxera.

In 1872, two areas of Spain were found to be infected with phylloxera: one was in Malaga and the other in Catalonia. By 1879, some 500 hectares were affected, and by the turn of the century it had spread to almost all the vines in the country. The Canary Islands escaped infection, thanks to the very fact of being islands and to strict protection measures, still in force today. To this day, the Canaries, once appropriately known as *Las Islas Afortunadas* —The Fortunate Islands— are still unaffected by this dreaded disease, and their winegrowing areas are, for this and other reasons, particularly interesting.

It had been observed that vineyards planted with European varieties (*vitis vinifera*) in eastern areas of North America did not flourish, although native strains (*vitis lambrusca, vitis aestivalia,* and others) did perfectly well. Nevertheless, in California the European varieties introduced, as we know, by the Jesuits, were flourishing and giving high quality wine.

This fact was noted with interest by the French Government. In 1873, it sent a special mission of experts to America so that they could study possible solutions to the disaster at home. The mission's findings provided the basis for an initial classifi-

The vineyards of the New World were created from cuttings, plants and grape or raisin pips which were brought mainly from Spain. Even today some Latin-American countries still grow considerable quantities of thriving vine varieties which were brought in at that time.



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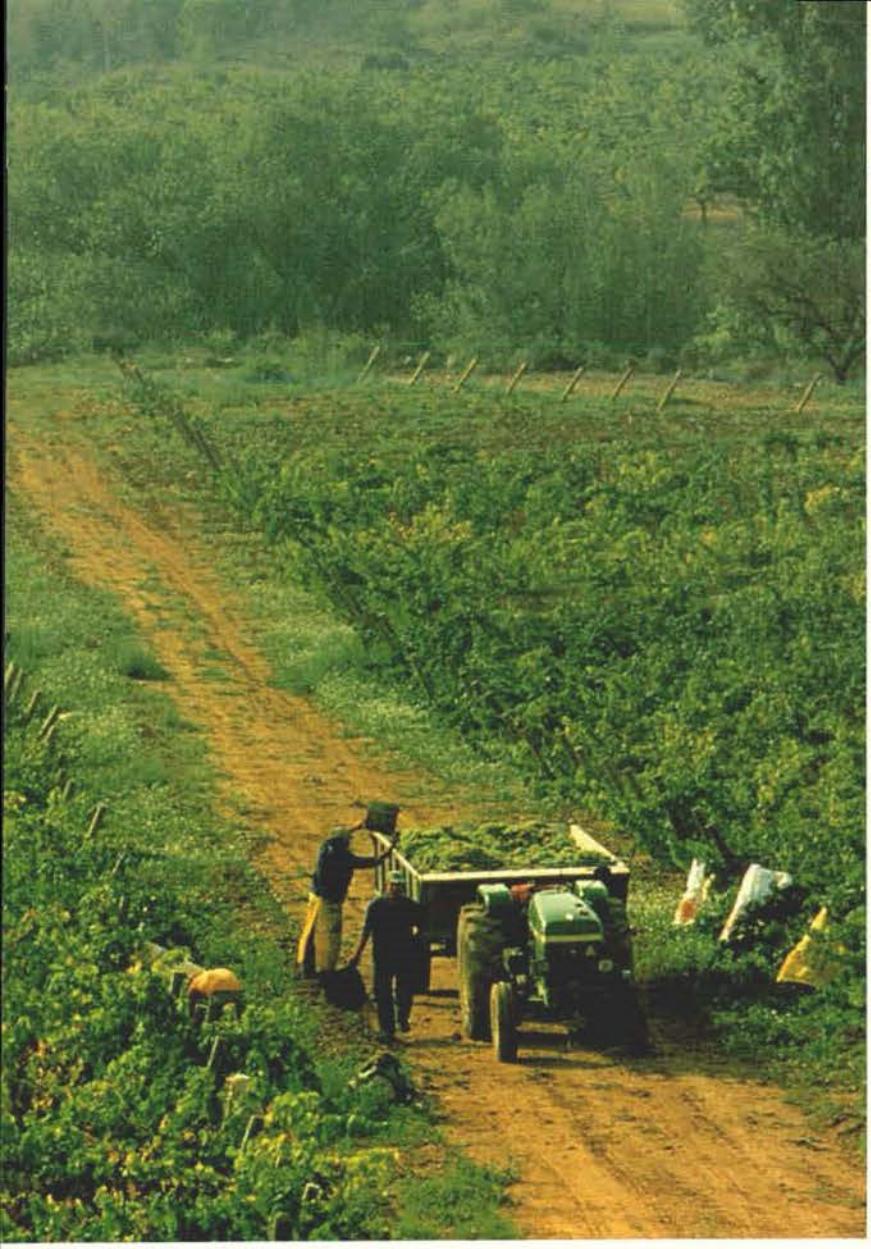

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cation of American varieties according to their resistance to phylloxera, and for research projects subsequently carried out, mainly in Montpellier.

Research was conducted in two main areas:

a) The use of phylloxera-resistant American varieties as hosts (stocks) onto which European varieties could be grafted. Initially, there were major obstacles to be overcome such as low biological compatibility between the European and American varieties, and the latters' lower resistance to the typically chalky soils of Europe's vineyards.

b) Direct production of grapes for winemaking. This approach ran up against the major drawback that the wine obtained from American grapes was of poor quality.

Both lines of research used the technique of hybridisation, namely crossing two species to create a new one which combines the characteristics of both. The aim of research project *a)* was to produce compatible host stocks whose characteristics included resistance to chalk, while research area *b)* hoped to achieve better quality wines.

The grafting of European varieties onto American stocks has been proven to work exceptionally well. Except for specific mistakes and accidents, this approach has successfully achieved its aims and can be thanked for the reconstruction of Europe's vineyards. It has also proved conclusively that it is the only certain means of achieving products of the desired quality.

However, attempts to obtain directly productive hybrids have come nowhere near achieving the quality of wine obtained by the grafting approach. The use of this type of hybrids is strictly prohibited in Spain.

José Serrano Cuadrillo is an Agricultural expert and Departmental Head of the Quality Section of Spain's National Denomination of Origin Institute, INDO. He contributes to specialist wine publications (Club de Gourmets and the Club de Gourmet Wine Guide).

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AREAS UNDER VINE ON THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

(1990)

Country	Area (ha.)
Argentina	267,000
Bolivia	2,000
Brazil	60,000
Canada	6,000
Colombia	1,500
Chile	120,000
Dominican Republic	340
Ecuador	170
Guatemala	60
Honduras	25
Mexico	46,000
Paraguay	2,000
Peru	8,000
Uruguay	2,000
USA*	320,000
Venezuela	1,100
TOTAL	836,195

*California: 257,000 ha.
Source: The International Office for Vine and Wine.

WINE PRODUCTION ON THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

(1990)

Country	Production (hl.)
Argentina	20,250,000
Bolivia	20,000
Brazil	3,108,000
Canada	455,000
Chile	3,978,000
Mexico	1,800,000
Peru	100,000
Uruguay	900,000
USA *	15,998,000
Other countries	60,000
TOTAL	46,669,000

*California: 14,637,000 hl.
Source: The International Office for Vine and Wine.

QUICK CONVERSION

In our recipes, quantities are given in metric measurements. The charts on this page show approximate equivalents between Imperial or American measures, and metric measures.

FLUID MEASURES
METRIC/BRITISH STANDARD

10 MILLILITRES = 1/3 OUNCE
50 MILLILITRES = 1 3/4 OUNCES
100 MILLILITRES = 3 1/2 OUNCES
250 MILLILITRES = 8 1/2 OUNCES
500 MILLILITRES = 17 1/2 OUNCES
1 LITRE = 1 3/4 PINTS

1 TEASPOON = 5 MILLILITRES
1 TABLESPOON = 18 MILLILITRES
1 OUNCE = 28 MILLILITRES
1 PINT = 570 MILLILITRES
1 QUART = 1.14 LITRES
1 GALLON = 4 1/4 LITRES

FLUID MEASURES
METRIC/U.S. STANDARD

10 MILLILITRES = 2 TEASPOONS
50 MILLILITRES = 3 TABLESPOONS
100 MILLILITRES = 3 1/2 OUNCES
250 MILLILITRES = 1 CUP + 1 TABLESPOON
500 MILLILITRES = 1 PINT + 2 TABLESPOONS
1 LITRE = 1 QUART + 3 TABLESPOONS

1 TEASPOON = 5 MILLILITRES
1 TABLESPOON = 15 MILLILITRES
1 OUNCE = 30 MILLILITRES
1 CUP = 235 MILLILITRES
1 PINT = 475 MILLILITRES
1 QUART = 950 MILLILITRES
1 GALLON = 3 3/4 LITRES

OVEN TEMPERATURE

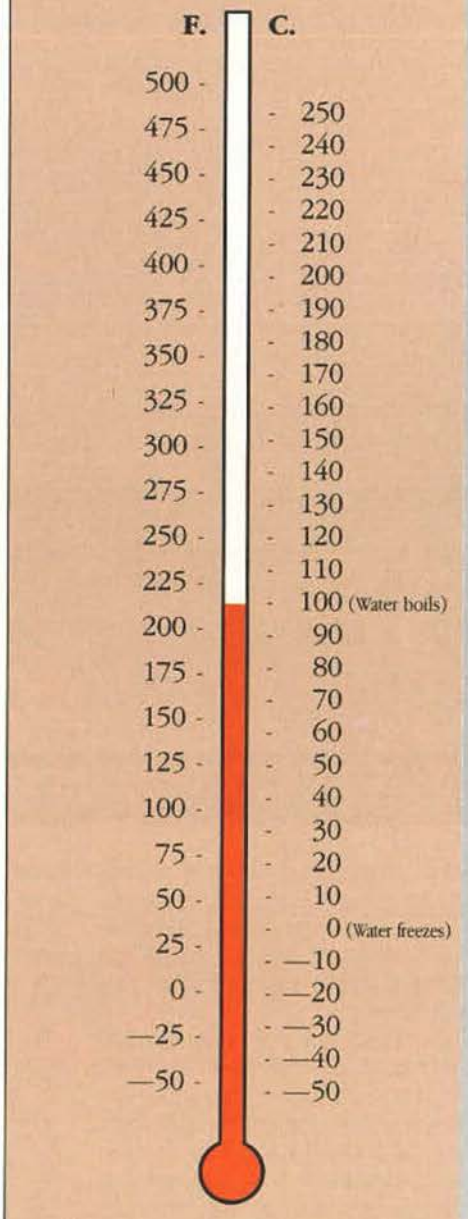
TEMPERATURE	DIAL NUMBER
VERY SLOW = 250F/120C.	= 1/4
SLOW = 300F/150C.	= 1
MODERATE = 350F/180C.	= 4
HOT = 400F/200C.	= 6
VERY HOT = 450F/230C.	= 8

WEIGHT
METRIC/OUNCES & POUNDS

10 GRAMS = 1/3 OUNCE
50 GRAMS = 1 3/4 OUNCES
100 GRAMS = 3 1/2 OUNCES
250 GRAMS = 8 3/4 OUNCES
500 GRAMS = 1 POUND + 1 1/2 OUNCES
1 KILO = 2 POUNDS + 3 1/4 OUNCES

1/2 OUNCE = 14 GRAMS
1 OUNCE = 28 GRAMS
1/4 POUND = 110 GRAMS
1/2 POUND = 230 GRAMS
1 POUND = 450 GRAMS

TEMPERATURE



SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Part travel book, part cookery book, part biography, *A Taste of Castile* could well be subtitled «The Adventures and Misadventures of an Unlikely Apprentice in a Castilian Kitchen».

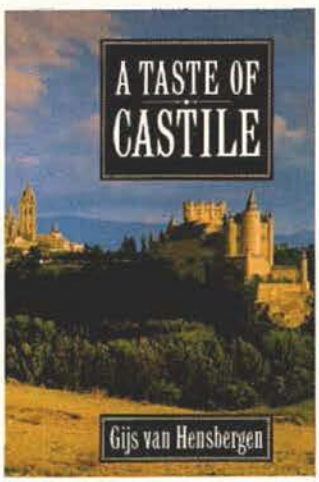
Gijs van Hensbergen, a Dutch journalist settled in England, suddenly decided to find out all there was to know about Castilian cooking, at first hand. Clearly no ditherer, he moved to the ancient and beautiful city of Segovia, in the heart of Old Castile where despite not speaking a word of Spanish, he got himself taken on as an apprentice at one of the city's best-known restaurants, Casa Duque.

Van Hensbergen was to spend several years in Segovia, during which he learned the secrets not only of the marvellous roast lamb and sucking pig that are this area's classics, but also of a life-style and culture by which he grew fascinated. The new recipes, friends and customs which he celebrates in this book were all clearly welcomed with open arms and a sense of humour, and he became thoroughly integrated into local life.

The Burial of the Sardine (the ritual which marks the end of carnival time in Spain), the mattress-maker repairing old wool-stuffed mattresses in the street. Holy Week processions, the art treasures of Segovia... all are closely observed and recorded. And, like all good Segovians, he searches for wild mushrooms in autumn, gathers water-cress, and buys fresh eggs and vegetables from the nuns of a local closer order convent.

The gruelling work at Casa Duque provides the ongoing thread on which his new experiences hand. He stood the heat, stayed in the kitchen, and gained unforgettable friends and experiences in the process. ■

A Taste of Castile.
Gijs van Hensbergen, 1992.
Sinclair-Stevenson Ltd.
7/8 Kendrick Mews.
London SW7 3HG.



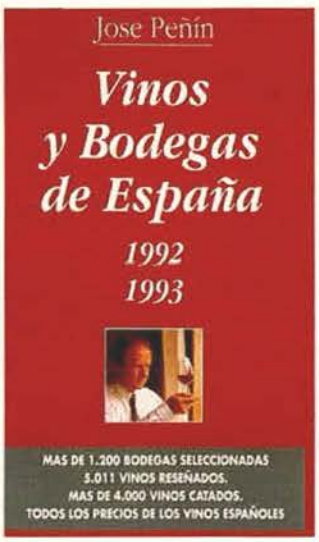
The vast range of wines currently available on the Spanish market can sometimes prove confusing to consumers, who often resort to the tried and true rather than run the risks involved in trying something new. Wine guides like this one were invented to help them out.

The author's intentions are made clear in his introduction: «*Vinos y bodegas de España*» is not meant to be a vademecum (the tasting notes would be superfluous) nor an explanatory manual about wine in general. It is a guide for use by consumers, be they amateurs, retailers or restaurateurs.»

The trouble with guides of this sort of guide is that they involve subjective opinions, and the author's taste may not necessarily be yours. However, the fact that José Peñín's professional life has been devoted almost entirely to wine, and Spanish wine in particular, inclines one to trust his judgement. This second, improved, edition of his 1990 book features over 1,200 selected bodegas and describes 5,011 wines (4,000 of them tasted), so the very scope of the book is impressive. Nevertheless it is clearly set out and easy to use.

It is organised by wine-growing areas, and though priority is understandably given to Spain's 39 recognised Denominations of Origin (with a brief introduction to each or them), non-D.O. areas also feature. Within each area, local bodegas are listed in alphabetical order (each with a thumbnail sketch of background information), followed by a wine section. Tasting information appears under two headings, the first giving overall scores on a scale of 4 to 10, and the second giving concise descriptions of each wine (colour, aroma, acquired characteristics, and so on). An excellent index helps you find your way about this comprehensive guide to the Spanish wine world today. ■

Vinos y bodegas de España 1992-1993.
José Peñín, 1992;
PI & ERRE Comunicación Integral.
Núñez de Balboa, 49.
28001 Madrid.
Telf.: (1) 576 72 51.



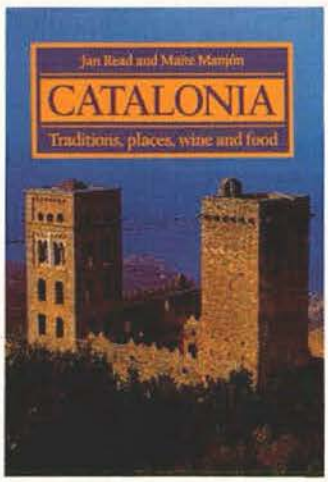
Spain is a compound of regions, each with its own history, culture and gastronomy. Even within this framework, Catalonia is something of a special case, and particularly since the death of Franco: the Catalan language and traditional local customs, suppressed during the dictatorship, have made a vigorous come-back.

Historian and wine writer Jan Read and Spanish food expert Maite Majón know Spain intimately. Although their special fields are wine and food subjects on which they have written several books together, their latest, *Catalonia,* is broader in scope. A succinct but comprehensive portrait of the history, culture and traditions, art, geography and tourist routes of the Catalan region, it makes ideal preparatory reading for the sort of visitor who likes to arrive well informed, and is a treat for armchair tourists.

As one might expect, the chapters on food and wine are particularly good Catalonia is a major wine-producing region, and has been since the Greeks established their first colonies on the Iberian Peninsula many centuries age. The wine section is very informative about the main bodegas of its several D.O.'s —Penedés, Alella, Priorato...— and about cava, the quality sparkling wine for which Catalonia is perhaps best, and most widely, known.

The food section traces the development of local cuisine from its origins to the present, and gives genuine local recipes based on classic ingredients. Jan Read's own photographs illustrate the text. ■

Catalonia. Traditions, places, wine and food.
Jan Read & Maite Manjón.
The Herbert Press, 1992.
46 Northchurch Road.
London N1 4EJ.

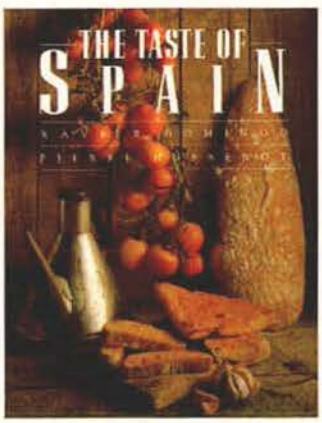


Xavier Domingo is a well-known Spanish journalist and gastronome — or "cuisinologist", as he prefers to be known. The experience and knowledge of this immensely cultured man of the world and bon viveur, and particularly his knowledge of Spanish food, are much in evidence throughout this book about authentic Spanish foodstuffs and cooking.

Published simultaneously in France, the US and Spain (in French, English and Spanish, respectively), **The Taste of Spain** attests to the generally recognised fact that there is no single Spanish cuisine, but rather various regional ones with certain characteristics and elements in common. The most common bond among them all is the ability to capitalise on the simplest of ingredients. For Domingo, bread, olive oil and garlic are the most classic elements of Spanish food, followed hy pulses, and pork and charcuterie. In the course of its 250 pages, the book deals individually with these and the many others ingredients which are staples of the Spanish diet (rice, fish, garns, vegetables, fruit, cheese, wine...). Each chapter gives a clear and vivid account of the role that each plays in Spanish cuisine, the customs that have evolved around particular foods, and recipes which specify their region of origin. The Pork and Salt-cod chapter is particularly interesting for its examination of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church on Spanish eating habits.

While the written content of **The Taste of Spain** is fascinating, the book is also a visual treat, illustrated with beautiful photographs by Pierre Hussenot styled by Marianne Paquin. ■

The Taste of Spain.
Xavier Domingo and Pierre Hussenot, 1992.
Flammarion.
26 rue Racine.
75006 Paris.



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TINTO RESERVA 1985

MANISES POTTERY

Rediscovering a Mediterranean Artistry

The Valencian region of eastern Spain is famous for its traditional pottery, particularly Manises and Paterna ware. Though, today, antique pieces of both these types of pottery are collectors' items, their value was not recognised until well into the 19C. This was largely due to the fact that, until the Curator of the Sevres Museum realised their true provenance in 1844, they had been mistakenly categorised in the museums of Europe as Italian pottery from the Renaissance period.

Manises pottery dates back many centuries, and its history can be divided into different periods and styles.

MUSEO DE CERAMICA DE MANISES

GREEN PATERNA WARE

The earliest remains of Manises pottery are decorated in yellow and date back to the Visigothic period in Spain. By the 13C, both Paterna and Manises were producing green copper-glazed pottery, using pigment obtained by mixing oxidised copper with vinegar.

This green ware was made mostly in Paterna, while Manises continued using manganese pigments and simultaneously developed a new style of cobalt blue pottery. This original style attained a considerable degree of decorative sophistication and was very influential on the pottery of Talavera, Seville and Toledo.

MANISES GOLD LUSTRE WARE

Gold lustre ware was introduced into Manises from Malaga and Granada during the period of decline of Arab dominion in the south. The caliphate city of Granada was the seat of an important pottery producing industry, largely under Arab control. The gold lustre technique consisted of painting on decorative motifs using copper and silver sulphates diluted in vinegar and then firing the pieces at low temperatures.

This type of pottery reached Manises in two clearly distinguishable forms, the Muslim and the Gothic: the combination of these two artistic styles is known as «Hispano-Moresque». The Moorish pieces were more delicately made and were decorated with more finely drawn designs, while the Christian type used more representational decorative motifs.

The status achieved by Manises lustre ware at that time was reflected in a thriving export trade, mainly with Italy, but also with much of Europe and the Middle East. Furthermore, at the height of the Golden Age of the Renaissance, this type of Pottery was much sought after in the most important royal courts and awakened the interest of, among others, the Medici family. Manises ware even appears in the works of the great masters: the Annunciation panel of the Portinari Altarpiece by Hugo van der Goes in Ufficci Gallery in Florence is one example.

Today, pieces of this type of pottery are exhibited in the Louvre and Cluny Museums in France, in the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert in London, and in the Metropolitan and Hispanic Society Museums in New York.

After the gold lustre period, Manises pottery went into a decline, as a consequence of the political and economic changes occurring in the Iberian Peninsula. Up until the late 19C, the type of pottery produced there was popular multicoloured ware.

MANISES POTTERY TODAY

Manises is still a major pottery centre, with over 130 artisan workshops, now creating pieces in the simple shapes that modern taste demands. Manises potters no longer work with common clay, they now use various media, stoneware and refractory clays among them, which enable them to produce new effects and explore different creative possibilities.

Nowadays, the use of ceramics is not limited to pieces of pottery or decorative glazed tiles; it is also applied to sculpture, murals, and the like. In contemporary pieces, colour is generally applied by adding colouring oxides to the glaze, and the spectrum has been broadened by the introduction of high-temperature enamels. Modern ceramics tend to concentrate more on form and colour than on decorative motifs. The factories in Manises which produce decorative tiles using modern technology are particularly worthy of mention in that they represent the continuation of an ancient craft tradition on an industrial scale.

María José Blanco

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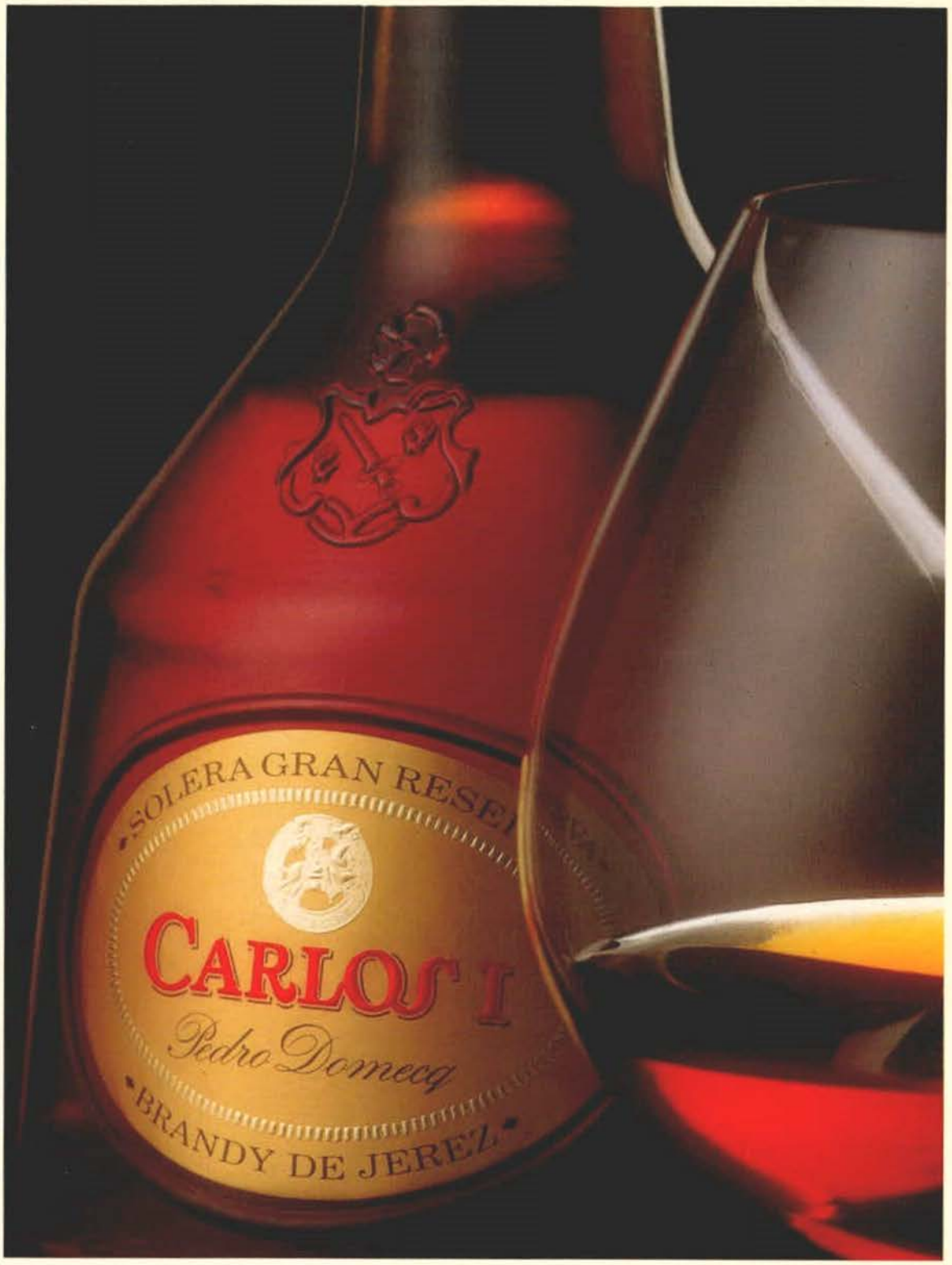

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