FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

SPAIN

GOURMETOUR

MEDITERREAN FOOD IN THE SOUTH OF SPAIN. FERNANDO CÓRDOBA, A MODERN APPROACH TO TRADITIONAL FOOD • SOMONTANO. THE DILEMMA FACING A MODERN WINE • THE BONANZA COAST. AN ADVENTURE IN TASTE

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January- April 1995

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Dear readers,

Despite the slight recovery witnessed in the Spanish economy, the start of 1995 is marked by the Government's basic goal of reducing the budget deficit. Just like other Spanish Institute of Foreign Trade publications, SPAIN GOURMETOUR has the duty to make its own small contribution to this austerity programme.

Without forsaking the quality which has been our trademark for the last nine years, we have decided to cut down the number of subjects covered, giving priority to information on products and companies to the detriment of more general areas of culture or tourism. Some readers may also notice a slight reduction in the weight of the paper used. This difference, should not, however, affect the reproduction of our photographic reports.

We have also taken advantage of these alterations to offer you a new, more sober cover design. Its common title in English used for all three editions -German, French and English-, since the magazine is distributed worldwide from Tokyo to Sidney via Milan, Paris, New York, Munich, Dublin and many other cities, now highlights our publication's country of origin.

Spain, a country full of gastronomic treasures that we shall continue to unlock for you. Spain, a country that will have plenty to say with regard to Mediterranean culinary tradition throughout the three issues to be published this year. But I shall leave it to you to be the judge, in the hope that, despite our economizing measures, SPAIN GOURMETOUR may still provide you with interesting, top quality information.

Cathy Boirac
Editor

STOP PRESS

Compiled by NICK LYNE

THE LEGACY OF AL-ANDALUS

Visitors to Spain this year should note that all roads lead to the southern city of Granada. "The Legacy of al-Andalus" is a year-long celebration of the almost eight-century-long Moorish presence in Spain. A series of historic routes, exhibitions and publications aims to bring alive Andalusia's rich cultural heritage.

"The Legacy of al-Andalus" kicked off in April in Granada, with the participation of the regional and national government, as well UNESCO, and offers visitors ten specially prepared routes throughout the region.

Aside from well-known cities such as Seville, Cordoba and Cadiz, the routes take in dozens of smaller towns and villages, while 14 exhibitions staged in different cities illustrate the many facets of the Moors' deep-rooted influence on southern Spain, ranging from commerce, science, daily life, to Islamic art.

"The Legacy of al-Andalus" is a unique opportunity to get to know Spain's largest region, and not to be missed.

A range of free guides and maps is available from: Paseo de la Castellana, 13, entreplanta, 28046 Madrid. Tel (1) 308 7076. Fax (1) 308 1620.

SPANISH CHEF GIVES COURSE AT AMERICAN CULINARY INSTITUTE

One of Spain's top chefs, Pedro Subijana, gave a three-day course at the American Culinary Institute's "Great Chefs of the World" school recently. Subijana is the first non-French European chef to be invited to teach at the prestigious institute. The maestro prepared a contemporary fish dish - San Pedro in mussel and sorrel sauces - and later answered questions on Spanish cuisine.

FIVE NEW WINE-PRODUCING AREAS RECEIVE DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN

Five new Spanish wine-producing areas were granted Denomination of Origin (D.O.) status during 1994: Lanzarote, Ycoden-Daute-Isora and La Palma, from the Canary Islands; Chacolí de Bizkaia, from the Basque Country; and Bullas, from Murcia.Wine buffs interested in getting to know Spain's wines better will want a free updated Denomination of Origin map, produced by the Instituto de Comercio Exterior (ICEX) which, along with road routes, shows all of the country's D.O. areas. The map is published in Spanish, English, French, German and Dutch. Available from the Spanish Commercial offices throughout the world (see page 14).

GALLINA BLANCA TO CREATE GENETICALLY IMPROVED RABBIT; WORTHY OF DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN

Spanish food groups Gallina Blanca and Artola are to create a genetically improved rabbit, to be known as "Monteño", and reared free-range. Some 20% of the estimated 300,000 kg production will be for export to the European Union, and will carry Specific Denomination of Origin.

SPORTING HOLIDAYS - AND THE GREAT OUTDOORS

The Paradores hotel chain, in conjunction with specialists in eco-tourism Haciendo Huella, has organized special walking weekends which allow visitors to get the most out of the Spanish countryside.

Meanwhile, the 1995 edition of "Los hoteles del golf" is just out, listing 39 hotels throughout Spain, the Canaries and the Balearics.

Available from: Los Hoteles del Golf, Velázquez, 111-4º D. Tel. (1) 561 0171. Fax. (1) 563 1364

EXPOLIVA '95; A DATE WITH OLIVE OIL

Expoliva '95, the seventh international trade fair for the olive oil industry, takes place this year May 4-7 in the Andalusian city of Jaen. Expoliva attracts producers and growers not only from Spain, but from throughout the Mediterranean. Such has been the demand, that this year's show offers 20% more stand space. Expoliva also offers symposiums, conferences and demonstrations.

For more information contact: FPDOAO, Paseo de la Estación, 25, 6ª planta, 23008 Jaen. Tel (53) 274976. Fax 276219

SPANISH FOOD AND WINE COMPANIES RECEIVE ISO CERTIFICATION

Aceites Toledo, Bodegas AGE and Coll de Juny are the first Spanish companies in the food and wine sector to be recognized by the International Standards Organization (ISO). Olive oil producers Aceites Toledo have been adapting its production and quality control since 1993, and now bears the certification ISO 9002. Bodegas AGE carries ISO number 9002, while Cava manufacturers Juny de Coll has received certification 9001.

NUÑEZ DE PRADO OLIVE OIL CELEBRATES TWO HUNDRED YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

One of Spain's oldest established olive oil producers, Núñez de Prado, celebrates its two hundredth anniversary this year. The family-run company, based in the small Andalusian town of Baena, between Cordoba and Granada, is into its seventh generation dedicated to the production of olive oil using traditional, time-honored methods. Indeed, Núñez de Prado's production relies on a late eighteenth century press - a masterpiece of Mediterranean industrial engineering.

However, the family firm's reliance on traditional technology is no whim, they have won numerous domestic prizes, as well as international merit such as the 1993 Culinaire Award in Belgium and a prize from German magazine A la Carte this year. Núñez de Prado's oils also carry Denomination of Origin of Baena.

The family welcomes vistors to its eighteenth century premises, where a range of top-quality oils can be sampled, along with a traditional "miller's" breakfast of fresh-hot bread, smothered in olive oil and topped off with tomato, garlic and cod.

GOOD FOREIGN PRESS FOR RIBERA DEL DUERO

The 1991 vintage Pesquera, from D.O. Ribera del Duero, has once again found a place in the top 100 wines put together each year by the United States' prestigious *Wine Spectator* magazine, winning this year's editor's choice as well. Cune's Viña Real 1985 Gran Reserva, a full-bodied Rioja, also figured, as did Bodegas Ismael Arroyo Ribera del Duero Mesoneros de Castilla 1991 vintage.

Meanwhile, British wine magazine *Decanter*, in its roundup of top wines for 1994, featured five Riberas del Duero: the 86 Pesquera Tinto, the Pago de Carraovejas, the Tinto Joven 92, the Señorío de Nava Crianza 89,the Dehesa de los Canónigos Reserva 90, and the Protos Gran Reserva 87.

SANDEMAN WINS AWARD, ORGANIZES SHERRY SEMINAR

Soléo, Sandeman's new sherry, was recently selected by Britain's *Wine & Spirits* magazine for a design and packaging award. The magazine considered that Soléo was a bold attempt to create a new market for sherry. The sherry was launched in Germany, and is now on sale throughout Europe and Latin America.

Sandeman is also planning a series of sherry seminars througout 1995. The courses last three days, explaining all aspects of production, from vine care to bottling. The seminars are held in English and in groups of about 15 people. Enrollement still open for courses in September. The courses are free, although participants will have to pay for travel to and from Jerez.

Information: Tel. Pilar Muñoz on (56) 301100

MARQUÉS DE RISCAL TO CONCENTRATE SOLELY ON RESERVAS

Leading bodega Marqués de Riscal has announced that from now on the company will produce only *reservas* and *grandes reservas*. The decision affects both domestic and export - to more than 50 countries - sales.

BODEGAS BERONIA, BARBADILLO AND BERBERANA ANNOUNCE NEW VINTAGES

Rioja wine producers Bodegas Beronia has announced a new vintage, a 1982 Gran Reserva.

Cadiz-based bodega Barbadillo has announced its 1994 Castillo de San Diego, while Berberana unveiled at the end of last year its 1988 Reserva Privada "Marqués de Griñón", and the 1991 Tempranillo "Marqués de Griñón". Meanwhile, Berberana carried off three of the five gold medals awarded to Spanish wines at the Milan International Food and Wine Salon last November for its 1987 Berberana Reserva, its 1983 Berberana Gran Reserva, and the 1988 "Marqués de Griñón".

NEW PRODUCTS

CODORNIU ANNOUNCES NEW RANGE OF CAVAS

Leading sparkling wine producer Codorníu has unveiled a new range of varietal cavas under the name Mas D'Anoia. The new range is made up of four cavas based on the following grape varieties; Chardonnay, Xarel.lo, Macabeo and Parellada.

LIGHT CHORIZO FOR WEIGHT WATCHERS AND NON-PORK EATERS

Family charcuterie firm Gabriel García Nieto, based in the western province of Salamanca, has announced a new light chorizo, which contains no pork, and is low in fat content. Bovilight, as the new product is called, is made from lean beef, veal, and white poultry meat, and is ideal for people with heart complaints or weight problems.

IX CLUB DE GOURMETS INTERNATIONAL FAIR:

Growing demands for quality and the presentation of new gastronomic guides proved to be the keynote themes of the IX Club de Gourmets International Fair, organized in Madrid by the Club de Gourmets. The gastronomy trade fair registered its customary success: 27,000 visitors browsed among the 437 stands between 17 and 21 March, tasting and selecting items from a wide range of top quality foods and beverages.

The 5,200 square metres of the

Pabellón de Cristal in the Casa de Campo exhibition centre were completely given over to this international fair. For the first time ever, exhibitors from Germany, Belgium, Dominican Republic and Luxembourg took part in the event.

An important feature of the gourmet trade fair was the holding of parallel activities to meet all tastes such as the IV Wine Forum, focusing on the relationship between women and wine; the II Dehesa de Extremadura Ham-cutting Competition, the I Spanish sommelier Championship or the Wine Tunnel, where the ten grape varieties used to produce top Spanish varietal wines could be tasted.

BERBERANA AND AVELINO VEGAS SALES UP

Berberana consolidated its position as Rioja's number two wine producer with sales of 26 million bottles, up 72% on the previous year. Total sales were worth $ 100 million.

Ribera del Duero and Rueda wine producers Avelino Vegas saw 1994 sales up 30% on the previous year, worth $ 12 million.

RIOJA SALES UP, EXPORTS SOAR

Sales for Rioja in 1994 amounted to more than 196 million liters, up 23% on 1993 and part of a general trend in increased sales since 1991.

Exports once again saw a significant increase; up 46% on the previous year.

RIOJA STUDY ON LESS WELL-KNOWN GRAPE VARIETIES

The Regulatory Council for the Denomination of Origin Rioja has just published a booklet on lesser known grape varieties in the Rioja region, based on work carried out by Fernando Martínez de Toda and Juan Carlos Sancha, viticulture specialists. A conference based on their work took place in mid January. At the conference, the researchers noted that they had identified some 70 grape varieties in Rioja, and have managed to keep the species alive in smallholdings. All attending the conference emphasized the need to maintain variety and avoid the tendency to use just one or two main grape types, as well as to prevent the importation of foreign strains.

This booklet is available by sending 500 pesetas to:

Oficina de Información de Vinos de Rioja del Consejo Regulador.
Tel/Fax (41) 254877

RIBERA DEL DUERO WINS FOUR PRIZES IN PARIS

France's annual wine show Vinalias, organized by the winetasters' Union of France, awarded top prizes this year to four wines from Ribera del Duero.

From a field of 880, Bodega Peñalba López carried off two Gran Prix d'Excellence for its Torremilanos Reserva 1987 and its torre Albéniz Reserva 90. Peñalba López was also awarded a Prix d'Excellence for its Torremilanos Crianza 90.

Bodegas Rodero, attending for the first time, won a Prix d'Excellence for its 91 Crianza.

2ND "PRESTIGIO RIOJA" PRIZE

This year's Premio Prestigio Rioja, a prize which the Regulatory Council of La Rioja offered for the second time, was awarded to biologist Francisco Ayala on March 8th at the Hotel Hyatt Island in San Diego. Among those on the jury were Camilo José Cela, Juan Antonio Samaranch and the President of the Regulatory Council of the Qualified Denomination of Origin of La Rioja.

Dr. Ayala, who was born in Madrid in 1934 and was educated in Spain, today teaches at the University of California and is scientific and technological advisor to President Bill Clinton as well as being president of the "American Association for the Advancement of Science". Francisco Ayala was selected for the prize for his biological research and, above all, for his contribution to viticulture. He himself is the owner of vineyards in Lockford, California.

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

SONIA ORTEGA

La guía de oro de los vinos de España1995

Andrés Proensa
Editorial Naturaleza y Ambiente, 1994
Domingo Párraga, 8 - 28021 MADRID - Tel: (1) 505 24 89 - Fax: (1) 797 35 48

El País - Anuario de los vinos de España 1995

PROGRESA (Grupo PRISA), 1994
Gran Vía, 32 - 28013 Madrid - Tel: (1) 536 55 00 - Fax: (1) 536 55 55

Many books about Spanish wines have been published in Spain over the past few months. We can single out from among these publications, *La guía de oro de los vinos de España*, due to its rather unique approach. Its author, Andrés Proensa, who is currently considered to be one of the best wine specialists in Spain, has sought to bring out the human side of the wines and wine-cellars and to remove all those barriers which are often put up between wine and the uninitiated. The author has sampled over a thousand wines, from which he has selected 500, each one of which he presents with a simple description, information about its foreseeable evolution, etc. He groups these wines *into four separate* categories: Gold, Silver, Bronze and Unclassified but very interesting wines. This book is also presented in an unusual way: It is printed in full color and illustrated with the labels of the 500 wines and photographs of the respective wine-cellars. A computer diskette is also included with the book which provides a summary of the Guide's contents.

Another interesting new publication is the first *Anuario de los vinos de España*, put out by *El País*, the daily newspaper with the largest nationwide edition. This book is intended to become a basic reference for everything related to Spanish wines. It includes subjects of *general interest to* the wine-growing sector, such as data on studies carried out, maps of the different Denominations of Origin and a list of the wine-cellars and the different wines which they elaborate for *the Spanish market*. The book also features an introductory chapter on each one of the different wine-growing regions of the country.

It was intended from the very beginning to be informative and concentrates on the unique and most noteworthy characteristics of the September 1993 to August 1994 agricultural year.

La Bodega del mundo. La vid y el vino en España (1800 - 1936)

Juan Pan-Montojo
Alianza Editorial, 1994
Juan Ignacio Luca de Tena, 15 - 28027 Madrid - Tel: (1) 741 66 00 - Fax: (1) 741 43 43

Vinos de Aragón

Miguel Lorente y Juan Barbacil
Editorial La Val de Onsera, 1994
Artes Gráficas, s/n - 22006 Huesca - Tel: (74) 22 98 00 - Fax: (74) 24 05 36

These are two recently published books. The first, *La bodega del mundo. La vid y el vino en España* (1800 - 1936), is really an economic study, in which the evolution of the Spanish wine-growing sector is analyzed throughout the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th. This study throws new light on the different stages of agrarian development taking place in Spain prior to the Civil War and helps to explain the origins of the major structural features which have shaped the contemporary Spanish wine-growing world. This extensive and well-documented study was written by Juan Pan-Montojo, *a historian and* economist, who has concentrated his research on the history of rural social movements, agrarian history and the history of the Public Treasury in the 19th century.

The second work covers a single region, Aragon, in Northeastern Spain, boasting four Denominations of Origin, which are covered in depth, from wine-cellar to wine-cellar. It also includes the history and culture of wine in this region. Aragón produces highly varied wines, many of which are not well-known to the general public. This region has also provided some very interesting surprises in recent years, such as *the wines of the Somontano* Denomination of Origin.

Manual de los vinos de España

Pedro Plasencia y Teclo Villalón
Editorial Everest, 1994
Carretera León-La Coruña, km 5 - 24080 León - Tel: (87) 80 20 20 - Fax: (87) 80 12 51

Guía del Brandy de Jerez

José Peñín
Pi & Erre Comunicación, 1993
Núñez de Balboa, 49 - 28001 Madrid - Tel: (1) 576 71 45 - Fax: (1) 577 29 20

Pedro Plasencia and Teclo Villalón are two enthusiastic followers of the wine world in all its facets and they have carried out diverse studies on certain very unique aspects, such as the architecture of wine-cellars. *Obviously the fact that* Teclo Villalón has a Doctorate in Fine Arts from the Complutense University of Madrid is of great help. They are regular contributors in specialized magazines of the sector and often work together, as they have done on this book. The authors have divided the contents into four parts, the first two of which cover subjects of a general nature (climate, soil, elaboration, the wine ritual, etc.). The third section is devoted to the different regions of Spain and their highly varied wines; while the fourth and last one is made up of glossaries and indices.

The first thing to be praised about the *Guía del Brandy de Jerez* is its practical pocket-size and its equally practical contents. José Peñín, who is probably one of the *most recognized wine experts in Spain*, covers the history of Brandy de Jerez from its origins, to its unique elaboration and ageing, as well as pertinent advice on its serving and enjoyment.

More than 60 different brands are discussed in the book, together with their respective characteristics, sampling and ratings, and everything is illustrated with color photos of the bottles and the identifying labels. This book is a must in the library of anyone especially fond of Jerez Brandy.

Text: Jess Ellis Knubis
Photos: Rick Brown

The Flavors of Spain Open the Ninth Annual Master of Food and Wine

The exciting rhythms of flamenco mingled with the sounds of the sea as Highlands Inn presented the ninth annual Master of Food and Wine at this spectacular location on California's Carmel Highlands Coast.

Noted by the media and aficionados from around the world as perhaps the finest gastronomic event of its type. The Master of Food and Wine has annually presented the world's great chefs and winemakers together for a six-day series of luncheons, dinners, wine tastings, cooking demonstrations and tours of the farms, vineyards and ranches that make this region one of the most admired destinations in California.

For the first time, the opening-night reception of the Masters of Food and Wine had a singular theme: "The Flavors of Spain". At this spectacular cliff-side setting, arriving guests were greeted in the Fireside Room with the inn's striking architecture beautifully decorated, and featuring Spanish-style murals done for the occasion by a local artist.

The opening night reception has come to be a celebration and foretaste of the week ahead, and a chance to meet, mingle and renew acquaintances. Around the room were chefs' stations and wine tasting tables, more than fifty together, with a separate room apart just for the bounty of the desserts, chocolates, sherries, and dessert wines.

The stars of the evening were the Spanish chefs and winemakers. Despite the heritage and similarities that California and Spain share, true Spanish food is not common here and California wines, of course, dominate area wine lists. So it was with eager anticipation that the guests gathered around the working chefs to sample offerings that were at once lively, delicious and wonderfully accessible.

Four separate stations offered a wide variety of Spanish cuisine. Spain's Jose Juan Castillo of Casa Nicolasa in San Sebastian prepared a Napoleon of Salt Cod with Potatoes Monkfish in a Sauce of Small Crabs. A special favorite were the *Huevos revueltos con hongos*, featuring a local wild mushrooms.

Jaime Lopez of Mesón Galicia in Norwalk, Connecticut, prepared a classic Loin of Lamb and Eggplant Caviar, Braised Cockles and White Beans with White Wine, Garlic, Parsley and Shallots, plus Steamed Octopus with Spanish Paprika and Olive Oil.

José Luis Relinque of Iberia restaurant in California's Portola Valley presented Grilled Marinated Pork Tenderloin Medallions, and Oxtail Confit Tartlets and Grilled Bacon Wrapped Scallops with Romesco Sauce.

Josu Zubicarai from Taberna del Alabardero in Washington D.C. offered Crabmeat Basque Style, a Roasted Pepper Salad with Tuna, and Veal with Sun-Dried Tomatoes.

So, too, did the American chefs catch the Iberian spirit. Highlands Inn Executive Chef Cal Stamenov prepared Sardines on Croutons with Basil and Black Olives, Stuffed Artichokes with Goat Cheese, Pepers and Herbs Wrapped in Swiss Chard, and Fried Pig's Feet Sticks with Shallot Vinaigrette.

Spain's wineries were well represented by U.S. importer, Seattle's Classical Wines of Spain. Alejandro Fernández, winemaker of Bodegas Alejandro Fernández presented his famed Tinto Pesquera. He was also slated as a special guest of the following night's formal wine dinner, presenting a selection of *reserva* vintages in company of a coterie of international chefs and winemakers.

Also poured among the fabulous selections of French, German and California and even Australian wines were Bodegas Bretón pouring the Loriñón Tinto Crianza 1990, the Loriñón Blanco Fermentation en Barrica 1993 and the Dominio de Conte Reserva 1989. Hidalgo Sherries poured the La Gitana Manzanilla Especial, Napoleón Amontillado and Jerez Cortado.

Among the abundance of riches of pastries and chocolates in the dessert room guests enjoyed the Casta Diva Cosecha Mel 1993, Bodegas Gutiérrez de la Vega, Hidalgo Cream Especial and Hidalgo Pedro Ximénez Viejo.

David Fink, general manager of Highlands Inn, and himself involved with virtually all of the previous years'events reported: "This is certainly the most exciting opening night we've ever had. The flamenco music and dancers, the decorations combined with the delicious aromas of great Spanish food and the delicious varieties of wine immediately elevated everyone's mood. It seemed to bring a whole new realm of sensations to the palates of our guests, who tend to be very sophisticated wine and food people."

The tenth annual Master of Food and Wine will be held February 27 through March 3, 1996.

***Jess Knubis** has written for magazines as* San Francisco Focus, L.A., Style *and* Food Arts. *He is a principal in Knubis Communications located in Carmel Valley, California.*

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FERNANDO CÓRDOBA

A MODERN APPROACH TO TRADITIONAL FOOD

Barely a decade ago, today's tremendously popular "Mediterranean Diet" was unfamiliar to the great majority of people. In the short space of time elapsed since then, however, things have changed and the media have proclaimed far and wide what scientists and doctors had already confirmed some time before: the advantages of a simple, tasty and at the same time healthy diet which has been the norm all along Mediterranean shores since ancient times.

Logically enough, the interest shown in this diet by scientists and the general public has also been echoed by the interest raised in culinary circles. A great many chefs from all four corners of the globe have incorporated Mediterranean ingredients and dishes into their menus. Although some products are certainly common to the region as a whole (olive oil is a striking example), the Mediterranean diet does vary somewhat from one country to the next and even from one region to the next within the same country.

It may seem superfluous to highlight the fact that Spain belongs to this group of countries laying a centuries-old claim to this diet, but inexplicably enough, some international publications often fail to mention it. Down the length of Spain's Mediterranean shoreline where all the classical Mediterranean cultures - Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans... - made their home, a rich gastronomic tradition has developed. Rich and varied, as we stated above, since the range of culinary possibilities to be found moving southwards from Catalonia to Andalusia via Valencia and Murcia is vast.

In *Spain Gourmetour*, the Mediterranean diet and its different facets have always been a focus of interest and we have devoted countless articles to the different products making up this diet - oil, pulses, a variety of vegetables, fruits, cereals, wines... In this particular case, we intend to approach the subject from a different angle: through three chefs hailing from three different geographical backgrounds but whose cuisine follows the purest Mediterranean style in all three cases. They will each give us the benefit of their in-depth insight, explaining what they are doing and how they are doing it. Each one will also put together a menu specially for our readers.

The person charged with reflecting all of this in a series of articles is María José Sevilla. She is an expert in Spanish gastronomy, the author of several books - a forthcoming publication deals with the Mediterranean diet - and BBC TV programmes on the subject, and is joint head of food and beverage promotion in the Spanish Commercial Office located in the UK. Our first step will be to go southwards and allow Fernando Córdoba to talk to us and cook for us.

Text: **María-José Sevilla** Still Lifes: **Menchu Artime** Photos: **A. de Benito/ ICEX**

FERNANDO CÓRDOBA

Antonia Trichopoulou, profesor of Nutrition and Biochemistry in the Public Health School of Athens University and one of the principal authorities on the subject of Mediterranean food, has written: "Since biblical times, people of the Mediterranean have based their diet on wheat, olives, grapes and wines. To supplement these staples, they also eat fish, fowl, goat cheese and yogurt, green vegetables and legumes, seasonal fruits, garlic and onions. References to bread, wine and olive oil can be found throughout early writings, from the Illiad to the New Testament". This pattern fits well with what we would now regard as a healthy diet, and with the food of Southern Spain (with one exception -traditionally we don't eat yogurt).

With the words of Dr. Trichopoulou in mind, and the first of three articles to be published in this magazine on the subject of Spanish Mediterranean food to write, I decided to go South, to Andalusia, and meet Fernando Córdoba, the head chef at the restaurant El Faro in Puerto de Santa Maria. He has been eating Mediterranean food all his life and has become, as a chef, totally committed to the preservation of the food culture to which he belongs. At El Faro, Fernando cooks traditional food with a new and delicate approach. He is fascinated by old Mediterranean recipes already forgotten, recipes and methods of cooking that he often brings back to life in the kitchen.

Last February I was travelling from Jerez to Puerto de Santa Maria, the little town across the bay from the historic city and seaport of Cadiz. All along the road red poppies and delicate blue and yellow flowers contrasted with the intense green of the fields and the white of the albariza soil planted with vines. It was already springtime in Andalusia. This was the dreamland of the Romans and the great passion of the Moors.

I had left behind me the market of Jerez, 18 kilometers (eleven miles) inland from Puerto de Santa Maria, but the images of fresh artichokes, minute peas, early tomatoes from Chipiona, and olives marinated in a hundred ways were all adding new ideas and new questions to those I had already prepared for Fernando Córdoba. What about pulses and grains? Is the list of ingredients enumerated by professor Trichopoulou equally important here ? Do they follow the same high hierarchy?

Puerto de Santa Maria is very different from her sister towns, Sanlucar de Barrameda and Jerez de la Frontera, even if they have a magic common denominator: Sherry . Perhaps this is a very personal perception but this town more than any other speaks to me of the historical exchange which was going to enrich the food of the old Mediterranean world. Every side street, every doorway and, above all , the river, speak of the Americas, the tomato, the pepper , the potato and so many other gifts from the New World. Yet, in the first place it was the Old Mediterranean World that travelled across the ocean westward from the small coastal towns of Southern Spain. They took with them the inheritance since 1100 B.C., of the Phoenicians from Lebanon, Carthaginians from Tunisia, Greeks, Romans and Moors.

LEARNING FROM THE ROOTS

Fernando Córdoba is one of the six children of Gonzalo Córdoba, the man behind the original restaurant of El Faro in Cadiz and still very much an institution in the food scene of the area. I met Fernando for the first time six years ago while travelling in Andalusia with a group of British chefs. At that time he was already showing an exciting approach to food. Last November at a food conference in Sydney I became more aware of his incredible knowledge of the food culture of Spain and of his unique style in dealing with traditional food in a modern world.

"My father has been working in the profession for the last thirty years of his life while my mother, from whom I learned to cook, always took care of us, the house and the family table until we left home", Fernando says. "Although my father insisted I had do a degree in Business Studies, which I did, immediately after graduation I went to study the art of cookery under two great teachers. First Víctor Merino of the restaurant Cabo Mayor in Madrid, and then Paul Schiff of the restaurant La Hacienda in Malaga. What I wanted most of all was to become a chef. I needed to learn as much as I possibly could and I still do. Víctor Merino insisted, and I believe it is the correct approach, that without knowledge of the fundamentals of classic cookery a professional cannot make the most of any traditional or regional food. But on the other hand without a substantial knowledge of the food of a particular culture, it will be impossible to apply any form of classic approach to cookery. Following some of my teachers' principles, but with ideas of my own I opened the second El Faro in Puerto de Santa Maria, seven years ago".

When Fernando was a child, restaurants as we understand them today were a rarity along this southern coastline. Small inns called *Ventas*, and the *Casas de comidas*, serving home style cooking, were the not-as-good alternatives to the food served in one's own house which, as a matter of fact, was and still is quite wonderful

"My mother was my first teacher ", says Fernando, "her food, one hundred per cent Mediterranean,was based on pulses, very fresh vegetables, rice and pasta dishes, fish and bread from the morning market, cheese and fruits of the seasons. Her winter stews with lentils, beans or chickpeas were excellent. Salads of fresh and roasted vegetables were always on her table. We eat very little meat in Andalusia. Meat has always been a festive food, an expensive food. Pork products though, are often added to stews in small quantities to flavor them. Small quantities of cured ham or a piece of *chorizo* will accompany a large *puchero*, the name of a cooking pot and the name of one of the most tradition-

al dishes of the region. In the *puchero* a selection of vegetables and small quantities of various meats are cooked together slowly until all the flavors are extracted. The broth will be served first with a few leaves of fresh mint and the meat, also known as the *pringá* is enjoyed as a second course.
With the exception of some specialities from Jerez influenced by French tradition and associated with the food of the Sherry families and houses, the main dishes of this region tend to have very few ingredients, but always of superb quality. Onions, garlic, olive oil, bread, wine, and a few selected herbs and spices are the secret here - and if you do not like them, the chef is in deep trouble.

Vegetables by the Shore

Vegetables are very important in this culture. You need to go to a market to appreciate the variety of the produce and the sophistication of the cosumers.The small towns of Chiclana, Chipiona, Rota and Sanlucar de Barrameda among others in the province of Cadiz, are producers of some of the tastiest and most varied vegetables one can find. Even in a place in which excellent fruit and vegetables are available out of season, the seasonal products from these parts belong in a category unto themselves. They are planted in sandy soil plots close to the beaches. The arrival in early spring of tender wild asparagus, known in Spain as *trigueros* (as thin as wheat, *trigo* in Castilian) announces the changes of the dishes to be prepared. Every local market will proudly show two or three different varieties of artichokes, particularly the Roman artichoke, round and beautiful; small green peppers for frying, or elongated large ones for the salad of roasted vegetables; early, tender broad beans chosen by the stall attendant, depending on the wishes of the client. "Madam are you going to prepare a dish with the pods or just the seeds"? . There is chard, spinach, three or four types of lettuce, small peas from Chipiona, leeks and different types of beets and mushrooms. Tomatoes are still out of season and the salad varieties are looking slightly pale. Parsley and fresh mint are always given away free with the other purchases, if asked for.
Fernando talks about two recipes based on vegetables which are prepared, traditionally, around Easter time: A substantial soup of tomato, peppers, bread and mint - simply a delight - and the speciality of the season, *Alcauciles con chicharros* (Roman artichokes and fresh pea stew). This recipe is special as the artichokes and peas together with a few drops of lemon juice, two onions and three or four cloves of garlic are added to a pot of cold water. Small pieces of fried bread and a little saffron end the list of ingredients which are brought to a boil and cooked until the water is practically gone. Yes, one can argue that vegetables cooked for a long time, etc. etc.... the reality is that you have to taste it and then make up your mind about how the ingredients are treated in different traditions. At the end of the summer Fernando waits for the arrival of the caquis and the pomegranates. In the South of Spain, the ruby seeds of one of my favourite fruits are often used to flavor and embellish salads of endive or crispy lettuce.
Roasted vegetables in salads (so varied and so popular throughout Mediterranean Countries) or combined with fresh vegetables and cured anchovies are extravagant but wonderful mixtures always available locally. The art of roasting vegetables is part of the culinary inheritance. Fernando remembers his mother tending to the slow roasting of peppers on a metal griddle over the fire. You have to turn each pepper often until all the skin has become dark and easy to peel. The pulp becomes soft and flavorsome. Vegetables roasted in the oven are an easier but inferior alternative which lacks the glamorous smoky flavors of vegetables roasted on a griddle.
Juicy tangerines, sweet oranges and lemons are still present everywhere and in every house even if the winter months are long gone. Bitter oranges hang on the trees by the thousand. What a temptation!! Another excellent cook, Fernando Bigote, prepares a delicious *raya a la naranja amarga* (Skate in bitter orange sauce) at his restaurant in Sanlucar following an age-old seafarers'recipe. In Cadiz, the famous fish broth *caldillo de perro* would not be the same without a few drops of juice from the oranges that came with the Arabs all the way from the Orient. Sweet oranges are also the main ingredient of a typical salad of onions and thinly sliced desalted cod dressed with olive oil.

That Wonderful Juice of the Olive

It's interesting that the use of olive oil, once the main criticism outside Spain of Andalusian food, has become such an important ingredient in the world of "healthy food". As far as I am concerned, Andalusian food culture could not exist without the juice of the olive. At El Faro, Fernando uses between 300 and 400 liters of olive oil each month. 80% is olive oil of 1 degree acidity, perfect for frying and in traditional stews, and 20% is virgin and extra virgin olive oil, which he prefers for dressings, marinading and making mayonnaise. He speaks passionately about Andalusian olive oil. He buys olive oil from the Cooperativa de Olvera and virgin olive oil from Abasa, Ybarra, Carbonell and Núñez de Prado, which is unfiltered. He likes the taste of the olive in olive oil. There are so many different olive oils in Andalusia that one needs to become an expert to do justice to each. While olive oil is produced practically all over the eight Andalusian provinces, the oils from the Sierra de Segura in Jaen and Baena in Córdoba are protected by a Denomination of Origin which guarantees their quality and place of production.
Olive oil has also been used to preserve food since ancient times. Cheeses, sausages and fish preserved in olive oil are still very popular. Vinegar and sea salt also played a very important part before ice and the freezer became part of the modern world.

FERNANDO CÓRDOBA

The Ancient Art of Preserving

The Phoenicians loved tuna and swordfish, which they needed to preserve, and was the reason why they established colonies in South Spain for the exclusive production of sea salt. The sea salt pans in Cadiz were the gold of the old travellers who crossed the Mediterranean from distant eastern shores in search of fish. *Escabeche de bonito a la antigua* (escabeche) and *Atún en salmuera* (tuna cured in sea salt and marinated) are two excellent examples of old recipes, that are still common today, using traditional preserving methods.

Fernando's *Escabeche de bonito* is tuna fillet cooked in olive oil and vinegar using a *sofrito* of onions and herbs as a base. The art of preserving tuna by salting and drying it, in which state it is known as *mojama*, has become part of the menus of many renowned restaurants all over Spain.

I would recommend the tuna cured in sea salt and marinaded in olive oil and herbs, served at the Hotel Los Seises in the city of Seville. The chef, Manuel Andrade, prepares a fillet of about 2 kg (four pounds) of fresh tuna covered with sea salt and left for 48 hours, time for the fish to be cured. He removes all the salt from the exterior. Then the fish is washed, filleted and marinated with olive oil, vinegar and fresh parsley. Served, with roasted red peppers, it becomes food for the gods.

Talking with Fernando Córdoba about Sherry vinegar, the exclusive product of Jerez and the only vinegar he uses, he insists that Andalusian people have throughout history disliked undone food. The characteristic power of vinegar to turn foods like game or fish white is an important aspect of its use here. He wonders if this was inherited from the Jewish tradition which existed from the first century in Andalusia. While in other parts of Spain fish and meat are often served underdone, so far he has not been able to convince his customers of the merits of this different approach to food. In the South, anchovies in vinegar need to taste of vinegar and become totally white in color otherwise the customers will complain. Sweet and sour combinations are also very popular.

Sherry vinegar can be powerful, particularly if, like Fernando, you choose a very old vinegar full of taste and character. This is why he dilutes it by combining two or three teaspoons of vinegar with two or three teaspoons of Pedro Ximenez, the delicious sweet Sherry made with the Pedro Ximenez grape. Beforehand he reduces the wine by one third in a small saucepan, to evaporate the alcohol and preserve the flavors of the wine. Five tablespoons of virgin olive oil, two teaspoons of concentrated Pedro Ximenez, two teaspoons of sherry vinegar, and a little salt become a perfect dressing. Try this combination on a salad of peppers, thin desalted cod and fresh oranges. It is quite delicious.

A Land of Cereals

Olives, grapes and wheat are the main ingredients that define the Mediterranean World and olive oil, wine and bread, the passion of the Andalusians.

The Romans encouraged the cultivation of wheat in the South as the quality of the cereals of the Betica, the name they gave to these provinces, have been highly regarded since ancient times. Lucie Bolens, the French writer specialized in gastronomy and perfumes, in her fabulous book *Andalusian Cooking. An Art of Living XIth to the XIIIth Centuries,* mentions the quality of the bread known as *tabuna*. "In Islamic Spain it was fashionable to serve a selection of different types of breads at the table", she says. As we can see they were truly ahead of their time. At El Faro small *candeal* bread baked every day exclusively for the restaurant is already waiting when you arrive. Fernando speaks of the danger that frozen dough could bring to the restaurants and the threat to some of the excellent bread still baked in Andalusia. On Sundays he often drives to Chiclana, Medina or Alcala de los Gazules to buy the elongated 1.5 kg (four pound) talera breads baked in Arabic ovens. *Molletes*, baked with aniseed, are taken out of the oven slightly uncooked. This bread is eaten for breakfast -always toasted, of course. Dried and unleavened flat breads, the *reganas*, are also very popular.

At his restaurant Fernando bakes an excellent *Pan de azafrán*, saffron bread, following a simple recipe with bread flour, fresh yeast, saffron threads, salt and water. For the best saffron bread, the night before he prepares a starter dough, known in Spain as *madre*, or mother of bread.

I was surprised but delighted that Fernando had chosen for this article a recipe with couscous, or *alcuzcuz*, the name used in medieval Spain for the small grain made from hard wheat. Couscous was brought here by the Berbers after the 9th. Century. Today, in the rest of the country and in the rest of Europe, couscous means Africa but, here, only a few miles from the Magreb, it has been reintroduced in the menus of the modern chefs. Once a week a large vessel departs from Cadiz with a cargo of couscous produced by the local mill destined for Tunisia. Good news, since we could readily introduce the healthy *alcuzcuz* into our diet once again.

There were many recipes prepared with cereals in Mediaval times in Andalusia and they still are. Andalusians loved soups with bread or semolina, all kinds of meat and game pies, pasta dishes such as noodles and macaroni. This was the time of the invention of quality flour and semolina, when Andalusian, African and Middle Eastern traditions merged forever.

Babeta is a typical Andalusian pasta similar to what the Italians know as fetuccini. It's believed that it did not come with the Arabs but with the Genoese traders at a much later time. *Babeta con caballa,* or pasta with mackerel is a classic homemade dish. In the interesting world of Andalusian pastas, however, I would recommend the pas-

ta, fish and shellfish stews ending with the words *en amarillo* (of a yellow color given by saffron).
By now the map of the ingredients of the food from this culture has begun to take shape, but there is another speciality of this chef which I have to mention: the rice dishes of El Faro del Puerto.
The advanced irrigation systems established by the Romans were perfected by the agriculturally talented Arabs. With them the whole world of food in Andalusia changed and become enriched and new. Rice arrived in Spain with the Arabs and the Spaniards were able to write an incredible and diverse new chapter on food. The majority of the rices cooked around Cadiz are described as *caldosos* or soupy rices. These are very different from the traditional rices prepared in the *paella* pan around Valencia. When the tomatoes planted in sandy soils from the town of Rota are ready, it's time to enjoy a classic rice dish of great simplicity cooked with onions, garlic, tomatoes and saffron. The secret of this rice rests in the broth which is added from the *puchero*. In summer, this rice is served in every house with roasted green peppers. In El Faro two or three different types of rice dishes are always available on demand and the customers are happy to wait as the rice needs to be *en su punto* (just right). Fernando's rice with chicken livers and seasonal vegetables is simply superb.
When Fernando was preparing for me the recipes included in this article, I was tasting an array of *tapas*, the small dishes of Spain, known as *mezze* in other parts of the Mediterranean world. There were marinated potatoes, fresh tomato and mint soup served in a minute earthenware pot, Roman artichokes and fresh pea stew, fried mullet, *aliñadas* (home made marinated fresh olives), shellfish balls or *albondiguillas*, mushrooms with spinach, goat cheese in olive oil, bread and of course one or two glasses of a delicate and very fresh Sherry: fino del Puerto.
I left the town late but contented. I had found what I had been looking for. Mediterranean food in Andalusia is an important part of life. Furthermore, the restaurant offering an equally delicious alternative to family food, is also rescuing traditions and ingredients which we thought had died out. We need to speak up about the subject, it is tasty and fascinating.
Good news: today yogurt has become part of our childrens' diet.

See recipes on page 102.

Editor's Note: Fernando Córdoba's recipes were prepared for photography by Jean Miguel López Castanier from "La Taberna de Liria", Madrid.

Restaurante El Faro

SPRING MENU

Hot and Cold Entrees

- *Roasted Vegetable Salad with Cod and Anchovies*
- *Monkfish Liver on Toast*
- *Salad of Smoked Fish and Goat Cheese*
- *Sautéed Tender Broad Beans with Asparagus and Jabugo Ham*
- *Roasted Tomatoes and Kingprawns with a Sherry Vinegar Dressing*
- *Salad of Spring Vegetables, Fresh Fruit and Kingprawns from Sanlucar*
- *Homemade Duck Liver Paté*
- *Cold Soup of Tomato and Mint*
- *Cream of Shrimps*
- *Wild Mushrooms and Clams in Brandy Sauce*
- *Cauliflower and Almond Fritters*
- *Shellfish Cakes with Cockles*

Fish

- *Steamed Fillet of Hake with a Sauce of Sweet* choricero *Peppers*
- *Monkfish* a la plancha *on a Bed of Vegetables and a Dash of Sherry Vinegar*
- *Fillets of Sole with Shellfish and a Fresh Tomato Compote*
- *Monkfish Stew with Saffron and Fresh early Peas*
- *Supreme of Sea Bream with Caramelized Garlic*

Meat and Game

- *Duck Confit with Magret on a Sauce of Sweet Wine*
- *Calf's Liver with Caramelized Onions*
- *Braised Sweetbreads with Oloroso Sherry*
- *Roasted Saddle of Spring Lamb with Rosemary and Thyme.*

Desserts

- *Arabic Pastry with Banana Mousse and a Chocolate Sauce*
- *Caramelized Apple and Almond Praline*
- *Warm Chocolate Cake with Vanilla Ice Cream*
- Tocino de cielo *(egg yolk pudding)*
- *Lemon and Meringue Pie with a Mandarine Sauce*
- *Profiteroles with Mint and a Hot Chocolate Sauce*
- *Bavarois of Vanilla and a Fresh Fruit Compote*
- *Vanilla and Raisin Ice Cream with Pedro Ximenez Sherry Sauce.*

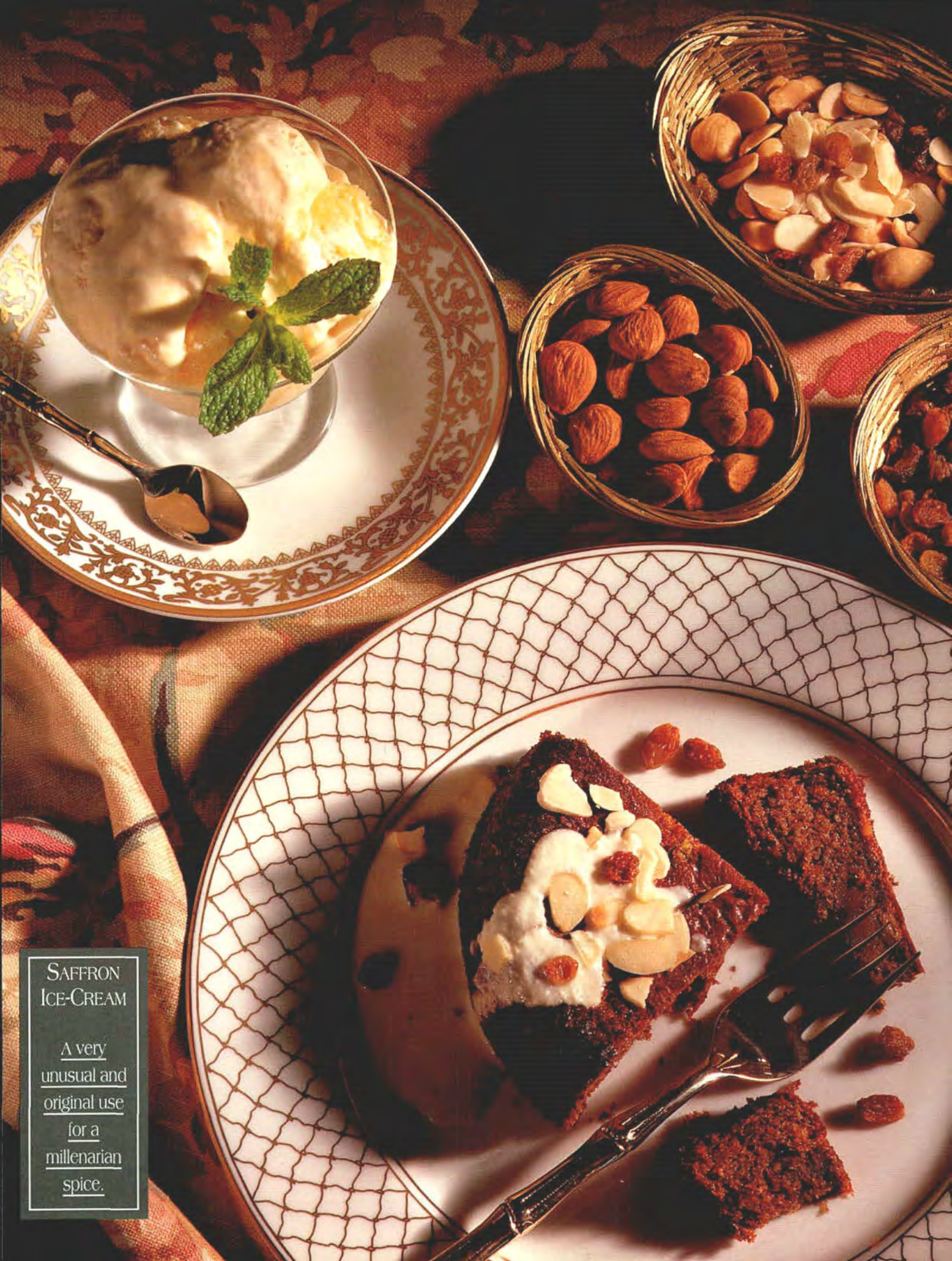
Restaurante El Faro
Carretera de Rota, km 0,5
El Puerto de Santa María (Cadiz).
Tel.: (56) 858003
Closed on Sunday nights (except in August)

Saffron

Manchegan Gold

Saffron's mythical origins befit one of the world's most precious spices. According to Greek legend, Crocos, a handsome mortal, fell in love with the nymph Smilax, who refused him,whereupon he was transformed into a saffron plant. The dried stigmas of this plant, used as a medicine, dye, aromatic, aphrodisiac and spice since ancient times, are still finding new uses both in and out of the kitchen. And Spain, with a saffron-growing tradition stretching back over a millenium, is still setting world quality standards.

Text: **Vicky Hayward** Still Life: **Menchu Artime** Photos: **A. de Benito /ICEX**



Saffron Ice-Cream

A very unusual and original use for a millenarian spice.

The levels of aromatic and flavoring oils are much higher in Spanish saffron than that grown elsewhere.

Although saffron has been valued in Europe since the times of the Phoenicians, it was the Arabs who first planted it when they came to Spain. By the 14th century, when European cooking was awash with saffron and spices, Spain had become a major exporter. Prices ran as high as silver and cultivation spread to Italy, France, England and Germany. But demand fell as food tastes changed and from the 18th century onwards production dwindled.

Only in Spain did saffron-growing continue to flourish. In 1898, exports were valued at some 9 million pesetas - more than oranges - and were sent as far afield as Russia and India. In 1930, some 11,000 hectares (27,000 acres) were cultivated and over 80,000 kilos of the dried spice produced.

The tradition has remained unbroken, if shrinking since then, on the same small-scale plots owned by families who have grown saffron for generations. Once it could be found in a much wider area, from Andalusia to Catalonia. Today most saffron growing is concentrated in two patches of La Mancha's wide-horizoned plains in southern Castile, one called La Manchuela north of Albacete, and the other in a western group of towns around Consuegra in Toledo. It is also still grown on a smaller scale in Aragon.

RED GOLD: CONSTANT QUALITY

While production levels have passed through varying cycles, the quality of Spanish saffron remains constant and unmatched. It is judged in two ways: by the length of the flower's stigmas, or dried filaments, and by their levels of pigment and essential oils which give color, flavor and aroma. Spanish saffron's blood-red stigmas are not only longer but also contain much higher levels of the volatile aromatic and flavoring oils than those of saffron grown elsewhere.

Nobody is exactly sure why this is so, since the plant variety *(Crocus sativus)* is the same around the world. But Spanish bulbs will not produce the same quality when planted elsewhere. Climate and soil contribute: the main producing areas share the same altitude (700m, or 2,300 ft), a dry continental climate with extremes of temperature at day and night, and alkaline soils rich in lime, gypsum and quartz.

But producers and scientists alike put more emphasis today on the importance of an unbroken growing tradition. Its legacy used to be thought of simply as accumulated knowledge and skills. Now, though, it is thought that the unbroken span of a millenium may have allowed a genetic adaptation of the bulb stock to its environment.

Saffron is graded according to the proportion of the potent vermilion in its threads.

THE FARMER AS CRAFTSMAN

One element of saffron's mystique is that this fragile flower has stubbornly resisted all efforts to tame it into user-friendly growing and harvesting. Any changes have affected the final quality of the saffron, and so it is still farmed entirely by hand, virtually as in ancient Mesopotamia forty-three centuries ago. Alongside this, it keeps old-fashioned customs lost in most modern agriculture: old land and weight measures, payment for work in kind, and, above all, a family workforce.

Even the first stage of the growing cycle, the selection of bulbs and planting, is a skilled task done by hand. The same bulbs are used for four consecutive years, multiplying as they grow, but also thinned. Once planted, the fields must be kept weed-free. Today, after nearly a decade of drought, they are usually irrigated too.

It is when the harvest comes, in a brief week to ten days between October and November, that the whole family goes to work. Sons and daughters who live in the cities return home to help out and as you drive across La Mancha, you see rows of pickers, backs bent, as they strip the landscape of their fleeting violet carpets. The crocuses must be picked at sun-up, the petals stripped back and the stigmas toasted all within a day. In homes, meanwhile, the *mondadoras*, or peelers - mainly women - strip off the petals with lightning speed. To call the work of the *monda* painstaking, delicate and fast is an understatement. An average family's production of one kilogram requires 5 1/2 kg of stigmas, which in turn come from 250,000-300,000 flowers. A practised *mondadora* can deal with 10-12,000 flowers a day. Finally, the stigmas are dried in sieves over gas heaters: damp is saffron's greatest enemy. Then the family's crop is wrapped and stored in a chest of drawers.

After the harvest, the bulbs are dug up, dried and kept for planting again. In the second and third year, the bulbs will produce their greatest number of blooms before beginning to exhaust themselves. Equally, the land must be left fallow to recuperate its strength, but for ten years.

QUALITY CONTROL: STRAND BY STRAND

But if saffron growing and harvesting have remained almost antique, its quality control has been revolutionized in the last decade. Inevitably such a precious spice has always been adulterated. Even in Roman times, safflower was used for coloring because true

Antonio Pina Díaz S.L. C/Guzmán el Bueno, 34. 03660 Novelda (Alicante) Spain. Tel. 6 - 560 27 00 Fax 6 - 560 59 93

Saffron

Phrygian saffron was so expensive. Today, turmeric - called Indian saffron - marigold and safflower are all used, though they have neither saffron's aroma nor its flavor.

Until twenty years ago, quality control was by eye and hand. The *mondadoras* would pick off the ash and the inert gold part of the stigmas after toasting while the *corredores,* or middlemen who travelled around the villages to buy, would inspect the hoarded saffron with a practised eye before purchase.

Now, this is done in Spain by photospectometry. Nearly every strand is analysed for its levels of crocina, or coloring pigment; safranal, or aromatic oil; and picrocrocina, or flavoring. Saffron for export is then double-checked by identical customs' analysis of samples.

The saffron is then graded according to the proportion of potent crimson threads: Mancha Selecto is the top quality; Río is the next; and Sierra is the third. A fourth quality, coupé, the most powerful of all, is made by removing a further 20-30% yellow or white strands from the stigmas.

Two other important elements in final quality are packaging to protect the saffron from damp and light and the artesanal methods used for pulverizing powdered saffron, which now makes up 70-80% of the export market. Once sold folded in newspaper packets, saffron is now hermetically sealed against damp and usually shielded against light. For pharmaceutical and chemical purposes, it is packed in 1-5 kg cans. Transparent packings are a response to consumer demand to see the product.

OLD AND NEW MARKETS

Saffron's unique properties have always given it many distinct markets. As a dye, it has been used to give Buddhist monks' robes their rich yellow hue, to paint Indian brides' skins and tint Irish wool kilts. Today, the Japanese still import saffron for hand-painting kimonos and cosmetic making, while the Chinese and Koreans use it as a natural drinks coloring.

Other markets reflect its age-old aromatic and medicinal uses. In the east it is still used for making perfumes and incenses, as in ancient Greece. Its renown as an aphrodisiac also holds good in the Middle East. This seems to be based on its narcotic properties, enjoyed by the Romans who drank it in spiced wines, but warned against by an Andalusian Arab scholar in the 12th century as producing 'noxious elements, some of which fill the brain with damaging vapours'.

Medicinal uses are now growing. In Aragon and Castile, saffron has long been used as a home remedy for stomach pains and spasms and now American research suggests that it may also act as a preventive of stomach cancer *(Cancer Letters, 1991).* In homeo-

Saffron in the Kitchen

Saffron needs to be treated with gentleness and not too much alchemy,' says Antonio Pina Galina, head of export at family company Antonio Pina Díaz, who has experimented widely with saffron in the kitchen.

At once powerful and elusive, it's easiest to appreciate in absorbent, pale ingredients such as rice, pasta, potatoes, bread dough and creamy sauces. The flavor and aroma need time to develop, whether before or during cooking, or by leaving the finished dish to rest, but cannot be forced with high temperatures. Qes. Quite the contrary: if prolonged, they kill its subtleties of aroma and flavor. So does reheating.

PREPARING SAFFRON FOR COOKING

Powdered saffron can be added direct to food or dissolved in a little liquid first to ensure it will mix in evenly. The threads, though, need advance preparation. Each of the four techniques below will give you a different finished effect.

• The easiest method is to cover the threads with hot (not boiling) liquid and leave them to infuse for 10-15 minutes. The liquid may be water, milk, cream, stock, fruit juice, wine or vinegar, as in reduced sauce bases. This develops a balanced but restrained aroma, flavor and color for short cooking times or baking. Pounding the threads first strengthens the effect.

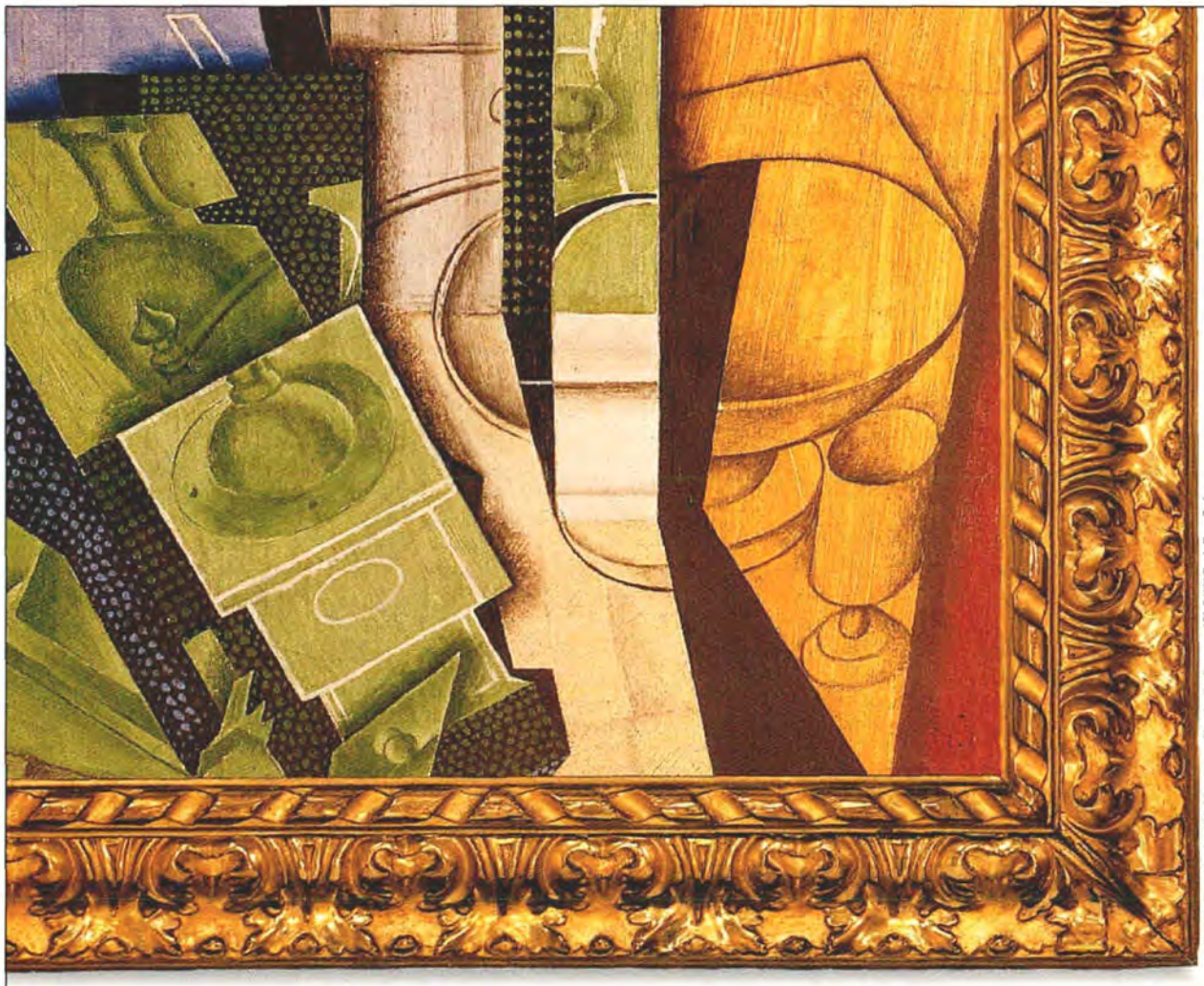
• Alternatively, you can briefly toast the saffron before crushing it and adding it into a dish with plenty of cooking liquid. The toasting can be done in a heavy pan over direct heat, or for 5-10 minutes in a cool to moderate oven (or wrapped in aluminium foil and waved in a flame or placed on a saucepan lid).

* To bring out saffron's full strength so it stands up to pronounced flavours such as tomato, you can fry saffron briefly in oil or butter at the beginning of cooking. But experts warn you need a deft hand not to kill the perfumed subtleties.

• Finally, you can simply pound the saffron before adding it direct to other ingedients. This is good in slow-cooked dishes or for emphasising the aroma and flavor rather than the color in dry dishes such as breads.

QUANTITIES

Recipes tend to be imprecise about saffron quantities because they depend on its quality. But Spanish producers calculate packet size on the basis that 125 mg Mancha quality saffron - about forty filaments - is enough for cooking a rice dish for four people (with 100 g dry weight rice per person). You will need proportionally more saffron for smaller quantities and less for larger quantities. A pinch works out at around roughly 12-15 strands.



Juan Gris, *The Breakfast*, 1916-1915. Oil on canvas. Giraudon/Art Resource, NY. ©1990 Foods From Spain.

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Saffron

pathic use, it is a tranquilizer and anti-depressant and in Spanish home remedies is used against toothache and kidney infections. Much top-quality coupé saffron is already exported to Swiss, German and Japanese pharmaceutical companies (in the Far East, one of its uses is for regulating menstruation).

Meanwhile, after several centuries of neglect, saffron is also back in vogue in the kitchen. In both Europe (primarily France, Italy and Great Britain), the Middle East and Asia (especially India and Sri Lanka), the culinary market for saffron is growing. Travel has made us familiar with its more subtle exotic uses, especially in Asian and Middle Eastern cooking, where it is often cooked with rice. Chefs have also been exploring its powers away from the European classics such as *bouillabaisse*, *paella* and *risotto alla milanese* . Now, it can be found perfuming fruit compotes, flavoring vegetable purées or subtly tinting omelettes and marinades. The 1990s have also seen the arrival of Spain's first saffron vinegars, a gourmet product made with both a concentrated essence and threads. It can be especially recommended for use in fish dishes and sauce reductions.

GUARANTEEING THE FUTURE

In the last few years, saffron-lovers - many of them recent converts - have started to sound the alarm at falling Spanish production. Growers have begun to come up against the problems of all small-scale unmechanized agriculture. On the one hand, rapidly shrinking families and rising wages - which now account for 50% of total costs - have cut profits. At the same time cheaper, poor quality saffron with little or no aromatic or flavoring power has been undercutting prices. Many consumers, both in and outside Spain, find it hard to distinguish this from good quality saffron until they notice the difference in flavoring and coloring powers in cooking. The producers and traders are philosophical. They emphasise that for a thousand years saffron has had cyclical patterns and that the international circuit for top-quality saffron is extremely stable.

'I am confident that Spanish production will not only continue but also increase,' comments Valeriano Gonzalez, chairman of Safinter, one of Spain's major saffron companies and its leading exporter. 'The return to natural ingredients, the broadening of tastes through travel and the interest in food which looks pleasing all suggest that its culinary use will increase.' As an indicator, prices at source rose steeply this year for the first time in a decade to some 120,000 ptas ($940) a kilo.

Others comment that positive results may come out of the problems. An agricultural engineering company is now coming to the end of its ten-year research program in search of the technology for mechanizing planting, harvesting, and perhaps even the stripping of stigmas. Other advances have already been made: irrigation and systematic bulb selection have doubled and in some cases even tripled yields from 8 to 25 kg per hectare (2.4 acres).

Producers also hope that the current concern may finally produce a Spanish denomination of origin, or close equivalent, with clearly labelled quality guarantees. They see this as a vital step in educating buyer's to understand and look for the uniquely high quality of Spanish saffron.

See recipes on page 104.

Vicky Hayward *is a freelance features journalist, travel writer and editor. She has written two guidebooks (about the Costa Blanca and Madrid, where she lives) and published numerous articles in the Spanish and British press.*

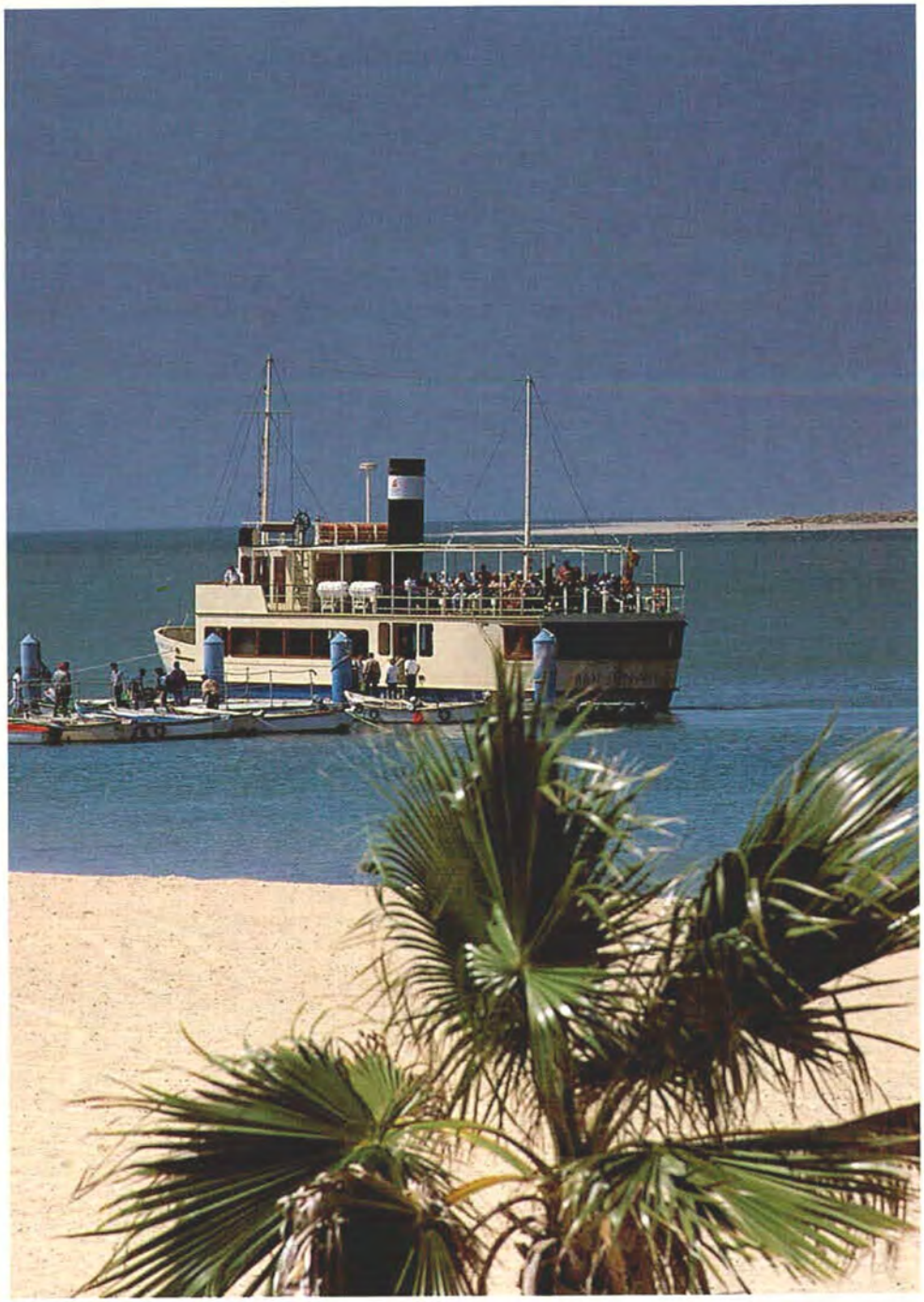
Buying and Storing Saffron

Buying thread rather than powdered saffron used to be advised to ensure quality, but these days guarantees on the packaging are a more realistic check. If the saffron threads are visible, they should be blood-red; the higher the proportion of gold or white parts, the less powerful they are. Market realities are another guideline. If the saffron's cheap, it's probably adulterated.

So, threads or powder? Powder offers speed (no preparation) and quantity control in professional kitchens. On the other hand, a skilled cook can pull much more varied effects from threads, playing up and down the color, flavor or aroma, or pulling out all the stops with them to give a much headier effect. And coming across the crimson-gold threads on your plate is like finding buried treasure.

Good quality saffron keeps for up to 2-3 years, so it is worth buying in quantity when you find good quality (it makes a good food souvenir or present from a trip to Spain). Poor quality saffron, however, will deteriorate within a year. Ideally, it should be kept in a tightly closed tin or dark glass jar, away from light, heat and - above all - moisture.

Sea breezes are claimed to give a special flavor to *manzanilla,* the wine produced at Sanlucar de Barrameda.



THE BONANZA COAST

AN ADVENTURE IN TASTE

Good food and good wine are a way of life for those who live on Spain's Costa de la Luz, the sun-burnished coast of Cádiz province which launched many of the historic voyages of discovery to the New World and beyond.

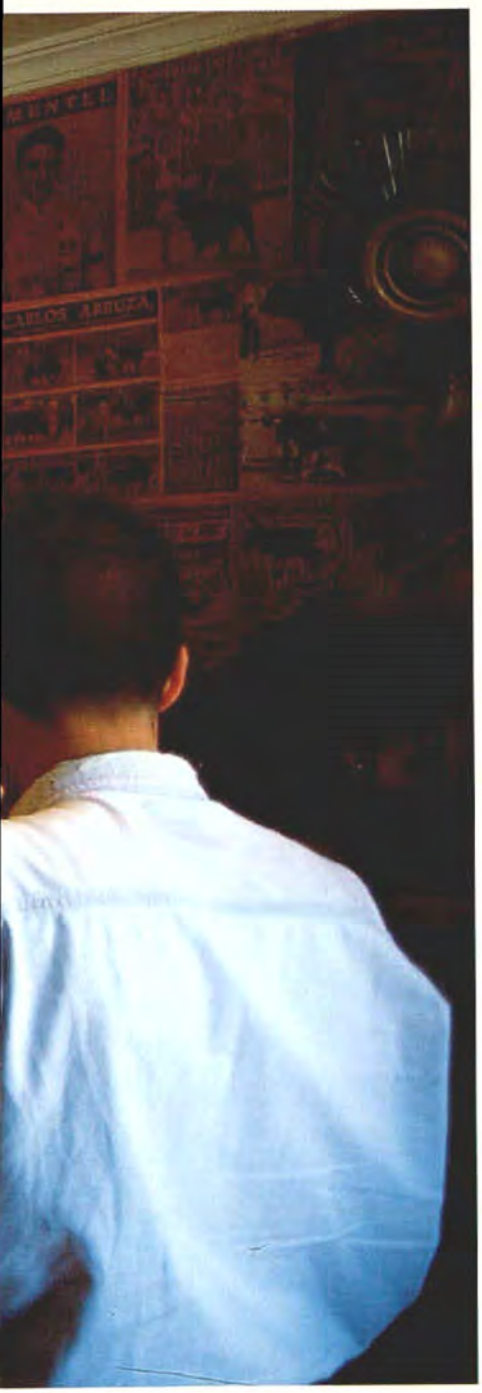
Text: **David Baird**

Photos: **Juan Ramón Yuste/ICEX**

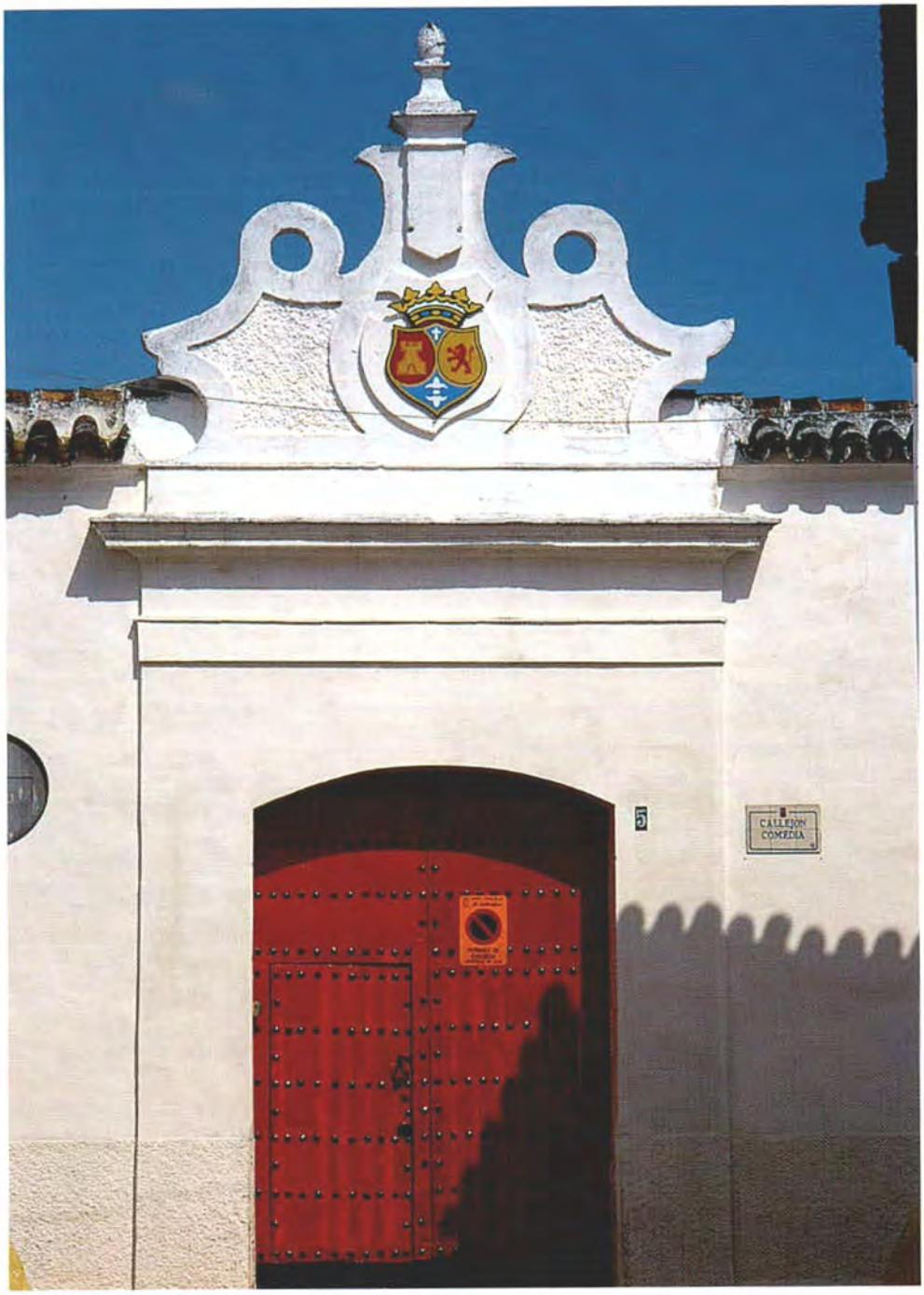

EL YIYO
EL SORO
TIO PEPE

In Bajo de Guía, in Sanlucar, a series of fish bars and restaurants offer such specialities of the zone as *langostinos* (kingprawns) or *pijotas* (whiting).

The tapeo (bar-hopping and taking snacks) is a great Spanish custom and there is no better place to practice it than on this coast.




TABERNA TIPICA


CALLEJON
COMEDIA

In the Bodega Merello, in Puerto de Santa Maria, where the atmosphere is redolent of another age, and the wine is drawn from one of the large barrels in the lofty barn.

Romans, Visigoths and Moors passed through, but the golden age of Sanlucar came after the discovery of America, when this town played a key part in trade with the New World.

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WINES FROM SPAIN

LEPANTO CONDE DE OSBORNE CARLOS I GRAN DUQUE DE ALBA CARDENAL MENDOZA

THE BONANZA COAST

It is called Bonanza and the name is apt. Every afternoon the little port's quayside hums with activity as scores of fishing boats queue to unload their cargoes. One after another salt-spattered trawlers come rolling in from Cadiz Bay to cruise up the estuary of the Guadalquivir River and make landfall at Bonanza.

A cornucopia harvested from the sea comes spilling out of their holds. Chilled by bucketfuls of ice, shrimp, prawns, sole, ray, grouper, monkfish, anchovies, squid, octopus, jumping, gleaming, wriggling, are swung ashore. In the cacophonous auction shed grizzled fishermen and shrewd-eyed buyers crowd around men barking unintelligibly into megaphones and, within minutes, the catch has been sold and is being whisked away to restaurants, hotels and bars.

The scene at Bonanza is proof enough that when you order seafood along the Atlantic coast of southwest Spain you can be sure it will be ultra-fresh. In the bars of Sanlucar de Barrameda, three kilometers from Bonanza (1,8 miles), you can enjoy both the fruit of the fishermen's labors and the imagination of cooks who have been refining the art of producing mouthwatering dishes for centuries.

Seafood is a Spanish fetish, but nowhere more so than in this area of Cadiz province where man and nature have combined to produce the perfect accompaniment, sherry wine. The coast, known here as the Costa de la Luz for the brightness of the light that burnishes the landscape, forms one border of the sherry zone and the rivers Guadalquivir at Sanlucar and the Guadalete at El Puerto de Santa Maria flank the two other sides.

Both are sea-breezy places, closely linked to Spanish adventures in the New World, and also friendly rivals, each with a distinct character of its own. Some distance inland lies the capital of the sherry business, Jerez de la Frontera, haughty and aristocratic compared to these down-to-earth ports, which seek to outdo one another in their hospitality.

There are few places in the world where, when a customer orders a gin and tonic, the barman cheerfully hands him the gin bottle to pour out his own measure. But in Sanlucar nobody blinks at such easygoing ways. The vagaries of history have taught its people to take life as it comes.

"This may be a poor town, but the quality of life is better than almost anywhere else," says one proud resident. "I can leave my work and in five minutes be out in a boat or enjoying the beach. I can buy the best fish in the world at very reasonable prices and just take a look at the market to see the quality of fresh fruit and vegetables. And at midnight in winter I can sit outside enjoying a drink when it is freezing in other parts of Europe."

STARTING POINT TO A NEW WORLD

Romans, Visigoths and Moors passed through, but the golden age came after the discovery of America, when Sanlucar played a key part in trade with the New World, the dukes of Medina Sidonia held sway over local fortunes, and riches poured in. Christopher Columbus and Magellan embarked from here on epic voyages; a plaque on the *Ayuntamiento* (town hall) records that of the 265 men who sailed with Magellan on September 20, 1519, only 18 returned and that was not until September 6, 1522, under the command of Juan Sebastián Elcano.

Unfortuntely, the ninth duke lost his seigneurial rights - resulting in a decline for Sanlucar - because of a slight indiscretion, news reaching the ears of the king of Spain that the aristocrat had pretensions to become monarch of an independent Andalusia. The wealth of the noble family has sadly diminished these days and the present Duchess of Medina Sidonia, a fiery lady whose willingness to take on the authorities on behalf of a cause has often earned her newspaper headlines, lives in far from affluent circumstances in her Sanlucar palace. However, scholars beat a path to the palace to pore over the family's priceless historical archives.

Next to the Medina Sidonia residence is the 14th century church of Nuestra Señora de la O, with a striking Mudéjar entrance. Both buildings are in the Barrio Alto, the upper part of the town, which shelters many noble structures as well as important wine bodegas. Santiago castle, due to be restored, dates back four hundred years while the palace of the Infantes de Orleans y Borbón was built in 1850 in a neo-Mudéjar style with some fancy brickwork.

Much of the lower part of town was once dunes and marshland. There you find old churches and the Plaza del Cabildo, the main square with its palm trees and open-air cafés. Modern buildings line the broad avenue, the Calzada del Ejército, which runs across reclaimed land to the river.

River traffic has long helped to link Sanlucar closely with Seville. Antonio Burgos, a *sevillano* newspaper columnist, once commented: "If Seville had the sea, it would be Sanlucar." His fellow citizens flock to the town beach and to the fish restaurants in the old fishing quarter, the Bajo de Guía. This August Sanlucar celebrates the 150th anniversary of an event unique in Spain, horse races on the beach. The horses race along the sands alongside the Guadalquivir.

At Pentecost, religious brotherhoods and followers, on foot, horseback and by motor vehicle, are shipped across the Guadalquivir at Sanlucar en route to the lonely shrine of El Rocío. This annual pilgrimage to pay homage to a Virgin known as La Blanca Paloma, the Queen of the Marshes, is Andalusia's biggest fiesta, attracting up to a million people. It is recorded that on one occasion Columbus had to delay his ships' departure because members of his crew insisted on joining in.

The pilgrimage traverses the dunes and marshes of the Doñana National Park, a vital stopover for Europe's migrating birds and an important breeding ground for waterfowl. The park, covering 76,000 hectares (190,000 acres), is a sanctuary for such endangered species as the imperial eagle and the lynx, but it is also possible to glimpse spoonbills, deer, boar and even camels, released many years ago and now running wild.

Visits to the park are strictly controlled, but part can be explored from Sanlucar on a four-hour excursion. A boat, named the Real Fernando after the first steamboat built in Spain which started plying the river in 1817, leaves daily and calls at two points, allowing visitors to make short walks with guides.

TAPEO IN SANLUCAR

Back on dry land the Bajo de Guía awaits the visitor. The beach area has been considerably spruced up and a promenade constructed. A series of fish bars and restaurants offer such specialities of the zone as *langostinos* (king prawns), *pijo-*

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THE BONANZA COAST

tas (whiting), and *acedías* (small flounder). You do not need to sit at a table to enjoy the best as a wide variety of *tapas* (snacks) are available, both along the riverside and in the rest of the town.

The *tapeo* (bar-hopping and taking snacks) is a great Spanish custom and there is no better place to start than in Sanlucar's Plaza del Cabildo. In the Bar Balbino, hams hang from the ceiling and a chalked board lists the *tapas* available. Four brothers, Antonio, Joaquin, Balbino, and Elías, plus the stuffed head of a 475 kg (1,045 pounds) bull killed by matador Paco Ojeda to mark the opening of Seville's 1992 World Fair, preside over proceedings.

Sea snails, *tortillitas de camarones* (crisp shrimp pancakes), stuffed eggplant, and squid stuffed with roe are among the delicacies scoffed by the chattering clients. Across the square at the Casa Martínez, *tapa* experts are at work on *mero al Brandy de Jerez* (grouper cooked in a brandy sauce) and fried cuttlefish. In the Barrio Alto are more bars where you can try *puntillitas* (baby squid) or *galera* (mantis shrimp, a chewy cross between a crab and a shrimp).

In the winter months these often go with *mosto*, young wine, but generally the favored drink is *manzanilla*, the light, aromatic sherry produced in Sanlucar, which has been dubbed *el vino de la alegria* (the wine of joy). The sea breezes that waft through the bodegas where the wine matures are said to give it a special flavor.

For a time *manzanilla* lost much of the Spanish market because of the fierce competition from *fino*, the dry sherry produced in Jerez and El Puerto de Santa Maria. But, according to Javier Hidalgo, head of a Sanlucar winery, that trend has been reversed by better marketing and other factors. "We now have the lion's share of the domestic market. We were helped by the fact that Andalusia has become fashionable and for some people *manzanilla* is easier to drink," said Javier.

If you drive a few kilometers west of Sanlucar, you reach Chipiona, packed with holidaymakers in summer because of its fine beaches. The esplanade by the lighthouse which guides ships in and out of the Guadalquivir estuary is an ideal place to watch the sunset and recall the lines of the Seville poet Antonio Machado, as he mused over the slow movement of the river to join the sea:

"I saw you born in Cazorla
And today in Sanlucar die.
A flash of clear water
Beneath a green pine
You were, and how happily
you played."

Long beaches border the coast between Chipiona and Rota. Inland is fertile farmland where the mild climate allows up to three crops to be grown annually on the same plot. Fruit, vegetables and flowers are harvested for local consumption and export (the flowers go largely to the Netherlands and in second place Britain). Where the landscape is more rolling and composed of white *albariza* soil, Palomino grapes flourish (see article on page 68). High in chalk content, the soil absorbs and retains moisture well, essential in the baking summers.

Rota, facing the port of Cadiz across the bay, has an excellent sandy beach which attracts holidaymakers to the whitewashed town, although most Spaniards associate the name with the massive base on its doorstep shared by Spain with the United States navy. The mighty ramparts of the Castillo de Luna, next to the fishing quarter, have recently been restored to shelter the Rota town hall. Nearby is the beautiful Gothic church of Santa Maria de la O. The town gives its name to a popular dish, *urta a la roteña* (seabream cooked with brandy, peppers, tomato, thyme and white wine)

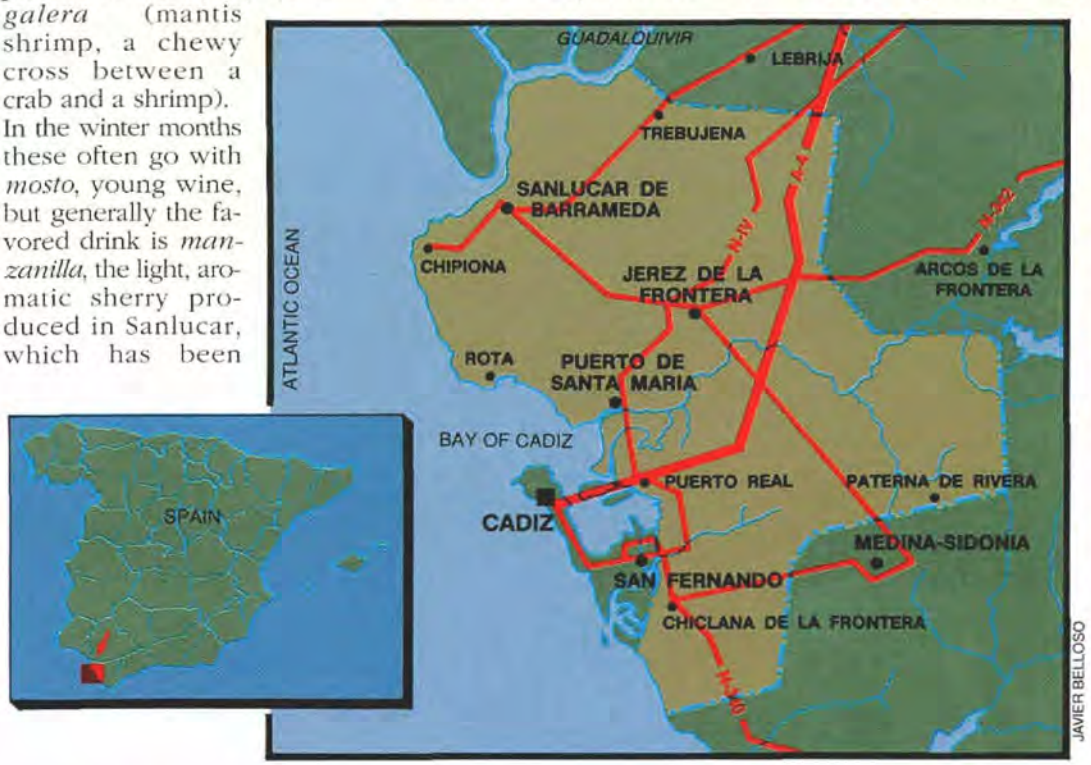
PUERTO SHERRY

The long narrow streets of the old quarter of El Puerto de Santa Maria, where important sherry-makers like the Osborne and Terry bodegas hide behind high walls, crowd the banks of the Guadalete river. Modern development has spread out along the beaches of the Atlantic and developments like Puerto Sherry, an ultramodern pleasure port, attract yachtsmen and vacationing families. So popular, in fact, has El Puerto become that in summer the population of 70,000 triples.

A vestige of the town's past is San Marcos castle, its crenellated walls rising above the surrounding houses. It has the military air you would expect of an ancient fortress. In fact it is a private residence which has been extensively altered and restored over the years. Inside, however, are remains of the original Moorish structure built in the 12th century.

Columbus spent the years 1483 to 1486 in this port as a guest of the Duke of Medinaceli, who was interested in his proposed voyage of discovery, and while here he made contact with Juan de la Cosa, owner of the ship Santa María.

El Puerto, as it is referred to, grew rich from trade with the Indies. Basques, Navarrese, Flemish, Italians and others flocked to share in the flourishing commerce,



GONZALEZ BYASS

SHERRY & BRANDY

many acquiring titles. The splendid structures built by merchants and adventurers caused it to be called The City of 100 Palaces, of which you can still see a few with their coats of arms on the façade. Some had lookout towers so that watchmen could check shipping movements.

Important military expeditions set off from the port from the 16th to 18th centuries when El Puerto was the base for the royal galleys. The fuente de las galeras, where ships parting for the Indies filled their casks with water, has been restored and stands on the waterfront. On the adjacent quay el vapor, a small ferry, sails regularly across the bay to Cadiz, a pleasant 40-minute trip.

"Because of its history and the many visitors, El Puerto is a cosmopolitan place. There is no typical inhabitant," say the *portuenses.*

Many visitors have only one thing in mind when they arrive. They head straight for the waterfront, the Ribera del Marisco. As its name implies, it is famed for the variety of succulent seafood available. Just across the river is the fish wharf where the catch is auctioned by dawn every morning. First stop is one of the *cocederos*, eating places specializing in preparing shellfish. At the popular Romerijo, you choose from an eye-boggling array of more than 25 different shellfish, from crab legs to winkles. They are sold by weight and handed over in paper bags. The custom is to retire with your bag to a table and eat the fish with your fingers while consuming a chilled beer or *fino.*

After that you are ready for a *tapa* tour, not difficult in El Puerto which has as many as 800 bars. They vary from places hardly larger than a shoebox like *Echate Payá* (slang for "move over"), its walls papered with bullfight reports, to the rather elegant El Patio, spacious with stone arches and wicker chairs. You can enjoy oysters, baked scallops, clams in sherry, grilled shrimps, *cazón en amarillo* (shark in saffron sauce), fried fish of all sorts, and a multitude of other dishes. *Ortiguillas* (sea anenomes) are considered a delicacy. They come crisp fried on the outside but with a dauntingly gooey centre.

If you are tired of fish, there is always cured ham from the sierras of Cadiz, blood sausage and onions, or *ajo caliente.* This last is served on Saturday and Sunday mornings in El Betis, a friendly spot where lottery ticket sellers drift in and out: an aged accordeon player adds a little atmosphere. "Hot garlic" turns out to be a hearty mixture of garlic, bread, and tomatoes, cooked in the juice of the tomatoes.

In the Bodega Merello, the fare is simpler and the atmosphere redolent of another age. Wine is drawn from one of the large barrels in a lofty barn where fading bullfight posters are the only adornment. Manuel, 35 years behind the bar, will quickly launch into eager conversation about the bulls - the bodega is a step away from El Puerto's century-old Plaza de Toros. Bulls and flamenco are enduring interests in El Puerto, despite the competition of modern pastimes and pop music.

Naturally, El Puerto has its restaurants too. One of the most sophisticated of these is Las Bovedas, located in a vaulted hall of the San Miguel monastery converted into a luxury hotel. Graced with marble floors, stone balustrades and antique furniture, the hotel is a useful spot to retire to. El Faro, another fine restaurant, is located in a converted summer residence, with a pleasant terrace. Fernando J. Córdoba, manager and chef, specializes in stews and fish dishes (see page 20). But to feel the pulse of the Cadiz coast and experience the exuberance of its people - while enjoying adventures in taste - there is nothing to beat the *tapeo.*

David Baird *is a freelance writer and photographer based in Southern Spain, whose work appears in leading European and American publications. His book* Inside Andalusia *won Spain's national travel writing award, the Vega Inclán Prize.*

Practical Information

Tourist information offices
Calzada del Ejército, s/n.
Sanlucar de Barrameda,
Tel.: (56) 36 61 10.
Calle Guadalete, 1,
El Puerto de Santa Maria.
Tel.: (56) 54 24 13.

Hotels
SANLUCAR:
Los Helechos,
Plaza Madre de Dios, 9,
Tel.: (56) 36 13 49;
Posada de Palacio,
Calle Caballeros, 11,
Tel.: (56) 36 48 40.

EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARIA:
Monasterio San Miguel,
Calle Larga, 27.
Tel.: (56) 54 04 40;
Los Cántaros,
Curva, 6. Tel.: (56) 54 02 40.

Restaurants
SANLUCAR:
Casa Bigote,
Bajo de Guía.
Tel.: (56)36 26 96;
Casa Juan,
Bajo de Guía,
Tel.: (56) 36 26 95;
Mirador de Doñana,
Bajo de Guía.
Tel.: (56) 36 42 05.

EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARIA:
Flores, Ribeira del Marisco, 9.
Tel.: (56) 54 35 12;
Las Bovedas,
Hotel Monasterio San Miguel,
Larga, 27.
Tel.: (56) 54 04 40.
El Faro del Puerto,
carretera de Rota, km 0,5,
El Puerto de Santa Maria,
Tel.: (56) 85 80 03

Tapas bars
In El Puerto you find many of these in and around the Ribera del Marisco. They include: on Calle Misericordia, *El Betis, La Bodeguilla,* and *El Patio;* on Ribera del Marisco, *Echate Payá* and *Cocedero Romerijo;* and on Calle Luna, *La Mezquita.*

In Sanlucar, recommended tapa bars include: *Casa Martínez* and *Bar Balbino* on Plaza del Cabildo; bars around the Plaza de la Paz; and the river area of Bajo de Guía.

Doñana National Park
Reception and Interpretation Center,
Bajo de Guía,
Sanlucar de Barrameda,
Tel.: (56) 36 07 15.
Ticket reservations for visit (daily, except Monday) on Real Fernando:
Tel.: (56) 36 38 13.

Bodega visits
Wineries which can be visited by prior arrangement include:
Osborne , Tel.: (56) 85 52 11 and Terry, Tel.: (56) 48 30 00 in El Puerto and Barbadillo Tel.: (56) 36 08 94 and Hidalgo (contact tourism office) in Sanlucar.

NELSON SOUTO/ICEX

Somontano, the Dilemma

The Somontano Denomination of Origin is found in the North-Eastern corner of Spain, with approximately 3,100 hectares (7,660 acres) of vineyards.

Facing a Modern Wine

Text: **José Peñín**
Translator: **Muriel Feiner**

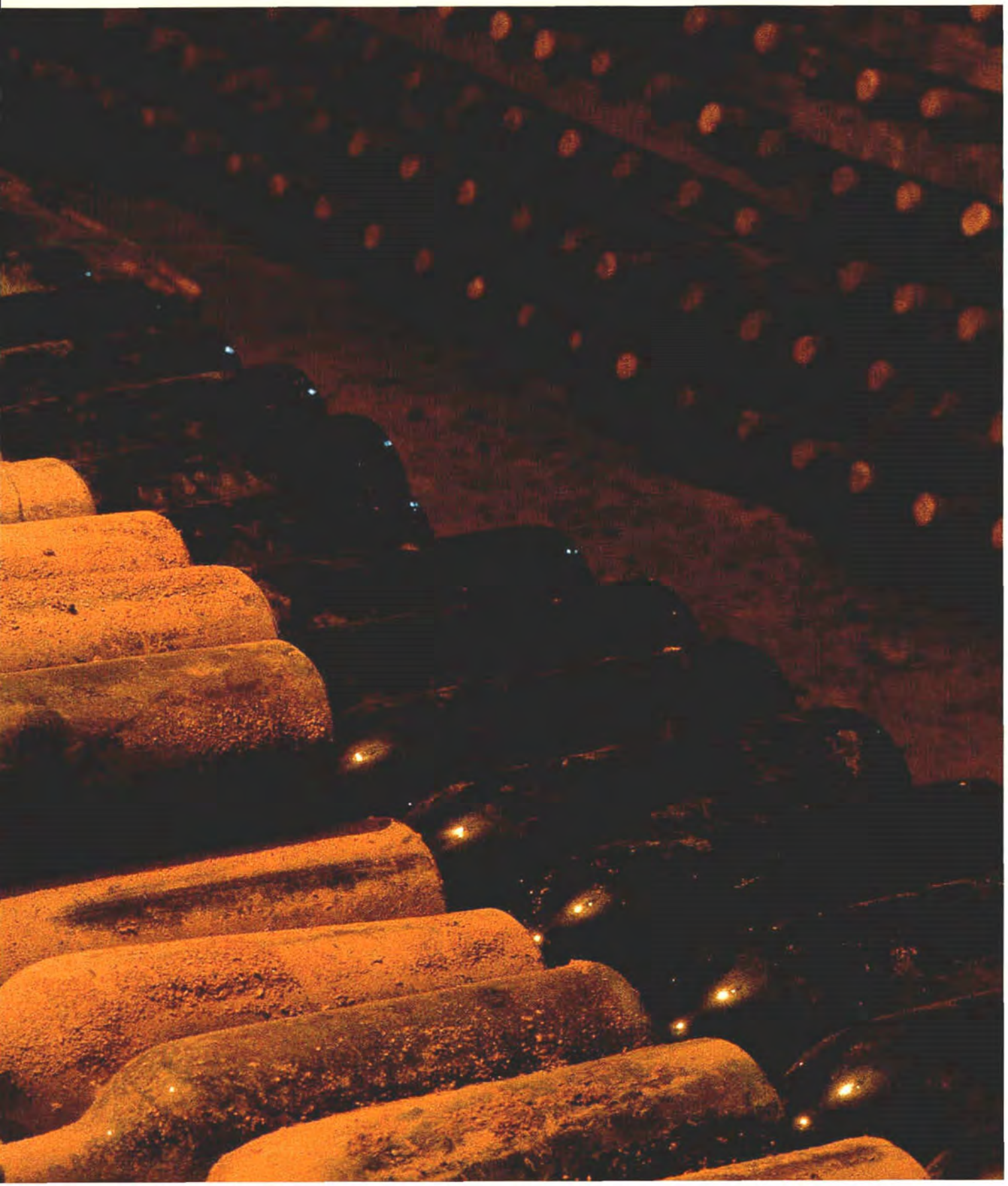
If we were to say that in a certain wine-growing region throughout the year there are 500 millimeters of rainfall, the sun shines for 2,700 hours and the thermometer marks an average temperature of 11ºC (51º F), we are giving the coordinates not only of the Ribera del Duero, but also those of Somontano. Somontano is a small and brand new Denomination of Origin (D.O.) which does not even reach 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) in size, spreading out to the East of the province of Huesca. If we add that it is located to the South of the Pyrenees, we can still imagine certain aspects of the Mediterranean landscape, while if we point out that it is in the North of Spain, then the Atlantic Ocean immediately comes to mind.

To the South of the Pyrenees, in Somontano, the influence of the Atlantic climate combines with that of the Mediterranean, which allows olive and almond trees and vineyards to flourish in the area.

The highly respected Larousse dictionary states that Somontano falls under the Atlantic influence and it does not enter into any details about microclimates. However, this area, like Navarre, the Rioja or Hermitage in the Upper Rhône, is a site of confrontation between these two domains and a place where they match wits. From the ocean, via the Cantabrian mountain range and following along the Ebro Valley, it receives enough water, while the nearby Mediterranean furnishes it with its special light and clear sky, which are the result of a unique natural phenomenon. This phenomenon is called *foehn*, which is something like a small oasis of thermal tepidity, which is formed to the South of a mountain range, capable of dissolving the clouds and blocking the inclement weather from the North. In other words, it is the same thing occurring in the Swiss Valais or the Italian Upper Adigio. In fact, this northern area of the transalpine countryside, situated on the slopes of the Alps, has the same natural habitat as found in Somontano.

Moreover, the very name of Somontano is derived from this natural circumstance, for it means "at the foot of the mountain", a phrase which takes on enormous significance when we comprehend that the peaks inspire a great deal of respect, but also provide protection. In each one of the top Spanish wine-growing regions, there is always a mountain to the North, in the same way that close to a French *Apellation contrôlée* there is always a river. Thus, instead of the infinite and wet meadows, thick forests and vineyards of tart and acidulated wine of Jurançon and Madiran of neighboring France, the Pyrenees, to the South, change the countryside and allow olive and almond trees and vineyards to flourish.

In view of the unique geography and climate, it is necessary to take into account that even though the area is closer to the mountains, it has a gentler climate in winter and a cooler one in sum-



The Somontano reds have an average body and an average capacity for ageing. The top-quality wines are generally elaborated with foreign varieties.

J.L.FAGOAGA/SOBBEMESA

The commercial popularity of the most advanced companies seems to be spreading to the others and slowly the labels of this area are increasing their presence on the market.

***S**omontano is an area which is almost unknown within the context of European wines and this is something which makes it highly attractive to buyers, seeking new Spanish wines.*

mer than that of its sister Denomination of Origin (D.O.S) of Cariñena and Borja. Somontano is not Aragón in the climatic sense and so its wines are different. In this location, the grape matures more slowly and so its acidity is not as marked as in other warmer areas of the region. All of this allows for a larger margin in the growing of different wine stocks with a greater or lesser varietal definition, as discovered from the experiences of COVISA, a wine-cellar more popularly known as Viñas del Vero. As the soil is not especially conducive it furnishes the grape with a lesser varietal nature, and the young aspect of the vineyard at present does not help resolving this problem. The soil does not have a good proportion of limestone, nor does it enjoy the drainage of a majestic alluvial earth. The eternal and Iberian brown soil predominates and in certain areas the reddish brown, where the clay prevails, although the earth is loose and rapid. However, the characteristic "touch of sun" is not detected in the red wines, which is something very frequent in the Mediterranean ones, such as those of Cariñena and Borja. It is also found in the distant Australian wines and even in some California reds which, under the blunt sun and in more fertile lands, tend to leave a slight trace, half herbaceous, half overripened in the mouth. The closest reference to the Huesca wines is found in the North of Navarre, in Valdizarbe, where the components of the whites and reds have achieved a satisfactory balance, without any problems of excessive alcohol or lack of acidity.

A Budding Region

Indeed, this area is still very young. It has not yet acquired a wine-growing tradition which would oblige it to respect the indigenous varieties, for up until the eighties Somontano was merely a supplier of raw materials, like other bulk-producing areas of Spain. Certain vines, such as Moristel, Parraleta or Alcañón have lasted for a long time and they, together with the Garnacha, make up the basis for the wine trade between cellars. These varieties were maintained because little care was required for their cultivation. Proof of this is that, just as in other areas of common wines, the hearty and resistent rupestris Lot graft-recipients have predominated, which is not really suitable for quality varieties. These vines, chosen for their volume and alcohol, left a certain rustic trace on the palate. Perhaps an exception could be made in the case of the Moristel which, with the aid of the new technologies, has revealed a certain fruity profile, characteristic of the wines of the region, and it is most appropriate for the elaboration of wines for immediate consumption.

The contemporary history of the area is based on the production of the Cooperativa de Somontano de Sobrarbe which, up until 1980, only bottled ordinary wines. In contrast, we can bring forth the stately but historically rich image of the Bodegas Lalanne and another more modern one which has reinforced the area to the most unsuspected limits, the Compañía Vitivinícola Aragonesa (COVISA). It has been the driving force behind the other two and an incentive for other investors, like those who built the Bodega Viñedos y Crianzas del Alto Aragón in 1991, inspired by COVISA. In general, these two firms are convinced that the future includes the varieties of the Atlantic style. The Tempranillo might not achieve in the red wines the structure of those of the Ribera del Duero, nor the elegance of the fine Riojas. However, it has a bright cherry color and a fresh fruitiness, which is very typical of an area of certain acidity and a slightly highland touch.

A Bit of Misticism

If the post-phylloxera past of the area lies with Lalanne, the prior history corresponds, as everything in the Christian West, to the Romans and monks. The course of the all-important

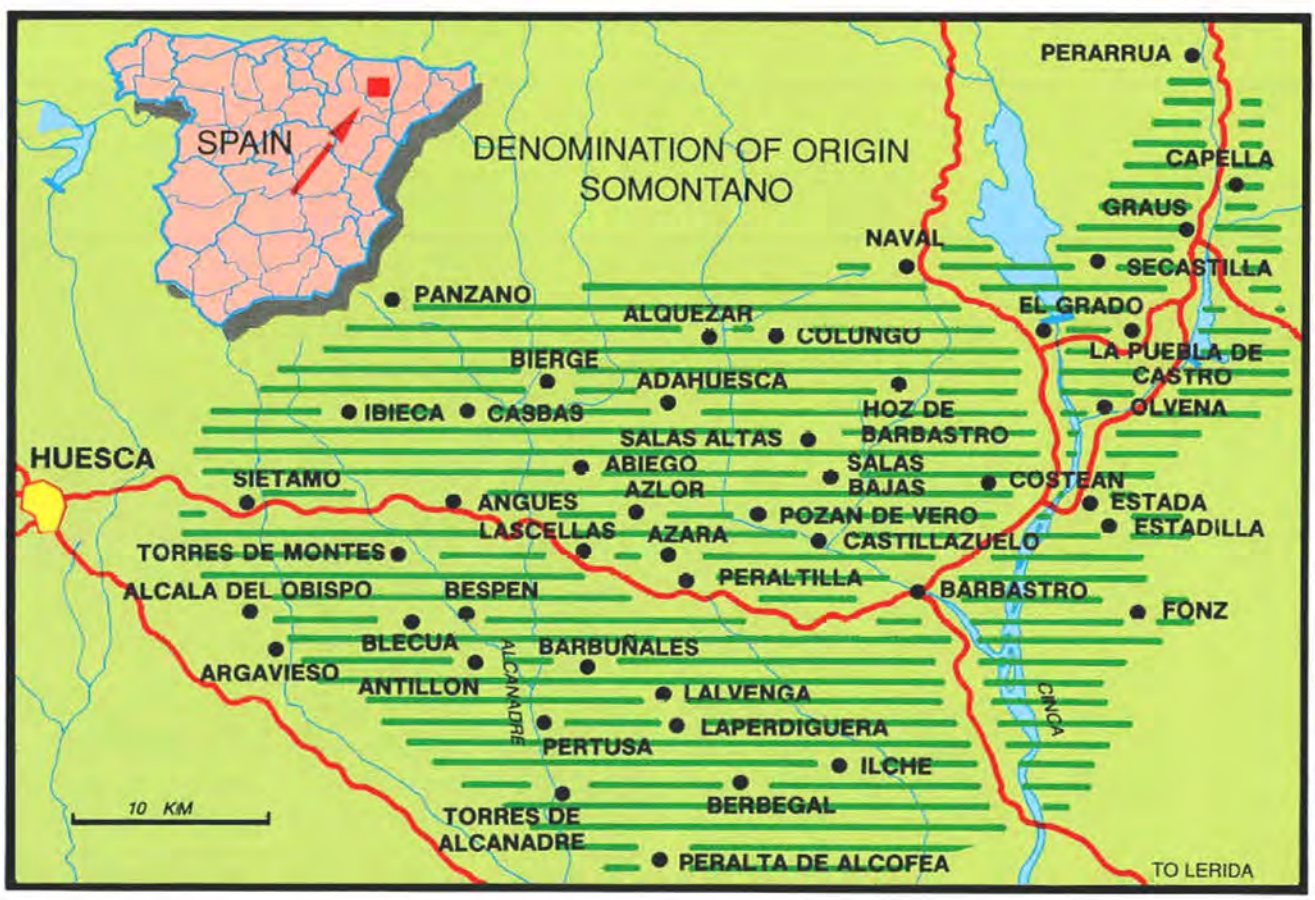
J.I.FAGOAGA/SOBREMESA

Somontano

Ebro river served the Romans as a guide for carpeting their settlements with vineyards, although later on, it became the line of battle between Moors and Christians. When the latter won, the Monasteries appeared and their monks brought about the resurrection of the Roman vineyards. The Monastery of San Juan de la Peña, in Jaca, and Santa María de Alquezar were the promoters of this agricultural and also devout practice, because the monks felt that wine, as Montaigne once said, was also a god, whose favors should not be restricted. This situation did not differ very much from what had taken place throughout the North of Spain, as was also the case with the supplying of wine to France in the final thirty years of the last century. If the Haro railway station and the Tarragona port were the shipping platforms for a large number of barrels, the peace and quiet of Somontano was also disrupted by the arrival of the French to buy wine. Today's 3,000 hectares (7,400 acres) are almost ridiculous when compared with the 145,000 hectares (358,295 acres) of that time, which were ready to supply the battered, phylloxera-hit French vineyards. The Lalanne family, who had originally come from the Bordeaux region, specifically from Barsac, felt that their country would never be able to get over the terrible hemipteron and so they settled in 1894 on the outskirts of Barbastro, although they could also have done so in Rioja or in Navarre. They came with all the knowledge of barrels, removers of grapes from the stalks, clarifications and crops from their native Bordeaux, to the point where they did not take long in becoming the suppliers of Alfonso XIII's Royal Family. Lalanne spent many years in relative calm with stable production, sustained by a small circle of clients, who were attracted by the number of crops which, in the purest Rioja style, lay in repose in the wine-cellar.

New Horizons

Much-needed support to the area came in 1986 from the *Sociedad Anónima para el Desarrollo Agrícola y Social de Aragón* (Corporation for the Agricultural and Social Development of Aragón) when they gave their backing to Somontano by creating the wine-growing farm Viñas del Vero. It might have been because there was no Denomination of Origin, nor a code restricted to a tradition of cultivation, so the adventure could begin from the very beginning with the creation of a wine-growing complex for the free cultivation of varieties in the American style, which had achieved such fine results in Raimat, of the Costers del Segre D.O.. In barely nine years, 600 hectares (1,480 acres) of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot noir, Sauvignon blanc, Chenin blanc and Gewurztraminer have been planted. The elaboration reaches 4,000 American and French oak barrels today and a total of four million liters of production. At present, the elaboration is impeccable and the results of the vari-



JAVIER BELLOSO

eties respond to the values of the geo-climate. The varieties of Alsatian and Central European origin, such as the Gewurztraminer and Riesling respectively, might not be profound. However, on the other hand, the young Tempranillo of carbonic maceration is spectacular, as well as the *reserva* (see note on page 113) Gran Vos del 90, on the other end of the scale. This latter wine shows a noteworthy potential for ageing, similar to the varieties of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, and its five per cent of Pinot noir content which gives it a very pleasant and unique quality. In these last ten years, the Cooperativa de Somontano de Sobrarbe has taken the initiative to improve its installations. The results are found in the new labels such as Señorío de Lazán with a Tempranillo base and a light touch of Moristel to give it a certain traditional flavor, and in the considerable improvements in the Montesierra, especially the rosé. The Cooperativa is thus joining the trend towards recomposing the crop with varieties of French origin, although it is nevertheless true that they still rely on bulk sales which total as much as 70 per cent. In addition, the Denomination establishes its Code of 1993 which is, in some ways, slowly beginning to awaken wine-cellars such as Monclús, Borruel and Lalanne. The latter is still, although to a lesser degree at present, living on its past, as it still maintains certain casks emanating old age. The surprising progress does not end here, for in 1991, the Viñedos y Crianzas del Alto Aragón was created. It is a spectacular, carefully designed wine cellar which has begun to elaborate the Enate label from two star varieties, such as Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, although it has not rejected an elaboration with the latest advances, using native wine stocks such as Moristel. The most interesting of the wine cellar is the Enate Chardonnay of 93, which has fermented in the barrel. It offers an elegant aroma with the presence of a fine, perfumed oak and the greasy and smokey touch of the Chardonnay. The other two wine cellars are Fábregas and Borruel, the latter, based in the town of Ponzano, and was the first to bottle with the Denomination. Its production reaches 50,000 bottles annually, only one-sixth of its entirety. Bodegas Fábregas bottles only five per cent of its production under the label Campo San Juan.

The most important aspect of the Denomination of Origin Somontano is the fact that it does not have any precedents which have created an image of popular wines. It is an area still unknown within the context of European wines, which makes it especially attractive to buyers seeking an alternative to Rioja or Catalonia. Therefore, Somontano's repercussion, not only in Spain but also on the international market, has been in a short space of time, the most spectacular in our country.

See the list of the main exporters on page 13.

José Peñín *is certainly one of the best Spanish wine specialists, a regular collaborator of a variety of media and the author of several important books and guides.*

A Guide to Somontano

Location:
The Somontano Denomination of Origin is found in the Central-Eastern corner of the province of Huesca, with approximately 3,100 hectares (7,660 acres) of vineyards

Climate:
It is continental, with hygrometric Atlantic and thermal Mediterranean alternatives. It features 2,700 hours of sunlight a year and about 500 mm of rainfall. There is a slight influence from northwesterly winds, which makes for very clear skies and mild summers and winters.

Soil:
The land features a certain relief made up of hills and soft ravines, with reddish brown earth. The soil is loose and there are certain calcareous clay areas, which have very little humus.

Wine stocks:
The autochthonous variety of Moristel predominates among the reds although it is becoming less popular, in favor of the Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon. Among the whites, the Macabeo and Alcañón variety prevails, followed by the Parraleta. These last two have been traditionally cultivated in this region.

Characteristics of the wine:
The Somontano reds are characterized by their acidic and alcoholic balance. Their geographic situation in a cooler area confers upon the reds an attractive cherry color, which is brighter than the rest of the wines from Aragón. The top quality wines are generally elaborated with foreign varieties, while the more popular ones contain the autochthonous Moristel and Garnacha, which furnish a more rustic taste. The reds have an average body and an average capacity for ageing. The whites are fresh, fruity and with a predominance of Macabeo, which make them resemble the Catalonian whites, although those of Somontano have a more rustic flavor. The rest of the varieties, such as the Chardonnay, Riesling or Chenin blanc, offer wines of a certain varietal nature, which have a clean aroma although the vineyard is still quite young to have discovered its own characteristic nuance. The rosés, except for the ones fermented with varieties such as Cabernet sauvignon or Tempranillo, can be considered as merely satisfactory.

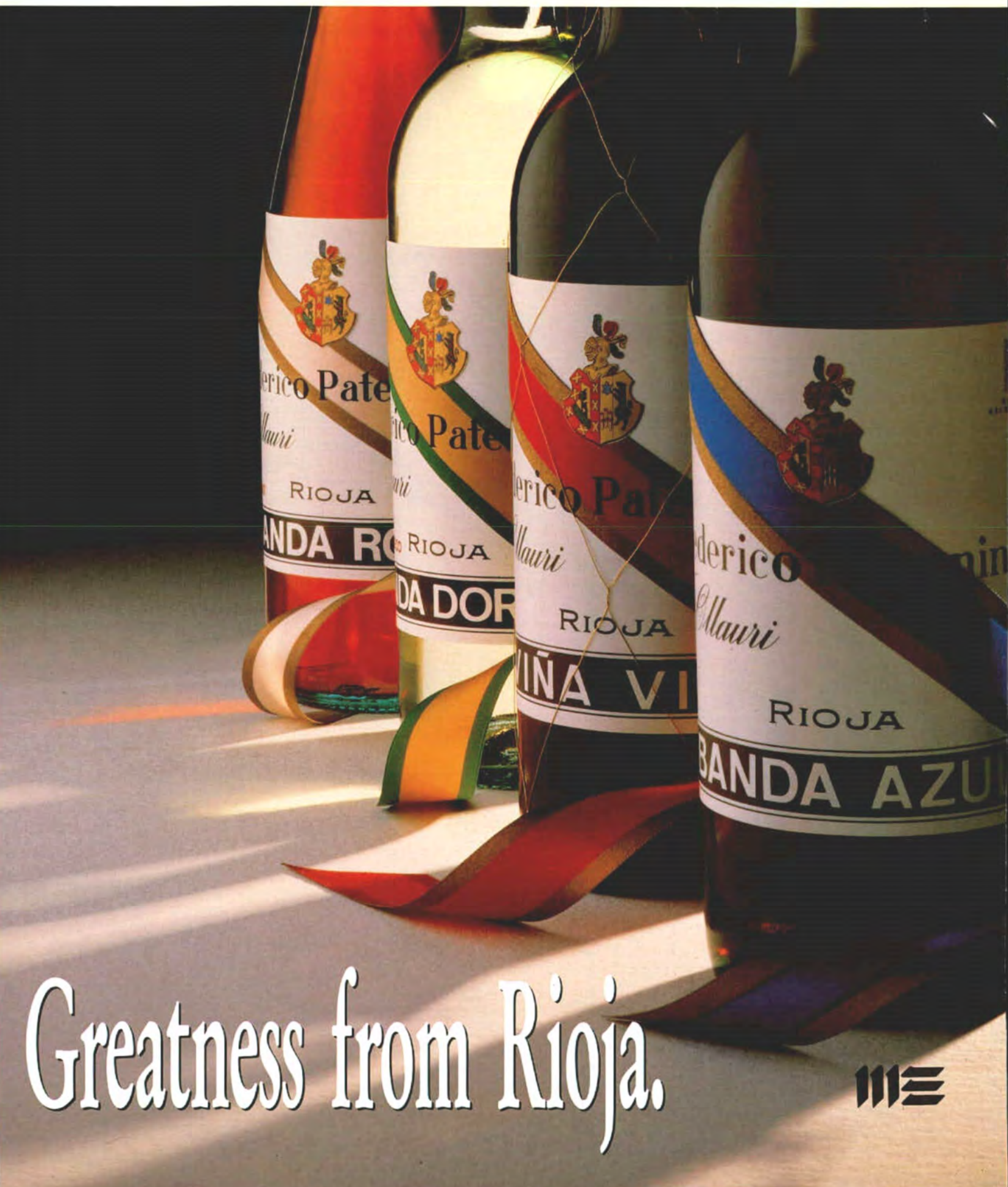
Serrano Ham

The Star of Spanish Cuisine

If the staccato sound of a Spanish guitar could be eaten, if the robust stomping of polka-dot clad flamenco dancers had a flavor, if someone could just package a warm Andalusian night and ship it abroad...there is no doubt that it would taste like Serrano ham-the star of Spanish cuisine.

Text: **Deborah Luhrman**
Still Life: **Menchu Artime** Photo: **A. de Benito/ICEX**

Paternina



Greatness from Rioja.

Serrano Ham

From the boisterous taverns of Madrid, to the fragrant patios of Seville; from the rucksacks of Extremaduran shepherds, to the elegant dining rooms of San Sebastian; Serrano ham is the most traditional and highly prized food in Spain.

Serrano ham is at its best served alone, with only a glass of red wine to accompany it. Cut in wafer thin slices, it is offered as a *tapa*, or appetizer. Serrano ham has a robust, intense flavor. Eating it makes the back of the tongue tingle and leaves a pleasantly sharp aftertaste, like a good aged cheese or fresh walnuts.

The teardrop-shaped hams are hung from the ceiling of every Spanish bar and the kitchens of many households. In rural areas the hams are home cured, while city folks give them and get them from gourmet shops as Christmas gifts. When friends arrive, all it takes is a few expert swipes with a sharp knife and an instant party is underway. Like no other food, Serrano ham captures the improvisational "live-life-to-its-fullest" spirit of Spain.

All Natural Product

Spain is the world's largest producer of cured hams. Some 30 million hams a year are produced commercially and thousands more are made at home in rural parts of the country. It is an industry worth $ 2.5 billion a year, that employs 46,000 people. Not surprisingly, Spain is also the world's largest consumer of cured ham. Spaniards nibble away roughly 4 kg (almost 9 lbs) a year per person.

The process of curing ham has remained largely unchanged since the times of the Romans. It couldn't be more simple. Then, as now, the only curing agent used is coarse sea salt, nothing else is added.

In country households throughout Spain, just as in ancient times, pigs are fattened all summer and autumn, then slaughtered at the first frost of winter in an ancestral custom known as the *fiesta de la matanza*. This is a work-party during which the family pig is slaughtered to provide food for the coming year. Friends and relatives join in to help make the *chorizos* and *morcillas*, wine flows, and a rather unpleasant task is turned into a good time.

The prized hind legs of the pig are covered with sea salt for 7-10 days, then the salted ham is washed and hung in a shed, where nature takes over. The cold days of winter take care of the first part of the curing process and then in spring as temperatures rise and the humidity decreases the ripening stage begins. The curing is completed with the hot, dry days of summer and then stabilized with the cool autumn temperatures that follow, so that about nine months after slaughter the ham is ready for eating.

Modern Spanish factories continue to follow the age-old rhythm of nature, but with the strictest hygiene standards and high-tech curing chambers, where temperature and humidity levels mimic nature's cycle of the seasons. Their biggest advantage is that quality controlled Serrano ham can now be produced all year round.

The first Serrano hams to reach other countries did so smuggled in the trunks of vacationing Europeans anxious to take home a gourmet souvenir of their holidays in Spain. It was not until 1990 that Serrano ham began to be exported officially.

In 1990 the Consortium of Spanish Serrano Ham was created to establish standards of quality and promote sales abroad. The consortium is made up of 18 of the country's major Serrano ham producers. Its annual budget is jointly funded by members' dues and the Spanish Foreign Trade Institute (ICEX). According to manager Jaime Vázquez González, the consortium has two major goals:

"Our first objective is to assure the quality of the product and to do this we have a technical department that visits each producer two or three times a month, inspecting each ham. The products which meet our export standards are numbered and branded with the consortium's 'S', our seal of approval."

"Our other main task is to introduce Serrano ham into international markets, and the best way to do this is by getting people to taste it. Once they try Serrano ham, they are convinced. So we spend a lot of time going to food fairs, making presentations for gourmet clubs and food writers, and launching promotional campaigns targeted at consumers in the markets where we are already established," he said.

Measuring Up

The consortium's first task was to set quality standards for Serrano ham. Perhaps because ham-curing is such a deeply-rooted and widespread part of Spanish culture, there were no industry standards before the consortium began its work. Each producer and each family has its aging secrets that few were willing to share and agreement was difficult to achieve.

Nevertheless, the consortium now sets the pace for the ham curing industry, requiring the highest sanitary conditions, a minimum weight of 6.5 kg per piece, and a minimum of nine months curing period, although the average curing period is 12 months.

The white pigs used for Serrano ham must come from crossings of the most appropriate races: Landrace, Duroc and Large White. Feeds must be exclusively natural and tend to be on average 70% cereals. Only natural sea salt may be used in the salting process. Specific parameters of temperature and humidity are set for the curing process, as well as for the storage phase.

Hams that measure up to these strict quality standards are hand branded with the consortium's seal, a large stylized 'S' in the shape of a Serrano ham.

The Consortium of Spanish Serrano Ham represents about half of the exports of Spanish ham and its large distinctive 'S' is the buyer's assurance of the highest quality possible. Serrano hams are produced in every province of Spain, so the 'S' guarantees the quality control of the consortium and not the region of origin.

Serrano hams are packed for export in three different presentations: the traditional ham "on the hoof", which must be cut by hand and can be seen in any Spanish bar; boneless ham centers, wrapped and perfect for machine slicing in delicatessens; and pre-packaged ready-to-eat slices.

La Quinta Esencia Del Fino

MMLB

Serrano Ham

How to Eat

In Spain, Serrano ham is treated almost with the same respect reserved for caviar in other parts of the world, though its price is much more reasonable. There are probably as many myths and legends about how to serve and eat Spanish cured ham as there are ham lovers. But there are a few basic guidelines for enjoying Serrano ham.

Slicing ham is an art and each year at the "Salón del Club de Gourmets", an international trade fair held in Madrid. Spain's ham cutting experts compete to see who can work the quickest and make his slices the thinnest. Since Serrano ham should be served as thinly sliced as possible, those without years of experience usually do better with machine slicing, using boneless hams.

If you want to try your hand at slicing, remember to cut lengthwise along the grain on the meat. Start with the rump half, removing the layer of fat little by little as you go and cut from the wide part of the ham towards the narrow part. The fat can also be replaced to keep the cut ham from drying out. Once the rump half is finished, turn the ham over and cut the shank half, lastly cut the shank.

Contrary to popular belief, there is no difference in taste between a whole ham and a boneless ham. While the bone does help to preserve the ham, its only other advantage is contributing to the spectacle of cutting.

Serrano ham should be served at room temperature. If you are not slicing it at home, that means taking the package out of the refrigerator 15-20 minutes before serving and letting the ham come to room temperature while it is still wrapped. When it begins to shine it is ready to serve. Don't arrange it on a plate and let it sit out or the ham will get too dry. Once the wrapped ham has attained room temperature arrange it in a single layer on a plate and enjoy.

Serrano ham can also be used in countless recipes (see page 109). In Spain ham scraps are cooked into nearly every type of dish from vegetables to omelettes, but gourmets agree that the best way to appreciate Serrano ham is in very simple uncooked presentations, such as melon and ham or on *pa amb tomàquet* , crusty Catalan toast rubbed with half a cut tomato, a little garlic, a dash of olive oil and topped with a slice of Serrano ham.

CLIMBING SALES

The consortium's second major objective is opening up the world's markets one by one. In 1994, after just four years, exports of Serrano ham had reached 262,000 pieces and sales abroad are expected to increase by 38% to 350,000 pieces in 1995. The biggest importers of Serrano ham are France, Argentina, Portugal, and Germany, in that order. Belgium, Holland and the United Kingdom are also beginning to show interest in importing, while Switzerland, Austria, Scandinavia and the United States have just recently opened up their borders to imports of Spanish ham.

Each import market poses its own unique set of challenges for the consortium's staff. But common to every market is the competition of Italian cured hams, mainly from Parma and San Daniele.

While Spanish Serrano ham offers a better price/quality ratio and often beats Italian hams in blind tastings, the Italians began exporting their hams to other European countries 34 years ago. They benefit from a well-established distribution network and good brand name recognition among consumers.

The main difference between Italian cured ham and the Spanish variety is in the curing process. Near the end of the curing phase Spanish hams are subjected to temperatures between 24° and 34° C (76-93° F). This stage, which simulates the hot summer months in Spain, dries the hams and concentrates the flavor. Since Italian hams are never subjected to heat, they retain more moisture and the result is a sweeter, but more diluted flavor, without the delicious aftertaste of a Spanish Serrano ham.

In France, for example, where appreciation of high quality food is legendary and people enjoy eating well, Serrano hams are a sought-after delicacy. In the Basque and Catalan border regions near Spain, sales of whole Serrano hams, on the hoof and all, are brisk. While in other parts of the country people prefer the boneless variety, sliced at the *charcuterie*.

Promotion in the French market has reached the consumer stage and the consortium's distinctive red and black billboards can be seen throughout southern France. They depict a tempting plate of Serrano ham and read "Olé", reminding shoppers, once again, of the very Spanish nature of this product. A variety of point-of-sale materials are also used to promote Serrano ham, especially in well-established markets such as France. They include educational flyers, available in six languages, with ham recipes from all regions of Spain and advice on how to store, cut and serve it, as well as nutritional information. Co-op advertising campaigns are conducted in major mass media, with members of the consortium promoting their individual brands in conjunction with the consortium, which promotes its 'S' seal as the guarantee of quality.

Belgium, like France, is another natural market for Serrano ham, where people appreciate fine dining. But acceptance has not been as easy in Germany, Europe's top pork producer.

German consumers tend to be spoiled for choice. Serrano ham competes in the butcher shops with 325 other types of cold cuts, dozens of national varieties and imported hams from every part of Europe. In Germany, Spanish producers have had to adapt the product to butchers' demands for a uniformly-shaped ham. They have also had to adapt to the preference of health-conscious German consumers for hams with all the fat trimmed away.

But little by little Serrano ham is winning German fans who enjoy serving it as a special treat on festive occasions.

Nutritionally Sound

It is not just German consumers who are increasingly concerned about the nutritional value of the foods they eat, people all over the world are more careful about their diets.

While Serrano ham is normally eaten as an appetizer, it is clearly miles ahead of starchy snack foods on the nutritional

EVERYTHING BUT THE ELEPHANT...

The twelfth-century castle of Peñafiel, in the heart of Ribera del Duero.

In 1501, the city of London enjoyed a week of festivities to celebrate the arrival of a Spanish Princess, who was to marry the King's brother.

Her name was Catherine, Infanta of Castile, and the locals turning out for the beer and fireworks in her honour were cheerfully convinced that they were going to the south-London district where she was staying to see the Elephant and Castle ...The rest is history.

Everyone knows the story, but how many know the Castile from which the Infanta took her title? There's not a lot in the way of elephants to be found here, but the historic countryside still has its share of castles, as well as the heritage of a thousand years of history provided by the Royal houses of León and Castile.

The river Duero flows through a lush green landscape of fertile soils and rolling hills under a crisp, alpine-blue sky. This is a land of wildflower meadows and sheep-farms as well as castles and kings, known as the breadbasket of Spain for its production of quality cereals...And soon to be known for another of its outstanding contributions to gastronomy: the wines of the Denominación de Origen Ribera del Duero. The vine thrives in the chalk and sandstone soils here, at an altitude of 2,500 feet: the very limit at which grapes can be grown and ripened anywhere in Spain.

The high, cool spring, hot summer and autumn, and very cold winter ensure that only the healthiest vines survive to produce grapes, and the combination of freshness, acidity and ripeness of those grapes is unique in Spain, and the rest of the world. The vine is the Tinto Fino, or Tempranillo, which has evolved its own unique characteristics in this high Castilian plâteau – characteristics which have been much prized by those in power in the major cities of the region: Burgos, where El Cid launched his campaigns against the Moors; Segovia, where Isabella – mother of the Infanta Catherine – was proclaimed Queen; Valladolid, former capital of Spain and Soria, for many years the frontier between Christian and Muslim Spain.

These proud Castilians demanded – and could afford – wines which matched their elevated tastes and the hearty foods which nature provided in such abundance.

In the countryside, too, people had a healthy thirst for good wine, and in almost every village you'll see *luceras* – strange towers like giant spears of petrified asparagus which stick up almost everywhere, between the houses and on the hillsides.

These provide light and fresh air for the labyrinthine cellars burrowed into the soft bedrock below, where every family, no matter how humble, would tread its ration of grapes and store their beloved product.

Add to this an explosion of new technology in the wineries, new ideas from young winemakers who are masters of their craft, and new investment in the land, and you'll understand why there's an atmosphere of excitement in Ribera del Duero.

The region's winemakers, the Consejo Regulador which polices the quality, and some pretty impressive international wine experts believe that one of the world's greatest wines is emerging here. You will, too.

It was, after all, good enough for the Infanta – and you can enjoy it with or without an elephant!

CONSEJO REGULADOR DE LA DENOMINACION DE ORIGEN
RIBERA DEL DUERO

WINES FROM SPAIN

66 CHILTERN STREET, LONDON W1M 1PR

Serrano Ham

scale. Serrano ham is rich in minerals, it has a good balance between protein and fat, it is free of carbohydrates, and rich in iron, sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium and B vitamins.
A 50 gr serving of Serrano ham contains 12-17 gr of protein, 2.5 to 5.0 gr of fat and only 100 calories. As an added bonus, researchers have found that the fats in Serrano ham are, to a great extent, polyunsaturated, the same type found in olive oil for example. Polyunsaturated fats, which are common in the Mediterranean diet, have been proven useful in combating the type of cholesterol that causes heart disease.
It is hard to find any other food that is so tasty as Serrano ham and at the same time so healthy and natural.

Crossing the Atlantic

The consortium's biggest success, so far, has been in crossing the Atlantic to open up the Argentine market, and perhaps this is an indication of where sales will boom in the future.
All of Latin America has deep cultural ties to Spain, but the consortium chose Argentina as its first country to target in the Americas because of the Argentine passion for all things European and because of their high buying power.
In the two years since it was introduced, Argentina has gone mad for Serrano ham and become Spain's number two market. Italian cured hams, which were introduced in the same year, seem to suffer a handicap in the Spanish-speaking world.
Promotion in Argentina focuses on the same typical Spanish images -fans, castanets and flamenco- but here interest is running so high that popular women's magazines and television cooking shows instruct viewers in how to cut and eat Serrano ham.
After seven years of rigorous testing, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in December 1994 gave Serrano ham a clean bill of health and legalized its import into the United States. The FDA's approval has raised high hopes among Spanish producers and prompted mountains of articles in the Spanish press.
The effect of the U.S. decree, however, will not be felt immediately, because a second lengthy process is now underway to license individual producers for export.
Ham exporters acknowledge that the United States will be a hard market to crack. First of all there is no tradition of eating cured ham and consumers' habits are very difficult to change. The primary target in the United States will be the growing Hispanic market, which has swelled to 22 million people, and exporters hope they will be able to repeat here some of the success they have had in Argentina.
But the real impact of the FDA approval may be in its secondary effect in opening up the markets of Mexico and Canada, signatories of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In Mexico, especially, Spain enjoys a prestigious image and the Mexican market holds good prospects of becoming a major Serrano ham importer.
The approval is also expected to have a domino effect on other Latin American countries, which often base their health standards on the results of strict FDA testing and will likely legalize imports of Serrano ham in the near future.
If Spanish producers have their way, you'll soon be able to see Serrano hams hanging from the ceiling and being thinly sliced in the bars of countries such as Venezuela, Uruguay, and Chile.
Gourmets throughout much of the world will finally have a chance to taste for themselves the food that best captures the uniqueness of Spanish culture and proves the slogan of the Consortium of Spanish Serrano Ham: "In Spain, life has another flavor."

See the list of the main exporters on page 12 and recipes on page 109.

American journalist ***Deborah Luhrman*** *is based in Madrid and writes on Spanish food, wine and travel for several publications, including* Spain Gourmetour, Lookout, Fodor's Travel Guides *and* Travel Trade Gazette.

EXPORTS OF SERRANO HAM

(by pieces, 6.5 kg minimum weight)

1991	12,000
1992	88,000
1993	170,000
1994	262,000
1995*	350,000

*estimate

CURED HAM CONSUMPTION IN EUROPE

	Metric Tons	Annual consumption per capita
Spain	160,000	4.10 kg
Italy	140,000	2.44 kg
Germany	130,000	2.12 kg
France	51,500	0.93 kg

Source: Consortium of Spanish Serrano Ham

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PALOMINO FINO

THE SHERRY GRAPE

Sherry wouldn't be sherry without the white Palomino fino grape. This variety has adapted perfectly to conditions in the south west of Spain where sherry is produced and today occupies 95% of the Jerez vineyards.

Text: **Luis Pérez**

Still Lifes: **Menchu Artime** Photos: **A. de Benito/ICEX** Translator: **Jenny McDonald**

The sherry-producing region is in the province of Cadiz. The main towns of Jerez de la Frontera, Sanlucar de Barrameda and Puerto de Santa María form what is known as the "sherry triangle". Palomino fino is a variety of white grape that has been cultivated in the sherry region for so long it now rates as a local grape. It has a whole series of other names too: Alban, Albar, Albillo de Lucena, Gencibel, Gencibel de Aragón, Gencibiera, Hurgazuela, Jerez, Jerez fino, Listán, Listán blanco, Listán común, Manzanilla de Sanlúcar, Palomina, Palomina blanca, Palomino, Palomino de Chipiona, Palomino del pinchito, Temprana, Temprana blanca, Xerez. In Jerez de la Frontera itself, as in Puerto de Santa María, it is referred to as Palomino fino and in Sanlucar de Barrameda as Listán.

According to Julián Pemartín's *Diccionario del vino Jeréz,* Palomino takes its names from Fernán Yáñez Palomino, a faithful follower of the Christian king, Alfonso the Wise, who in 1264 conquered the Moorish stronghold of Jerez.

In the Middle Ages and down through the centuries, the Jerez vineyards produced a variety of white and red grapes. After Sanlucar de Barrameda was incorporated into the Royal Estate in 1645, the lands were leased out to the local farmers, still today known by the archaic name of *malletos*, who took great pride in their small vineyards. They chose to plant Palomino fino vines to produce a white wine much to the liking of the local population - a century later, it was to be given the name of Manzanilla.

Nº 1

Palomino fino is a variety of white grape that has been grown in the sherry region for so long it now rates as a local variety, and is today grown in 95% of the Jerez vineyards.

N.º 2

Palomino fino is well adapted to the chalky albariza soils of the sherry vineyards, where it is trained according to traditional pruning techniques.

Summer weather conditions help Palomino fino to mature fully, guaranteeing its high sugar levels and low acidity.

This viticultural vocation, deeply rooted in the need for subsistence and in the local way of life, brought man into close contact with nature. He was able to provide it with a sense of direction through breeding and cultivation techniques based on observation, and gradually laid the foundations on which present-day sherry production is built.
Palomino fino became increasingly popular in Jerez vineyards during the eighteenth century and, by the end of the nineteenth century, was the most widely grown variety. When many vineyards had to be replanted after widespread damage was wreaked by phylloxera at the close of the last century, Palomino fino really took over. It now occupies 95% of the almost 11,000 hectares (27,181 acres) currently growing vines in the Jerez area.

Its characteristics

Palomino is a variety that has undergone a long acclimatisation process and careful breeding. It adapts very well to the chalky local soils known as *albarizas* which have a calcium carbonate content of 60% or more. When grafted onto Berlandiera stocks and its hybrids, it takes easily and gives long-lasting vines. These are trained using the traditional local pruning method based on vines with two 40 cm (15.7 inch) branches. One leader branch is left with one lateral branch bearing 10 buds and the other leader branch is left with only a very short shoot with just one or two buds. The long and short shoots alternate on the leader branches each year. The Palomino fino variety, aided by the *albariza* soil which collects and holds rainwater (an average of 600 mm per annum), flourishes in the long, hot and dry summer season. The fruit begins to grow once flowering, which generally begins in the third week of May, is over. The *envero*, or initial ripening process, takes place in the second half of July, and the grapes are ripe and ready for harvesting by the first fortnight of September.
Palomino fino averages some 3.5 kg of grapes per vine stock and the planting density is 3,460 vines per hectare (2.421 acres). The yield varies depending on the location of the vineyard in its particular sub-area or *pago* - Añina, Balbaina, Miraflores, Macharnudo, etc. - and on the growing and weather conditions.
Palomino fino bunches are average in size and have very short stalks. The grape itself is of medium size and weighs about two grams when ripe, its greeny-yellow skin mellowing to gold in the intensely bright sunlight of late August. This skin, coated in waxes or *pruina*, gives the grape its veiled appearance which is accentuated by the white *albariza* dust left behind by the hot and dry easterly winds known as *levanteras* that buffet the Jerez vineyards. Things cool down only when the damp, mild westerly winds start to blow.
The skin, or epidermis, of the Palomino fino grape, is some 2.6 micra thick. It tends to be fragile when the grape is ripe so care must be taken in harvesting and transport to the wine press where the must is obtained. It is not sensitive to cryptogamic disease but if, for any reason, the skin splits due to excessive swelling of the grapes as a result of out-of-season rainfall or if attacked by insect larvae such as *Lobesia botrana*, then *Botritis cineree* or rot sets in, seriously affecting both the quality and quantity of the crop.
Summer weather conditions encourage maturation in the Palomino fino grape. The sugar content rises - to almost 12 Bé - particularly in the inland area. Sugar levels are somewhat lower in the areas nearer the coast, where humidity and morning dews keep the grape juicier. It is significant that at the end of maturation the Palomino fino registers very low total acidity - around 3 gr/l expressed as tartaric acid. This low acidity is caused by the breakdown of malic acid during ripening, so much so that the must itself contains under 0.5 gr/l. The low malic acid content in the must of Palomino fino grown in the Jerez region is basic to the development of sherries, particularly those subjected to the process known as *crianza biológica bajo velo de flor* ("veiled" biological maturation).
This term is used to describe the biochemical transformation that takes place while the wine matures in the wooden casks, resulting from the intense and continuous metabolic action of the yeasts that form a "veil" covering the surface of the wine.

Palomino fino and sherry

If we had to single out one key characteristic of Palomino fino for sherry production, it would be its "delicate docility". Sherry has a well-developed, very characteristic bouquet, with tertiary aromas acquired during lengthy maturing or ageing processes.
The must obtained from careful pressing of Palomino fino gives a young, dry, white wine which is still referred to locally as *mosto* since the term "sherry" is only used after it has developed its strong character. This fermented must has a fine, delicate aroma which facilitates sensory assessment. This assessment determines which steps should be taken next: fortification with pure wine spirits or "veiled" biological maturing giving an alcohol content of 15.5º vol. The latter process, lasting 4-5 years, results in

Fino if matured in Jerez and Puerto de Santa Maria, or Manzanilla if matured in Sanlucar. Alternatively, the must may undergo a physical and chemical ageing process lasting 10 years or more, up to 18º vol. And Amontillado sherries are those that are first aged as Fino then fortified and aged further. Both the "veiled" biological maturing and the physical-chemical ageing processes take place in oak butts called *botas* holding some 500 liters. In each case, the system applied during the ageing process, after the initial year-by-year ageing stages, is commonly known as *criaderas y solera* (see note on page 113).

Wine subjected to biological maturing *bajo velo de flor* undergoes an intense transformation since the yeasts in the "veil" burn up the alcohol and metabolize many other components such as glycerine which is eventually almost totally eliminated. This phenomenon makes the Finos and Manzanillas the driest of dry wines. No other wines experience such profound changes in their composition and sensory qualities as those matured under this "veil" of yeasts. The main virtue of Palomino fino is that it is enhanced by this transformation: it gives up some of its body but gains strong, penetrating, almondy aromas and a flavor that explodes on the palate leaving an agreeable though somewhat bitter aftertaste. These sherries are the most unusual and versatile of wines and the most elegant and interesting aperitif in the world.

The low malic acid content of Palomino fino when grown in the Jerez region helps stave off the development of bacteria during the biological maturing process which could jeopardize final product quality. The primary aromas that stem from the clean, white *albariza* soil in which the grapes are grown do not hold back the aromatic nose given by the "veiled" maturing process. These fine, subtle aromas, typical of Palomino fino, have also brought it recognition as a young, dry, white table wine, which some of the local wineries are now marketing successfully.

The Palomino fino grape joins forces with the ecosystem of the sherry region and, in keeping with the 3,000 year-old local tradition in wine-making, the sherries are the offshoot of that happy marriage mentioned above between man and nature which has led to the natural selection of both the local microbial flora and the grape variety best suited to sherry production.

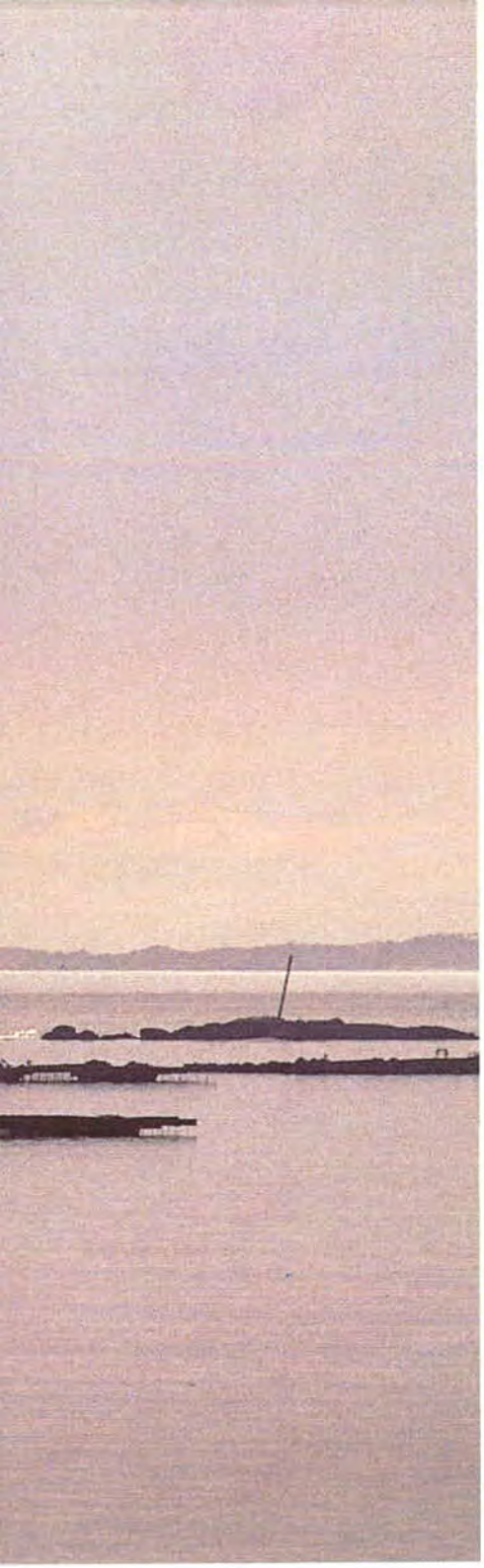
Luis Pérez Rodríguez, *Doctor in Chemistry, is Professor of Food Technology at the University of Cádiz and Director of Research and Development in Pedro Domecq, S.A. He has directed several doctoral theses and has carried out extensive research into sherry.*

Palomino fino is well adapted to the chalky albariza soils of the sherry vine yards, where it is trained according to traditional pruning techniques.

AVERAGE COMPOSITION OF PALOMINO MUST AND SHERRIES

AVERAGE PARAMETERS	Must	Fermented Must or Young Wine	Young Wine "Sobre Tablas"	Fino Solera	Oloroso Solera
DEGREES BÉ	11.5	-	-	-	-
ALCOHOL CONTENTS % VOL.	-	12.0	15.5	15.0	19.0
TOTAL ACIDS g/l	3.0	4.5	4.5	4.0	5.1
VOLATILE ACIDS g/l	-	0.3	0.35	0.2	0.5
GLYCERINE g/l	0.1	7.0	4.5	0.2	8.5
TARTARIC ACID g/l	6.0	6.0	4.5	3.2	1.0
MALIC ACID g/l	0.3	0.3	0.2	-	0.5
CITRIC ACID g/l	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.15	0.5
AMINOACIDS mmol/l	10.0	10.0	8.0	2.5	9.0
DIETHYL ACETAL mg/l	-	8.0	12.0	45.0	20.0
ACETOINE mg/l	-	3.0	10.0	80.0	8.0

Apart from tuna, Garavilla and Calvo products include other canned fish and seafoods such as mussels, cultivated in lattices along the Galician coast.



FERNANDO BRIONES/ICEX

GARAVILLA AND CALVO

TWO SPANISH LEADERS THAT CAN AND DO

SUCCESS ABROAD (VII)

Spain's two biggest fish canning companies may be major rivals but they share several things in common. In a highly-competitive, international market, where a Spanish label is synonimous with quality, both Basque Country-based Garavilla and Galicia's Calvo remain family-run businesses. And both have opted to open up factories overseas to boost foreign sales.

Text: **David Ing**

Garavilla has its own fleet of five fishing vessels and a refrigerated transport ship.

GARAVILLA

ISABEL: A NAME TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY

"Today we'll be eating ... with Isabel" is one of the best known advertising jingles in Spain; a simple yet catchy signature tune that has helped propel producers Conservas Garavilla S.A. to the pole position in the conserving industry.

It was a clever move. For apart from being one of the most popular girl's names in Spain, Isabel is also the leading brand name of the company, founded just over a century ago on the shores of the Bay of Biscay, one of Europe's richest fishing grounds.

Since then Garavilla has spread its net ever wider as it has strived to satisfy not only a burgeoning home market for its tuna, sardine and other fish products, but also become Europe's biggest seller of branded canned fish.

The company started this century with a new home base, Bermeo, just along the coast from Elanchove where it was founded and 45 kilometers (28 miles) from the economic center of the Basque Country, Bilbao.

The original factory façade still exists on the main road leading into the port. But, although Bermeo remains the company's headquarters, its somewhat cramped facilities have long since been overtaken in production terms by three other plants strategically placed near Spain's main fishing grounds.

Starting in the 1960s, the company set up factories in Arrecife, the capital of Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands, El Grove in the northwest region of Galicia, and Algeciras on the Atlantic side of the Straits of Gibraltar.

The next decade saw the first move overseas with the opening of a plant in Manta, Ecuador - a factory which now supplies most of the America as well as some European markets - followed in 1994 by another in Agadir, Morocco.

To help boost exports, Conservas Garavilla also has wholly owned agency subsidiaries in two of its principal markets; one at Santa Margherita Ligure near Christopher Columbus's home town of Genova in Italy and the other, David Coutts, in the equally historic port city of Liverpool in England.

When the company was founded, the Basque coast was still a major source of tuna, the albacore variety known popularly in Spain as the *bonito del norte* (see Spain Gourmetour nº30). But dwindling stocks led Garavilla to set up its own fleet of five vessels which trawl the rich fishing grounds off the Ecuadorean coast.

It also has a refrigerated transport ship which plies backwards and forwards between Ecuador and Spain, bringing fish one way and returning with the oils and sauces in which tuna is traditionally preserved.

The new source led to a distinct switch in production and consequently eating habits, says Garavilla's export director Juan Madurga. The albacore now represents about 10% of the company's production with the rest being swallowed up by yellowfin and skipjack.

Albacore, for so long a staple of the Spanish diet, is now the deluxe tuna costing around twice as much as the newcomers. With its white flesh, it has a delicate taste while the others have a stronger flavor and are darker in color.

Although 15% of the company's output now goes in exports, the primary production of Isabel and its two sister brands, Garavilla and Rex, are very much led by the tastes of a home market which remains one of the biggest fish and seafood eating nations in the world.

The company's annual canned fish and seafood production in Spain is around 25,000 metric tons of tuna, followed by mussels at 7,500 tonnes, sardines at 7,000 tons, mackerel at 1,800 tons, squid at 1,000 tons and cockles 300 tons.

The canning industry calls for on-

ly the best of the product to be packaged, but almost nothing goes to waste. The Arrecife plant also turns out 13,000 tons of fish flour for animal feed. Ironically, much of the production is used to nourish the likes of baby trout and salmon being reared on fish farms.

Garavilla's Ecuadorean subsidiary, Isabel Ecuatoriana S.A., cans another 7,000 tons of skipjack and 6,000 tons of sardines, virtually all of which goes for export. Its location, close to the famous El Niño current with its major fish feeding grounds, makes it an ideal base for supplying the major Latin American markets of Colombia to the north and Chile to the south.

Other leading markets include the United States and, in Europe, Italy and the United Kingdom, while Ecuadorean-canned exports also help to top up supplies for the Spanish market.

Meanwhile, Agadir was opened last year to take advantage of the rich sardine shoals which in recent years have been moving further south in the Atlantic. Production at present is around 3,000 tons, although the plant's capacity is capable of more than doubling this figure if demand makes it necessary.

Like Manta, the Moroccan factory also gives Garavilla an important base in a developing country, enabling the company to maintain quality while keeping down production costs.

Despite the problems of price differential, the prestige of the Isabel brand has enabled its Spanish plants to maintain a healthy market in Europe, especially in sardines, which account for around 60% of exports and tuna, around 30%.

Italy, which shares Spain's love of seafood, is by far the biggest buyer with Isabel claiming the number two spot in the branded market. That stake, backed by the company's top spot in Spain, enables the company to claim to be Europe's biggest seller of branded fish products.

But export sales do not stop in the Mediterranean. Land-locked countries such as the Czech and Slovak Republics and Switzerland are also prominent on the sales list, along with markets such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Germany.

Further afield, Jordan and Saudi Arabia have helped replace a once healthy West African market which was largely taken over by local canneries. And even in the highly competitive U.S. market, Garavilla's Spanish heritage has given it a high profile in the rapidly growing Hispanic market.

Like many companies, Garavilla is also keeping a close watch on Russia. The upheaval in the economy there since the fall of Communism has yet to stabilize. But the sheer size of the Russian market means that once it does calm down it could prove to be a major new opening says Mr. Madurga.

As with the fish itself, what it is conserved in varies very much with national tastes. In the Mediterranean countries olive oil is still the norm for canning although there is an increasing tendency to follow the northern Europeans' preference for brine, in these calorie-conscious times.

Whichever the shopper picks, the products have a guaranteed shelf life of at least four years. "The only difference is that people are beginning to look more at their waist-lines," says Mr Madurga.

In the future, he says the company will move still more into "added value" products to help counterbalance the flood of cheaper fish from the Far East. The move has already begun with the launch of Isabel-branded tuna-based salads four years ago which now account for more than half the sector's sales in Spain.

These prepared, ready-to-eat dishes contain around 25% tuna mixed with different salads and sauces. Milanese, Mediterranean, Californian, Russian and Provenzal are currently available

CALVO

Carballo, where Calvo headquarters are, is not on the coast but more than half-a-dozen ports are within a radius of 50 kilometers.

GARAVILLA AND CALVO

Four years ago Garavilla launched Isabel-branded tuna-based salads, which now account for more than half the sector's sales in Spain.

and Garavilla is ready to produce other varieties to suit different international palates.

Another canned product with a promising future is fish patés, he says, which are already being made from anchovies, salmon and tuna.

The company has its own research and development laboratory in Valencia on Spain's east coast for investigating new products as well as acting as an independent monitoring base to keep a continual check on the quality standards of the four Spanish plants.

Apart from product, the laboratory is also looking at possible new packaging. Some companies are already using plastic for preserving fish, although Garavilla is yet to be convinced.

After all, "plasticking" doesn't have quite the same ring as canning.

CALVO FINDS AN ITALIAN CONNECTION

The big surprise for any first-time visitor to Carballo, headquarters of Calvo, is the absence of the sea. Most people take it for granted that a fish-packing industry has got to be immersed in a seafaring ambience, as close as possible to the docks.

But not here. The Atlantic rollers may be less than 10 kilometers (6 miles) away and the air more often than not laden with the salty tang of the prevailing westerlies, but Carballo has the distinctive air of turf rather than surf country.

The façade of the 17,000 square meter (183,000 square feet Calvo factory does nothing to break the image. With not a fish net in sight, from the outside it might be just any other modern factory that has located to a green and pleasant setting rather than jostle elbow-to-elbow with others in a soul-less industrial estate.

Only when you climb the stairs to the office of managing director José Luis Calvo, do you start to get a real feel of what the factory is all about. Two glass cabinets in the ante-room display finely-detailed models of fishing boats - one French from the last century, the other one of the six vessels that make up Calvo's own fleet.

"So why pick Carballo and not a port town for your location?,"seemed an obvious first question for the second-generation head of the family company.

"It all goes back to 1940, soon after the end of the Spanish Civil War," explains Mr. Calvo. "My father, Luis, had been involved previously in food distribution generally but after the war he saw no future in it because of the shortage of products to sell. So he decided to change."He looked at a couple of projects, including preserved meats, but the then government prohibited him from pushing them through. And so he went for preserved fish."

The idea was simple yet effective. Carballo, where he lived, was not on the coast but was firmly part of a region linked intrinsically to the sea. Within a radius of 50 kilometers (31 miles) were more than half-a-dozen ports and with his own truck he could easily bring the product back to a central point.

Since then the company has grown to around 1,000 employees worldwide handling an annual production of 34,000 metric tons of fish. In 1978 Calvo established its own tuna fishing fleet which now has two boats stationed in the Indian Ocean near the Seychelles and another three in the Gulf of Guinea, off Africa's west coast.

Ten years later a refrigerated transport ship was added to bring in tuna from a plant the company set up adjacent to another major fishing ground, near the leading seaside resort of Puerto la Cruz on Venezuela's Caribbean coast.

The continued expansion not only enabled Calvo to cope with a rapidly expanding home market but also to look overseas. Although the company continues to export tuna, mainly to Latin America and Denmark, the decision was taken to concentrate efforts on a major market. Italy, like Spain a leading consumer of seafood, was the obvious choice.

In 1993 the company bought up Nostromo, Italy's sixth largest producer of canned tuna, based at Vivo Marino in the toe of the country where it points out toward Sicily. The new market added another 70 million cans of tuna to the 180 million Calvo now sells each year in Spain.

It also provided a new sales area for some of Calvo's 20 million ton annual produc-

In 1993 Calvo bought up Nostromo, Italy's sixth-largest producer of canned tuna, adding a production of 70 million cans of tuna per year.

tion of other canned fish and seafoods such as mussels, sardines, mackerel and squid which are packed at its second Galician plant, 60 kilometers (37 miles)south of Carballo on the Ria de Mouros estuary.

Since Luis Calvo died in 1980, the company has continued in family hands with four of his six children involved in management. And with the addition of Nostromo, it now has five separate arms.

Luis Calvo Sanz, the core company in Spain which runs its two canning plants, has sales of 11,500 million pesetas and 450 employees and Nostromo 5,000 million peseta sales and 200 workers.

The other subsidiaries are Calvo Pesca, the fishing fleet with 180 employees; Atorsa Venezuela, the South American processing plant with 160; and Gestra Monte Blanco, the refrigerated transport company with 20.

José Luis, who joined the company back in 1952, is the first to acknowledge the part played by his father in shaping the company, enabling it to consolidate its present position as Spain's second biggest producer of canned tuna in an increasingly competitive market.

Over the years the exigencies of rapidly modernizing supply and sales systems have decimated what has been an historically fragmented sector. To cope with the changes in both consumer and retailing habits, the number of canneries has dropped in the last 20 years from 400 to 148, of which the number of major players is around a dozen.

That Calvo has proved to be one of the winners is very much due to the efforts of, in the words of his son, "a restless man" who was always looking at new ideas. Not content with merely moving into a totally new industry, he had to find ways of improving it.

One of his first accomplishments was in the way tuna is packed. In those early days it was a slow and cumbersome process with slices of fish having to be slotted manually into a can.

But Luis came up with his own invention, an automatic machine that pressed the products into moulds and measured automatically the quantity needed.

His new 'baby' was capable of filling tins at the speed of 36 a minute. Some 250 were bought by other packers in France, Italy and Portugal, as well as Africa and Latin America, before the company decided to leave machine-making and concentrate on the final product in the 1970s.

Luis's innovations did not stop there. In the 1950s he foresaw the problems with supplying enough albacore from European waters. At the time it represented 95% of all the tuna eaten in Spain. But he put his faith in the yellowfin, known in Spain as *atún claro*, preempting a switch that has since seen albacore virtually obliterated by yellowfin and skipjack.

Another tradition to go was the then classic oval can. The shape made it more difficult to fill, to pack in cartons, and to transport. So, in the 1960s, Calvo began the move to the now familiar round can. Then, when the family saw that they were perhaps too big for many customers to use in one go, they turned up another new idea.

One of the main reasons why tuna is such a big-seller in Spain is its widescale use in *tapas* and other appetisers. Apart from the traditional Galician fish pie, the *empanada*, it is a common base for omelettes and salads and a whole range of canapés.

Calvo was yet again a trendsetter, introducing the first three-pack of 100 gram cans in a cardboard sleeve to make sure the cook always had the right amount available.

Like main rivals, Garavilla, Calvo has also made astute use of television advertising to boost its sales. Calvo is the Spanish word for bald, while claro, as well as being the popular name for Yellowfish, also translates in English as "of course". So, they came up with the humorous angle where two well-known actors with decidedly thinning hair were picked to play on the catchphrase "Claro Calvo".

Recall of the brand name shot up from 20% to 95% among consumers and won the company the trophy for the best television commercial of the year.

David Ing *is a freelance journalist who reports on Spain for several leading international trade publications involved in the travel, food and drink industries.*

Peeled White Asparagus from Spain - Extraordinary!

Text: **Janet Mendel**
Still Life: **Menchu Artime**
Photo: **A. de Benito/ICEX**

Spring arrives early in some regions of Spain, bringing to market the season's first white asparagus, an extraordinary gourmet delight. From the Valle del Tietar comes the early asparagus—peeled an ready to cook— especially valued in Germany and other European countries

Spring comes very early to the Valle del Tietar, a region west of Madrid between Castile and Extremadura. By mid-February, the cherry trees are already in flower and the storks are busy tidying up their nests atop roofs and towers. After several days of rain, the Tietar River, lined with trees, fairly gushes along its banks. The backdrop of the Sierra de Gredos is still frosted with snow.

On the Bergas asparagus farm, bordered by the river, puddles remain in troughs between mounds of earth. But the soil, covered with plastic to trap the sun's heat, is warm to the touch. A worker bends, quickly slices a hole in the plastic, digs away the earth and uncovers an ivory-colored stalk of asparagus. He cuts it off at the base, adds it to his collection box, scoops dirt into the hole - for the same plant will produce another dozen stalks - and moves on down the row.

It takes a sharp eye to spot the slight crack in the soil's surface, indicating a stalk pushing its way up through the mounded soil. If missed today, by tomorrow it will have poked through to the light, and its white tip turned to violet, decreasing its market value by nearly half.

Spring sun shining on the plastic-covered mounds makes the fields appear like a rolling sea. Several hundred men work the Bergas asparagus fields, which cover 250 hectares (617 acres) with another 250 hectares being planted. Early in the season, the daily catch is still small. Spears don't begin sprouting until soil temperatures reach 15ºC (59ºF).

A truck plies the fields, collecting the workers' asparagus, delivering it to a central processing

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In mid-February, while the rest of Europe is still under winter's blanket, Bergas can name its price for this very early, choice white asparagus. Bergas asparagus refrigerated trucks deliver to wholesale points in northern Europe. Forty-eight hours after they are picked, Bergas white asparagus spears are being eaten in Germany and in Italy

depot in less than two hours. The asparagus is quickly put through a cold-water shower, reducing its temperature.

According to Luis García Bergas, director of Agrícola García Bergas, a family business since the beginning of the century, it is this quick chilling which keeps the asparagus from becoming fibrous. This is the first step in a process providing an extraordinary, luxury product to northern markets.

Peeled Asparagus Is Unique

The firm markets both fresh white asparagus and, uniquely— the first such producer in Spain—fresh, peeled white asparagus. Peeled asparagus, which in 1994 represented 8% of the firm's total production, is expected in 1995 to reach 15% of total production.

Asparagus to be peeled proceeds directly to a mechanized unit which turns each individual spear around and around, shaving off its thin skin. After calibrating for size and weight, it is packed in "designer" boxes with labels showing two bunches of asparagus: "500 gr + 500 gr + a housewife's 15 minutes in peeling time - 350 gr peelings = 650 gr of peeled, ready-to-cook asparagus". Peeled asparagus, a luxury product, costs more because, typically, 20% of the peeled produce is lost to broken tips.

If not destined for peeling, the asparagus, after its initial cold bath, proceeds to an assembly line where it is graded for quality and calibrated for size. Those with violet tips or short lengths are packed separately (under the brand name of AGB—Agrícolas Garcia Bergas). The whole process takes less than two hours. Once packaged, the asparagus is kept at under 5ºC (41ºF) and is shipped out on the same day.

Meanwhile, the phones are ringing at Bergas. Agents from all over Europe want to know: when? how much can you ship? tomorrow? what's its cost?

In mid-February, while the rest of Europe is still under winter's blanket, Bergas can name its price for this very early, choice white asparagus. Refrigerated trucks deliver it to wholesale points in northern Europe. Forty-eight hours after it's picked, they're eating Bergas white asparagus in Germany and in Italy, long before Easter. By May, when the rest of Europe is cutting asparagus, Bergas is closing down production. By then, ferny leaves appear on the plants.

Fresh Product Corners Market

Although Bergas is by no means Spain's only producer of asparagus - there are important centers of preserved, bottled white asparagus (Navarre), fresh white from Andalusia, and fresh, green asparagus (Granada), it has cornered a very special market niche, by devoting itself exclusively to producing a fresh product, hand-picked and hand-processed, to meet high standards of quality, meriting qualification as a high-priced luxury product.

Agrícola García Bergas, which employs nearly 1000 persons at the top of the season, shipped 1,000,000 kg of asparagus in 1994, all from its own plantations, and showed 800 million pts (over $6 million dollars) worth of billings in 1994. The best markets so far for Bergas white asparagus have been Italy, first, and Germany, second. Most of it goes, through wholesalers, to top-quality restaurants, not supermarkets.

In Spain, asparagus is adored, but it's known either as bottled white asparagus, or in tins, served with mayonnaise or to garnish salads, or, else, as in Andalusia, as trigueros, wild green asparagus gathered from wet wheat fields, fried up to incorporate in omelettes. Although Bergas supplies top restaurants in Madrid with asparagus cut the same day, the product is still not widely available on the domestic market. Only special outlets in Madrid, Barcelona and Saragossa boast Bergas Asparagus.

Whereas, in Germany, said Mr. García Bergas, asparagus in the spring approaches cult, passion. "In any fine restaurant, a platter heaped with white asparagus is served to start—I've seen people eat 40-50 spears. Then you order a main dish."

Agrícolas Bergas started out

ISABEL

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It takes a sharp eye to spot the slight crack in the soil's surface, indicating a stalk pushing its way up through the mounded soil. If missed today, by tomorrow it will have poked through to the light, and its white tip turned to violet, decreasing its market value by nearly half

growing tobacco and fruit ("a lottery," said Mr. García Bergas, "You never know when a late frost will wipe out the whole fruit harvest,"), but has made the transition to asparagus over the past 15 years. The firm started out producing bottled white asparagus, but found the market too competitive. Producing extraordinary quality, early-season fresh asparagus, he said, is a special market.

This quality product, packaged and kept refrigerated from harvest to point-of-sale, is best used within eight days, though it keeps much longer.

Looking ahead, Bergas is extending its plantations each year. Typically, this special variety of asparagus, planted in the rich, sandy loam of this fertile river valley, takes two years to come to full production and goes on producing for 10 years.

While Bergas's business currently is almost entirely in Europe, it is looking to expand exports to the market in Japan, Singapore and other points on the Asian Rim.

Agrícola García Bergas, S.A.
Musgo, 5 Urbanización La Florida, 28023 MADRID.
Tel.: (1) 307 61 71
Fax: (1) 307 73 04

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In the Kitchen with Peeled White Asparagus

Bergas white asparagus -hand picked and packed- is a luxury product. So it always deserves special care in the kitchen.

Buy your fresh asparagus peeled and keep them refrigerated until ready to use. Use a vegetable peeler to pare off a film of skin from the spears, to about 5 cm (2 inches) from the tip, and slice a centimeter (0.4 inches) off the butt end. Then absolutely the whole stalk is edible (even raw!), leaving no fibrous bits in the mouth.

The traditional way to cook asparagus is upright in a special, tall asparagus cooker, which allows the stalks to stay submerged in bubbling water while the delicate tips steam, "above it all." Folks who didn't own an asparagus cooker used to improvise with a tall coffee pot or an inverted double boiler.

You can cook asparagus perfectly well in a wide, flat frying pan, just deep enough to hold the asparagus submerged in water. The tricky part is to drain it very, very carefully, for brusque handling can damage those fragile tips.

How long to cook? Here are three good ways. 1. Cook (preferably upright) in simmering water until a stalk bends limply across a fork, about 25 minutes. 2. Cook (flat) in boiling water for five minutes. Drain and plunge into cold water to stop the cooking. 3. Put the asparagus into boiling water, bring to a rolling boil again then cover and turn off the heat and leave for 30 minutes. The second and third methods produce pieces with still a little crispness.

The delicate flavor of fresh asparagus is best appreciated when it is served warm or at room temperature, never chilled. You can reheat cold asparagus by submerging it for a few minutes in boiling water.

Though white asparagus is delicious served, in classic style, with melted butter, hollandaise sauce or mayonnaise, it lends itself to dozens of other ways. It's especially good with salty foods such as ham, smoked salmon or cheese. It's a lovely foil for rich sauces. It's a natural with seafood such as sole, hake, salmon, shrimp.

See recipes on page 111.

Packaging of perishables has always posed a challenge to growers, especially if those products are to be exported long distances. From nostalgic turn-of-the-century wooden crates of Valencia oranges and wooden barrels of Almeria grapes packed in cork crumbles to the sophisticated mechanized packaging of today's wide variety of fruits and vegetables, Spanish produce exporters have adapted quickly to ever changing market demands.

Long before refrigerated trucks were criss crossing Europe on a network of divided super highways linking all major capitals, Spanish produce exporters were adapting to market needs. In the early party of this century, oranges from Valencia, individually packed in tissue paper, were shipped in wooden crates to the farthest and coldest parts of Europe. Tough skinned Almeria grapes survived long boat trips in wooden barrels with a cork filling to arrive at dinner tables that were weeks away from the sunshine of Andalusia. Even tomatoes, packed in triangular boxes filled with sawdust, could arrive at European tables long after their own growing season had ended. But, ingenuity aside, exports were limited to produce that could survive the then lengthy travel time.

PACKAGING FOR EXPORT

A CONSTANT CHALLENGE FOR INNOVATION

Text: **Ana Westley**
Still Life: **Menchu Artime**
Photo: **A. de Benito/ ICEX**

spring colours

Given the favourable climatic conditions of west Almería, we have opted for traditional biological agricultural methods, using the sun to ripen the fruit and natural pollination.
Harvested at just the right moment, the fruit is selected and carefully packed by specialised staff, and consequently the customer receives the product in optimum eating condition.
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Nuebe

PACKAGING

As travel time shortened with the construction of highway networks, packaging had to be adapted to new demands. Boxes and crates had to fit standard truck containers to be unloaded directly at giant supermarkets. By the 1960's and 1970's consumers around Europe were loading 2 kg plastic net bags of oranges directly into their shopping cart instead of picking them out, one by one, at the corner grocery store.

With temperature-controlled transportation and mechanized harvesting and packaging, even produce as perishable as lettuce can now arrive at the dinner table within a few days after being picked from the fields of Murcia.

MECHANIZATION FROM FIELD TO SUPERMARKET

Increasing mechanization helped lead to the standardization of modular sizes that can be mechanically stacked on pallets and loaded into trucks to be delivered directly at the supermarket display shelf. Machines not only calibrate fruits by size, but have computers that can classify by color.

"It's a buyer's market out there," commented Joaquín Monfort of ANECOOP, a Valencia based cooperative of fruit and vegetable exporters from many provinces in Spain. "We package our produce the way our clients want it, from field to truck," he affirmed. Big supermarket chains no longer want to waste expensive labor costs on stacking complicated displays and insist on modular cardboard boxes that fit perfectly into their fruit and vegetable display shelves.

"Some clients want their own brand name on the boxes or net bags, while others allow us to use our logo," Mr. Monfort explained. The days of large wholesale truck shipments have disappeared for exports. Nowadays, even "wholesale" truck shipments are divided into flat manageable cardboard boxes.

Supmermarkets still like to display some produce unpackaged where the consumer can pick and chose their fruits to be weighed and there will always be a need for the small corner grocery store. But the flat stackable box is still preferred, even for wholesale shipments.

Most "wholesale" shipments tend to contain prepackaged handy sizes within a larger box. The 2 to 2.5 kg net bag of oranges now comes in a larger cardboard box of 180 kg, for example. Smaller trays of fruits and vegetables in plastic half-kilo buckets or trays also fit into standard supermarket display boxes.

"Every type of fruit or vegetable needs its specific type of container that must guarantee the hygiene of the product while allowing air to circulate," Mr. Monfort explained. Thus, a kilo of tangerines can be packed in a plastic bucket with a string net cover, a plastic bag with holes in it, a half kilo tray with a plastic cover for the early part of the season when the fruit is more expensive, or a string net bag.

"Generally, the smaller and more perishable, the more complicated the wrapping." Start-of-the-season strawberries go in small buckets, while peaches, nectarines, and plums, for example, must be packed in a flat box with egg crate like spaces for each fruit. This can be a paper pulp sheet or, more recently, it can be made out of plastic, much like inverted plastic cupcake holders.

"Everything is designed with the supermarket in mind," Mr. Monfort noted. Convenience is now measured by how easy a product can be loaded into a supermarket cart, then unloaded onto the supmermarket conveyor belt with the code bars and price included in the packaging for easy scanning, and then packed into checkout bags.

LONGER CONSERVATION, SHORTER PROCESSING

By the 1980's, produce packaging had developed into a sophisticated industry on its own. Packaging was designed not only to protect a product from damage or deterioration, but to prolong conservation and shelf life. Standardization and mechanization not only shortened processing time, but reduced the amount of costly storage space for both factory and supermarket. Clients had no space to store a large mish mash of different size boxes and demanded easily collapsible boxes.

Efficient containers not only grouped produce into easily manageable units ready to be scanned in the supermarket checkout counter, but facilitated warehouse accounting, inspection and quality control. Modular units tucked into standard-sized, easily stackable boxes, could as easily be packed in a truck container as in the storage room of a supermarket.

Packaging had become not just a tool for moving a product from one place to another but a means of making handling and conservation easier as well as presenting an appetizing and appealing product.

THE FOUR "R'S"

Spanish producers had already adapted themselves to the norms of most supermarkets, both within Spain and abroad. But the most difficult test came with the introduction in Germany in 1991 of the so called Töpfer Law that is revolutionizing packaging throughout Europe, especially fresh vegetables and fruit.

The law, which was adopted by the European Union last year and will go into effect in most countries before 1997, establishes "green" guidelines that have become nicknamed "the four R's." They are: Reduce, Recover, Reuse, and Recycle.

"Those of us in the fruit and vegetable export business , had to adapt immediately as Germany is an important client for us," confided Isidoro Sánchez, Operations Director of Pascual Hermanos, S.A., Spain's largest private produce exporter. He recalled that back in the mid 1960's, Pascual was one of the first producers to export oranges in the now omnipresent plastic net bags. "We realized that these "four R's" would soon be required all over Europe and represented the wave of the future."

Now an expert in the field of produce packaging, Mr. Sánchez explains the new difficulties facing produce exporters. "Reducing means eliminating superfluous packaging, but fresh produce requires more protection to guarantee hygiene and product safety," he points out, noting that other consumer products are worse abusers of superfluous wrappings.

Recovery, he says, will entail

THE TENTH INTERNATIONAL GOURMET CLUB SHOW

Madrid, 19th, 20th, 21st, 22nd April 1996

What is the Gourmet Show?

It is the event where product manufactures, 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 magazine for gastronomes and users of tourist and good food guides).

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

Products to be shown

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

Activities and conferences

During the period of the Show, a number of talks and championships will be taking place, among which the V Spanish Chefs Championship stands out.

The result of the ninth Show

The ninth Show occupied a total area of 19,000 sq. m. among the 437 companies which are exhibiting –of which 40% were from the food sub-sector and 51% from the drinks sub-sector. Throughout the four exhibition days more than 27,000 professionals visited the show.

Forecast for the tenth Show

Exhibitors: 475.
Professional visitors: 30,000.

For further information about the Tenth International Gourmet Club Show, send this coupon to Progourmet, S. A. C/. Claudio Coello, 52 - 1.ª Planta. 28001 - Madrid (SPAIN). Tel.: (1) 577 04 18. Fax: (1) 431 13 59.

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PACKAGING

a change of mentality for consumers with a return to such concepts as a deposit on returnable containers. Consumers will have to store the containers until they are collected or delivered.

Reuse of containers has already begun in the produce industry, especially for harvesting and collection. Easily stackable plastic containers are used, then sterilized for reuse. Pallets where containers are stacked for easy loading and unloading are routinely reused.

Reusable plastic containers in modular sizes have also been introduced successfully for some clients. The plastic boxes collapse flat for storage, but must be returned to the sender to be reused. However, some producers feel that this system does not address the concept of brand name promotion, both for the producer and retail client and consumers tend to find the plastic crates less attractive for quality products.

"For the time being, the reusable crates are not personalized enough," Mr. Sanchez thinks, although their use is growing. Only a small percentage of exports are currently packaged in reusable plastic containers, as the process is not yet fully mechanized and therefore requires more labor.

Recycling norms mean that packaging material must have the potential for recycling, which means storage space. For supermarkets, storage space is at a premium, so the smaller the better. Some large retailers have found it less costly to have a machine that reduces all cardboard and paper packaging into a sort of pulp that can then be easily stored for pick up by companies specializing in recycling. Others prefer cardboard or paper boxes that can be mechanically squashed or smashed down to take up minimum space for pick up.

Consumers throughout Europe are already beginning to classify their garbage by recyclable materials. Dyes in cardboard and paper packaging must be free of toxic products for recycling.

"Like it or not, the new European Union directives on the '4 R's' will change commercial and consumer habits," Mr. Sánchez predicts. Spanish exporters have already adapted to most of the norms. For example, staples in cardboard boxes have been replaced by glues for machine assembly of boxes, and in compliance to recyclable biodegradable norms.

STAR PRODUCTS

Wooden crates, a traditional packaging form still in use for oranges, recycle easily but must have nails and staples removed, usually by magnets, once the wood has been reduced to a pulp.

"Packaging has helped change the concept of fresh produce as something of little value to a star product," Mr. Sánchez notes. Before, and in the old fashioned and picturesque food markets, horticultural products "were sold and marketed badly," he adds. All that has changed.

Yet one packaging relic has survived: the traditional wooden crate for oranges. "Wood seemed to conserve the fruit better, before the days of anti-humidity treated cardboard boxes and crates," Mr. Monforte of ANECOOP recalls. Many producers ran up huge losses with the first shipments in flimsy cardboard boxes. Excess humidity and poor ventilation in unrefrigerated trucks contributed to more spoilage. But today's new generations of specially treated cardboard boxes are as good or better than wood, especially for relatively short trips within Europe.

For long trans-Atlantic shipments via boat, wood is still the preferred material, which is why exports to the U.S. still continue in wooden crates. "There is something nostalgic about wooden crates that customers find appealing, despite distribution and storage difficulties.

BROCCOLI ON ICE

Nevertheless, cardboard boxes have become so sophisticated and anti humidity treated that fresh broccoli can be packed in granulated ice in cardboard boxes. The ice helps to keep broccoli fresh by maintaining humidity and preventing wilting. The ice-packed boxes are transferred almost immediately to refrigerated trucks to arrive at destination with the ice - and box- still intact.

Castillejos S.A. of Murcia is one of Spain's leading broccoli and lettuce exporters with over 2 million boxes of iceberg lettuce and 1.5 million boxes of broccoli being produced per season, most of which is exported to England and Holland which then redistributes to other continental countries. Only three or four days go by from the time a head of broccoli or lettuce is picked to arriving at the consumer's kitchen in England.

Lettuce heads get wrapped in a porous transparent film and are then tucked into various standard size boxes to be placed directly on supermarket shelves.

Lettuce heads that are not perfectly round get packed wholesale into larger boxes to be sent directly to fast food networks for all those millions of hamburgers being eaten in northern European and British cities.

Once wrapped and packaged in boxes on pallets, the lettuce heads at Castillejos are chilled in a few minutes in a vacuum cooler before being loaded onto refrigerated trucks.

"Only a few generations ago, the idea of crisp lettuce at Christmas time was a novelty only found in expensive restaurants," Javier Pérez of Castillejos pointed out. "Now our Christmas shipments to large supermarkets are on television commercials aimed at the average family," he affirmed.

Thanks to technological advances in package mechanization, new innovations stemming from constant research, and refrigerated transportation, fresh fruits and vegetables from Spain have become an affordable luxury in households throughout Europe and as far away as Japan. Recent scientific studies have demonstrated the importance of fresh fruit and vegetables for a healthy diet. Long a staple of the traditional Mediterranean diet, packaging has made them available to almost everyone, any time of year.

Ane Westley *is the Spain correspondant for* The New-York Times. *She has been also the correspondent in Spain for the U.S. weekly news magazine* Business-week *since 1988. Previously, she was the correspondant for* The Wall Street Journal. *She has also contributed regularly to various other publications.*


RIAS BAIXAS
ALBARIÑO
LAGAR DE FORNELOS, S.A.
LUSTAU
ESCUELA RESERVA
Medium Dry
Amontillado
LOS ARCOS
EMILIO LUSTAU
Rueda
1994
LUSTAU
ESCUELA RESERVA
Moscatel
Superior
EMILIN
EMILIO LUSTAU
BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS
VEGA SICILIA
TINTO «VALBUENA» 5.º
Ribera del Duero
COSECHA 1989

THREE OF A KIND

Europvin Iberia Consortium

Text: **John Reeder**
Still Life: **Menchu Artime**
Photo: **A. de Benito/ICEX**

Three of Spain's most prestigious wineries, the legendary Vega Sicilia from the Ribera del Duero, the classic Rioja house, La Rioja Alta, and one of sherry's great names, Emilio Lustau, famed for its Almacenistas range, decided some five years ago to combine their efforts on the difficult U.S. export market and put together probably the finest portfolio of the Spanish wines available to the American connoisseur.

Three wineries decided to pool their considerable expertise and resources and launch together the Europvin Iberia consortium. All three project the same image of exclusiveness.

It all started because the three bodegas were represented by the same single export agent, the Englishman Christopher Cannan who operates out of Bordeaux. It was at his suggestion that they set up the Europvin Iberia Consortium. The new consortium, headed by Cannan, took on a dynamic entrepreneur to handle operations on the ground in the U.S., originally Louis Broman in New York, and currently his replacement Todd Helmus of Cambridge, Massachusetts. Local distribution networks were built up in the U.S. which currently extend to cover some twenty states. Aiming at a quality market where volumen sales were not the principal objective, since none of our three bodegas produces large quantities of their premium quality wines, Europvin Iberia met with considerable success, two of the partners doubling their exports to the U.S. in the space of four years. Encouraged by their success, in 1994 the consortium decided to employ the same formula on the much more complicated Japanese market, where they took on Minoru Kanai, a wine specialist with a wealth of experience in the world of wine clubs and the gourmet food business, to co-ordinate their strategy, and where initial results have exceeded expectations.

What made these three wineries decide to pool their considerable expertise and resources and launch together the Europvin Iberia export consortium? Well, firstly obviously to share expenses and contacts. Being bodegas with a very similar approach to their customers, personalized attention to both local distributors and customers, and very similar house styles, enormous prestige and a low profile, it was thought that they would naturally appeal to the same kind of retailer and wine buff.

Quality. Prestige. Tradition. These three words sum up what unites our three bodegas. All three project the same image of exclusiveness and quality of product, all three are medium-size, long-established companies with a century each of wine-making traditions behind them, deeply committed to offering their customers only the finest wines possible. All three have in common promotion policies which involve virtually no direct advertising, relatively small production figures, a fascination with long-term cask ageing processes, and what can only be described as an obssesion with the highest standards in wine-making.

Classic Rioja

Who then are these wineries? Each one is in its own way the guardian of classic wine-making practices in its respective Denominación de Origen (D.O.), and form most connoisseurs of European wine will probably need no introduction. A brief pen picture will serve to refresh the memory.

Firstly, La Rioja Alta, situated, as its name implies, in what is generally considered to be the "best" of the Rioja sub-regions, that is to say climatically the most favored, where the moistness and coolness of the Atlantic is closest at hand, lending a touch of acidity and elegance to the wine, where the Tempranillo, the black thoroughbred indigenous grape variety, gives of its best, and where the old nineteenth. century wine-making and ageing traditions are still most clearly adhered to. The winery was founded in 1890, the date referred to in the name of one of La Rioja Alta's finest *gran reserva* (see page 113) reds, Reserva 890, of which more later. It's still located in the old railway station district of Haro, where almost all of the Rioja's centenary bodegas were built at the end of the last centry to supply the new industrial city of Bilbao to the north with wine, names which conjure up the long and richly patterned history of the Rioja: López de Heredia, Cune, Bodegas Bilbaínas...

The Rioja Alta bodega has been described as a great library of fine wine, holding as it does over thirty two thousand oak casks of wine and around six million (yes, million) bottles of *reservas* and *grandes reservas*. Avowed and unashamed traditionalists, it is thanks to its policy of lengthy barrel and bottle ageing that in spite of its vast stocks of wine, in terms purely of short-term volume of sales, La Rioja Alta would have to be considered as merely a medium sized business.

The three most renowned of La Rioja Alta's wines are all cask-aged, Tempranillo-based reds, the younger Viña Ardanza Reserva, four or five years old, and aged for a minimum of two years in oak, and a year in the bottle, and the two *grandes reservas*, both 80% Tempranillo: the Reserva 904 named after the exceptional Rioja vintage of 1904, and the Reserva 890, mentioned previously. Both are made only rarely from outstanding vintages, thus the last Reserva 904 is at least ten or eleven years old (six of which are spent maturing in oak) and a Reserva 890 will be more than fifteen years old, a remarkable eight years of which will have been spent in old oak casks! Dedicated then to those marvellously old-fashioned oaky red reservas so beloved of Rioja buffs, in the late 1980s La Rioja Alta even extended its library, enlarging its huge cellars still further as part or the bodega's continuing policy of prolonged cask ageing.

Almacenistas

Ever since Robert Parker discovered Lustau's Almacenistas range of old *solera* sherries in the mid-1980s, giving them spectacularly high ratings and finally laying to rest the old and greatly undeserved "sherry's boring" myth which had bedevilled the wines of Jerez in America for decades -you will recall Parker's panegyrics, "incredible perfume and finish. Dry, very rich, great complexity, 93" and "fabulously rich bouquet, intense, concentrated flavors... 96"- Lustau's sherries became and remain amongst the most sought after of wines in America's winestores.

Emilio Lustau, La Rioja Alta and Vega Sicilia between them offer probably the finest selection of Spanish wines available on one list.

The Almacenista sherries are small stocks of old *soleras* owned by private individuals, or small-scale intermediaries in Jerez, known as *almacenistas* in Spanish, "they who store the wine", normally a limited number of butts, which have been bought up by Lustau and then bottled. A second speciality of Lustau are the Landed Age Sherries. For centuries sherry has been shipped from Jerez and held in bond in butts in cellars in London. The sherry held there, often for considerable periods of time, matured in the damp, cool English climate, was found to have acquired a softer, perhaps more elegant finish, certainly it was a shade different, and appealed to English sherry fanciers. Lustau, in their efforts to offer the winedrinker an ever greater range of sherry experiences, have revived the practice. Lastly, Lustau has on its list a fascinating rarity amongst sherries, a vintage sherry, the Vendimia Cream, a sherry made from a single grape harvest and matured in the butts without being blended or refreshed as occurs in the normal *solera* system, *vendimia* being the Spanish for grape harvest or vintage. The definitive quality Sherry House? That is what Lustau claim and certainly no-one else in Jerez has a longer or more richly diverse list of highly original fine sherries.

Vega Sicilia: Simply Spain's Finest Red Wine?

What can one possibly say about Vega Sicilia that has not been said already? Superlative, thoroughbred, cask-aged limited production red wines so sought after in Spain they are distributed here on a quota basis -and there is a waiting list of frustrated wine people trying to get included in the quotas. Fortunately for wine lovers outside Spain more and more of the good stuff is leaking out onto export markets, above all thanks to Europvin Iberia in the U.S. where, although there are, no quotas as such, it is still not plentiful. So, if you see a bottle, grab it!

What makes Vega Sicilia so different? Is it the long-aclimatised noble grape varieties -Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec which were planted here alongside the local Tinto Fino black grape over a hundred years ago and are not Johnny-come-lately transplants, yesterday's latest fashion? The equally long Vega Sicilia tradition of careful winemaking, blending and cask-ageing? The chill, cold September and October nights just before the grape harvest which lend that touch of acidity and breeding to the wine? All of these factors contribute to mould the personality of one of Europe's great wines, which like all great wines, is ultimately undefinable, only to be truly appreciated in the glass.

Amongst the very limited production wines Vega Sicilia is currently offering, two red *reservas* are available through Europvin Iberia: the Valbuena 5º año (fifth year) 1990 vintage and the Vega Sicilia 1974 Cosecha Unico. The Valbuena is made from 80% Tinto fino, the local indigenous noble grape variety and around 20% Merlot and Malbec, all, of course, grown in the bodega's own vinerards. Following fermentation, the wine spends six months in huge oak vats, then a year in new oak plus a further year in old oak. Two years in the bottle round off the ageing process, the wine having reached the market in March 1995. The Vega Sicilia 1974 Cosecha "Unico", only around sixty thousand bottles of which were released, spends an amazing total of ten years in different types of oak casks, two years in the huge twenty thousand liter vats, two years in semi-new oak casks and six years in old oak, before being bottled. If all this oak frightens you, let me recommend you taste the finished product, a beautifully structured, elegant, silky wine, gratifyingly complex and rich on nose and palate, subtly aromatic of spices, tobacco and sandalwood, with, surprisingly, a pleasingly light touch of oakiness.

New Projects

Where next, then, for our three musketeers and Europvin Iberia? A new man, Tood Helmus, philosophy graduate weightlifter, climber, hiker, winewriter and marketing specialist extraordinaire (when does he find time to sleep?) has taken over the direction and co-ordination of the consortium in the U.S. and futher expansion is anticipated.

The consortium decided in 1994 to move into the lucrative but notoriously difficult Japanese market, a major growth area for Spanish wines where a high degree of brand loyalty and high price structures would suggest that the premium quality products Europvin Iberia offers should do very well. In Minoru Kanai they have chosen a wine educator and entrepreneur who has been involved in promoting Spanish wine for many years amongst Japanese winedrinkers and retailers.

Emilio Lustau, La Rioja Alta and Vega Sicilia between them offer probably the finest selection of Spanish wines available on one list: a vast range of quality sherries, distinctive cask-aged red vintage wines second to none in Europe, wines from probably the three outstanding traditional wine producing areas in Spain: Jerez, the Rioja and the Ribera del Duero. Perhaps the only thing lacking from this imprevissive portfolio was the presence of some of Spain's fine new varietal white wines.

Europvin Iberia has now filled this gap with two of Spain's most distinctive quality white wines: an Albariño varietal from Galicia, the north-western Atlantic tip of Spain, and the Verdejo varietal made in the Rueda (D.O.) high up on Spain's Central Castilian plateau not a stone's throw from the Iberian peninsula's pedigree winemaker's river, the Duero. La Rioja Alta owns a bodega in the Rias Baixas (D.O.), Lagar de Fornelos, which makes a green-tinted, pale straw yellow wine, fresh, elegantly clean and different, an unusual, very slightly acidic Atlantic style white wine of

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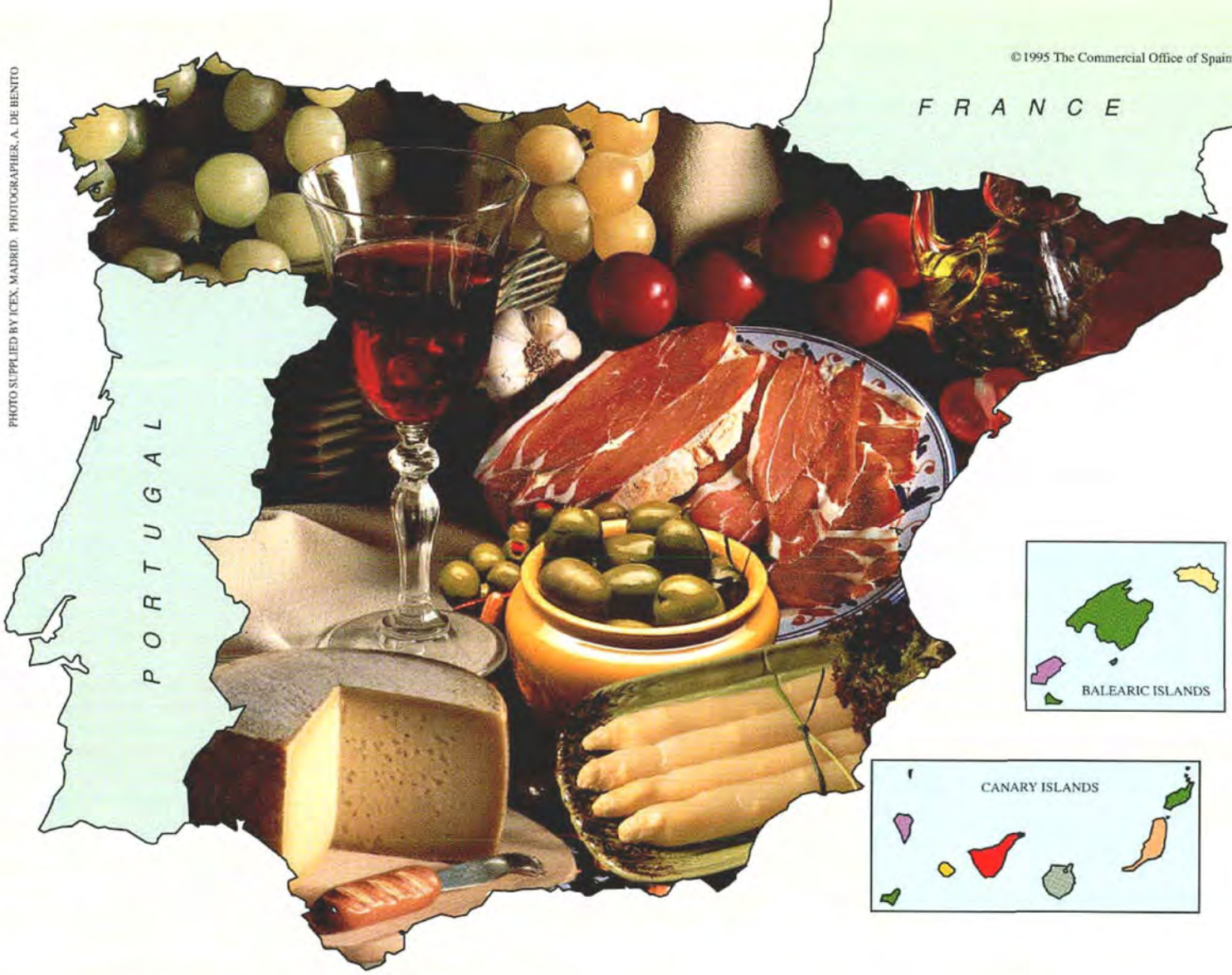

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the same name as the bodega, made from the local noble grape variety Albariño. Emilio Lustau has a winery, Marques de Irún, in the Castilian Rueda D.O., where what is arguably one of Spain's more original varietal white wines is made from the indigenous Verdejo grape. An unusually dry but fruity wine with a special floral aroma. Two of Spain's more distinctive white wines, then, added to Europvin Iberia's already highly original portfolio, two Spanish wines that represent something genuinely different, not just another Chardonnay or Chardonnay clone.

More new from the front. As from March 1st 1995, Vega Sicilia's new sister bodega, Alión, a dozen kilometers (7,5 miles) further down-river in Padilla del Duero, has launched a new Tempranillo-based younger (by Vega Sicilia standards) red wine made from grapes from its own vineyards planted at the beginning of 1988, Alión 1991, another welcome addition to Europvin Iberia's selection of Spanish wines.

The Wines

This is all very fine, I hear the wine buff say, but what difference is Europvin Iberia going to make to my sipping and quaffing? What new delights am I going to be able to find on the racks of my favourite local wine store?

We asked the bodegas which make up the consortium to choose a couple of the wines from their list which you as customers can expect to find at your local vintners. These few brief tasting notes on the wines chosen are by way of whetting your appetite. Good drinking.

Two traditional red *reservas* from La Rioja Alta:

Viña Ardanza Reserva 1987. An intense, deep cherry-red wine, aromatic, delicate and elegantly spicy with a prolonged after-taste.

Gran Reserva 904, 1985. Ruby red with brickish tinges. A well-structured wine with a pleasingly vinous aroma which seems to bloom in the glass. Silky glycerene texture in the mouth with a long oaky tannic aftertaste.

Two thoroughbred cask-aged reds from Vega Sicilia:

Valbuena 5º año - Cosecha 1990. Deep cherry-red, aromas of pipe tobacco, ground coffee, spices. Dry, clean and fruity on the palate, with just a touch of oakiness.

Vega Sicilia Cosecha 1974, Unico. Ruby-red, brick-colored at the edges, with a balsamic oaky nose, subtle, complex, a thousand shades and hues of aroma and taste, constantly evolving in the glass - I give up, words fail me, wonderful!

Two classic old *solera* sherries from Emilio Lustau:

Lustau Solera Reserva "Los Arcos" Dry Amontillado sherry. A deep amber-gold mature Amontillado, a truly dry, hazel-nut, full taste. A superb aperitif - serve at room temperature, remember, don't chill it.

Lustau Solera Reserva Emilio Moscatel. A luscious, raisiny dessert wine redolent of the Muscat grape variety, made from grapes dried in the sun on rush matting. The perfect dessert wine -try pouring a little over vanilla ice-cream.

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.*

MY CULINARY JOTTINGS

We iniciate in this issue a new section that will gather the impressions of a real connoisseur in Spanish gastronomy. María-José Sevilla has been working ever since 1979 at the Spanish Commercial Office in London for the promotion of food and wine and has written several books and participated in TV programs on the BBC, on Spanish gastronomy.
As a result of her travels around Spain and her promotional work, María-José Sevilla will leave in these pages her most striking impressions over products, restaurants, wines, recipes, chefs etc..., every four months.

After the period of relative tranquility that follows Christmas it is time for thought, planning and above all tasting food and wine which is, at the end of the day what I like most about my job. Last year Graham Hines from the Sherry Institute of Spain in London and I embarked on a delicious adventure aiming to prove the capacity of Sherry as a wine to combine with foods from all over the world (see Spain Gourmetour no. 31).
This year all our efforts will focus on establishing which Spanish wines made with indigenous grape varieties are the perfect partners to some of the most traditional preserved foods from Spain.
Having selected and tasted the wines in London I had to go shopping for food, this time in my favourite hunting grounds, the streets of Madrid and Barcelona.
This was the list of the wines selected: Lagar de Cerveza 1993 Albariño, D.O. Rias Baixas, Tio Pepe, *fino* de Jerez, D.O. Jerez, C.V.N.E Monopole white Barrel Fermented 1993. D.O.G. Rioja, Campillo Crianza 1987, red. D.O. Navarra. Rich Old Oloroso 1796 from John Harvey and Sons D.O. Sherry and a superb Pedro Ximenez from Valdespino also D.O. Sherry.
As far as the foods were concerned I was looking for preserved fish and vegetables, cured meats, cheeses, and of course sweets; *Mojama*, anchovies in olive oil, tuna or mackerel in *escabeche* (soused) cured beef, Iberian ham, loin of pork, one or two different types of *chorizo* (cured sausage), cheeses, quince paste and *turrón* (nougat). *Mojama* brings back memories of Andalusia and the town of Ayamonte in Huelva established by the Phoenicians over 3,000 years ago for the exclusive production of dried tuna fish. *Mojama* is made from the best fillets taken from between the neck and dorsal fin of this magnificent fish, slightly salted and wind dried. It is produced in Andalusia and the Spain Levant following the original methods. *Mojama* has a succulent melting texture and a luxurious flavor. Thinly sliced it is traditionally served as a *tapa* in Southern Spain to accompany a chilled *copita* of fino Sherry. In the coastal villages to Alicante green salads are often prepared with sliced *mojama*, dressed with olive oil. You can find *Mojama* in the specialist shop, La Antigua, in Madrid's Plaza Mayor packed in 200 gr vacuum packs, under the name Etnomaya. Artisan wind dried *mojama* is produced by Fernando Castillo Picón, Etnomaya, S.A. Muelle Norte, s/n, Ayamonte, Huelva.
I can only compare the excitement that freshly landed anchovies will bring to any member of my family with the delight the small carefully filleted anchovies preserved in olive oil bring to *tapas* at home on Sundays before the roast. *Verdel* (Mackerel) in *escabeche* smells as delicious as it tastes and is quite wonderful on toasted home-baked bread. Once more I serve this type of appetizer with a glass of fino or a chilled oaky white Rioja. Both the anchovies and the mackerel are from Conservas Ortiz in the fishing village of Ondarroa in the Basque Country. Tuna *escabeche* is also very popular in Spain. One of the best recipes I have for a homemade and succulent *escabeche* was given to me by Fernando Córdoba, the chef patron of the Restaurant El Faro in Cádiz. You need 750 gr fresh tuna, 300 gr chopped onions, 1 head of garlic, sliced, 2 bay leaves, thyme, 500 ml olive oil, 200 ml sherry or white wine vinegar, salt, 3/4 bottle dry white wine and water as needed. Season the tuna with a little salt and set aside for two hours. Fry the onions and garlic with the bay leaves and the thyme and cook until the onions are tender and transparent, they should not be browned. Place the tuna fish in a deep casserole, add the onion *sofrito* and season with salt according to taste. Cover the ingredients with wine, vinegar and a little water to ensure that the tuna is totally covered and bring to the boil, reduce the heat and simmer until the tuna is very tender. Leaving the tuna in the liquid, allow to cool and set aside for at least 24 hours. To serve remove the tuna from the stock. Slice and dress with a little stock and serve with a purée of caramelized onions and a salad of leaves and roasted vegetables.

Even if I can find these products in the United Kingdom today, two or three cans of the fiery Piquillo Peppers from Navarre will be part of my heavy case when I return home from home. This time I have favoured El Navarrico, the trade mark of these distinguished little canned hot peppers that are roasted over a wood fire. They are a match for even a "powerful red" such as the Chivite Aniversario, and feel at ease with the character of a fino sherry. Protected by a Denomination of Origin these piquillo peppers are produced by **José Salcedo Soria, S.L. C/La Ribera, 31 San Adrián, Navarra Tel: (48) 670261**. I normally buy them in the **Gourmet shops of the El Corte Inglés, in Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia, Las Palmas, Málaga y León.**
I tried *Cecina*, the wind dried and smoked beef, a few years ago in the medieval city of Morella in Castellon for the first time. At first I was slightly prejudiced as I was comparing it with Serrano ham, but I soon realized that this was a very interesting product with a pleasant and slightly sweet distinctive taste, very different from cured ham. Above all I thought *Cecina* which is cured for 18 months, was ideal for the people who do not eat pork products. The *Cecina* I will be including in these tastings is not from the Spanish Levant but from the town of Astorga in Leon where a great selection of artisan cured meat and sausages are made following family recipes and traditions. The cured loin of pork, *lomo*, and the hot and sweet *chorizo* sausages I selected, are also produced by the same family.
Cecinas Pablo, S.A. 24700 Astorga, León, or in Madrid, Prada a tope, 32 Cuesta de San Vicente. Tel.: (1) 559 39 53.

After years of speculation and EEC restrictions, Iberian hams and other cured meat products have become available in the U.K. The handsome animals from the Iberian breeds live almost free in

the *dehesa* countryside feeding on acorns (see Spain Gourmetour no. 33). Iberian ham is very different from any other ham I have ever tasted. It has a buttery texture and a very long and complex taste. The flavorsome components of the fat, and the way this fat is marbled within the meat, are responsible for the unique flavor exclusive to one of the most exciting tastes I know. I can assure you that the quantities one can afford will make certain it will not break your diet. The Sierra de Candelario in the province of Salamanca is the area of production of the ham I am including here. I would recommend a shop in central **Madrid**: **Tanis in 20, Corredera Alta de San Pablo**, where Iberian products including "Guijuelo" cured hams from Extremadura and "Jabugo", the denomination from the Sierra de Aracena in Huelva, will be sliced to perfection by the Herranz family. Under the title "The Land of the Hundred Cheeses", *Spain Gourmetour* has been running several articles by Enric Canut, the Catalan who knows all about them. How often I find myself explaining that the variety and quality of the Spanish cheese culture is outstanding. According to tradition, geographic and climatic conditions in Spain cheeses are made with one or several types of milk: cows, goats and ewes. I needed at least one of each. A fresh 20 days old Tietar from Avila, a 12 months old superb 100% ewes milk Manchego Pasamontes from Ciudad Real, and artisan Mahon made from cows milk in the Isle of Minorca and a powerful the fino Sherry, the red wines and the oloroso sherry. In Madrid, you will, find them in Cuenllas: **Ferraz, 1 - 28008 Madrid, Tel.: (1) 547 31 33**

Membrillo brings back memories from my childhood. *Membrillo,* or quince paste, was one of my favourites for *merienda*, the (afternoon) after school snack, eaten with bread. It is also served for breakfast with fresh or cured cheeses. Commercial *membrillo* is light in color and very tasty, but this type of product has little to do with the artisan and natural *codonyat* (quince paste in the Catalan language). Lourdes Sifré i Metje prepares quince paste as her mother did, following a home recipe with fresh quinces, sugar, cinnamon and lemon peel. *Codonyat* can be purchased in **Tall a Tall Illa Diagonal, Avda. Diagonal, 557 08029 Barcelona and in Xarcuteria La Garriga C/Jacinto Benavente, 8 - 08017 Barcelona.**

Although in Spain *Turrón de Jijona*, the soft nutty nougat produced in the city of Jijona in Alicante is a traditional Christmas sweet, add a classic vanilla custard and it becomes the delicious *turrón* ice cream which I serve with a sauce of sultanas and Pedro Ximénez and a glass of the same Pedro Ximénez. This is the recipe for the *turrón* ice cream: You need 500 gr milk and 150 gr Spanish Jijona Turrón. For the sauce you need 6 tablespoons sultanas or golden raisins and 1/2 bottle Pedro Ximénez Sherry. Soak the sultanas in the Sherry for 2 days before making the ice cream. Prepare a custard for the ice cream with the milk, vanilla pod and egg yolks and chill. Whip the cream and stir into the cold custard. Blend with the *turrón* (which is very soft and slightly oily). Use an electric ice cream maker to prepare the ice cream. Serve small portions of ice cream and pour the sultana and Sherry sauce on top at the last minute.

On the 13th of February and during the annual Chefs Conference in London, fifty chefs decided on the merits of our food and wines. For the majority the Albariño and the white Rioja went well with the *escabeche*, the fresh cheese and the Mahon, while the fino was favoured with the *mojama*, the anchovies and the piquillo pepper. The reality is that the fino sherry was terrific with practically every single product including all the meats and cheeses. Of course this is not surprising for fino is the perfect accompaniment to *tapas*. The *cecina* loved the fino but it could also be served with the red wines. Fino and *Jamón Ibérico* were made for each other. The *lomo* and the sweet *chorizo* taste better with the Navarra red than the Rioja red and the *chorizo picante* with the white wines and with the Rioja red. With the very strong Monte Enebro only the fruity red from Navarra had a chance.

All the cheeses and the *membrillo* were almost perfect with the outstanding oloroso. The ice cream and the Pedro Ximénez became the final treat. I wonder what we will be tasting next year.

MEDITERRANEAN DIET

Fresh Artichokes with Sherry
(Alcachofas con jerez)

SERVES 6:
24 small and tender artichokes
2 kg fresh broad beans
2 onions
6 garlic cloves
A few leaves of fresh mint
8 saffron stigmas
2 copitas or sherry glasses of Finc
Olive oil
1/2 liter chicken stock
2 spoonfuls flour

Peel the artichokes down to just the hearts. Rub with lemon to avoid discoloring the vegetable. Blanch in boiling water until tender. In a different pot with boiling water do the same with the tender broad beans. Peel all the beans once they are cooked. Drain and set aside both vegetables.

Pound a few of the beans into the Sherry with the saffron, in a mortar and pestle. Sauté the onions and garlic in olive oil, add the artichokes, mint, flour and wine mixture. Cover with the stock and boil until the liquid is reduced.

Serve very hot.

Salad of grilled Kingprawns with Couscous
(Ensalada de langostinos a la plancha al couscous)

SERVES 6:
24 kingprawn tails
400 gr couscous already steamed
50 gr sultanas
50 gr pine nuts
1 onion, finely chopped
2 green peppers, finely chopped
Olive oil

FOR THE SAUCE
2 fresh tomatoes
250 ml virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon honey
The juice of 1 lemon
Salt and pepper

Fry the onions and the peppers until tender but do not allow the onion to brown over.

Add the dried fruits and the steamed couscous and sauté all together.

Emulsify the tomato pulp, honey, lemon juice and olive ol until a light sauce has been achieved. Sieve. Sauté the kingprawn tails in a little olive oil and a dash of lemon juice. Fernando Córdoba uses freshly blanched chard leaves to cover each tail in plating each dish.

To serve it, place a metal open ring on top of each plate and fill with the couscous mixture. Remove the ring and carefully place the kingprawn tails around the grains. Pour a little sauce over each plate and decorate with a little freshly ground red peppercorns and dried parsley.

Fernando often uses a very personal way to prepare the couscous grains without having to use a couscoussiere. First he fries the couscous in a little olive oil until the grains are lightly colored. Next he gradually adds vegetable stock until the grains are cooked to the desired consistency.

Filets of Red Mullet with Alboronía and Caramelized Garlic *(Filetes de salmonetes con alboronía y ajo caramelizado)*

FOR THE ALBORONIA
1/4 gr Courgettes, chopped in finely diced squares
1/4 gr Aubergines, chopped in small squares
1/4 gr pumpkin, peeled and chopped
3 red peppers, chopped
1 onion, chopped
75 ml olive oil
Salt
A little fresh coriander
1/2 liter fresh water

FOR THE CARAMELISED GARLIC
12 cloves of garlic
Olive oil
Sherry vinegar
Dried parsley
A pinch of dried thyme
1 teaspoon sweet paprika.

FOR THE FISH
12 fillets or red mullet, deboned but with the skin.

To prepare the *alboronía* or vegetable salad sauté all the vegetables in olive oil, cover with the water, season with salt. Bring to boil and cook until all the water has evaporated. Meanwhile blanch the garlic clove in boiling water, drain. Next fry the cloves of garlic in plenty of olive oil until golden. Remove the garlic and in the same oil add two tablespoons of sherry vinegar and two or three tablespoons of water or fish stock if available. Add the parsley, thyme, and paprika and bring to boil. They will be ready. Place the fish on a hot plate or flat iron pan with a drop of oil, season with a little salt and cook for one or two minutes.

On each plate, place a few tablespoons of *alboronía* with the fish on top and some garlic around it, and cover with a sauce. Fernando Córdoba serves this dish with small cauliflower timbales.

Dried Figs with Ricotta and Red Wine Sauce *(Higos secos con requesón y salsa de vino tinto)*

Serves 6:
24 dried figs
3/4 bottle red wine
1 cinnamon stick
100 gr sugar
3 cloves
1/2 vanilla pod
Caramelized orange peel

FOR THE FILLING
400 gr *ricotta*
The juice of 1 lemon
1 carton double cream

Boil the figs with the cinammon, vanilla pod, cloves, wine and sugar until the wine has almost boiled down to a syrupy consistency, about 20 minutes. Leave to cool. To prepare the filling make a cream with the ricotta, lemon juice, sugar and double cream. Fill each fig with the *ricotta* cream and serve with the wine sauce and dress with caramelized orange peel.

SAFFRON

Here is a selection of international and Spanish recipes where saffron is a basic ingredient.

Recipes from Around the World

Mussel soup with Saffron *(Soupe de moules saffranée)*

Saffron was grown in France from the 16th century and worked its way into the cooking of the growing areas in the Gratinais and around Albi (Provence). One of the most unusual recipes in which it's used is *le mourtayrol,* a mixed meat *pot-au-feu* with bread-thickened saffroned juices. But it's most closely associated with southern fish soups, such as *bouillabaisse* and *zéphir,* and mussel dishes. Originally from La Côte d'Or restaurant in Saulieu, Burgundy, this is an excellent soup with easily found ingredients.

SERVES 4-6:

1.25 kg mussels
350 gr sole and John Dory bones (or other bones, but not from oily fish)
1 tbsp olive oil
1.25 liters water
1 bouquet garni
1 large carrot, peeled
2 onions , skinned
1 stick of celery, trimmed
2 tsp creme fraiche
6-8 saffron threads
Salt
Freshly ground white pepper

Brown the fish bones for 5 minutes in half the oil. Then add the water to the pan, put in the bouquet garni, cover and simmer for 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, dice the vegetables and sauté for a few minutes on all sides in a wide saucepan with the rest of the oil until golden. Strain the fish stock through a fine sieve over the vegetables. Bring to the boil and simmer over a gentle heat for 15-20 minutes.

Scrub the mussels, discarding any opened shells and heat them in a non-stick pan, shaking it to open them quickly and all at the same time. Discard the shells (and any mussels that remain closed) and reserve the juice, which should be strained and added to the stock.

Put a few mussels in each heated soup plate. Stir the creme fraiche and the saffron into the soup, and taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Pour it over the mussels and serve.

Rissotto with Saffron and Parmesan *(Rissotto alla Milanese)*

Saffron, or *zafferano,* grows wild in Italy and has been used in cooking since Roman times. It was also cultivated around L'Aquita in the Abruzzi, to the east of Rome, but production has dropped dramatically from over 4,000 kilos to a mere twenty since the beginning of this century. It is the key ingredient in a classic *rissotto alla Milanese,* which makes the most of saffron's subtleties. This recipe comes from Silvia Fadda, who is a singer and excellent home cook in Rome. Quantities are for a main course, as the *rissotto* is eaten in Italy.

SERVES 4:

Beef marrow from 2 ox-bones
3 good tbsp butter or olive oil
1 sweet onion, thinly sliced
4 small fistfuls fine-quality short-grain rice per person
2 glassfuls of white wine
About 1.5 l mixed chicken and beef stock, clarified with an egg white
40 saffron threads
100 gr Parmesan cheese, grated

Dissolve the beef marrow in one spoonful of butter or olive oil, add the thinly sliced onion and sauté gently till it is soft but not browned. Add the remaining butter and then the rice itself, stirring it round in the fat till it is glossy. Meanwhile, heat the chicken and beef stock.

Add the wine to the rice and cook, stirring, until it has evaporated. Add several cupfuls of stock, enough to cover the rice and start cooking. Keep adding stock as the pan dries out, stirring gently.

Meanwhile, lightly toast and pulverize the saffron. Add it with the last batch of stock and while there is liquid, stir in the grated Parmesan cheese. Finish cooking to a creamy consistency and serve. Traditionally this would accompany osso bucco.

Lamb in Spiced Saffron-milk gravy *(Khashir Rezala)*

Saffron is widely grown in India, but consumption is so great that large quantities are imported. Most is used outside the home in sweet-shops for making *kheer* and *rasmalai*, or for catering for large numbers at festivals and in temples. But there are some dishes from home-cooking which call for saffron rather than turmeric. One is this Muslim kid or lamb stew with a pale yellow gravy, which comes from Chitrita Bannerjee's book *Life and Food in Bengal*.

SERVES 8:

2 kg kid or lamb, cut into cubes
2 tbsp ground ginger
3 tsp ground garlic
5-6 whole cardamoms
5-6 pieces of cinnamon, each 2.5 cm (1 in.) long
250 gr natural yogurt
1 tbsp sugar
3 tsp salt
250 ml ghee
1/2 tsp saffron threads
250 ml warm whole milk
20 whole fresh bird's-eye green or ripe, red chillis (adjust quantities and remove seeds according to taste).

Toss the lamb with the spices, seasoning, yogurt and ghee and leave to cook in a covered pot over a low flame for half an hour. Remove the lid, stir the meat well and cover again until the moisture has evaporated and the ghee is visible. Soak the saffron briefly in the warm milk and pour it over the meat. Add the chillis, reduce the heat to a minimum and leave the meat tightly covered for about half an hour before it is ready to serve.

Navy Bean Salad in Saffron Vinaigrette

Richard Stephens, American-born choreographer and chef, opened his restaurant La Gamella in Madrid in 1982. His cooking style crosses gastronomic frontiers: while he uses almost exclusively Spanish produce, his dishes reflect his mid-western American background, his French cooking techniques and travels around Spain. So his uses for saffron range from formal French - in a brioche served with *foie gras* - to a more rustic dish of quails braised with lentils. He stresses that in this recipe an extra-virgin olive oil drowns out the saffron; it is best to choose one that is not too strong or fruity.

SERVES 6:

1.2 kg cooked haricot or navy beans
1/2 large sweet red pepper, diced
1/2 green pepper, diced
1 tbsp finely chopped sweet onion
1 tbsp diced cucumber flesh (without skin or seeds)
Salt

FOR THE VINAIGRETTE:

12 saffron threads
1-2 tbsp white wine
120 ml olive oil
1 tsp sherry vinegar
Salt and pepper

If you are cooking the beans, leave them to soak overnight in water. Bring to the boil and simmer gently in water for 1-2 hours, or until tender. Salt them, drain well and leave to cool.

To make the Vinaigrette, first heat the white wine. Crumble or pound the saffron into it, in a cup or a spoon, and leave to sit for 5-10 minutes. Mix with the olive oil and sherry vinegar. Check the seasoning.

Meanwhile, prepare the vegetables. Toss them with the Vinaigrette and leave for two hours for the flavors to mix. Then toss with the beans as well and leave for 25 minutes before serving at room temperature. The salad will develop a creamy yellow tinge. If you are feeling extravagant, you can finish off the salad by crumbling one or two threads of lightly toasted saffron on top.

Lucia's Cats *(Lusse-Katter)*

Sweden is one of the few countries where saffron bread is still baked for a big national festival. Early before sunrise on St Lucia's day, the 13th of December, families wake to eat these small saffron breads and ginger biscuits with spiced red-wine *glogg*. Traditionally, the bread is carried in by a girl wearing a long white nightgown, red sash and crown of candles (these days usually electric!). The currants, or eyes in the head of each 'cat', symbolize Saint Lucia having her eyes burnt out. I have based this recipe on the dough in George and Celia Scurfield's reliable book of *Home Baking*.

MAKES ABOUT 12 CATS, OR ONE 450-GR LOAF

250 gr flour
150 ml warm milk
25 gr fresh yeast
15-20 saffron threads
25 gr butter
50 gr sugar
1 egg
1 desertspoon ground almonds
30 gr seedless raisins, plumped in water or rum

Dissolve the yeast in half the warm milk and mix in enough of the flour to make a thin paste. Leave to rise in a warm place for 30 minutes.

Dry off the saffron for 5-10 minutes in a cool oven. Pound it with a little sugar. Then stir in in with the rest of the milk, and add it to the yeast mixture. Whisk the butter, warm and liquid but not too hot, with the egg and the rest of the sugar, then work this into the saffron-yeast mixture. Gradually beat in the flour, kneading briskly until you have a smooth soft yellow dough. Finally, knead in the ground almonds.

Cover with a cloth and leave to rise in a warm place for 1´ hours or until the dough has doubled in size. Knock the dough down and knead for a few minutes.

To make the cats, roll the dough out into a long, fat rope and divide into bun-size portions. Gather a small part of each into a round ball - the cat's head - shape the rest into an S-shaped body and place a currant, or eye, in the centre of each head. Prove on a lightly floured baking sheet for about 30 minutes. Bake for 15-20 minutes in a fairly hot oven (370º-400º F, 190ºC, mark 5).

The dough can also be made into a plaited loaf. Divide it into three equal portions, roll each out into a long, thin strand and plait. You can bring out the golden color by brushing the dough with a beaten egg glaze. Bake for 20-30 minutes.

Spanish Recipes

Wild Mushroom Soup *(Sopa de Bolets)*

An excellent recipe for making a few wild mushrooms go a long way. Catalans are expert mushroom hunters; if you cannot find the *chanterelles* and fairy-ring mushrooms, others will do. The saffron is added in a *picada,* or pounded paste of garlic and almonds (other times with bread and other flavorings too), which both thickens and ties up the flavors. Ideally, the *picada* should be made in a mortar, not a processor, so it's not too smooth. The recipe comes from Josep Lladonosa i Giró's recently republished *El Gran Libro de la Cocina Catalana.*

SERVES 6:
200 gr fairy-ring mushrooms
(Marismius oreades)
100 gr chanterelles
200 ml olive oil
2 medium sized onions
6 green garlic shoots,
or equivalent jarred
4 ripe tomatoes
3 liters good chicken stock
A few slices rough country bread

FOR THE *PICADA:*
2 cloves of garlic
8-10 saffron threads
200 gr toasted almonds
Salt

Cut the stalks from the funghi and wash them, changing the water two or three times to be sure you clean off all the earth. Cut the larger ones into pieces, so they are more or less the same size as the small ones. Put the mushrooms in a frying pan with a little oil, so that they release all their water. Drain well.

Put a large pan over slow heat, add the rest of the oil, the finely chopped onion and the green garlic cut into small pieces. Sauté until the onion begins to turn gold, add the tomatoes -also chopped - and leave to sauté for 8 minutes. Then add the mushrooms and the chicken stock. When the soup comes to the boil, add the bread slices and leave to simmer for 15 minutes.

Make a *picada* with the garlic, saffron and almonds, dilute with a little of the soup liquid and return to the pan. Leave to cook for another 5 minutes and check the salt.

Swordfish with Potatoes *(Picos de pez espada con Patatas)*

This unusual Murcian recipe for a fish which is usually simply grilled comes from *Ranchos de a bordo,* a book of fishermen's dishes published by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. It should be made with the *picos,* cut from the fish's head, which has a strong oily flavor, but any cut of swordfish will work well. Since there's no garlic or tomato in this, the saffron shows up well.

SERVES 4-6:
2 large sweet onions, skinned
2 green peppers, seeded
Olive oil, for frying
1 kg potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks
1.5 kg swordfish
6-9 threads of saffron
Salt
250 gr thin vermicelli noodles

Chop the onion and the pepper into small pieces. Heat a little olive oil in an earthenware or other flameproof casserole and sauté the onion and pepper gently. When they are soft, add the potatoes chunks, the fish and the salt. Pound the saffron, sprinkle it over everything and cover with water.

Leave to cook for a quarter of an hour and then add the noodles, adding more hot water if necessary to stop the dish drying out. Cook everything together for another fifteen minutes.

Rice with Swiss Chard *(Arroz con Bledes)*

'When there's a fiesta, the poor
who find life rather hard,
cook a rice with little flags
(I mean, with leaves of chard).'

This is one of the most popular Valencian rice dishes, yet little known outside the region. Served slightly soupy, it was originally made with snails; you can add a little salt-cod instead if you like.

SERVES 4-6:

250 gr dry white haricot beans
450 gr Swiss chard, washed and roughly chopped
1 small bay leaf
200 ml olive oil
1 large onion, skinned and chopped
1 large ripe tomato
3-4 cloves of garlic
Fresh parsley leaves, finely chopped
1 tsp sweet paprika, or 1 dried pepper
400 gr rice
40 saffron threads
Stock
Salt

Put the beans to soak in plenty of cold water overnight or for 12 hours. Drain and cook with fresh water in a deep saucepan. Halfway through, add the Swiss chard, cleaned and roughly cut into pieces. Add salt and a small bay leaf, cover the saucepan and cook until everything is tender. Drain the beans, reserving double the volume of rice in bean stock. Or, for a wetter rice, measure out triple the volume (top up with water if necessary).

Meanwhile, fry the tomato, onion, garlic and parsley in the olive oil and, off the heat, add a teaspoonful of paprika. Pour this *refrito*, which the original recipe says should be 'abundant ... neither too scarce nor too oily', into the beans, chard and measured stock.

Stir everything well and check the salt. When it comes to the boil, add the rice and saffron and cook over lively heat (if you like, you can finish it off in the oven). Eighteen minutes is enough for the rice.

Chicken Pepitoria *(Gallina Pepitoria)*

This braised chicken, which can be found in the whole of the *meseta* including the saffron-growing regions, used to be served at weddings feasts. This version comes from Santa Olalla, in Toledo province. There are more sophisticated versions cooked in wine to which hard-boiled egg, pine kernels and cured ham can be added.

SERVES 6-8:

2 slices of bread
About 2 tbsp olive oil
1-2 tbsp red wine vinegar
1 onion, peeled and cut into chunks
1 head of garlic, skinned
2 chicken livers
1 farmhouse chicken, preferably a mature bird, cleaned, skinned and jointed
1 handful of peeled raw almonds
Salt
Black peppercorns
2 large pinches (about 30 strands) saffron
Fresh parsley

Fry the bread slices in olive oil and moisten them with the vinegar. In the same oil, fry the onion, the garlic cloves and the chicken livers. Remove them from the pan. Reduce everything you have fried to a thick purée in a food-processor, blender or by passing it through a pasapure.

Cut up the chicken and fry it, draining the pieces well. Choose a large

earthenware or other flameproof casserole and put the chicken and sauce in it. Fry them together a little.

Pound the almonds and add to the chicken. Pound together some black peppercorns, saffron and parsley, dissolve in a little hot water and add to the chicken. Add enough water to just cover, season to taste with salt and simmer gently until the chicken is tender.

Saffron Ice-Cream
(Helado de Azafrán)

Jean Miguel López Castanier, chef-proprietor of the Taberna de Liria in Madrid, comes to cooking with a hybrid Mediterranean eye. His mother is French and he started his professional life in the Côte d'Azur's kitchens. Lamenting the limited uses to which saffron is now put in Spanish kitchens, especially in sweet things, he plays with it in very varied ways on his own changing menus. Puddings have included pumpkin and saffron sponge-cake, quince compote with saffron and red wine, and this golden ice-cream. I have used his wording for the recipe.

SERVES 4-6:

5 gr of thread saffron
125 gr caster sugar
3 eggs
1/4 liter whipping or double cream

Put the saffron in a dry pan. With nothing else in it. This goes into a warmed oven at 200ºC/400ºF/gras mark 6 for 2 minutes. Then the toasted saffron goes into a mortar and is pounded.

Whip the cream. Then, beat up the whole eggs, as for a *sabayon* or Genoese sponge. Put the sugar in a pan with a little water. To this, add the saffron. And put it over the heat, as if to make a caramel. Before it begins to turn gold, add the beaten eggs and, working quickly, the whipped cream. Then place it in the freezer for at least 4 hours, or in an ice-cream maker, following the manufacturers' instructions.

SERRANO HAM

Serrano Ham with Crusty Bread
(Jamón serrano con pan de pueblo)

SERVES 6:

300 gr thinly sliced the serrano ham
150 gr crusty bread
2 tripe tomatoes
2 cloves fresh garlic
Olive oil

Cut the serrano ham into very thin slices. Lightly toast sliced bread. Rub the bread slices with garlic and ripe tomato and sprinkle with olive oil. Place the serrano ham slices on bread, and serve.

RECIPES

Fig's with Serrano Ham *(Higos con jamón serrano)*

SERVES 6:

6 slices of serrano ham, large but thinly sliced.
24 figs
1 kiwi
1 tbsp of olive oil
1 sherry of vinegar
A pinch of salt

Refrigerate the figs for a few hours. Take them out and peel them carefully with a sharpened knife.

Divide a ham slice into three strips lengthwise and decorate a plate with them by making flowers or curls. Repeat with all 6 plates. Place a fig in the centre of each flower.

Cut a cross in the top of each fig. Mix the oil, vinegar and salt; season each ham and fig with three or four drops of the dressing.

Canapés of Serrano Ham and Fried Oranges Segments *(Canapés de jamón serrano con gajos de naranja fritos)*

SERVES 6:

200 gr of serrano ham in small, thin slices
1 orange
20 salted crackers
1 cooked eggwhite, diced
Chives
1 beaten egg
Flour
Olive oil
6 garden tomatoes

Peel the orange and separate the segments. Dust with flour and dip in the beaten egg; deep fry them. Drain on absorbent kitchen paper and cut in half.

Put a piece of ham and a piece of orange on each cracker. Sprinkle with chives and some of the diced egg white. Add a piece of tomato to each canapé and serve.

Serrano Ham with Scrambled Eggs and Mushrooms *(Jamón serrano con huevos revueltos y champiñones)*

SERVES 6:

150 gr. serrano ham cubed
7 eggs, beaten
150 gr mushrooms, sliced
4 tbsp olive oil
Small handful of fresh parsley

Sauté the serrano ham and mushrooms in the olive oil at a high temperature in a large frying pan. Add parsley to the beaten eggs and pour mixture into the frying pan. Lower cooking temperature and stir until done.

Serve on a plate and garnish with fried bread.

Asparagus with Serrano Ham *(Jamón serrano con espárragos)*

SERVES 6:

1 tin large asparagus.
1 slice Consortium serrano ham per asparagus
Butter, flour and milk for white sauce
Grated emmenthal (swiss) cheese
Vegetables for garnish

Drain asparagus thoroughly. Wrap each asparagus with a slice of serrano ham. Prepare white sauce. Place asparagus, wrapped in ham, into a baking dish. Pour white sauce over asparagus, sprinkle with cheese and place in oven under grill until golden. Serve garnished with vegetables.

ASPARAGUS

Cold White Asparagus Gazpacho Soup *(Gazpacho blanco de espárragos)*

SERVES 4:

1/2 kg peeled white asparagus
2 liters light chicken stock or water
1 orange, juiced
75 gr stale bread
1 clove garlic
3 tbsp olive oil
4 tbsp sherry vinegar
Salt
Minced green onions or
Green garlics (ajetes)

Cut 4-5 cm (1,6 inches) of the tips from the stalks. Slice the tips thinly and cook in boiling water for 2 minutes. Drain and rinse in cold water. Drain and reserve. Cut the stalks into chunks. Put them to cook in the 2 liters of stock or water with the orange juice. Cook, uncovered, until they are very tender, about 40 minutes. Add the bread to the liquid and let it soak until softened. Puré the asparagus and bread in a blender or processor with the garlic. Add the olive oil and vinegar. Stir the puré into the remaining liquid and season to taste with salt. Chill the gazpacho. To serve, ladle the soup into bowls and garnish with the reserved tips and a sprinkling of minced green onions or garlics.

Tomato Salad with White Asparagus *(Pipirrana con espárragos blancos)*

SERVES 4:

300 gr peeled white asparagus
2 tomatoes
2 green onions (or 1/2 onion)
1 small green pepper
1 clove garlic, minced
1 tbsp chopped parsley
50 gr serrano ham, chopped
1 hard-cooked egg, chopped
3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp Sherry vinegar
Salt to taste

Cut the asparagus crosswise into pieces (approx. 1 cm or 0,4 inches) and cook in boiling water for 5 minutes. Drain and refresh in cold water. Chop the tomatoes, green onions and green pepper and combine in a bowl with the minced garlic, chopped parsley, chopped ham and chopped egg. Add the drained asparagus. Spoon over the olive oil and vinegar and salt to taste. Combine the salad and leave to marinate at least 1 hour before serving.

Asparagus in Avocado Sauce *(Espárragos en salsa de aguacate)*

SERVES 4:

1 kg fresh blanched (white) asparagus, peeled
Pinch of sugar
1 avocado
150 gr butter
2 egg yolks
1 tbsp. cold water
Juice of 1 lemon
Salt and white pepper

Cook the asparagus for 15-20 minutes in a saucepan with a little salted water, 20 gr butter and a pinch of sugar. Drain the asparagus and keep them warm.

Melt the rest of the butter and leave to cool.

In a bain-marie, beat the water, egg yolks, lemon juice and salt with a spatula until the sauce becomes frothy. Gradually add the melted butter. Remove from the bain-marie and season with salt and pepper.

Cut the avocado in half and remove the stone. Scoop out the flesh with a spoon, squeeze the lemon juice and beat the mixture until a smooth cream is obtained. Add it to the butter sauce and season with a pinch of sugar and pepper. Serve the avocado sauce with the asparagus.

RECIPES

White Asparagus in Basque Style *(Espárragos blancos al estilo vasco)*

SERVES 4:

650 gr peeled asparagus
250 gr clams
5 tbsp olive oil
3 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
1 tbsp flour
150 ml white wine
100 gr peeled shrimp
2 tbsp cooked peas
Salt to taste
2 tbsp chopped parsley
1 hard-cooked egg, sliced

Cut the asparagus stalks into thirds and cook in boiling water for 5 minutes. Drain, saving the liquid. Add 1 cup of the asparagus liquid to the clams in a small pan. Cover and steam them open. Reserve. (If desired, clams can be shucked and shells discarded, but this is not necessary.) In an earthenware casserole heat the oil and add the chopped garlic. Fry for a minute, then add the pieces of asparagus. Turn them in the oil for a few minutes, then sprinkle them with the flour. Add the wine and the strained liquid from the clams. Tilt the casserole back and forth to combine or stir gently with a wooden spoon. Add the peeled prawns and peas and salt to taste and cook for 15 minutes, adding additional asparagus water if sauce seems too thick. Immediately before serving from the same casserole, add the clams, sprinkle with chopped parsley and sliced egg.

Andalusian Style Asparagus Casserole (Cazuela de espárragos a la andaluza)

SERVES 4:

400 gr peeled asparagus
3 tbsp olive oil
3 cloves garlic
2 slices bread, crusts removed
1/4 tsp saffron
1/2 tsp paprika
8 black peppercorns
1/2 tsp salt
2 tbsp sherry vinegar
4 eggs
200 ml milk

Cut the asparagus crosswise into pieces of 4-5 cm (about 2 inches). Cook them and drain, setting aside the liquid. In a frying pan or earthenware casserole, fry the peeled garlics and slices of bread until golden. Remove them. In the same oil fry the drained asparagus. In a mortar, blender or processor crush the saffron, paprika, peppercorns and salt with the fried garlic and fried bread. Dilute with 1 cup of the liquid. Stir this mixture into the asparagus with the vinegar and cook another few minutes, adding additional liquid if sauce is too thick. Beat the eggs and combine with the milk and a pinch of salt. Pour the eggs over the top of the asparagus in the casserole (or, divide the asparagus and eggs among four small oven ramekins) and bake in a preheated medium oven until the egg mixture is set, about 30 minutes. Serve hot. You can prepare it in individual ramekins.

Scrambled Eggs With Asparagus and Green Garlic *(Revuelto de espárragos y ajetes)*

FOR EACH SERVING:

150 gr cooked asparagus (3 spears)
1 heaping tbsp of minced green garlic
2 tbsp of olive oil
2 eggs

Ajetes are skinny shoots of green garlic, which come into the market in springtime, along with asparagus. If not available, substitute green onion plus a half-clove of minced garlic.

Sauté the minced garlic in the oil. Add the cooked asparagus, cut into short pieces. Stir in the eggs beaten with a pinch of salt. Stir on a low heat until the eggs are soft-set. Serve hot with a sprinkling of cayenne and pieces of fried bread. Serve hot with a sprinkling of cayenne and pieces of fried bread.

NOTE: Asparagus recipes, except "Asparagus in Avocado Sauce", were developed especially for SPAIN GOURMETOUR by Janet Mendel.

GLOSSARY

WINE ***Crianza***. This term is reserved for wines aged in the wood and bottle for at least 2 years, 6 months of which must be in oak casks.

Reserva. There are two types of standard for the use of this designation. Red wines must age for a minimum of 36 months in the wood and bottle, at least 12 of them in oak casks. For rosé and white wines, the minimum period is 24 months, 6 of them in oak casks.

Gran Reserva. This term is used exclusively for red and claret wines that have aged for at least 24 months in oak casks followed by at least 36 months in the bottle. For white and rosé wines, the minimum period is 48 months of which a minimum of 6 months must be in the wood.

In all cases, the barrels must be made of oak and must have a maximum capacity of 1,000 liters.

SHERRY The system used in Jerez for blending wines is known as *criaderas y solera*. The butts, or *botas*, are arranged in rows up to three high, the bottom row being called the *solera*. The upper rows are called the *criaderas*, that nearest the *solera* being the first *criadera*, the next one up the second *criadera*, etc.

When the time comes for bottling, about one third of the wine from each of the *solera* barrels is removed. Then one third of the wine in the first *criadera* is drawn off, blended in an operation called *cabeceo* and added to the *solera*. The process is then repeated with the second *criadera*.

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

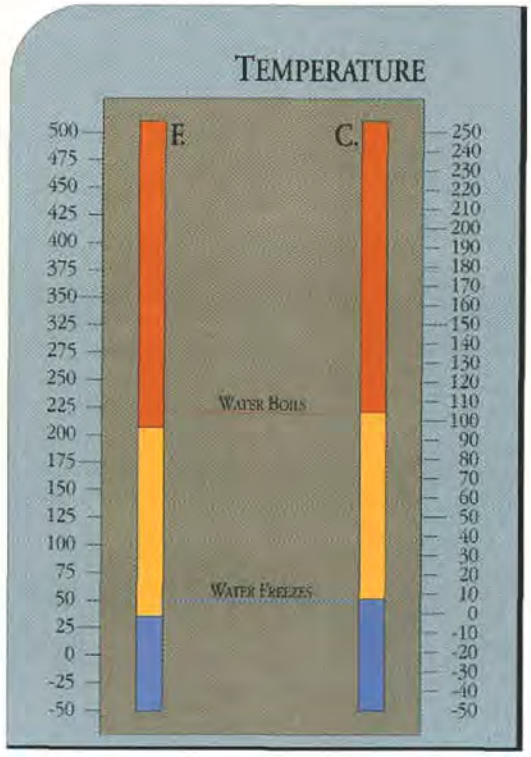
10 millilitres = 2 teaspoons
50 millilitres = 3 tablespoons
100 millilitres = 3 1/2 ounces
250 millilitres = 1 cup + 1 tablespoon
500 millilitres = 1 pint + 2 tablespoons
1 litre = 1 quart + 3 tablespoons
1 teaspoon = 5 millilitres
1 tablespoon = 15 millilitres
1 ounce = 30 millilitres
1 cup = 235 millilitres
1 pint = 475 millilitres
1 quart = 950 litres
1 gallon = 3 3/4 litres

Weight
METRIC/OUNCES & POUNDS

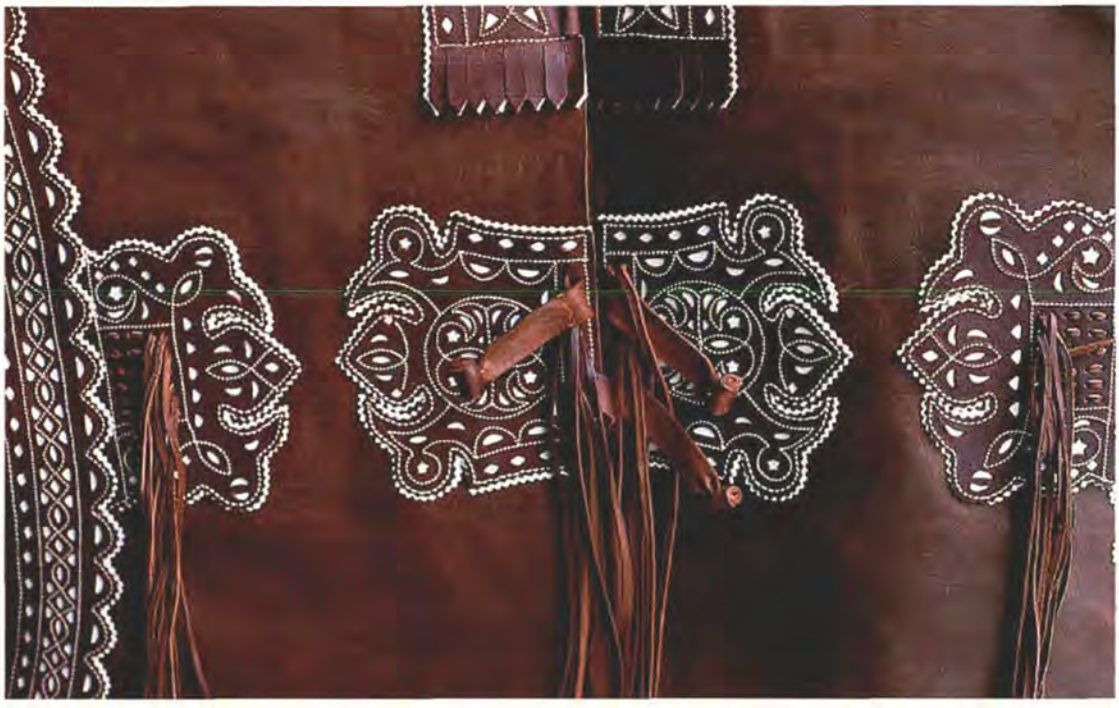
10 grams = 1/3 ounce
50 grams = 1 3/4 ounces
100 grams = 3 1/2 ounces
250 grams = 8 3/4 ounces
500 grams = 1 pound + 1 1/2 ounces
1 kilo = 2 pounds + 3 1/4 ounces
1/2 ounce = 14 grams
1 ounce = 28 grams
1/4 pound = 110 grams
1/2 pound = 230 grams
1 pound = 450 grams

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



FIT FOR ROYALTY
SADDLERY FROM THE CRAFTSMEN OF JEREZ



JUAN RAMON YUSTE/ICEX

Constructing a well-crafted saddle can take a month of skilled work. If that skill is backed by a century of experience and knowledge, the results can be fit for royalty. For that reason many a keen equestrian beats a path to a small workshop in unpretentious premises in the centre of Jerez de la Frontera.

Guarnicionería Duarte has been producing saddles and bridles and harness for carriage horses ever since Miguel Duarte Pérez founded the business in Calle Lancería at least a century ago - the exact date is not sure but it was most probably 1889. In a city which reveres fine horses only a little less than fine wine, he soon gained famed for his craftsmanship and attracted illustrious clients.

Later his son Francisco and daughter Charo succeeded him. Charo now runs the business while the third generation of Duartes, María de los Angeles, Francisco's daughter, and Rosa Mari, his daughter-in-law, has also entered the firm.

"Everything is made by hand in the traditional way. Our customers want the best," comments Charo. "Horses have always been part of my life. I no longer ride but I had my own horse and a carriage and always took part in the Jerez fair." Among the many pictures on her office wall is a large framed certificate, dated 1923, declaring the Duartes official suppliers of harness to Spain's royal household. That appointment came after King Alfonso XIII ordered a Duarte saddle and was suitably impressed.

A more recent royal client was Britain's Queen Elizabeth who in 1988 ordered horse collars in the colorfully-decorated Andalusian style for six carriage horses. And in 1993 the city of Jerez presented the Infanta Elena, the Spanish king's elder daughter, with a *montura vaquera* (the high-backed cowboy-type Spanish saddle, as opposed to the lighter English style).

Leading sherry families, the Real Escuela Andaluza del Arte Ecuestre, and horse-lovers from as far afield as Mexico, Nicaragua, and Venezuela order their gear from the Duarte workshop.

Bull or cowhide is used for harness while calfskin is employed in *zajones* (breeches or chaps) because it is finer and more flexible. Saddles call for all the leatherworker's skills. To construct a Spanish saddle, hay is packed into a canvas lining around a steel framework and bull hide sewn over it to give strength. A pad filled with horse hair cushions the saddle where it touches the horse's back. A distinctive touch may be added by decorating the pommel and side-flaps with a dotted pattern in leather or silk.

Holding a length of harness in a wooden clamp, Rafael González neatly sews it with strong linen thread, stitch by stitch. He remarks that he is the junior member of the staff, having worked here for a mere 23 years: "It's like a family, working together with people you know so well. Each job is different because you have to consult with clients to fit the harness exactly to their needs. I started at 13 and the truth is you never stop learning."

David Baird


San Miguel
The Spanish beer.

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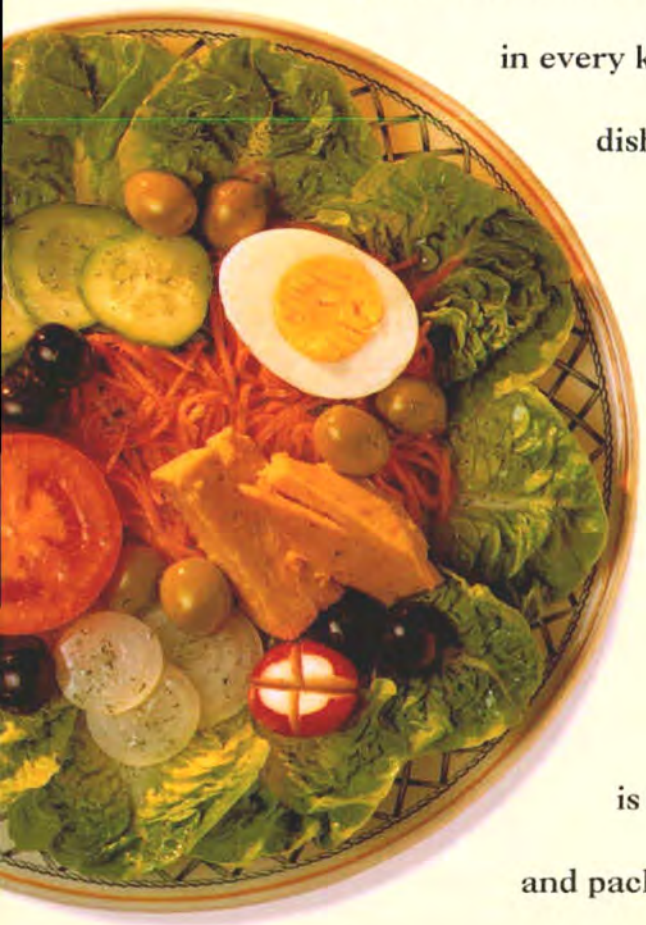

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