

FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

# SPAIN

G O U R M E T O U R



TAPAS EXPRESS. SPEEDY TAPAS FROM THE SPANISH LARDER • BIERZO. HIDDEN TREASURES • WHAT'S NEW? AN EXPLORATION OF SPAIN'S NEW HARVEST OF BODEGAS, WINEMAKERS AND TOP QUALITY WINES

No. 37 SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 1995

SPAIN GOURMETOUR

US \$5



*La Quinta Esencia Del Fino*



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28004 Madrid

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**D.L.**

M. 45.307 - 1990

**ISSN**

0214-2937

**Color Separations**

Progreso Gráfico

Recoletos, 12

28001 Madrid

**Printed in Spain**

Raycar, S.A.

Matilde Hernández, 27

28019 Madrid

**COVER**

Photography: A. de Benito

Still Life: Menchu Artime

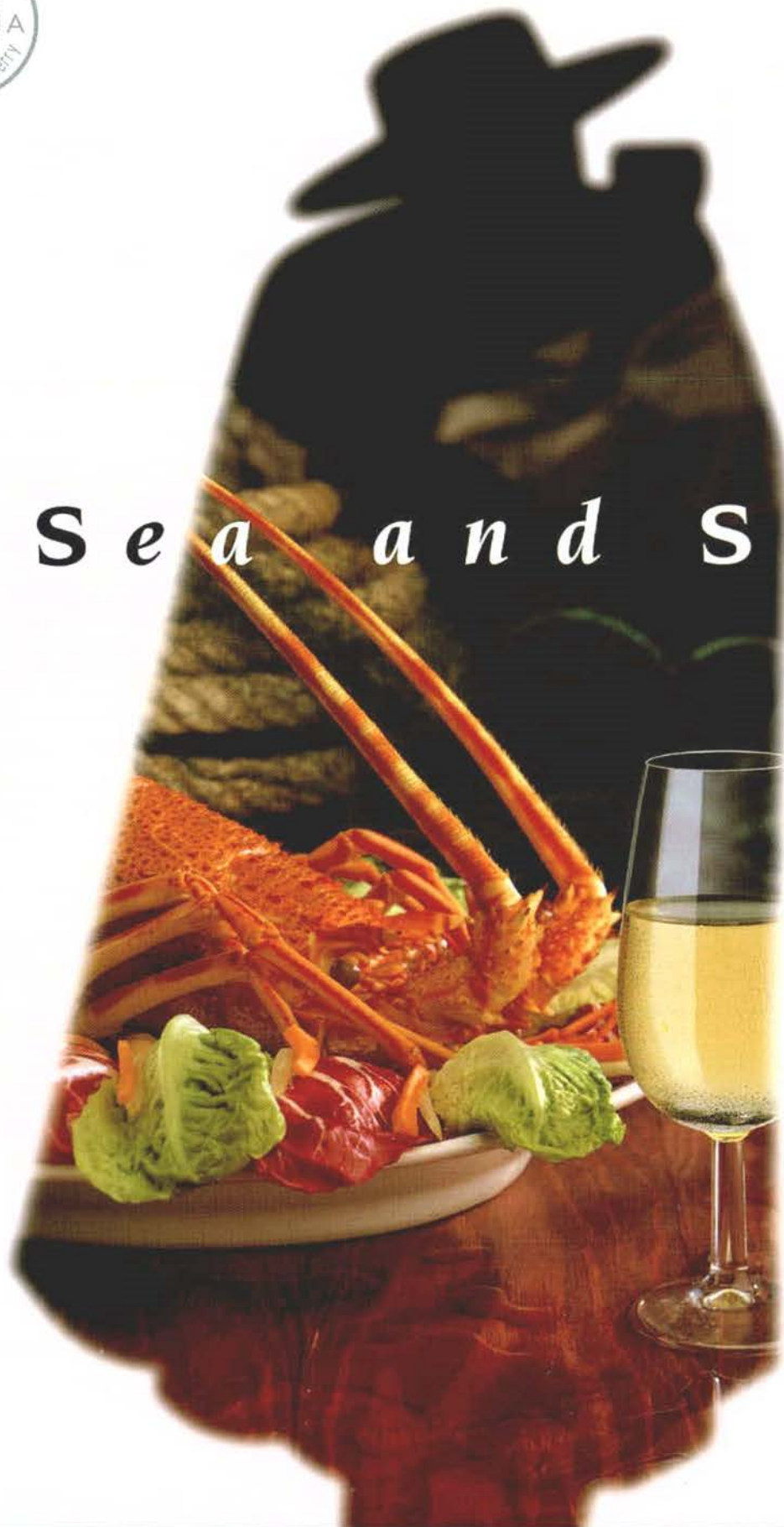
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# Sea and Sun



*Sandeman Dry Seco:  
That very special touch  
of light that makes  
a luncheon by the sea into  
something unique.*



**SANDEMAN. The Traditional Spanish Sherry**

# D

ear readers,

Here's our last issue for this year, a year in which we've been highlighting the Mediterranean diet as interpreted by some of the top Spanish chefs. Our series draws to a close with an article on "Casa Benigna", a taste of the Mediterranean in Madrid.

From the Mediterranean too come Spanish clementines -a relatively unknown but increasingly popular fruit- that have found their ideal habitat along the eastern coast of Spain. This is also where the Vinalopó vines flourish, receiving such meticulous care that each individual bunch of grapes is protected inside a paper bag in order to ensure fruits of excellent quality and to lengthen the production period.

An ubiquitous feature of Spanish gastronomy over the last ten years have been the small, pointed, red *piquillo* peppers. Their versatility has made them something of a classic.

And talking of classics, our opening article deals with the much-acclaimed *tapas*. We give many ideas for quick-to-prepare *tapas*, most of which are based on Spanish canned foods, sausages and cheeses. They are the ideal solution for a thousand and one occasions. And they go down well with a glass of San Miguel, the Spanish beer that is popular on several continents.

For wine-lovers we have an article on some of the most representative of the new Spanish wineries.

Finally, in our tourism section, we reveal the charms of the secluded Bierzo region that lies tucked away between Castile and Galicia - its villages, landscapes and monuments and, of course, its gastronomy and wines.



Compiled by  
BETTINA KRÜCKEN

## **SANDEMAN GETS ISO-CERTIFICATE**

*In September, the Sandeman firm became Jerez de la Frontera's first sherry producer to get the ISO 9002 certificate of quality from AENOR, which monitors the observance of ISO standards in Spain and keeps the register on Spanish companies. Sandeman has now achieved the aim of its protracted process of introducing new quality standards and internal restructuring, which, in the future, will improve and facilitate all the company's business activities.*



## **250 YEARS OF GOYA**

*A series of exhibitions of the paintings of this brilliant Spanish artist will open on March 29th 1996. On the initiative of the Ministry for Culture and the Ministry for Trade and Tourism, 1996 is to be Goya year. Their aim is to promote cultural tourism in Spain with this project. From the end of March to the end of June, the "Artistic Essence of Modern Spain: Goya and Picasso" can be seen in the Prado, and from September in the Reina Sofía Museum. Goya's drawings will be on display in the Prado in July and August. Other Goya exhibitions can be admired in the Royal Palace, the National Library, the Archaeological Museum and other Madrid museums.*

## **THE DROUGHT IN SPAIN**

Anyone doubting the existence of a drought in the southern half of Spain should study the latest statistics issued by the Meteorological Observatory of the autonomous government of Castilla-La Mancha at Toledo.

The average for rainfall during the 24 years since 1971 is 360.3 mm per annum. The highest annual rainfall was in 1977 with 503 mm (1977 was notorious for mildew in La Mancha), and the lowest was last year with 178.3 mm - 49% of average.

During the first five months of 1995 the total rainfall has been 43.6 mm, which is 27 per cent of the average for that period. In a region which has a low average rainfall, these statistics represent a near disaster for agriculturists, not least the viticulturists. With frosts both in 1994 and 1995 as well, the forecasts for production for 1995 are below the 50 per cent shortfall in 1994, and for a difficult harvest in 1996, whatever happens climatologically.

## **VALENCIA'S ORANGE FUTURES MARKET**

The very first futures market for citrus fruits opened in Valencia in early September, following in the footsteps of Chicago's cereals market. Setting prices according to international demand, providing legal safeguards on promises and contracts of citrus fruit sales, and modernizing citrus farming are just some of the major aims of what will be the first worldwide market dealing in fresh fruit. For the time being, the orange varieties Navel-Navelina are to be bought and sold here and, as of April next year, Valencia-late will be added to the list. Lemon and clementine trade is also planned over the next two years.

## **CAVA'S EXPORT GROWTH BUBBLES OVER**

Cava export figures rose 28.4% in the first six months of 1995 compared to the same period of the preceding year. By June, well over 22 million bottles had been exported, with sales up 49% to Britain, 45% to Germany and 10% to the USA. Germany remains the number one buyer with 11.5 million bottles in the first six months of 1995 alone. The Regulatory Council for the Cava Denomination of Origin admitted that this was the most outstanding result they had had in recent years.

## **GUIDE TO RIOJA'S BODEGAS**

The Regulatory Council of the Rioja Denomination of Origin recently published a handy guide, in both Spanish and English, which covers over 100 D.O. Rioja bodegas. The key facts about the bodegas are printed on 78 pages and are complemented by pictograms, which are explained in the appendix in four different languages. Seven general maps and a few photos round off the booklet. The *Visitor's Guide to the Bodegas of Rioja* can be obtained free of charge from the Regulatory Council of the Denomination of Origin.

Jorge Vigón, 51 - 26003 Logroño. Tel. 34-41-241199. Fax. 34-41-253502

## **RIBEIRA SACRA: A NEW DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN**

On 7th July, 1995, the Provisional Denomination of Origin, Ribeira Sacra, was officially recognized. It covers 50 bodegas in the sub-regions of Amandi, Riberas do Miño, Chantada, Quiroga and Riberas do Sil in the province of Lugo in the North West of Spain. The most important permitted grape varieties are white Albariño, Loureira Godello, Dona Branca and Torrontés, and additionally Palomino. Mencía, Brancellao, Caiño, Loureira Tinta, Sausón, Merenzao, Ferrón Espadeiro and Negrada, as well as Garnacha, are the red grapes, grown on a total of 13,706 acres on the banks of the Sil and the Miño.

## **FLAGSHIP FOR FIRST-CLASS TOURISM**

The Parador hotel of Bayona in Pontevedra (Galicia), which belongs to the Spanish Parador hotel chain, is to become an advertisement for first-class tourism at an international level. The refurbishing of the hotel will start in October this year and, by the time it is completed in March 1997, investments in

**RIBERA DEL DUERO  
REVEALS A TASTE FOR ART**

At ANUGA, the Cologne food fair, some 50 paintings and other works of art were exhibited in the Deutz Glass Pavilion. These provided the effective backdrop for the title of the exhibition organized by



the Regulatory Council for the Ribera del Duero Denomination of Origin "Bottle Spirit and Table Pleasures". The pictures of 25 international painters showed a multiplicity of ways of interpreting the motto "Art for the Senses" around the D.O. Ribera del Duero wines. The more than 1,000 visitors to the fair were not only able to enjoy the art, but also to taste the wines and experience the atmosphere of a Spanish fiesta conveyed through flamenco music.



the realm of Pts 1 billion (US\$ 8.1 million) will have been ploughed into it. With 86 hotels all over Spain, the chain earned profits of Pts 439 million (US\$ 3.6 million) in 1994, and is about to open up new hotels.

**THE EU DECLARES SPAIN FREE OF AFRICAN SWINE FEVER**

After a 35-year fight against African swine fever, in November the European Union Standing Committee on Veterinary Matters declared in Brussels that Spain is now free of the disease. As very few areas have been affected over the last three years this new situation does not really entail any notable change in the sector's activities. It is really just a question of image as Spain can now escape stigma of carrying this disease.

**CHUPA CHUPS PRODUCES IN THREE CONTINENTS AND EXPORTS INTO SPACE**

The Catalan sweet manufacturer Chupa Chups has invested Pts 2.5 billion (US\$ 20.32 million) in the initial production phase of a new plant in Mexico, which is mainly to meet demand from the United States, Latin America and Mexico. What will become the group's largest plant outside Spain, located on a third continent, in addition to Europe and Asia, will manufacture four of the firm's product lines and export some 70% of its production. By the way, Chupa Chups' most unusual export is being sent out into the cosmos. In the MIR Space Station, the Russian cosmonaut Strekalov is, for the first time, enjoying the taste and entertainment possibilities offered by this universal lollipop.

**NEW DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN FOR "HAM FROM HUELVA"**

In July this year, a new Denomination of Origin (Denominación de Origen) for "Ham from Huelva" was officially recognized by the Ministry for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. A total of 89 firms raising Iberian pigs in Cáceres, Badajoz, Huelva, Cádiz, Córdoba, Seville and Málaga, belong to the new D.O. After slaughter, the hams from these pigs are cured in the province of Huelva.

**QUALIFICATION OF THE 1994 VINTAGE OF SPANISH WINES WITH  
DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN**

ALELLA	VG	MONTILLA MORILES	VG
ALICANTE	G	NAVARRA	VG
ALMANSA	VG	PENEDÉS	G
AMPURDÁN-COSTA BRAVA	G	PRIORATO	VG
BIERZO	VG	RIAS BAIXAS	G
BINISALEM	-	RIBEIRO	-
BULLAS	VG	RIBERA DEL DUERO	VG
CALATAYUD	VG	RIOJA	E
CAMPO DE BORJA	G	RUEDA	G
CARIÑENA	G	SOMONTANO	E
CAVA	G	TACORONTE ACENTEJO	G
CHACOLI DE GUETARIA	G	TARRAGONA	G
CIGALES	G	TERRA ALTA	VG
CONCA DE BARBERÁ	G	TORO	E
CONDADO DE HUELVA	F	UTIEL-REQUENA	VG
COSTERS DEL SEGRE	G	VALDEORRAS	VG
JUMILLA	G	VALDEPEÑAS	G
LA MANCHA	VG	VALENCIA	VG
LANZAROTE	VG	VINOS DE MADRID	VG
LA PALMA	VG	YCODEN-DAUTE-ISORA	G
MÉNTRIDA	G	YECLA	G

P: POOR

F: FAIR

G: GOOD

VG: VERY GOOD

E: EXCELLENT

PRESS RELEASE FROM SHERRY SHIPPERS ASSOCIATION - A.C.E.S.  
**END OF THE JEREZ RECONVERSION PLAN**  
**SEPTEMBER 1991 - AUGUST 1995**



**SHERRY, 1995 AND BEYOND**

The objectives of the Sept 1st, 1991 to Aug 31st, 1995 Plan (to adjust grape production capacity and bodega wine stocks to market demands) have been achieved through a reduction of 38% in vineyard area to current 10,600 Ha./26,192 acres and 32% in bodega wine stocks down to 340 million liters with world consumption remaining steady at around 125 million bottles of Sherry per year on a MAT basis; so far, a good effort and a good result.

However, after two years of severe drought, 1995 harvest has been the driest in living memory, producing around 40 Mn/liters of wine or *mosto*, 47% of normal yield. Coming as it does straight after a very short vintage in 1994 which produced just 57% of the wine required to replace 1994/95 yearwine ex-bodega sales of 95 Mn/liters, this unprecedented, untimely "problem of nature" looks like becoming "the" thing in the aftermath of the Jerez Plan because the bodega wine stocks "cushion" that had been allowed under the Plan to help maintain Sherry consumption levels undisturbed by price turbulence will be all but gone by September 1996. Even worse is that grape production potential for 1996 and 1997 will depend entirely on having

a good deal of heavy rain during the next two winters - something not very likely right now!

Meanwhile, 1995 prices are up 50 to 60% for grapes and 35 to 40% for wine or *mosto* relative to 1994 levels which were based on the four year Plan figures established back in 1991. It is to be hoped that the delaying element built into the mechanics of the *criaderas* and *solera* method of Sherry ageing (it takes years for the wine entering the youngest *criadera* to get down to the final *solera* butts) will help avoid the type of rapid ex-bodega price increases which might create unnecessary difficulties for all concerned in terms of maintaining sales volumes and Sherry market share vis-a-vis other drinks.

As to the future, until and unless climatic conditions return to normality, i.e. 550/650 liters of rain per square metre as against 1995 mean of 250/300, Sherry will become scarce for the first time in many years. Will it be yet another change for the better?; already the renewed emphasis of the last few years in underlying the quality and prestige of Sherry has been a very positive sign. Time will tell.

**1991/95 FOUR YEAR PLAN SUMMARY & ESTIMATES FOR 1995/96 TO 1998/99 (Mn/Liters)**

PLAN WINEYEAR				
	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95
<b>A</b>	463	420	392	383
<b>B</b>	69	71,5	77	54
	<b>532</b>	<b>491,5</b>	<b>469</b>	<b>437</b>
<b>C</b>	102	96,5	92	97
	<b>430</b>	<b>395</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>340</b>
<b>D</b>	10	3	6	0
	<b>420</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>340</b>

POSPLAN WINEYEAR				
	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99
<b>A</b>	340	290	267	267
<b>B</b>	41	65	87	87
	<b>381</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>354</b>
<b>C</b>	92	92	92	92
	<b>289</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>262</b>
<b>D</b>	1	4	5	5
	<b>290</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>267</b>

**A** OPENING BODEGAS STOCKS (Sep. 1st)    **B** YEAR WINE/MOSTO    **C** EX-BODEGA SALES    **D** OTHER    **E** FINAL STOCKS (Ag.31st)

Text: Cate Conniff-Doberich  
 Photos: Javier Rodero and Luis Angulo/ICEX

## "Flavors of Spain" pervade the Culinary Institute of America



**V**ineyards, olive trees and the bold, sensuous flavors of a land favored by the sun -these are a common theme in the pleasures of the table which are shared by Spain and Napa Valley, California. The distance between the two regions was shortened last November when chefs from the two lands gathered for a remarkable

five days of cooking and learning. Sponsored by Foods from Spain -the Department of the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade which promotes food exports- and held at

the Culinary Institute of America's new campus at Greystone, the week-long course "Flavors of Spain" gave some of California's most noted chefs and journalists a rare opportunity to study the distinct regional cuisines of Spain and the Mediterranean influences which play so predominately in their composition.

Housed on the top floor of what is considered to be

the largest stone winery building in the world, the Teaching Kitchens at the new campus of the Culinary Institute of America in Napa Valley held fragrances of *sofrito* and roasted *piquillo* peppers, while garlic sautéed in the fruity olive oils of Spain. Acting as ambassadors of the rich variety of regional Spanish cuisines were Chef Ramón Roteta and María José Sevilla. Roteta, chef-owner of Restaurant Ramón Roteta in San Sebastián, combined traditional Basque cuisine with contemporary ideas of food and cooking. María José Sevilla, a consultant and presenter for the successful BBC series and book *Spain on a Plate* and also author of *Life and Food in the Basque Country*, as well as the newly released *Mediterranean Flavors*, lent her broad understanding of Spanish cooking to a spirited presentation of traditional recipes. Together, Chef Roteta and Ms. Sevilla brought to life the soul and secrets of Spanish ingredients in dishes such as *Marmitako* (a tuna stew simmered in white wine, potatoes and sweet peppers) and Red Snapper in Sauce of Black Olive Alioli. The class, which is the

first of its kind to be offered in the United States, helped American chefs and food writers to understand the basic elements of traditional foods that come from the village and family life of Spain. At the heart of the class were the ways in which authentic Spanish ingredients and cooking techniques can be translated by the professional chef into the healthful and deeply satisfying dishes associated with the Mediterranean diet.

Throughout the week of November 6th, participating chefs and journalists worked side by side with chef Roteta and Ms. Sevilla on what is considered by many in the food industry to be one of the most impressive array of cooking equipment ever to be assembled under one roof. Students and instructors cooked Almond Soup with Prawns and Pasta with Fresh Artichokes and Ham on custom-designed Bonnet cooking "suites" which employ a myriad of technologies, from traditionally crafted rotisseries to the advanced technology of magnetic heat induction. The 15,000 square foot Teaching Kitchens at Greystone were designed without walls to facilitate an open exchange



of ideas among professionals in the food and wine industries -a concept successfully put into practice during the "Flavors of Spain" class.

Catherine Brandel, a chef instructor at Greystone and formerly of the renowned Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California, has been cooking professionally for years. Yet Ms. Brandel learned new techniques about how to use Spanish ingredients such as salt-cod, saffron, uniquely Spanish olive oils and arborio rice that will help her to express more fully the nature of the Spanish-inspired cooking she does in the future. "This has been like a vacation to Spain" said Catherine of the week at Greystone. "I have had a chance to taste Spanish food in a way I thought possible only by actually

being in Spain. I now know what it is I am working towards when creating the types of rustic Spanish dishes which are a favorite of mine".

The "students" involved in the "Flavors of Spain" class were chefs and food writers from some of the most prestigious restau-

rants, hotels, publications and universities in California. Restaurants such as Chez Panisse, Zuni, Olive-to, Stars, and Bizou were represented, along with hotels in the league of The Hyatt Regency (San Francisco) and The Beverly Hills Hotel. Stanford University's executive chef André Mallie attended, as did cookbook author James McNair.

One member of the class was Connie Gutteresen, RN PhD, who is on the teaching staff at Greystone. Ms. Gutteresen's role as a registered dietitian with a PhD in Nutritional Physiology brings a unique synthesis of the nutritional sciences and the culinary arts. "Typical of the Mediterranean diet, the cuisines of Spain are mostly plant based, using legumes, rice and pasta as the base of their diet, and when protein is introduced it is usually fish or small amounts of meat. The Spanish have a unique way of creating intense flavors without fat, with the use of ingredients such as sherry vinegar and spices, and with techniques such as the roasting of peppers. And if you are going to use a cooking fat, olive oil is the best choice."

The highlight of the week was a slide show presentation by María José Sevilla and a dinner showcasing the cooking style of Chef Roteta. Forty San Francisco-based food and wine experts were invited to join the original group of students for a meal which demonstrated what is happening with Spanish food today -dishes that have as their source traditional recipes from which this professional chef is moving forward with creative, well-balanced touches of his own. Chef Roteta -with recipes such as Lobster Salad with Sherry Vinaigrette, Fried Noodles with Fish and Shellfish, and Roasted Rockfish with Black Olive and Green Pepper Aliolis-skillfully presented examples of the ways in which a professional chef can adapt a Spanish recipe to contemporary tastes without altering the essential spirit of the dish.

*Cate Conniff-Doberich is the Marketing Manager at the Culinary Institute of America at Greystone.*



# LASTING IMPRESSIONS

SONIA ORTEGA

•The Legacy of al-Andalus is a tourism and cultural project being implemented throughout 1995 in commemoration of well-nigh eight centuries of Arab presence in Spain (see Spain Gourmetour no.35). It involves exhibitions, lectures, visits to places of historic interest and publications, one of the latter being **The Routes of al-Andalus**. This book describes 11 routes meeting in Granada and visiting those towns in Andalusia with a strong Moorish flavor as well as others further afield in Murcia, Portugal and even North Africa. In addition to the routes, there is a summary of the exhibitions organized as part of the project. The book's value undoubtedly lies in its photographs, which reflect the immense architectural and artistic heritage of al-Andalus which is only briefly described in the text.

•In the "Lasting Impressions" section in our last issue we described the Spanish edition of **The Wines of Spain in the Writings of Travellers from Abroad**. This has now come out in English in a luxury edition, basically the work of Gustave Doré, with old photos giving extra interest. As we said previously, the text is a collection of opinions on Spanish wines as expressed by foreign travellers to Spain over five centuries (from the 15th to the 19th century), from Casanova to Victor Hugo.

•José Peñín, the veteran of Spanish wine writers, has brought together in this beautiful book, **12 Grandes Bodegas de España**, a dozen veteran Spanish wineries. Each has its own intense history, produces unique wines and, over centuries or at least decades, has maintained quality standards in spite of economic and historic vicissitudes: Alvear, Codorníu, Cune, Chivite, Domecq, González Byass, López de Heredia, Marqués de Murrieta, Marqués de Riscal, Osborne, Torres and Vega Sicilia. Twelve life stories in twelve chapters that all end with the



wines themselves and a tasting session described in Peñín's personal style.

The book is illustrated with a magnificent selection of top-quality and original photographs by Pepe Franco.

It is expected to come out in English in the near future.

•This guide to the best places to eat "Tapas" in Madrid is more than welcome. I believe it is the first time -excuse me if I am wrong - that such information with special reference to Madrid has been printed in book form. In **De tapas por Madrid** José Carlos Capel, a well-known food writer, leads the way to 149 bars in nine areas of the city in a booklet that is small in size but is full of practical information. As well as a map of the city there are maps of each area showing the location of the selected bars. The most characteristic tapas of Madrid are described with recipes, there are comments on each bar and on the tapas it specializes in and finally there are four indices according to name, category, tapa and street.

In addition to the classic tapa bars, Capel gives others that are less well known. Although the classification could have taken more into account value for money and factors such as convenience, this will be a valuable pocketbook for anyone wanting new experiences in the world of tapas.

•After her first two books, one on the cuisine of the Basque Country and the other on Spanish cuisine in general, and her successful series *Spain on a Plate* for the BBC, María José Sevilla now spreads her wings to cover the Mediterranean basin as a whole in **Mediterranean Flavours**. An ambitious task but the author achieves her aim through simplicity. This is no doctoral thesis on Mediterranean cuisine on either shore of the Mare Nostrum -it simply explains how common products have led to a varied and appealing gastronomy. There is no traditional classification under "starters", "soups", etc. and ending up with "desserts" but rather the book centers on the most charismatic products - garlic, olive oil, bread. A total of ten chapters with condensed information containing 80 recipes both classical and modern that are always clearly explained.

Special mention must be given to the brightly-colored original linocuts by Christopher Wormell. They have a very Mediterranean feel to them and suit the contents to perfection.

•This is the first bibliography to be published of cookery books in the Spanish language. **El libro de los libros de cocina** lists over 1,000 books, mostly on Spanish cuisine, although it includes

some on the cuisine of other countries, mainly in Latin America, written in Spanish as well as a section on books on Spanish cuisine written in other languages.

Classification is by region and by subject. Each entry includes a brief description of the book and practical information (author, editorial, ISBN, format, price, number of pages, etc.) and in most cases there is a photo of the front page. The criterion for selection was to include all works that readers could obtain easily. All the books can be obtained by post through the publishers of this bibliography.

*The Legacy of al-Andalus*  
*The Routes of al-Andalus*  
Paseo de la Castellana, 13  
28046 Madrid  
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*12 Grandes Bodegas de España*  
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Ediciones El País-Aguilar  
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*Mediterranean Flavours*  
*Savouring the Sun*  
M<sup>re</sup> José Sevilla  
Illustrated by Christopher  
Wormell  
Pavilion Books Ltd.  
26 Upper Ground - London SE1  
9PD

*El libro de los libros de cocina.*  
*Le Cordon Bleu*  
SPA, S.L.  
Guzmán el Bueno, 21, 1<sup>er</sup>.  
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## D.O. Bierzo Wine

### **BODEGAS PRADA A TOPE, S.A.**

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## Clementines

### **ANECOOP**

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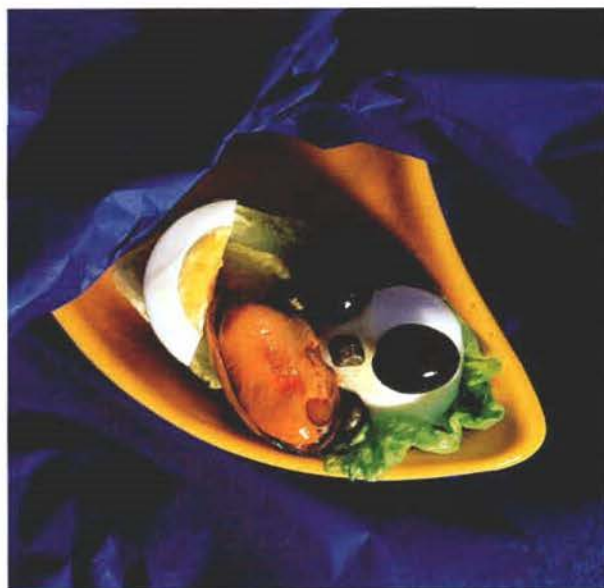
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# Speedy Tapas From The Spanish Larder

## TAPAS EXPRESS

Today's *tapas* have come a long way from their simple Andalusian origins in a mouthful of ham or sausage on a saucer used as a lid over a glass of wine. These days the selection of dishes in a *tapas* bar often stretches the length of the bartop. And not only in Spain: in the last decade, *tapas* bars have not only mushroomed around Europe and across America but also reached Australia and Japan. One reason they can offer authentic Spanish flavors is that many *tapas* are based on Mediterranean preserves such as olives, cured ham and anchovies or tuna in olive oil, all of which originated as foods intended to travel and keep well. Here is how to make the best of Spanish preserves in easy traditional and new *tapas*.



TEXT: VICKY HAYWARD  
STILL LIFES: MENCHU ARTIME  
PHOTOS: A. DE BENITO/ICEX

## The Spanish hams, sausages and cheeses becoming available abroad in an ever-widening range make easy *tapas*.

Walk into a Spanish *tapas* bar worthy of its name and the first thing that hits you is the variety: pickles on cocktail sticks, cheeses and hams, homely omelettes, baby earthenware casseroles with sizzling hot dishes and elegant mayonnaise-topped mouthfuls. It's the chance to dip into so many tastes, as well as the visual spread of *tapas* that make them universally appealing.

But behind the apparently bewildering variety are certain clear principles. Originally a mouthful of food included in the bar-price of a *fino*, wine or beer, a *tapa* is designed to accompany drink and good conversation. Or as journalist Pedro Soleras put it in the newspaper *El País* last year, 'The *tapa*, invented in an age less obsessed with productivity, is a trick for spinning out your drinks without getting drunk.' And whether thirst-provoking or absorbent, they should be easy to eat so they don't interrupt the flow of conversation.

Another point is clear too. Even though they are now to be found in homes and smart restaurants, *tapas* have kept an informal spirit through their popular origins as street-food. So don't hold back. There's always room for improvisation around the ingredients that come to hand and the cook's personality. Treat the recipes below simply as a springboard for your own ideas.

### Quickest of All: Quality in a Can

Some of the most traditional *tapas* are also the speediest fast food, taking only as long to prepare as you need to open a tin. The most obvious example are the wide variety of canned olives: whole or pitted, stuffed with

almonds or anchovies, cracked and canned in marinades.

But in many an old-fashioned Spanish *bodega bar*, *tapas* from cans, or *latas* as they are called, cover a much broader range. Listed on chalked-up menus under that heading, they might include clams, cockles and razorfish in their juices; anchovies, sardines and tuna fillet in olive oil; mussels or tuna in *escabeche* (marinade). These will usually be on display in large drum-like tins behind the counter so customers can check their quality. All are considered delicacies to be savoured in their own right, fished out onto a dish and served with bread. In recent years the range has grown, too, with the arrival of new gourmet preserves such as elvers, crawfish, sea-urchin coral and baby octopus in olive oil.

Such instant *tapas* can be made a little more solid by spearing them with bread on a stick or laying them on toast dribbled with olive oil and rubbed with garlic. Or they can be made more elaborate, if still foolproof, by combining them -say tuna with roasted red pepper- to hit your tastebuds with a satisfying combination of flavors.

### Ham, Charcuterie and Cheese

The Spanish hams, sausages and cheeses that are becoming available abroad in an ever-widening range make equally easy *tapas*. A *ración*, or sliced plateful, could be of fine or coarse-cut *chorizo*, *salchichón*, cured loin or ham. All can now be bought handily vacuum-packed in counted slices as well as loose by weight from delicatessens. Remember that if you are

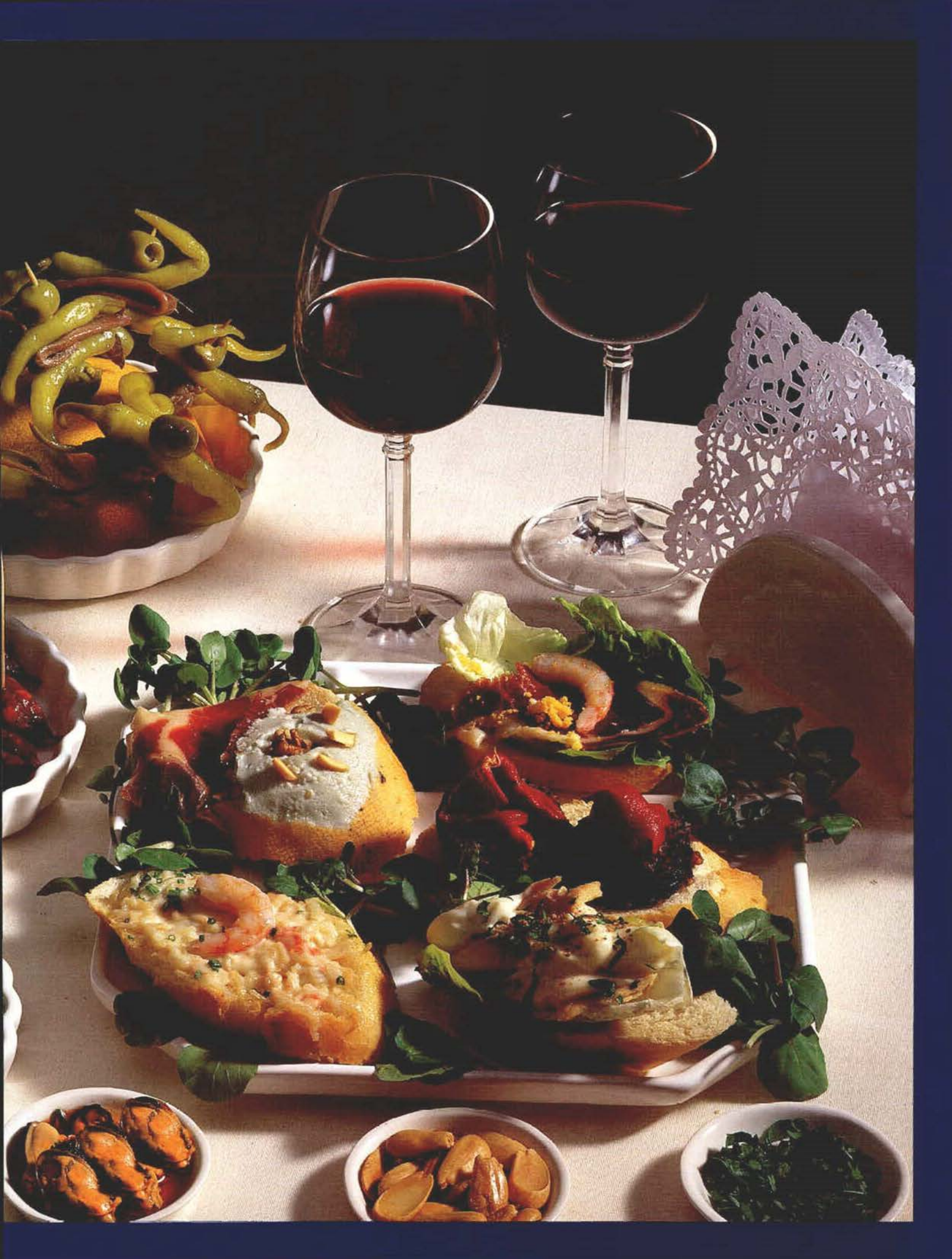
cutting your own Iberian cured ham made from native black-footed pigs, it needs to be sliced along the grain into wafer-thin, translucent slices to bring out its full aroma and flavor. Likewise, it is now possible to make up a varied *tabla de quesos*, or cheeseboard, of the Spanish cheeses being newly exported. One unusual addition you can make easily for yourself is deliciously nutty Manchego cheese preserved in olive oil. The cheese is cut into cubes or triangles and small holes pricked in it so the oil soaks in well. This keeps for up to a year, with the flavor maturing all the time, but you can dip into it after a month.

### Instant Hot Tapas

Another good trick for adding variety to *tapas* if you're either pressed for time or if you're a reluctant cook is to open a jar or can of a preserved cooked dish with a strong whiff of Spain. Again the range has not only widened but also improved enormously in quality. Squid cooked in its ink, braised Mediterranean vegetable *pisto* from La Mancha, braised partridge, quail in *escabeche* and tuna fish with green peppers are only few examples of high-quality preserved dishes that you can serve as they are, use to fill pastry cases or serve on toasted rolls.

**Vicky Hayward** is a freelance features journalist, travel writer and editor who lives in Madrid. She has written two guidebooks and published numerous articles on Spanish food, culture and society in newspapers and magazines.





*Mediterranean Tapas  
as a Meal*









# Recipes For Tapas

(Note: can and packet sizes are approximate as a buying guide.)

## COLD TAPAS



### Black Olives with Paprika, Onion and Olive Oil

A simple combination, but with great flavors and colors.

For 10-12 *tapa* servings, use 300 gr whole or pitted black olives, 4 tbsps fruity olive oil, 1 dsp wine vinegar, 1 small sweet onion and 1 level tsp smoked or sweet paprika (*pimentón*). Toss the olives in the oil; scatter over the chopped onion and paprika.

### Lettuce Hearts with Anchovies

This portable salad shows off prime-quality anchovies in olive oil at their best. Spanish anchovies come from Catalonia -those from La Escala, with their own denomination of quality, are salt-cured for a year- but most are fished off the Cantabrian coast.

Each lettuce makes 4 *tapas*; choose a dense-hearted lettuce such as Little Gem. You also need a 50-gr can of anchovies in olive oil, 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tsp sherry vinegar or lemon juice. Strip tough outer leaves off the lettuce and cut the heart into quarters.

Drape 2 anchovies over the cut edge of each lettuce quarter and chill. Just before serving, make up the vinaigrette (unsalted) and trickle it inside the lettuce leaves. Leave out the vinaigrette for finger food.

### Cockles and Cucumber in Sherry Vinegar and Lemon

A new twist to the old *taberna* favorite of canned cockles with vinegar. Most canned Spanish cockles are gathered in Galicia. This is also good made with canned clams from the same region. For 10-12 *tapa* servings, you need 1 large cucumber, 2 chilled 300-gr cans of cockles, a few sprigs of fresh parsley, 2 tbsps sherry vinegar, juice of 2 lemons, a little white pepper and salt to taste. Peel the cucumber, remove the seeds, dice the flesh and salt it for 10 minutes. Drain the cockles and chop the parsley. Rinse and dry the cucumber, toss with the cockles and chill again. Serve with cocktail sticks.

### Roasted Red Peppers and Anchovies

Roasted red peppers preserved in their own juices keep the flavors of wood-roasting and make great fast food. Many top-quality peppers, such as *piquillo* from Navarre or those from El Bierzo, have a slight peppery edge.

For 12 *tapas* servings, you need two 340-gr jars or tins of roasted red peppers (either whole or in strips), 4 fat cloves of garlic, 5 tbsps extra-virgin olive oil, 1 dsp sherry vinegar, small pinch of salt, 1 small 50-gr can of anchovies in olive oil, and a little finely chopped parsley. Drain the peppers well and

slice them into narrow strips. Lay them parallel in a shallow dish. Chop the garlic finely, sprinkle it over the peppers, then lay the anchovies on the top. Mix the vinaigrette and pour it over (there should be plenty) then finish off with the parsley. You can make this simply with toasted cumin, sliced onion rings and olives for a vegetarian version, or with canned tuna chunks for a filling dish.

### Cheese and Membrillo

Membrillo, a dense quince paste, is served with cheese after a meal, but makes a good combination to round off a *tapas* menu too.

Cut squares or triangles of Manchego or another cheese (such as goat's-milk Los Balanchares and Cabra del Tiétar, or cow's-milk Tetilla and Mahón) and lay on top same-size but thinner triangles of *membrillo*. For 12, you need 125 gr *membrillo* and 200 gr cheese.



### Banderillas

In Spain, many bars serve *banderillas*, or cocktail-stick snacks, ready-made from jars. But you can also make them up at home.

- Mixed Pickles: for each *banderilla*, spear a slice of

dill pickle or a whole small gherkin, a pearl (silverskin) onion and a pitted green or black olive. Pieces of spicy green pepper (*pimiento*) add heat, cauliflower gives crunch, pimiento adds colour.

- *Gildas*: for each *banderilla*, spear a pitted olive, rolled anchovy and spicy green pickled pepper.

- Anchovy, Smoked Cheese and Cherry Tomato: for each *banderilla*, spear a small chunk of Idiazábal cheese wrapped around with an anchovy fillet and a cherry tomato. To make a dozen, you need 150 gr cheese and 125 gr cherry tomatoes.

- Asparagus, Tuna Fish and Caper: for each *banderilla*, you need three capers, a matchstick length of white asparagus and a small chunk of tuna fillet in olive oil. Spear the asparagus and tuna, punctuating them with a caper in between and at either end.

- Cured Ham, Melon and Fig: for each *banderilla*, you need a small cube of fresh Galia or Honeydew melon, a 5-cm (2-inch) slice of *serrano* cured ham and 1/4 fig. Trim the ham to size to wrap neatly around the melon, spear it and then the fig. To make a dozen, you need approx. 100 gr melon, 2 slices of *serrano* ham and 3 figs.

### Tuna Fish and Red Pepper Toasts

The smooth firm meat of the tuna's underbelly, called *ventresca*, holds together in large fillets and is ideal for this dish. If you cannot find it, good quality tuna in olive oil will do.

For 12 *tapas*, you need a 200-gr can of tuna, 3 toasted slices of wholemeal or white bread, 1-2 peeled and halved garlic cloves, 12 strips roasted red pepper, 1 tbsp finely chopped onion,

a little fruity olive oil and chopped parsley. Drain the tuna and divide it along the grain into fillets or chunks to fit the toast. Cut the crusts off the toast, rub over with garlic and cut each slice into 4 fingers. On each lay a piece of tuna and finish off with a roasted red pepper strip, a little onion, a dribble of olive oil and a pinch of chopped parsley.

### Creamed Cabrales and Cider Spread

In the north-westerly region of Asturias, pungent blue-veined Cabrales cheese is mixed with dry (or hard) local cider to make a punchy spread for vegetables, bread or toast.

For spreading on 24 bread slices cut from a French stick, you need 150 gr Cabrales cheese and 1-2 tbsps dry or hard cider. Cut any hard edges or rind from the cheese, crush with a fork till smooth (if the cheese is hard, you can mix in a little butter) and mix in enough cider to give a creamy spread. Slice the bread thinly on the bias and spread with the cheese. (If you want, finish this off with capers, or apple dipped in lemon juice and fresh parsley.)

### Pa amb Oli

Rough bread with garlic and olive oil, simple food from the Mediterranean coast and islands, makes excellent rustic eating.

For 12 solid *tapas*, you need 6 thick slices of rough white or wholemeal country bread, 1-2 fat cloves of garlic, 6 tsps olive oil, a little vinegar (optional), 12 thin slices of *serrano* ham (approx 150 gr), 1 200-gr can of pitted or whole black olives, a 60-gr jar of capers. Lightly toast the bread slices. Rub

them with the cut garlic cloves, moisten well with the oil and, if you like, a few drops of vinegar. Cut each slice in half. Fold the ham over the top and finish off with 1-2 olives and 2-3 capers. Catalan *pa amb tomàquet* is made in the same way, but is also rubbed over with a juicily ripe tomato cut in half. Finish off, if you like, with cured ham or anchovies.



### Marinated Sardines

Sardines for canning are fished in summer when they are rich in the oils (20-22% content) which give them depth of flavor, aroma and high nutritional value. This dish, taught to me by a Basque friend, is an excellent way of flattening the oiliness and bringing out the flavor.

For 12 *tapas*, you need a 155-gr tin of sardines (or small *sardinillas*) in olive oil, 1 fresh red and 1 green peppers, 1 small skinned sweet onion, 4-6 tbsps sherry vinegar or dry white wine, 3 toasted bread slices (optional), salt and pepper, chopped fresh parsley. Drain the sardines and divide each into two fillets. Chop the peppers and onion finely. Marinate the sardines and, separately, the

peppers and onion in vinegar or wine. Spoon the diced pepper and onions over the sardines, season and sprinkle with parsley. For finger food, lay on toasted bread.

### Cherry Tomatoes Stuffed with Tuna and Green Olive Pate

This is a quick recipe for a light paté that I have adapted from one of Inés Ortega's recipes in her book *Sandwiches, Canapés y Tapas*. It's also good simply spread on bread or toast.

To fill 3 dozen cherry tomatoes or spread on 12-16 toasts, you need 75 gr pitted green olives, 50 gr good quality canned tuna, 1/2 skinned clove of garlic, 75 gr pine kernels, 2 shelled hard-boiled eggs, 50 ml fruity olive oil, juice of 1 lemon, and salt and pepper to taste. Cut the tops off the tomatoes and scoop out the seeds (a teaspoon handle works well). Leave upside down to drain while you make a smooth paté with all other ingredients in a food-processor or blender. Fill the tomatoes with the paté and chill them.

### Stuffed Eggs with Sea Urchin Caviare and Pimiento Mayonnaise

Sea-urchin caviare, with its intense flavor of the sea rather like lobster coral, makes an unusual stuffing for cold eggs. Tuna is a good alternative and contrast to the mayonnaise.

For 12 half-eggs, you need 6 shelled hard-boiled eggs, 1 75-gr jar of sea-urchin caviare, 2 tbsps finely chopped onion, 50 gr canned roasted red peppers, 75 ml thick mayonnaise and parsley leaves. Halve the eggs lengthways, remove

the yolks and mix them with the caviare, onion and seasoning. Drain the peppers and squeeze to remove all the juices, puree them and stir into the mayonnaise. Stuff the egg-halves with the yolk mixture, top with a blob of mayonnaise and finish with a parsley leaf.

## HOT TAPAS



### Chorizo Pinchos

Spicy-hot or plain *chorizo*, usually eaten raw, is excellent fried or grilled (for this buy *chorizo a la parrilla*) to serve as hot snacks on cocktail sticks.

- Grilled *Chorizo* and Bread: To make 24, grill six small grilling *chorizos* (this is excellent over a wood-fire), cut into bite-size slices and spear each with a bread cube.

- Spicy *Chorizo* and Green Peppers: To make 24, you need 200 gr spicy-hot *chorizo*, 2 green peppers and olive oil for frying. Slice the *chorizo* thickly, trim and cut the green peppers into small squares. Fry the *chorizos* till crispy and the pepper squares till tender in olive oil (or dry-fry on a hot) griddle, salting lightly at the end. Spear a piece of *chorizo* and pepper on each stick.

### Fried Cheese

There are many recipes for fried cheese from around Spain. Usually fresh white cheeses are fried with no coating; melting semi-soft cheeses in breadcrumbs. If you cannot find flavorful Mahón, Manchego would work well.

For 12 tapas, you need 200 gr Mahón cheese, 2 beaten eggs and dry breadcrumbs for coating, and olive oil for frying. Cut the cheese into thick matchsticks, dip in egg then breadcrumbs and shallow-fry in very hot oil for 1-2 minutes so the crumbs are golden and the cheese just melting. Serve immediately with cocktail sticks.

### Fried Green Asparagus

This is an ingenious way to cook preserved green asparagus from *El Libro de Oro de las Tapas* by Itos Vázquez. It's quick, easy and very light.

To make 24 tapas, you need 1/2 300-gr can green asparagus, 2 beaten eggs and breadcrumbs for coating, olive oil and salt. Cut the asparagus stalks into short even lengths, lay 3-4 pieces side by side -alternating tips and stalks- and pin widthways with two cocktail sticks. Pat dry, dip in beaten egg then breadcrumbs and shallow-fry immediately in hot olive oil. Drain on paper towels.

### Baked Mussel and Ham Puffs

For 12 tapas, you need 12 large mussels in *escabeche* (2 105-gr cans), 2 slices of cured *serrano* ham, 200 gr of thawed frozen flaky or puff pastry, a little beaten egg. Drain the mussels and wrap each one in a short piece of cured ham. Roll out the pastry and cut out circles a little larger than the mussel packets.

Place each one on a circle, cover with a second one, moisten the edges with beaten egg, fold in and seal. Bake at 230° C/450° F/gas mark 8 for 15-20 minutes.



### Baby Broad Bean and Cured Ham Omelette

This thick Spanish omelette made with small broad beans is popular in Murcia (south eastern Spain), where many of the beans canned for export are grown. It cuts into squares well for *tapas*.

For 24 tapas, you need 250 gr broad beans, 6 tbsp olive oil, 1 finely chopped small onion, 50 gr diced cured ham, 6 lightly beaten eggs. Drain the broad beans. Heat half the olive oil in a heavy-based frying pan and sauté the onion and ham in it, adding the beans after a few minutes. Cook everything together for 5 minutes. Cool slightly and mix into the eggs. Wipe the pan clean, heat the remaining oil in it, pour in the eggs and make a thick round omelette, turning half-way through with the help of a plate or large pan lid when the underside is golden. Cool slightly and cut into squares.

### Baby Potato and Truffle Omelettes

Spain has a much larger truffle production than you might suspect since most are exported fresh directly to restaurants abroad. But some are preserved individually in jars with a little of their juice. This is a good way of making a little truffle go a long way with other down-to-earth ingredients.

To make 24 baby omelettes, you need 350 gr waxy potatoes, 1/2 onion, 6 tbsp olive oil, 5 beaten eggs, 1 chopped preserved truffle (10 gr) and its juice, 2 tbsp finely chopped parsley and a little salt. Slice the potatoes thinly, cut across into matchsticks and slice the onion. Heat half the oil and fry the potatoes gently with the onion till they are tender but slightly crispy on the outside. Cool slightly, and mix into the eggs with the chopped truffle, its juice and parsley. Clean out the pan, heat the remaining oil and fry dessert-spoonfuls of the omelette mixture into baby omelettes. Drain and serve hot.

### Wild Mushroom Boats

The mixed or single-variety wild mushrooms now being jarred and canned in Catalonia keep much of their flavor when canned or jarred and make a great short-cut ingredient for quick *tapas*.

To fill 12 small pastry boats, you need 2 tbsps olive oil, 25 gr chopped cured ham, 1 finely chopped garlic clove, 1 spicy dried red pepper (optional), 100 gr drained wild mushrooms, a splash of dry *fino* sherry, salt, 1 tbsp chopped parsley. Heat the oil and fry the ham, garlic and chopped dried pepper. Dry the mushrooms, chop them and add them to the pan with a splash of *fino* sherry, cover and cook for 10-15 minutes, stirring in the

parsley. Spoon into the pastry boats.

### Scrambled Egg and Mujjol Caviare Tartlets

Spain's Mujjol caviare, made with reconstituted mullet, herring and salmon eggs by a Murcian company, contains no colorants and, unlike other caviare substitutes, can be heated in cooked dishes. You can vary this idea with countless other flavorings, such as roasted red peppers, preserved garlic shoots or diced cured ham.

For 12 baby tartlets, use 3 large eggs, 1 tbsp milk, 1 50-gr jar Mujjol caviare, a little freshly ground black pepper, 1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley. Beat the eggs lightly with the milk, caviare, pepper and parsley. Cook as for lightly scrambled or shirred eggs, stirring constantly, turn onto a plate just before it is done and leave to cool. Spoon into the pastry cases.



### Chorizo in Cider

An excellent way to cook *chorizo*.

To make 24 *pinchos*, you need 200 gr plain *chorizo* and 350 ml dry (or hard) cider. Slice the *chorizo*, put it in a small heavy-based pan and cover with the cider.

Simmer with the pan covered for 30-45 minutes, turning the *chorizo* half way through and adding more cider if it evaporates. Spear the slices with cocktail sticks.

### Tuna Empanadillas

These deep-fried pasties, called *empanadillas*, are found in bars all around Spain.

For 12-14 pasties. Pastry: 15 gr butter, 2 dsps mild olive oil, 1/2 egg, 1/2 glass of water, 150 gr flour, salt. Filling: 1 tbsp olive oil, 1 clove of garlic, 1 dsp chopped cured ham, 2 anchovies, 1 tbsp fried tomato puree, 1 190-gr tin of tuna in *escabeche*, 1 finely chopped red *pimiento*, a little chopped parsley, salt and pepper. Make the pastry. Put the oil, butter and water into a saucepan, heat and stir in the flour and the egg. Leave to rest in a cool place and make the filling. Heat the olive oil and sauté

the garlic, ham, anchovies, tomato puree, flaked tuna fish and chopped *pimiento*; when cooked, stir in the parsley and season. Roll out the pastry thinly, cut 10-cm circles and with them make half-moon pasties folded over teaspoonfuls of the filling, crimping the curved seam. Deep-fry in plenty of oil.

### Cured Ham Croquettes

Another classic, which can be made up in advance and frozen until you want to fry them. The bechamel for this and the stuffed eggs of the next recipe should be made ahead of time (the day before if you like).

To make 20-24 thumb-size croquettes, you need 40 gr butter, 40 gr flour, 375 ml milk, 200 gr chopped cured ham, 2 beaten eggs and dry breadcrumbs for coating. Make up the bechamel, which should be thick, and leave to cool in a tray or

dish. Roll small spoonfuls into thumb-shaped croquettes, dip in beaten egg then breadcrumbs and fry in plenty of hot oil.

### Alfredo's Fried Stuffed Eggs

The recipe for these eggs originally came from Bar Alfredo in Barbastro, Aragón.

For 12 *tapas*, you need 6 shelled hardboiled eggs, a thick bechamel made with 150 ml milk, 25 gr butter, 25 gr flour (to give 12 heaped dsps), 160 gr flaked drained tuna meat in *escabeche*, 2 beaten eggs and dried breadcrumbs for coating. Make up the bechamel, stir in the tuna and leave to cool and solidify. Meanwhile, halve the eggs, remove the yolks and stir into the bechamel. When it is solid, mound it onto the egg halves to reform the whole egg shape. Dip

them in egg and bread-crumbs and fry. Serve hot. This is also good made with 2 tbsps chopped capers stirred into the bechamel.

### Stuffed Piquillo Peppers

This recipe made with the excellent jarred *piquillo* peppers come from the Basque country.

For 10-12 peppers, you need a 230 gr can *piquillo* peppers, 5 tbsp olive oil, 2 tbsps finely chopped onion, 100 gr minced beef or veal, 2 level tsps flour, 100 ml milk, 2 beaten eggs and flour for coating. Drain the peppers and pat dry. In a small pan, heat the oil and sauté the onion, then the beef. Stir in the flour and milk, as for a ragout, and season. Spoon into the peppers, fasten them with cocktail sticks, dip in flour then egg and fry.

# Tapas Menu

## EXPRESS MENU:

- Banderillas (*Gildas*)
- Olives
- Canned Anchovies and Mussels
- Manchego Cheese *Pinchos*
- *Chorizo Pinchos*
- Assorted Canapés (Creamed Cabrales and Cider Spread, *Morcilla* or Blood Sausage, etc)
- Capers, Almonds...

## FINGER TAPAS

*For serving without plates, forks or cocktail sticks*

- Cherry Tomatoes Stuffed with Tuna and Green Olive Paté
- Marinated Sardines on Toast, or Tuna Fish and Red Pepper Toasts
- Stuffed Eggs with Sea Urchins and Pimiento Mayonnaise
- Scrambled Egg and Mujjal Caviare Tartlets
- Ham Croquettes
- Mussel and Ham Puffs

## VEGETARIAN TAPAS

*No meat or fish*

- Banderillas (*Gildas*)
- Creamed Cabrales and Cider Spread
- Baby Potato and Truffle Omelettes
- Fried Asparagus
- Wild Mushroom Boats (without ham)
- Fried Cheese

## TAPAS WITH PLATES

*For serving with forks and plates*

- Cockles and Cucumber in Sherry Vinegar and Lemon
- Roasted Red Peppers with Anchovies
- Marinated Sardines
- Hot Stuffed Eggs
- Stuffed *Piquillo* Peppers

## MEDITERRANEAN TAPAS AS A MEAL

- Black Olives with Onion and Paprika
- *Chorizo* in Cider *Pinchos*
- *Pa amb Oli* with Ham
- Lettuce Hearts with Anchovies and Vinaigrette (3 lettuces)
- Roasted Red Peppers and Tuna
- Cheese and *Membrillo*

## FESTIVE MENU

- Baby Potato and Truffle Omelettes
- Cherry tomatoes Stuffed with Tuna and Green Olive Paté.
- Stuffed Eggs with Sea Urchin and Pimento Mayonnaise
- Baked Mussel and Haw Puffs
- Scrambled Egg and Mujjal Caviare Tartlets.
- Tuna Empanadillas
- Cured Ham Croquettes
- Cured Ham and Melon
- Marron Glace and *Turrón*



## MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE IN MADRID



# CASA BENIGNA: GOOD TIME FOOD

*Madrid is, and has been for centuries, the point where all of Spain's many cuisines converge. Any professional cook with designs on gastronomic stardom heads for Madrid. In this third and last article in our Mediterranean Diet series, the quest for Mediterranean food in the capital led me to a chef, Norberto Jorge. Alicante-born Norberto Jorge has had his ups and downs in the course of his cooking career, but the apron is still on and he is doing a convincing job of proving that man does not live by bread alone. His policy is that you should not only eat well at a restaurant, but actually enjoy being there, too. That's what you are paying for. You get a good deal at Casa Benigna.*

Autumn is the best time of year in the city beloved of the Habsburgs and Bourbons when, reinvigorated by its summer siesta, it seems eager to get on with real life. The light -the Castilian light I miss so much during the long gloom of the London Winter- is still marvellous, heightening the beauty of the buildings and the red and gold leaves on the trees. A new season, the build-up to winter, means a new menu and winelist in most of the city's restaurants, where the return of their customers, and the return to routine, come as something of a relief.

It was to sample the new menu, and to test the recommendations of many friends, that I approached the door of Casa Benigna one sunny morning. Had it not been for the charming painted sign indicating its name, I think I would have just walked past. The façade gives no clue of what goes on behind it. There are metal bars on the windows, a rather unattractive aluminium door, a bell-push... I press it, the door opens, and I walk into a Mediterranean environment.

Norberto Jorge is a charmer and the founding partner of several restaurants. He is also a cook (he calls himself a *mesonero*, which carries implications of both cook and host), troubadour and wine-lover. I first met him more years ago than I care to remember, at La Moñica, the restaurant he used to run in the Alicante village of San Vicente de Raspeig, in the Valencia region of Spain's eastern coast known as the Levante, on the Mediterranean.

I was there as escort to a group of British journalists, and had come to find out about a study that Norberto Jorge and Carlos Llorca Baus were making of the traditional methods and equipment used in tuna fishing and salt-fish cuisine in south-eastern Spain. I have never forgotten the dishes I tasted that day, based on *mojama* (dried salted tuna) and tuna

roe and a delicious Alicante rice dish prepared by his mother, a renowned local cook.

I was delighted, years later, to hear about Casa Benigna and the chef who was engendering a lot of interest in Madrid with his distinctive approach to Mediterranean cuisine. It was Norberto Jorge.

He was a bit older, plumper and just as friendly and approachable as I remembered him. We launched on another journalistic exploration of his life, ambitions and experiences. Our talk was to last two days, a tapas session, a dinner and a moving impromptu concert with two guitars and singer.

## MEDITERRANEAN ORIGINS

"I'm a Mediterranean man, born in San Vicente de Raspeig near Alicante. I was raised on fried vegetables, with lentils, rice, and game *gazpacho* on special occasions. There were olives, too, and pickles, all sorts of fish, and tender young almond hearts. That's where my style of cooking comes from, and if I am to serve up authentic food, that's the sort of food it has to be".

Having said that, Norberto Jorge has followed a tough and tortuous route to reach this conclusion and the style of cuisine that he so proudly serves his customers today. The route has been one of aspirations, disappointments, financial crises, cuts and burns, but it has also been crammed with the excitement that is clearly the stuff of life for him.

In 1974, he was in his early twenties, still a student for want of something else to do, and an enthusiastic member of the *tuna* (those jolly groups of student singers in period costume). He started his culinary and commercial career in Norway, where he opened a 'typical' Spanish restaurant



called Sancho. This was followed by a period of discipline and apprenticeship in the kitchens of the Restaurante Duque in Segovia, and Madrid's famous Jockey. Back in Scandinavia, he opened Norberto, which served French nouvelle cuisine and which soon became one of the most popular restaurants in Oslo and featured in the *Gault Millau* guide. Eventually, he returned to Spain to start a venture which, though fascinating, did not turn out as well as he had hoped. He opened a restaurant in his home town of San Vicente de Raspeig, called La Moñica (this is the Catalan word for 'doll', and is his grandmother's nickname). La Moñica did very well and gained Michelin stars, but there came a day when it was no longer pleasing its customers. Essentially French in pedigree and presentation, the food was no longer in synch with the taste of an increasingly sophisticated clientele. This was the Spain of the early Eighties, and modern French cuisine was being nudged into second place.

"With innovative food", says Norberto Jorge "you have a problem when the customer tells you that he's not going to order a certain dish because he's tasted it already. Which means either that it was badly cooked, or that it just wasn't interesting enough." Either way, it's bad news for the cook, who would never receive that sort of response to a more traditional kind of cooking. At La Moñica, the extensive menu included both French dishes and examples of the new Basque cuisine, especially dishes created by one of that

movement's leading figures, José Mari Arzak. "It was a style of cooking in which the dishes were all perfect copies, but nothing more". Disillusioned, and with a flagging bank account, he decided to heed the advice of Vitorilla, the great cook of the Figón de Santiago, a traditional Madrid restaurant. She persuaded him to head for the capital and to stick to the particular gastronomic culture that had attracted him to cooking in the first place. In his case, this meant Mediterranean cuisine, to which he has since applied in-depth knowledge and mastery of classic culinary skills. Since making the radical break with French cuisine, Norberto has not looked back. He spent some time at the Figón de Santiago and at another Madrid restaurant, Alviso, before opening the doors of Casa Benigna -though only when the bell rings.

#### GROWING UP IN THE LEVANTE

To understand what Norberto Jorge and his team are doing at Casa Benigna, one has to know something about the lifestyle and food of the Levante in general, and of coastal and inland Alicante in particular. There is the fact, too, that three important cooks have influenced his career: his grandmother Antonia, his mother Carmen, and his great friend and adviser Vitorilla.

The cookery of the Land of Valencia (Alicante is one of the three provinces of the region) is as varied as its geography, and has been influenced for centuries by cultures attracted to the Iberian Levante, such as the

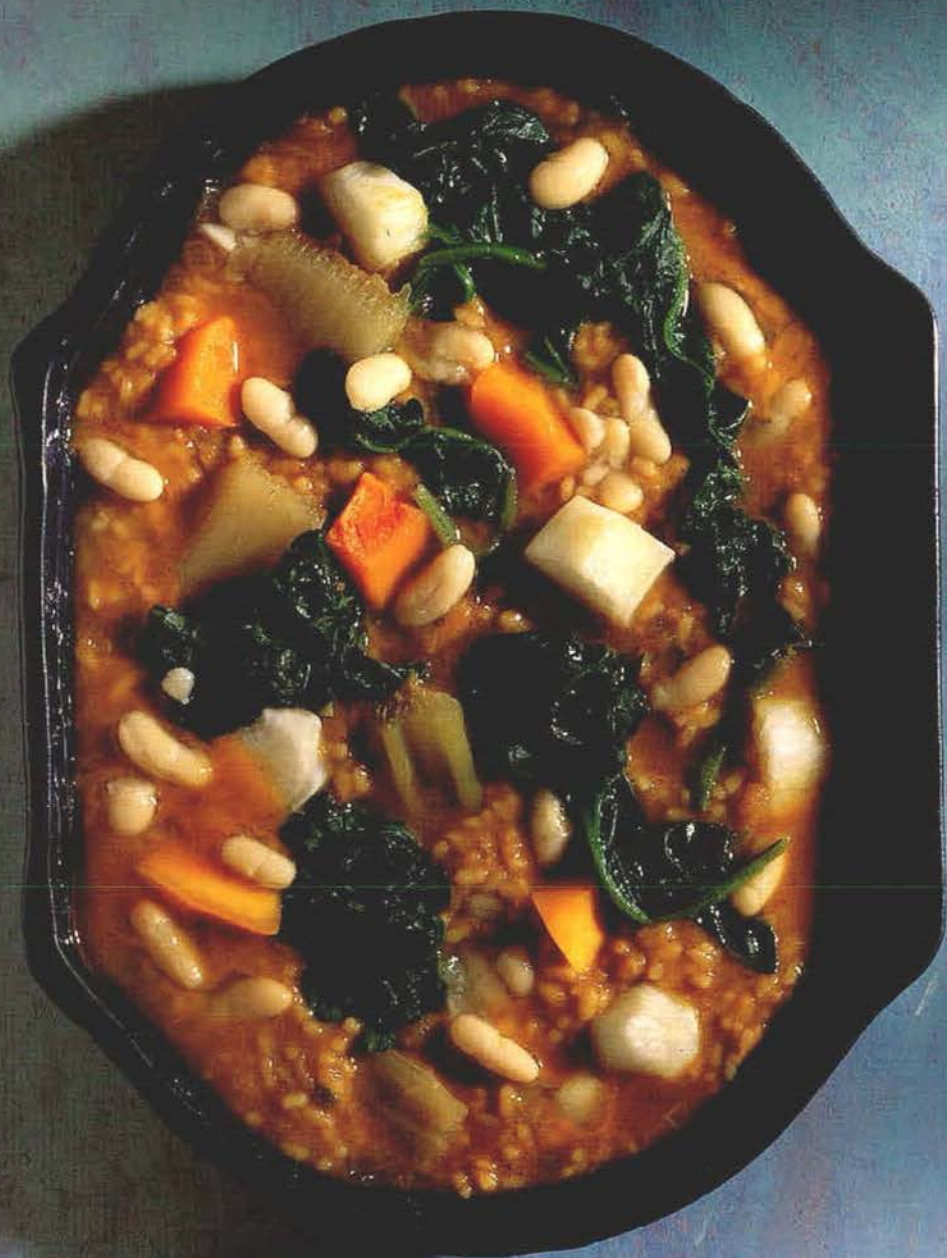
Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and Moors. The cookery here is divided between the food of the coast and the specialities of the mountains or hinterland. Fresh vegetables and fruits, olives, almonds, fresh and salted fish and rice are all equally relevant.

I have always believed that to grow up with good food is hugely influential in developing a good palate. If one then decides to devote oneself professionally to the art of preparing food and even, as *mesoneros*, to determine the environment in which it is to be eaten, that training in combination with good taste give one a head start. "It's true in so many respects -the imprints of childhood that we retain are few but vital", observed Norberto Jorge, as he reminisced during our interview: "I have a vivid and touching memory of my grandmother's kitchen, which was behind the family grocery shop. I used to cut slices of salted *marrajo* (a small species of coastal shark very common throughout the Mediterranean) and take them to the kitchen, where La Monica would be preparing her famous fried vegetables. She used to cook the fish on the hotplate for me with a little oil to keep me going until dinner". (A traditional pattern of eating tapas at home, which lets the cook work on in peace). "I remember the smell of the ingredients frying when my grandmother was starting one of her rice dishes", says Norberto "Then there was killing the turkey for Christmas, the great annual fiesta that everyone looked forward to. Those turkeys, brought into Spain originally from America in the 16<sup>th</sup>C,

would be raised over the year by every household and fed on bran and corn. They were killed on Christmas Eve day, and we would immediately start making *tarondjetes* (meat balls) to put into the traditional Christmas Day *cocido* of chick-peas, potatoes, vegetables and a bit of beef. The *tarondjetes* were made of pork, pine-nuts, bread-crumbs, beaten egg and a little turkey blood. On Christmas Eve, which is the big day of the festival in Spain, a turkey *rosao* was served. This was just a stew made with the white-meat parts of the bird and their corresponding bones".

Talking about the vegetables he remembers as an ever-present feature of his childhood diet, he reeled off an almost endless list: salad leaves, artichokes, aubergines, de luxe varieties of potato, spinach, fresh young broad beans -an ingredient in so many dishes of the Levante-, swiss chard, runner beans, local cardoons... Almonds, too, were an important ingredient; fried and crushed, they are a classic part of *pepitoria de gallina* (chicken stewed in a sauce of almonds, roasted garlic, fried bread and egg yolk).

"I couldn't talk about my childhood", Norberto continued, "without mentioning bread with wine and sugar at tea-time, or the green olives we used to share out one by one as we chanted a rhyme on the beach, and that we used to break open by throwing them against a wooden board. Then we'd soak them for a week, changing the water once or twice a day to get rid of the bitterness. Then we'd add fennel, lemon leaves, chunks of lemon and salt to taste. Purple olives we



would just rinse, then put them in water with *pebrella* (a sort of oregano) and thyme. We never made charcuterie at home, because we never killed a pig. We did cook *bacalao* (cod) though. Both my mother and grandmother were very good at *bacalao* and had many ways of cooking it. It featured very frequently, in salads, and in *esguellats* (a Catalan term for vegetables baked with flaked *bacalao*). Tomatoes with *bacalao* and *ñora* oil (see below) are still one of my weaknesses".

Unlike other Mediterranean cuisines, such as Turkish and Tunisian, the cuisine of the Levante does not use many spices except, of course, saffron, pepper and *pimentón* (paprika), both sweet and hot types. The mention of *pimentón* leads on to the *ñora*, whose role as a flavoring/coloring agent characterizes the food of certain areas of Alicante. The *ñora* is a dried, small, round red pepper, and is very much a part of the seafaring cuisine of the southern coast of the Levante. It provides color and flavor in the stock for many rice dishes and is, furthermore, the secret of another speciality - *boix*.

A *boix* in Catalan is a pestle, as in pestle and mortar. It is also the name given to a spread of the fried *ñora* left behind on the pestle after crushing it with rock salt (this is how it is added to cooking liquid for the famous rice dishes). The pestle is wiped clean on a piece of bread which is then sprinkled with a little oil. Simple and basic, but delicious - I know: I tried a piece of toast spread with *boix* at Casa Benigna.

### THREE GENERATIONS AT THE STOVE

Norberto believes that the family plays a decisive role in gastronomic circles: "I belong to the last generation that has seen its mothers and grandmothers really cooking; my children haven't had that experience", he declares. "I come from a family of farmers, as everyone was in that area. Just before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, my grandfather helped set his sons up in the wine business. Those were hard times, and wine was on the black market. They started out selling it from the back of the house, and after the war ended they made it into a legal grocery shop."

Antonia, "La Moñica", the great cook of the family and teacher of them all, not only had marvellous hands but also three sons who would go off to the *buerta*, the fertile irrigated land where fruit and vegetables flourished, and up into the hills to buy oil and flour. These ingredients were the best bartering currency for obtaining other things, such as meat and fish, with which she could make a huge range of dishes. "I will never forget her vegetable *fritangas*, with mouthwatering fried peppers and tomatoes" he recalls. "Of course they influenced my cooking." Rice, such a fundamental part of everyone's diet in the Levante, was another of her specialities. The family used to eat rice in some form three or four times a week. There would be *caldoset* (a rice dish with a lot of unabsorbed broth), special occasion rice (a drier rice with rabbit and snails, made in the *paella* pan which gives the dish its

name; *olleta*, a local stew, also named after the receptacle in which it is made, of vegetables, potatoes and rice, served with *pericana* (*ñoras*, garlic and *bacalao*) and spring onions. She also made a delicious vegetarian chick-pea stew, and simple, warming winter soups with garlic and toasted saffron. We used to eat a lot of oranges and mandarins, and heaps of *frutos secos* (dried fruits, nuts and seeds): walnuts, almonds, *torrats* (little dried chick-peas), pumpkin seeds, *chufas* (tiger nuts)... They were so much in demand that the best stall at any local fair would be the *frutos secos* stall. I still serve that sort of thing among the aperitifs at Casa Benigna", he explains.

"My mother's cooking is just like my grandmother's but with one difference. She knows how to adapt home cooking to the needs of a professional cook. This is fundamental to the sort of food that we are cooking in Spain today, and it is attracting more and more enthusiasts. She must have made thousands of rice dishes at La Moñica. Another of her dishes that I still love is bonito or mackerel marinated with artichoke hearts. Then there's *giraboix*, a delicious cocido of *bacalao* with countless vegetables. My mother often comes to Madrid, and when she's here she revolutionizes both the kitchen and the dining room. After she's gone back to Alicante, the customers ask after her, and this or that sauce, or a delicious stew. We are now working with my mother on a compilation of her cuisine, interwoven with experiences and anecdotes about her."

### SALT FISH, GAZPACHOS AND COCAS

Norberto and I also talked about other foods which are equally typical of his home area, yet being lesser-known are often misrepresented outside the Levante. Among them are salt fish, *gazpachos* and *cocas*.

Salting as a method of preserving tuna and other fish has been used around the coasts of Spain, both Atlantic and Mediterranean, since time immemorial. Partly because it is so easy to transport, salt fish has played an important role in the culture and larder of much of Spain, both on the coast and inland, and this is reflected in its many culinary applications. Norberto Jorge has been defending home-salted fish for years: *Almadraba, Salazón y Cocina*, the book on which he collaborated with Carlos Llorca Baus, published in 1988, is now unfortunately out of print. "Salt fish became the classic popular snack, or *companage* (from the Latin, meaning 'with bread'), before the widespread introduction of things like dairy products, sausages, etc. As well as its low price, its fortifying effect made it indispensable, whether in the ploughman's basket or on board ship", explain the authors.

Norberto Jorge's fascination with the subject is hardly surprising. It was a common occurrence for La Moñica to salt her own fish, especially small mackerel, in the patio at home.. She would first cure them with salt, then prop them up on two sticks in the sun. In fact, there are two classes of salt fish, the humble and the de luxe, the latter category including *mojama* (salted dried tuna) and tuna roe.



Early in the interview, Norberto Jorge mentioned the special occasion *gazpachos* he used to eat as a child. This is perhaps the least-known dish in Alicante cookery. Antonio Vergara, food critic and authority on that area, is the author of *Comer en el País Valencià* (Eating in the Valencia Region), published by Penthalon in 1981, in which he discusses the region's *gazpachos* made with meat and fish. These are nothing like the cold or hot Andalusian soups which have become so well-known internationally. They are substantial stews made with chicken, pigeon, duck, partridge or wild rabbit, to which a kind of flour and water patty is added.

The *coca*, a bread-dough base spread with a wide range of toppings, is clearly a member of the same Mediterranean family as Italy's *pizza*, southern France's *pissaladiere* and Morocco's *kbboz bishemar*. In the Levante, *coca* is very popular both unadorned (just a variety of bread) and topped. In the villages of Alicante, making *coca* is man's work or at least it was in the house of Norberto's grandfather. Grandpa Toni had his own individual approach to *coca*-making, cooking the base and the topping separately. First he prepared the bread-dough bases which he cooked on a griddle out in the open air, pinching them as they cooked so that they absorbed the oil he sprinkled over them from time to time. He liked his *cocas* with young garlic shoots grilled over the coals, raw broad beans and grilled

sardines or *longaniza* sausage, with a glass of wine close at hand.

#### TAPAS AT CASA BENIGNA

Having heard all about his origins and his career so far, the time had come to taste the fruits of so much experience. Seated at a table in Casa Benigna's dining room, I felt quite at home, and this is not a frequent experience for me in restaurants. The dining room is divided into two sections. The first, nearest the street-door, is simple, functional and cheery, while the rear section, nearest the kitchen, is totally welcoming with a family atmosphere, especially at night. The walls are painted a gentle blue and hung with lots of modern oil paintings and shelves of books and objects. The cloths are white, and attractive ceramic under-plates contrast with simple tableware and cutlery. Lighting has been carefully planned and each table has its own pendant light. Casa Benigna does not overdo the luxury or pretensions; it's a place where you eat well and enjoy yourself, which is, after all, the point when customer wellbeing is considered to be paramount.

There are few rigid rules at Casa Benigna. For example, customers decide whether they want to eat conventionally, following an established sequence of dishes, or not. Importantly, they decide, too, how big a serving they are ready for just then, whether an amuse-gueule, a tapa-sized serving, or a full portion. The menu can be long and narrow, short and narrow, short and wide... The wine-

list is worth studying -currently experimental, it could turn into one of the best in Spain. It provides information about vinification, organoleptic characteristics, optimum drinking time, and even value for money assessments.

Without further ado, here is the range of *tapas* that we enjoyed at lunchtime. I add the occasional comment:

Salad of steamed mussels with crisp lettuce hearts and red prawn mayonnaise. (To make the oil for the mayonnaise, sauté the prawn shells and heads in olive oil. When the juices released are slightly caramelized, add fresh oil and allow to infuse for an hour. The delicious aromatized oil that results is then mixed into the eggs in the usual way.)

Salad of *bacalao* and tomatoes with *ñora* oil. (Excellent.)

Piquillo peppers stuffed with prawn and leek and served with a purée of peppers and sauce. (I always enjoy these little Navarrese peppers, full of flavor and just slightly piquant.)

Sautéed ceps with garlic. (Pleasant enough, though not exciting.)

Tripe in piquant sauce. (This recipe is by José Rodríguez Sánchez, Casa Benigna's chef de cuisine, and this dish is exciting. The secret is the sauce based on a sofrito of *morcilla* (blood sausage) and *chorizo* (paprika sausage) with thoroughly softened onion and a touch of chili or tabasco.) *Morcilla* (blood sausage) wrapped in delicate filo pastry and fried in olive oil. This one was my favorite and, also, *empedrat*, a vegetable rice with *bacalao* skin, which was simply sublime. We drank Mas Comptal

1994, an excellent Merlot rosé made in Catalonia by Albert Mill" Mallofre.

#### GOOD EATING, GOOD LIVING

The next night, I was back at the door of Casa Benigna. It was 11 pm, and the dining room was lit up and lively. Norberto was taking the orders, helping out where needed, and recommending the house wine. Some customers were already sampling the house aperitif-a little board of *fuet* (Catalan hard sausage) and bread (not, unfortunately, homemade). Within minutes of having sat down, I was served my own little board and a plate of simply exquisite potato skins. These nibbles were closely followed by a Mediterranean selection of pickled pimientos and onion and tiny but delicious marinated olives. The first wine of the night was a cold Albariño, just right for drinking and correctly served. I popped in potato skins, *fuet* and olives until the first dish of the menu I had chosen -definitely long, and definitely narrow- arrived. Salt-baked red prawns *en papillote*. I have eaten many a salt-baked prawn in my time, but the quality and color of these made them irresistible: cooked just enough, their freshness and flavor were a pleasure, though I think they would have been better in coarser salt, since the head and shell (the parts I like best) were just a little too salty.

We ate slowly -we were in no hurry, and neither was the kitchen, nor, thank goodness, the wine-waiter. Courgettes with a tomato and oregano sauce followed



the prawns. They appear on the winter menu as *tallarines de calabacín* (courgette noodles), just because it's fashionable to call things by another name, sometimes more aptly than others. We tend to think that making a good tomato sauce is child's play, and of course it isn't. This one was excellent, with an added touch of sunflower seeds and an egg poached by an expert. For me, the secret of this dish was the harmony of the vegetables and the little touch of lemon which perked up the courgette. We decided to change wines, and moved on to a very modern Navarre red made by Bodegas Magaña in 1990: Eventum. Excellent fruit, balance and length characterize the '90 vintage. It is the perfect accompani-

ment to all sorts of food, sea and land, and went particularly well with the vegetable *escabeche* of artichokes, tomatoes, aubergines, pine-nuts, olive oil and Jerez vinegar.

Another glass of Eventum accompanied a generous serving of fresh cod with Ibérico ham on a bed of spinach and olive oil. One does not often find fresh cod in Spanish restaurants. Dried salt cod cookery features very largely throughout Spain, and is often very complex and sophisticated. It has been a staple ingredient for so long that the culinary imagination has been applied to it for centuries and has given rise to a style of cuisine which is unique in the world. But coming across fresh, really fresh, cod in a restaurant is a treat

for those of us who could live quite happily without meat as long as we had fish. Jabugo ham, held by experts to be one of the finest cured hams in the world, gave this dish a particularly Spanish deliciousness and made it robust enough for the red wine that I was still drinking. I think I would substitute some other vegetable for the spinach, but that's just a question of personal taste. It was dessert time, and I could just about find room for the date pudding, evocative of medieval times when the date alm was planted in Spain's Mediterranean regions. And dates called for *fondillón*, a complex sweet Alicante wine which is in danger of becoming extinct. Something must be done. I had snacked, dined, drunk and talked, and I was still

feeling quite at home. We stayed on listening to the sound of the guitar and the sad sweet voice of our host: charmer, cook, restaurateur by profession and singer by inclination. Mediterranean cuisine has found a permanent niche in Madrid.

**See recipes on page 104.**

*María José Sevilla is an expert in Spanish gastronomy, the author of several books and a BBC TV program on the subject, and is joint head of food and wine promotion in the Spanish Commercial Office located in the UK.*

## Casa Benigna

### 1995 WINTER MENU

#### Entrées

- Salad of brown rice and baby cuttlefish with black vinaigrette
- Vegetable and mussel *escabeche*
- Ciabatta toast with Alicante salt fish
- Squid with country vegetables
- Vegetable assortment, grilled or in dressing (your choice)
- Courgette noodles with tomato and oregano sauce
- Morcilla* sausage rolls on roast pepper strips
- Home-marinated salmon with juniper

- Grilled papillote of red prawn
- Bilbao-style soya sprouts

#### Rice and pasta

- House-style *arroz a banda* (seafood-flavored rice)
- Vegetable rice cooked in the *paella* pan
- Rice with cod skin
- Papardelle with garlic and spinach

#### Fish

- Sole in *romesco* (pepper, almond & garlic) sauce
- Turbot in a cabbage-leaf parcel, with salted herring roe
- Suquet* of sea-bass (fish stew)
- Baked bream

#### Meat

- Roast top rump of beef
- Little entrecotes of lamb with rosemary
- Free-range chicken with bread
- Wild duck with caramel of merlot vinegar

#### Desserts

- Tart of the day
- Chocolate marquise with mint sauce
- Date pudding
- Tocino del cielo* (rich egg custard) with coffee caramel
- Sorbet
- Norwegian biscuit with red fruits

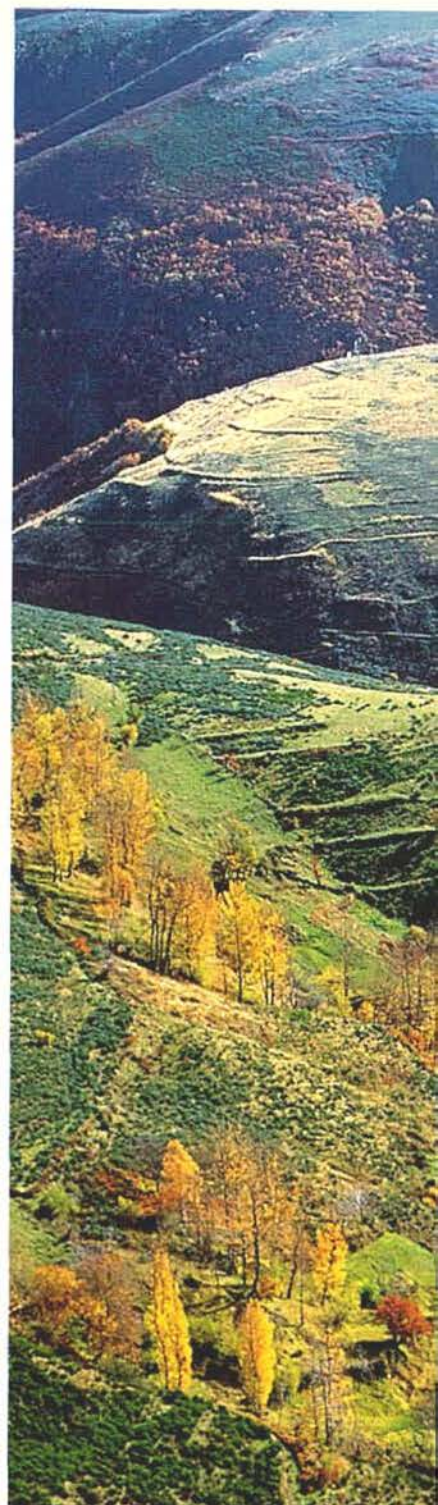
#### Dishes of the day

- Monday: Rice with pork
- Tuesday: Black rice
- Wednesday: Sea-food rice
- Thursday: Rice with rabbit
- Friday: Rice with lobster
- Saturday: Rice with mushrooms
- Sunday: *Paella*

**RESTAURANTE CASA BENIGNA**  
**Benigno Soto,9**  
**28002 MADRID**  
**Tel: 34-1-413 33 56**  
**Closed Holy Week and Christmas**



*Villafranca enjoys the richest architectural heritage in this area. San Nicolás el Real is a good sample.*



*In El Bierzo, small villages are*

The region of El Bierzo in north-western Spain marks the transition between the verdant landscape of Galicia and the bleak plateaux of Castile. Like so much of Spain, it is a nexus of routes and cultures. Relics of its long history include ancient Celtic settlements; remains of the Roman occupation (they extracted huge quantities of gold from its hillsides); and churches and monuments built along the pilgrimage route trodden by countless thousands on their way to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. These are just some of the highlights: while invaders of one sort and another have come and gone, El Bierzo has evolved a lifestyle and culture all its own.

Text: **Sonia Ortega**  
Photos: **Miguel Sánchez and Puri Lozano / ICEX**  
Translation: **Hawys Pritchard**



*integrated into the landscape, like Bouzas, in the midst of a beautiful valley which changes its colors when Autumn arrives.*

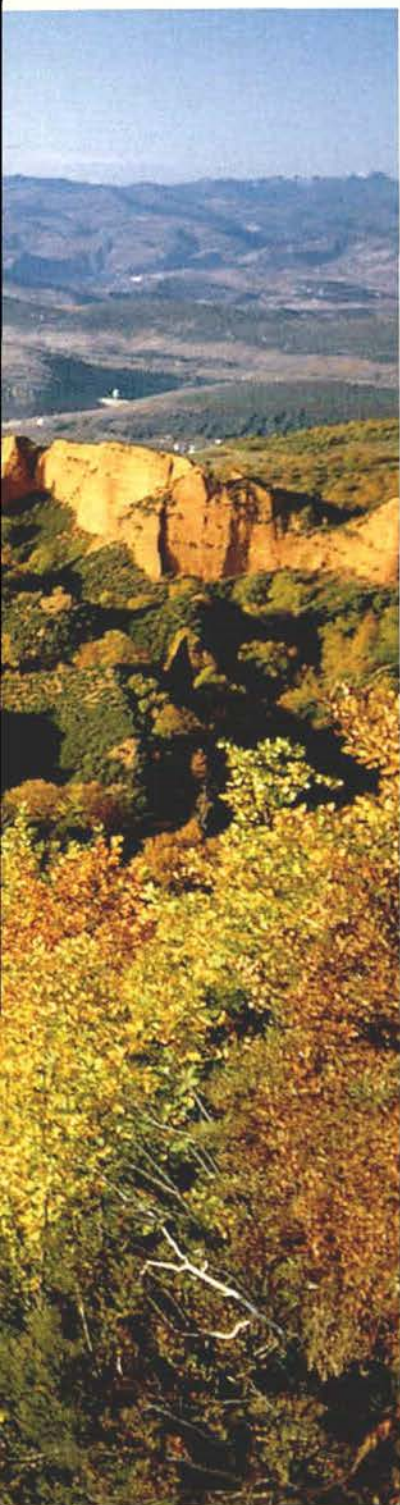
# EL BIERZO, HIDDEN TREASURES

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*El Bierzo boasts treasures such as the unique and mysterious landscape of Las Médulas. This was the biggest gold mine in*

**T**he awesome beauty of Las Médulas is the result of a gigantic feat of engineering, in the course of which the Romans moved millions of tons of earth in search of gold by a method described as *'ruina montium'*.



the entire Roman empire.

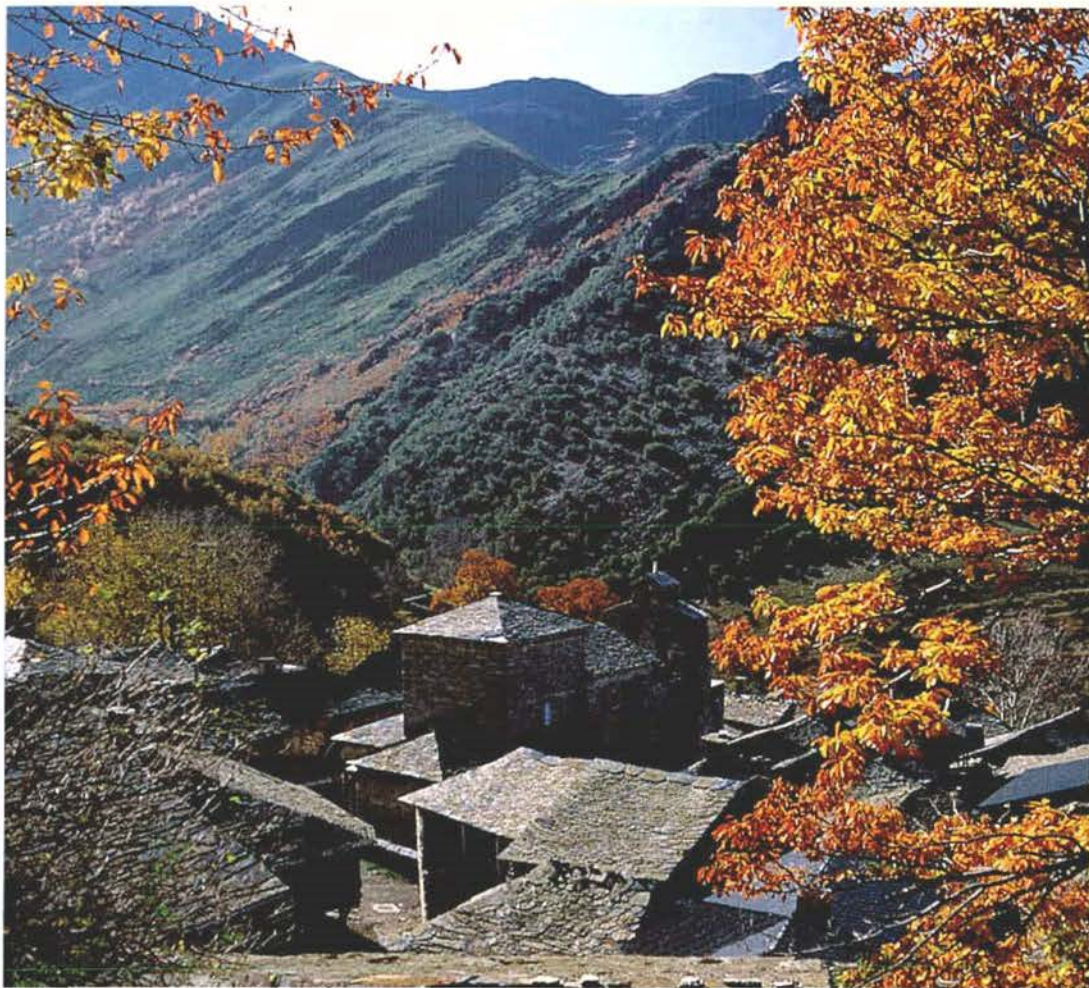


At Campo del Agua a group of pallozas were reconstructed to recreate a now extinct type of village.

Come February each year, Madrid's *bercianos*—natives of El Bierzo—get together in one of the city's hotels to pay homage to the 'Berciano of the Year' and, importantly, to eat a *botillo*. As you will have guessed, this is an El Bierzo delicacy, indeed exclusively so. Ready for eating a few weeks after the traditional *matanza*, or pig-slaughtering, the *botillo* is a huge pork sausage which includes meat and ribs dressed with paprika and cured by smoking. It is served boiled, accompanied by vegetables and *cachelos* (boiled potatoes). It's the sort of dish that brings to mind words like 'hearty' and 'rib-sticking'. Surely the *botillo* is just an excuse for city-dwelling *bercianos* to get together and indulge in a bit of nostalgia for their little-known region. And it is little-known even in Spain, despite the best efforts of one of Spain's most popular radio

broadcasters, Luis del Olmo, himself a *berciano* who misses no opportunity to tell his listeners how wonderful his home patch is.

One could be forgiven for thinking that if El Bierzo is little-known, it might be with good reason, however highly Sr. del Olmo rates it. I can now tell you that is not the case. Indeed, the tourist authorities are currently trying to rectify their previous lack of effort with a campaign promoting El Bierzo as '*Un País Encantado*' ('A Wonderland'), quoting the words of 19<sup>th</sup> C writer and historian J. M. Cuadrado. And it is wonderful, but in an unassuming way, like those people we all know are worth their weight in gold yet in so straightforward and natural a way that we don't realize their virtues until we stop and think about them. Those, at least, were my thoughts when, in late Spring this year, I explored a good deal



*Peñalba de Santiago is one of the finest examples of the rural architecture of El Bierzo.*

of the area and discovered for myself that El Bierzo contains treasures such as the unique and mysterious landscape of Las Médulas, architectural gems such as Santiago de Peñalba, ethnographic relics like *pallozas*, and towns rich in fine historic buildings, like Villafranca del Bierzo. And as a backdrop to its many features of special interest, there are luxuriant expanses of chestnut woods the like of which few have survived to this day and age.

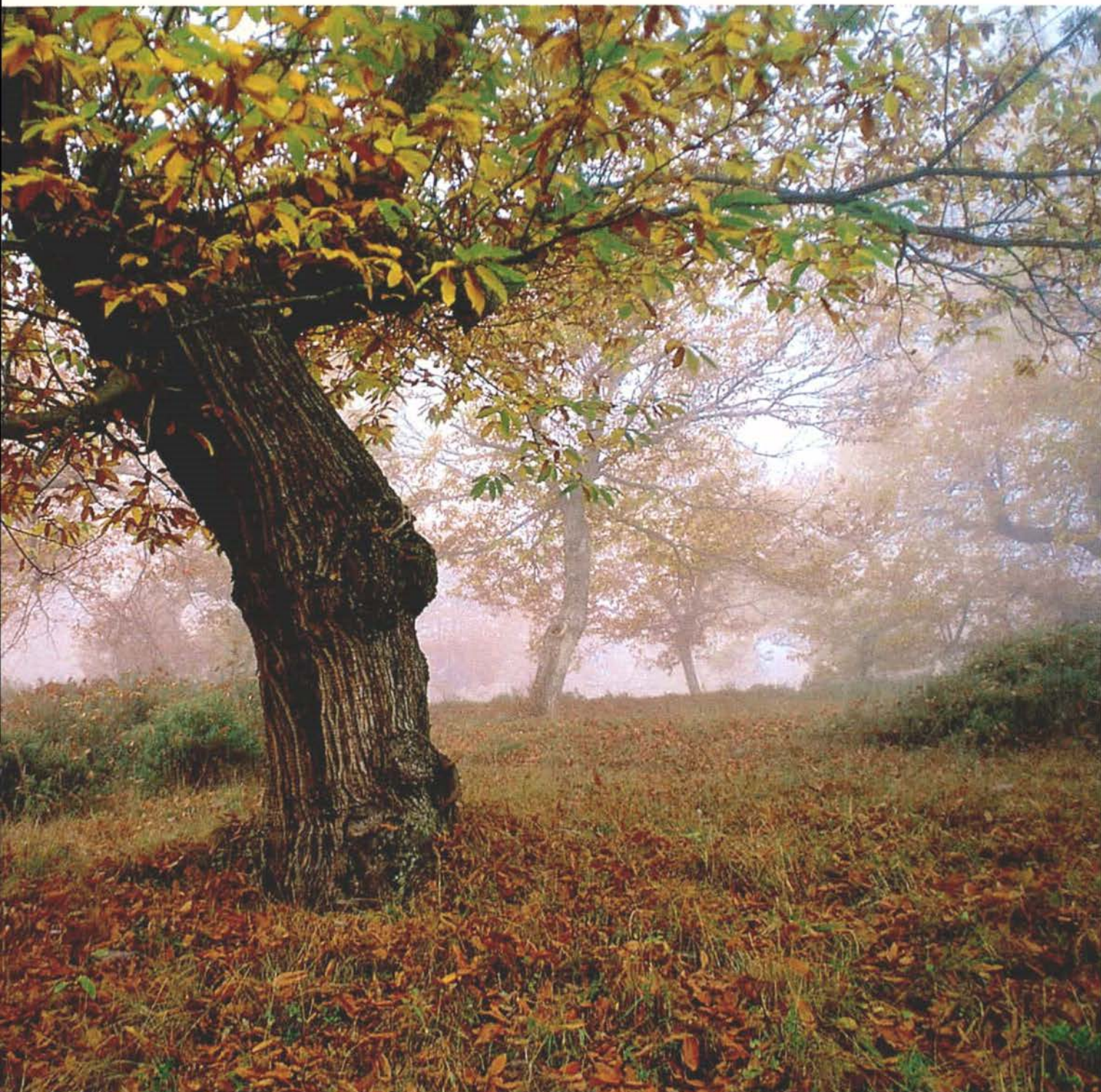
#### **River Hollow**

First a bit of background information before setting off on this guided tour of the *País Encantado*. Geographically speaking, El Bierzo is valleys and mountains, grouped around a curious fluvial depression into which all its rivers flow, and out of which the largest of them all, the River Sil, bears their waters on towards the At-

lantic. Within this geographical setting, there are various Bierzos, each with its own appeal: wild and mountainous; fertile alluvial; wooded and druidic. The fertile alluvial is a significant factor in the area's economy, its crops being grapes, fruit and top quality red peppers. These provide the basis of a sizeable canning industry and of winegrowing -local wines have been Denomination of Origin covered since 1989. Most of the agriculture goes on in the lowland Bierzo Bajo, while the upland area, the Bierzo Alto, lives, basically, by coal-mining. Ponferrada, population 60,000, is El Bierzo's administrative, commercial and services center. A settlement since before the Roman occupation of the Iberian Peninsula, Ponferrada took on importance with the growth of the Pilgrimage Route to Santiago de Compostela. At the close of the 11<sup>th</sup> C, Bishop Osmundo ordered a bridge to be



*Wooded and druidic Bierzo: As a*



*backdrop to its many features of special interest, there are chestnut woods the like of which few have survived to this day and age.*



The very peace that those early hermits were seeking as the setting for their committed contemplative life still survives in the 'mystic Bierzo'. San Pedro de Montes, founded in the Middle Ages, was one of the most important monasteries here.

# EL BIERZO

built to make the way easier for pilgrims on their way to Galicia. The bridge, reinforced with iron, was the *pons ferrata* ('iron bridge' in Latin) which gave the town its name. From then on, and throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> C, Ponferrada began to expand in all senses. Instrumental in this was the installation there of the Military Order of the Knights Templar which, to fulfil its mission of protecting pilgrims on their journey, built an imposing fortress which has Ponferrada's symbol.

I draw a veil over the new part of town, engendered by the area's coal mining industry, and whose architectural attractions are nil. Better to focus on what used to be the old walled town with, in addition to the famous castle, other fine old buildings such as the Town Hall (Baroque), the Basílica de la Encina (Renaissance), and the curious clock tower built in the 16<sup>th</sup> C over one arch of the medieval town walls.

Ponferrada is ideally situated to serve as a point of departure for various routes providing a thorough exploration of El Bierzo as a whole. Las Médulas, just 20 kilometers (12 miles) south-west of Ponferrada, is a dramatic place to start.

## Strange Red Mountains

In the process of extracting quantities of gold from the surrounding hills, the Romans left their mark on El Bierzo in more ways than one. The Mirador de Orellán is a vantage point which looks out over an astonishing landscape. Anyone surveying it with no background information would find it difficult to explain. The awesome beauty of Las Médulas is the result of a gigantic feat of engineering, in the

course of which the Romans moved millions of tons of earth in search of gold.

Up in the Aquilanos hills, with the River Sil nearby, this site provided the Romans with the location for the biggest gold mine in their entire empire. Circumstances could hardly have been more favorable: alluvial soil containing scattered deposits of gold, abundant water and steep slopes to provide hydraulic power, and gentler slopes towards the Sil to provide drainage.

After visiting Las Médulas, the Roman savant, geographer and historian Pliny the Elder (AD23-79) described the gold-extraction method used there as '*ruina montium*'. Basically it consisted in demolishing hills by using water to exert pressure and erosion. Water accumulated in reservoirs constructed at the mountain top was suddenly released to gush its way through a complex system of manually excavated galleries in the bowels of the mountain to be demolished. At the end of the watercourse, the great mass of mud carried along by the water was filtered through mats of gorse and broom in which gold dust and nuggets were left trapped.

And there is still more. As David Gustavo López points out in his fascinating study entitled *Las Médulas*: "... this entire process, 'simple' in conception, depends fundamentally on one element: water. By definition, the water must be released from the site's highest point. How is it to be got there? The Roman engineers found an easy solution, though putting it into practice required hard labor. They built a network of aqueducts which led from river and stream sources up in higher ground and wound its way through the mountains to the site reservoirs. The scale of the project is barely credible: 325 km (200 miles) of

channelling, much of it excavated from rock, make up the system created to supply the Las Médulas works with water".

The Romans designed the system, but it was built by slaves. During the 200 or so years that the mine was operational, thousands of slaves must have worked here in appalling conditions to extract something in the region of a million kilograms (2.2 million pounds) of gold from 240 million cubic meters of moved earth.

What remains in Las Médulas today is a fantastic landscape of caves and conical hills of red mud, covered with woods of mighty-trunked chestnut trees. The only other people there on the day of my visit were schoolchildren from Las Médulas village, there with their teacher to mark the conservationist 'Earth Day'. They picnicked under the trees after carefully putting up posters they had made encouraging visitors to respect the environment in this special place. Reading their messages, I was struck by the paradox: what we were admiring and aiming to protect was essentially a scene of destruction on a vast scale, a brutal spoliation of the natural environment carried out nearly 2000 years ago by an unscrupulous and imperialist conquering power. As if, somewhere around the year 3500, our descendants were to thrill to the beauty of the deforestation of the Amazon. Suspending judgment, though, Las Médulas today is an astonishing sight, both as a landscape and as evidence of human ingenuity. The grandeur of the scheme is best appreciated from the Mirador de Orellán before getting down to hands-on exploration of the tunnels, caves and passages that survive to this day.

## Mystic El Bierzo

Returning to Ponferrada and heading south-east, the tone of the trip changes completely. This is the 'monastic' route, and leads through little hillside villages of stone and slate houses surrounded by valleys in which nothing seems to stir.

The Middle Ages was a particularly formative period for El Bierzo. In the 7<sup>th</sup> C, San Fructuoso founded the monasteries of Compludo and San Pedro de Montes on the slopes of Aquilanos hills, thereby establishing a deeply spiritual eremitic tradition and earning himself a reputation within the monastic community as the St. Anthony of El Bierzo. San Fructuoso's mission was completed by San Valerio and, some centuries later, San Genadio, founder of Santiago de Peñalba.

The place where the monastery of Compludo once stood is reached by a tiny, well-concealed road. Of the monastery itself, there remains nothing but the memory, though the village is still there. It is a fine example of popular architecture, its houses galleried in wood and roofed in large slates. Just outside the village is a perfectly preserved medieval smithy. The workings of the smithy, at once complex and astonishingly simple, are powered entirely by water. Basic elements - water, air and fire - are cleverly harnessed; an enormous wooden hammer thuds rhythmically. Opinions vary as to the age of the smithy, some claiming that it dates back to the time of San Fructuoso and his monastery, namely around the 7<sup>th</sup> C.

San Fructuoso was far from alone here. This founder of Spanish monasticism, described by his biographers as a nobleman and a Goth, established a total of nine monasteries, of which San Pedro de Montes was one of the most important. The

# EL BIERZO

writings of San Valerio, a disciple of San Fructuoso, reveal the whole spirit in which the monasteries were founded and withdrawal from the world embraced: 'It is a place'—he wrote—'like the Garden of Eden and, like that Garden, is the ideal place for retreat, solitude and the recreation of the senses. True, it is enclosed by gigantic hills, but do not therefore think that it is shaded and gloomy but rather sparkling and radiant with sunlight, pleasant and fertile, with a Springtime greenness... What a delight it is to look out from here over the banks of trees - olive, yew, bay, pine, cypress and cool tamarinds...' Valerio's paradise was not to last long. Tradition has it that as a result of the Muslim invasion, it was left abandoned until the 10<sup>th</sup> C, when it was rebuilt and revitalized by San Genadio. It flourished and prospered, but the 19<sup>th</sup> C Disentailment (confiscation and sale of Church property) initiated by Prime Minister Juan Alvarez Mendizábal left the monastery empty once and for all. In 1842, the monastery building, then used as a wood store, was destroyed by fire, and only part of the cloister, the church and its tower were saved. These dependencies still stand today, and are gradually being taken over by vegetation. In the course of its history, the monastery complex became an amalgam of architectural styles and periods: from the earliest period, pre-10<sup>th</sup> C, there are a few capitals embedded in the tower, and the foundation stone; from the Romanesque period, the apses, tower and the doorway linking the church and the cloister; from the 18<sup>th</sup> C, the cloister, church vaulting,

and the façade. Even in its present crumbling condition, the overall effect is still impressive. There is a further architectural treasure just as one leaves the village: the walls of little Hermitage of Santa Cruz are embedded with reliefs dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> C in the Visigothic and Mozarab styles (this latter was the style developed by Christian craftsmen working in Arab-occupied territory). And the very peace that those early hermits were seeking as the setting for the committed contemplative life still survives here. Questing men, or men who were simply tired of the life they knew, distanced themselves from the familiar world by withdrawing to these retreats. Remote enough today, they must have been virtually inaccessible ten centuries ago. The narrow road leads on, parallel to the River Oza, towards Peñalba de Santiago. San Pedro de Montes seemed remote, but Santiago de Peñalba is even more so. Time really does seem to have stood still here -20<sup>th</sup> C conveniences that the rest of us take for granted are still novelties. Its first road for wheeled vehicles (and intrepid travellers) was opened in 1966; piped water and drainage arrived in 1976, electricity in 1977 and the telephone in 1986. But these amenities have not changed the look of the place: this lovely village is one of the finest examples of the rural architecture of El Bierzo. There used to be a monastery here, too, founded by San Genadio in the 10<sup>th</sup> C, but it is no longer in existence. All that remains of it is the little church which stands right in the center of the village. And what a church it is. Whereas the outside is unassuming, the interior is a gem of Spanish Mozarab art. One enters through a doorway composed of a double horseshoe

arch supported by three marble columns. The simple beauty of the interior, and the fact that it has witnessed over a thousand years of history, is quietly thrilling. Outside, the scene is not so much thrilling as imposing: such is the solitude that it is known as *El Valle de Silencio* (The Valley of Silence). Here the saints of bygone days felt themselves to be closer to heaven.

## A Village for Asterix

Another route, another facet of El Bierzo. Following the trail of the Celts, we enter Los Ancares. Though familiar by name to many, this is another little-known part of Spain. Actually in the west of León Province, it is much closer to Galicia and Asturias in its landscape, resources and traditions. From Ponferrada, the road leads through lowland El Bierzo to climb upwards to Vega de Espinareda, a good base from which to explore Los Ancares. The area is made up of several valleys which, though almost parallel, are self-contained units: topography seems to have determined patterns of social space, linguistic and cultural development and trade relations. The valleys of Burbia, Ancares and Fornela occupy an area of something over 400 km<sup>2</sup> (156 square miles). There is plenty of water but the soil is poor, so the traditional local occupations have been livestock-raising and muleteering. For many centuries, the inhabitants of Ancares and Fornela have traded in the most diverse products and transported them by mule. Valley lore abounds in Moors living in caves, and treasures guarded by fabulous beasts. The fact that the area is rich in archaeological remains might well have provided strands for the weaving of these local legends. Among their ancestors, these valley people can count dwellers in the

area's many pre-Roman Castro settlements, and the authors of cave paintings discovered here. Recent excavations support the theory that the area has been inhabited since the late Iron Age. Despite the beauty of the environment, life in these parts has not been easy. Electricity and roads arrived very late, by which time many had opted for moving elsewhere. Some of the area's most ancient dwellings -*pallozas*- have been restored. There were once many *palloza* settlements in these mountains. Generally held to be akin to the Celtic Castro huts, they are a type of thatched round house. In the interior, compartments for animals and people are barely separated by wooden partitions. There is access from the outside to the *astrago*, a sizeable central corridor which divides the *palloza* in half, where everyday tasks such as working wood or flax were carried out, and there is a hearth in the center. Curiously, the roofs (today constructed by old craftsmen skilled in thatching with rye straw) have no chimney. Apparently, smoke helped preserve the wood and straw. *Pallozas* are large dwellings (about 200 m<sup>2</sup>-2,153 sq. feet) whose interior space is ergonomically organized. Since there are few windows, they are very dark though the bonus is that the temperature is consistently comfortable, thanks mainly to the insulating effect of the straw. However rational the organization of space, though, living conditions in a *palloza* must have been fairly rudimentary. Even so, some are still inhabited, alongside the modern housing in some villages. They are fascinating to visit for tourists like us. Manolo, a chatty retired bachelor, showed us around his spacious home. Though he pointed out several times

the improvements he has made, he was looking forward to moving in with a relative who lives in town. The pattern of history is implacable; these little villages will probably become open-air museums before long. It has already happened at Campo de Agua, the beautiful location of El Bierzo's biggest and best group of uninhabited *pallozas*, reconstructed to recreate a now extinct type of village in which Asterix & Co. would feel quite at home.

In the villages of Los Ancares which do not boast *pallozas*, domestic architecture is in the style typical of El Bierzo as a whole: houses are stone-built, slate-roofed and wooden-galleried and grouped in small villages integrated into the landscape. They come to life in summer when many of the people who have moved to Ponferrada or the provincial capital, León, return to spend their holidays among the woodlands - those marvellous chestnut trees again - which carpet the many-rivered valleys.

### En Route

South of *palloza* territory and the secluded valleys of Los Ancares, El Bierzo is traversed by the historic Pilgrimage Route to Santiago de Compostela.

The 'discovery' of the tomb of the Apostle St. James in Galicia was a hugely significant event on many counts. From the 10<sup>th</sup> C on, the tradition of making pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela evolved into what we would think of today as mass tourism. The Pilgrimage Route, trodden by thousands of pilgrims, often from very far afield, passed through El Bierzo, bringing change in its wake. It crosses El Bierzo from east to west, entering the region at the Foncebadón Pass. At that point, pilgrims leave behind them the arid plains of

Castile and begin a cooler, less rigorous phase of their journey. In Foncebadón, they encounter the *Cruz de Ferro*, (Iron Cross), a simple monument at whose feet it is traditional to place a stone to fend off dangers along the way. Pilgrim after pilgrim, stone upon stone, the mound has grown, so that each traveller realizes that many have gone before him. The El Bierzo section of the Route passes through the little village of El Acebo (a fine example of popular architecture), Molinaseca, with its *Puente de Peregrinos* (Pilgrims' Bridge) leading into Calle Real, also known as Calle Peregrinos (Pilgrims' Street), and many fine old aristocratic houses, and on to Ponferrada (the imposing castle would have reassured pilgrims that they were protected from attack) and Cacabelos. The extensive vineyards on either side of the road are a clue that this town is where the area's wine-production is centered. Cacabelos is an appealing town, with lively streets and an interesting little Municipal Archaeological Museum. Though it means deviating slightly from the Pilgrimage Route, it is worth making the detour to the Monastery of Carracedo, just a few kilometers outside Cacabelos. It has stood, right in the heart of El Bierzo, for a thousand years.

The origins of the Cistercian monastery of Carracedo date back to the year 990. In that year, King Bermudo II donated the estate to provide a refuge for monks fleeing from the persecution of Muslim warlord Al-Mansur, scourge of Christianity. That early monastery was restored in 1128 by the Infanta Doña Sancha, who entrusted it to the Benedictines. Somewhere around 1203, it was amalgamated into the Cistercian order and went on to become rich, influential and increasingly powerful. Six centuries lat-

er, in the course of which its fortunes fluctuated, the monastery was definitively plundered and destroyed in the course of the Disentailment of Church property. In 1928, its ruins were officially declared a *Monumento Nacional*, and restoration work was begun in the 1960s. It is yet another example of the architectural mosaic, acquiring additions in different styles over its long history: Romanesque in the original church, Gothic in the little '*Palacio Real*' (Royal Palace), Baroque in some of the cloisters and Neo-Classical in the church presently in use. With Carracedo, our exploration of El Bierzo is nearly at an end. However, no pilgrim would miss out Villafranca del Bierzo, whose tiny population of barely 3,000 enjoys the richest architectural heritage in this area.

Its origins date back to the 11<sup>th</sup> C and the Cluniac monks, who established a monastery at the confluence of the Rivers Burbia and Valcarce to provide support for pilgrims from France on the last leg of their journey. As time passed, it became firmly established as a classic stopping place and important township along the Pilgrimage Route, and many foreign craftsmen and merchants settled there, especially from France. Hospitals and bridges were built, and by the 12<sup>th</sup> C, the town had already taken on a particular significance, represented by the fact that its Romanesque church, dedicated to Santiago (St. James) has a north portal known as the *Puerta del Perdón* (Door of Pardon). Tradition has it that wearers of the cockle-shell emblem which designated a pilgrim who had followed the Route as far as Villafranca but could not complete the journey, were entitled to the same privileges as they would have been in the city of Compostela.

From the church of Santiago at the highest point of the town, the Route continues along the street known today as the Calle del Agua. This street was the main axis of the old town center, whose impressive collection of assorted civil architecture dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> C and 17<sup>th</sup> C. This long, wide street is lined with *palacios*, such as the Palacio del Marqués de Villafranca and the Palacio del Obispo Torquemada, which stand opposite each other and are built in the early Baroque style. And there are also aristocratic town houses, convents, homes of the prosperous bourgeoisie...

The whole town is dotted with architectural gems, which include, as well as the church of Santiago, the church of San Francisco, formerly part of a Franciscan monastery and reputed to have been founded by St. Francis of Assisi during a stay in town en route for Santiago de Compostela. Built in the Romanesque style, albeit extended on various occasions, it has a marvellous 15<sup>th</sup> C painted coffered ceiling.

The town's several convents include San José, which has an interesting collection of tapestries, and La Anunciada, built by Don Pedro Alvarez de Toledo, Marqués de Villafranca. On hearing that his daughter, Doña María, had decided to take the habit he declared: 'If she must be a nun, she had better found a convent'. That's a father for you. The Convento de la Concepción dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> C. Plundered by Napoleon's troops in the early 19<sup>th</sup> C, it then became a barracks and prison before returning to its original role later in the century. The Jesuits were also active here, founding a school, San Nicolás el Real, in the 17<sup>th</sup> C. Run today by the Pauline Fathers, it contains a Natural Sciences Museum.

# EL BIERZO

There is no shortage of candidates, but Villafranca's most imposing historical building is unquestionably

the Colegiata de Santa María. What originally stood on this site was a Benedictine monastery, founded by the Cluniac Order in the 12<sup>th</sup> C. By the 14<sup>th</sup> C, it was almost in ruins, and in the 16<sup>th</sup> C it was entirely rebuilt to the

grandiose specifications of the first Marqués de Villafranca and Viceroy of Naples. He used his political position and geographical proximity to the Papacy to obtain permission from the papal curacy for the Cluniac monastery to be-

come a collegiate church. The works which began in 1529 continued until the 18<sup>th</sup> C, yet the building never actually matched the original conception: it is three wings short and the 17<sup>th</sup> C façade is just that - nothing more than a wall.

## RED PEPPERS, BOTILLO AND PLENTY MORE

An added bonus of exploring the lovely landscapes and villages of El Bierzo is the local cuisine which, like the region itself, combines characteristics of both Castile and Galicia.

The mild climate and fertile soil of the lowland part of El Bierzo, the Bierzo Bajo, combine to give high quality agricultural products. One example are the red peppers of which local people are so proud. There are 'ordinary' (sweet) ones from Carracedo and Carracedelo and other lowland places, but the real local speciality are the piquant ones from Ponferrada. These are different not only in flavor but also in texture, being thin-fleshed and difficult to peel. The season begins in early Autumn and lasts four to six weeks, during which time the air in many of El Bierzo's *pueblos* is heady with the smell of peppers roasting over an open fire before being peeled and canned. For serving, they are just cut into strips and sprinkled with salt and olive oil and perhaps a dash of good wine vinegar and a little chopped garlic. Every house in this area, especially the pepper-growing part, has its stock of canned peppers, and the last few years have seen the emergence of commercial companies which do the can-

ning on a larger scale, though still using the same traditional methods. Unfortunately for readers outside Spain, the companies that can and bottle these delicious peppers and other El Bierzo delicacies, such as cherries in *aguardiente* (kirsch) pears in wine, and chestnut preserves, are not yet in the exporting league.

You can, however, sample El Bierzo wine, which was granted D.O. status in 1989. Wines from El Bierzo, especially reds, are gradually earning themselves a niche among Spain's quality wines. Young monovarietal Mencía reds reveal the high quality of the fruit: they are generally an intense ruby-cherry color, and the velvety

palate is very characteristic of this region's wines.

There are over 3,000 Ha (8,000 acres) under vine here, and conditions are conducive to the production of quality wines: an Atlantic climate similar to that of Bordeaux, undulating hilly terrain varying in altitude (from 450 to 1,000 meters/1,476 to 3,280 feet) and



JAVIER BELLOSO

Even so, this hybrid Gothic-Renaissance building, built to plans drawn by the architect Rodrigo Gil de Hontañón, is nothing if not impressive. In addition to all this religious architecture and the elegance of the Calle del

Agua, Villafranca also boasts a castle. Built by the Marqués de Villafranca around 1490, it is square in plan, with turrets crowned with battlements. It is the most recent, the best preserved and the only inhabited castle in the whole of

El Bierzo. From its strategic position at the apex of Villafranca, it commands views over the town itself and the Pilgrimage Route beyond, wending its way through Galicia's Sierra del Cebrero, on the last leg of the journey to Compostela.

**Sonia Ortega.** is a journalist and the Publication Coordinator of this magazine from its beginnings.

orientation, and plantations of a quality variety such as Mencía.

Whilst Mencía accounts for 60% of the total, the other authorized varieties are Garnacha Tintorera (8%) and the white Palomino (15%), Doña Blanca (6%), Malvasía (3%) and Godello (3%).

'An area with a future, but getting there in slow-motion so long as the cooperatives retain their pre-eminent position,' was the conclusion of José Peñín, one of Spain's veteran wine writers. He singled out for mention interesting new experiments with blends of Mencía and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Then there is *cecina*. A speciality of León Province as a whole rather than of El Bierzo exclusively, *cecina* is a type of cured beef. Large prime cuts of beef are first salted then hung in the open air to prevent spoilage, then smoked in oak or ilex wood-smoke. They are then dried for long periods in cellars or drying chambers, giving an end product which is juicy, smooth textured and distinctive in aroma and flavor.

The cuts used are undercut and oyster round, and pieces weigh between 5 and 3 kilos (11 and 6 pounds).

Having been produced in this area for some two thousand years, *cecina* was given Denominación Específica

status, which guarantees its quality, in 1994.

#### **Botillo and Other Delicacies**

Another local type of charcuterie as old as *cecina* is *botillo*, mentioned by Apicius in Chapter V of his *De re coquinaria* as *botellus* or *botullus*. Pork ribs and other parts with lean meat still attached are marinated with paprika, garlic and water. These are stuffed into the larger intestine of the pig or, if larger, into the stomach or *botelo*, and then cured by smoking for two to three months. When it is ready to be eaten, the *botillo* is cooked with potatoes and cabbage. When ready, it is punctured to release its juices, reddened by the paprika, which impregnate the potatoes and other vegetables with color, aroma and flavor.

The *botillo* features not only in the gastronomic but also in the monastic history of El Bierzo. In her book *La cocina del Camino de Santiago* (The cuisine of the Route to Santiago), María del Carmen Zarzalejos relates that in the monastery of Poiobueno 'the monks kept pigs with a view not to their hams but to the later making of the *botillos* which were special occasion food in their refectory, for welcoming monks and bishops, and pro-

viding an excuse for a great hullabaloo since it took a long time to eat them, picking up and enjoying each and every bone the *botillo* contained, with plenty of El Bierzo's wine and rye bread.' Though the *botillo* is officially an *embutido*, a sausage, it is a rather unusual one both for its size and content. The famous local *chorizos* are more traditional. These are used to make *cachelada berciana*, for which *chorizos*, potatoes and vegetables are cooked together. There is a very Galician accent to this dish, as there is to the *empanada berciana* (a type of pastry), though local experts are divided as to whether the *empanada* was invented in Galicia or El Bierzo. Whichever is the case, the local range of *empanadas* is wide — they come filled with trout, eel, *chorizo*... But the supreme version, known as *empanada de batallón*, is made with peppers, plenty of onion and leeks and, depending on the locality, rabbit, quail, frog's legs, Swiss chard, partridge or kid.

An El Bierzo menu could be rounded off with fresh or preserved fruit, depending on the season, or a dessert made with the excellent local chestnuts.

However humble the pueblo, a traveller can be

sure of finding a good plate of *cecina*, *chorizo* and cured ham. For a wider choice when eating out, the best places to go are Ponferrada, Villafranca del Bierzo or Villafranca. La Charola restaurant, in Villafranca, is known for generous helpings of good food.

There is a choice of two restaurants in Cacabelos, El Gato and La Moncloa. The latter is a kind of sanctuary for El Bierzo cuisine, housed in an old pilgrims' hospital. It is extremely welcoming and combines the functions of restaurant, social salon and shop selling local delicacies all bearing a seal with the legend *Prada a tope* (Plenty from Prada). Prada is a local institution which during the 20 years it has been championing El Bierzo products has succeeded in making them known throughout Spain and opening shops and restaurants in many parts of the country. At harvest-time, in the Moncloa complex one can also see how some of the products are prepared - peppers being roasted and canned, delicate chestnuts being turned into marrons glacés. *El Bierzo a tope*.

**See main exporters on page 12 and recipes on page 107.**

It is now some five or six years since a strikingly individual Spanish red wine from a little known wine producing area in Castile, Gran Colegiata from Toro, burst upon the wine world to applause from such discerning palates as Robert Parker or Emile Peynaud. The success of Bodegas Fariña's fine, overwhelmingly fruity, full-bodied red *gran reservas* (see glossary page 113) sparked off a search for other discoveries in Spain. What other delights lie in wait hidden away in country wineries off the beaten track? Gran Colegiata served as a catalyst in making the wine world -and above all wine drinkers and importers- more aware that Spain,

Text: **John Reeder**

the country in Europe with the largest area under wine, was not only Sherry and Rioja but had a hugely varied wine culture to offer, just waiting to be explored. Now, over half a decade on, new techniques, young new wine-makers, new entrepreneurs, and, above all, new distinctive, quality wines seem to be constantly burgeoning forth across the country, a wealth of carefully made individual wines to rival Europe's finest. We decided one Spring morning to fill up with petrol and head for the open road to seek out some of the more interesting of this new crop of wines wineries and wine-makers.

Photos: **Pablo Neustadt / ICEX**

# WHAT'S NEW?

## AN EXPLORATION OF SPAIN'S NEW HARVEST OF BODEGAS, WINEMAKERS AND TOP QUALITY WINES

### CLOS DOFI: A RED WINE OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY

Most tourists know Catalonia for the coves and fine beaches of its Mediterranean coastline, or for the cosmopolitan port of Barcelona, a sophisticated city, part post-modern, part medieval, part fin-de-siècle. Few venture up into the spectacularly beautiful mountainous Catalan hinterland. Not forty miles from the bustling beach resorts of Salou and Cambrils, high in the mountain valleys of the Catalan interior lies one of Spain's least known *Denominaciones de Origen* or Denominations of Origin (D.O.) (officially delimited wine-producing region): the Priorato.

A clutch of wine villages dotted about a rugged slaty terrain, steep terraced hills and winding streams with an impressively high range of

mountains as a backdrop. This then is the unexpectedly beautiful and secluded location for the making of one of Catalonia's best-kept wine secrets -the highly distinctive, rich and elegant cask-aged Garnacha-based red wines of the Priorato- or Priorat in Catalan, if you prefer. Whose Priory, you may well ask? Well, some eight centuries ago, a community of Carthusian monks under the rule of their Prior, seeking precisely that seclusion the area offers, set up a monastery here, and it was they who probably first planted the black Garnacha grapes for their communion wine. The reputation of the wine of the Priorato has had its ups and downs, going from famed medieval wine to the Bordeaux blender's standby, who in the nineteenth century used its body and color to fill out his not infrequent poorer vintages. Reduced more recently to staple tippie

for Barcelona's more modest taverns, all this was to change a mere half dozen or so years ago, when a collection of mostly small but adventurous wine-makers - "the madmen", local wine-maker Alvaro Palacios calls them- arrived in the D.O. Amongst them was this same Palacios, scion of an old-established Rioja family of wine-makers, a young oenologist with a distinguished pedigree in the current globe-trotting mould, Bordeaux trained, having worked later at Chateau Petrus and then in the Napa Valley.

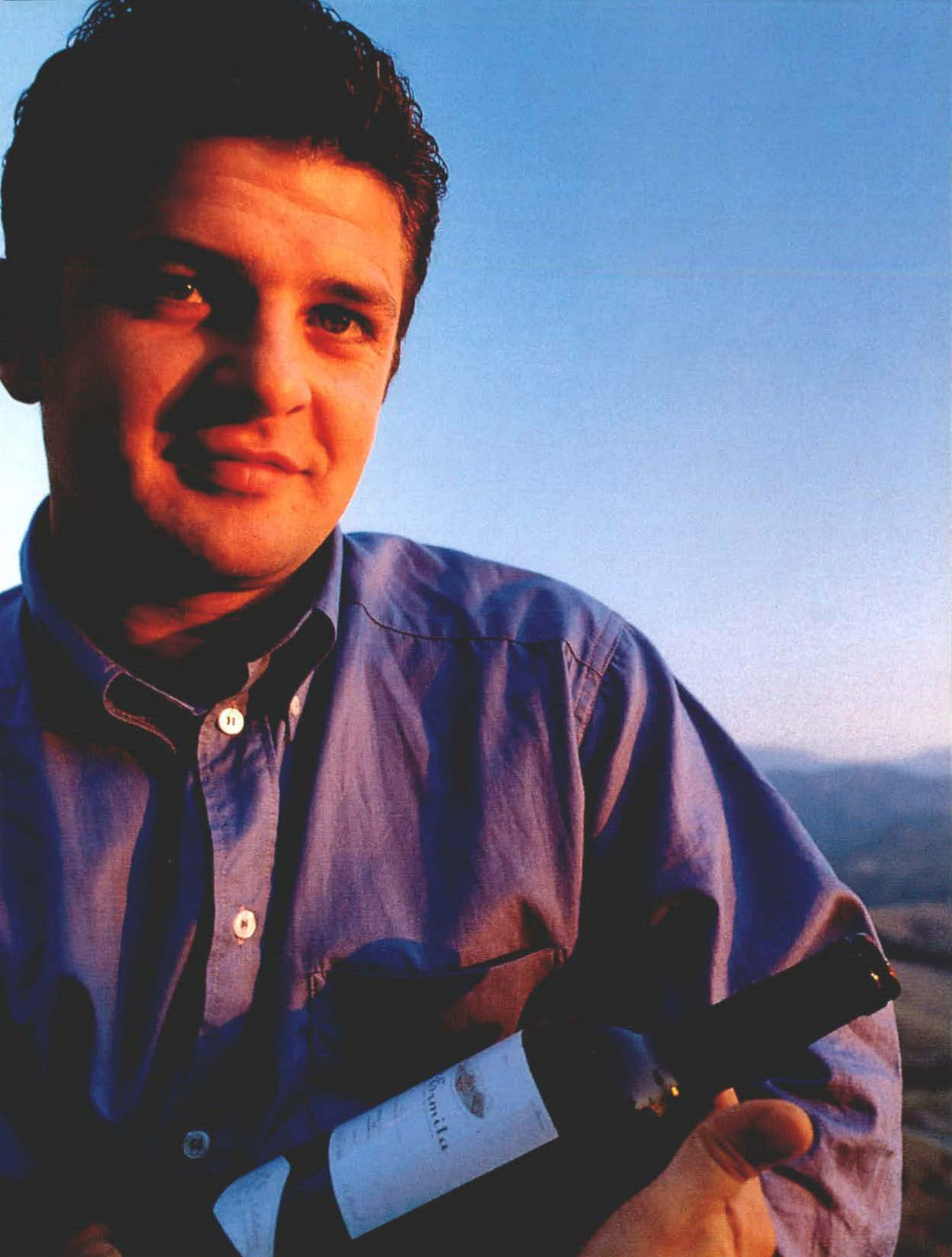
A Riojan in Catalonia? Pala-

tricts in the country, a search for an area which could, given care and skill in wine-making, produce a wine of the highest quality. Not just another good wine, but a distinctive and superlative wine, to rank, say, with the world's top dozen. A Pomerol or even a Romanée Conti. Nothing if not ambitious, Palacios settled on the Priorato and in the hilltop village of Gratallops set up his Clos Dofi bodega. Why? Well, firstly of course because Palacios felt that the unique wine of the area, with a little more oenological skill, the applica-

In his quest for a truly premium wine, Alvaro Palacios is constantly experimenting with new ideas and new possibilities.

cios returned from France to his native Spain and began a quest which led him to visit all the wine-producing dis-

tion of the latest wine-making technology and the injection of some much needed capital investment, had virtually un-



## CLOS DOFI

limited possibilities. A whole series of factors seemed to be stacked up in favor of the Priorato and its wine. A dry, mild climate with reasonable levels of rainfall in Spring and Autumn, an altitude of around 300 meters (1,000 feet), giving much cooler night-time temperatures than the nearby Mediterranean coast; a slaty terrain, which, when broken up, is highly water-retentive, gradually releasing the moisture to the vine; long established viticultural traditions, that is to say, an invaluable accumulation of human capital; and mature, well-kept vines, and, of course, an indigenous long-acclimatized noble grape variety, the black Garnacha, the Grenache so beloved of Chateauneuf du Pape.

The downside for grape-growers are the terraced vineyards, cut into the crumbling, extremely steep, slaty hillsides, which makes tending the vines and the grape harvest unavoidably labor intensive and particularly back-breaking tasks. The second problem are the appallingly low yields, around three pounds per vine in the case of the Garnacha, which explains why viticulture was so unprofitable in years gone by

when the local wine was cheap and heady, over the counter wineshop glass.

One of the first problems Palacios had to face, therefore, apart from encouraging and supervising more careful grape-growing and vinification techniques, above all in the local co-operative, was to introduce a new, differentiated price structure for both grapes and wine. His first task was to re-situate the new-stile cask-aged red *reserva* wines in a new and correspondingly higher segment of the market through specialist tastings, redesigned labels, promotional material, etc. Then, by paying around three times the accepted price for finest quality grapes, Palacios injected a much needed, new stimulus into local viticulture. Eschewing the fetichism of varietal wines, a practice which might make some sense in the case of young whites, but not for red *reservas* often aged in the cask for lengthy periods, Palacios went for the tried and tested French techniques of *coupage*, seeking that complementary relationship between the constituent proportions of the different noble grape varieties used which leads to a greater degree of complexity and subtlety, the hallmark of a

great wine. Palacios uses the indigenous black Garnacha variety as a base for body and color, blended with smaller proportions of Cariñena, and the thoroughbred French varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon, the classic black grape of Bordeaux, to lend breeding, character and elegance to the wine, Merlot, another Bordeaux variety, and the Rhone Syrah to give an edge of plummy spiciness.

Palacios, an intense young man positively bristling with energy and purpose, whose enthusiasm for his wine borders on passion, in his quest for a truly premium wine is constantly experimenting with new ideas and new possibilities. To make an Atlantic wine with the structure, balance and elegance of a Bordeaux *cru classe* in a Mediterranean region is how he described the challenge he has set himself. Trying out new proportions of grapes for this *coupage* for example, or testing the effects of oak from different provenances, Nevers, Limoges or Missouri, and of different ages on the processes of aging. Well then, has he done it? Will in the not too distant future the red Priorato *reservas* rank with Hermitage, Romanée Conti or Brunello di Montal-

cino? Recent rave reviews in the *Wine Spectator*, *Decanter* of London and *Gault et Millau* in Paris would seem to indicate that he is on his way. I can only say that I personally would rate Palacios' Clos Dofi '91 as amongst the three of four most interesting red wines from Spain to have appeared recently. It is an estate bottled, limited production red *reserva* (just eight hundred cases were bottled of this outstanding vintage) sixteen months in a combination of newish, wine soaked and old French and American oak, made from 65% Garnacha, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, the remainder being about equal proportions of Syrah, Merlot and Cariñena. I would place Clos Dofi on a par with, and in quality possibly a little ahead of such favorites as Alejandro Fernández' celebrated Pesquera '91, the Bodegas Palacio (no final "s" and no relation) superbly fruity *petit bourguignon* style Crianza Rioja Cosme Palacio 1990 or the red *reserva* from Vega Sicilia's new bodega, the lighter Alion '91, an interestingly original wine in a Medoc vein.

## SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL: AUGUSTUS

Back down on the Mediterranean coast there is an old Roman road, the Via Augusta, which runs from the port of Tarragona -the Roman Tarraco for those classical scholars amongst you- which took us up the coast to what is probably the most famous of Catalonia's D.O.s, the Penedés, home to fresh, fruity, young white wines, elegant cask-aged reds and, of course, one of the main producing centers of Catalonia's principal wine export, the sparkling Cava. Just past a glorious first

century B.C. Roman triumphal arch, the Arch of Bará, set amidst an exquisitely kept vineyard is Cellers Puig i Roca. In a functional, business-like building surrounded by a stand of tall Mediterranean black pine we were received with the proverbial hospitality of the Catalan by one of Spain's legendary winemen, Josep Puig, a jolly, hugely energetic and infectiously enthusiastic man. Puig was for fourteen years export manager and trouble-shooter extraordinaire for what is probably Catalonia's most famous family bodega, Torres, a winery whose very name is a by-

word for commercial seriousness. Veteran of a thousand battles on the world's toughest export markets from the Far East and the Pacific to Eastern Europe, Puig was also responsible for setting up the Torres' Santa Digna winery in Chile. Before that he was a renowned Barcelona

that a young trainee technician in Hamburg; and before that a very young assistant cook in England. Very much the citizen of the world and completely at home in faultless English -which is just as well, as my Catalan is not what it should be- Puig chatted to us in an office perched above his

Josep Puig is one Spain's legendary wineman whose limited production wines are to be found in four and five-fork restaurants.

chef and restaurateur -speciality *arros negre*, the inimitable Mediterranean black rice dish- and before

small but very much state-of-the-art winery. Having bought in 1982 some dozen or so hectares of prime land



Handwritten notes on a piece of paper:

20/18 AT 11/9  
3/14 8/17-15

20/18	AT 11/9
3/14	8/17-15

20/18 NW 0.35

Handwritten notes on the barrel:

20/18 AT 11/9  
3/14 8/17-15

## AUGUSTUS

in sight of the sea, he planted his vineyard with a selection of Europe's finest noble grape varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Chardonnay, clearly with international palates in mind. He moved on from Torres a couple of years ago to dedicate himself to Cellars Puig i Roca. Very limited production figures - a total of just a hundred thousand bottles a year, obsessively painstaking approach to his wine-making and a highly diversified product range are what sets Cellars Puig i Roca and its Augustus range of wines apart from the herd. I was particularly impressed with three of Puig's estate-bottled offerings: a gorgeous raspberry-nosed

fruity Cabernet Sauvignon first year varietal rosé which actually tasted of Cabernet Sauvignon, a wine far removed from the characterless milk-sop stuff we are often fobbed off with as rosés; a fine, deep barrel-fermented Chardonnay, and an unusual, early-harvested young '94 Merlot varietal, left to ferment for twelve hours on the grape-skins, velvety-smooth with overpowering fruit.

Improving on the late lamented Miguel Torres senior's dictum "Never mind about the supermarkets, I want my wine to be in the three-fork establishments", Puig's limited production wines are to be found in four-and five-fork restau-

rants, gourmet and specialist wineshops, and top quality stores like Harvey Nichols of London. The product range of this restless entrepreneur also includes a bitter-sweet Cabernet Sauvignon vinegar aged in Chestnut casks and a premium *extra virgen* olive oil, both marketed under the Forum label, a fine brandy, a highly ingenious cork-screw, designed by Puig and an engineer cousin called, with apologies to another engineer, a Puigpull. He also is principal distributor in Spain for the Austrian range of specialist wine-tasters' glasses, Riedel, plus... Stop, stop, in the name of mercy, stop! Is there no limit to this man's

enterprise? Rather mischievously, I asked Puig whether, if he were to be successful with his existing product range, which seems, in the light of the quality of his wines and the man's terrifying energy, to be almost inevitable, he would not be tempted to expand? New vineyards, and perhaps, a larger vinification plant? "Certainly not", he replied, "If we make money out of this venture, we'll invest it in something completely different. Cellars Puig i Roca stays as it is. Four permanent employees, ten hectares of vineyards and eight or nine thousand cases of wine". Small is beautiful, as the man said.

## GUELBENZU: THE FAMILY BODEGA

A two hundred or so mile trip up country westwards, following the course of one of Spain's great rivers, the Ebro, took us out of Catalonia, across the ancient kingdom of Aragón and into Navarre, to the old city of Tudela, once a famed medieval center of Jewish learning - two of its scholars have streets named after them in Jerusalem. Just outside this attractive small town with its fine porticoed square, in the valley of Queiles, is the wine village of Cascante. The valley lies in the shadow of Mount Moncayo, a winter-snow-capped peak of over 1,800 meters (six thousand feet) and enjoys - if that is the right word - a climate far removed from that of the benign and balmy Catalan coastline: cold, frosty winter nights, wet northerly winds in Spring and Autumn, and long, hot, dry Summer days, freshening and cooling at night. Good wine country. The Guelbenzu family have

owned vineyards in the valley and have had a winery in the grounds of their country house in Cascante since 1851. Firstly, perhaps, a word about the house. Cascante is a squat, sturdy and rather unprepossessing agricultural village of clean, workaday streets and houses. You walk through the village, turn a corner and presto, an exquisitely looked after mid-nineteenth century house in white and napoleonic pink, straight out of a Victorian hand-colored print, set in a shady garden of walks and iron benches. The inside of the house is even more impressive, a veritable time capsule, room after room furnished and decorated in the 1860s and 1870s and virtually unaltered. Not a museum, mind you, but a lived-in period family house - there are eight Guelbenzu brothers, all of whom practise either law or medicine in nearby cities, and in the summer holidays the huge house is bursting at the seams with their respective spouses and offspring. All but one, that is. For Ri-

cardo Guelbenzu, lawyer turned winemaker, gave up his profession to dedicate himself to running the family bodega which is located in an old wing of the house. Now the winery in which all the family are shareholders finances the upkeep of the house and the state. Fervent upholder of the family traditions, a more than amateur wine historian and ecologically aware entrepreneur - the bodega has recently replaced wooden cases for their wine with boxes made from re-cycled cardboard - Ricardo Guelbenzu has since the 1980's been responsible for the re-launching and re-organization of the winery. Substantial investment in a new vinification plant and in the acquisition of a considerable quan-

tity of French oak has recently taken place and the cool subterranean cellars extended. The vineyards, relatively small handkerchiefs of land totalling some 36 hectares (90 acres), spread out across the Queiles valley, situated at different altitudes and on differing soil types, mostly stony and chalky, have also been replanted. In accord with current international consumer preferences, the French black varieties Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot now complement the indigenous black Tempranillo grape. The wines, Guelbenzu *crianza* and *Evo reserva* - the winery makes only red wines - are both estate-bottled, and therefore only available in limited quantities, annual production currently running at around 180,000 bottles, a situation aggravated by the bodega policy of hold-

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tity of French oak has recently taken place and the cool subterranean cellars extended. The vineyards, rela-

ting back an important proportion of the finer vintages for further aging. The house style - lighter



## GUELBENZU

bodied, slightly tannic, a certain "perfil bordelais"-represents a departure from that of the wines of the region, Navarre traditionally known as Garnacha country and associated above all with aromatic fruity young rosés, and more recently with good Garnacha-Tempranillo Rioja style reds. The introduction of the Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in the coupage and the lighter style reflects the growing preoccupation with changing international tastes on the part of a bodega which

exports more than fifty per cent of its wine.

When the excellent '89 vintage was first launched as Guelbenzu crianza, a fifty-fifty blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo, *Wine Spectator* magazine, in its rather fulsome way, described it as "a rainbow of plum, blackberry and currant" and gave it an 87 rating, only improved upon amongst Spanish reds by the ubiquitous Pesquera which made 91. Available now as Evo 1989 Gran Reserva -the name Evo, by

the way, refers to the cry "Evoeh" with which supposedly Greek worshippers at the grape harvest saluted the god Bacchus -with a little Merlot added to the coupage, with twelve months in newish French oak (Limousin, Nevers and Allier) the extra time in the bottle has rounded out what was already a fine year. We found it clean and well-balanced, slightly tannic, still fruity which augurs well for the future, wonderfully dry in the mouth, persistently aromatic, with

pleasing complex and subtle hints of spice and wood. What then of the future for a small family firm based on a limited production quality product? Ricardo Guelbenzu had no doubts: "Generation after generation of Guelbenzu have always taken pride in a task well done. Look after the details and take the greatest possible care over what you do. The consumer will always appreciate a finely made wine".

## TORRE DE OÑA: A CHATEAU IN THE RIOJA

Carry on up the valley of the River Ebro and you get closer and closer to the Atlantic. As you enter the Rioja the vegetation appears to become greener, the air a mite cooler. Cross the river towards the north and you enter into the Basque province of Alava, still part of the Rioja D.O. but with perhaps a more northern feel about it. The often cloud-hung Sierra de Cantabria just 32 km (20 miles) or so north of the river seems like a reminder that more moist climes are not far off. Beneath the Sierra is the Basque hill town of Laguardia whose narrow, medieval streets still proudly defy the motor car. Not a couple of miles from Laguardia is the village of Paganos and the bodega of Torre de Oña.

If you had been given ten, fifteen, maybe twenty dollars, say, to set up a chateau-winery in the Rioja, you too could have become the owner of Torre de Oña. A massive and, it must be said, capricious investment in the late 1980's -by whom? banks seeking to diversify investments? a mythical American company? who in the village

of Paganos put together one of the most interesting wine-making estates in the Rioja? More than fifty hectares (123 acres) of vineyard, a quantity of land under vine unheard of in these parts where ten hectares (25 acres) of vines is a latifundium, surround the fine, newly built stone-faced group of buildings that house winery and offices. The vines, now around seven to eight years old, are local thoroughbred black varieties, mostly Tempranillo as is the way in the Rioja Alavesa, with some Mazuelo. The spotlessly clean, superbly modern vinification plant includes eighteen huge, stainless steel, temperature-controlled fermentation tanks, pristine and gleaming. The cellars, equally operating-theater clean, house 1,800 semi-new French oak barrels, and a stock of over a million and a quarter bottles of cask-aged *reservas*.

Wandering around the bodega called to mind the description normally given by collectors and dealers in antique toys of an especially well-preserved item -mint and boxed. The whole winery felt untouched and unused, mothballed from new. Torre de Oña has suffered the fate of all caprices, the original

owners tiring of their chateau-winery -not enough short-term profits perhaps?-and in January of this year they sold it, fortunately, to one of the oldest established and most prestigious bodegas in the Rioja, La Rioja Alta of Haro (see *Spain Gourmet* No. 35.). You will remember La Rioja Alta as the makers of some of the Rioja's finest traditional cask-aged red *reservas* and *gran reservas*, Viña Ardanza -seek out if you can the memorable '85- and Gran Reserva 904. I say fortunately because the wine, the splendid Barón de Oña 1989 red *reserva*, is anything but a caprice, a highly individual, original wine, a genuinely different addition to the wide range of quality wines made in the Rioja, and it would be a pity if this very particular wine were to have been lost, submerged in the lengthy portfolio of a large bodega. La Rioja Alta, however, impressed with what they call the "personal style" of Barón de Oña are determined to preserve its identity. The 1989 vintage was of very high quality generally in the Rioja Alavesa -witness the fine Cosme Palacio '89 red made not a mile or two down the road from Torre de Oña in Laguardia- and the estate-bottled Barón de

Oña '89 is no exception. Made with a Tempranillo base, blended with a little Mazuelo, the wine was aged for two years in newish French oak before bottling, and by April 1995 had spent around three years in the bottle. Despite all the stainless steel and science, Barón de Oña is made according to the traditional winemaking canons and practices of the Rioja Alavesa, clarified, for instance, with real egg whites. If you had to find just one expression to define Barón de Oña, I suppose that expression would be "well-bred". It is a brilliant, deep-red in color, lighter in texture, almost delicate, subtly aromatic (ripe fruit, vanilla and spice), well-balanced, dry, clean and complex in the mouth, with that lingering touch of acidity which betokens a thoroughbred wine.

An unexpected profile, perhaps, for a Rioja red *reserva*. Since taking over distribution, the men from La Rioja Alta have been agreeably surprised by the favorable reception, above all on export markets, given to Barón de Oña. An original with a growing following. Try some. I think you'll be surprised too.



Juan Gris, *The Breakfast*, 1913-1915. Oil on canvas. Grunow/Art Resource, NY. ©1993 Foods From Spain.

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## PAGO DE CARRAOVEJAS: YOUNG WINE FROM THE RIBERA

The last stage of our trip was to take us out of the Rioja down into Castile to the Ribera del Duero. To cross from the valley of the Ebro to the valley of the Duero, from the Rioja to Soria, is no mean feat, and would in winter have been decidedly complicated. On a mild moist April morning, however, the only hazard was the overpowering smell of pine. Driving the hundred or so miles separating the two rivers at this point involves going through the spectacular mountain range of the Sierra de Cameros, over the pass of Piqueras - some 1,800 meters (6,000 feet) high and often snowbound in winter, so if you're going that way, take care -and then down into the province of Soria in Castile where the River Duero rises.

The Duero is the second of Spain's great wine rivers - and indeed has claims to being the Iberian peninsula's first. Rising in Soria, it runs westward across Castile through the wine-producing Denominations of Origin of Ribera del Duero and Toro, then crosses the border into Portugal, where it becomes the Douro, the famous Port wine river, before flowing out into the Atlantic at the scaport of Oporto.

Ribera del Duero is a wine-producing area that has been on the move since the late 1980s (see *Spain Gourmet* No. 32). As far as international recognition is concerned, two events coincided then. Firstly, the mythical Vega Sicilia bodega, key to the reputation of the area, had a change of heart. Its very, very limited production wines became slightly more accessible, export quotas were raised, and for most of us Valbuena 5º año and Vega Sicilia Cosecha Unica became something more than

just hearsay. Mere mortals even got to taste some. Which revealed the potential of the area to more and more people. Secondly, Robert Parker famously described Alejandro Fernández Pesquera '86 -now even better after prolonged bottle aging but extremely difficult to get hold of- as Spain's Chateau Petrus. Suddenly, everybody wanted to know. The Ribera del Duero became an officially delimited D.O., with Vega Sicilia, who were persuaded to join, as its unofficial flagship. Hitching its wagon to the prestige of Vega Sicilia, the Ribera del Duero Denomination of Origin grew and grew, new bodegas began springing up along the banks of the river from Valbuena to Aranda, Dehesa de los Canónigos, Hacienda Monasterio, Pago de Carraovejas and the wine world discovered a new source of first quality Spanish wine.

The Pago de Carraovejas vineyards and bodega enjoy one of the most beautiful sitings in the whole of Castile: the gentle slope of a valley which faces what is probably Spain's most impressive castle, Peñafiel, a vast ocean liner of an edifice perched atop a perilously steep hill. The owner -a small group of Madrid and Valladolid restaurateurs and local oenologists and winemen- had to wait their chance for several years before they could buy the sixty-hectare vineyard. It was previously jointly owned by the town's doctor and pharmacist, and the wines made from their grapes were locally renowned for their color and character. Even in poorer years, Pago de Carraovejas always produced a good vintage. The secret lies in the well-drained, west-facing gentle slopes, well-sheltered from the cold easterly winds which tend to blow in these parts. On these slopes frosts are less frequent and less persistent, above all the dangerous late

Spring frosts, and west-facing, the slopes enjoy more sunshine hours than other spots in the area. On the other hand, the altitude of over 600 meters (2,000 feet) ensures cooler night-time temperatures in Summer and Autumn, one of the key factors in producing a quality wine in Central Spain. Pago de Carraovejas is then a prime site for a vineyard. For their wines they have opted for a blend of the local indigenous black grape variety, the Tinta del País, otherwise known as Tinto Fino, a locally acclimatized brother of the noble black grape of the Rioja, Tempranillo, with the imported Bordeaux grape, Cabernet Sauvignon. About 70% of the vines are Tinta del País, and the remaining thirty, Cabernet Sauvignon. The rows of impeccably maintained vines are trained high off the ground over trellises on the espalier system, for better protection against parasites and disease and to ensure maximum benefit from the sun.

A functional, industrial, prefabricated building set into the hillside -"We'll build a more attractive bodega with our profits after we've paid off the bank"- houses a state of the art vinification plant. They currently make two interesting cask-aged red wines: an 85% Tinto Fino, 15% Cabernet Sauvignon Crianza which spends twelve months in a combination of semi-new wine-seasoned French and American oak, and a first year fruity-grapey young wine, given four months in the wood. It was an example of this last type of wine, a young '92, one of the best of the new crop of young Ribera del Duero reds, for which Pago de Carraovejas is rapidly acquiring a fine reputation, which was recently awarded top rating in a tasting of Spanish red wines organized by a leading wine publication. Unfortunately, the tast-

ing panel then went on to describe the wine in pure winespeak as having "a rich nose... offset by tones of stewed fruit and rhubarb!" I know we all do it sometimes, but really! It makes a fine wine sound like one of my aunt's less successful puddings! Bunkum. Don't believe a word of it. Taste the wine for yourself and you will agree that Pago de Carraovejas wines are outstanding examples of what Spain can do in the way of well-made, attractive and individual young wines, rich and pleasingly fruity.

Our trip had taken us across half Spain in search of new and interesting wines, new winemakers and their bodegas, wines such as Clos Dofi, Barón de Oña, or Pago de Carraovejas, winemakers like Josep Puig, Ricardo Guelbenzu or Alvaro Palacios. Bodegas seeking to relive the success of earlier Spanish discoveries, Pesquera, for instance, or Gran Colegiata, seeking like Alejandro Fernández or Manuel Fariña to establish their wines as accepted favorites on the harshly competitive world export markets. Quality wines from new and renewed wine producing areas such as Ribera del Duero or the Priorato bidding to become the classics of the future. Above all, we had sampled a fascinating variety of fine Spanish wines. Try them too.

**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.

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### Crianza

This wine has been aged in French Tronçais oak casks just long enough to give it a touch of oak, balanced with elegant fruit and good acidity. Produced from selected cuvées, it has complexity and structure for an excellent development in bottle. Delicious as an aperitif, with shellfish, fish and beef prepared in sauce, sautéed vegetables and mild cheese.



### Antea

Barrel-fermented, produced from Viura grapes with a small percentage of Malvasia. A fine bouquet of ripe apples, well-balanced and complex with a perfect combination of fruit and delicate notes of vanilla. Can be served as an aperitif or with all kinds of fish, shellfish and lobster as well as rice and pasta dishes prepared with seafood.



### Satinela

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# CLEMENTINES

Text: Ana Westley

Photo: Félix Lorrio/ICEX

**W**hat's as sweet as candy, juicier than oranges, low in calories, as irresistible as pop corn, high in vitamins, has no seeds, is quick and easy to eat, and is a favorite of both children and adults? The answer, of course, is Spanish clementines, a relatively recent tangerine/orange hybrid that has become Spain's star citric fruit over the past two decades.

With just the right proportion of sugar and acidity, the seedless Spanish clementine has fast replaced standard tangerines to become the mandarin of choice in foreign markets where it has been introduced. Despite overseas transportation difficulties, Spanish clementine exports to the United States and Canada are growing steadily where they are finding a gourmet niche among fruit lovers.

**E**ver since Spanish researchers developed several varieties of seedless clementines in the late 1960s and early 1970s, cultivation and exports have been booming. And it's no wonder. The tangy but deliciously sweet fruit is simply exquisite and a delight to eat.

"The best test is to see what children choose," comments Luís Fernández of the Valencian Institute of Agrarian Investigations, known by its acronym IVIA. "Given a choice between candy, clementines, soft drinks, or any fast food, the child will almost certainly choose, not just one, but two or three clementines," he predicted. One of the main reasons contributing to clementines' success abroad is their popularity among children.

Smaller and rounder than standard tangerines, one fits perfectly in a child's hand, two or three fit nicely in a lunch box



# Spain's gourmet "fast fruit" delight



# Spanish Masterpieces



## GONZALEZ BYASS

SHERRY & BRANDY

**D**espite overseas transportation difficulties, Spanish clementine exports to the United States and Canada are growing steadily where they are finding a gourmet niche among fruit lovers.

or even a large pocket and are very easily peeled without assistance by even a small child. They are easy to separate and share, and unlike other fruits, three or more can be eaten at a time -or even as many as you want. Spanish seedless clementines have become so popular in European fruit bowls that they have earned the nickname of "fast fruit." "It's a perfect fruit for modern times," adds José Martínez of the General Committee of Citrics in Valencia. "It has a very pleasant aroma and flavor, has no seeds and very thin section membranes, and it can be peeled without even looking at it. It's a perfect healthy snack for watching television -much better than pop corn."

In the past 10 years alone, exports have soared from a little over 400,000 tons to this season's record estimate of 1.2 million tons. Production and exports have grown so quickly that the clementine is quickly gaining ground on oranges, long the main citric export of Spain's Levante, which runs from Tarragona in the north to Murcia in the south. Clementines currently represent over 25% of all Spanish citrics, both in production and exports compared to a mere 5.5 % in the early 1970s when production barely topped over 120,000 tons.

Over 95% of Spanish clementine exports are European bound, but new markets quickly latch on to clementines as soon as they are available. Exports to the U.S. have more than tripled from close to 4,000 tons in the 1984/85 season to 15,842 tons for the 1994/95 season, a market that Spanish growers think has barely been tapped. Whereas Spanish orange and other citric exports to the U.S. are

merely symbolic, except during occasional California or Florida catastrophic freezes, clementines have practically no U.S. domestic competition.

**I**DEAL MICROCLIMATE LAND SPECIFIC SOIL. Due to very specific soil and climate conditions found only in the Castellón-Valencia area of Spain's eastern seaboard, and in certain areas in North Africa, clementines are not easily cultivated in other citric producing areas in the world such as California.

"Clementines have been tried in the U.S. but they just don't do well," claims Mr. Fernández of Valencia's pioneering IVIA. "The perfect clementine not only requires a very specific Mediterranean climate, but also just the right alkaline clay soil, as well as almost constant care," Mr. Fernández explained.

Though originally brought to Spain in 1925 from Algeria where a monk named Clemente first discovered the new mandarin hybrid in his garden, the Castellón region in Spain's levante or eastern coast turned out to have the ideal microclimate for the new fruit in stretches of flat plains between the sea and low mountains. The humidity has to be just right and the variation in temperature almost extreme. Summers must be hot, and Fall and Winters sunny with daytime temperatures between 14° and 16°C/57° and 61°F that drop to near zero C/32°F during the night. "The whole countryside during Fall and Winter ripening becomes a huge refrigerator at night, while the sun ripens the fruit during the daytime," explained Marcos Gual of the Castellón based exporters cooperative Bagú in Burriana. "It's like a refrigerator with sunshine."

In addition to a highly specific microclimate and soil, clementine orchards need very careful cultivation or what Americans term TLC - Tender Loving Care.

"Clementine growers are more like gardeners than fruit farmers," Rafael Arnau of Narvil, another Castellón cooperative pointed out. That means the trees thrive only in small orchards, usually family plots, that are individually tended to on an almost daily basis.

Unlike orange trees that may be productive for forty years, the productive period of a clementine tree is limited to 30 years. It takes 7 to 9 years for a tree to hit peak production, compared to 5 years for an orange tree. Production yield varies from variety to variety, but most average 70 to 80 kilos/154 to 176 pounds of fruit a year.

Growers are constantly experimenting with new grafts and cross-breedings to improve varieties, develop new ones, or to extend the growing seasons in either direction. Valencia's pioneering IVIA citriculture department works in close association with growers who are eager to try out new varieties as soon as they have been certified to be free of various plagues and viruses. Since large scale production began thirty years ago, the growing season has already been expanded at both ends from mid November-late January to mid September through April and even early May. Researchers believe that even earlier and later varieties might still appear, although growers claim it is easier to expand on the late end than develop earlier season varieties.

"Clementines may have come from Algeria, but it is here in Castellón that all the varieties were developed," claimed Juan Arnal, a general director at Nulexport, a co-

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**I**n the past 10 years alone, exports have soared from a little over 400,000 tons to this season's record estimate of 1.2 million tons.

operative in Nules, Castellón, with obvious pride. Tangerines, which had been cultivated for over 150 years, travelled poorly and were loaded with seeds, but were still valued for their sharp flavor. The first Algerian clementines also had seeds but travelled better and had a more pleasing tart-but-sweet flavor. Nevertheless, they were initially considered too small to be of any commercial interest. Only thirty years ago were seedless clementine varieties developed in Spain and exports since then began to soar. In these parts of Castellón-Villaviejo, Burriana, and Nules- the price of clementines is more important than changes in governments, and half a dozen different

types of clementines are household words. Everyone knows when the season for one variety begins and ends and everyone is on the look out for spontaneous mutations that could develop into yet another new variety of clementine.

Clementines are grown in *minifundia*, or small plots of land scattered all over the townships. Everyone from the local bank director to the parish priest tends to at least some clementine trees in their spare time, either in a back yard patio or large or small family plot.

All these part-time growers usually belong to cooperatives together with full-time medium-scale clementine farmers. The cooperatives share the latest cultivation

techniques and guidelines as well as organize the packaging and export of the produce with the latest technology. In general 85% to 95% of production is exported, mainly to the European Union. In these parts, 30% of local economies depend on clementines directly and another 70% of the economy is said to be indirectly related to clementines.

**WORLD'S LEADING CLEMENTINE PRODUCER AND EXPORTER.** Spain is the world's fifth largest citric producer and the number one exporter of fresh citric fruit. Yet in clementines, Spain is the world's biggest producer and exporter with exports of over 1.2 million tons. Its closest rival is Mo-

## Ranking of Main Clementine Importers (In tn.)

COUNTRY	SEASON 94/95	SEASON 93/94	SEASON 92/93
GERMANY	336,058	308,402	299,726
FRANCE	232,927	226,986	245,034
UNITED KINGDOM	84,372	54,431	60,179
HOLLAND	62,922	55,102	56,340
BELGIUM/LUXEMBURG	39,032	33,923	34,178
ITALY	32,218	19,668	45,000
SWITZERLAND	30,485	30,674	28,010
POLAND	28,493	24,493	17,787
AUSTRIA	18,506	12,767	8,069
DENMARK	17,749	14,928	15,342
U.S.A.	15,847	8,574	5,526
CANADA	15,420	12,066	7,172
CZECH R.	12,674	5,261	2,103
SWEDEN	8,244	8,729	7,846
NORWAY	6,734	4,093	5,783
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>941,681</b>	<b>820,097</b>	<b>793,140</b>

Source: Comité de Gestión de Cítricos

# THE TENTH INTERNATIONAL GOURMET CLUB SHOW

## Madrid, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1996

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**S**panish seedless clementines have become so popular in European fruit bowls that they have earned the nickname of "fast fruit".

rocco with exports of around 200,000 tons that have remained steady over the past decade. Tangerines from Turkey and some hybrids from Israel represent an even smaller share in the world mandarin market. Spain exports clementines even to Italy, which does not produce enough to satisfy its own domestic consumption.

While Spanish orange and other citric fruit exports have tended to stabilize over the last decade, clementine exports continue to gain. With demand growing in Eastern European countries and the North American market still relatively virgin, except for the east coast, the market ceiling is far from topping off. As with other citrics, mandarins or tangerines, are believed to have come from China or possibly Indochina. Unlike oranges which had been cultivated in Spain a century earlier, tangerines were not introduced to Europe until the early 1800s as an exotic flower pot plant. By 1840 it was cultivated in Italy and by 1845 the easy peeling citric had found a natural home in the Valencia orange growing region. Within another 10 years, tangerine cultivation had spread to the Castellón region just north of Valencia on the eastern seaboard where it continues today in the seedless and tangier clementine varieties.

Enterprising growers grouped together in cooperatives speedily adopt the most up-to-date cultivation techniques with state-of-the-art packaging that is quick to adapt to consumer preferences.

Clementines still have to be hand picked and each tree may need to be harvested several times as the fruit does not all ripen at once. There isn't much to be automated at the picking end,

but once in cooperative warehouses, machinery takes over in calibrating size, and even in the selection of color tone. European customers can have the fruit delivered door to door, within two days of picking, in boxes, net bags, styrofoam dishes wrapped in plastic, or any special requirement. "Each country has slightly different consumer demands," Rafael Arnau, of Narvil, a cooperative in Villavieja, Castellón, explained. For example, he pointed out that Belgian retailers require that clementines be packaged with one or two leaves. "That makes packaging more complicated because the longer stems snag plastic wrappings or jab into other fruits, but we are prepared and have mastered the technique" he insisted though granting that the demand of one or two leaves provides consumers with unalterable proof of freshness. "The fruit can stay fresh for weeks in refrigerators, but leaves only last a few days before drying out."

**T**HE NORTH AMERICAN UNTAPPED MARKET. Shipment to the United States and Canada is more complicated due to the distance and in the case of the U.S. very strict agricultural plague and insecticide controls. Nulexport, a cooperative of Nules, Castellón, has seen its U.S. and Canadian exports increase dramatically over the past few years to represent almost a third of total North American Spanish clementine exports. He explained that for U.S. exports, crops can only be treated with brand name insecticides approved by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The fruit must also be in quarantine 11 to 12 days at a temperature of 1° to 1.2°C/33.8° to 34.2° F while en route to the U.S. by boat. This cooling also kills any insect larvae and is espe-

cially aimed at killing the Mediterranean fruit fly. To facilitate matters, once harvesting begins USDA inspectors come to Valencia ports to gain shipping time.

Nulexport has participated in several U.S. food fairs and hopes to keep increasing exports. "There is no local U.S. competition for clementines," he pointed out, noting that Nulexport has even sold clementines to California retailers, who consider it an exotic fruit.

Mr. Gual, of Bagú, recalled that initially the cooperative had to send a box of clementines to their U.S. advertising agent. "The creative advertising designers had to see it to understand what we were talking about because the product was simply unknown in the U.S." He remembered that "we had to travel around with a box of clementines under our arms to introduce the product because no one had ever heard of it," he chuckled.

European Union countries now absorb 95% of clementine exports with Germany, France, and the United Kingdom the biggest consumers. Much of the exports to Eastern Europe and Russia are channelled through Poland and the Czech Republic.

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

**See list of main exporters on page 12.**



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# TYPES OF CLEMENTINES

In general, clementines are slightly smaller and rounder than tangerines though the fruit is slightly flattened. Large clementines have a diameter of about 6 cms (3 1/4 inches) and clementines considered small have diameters of 5 cms (3 inches) or less. The fruit usually has 11 thin membraned sections that are easily separated from each other. The color tends toward deep orange with a reddish tinge and, of course, the skin peels easily. The fruit is seedless and has a sweet but pungent flavor and is on the market from late September through April. There are dozens of varieties, but the most commercially important or popular ones are the following:

## **FINA**

This is the original clementine introduced in Spain from Algeria in 1925, and is thought to be a hybrid between a tangerine and possibly a sour orange. Spain developed a seedless version in the 1970s. The fruit remains smallish, about 5 cm, but is one of the best for its juice content and perfect combination of sugars, acid and aromatic properties. Depending on areas, Fina clementine trees can start producing in November through mid February but trees are less productive than other varieties. Today, the Fina clementine represents only about 6% of total clementine production.

## **OROVAL**

Oroval clementines are one of the earlier mutations of the Fina clementine which occurred around 1950. As with the Fina version, a seedless version was developed over twenty years ago. The juice is slightly acidic but the trees are more productive than the Fina clementine trees. Production is earlier, beginning several weeks before the Fina clementines. Thanks to the more produc-

tive Oroval, and later Nules clementines, Spanish clementine production began to soar beyond the 120,000 tons of the 1969/70 season. It now represents about 18% of production.

## **NULES**

Also known as Clemenules, Nulesina, and Clementina Nulera, the Nules clementine takes its name from the township of Nules where it was discovered in 1953. Seedless, the fruit is considered to have one of the best proportions of sugar and acidity which give it excellent organoleptic qualities. It has a long season from mid November to mid February, depending on the area, but does not last long on the tree. The skin can become puffy if not harvested promptly. The tree has a tendency toward staggered flowering which produces different types of skin from very smooth to slightly rough. Currently, the Nulera clementine is by far the most cultivated in Spain, representing 63% of the total.

## **TOMATERA**

Deep orange in color, the Tomatera clementine in size is somewhere between the Fina and Nules clementine and has a good juice content. Harvesting begins about ten days after the Oroval.

## **HERNANDINA**

A 1966 mutation of the Fina clementine, this seedless variety is one of the late maturing varieties beginning production in late January and lasting until mid March. The skin may have some green coloring although the fruit is fully mature. Together with other late maturing clementines, the Hernandina represents about 8% of current production.

## **CLEMENTARD**

Similar to the Hernandina though with a less intense orange coloring, the Clementard begins production just

after the Hernandina. As with other varieties, it is thought to be a mutation of the Fina.

## **MARISOL**

A mutation of the Oroval detected in 1970 in Castellón, this variety is the season's first clementine with production beginning in some areas as early as mid September although if cultivated in late maturing areas, harvesting can coincide with that of other varieties. It must be picked when greenish orange. If left until orange colored on the tree, the skin may become puffy losing commercial value. Together with other early varieties (Oronules, Arrufatina, and Esbal), the early season clementines represent 5% of total production.

## **ORONULES**

This early season variety is considered a mutation on a Fina clementine tree discovered in Nules in Castellón in 1970. Though not as productive as the Marisol, the deeply reddish orange fruit is considered to have better organoleptic qualities than the Marisol.

## **ARRUFATINA**

Discovered in 1968 in Villarreal, Castellón, this precocious productive variety is similar to the Marisol, although the pulp is slightly granulated. The fruit has a lower sugar content but at the same time, it is less acidic or sour. It cannot remain too long on the tree or the skin will puff.

## **ESBAL**

A mutation of the Fina clementine that appeared in Sagunto, Valencia in 1966, this clementine, though slightly bigger than the Fina, is still on the small side. Harvesting begins barely a week after that of the Marisol. The skin color is deep orange but can be damaged by rain once it has reached full maturity.

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# GARNACHA TINTA

## UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

*This native Spanish variety has been grown in the vineyards of Spain for many centuries, and is known as a particularly good fount of young reds and rosés. Yet, in these days of advanced technology, there is qualitative potential still to be explored.*

Text: **Gabriel Yravedra**

Still Lifes: **Menchu Artime**

Photos: **A. de Benito/ICEX**

Translation: **Hawys Pritchard**

Garnacha Tinta is a variety of the European vine species *vitis vinifera*. It is very widely planted in Spain, its natural habitat being areas whose Mediterranean climate supplies plenty of sunshine and high temperatures. As long as the terrain and stock are suitable, its plants can extract moisture from deep underground during times of drought and are therefore able to thrive in arid conditions. Garnacha or Garnacha Tinta is also known by other names:

Garnacho, Tinto de Navajcarnero, Tinto Aragonés, Lladoner, Garnatxa Negra, Grenache and Grenache Noir in different winegrowing areas. These are all synonyms for the same variety. Even so, there is ongoing research into strains known by variants on the name of this variety and its clones, correct definitions being obtained by enzyme and polyphenol analyses backed up by ampelographical studies and, in certain cases, DNA tests for accurate differentiation.

N<sup>o</sup> 5



*The adult is small to medium sized, serrate with short teeth and convex sides. The sinus is an open U-shape, and the petiole short, thick and hairless. Both upper and lower leaf surfaces are also hairless.*

*N<sup>o</sup> 6*



*Garnacha is particularly suitable for making rosés and young reds. It also contributes to the structure and fruitiness of wines made from other varieties.*

*Garnacha is the basic variety grown in the D.O.s of Campo de Borja, Cariñena, Cigales, Madrid, Méntrida, Navarra, Priorato and La Rioja, and also features importantly in other quality wines.*

#### AMPELOGRAPHIC AND GROWING DATA

Garnacha is an upright vine. It has long, strong and many-branched shoots, and one or two short laterals per shoot. Young shoots show slight blue pigmentation at the ends caused by migration of anthocyanic substances.

The adult leaf is small to medium sized, pentagonal in shape and five lobed, serrate with short teeth and convex sides. The sinus is an open U-shape, and the petiole short, thick and hairless. Both upper and lower leaf surfaces are also hairless.

The flower is hermaphroditic with apparently well developed sexual organs, though fertilization is often unsuccessful, an apparent accident which prevents fruit set from occurring.

The grape cluster is medium in both size and compactness, with a short bunchstem (up to 5cm - 2 inches). The fruit or berry is spherical, medium sized, and has thin, densely colored skin (dark blue to black) made matt by abundant bloom, colorless flesh, and pips.

Garnacha buds early, and is consequently susceptible to late frosts like those that Méntrida (Toledo) and Navalcarnero (Madrid) were unfortunate enough to experience this year.

Gobelet pruning is traditional, with four or more arms and two spurs per arm, though more recently, espalier training is also being used.

The high vegetative potential of this variety, with its tendency to form robust trunks, arms and shoots which facilitate the circulation of sap, makes it important to control planting density, choice of rootstock and pruning style according to the availability of water, balancing vegetative growth so as to obtain high quality fruit.

Garnacha is considered a native variety in Spain, and in the course of its long his-

tory clones have evolved, adapted to soil and climate conditions in different geographical areas. This explains the many variants on its name.

Other varieties exist, different from Garnacha Tinta, which are dissimilar and genetically unrelated, yet known by double-barrelled names in which 'Garnacha' is qualified by an accompanying term. Examples are Garnacha Blanca and Garnacha Roja, and the black varieties Garnacha Peluda and Garnacha Tintorera.

#### SUITABILITY FOR WINE-MAKING

Garnacha has many fine qualities as a wine grape, important among these being its richness in polyphenols and its good ripening record in appropriate conditions. A well-made Garnacha wine is densely colored, rich in primary aromas and dry extract, and characteristically fruity.

Photosynthesis occurs in much the same way throughout the vegetable world, and the various varieties of *Vitis vinifera*. As we know, this system of absorbing energy from sunlight uses the leaf as a screen whose chlorophyll transforms the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere into sugars. That said, however, each variety metabolizes differently and the grape's ripening process is not simply a question of producing a certain level of these sugars (glucose and fructose), but also of synthesizing many other substances which affect wine quality importantly. Among these are the primary aromas specific to each variety, organic acids and polyphenols, which make up a vast group of substances including the grape's colorants and tannins.

This is why it is so important to know all about a grape variety if one is to get the best possible results from vinification, both as regards capitalizing on its character-

istic qualities and aromas and avoiding problems.

An important feature of Garnacha is its particular aptitude for reaching high glucose levels. This means that the growing method must be adapted accordingly and ripening must be watched carefully, timing the harvest so that the grapes still have a good overall acidity level. This is all vital to achieving successful vinification, a long-lived wine and the right organoleptic balance.

The activity of oxidase enzymes characteristic of this grape (and of others) has to be catered for. Cultivation and plant care need to focus on ensuring really healthy grapes, and picking and transporting the harvest must be done so that the bunches reach the winery's reception hopper as unscathed as possible.

The action of these enzymes may also need to be blocked by treatment in the winery, and by excluding oxygen as far as possible at critical junctures to avoid oxidation of the polyphenolics and, particularly, coloring matter.

Garnacha grapes are particularly useful for young red wines, or wines for drinking in their first or second year, whether varietal or blended with other varieties. They respond well to vinification by the traditional maceration method, allowing time for the extraction of plenty of coloring matter without creating an excess of tannins, and by the carbonic maceration method. Either way, levels of free sulphur dioxide need to be monitored to ensure its antioxidant effect, and where possible, wine should be made and stored in an inert atmosphere of carbon dioxide or nitrogen. Garnacha is also widely blended with other varieties such as Tempranillo, Mazuela, Garnacha Tintorera, Bobal and Cabernet, to give better balanced fixed acidity, extract and color, and greater stability.

All the areas where Garnacha is grown produce excellent rosés, either monovarietal or with a small percentage of other varieties. These are fruity, richly colored wines and are produced in, for example, the Denomination of Origin (D.O.) areas of Navarra (from the Baja Montaña subzone), Cigales, Rioja, Cariñena and Priorato.

Garnacha is also used for notable *rancio* (maderized) wines in traditional areas such as Tarragona (Catalonia) and, particularly, in Priorato. These are made by the old method of forcibly oxidizing wine by exposing it to changing temperatures, stored either in wooden casks or in glass demijohns left in the open air.

It is often used, too, for what used to be known as *mistelas* (now known as *vinos de licor-liqueur* wines), though these are made only in a few specific areas.

It would be true to say that Garnacha does not occupy prestige status -it is associated with wines which are high in alcohol, astringent, unpretentious and vinous. This is largely because in many areas Garnacha is still being grown in old vineyards and is often vinified in rudimentary wineries.

One does not often find a monovarietal Garnacha red -officially this means wine made with 85% or more Garnacha grapes. It is a dif-

ficult variety to vinify for the reasons outlined above, so the tendency is to use more easily vinified varieties or to use Garnacha in blends.

Monovarietal wines not only require modern technology, but technology appropriately applied to the particular variety. Some of the wineries successfully approaching Garnacha in this way include Rioja's Viña Ijalba and the San Isidro de Aldeanueva de Ebro cooperative; Cariñena's San Valero cooperative (Monte Ducay '94), and the Longares and Paniza wineries, also covered by the Cariñena D.O.

In Navarre, good Garnacha wines made by carbonic maceration come from the Cascante and Cintruénigo cooperatives in the Ribera Baja and from the Sada cooperative in the Baja Montaña.

Good Campo de Borja Garnachas include Borsao from the Borja cooperative (a blend with Cabernet), and Viña Ainzón.

With few exceptions (see article on Clos Dofi on page 54), promoters of new wines and brands tend to focus attention and big money on planting and vinifying international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot. They do not apply the available technology to exploring and maximizing the potential of native Spanish varieties like Garnacha.

## GARNACHA IN SPANISH VITICULTURE

Data from the *Catastro Vitivinícola* (Winegrowing Census) for the decade 1972-1982 show that Garnacha occupied 176,000 hectares (434,896 acres) of Spain's vineyards, accounting for 13.23% of the country's wine grape total and 33.4% of its black wine grapes. This figure includes Tinto Aragonés, which the Census treated as a different variety but which is currently considered to be a Garnacha clone. In terms of area planted, Garnacha is the leading black grape variety in Spain and the second in the overall variety figures, after the white Airén.

Spain is currently compiling its Viticultural Register to European Union (EU) regulations. So far, INDO (the National Institute for Denominations of Origin) has published the volumes relating to nine provinces, among them Toledo, Tarragona and Zamora, the up-to-date figures for which are quoted below.

The map shows the main Garnacha-growing area and highlights the greatest concentrations of this variety.

The provinces listed below are those where plantations of Garnacha exceed 5,000 ha (12,355 acres) and account for 20% or more of that province's total area under vine.

PROVINCE	AREA (Ha)	%
Zaragoza	60,600	72
Toledo	30,900	18
Navarra	24,000	88
La Rioja	13,400	44
Madrid	8,200	27
Avila	7,300	79
Teruel	6,000	45

Zaragoza is the province with the largest area of Garnacha. There, it is the principal variety and the basis for the wines covered by the D.O.s of Cariñena, Campo de Borja and Calatayud.

Garnacha is the dominant variety in most of the province's municipalities,

*In Spain, not enough advanced technology has been applied to Garnacha and its particular characteristics.*

*Its quality potential has yet to be explored.*



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and has been for many years, though the figures for the last 20 years show an increase in plantings of white varieties such as Viura and Garnacha Blanca.

In Toledo Province as a whole, Garnacha is the second variety after Airén (though in Méntrida D.O. it occupies 92% of the vineyards) and the wines hereabouts are characterized by this variety's fruity primary aromas.

A comparison of the old *Catastro Vitivinícola* figures for Toledo with the updated Viticultural Register (their field data refer to 1975 and 1992 respectively, so that they span 17 years) shows that Garnacha has fallen back by 7,000 ha, or 18%. However, the ripping out or abandonment of Airén plantations has now increased Garnacha's share of the overall figure from 18% to 21%.

The municipalities of Fuenzalida in Toledo Province and Cariñena in Zaragoza Province have the most extensive plantations of Garnacha, each of them exceeding 3,000 ha (7,413 acres).

Garnacha's percentage in Navarra is very high, though current figures show important changes. In Navarra D.O. overall, Garnacha accounts for about 52%, dominating in the Baja Montaña at 90%, while there is a relative decrease in the Ribera Baja, with 43%.

In La Rioja Province, Garnacha is the most widely planted variety, accounting for 44.5% of the total under vine, though it should be noted that in the Rioja Alta the figure is less than 25%, while in the Rioja Baja it exceeds 70%. Garnacha is the leading variety used for young wines, and is blended in varying proportions with Tempranillo and other varieties for *crianza* and *reserva* wines (see Glossary, p. 113).

As the table shows, Garnacha is also an important variety in Madrid Province,

especially in the subzones of Navalcarnero and San Martín de Valdeiglesias. In Avila Province, it accounts for almost 80% of its vineyards, with 1,800 ha in the Cebreros area alone. In Teruel, Garnacha is the leading variety in many municipalities, though here it is more widely dispersed rather than being grown in particular nuclei.

Other provinces whose Garnacha figures merit a mention are: Burgos, with some 5,000 ha (12,355 acres), and Soria, Tarragona and Valladolid all with about, or more than, 2,000 ha (4,942 acres), though their plantations are more widely dispersed.

In Tarragona, Garnacha has declined during the period under consideration by some 3,000 ha (7,413 acres), or 62% of the original area. However, higher percentages of other varieties have been ripped out or abandoned. It is actually gaining ground in Priorato and in the Falset subzone of the Tarragona D.O., revealing confidence in this variety on the part of local growers.

In Huesca, Garnacha occupies 19% of monovarietal vineyards, especially in the Somontano D.O.'s production area, and it is also grown in the majority of the province's vineyards in tandem with other varieties.

Zamora meanwhile has practically doubled its area of Garnacha since the old *Catastro* figures.

## GARNACHA ABROAD

Garnacha is the same variety as the one known in France and elsewhere as Grenache or Grenache Noir. In the EU, the authorization of grape varieties is regulated by R. (EC) 3800/81 modified last year by 3255/94. After Spain, France is the biggest grower of this variety, with plantations of it in the southeasterly départements, par-

ticularly Vaucluse and Gard, and the Pyrénées Orientales, Drôme, Hérault and Aude, in areas with plenty of sun and sufficiently high temperatures. It is the principal variety for several D.O.s, including Côtes du Roussillon, Corbières, Costières du Gard and Côteaux de Languedoc.

In the vast Languedoc-Roussillon, Garnacha Tinta is used to make naturally sweet wines such as Rivesaltes and Banyuls, and it is also used in Côtes de Provence and Côtes du Rhone in combination with other varieties such as Syrah. In Portugal, Garnacha is authorized only in Ribatejo e Oeste, Alentejo and the island of Madeira.

In Greece, there are plantations of Garnacha on the Chalcidice Peninsula, in the Dodecanese and, principally, Heraklion. Garnacha is not a significant variety in Italy.

In California, Garnacha accounts for 14% of the area planted with black wine grapes, occupying third place after Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon.

*Garnacha is a variety native to Spain, which over the centuries has adapted to the climatic and soil conditions of different areas to produce various clones and variations on its name.*

**Gabriel Yravedra** is an agronomist, First Vice President of the International Vine and Wine Office, and a member of the Scientific Committee for Denominations of Origin of Agro-Alimentary Products in Brussels.



San Miguel's exports amounted to over 4 billion pesetas in 1994 thanks to its brand image linked to Spain.



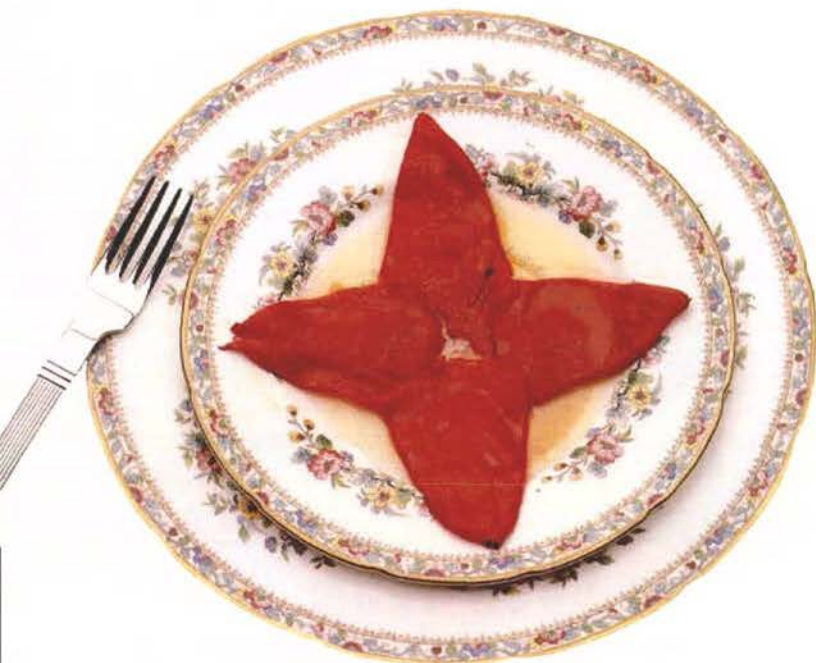
# San Miguel

## The beer from Spain

A GROUP OF AUGUSTINE MONKS PROVIDED THE FORMULA, GENERAL MACARTHUR WAS IN CHARGE OF THE LOGISTICS, THE SECOND WORLD WAR SAW TO THE PROMOTION AND SOME SPANISH EMIGRANTS DID THE REST. THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE INGREDIENTS OF SAN MIGUEL, ONE OF THE FEW SPANISH BRAND NAMES THAT ARE AS WELL KNOWN OUTSIDE SPAIN AS THE SINGER JULIO IGLESIAS.

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"Stop buying San Miguel beer and Julio Iglesias records". This was the headline splashed across the front page of *The Sun* of London when it sided with Canada during the recent fishing conflict with Spain.

Many Spanish companies report higher export figures than San Miguel -and some are even better known- but they all discovered to their envy that in Europe no other consumer goods are more closely identified with Spain than records by Julio Iglesias and beer brewed by San Miguel.

The firm's export manager, Antonio Claramunt, is only too happy to accept the tabloid's verdict and to state that it is an honor to figure alongside Julio Iglesias -he even confesses to having considered sponsoring one of the singer's concerts in the United Kingdom.

Long before *The Sun* suggested boycotting San Miguel beer, this was one of Spain's highest-flying export products. Since 1967, San Miguel has been Spain's greatest exporter of beer and in 1994 its sales outside Spain passed the 4 billion-peseta (32 million dollar) mark. This is clearly something of a miracle for a country with no brewing tradition.

Firstly, hops have never been widely cultivated in Spain due to the climate. This also means that beer-drinking was not common practice until just a few decades ago, obviously being held back by the quality and quantity of Spanish wine production. But anyway the fact is that the origin of San Miguel goes back to the Philippines and, from there, it grew to become one of the emblems of Spain abroad.

Its upward progress was boosted by coincidence and by a number of historic personages -from General MacArthur to the painter Zuloaga, including a monastery full of monks, the latter having traditionally figured largely in the history of alcoholic beverages.

## San Miguel Was Born with a Blessing.

The company started out in 1890 in the Augustine monastery in the San Miguel district of Manila. The tropical heat under the monk's habits was such that the abbot decided it was preventing them from carrying out their spiritual tasks. To raise the soul of his monks above worldly fatigue, this cheerful character decided to start brewing beer.

The Philippine Islands that took their name from Spain's King at the time, Philip II, were Spain's most eastern colony, conquered for Spain in 1521 by Juan Sebastián Elcano. Since it was impossible to cover the whole of the territory that not only comprised over 7,000 islands but was inhabited by aggressive local tribes, the Spaniards who were most persistently present in the Philippines were always the religious orders whose abnegation in the face of hardship was to play an important role in the history of San Miguel.

The Philippines had always been the port of call for passengers and goods travelling between Asia and America before setting off across the Pacific Ocean or the China Sea, the latter being sometimes the unwished-for destination of ships repelled by the bellicose locals. This was the case with Elcano who was thus forced to make the first round-the-world voyage. After fleeing from the archipelago to escape from the natives, he found that the trade winds that had taken him that far now prevented him from sailing back to America. So he summoned up courage, set off for China and continued westwards as far as the Cape of Good Hope, so named because it at last enabled him to veer northwards towards Spain where he was to return, although with just 18 of the 240 men

who had left with him three years before.

Similarly courageous were the Augustine monks in the San Miguel district who decided to stay on in the Philippines after the battle of Cavite (1898) that put an end to domination by the Spaniards and opened the way to the influence of the United States. Undaunted, the monks continued brewing. Their remedy for the heat was so successful that just after the turn of the century they were able to expand the brewery and float shares under the name of San Miguel. Soon afterwards, they sold their stake to a group of Philippine families led by the Soriano family.

San Miguel continued with its activities, taking advantage of the fact that the effects of the First World War were hardly noticeable in the Pacific. But the Second World War was to bring drastic changes. It led to a 3-year occupation of the Philippines by the Japanese, until the islands were liberated in 1944 by General MacArthur. His adjutant was Colonel Andrés Soriano Roxas, a Philippine entrepreneur and descendant of the first San Miguel shareholders, who had joined the army after the Japanese invasion. At the end of the war, Soriano became President of San Miguel and determined to expand the company, which had meanwhile continued to grow during the war as a result of assistance from two unexpected quarters.

The first boost was to foreign trade and came from the U.S. navy. Before the attack on Pearl Harbor, San Miguel had received a small order from one of the U.S. warships and by 1945 it had become the largest supplier to the Pacific Fleet. The navymen had become so familiar with the brand that they got into the habit of asking for a "San Mig". And

the beer followed them as they advanced through the Pacific towards Japan. Antonio Claramunt says: "By the end of the war, San Miguel had come to be a highly-esteemed brand and was sold from Hong Kong to the island of Guam".

The second boost led to expansion within the Philippines and arose from the local mastery of military logistic techniques, of prime importance when a company has to take its products to 7,000 islands. The vast distribution network that was set up was the reason why, years later, companies such as Coca-Cola or Nestlé were to join up with San Miguel in order to penetrate this market.

## San Miguel Comes to Spain.

Just as Elcano did four centuries before, Andrés Soriano Roxas returned to Spain in 1945 but this time to celebrate the end of the war. Soriano was of Spanish origin and had always maintained close links with Spain. Some time before, when searching for an artist to portray his wife, Carmen Montemar, it was a Spanish painter whom he commissioned -Ignacio Zuloaga. The artist had died a few months before his trip so Carmen Montemar was keen to visit the museum set up by the Zuloaga family in the Basque town of Zumaya to display its art collection. Soriano was not aware of it but this was to be the start of the Spanish San Miguel.

Chance led him to be guided on his visit by the industrialist Enrique Suárez Rezola, the painter's son-in-law. They spoke of the tremendous problems of post-war Spain and of the dearth of certain products, one such being beer. They got on well and, over lunch, it was pointed out that there was no-one in Spain producing quality beer. It didn't take long to reach the decision to

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start producing San Miguel in Spain.

Right from the start, according to Antonio Claramunt, Soriano and Suárez "agreed that they should produce top quality beer, a surprising decision in the rickety conditions of post-war Spain in which only beer of standard quality was being produced". In those days there were not many Spaniards who could afford the luxury of top quality so they decided to think in terms of the national market, rather than just the local market which was the approach adopted by all other Spanish brewers. "The others just produced for their own locality", says Claramunt. In addition, they inherited the Philippine vocation to export which had already led the Soriano family to sell its products throughout the Pacific area. This ambitious plan was not easy to put into effect, least of all in post-war Spain. And it was twelve long years later, on 12 May 1957, that the first bottle of San Miguel came off the production line in Spain.

Two years before, after battling with officialdom, they had finally received a licence to brew beer in the province of Lerida. A company had already been set up under the name of 'San Miguel - Fábrica de Cerveza y Malta', the main shareholder being Andrés Soriano who, together with the Cortina family, formed the nucleus of the company. "It must be remembered," states Claramunt, "that the company they set up was completely different to the Philippine San Miguel with which it had ties only through one of the capitalists, the management being entirely separate." The two companies were to share out the world market applying different export strategies. "We took on Europe and Africa, and Asia and the United States were left to them." Today the Spanish

San Miguel continues specializing in brewing whereas the Philippine company has become a giant holding that is present in all the branches of the agriculture and food sector, pays 5% of all the taxes collected by the Philippine state and provides for 3% of its GDP.

In 1957, the first year of operation, production amounted to just 18,000 hectoliters of beer. In 1994 it exceeded 3.5 million hectoliters with a total turnover of 36.43 billion pesetas. In the intervening years the three San Miguel factories were set up and a powerful brand image was to become consolidated with a close link to Spain.

### **The Brand Name is All-Important.**

At least this is Antonio Claramunt's opinion concerning consumer goods. San Miguel focused its efforts on building up a powerful identity to gain the edge over its competitors. He states: "There's no longer any point in telling your customers that your beer is clearer or darker or better than the others. The basic challenge is to find something that differentiates your product from those of the competition and that's where San Miguel has succeeded: it is *the* Spanish beer. It automatically brings up images of sun, sand and holidays and all of these help to push up beer sales." With this idea in mind, San Miguel gradually built up its image that has since been copied by others -the Mexican Corona-Coronita and Sol beers emphasize Mexico and things Mexican in their publicity campaigns.

But Claramunt believes the Mexican success is due more to a fashion for drinking beer with a slice of lemon than to the product itself and he rejects these formulas. "They might push sales up fast but the subsequent fall can be just as fast. San

Miguel does what it can to not be fashionable because fashions come and go." He considers there is nothing exotic about San Miguel. "It's just a good beer whose strength lies in the fact that on the world market it is the beer from Spain."

He believes that the beer's success in building up an image and in flourishing on the export market was due to several factors, one of which was tourism. "In 1994 about 60 million tourists came to Spain. They bought San Miguel in the bars and shops and inevitably started to associate it with our country. Back home in Paris or London, when they see San Miguel, they know the brand and start to ask for it," says Claramunt.

While it was consolidating its brand image, San Miguel extended its plant. After Lerida came the Burgos brewery in 1964 and, six years later, the one in Malaga. Its production structure remains the same today, with each of the three breweries being of similar size and each producing one third of the 3.5 million hectoliters brewed in 1994.

### **San Miguel up For Sale.**

Andrés Soriano III, President of today's San Miguel, and the Suarez and Cortina families had to make a tough decision in 1994: whether or not to sell the company, in which they held approximately 52% of the shares. Economic globalization and the European Single Market meant that San Miguel had become just a small fish in the European brewing sector. One of the solutions to ensure the company's survival was to sell out to a large group and Danone, which had already purchased 22% in 1992 from other shareholders, was the successful candidate. Four takeover bids were launched in order to enable all the shareholders to sell their

stakes under the same terms. Two have already taken place and Danone currently holds 60% of San Miguel. This percentage is expected to reach 100% in 1997.

So today San Miguel is undergoing a process of change from being almost a family company to forming part of the Danone group. San Miguel now also produces Kronenbourg beer, another brand owned by the Danone group, and Antonio Claramunt accepts that it is not impossible for San Miguel beer one day to be produced in Danone-owned breweries outside Spain.

In spite of the many changes in store, the San Miguel brand name is likely to be preserved. "Today when a company is up for sale, the buyer isn't interested in the plant or other tangible assets. He just looks for a brand-name and the real value of San Miguel lies in its name," says Claramunt. Even the editors of *The Sun* are aware of this. After recommending their readers to boycott San Miguel, they then took advantage of its prestige to carry out a promotion campaign. A team of glamorous promoters was taken on by the paper to spend the summer on the Spanish beaches. Whenever they saw a sunbather with a copy of *The Sun*, they handed out 1,000 pesetas -"enough to buy eight bottles of San Miguel beer", according to the newspaper's front page.

*Iñigo Moré writes for the business section of El País and for other media, one of which is Intereconomía, the first European radio station to specialize in business information.*

# IT'S IN THE BAG!

## THE WORLD'S MOST PAMPERED TABLE GRAPES GROW IN SPAIN



*A tiny valley on Spain's Mediterranean coast has developed an unusual and completely natural way to grow table grapes that look more perfect, taste better, are healthier and can be enjoyed well into the winter. The grapes of the Vinalopó Valley are so special that they have been granted the world's first and only "Denominación de Origen" for table grapes.*

Text: **Deborah Luhrman**

Photo: **C.R.D.O. Uvas de Vinalopó/ICEX**

**T**here is a reason that Manual Bonmatí was elected mayor three times. The year was 1912. People in the farming town of Novelda, in the sunny valley of Vinalopó near Alicante, liked Señor Bonmatí because he was a model of civic leadership. He was pro-education, he reduced unemployment, and he helped bring water to the grape growers of this arid valley. But his most long-lasting contribution to the community was a simple, yet ingenious, discovery. He found that grapes could be grown in paper bags. As mayor and a prominent grower himself, Sr. Bonmatí led the fight against a grape pest called "Cochylis" that

plagued the valley from 1912 to 1919. He tried everything he could think of to foil the pesky moth which laid its eggs in the fruit. But his efforts were in vain and his grapes continued to be damaged from the resulting tiny worms. So Sr. Bonmatí began to experiment with tying paper bags one-by-one around his ripening bunches of grapes. It looked like the vines were growing paper bags instead of grapes and his neighbors could not stop laughing. Agricultural authorities came out to inspect his unorthodox growing methods and dismissed him as a lunatic. Nevertheless, it worked. The paper barriers kept the pest away from the fruit and







It is said that the toughest terrain always produces the best grapes, so it should be no surprise that Spain's most renowned table grapes come from a land that seems suited for little else.

Sr. Bonmatí discovered that his method produced a number of other advantages. His pampered grapes looked more perfect than those of his neighbors and the skins were not as tough, but best of all he found that paper bags slowed the ripening process. His grapes could stay on the vine months longer than anyone else's and be harvested as late as December or January, when they could fetch a higher price in the market and be enjoyed as a special treat on Christmas or New Year's Eve.

The grape growers of the Vinalopó Valley are not dumb and soon paper bags began sprouting from vines throughout the region. The threat of the Cochylys plague has long since vanished, but Sr. Bonmatí's method of pampering grapes by growing them in paper bags remains the same as in 1919. His ingenious discovery has spread out over 10,000 hectares (14,170 acres) and turned into a US\$ 21.6 million a year business.

Probably even more heartwarming to Sr. Bonmatí would have been the return of the agricultural authorities. In 1990, 21 years after his death, the Fishing and Agricultural Council of the Valencia region recognized the unique growing method and unrivaled quality of Vinalopó grapes by creating the world's first and only *Denominación de Origen* (Denomination of Origin) for table grapes. This D.O. designation, which appears on the label of every box that meets D.O. standards, assures consumers that they are buying grapes grown in paper bags in the Vinalopó Val-

ley -the highest quality available on the market today.

#### A DESERT TREAT

The Vinalopó Valley is surrounded by arid, craggy mountains about 35 km (21 miles) inland from the Mediterranean city of Alicante. The Vinalopó River, which once carved out the valley, has long since dried up. All that remains to mark its path is a narrow strip of grass and reeds that feed on the runoff from infrequent rains.

Vinalopó's vineyards share hillsides with dusty marble quarries. The soil bakes and cracks under a blinding sun. It is a thirsty landscape and due to several years of drought in southeastern Spain even drier now than ever.

Standing out in sharp contrast to the bleak landscape are the bright green grape leaves of the vineyards. They are irrigated with drip systems that do not waste a drop of the precious liquid and it almost seems like a

miracle that such an unpromising place could produce such healthy plants.

It is said that the toughest terrain always produces the best grapes, so it should be no surprise that Spain's most renowned table grapes come from a land that seems suited for little else.

The Vinalopó Valley lies just north of Elche -a town famous for its palm oasis, date groves and a medieval Christian mystery play that is sung in haunting oriental melodies that belie the region's Moorish past.

Just beyond Elche is the Alicante International Airport, which receives planeloads of northern European tourists everyday. They come from places like Manchester, Zurich, and Hamburg for a sunny holiday on the Costa Blanca -which is almost a sure bet at the nearby resorts of Benidorm or Playa San Juan. The relentless sun, the dry winds swooping down from the arid mountains and moisture-laden breezes that

come up the valley from the sea at night provide the Vinalopó region with a unique set of climatic factors just right for growing grapes in bags. The method has been copied and tried in other parts of Spain, but without success. In other places, the grapes tend to rot from moisture trapped inside the bag.

#### A BUNCH OF ADVANTAGES

Two varieties of grapes are included in the *Denominación de Origen* Vinalopó: Ideal -which is also called Italia- and Aledo. The Ideal variety grows in long, loose, cone-shaped bunches. The grapes themselves are large and pale yellow, with a crunchy texture and a light, delicious muscat flavor. They contain only one or two seeds and are harvested from mid-August to mid-October.

Aledo grapes are a special gourmet treat -almost like eating a bite of candy on a stem. Named for a village in the nearby province of Murcia, Aledo grapes grow in compact bunches. They are medium to large-sized white grapes with firm, crunchy flesh that contains a burst of sweetness. Aledo grapes also contain only one or two seeds and are harvested from mid-November to mid-December.

Vinalopó grapes have a number of advantages over other types of less pampered table grapes. Since the bag protects the fruit from sun, rain and hail, as well as insects, the grapes have plenty of eye-appeal. Each bunch ripens evenly and naturally. They benefit from a uniform pale hue that gives them a mark of ele-





## Perhaps the most important advantage of Vinalopó grapes for the consumer is that the paper bag acts as a natural barricade to protect the fruit from pesticides and fungicides.

gance. There are no brown areas from sunburn nor are there any overripe or misshapen grapes.

The unusual growing technique also slows the ripening process and allows farmers to keep the grapes on the vine virtually until an order comes in. There is no need to keep the grapes in cold storage or use artificial ripening methods. Consumers are guaranteed of getting vine-ripened grapes that contain maximum flavor and nutrients.

Vinalopó's motto is "from the vine to the table" and growers pride themselves on the ability to get their produce into the distant markets of Milan or Hannover within two days of picking. But the best part of this growing system is that it allows consumers to enjoy a summer fruit in the middle of winter.

The delayed harvest of the Aledo variety of Vinalopó table grapes is much appreciated during the holiday season by Spanish consumers who eat grapes to bring in the New Year. There is no New Year's Eve party in Spain that is without grapes, every market stall is well-stocked and they are even sold in tiny plastic bags on the street corners. Popular folk wisdom dictates that at midnight on New Year's Eve one grape must be eaten at each chime of the clock. Those who manage to chomp down all 12 grapes before the New Year begins are assured of good luck in the upcoming year, while those who fail or stop short of the required 12 can always take solace in another glass of cava.

### NATURALLY SUPERIOR

Perhaps the most important advantage of Vinalopó grapes for the consumer is that the paper bag also acts as a natural barricade to protect the fruit from pesticides and fungicides. From the time the bags are placed on the grapes until harvest, up to six months later, none of the agricultural sprays touch the fruit.

In September 1995, SOIVRE -the Spanish export inspection agency- conducted a careful analysis of pesticide residues in Vinalopó grapes. The SOIVRE laboratories in Alicante, which are approved by the European Community (EC), used the most advanced testing equipment to determine precisely how much healthier Vinalopó grapes are.

Laboratory testing proved that the unique growing methods used in Vinalopó produced grapes with practically no residual pesticides -just one-tenth of the allowable EC limits.

While not theoretically an organically-grown product, this ultra-low level of residual pesticides in Vinalopó grapes has been recognized with a special certificate of quality in the form of a green star that will be placed on every case and on the Vinalopó labels. The green star is intended to remind consumers that they are buying an exceptionally clean and healthy product.

### GROW UNDER WRAPS

The Vinalopó Valley and especially its largest town, Novelda, is one of my favorite places in Spain. Not that it boasts any outstanding monuments, nor is it very beautiful, but Novelda

is the exit on the Madrid-Alicante highway that I always take to get to the beach.

After the four-hour race across the desolate plains of La Mancha, it is always a pleasure to reach the quiet country roads that wind around hills and through the vineyards of Vinalopó. This is where the holiday mood sets in, where I search for a flamenco music radio station and where I roll down the car windows to try to catch the first hint of sea air.

Motorists passing through this valley during the month of July are certain to see the unusual sight of workers in the vineyards tying bags around the emerging bunches of grapes.

It is a hot and tedious job, but the well trained workers move quickly along the rows of grapes armed with a stack of paper bags and a bundle of jute ties. The workers, most of them women, usually sit on a plastic packing crate. First they prune away all the inferior bunches. Then they pick up one of the bags, all of which are open on the bottom to allow more air flow, and with one deft motion they place the bag over the bunch of grapes and tie it on with a short length of jute.

Workers, most of whom come from nearby villages, normally work in teams of three or four people and they repeat this expert maneuver 20-25,000 times for each hectare of grapes. With 10,000 hectares (24,710 acres) of grapes under cultivation in the Vinalopó Valley it amounts to 250 million bags -each one tied on one at a time by hand.

The bags are specially made for Vinalopó grapes with a coating that helps them withstand up to six months of wind and rain. They start out a pale yellow color but before harvest the bags are bleached white in the sun. Farmers like to say the pale yellow color of the bag is transferred magically to the fruit inside as it ripens.

It is a time-consuming and labor-intensive process and one that costs growers about 15 pesetas (US\$ 0.12) per kilo of fruit. But anyone who has sampled the pampered Vinalopó grapes will agree that it is worth the extra effort and expense.

### BAGGING THE MARKET

The regulatory council of the *Denominación de Origen* Vinalopó began operations in 1990 with the purpose of defending the common interests of the valley's grape growers and promoting their produce both within Spain and in international markets.

It is funded by the Spanish Foreign Trade Institute (ICEX) and by local growers and shippers, who contribute 200 ptas. (US\$ 1.60) per tonne of Vinalopó grapes they produce.

The council employs a full-time inspector, who visits vineyards and packing houses to make sure that growing and shipping methods comply with D.O. regulations. About 40 vineyards currently belong to the regulatory council, which groups 120 companies and about 70 different brands.

Only first-quality and extra-quality Vinalopó grapes are allowed to carry a D.O. label, so that consumers can be sure of getting the best possi-



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## The unusual growing technique slows the ripening process and allows farmers to keep the grapes on the vine virtually until an order comes in.

ble product. The distinctive D.O. label can be found on the packing crate and on the stem of some of the bunches of grapes in each box.

While 130,000 tonnes of grapes were produced in the Vinalopó region in 1994, only 13 per cent or 17,000 tonnes carried the D.O. label. This is partly because of the high standards of quality that the D.O. requires. But it is also a reflection of the independent nature of Spanish farmers -who are sometimes difficult to convince about benefits of joining any kind of association. Currently about half of the valley's grape growers belong to the D.O. and one of the council's chief missions is to achieve full participation.

Vinalopó's promotional campaign involves educating consumers and produce wholesalers about the benefits of growing grapes in bags and opening up new international markets.

"This is no ordinary grape", said Cosme Martínez Ruíz, secretary of the regulatory

council, "and we do not try to sell it in supermarket chains or the big hyper-markets."

"Vinalopó grapes are aimed at an elite market segment that knows how to appreciate a high quality product and is willing to pay a premium price, so we tend to distribute to gourmet and specialty shops," he said.

Point-of-sale brochures and posters explaining the advantages of Vinalopó grapes are used for promotion. Print and television advertising campaigns have also been launched in some markets.

But the biggest promotional boost came during Expo 92 in Seville. An entire day at the Valencia pavilion was declared the day of the D.O. Vinalopó table grapes. Everyone who visited the pavilion that day was treated to samples of Vinalopó grapes and a explanation of the growing process. Among the visitors who stopped by were Spanish King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia. The delicious grapes, it turned out, were fit for a

king (or queen) and much admired by the monarchs. But what did Spain's pragmatic king ask the Vinalopó growers? He wanted to know when Spanish farmers were going to start producing seedless grapes.

International marketing is relatively new to the regulatory council of Vinalopó, but informational materials are now available in three languages: French, Spanish and German.

The biggest foreign market in 1994 was France, where there is always a healthy demand for high-quality foods. French consumers purchased nearly 4,000 tonnes of Vinalopó grapes last year. Germany is the number two export market, purchasing 1,670 tonnes of Vinalopó grapes in 1994. It is followed by exports to other European countries such as Italy, The Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and Denmark.

An elite product such as Vinalopó grapes deserves a top class marketing campaign and the 1995-96 sea-

son will focus on increasing sales to gourmet and specialty shops in Germany. Point-of-sale materials including recipes for winter salads and desserts have been prepared. To educate consumers and import managers, tastings will be combined with and advertising campaign and appearances at major food shows.

Vinalopó's growers are certain that once a consumer finds out about the pampered way they grow their grapes and tastes the delicious results they will gain a life-long fan.

*American-born journalist Deborah Lubrman has lived in Spain for seven years, reporting on a variety of Spanish, topics including food, wine and travel. She is currently serving as press attaché for the Madrid-based World Tourism Organization.*

**See list of main exporters on page 15.**

### ANNUAL PRODUCTION OF D.O. VINALOPO TABLE GRAPES

1990-91	1,040 TONNES
1991-92	4,220 TONNES
1992-93	9,108 TONNES
1993-94	16,555 TONNES
1994-95	17,000 TONNES

Source: Regulatory Council of the Denomination of Origin Vinalopó table grapes.

### EXPORTS OF D.O. VINALOPO TABLE GRAPES 1994-95 SEASON (IN TONNES)

FRANCE	3,937
GERMANY	1,670
ITALY	485
THE NETHERLANDS	208
BELGIUM	138
SWITZERLAND	136
DENMARK	128
OTHER COUNTRIES	227
TOTAL	6,931

Source: Regulatory Council of the Denomination of Origin Vinalopó table grapes.

*Their flavor, color and versatility fit well with modern trends in food. They are also easy to store and quick to prepare.*

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**R**ED, POINTED, TRIANGULAR AND TINY, THESE VERSATILE LITTLE PEPPERS HAVE PROGRESSED FROM LOCAL SPECIALITY TO METROPOLITAN FOODIE'S DELIGHT IN THE LAST FEW YEARS. THEY NOW STAR IN COUNTLESS RECIPES.

TEXT: JOSÉ IGNACIO FAGOAGA/SOBREMESA





PIQUILLO PEPPERS

# LITTLE RED STAR



*The peppers start off green, pass through the green-and-red stage, then go to bright red. They are usually gathered at this stage, or just before.*



**T**here was a time when the streets of Lodosa, a town in Navarre, in north-eastern Spain, were festooned in red each Autumn. Nowadays, this annual ritual is far more low-key. One sees the occasional façade decorated with strings of peppers hung out to dry, but it's a far cry from the vivid display one would have seen twenty or thirty years ago.

Lodosa's speciality crop used to be *pimientos del cuerno* ('horn' peppers, so-called because of their shape), but everyone used to sow a few rows of *pimientos del piquillo* ('pointy' peppers) too. This very small, fleshier variety, barely ten centimeters (four inches) long, has always been grown here, but for home consumption only, while the others were grown for the market, too. At the beginning of Autumn, in October, everyone picked their small crop of *piquillo* peppers, then baked and canned or bottled them for storage in the larder alongside other preserves of local produce-asparagus, tomatoes and peaches.

In the late 1960s, Lodosa was a favorite Summer holiday destination for families from the Basque Country, as was so much of the Ebro Valley. This had been an established tradition among the middle-classes living near the Cantabrian coast long before the invention of tourism as we know it today. Among the local produce that these summer visitors ate were *piquillo* peppers preserved and stowed away in Lodosa's larders the previous Autumn. Once discovered, their fame spread: many visitors took cans of *piquillo* peppers home with them at the end of their holiday as a treat for themselves or as a gourmet gift for friends.

# THERE ARE NO EXACT FIGURES, BUT PRODUCTION IS THOUGHT TO HAVE MULTIPLIED BY TWENTY OR THIRTY IN THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS

Sometimes, stocks laid down the previous Autumn were enough to meet demand, but otherwise visitors would have to place an order and come back for their peppers in November or December. As this pattern evolved into the norm, local smallholders began planting extra rows of *pimiento del piquillo*, gradually cutting back on *pimiento del cuerno* to make room for them.

But the definitive shift in emphasis really happened when *piquillo* peppers were taken up by the cooks instrumental in creating Basque nouvelle cuisine. Julián Rivas, then proprietor of the well-known Tolosa restaurant *Julián*, is usually credited with having launched the *piquillo* pepper into restaurant circles, though how he actually cooked them is still one of those closely-guarded gastronomic secrets. Thanks to him, *piquillo* peppers became smart food, first in the Basque Country and Navarre, then in Madrid and Barcelona, and now almost everywhere in Spain. José Luis Mañu, Secretary of the Regulatory Council of the Pimientos del Piquillo de Lodosa Denomination of Origin, reveals that 60% of the regulated production is absorbed by the Basque and Navarrese markets, 30% by Madrid and Barcelona, with the remaining 10% going to various destinations, including the small but growing percentage which is exported to France. Though there are no exact figures to reflect the overall increase in

production, it is estimated to have multiplied by twenty or thirty in the last fifteen years.

## Denomination of Origin

The huge increase in demand has caused a complete reversal of Lodosa's original crop pattern. Nearly all the peppers grown in Lodosa today are *piquillo* ones, with only the occasional row of *pimiento del cuerno* and chillies still being grown for local domestic use.

The *piquillo*'s ascent to stardom has produced other side-effects, too. Quantities of canned peppers flooded the market, labelled as *piquillo* though their actual provenance and variety were far from clear. As we have seen, the whole point about *piquillo* peppers was that they were a home-made preserve, originally intended for domestic consumption. This meant that there were no applicable labelling standards or anything of the sort, since they were grown and prepared exclusively in Lodosa, and there was no involvement with the canning industry. Furthermore, the original production area very soon became too small to meet the increasing demand and began to spread uncontrolledly. It was to tackle these problems that the Denomination of Origin Pimientos del Piquillo de Lodosa was created.

It was intended to regulate three specific problem areas. The first of these was to guarantee that the peppers had actually been produced in Lodosa and the

surrounding area, the second to certify the variety of the peppers, and the third, to ensure that they were prepared according to the traditional method.

The production area boundaries were established mainly by geographical criteria, but agricultural traditions were also taken into account. The boundaries established originally, in 1985, for the Regulatory Council's area of jurisdiction encompassed the municipalities of Lodosa, Mendavia, Saraguda, Andosilla and Carcar. This was later extended to include San Adrián, Lerín and Azagra. These municipalities lie in Navarre's Ribera Alta, where a relatively high proportion of the land is irrigated: the rivers Ebro and Ega and the Lodosa Canal provide the water essential for growing peppers. Guaranteeing the variety is a more complex issue. Apparently, *piquillo* was a variety exclusive to Lodosa. Apparently. In nearby Mendavia, however, the pepper they call *pimiento del pico* has been grown in considerable quantity for the canning industry for many years, predating the *piquillo*'s rise to fame. And the difference between a *pimiento del piquillo* and a *pimiento del pico*? Size is the most obvious one (the word *piquillo* means a finer point than a mere *pico*). While opinions may vary as to differences in quality, the difference in quantity is indisputable. How to tell a *piquillo* from a *pico*, or indeed from a related variety? Actually on the plant, or in

the raw, there is no possibility of confusion (*piquillo* is shorter and has a curved 'tail') but once in the can, it is not so easy. The number of peppers in a tin provides a fairly reliable clue. A half kilo (1 pound) can of extra quality *piquillo* peppers should contain at least twenty four. If there are fewer than twenty, the chances are that these are not *piquillos* but some other variety. They may not be inferior to *piquillos*, but they are not the genuine article.

The method of preparation is also simple but strict. The original Lodosa method was to roast them over coals in a vessel made out of a large tin can or drum, much like those used by hot-chestnut vendors. The roasting process was tedious and tiring in that one had to keep a close watch on the peppers and wield tongs for picking them up by the tail to remove them from the heat at just the right moment. When demand shot up, very simple but efficient appliances fuelled by butane gas were invented, which made the whole process much more convenient. If you stroll around Lodosa any day in October, you are sure to see them in use. People set them up in the street just outside their basement doors. Only two people can work them at time (one puts the peppers in at the top and turns them, the other waits for the roasted pepper to fall into the bottom part, then peels it). Even so, the whole family tends to be involved, plus friends pressed into ser-

# THERE ARE THREE BASIC QUALITY CATEGORIES: EXTRA, PRIMERA AND SEGUNDA. ONLY EXTRA AND PRIMERA CATEGORY PEPPERS QUALIFY FOR DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN COVERAGE.

vice, and they all mill about and help roast, peel, and can the harvest. What they are making is a strictly artisan product. The bulk of canned peppers, however, are produced in medium-sized factories, which apply the same process, albeit using rather more sophisticated technology, though it is far from high-tech. The only fuels permitted to be used for pepper-roasting, for example, are wood, coal and butane gas, never fuel-oil or similar fuels which can disturb the original flavor. The peeling has to be done by hand, using a cloth and a little knife. The pepper is never washed in water, since it would otherwise lose much of its flavor. And nothing-not even a drop of water-is added to the basic ingredient during canning. The Regulatory Council is responsible for ensuring compliance with these requirements. José Luis Mañu explained that the Council fulfils two functions. One of these is to monitor production by growers and the sale of their crops to the canneries, and to issue tested and approved batches with numbered labels which are then affixed to the relevant cans. The Council also inspects canners to ensure that they are complying with the established processing requirements. Both these controlling functions are rigorously applied, though Sr. Mañu believes that the best guarantee of quality a D.O. product provides is that high quality brings its own rewards: "Any brand that has earned a certain rep-

utation, and they nearly all have, can't take the risk of losing it. It just wouldn't be worth it. The market is very demanding, and any slip-up could cost them dear."

## Red, Green and in-Between

*Piquillo* peppers appear in various guises: most of them are a very characteristic bright, shiny red, but they also come green, a mixture of red and green, and a sort of toned-down, orangey red.

These are not different varieties of pepper, but the same variety at different stages of ripeness. The peppers start off green, pass through the green-and-red stage, then go bright red. They are usually gathered at this stage, or just before: if there are still a few little green areas when they are picked, they are simply left for three or four days before roasting, during which time they redden completely. Peppers collected earlier in the ripening process than this, however, will not go red before roasting: these are the red-and-green type.

Green *piquillo* peppers are the ones that are still green at the end of the season and are gathered when the weather is expected to break so that they are more likely to rot on the plant than ripen further. They are harvested just before the first severe frosts, usually around the beginning of November, though this can vary considerably from one year to another. The peppers high up on the plant tend to be the last to ripen, if indeed they do at all.

So which is the best of these gastronomically speaking? This depends to some extent on personal preference, of course, though the red peppers are the ones that are at their peak and have the fullest, smoothest flavor. Greenness really means the opposite: less flavor, more sharpness on the palate and less sweetness. All these 'defects' can be considered virtues, though: green *piquillo* peppers are sometimes stuffed with fillings whose flavors would be overwhelmed by that of the mature red pepper. Green-and-red *piquillos* are very like the red ones in flavor, though perhaps slightly less sweet.

*Piquillo* peppers are held by some to be a relation of Galicia's *pimientos de Padrón*, the tiny, delicious green peppers of which just the occasional one is ferociously hot. *Piquillos*, too, can sometimes be piquant, though less frequently and less dramatically. Curiously, there is no satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon of random hotness: hypotheses include the genetic and meteorological, the finer points of the pollenization process, right through to magic and mythology.

The factors which affect overall quality in peppers are well understood, however. Setting aside the particular qualities of each growing area (this is an issue that local growers love to debate, especially those of Lodosa and Mendavia), it is the weather that most affects the harvest. Summer rain, if not excessive, promotes growth and flowering, while moderate heat in

Autumn helps ripening. If the first frosts arrive late, this can extend the season and give a more abundant crop.

## How to Eat Them

The classic method of cooking *piquillo* peppers could not be simpler: they are just roasted, and eaten with a little salt. This would have been how most people in Lodosa ate their home-canned *piquillos*.

They can also be cooked with a little oil and chopped garlic over a slow heat or in the oven. Prepared in this way, they are usually served as a starter or as a side-dish for meat. Remember that the peppers have already been cooked once before canning, so they need very little further cooking, though this can depend on the quality of the pepper and for how long it was originally roasted.

Food enthusiasts in Spain have really discovered *piquillo* peppers in the last few years, and demand now seems to be spreading to the rest of Europe. Their flavor, color and versatility fit in well with modern trends in food. They are also easy to buy and store, quick to prepare, and can be incorporated into hundreds of recipes -just the thing for imaginative cooks.

*José Ignacio Fagoaga is a journalist and food-writer. He contributes regularly to Sobremesa, one of Spain's leading food and wine magazines.*

**See page 13 for main exporters and page 108 for recipes.**

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# WHEN SHOPPING

There are *piquillo* peppers of various types, provenance and categories on the market.

## Home-preserved peppers

This type, prepared in the old traditional way, can only be bought directly from whoever preserved them, or at a few shops in the town. They are usually good, though standards do vary. The best peppers in the area come into this category, though an unlabeled tin is by no means a guarantee of quality. You can only really be sure of what you are getting if you know and trust the maker and his product.

## Denomination of Origin peppers

These are processed at small and medium-sized canneries registered with the Denomination of Origin's Regulatory Council. According to the latest available data, there are thirteen such factories. A can bearing the Regulatory Council's

label offers a reliable guarantee as to the variety and area of origin of the peppers it contains, and the way they have been processed.

This type is readily recognizable, since the can bears the manufacturer's label, which incorporates the D.O. logo, and also a numbered label issued by the Regulatory Council.

## Brands of piquillo peppers without Denomination of Origin

Not even 50% of the cultivation area of *piquillo* peppers in Navarre is registered with the Regulatory Council of the Denomination of Origin. It includes only the territory of Lodosa and some neighboring municipalities although *piquillo* peppers of very good quality are produced in many, more areas

in Navarre and even La Rioja. The cans without the D.O. label just lack the double guarantee of the Regulatory Council but need not be inferior in quality. There exist plans to enlarge the geographical production area protected by the Council.

## Quality categories

There are three basic quality categories. *Extra* quality peppers are always whole, red, fully ripe, blemish-free and small (this is the most desirable size). *Primera* quality ones are also whole, though standards are less stringent as to ripeness, size, and minor blemishes, such as cracks and the like. *Segunda* quality peppers come cut into pieces. Only *extra* and *primera* category peppers qualify for Denomination of Origin coverage.



# Vitamin



Clementines from Spain



**Morgadio is the name of an excellent Galician white wine made in the Denomination of Origin Rias Baixas from a premium variety, the Albariño grape.**

**I remember well the 1993 vintage which I tasted last winter at the Suntory restaurant in Madrid. A wine of a golden color and unique character shaped by complex flavors of ripe fruit and moderate but lively acidity and a wine which did justice to the food served at this exciting Japanese restaurant.**

I was so impressed by the wine that I decided to visit the bodega and taste the 1994. To my great surprise two different bottles of the vintage were opened at the same time. Within minutes all was revealed. The wine maker, having listened to his American and British importers, had decided during the 1994 vintage to vinify wine in accordance with both the national and the international taste. What a wonderful idea and what a terrible dilemma I had to face when José Antonio López, the Managing Director of the bodega, asked me which one was my favorite. Having lived in England for longer than I care to confess and having had to defend our wines against the fearless competition from France, New Zealand, Australia and California I welcomed the lightness and

extra dash of acidity which characterized the sample destined for the international market.

It was the perfect accompaniment to oysters and shellfish in general, on the other hand I loved the complexity and color of the more traditional style which I know still please the Spanish taste and my taste as a cook.

This is good recipe combining scallops and Albariño wine. To prepare it you need 4 fresh scallops in their shell, 4 tablespoons olive oil, 75 gr chopped onions, 2 teaspoons chopped fresh parsley, Albariño wine, salt and pepper. Open the scallops with a sturdy knife. Scrape off the beard-like fringe from around the scallop meat, and remove the black intestinal thread. Slide a sharp knife under the scallop and remove both the scallop and the coral from the shell. Scrub the shells thoroughly. Place a scallop in each rounded bottom shell. Add a little olive oil, onion, parsley, wine, salt and pepper. Place them under the grill (broiler) for 1 or 2 minutes. Do not overcook and serve at once. **Bodegas Morgadio-Agromiño, Albeos, 36240 Creciente (Pontevedra) Tel.: 34-1-86-66 61 50**

## Galician Delicacies

There is no doubt that shellfish is the gastronomic passion of the inhabitants of this ancient land and sea-farmed scallops, oysters and mussels much more than a regional hobby. José Sanmartín Galiano is the skipper of one of the larger serving boats attending the mussel rafts in the stunning Ría de Arosa. While I could eat fresh mussels cooked in a *sofrito* of onions, garlic, bay leaf and a dash of white wine every day of the year I am also very partial to the high quality canned product made with the mussels supplied by José Sanmartín.

Under the name Friscos you can find superior mussels, both in *escabeche* (cooked in vinegar and olive oil) or *al natural*, at La Despensa Gallega, an excellent delicatessen shop offering Galician specialties. **La Despensa Gallega, Calle Carzal, 32 - 36201 Vigo Tel.: 34-86-43 78 68**

Autumn brings us the fruit of a tree that graces inland Galicia, and the province of Orense in particular: the chestnut. I have never lost my taste for roast chestnuts, whether they are roasted in my own hearth at home or by the street sellers who appear in every city in

Spain once the cold begins to bite. I have to say, though, that my passion for Marrons Glacés, especially those that are made in Galicia as they are particularly excellent, is a fairly new one.

Of the three varieties of chestnut that grow in this part of the world the one called *negral* is the one that the confectioners use. The other two, the *raigona* and the *perez* tend to be sold fresh, in syrup for decorating cakes and tinned *al natural*. The latter are what I buy for making winter *compotas* (fruit stews) and stuffing for poultry.

As far as Marrons Glacés are concerned, as they first have to be glazed - a long and intricate process which I would not recommend undertaking in the home - I would suggest you look for the *Castañas artesanas* produced by **Cuevas y Cía, San Ciprián de Viñas. Apartado 91 - Orense, Tel.: 34-88-22 12 66**. La Despensa Gallega and all the Gourmet sections at the "El Corte Inglés" all over Spain are good suppliers of this delicious delicacy.

Driving north from Vigo towards Cambados I tasted in the fishing village of Raxó two dishes that could justify, if needed, any journey to the North West coast of Spain. A *ración* (small portion) of *Navajas a la Plancha* (grilled Solen vagina or Razor Clam) and a plate of *Judías Blancas* (a succulent batter bean stew). At the restaurant **Casa Verísimo (Tel.: 34-84 74 00 16) (Pontevedra)** *Navajas* are prepared grilled on a hot plate with sea salt. Once they are ready, they are simply dressed with pound-

ed garlic and parsley gently fried in olive oil. For total delight you need some local baked bread and a glass or two of the modest but delicious fruity red wine produced by the owner of the restaurant. If you would like to taste the menu of the day, which is always the best, you have to phone the restaurant in the morning before the locals reserve their places. Squid in tomato sauce, tripe, winter stews and fried peppers are the speciality of the house.

The word pepper in Galicia is synonymous with the exquisite *Pimientos de Padrón*, a type of small green pepper from the village of Padrón in Pontevedra which I call "Russian roulette peppers". Deep green in color and smaller than your little finger, they can be either sweet or terribly hot, depending on the time of the year. I love to buy them at the Santiago de Compostela market, a place without equal. The softness with which the Galicians speak Castilian is as remarkable as their tenacity as sales people. Their persuasiveness also meant that on my last trip I caught the plane back to London loaded down with 2 kg of *Pimientos de Padrón*, one cheese (a soft cowsmilk known as *Tetilla*), two tins of Pimenton Jauja (one sweet and one hot), one earthenware chocolate maker, one medium size Tarta de Santiago (almond cake) 500 gr piece, *broa* bread made with cornmeal and raisins and one tuna *empanada*.

Aside from being a very useful culinary resource employed by virtually all *Gallegos*, Galician pies, or *empanadas*, are the best bread dough dish made in Spain. *Empanadas* are made from wheat, maize or maize and rye flour. Every day *empanadas* are made from a simple dough, or baker's dough, whereas special occasion ones are made with a very delicate puff pastry that is hard to perfect. A "La Costrada de Puentevedume" *empanada*, if you are lucky enough to find one, and there is at the moment only one lady in Puentevedume who makes them, is an excellent example of a puff pastry *empanada*.

If I have to choose I have to favor the ones prepared with a very special tuna, the Albacore (*Thunnus alalunga*), the deluxe tuna traditionally caught in the North of Spain. *Conservas Garavilla* originally of Bermeo, in the Basque Country, are still supplying this product under the

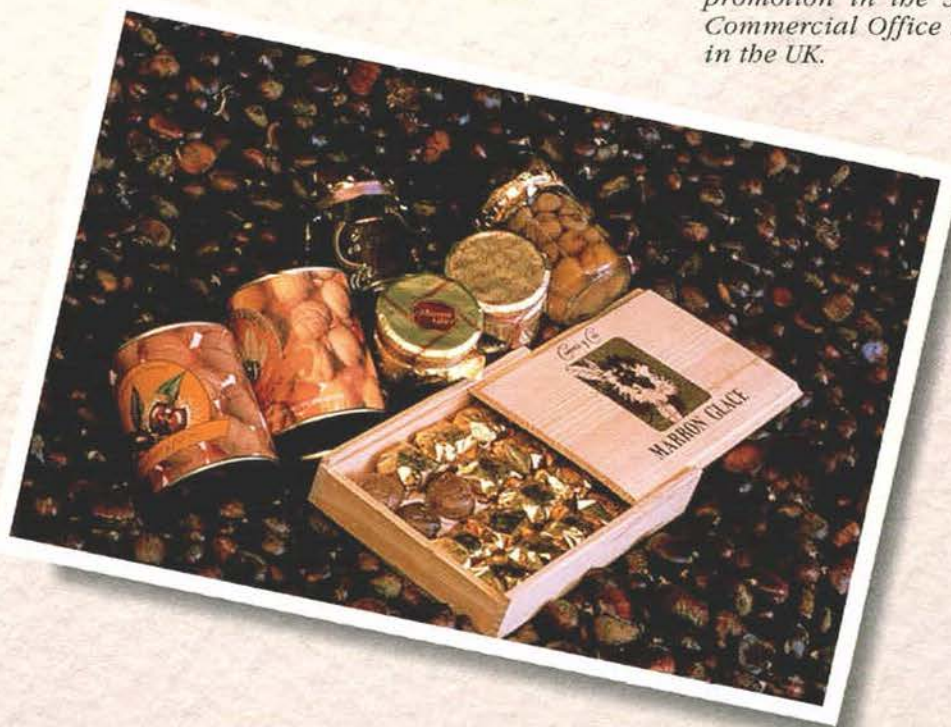
brand name Isabel to both the domestic and the international markets (See *Spain Gourmetour* No.35). In Madrid you can buy excellent canned fish at **Alfaro in Calle Narváez, 28, Madrid 28009** Tel.: 34-1-576 30 59.

This is Digna Prieto's recipe for the sensational tuna *empanada* she makes at her restaurant El Grisol in El Grove.

For the pastry you need 1 tablespoon fresh yeast, 3 tablespoons tepid water, 2 teaspoons sugar, 500 gr plain flour, a pinch of salt, 2 egg yolks, a dash of aniseed liqueur and 250 ml warm milk. For the filling 2 tablespoons olive oil, 2 onions, 4 tablespoons fresh tomato sauce, 250 gr tinned chopped peppers, 400 gr tinned tuna fish, saffron and 1 egg, beaten. Mix the yeast and tepid water and stir in the sugar. Mix the flour and salt in a food processor. Add the egg yolks, anis, milk and the yeast mixture and process at the lowest speed for five min-

utes. Turn to the second lowest speed and process for a further 5 minutes until the dough is light and elastic and leaves the sides of the bowl cleanly. Remove from the bowl and roll into 2 balls. Cover and leave it to rise for about 30 minutes. To make the filling, heat the oil and sauté the onions until soft. Add the tomato sauce, chopped red peppers, tuna and saffron and cook for a few minutes. Pre-heat the oven to gas mark 6. Roll out the dough pieces on a lightly floured surface into two squares. Place one sheet on a greased baking sheet and spread with the filling, then cover with the second piece. Damp the edges and seal them together so the filling does not leak out during cooking. Glaze with beaten egg. Bake for about 20 minutes until golden brown.

*María José Sevilla is an expert in Spanish gastronomy, the author of several books and a BBC TV program on the subject, and is joint head of food and wine promotion in the Spanish Commercial Office located in the UK.*



## Benigna-style potato skins

## MEDITERRANEAN DIET

SERVES 10 AS AN APERITIF:  
 Peelings of 2 kg potatoes  
 1 liter virgin olive oil  
 Fine salt

Wash and scrub the potatoes carefully so as not to damage the skin. Peel them thinly; the 2 kg should give about 280 gr of raw peelings, which will reduce to about 100 gr when fried.

Heat the oil and maintain the temperature so that the peelings cook but do not brown (about 100°C/212°F). The peelings should be in the oil for about 6 minutes, until soft. Remove them carefully and spread them out on kitchen paper.

When all the peelings are done, turn up the heat and put a slice of lemon peel into the oil. When this has turned golden (135°C/275°F), add the peelings in batches of 7 or 8. Brown them lightly, drain on kitchen paper, and sprinkle with salt before serving.

## Boix

SERVES 4 AS AN APERITIF:  
 10 *ñora* peppers  
 Coarse sea salt  
 Olive oil  
 Country bread

De-seed the *ñoras* and fry them. Drain on kitchen paper, then mash them with a little sea salt using a pestle and mortar. Sprinkle a slice of bread with oil, then use the pestle (*boix* means 'pestle' in Catalan) to spread it with mixture from the bowl.

## Benigna 'elvers': Bilbao-style soya sprouts

SERVES 4:  
 600 gr soya sprouts  
 4 cloves garlic  
 A little fresh chili (8 - 12 fine rings)  
 Oil (just enough to cover the bottoms  
 of 4 individual dishes)  
 1 fresh sardine

Fry the sardine in the oil in a pan over a medium heat, until it is just brown but not burned. (Reserve the sardine for another dish).

Carefully remove the filaments from the tip of each sprout, being careful not to break them. Cook the sprouts in vegetable stock (water will do) for 4 minutes.

Add a little fresh oil to the sardine-flavored oil, then pour it into four individual fire-proof dishes. Heat them, and gently fry a sliced clove of garlic in each until golden. Drain the soya sprouts well, then share them out among the four dishes, adding 2 or 3 rings of chili to each. Stir well for half a minute, then cover the dishes and serve. This is the traditional cooking and serving method for *angulas* (baby eels).

## Courgette noodles

### SERVES 4:

6 courgettes weighing  
500 gr each  
12 fine slices garlic  
Zest of 1 lemon, very  
finely julienned  
4 poached eggs

Home-made tomato sauce  
with oregano, salt and  
pepper to taste  
Grated Parmesan cheese  
Peeled sunflower seeds  
Virgin olive oil

Cut off the ends of the courgettes, then quarter them lengthways, removing the soft seedy core. Using a sharp knife, slice each piece lengthways into strips the thickness of Italian noodles. Blanch the strips in boiling salted water for a minute, remove them with a slotted spoon, and place in ice-water to cool. Drain and set aside.

Heat some good olive oil in a non-stick pan over a high heat, then sauté the courgette strips with the garlic slices and lemon zest, and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Share out among four individual plates, sprinkle with freshly grated Parmesan and gratiné in the oven until the cheese begins to brown. Remove from the oven, make a little hollow in the center of each, and place a poached egg (cooked for 4 minutes) in it. Pour tomato sauce over the egg, add a little more Parmesan, sprinkle sunflower seeds roughly crushed between your fingers on top, and serve.

## Alicante-style *olleta*: rice in broth

### SERVES 8:

500 gr dried broad beans  
3 cardoons  
1 bunch Swiss chard  
400 gr turnips

500 gr fresh broad beans  
(shelled)  
3 sweet potatoes  
3 potatoes

If you are preparing this dish for, say, Wednesday, put the beans to soak on Monday night.

On Tuesday, cook the soaked beans in plenty of water over a low heat with all the vegetables, except for the sweet potatoes, potatoes and onion, well washed and cut up into bite-sized pieces.

On Wednesday, peel and cut up the sweet potatoes and potatoes and add them to the cold bean pot, then bring it slowly to the boil. Heat the oil in a frying pan and gently fry the onion until golden, then tip the contents of the pan into the beans and allow to boil over a medium heat for half an hour so that the oil is thoroughly absorbed. When adding the onions, place the fried, chopped *ñoras* in a sieve, and immerse this in the bean pot for that half hour, during which time they will release flavor and color. Remove the pot from the heat, and the sieve from the pot. This is the basic *olleta* mixture.

Transfer a generous ladleful per person of this mixture into a large pan and bring to the boil. Add 100 gr of rice per person and cook for 20 minutes. The end result should be quite soupy, so add vegetable stock if it starts getting too thick.

# RECIPES

## Date pudding with syrup

SERVES 1/2:  
1 liter milk  
1/2 vanilla pod  
8 egg yolks  
80 gr sugar  
40 gr flour  
1/2 liter Fondillón  
(Alicante sweet wine)

50 gr butter  
50 gr sugar  
24 dates, stoned and  
chopped  
Syrup

Heat the milk with the vanilla pod and allow to cool. Beat the egg yolks with the sugar, then gradually add the flour. When the milk has cooled to luke-warm, stir in the batter, then the Fondillón wine.

Grease 12 moulds with butter and sugar, and place some chopped dates in each. Top up with the prepared mixture, and bake in a bain-marie until set. Allow to cool, then serve in a little pool of custard (vanilla custard is good), flavored with syrup. (At Casa Benigna, they use *arrope* a syrup made with grape must reduced with fruit).

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## EL BIERZO

### Poached El Bierzo sausage and potatoes (*Cachelada berciana*)

SERVES 6:

12 El Bierzo *chorizo* sausages  
2 1/2 kg potatoes

Water  
Salt

Poach the *chorizos* in water for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, boil the potatoes separately. Transfer the *chorizos* to a serving dish, allow to stand for 3 minutes, then puncture the sausages and add the potatoes, which will absorb some of the red juice. The whiter the potatoes, the better. (From *Sobremesa* magazine).

### Roasted El Bierzo peppers

6 peppers  
Olive oil  
Salt

The fine-fleshed piquant peppers typical of Ponferrada are roasted on a metal griddle over a fire made with oak or some other aromatic wood. When they are cooked, they are covered with a cloth to cool, then peeled before they are quite cold. They are served cut into fine strips and dressed with a little olive oil and salt.

(From *Sobremesa* magazine).

### El Bierzo pasty

SERVES 6:

1 kg bread dough,  
ready for baking  
250 gr pork lard  
1 cup olive oil  
3 large onions  
4 red peppers

4 large ripe tomatoes  
3/4 kg finely sliced pork loin  
(you can use previously  
cooked chicken, rabbit or  
pigeon)  
1 beaten egg

Work the lard into the bread dough, rolling it out several times with a lightly floured rolling pin until the lard is completely absorbed. This will make the cooked pastry flaky and smooth.

Slice the onion finely, cut the peppers into strips, peel the tomatoes and chop them. Fry them gently in the oil, seasoned with a little salt, in a covered pan.

Divide the dough into two pieces. Roll out one piece, and line a rectangular baking tin with it, leaving plenty around the edges. Spread this pastry base with a layer of the vegetable mixture, then the slices of pork, then another layer of vegetables. Roll out the remainder of the dough and top the pasty with it, making it large enough just to reach the edges of the tin. Turn in the surplus pastry from the base all round the pie, pressing with the fingers to form a ridge and knit the pastry base and top together. Any left-over pastry can be used to decorate the top. Brush the pie with beaten egg and bake in a moderate oven until golden and thoroughly cooked.

(From María del Carmen Zarzalejos' *La cocina del Camino de Santiago*).

### El Bierzo-style trout

SERVES 8:

8 trout  
Pork lard  
Salt

Clean the trout, season with salt and spread the insides with a little pork lard. Grill and serve immediately.

Note: Ideally, they should be grilled over an oak-wood fire, then left, covered, for 6 minutes before serving.

(From María del Carmen Zarzalejos' *La cocina del Camino de Santiago*).

## Chestnut dessert

1/2 kg chestnuts	60 gr melted butter
1 glass milk	80 gr icing sugar
1 pinch salt	4 egg yolks
Small piece vanilla pod	3 egg whites

Peel the chestnuts and cook them gently in the milk with the salt and vanilla.

When they are soft, purée them in the blender or mouli-légumes, then beat in the melted butter and the icing sugar.

Add the egg yolks one by one, then fold in the stiffly beaten whites. Butter a round mould, then pour in the mixture and sprinkle with a little sugar. Place in a bain-marie, and bake in a moderate oven. Serve with whipped cream.

(From María del Carmen Zarzalejos' *La cocina del Camino de Santiago*).

## Juicy piquillo peppers

SERVES 6:	
24 <i>piquillo</i> peppers (1 can)	2 dl virgin olive oil
8 cloves garlic	Salt

Heat the oil in a flame-proof earthenware dish over a medium heat. Gently fry the finely sliced garlic until it begins to turn golden, then add the peppers, juice and all. Season with a little salt and cook for five minutes. Turn them over and cook for another few minutes, shaking the dish so that the juices and oil blend. This makes a delicious first course, and is also excellent served on the side with lamb chops, grilled beef or veal, fried eggs, fried cod, bacon....

(From *Sobremesa* magazine).

## Piquillo pepper scrambled eggs

SERVES 6:	
8 <i>piquillo</i> peppers	Parsley
10 eggs	Salt & freshly ground black pepper
2 shallots	Oil & butter
1 clove garlic	

Finely chop the shallots and garlic, and sweat gently in a little oil and butter. Cut the peppers into thin strips, add to the pan and cook for two to three minutes. Beat the eggs with some chopped parsley, pour over the mixture and stir until it just begins to set, making sure not to overcook it. Consider this a basic recipe, to which you can add, for example, chopped cured ham, prawns, flakes of cooked cod...

(From *Sobremesa* magazine).

### Sautéed langoustines with prunes and piquillo peppers

SERVES 4:

1 kg langoustines  
(about 16 in number)  
16 *piquillo* peppers  
1 large onion  
1/4 kg green capsicum  
16 fine slices bacon  
16 prunes

2 teaspoons chopped parsley  
Chervil leaves for garnish  
1 dl olive oil  
2 cloves garlic  
Salt & freshly ground  
black pepper

Cook the *piquillo* peppers briefly with the chopped garlic in a little olive oil. Using a round pastry cutter (5 cm, or 2 in., in diameter), cut 16 discs out of the cooked peppers, then slice up the remains into julienne strips. Julienne the capsicum and onion, and soften in a little oil over a gentle heat. When they are nearly done, add the strips of *piquillo* pepper, and finish cooking together. Stone the prunes. Peel the langoustines, select the four best-looking heads and boil the heads briefly in salted water. Place a langoustine round each prune, then wrap each in a slice of bacon, fixing the parcel with cocktail sticks.

Heat a little olive oil in a frying pan, then sauté the parcels, seasoning with salt and adding the parsley just at the end.

To serve, spread four individual plates with julienned onion and capsicum and place four *piquillo* discs on each. Place a sautéed parcel on each disc, and decorate each plate with a langoustine head and chervil leaves.

(Juan Mari Arzak, Restaurante Arzak, San Sebastián).

This and the following recipes appear in *Los espárragos de Navarra y los pimientos del piquillo de Lodosa en las 26 recetas de 26 cocineros españoles* (Navarre Asparagus and Lodosa Piquillo Peppers in 26 Recipes by 26 Spanish Cooks) published in Spanish by the Regulatory Councils of the Denominations of Origin covering these two products.

SERVES 4:

8 *piquillo* peppers  
450 gr salt cod (soaked)  
8 tbsps single cream  
8 tbsps olive oil  
2 cloves garlic  
1/4 l home-made tomato sauce

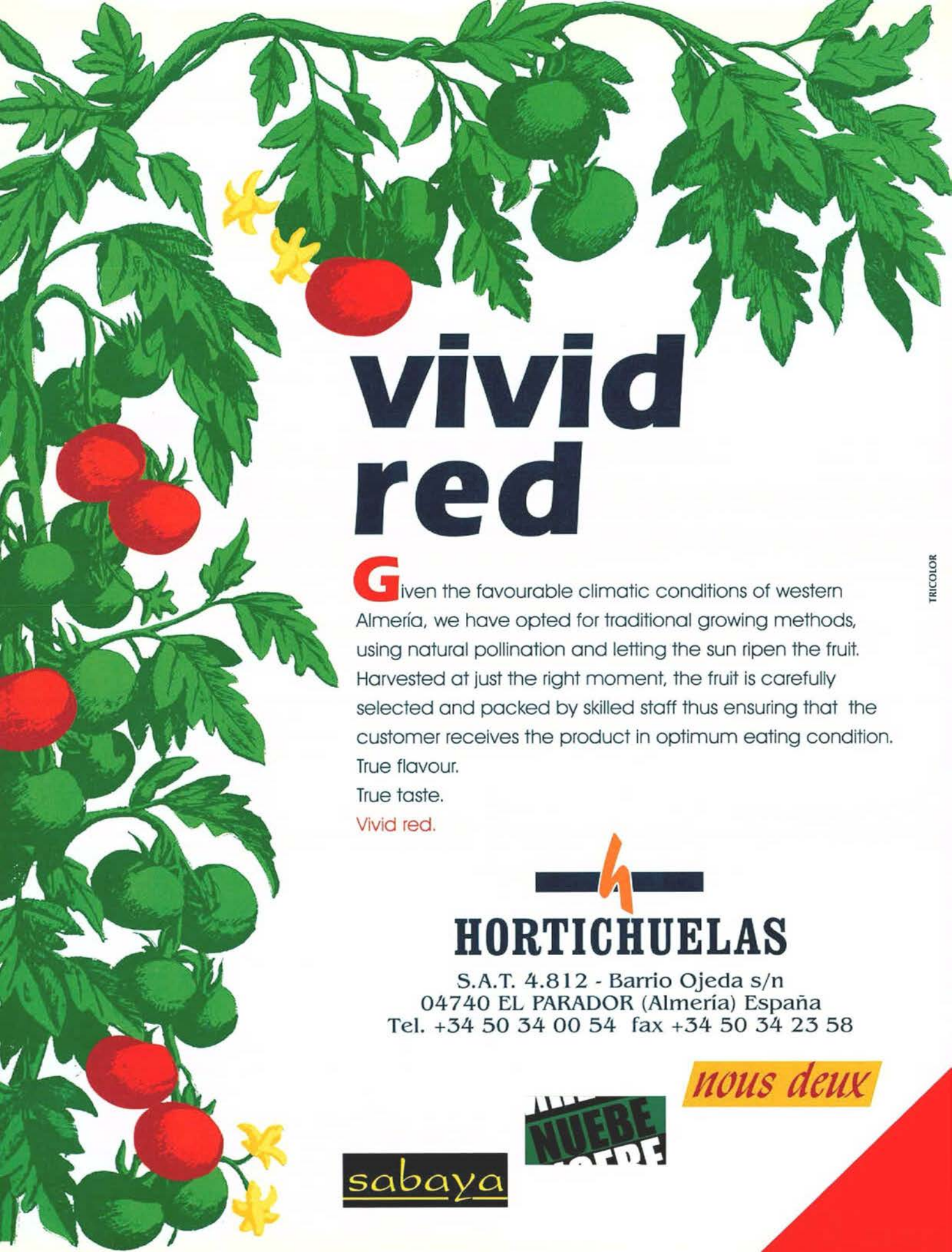
Flour  
Eggs  
Oil  
Salt & freshly ground  
black pepper  
Alioli

Cut the cod into pieces and bring to the boil in plenty of water. Drain, carefully remove all skin and bones, then flake it. Fry the garlic cloves gently in the olive oil, discarding the garlic when it has had time to flavor the oil. Gently heat the cream—do not let it boil.

Place the fish in deep bowl and use a whisk to break it up as finely as possible. Beating constantly, add the garlic-flavored oil and the cream until the mixture forms a thick, creamy paste (a food processor is useful for this stage). Check the seasoning, then fill the peppers with the mixture. Dip each in flour and beaten egg, and fry rapidly in hot oil until golden. Arrange them in a large earthenware dish, cover them with tomato sauce and heat through gently. Finally, top each pepper with a spoonful of alioli, and brown under the grill before serving.

(Josep Monje, restaurante Vía Veneto, Barcelona).

From the Navarra Asparagus and Lodosa Piquillo Peppers cook book (see above).



# vivid red

**G**iven the favourable climatic conditions of western Almería, we have opted for traditional growing methods, using natural pollination and letting the sun ripen the fruit. Harvested at just the right moment, the fruit is carefully selected and packed by skilled staff thus ensuring that the customer receives the product in optimum eating condition. True flavour. True taste. Vivid red.



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*nous deux*



*sabaya*

TRICOLOR

## Layered piquillo peppers, foie gras and potatoes

SERVES 4:

8 *piquillo* peppers  
4 medium potatoes  
200 gr fresh foie gras  
300 gr shelled broad beans

1 spring onion  
1 clove fresh garlic  
1 dl poultry stock

This is a sort of lasagna.

Sauté the *piquillo* peppers with the garlic and a little salt. Peel the potatoes and slice them finely. Arrange them in an oven dish, sprinkle with salt and a little oil and bake gently. Cut the raw foie gras into thin slices, season with salt, and fry in a little hot oil. Chop the shallot and soften in oil until golden, then add the beans, cook together briefly, then pour in the stock. Simmer gently until the beans are soft, then whizz in the blender to make a thin sauce (reserve a few whole beans for garnish). Season with salt.

In an oven dish, arrange a layer of peppers, then one of foie gras, then one of potatoes, keeping going until you reach the top. Pour the sauce over, and dot a few beans on top.

(José Manuel Las Hayas, Restaurante Belagua, Madrid).

From the Navarra Asparagus and Lodosa Piquillo Peppers cook book (see above).

## Stuffed peppers Rioja-style

SERVES 4:

250 gr minced pork  
250 gr minced veal  
1 clove garlic, peeled and  
finely chopped  
1 sprig parsley, finely chopped  
200 ml olive oil  
4 tbsps plain flour  
A little milk

Pinch freshly grated nutmeg  
12 *piquillo* peppers, or  
tinned  
small red peppers  
3 eggs, beaten,  
1 glass dry white wine  
4 tbsps tomato sauce  
2 tbsps water

To make the filling, mix together the minced meats with the garlic and parsley. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a frying pan and brown the meat mixture. Stir in 2 tablespoons of flour and a little milk, season with freshly grated nutmeg, and cook for 5 minutes. Stuff the peppers carefully with the filling and coat them in beaten egg, then in flour. Heat enough oil almost to cover the peppers, and fry them for about 10 minutes until cooked. Transfer them to a flameproof earthenware casserole, and keep them warm.

Make a sauce with half the oil that is left over from frying the peppers. Stir in 1 tablespoon of flour, then wine, tomato sauce and water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 2 minutes. Strain the sauce and pour it over the peppers. Place the casserole over a moderate heat and heat through until very hot before serving.

(From María José Sevilla's *Spain on a Plate*).

# EVERYTHING BUT THE ELEPHANT...



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

**I**n 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!*



WINES FROM



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# 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 at least three 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.

Every three months 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*.

## CAVA

Cava is the sparkling wine produced in a delimited area known as the "Cava Region" following the rules of the traditional method. This means that from the bottling (filling of the bottle for the second fermentation) till the disgorging (getting rid of the sediment), the entire process takes place in the same bottle which is the one offered to the consumer.

## QUICK CONVERSION

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

### Fluid Measures

#### METRIC/ BRITISH STANDARD

- 10 millilitres = 1/3 ounce
- 50 millilitres = 1 3/4 ounces
- 100 millilitres = 3 1/2 ounces
- 250 millilitres = 8 1/2 ounces
- 500 millilitres = 17 1/2 ounces
- 1 litre = 1 3/4 pints
- 1 teaspoon = 5 millilitres
- 1 tablespoon = 18 millilitres
- 1 ounce = 28 millilitres
- 1 pint = 570 millilitres
- 1 quart = 1.14 litres
- 1 gallon = 4 1/4 litres

### Fluid Measures

#### METRIC/U.S. STANDARD

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

### Weight

#### METRIC/OUNCES & POUNDS

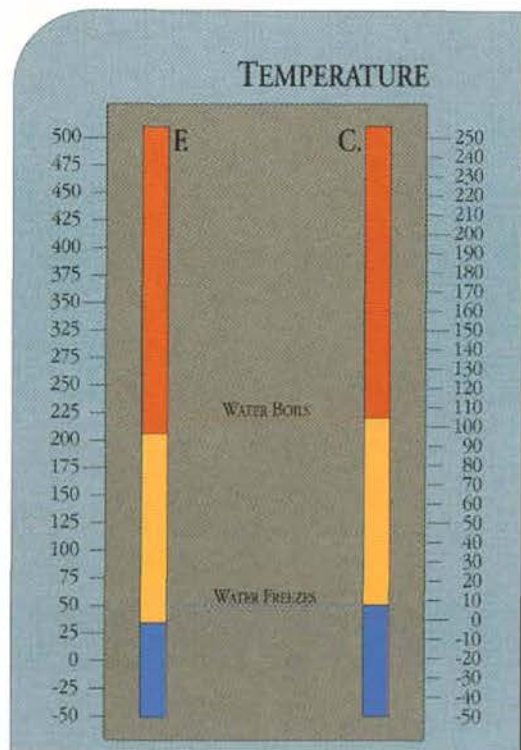
- 10 grams = 1/3 ounce
- 50 grams = 1 3/4 ounces
- 100 grams = 3 1/2 ounces
- 250 grams = 8 3/4 ounces
- 500 grams = 1 pound + 1 1/2 ounces
- 1 kilo = 2 pounds + 3 1/4 ounces
- 1/2 ounce = 14 grams
- 1 ounce = 28 grams
- 1/4 pound = 110 grams
- 1/2 pound = 230 grams
- 1 pound = 450 grams

### 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



# JUAN DE ESPINOSA

## STILL LIFE WITH GRAPES, APPLES AND PLUMS



ZORON

© Prado Museum, Madrid

**T**

### he painter

The small objects of everyday life along with flowers, fruits or dead animals have always interested painters -such lifeless articles allow

them to depict a fragment of reality. When the ancient Greeks spoke of their contemporary, the painter Zeuxis, they praised his skill in painting grapes that looked so real that even birds flew up to peck at them. But if we had to determine when still lifes first came to be a genre in painting, then this would be towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> C when the brilliant Italian painter, Caravaggio, painted his *Basket of fruits*.

From then on still lifes were to develop, sometimes just as an exercise in realism and sometimes as works of art in themselves. The genre was cultivated by all the greatest masters and had followers in all the European schools.

In Spain it was Sánchez Cotán with his *Still life with fruits and vegetables* who first drew attention to this genre. Living at the turn of the century, Cotán helped to promote still lifes as a genre

both in Toledo, where he lived for a time, and in the nearby court of Madrid. Although in the rest of Spain the genre was practically unknown, in Madrid several painters developed an interest in this style and this was doubtless to influence later painters such as Juan Fernández Labrador and Juan Bautista de Espinosa, the artist concerning us here.

Little is known about Juan de Espinosa except that he lived in Madrid in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> C. And the facts are confused because there were in fact two painters with the same name at the same time -one who died in the capital in 1641 and another who lived in Madrid from 1631.

What is known, however, is that this artist produced masterly still lifes, and was especially expert at painting grapes, which practically became his hallmark. His works also often included shells, birds and items of American pottery. He must have been well known in his time because works signed by him frequently appear in the inventories of contemporary private collections. Today paintings of his can be seen in public and private galleries in Madrid, Paris and London.

### The painting

Although unsigned, this painting is attributed to Espinosa because of its affinity with other works by him. It is believed to have been painted around 1630 when the artist was at his peak. There are two parts to the painting. The top half occupies practically two thirds of the canvas and shows several hanging bunches of fruits and in the lower half there is a pot with more fruit. The composition is similar to that in the works by Sánchez Cotán although there is no sign of the tenebrism favoured by the latter. Plums and bunches of various varieties of grape hang over a plate holding apples and grapes and a red earthenware pot from Mexico of the sort that cooled and perfumed the liquid it contained. The whole tableau is lit up by a strong light coming from the upper left corner and giving a clear outline to the objects.

More than just a skilful draughtsman, he imitates to perfection the shine on the fruits, as well as the different textures of the fruit skin. In this his work is reminiscent of the still lifes painted by the masters of realism of the Flemish school.

**José María Ortega Sanz**

Bodegas Bilbainas was established as a company in 1901, though its history goes back as far as 1859.

It owns an estate of 260 hectares of vineyards surrounding the bodega itself in Haro, the heart of Rioja Alta. The grape varieties grown include Tempranillo, Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuelo.

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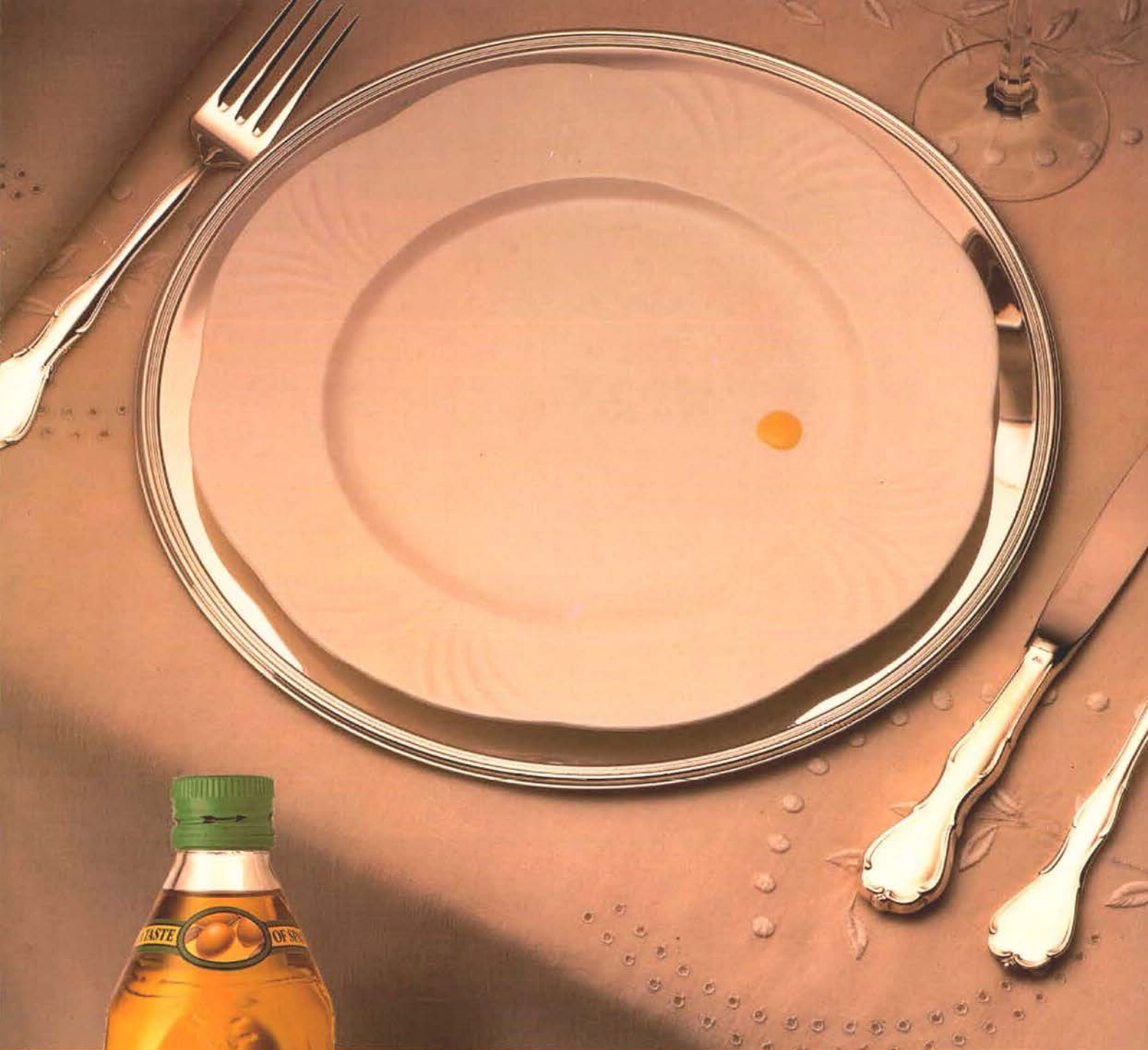
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