FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

SPAIN

GOURMETOUR

ROAST LAMB AT THE CASTLE GATE • OLIVE GROWING: THE SPANISH VARIETIES
• VINEYARD ROUTES OF SPAIN: ANDALUSIA

No. 44 JANUARY-APRIL 1998

SPAIN GOURMETOUR

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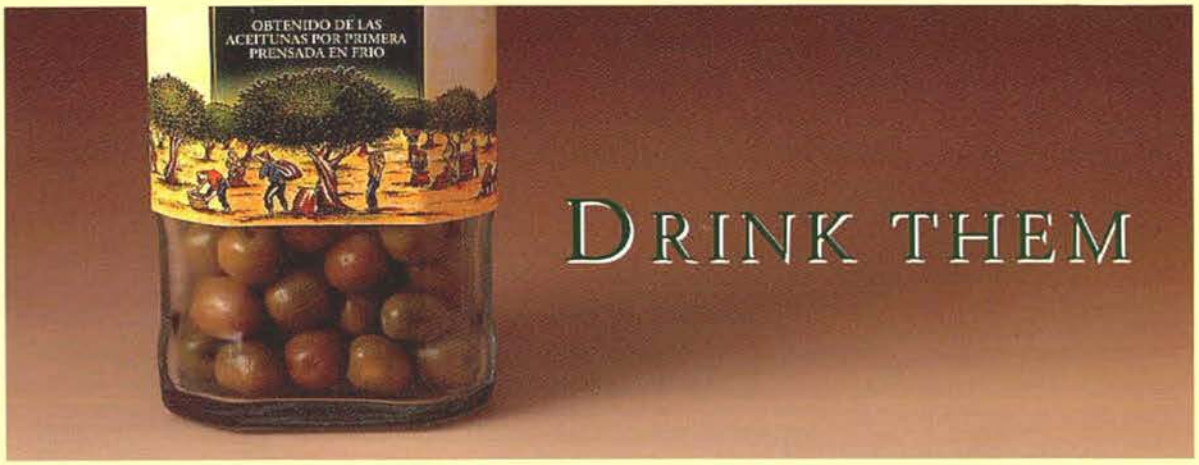

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CONTENTS

January-April 1998

Information and Subscription
Spain Gourmetour is a journal published by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX) of the State Secretariat for Trade, Tourism and Small and Medium Enterprises, Ministry of Economy and Finance to promote Spain's food and wines, as well as its cuisine and culture. The magazine is issued three times a year in English, French, and German, and is distributed free of charge to professionals in the sector. If you want to subscribe to Spain Gourmetour, please contact the Spanish Embassy Commercial Offices (see list on page14).

PCYC

SOLERA GRAN RESERVA

CARDENAL MENDOZA

Brandy de Jerez

SANCHEZ ROMATE HNOS. JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA

Dear readers,

In 1998 we begin a new series with initially two chapters on Spain's olive oil varieties, a product which is increasing more and more in significance in healthy eating. We have selected eight of the most important olive varieties, which we present to you fresh from the tree with all the organoleptic and technical details.
We are continuing our series of "Vineyard Routes" across Spain and lead you to Andalusia. In the Denominations of Origin Jerez-Xérès-Sherry y Manzanilla de Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Condado de Huelva and Málaga, we also present you the gastronomy of *tapas* and seafood at the southern tip of Spain, in addition to landscapes, *bodegas* and such famous wines as sherry.
A historical-culinary journey through the plain of Castile leads us past countless fortified castles where, in the Middle Ages, Spanish history was made. Castile, made rich by trading wool from enormous herds of sheep, has since then retained the tradition of preparing roast lamb and suckling pig in large wood-fired adobe ovens and provides the most solid fare for the traveler in typical villages and inns.
We open up to you the wine cellars of the D.O. Bierzo and, in addition, the cocktail bar with a "spiritual" mix of the widest variety of liqueurs and spirits in Spain such as, for example, Galician orujo or cider spirit from Asturias.
The Spanish spring, with its fragrance of rosemary and many other flowers, has lured the honey bees out of their hives and we travel with them through the countryside to get to know their work, their delicious product and the bee-keepers who preserve the seasonal honey.
We will be reporting on "Rising Stars" in the area of fresh foods. Asparagus, loquats, cherries and grapes from cultivation with low-level use of chemical productos are the "green" stars, even out of season.
Our article on farmhouse cheeses from all over Spain which are full of character, yet continue to remain little known should whet your appetite for new products made of cow's, sheep's and goat's milk and entice you into the mostly undisturbed, natural environment of these ruminants.
Ham from Spain: a much discussed topic, yet for many, however, still a book with seven seals. Iberian ham, Serrano ham, Jabugo ham, Pata Negra? We attempt to offer enlightenment in the confusion of terms surrounding the cured ham from Spain.
The sauce is the making of the dish. However, no sauces thickened with flour please! Instead, traditional, light sauces from Spanish cookery, which combine outstandingly well with healthy Mediterranean cooking. The recipes for Romesco, the Canarian Mojo colorado, Sofrito, Ailioli or Picada are an invitation to cooking and enjoyment.

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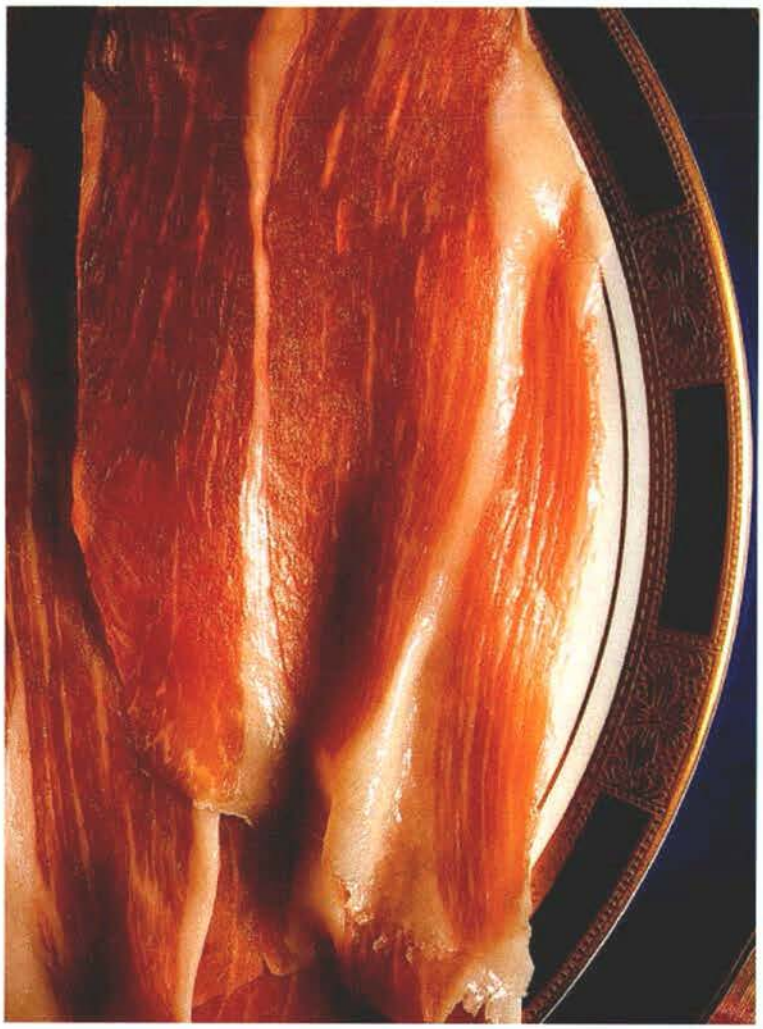

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Text: Charles Powell
Photos: Nelson Souto/ICEX

The Barcelona Alimentaria 1998: Delivering a Foretaste of the 21st Century

There are three leading food fairs worldwide: ANUGA in Cologne, SIAL in Paris, and Alimentaria in Barcelona. Each is immense by any standard and each surpasses those held in the Americas and elsewhere, lands where food interests have been fractionalized, regionalized, and departmentalized.

In North America, for instance, there are specific fairs for seafoods, gourmet products, food service, frozen foods, beverages, supermarket fare, wines and liquors, even "niche" categories like spicy foods and condiments and New England Artisan fare. Each enjoys its day in the sun and the food marketer who so desires, or requires, can spend time each month in one distant city or another, keeping up with all the developments in those diverse food environments.

Europeans are perhaps wiser. They realize that the human stomach has a finite capacity, while the human appetite can encompass more infinite culinary interests.

Thus growers, processors, vintners, and marketers in Europe are more disposed to join together in showing their wares to the many who cater to the food needs of consumers, whether they buy and consume their food at home or away from home.

Food Fairs in Particular

The Barcelona Alimentaria, held every two years, has now completed a quarter century with its 12th biannual food fair. The event has continually grown in size, scope, variety, and features, to keep up with current trends and evolving interest. This year's Alimentaria, for example, included products for the next century in a grouping called "Innoval," featuring such new products as low-salt cured olives, alcohol-free whisky (sampling with cola was not to everyone's taste), the first dental chewing gum that reduces plaque and helps prevent cavities, hams cured without phosphates and cold snack meats with eight added vitamins that are also low in calories and cholesterol.

Barcelona, the Mediterranean Capital

This year's Alimentaria was, as usual, held in Barcelona, on the hillside reaching upwards to the National Palace atop Montjuic, the area where many of the 1992 Olympics sports events were held. The fair grounds are composed of impressive stone buildings built originally for the 1929 Barcelona World's Fair and are interspersed with more modern structures of steel and glass. Because the demand for booth space was great, semipermanent tents and free-standing booths were also erected. The fair was divided into sections as follows:

Expobebidas—covering all soft drinks, waters, and beers.

Intervin—featuring virtually all of Spain's wines and spirits.

Interlact—for dairy products of every type and stripe.

Vegefruit—for fruits and vegetables, marketed fresh, canned, frozen, and dry.

Intercarn—showing all manner of meat products, fresh, cured, canned, with some 350 different firms exhibiting.

Interpesca—for all manner of seafood, fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and smoked.

Mundidulce—exhibiting sweets, confectionery, biscuits, and cakes.

Multiproducto—the section for companies with a broad range of products, from snacks to frozen meals, pasta and rice, olive oils and olives, coffees and teas.

The International Section—featuring exhibits grouped by country from many corners of the globe, as near as Portugal, France, and Italy and as far away as Cameroon, Chile, China, and the United States. Virtually all of the EU countries (European Union) were there in force.

The Regional Pavilions—here every region of Spain has its own extensive booth, designed to feature those local and often artisanal processors who would not otherwise be able to afford to participate. For a true feeling of the diversity of food products Spain harvests, produces, and markets, this pavilion was the one not to be missed.

The last pavilion was not a pavilion at all, but a horseshoe shaped rectangle of independent restaurants and snack bars, for attendees who preferred a sit-down meal or *tapas* break to snacking their way from

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the dictionary,
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moving
from one
point to
another
in an
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aisle to aisle. In short, a sensible and civilized respite, for which the Spanish are particularly noted.

Vital Statistics

Although the full count is not in, it is known that there were well over 100,000 professional attendees, along with thousands of Barcelona's more serious "foodies." The booth count numbered well over 3,000 and the total number of products shown were almost countless. International visitors were well into five figures, including both North and South Americans, Asians, and contingents from every other EU country.

Diets for Life, In the Centuries To Come

In these latter days of the twentieth century, the "Mediterranean Diet" has captured the world's imagination, changed its mind-set and built on consumer enthusiasm to significantly alter human food consumption around the globe. To one degree or another, these culinary changes have taken hold in every hemisphere, on every continent and in virtually every country.

It began when doctors and nutritionists began studying the food habits of many cultures, hoping to relate good health and longevity to diet. In Asia, rice, vegetables, and fish were positive for health. In Greenland, a diet of Omega 3 fatty acids found in salmon and mackerel, even seal meat made for a low incidence of heart disease. In France, they came upon a paradox, a diet of vegetables, fats from cheese and red meats, yes, but combined with daily consumption of wine (albeit moderate) also brought health benefits. But these diet habits, some forced by available food supplies, could be too confining and more than a bit restrictive. The breakthrough came in unearthing and then publicizing the culinary habits of the millions of ordinary peoples living around the Mediterranean basin, diets they have enjoyed since the dawn of recorded time.

Spain cannot lay claim to a monopoly on the Mediterranean diet, but in its role as the market garden of Europe, with the Continent's most diverse agricultural base, Spain holds the center in this revolutionary change in human eating habits, a fact that was evident in one way or another in almost every exhibit at the fair.

This diet has been visualized as a pyramid, perhaps one that will rival those of Egypt in longevity down through the ages, despite the fact that it is more ephemeral, seen as a guideline only on paper. However, for those who follow it, there will be health benefits that could not only extend life but make it more vigorous and satisfying. At the base the pyramid calls for daily helpings of cereals, rice, pasta, potatoes, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, cheese, and other dairy foods, olives and olive oil. Several times a week poultry, fish, and eggs are recommended, leaving sweets and red meat at the very apex, for monthly consumption.

One on One at Alimentaria

Many of the exhibitors we interviewed were representative of this healthy diet trend, or else represented the foods that by their very nature, were gourmet items to be savored only from time to time, rather than on a daily basis.

Aceitunas Guadalquivir S.A. of Seville is the largest exporter of bulk olives and capers to North America and a major supplier to Eastern Europe and the EU countries. Director Francisco Javier Escalante pointed out that "our shipments are white label, without any brand name and are repackaged for supermarket sales."

Nearby, we met Mr. Eduard Pons of the Euroaliment group in Lérida. They produce several olive oils and pack Arbequina olives as well. He told us that, "Our Pons, Mas Portell, and Romulo brands are shipped throughout the EU, to the U.K., North and South America, and Asia." Interestingly, his best market is Australia. We later learned that Spain enjoys a 60 percent share there as the Australian market is fully aware of the many distinctive varieties of oil Spain produces, due to the many varieties of olives pressed (perhaps more than any other olive oil producing country. See article on page 27). He also told us that Japan is a fast emerging market, led by the food halls of large department stores, always a supe-


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rior outlet for quality foods with "gourmet cachet."

In the cheese area, perhaps the most fascinating displays were for an artisan cheese exhibition, "Spain the Country of 100 Cheeses." It was two years ago that the directors of Alimentaria requested Enric Canut -one of the most renowned experts for Spanish cheese- for the first time that this exhibition should become a feature of the show, to help artisan producers increase awareness, always a first step to successful marketing. The cheeses on display and for sampling came from all over Spain and were primarily from smaller producers. It is the diverse climates, species of animals milked, and mixtures of cow, goat, and sheep milk that created the extensive variety of Spanish cheeses. One cheese that we liked in particular was called "Torta del Casar" from a small village in Extremadura. The cheese had a stable, flexible rind and, when ripe, the center took on a consistency of soft butter with a piquant bite.

Fresh and cured meats have found their way to many corners of the globe, as well they should. But for some years, there has been a single holdout, the United States.

Now, the logjam has been broken and Serrano hams are entering the U.S. from Navidul, S.A., a major producer with United States Department of Agriculture approval. Before year's end, thousands of hams will have been sold monthly to American consumers and there could well be more, as five other Serrano ham producers in the Spanish Serrano Consortium have U.S.D.A. approval, including the other major producer, Campofrío.

In the seafood area, we met with Sr. Prats of Pasapesca, a processor with factory fishing ships that range as far south as Argentina, in search of a catch. Some products are marketed in North America but the EU countries and Eastern Europe have been their best customers to date, buying squid, hake, halibut, and swordfish.

Finally, we had the opportunity to compare notes on what we had seen with Ms. Joanne Stewart of the Special Products Department of Sainsbury's, the 400-store supermarket chain in Great Britain. Ms. Stewart was on a fact finding and product finding visit for her stores, where she is responsible for bringing in "gourmet style" items that she expects will move from the gourmet sections to the mainstream in purchase rate by Sainsbury's customers. She told us, "Although the products we select start out on our gourmet shelves, our objective is always to find products that will become regular purchases by our shoppers, to be replaced later by other new gourmet items."

We both agreed that Spain offers perhaps the widest range of flavors in quality olive oils, quality dried beans, superior red peppers and splendid, colorful roasted ones, Mancha saffron, of course, artisan cheeses, upmarket wines, and quality canned seafoods.

Our comments on wine and liquors could add pages to these observations. However, the one all-encompassing fact seems to be that each of the many producers have dedicated themselves to constant improvements in their products, so much so that their wines increase in value the longer they are treasured. As the late Don Miguel of Torres Vineyards once said, "Sometimes I think I make a mistake selling my wines, when buying them would be a better investment."

In Summary

We are running out of space a good deal faster than we are running out of foods to tell you about. Suffice to say that though everybody, everywhere will claim quality, in Spain, the supervising consortiums and the individual companies who produce, all seem to exude a true aura of quality that is evident in the tasting as well as appearance. This comes from good raw materials, proper handling and sanitary processing. In Spain, it would appear that the seldom achieved goal of going up to a quality rather than down to a price is a hallmark of the country's agriculture, seafood, wine, and animal foods output. And that seems to us to be the perfect objective for a hungry and increasingly quality-conscious world.

Charles Powell *of the American Culinary Federation is a cookbook author, chef, and food-travel writer.*

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LASTING IMPRESSIONS

SONIA ORTEGA

• Time to look at the new editions of the classic guides that are published yearly. Amongst those devoted to the world of wine is the 13th edition of the **Guía de vinos Gourmets 1998** which, by way of novelty, includes a CD Rom with the complete contents. Almost 3,000 wines are covered, of which about 1,000 receive a grade. Altogether, a 700-page compendium giving a very considerable amount of up-to-date information on wines in Spain. The **Guía Peñín de los vinos de España 1998** focuses on specific details for each wine and mentions up to 6,000 brands, giving a grade to 2,800. The same author has also published **Los mejores vinos y destilados 1998** expressing his personal impressions of his favorite wines. Finally, Andrés Proensa—in between the various issues of his magazine **Vinos de España**—has now produced **La guía de oro de los vinos de España '98**. Although not as exhaustive as the other two—it covers 627 wines—he has adopted a very pleasant, easy-to-read approach with few technical terms. Plenty of information is afforded on the human touches that give the individual wineries their character, making a very readable guide. The tourist and gastronomic guides are not so early off the press as the wine guides. At the time of writing—late February—only two of the classic guides have published their 1998 editions. **Gourmetour**, which has been covering the best restaurants in Spain for 20 years now, in this edition comments on over 2,000 restaurants, almost as many hotels, 738 towns and villages, not to mention specialist shops, with maps, sightseeing information, etc. It provides a wealth of information to suit all sorts of travelers and tourists in Spain. El País-Aguilar has now published its second **Guía Mondial Assistance de hoteles y restaurantes de España**, sponsored by the well-known insurance company. The information on restaurants has been coordinated by José Carlos Capel, and that on hotels and towns by Fernando Gallardo, both of whom are experienced, specialist writers in the daily newspaper *El País*. The guide covers as many as 1,400 towns although sometimes the information given is too concise. It has a very full collection of town maps.

• **The Spanish Kitchen** is subtitled "A Gastronomic Tour of Traditional Spanish Cooking Region by Region". Its author, Pepita Aris, a cookery writer and editor, is a specialist on Spanish gastronomy who no longer lives in Spain but still has a home in an Andalusian village. This is her fifth book on the subject of Spanish cooking and in this one she gives her personal impressions of each of the Spanish regions as well as the recipes—about 10—that she considers most characteristic. The book is a revised version of one published in 1992 although this is a simpler edition without photos. It is a readable book in a refreshing style that correctly points out the peculiarities of each region but I'm afraid we have two complaints. First, there is no section on the Canary Islands—they may be far away but they are still part of Spain. And, second, although outside Spain many people are still using the old names, New Castile and Old Castile were some time ago officially renamed Castile-La Mancha and Castile-Leon respectively.

• **Tapas and More Great Dishes from Spain** is a small book for which Janet Mendel, who has written several other books on Spanish gastronomy, has selected the most significant of Spanish dishes. She gives the recipes for them alongside photos by John James Wood, some of which are outstanding. The book concentrates on tapas, with classics such as potato omelette, Galician-style octopus (boiled then drizzled with olive oil and paprika) or squid fried in batter. Other sections cover soups (*gazpacho*, etc.), main dishes (*fabada, cocido*, etc.) and sweets and puddings, with dishes such as *crema catalana*.

• While on the subject of food, here is a rather unusual book—a cross between a culinary dictionary and a selection of Spanish dishes. **Spanish Cuisine. The Gourmet's Companion** by Matt A. Casado starts with an introduction to Spanish regional food and this is followed by a section called "Dishes by Course" (tapas, soups, rice, fish, etc.) giving all sorts of dishes with a brief description of their ingredients and how to make them. The second section is a vocabulary which should help solve gastronomic queries. A word of warning: since this book aims to be a guide book, it includes some international dishes that might be found on the menus of Spanish restaurants but that have nothing to do with original Spanish cuisine.

• **Mis restaurantes favoritos en Madrid** (My Favorite Restaurants in Madrid) is a lighthearted book covering some of the most emblematic restaurants in Madrid. Apart from the fact that it is a bilingual book with the text in both Spanish and English, what makes it original is that the 50 or so restaurants included are the favorites of some of the most influential people in Spanish contemporary life—politicianss, culture vultures, media men, business moguls, and other stars in the Spanish firmament have all given their gastronomic preferences in the capital. The history of each restaurant—some longer than others—is narrated by Ana Escobar and accompanied by the recipe of its most popular dish and excellent photographs by Pasquale Caprile who has managed to capture the spirit of each of the restaurants.

• Economic progress has led to new styles of eating that often do us more harm than good. This is why such importance is being placed on the Mediterranean diet which combines the pleasure of good food with a healthy eating regime. In times of financial hardship when feeding the family was a daily struggle in Spain, the ingredients were often very simple but the results more often than not were tasty and varied. Under the title **El fogón del pobre. Recetario de cocina popular española** (The Poor Man's Stove. Recipes From Popular Spanish Cooking), the journalist Emilia González Sevilla has brought together about 300 recipes, most of which can still be made very cheaply. And I say "still" because the author makes many mentions of Spanish classical writers and foreign travelers in Spain who wrote of Spanish dishes and cooking methods. This is a well-documented and enjoyable book that will be essential for anyone that is curious about the origins of today's Spanish gastronomy.

• Finally, a new magazine is now available on an increasingly popular form of tourism. Called **Turismo rural**, it is a monthly publication that first appeared just a few months ago but that has already established a very well defined and attractive approach to its subject. The Spanish rural world is still so rich and varied that it fully deserves such attention. The magazine features an easygoing style, careful presentation, and much practical information and includes contributions from some of the best specialist writers and photographers. Undoubtedly, its appearance is very good news for country-loving city dwellers.

•**Guía de vinos Gourmets 1998** and **Gourmetour, guia gastronómica y turística de España 1998**, Club G, S.A.; Claudio Coello, 52-1º; 28001 Madrid; Tel: (34) 915 770 418; Fax: (34) 914 311 359 •**Guía Peñín de los vinos de España 1998** and **Los mejores vinos y destilados 1998**, José Peñín, Pi & Erre Ediciones; Pilar Andrade, 11 - Chalet, 8; 28023 El Plantío (Madrid); Tel: (34) 913 077 890; Fax: (34) 313 076 701 •**La guía de oro de los vinos de España'98,** Andrés Proensa, N&A - Naturaleza y Ambiente, S.L., Islas Marquesas, 28B; 28035 Madrid; Tel: (34) 913 163 600; Fax: (34) 913 860 265 •**Guía Mondial Assistance de hoteles y restaurantes de España**, Ediciones El País-Aguilar; Torrelaguna, 60; 28043 Madrid; Tel: (34) 317 449 060; Fax: (34) 917 449 224 •**The Spanish Kitchen**, Pepita Aris, Casell; Wellington House, 125 Stand, London WC2R OBB; Tel: 0171 420 5555; Fax: 0171 240 7261 •**Tapas and More Great Dishes from Spain**, Janet Mendel, Ediciones Santana; Apartado 422, 29640 Fuengirola (Málaga); Tel: (34) 952 485 838; Fax: (34) 952 485 367 •**Spanish Cuisine. The Gourmet's Companion**, Matt A. Casado, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Professional, Reference and Trade Group; 605 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10158-0012 •**Mis restaurantes favoritos en Madrid**, Lunwerg Editores; Beethoven, 12; 08021 Barcelona; Tel: (34) 932 015 933; Fax: (34) 932 011 587; Sagasta 27; 28004 Madrid; Tel: (34) 915 930 058; Fax: (34) 915 930 070 •**El fogón del pobre, recetario de cocina popular española**, Emilia González Sevilla, Ediciones del Serbal; Francesc Tàrrega, 32-34; 08027 Barcelona; Tel: (34) 934 080 834; Fax: (34) 934 080 792. •**Turismo Rural**, Prensa Española General de Revistas, S.A., Juan Ignacio Luca de Tena 7, 28027 Madrid; Tel: (34) 913 399 176; Fax: (34) 913 209 494


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Tels: (171) 486 01 01 - 953 15 16 - Fax: (171) 487 55 86 - 224 64 09

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Tel: (45) 33 15 11 65 - Fax: (45) 33 15 83 65

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- Via Broletto, 30 - 20121 MILAN
  Tel: (2) 72 00 46 25 - Fax: (2) 72 00 43 18
- Via del Mortaro, 19 - Interno 5 - 00187 ROME
  Tels: (6) 678 31 06/28 50 - Fax: (6) 679 82 72

JAPAN, Daini Toranomon Denki Bldg, 4F - 3-1-10 Toranomon - MINATO-KU, TOKYO 105
Tels: (3) 34 32 61 41/42 - Fax: (3) 34 32 61 44

NETHERLANDS, Laan van Meerdervoort, 8-8ª - 2517 THE HAGUE
Tels: (70) 346 59 00/01 - 360 92 05 - Fax: (70) 364 98 59

NORWAY, Kronprinsensgate, 3 - 0251 OSLO 2
Tels: (47) 22 83 40 50 - Fax: (47) 22 83 19 22

SWEDEN, Stureplan, 6 - 114 35 STOCKHOLM
Tels: (8) 611 19 92/41 36 - Fax: (8) 611 44 07

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  Tels: (213) 658 71 88 - 658 71 92/93/95 - Fax: (213) 658 10 61
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  Tel: (212) 265 88 22 - Fax: (212) 265 88 64

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Tel: (34-1) 516 66 66 - Fax: (34-1) 516 66 57/58
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Erratum:
- *In the last issue of Spain Gourmetour, page 110, the address of the C.R.D.O. Rioja should read: Estambrera, 52. 26006 Logroño (La Rioja). Tel: (34) 941 241 199. Fax: (34) 941 253 502.*
- *On page 22, the phone and fax of Aneccop should read: Tel.: (34) 963 938 500. Fax: (34) 963 938 538.*

The suckling lambs —18 to 25 days old— or lechazos, are served in an earthenware dish, after roasting slowly in adobe, wood-fired ovens for at least two hours.

Roast Lamb at the Castle Gate

Text: **Tom Burns**
Photos: **Carlos Navajas/ICEX**

Coca's castle, built in the 15th century, is a pristine example of the brick architecture which is known as mudéjar, *after the Muslim artisans living under Christian rule that perfected the style.*

Tom Burns, intent on a weekend break from Madrid, chose a circular route out of Segovia that took him north across old Castile to the Duero River valley. Mixing cultural and culinary curiosity, the plan was to view castles and, between one historic *castillo* and another, to savor suckling lamb at the nearest *asador*.

Segovia's Alcazar where Isabel was proclaimed queen of Castile, is often described as looking like the prow of a ship sailing in a sea of corn.

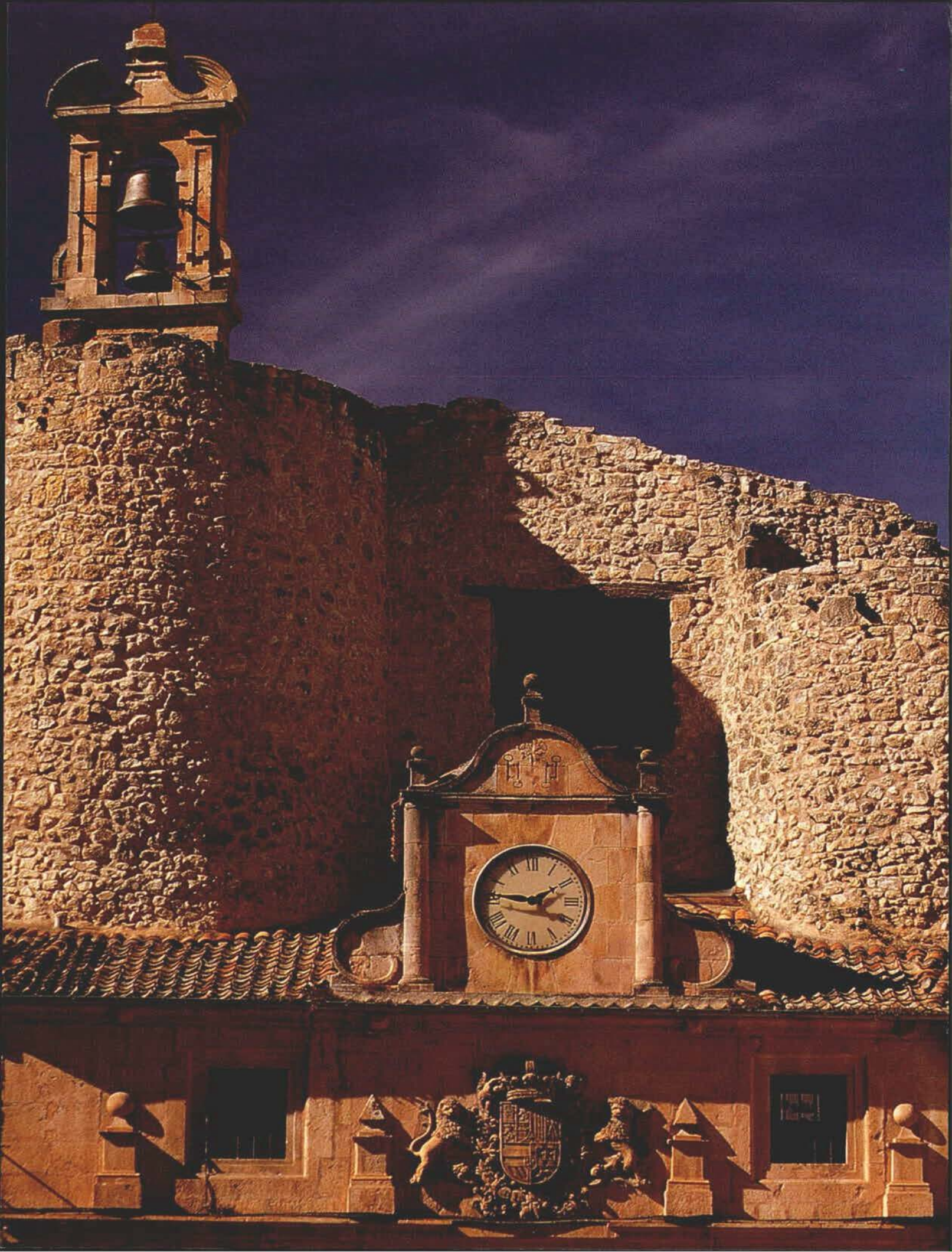
Taking the Arévalo road out of Segovia, keeping close to the Eresma river that gurgles furiously at the bottom of a steep gorge, you instinctively know what lies ahead. High on the cliffs above stands Segovia's Alcazar, the magic kingdom castle with its slender, slate-roofed white turrets, the genuine article that Disneyland copied. Isabel of Castile, the *Reina Católica* who united Spain through her marriage to Fernando of Aragon, took possession of her realm from those same ramparts in 1474 and from the battlements she could take in the shimmering plateau that extends north as far as the eye can see, a tableland of cornfields, flocks of sheep, and villages huddled around mighty churches and mightier forts. The landscape that belonged to the age of chivalry and courtly intrigue remains essentially unchanged more than 500 years later.

As you swing left towards Arévalo, the wool-market town where Isabel grew up, climbing out of the gorge and driving under an arch that was built in honor of her great-grandson Philip II who lavishly restored Segovia's Alcazar, there lie countless more medieval castles and in every village *mesón*, limitless roast lamb, the byproduct of the wool trade that made Castile rich in the 15th century, awaits the traveler.

Just before the turn there is a monument to Segovia's, and by extension Spain's, master roaster, to the most famous *mesonero,* in the land, to the man known simply as Cándido. Life size and immortalized in bronze, framed by the city's cathedral that looms above the Eresma, Cándido stands over a table and the inscription reads: "Honor to him who brought honor to Segovia." In his right hand he holds a plate much like a matador holds his *montera* or cap when he dedicates a bull's death to the public and on the table are draped four bronze suckling pigs or *cochinillos.* Cándido's legendary party trick was to "carve" his cochinillo roasts with a platter in order to demonstrate their tenderness.

To be turned into a memorable dish, a suckling pig or lamb requires the skills of an experienced asador *who masterfully uses a long paddle to move the earthenware dishes around the oven.*


Duque
Maestro
Asador De
Segovia



Pedraza's castle served as prison for two young French princes who were held hostage by Charles V in the 16th century, and it was restored earlier this century.

The City Hall façade is grafted on the old castle of the attractive medieval town of Sepúlveda, a meca for roast lamb lovers.

ORNATE COCA

Turning off the Arévalo road at Santa María la Real de Nieva you head through woods of pine and black poplars for Coca, the site of one of the most unusual castles in all of Spain and now the home of a forestry school. Coca's castle, built in the 15th century by the founder of the ubiquitous Fonseca dynasty, is a pristine example of the brick architecture which is known as *mudéjar*, after the Muslim artisans living under Christian rule that perfected the style. Medina del Campo, the most important town in the vicinity, boasts a similar brick and horseshoe arched fortress called Castillo de la Mota, the castle where Isabel died in 1504, but Coca represents mudéjar military architecture at its ornate best.

The Fonsecas had a castle of great beauty built for them but they must have worried about its fragility. The carefully crafted brickwork is therefore protected by the largest and deepest moat imaginable, and the castle rears up impregnable like a rocky island dominating its own sea. Satisfied with this protection, Alonso de Fonseca, the first lord of Coca and a key advisor to Isabel's father, Juan II, gained for the town the royal privilege of staging regular wool fairs (the equivalent in medieval Castile to striking an oil well) and he then sallied forth to become archbishop of Seville and then of Santiago. He lies in alabaster and mitered glory on the gospel side of the altar in Coca's impressive parish church.

Why did Alonso go to the expense of having an extraordinary moat dug around his fancy fortress, or why did he want to have a castle built in the first place? What you learn in the parish church, where four Fonsecas are buried, is that these were perilous times. Alonso's brother Fernando, who occupies one of the tombs, was killed in a battle fought at nearby Olmedo where he arrived at the head of 150 knights to

JUAN JOSÉ MORAL DAZA/ICEX

Here, emerging from fluvial mistiness, Peñafiel's castle is one of several awesome fortresses built along the Duero, the river that once formed the border of Christian and Muslim Spain.

defend Isabel's claims to the throne of Castile against those of Juana, the disputed daughter of Enrique IV, Isabel's half-brother and a feeble king who was known as the Impotent and said to be homosexual. Fernando was killed by a lance thrust delivered by none other than Beltrán de la Cueva, the strong-man of Enrique's camp court and the supposed father of Juana who accordingly went down in history as La Beltraneja. Beltrán de la Cueva, Duke of Alburquerque, owned the castle of Cuéllar, half an hour's drive away and the next port of call.

Coca proudly calls itself the "Cradle of Emperors" which is a fair boast because Theodosius, who ruled Rome from 343 to 361 A.D., was a native son. One suspects, however, that the real claim to the title is that the peerless Cándido, who looked every inch an emperor, was also born in Coca. Cándido, who died in 1994, operated out of his mesón in Segovia, appropriately just by the city's Roman aqueduct, but he returned frequently to Coca and donated a fountain, called, naturally, the fountain of Teodosio el Grande, to his home town. The fountain, which stood in front of the Fonseca-packed parish church has been replaced by a bandstand and is awaiting a new site.

WARRING BARONS

Cándido's grandson, also called Cándido, is a worthy heir of his grandfather. At the mesón he founded by the aqueduct they still "carve" the cochinillo *with a plate using the showmanship that he made famous.*

Alburquerque castle in Cuéllar menacingly commands a small and enchanting walled town. Its circular, crusader-style donjon looks, and was intended to look, grim, a far cry from the lightness of Coca, but relief comes quickly once inside the castle's walls for a loggia, added in the 16th century, turns the forbidding fortress into a relaxed Renaissance residence. The age of enlightened learning left its mark on the castle; it now houses a teacher-training school.

The castle at Cuéllar, like Coca's and like so many more in


CASA CANDIDO
Mesón de Candido
el Segoviano
HORNO
DE
ASA

FROM THE BATTLEMENTS OF SEGOVIA'S ALCAZAR, ISABEL OF CASTILE, THE REINA CATÓLICA, SAW A SHIMMERING PLATEAU OF CORNFIELDS, FLOCKS OF SHEEP, AND VILLAGES HUDDLED AROUND MIGHTY CHURCHES AND MIGHTIER FORTS. THE LANDSCAPE REMAINS ESSENTIALLY UNCHANGED MORE THAN 500 YEARS LATER.

Castile, was an insurance for every would-be medieval warlord who sought social and economic advancement at a time of swiftly changing political moods. The Fonsecas prospered—despite temporary upsets caused by the likes of Alburquerque—and they did so chiefly at the expense of Álvaro de Luna, a rapacious upstart whom they replaced as chief advisor to Juan II.

De Luna, who rose to become master of the powerful military order of Santiago, committed the deadly mistake of engineering Juan's second marriage to Isabel of Portugal; the new queen, who was to be the mother of Isabel of Castile, lost no time in telling her husband that his favorite was robbing the kingdom (the Fonsecas and other nobles wholly agreed with this view) and de Luna was promptly imprisoned and finally executed in Toledo in 1453. The ruined grandeur of the town of Fuentidueña, where de Luna built a huge hilltop fort and richly endowed the local churches, is a moving testimony to the rise and fall of the baronial class in 15th century Castile. The final expression of the town's vanquished splendor was the wholesale removal in the 1920s of one of its convents to New York where it was rebuilt in the Metropolitan Museum.

LAMBS AND WINE

Fuentidueña, in the valley of the Duratón river, lies east of Cuéllar and forms with it a triangle that has as its apex the spectacular castle of Peñafiel which strategically controls both the Duratón and the Duero river valleys. Close to the all but abandoned Fuentidueña, you come across lyrically named Sacramenia, a thriving pastoral *pueblo* that, with seven flocks of some 400 sheep each, has a lot more sheep than inhabitants. "Sacramenia," wrote Camilo José Cela, Spain's Nobel prize-winning man of letters, "is a village of fruit trees and white poplars, of pastures and gall oak groves, of holly oak and of hollow, fantastic holm oaks." Travelers seeking the perfect village asador (restaurant featuring a wood-burning oven) in order to eat the perfect *lechazo* or suckling lamb, could do a lot worse than to save up their appetite until they reach Sacramenia. The village's competitive edge over Castile's other revered roast lamb centers is that nowhere else are so many Churra sheep to be found. Lean, long-legged, with their distinctive black noses and ears, the Churra breed is native to the area. While the better known, and all white, Merino sheep are prized for their wool, the Churra ewes are reared for their milk and for their milk-fed lambs.

Javier and José Carlos González, who own one of Sacramenia's larger Churra flocks as well as the Mesón González, just off the village square, have the pick of the suckling lambs—18 to 25 days old—that are served up as lechazo asado in an earthenware dish, after roasting slowly in adobe, wood-fired ovens for at least two hours. "All the lechazo needs is a rub of pork fat, salt, and a bit of water," said Javier. "The flavor comes from the ewe's milk because she has fed around these hills on thyme, rosemary, and lavender." That is not quite *all* a lechazo needs to be turned into a memorable dish. It also requires the skills of an experienced asador, like Javier's brother José Carlos, who masterfully uses a long paddle to move the earthenware dishes around the *horno* or oven so that each leg and rib cage of lamb receives an even roast.

FRONTIER FORTRESSES

Peñafiel is best approached from the south, arriving from Sacramenia. This ensures the finest view of the town's extraordinary early 13th century castle. It is strung out, defying time, at the top of a ridge, lording it over the Duero valley and looking down towards the valley of the Duratón. Peñafiel's castle is one of several awesome fortresses built along the Duero, the river that once formed the border of Christian and Muslim Spain. Traveling east, beyond Aranda del Duero, you come to the stunning castle of Peñaranda del Duero and further up river lie the fortresses of Gormaz and of Berlanga del Duero.

The forts are architecturally similar—the towering donjon stands in the center of the long frontline wall—and they served the same defensive purpose. In Spain, these castles, sprawled on the horizon above the Duero, are known as castillos *roqueros*, castles built on rocky hilltops. "Like dismantled, empty shells, the vast carcasses of extinct beasts—that is how they rule over the bare land and the low unprepossessing villages in which churches and con-

vents preserve the remembrance of former glory," wrote the Dutch writer Cees Nooteboom (1933) in his book *Roads to Santiago.*

No longer caught in the cross fire of the Christian north and the Muslim south, the inhabitants of the Duero valley today peacefully spend their time tending acres upon acres of vineyards. Wine buffs need no introduction to the great wines of the Ribera del Duero D.O., for Vega Sicilia and Pesquera vintages have become collector items. The mere *aficionado,* who enjoys his wine as much as the next man, ought to drive from Peñafiel to Roa, detouring off the main road to Aranda, and make straight for a small wine store that stands opposite the church in Roa's Plaza Mayor. The store's owner, Tomás del Val, is the local distributor of wines produced by the Virgen de la Vega cooperative and his Ribera del Duero range of last year's young wines, *crianzas* (see Glossary on page 150), and *reservas* should please most palates and, certainly, all pockets.

Ribera del Duero wines are the lechazo's best companion (in Sacramenia the González brothers serve a brilliant Ribera rosé in earthenware jugs) and the traveler who has reached the Duero valley has several choices if he wishes to pursue the suckling lamb experience. El Nazareno, which has moved to spacious new quarters up on Roa's town walls (from its terrace you can see all the way to the Guadarrama mountains that separate Segovia from Madrid), is one famed local asador and Casa Florencio, in the pedestrian center of nearby Aranda del Duero, is another.

Roa's Nazareno has two huge roasting ovens, the bigger one has a circumference of more than two meters (almost seven feet), with their bundles of faggots and piles of *encina* and holm oak neatly stacked against them, in full view of the dining room. In Casa Florencio's dining room there is a signed photograph of the great Cándido himself that reads: "to my friend and colleague Florencio who roasts the best lamb in Spain. This is said by someone who knows what he says and is able to say it." Among the fraternity of Castile's master roasters, such a tribute from Cándido is the equivalent to winning an Oscar.

CASTLES AND ASADORES

From Aranda, those in a hurry can return fast to Madrid along the highway but leisurely castle lovers seeking out Peñaranda del Duero should follow the river valley, along the Soria road, for about a quarter of an hour and then turn left at the town of Vid in order to approach Peñaranda's fabulous fortress from the best perspective. By far the best route back south, (keeping off the highway) is to head for the mountain village of Maderuelo above the Linares reservoir (turn left at La Venta, halfway between

FUENTIDUEÑA IS A MOVING TESTIMONY TO THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BARONIAL CLASS IN 15TH CENTURY CASTILE. THE FINAL EXPRESSION OF THE TOWN'S VANQUISHED SPLENDOR WAS THE WHOLESALE REMOVAL IN THE 1920S OF ONE OF ITS CONVENTS TO NEW YORK WHERE IT WAS REBUILT IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM.

Vid and Aranda) and, once there, take a local road that crosses the highway at Bocegillas, and leads to the attractive medieval town of Sepúlveda where the colonnaded Plaza Mayor is virtually lined by asadores.

Those who want to combine a lechazo feast with a castle visit should go to the walled town of Pedraza (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 32) and/or to Turégano, both of which lie between Sepúlveda and Segovia. Pedraza's castle, which comes complete with a drawbridge over a moat and merlon-capped turrets, served as prison for two young French princes who were held hostage by Charles V in the 16th century and it was restored to look like a picture book fort by the painter Ignacio de Zuloaga earlier this century. Turégano's castle, in contrast, is odd because it combines a church and a fortress. Half ruined, the castle would look as fierce as Cuéllar's but for the church façade that was grafted onto its keep in the 17th century by the bishop of Segovia who doubled up as lord of Turégano.

Pedraza is a bijou village that is full of antique showrooms and craft shops and, at weekends, crammed with hordes of tourists. The Hostería del Pintor Zuloaga, one of its numerous asadores, has a historical advantage over rival establishments because it was once the local headquarters of the Inquisition. Turégano, much less pretentious, has a lovely elongated square dominated by the castle-come-church and a very popular asador on the plaza called Casa Holgueras that on Sundays is still serving lechazos well after 5 p.m.

From Pedraza and Turégano it is a short drive to Segovia and to the "singular" Alcazar which, as the Castilian writer Dionisio Ridruejo (1912-1975) rightly said "sets Segovia apart." If you want to retrace your steps in your mind's eye, climb up to the Alcazar's battlements, as Isabel la Católica used to do, and take in Castile, from Coca across to Sepúlveda and to the ridges of the Duero Valley on the horizon. If you're still hungry, Cándido's suckling pig, as an alternative to lechazo, is a must. At the mesón he founded by the aqueduct they still "carve" the cochinillo with a plate—two smart blows along the spine and four across—using the showmanship that he made famous. The story goes that a plate slipped out of the master roaster's hand just as he was holding it over a piglet, fresh out of the oven. Thus are traditions born.

Tom Burns *writes for* The Financial Times. *His latest book* Conversaciones sobre la Derecha *has completed an acclaimed trilogy that examines the Monarchy, the Left and the Right during Spain's transition to democracy.*

ASADORES

Aranda de Duero
Casa Florencio
C/ Islilla, 14
Tel: (34) 947 500 230

Cuéllar
Mesón San Francisco
Av. Camilo José Cela, 2
Tel: (34) 921 140 009

Pedraza
Hostería Pintor Zuloaga
C/ Matadero, 1
Tel: (34) 921 504 088

El Yantar de Pedraza
Pza. Mayor, s/n
Tel: (34) 921 509 842

Roa
El Nazareno
C/ El Espolón, s/n
Tel: (34) 947 540 214

Sacramenia
Mesón González
Ctra. Sepúlveda, 17
Tel: (34) 921 527 018

Segovia
Mesón de Cándido
Pza. Azoguejo, 5
Tel: (34) 921 425 911

Mesón José María
C/ Cronista Lecea, 11
Tel: (34) 921 461 111

Mesón Duque
C/ Cervantes, 12
Tel: (34) 921 430 537

Sepúlveda
Casa Paulino
C/ Barbacana, 2
Tel: (34) 921 540 016

Figón Zute
El Mayor "Tinín"
C/ Lope Tablada, 6
Tel: (34) 921 540 165

Zute El Menor
C/ José Antonio, 16
Tel: (34) 921 540 265

Sotosalbos
Las Casillas
C/Eras, 5
Tel: (34) 921 403 068

Torrecaballeros
El Rancho de la Aldegüela
Ctra. Nac. 110, s/n
Tel: (34) 921 401 060

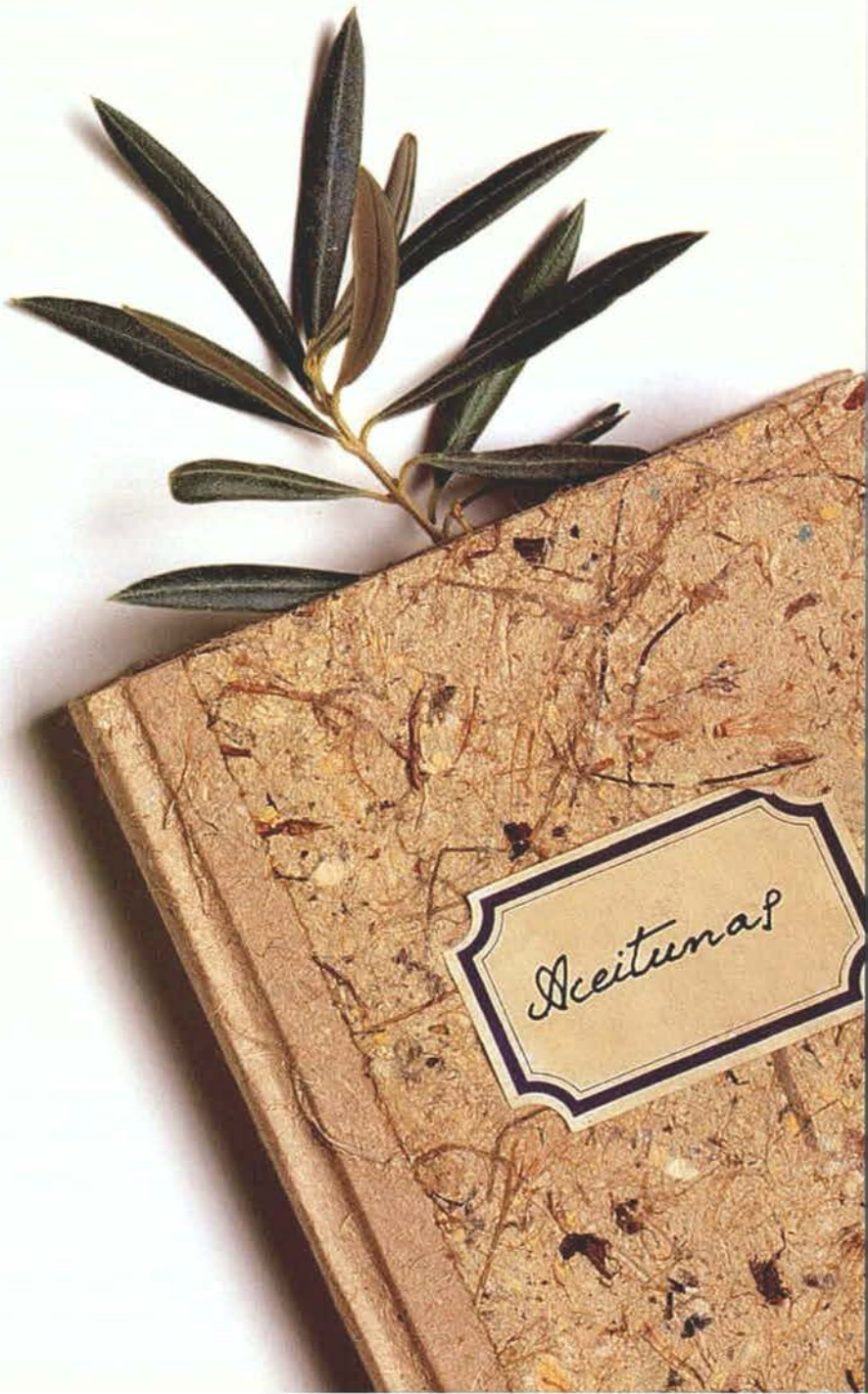
La Posada de Javier
Ctra. Nac.I Soria-Plasencia
Tel: (34) 921 401 136

Turégano
Casa Holgueras
Pza. España, 11
Tel: (34) 921 500 028

Olive cultivation began in the Middle East over 5,000 years ago and gradually spread westward throughout the Mediterranean basin. The first olive farmers selected the most suitable specimens from amongst the wild olive trees or oleasters, taking into account factors such as productivity and adaptability to different soils and locations. These practices continued over the centuries and have passed down an enormous number of varieties, with so many names it is impossible to know which are subvarieties or which just vernacular designations for a single variety. The names are generally associated with the tree, the leaf color or size, the shape of the fruit, area of production, or the oil obtained. The 262 varieties grown in Spain have been classified into four categories: main, secondary, scattered, and local.

Olive Growing : The Spanish Varieties (I)

Andalusia is the largest olive-producing area in the world. Of its eight provinces, Jaén alone which has a surface area that is equivalent to 10% of Greece (the world's third or fourth producer, depending on the year) produces on average more olives, and therefore more oil, than Greece. Taking oil yield to be about 20% of the weight of the olives, Jaén is able to produce about 300,000 tons per annum of oil so about 1,500,000 tons of fruit. The endless, rolling olive orchards are a most memorable sight. Andalusia is considered to have about 165 million trees of which 50% are in Jaén, 30% in Cordoba, and 20% in the provinces of Seville, Málaga, and Granada, with smaller quantities in the remaining Andalusian provinces of Huelva, Almería, and Cádiz. Of all the varieties grown, we have chosen four, not only for the volume of production but also for the superb characteristics of their oil.



Text: Jerónimo Díaz Rivas
Gastronomic Notes: Alicia Ríos
Translation: Jenny McDonald
Still lifes: Menchu Artime
Photos: A. de Benito/ICEX

PICUAL This is the most important variety in the world, accounting for 97% of the Jaén olive trees and 37% of those in the province of Cordoba. This amounts to 50% of Spanish olives and therefore approximately 20% of the world's olives. In spite of these figures, it is not very widespread, being grown only in the provinces of Jaén, Cordoba, and Granada where it grows at high density over about 645,000 hectares (1,600,000 acres). It receives different names according to the area of production: Marteña in parts of Cordoba and Jaén, Lopereña in Baena, Morcona in the mountains of Beas de Segura, Temprana in the Sierra de Cazorla, Corriente in Ubeda, and Nevado or Nevadillo Blanco in other parts of Cordoba. The main name comes from the shape of the fruit with its pointed tip, or *pico* in spanish.

The tree. Very vigorous with fairly short branches and a high shooting tendency. The canopies tend to be fairly closed with good leaf development and the young wood is a gray-green color. The trees start to fruit early and the high yield is one of the main reasons for the popularity of this variety, together with its adaptability to various climate and soil conditions. Tolerant of frost but not of drought or very limy soils.

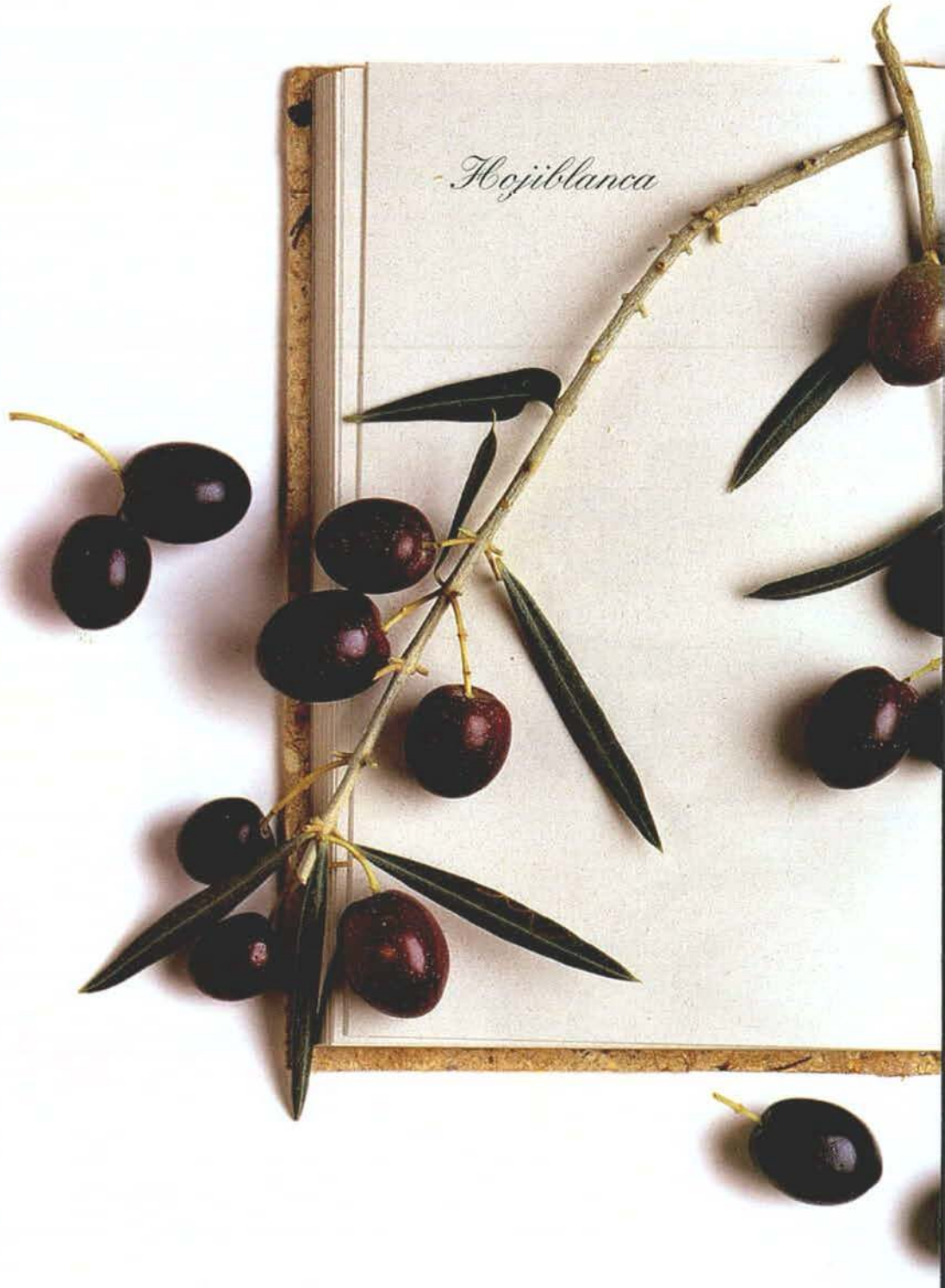
The leaf. Longish and widest at the top end.

The fruit. Generally medium sized to large, depending on the rainfall and consequent vegetable water content. Weight varies between 2.14 and 3.7 grams, giving an average of 3.2 grams. The ratio between the flesh, which contains the vegetable water, and the stone is 5.6. Maturation takes place between the second week of November and the third week of December. Oil yield is good, rising as high as 27%, although the average is about 22%.

The oil. From the physical and chemical point of view, the oil is of excellent quality because of the fatty acid content and the amount of natural antioxidants. It usually contains about 78-80% of monounsaturated oleic acid which is important for avoiding cardiovascular disease and has a low linoleic acid content (about 4%). The latter

IS ESSENTIAL IN THE HUMAN DIET BUT IN EXCESS LEADS TO OXIDATION WITH THE FORMATION OF FREE RADICALS WHICH ARE HARMFUL FOR CERTAIN ORGANS OF THE HUMAN BODY. THE POLYPHENOL CONTENT WHICH DETERMINES THE STABILITY OF OIL IS VERY HIGH SO THIS IS AN OIL THAT LASTS WELL AND BEHAVES WELL WHEN HEATED. THE ORIGIN OF THE OIL TO SOME EXTENT DETERMINES ITS ORGANOLEPTIC QUALITIES. IF FROM LOW-LYING LAND, THE OILS TEND TO HAVE A LOT OF BODY AND A BITTER TASTE WITH A SLIGHT TOUCH OF WOOD TO IT, WHEREAS OILS FROM MOUNTAINOUS AREAS TEND TO BE SWEETER WITH A PLEASANT, FRESH FLAVOR.

GASTRONOMIC NOTES. VERY SUITABLE AND TRADITIONALLY USED FOR FRYING, FOR MEAT DISHES AND FOR STEWS, ALL OF WHICH ACCEPT ITS VITALITY WELL, BUT EQUALLY GOOD FOR SALADS AND *GAZPACHOS*.



HOJIBLANCA THE NAME COMES FROM THE WHITISH UNDERSIDE OF THE LEAVES WHICH GIVES THE TREE A SILVERY APPEARANCE FROM THE DISTANCE. ALSO KNOWN AS CASTA DE CABRA AND LUCENTINO IN BAENA. IT GROWS MOSTLY IN THE EAST OF SEVILLE, THE SOUTH OF CORDOBA, AND ACROSS THE NORTH OF MÁLAGA. IT ACCOUNTS FOR ABOUT 16% OF THE ANDALUSIAN OLIVES AND OCCUPIES ABOUT 217,000 HECTARES (536,207 ACRES). USED FOR BLACK TABLE OLIVES BECAUSE OF THE FIRM TEXTURE OF ITS FLESH AS WELL AS FOR OIL PRODUCTION.

THE TREE. MEDIUM TO GOOD VIGOR WITH LONG, HANGING FRUIT-BEARING BRANCHES. THE CANOPIES ARE OF AVERAGE DENSITY WITH A REGULAR LEAF SURFACE AND THE YOUNG WOOD HAS A CHARACTERISTIC LIGHT GREENISH COLOR. IT WITHSTANDS COLD

WEATHER AND IS PERFECTLY SUITABLE FOR LIMY SOILS.

THE LEAF. PARTIALLY RIBBED, LONG, AND FAIRLY WIDE, AND CHARACTERIZED BY THE SILVERY BACK.

THE FRUIT. ALTHOUGH VARYING GREATLY, THE FRUIT IS USUALLY LARGE, REACHING WEIGHTS AS HIGH AS 4.3 AND EVEN 4.8 GRAMS. THE SHAPE IS ALMOST PERFECTLY SPHERICAL AND THE FLESH-TO-STONE RATIO IS HIGH, ABOUT EIGHT. THE FRUIT ALSO WITHSTANDS COLD WELL. FLOWERING TAKES PLACE DURING THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF MAY, REACHING ITS PEAK IN THE SECOND WEEK. MATURATION TENDS TO BE LATE, FROM THE END OF NOVEMBER TO THE END OF DECEMBER AND, ONCE RIPE, THE FRUIT IS RESISTANT TO PICKING SO HARVESTING IS DIFFICULT. THE OIL YIELD IS LOW WITH AN AVERAGE OF 17-19%.

THE OIL. IT HAS A VERY WELL-BALANCED FATTY ACID CONTENT WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF OLEIC ACID—ABOUT 75-77%. THE AVERAGE LINOLEIC ACID CONTENT IS 7-8% AND THAT OF THE SATURATED FATTY ACIDS IS LOWER THAN IN MOST OTHER OLIVE OILS, ESPECIALLY PALMITIC ACID WHICH MAY BE AS LOW AS 8% IN MANY CASES. THIS COMPOSITION IS IDEAL FROM THE DIETARY POINT OF VIEW IN THAT LINOLEIC ACID IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE HUMAN DIET, MAKING UP 7% OF THE FATS OF MOTHER'S MILK. THESE OILS ARE NOT VERY STABLE AND SHOULD BE KEPT IN A DARK PLACE TO PREVENT EXCESSIVE OXYGENATION DURING STORAGE. FROM THE ORGANOLEPTIC POINT OF VIEW, THEY HAVE A TREMENDOUS RANGE OF FLAVORS BUT THE MOST CHARACTERISTIC ATTRIBUTES ARE SWEETNESS WHEN FIRST TASTED, THE FRUITY AROMA OF FRESHLY-CUT GRASS, THE SLIGHT BITTERNESS OF UNRIPE FRUITS, AS WELL AS REMINISCENCES OF A VARIETY OF OTHER FRUITS. SLIGHTLY PUNGENT IN THE THROAT, AND THE AFTERTASTE IS OF ALMONDS.

GASTRONOMIC NOTES. THIS OIL BRINGS OUT THE FLAVOR OF FRIED FOODS SUCH AS CHIPS, SQUID RINGS, AND FISH, AND ENHANCES THE QUALITIES OF SAUTÉS AND CASSEROLES. IDEAL FOR PASTRIES AND BAKING, IT GIVES EXCEPTIONALLY WORKABLE AND LIGHT DOUGHS.

LECHÍN DE SEVILLA

This variety occupies about 185,000 hectares (157,135 acres) in the provinces of Seville (69%), Cordoba (14%), Cádiz (12%), Málaga, and Huelva. Its name refers to the whitish, milky color of the flesh and of its oily must (the mixture of vegetable water and oil). This variety is known in the southwestern growing areas under several common names—Lechino in the mountainous areas of Cádiz, Zorzaleño in other parts of Cádiz and Seville, but mainly Lechín de Sevilla, whereas in the southeast of Spain—in some parts of Jaén but especially in Granada—it is called Lechin de Granada.

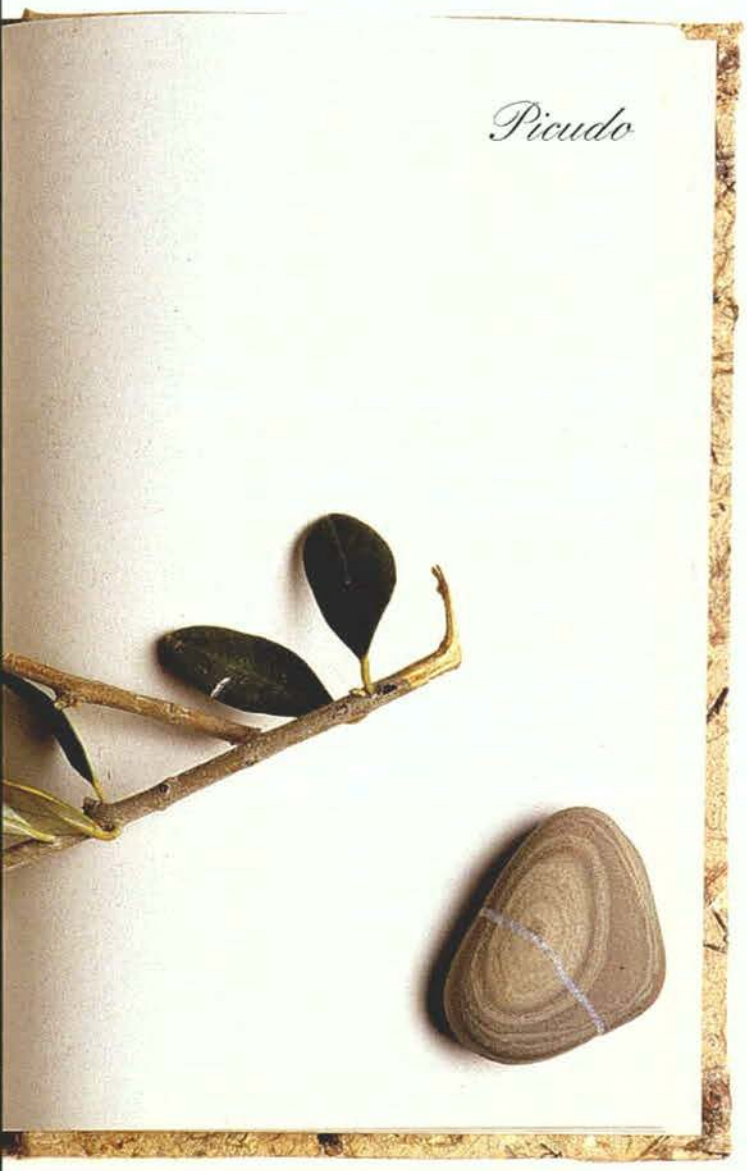
The tree. The Lechín olive is especially vigorous with a complex rooting system. It has an open growth habit and its canopy is dense. It is a hardy tree that tolerates both frost and drought as well as poor-quality, limy soils. Although productive, the flowering period is only average and crop failures occur due to blossom drop. Harvesting is difficult and costly because the fruit is of small size and is resistant to picking so this variety tends to show serious alternation in production.

The leaf. Small, short, and flat, they widen at the center. They are a bright yellowish green on the top and a grayish-green underneath.

The fruit. The olives have an average weight of about three grams and an ellipsoidal shape which bulges slightly on the back and is slightly asymmetrical. The apex is rounded, sometimes with a small nipple, and the color is black when ripe. The low average oil content—about 18%—goes together with a high flesh-to-stone ratio of 7.2 to 8.5. The fruit ripens early.

THE OIL. CHEMICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FATTY ACID COMPOSITION SHOWS A FAIRLY HIGH CONTENT OF PALMITIC ACID (12-13%) BUT THE CONTENT OF SATURATED ACIDS TAKEN TOGETHER IS NOT HIGH BECAUSE THE STEARIC ACID CONTENT IS LOW. THIS COMPOSITION MAKES IT FAIRLY UNSTABLE TO OXIDATION AS IT LOSES ITS ORGANOLEPTIC VALUES FAIRLY FAST. IT IS A FLUID OIL WITH A BALANCED, GRASSY AROMA. THE FLAVOR IS SLIGHTLY BITTER AND PUNGENT AND IT LEAVES A TASTE OF GREEN ALMONDS IN THE MOUTH. WHEN FRESHLY PRODUCED, IT IS A VERY PLEASANT OIL. **GASTRONOMIC NOTES.** LECHÍN OIL IS THE IDEAL VEHICLE FOR THE STARS OF SEVILLIAN GASTRONOMY WITH ITS WIDE RANGE OF *TAPAS*, CRISP FRIED FOODS AND THE SWEETS WITH MOORISH REMINISCENCES THAT HAVE COME DOWN TO US THROUGH THE CONVENTS.

PICUDO It gets its name from the shape of the fruit which has a pointed, curved tip with a marked nipple. Other names are Basta or Carrasqueño in Lucena in the south of Cordoba, Castuo, and Paseto in the north of the province of Cordoba and Picudo Blanco in towns to the southeast of Seville. It receives the strange name of Pajarero (for birds) in Luque, a town southeast of Cordoba, apparently because the sweetness of the oil in the ripe fruit encourages birds to peck at it. This variety currently occupies over 60,000 hectares (148,000 acres) spread over the provinces of Cordoba (60%), Granada (20%), Málaga, and Jaén, with greater density in the area of the Baena D.O. to the southeast of Cordoba.



THE TREE. VERY VIGOROUS, WITH AN OPEN GROWTH HABIT AND A VERY DENSE CANOPY. THE FRUIT-BEARING BRANCHES HAVE INTERNODES OF AVERAGE LENGTH AND ARE OF A GRAYISH GREEN COLOR. IT HAS GREAT ROOTING CAPACITY AND ADAPTS WELL TO LIMY SOILS AND EXCELLENTLY TO EXCESS RAINFALL OR DROUGHT. FROST RESISTANT AND HARDY.

THE LEAF. THE LEAVES ARE LARGE, LONG, AND WIDE. THE COLOR ON THE TOP SIDE IS VERY DARK GREEN AND THE VARIETY IS EASY TO DISTINGUISH FROM A DISTANCE BECAUSE IT IS THE DARKEST OF THEM ALL.

THE FRUIT. TURNING BLACK ON RIPENING, THIS FRUIT IS THE SECOND IN SIZE OF THOSE USED FOR OIL EXTRACTION, WITH AN AVERAGE WEIGHT OF ABOUT 4.8 GRAMS. THE FLESH-TO-STONE RATIO IS HIGH AT 6.3. MATURATION TAKES PLACE BETWEEN THE FOURTH WEEK OF NOVEMBER AND THE END OF DECEMBER AND OIL YIELD, WHILE NOT AS HIGH AS THAT OF PICUAL, REACHES ABOUT 20%. EXCELLENT FOR TABLE OLIVES, BOTH GREEN AND BLACK.

THE OIL. THE FATTY ACID COMPOSITION IS SIMILAR TO THAT OF THE LECHÍN VARIETY, WITH HIGH LEVELS OF PALMITIC ACID (UP TO 14%) AND LINOLEIC ACID (UP TO 15%) SO ITS MONOUNSATURATED OLEIC ACID LEVELS ARE BETWEEN 63 AND 65%. IT IS CONSIDERED A DELICATE OIL AS IT OXIDIZES RAPIDLY. THE ORGANOLEPTIC QUALITIES ARE OUTSTANDING WITH UNEQUALLED BALANCE AND SWEETNESS. IT IS FLUID WITH LIGHT FLAVORS AND NO HARSHNESS. SOMETIMES THERE ARE SLIGHT REMINISCENCES OF EXOTIC FRUITS, APPLE, AND ALMOND.

GASTRONOMIC NOTES. THE GREAT VARIETY OF FLOWER AND FRUITY ATTRIBUTES IN THIS OIL'S AROMATIC PERSONALITY MAKE IT EXCELLENT FOR GAZPACHOS, WARM SALADS, STEWS, AND PASTRY AND CAKE MAKING. TRY IT DRIZZLED OVER LIGHTLY GRILLED CRUSTY BREAD WITH FRESH, THICK HONEY.

JERÓNIMO DÍAZ RIVAS *IS A CHEMIST SPECIALIZING IN OLIVE OIL. HE IS TECHNICAL ADVISER TO ASOLIVA (SPANISH ASSOCIATION OF OLIVE OIL EXPORTERS) AND COLLABORATES ON SEVERAL RESEARCH PROJECTS WITH THE HIGHER COUNCIL FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH (CONSEJO SUPERIOR DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTIFICAS, MADRID) AND IN THE PROMOTION OF OLIVE OIL WITH ICEX (SPANISH INSTITUTE FOR FOREIGN TRADE) AND IOOC (INTERNATIONAL OLIVE OIL COUNCIL) IN OECD COUNTRIES.*

THE AGRICULTURAL DATA GIVEN ARE BASED PARTIALLY ON PUBLICATIONS BY MR. DIEGO BARRANCO, DOCTOR IN AGRONOMY, UNIVERSITY OF CORDOBA.

Doña Mencía, Queen

Located in the northwest of Spain, El Bierzo is not a valley or a plain, but rather a square-shaped region hemmed in by mountains on all four sides and Cacabelos is where the Regulatory Council for the Denomination of Origin is based.

# of El Bierzo

The people of El Bierzo in northwestern Spain are justifiably proud of the grape that is native to their land. The Mencía variety is fragrant, light, and highly aromatic. After a brief period during which this grape was unwisely neglected, the winemakers of the region have understood that their future lies in making the most of the personality and originality of the Mencía, a cousin of Cabernet Franc. Grouped under the young *Denominación de Origen* of El Bierzo, they strive to stand out in the world of Spanish wines and are adopting organic farming methods to extract the best qualities from the queen among their grapes.

Text: **Enrique Calduch** Translation: **Mark Little** Photos: **Juan Ramón Yuste/ICEX**

Prada has built a pretty bodega, with the aging cellars located in the estate's old stone manor house.

The surrounding mountains are blanketed in snow, yet in the chilly Hoya, the lowlands of El Bierzo, the young men from the mines strut proudly outside the disco, with their shirt sleeves rolled up to impress the girls. Folks here are friendly and hospitable, but they tend to talk in loud voices and might appear somewhat boisterous and boastful to the newcomer. They are, after all, proud to be part of a land which is different from the rest.

Located in the northwest of Spain, El Bierzo is not a valley or a plain, but rather a square-shaped region hemmed in by mountains on all four sides (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 37). Politically it is part of Castile, but geographically it is very far from the parched Castilian plateau. It is more akin to Galicia, its western neighbor, although here too, there are differences, accented by the mountains that separate the two regions. The folk of El Bierzo are keenly aware of their unique identity. It is not surprising that this is the only area in Spain governed by a *Consejo Comarcal*, a sort of local autonomy within an autonomy, but don't be led to think that El Bierzo has suffered from isolation. All the civilizations that have dwelt in Spain through history have made a point of opening communication routes through El Bierzo's protective belt of mountains. First there were Roman roads, then the medieval pilgrim route of Saint James. Today, tunnels and bridges slice through the mountains to make way for modern highways. El Bierzo is the only direct link between the dry *Meseta* of Castile and the wet, rainy northwest of the Peninsula. Furthermore, it is a land rich in mineral wealth which has attracted settlers throughout history.

MINING COUNTRY

Since antiquity, mining has brought wealth to El Bierzo. The Romans came here seeking gold; later, it was a major source of iron and, in our time, of coal. While the region is not completely free of the restructuring that looms over the mining industry in general, El Bierzo is in fact more fortunate than most, being the only

Vines of the Mencía variety have been cultivated in El Bierzo for as long as anyone can remember.

La Quinta Esencia Del Fino

Politically El Bierzo is part of Castile, but geographically it is very different from the parched Castilian plateau. It is more akin to Galicia, its western neighbor.

coal mining area in Spain that is profitable. With natural energy sources close at hand, industry flourished and with it a thriving service sector. In Toreno, in Bembibre, in the mountains of the north one finds the main coal mining activity. Ponferrada, the capital of the area, is a hub of industry and service companies. Finally, the south of the region is the Hoya, where the river Sil and its tributaries flow, a land of exceptionally fertile soil where the vineyards of El Bierzo are located.

Vines of the Mencía variety have been cultivated in El Bierzo for as long as anyone can remember. The locals claim the Mencía is native to this land, pointing out that its relation to the Cabernet Franc is due to the French pilgrims who traveled the Route of Saint James in the Middle Ages, who took Mencía cuttings back with them on their return. In El Bierzo nobody dares argue with this self-evident truth, although the French version of the story has it the other way round: that it was French pilgrims who first introduced Cabernet Franc cuttings to El Bierzo.

Whatever its origin, today the Mencía is inextricably linked to El Bierzo. It is a very special grape which does not have much color but is doubly blessed with sweet, fresh aromas, and gives wines with an excellent alcohol level.

Yet there was a time when wine growers of El Bierzo were blind to the potential of their grape. In the Sixties, they made good the Spanish saying, *lo barato sale caro*—they were penny-wise but pound-foolish. Their thirsty neighbor, Galicia, whose own supplies could not keep up with the demands of its wine-loving citizenry, sought new sources in neighboring regions, and the crafty wine growers of El Bierzo decided to make the most of the situation. They moved their vineyards from the sun-drenched slopes where they'd grown for centuries down to the more fertile but far less suitable land beside the Sil river. The fertility of the soil, added to an annual rainfall of 35 1/2 inches (900 liters per meter), led to the virtues of the grape being diluted to favor larger yields. On top of that, growers introduced the less-than-worthy but prolific Garnacha Tintorera grape, here known as Alicante, to obtain more color and more gallons. Quality did not even come into the equation; the Galician buyers didn't care anyway. They would show up by the hundreds in the villages and cellars of El Bierzo to seek supplies, armed with their *conca*, the ceramic wine drinking cup of Galicia. If the wine stained the cup, it was considered suitable. During those heady days of the Sixties and early Seventies, a number of El Bierzo wine growers made a fortune selling their wine this way, but change was on the horizon. Following the trend in the rest of Spain, the Galician market started to demand less quantity and more quality. El Bierzo's bonanza was over, and all that was left to do for the local farmers was watch how their Mencía grapes became watered-down ghosts of their former selves in vineyards next to the river more suited for growing peppers, and wonder what to do with the increasing quantities of low-quality Garnacha Tintorera grapes which nobody wanted.

A TIME OF REBIRTH

Eventually, some of El Bierzo's wine growers reacted. They saw the need to establish a Denominación de Origen board which would keep the excessive yields in check, promote the Mencía variety and eradicate the Garnacha Tintorera in an effort to produce serious bottled wine. The provisional regulatory board was established in 1985, and in 1989 the Denominación de Origen won its definitive approval.

Among El Bierzo's new generation of winemakers is José Luis Prada, who is something of a one-man whirlwind. If you greet him with the standard "How's it going, José Luis?" the answer will invariably be "*A tope*—flat out!" That is his motto, and the name of his winery: A Tope. Prada was a sort of local hippie from Cacabelos, the village with the strongest winemaking tradition in El Bierzo, but he became involved in the wine trade in a roundabout way. He opened a shop selling shoes, clothes, and Sixties music which seemed transplanted from Oxford Street in London. One day, it occurred to him to include the typical cherries steeped in *anís* liqueur of the region, and it was such a success that he switched to food products, dealing in preserved chestnuts, peppers, pears, and figs. At last, he decided to try wine, with the proviso that it had to be an authentic, traditional local product.

Sporting an enormous moustache and cowboy boots, Prada guides us around the Palacio de Canedo, the estate where he has his 17 hectares (42 acres) of vineyards. Most of it is planted with Mencía, but there is also some Godello and Doña Blanca, two local varieties used for white wine. Here he has built his pretty *bodega*, with the aging cellars located in the estate's old stone manor house. Prada speaks with overwhelming enthusiasm, in a booming voice. Those not familiar with the people of this region might assume that he is angry, but no, this is simply the way the locals express themselves. In all the wineries we visited, the friendliness and warm welcome were universal, but when it came to the subject of wine, El Bierzo vintners would invariably raise their voices to put across their point.

Organic grape farming is the talking point of El Bierzo these days, and more and more wineries and growers are switching to environment-friendly methods.

THE SEARCH FOR ORIGINALITY

Prada, who was at one time mayor of Cacabelos, is a stalwart defender of its local products and does not approve of the introduction of foreign grape varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, or Chardonnay which some growers have been planting since 1991-1992, even though these varieties are not endorsed by the denominación. Prada's conviction is that it makes good business sense to exploit the original character of the Mencía. He believes the world has more than enough Cabernet, Merlot, and Chardonnay, from places as far flung as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Argentina, Chile, and California, and that there is a segment of the wine-drinking public which yearns for originality, for wines with a difference, wines capable of surprising and delighting the drinker. On the other hand, Prada is well aware that a Mencía varietal wine, for all the fruit and floral fragrances of its youth, tends to lose these qualities over time, for this is a variety that doesn't age well on its own. Therefore he accepts the need to blend it with other, more persistent varieties that will complement it in order to make aged *crianzas* and *reservas* (see Glossary on page 150), but only as long as these wines are made with at least 80% Mencía.

Ada, Prada's eldest daughter, an oenologist with two years' training in Bordeaux, has created a very attractive young wine using carbonic maceration, packed with aromas of blackberries and raspberries. The winery also makes an excellent wine of the year, again a Mencía varietal, and finally, an aged wine using blends with Tempranillo, the emblematic Spanish grape which is the basis of Riojas and Riberas del Duero. All their wines bear the label Prada a Tope, except for the Palacio de Canedo reserva.

The family, which already exports to Switzerland and Germany, needs to buy grapes to supplement those produced on its Canedo estate, and herein lies one of the big drawbacks of the area, a problem that also affects El Bierzo's biggest cooperative, Vinos del Bierzo in Cacabelos: where to find good grapes. It is a problem against which the cooperative manager Luis Hernández Romo, who is also president of the El Bierzo wine Regulatory Council, has to struggle every day.

RAINY DAY FARMERS

It seems ironic, but the wealth which mining has brought to El Bierzo is a handicap for its wine industry. Several thousand people are owners of vineyards, but most of these are postage-stamp farms of an average 0.78 hectares (2 acres), scattered here and there over the countryside. These owners are not professional wine growers. They have good paying jobs in the mines, in the factories, or in the service sector and, in the best of cases, are weekend farmers. For sentimental reasons—in most cases, the plots have been in the family for generations—they don't sell their vineyards, nor do they accept the merging of plots to make them more efficient. These miniature vineyards do not produce much money, so not much work is put into them. Meanwhile, the wet climate of the area increases the risk of fungus diseases such as oidium and mildew, and to keep the vines healthy requires regular plowing of the land and treating the vines to protect them. To obtain good quality grapes, careful pruning is needed in order to control the yield. All this means much more work than a weekend farmer is willing to undertake.

In contrast to this majority is the new generation of El Bierzo wine growers whose approach is the complete opposite. They work their land professionally and use, insofar as possible, organic growing methods. Aside from plowing and skillful pruning, they refuse to use artificial nitrogen fertilizers or herbicides, and instead use organic fertilizers and environment-friendly products such as copper sulfate to fight diseases. This is infinitely more time consuming, as the sulfur powder, dusted on to the vine, does not penetrate the plant and thus must be replenished every 15 or 20 days, or even more often if a rainstorm should wash off the fine powder.

Few of these growers have the resources to establish a winery and market their own labels, so they must sell their harvest to the cooperatives. Here, they come face to face with their neighbors, the weekend wine growers. Javier Vázquez, the oenologist at the Viñas del Bierzo cooperative, takes care to separate the different batches: the serious grower's grapes are destined for quality bottled wines, the weekend farmer's grapes to ordinary table wines. The cooperative's top labels are the young Fontousal and the red Guerra. They also make a reserva called Señorío del Bierzo, all with Mencía.

THE PROMISE OF PROFESSIONALISM

Slowly but surely, the professional wine grower is gaining force in El Bierzo. Like the Viñas del Bierzo cooperative, Prada pays considerably more for the grapes he buys, on the condition that the grower forsake herbicides and put the necessary care into his vineyard, supplying only the best quality grapes.

For its part, the cooperative is undertaking a reemerging of plots in the old wine growing area, on sunny slopes far

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from the river where the 200-hectare (1,235-acre) vineyard of El Castrillón is taking shape. Here, vines can be trained on espaliers and much of the process can be mechanized. The aim is to achieve smaller yields of grapes with a much higher sugar/alcohol content, and richer in extracts, providing the basis for superior quality wines. Herein lies the future of El Bierzo.

Organic growing methods are the talking point of El Bierzo these days. One of the area's winemakers is among the pioneers in this type of wine growing in Spain, and has set an example for the others. Francisco Pérez Caramés comes from a family of El Bierzo vintners which was among those which made a fortune selling cheap grapes to the Galicians in the Sixties. But Francisco had a different approach to winemaking. He now has a marvelous estate of 31 hectares (76 acres) called El Toleiro where he obtains 160,000 liters of wine a year, and he has adapted his winery to handle just this quantity. He does not want his operation to increase in size. His aim is quality above all, and he is enthusiastic about coming up with new blends, all with grapes from his garden-like vineyard, for he does not buy grapes elsewhere.

Francisco Pérez Caramés' game plan differs significantly from that of other El Bierzo vintners. Although he believes, like the rest, that the Mencía is perfect for young wines—he makes a carbonic maceration wine of extraordinary quality called Cónsules de Roma—he does not agree that the Mencía should be the dominant grape in the aged wines. At El Toleiro he has planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, and Chardonnay to blend with Mencía, which never accounts for more than 30% of the finished product. For this reason his wines do not come within the denominación de origen.

As he explains: "I do not use the other varieties to help the Mencía age. On the contrary, I want to use the Mencía to soften the Cabernet Sauvignon." While he admires the Mencía's qualities, he does not believe that the area should rely exclusively on this variety.

JAVIER BELLOSO

ORGANIC FARMING

Pérez Caramés, who exports 60% of his production to European countries, mainly to Germany, is one of the few people in El Bierzo who does not raise his voice, but he is just as adamant as his compatriots when arguing a point. In 1993 he took the key decision to eliminate chemical treatments from his estate altogether. He became an environmentally-aware wine grower. He plows the land to keep it weed free, uses organic fertilizer, and mulches his vineyard with compost mixed with straw.

"The countryside is full of beneficial insect larvae, microorganisms, ladybugs, and butterflies. Herbicides and synthetic nitrogen fertilizers kill all these off and disturb the natural balance of the soil and the plant," he contends. To protect the vines against disease he uses a micronized sulfur spray and Bordeaux mixture, made with copper sulfate diluted in neutralized lime. These methods are time consuming and expensive, but he is happy with the results. The wine itself is afforded an equally pampered treatment, with gentle pressings, and the wine is clarified with egg whites and not subject to cold stabilization. "When you drink Cónsules de Roma and find it fruity, it is because you are actually drinking flowers," he maintains.

Wine cooperatives still prevail over individual wineries in El Bierzo, and many look forward to the appearance of new companies which will bring further vigor to the region. They have welcomed the establishment of a new bodega, Señorío de Peñalba, with a capacity for up to two million liters a year. Javier López Vuelta, the winery oenologist, is another enthusiast of the Mencía. The winery does not have its own vineyards, but to ensure quality they demand care and professionalism from the growers that supply them, another good influence for the area. Like the majority, they believe that the young Mencía wines are unbeatable, and they make jokes at the expense of Beaujolais (although they recognize that when it comes to marketing their wine, the French have few peers). While Javier López maintains that the Mencía can stand up without problems for five years, for their aged crianzas the winery is seeking blends with Tempranillo and Cabernet.

The stage is set for the drama of El Bierzo's winemaking future. Will innovative organic wine growers win the day over sloppy weekend farmers? Will the huge cooperatives be joined by forward-looking new wineries? Will the indigenous varieties win the hearts of the world's wine drinkers, or will introduced varieties become the norm? We must wait for the outcome: meanwhile, we can enjoy the young Mencías and carbonic maceration wines of El Bierzo, with their explosion of fruit and floral aromas and their smooth but long presence in the mouth.

Ask the cocky young men with the rolled up sleeves in front of the disco what the best wine in the world is. They will reply without hesitation in that typically booming voice: "Why, Mencía wines, of course, made from the queen of El Bierzo!"

Enrique Calduch *is a journalist specializing in wine and gastronomy. He is the wine critic for the daily* Expansión, *directs a television program on food, and also contributes regularly to* Sobremesa, Vinum, Restauradores, Lookout, *and* Viajar *magazines.*

See Main Exporters on page 138.

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SPANISH CHEESE ACROSS THE BOARD

Some time ago, I put up on the wall facing my desk, a quotation from the great Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) which goes something like this: "The people that abandons its traditions is like a tree with rotten roots: it ends up getting blown away by the wind." Thankfully, the great traditions of the people of Spain are still alive at the roots.

Text: Mariano Sanz Pech
Translation: Hawys Pritchard
Still life: Menchu Artime
Photo: A. de Benito/ICEX

GAMONEU, ONE OF THE GREAT NATURAL CAVE-MATURED CHEESES, IS MADE IN THE HEART OF THE PICOS DE EUROPA NATIONAL PARK, NEAR THE DISTINCTIVE MOUNTAIN FORMATION OF EL CORNIÓN.

Luckily, the people of Spain have plenty of traditions to preserve. They have reemerged from every corner of the country, in response to the first drops of the blessed rain of freedom—dances, songs, foodways, the habits and customs which unappreciative, misguided modernists attempted to devalue as too old, too outdated, and too local. The cheeses which are just as much a part of the way of life of each and every one of Spain's towns and villages, have for centuries been an equally valid expression of their specific character. I always maintain that behind every cheese, there's a community, with all that that implies: patterns of life, customs, how it relates to its own natural environment and climate, and so on. In this article, I'm going to take you on a conducted tour of the natural and human background to Spain's "other," lesser known cheeses, products of the rich biodiversity that reflects the Iberian Peninsula's varied ecosystems. Cheeses such as San Simón, los Beyos, Afuega'l Pitu, Gamoneu, and Ahumado de Ávila, from the rainy part of Spain, "green" Spain, up in the north. Traveling eastward across the country as far as the Mediterranean, we find Garrotxa cheese, then heading south through Old Castile for Pata de Mulo, into Extremadura for cheeses such as Sierra de Gata, Ibores, and Torta del Casar. The Rondeño cheese from the Málaga hills is our last stop on the mainland before heading for the Canary Island of Fuerteventura, where Majorero is made. The whole across-the-board route takes in cheeses from valleys, mountains, plains, hills, and volcanic terrain, all with very different characteristics.

There are three broad types of climate in mainland Spain: Atlantic, Mediterranean, and continental. The climate of "green" Spain is typically Atlantic, characterized by long and almost continuous periods of rain, which account for the existence of abundant lush pasture for livestock, both in its many beautiful valleys and in the barely accessible but rich highland pastures to which herdsmen still lead their transhumant herds in the summer months.

Setting off from what the Roman Empire dubbed *Finis Terrae*—Land's End—in the magical, unpredictable land of Galicia, we head for the rolling, restful valleys of Asturias and Cantabria within which, like an enclave, is the natural paradise of the Picos de Europa. This sacrosanct, stunningly beautiful mountain mass contains natural chalk caves in whose dark, damp, silent intimacy all the greats among Spain's blue cheeses take on their enduring and unique qualities. There are certain elements common to the whole of this area which define and determine the characteristics of the valley and mountain cheeses made hereabouts:

- The abundant pasturelands make "green" Spain a paradise for cows. Up in the mountains, cows share their pasture with a few hardy sheep and goats, which provide an effective supplement to the cattle which are unwieldy in large numbers in this terrain.
- Biodiversity is a characteristic of these herds. Despite colonization by the ubiquitous Friesian, there are, fortunately, still herds of native breeds which make a splendid contribution to Spain's cheese output. Breeds such as the glamorously named Rubia Gallega (Galician Blonde), Casina, Carreña, Tudanca, Parda Asturiana, and so on, are still the basic stock of many livestock farmers.
- The role of women on the farm is a multifaceted role: they are the tacklers of all the domestic jobs in the rural home, defenders and transmitters of family traditions and, on top of all that, the ones who make the cheese.
- The cheeses made here are small, fundamentally because the existing native breeds could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be described as champion milk producers. However, they make a valuable contribution to the small farm in the form of manure for the kitchen garden, they pull carts laden with firewood, grass, and harvested crops, they feed their calves and, at the same time, provide a (very) few liters of milk for domestic use and cheese making. The cheeses have to be small.

SAN SIMÓN

This cheese comes from a Galician vale in "green" Spain. Made from the milk of the native Rubia Gallega cow, the method is very complex and labor intensive, which perhaps explains why the women from around Villalba, in Lugo Province, are gradually giving up making it at home. However, small artisan cheese makers are setting up commercially and taking over production. One thing that distinguishes this cheese from others is its pear or cannonball shape. Its attractively shiny, waxy amber-colored rind is the result of smoking before being offered for sale. The interior is dense and straw yellow, and the creamy, lactic flavor harmonizes well with a slight smokiness. It is sold in units weighing about 1 kg (2.2 lb), and buyers should take into account the painstaking work that has gone into it and the finesse. This is a lovely, subtle cheese that only a Galician countrywoman could have created.

LOS BEYOS

We now enter the Los Beyos gorge, a sort of imposing corridor between the autonomous communities of Asturias and Castile-Leon.

This cheese comes from a steep mountain environment, whose tiny clusters of rural dwellings are inhabited by genuine heroes, now dwindling in numbers, who have survived a tough lifestyle that many compatriots abandoned for central Europe or South America. Small herds of Carreña and Ratina cows, both enormously hardy native breeds thoroughly adapted to the difficult local terrain, live alongside small, and also dwindling, numbers of sheep and goats.

Los Beyos cheeses are all small and cylindrical in shape. They are made up in the mountain pasturelands during the clement periods of the year, and in farmhouse kitchens when the days are short days in deepest winter. This cheese is made by acid coagulation, the milk from the morning milking being added to the evening milk and left to coagulate slowly by the fire overnight. After the curd is cut and the whey removed, the curd is put into molds to drain. After salting, the cheeses are formed and left to mature for 2 to 3 weeks until

the rind turns straw yellow. The interior is rather crumbly and pale yellow, slightly acidic, mature in flavor, and buttery on the palate.

AHUMADO DE ALIVA

This cheese is made in the autonomous community of Cantabria, mainly in the area around Liébana. Another mountain cheese, it shares certain characteristics with the Los Beyos, though the Aliva cheese is smoked over juniper wood. This tradition dates back to the time when the cheeses were made in the shepherd's hut during that part of the year spent up in the highland pastures by herds of native Pasiega and Tudanca cows and the occasional sheep and goat. The cheese is made in a similar way to Los Beyos, though the use of suckling kid rennet and maturing some cheeses in natural caves up in the mountains are practices specific to Ahumado de Aliva.

AFUEGA'L PITU

Back in Asturias again, deep in the valley formed by the region's two big rivers, the Nalón and the Narcea. From the hills that flank this valley, one can see as far as the Bay of Biscay. Sad to relate, the native breed of cow known as the Carreña or Asturiana de los Valles, typical of this region, is being ousted, without any regard for tradition, by the Dutch Friesian which is taking over with indecent speed. Afuega'l Pitu is a valley cheese, and another very labor intensive one. It is made by acidic coagulation, the milk being left close to the kitchen stove all night in winter and somewhere cool on warm summer nights. The following morning, the curds precipitated to the top by acidification are ladled off and pressed to release as much whey as possible. The lightly drained curds are then placed in a cloth or a metal sieve for further draining. When all the whey has drained off, the curds are transferred to perforated molds shaped liked truncated cones and left for three or four days to take on their characteristic shape. The small cheeses, weighing around 0.5 kg (1.1 lb), are then left to air in a cool, well-ventilated place. There is one variant, perhaps a response to the difficulty of storing these cheeses, particularly in summer, which consists in adding small amounts of hot or medium-hot paprika to the cheese when salting, which makes it look good and last longer. Afuega'l Pitu cheeses are sold soft and fresh or matured for 40-50 days, in which case the interior takes on a markedly dry, granular texture which sticks to the palate when eaten.

GAMONEU

We now climb to the heights of Asturias in the heart of the Picos de Europa national park, one of whose mountain formations is known as El Cornión: this is where Gamoneu, one of the great natural cave-matured cheeses, comes from. This is highland livestock farming territory, and herdsmen and their transhumant herds use it to the fullest, heading for its high pastures in spring and summer. The herdsmen live there in huts with other members of their family to help keep an eye on their

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IN THE EXTREMADURAN COUNTRYSIDE AROUND LOS IBORES AND LAS VILLUERCAS, THEY MAKE IBORES, ONE OF THE BEST AND MOST DISTINCTIVE OF SPAIN'S GOAT CHEESES.

native Casina and Carreña cows and their few sheep and goats. The herd's yield from the same day's morning and evening milkings are mixed, and by the following morning acid coagulation produces curds from which they remove as much whey as possible: this is a significant point of difference with the other blue cheeses. After being pressed for several days to expel the whey, the cheese is sprinkled with coarse salt and placed on wooden racks where it is left for 10 to 15 days to air and absorb the smoke generated inside the hut. It then continues its development in natural caves in the chalky mountainsides where it will stay for two months until the lightly smoked rind it had when it was put into the cave has developed a dense, variegated reddish, grayish, greenish moldy down. These cheeses weigh around 3 kg (6.6 lb) apiece, and when cut, reveal some mold inside near the rind. The interior is dry and crumbly with a slightly piquant, mature flavor.

GARROTXA

Moving on now to northeastern Spain, we leave behind the fertile Atlantic zone for the Garrotxa area of Catalonia. This area is typical of the Mediterranean climate, with its rolling hills and valleys, and pines and Mediterranean flora marking the difference. This is the setting for a success story among the attempts to rescue traditional cheeses made by young exponents of the "back to the countryside" movement who, in the 1970s, turned their backs on their impressive academic qualifications as lawyers and doctors to set about revitalizing this area's depopulated villages, working as artisans and swapping academic gowns for overalls, and the civil code for the instruction manual to the milking machine. They successfully launched an excellent goat's cheese which encapsulates all the finesse and charm that Mediterranean creativity is known for. They started out by renting typically Catalan 17th-, 18th- and 19th-century farmhouses (they are known as *masías* in Catalan), and set themselves up as goat keepers and cheese makers. They opted for the Murcian-Granadine goat as the most suitable one for their intentions, installing them in simple but comfortable stables built entirely of pine, and letting them loose to wander about for hours on end and graze on the aromatic pasture provided by the Mediterranean woodland.

Garrotxa cheese is made by coagulating the milk with animal rennet for a minimum of two hours, after which the curds are cut up into little bean-sized pieces, placed in cylindrical molds, and pressed gently. After mild salting in brine, the cheeses are left to air for a day, then transferred to natural caves with high humidity levels. They remain there for a minimum of 20 days, by which time each small cheese, weighing about a kilo (2.2 pounds), is covered in the delicate coating of gray-blue *Penicillium Glaucum* which is one of its distinguishing characteristics. Garrotxa is surprising for the delicacy of its aromas, its slight touch of acidity softened by a buttery, slightly melting effect. It is attractive in appearance, too, the gray outside contrasting dramatically with the immaculate white of the interior. This little gem of the cheese maker's art with a touch of Mediterranean creativity has a guaranteed future.

PATA DE MULO

Turning our backs on the north, we now move southward towards the meseta of Castile, the Iberian Peninsula's great central plateau some 600 meters (2,000 feet) above sea level. In its continental climate of freezing winters and boiling summers, the sheep reigns supreme, virtually unchallenged, grazing on the post-harvest stubble of cereal, pulses, vines, and the like in flocks of from 300 to 1,000 head at a rate of six to seven km (four miles) a day. Within the meseta, in the heart of the part of Castile known as Tierra de Campos, a fine but almost forgotten cheese is made from the milk of Churra and Castellana sheep, two very hardy native breeds adapted for centuries to the rigors of this ecosystem. Pata de Mulo originated in Villalón, in Valladolid Province, as a fresh cheese. The milk from each milking is coagulated with lamb rennet for about an hour, then the curd is cut into little hazelnut-sized pieces. When the whey has been drained off, the curd for each cheese is wrapped in a cloth to form a cylinder, and expel more whey. The rolls are left on wooden boards where they flatten out slightly, taking on their final shape of a rounded parallelepiped. Traditionally, the shepherds would take these cheeses to the fair in Villalón de Campos to sell as fresh cheese. Unsold cheeses would be taken home again and left to mature for two to three months, developing into a cheese with a natural gray rind, the interior perforated throughout with evenly-distributed holes, and a rather acidic flavor, creamy palate, and marked overtones typical of sheep's cheese.

SIERRA DE GATA

Still heading southward, we now enter Extremadura, a superb source of sheep's and goat's cheese. The Sierra de Gata is a dramatically beautiful granitic mountain range whose interior is dotted with little villages, all in locations providing shelter from the north winds and positioned halfway up the mountainsides, with woodland above them and pasture and crops below them towards the valley floor. The Retinta goat does well in this highland environment: it is a hardy breed with a coat the color of freshly stripped cork oak.

Sierra de Gata is a classically mountain cheese: unadorned, rustic with a broad palette of aromas and flavors. The Retinta goat grazes freely on the mountainsides, relishing the aromatic and other plants it comes upon, and disposing of a fire hazard in the process. Sad to relate, in areas where goats are no longer grazed, forest fires have been seen to increase dramatically. The best part of the year for making country cheeses is January to September, when there is the greatest abundance of good, fresh pasture. The milk is coagulated with kid's rennet, and the curd is cut and drained of whey and then placed in perforated molds to carry on draining and to form the cheeses into their characteristic flattened

MAJORERO IS MADE ON THE CANARY ISLAND OF FUERTEVENTURA IN A VOLCANIC ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE GOAT IS THE ONLY ANIMAL ABLE TO SURVIVE ON ITS VERY LIMITED RESOURCES.

cylinder shape. They are then left to air and mature in the warm, damp mountain air—this is why the rind is always damp. It is often protected by successive rubbings of good local extra virgin olive oil, which eventually lends a little zing to the creamy interior whose flavor is distinctly floral with overtones of goat's milk. Like most country cheeses throughout mainland Spain, these are small, not exceeding 1.5 kg (3.3 lb) in weight.

LOS IBORES

Still in Extremadura, the lovely countryside around Los Ibores and Las Villuercas is the source of Ibores, one of Spain's best and most distinctive goat's cheeses. Retinta, Verata, and Serrana are the local breeds of goat, and they thrive on the natural resources provided by the area's pastures and lower hillsides, giving milk that is rich in aromas, fat, and protein. The goats are kept in small herds, and the cheeses made from their milk are also small. The milk is coagulated with natural, suckling kid rennet. The process of cutting the curds and draining the whey is carried out quickly, and the curd is then placed in small perforated cylindrical molds. They are salted manually and left to air and mature in a cool well-ventilated place. It is common for these cheeses to be rubbed with oil and paprika to protect the rind from insect attack. Forty to 60 days later, the cheese is ready for eating, its interior markedly white, and its texture soft with occasional holes evenly distributed. The flavor combines tangs of oil, acid, and salt with delicate floral aromas which, along with the touch of paprika, make this a really memorable cheese.

TORTA DEL CASAR

To a different setting now, very close to Cáceres in the Extremaduran tableland, where we find one of Spain's most superb cheeses: Torta del Casar. It is made from the milk of Merino sheep, the breed that is something of a national mascot. The Merino is native to Spain and has been jealously guarded as a national exclusive though it has traveled all over the world in the course of history: Merino sheep were even taken as booty by Napoleon's troops during their brief occupation of Spanish soil. The Merino sheep was always valued for its wool and meat, though not so much for its milk. Now, though, the situation has changed: the demand for wool has dropped drastically and other sources of lamb meat put up stiff competition, so that Merino-milk cheese is now the breed's best product. Merino sheep yield very little milk, but it is rich in fat and protein. The milk is coagulated using vegetable rennet obtained from the cardoon thistle, a differentiating factor which gives the cheese a slightly bitter flavor and, along with the gooey texture of the interior, its creaminess and lactic taste make it unmistakable. The cheeses are a flattened cylindrical shape, with a natural rind which is so yielding that it tends to split. The local way of eating this cheese at home is to cut off the top and dip into it, spreading it on slices of country bread.

RONDEÑO

Back now to a mountain environment, but this time in Andalusia's Serranía de Ronda. Here, too, small herds of

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GARROTXA IS ONE OF THE TRADITIONAL CHEESES RESCUED BY YOUNG EXPONENTS OF THE "BACK TO THE COUNTRYSIDE" MOVEMENT WHO SWAPPED THEIR ACADEMIC GOWNS FOR OVERALLS.

pretty Málaga goats feed ecologically on the natural mountain pastures. Their milk is coagulated using rennet from suckling kid, the curd is cut and drained of whey, and then molded in bands of plaited esparto grass (though the use of these is dying out). This compresses the cheeses and forms them into cylinders decoratively stamped with the imprint of the mold. They are salted and aired in cool, well-ventilated places in this area's lovely farmsteads, known as *cortijos*. Sixty days later, they are at their peak of readiness for eating, the flavor roundedly creamy and mature with floral and aromatic overtones which add grace notes to the characteristic goat's cheese flavor. Though Rondeño has tended to be eaten fresh, people are starting to rediscover its qualities as a mature cheese.

MAJORERO

Taking off from Andalusia across the Atlantic, we reach the end of our tour in the Canary Islands, each of which produces its own cheese, usually made of goat's milk. Majorero is made on the island of Fuerteventura from milk obtained from the Canary goat, a large breed with a variegated coat. In this volcanic environment, the goat is the only animal hardy enough to survive on the very limited resources available. I remember being amazed to see the local goats nibbling away at the volcanic rocks for lichen. Majorero is made in small, isolated farms, set in the most arid surroundings on which the sun beats down. The milk is coagulated using rennet from suckling kid which separates it in an hour. The curd is then cut and drained and the chopped pieces are put into molds handmade out of plaited palm fronds. These shape the cheese into characteristic cylinders imprinted with the pattern of the mold after being pressed hard to extract as much whey as possible. After salting, the cheeses, which usually weigh from 3.5 to 5 kg (7.7 to 11 lb), are aired in the driest, mildest place available. To prevent the cheese from spoiling, the rind is sometimes spread with oil, red paprika, and a local toasted flour known as *gofio*, a variant of a technique that we have seen before, and a fine example of know-how about natural ways of preserving foodstuffs. Majorero is an amazingly delicious cheese, smooth, sweet, creamy, and with the goat's cheese taste only very slightly in evidence. The oil and paprika are also very slightly discernible in the flavor, though not enough to alter it radically.

Our across-the-board tour of Spanish cheeses ends on this island outpost. There are plenty more that we could have stopped to sample, for there are excellent examples to be found all over the country. They're still one of Spain's great untapped resources.

Mariano Sanz Pech, *generally acknowledged as one of the leading authorities on Spanish cheese, is an agronomist and food scientist whose work has been focused on the cheese producing-sector since 1969. A former president of the* Asociación para el Fomento de los Quesos Artesanos *(Association for the Promotion of Artisan Cheeses), he is currently president of the* Consorcio de los Quesos Tradicionales de España *(Traditional Cheeses of Spain Consortium).*

See Main Exporters on page 138.

OPINION OF A CHEESE CONNOISSEUR

Text: Steven Jenkins

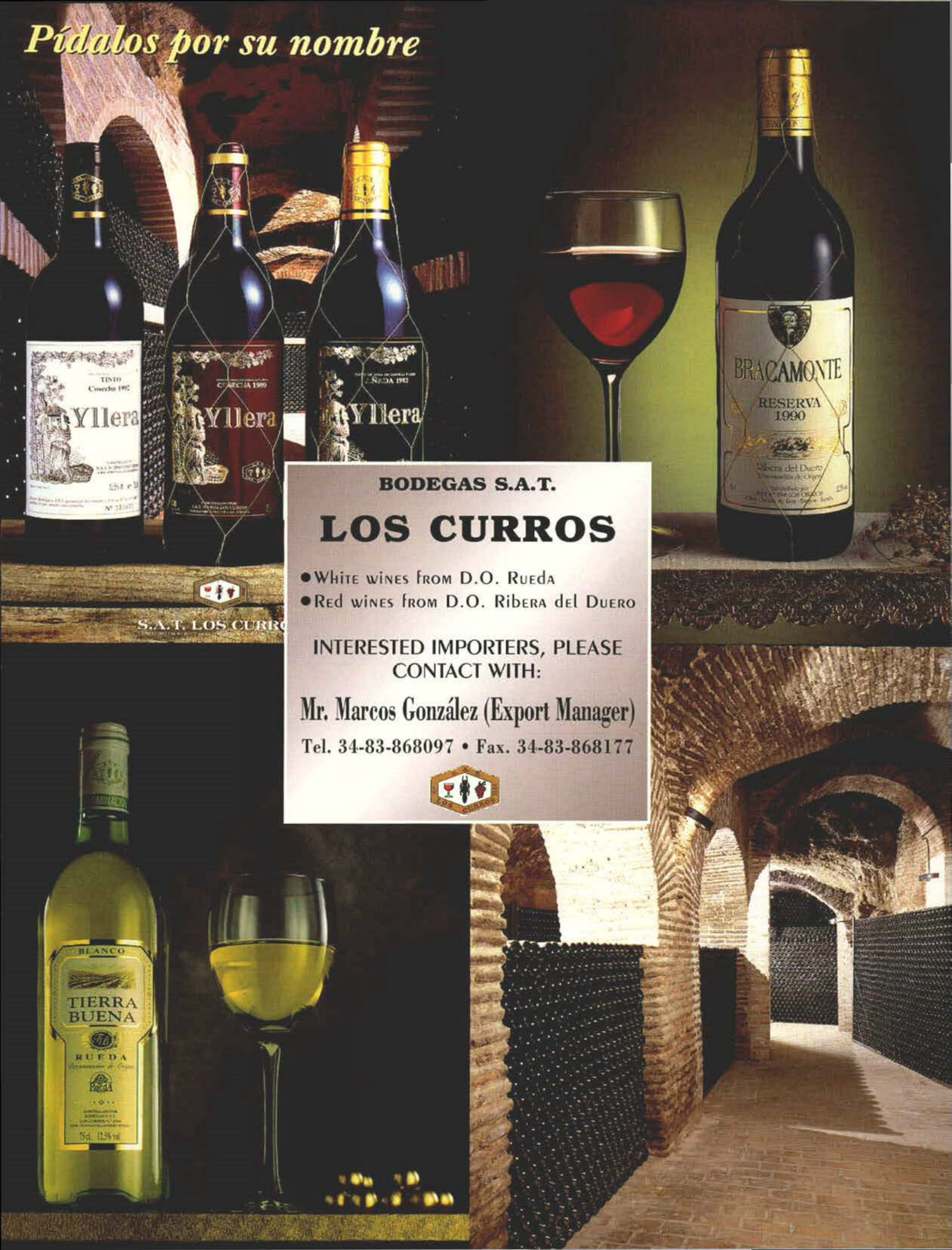
Garrotxa
Fast becoming Catalunya's most important food export behind cava and olive oil, Garrotxa is sturdier and longer-lived than either of the region's other two remarkable cheeses, Montseny and Montsec, yet it retains their alluring and irresistible flavor—nutty, peppery, lingering—as well as their luxurious mouth-feel, while improving upon their rustic visual appeal with its steel-gray, velveteen cloak sensuously sloping shoulders and bone-white interior: a singular and all-important cheese.

Majorero
The brilliant goat's milk cheese from Fuerteventura (Las Canarias) has enormous appeal because of its abundance of flavor—rich, brassy, bright and full of nuance (rosemary, thyme, pepper, pine), its unobtrusive goatiness (too much of which can be off-putting), its barely perceptible salinity (resulting in a perfect balance between sweet and salt) and its toothsome, yet rich and creamy mouth-feel despite its flinty texture.

San Simón
Galician cheeses are far too mild for my personal satisfaction, but this gorgeous cheese has such visual appeal I can only marvel. More a burnished work in ancient walnut, this bed knob of a cheese commands attention just by showing up. Remember to slice it horizontally. Attracts customers like a litter of puppies.

Torta del Casar
Soon perhaps, the fact will be universally acknowledged that Extremadura produces one of the world's four or five greatest cheeses. Because of TDC's excruciatingly delicious flavor (fried egg, almond paste, hickory smoke, creme brulee, white truffle) and near-erotic texture, this stunning sheep's cheese has rocketed past every other cheese in my experience, (despite its high price) in terms of importance, theatricality, memorability, and regional integrity. Though frequently a firmer cheese, Queso de la Serena, also from Extremadura, is otherwise indiscernible.

Afuega'l Pitu
Brilliant cheese; seemingly neolithic in its primitive and rustic appearance; again, a cheese I term "excruciatingly delicious": intense flavor of black walnuts; amazing palate-coating mouth-feel; lingering, lip-smacking aftertaste; a fascinating link between Asturias and France's Perigord region: their besace (beggar's purse) de chevre, though Afuega'l is of cow's milk. I am completely devoted to this cheese, and as an aside, Asturias ranks for me as the single-most important cheese-producing region in the world.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Spain's Beekeepers and Their Seasonal Honeys

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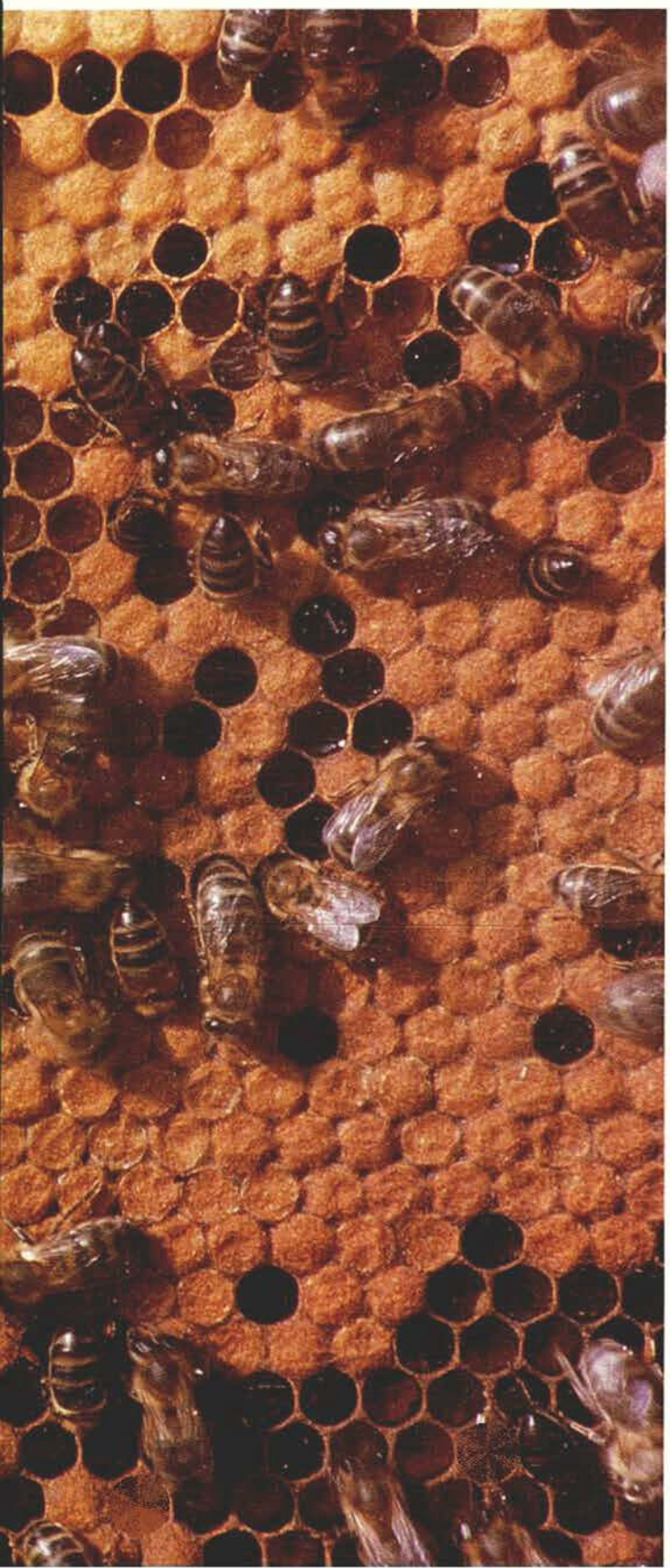

José Ferrando has been a beekeeper for over thirty-five years. Every spring and summer he travels across Spain in his truck, dropping off beehives in patches of countryside in bloom. One or two months later he returns to harvest the honey—Mediterranean rosemary in February, Andalusian thyme in May, and Valencian orange blossom in June—and moves on to catch the next flowering season. In chilly winter months the bees stay in just one place, feeding on honey left for them in the hive. Working in this way, like most Spanish professional beekeepers, José produces an exceptional range of single-flower honeys. Today they are emerging from anonymity as producers begin to realize their hidden qualities that were once taken for granted.

Text: **Vicky Hayward** Photos: **Félix Lorrio/ICEX**

"The routes vary with the weather each year," explains José, "but I leave the hives in the same farms. I have longstanding friendships with the owners and the only payment is fresh honey after the harvest. Of course things have moved on. Now I have 6,000 hives, two lorries, and electrical equipment for extracting the honey. But I like to keep the honey as natural as possible." José is typical of Spain's 20,000 professional beekeepers. Many have fewer hives than him—perhaps just a few hundred—but nearly all migrate around the country. Generally speaking, they run small family businesses. José, for example, is helped out by his nine children. One of his hives, well managed, gives some 30-40 kilos of honey per year. Modest as that may sound, with a national total of 1.6-1.9 million hives— although not all are the professional beekeeper's high yield migrant hives—it contributes towards an average annual production of 30,000 tons of honey a year, the highest in the European Union. Astonishingly, 60% of this is sold direct—usually locally—by the beekeepers as pure raw honey.

Only in the last decade have the beekeepers begun to realize the full value of their honeys at home and abroad. Bulk sales to industries and packers still account for 40% of all production, but today single-flower honeys are coming into their own, increasingly recognized as products as distinct as Spain's fine olive oils and wines.

The First Iberian Hives

Honey has been close to Spaniards' hearts for a very long time. Close to Valencia, just outside the village of Bicorp, a cave painting shows a neolithic honey gatherer clinging to a creeper, basket in hand, as he or she plunders a wild bees' nest. The artist painted the portrait around a real hole in the rock, about 12,000 years ago, it is thought, perhaps as a guide to others that honey was to be found here. Or maybe it was a warning. All around the honey hunter buzz angry bees.

We can only guess why the ancient Iberians valued honey enough to risk the stings. The bees traveled between the gods on high and the earthly world below, carrying heavenly truths along with nectar from flowers—or so the Greeks and Romans believed. That taken from the slopes of Hymettus, the gods' mountain home in Attica, was divine.

Migrant beekeepers follow the spring and summer flowering seasons, traveling around the country with their portable hives.

In fact, say historians, much so-called Hymettus honey was really Iberian mountain honey relabeled by sharp-eyed Roman shopkeepers. Clearly, while times may change, business practices do not.

By the time the Romans were importing Iberian honey, it came from hives. The hedonistic Tartessans built clay ones around Cádiz in the Bronze Age; the Celtiberian tribes further north used mobile straw ones; the Romans favored cork. They all mixed honey with water to make *hydromiel*, the drink for which the poet Columela, born in Cádiz, gave a precise formula in *De re rústica* (60 A.D.). The same recipe, passed down through Arabic texts and medieval cookbooks, still exists in areas of rural Castile as both a nonalcoholic drink and a fermented brew. "It can be as strong as Spanish wine," wrote Alexandre Dumas. One suspects it may have been hydromiel rather than honey's divine qualities which motivated Bicorp's honey hunter.

The Art of Beekeeping

In the Muslim and medieval centuries, honey was so highly valued as a sweetener, medicine, and preserving medium that hive owners' brotherhoods were protected from theft under regional laws. But despite the importance of beekeeping the honeybee's life cycle was to remain a mysterious affair. Only at the end of the 16th century did Luis Méndez de Torres, a bookseller and researcher, suggest for the first time in his *Tratado Breve de la Cultivación y Cura de las Colmenas* (1598) that a single queen bee laid all the eggs for each colony. He called the queen bee *maesa* or *maestra*. This and other discoveries about the complex social order and workings of the beehive would eventually, at the beginning of this century, become the basis of today's professional migrant beekeeping. Of course there were earlier expert Spanish beekeepers. The monasteries relied on beeswax for candles, especially along the pilgrimage route to Santiago, and honey provided a vital source of income in a few regions. Beekeepers from the Alcarria in Castile, called *mieleros*, sold rosemary and lavender hon-

Large producers offer quality guarantees on the flower type and purity of the different honeys they sell.

Single-flower honeys are now being valued for aromas and flavors as individual as those of fine olive oils or wines.

Spain's exceptional range of single-flower honeys reflects its range of landscapes and their biodiversity.

Generally, it is Spain's larger honey specialists who have been the first to translate flavor characterization into everyday quality controls.

ey all over Spain from small barrels. In the Extremaduran sierra of Las Hurdes, squabbles over hive rights raged between landlords and tenants for centuries. The honey was cut twice a year, the best quality in spring with a secondary harvest in autumn. But beekeeping was often basic. Hives might be simply a length of hollow tree trunk with a bees' nest carried home to supply family needs. Apart from this, the hives were always left in the same place.

Finally, it was the arrival of the American wooden box hive that allowed Spanish migrant beekeeping to take off at the beginning of this century. Designed around the exact size of entry tunnel the bees liked and lift-out vertical frames for the honeycombs, this hive remains the most popular still in use in Spain today.

In and Out of the Hive

Both in and out of the hive, the bees' life cycle is as seasonal as that of the beekeeper. In winter the bees rarely leave the hive, repairing any draughty holes with resin-based propolis, or bee glue, to keep warm. Heavy rain also forces them to stay at home, making spring honeys—such as rosemary, eucalyptus and sunflower—the least predictable harvests. On long warm spring and summer days, though, the bees journey out from their hives up to a dozen times a day. The native Iberian black bee, *Apis mellifica Ibérica Goetze*, small and long tongued, is particularly aggressive and active outside the hive.

As the foraging bees fly around, drawn by flowers' fragrance, they pause long enough to suck out each flower's nectar or tree's honeydew. This they carry back to the hive, passing it via the mouths of worker bees who regurgitate and deposit what is by now liquid honey in the hexagonal wax cells of combs, fanning it with their wings to reduce the water content and capping it with a protective layer of wax.

Although the bees' enzymes alter the honey's composition, it keeps the characteristics of the flowers from which it came.

Some flower blossoms give glucose-rich and therefore quick-crystallizing honeys while others have a high fructose content producing clear, smooth, slow-crystallizing honeys. Each has different medicinal values, tastes, and aromas. Fragrant orange-flower honey evokes the Valencian citrus groves, Alcarrian rosemary honey its moorlands splashed blue in spring. It is this biodiversity—Spain has over 26 million hectares (64 million acres) of wild spaces—that provides the raw materials for such an exceptional range of single-flower honeys.

The Small Producers: Rediscovering Single-Flower Honeys

Spain's beekeepers are now exploring this potential for quality in very different ways. Small producers such as José Ferrando who once sold their honey in bulk quantities now pack and sell it themselves. José, based in the Valencian region—the heartland of honey producers—specializes in rosemary and orange blossom honey from the Mediterranean coast. Another family company from the same region, El Romeral, has made its reputation on artesanal raw honeys which include unusual single flower types such as lemon blossom, anise, sunflower, and almond. Elsewhere in Spain you may come across other types: blackberry, clover, arbutus—the strawberry tree—pine, birch, heather, ling, and native holm oak honey, which gives an unforgettably rich dark brown honey.

Once extracted, these quality raw honeys are very simply processed by removing the wax, bees' wings, or other alien matter that floats to the top (and sinks to the bottom) of the honey. Stored in cool dark warehouses, the honey is then left to crystallize at its own speed and hand-spooned or machine-dosed—depending on consistency—into jars. Left unfiltered, these honeys keep a high pollen and glucose content and offer a superb range of tasting and aromatic qualities. El Romeral's honey, for example, ranges from a light citric lemon blossom to a dark, caramel-like anise honey.

Some small-scale producers of this kind are grouped into regional quality labels or Denominations of Origin. Six such labels exist—in Galicia, Asturias, Extremadura, the Sierra de Alcarria, Basque Country, Levante, and Murcia—each one specializing in the area's single-flower honeys. All are included in the European traditional foods register (Euroterroirs), promoted and financed by the E.U.

A surprising number of these small producers already sell abroad—José Ferrando, for example, to Luxembourg, Germany, and France—but, with demand high at home, their export potential as yet remains largely untapped. Nonetheless, they are setting standards for the future. In particular, the Basque Country's honey label (1993) is the first to define quality biologically rather than chemically. Many Spanish quality producers hope that this shift of parameters will soon be echoed in Spain's national apiculture law—currently being reframed—and, later, by E.U. regulations.

The Large Producers: Redefining Quality

Generally, though, it is Spain's larger honey specialists who have been the first to translate flavor characterization into everyday quality controls. Such specialists, who source honeys from beekeepers right across the country, range from old family companies to newly formed cooperatives.

In some cases they have also subsidized the research on the parameters for scientifically defining Spain's single-flower honeys. Mielso, better known by its brand names El Brezal and Floresta, is one such company (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 22). At its large Mediterranean warehouse near Castellón, where 5-7,000 tons of honey are treated and packed each year, a wonderfully honeyed aroma hangs in the air.

As each drum of honey enters the warehouse, a sample is taken for laboratory testing to identify the honey's sugar spectrum, water content, color, mineral elements, viscosity, pollen content, and the percentage breakdown of pollen by flower type. Only after the results for each sample are available does the honey go on for processing and packing as rosemary, orange blossom, eucalyptus, mountain, wood, or wildflower honey.

Mielso also relies on another key process, a patented Japanese technique under which the honey goes through a very slow, low-temperature heating which guarantees the honey will not ferment or crystallize but also ensures it conserves all its enzymes and volatile aromas.

Another Spanish company, El Quexigal—owned by Vega Sicilia Wines—also uses a process whereby the honey is never heated to more than 40°C (104°F). Their range of six single-flower honeys treated in this way includes heather and lavender. Both these companies have successfully found niche markets abroad, not just in northern Europe but also as far afield as the United States and Japan, and are expecting their exports to grow as

A TASTE OF HONEY

A Spanish honey tasting reveals a remarkable range of flavors and textures, which also translates into different medicinal properties and pollen levels.

Almond (*almendra*) Pale creamy spring honey from Valencia. Helps digestion. Artesanal quantities only.

Anise (*anís*) Intense, syrupy dark honey with a caramelized aniseed flavor. Cuts stomach gases. Artesanal quantities only.

Chestnut (*castaña*) Dark tree honey with a light aroma. Astringent and blood cleanser. (Minimum 90% pollen.)

Eucalyptus (*eucalipto*): Liquid amber honey with a woody balsamic flavor, harvested from February to September in western Spain. Anti-inflammatory, diuretic, good for respiration. (Minimum 70% pollen.)

Heather (*brezo* or *biercol*): Spring to summer honey from Castile and Andalusia made with heather or ling. Recommended for rheumatism. (Heather minimum 45% pollen; ling minimum 15%.)

Holm oak (*encina*): Rich dark honey made from tree honeydew harvested in summer, often blended with chestnut and oak in woodland honey (*miel de bosque*). Asthma and lungs.

Lavender (*cantueso* and *espliego*): Thick amber honeys with fine crystals, harvested mid to late summer in Castile. Treat coughs and prostate, digestive. (Minimum 10-30% pollen, depending on variety.)

Lemon blossom (*azahar de limón*): Pale and opaque, with a delicate citrus tang. Sedative, good for bones and nails. (Identified by fragrance rather than average 20% pollen content.)

Lime blossom (*tilo*): Clear liquid lime-yellow honey with a heavy aroma. Sedative, antispasmodic, stomach toner, combats headaches. (Minimum 25% pollen.)

Orange blossom (*azahar*): Outstandingly fragrant, golden, clear early summer honey harvested close to the Valencian and Murcian orange groves. Sedative. (Identified by fragrance not average 20% pollen content.)

Rosemary (*romero*): Pale thick spring and summer honey, delicate but herby, harvested in central Spain. Highly valued medicinally for the liver, asthma, stomach. (Minimum 20% pollen.)

Sunflower (*girasol*): Golden, quick crystallizing, mildly fruity honey from Andalusia and Castile-La Mancha. Vitamin E rich. (Minimum 15% pollen.)

Thyme (*tomillo*): Late summer, clear brown honey from Castile and Aragon with an herby flavor. Disinfectant for throat and intestine; good for bronchitis and colds. (Minimum 15% pollen.)

Spain's single-flower honeys become better known.

However, many exporters of Spanish honey still look for the permanently clear, liquid pasteurized honey preferred by customers in some markets. Spain's largest cooperative, Anae, which handles some 2 million kilos of top-quality pasteurized honey a year from its large warehouse in the mountains behind Valencia, ships tankerfuls of honey to luxury chocolate manufacturers and supermarkets. It has been packing single-flower honeys since the early 1980s and today they have grown to represent some 52% of all the honey leaving the warehouse. All their six honeys are laboratory sampled before filtering, pasteurizing, and packing to the highest standards.

Back to the Future

As the quality controls for single-flower honeys become more precise (see box on page 62) so the producers are becoming aware of the need for a legal framework which allows customers to understand these hidden qualities. Their major concern today is that E.U. labeling should exclude high-fructose corn syrups, which can currently be legally retailed as honey.

"Honeys are more than simply sweeteners," comments Josep Serra Bonhevi of Catalonia's Agricultural and Food Laboratory, where key research on identifying native single-flower honeys has been carried out. "They need to be treated as biological rather than chemical products since they also contain glucose, pollen, mineral salts, antioxidants, amino acids, and clearly identifiable aromatic or tasting values."

Public demand has set the pace and beekeepers are already feelings the effects. Pollen, royal jelly, beeswax, and propolis—the resin used for repairing the hive—are all in rising demand for their health values. Spain as yet produces no royal jelly and little propolis, but is Europe's leading pollen producer with an annual total of 200-300 tons harvested in the central sierras and packed by the honey companies. Caught in small bags which hang from the hives, it is simply sifted and dried before vacuum-packing. Spanish honey with added pollen and royal jelly are also finding a place on the international market.

One of the logical conclusions of the growing interest in honey as a healthy product is organic production. Treatment of bees' illnesses with low-residual chemicals has already started and Spain's wild mountain areas offer the possibility of certified organic honey making once there is sufficient demand.

"The potential for Spanish honeys is huge," comments Justo Peris, National Coordinator for Apicultural Products. "The native single-flower honeys are establishing a reputation as among the finest and most varied in the world. Also, we have the space to at least double production."

As José Ferrando begins to plan his spring and summer travels for 1998, he is also clear where the future of the Spanish beekeepers lies. "What has happened," he explains, "is that in the world today people are finding a new value in such a completely natural product. The honey itself has been there forever, but many people are only just discovering it."

Vicky Hayward *is a writer, journalist, and book editor whose articles about culture, society, travel, and food are published internationally. She lives in Madrid.*

The author would especially like to thank Justo Peris and Josep Serra Bonvehí for their generous collaboration on this article.

See Main Exporters on page 138.

SAUCES

A LA ESPAÑOLA

TEXT: JANET MENDEL

PHOTO: A. DE BENITO/ICEX

STILL LIFE: MENCHU ARTIME

Open any basic cookbook to the sauce chapter and what you'll find are a whole bunch of sauces with French names—mornay, bechamel, velouté, chasseur, remoulade, poivrade, hollandaise. White sauces, brown sauces, egg-based sauces. Sauces with flour, butter, and cream. Even the one called espagnole sauce—meaning Spanish sauce—is described as the "classic French brown sauce." (Called Spanish because of the addition of tomato, which deepens its color.) But sauces, like hemlines, change. Today, high style in saucery means a Mediterranean flavor, with a bit of flounce and sunshine. Spain's native born cooking boasts some outstanding sauces that perfectly fit this trend. Sauces which you probably won't find in that old classic cookbook.

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NATIVE BORN SAUCES ADD VIBRANT FLAVOR TO MANY DISHES FROM ONE END OF THE COUNTRY TO THE OTHER.

What is a sauce anyway? It's any juicy essence that flavors a food. In old fashioned haute cuisine this was often a concoction having little to do with the main food—confected from reductions of stocks, thickened with flour, enriched with butter, cream, and eggs. Such sauces were once pervasive in Spain's restaurant cooking too—in the so-called "international style"—even though they had little to do with traditional regional cooking.

Now that such stodgy cooking has been put to rest—thanks to innovative cooks everywhere—Spanish sauces have risen to the top, adding vibrant flavor to many dishes from one end of the country to the other. Not that they ever disappeared, but outside of real home cooking, it was hard to find them.

Four things distinguish Spanish sauces: First, sauce in Spain is almost synonymous with olive oil. The most basic sauces are just combinations of the precious, flavorful oil with, perhaps, garlic, salt, a few herbs—hardly more than what we would call a dressing. Even the most complex of Spanish sauces have olive oil as their star ingredient. Although excellent butter is produced in regions such as Galicia and Asturias, even in these regions the typical sauces are oil based.

Another unifying principal in Spanish sauces is the use of the mortar and pestle. To crush nuts, garlic, herbs. To emulsify. As we will see, however, these traditional sauces of the mortar now are quickly made in an electric blender or processor.

The third feature—which explains why Spanish sauces don't appear in the separate chapter on sauces—is that sauce is usually the liquid, thickeners, and seasonings added to food while it is cooked, and hardly ever a separate preparation to be served under, over, or beside a food. Thus, the Catalan dish, *pollo en samfaina*, is chicken cooked with its samfaina sauce; the Aragonese *cordero en chilindrón* is lamb cooked in chilindrón red pepper sauce, and Andalusian *gallina en pepitoria* is poultry cooked in an almond-saffron sauce. Once you know how the sauce is made, you can easily use it to accompany different foods. You might even invent new combinations.

Hardly any of the traditional sauces are flour thickened. Often bread and/or finely ground nuts serve as a thickening ingredient. Sometimes the thickener is crushed crumbs from plain biscuits (cookies) such as the not-too-sweet *galleta María*, very popular in Spain. (Graham crackers could be substituted.) Instead of a flour thickened gravy to accompany roast meats, in Spain you would simply deglaze the pan with a little wine, strain, and serve the juices with the roast. So simple.

GARLIC SAUCES

Almost every region of Spain has some variation on garlic and olive oil sauce—a combination which has been popular in Spain since Roman times. The simplest of all is *aliño*, a dressing of chopped garlic, chopped parsley, olive oil, and lemon juice, used for salad or spooned over grilled fish or meat. Somewhat more evolved are *alioli, ajiaceite, ajoaceite*, and other regional variations of garlic sauce. In the simplest version, a quantity of garlic is crushed in a mortar, then olive oil is beaten in slowly until amalgamated. In some, the addition of bread helps to stabilize the sauce. In other versions, more famously, egg is what makes a smooth emulsion. In this case, the sauce is a mayonnaise first. Garlic sauces are served spooned into fish soups, such as the *caldero* of Murcia; as an accompaniment to rice dishes, such as *arroz a banda* of Alicante, or with grilled foods.

MAYONNAISE, A MAGIC SAUCE

Of all the sauces of "classic" (French) cuisine, mayonnaise is probably the only one which is purely Spanish in origin. Legend has it that this famous sauce was invented in Mahón on the island of Menorca. It was supposedly discovered there in 1756 by the Marshal of Richelieu, chief of the French invading forces, who either first ate it served by a lowly innkeeper or, possibly, by a saucy Menorcan lady who delighted him. He later is said to have popularized the sauce in Paris, calling it *sauce mahonnaise*.

Who's to dispute a legend? Mayonnaise—whatever the origin of the name—is certainly of Spanish origin. Why? Because mayonnaise is an oil based sauce and Spain is where olive trees grow. Although no one has indisputably proven when mayonnaise was first made, for sure, it is the one "classic" sauce which is known in every household in Spain, from the rich to the poor, from the north to the south.

In the old days, mayonnaise was always handmade, a leisurely process. Egg yolks are placed in a deep mortar or small bowl. The olive oil, measured into an egg shell, is beaten into the yolks, a few drops at a time until it is slowly incorporated. As the yolks absorb the oil, the sauce magically thickens, emulsifies, and expands. The resulting sauce hardly resembles its two basic ingredients at all. Flavored with lemon juice and salt, it is wondrous. Mayonnaise turns simple salads into deluxe ones. It also is used to bind unusual soups.

Mayonnaise you buy in a jar is seldom made with olive oil. If you require a bland sandwich spread, that doesn't matter. But the true sauce, made with the true oil, is a revelation. Try it with stuffed eggs. Dabbed on boiled potatoes. With garlic added (in which case, it is *alioli*) to accompany grilled lamb chops or fish.

SOFRITO, THE BASIC TOMATO SAUCE

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WINE IS SUCH A BASIC COOKING INGREDIENT THAT YOU CAN'T REALLY DIFFERENTIATE A CATEGORY OF WINE SAUCES.

lineup of Spanish sauces—but it by no means dominates the limelight. The basic tomato sauce—"mother" of all sauces—is not a slow-simmered sauce at all. It's a quick sauté—chopped onions and chopped fresh tomatoes, usually with garlic and a bit of green pepper too, fried in olive oil—just until the liquid is reduced—hardly 15 minutes. At that point, the sauce can be sieved or pureed in a blender, if a smooth sauce is desired. Then you add the *sofrito* to food to be cooked—for example, sautéed chicken or meatballs—usually with additional liquid—preferably wine, sherry, for example. The food continues to cook with the sauce until done. In the case of shellfish, this is a matter of minutes, whereas stewing beef or a whole joint of lamb might take an hour or more.

One of the best-known Catalan sauces, samfaina, starts with a sofrito, to which is added chopped aubergine (eggplant) and courgette (zucchini). This usually accompanies chicken.

RED PEPPER AND PAPRIKA SAUCES

It's not the tomato, but the capsicum pepper in its various forms (sweet bell pepper, paprika, dry pepper) which plays the starring role in many Spanish sauces in several regions. (As it does in Spain's emblematic sausage, *chorizo*.) The capsicum is one of those exotic vegetables which the Spanish conquistadors brought back from the New World.

Sauce in Spanish, by the way, is *salsa*. But, here it must be pointed out that salsa, as it is known in North America, means a chili-hot condiment used with Tex-Mex style foods and roast meats. Spain's many salsas are seldom so piquant.

The Catalans are renowned for their sauces. These are, depending on how you count, one, two, three, four or five—sofrito, alioli, samfaina, *picada* and *romesco*.

While the Catalans count all five as their very own, in fact, alioli and sofrito, described above, really are known everywhere in Spain. Picada, a sauce of ground nuts, is also made in other regions, where it is known as *salsa de almendra*, almond sauce, or pepitoria. So too is samfaina, though elsewhere it is called *pisto*.

Romesco, however, is unique to Catalonia, in particular Tarragona, and is possibly the most interesting of all Spain's sauces. It is named for a type of dried sweet red pepper called the romesco, a plum-shaped pepper with crinkly skin. Traditionally the sauce was confected by grinding the peppers with garlic and nuts in a marble mortar. Now it's quickly made in a blender or processor.

Romesco sauce can be served alongside grilled shellfish or grilled fish or it can serve as a cooking medium for fish or meat. Thinned, it makes a wonderful dressing for salads and cooked vegetables. In the springtime, the people of Tarragona celebrate the festival of *calçots*—skinny spring onions, grilled over a wood fire. The charred skin is peeled back and the onions dipped into romesco sauce. Some grilled Catalan sausages (*butifarra*) complete the outdoor feast (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 43).

The Basques, too, make an outstanding sauce based on a dry pepper. This is *vizcaina* or Biscay sauce, which most usually is cooked with *bacalao*, dry salt cod. However, so delicious is the sauce, that it's worth trying with chicken or lamb chops. The pepper here is the *choricero*, a long, slim dried pepper which imparts a dusky, smoky taste to the sauce.

Another red pepper sauce, this one made with fresh red bell peppers, is the chilindrón of Aragon. Strips of roasted peppers are cooked with chicken or lamb.

Paprika is a spice which is simply dried sweet red peppers which have been ground to a powder. The flavor can vary from sweet to very piquant. In Galicia paprika is the basis of *ajada*, a simple sauce which flavors potatoes, octopus, and vegetables. The ajada is made by browning coarsely chopped garlic in a cup of olive oil, to which is added a heaping spoonful of paprika and a spoonful of vinegar. Some people like a pinch of cayenne as well. And, in the Canary Islands, Spain's most far-flung region (off the coast of Africa), *mojo colorado*, is similar, but includes a touch of ground cumin and chili. It's served with fish, potatoes, vegetables. Another one with lots of paprika is the Valencian *all I pebre* sauce—basically garlic, paprika, and oil. Often cooked with eel (*anguila*), it works well with chicken, too. Yet another is the *arriero* sauce of Castile-Leon, of garlic fried in oil, laced with vinegar and paprika. Arriero means mule driver, the truck drivers before the internal combustion engine, who transported fish inland from the sea; wool and wheat from the interior to ports.

ALMOND AND OTHER NUT SAUCES

In Andalusia and the Levante almond trees grow on hillsides, blooming pale pink in late winter. The nuts, which are harvested in the fall, are an ingredient in many of Spain's best-loved sweets, such as *turrón* (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 34), and also in savory sauces. In other regions, nuts also are an important sauce ingredient—in Galicia, chestnuts; in the Basque Country, walnuts; in Catalonia, hazelnuts. The most outstanding nut-based sauces are the Catalonian picada and the similar pepitoria.

In most nut-based sauces, bread, fried or toasted with the nuts, is used as an additional thickening ingredient, and garlic, saffron, and wine usually play a part. Pepitoria, a popular sauce for chicken, is one of the best-loved preparations, but almond-saffron sauces are also used with meatballs, and for vegetable dishes such as cardoons.

One of the most famous dishes of Mexico, turkey in *mole poblano* sauce, was created in

the 16th century by Spanish nuns for the visit of a Spanish viceroy. That dish is, basically, a version of the classic Spanish dish—chicken in pepitoria, crushed almonds and saffron—to which were added those New World ingredients, turkey, chili pepper, and chocolate.

And, coming round full circle (perhaps when those nuns returned to Spain), just a few of Spain's nut-based sauces, such as the Catalan picada, contain just a touch of chocolate. Rabbit, partridge, lobster Catalan style, usually come in a sauce enriched with nuts and a hint of chocolate.

MARINADE SAUCES

Adobo, salmorejo, and *escabeche* are marinade sauces which were used to preserve fish or meat long before the days of refrigeration. They are still enjoyed because they add so much flavor. The primary ingredients in adobo are oil, vinegar, garlic, oregano, and paprika. Salmorejo, frequently used with rabbit, would serve as marinade and cooking liquid. Escabeche, a favorite with partridge, is similar, but might contain bay leaf, thyme, carrots and onion, peppercorns, even chili pepper. Usually cooked food is put into the escabeche marinade, which serves as a dressing when the food is served.

SAUCES WITH WINE

In Spain, wine is such a basic cooking ingredient that you can't really differentiate a category of wine sauces. A cook might pour a glassful of the local wine into the stew or the roast, which combines with the other flavors to transform into a tasty sauce. Wine is a perfect cooking medium for fish, naturally creating a sauce when amalgamated with oil and the fish's juices. *Marinera* sauce is one such sauce—oil, garlic, parsley, and wine in which shellfish cooks.

However, one wine sauce is so outstanding that it deserves special mention. This is food cooked *al jerez*, in a sherry sauce. One such is *riñones al jerez*, kidneys cooked in a dark and velvety sherry sauce.

GREEN SAUCES

With one exception, herbs are used discreetly in Spanish sauces—a sprig of thyme in a rabbit dish; bay leaf in meat stews; oregano in vinegar marinades; wild fennel with fish. The exception is parsley, which is used lavishly in many different dishes, raw and cooked. In the Basque Country, so appreciated is the fresh and grassy taste of flat-leaved parsley that it forms the basis of one of the most characteristic sauces, *salsa verde*, green sauce. Made with olive oil, garlic, and a whole handful of chopped parsley, the sauce is slightly thickened with flour. The liquid can be a fish stock, water, or white wine. The sauce is cooked with hake for the renowned Basque dish, *merluza en salsa verde*, which is sometimes finished off with a few clams, asparagus spears, and sliced egg. It's also cooked with potatoes and other vegetables.

A variation on green sauce is *mojo verde* of the Canary Islands. This is an uncooked dressing with oil, garlic, lots of parsley, plus chopped fresh coriander leaves (*cilantro*) and chopped green chili. It is served with fish and as a dressing for vegetables.

Janet Mendel *is a journalist who contributes regularly to* Lookout, *Spain's Magazine in English. She is the author of four books about Spanish food.* Traditional Spanish Cooking *(Garnet, 1996) won last year's André Simon Cookbook Award. Her newest book is* Tapas and More Great Dishes from Spain.

See Main Exporters on page 143.

R E C I P E S

Romesco
Catalan Pepper Sauce

The romesco sauce can be made in advance. Serve it at room temperature. Serve with a mixed grill of prawns, fish, clams, and mussels or as a topping for cooked vegetables. Makes about 300 ml thick sauce:

4-5 small dried sweet red peppers (*ñoras*) or 2 tbsp paprika
1 chili pepper or to taste
3 tomatoes
1 head of garlic
1 dozen almonds, blanched and peeled
2 dozen hazelnuts, skinned
1 sprig of mint, chopped
1 slice of bread, toasted
1 tbsp parsley
150 ml olive oil
1 tsp salt
1 tbsp vinegar

If using the dried peppers, remove stems and seeds and either toast and grind them or else soak in boiling water and scrape the pulp from the skins. Do the same with the chili. Roast the tomatoes and garlic in a hot oven until the tomatoes' skins split, about 15 minutes. Remove. Skin the tomatoes, cut them in half and remove seeds. Skin all the garlic cloves. Put the peppers (or paprika) in a processor with the tomatoes, garlic, almonds, hazelnuts, mint, bread, parsley, and part of the olive oil. Process until you have a smooth puree. Beat in remaining oil, salt, vinegar, and pepper. The sauce should be the consistency of thick cream. If too thick, thin with a little water or white wine.

Mojo Colorado
Canary Island Red Sauce

Serve with fish or drizzled over boiled potatoes or cooked vegetables. Mojo verde, green sauce, is made by omitting the paprika and using green chilis and chopped coriander and parsley leaves.

2 cloves garlic
1 chili pepper
2 tsp paprika
1/2 tsp ground cumin
1/2 tsp oregano
3 tbsp olive oil
3 tbsp vinegar
100 ml water
Salt and pepper

In a blender or mortar crush the garlic and chili pepper with the paprika, cumin, oregano, oil, and vinegar. Add water to dilute the mixture and season with salt and pepper.

Salsa Vizcaína
Biscay Sauce

Makes about 600 ml sauce, enough for one small chicken or 750 gr of salt cod. This is usually prepared with dry salt cod, but is delicious too with chicken. If dried choricero peppers are not available, use a tablespoon of paprika.

6 choricero peppers
200 ml olive oil
1 onion, chopped
1 leek, chopped
50 gr chopped serrano ham
1 clove garlic, crushed
2 tbsp chopped parsley
150 ml white wine
Pinch of cayenne
6 Marie biscuits (galletas María) *
250 ml water

Remove the stems and seeds from the peppers. Cover them with water and boil for 5 minutes. Leave them to soak. In a frying pan or earthenware *cazuela*, heat the oil and add the onion, leek, ham, and garlic. Let this soften very slowly for 30 minutes. Then add the parsley, wine, cayenne, the peppers with the liquid in which they cooked (or paprika if substituting), the biscuits, and water. Cook for 30 minutes. Puree the sauce in a processor, then sieve it, pressing hard on the solids. If cooking with cod, cut the cod which has been desalted by soaking for 36 hours in several changes of water, in small pieces. Simmer, covered in the sauce, for 30 minutes. For chicken, brown chicken pieces in oil, then add the sauce, cover and simmer until chicken is tender.

*Galletas María are a plain, not-too-sweet biscuit (cookie). Graham crackers or plain bread crumbs could be substituted.

Sofrito de Tomate
Tomato Sauce

Makes about 750 ml of sauce:

1 small onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, chopped
4 tbsp olive oil
2 kg tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped
1 tsp salt
Bay leaf
Sprig of parsley
100 ml water, white wine, or stock

Sauté the chopped onion and garlic in the oil until the onion is softened. Add the tomatoes and fry on a hot fire for a few minutes. Add the salt, bay, parsley, and liquid. Bring to a boil, then simmer 15-20 minutes or until liquid is reduced. The sauce can be used as is or, for a smooth sauce, it can be sieved or pureed in a blender. It is then added to food to continue cooking. For example, use sofrito with meatballs which have been browned in oil, sautéed liver, browned chicken, or cubes of pork. Finish cooking the food in the sofrito, adding a little additional liquid if needed.

Alioli
Garlic Mayonnaise

Old fashioned handmade mayonnaise uses egg yolks. This quick version, in blender or processor, requires a whole egg. Serve with grilled rabbit, lamb chops, baked potato, baked fish, vegetables, snails. Makes about 200 ml of sauce:

1 egg
3 cloves garlic, crushed
175 ml olive oil
2 tbsp vinegar
1/2 tsp salt

In a blender or processor

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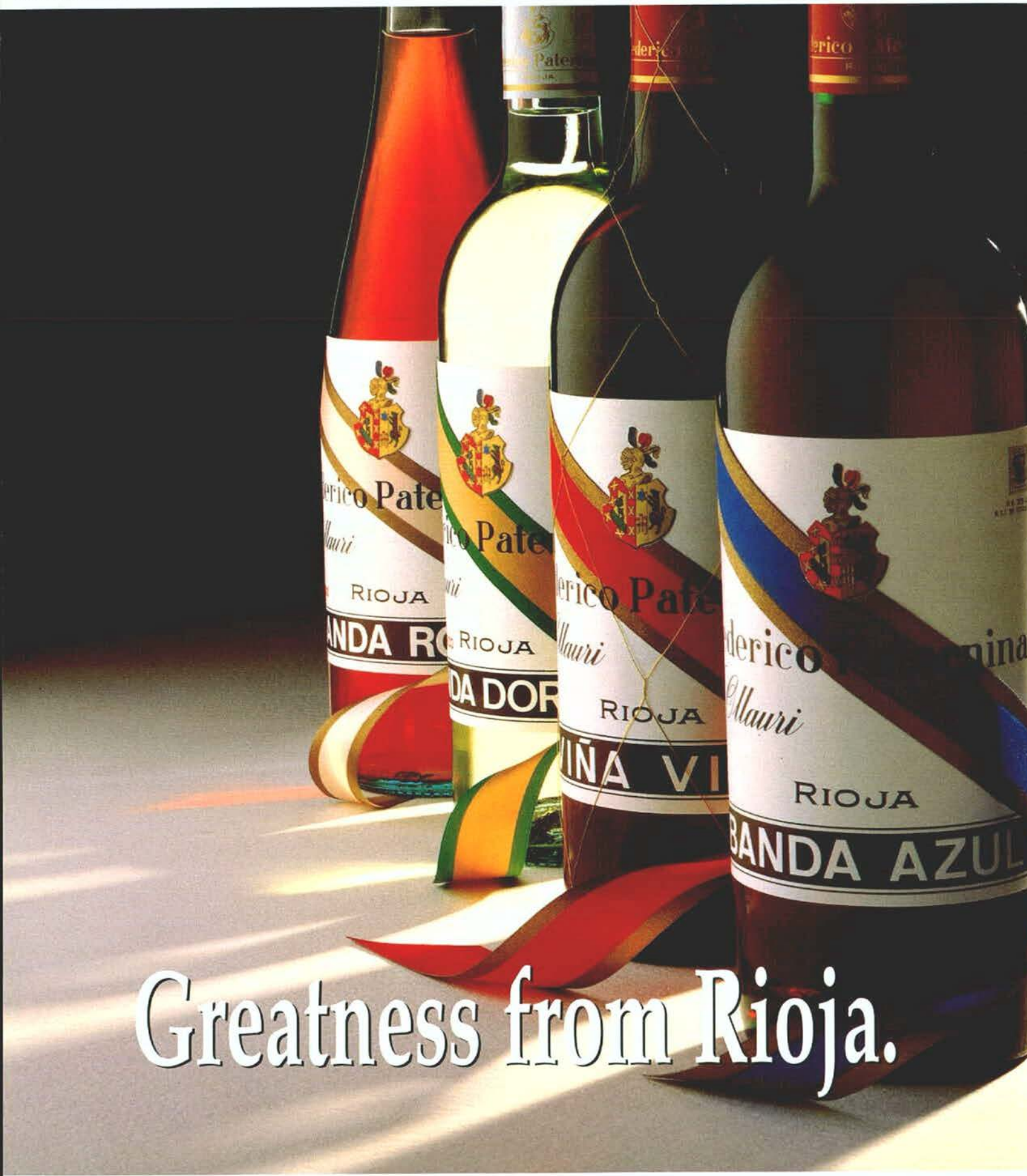

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place the egg and crushed garlic. Whirl until garlic is smooth. With the motor running, add the oil in a slow stream, until the sauce is thick and emulsified. Add the vinegar and salt.

Picada
Nut Sauce

Use this sauce in which to cook lobster, monkfish, rabbit, partridge, or chicken.

40 gr skinned hazelnuts and/or almonds, toasted
1/2 tsp saffron
2 cloves garlic
2 Marie biscuits (*galletas María*)*
1 sprig parsley
1/8 tsp cinnamon
1/4 tsp salt
100 ml medium sherry, white wine, or *vino rancio*
100 ml water
25 gr dark chocolate (optional)
A few pine nuts (optional)

In a mortar or blender crush the toasted nuts with the saffron, garlic, biscuits, parsley, cinnamon, salt, sherry, and water, adding the chocolate and pine nuts if desired. Add this to partially cooked chicken or fish, with more liquid if needed, and simmer another 10-15 minutes. Makes about 250 ml thick sauce.

*Galletas María are a plain, not-too-sweet cookie. Graham crackers or plain bread crumbs could be substituted.

Pollo en Samfaina
Chicken in Vegetable Sauce

Serves 4-6:
1 chicken (2 kg), cut in serving pieces
Salt and pepper
6 tbsp olive oil or lard
400 gr aubergines (eggplant), diced
2 green or red bell peppers, cut in large pieces
400 gr courgettes (zucchini), diced
2 onions, thinly sliced
3 cloves garlic, chopped
400 gr tomatoes, peeled and chopped
75 ml white wine
1 bay leaf
Sprig of thyme
Sprig of parsley

Rub the chicken pieces with salt and pepper. In an earthenware cazuela or frying pan heat half the oil or lard and brown the chicken pieces, then remove them. Add the remaining fat and fry the aubergines 5 minutes. Add the peppers, then the courgettes, onions, and garlic and fry for a few minutes. Add the tomatoes, then the wine, salt and pepper, bay leaf, thyme, and parsley. Return the chicken pieces to the sauce, cover and cook until chicken is tender, about 50 minutes.

Pavo en Pepitoria
Turkey in Almond Sauce

Serves 8:
1 small turkey, jointed, or 2 kg turkey parts
Salt and pepper
Flour
5 tbsp olive oil or lard
40 gr almonds, blanched and skinned
6 cloves garlic, peeled
50 gr (2 slices) bread, crusts removed
1 onion, chopped
1 clove
10 peppercorns
1/2 tsp saffron
1 tsp salt
1 tbsp chopped parsley
140 ml dry sherry or white wine
250 ml chicken broth
1 bay leaf
2 hard-boiled egg yolks

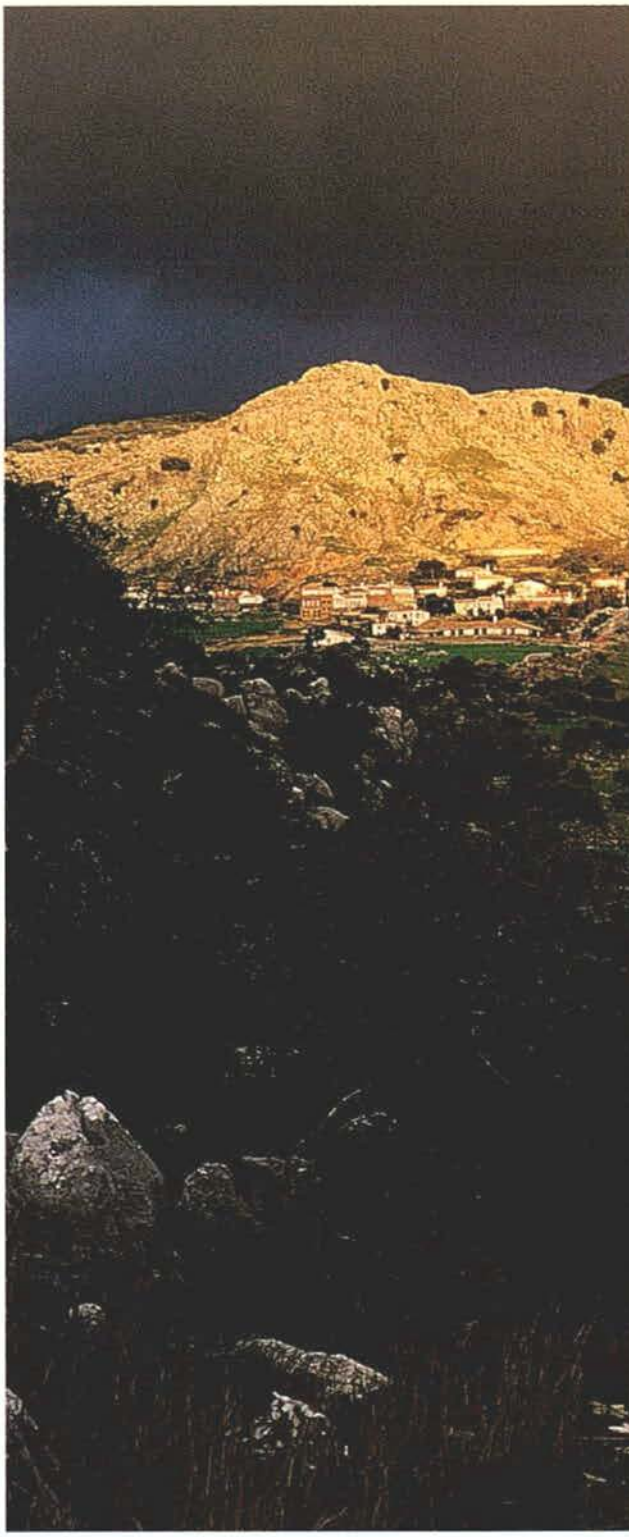
If using a whole turkey, the backs, wings, and giblets can be used to make stock. Rub the turkey pieces with salt and pepper, then dredge them in flour. Heat the oil or lard in a frying pan and fry the almonds, 4 cloves of garlic, and the bread slices until they are golden. Skim out and reserve. In the same oil, brown the turkey pieces very slowly on both sides, adding the chopped onion. Remove the turkey to an earthenware cazuela or a deep pan. In a mortar, grind the clove, peppercorns, and saffron with the salt. Add the fried garlic, the remaining 2 cloves of raw garlic, almonds, and bread (this can be done in a processor), then the parsley. Dilute this mixture with some of the wine and stir it into the turkey pieces. Add the remaining wine and broth. Bring to a boil, then simmer, covered, very gently until the chicken is tender. Mash the egg yolks with a little of the liquid and stir it into the casserole to thicken the sauce.

Merluza en Salsa Verde
Hake in Green Sauce

Hake is a favorite flaky-white fish in Spain. It is a member of the cod family, which could be substituted. Usually the fish is cut in thick, crosswise steaks, though bone-free medallions could be used.

Serves 4:
1 kg thick slices of hake
Salt
1 tbsp flour, plus more flour for coating fish
6 tbsp olive oil
6 cloves garlic, chopped
150 ml white wine or fish stock
8 asparagus tips, cooked, or 2 tbsp cooked peas
Salt and pepper
4 tbsp chopped parsley
2 hard-boiled eggs, chopped

Lightly salt the fish slices and let them stand for 30 minutes. Dredge them in flour and pat to remove excess. Heat the oil in an earthenware cazuela or heavy frying pan. Add the pieces of fish and cook on a high heat, without letting them brown. Add the garlic when the fish is turned, then sprinkle with the spoonful of flour. Add the wine or stock. Tilt the casserole or frying pan back and forth to combine flour and wine, adding a little additional liquid if necessary to make a sauce the consistency of cream. Top with the cooked asparagus or peas, the chopped parsley, and the chopped eggs. Serve in the same cooking pan.

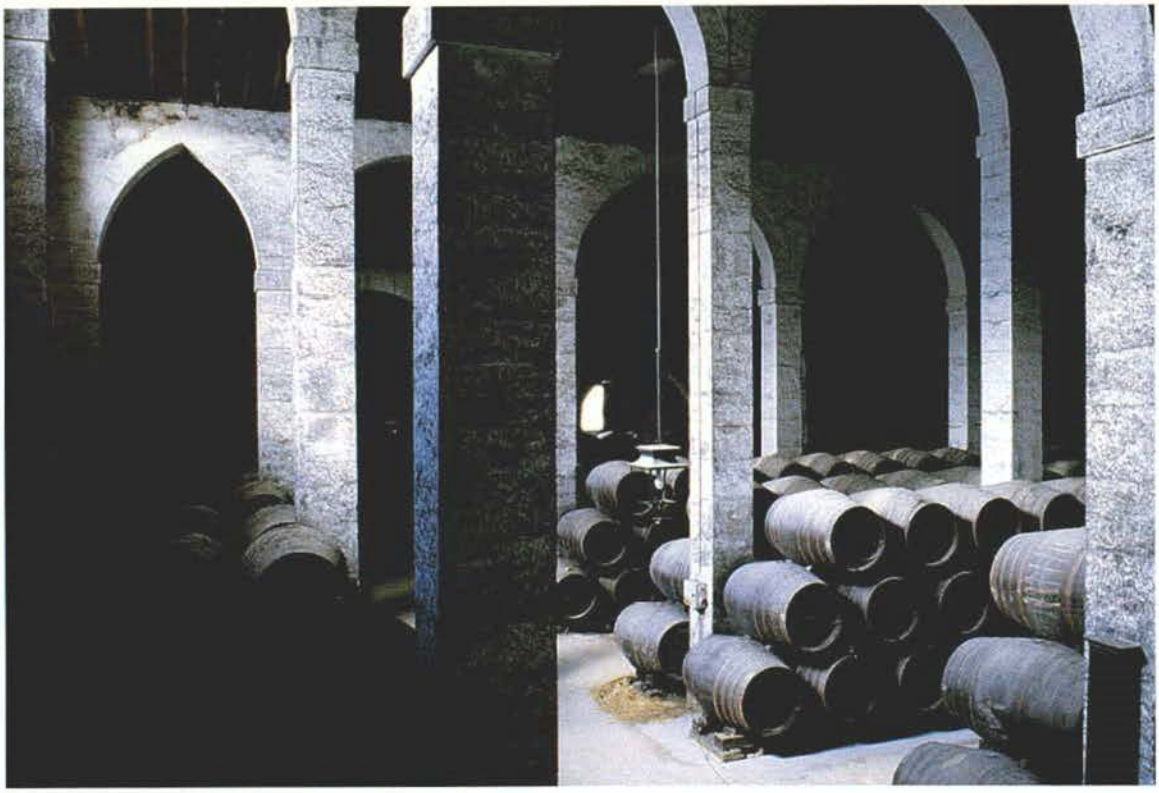


With this issue, our continuing series on the wine routes of Spain takes us to Andalusia—the land of flamenco, brave bulls, and legendary wines, a country rich in tradition, delicious seafood, and dramatic landscapes. In our journey through the vineyards of southern Spain, we'll relive Columbus' historic journey and see the natural treasures of Doñana in Huelva, explore the vast wine cellars of Jerez, Puerto de Santa María, and Sanlúcar, and soak in the breathtaking scenery of the mountains of Málaga.

ANDALUSIA

Text: **Mark Little**
Photos: **Fernando Briones/ICEX**

Little-known to most visitors, the Sierra de Grazalema is the rainiest spot in Spain. These towering peaks trap the clouds rolling in from the Atlantic, creating a unique micro-climate.



One of the enormous bodegas of Osborne at El Puerto de Santa María.

The Doñana National Park is one of Europe's greatest natural treasures, home to eagles, wild boar, and hundreds of different bird species.

El Rinconcillo in Seville is the very image of a classic Spanish tavern, with its glazed tiles, old posters, cast iron pillars, and wooden counter where the waiter chalks up your bill. It seems to belong to another age, and no wonder: founded in 1670, El Rinconcillo is Seville's oldest bar.

As you bite into a *tapa* of crisp *pavía de bacalao* (a batter-fried strip of codfish), your gaze wanders across the rows of bottles displayed on shelves overhead—every possible shade of sherry seems to be present, from bone dry *fino* to smooth, sweet Pedro Ximénez. In fact, our food and wine tour of Andalusia could start and end right here, in the enchanting capital of Andalusia, as we explore dozens of bars serving great tapas.

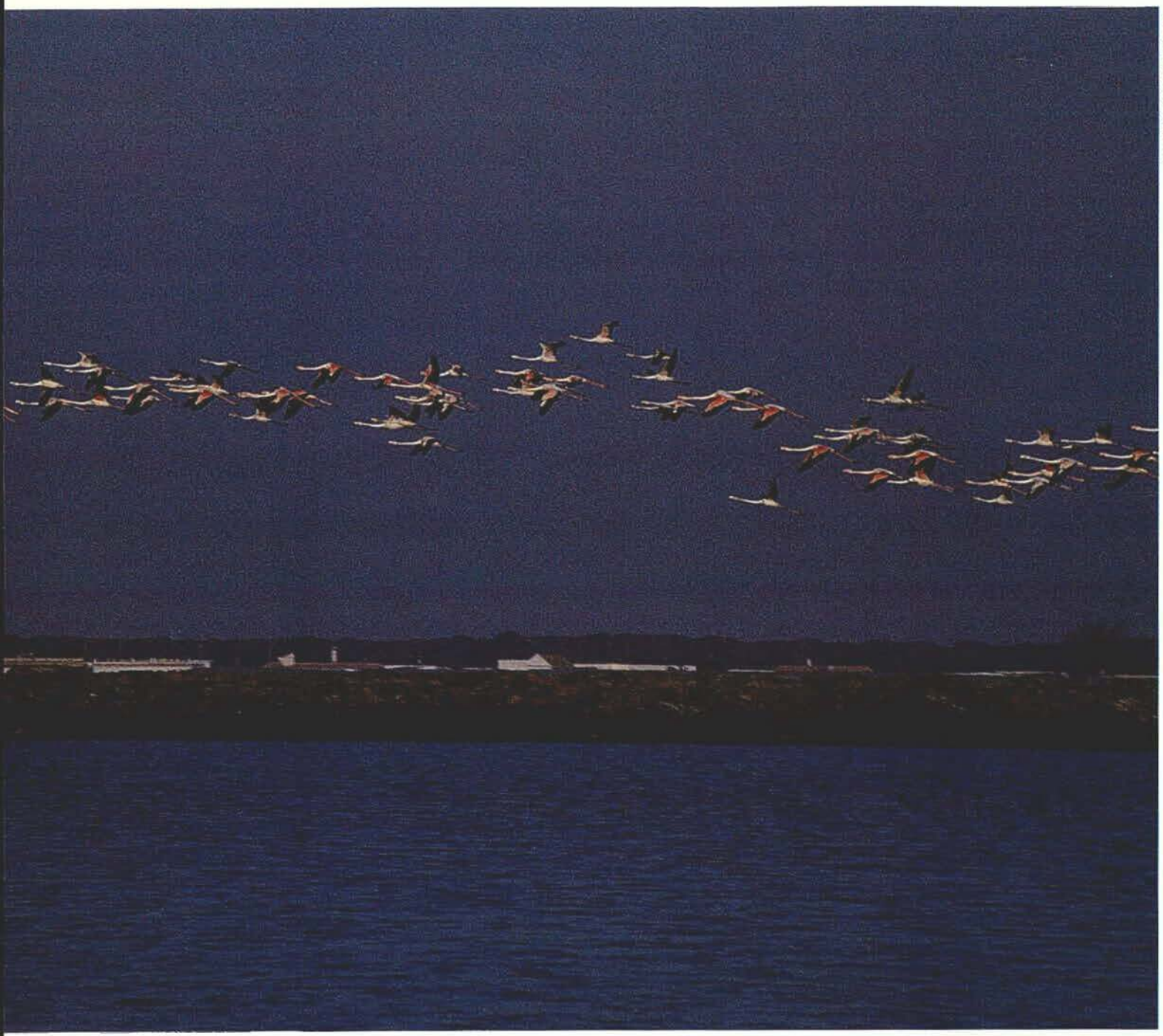
But we mustn't tarry. Those tasty tapas will have to wait for later. We have a whole region to discover, some awe-inspiring landscapes to admire, some of the world's great wineries to visit, and a tankful of gas to burn. Furthermore, there's a ship waiting for us.

Encounter with Columbus

Three ships, to be exact. Taking the A-49 highway west from Seville, we reach the province of Huelva and the turnoff for the *Lugares Colombinos*—the place where one of history's greatest adventures started. The road takes us past the towns of Moguer and Palos de la Frontera to the mouth of the Odiel river and the Muelle de las Carabelas, the Quay of the Caravels. This outdoor museum is a reproduction of a 15th-century port, and in it is berthed Christopher Columbus' famous flotilla, the Niña, Pinta, and Santa María, exact replicas of the original ships made with the same shipbuilding techniques of Columbus' day.

Not far from here is the Monasterio de La Rábida, the 15th-century Franciscan monastery where Columbus sought shelter when he first arrived in Spain in 1485. Seven years later it was from nearby Palos de la Frontera that Columbus sailed. Most of his crew were from Palos and Moguer.

Columbus took with him his dreams of discovery. His crew took more practical things, such as dried tuna, wheat, legumes and, of course, a good supply of Huelva wine, the first Spanish wine to be exported to America.



P. SANCHO-MATA/ICEX

Their descendants still make wine in the Condado de Huelva, as this area is known. This is one of the four *denominación de origen* winemaking regions in Andalusia. The oldest winery in the district is located in Moguer—Diezmo Nuevo, founded in 1770.

Huelva wines are made with the Zalema, the indigenous white grape of the region. Traditionally, it is used to make an amber-colored *oloroso*-style fortified wine, Condado Viejo, an earthy, nutty, mouth-filling wine that goes perfectly with the famous hams of Huelva. But living in the shadow of Jerez, this wine region seemed forever condemned to play second fiddle to its mighty neighbor. Many *bodegas* went out of business, and those wine growers with good land switched to strawberries, today the biggest cash crop in the province.

In the late 1970s a new generation of vintners started to experiment with unaged white Zalema wines, using modern technology and temperature controls that could halt the grape's proclivity to oxidation. The results were fresh, light wines that go perfectly with seafood, and their success was immediate. Although the district's 30-odd bodegas still make the traditional lines, young white wines are fast becoming the Condado de Huelva's star product.

Most of the Condado de Huelva's winemaking activity is centered around Bollullos Par del Condado, our next destination. The coastal road from La Rábida slices through a pine forest 40 kilometers (25 miles) to the beach resort of Matalascañas. Drive carefully here, especially at dawn and dusk: deer and wild boar have the habit of wandering onto the road.

We are approaching one of the great natural treasures of Europe: the Doñana National Park, an expanse of scrub, marsh, sand dunes, and pine forest that spreads over 57,700 hectares (142,000 acres) at the mouth of the Guadalquivir river. Millions of birds use Doñana as a vital stopover during the long migration from northern Europe to Africa. Many other species breed here, or live year round. Golden eagles wheel overhead, lynx hunt amongst the rugged undergrowth.

P. SANCHO-MATA/ICEX

The park's main reception center is located at Acebuche, a few kilometers from Matalascañas. From here you can join a tour through the park in four-wheel-drive vehicles.

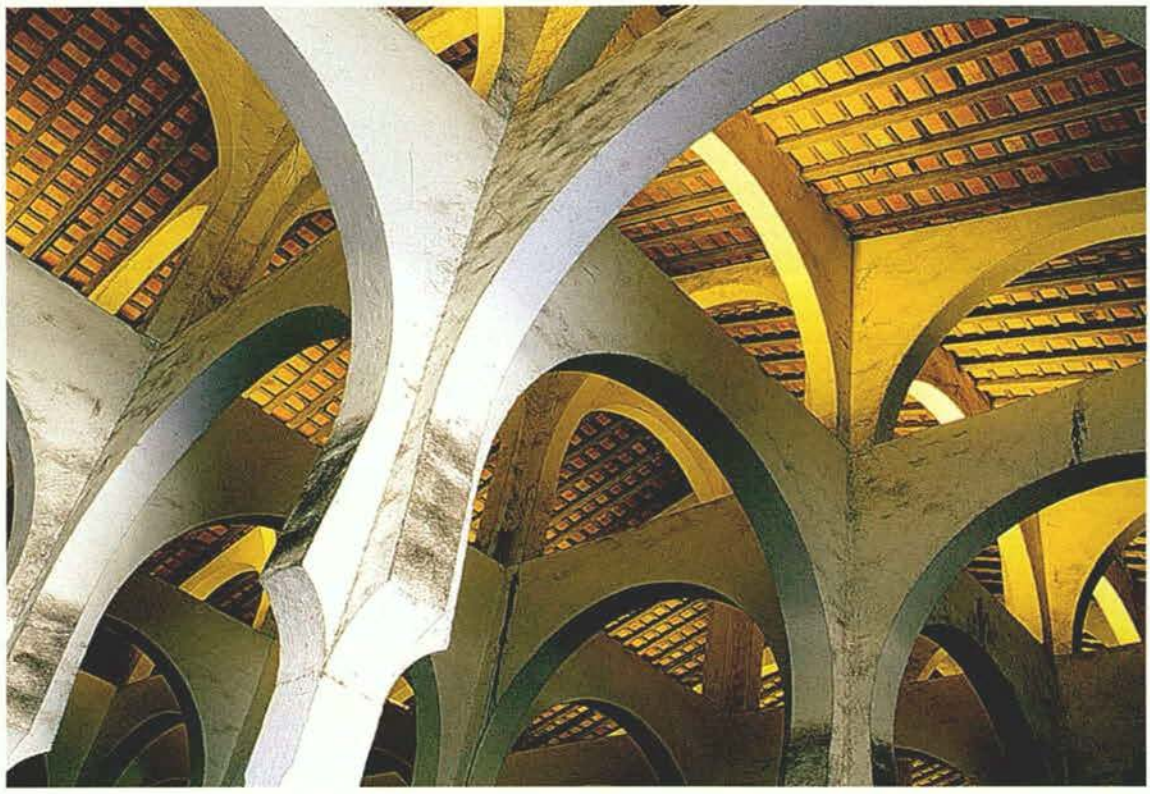
Heading north, we arrive at Almonte, at the edge of Doñana. It was a shepherd from this village who, in the 13th century, stumbled across an image of the Virgin concealed in the hollow of a tree. A shrine was built on the spot, in honor of the Virgen del Rocío—Our Lady of the Dew. Every year at Whitsuntide, around a million people converge on the shrine to honor the virgin in the three-day Romería del Rocío, which combines religious fervor with all the color of an Andalusian fiesta.

It's a short drive from Almonte to Bollullos Par del Condado, the winemaking capital of Huelva. The main street of the town is lined with barn-like establishments offering local wine, ham, sausage, and cooked shrimp by the ton. For a preview of the local winemaking scene, visit the Casa del Vino, a small white building at the northern exit of the town. The products of all the region's wineries are on display here. You can sample and buy local wine, and they will also supply you with maps and brochures.

The first winery on our list is the family-owned Bodegas Andrade. Visitors are treated to an audiovisual show explaining the winery's history before stepping into the aging cellars to sample the bodega's products. Outside, there is a large corral where guests are treated to a demonstration of Andalusian horsemanship.

Like the other wineries in Huelva, Bodegas Andrade produce a classic oloroso, Doceañero, as well as a lighter *pálido* wine, but above all a young white in the new style, Castillo de Andrade. With the reputation of Huelva whites firmly established, it was only a matter of time before vintners started considering new variations on the theme. The Nuestra Señora del Rocío wine cooperative in Almonte, for instance, now makes Andalusia's only sparkling wine, Raigal. For its part, Bodegas Andrade are excited about their latest

Sanlúcar de Barrameda is known above all for two things: its giant shrimps and its manzanilla, a type of sherry made here alone.



High vaulted ceilings, like in "La Mezquita" of Domecq, keep summer temperatures down; the windows oriented to the westerly winds ensure good ventilation.

wine, a *vino de aguja*, a petillant white with a certain amount of natural carbonic gas. There are other interesting developments taking shape at the region's largest wine cooperative, Vinícola del Condado, also in Bollullos.

The bodega's young oenologist, Juan Alfonso Ojeda, was part of the team that helped develop the first young Huelva white. Now Vinícola del Condado is involved in a publicly-funded project that could change the face of winemaking in Andalusia. Four hectares in each of the region's eight provinces have been set aside to be planted with introduced grape varieties, ten red and ten white. The idea is to see which ones grow best in the different terroirs of southern Spain, with a view to coming up with new blends for table wines. Meanwhile, Vinícola del Condado makes a dry white, Privilegio del Condado, and a semidry Don Condado, as well as a variety of traditional fortified wines.

Before leaving Huelva, make a short detour to the town of Niebla to admire the spectacular, well-preserved medieval walls which encircle the town. For centuries Niebla was a strategic fortress, protecting routes that carried the rich minerals mined in the Huelva mountains. It was virtually impregnable, and the Moorish town fell to conquering Christians in 1257 only after a nine-month siege in which gunpowder was used in Spain for the first time.

From Niebla, heading back towards Seville, the highway takes us across the impressive Quinto Centenario suspension bridge just south of Seville, speeding us towards our next destination, one whose name is synonymous with fine wine: Jerez de la Frontera.

Into the Heart of Sherry Country

Jerez is known as the birthplace of the Carthusian breed of horse, a cross between the flight Arab steed and the sturdy Spanish horse. It is also the undisputed capital of pure flamenco (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 43), which can be experienced in the numerous *peñas*, or clubs, in its Santiago quarter. But above all, Jerez is known for its wine. Yet as we approach Jerez, the famous Osborne bull looms reassuringly on

The old "botas" in one of the bodegas of Pedro Domecq with autographs of historical VIPs.

the horizon, but aside from that there is nothing to indicate that we are in one of Spain's most famous wine-growing regions. You start to wonder: where are all the vineyards?

There are in fact more than 10,000 hectares (25,000 acres) of vineyards in the Jerez region, but to see them, we must turn off the main road and travel along the country lanes that connect the towns of Jerez, Sanlúcar de Barrameda, and El Puerto de Santa María. Here, on gently sloping land, grow the Palomino grapes that are the essence of sherry (See *Spain Gourmetour* No. 35).

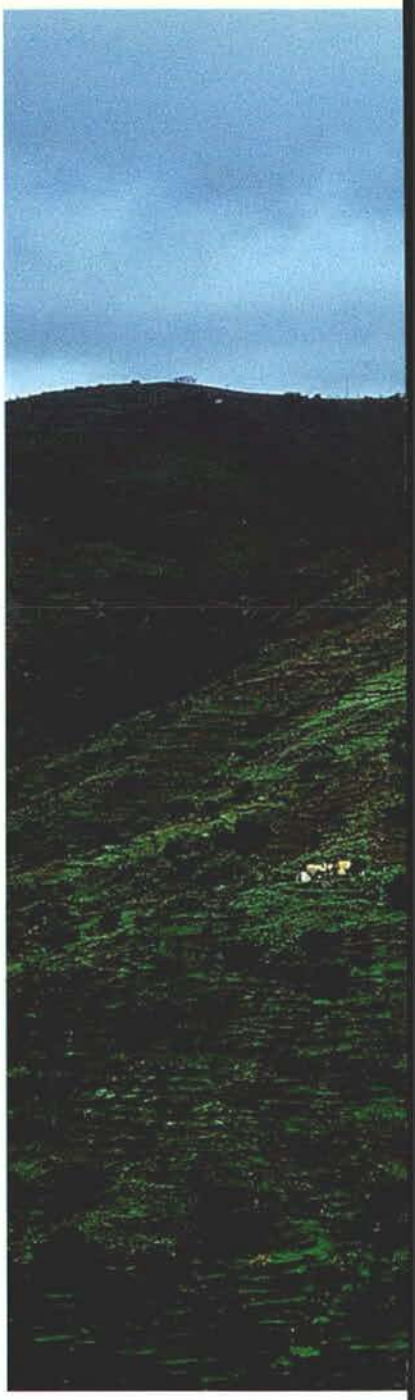
The soil is blindingly white: this is the chalky *albariza* which is part of the secret of sherry. It has the quality of soaking up and storing water from the torrential rainfalls of autumn and winter, providing nourishment to the vine throughout the long, hot summer.

Grown elsewhere, the Palomino is a rather undistinguished grape, but due to the happy combination of soil and the prevailing humidity thanks to Jerez's proximity to the ocean, a miracle happens in the wine cellars of Jerez. A yeast present on the grape skins flourishes, producing a protective layer called the *flor* which prevents the wine from oxidizing, resulting in sherry's exceptional dryness and aroma.

Each bodega has its legends and its special charm. Most cellars welcome visitors, and constitute the main tourist attraction in the town. The Gonzalez Byass winery alone welcomes 100,000 visitors each year.

A typical visit goes something like this: first, you watch a short film or audio-visual show. Next, a guide leads you through the rows upon rows of casks—many of them signed by illustrious visitors in the past—explaining the *criadera* and *solera* system (see Glossary on page 150) used to blend different vintages, and the difference between finos, *amontillados* and olorosos. The tour ends in the *sacristía*—the sacristy—with a tasting of the various wines, expertly drawn from the barrel by the *venenciador*, using a cup attached to a slender rod (see article on page 148).

Visiting a wine cellar in Jerez is an education. Visit three, and you're an expert. Visit six, and you come away with the feeling that there is an awful lot more to learn about sherry.



The Axarquía is a breathtaking country, with gleaming white villages clinging to hillsides. The area is famous for its sweet Muscatel raisins.

The Gonzalez Byass and Domecq complexes in Jerez resemble miniature cities. Their citizens are the tens of thousands of old oak sherry butts that repose in vast cellars, each cask containing 500 liters. Everything is designed to keep that vital flor happy. High vaulted ceilings keep summer temperatures down, the windows are oriented to the westerly winds to ensure good ventilation, the cellars are hosed down regularly. Even the lush gardens that surround the wineries owe more to a need to maintain the proper microclimate than to a bent for botany.

At Gonzalez Byass, you view such hallowed cellars as Los Apóstoles and La Constancia. You might even catch a glimpse of the famous sherry-sipping mice, which have returned after a few year's absence following some repair work in the cellar (a glass and a miniature ladder are set out for their indulgence). You will learn how a cask from the private supply of dry sherry kept by José de la Peña, the founder's uncle, was shipped to England, giving birth to another legend: Tío Pepe.

At Domecq—at 268 years the oldest winery in Jerez—they'll also tell you about how an undelivered shipment of wine spirits originally destined for Holland was left to mellow in old sherry casks and metamorphosed into the first Brandy de Jerez in 1874: Fundador. You'll also see the touching memorial to the late José Ignacio Domecq, who was armed with a formidable proboscis and an uncanny knack for using it: no one could sniff out the qualities of a good wine better than he.

Sadly, this could be your last chance to visit another classic winery, Williams and Humbert, home of Dry Sack. Sprawling over several blocks of prime real estate next to the Jerez bullring, the old cellars are being dismantled.

"If only the walls of the place could talk," remarks Juan Manuel Espinosa, the Williams and Humbert PR officer, not without a hint of nostalgia, as he gestures at the Williams and Humbert sacristía. Fortunately, this part of the winery will remain: it is being ceded to the Jerez town hall, which plans to convert it into a much-needed wine museum.

Meanwhile, the Williams and Humbert operation will shift to a large plant just outside Jerez. Which brings us to another aspect of sherry, one the visitor rarely gets to see. For all the mysticism and romantic aura of Jerez, there is a modern, hi-tech side to winemaking here. The wineries in town are aging cellars. The pressing, fermenting, initial aging, and bottling usually take place in modern plants outside the city.

A good example of the modern face of sherry is the sprawling Rancho Croft. Although the story of the Croft port and sherry company goes back to 1678, there is nothing old fashioned about their Jerez operation. With pinpoint precision, the grape harvest undergoes a highly mechanized process to provide the raw material for the winery's labels. The only aspect they haven't improved on is the indispensable criadera and solera aging in vast cellars.

From Jerez, our route takes us to the bay of Cádiz and Puerto de Santa María, the port from which sherry was traditionally shipped, and home to more legendary names. Laid out in a businesslike grid pattern, El Puerto is known for its 13th-century castle and its attractive bullring, but most visitors head straight for the famous Ribera del Marisco—Shellfish Row. Here, in a dozen establishments, crustaceans of every shape and size are cooked to perfection to be eaten at tables on the sidewalk outside.

The proper accompaniment is, needless to say, fino del Puerto—the dry local sherry. The two largest bodegas are Terry—a visit to their wine cellars includes a colorful display of Andalusian horse-drawn carriages—and Osborne, whose elegant reception center has the air of an Edwardian gentlemen's club. Being closer to the ocean, Puerto de Santa María is that much more humid. The flor, which tends to diminish or even die out in the hot summer and cold winter months further inland, lasts longer here, and so the wines are a touch drier and paler. But to sample the driest of the dry, we must head for the third town in the Sherry trio: Sanlúcar de Barrameda, stand-

Antequera is known for its outstanding number of monuments. In the background is the "Rock of the Lovers."

The town of Niebla, which for centuries was a strategic fortress, is encircled by the spectacular, well-preserved medieval walls.

ing across from the Doñana Park at the mouth of the Guadalquivir river.

Sanlúcar is known above all for two things: its giant shrimps, the langostinos de Sanlúcar, and its manzanilla, a type of sherry made here alone.

Connoisseurs claim that there's a hint of sea in manzanilla, and no better place to check this out than in the town's oldest winery, the family-owned Bodegas Delgado Zuleta, whose origins go back to 1719. They have 14 different cellars scattered around the upper part of town—where they are exposed to sea breezes unhindered by surrounding buildings—including the original cellar, known simply as La Casa because it once doubled as the family home. Here we learn that the crystal clear, dry manzanilla sold elsewhere is different to that which they enjoy drinking themselves: they prefer manzanilla pasada, which ages longer and is subtly darker than the other kind, with a perceptible marine tang to it. Zuleta's La Goya is the town's best-selling wine. For a real treat, try their very old amontillado, Quo Vadis, which is all the rage among knowledgeable wine lovers. Housed in a dozen large buildings clustered around Sanlúcar's Santiago castle, the biggest of the town's cellars is Barbadillo, which has been in business since 1821 and was the first company to ship its products under the generic name manzanilla (in 1827). Yet for most of its history it served mainly as a supplier and aging cellar for other wineries. Thus, when it decided to market wine under its own label a decade ago, it found that its competitors had a head start.

The winery started to toy with the idea of making a young white wine with the Palomino grape. This would have been inconceivable a few generations ago, but with the new technology available, Barbadillo decided it was worth a try. The result was one of the success stories of Spanish winemaking: today, their fresh, light Castillo de San Diego is the best-selling white wine in Spain.

The best place to down a well-chilled bottle of Castillo de San Diego is the Bajo de Guía, a district of Sanlúcar on the banks of the Guadalquivir. Every other house here is a restaurant, serving shrimp, lobsters, oysters, and every sort of fish imaginable.

COLUMBUS TOOK WITH HIM HIS DREAMS OF DISCOVERY. HIS CREW TOOK MORE PRACTICAL THINGS, INCLUDING A GOOD SUPPLY OF HUELVA WINE, THE FIRST SPANISH WINE TO BE EXPORTED TO AMERICA.

For Dessert, Málaga

For the final leg of our journey, Málaga, we have several options, all of them scenic. We could take the coastal route, rounding the tip of Europe at Tarifa, with Africa looming across the Strait of Gibraltar. We could take the shorter route through bull ranch country, passing Medina-Sidonia and Alcalá de los Gazules.

A third option is the mountain route, which will take us to some of the picturesque white villages of Andalusia. Leaving Jerez behind, our first stop is Arcos de la Frontera, perched spectacularly on a cliff. For one of the best views in Spain, head for the main square, at the highest part of the village. Soak in the scenery as you sip a glass of chilled sherry on the terrace of the palatial *parador* hotel.

On the road to Ronda, before entering the province of Málaga, it is worth making a short detour to Grazalema, another classic white pueblo. Little known to most visitors, Grazalema and its adjoining natural park is the rainiest spot in Spain. These towering peaks trap the clouds rolling in from the Atlantic, creating a unique microclimate for the rare fir tree, *abies pinsapo*, which can only thrive in humid conditions at high altitudes. Thanks to these sheltering mountains, the coast of Málaga to the east enjoys the fair year-round climate which has turned it into one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe.

A half-hour journey brings us to Ronda, overlooking its dizzying gorge, the Tajo de Ronda. This town of elegant palaces and churches is known as the cradle of bullfighting and its *plaza de toros* is one of the oldest in Spain. To reach the coast, we follow the old smugglers route through forests of cork oaks. More postcard villages await along the way: Gaucín, Jimena de la Frontera, the old town of Castellar rising impossibly atop a rocky outcrop... Finally we reach the Mediterranean coast and, heading eastward, we take the two-kilometer road inland to Manilva, the capital of one of the three separate zones that constitute the Málaga wine region—the others are the Axarquía, a mountainous region east of the city of Málaga, and the plains around Antequera, in the north of the province where the predominant grape is the Pedro Ximénez. Each of the three has totally different growing conditions. Manilva, being closest to the Atlantic, has more humid weather and its soil is richer. As a result, the Muscatel grapes grown here swell to an enormous size. Although a small quantity is destined for wine, most of the crop is sold as eating grapes. Andalusians will pay any amount of money for a bunch of juicy, sweet Muscatels, and many flock here for the harvest festival on the first weekend in September, when local farmers bring their biggest bunches of grapes to be auctioned off to the crowd.

The regulations stipulate that Málaga wine must be aged in the city of Málaga, and it is there we are headed next. On its leafy Alameda is one of Málaga's oldest institutions: the Antigua Casa de Guardia, a small wine tavern not far from the colorful main market of Málaga. Wines are sold directly from the barrel at the Antigua Casa, which has been a popular watering hole for the last 150 years.

Málaga's wine trade goes back to Roman times. Its winemaker's guild, the oldest in Spain, was established in 1487, and for centuries Málaga wines made with Muscatel and Pedro Ximénez were among Spain's most successful exports, but the phylloxera plague of last century and the increasing popularity of drier wines sent the region into a slow decline. The closure a few years ago of the city's most classic winery, Scholtz, saddened both friends and competitors.

Fortunately for wine lovers, a handful of wineries carry on with the tradition. One typical example is Hijos de José Suárez, better known by its picturesque nickname: Quitapenas, meaning something that removes sorrow, a fairly accurate description of the effect of an 18% proof Málaga wine.

Some 30,000 annual visitors to their bodega in the crusty fishermen's quarter of El Palo could well feel they've stepped back in time at this winery in which grapes were still tread by foot as recently as 1989 (and it only stopped then due to E.U. regulations). They produce the full classic range of Málaga, from the basic Málaga sweet wine, aged for at least two years using the crianza and solera blending system, to longer-aged sweet wines—velvety and elegant—including one to be released this year, Viejo Abuelo 1940, which has been doing the rounds in the barrels for the last six decades.

The winery was founded in 1880 by Francisco Suárez, who had until then been a farmer in the Axarquía district east of the city. The Axarquía is a breathtaking country, with gleaming white villages clinging to hillsides. Grape growing here is a laborious business—the Muscatel vines grow on narrow terraces hacked out of the mountainside, a terrain that defies mechanization. The area is famous for its sweet Muscatel raisins. Following harvest, the grapes are spread out in rectangular beds to dry in the hot Andalusian sun. There is even a raisin museum—the Museo de la Pasa—in the village of Almáchar.

VISITING A WINE CELLAR IN JEREZ IS AN EDUCATION. VISIT THREE, AND YOU'RE AN EXPERT. VISIT SIX, AND YOU COME AWAY WITH THE FEELING THAT THERE IS AN AWFUL LOT MORE TO LEARN ABOUT SHERRY.

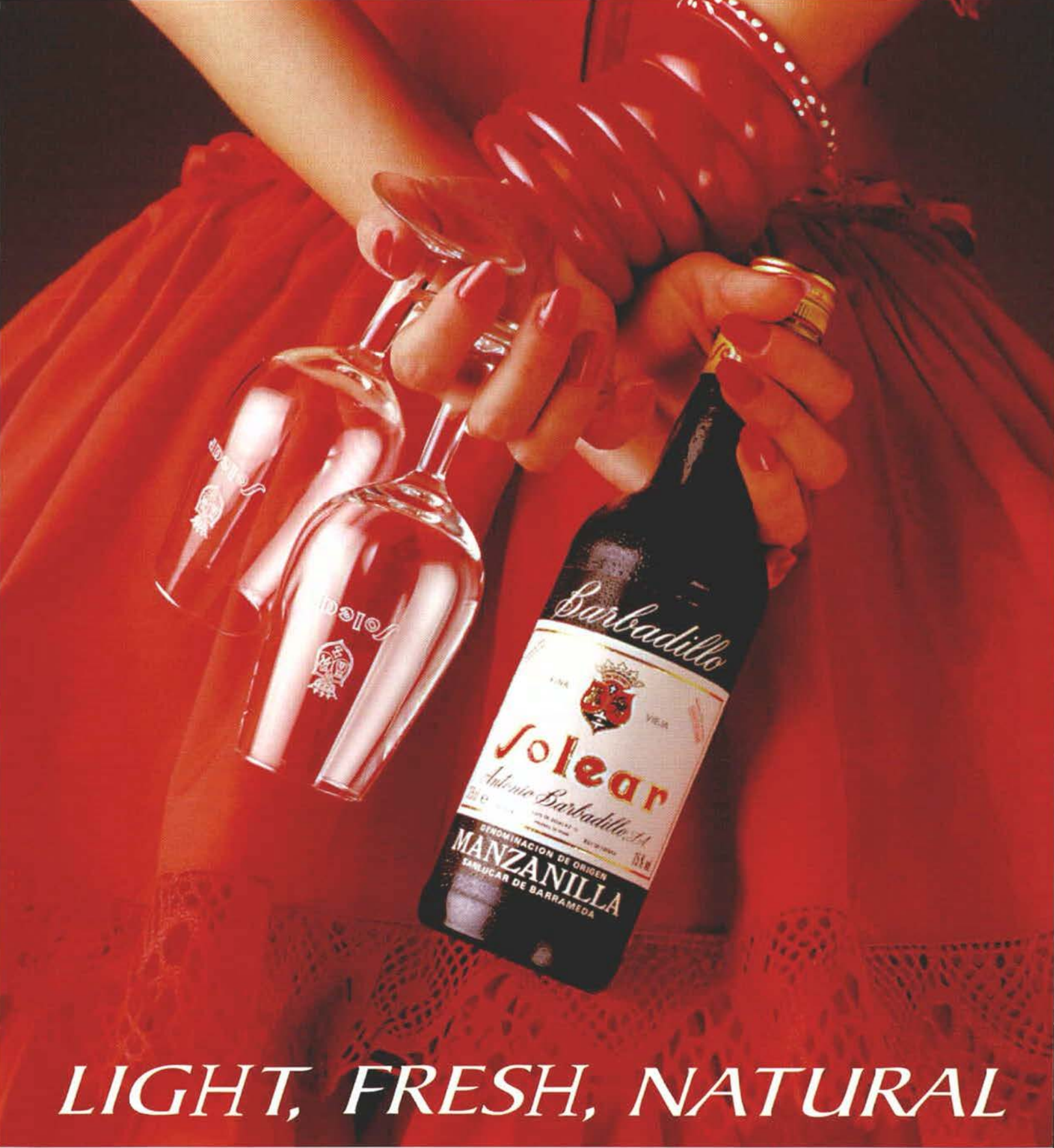
The best-selling Málaga wine—indeed, the best-selling sweet wine in Spain—is Málaga Virgen, made by the López Hermanos winery. If Quitapenas offers a vision of the past, this bodega is the best place to see where the future of Málaga wine lies. Five years ago they started producing what they believe will be the next generation of Málagas: it is a Muscatel varietal, Cartojal, a pale cream which unlike most other wines of this type has no added grape concentrate and contains only the sugar from the original grapes. Surprisingly complex and intriguing, it makes for an interesting chilled aperitif, and goes well with dishes such as foie gras.

López Hermanos are supplied by wine growers in all three of Málaga's subzones, and a few years ago acquired their own vineyard near Antequera, 60 kilometers (40 miles) north of Málaga. Aside from being a town with an outstanding number of monuments, Antequera is known for its dolmens—megalithic constructions fashioned out of immense stone slabs—and two nearby natural wonders, the weird rock formations of El Torcal, and the salt lagoon of Fuentepiedra, the major breeding ground for the greater flamingo. A scant kilometer from the lagoon is the López Hermanos vineyard. Here, on a flat terrain that is chilly in winter, baking hot in summer, flourishes the Pedro Ximénez grape (named after one Pero Ximen, a Spanish soldier said to have brought the original vines back from the Rhine in Germany in the 17th century). Following harvest, the grapes are laid out in *paseros* to gently toast in the sun, inducing the partial raisining that results in the elegant sweetness of a good, dark Málaga, the perfect way to end a meal, and our tour as well.

If we headed north from Antequera, we would arrive at the forth denominación de origen area in Andalusia, Montilla-Moriles in the province of Cordoba, but that is another story we'll save for a future issue. For now, let's head back to Seville. We still have all those tapa bars to visit, remember?

Mark Little *is an American-born journalist based in southern Spain. He was editor of the English-language* Lookout Magazine *for many years, and is now a freelance writer contributing to publications and guide books about Spain.*

See Main Exporters on page 140 and Recipes on page 134.



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Early season strawberries swell to incredible size in the greenhouses of Huelva.

PRODUCTS: CULINARY TREATS

The story goes that when Allah created the world, he gave each region four wishes. In addition to clear skies and fair women, Andalusia wished for a sea full of fish and ripe fruit.

The gods were indeed generous with this country. Rich soil and abundant sunshine conspire to produce bountiful crops, many of them introduced by the Moors themselves, including almonds, oranges, and sugar cane. Other crops were introduced even earlier, by the Phoenicians, such as the olive which forms the basis of the Andalusian diet. Modern agriculture has added to this bounty—Andalusia now grows avocados, mangos and papaws. Early season strawberries swell to incredible size in the greenhouses of Huelva.

Many of the most typical products of the region are directly related to the centuries-long winemaking tradition: Jerez produces most of Spain's brandy, aged in sherry casks, which gives it a unique aroma. Vinegar produced from sherry is exceptionally flavorful. In the days when egg whites were used to clarify wine, the yolks were donated to convents where nuns combined them with almonds, honey, flour, aniseed, and other flavorings according to recipes dating from Moorish times. The vast cork oak forests that extend between Ronda and the Strait of Gibraltar are stripped to provide the corks for Spanish wines.

In Málaga, the juicy Muscatel grapes which don't go into wine are dried in the sun to make raisins which have been enjoyed for centuries, and which are now marketed under their own Denomination of Origin. Figs, another local specialty, are likewise sun dried to produce sweet *pan de higos.*

In the mountains around Grazalema, goat's milk is used to make fresh cheeses. The prized Iberian pigs which forage amongst the oak trees of Andalusia provide the famous cured Ibérico hams of Huelva, and a full range of sausages. Down on the coast, the tuna which migrate from the Atlantic into the Mediterranean in spring are netted off Barbate (Cádiz) and their dark meat is cured to produce *mojama*—the marine cousin of mountain cured ham.

A gastronomic shopping spree in Andalusia would not be complete without a bottle of extra virgin olive oil, that health giving, flavorsome liquid gold, made from the Hojiblanca olive of Antequera, the Picuda of Cordoba or the Picual of Jaén.

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The impression on entering the Parador of Arcos is positively palatial. The most spectacular rooms are those on the cliff side of the hotel.

PARADORES

CASA DEL CORREGIDOR:

KING FOR A DAY IN ARCOS

If you had to limit your "Route of the White Pueblos" to one village, the choice would be obvious: Arcos de la Frontera, in the Cádiz sierra, is a cubist's dream of gleamingly white houses and narrow medieval streets clustered at the edge of a cliff. This strategic location is explained in the sobriquet, "de la Frontera." Arcos, like the similarly-surnamed Jerez, Jimena, Vejer and others, stands at what was once the frontier between the Christian territory and the Moorish kingdom of Granada, which weren't always on the best of terms.

At the highest point in the village is the main square. One side of the square opens out onto the cliff edge, rising hundreds of feet above the valley. At the further end is the Gothic-Mudejar church of Santa María de la Asunción. Flanking it is the town hall, encrusted in the castle walls, and across from this is the Casa del Corregidor, the Arcos parador.

Although the brochure mentions (somewhat apologetically) that the building is not of as high a birth as some of the other establishments in the parador chain, the impression on entering is positively palatial, with its ample, ochre-painted public rooms and its attractive inner courtyard. Rooms are spacious, and tasteful use has been made of the clay floor tiles and colorful wall tiles so beloved to Andalusians. Some rooms overlook the square with its church and the castle walls beyond, but the most spectacular are those on the cliff side of the parador, where you can enjoy breakfast on your private terrace while hawks cavort below. You start to feel like a cosseted member of the aristocracy.

To truly feel like a grandee of Spain, ease into one of the green wicker chairs next to the enormous picture window at one end of the parador bar lounge. While you nibble a plate of enormous pickled olives and sip a sherry *fino* or an *oloroso*, the valley of the Guadalete river spreads at your feet.

Just as you're finishing your evening aperitif, a knight comes forth to issue a challenge. But this knight wears a chef's uniform rather than a suit of armor, and his is a challenge you'll gladly accept. The parador's chef de cuisine tempts you to indulge yourself by savoring your way through the 11 courses that make up his Gastronomic Menu, a sampling of local dishes.

Who could say no to such an offer? To start with there might be Cádiz-style clams and Arcos-style eggplant, followed by Algeciras-style artichokes and Chiclana-style sirloin, and for dessert, cakes with honey and goat's cheese from Grazalema: a wonderful way to become acquainted with the cuisine of Cádiz, and the perfect excuse to try some of the region's fine wines, including quality table wines, which, in a novel venture, are being produced in the vineyards of Arcos itself.

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Fax: 1/813/ 248.3260

The perfect companion for the typical Andalusian seafood is a copita *of chilled manzanilla.*

ANDALUSIAN MENUS

If you are lucky enough to be in the Jerez area at lunch time, you have a wide range of excellent restaurants to choose from—this part of Andalusia is renowned for good eating. And if you want to turn lunch into a learning experience as well, head for the Mesa Redonda. Its proprietor and chef, José Antonio Romero Valdespino, has devoted his life to seeking out traditional recipes once cooked in the homes of aristocratic Jerez families in the genteel days of large kitchen staffs. Old cookbooks and notebooks full of handwritten recipes line the shelves in the anteroom of his small restaurant.

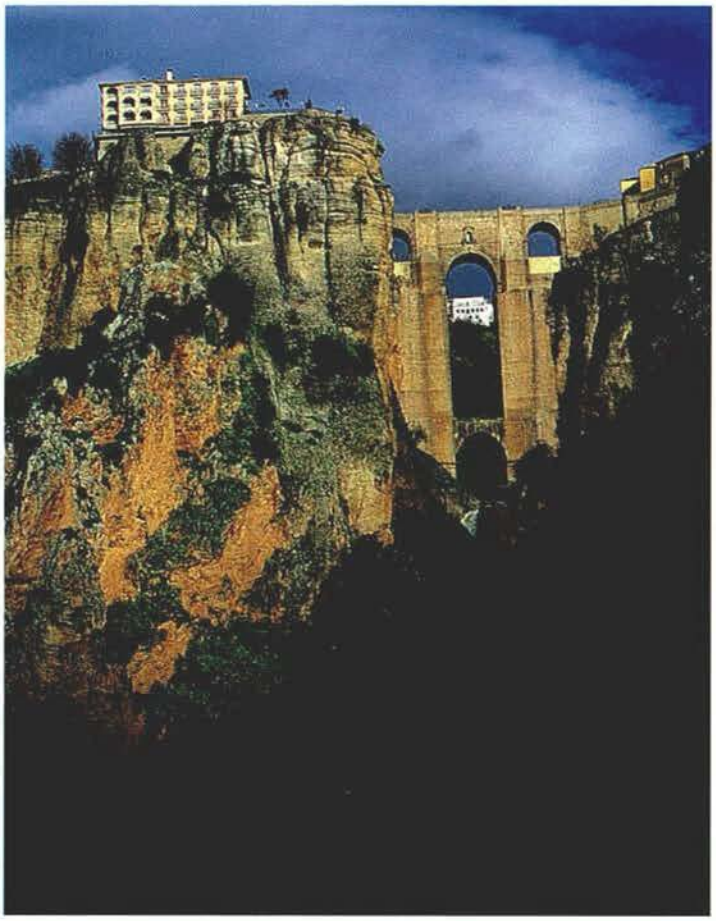
José Antonio will explain how Andalusian cuisine has been shaped by numerous influences—from the Moors who lived here for many centuries, to the English families who settled in Jerez to found the great sherry dynasties. He will also tell you about the importance of wine as a flavor-enhancing ingredient in addition to accompaniment for food. In this respect, he reminds you: "Only use good wine when cooking. A spoonful of quality wine will lend more flavor to a dish than a whole bottle of the inferior stuff."

Andalusia, blessed with the freshest of raw materials from sea and land, has a rich culinary heritage, yet it was only recently that the region's dishes made it onto restaurant menus. They were relegated to the home kitchen until a handful of chefs from elsewhere, such as the late Paul Schiff at his La Hacienda in Marbella or the Basque José Mari Egaña of Seville's Egaña-Oriza, demonstrated the heights to which Andalusian dishes could be taken.

With such fresh ingredients, some of the best preparations are the simplest: prawns grilled with coarse salt, sardines spitted on sticks and roasted on the beach, fresh anchovies batter fried in quality olive oil or marinated in vinegar with garlic and parsley. From the land, there's fresh Iberian pork, the whole gamut of game, lamb and kid, kidneys braised in sherry, enormous manzanilla olives, crisp vegetables, and a cornucopia of fruit.

Take a few basic ingredients—bread, almonds, garlic, vinegar, and oil—and you have one of the world's greatest cold soups, *ajo blanco*, delicious served with Muscatel grapes. Not to mention that gastronomic monument, *gazpacho*, or its thicker cousin, the *porra de Antequera*, served with diced ham and egg.

Ronda, overlooking its dizzying gorge, the Tajo de Ronda. This town is known as the cradle of bullfighting.



TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISITING BODEGAS

Many *bodegas* have well-organized departments in charge of tours. Even those that don't generally welcome visitors. In either case, you should always phone ahead to make an appointment. Tours are usually available on weekday mornings, although some cellars also open for weekend visits. Some wineries charge a token fee, but it is rarely more than 300 or 400 pesetas. Bodegas are closed during the month of August.

DENOMINATION OF ORIGIN OFFICE

Condado de Huelva D.O.
Antonio Machado 8-1º
21710 Bollullos Par del Condado (Huelva)
Tel: (34) 955 410 322
Fax: (34) 955 410 218

Jerez-Xérès-Sherry y Manzanilla de Sanlúcar de Barramdea D.O.
Av. Alvaro Domecq 2
11405 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 332 050
Fax: (34) 956 338 908

Málaga D.O.
Fernando Camino 2 - 3º 3
29016 Málaga
Tel: (34) 952 227 990
Fax: (34) 952 227 990

FEATURED BODEGAS

Condado de Huelva D.O.: Bodegas Andrade, Avenida Coronación 35, 21710 Bollullos Par del Condado
Tel: (34) 959 410 106
Fax: (34) 959 411 305

Vinícola del Condado, Calle San José 2, 21710 Bollullos Par del Condado
Tel: (34) 959 410 261
Fax: (34) 959 410 171

Jerez-Xérès-Sherry y Manzanilla de Sanlúcar de Barrameda D.O.

Domecq
San Ildefonso 3
11404 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 151 500
Fax: (34) 956 338 674

González Byass, Manuel María González 12
11403 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 357 016
Fax: (34) 956 357 046

Croft, Crta. N-IV km 636,3
11407 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 306 600
Fax: (34) 956 303 707

Williams and Humbert
Nuño de Cañas 1
11402 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 331 300
Fax: (34) 956 310 949

Barbadillo, Luis de Eguilaz 11, 11540 Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 360 894
Fax: (34) 956 365 103

Delgado Zuleta, Ctra. Sanlúcar-Chipiona Km. 1.5
11540 Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 360 133
Fax: (34) 956 360 780

Osborne, Fernán Caballero 7
11500 El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 855 211
Fax: (34) 956 853 402

Terry, Santísima Trinidad 2
11500 El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz)
Tel: (34) 956 483 000
Fax: (34) 956 858 474
Málaga D.O.
Hijos de J. Suárez Villalba (Quitapenas), Juan Sebastián Elcano 149
29017 Málaga
Tel: (34) 952 290 129
López Hermanos, Calle Canadá 10, El Viso
29006 Málaga
Tel: (34) 952 319 454
Fax: (34) 952 359 819

WINE FESTIVALS

The biggest wine harvest festival in Andalusia is the **Fiesta de Otoño** in Jerez de la Frontera. A full program of sporting events and cultural activities revolves around this celebration, which takes place over four weeks in September and October. The highlight is the blessing of the harvest and the symbolic treading of grapes in front of the Jerez cathedral on September 21.
Other wine-related fiestas in the region include:
Feria de la Manzanilla, in Sanlúcar de Barrameda during the last week in May.
La Noche del Vino (Wine Night), on August 15, in the Axarquía village of Cómpeta (Málaga). The earthy local wine is distributed free among fiesta goers.
The **Fiesta de la Vendimia** in Manilva (Málaga) takes place on the first weekend in September.
Other wine harvest festivals are held during September in **Mollina** (Málaga) on the first weekend in September, **Bollullos Par del Condado** (Huelva) in the second week, **La Palma del Condado** (Huelva) in the third week.
Also during the third weekend in September the village of El Borge (Málaga) holds its **Fiesta de la Pasa**, celebrating the raisins of the Axarquía region.

PRINCIPAL SIGHTS AND VISITS

EL CONDADO DE HUELVA
Monasterio Santa María de la Rábida. The 15th-century Franciscan monastery where Columbus sought shelter when he first arrived in Spain. Open Tues.-Sun. 10 a.m.-1 p.m., 4-7 p.m. La Rábida, 21819 Palos de la Frontera (Huelva).
Tel: (34) 959 350 411
Muelle de las Carabelas. Reproduction of a 15th-century port with copies of the Niña, Pinta, and Santa María. Open Tues.-Sun. 10 a.m.-2 p.m., 5-9 p.m. La Rábida, 21819 Palos de la Frontera (Huelva).
Tel: (34) 959 530 597
Moguer. This pretty town was once a seaport (many of Columbus' crew came from here) but has since become landlocked by silting up of the Río Tinto river, and is devoted to growing the luscious strawberries of Huelva. It is known as the home town of the Nobel Prize-winning poet, Juan Ramón Jiménez, author of *Platero and I*, whose home is now a museum. Open Mon.-Sat. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. and 5-8 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Casa Museo Juan Ramón Jiménez, Calle Juan Ramón Jiménez, 21800 Moguer (Huelva).
Tel. (34) 959 372 148
Doñana National Park. One of Europe's greatest natural treasures, home to eagles, wild boar, and hundreds of different bird species. Tours organized from the Acebuche Reception Center, Ctra. H-612 Almonte-Matalascañas.
Tel: (34) 959 448 711
Niebla. Medieval walled city. Information from the Oficina de Turismo, Avda. Alemania 12, 21001 Niebla (Huelva).
Tel: (34) 959 257 403

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA
Royal School of Equestrian Art. Every Thursday at noon, show of the Dancing Horses of Andalucía, a masterful demonstration of horsemanship. You can also see rehearsals other days of the week from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Real Escuela de Arte Ecuestre, Avda. Duque de Abrantes, 11407 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz).
Tel: (34) 956 311 111
Andalusian Flamenco Center. In the 18th-century Pemartín Palace, a research center with documents, photos and, recordings related to flamenco. They can also give you a list of Jerez *peñas* (clubs) where you can listen to flamenco. Centro Andaluz de Flamenco, Plaza San Juan 1, 11403 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz).
Tel: (34) 956 349 265
Monasterio de La Cartuja. 15th-century Carthusian monastery on the outskirts of Jerez. It was monks here who developed the Cartujano breed of Andalusian horse. La Cartuja, Ctra. Cádiz-Los Barrios Km 5, Jerez de la Frontera, Cádiz. This is still a working monastery, and access is restricted to the exterior. Tues., Thurs., and Sat. 8 a.m.-6 p.m.
Clock Museum. A collection of 300 rare clocks from the 18th and 19th centuries, all of them working. Museo de Relojes, Calle Cervantes 3, Jerez de la Frontera, Cádiz. Tel: (34) 956 182 100 Mon.-Sat., 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA:
San Marcos Castle. 13th-century fortress. Castillo de San Marcos, Plaza Alfonso X El Sabio, El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz). Sat. 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Bullring. One of the largest and most attractive bullrings in Spain, opened in 1880. Real Plaza de Toros, Plaza Elías Ahuján, El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz). Mon.-Sat., 11 a.m.-2 p.m., 6-8 p.m.

SANLÚCAR DE BARRAMEDA:
Fábrica de Hielo. This former ice factory now serves as a visitor's center for the Doñana National Park across the river. Exhibitions are devoted to the park's wildlife and the history of the civilizations on the banks of the Guadalquivir. Bajo de Guía, 11540 Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz).
Tel: (34) 956 381 635
Real Fernando. Named after the first steamboat to sail the Guadalquivir in 1817, this boat takes you on a four-hour trip upriver, with stops at the park on the further shore. Departs mornings and afternoons in summer, mornings only in winter, from the Bajo de Guía.
Tel: (34) 956 363 813

MÁLAGA:
Alcazaba. Moorish fortress and palace. Alcazaba, Calle Alcazabilla 1, Málaga. Tues.-Fri. 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 5-8 p.m. Sat.-Sun., 10 a.m.-1 p.m.
La Concepción Botanical Garden. Started as a private garden 150 years ago, a col-

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lection of rare palm trees and other plants. Jardín Botánico La Concepción, Ctra. de las Pedrizas, Km. 166, Málaga. 9:30 a.m.-9 p.m.
Tel: (34) 952 252 148
Museum of Arts and Crafts. Devoted to traditional crafts of the province. Museo de Arte y Tradiciones Populares, Pasillo de Santa Isabel 10, Málaga.
Tel. (34) 952 217 137
Tues.-Sat. 10 a.m.-1 p.m. and 4-7 p.m.

EATING AND SHOPPING FOR FOOD

MARKETS

For a closeup look at the generosity of Andalusia's sea, there's nothing better than to watch the fish auction at Bonanza, 4 km. from Sanlúcar de Barrameda, in the afternoon at around 5:30 p.m. when the fishing fleet return to port and unload their catch.
Every large town has its marketplace. The Atarazanas market in Málaga is among the most colorful, with its impressive displays of fish and fresh fruit and vegetables, in addition to every spice imaginable. The main entrance is through a Moorish gate that once was part of the city walls.

CONVENTS

Convents in Andalusia specialize in sweet pastries, many of them using Moorish recipes. Recipes are based on flour, honey, almonds, and flavorings such as aniseed. The convents in Jerez are especially well known. You can buy sweet pastries and confections directly from convents including, in Jerez, the Hermanas Ermitañas (Santa María de Gracia 2), Madres Clarisas (Borja 2) and Madres Dominicanas (Espíritu Santo 9).

SHOPS

Gourmet, Valdés 34, 11500 El Puerto de Santa María. Tel: (34) 956 542 848. Fine food and wines.
La Casa del Barril, Calle Honda 3, Jerez de la Frontera. Casks, venencias, glasses and other accessories for the wine lover.
La Ibense Bornay, Ancha 1, Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Famous for its homemade ice cream.
El Corte Inglés: Club del Gourmet, Avda. Andalucía, Málaga. Tel. (34) 952 300 000. Gourmet section of the leading Spanish department store chain.
Ultramarinos La Fama, Calle Bolsa 14, 29015 Málaga. Tel: (34) 952 211 918. Good source of wines, cured hams, and other delicacies.

RESTAURANTS

HUELVA:
Parador Cristóbal Colón, Ctra. Huelva-Matalascañas Km. 24, Mazagón (Huelva). Tel: (34) 959 536 300. The restaurant of this parador hotel (see Accommodation, below) is a good place to sample some of the traditional seafood dishes of the Huelva coast. Try their Sopa Viña AB (a seafood soup thickened with mayonnaise) or the stuffed squid.

JEREZ:
La Mesa Redonda, Manuel de la Quintana 3, Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz).
Tel: (34) 956 340 069. Traditional Jerez family recipes collected by chef-owner José Antonio Romero Valdespino, served in the warm, welcoming ambience of this small, eight-table establishment. Menu changes constantly. Try one of the dishes prepared with *mojama* (dried tuna).

EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA:
El Faro del Puerto, Ctra. Rota Km. 0.5, El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz).
Tel: (34) 956 858 003. Innovative cuisine, with some interesting preparations of *urta* (a type of bream) and other locally-caught fish, at this restaurant run by a son of the family which owns the famous El Faro restaurant in Cádiz.

SANLÚCAR DE BARRAMEDA:
El Mirador de Doñana, Bajo de Guía, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz). Tel: (34) 956 364 205. A good example of the restaurants in this famous seafood quarter on the shores of the Guadalquivir. Only the freshest of seafood, in an informal setting.
Casa Bigote, Bajo de Guía, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (Cádiz). Tel: (34) 956 362 696. The most famous of the Bajo de Guía restaurants, the perfect place to enjoy a plateful of fried *acedías* (a type of small sole), or the famous shrimp of Sanlúcar.

MÁLAGA:
La Cónsula, Finca La Cónsula, 29140 Churriana (Málaga). Tel: (34) 952 622 562. Set in a palatial estate surrounded by a spectacular garden, this is the restaurant of the Málaga Hotel School, serving exceptionally creative and exquisitely presented dishes based on local ingredients. (Open only for lunch, Mon.-Fri., and reservations are an absolute must.)

RECOMMENDED ACCOMMODATION

HUELVA:
Parador Cristobal Colón, Ctra. Huelva-Matalascañas Km. 24, 21130 Mazagón (Huelva). Tel: (34) 959 536 300, Fax: (34) 959 536 228. A modern parador perched spectacularly on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic and surrounded by pine forests near the town of Mazagón, within easy reach of La Rábida and the Doñana National Park.

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA:
Hotel Jerez, Avda. Alavaro Domecq 35, 11405 Jerez de la Frontera (Cádiz).
Tel: (34) 956 300 600, Fax: (34) 956 305 001. Recently renovated, this is a classic luxury Jerez establishment, located in the residential area of the city.

EL PUERTO DE SANTA MARÍA:
Monasterio de San Miguel, Calle Larga 7, 11500 El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz). Tel: (34) 956 540 440, Fax: (34) 956 542 604. A tastefully renovated 18th-century monastery, in the very heart of the town.

ARCOS DE LA FRONTERA:
Parador de Turismo Casa del Corregidor, Plaza del Cabildo, 11630 Arcos de la Frontera (Cádiz). Tel: (34) 956 700 500, Fax: (34) 956 701 116. Comfortable lodgings in a palatial setting, with incredible views over the Guadalete river valley.

RONDA:
Parador de Turismo de Ronda, Plaza de España, 29400 Ronda (Málaga). Tel: (34) 952 877 500, Fax: (34) 952 878 188. A classical façade conceals the strikingly modern interior design, inaugurated in 1994, overlooking the spectacular Ronda gorge. The cuisine, featuring regional specialties, is justifiably famous.

MÁLAGA:
Parador de Turismo de Gibralfaro, Castillo de Gibralfaro, 29016 Málaga. Tel: (34) 952 221 902. Recently renovated, this parador is on the top of the pine-clad Gibralfaro mountain overlooking the city of Málaga, with views of the cathedral, port, and bullring.

TOURIST OFFICE PHONE NUMBERS

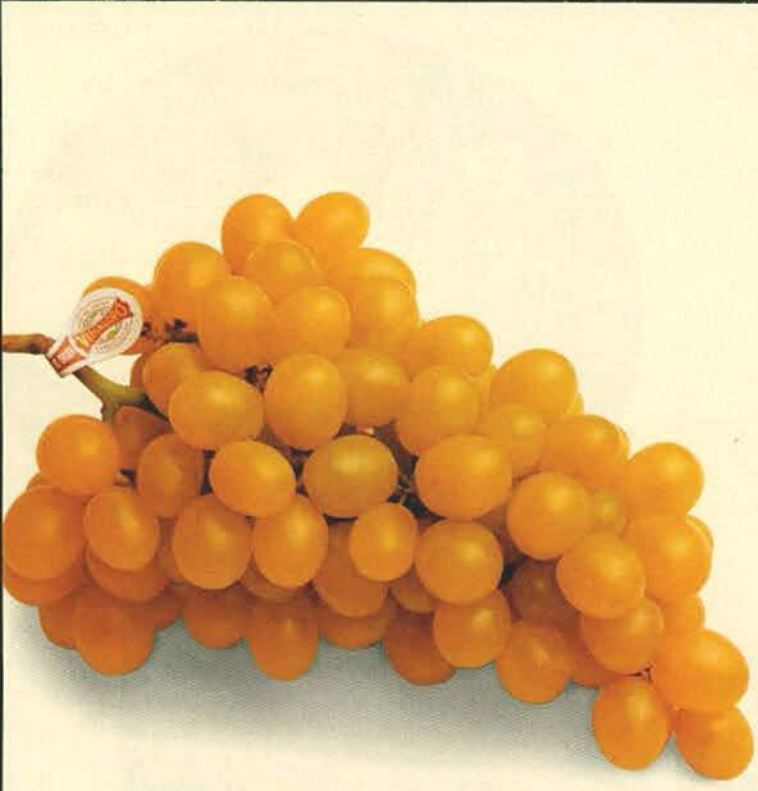
Jerez de la Frontera:
Calle Larga 39
Tel: (34) 956 331 150
El Puerto de Santa María:
Guadalete 1
Tel: (34) 956 542 475
Sanlúcar de Barrameda:
Calzada del Ejército
Tel: (34) 956 366 110
Málaga:
Pasaje de Chinitas 4
Tel: (34) 952 213 445

GREEN GROWERS, LUSCIOUS PRODUCE

Meet Spain's rising stars: grapes ripened inside paper bags to midwinter sweetness, juicy stemless cherries like polished red marbles, plump subtropical loquats, and early-season white asparagus. All come from areas where growers have cannily adapted small-scale cultivation techniques to the local ecosystem and are producing superb out-of-season fruit and vegetables. Long prized at home, these winter and spring luxuries are now making a splash abroad, packed in boxes marked with a curvy yellow, red, and green star. The innovative star system, first launched in 1994, stretches traditional ideas of quality control—flavor, freshness and appearance—to include independently certified low-level use of pesticides and other chemicals during growing and packing. The result? Green growers, luscious produce.

Text: **Vicky Hayward**

Photos: **C.R.D.O.s and ICEX**



FRISCHER SPARGEL

Spanien

HOW CAN WE TELL
WHEN OUR PICOTA CHERRIES
ARE RIPE & READY FOR PICKING

SIMPLE~
WE ASK THE TREES

PICOTA CHERRIES
WE KNOW WHEN
THE TIME IS RIPE
HAVE YOU TWIGGED YET?

Valle del Jerte

How long has the Picota Cherry been growing in the Jerte Valley?

Since the..... 16th Century ☐ 17th Century ☐ 18th Century ☐

Name

Address

Postcode

Telephone

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY.

THE UNIQUE QUALITY OF GREEN-STAR GRAPES, LOQUATS, ASPARAGUS, AND CHERRIES REFLECTS GROWERS' ADAPTATION TO ECOSYSTEMS.

In the dusky Mediterranean light, the vineyard in front of the farmhouse seems to be hung with paper lanterns. Walk down between the leafy green vines and each lantern turns out to be a sun-bleached white paper bag tied at the top with rough string. Reach into one and you find a heavy bunch of unblemished, soft-skinned grapes. Bite into a grape and your mouth fills with an unexpected honeyed sweetness. These autumn and winter grapes, tended and picked by hand in the Vinalopó valley, behind Alicante, are just one of Spain's fruits and vegetables now being rediscovered for their superb old fashioned flavor and quality.

PRODUCE WITH CHARACTER

"The full range of Spanish produce is relatively little known abroad," explains Ventura Mijares, the ICEX economist who dreamed up the green-star export scheme. "Top-quality fruit and vegetables are often grown on a relatively small scale for the home market because their unique quality, character, and season depend on limited growing conditions. The grapes, cherries, loquats, and asparagus in the green-star scheme are all examples of that."

Spanish gourmets can recognize such vegetables and fruits at a blind tasting. Autumn and winter grapes from Alicante's warm Vinalopó valley are famed for the aromatic sweetness under their velvety bloom. Loquats from the Mediterranean hinterland of Callosa d'En Sarriá, south of Valencia, are prized for their tangily satisfying flavor and size. Cherries grown in the Jerte and its neighboring valleys southwest of Spain's snowy central sierras are synonymous with their intensely fruity, juicy sweet flesh. And finally tender white early-season asparagus is identified with the warmer lowlands of Andalusia and Extremadura.

In new markets, though, the growers of such produces are at a disadvantage. How can they reach customers abroad who have no way of guessing that their produce does not simply look good, but also has such outstanding character and flavor?

THE CHAIN FROM PRODUCER TO BUYER

Ventura Mijares' solution, simple but ingenious, was to forge a two-way information and quality-control chain linking the producers to their customers abroad. For each fruit or vegetable, the chain would begin with a D.O. (Denomination of Origin) authority, growers' association or cooperative. Next would come a team of agricultural engineers and chemists researching and certifying government control. Finally, producers and researchers would receive feedback from market analysts at home and abroad specifying customers' tastes in different foreign markets.

If a fruit or vegetable managed to get the seal of approval all the way down the chain then it could travel abroad with a special new seal of quality and an individual guarantee of flavor, appearance, freshness, and nutritional value.

"The key idea," comments Mijares, "was to have a recognizable and uniform seal of quality for fine native Spanish produce that was also flexible enough to adapt to each type of produce and customers' varying tastes."

In 1995 the very first batch of green-star produce—grapes from the Vinalopó valley—traveled abroad to Germany. Next to the star stamped on each packing box was the individual label guarantee identifying the producer, date of harvesting, and packer of the produce. Three years and thousands of boxes later, the Vinalopó producers have never received a complaint.

A SENSE OF PLACE

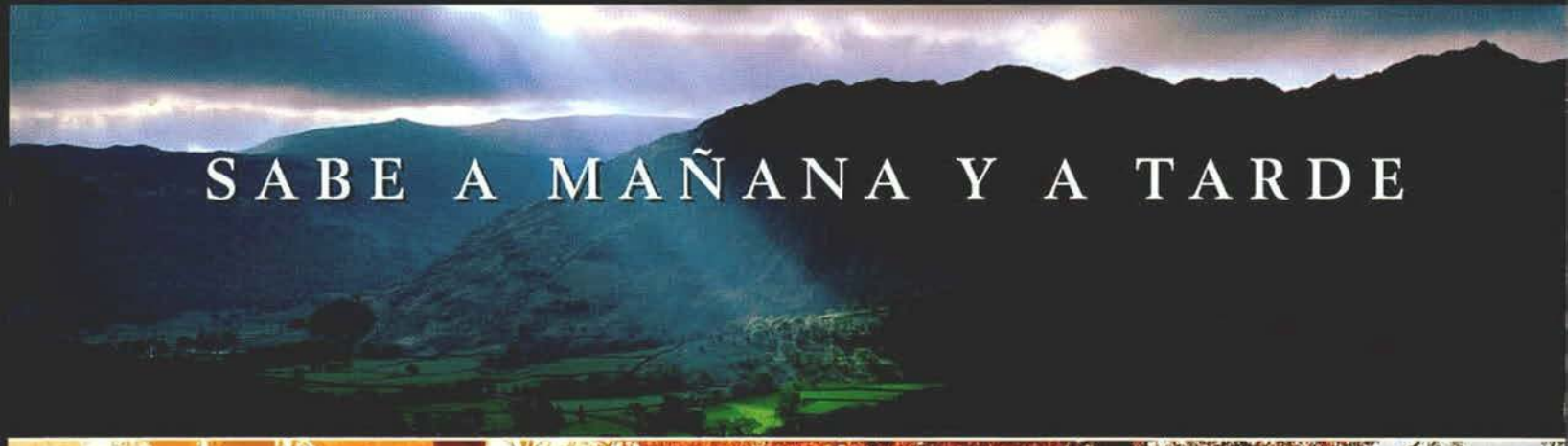
At the heart of the green-star project lies the range of such faultless, hand-tended quality Spanish produce. Focus on any of its widely contrasted geographical pockets and microclimates, and you will nearly always find a crop with a sense of place.

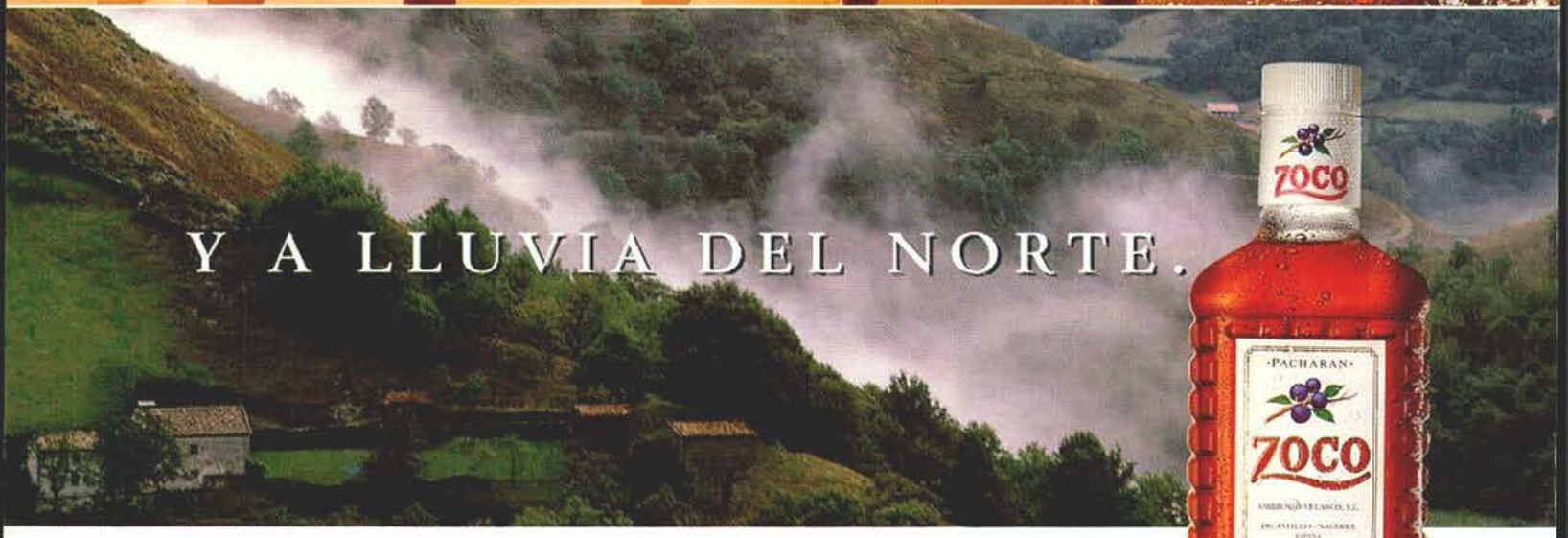
Take the grapes from the Vinalopó valley. Their character and quality are the result of a growing method invented by a certain Señor Bonmatí, mayor of one of the valley's villages, at the beginning of this century. He decided to protect his grapes against a pest called cochylis by covering the bunches of young grapes with paper bags. When harvest time arrived, he found he had not only healthy but also improved fruit with unblemished thin skins and a telltale honeyed sweetness produced by slow, gentle ripening on the vine.

Such was the success of Bonmatí's technique that local growers quickly picked up on the idea. By the 1950s native and imported vines harvested from September to January had ousted the more traditional carobs, olives, and almonds planted on the valley floor, and were in demand in France and Germany. Another forty years on, 1991, Vinalopó's growers won recognition as Europe's only D.O. label for table grapes. Now, within a 10,000 ha (24,100 acres) growing area, some 1,500 registered growers produce 180-190 million kilos of grapes annually, of which nearly 40% are exported around Europe.

OLD AND NEW FRUITS

The other green-star fruits and vegetables also have characterful pasts. The cherry trees of the Jerte valley tucked under the southwestern tip of Castile's central mountain range date back to at least the 14th century, when post-Reconquest settlers found them scattered among the chestnut woods. As the cherries' fame spread so, too, did the orchards into four sheltered riv-





Y sabe a tierra. Y sabe a aire. Y sabe a bosque.
Antes de ser Zoco, el pacharán es endrina. El fruto del Norte que crece con la sombra y con la lluvia.
Se recoge a final de verano, cuando más madura y dulce está la fruta.
Y luego macera durante el tiempo necesario para adquirir el color rojizo natural
y el sabor único del pacharán Zoco.
Un sabor cien por cien natural. Cien por cien Zoco.

·PACHARAN·
ZOCO

Fruto de la Naturaleza.

Bebe con moderación. Es tu responsabilidad.

SPAIN'S WONDERFUL RANGE OF TOP-QUALITY PRODUCE, OFTEN GROWN ON A SMALL SCALE, REFLECTS THE COUNTRY'S VARIED GEOGRAPHY.

er valleys carpeted with blossoms in spring.

The Jerte cherries' fame owes something to the wet warmth of the valleys and to traditional growing methods, but it is the native Picota variety which gives it such character. Large and firm fleshed, slow ripening, it has an intense flavor when it is finally picked 50-100 days after flowering and it leaves behind its stalk on the tree. Since refrigerated transport led to the cherries being discovered elsewhere in Europe, production has boomed. A growing area of 6,506 hectares (16,000 acres) produces an average annual crop of 20,000 metric tons, of which some 9,000 metric tons are exported. But cultivation techniques remain overwhelmingly traditional on the small-scale holdings.

Loquats, by contrast, are a modern Mediterranean crop. A merchant sailor named Captain Roig planted the first one at Sagunto near Valencia 90 years ago, and commercial production began to the south at Callosa d'En Sarriá where the fruit found its ideal habitat in a fertile coastal valley. Originally it was thought the trees would bear fruit for only 15-20 years, but nearly eighty years later some are still going strong.

Production began to take off in the 1950s after a local farmer brought back seeds from a tree in Algeria which produced loquats unrivaled in size and quality. Today, thanks to that Algar variety, Callosa is the world's largest growing area and has D.O. status (1992). At the height of the season from mid-April to mid-May an extra 5,000 workers are shipped in to help with the delicate task of harvesting an annual crop of some 25 million kilos grown over 2,500 hectares (6,118 acres). Growing, however, remains traditional with families tending the trees by hand and packing the fruit at home before taking it down to the local cooperative or packers. These days, though, shiny gray nylon nets like giant frame tents, which protect the fruit from dehydration, box in their lush luxuriance.

The First Asparagus

The newest rising star is also the most modern crop: early white asparagus grown in limy and sandy pockets of westerly Extremadura and southern Andalusia. While green asparagus still found sprouting in hedgerows goes back to the Muslim centuries—it is not hard to see why the Arabs thought it was an aphrodisiac—white asparagus is a commercial crop of the last twenty years. Tender and delicately flavored, the shoots grow underground in loosely packed banks of earth kept warm under plastic sheets and are cut by hand from the crown of roots just before their tips break through the soil's surface.

Quality in this case is defined by skills and climate as much as soil and variety. What makes the asparagus special is not only its early harvesting from February to May but also hand tending by the growers, which ensures stalks with perfectly formed buds, the base cut cleanly at right angles and the stems crisply moist. The asparagus is collected in the early morning before the heat of the day and is taken straight to warehouses in boxes covered by damp cloths. Within a few hours it is hand washed, sorted, wrapped, and packed before being transferred to chilled lorries with controlled humidity. One to two days later, it reaches the markets. Producers, who range from small growers packing at cooperatives to large-scale integrated growers and packers, harvest 7,000 kg per hectare each season and, with exports now accounting for half the crop, are expanding planting with production now totaling 48 million kilos.

Certifying Quality

Once tasted, such characterful produce is not easily forgotten. But producers, anxious to protect their reputations and establish consistently high standards, also translate eating quality into clearly understood and strictly defined quality standards such as size, appearance, presentation, permitted varieties, growing methods and packing (see *Spain Gourmetour* Nos. 35, 37, 38, and 41 for more details on each type of produce). These existing quality controls remain in place as the first-stage mechanism within the green star's quality controls.

In some cases, such as that of both the grapes and loquats, these are laid down by D.O. authorities and in others by growers' associations responding to retail and export needs. In all cases, they have evolved in response to the idiosyncratic nature of the produce itself, its cultivation methods, and E.U. regulations.

"Working with well-organized and controlled sectors which were already exercising strict quality control was an essential starting point for us," comments Mijares. "It meant we already had the mechanisms in place for offering consistently high quality products, but could also go one step further."

These quality controls are still independently run. Checks and grading for loquats, for example, are carried out by exporters as each grower delivers their home-packed fruit. At the height of the season, from April to June, over twenty people work full time on such quality control with a full time Denomination coordinating such spot-checks. In Vinalopó, grapes are initially hand trimmed and checked by women packers while the D.O. inspector visits vineyards and packers to ensure methods comply with the regulations.

Likewise, Jerte cherry growers follow quality standards

ROSARA

Sauces

Ideal for accompanying meat, fish, pasta, rice dishes, etc...; made from natural products.

- *Tomato Sauce*
- *"Piquillo" Pepper Sauce*
- *Wild Mushroom Sauce*
- *Biscay Style Sauce*
- *Spicy Peppered Sausage Meat*

Full of quality

Cream soups are a challenge to the imagination in today's cuisine. Our selection includes seafood, asparagus, vegetable, and peas. They are the perfect result of Rosara Cooking.

- *Cream of Seafood*
- *Cream of Asparagus*
- *Cream of Green Vegetables*
- *Cream of Prawns and Peas*

Cream Soups

Conservas Artesanas ROSARA

GREEN-STAR PRODUCE TRAVELS DOWN A TWO-WAY INFORMATION AND QUALITY CONTROL CHAIN LINKING PRODUCERS TO CUSTOMERS ABROAD.

the cooperative's association laid down and enforced themselves as a step towards their current provisional D.O. status. Asparagus meets E.U. regulations enforced by the growers' association. All the produce ends up with quality grades, of which only the best—Extra and Primera—classify for inclusion as green-star fruit.

GREEN-STAR STANDARDS

The green-star system has raised the quality stakes yet again by adding a new layer of quality control through independent laboratory analysis of top-grade produce grown with integrated cultivation methods. It would be designed to show that, while not organic, it did have certifiably low-level use of chemicals.

In large part, this was simply a question of measuring what had always been the case. The crucial change for producers was not in their growing methods but in customers' attitudes. Feedback from market analysts working on the scheme abroad showed that today's buyers of high-quality fruit and vegetables in markets such as Germany and the U.K. now want such guarantees on luxury produce. Such discerning consumers aim for retail outlets, whether shops or farmers' markets, where they can be sure such produce is stocked.

The growing methods of all four crops were ideally adapted to such criteria. Thus, for example, the Vinalopó growing method meant fruit had never been in direct contact with pesticides or fungicides and equally its very slow vine ripening eliminates the need for chilled storage during which fruit is often covered with sulphur impregnated papers. As an indicator, in the first season of testing in 1994, fruit showed chemical residues at 10% of E.U. levels. Likewise the nylon net cages used to protect loquats also ensure minimum contact with chemicals.

Cherry and asparagus cultivation were also largely chemical-free. For the small-scale cherry growers, winter weather naturally kept down most pests; some pesticides might be used in autumn and short-term fungicides during the wet spring but only up until two months before harvesting. In the case of asparagus, weed killers are used after harvesting and samples taken even before the green-star scheme showed residue levels running at under 20% of those permitted.

IN THE LABORATORY

Nonetheless, laboratory testing is stringent. Under a written agreement with the producers, government-run laboratories test up to 100 samples of each type of produce taken during the course of the entire season. Some are submitted by producers themselves, others by the relevant D.O.s, growers' associations, or exporters. After the sample is crushed and dissolved in alcohol to produce a concentrated essence, gas chromotography and tests in solution are then used to fingerprint traces of up to 30 different substances (the list of products changes each year). The sample leaves the laboratory one to two days later with a detailed breakdown of any traces of residue present expressed as milligrams per kilo.

At the end of each season, the laboratory also issues producers with a general overview of the year's results. Unexpectedly, perhaps, this has turned out to be one of the most effective links of the information chain, working a sea of change in producers' attitudes to such regulations. Both grape and early asparagus growers are interested in voluntary action to lower levels even further. In the same vein, the Jerte Cherry Growers' Association has started a compulsory register on which all growers must declare the chemicals they are using.

As Ángel Rodríguez Pérez of the Callosa loquats D.O. sums it up, "The producers are realizing that it is not worth taking risks and are changing their mentality from quantity to quality."

STAR POTENTIAL

With the green-star products successfully moving out into wider European markets, the scheme's potential for the future is huge. On the one hand new markets sensitive to ecological produce—such as Scandinavia—have not yet been touched. On the other, Spain's range of such small-scale quality produce—running from peaches to pomegranates and wild mushrooms to potatoes—has hardly been explored.

"The philosophy is to move forward very slowly," comments de Vega "to be sure of absolute quality control."

Feedback to the producers also suggests the green-star scheme will have a long future. "This year we have had more requests for information than ever, not only from established foreign markets such as Germany, but also unexpected places further afield like Finland," comments Luís González Navarro of the Vinalopó D.O.

Meanwhile, the last of the paper lanterns dangling off the Vinalopó vines are being snipped off the vines by hand and the bunches trimmed, packed, and sent off to distant markets. Each bunch carries with it not just the seal and guarantee of quality, but also its story captured in its honey-sweet flavor. Once tasted, it seems, not forgotten.

Vicky Hayward *is a writer, journalist, and book editor whose articles about culture, society, travel, and food are published internationally. She lives in Madrid.*

We would specially like to thank Agrícola García Bergas for allowing us to use their promotional brochure.

See Main Exporters on page 142.

TEXT: JULIA LÓPEZ DE SAGREDO

BONE UP ON SPANISH HAM

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT SPANISH CURED HAM IS DELICIOUS—JUST A TASTE TELLS YOU THAT. BUT THE INFORMED FOODIE NEEDS TO KNOW A BIT MORE, FOR IT COMES IN VARIOUS DIFFERENT TYPES. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES? WHAT'S THE CORRECT TERMINOLOGY? THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE SETS OUT TO PUT YOU FULLY IN THE PICTURE.

AS A GENERAL RULE, SPANISH HAM IS NOT CURED BY SMOKING. WHEREAS SMOKING HAS BEEN, AND STILL IS, THE TRADITIONAL METHOD IN CENTRAL AND NORTHERN EUROPE, IT IS THE ANCIENT CUSTOM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN TO WIND-CURE HAM VERY SLOWLY, FOR MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS, AFTER A BRIEF SALTING IN COARSE SEA SALT. THE FACT THAT SPAIN IS THE BIGGEST PRODUCER OF CURED HAMS AND SHOULDERS IN THE WORLD, WITH AN ANNUAL PRODUCTION FIGURE OF OVER 30 MILLION UNITS, GIVES SOME IDEA OF THE IMPORTANCE THESE PRODUCTS ENJOY THERE. AS CONSUMERS, TOO, THE SPANISH ARE WELL UP AMONG THE WORLD LEADERSHIP, WITH CONSUMPTION EXCEEDING 4 KG (8.8 LB) PER INHABITANT PER YEAR. BUT NOT ALL HAMS, PRODUCED IN SPAIN ARE THE SAME. THERE IS ONE PRINCIPAL DIVISION INTO TWO DISTINCT TYPES, BASED FUNDAMENTALLY ON THE STRAIN OF PIG FROM WHICH THE HAMS ORIGINATE: IBÉRICO HAMS, WHICH COME FROM IBÉRICO PIGS (A BREED NATIVE TO THE IBERIAN PENINSULA WHICH STILL RETAINS ITS GENETIC CHARACTERISTICS), AND SERRANO HAMS, MADE FROM WHITE PIGS (BREEDS WHICH HAVE BEEN IMPROVED TO MEET PRODUCTIVITY AND COMMERCIAL REQUIREMENTS, AND WHICH WERE INTRODUCED INTO SPAIN IN THE 1950S, MAINLY FROM CENTRAL AND NORTHERN EUROPE). AT ONE TIME, THE TERM "SERRANO" DESIGNATED ALL CURED HAMS PRODUCED ON SPANISH SOIL, REGARDLESS OF THE STRAIN OF PIG FROM WHICH THEY CAME. *JAMÓN SERRANO* LITERALLY MEANS HAM FROM THE SIERRA, OR MOUNTAINS, AND INDEED PROCESSING COMPANIES ALWAYS USED TO BE SET UP ADJACENT TO THE SPECIAL HIGHLAND MICROCLIMATE, WITH ITS COLD DRY AIR, THAT MADE THE NATURAL CURING PROCESS POSSIBLE. NOWADAYS, THOUGH, THE TERM APPLIES ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY TO CURED HAMS DERIVED FROM WHITE PIGS, REGARDLESS OF WHERE IN SPAIN THEY ARE PRODUCED. BY THE SAME TOKEN, THE TERM "IBÉRICO" APPLIES ONLY TO HAMS MADE FROM IBÉRICO PIGS. THE VERY DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE TWO STRAINS OF PIG DETERMINE MANY OTHER FACTORS, WHICH IN TURN ACCENTUATE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO TYPES OF HAM DERIVED FROM THEM. THESE FACTORS ARE:

1. REARING AND FEEDING METHODS. IBÉRICO PIGS ARE PUT OUT TO FORAGE ON PASTURELANDS IN SOUTHERN AND WESTERN SPAIN WHERE THEY EAT A NATURAL DIET OF THE GRASSES AND HERBS, POST-HARVEST STUBBLE, AND ACORNS THAT THEY COME UPON IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. WHITE PIGS, LIKE THE PIGS USED FOR HAMS IN THE REST OF EUROPE, ARE INTENSIVELY FARMED, THE ANIMALS BEING REARED IN SHEDS ON A DIET OF PREPARED FODDER. THEY ARE SLAUGHTERED YOUNGER AND SMALLER.

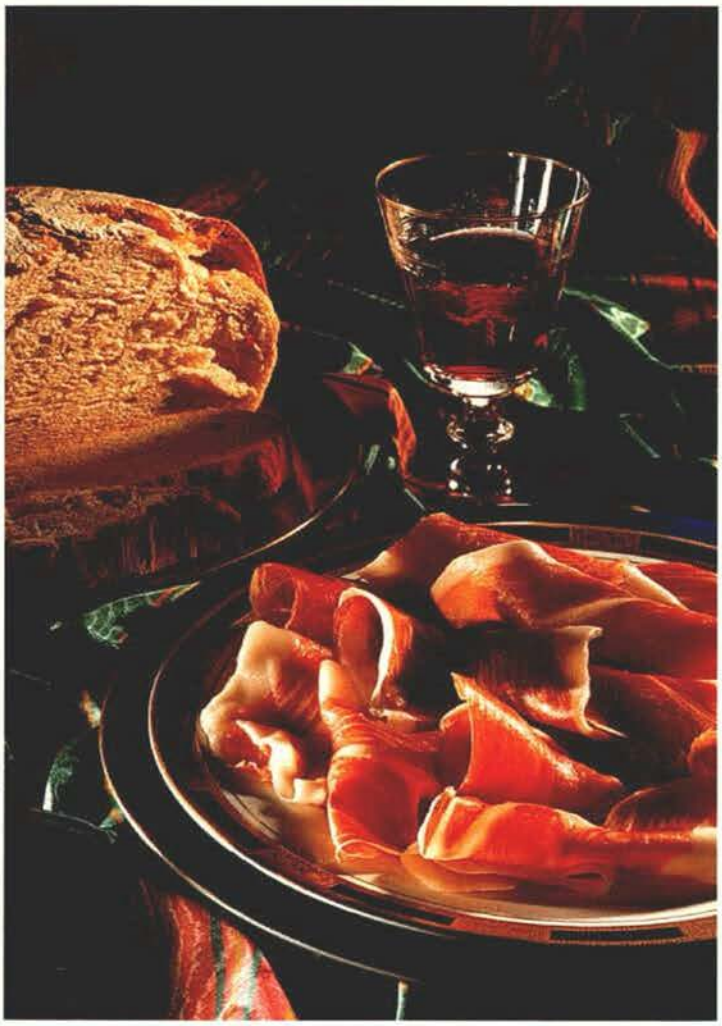
2. PROCESSING. IBÉRICO HAMS ARE CURED NATURALLY, IN THE ARTISAN WAY, FOR PERIODS OF UP TO 24 MONTHS AND EVEN LONGER. SERRANO HAMS, LEANER AND LARGER THAN IBÉRICO ONES, ARE USUALLY CURED IN CONTROLLED CONDITIONS FOR PERIODS OF BETWEEN 6 AND 14 MONTHS.

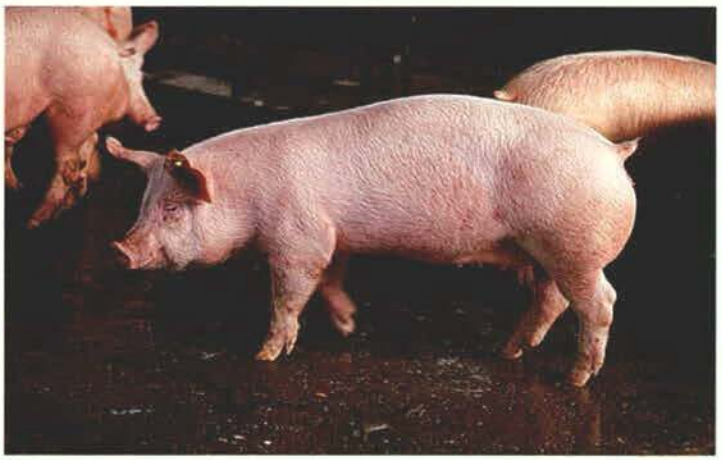
3. INDUSTRIAL STRUCTURE. CHARCUTERIE COMPANIES USING IBÉRICO MEAT ARE STILL BASICALLY FAMILY BUSINESSES AND STILL MAINTAIN CLOSE LINKS TO THE LAND, SPECIFICALLY HIGHLAND AREAS WHICH, SINCE ANCIENT TIMES, HAVE PROVIDED THE PERFECT CLIMATE FOR CURING HAMS NATURALLY. THESE ARTISAN HAMS ARE PRODUCED IN SMALLER QUANTITIES. FACTORIES PRODUCING WHITE PIG CHARCUTERIE HAVE SPREAD ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, SINCE THEIR MORE HIGHLY TECHNOLOGIZED PROCESSES ARE NO LONGER DEPENDENT ON CLIMATOLOGICAL CONDITIONS.

TRANSLATION: HAWYS PRITCHARD

CONSORCIO DEL IBÉRICO/ICEX

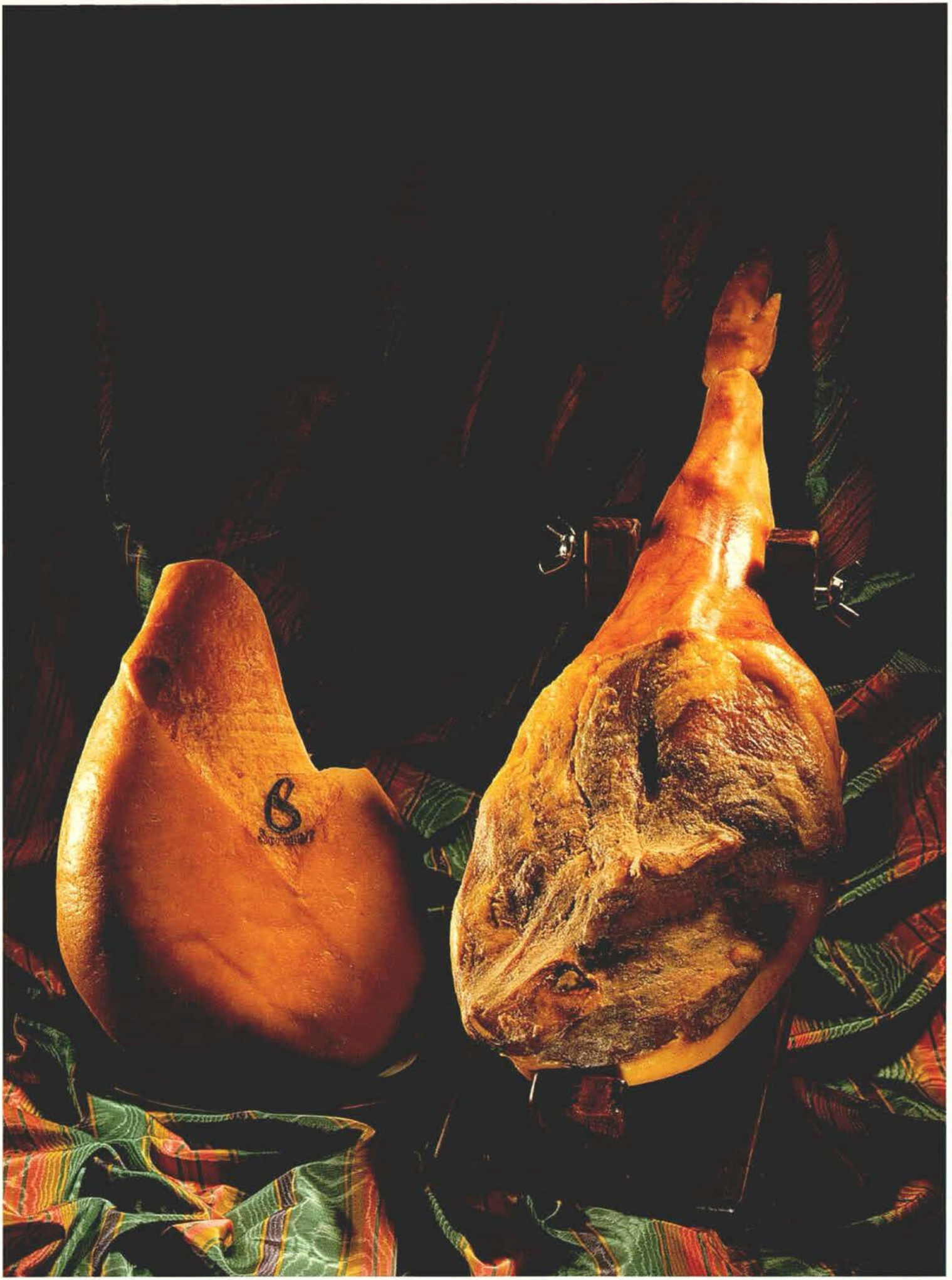
SERRANO HAM IS NOT ONLY DELICIOUS WITH ITS COMPLEX FLAVORS AND AROMAS, BUT IT IS ALSO A HEALTHY FOOD, BEING A NATURAL PRODUCT AND NUTRITIONALLY RICH.





The principal white-coated pig breeds for producing serrano ham are Large White, Landrace, Belgian White, and their crossbreeds, which are well adapted to intensive farming and indoor life.

PHOTOS: CONSORCIO DEL JAMÓN SERRANO ESPAÑOL/ICEX



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CONSELLERIA DE AGRICULTURA, PESCA Y ALIMENTACION

White Pigs and Serrano Ham

THE SPANISH SERRANO HAM CONSORTIUM

In 1990, shortly after the removal of barriers to foreign markets for Spanish cured ham derived from white pigs—i.e. serrano ham—a consortium was set up in Spain to promote this product. Though constituted of only 18 of the subsector's 1,350 companies, it represents 50% of the total production of white pig hams and shoulders. The consortium and its producers have succeeded in creating a top quality category for serrano ham, issuing their products with a guarantee stamp which indicates that they have undergone rigorous quality control. This approach has contributed to providing identifying characteristics for this product overseas, where consumers unfamiliar with producers' brand names and quality grades have to rely on generic names. Such are the quality, flavor and recognizability of consortium-produced serrano ham that it has inevitably found its market niche among the gourmet hams in the foreign marketplace, formerly represented almost exclusively by Italy's Parma and San Daniele. Acting as a body independent of producing companies, the Spanish Serrano Ham Consortium (*Consorcio del Jamón Serrano Español*) monitors the whole production process from rearing the pig right through to the finished product, and it is therefore able to guarantee that hams bearing its stamp satisfy the high quality requirements that it, the consortium, stipulates. It also provides an advice service for its members and carries out mutually agreed upon promotional activities abroad.

WHITE PIG BREEDS

The principal white-coated pig breeds introduced into Spain in the 1950s—Large White, Landrace, Belgian White (*Blanco Belga*) and their crossbreeds—offered, among other characteristics, a better yield in terms of ham, shoulder, and loin meat, quicker development and higher prolificity than the types of pig already present in mainland Spain. Since all these characteristics were attractive ones to the charcuterie industry, which was expanding rapidly in Spain at that time, substituting new breeds and crossbreeding among them took place very rapidly. These measures were instrumental in bringing about the extinction of some native breeds and a drastic reduction in others, the Ibérico herd being a case in point. Improved dark-coated breeds and breeds from other sources, such as the American Duroc-Jersey, were also introduced.

REARING AND FEEDING WHITE PIGS

All the European and American breeds mentioned above, and their crossbreeds, are used for producing serrano ham. These breeds of pig are well adapted to intensive farming techniques and an indoor life. Approximately six months after weaning, they reach the 90-95 kg (198-209 lb) weight required for slaughtering, having been fed throughout their lives on prepared feed which, in the case of consortium serrano ham, must include a minimum of 55% cereal. Pigs are slaughtered throughout the year, and fresh hams are produced continuously.

PROCESSING

The ham curing process is fundamentally the same for all types. In the case of serrano ham, factories are so highly automated that the year's natural sequence of climatic conditions necessary for the curing process can be replicated and production can therefore be continuous. The first stage of the process, the actual curing, is essential to preserving the meat, and the second one, the maturation, resting, or aging stage, is what allows it to develop the more complex flavors and aromas of the finished product. The curing process starts with the hams being buried between layers of coarse sea salt and curing salts. Once salted, they are washed and brushed, then moved on to post-salting rooms. The drying process then begins, with the temperature being raised gradually from 6°C to 34°C (43°F to 93°F). It ends with the maturation or resting stage, which takes place in cellars. The consortium specifies the basic conditions and minimum duration for each stage of the process, stipulating that consortium serrano hams must have undergone a curing process lasting at least 36 weeks from being placed in salt to finished product. The weight loss in hams cured by this method must amount to at least 32% of its fresh meat weight.

SALES OF SERRANO HAM

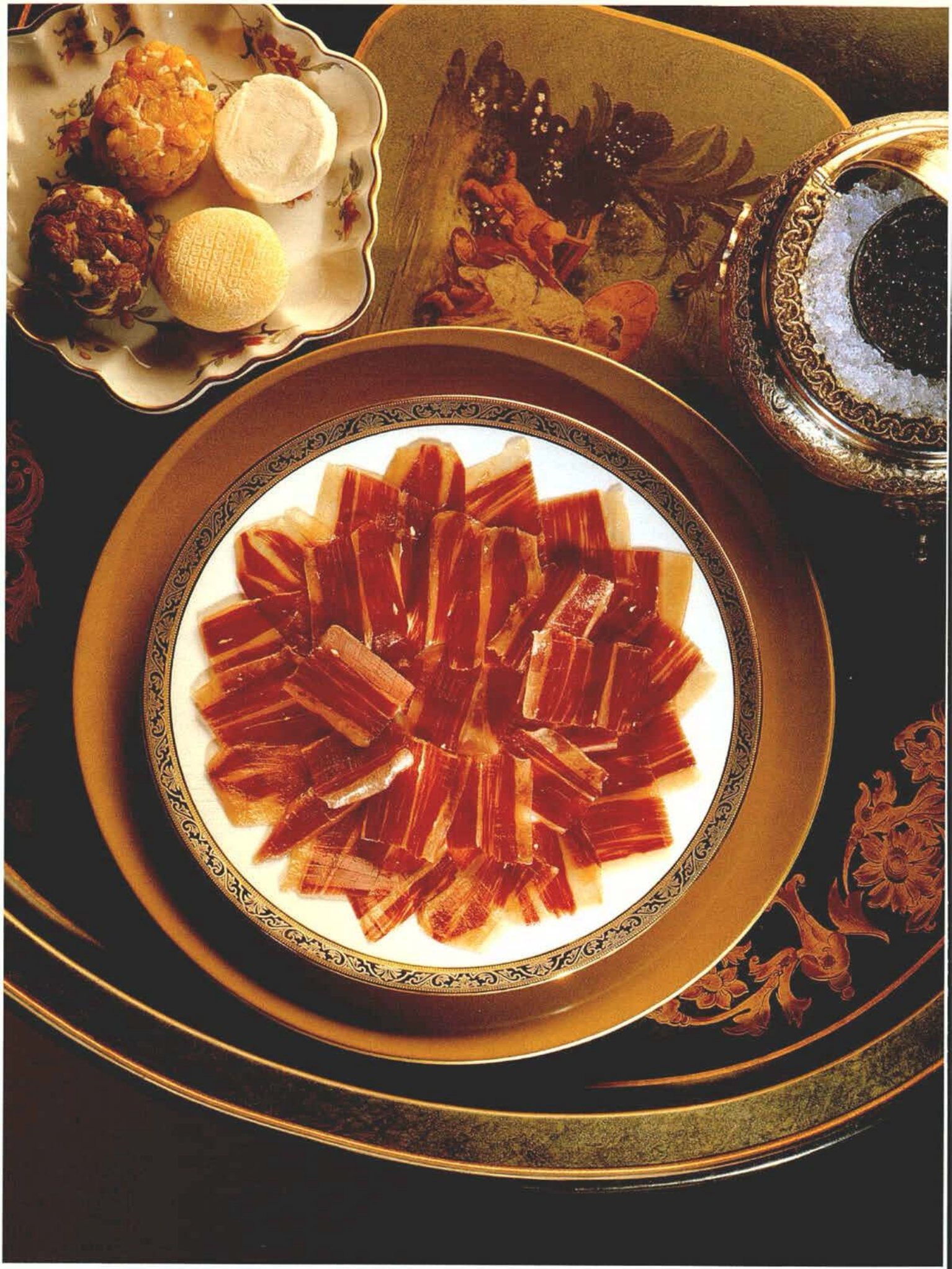
Over 90% of the cured hams and shoulders produced in Spain derive from white pigs. Of these, some 4.4% were exported in 1996, with consortium serrano hams accounting for 25.7% of that figure. Of the 49 countries around the world that buy serrano ham, the leaders are France, Argentina, Germany, and Portugal. The commercial presentations permitted by the Serrano Ham Consortium are: whole ham on the bone, weighing no less than 6.5 kg (14.3 lb); boned, vacuum or controlled-atmosphere packed, weighing no less than 4.5 kg (10 lb); sliced, vacuum or controlled-atmosphere packed in trays, and so on. There is a higher, and growing, demand from foreign markets for boned, skinned, low-fat hams.

SERRANO HAM AND NUTRITION

Serrano ham is not only delicious, its complex flavors and aromas having been given time to develop during its long, slow maturation period, but it is also a healthy food, being a natural product and nutritionally rich. The cut surface of a quality serrano ham is pink to purplish red in color, and its meat is only slightly fibrous and relatively lean. The fat is usually yellowish white, glossy, aromatic, and greasy though quite dense, the fatty subcutaneous part of the ham being revealed when it is pressed with the finger.

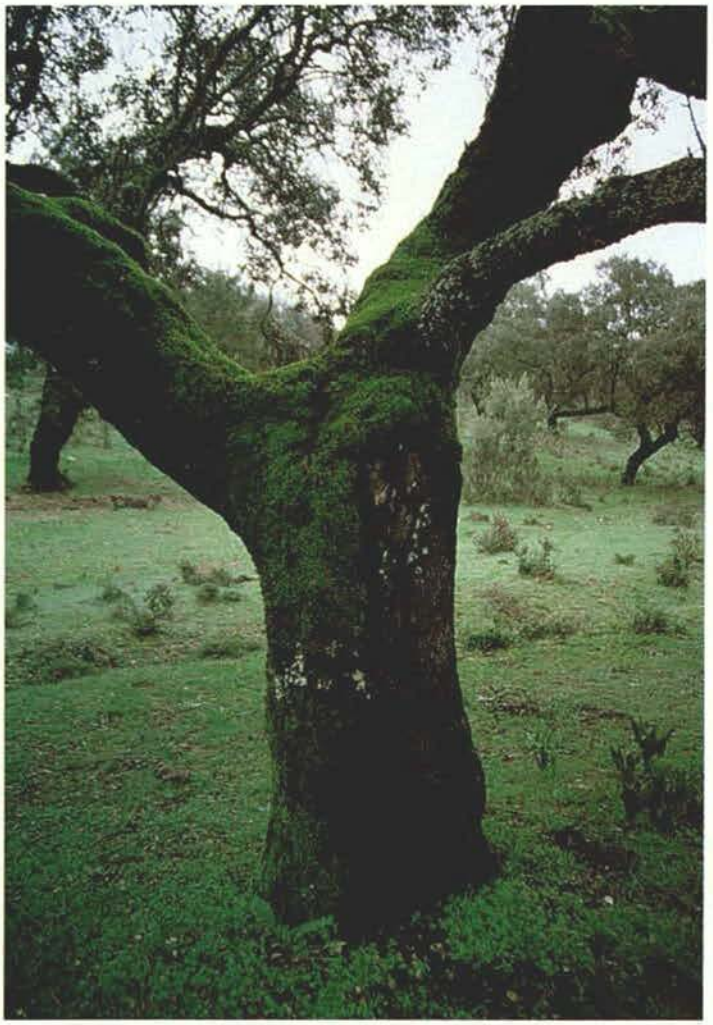
D.O. JAMÓN DE TERUEL

Jamón de Teruel is Spain's oldest Denomination of Origin for cured ham. Its catchment area covers the whole of Teruel Province for rearing white pigs and producing serrano hams. Produced in small quantities nowadays, these are cured in natural conditions with all the skin on, for 12 months, at an altitude of over 800 m (2,624 ft). This type of ham is usually larger than most serrano types since the pigs are slaughtered bigger and older, and presentation is always with skin and trotter. The cut surface shows a certain proportion of infiltrated fat (a requirement stipulated by the regulatory council), a feature contributed by crossbreeding with Duroc, a breed of originally Ibérico stock.



PHOTOS: CONSORCIO DEL IBÉRICO/ICEX

BÉRICO HAM PRESENTS A PARTICULAR BOUQUET, UNIQUE AMONG HAMS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD AND DERIVED FROM THE PIG'S NATURAL ACORN-BASED DIET.



Reared in the wild the Ibérico pig passes through two phases: during the first they are fed grass and cereals; in the montanera *phase they root around for acorns, bulbs, and roots.*

AGRUPACIÓN DE COOPERATIVAS
Valle del Jerte
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10614 VALDASTILLAS
CÁCERES. SPAIN
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Traditional liqueurs and Picotinas

Brandies made from fruits

Ibérico Pigs and Ibérico Ham

THE IBÉRICO CONSORTIUM: REAL IBÉRICO

A consortium to promote Ibérico-derived products was set up in late 1996. It is made up of 50 companies out of the sector's total of 350, the member companies representing 80% of the total production of cured Ibérico hams and shoulders. This is, then, a small, atomized sector, with a product whose added value is high. Exports of Ibérico products, begun quite recently, exposed the need for promotional activity based on a homogeneous supply and quality standards guaranteed by an institution independent of suppliers. This was why the consortium was set up and why its Real Ibérico quality stamp was created. Real Ibérico (which in Spanish actually means Royal Ibérico, though it works well as a guarantee of authenticity in English, too) stamped on a ham guarantees that the product complies with the consortium's stipulations regarding the genetic provenance, rearing, feeding, and slaughtering of Ibérico pigs right through to the processing, flavor, and aromatic characteristics and commercial presentation of the product. The consortium, which was set up in agreement with the three preexisting Denominations of Origin and widely publicized, awards the right to use the Real Ibérico mark of guarantee in addition to the appropriate D.O. stamp. The companies that make Ibérico products are located in western and southern Spain, primarily in the provinces of Salamanca, Ávila, Cáceres, Badajoz, Huelva, Cordoba, Seville, Málaga, and Cádiz, all of them associated with highland towns at altitudes of over 500 m (1,640 ft). Given its special characteristics, and declared by experts to be the best ham in the world, Ibérico ham takes its place naturally among the international aristocrats of gourmet products, alongside the best caviar, foie gras, and vintage wines.

IBÉRICO PIGS

The Ibérico pig is the last type in Europe to enjoy pannage, or pasturage. It is believed to be a descendant of the early Mediterranean wild boar, *sus mediterraneus*, a native of the Iberian Peninsula. It is a primitive strain, in the sense that it has evolved entirely in response to the terrain of its habitat, and there are various different types differentiated by, among other characteristics, color of coat and bristliness of skin. They also tend to have dark trotters: Ibérico ham is popularly described as *pata negra*, or black foot, but this is not quite accurate since some Ibérico pigs have different colored feet while some, though these are getting rarer, don't have black feet at all. By the same token, certain non-Ibérico breeds of pig also have dark coats and trotters. One property of the Ibérico pig that is unique and exclusive is its capacity to infiltrate fat into its muscle mass, and this makes thorough breeding a factor vital to the quality of derived products. This is why Consortium-approved hams must come from pigs which are at least 75% Ibérico stock, with the remaining percentage accounted for by Duroc-Jersey.

REARING AND FEEDING IBÉRICO PIGS

The Ibérico pig's habitat is the pastureland known as the *dehesa*, the ecosystem of the early Mediterranean woodland of evergreen, cork, and gall or holm oak (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 33). By today, the dehesa constitutes a veritable ecological reserve, unique of its kind, whose survival is closely linked to that of the Ibérico pig. Reared in the wild, these pigs pass through two phases, a period between weaning and achieving weights of 80-115 kg (176-253 lb), and a fattening-up period leading up to slaughter on reaching a maximum weight of 180 kg (396 lb) at a minimum age of 12 months. During the first phase, when the pigs are still small, and depending on when they are born, they are fed spring grass, cereals, and summer stubble from the dehesa. The second phase is known as the *montanera*, or countryside phase, during which the pigs root around for acorns, grasses, bulbs, and roots. The montanera begins when the acorns appear and ends when they are over. Though dates can vary according to weather conditions, this period generally lasts from October to February or March. Pigs slaughtered immediately after the montanera, and which have gained at least 50% of their pre-montanera weight in the course of that feeding period qualify as *de bellota*, or acorn-fed. Other Ibérico pigs, which have failed to reach the required weight by the end of the montanera, have their diet supplemented with natural feeds, still under free range conditions.

PROCESSING

The process for making Ibérico ham is fundamentally similar to that for the serrano type, following the same stages of salting, washing, resting, drying, and aging or maturation in cellars. However, the fact that the drying and maturation are allowed to occur naturally means that Ibérico ham qualifies as a completely artisan product. This fact also affects the entire production cycle, which has to start at the coldest point of winter or early spring so as to be able to take advantage during the subsequent drying stage, of the slow and gradual increase in temperature leading up to late summer. It is during this latter stage that the fat begins to spread and infiltrate the muscle fibers which, once impregnated, retain its aroma. In the autumn, the hams are transferred to natural cellars where, during the resting period, they acquire the generic characteristics of aroma and flavors typical of the microclimate and microflora of the area where they are made. By the end of the process, weight loss will amount to around 32-35%. Ibérico meat's particular characteristics enable it to be cured for longer periods, though these vary according to size when slaughtered: for lower weights, the consortium stipulates a minimum period of 15 months for hams and 12 for shoulders, though in fact curing usually lasts for over 24 months.

SALES OF IBÉRICO HAM

Ibérico hams and shoulders account for just over 5% of Spain's total cured ham production. The Ibérico Consortium stipulates various presentation modes—whole with bone and trotter, whole boned—specifying authorized minimum and maximum weights in each case. Packs of slices are also being considered, though these are very rarely available. In shape, an Ibérico ham differs from a serrano one in that the former is generally smaller and more streamlined with a slenderer shank. The black trotter can also be a distinguishing feature, though, as we have seen, not infallibly so.

The consortium defines two categories of product, according to how the pig they derive from was fed, and it guarantees them with its Real Ibérico quality stamp. The first category covers acorn-fed Ibérico hams and shoulders made from pigs fed exclusively on acorns during the montanera stage: in these cases, the guarantee label includes the acorn-fed specification de bellota. The second covers Ibérico hams and shoulders made from the remaining Ibérico pigs.

IBÉRICO HAM: NUTRITION AND FLAVOR

The cut surface of Ibérico ham is readily recognizable as such by the streaks of intramuscular fat which give it a marbled appearance. The fat itself is very similar in composition to olive oil in that it contains a high percentage of mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids, oleic acid accounting for 59%. This type of fat melts at lower temperatures than saturated fats, which explains why firstly, while the hams are drying and maturing, and then later actually in the mouth, it melts easily, developing and imparting in the first instance to the meat, in the second to the palate, the whole complex of aromas it contains, and presenting its own particular bouquet, unique among hams from all over the world, derived from, among other factors, the pig's natural acorn-based diet. The physical exercise involved in free range grazing also contributes to meat quality, giving greater density and finer texture and concentrating aromas. All these factors make it both a healthy and delicious food.

D.O. GUIJUELO

This is the oldest Denomination of Origin for Ibérico hams and shoulders, and it covers hams made in highland municipalities of Salamanca Province, Guijuelo being the most important. This area has a long charcuterie-producing tradition—in fact many companies which later appeared in Extremadura and Andalusia were established by Castilians originally from this area. Its dry, cold climate means that the salting process can be reduced, so hams from here tend to be smoother and sweeter than those from other, southerly, regions, having spent less time in sea salt.

D.O. DEHESA DE EXTREMADURA

This Denomination of Origin covers the whole of Extremadura for pig rearing and several highland municipalities for processing hams and shoulders. The region has the highest concentration of Ibérico pigs.

D.O. JAMÓN DE HUELVA

This Denomination of Origin covers hams made in certain municipalities of the mountainous area of Sierra de Huelva, which, along with the famous town of Jabugo, include Aracena, Cumbres Mayores, and Cortegana, all of them traditionally ham producing.

Julia López de Sagredo *is an agronomist. She worked for seven years in the Commercial Office of the Spanish Embassy in Dusseldorf, Germany, where she handled the promotion of processed agroalimentary products from Spain. She currently lives in Almería where her work includes contributing to specialized agroalimentary and foreign-trade publications.*

See Main Exporters on page 138.

GLOSSARY OF SPANISH CURED HAM TERMS

SERRANO:
This generic name applies to all cured hams made from non-Ibérico white-coated pigs.

SERRANO CONSORCIO:
This term designates a serrano ham of a quality stipulated and guaranteed by the Spanish Serrano Ham Consortium (*Consorcio del Jamón Español*). The most important specification is the insistence on a minimum curing period of 36 weeks (between placing the meat in salt and the finished product).

SERRANO ESPECIAL:
Another designation, used in Germany, for Serrano Consorcio ham.

IBÉRICO:
This name applies to hams derived from Ibérico pigs. The Ibérico Consortium qualifies this term depending on how the pig was fed.

REAL IBÉRICO DE BELLOTA:
This term designates acorn-fed Ibérico hams guaranteed by the Ibérico Consortium (*Consorcio del Ibérico*) as satisfying its requirements. This is a "supreme" category: these hams come from pigs fed exclusively on acorns in the period leading up to slaughter.

REAL IBÉRICO:
This term indicates Ibérico hams of characteristics stipulated and guaranteed by the consortium, which derive from Ibérico pigs which, after their period of feeding in the wild, had their diet supplemented with prepared feed before slaughter.

D.O. TERUEL:
This Denomination of Origin covers serrano hams produced in Aragon's Teruel Province.

D.E. TREVÉLEZ:
This term designates serrano hams cured in the town of Trevélez and surrounding area, in the Alpujarras, south of the Sierra Nevada, in Granada. (For D.E. See Glossary on page 150.)

D.O. GUIJUELO:
This Denomination of Origin covers Ibérico hams and shoulders produced in and around the town of Guijuelo, Salamanca Province.

D.O. DEHESA DE EXTREMADURA:
This Denomination of Origin designates Ibérico hams and shoulders processed in various highland areas of Cáceres Province and the south of Badajoz.

D.O. JAMÓN DE HUELVA:
This Denomination of Origin covers all Ibérico hams produced in the Sierra de Huelva, in the north of Huelva Province.

LOS PEDROCHES:
This Denomination of Origin for Ibérico ham in Cordoba is currently in the process of obtaining official recognition.

JABUGO:
In popular usage, this term is sometimes—often inaccurately—applied to Ibérico ham in general. In point of fact, it is the name of a town with a long ham producing tradition. It is not in itself a Denomination of Origin, though it does belong to the production area of the Jamón de Huelva D.O.

PATA NEGRA:
This is another term in popular use to describe Ibérico ham in general. It is far from accurate, though, since not all Ibérico pigs have black legs and trotters, while some non-Ibérico pigs do.

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In a country so diverse in geography and climate as Spain, it is no surprise that drinks should be equally varied. Herbs and spices that grow in some regions, different fruits from others, have all had their effects on local palates when it comes to producing the favorite tipple to finish off a good meal or just to pass the time away over a chat with friends or family.

A LAND FOR LIQUEUR LOVERS: SPIRITS AND LIQUEURS FROM SPAIN

Text: **David Ing**

Some liqueurs and spirits—or *aguardientes* as these last ones are known in Spain—have centuries of history and are made from recipes passed down from parents to children before anyone ever thought of opening a liquor store. Others are relative newcomers, taking advantage of a plentiful crop of local fruit.

With so many to choose from, it is difficult to know where to start and where to finish. So to give a representative idea of those available, let's begin at the middle of the country's northern edge, in the autonomous region of Navarre, with one of the most unusual and popular, and work round in a circle.

Pamplona, the capital, famous for the annual running-of-the-bulls immortalized by Ernest Hemingway, is the only city of any size while the rest of Navarre Province is a predominantly agricultural region that slopes down from the Pyrenees to the valley of the river Ebro.

Still Life: **Menchu Artime**

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

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In the 1970s people visiting the area or youngsters going off to do their military service began to talk about a red liqueur from Navarre, *pacharán*.

Here, between the crops and pasture, it is common to find the blackthorn bush, covered in autumn with a chubby little apology for a plum that has made its name as the basis for one of Spain's top-selling liqueurs, *pacharán*.
Cringingly sour to the taste, it seems unimaginable to conceive that anybody in their right mind would ever think of trying to bite into a sloe. But somebody decided to try, and while they discovered it was not exactly manna from heaven, it did have its uses. What might appear to be a perfect recipe for a stomach ache, when crushed into a juice and taken with some sort of alcohol actually helped cure one.
At some stage, nobody knows exactly when, it was decided to mix sloes with anise, a concoction that was also produced in other parts of northern Spain, especially La Rioja and the Basque Country. But, it was in Navarre that this new sloe liqueur—named pacharán for the fruit—found most favor.

ONE OF THE PIONEERS...

The first commercial production of pacharán began around the end of the last century. One of the pioneers was Antonio Velasco, whose company is now owned by the giant French beverage company Pernod Ricard but is still run by the fourth-generation Fernando Velasco.
In an ultramodern plant in the village of Dicastillo, below the impressive 19th-century manor house of the Palacio de la Vega, the company produces several fruit liqueurs as well as local wines. But their flagship drink brand is Zoco, which accounts for more than half of all pacharán sales from a region which is responsible for 90 percent of Spanish production. Named for a local footballer who later starred for the legendary Real Madrid, Zoco was launched in 1957 at a time when sales were still very much restricted to the local region. Twenty years later everything changed.
"It was about the years 1975-76," says Mr. Velasco. "People were beginning to look for drinks with less alcoholic strength. There were no great advertising campaigns or anything like that. But people visiting the area or youngsters going off to do their military service began to talk about this red liqueur from Navarre. From then on sales spread out across the country like a wine stain on a tablecloth."
Within a couple of years the company found that it was selling its entire production by January or February and had to wait until September to start replenishing the market. This phenomenal leap in sales led to a need to find new sources for sloes.
"I remember in the early 1980s we set up a national network of pickers," said Mr. Velasco. "But it was not easy. People could not believe we were prepared to pay for sloes. So first we had to go and speak to the local priest or forest warden to convince the villagers that we were serious."

...CONTINUES TO GROW

Although sales have slackened off since, pacharán continues to grow, not only in volume but also in quality. Exportation of pacharán began about 10 years ago and for Zoco the two biggest markets are two of the most recent to be exploited, the east coast of the United States and Argentina. Other markets include Japan and major European Union partners, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Italy.
According to the Denomination's Regulatory Council, the biggest overall markets for pacharán are France and Cuba, an island which was one of the most popular destinations for poor Navarran emigrants in the past.
The Council's secretary-general, María Eugenia López, said that many of the sloes used now had to be imported from eastern Europe. But past problems with supplies and the need to keep a constant watch on quality had prompted the industry to set up its own plantations to guarantee a production which is about 7.6 million liters a year among the members of the Navarre denomination.
From inland Navarre our liqueur route takes us west to the Cantabrian Coast, to Asturias. Backed by the Picos de Europa mountain chain, this region was the bulkwark of the Christians' initial resistance and then reconquest of the country following the Moorish invasion in the eighth century.
Famed for its lush, green valleys, the region is dotted with apple orchards which have been the main source for years of Spain's favorite cider. The *escanciadores*, are renowned for their feat of being able to pour the golden liquid from a bottle held at least a meter (three feet) above to produce a foaming head in the glass, without spilling a drop.

A DRINK REVIVED

Although cider aguardiente was produced locally in the last century, production died out until the family-owned distillery, Los Serranos, revived the drink in 1960.
There was, however, one brief exception when a Frenchman called René, escaping from the Second World War, decided to make a batch of a drink which had already become world famous in his own country as Calvados.
One of the five brothers who now run Los Serranos, Julián Serrano, recalls the Frenchman's son discovering some of the bottles which were distributed among friends and colleagues in the Asturias capital of Oviedo in the early 1980s.
Since restoring cider aguardiente to its rightful place in the region's gastronomy, Los Serranos now produces between 25,000 and 35,000 liters a year—depending on the size of the apple harvest.
Julián Serrano said that their Marc de Asturias brand can range in age from four years to 20. Because of its limited production, most of it is sold within the Asturias region or in big city restaurants.
"Making cider aguardiente is a bit like making a good soup," he said. "It's a case of mixing in various ingredients, in this case apples; some more mature, some greener, to get the right combination."
Recently, Serranos was joined by another of the region's cider producers, Sidra Escanciador, based in the small town of Villaviciosa. Production director Teresa Riera said the contents of their first batch of 10,000

Bodegas *LAN*

"Towards the new Rioja"

With 25 years experience in the wine business, LAN is now breaking new ground, making a new-style Rioja wine.

Consumer taste evolves. Today, in the late nineties, deep-coloured, fruity, more tannic, full-bodied wines with the right degree of oak ageing are in demand. Bodegas *LAN* have been following this evolution closely, and in a move away from the market for traditional and similar-tasting wines, *LAN* is now seeking to make wines differently by combining the character and personality of Rioja with the modern style now demanded by consumers.

In order to achieve this, greater emphasis has to be put on the quality of the grapes. As Víctor Leiva, technical director of the winery, says, "to make fine wine, optimum quality in the grapes is essential".

Since its first days, *LAN* has owned a 70 hectare vineyard surrounded by the Ebro river, the main artery of the Rioja wine region, and located close to the boundaries of the Rioja Alavesa. Its name, Viña Lanciano, is also the name of one of the winery's top wines, and the finest example of *LAN*'s new-style Rioja.

The wines which are distributed under the *LAN* label are made from grapes bought-in from local growers after careful control and supervision of growing conditions, ripening and harvesting. "At *LAN* we are proud to say that we have the best 1996 vintage. Stocks are five times greater than sales, which is rare in Rioja. This enables us to make strict selections and maintain consistently high quality", states Leiva.

By using the typical grape varieties of the Rioja, we continue to make wines which have all the character and personality of the region. Red wines are made mostly with Tempranillo, with a small percentage of Mazuelo and, in some cases, Garnacha. The white wines are made exclusively with Viura, a variety which ages particularly well in barrel.

Maximum care is taken throughout the entire wine-making process: only whole, undamaged berries are accepted, followed by temperature control during fermentation, extended maceration periods, and immersion of the cap of skins in the must to extract tannin, colour and aromas from the grapes —essential characteristics in *LAN*'s new-style Rioja.

This careful attention to detail continues during the ageing process in the barrel and the bottle. Regular analyses of the wine are performed throughout these stages of its development in order to guarantee quality.

LAN is constantly innovating: A recent acquisition is a new barrel-rinsing belt, which washes the barrels more thoroughly and evenly. New barrels have been purchased. "This is essential for our new style of Rioja. In two years time, the 13,000 barrels we have in our cellars (mostly in American oak, but also in French oak) will be totally renewed, so as to have the highest percentage of new oak barrels in Rioja", states *LAN*'s technical director.

Innovative presentation is also in evidence with new back labels for the bottles, giving useful information to consumers, "the only people who direct us in our daily activity". Practical tips on how to store wine as well as its ageing potential are to be found on all bottles distributed by *LAN*.

Of the total production of the *LAN* winery, two million bottles, around 70% is sold on the domestic market, and the remaining 30% is exported, mostly in Europe. *LAN* is cuzrrently moving into markets in the USA and some Asian countries.

Rioja

Bodegas LAN, S. A.
Fuenmayor (La Rioja) Spain
Tel.: 34 941 45 00 50
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Europe's biggest cherry orchard region has been able to capitalize a combination of factors to give Aguardiente Valle del Jerte its own personality.

bottles of cider aguardiente had been maturing in traditional French oak casks from Limousin and Allier for at least three years.
Although the company was founded as long back as 1914, it is their first venture into distillation. A dry tasting aguardiente, made to a full strength of 40 degrees, most of the first batch is expected to head towards Asturian restaurants in central Spain, especially Madrid, although Ms. Riera hopes that increased production in future years will enable them to start exporting.

GALICIAN ORUJO

Immediately west of Asturias is Galicia, best known for its fish and seafood but also light, white wines to accompany them such as Albariño. As in other wine-growing regions, it became custom to use the pulp left at the end of the pressing of the grapes to produce what the French call *marc*, the Italians *grappa*, and the Spanish *orujo*.
The rural folk of Galicia have been making their own orujo for centuries. A local saying demonstrates its importance to a community where for centuries poverty was on everyone's doorstep. "Orujo is better than bread, getting rid of the cold in winter and hunger in summer."
For years the industry was dominated by often illicit distilleries in remote farms. But, in the last few years great efforts have been made to regularize the industry, culminating four years ago with a Specific Denomination (see Glossary page 150). Orujo de Galicia is now produced in nine subzones, with each having its own distinct properties and alcoholic strength that can range from 37.5 to 50 degrees. The Denomination had grown to 31 members bottling orujo and the production is now around 350,000 liters a year, some of which is exported to the United States, South America, and Europe.
Although the history of the drink dates back to the Moorish occupation, a renewed interest in producing the true orujo of Galicia has prompted several newcomers into the industry. Aguardientes de Galicia was formed just seven years ago by Santiago de Compostela university professor Carlos Hernández Sandé and four colleagues.
The group chose a site near the river Ulla which had a long tradition of orujo making and their distillery now produces various different varieties as well as coffee and herb liqueurs. For Mr. Hernández, the Galician orujos owe their increasing popularity to the influence of the nearby Atlantic. The prevailing westerlies help produce grapes such as the Albariño with a high acid and low alcohol content.

KIRSCH FROM A HIDDEN VALLEY

From Galicia, we traverse the *meseta* of Castile-Leon until we reach the furthest province, Ávila. Just at the point where the road drops steeply into neighboring Extremadura is a mountain pass called Tornavacas—the turning of the cows—named for a resting point on one of the principal cattle trails that still crisscross Spain.
The view from the top of the pass is stupendous at any time, but especially so in early spring. For way below lies the valley of the river Jerte, the heart of the country's main cherry-growing region, which for several weeks becomes a sea of white blossoms nestled between the wooded green slopes on either side (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 41).
The local cooperative association, which also includes some growers from the Vera region on the other side of the Gredos mountains that form the eastern side of the valley, has been producing fruit liqueurs since the mid 1980s. These include liqueurs made from raspberries and plums grown in the valley as well as pears brought in from the neighboring province of Badajoz. But the best known is the local spirit made from cherries, known in Europe as kirsch.
Seeing that their surpluses were being bought up for distillation in other countries, the local cooperatives decided that the best idea was to produce their own drinks. After a low-key start, they decided in 1989 to invest in a brand new distillery in Valdastillas which now ranks as one of the biggest of its kind in Europe with no less than 40 giant 25,000 liter capacity fermentation tanks.
The cooperatives' commercial director, Ramón Sinovas, said current annual production was about 120,000 liters of pure alcohol, with around 40 percent of the liqueur going for export. Major markets include Switzerland, Germany, and France, to which they hope to add Belgium and Austria soon.
Another potential market is the United States where the Aguardiente Valle del Jerte, as the sole brand is called, is being promoted along with other foods and drink from the Extremadura region.
Technical director Miguel Muñoz Mendoza said that, apart from local homemade production, kirsch had been unknown as a Spanish product before bottling began in earnest in 1991.
But, Europe's biggest cherry orchard region has been able to capitalize a combination of an enviable sunshine record and its own regional varieties of cherry to give Aguardiente Valle del Jerte its "own personality."
With some 1.5 million cherry trees and 50 different types of the fruit growing in the valley, it took several years of research before the cooperative group came up with the right formula.

THE RIGHT BALANCE

They decided to go for three different varieties of the black picota which gave the right balance between acidity and sugar content and a particularly aromatic nose, said Mr. Muñoz.
The new Spanish kirsch has also found favor with confectionery makers for whom the cooperatives are able to mix different combinations of cherry liqueur to meet individual needs.
The group has also begun producing Picotinas, a lower strength liqueur with cherries steeped in the drink, allowing for the fruit to be picked out and used for making desserts.
The immediate target for the Agrupación de Cooperativas Valle del Jerte is to reach

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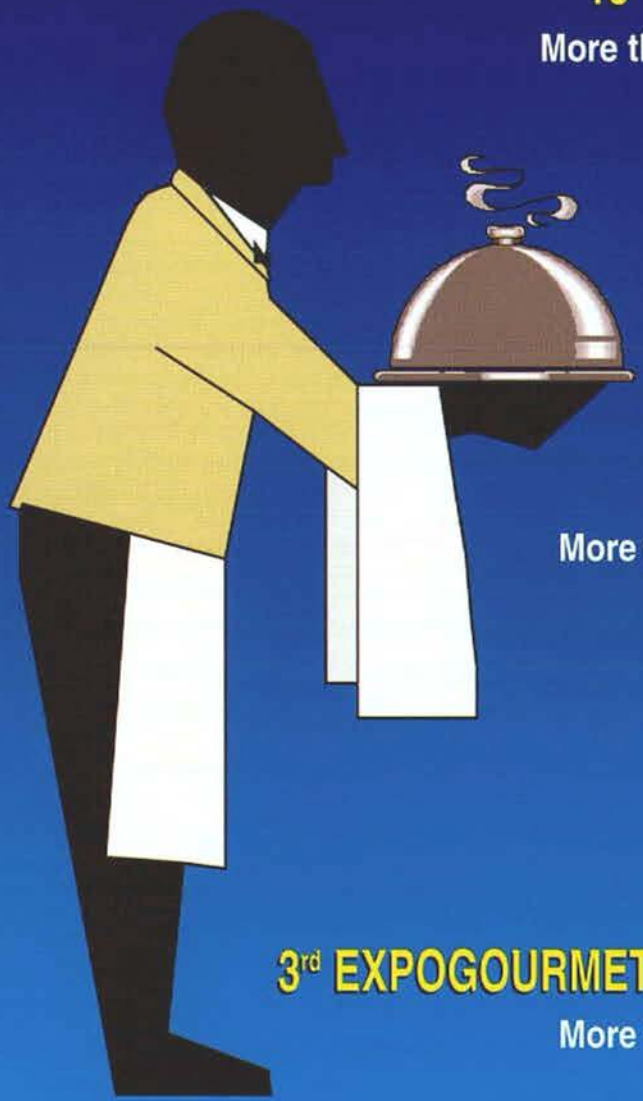

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Famed for its lush, green valleys, the Asturias region is dotted with apple orchards which for years have been the main source of Spain's favorite cider.

200,000 bottles by 1998 in sales to traditional kirsch-drinking countries and Spain itself, a novice when it comes to drinking cherry liqueur.

So, next time you try a "typical local kirsch" in Germany or Switzerland, have a good look at the bottle. It may be that it does not come from there at all... but from a hidden valley in southwestern Spain.

From one of the country's newest liqueurs, we turn again to one of the oldest and most traditional. Anise liqueur (*anís* in Spanish) has been made for centuries in many parts of the country. But it is in the typical Castilian town of Chinchón, less than 50 kilometers (31 miles) from Madrid, that we make our next stop.

With a near circular town square that converts to a bullring at fiesta time, Chinchón is famed for its oven roast meats which draw hundreds of visitors from the nearby capital every weekend. And to finish their meal, what better than a glass of the local anís?

A FIFTH FOR EXPORT

Chinchón is, in fact, the only area that has its own Denomination for anise, with three distilleries producing 2.4 million liters a year, about a fifth of which goes for export.

Francisco Domenech, the secretary of the Regulatory Council, is also production director at the biggest distillery, Alcoholera de Chinchón.

The big difference with anís from Chinchón is that it is made from the *matalahúva*, one of several plants that produce anetol—the essence of anís—but the one with the most flavor. It was also the only area that guaranteed 100 percent distillation of the drink, he says.

Although sales of anise have dipped since the 1980s, Chinchón has managed to hold its own and accounts for about 22 percent of national production.

While it is the Dutch who are attributed with discovering the idea of making liqueur from the seeds of the star-shaped badiana plant, it was the Spanish who took the drink to heart. By the 18th century it had become the national drink with virtually every town worth its name producing its own version. The practice of sipping an anís soon found its way to the New World, especially Mexico which still accounts for three quarters of exports. Most of the rest go to other parts of Latin America and to Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

The Denomination's regulations allow for four different types of anise to be produced, three of which are dry. But it is the sweetened version which remains by far the favorite, accounting for 85 percent of sales according to Mr. Domenech.

Beyond Chinchón, there still remain 100 other companies distilling anise, from Andalusia in the south to Catalonia in the north, according to Javier Angulo, managing director of FEFBE, the Spanish federation of spirits manufacturers.

A CONTINUOUS BATTLE

Of these, five produce more than one million liters a year with the top spot producing a continuous battle between two rivals not only in anís but also in sherry—Castellana which is part of the Allied Domecq empire and Mono (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 38) which belongs to Osborne.

Castellana, which currently claims No. 1 status with case sales of more than 403,000 last year, has been produced in Segovia, 80 kilometers (50 miles) northwest of Madrid, since the beginning of the century. Today, its strongest sales base is in the capital and Andalusia, while Germany represents its biggest export market.

The last leg of our "spiritual journey" takes us back towards the sea, this time the Mediterranean and the northeast region of Catalonia. Here is *cava* (see Glossary on page 150) country, the home of Spain's best-known sparkling wine.

Francisco Ventura's family has been distilling liqueurs since 1919, but it was only 17 years ago that they produced the first marc from local cava grapes.

Today they distill around 60,000 liters a year, all of which goes for bottling to leading cava house Segura Viudas, either as a freshly-produced marc or *viejo* which has undergone two years of aging.

The marc from the Venturas' distillery at La Roca des Vallés, 25 kilometers (15 miles) north of Barcelona is already sold by Segura Viudas in Germany, although Mr. Ventura said that the high alcoholic strength—over 40 degrees—would always restrict major growth.

Meanwhile, on the other side of Barcelona, in San Sadurní de Noya, cava house Gramona claims to be the pioneer in selling Spanish marcs in the mid 1970s.

Their brand, Celler Battle, has a taste more similar to that of Burgundy marcs in France than those of Champagne, yet with its own personal character, according to technical director Jaume Gramona i Martí. Matured in aged American oak barrels for two years and another two in bottle, it is regarded as a classic digestive.

This marc has since been joined by the lighter Gramona brand which is recommended for drinking at a temperature just above freezing point, and for taking between dishes as well as at the end of a meal. It is the best style for mixing with desserts such as sorbets.

The company was also the first and still the only one in the market to sell a cream liqueur version, the Licor de Marc Celler Battle.

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

See Main Exporters on page 139.

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LICOR 43 KEEPS ITS SECRET

History has it that when the Romans landed in southeast Spain around 200 B.C. to drive out their bitter rivals the Carthaginians, they discovered that the city, renamed by them New Carthage, was producing its own liqueurs.
The Romans apparently tried to stamp out the production. Whether they succeeded or not is not recorded. But some two millennia later, at the beginning of this century, a company in the now Cartagena began producing a drink reportedly based on the Carthaginians' Licor Mirabilis—a mixture of citric juices, aromatic plants, and other fruits from what is nowadays the Murcia region.
In 1944, local businessman Diego Zamora decided there was a future for this drink which, until then, had only been drunk locally. With the use of creative advertising campaigns, then virtually unknown in Spain, that drink, Licor 43, was pushed to the forefront of the Spanish market until, in the 1960s, the first export drive began. Today it is Spains's most international liqueur, selling in more than 60 countries worldwide.
Taking its name from the original number of ingredients used in the secret recipe, the makers of Licor 43 have no qualms about professing its "mixability" with anything from coffee to cola. But, like most liqueur makers, they also like consumers to try it on its own or simply on the rocks to appreciate its subtle taste.
Current chairman Emilio Restoy Zamora is proud to claim that Licor 43 is still the leading Spanish export brand, although he refuses to be drawn as to what contributes most to the drink's distinctive taste.
One thing is not a secret. The company produces 270,000 cases of 8.4 l a year of Licor 43, of which a third is exported. The main markets are North and Central America and northern Europe.

A GENTLEMAN AMONG DRINKS

Ponche Caballero is not only Spain's biggest selling liqueur, but the eighth biggest brand in the world, outselling leading international names such as Tía María and Drambuie.
Ponche is no stranger in the world. Other countries have their rum punch, *vin chaud* or whisky toddy. But they all share common roots—an ancient Persian drink called *panch*. Panch was their word for five, a reference to the number of basic ingredients: alcohol, sugar, cinnamon, egg yolk, and spices.
Over the centuries, the type and quantity of ingredients changed according to the taste of different nationalities. Panch became punch in English and ponche in Spain, where the formula changed yet again thanks to a gentleman called "gentleman"—*caballero* in Spanish.
Luis Caballero and his family moved from their native Galicia to the brandy region of Jerez where he began experimenting with different mixes until he came up with Ponche Caballero in 1917.
As with many beverage companies, the family kept the actual formula a closely guarded secret. But they acknowledge it contains orange—the most obvious to the taste—as well as plums, raisins, dried fruits, syrup, natural spices, and plant extracts such as almond and vanilla. What is more, they gave it a distinct silver-colored bottle to match a silver punch bowl. Little has changed since those early days, apart from a few adjustments to the labeling—and the sales. Today, Ponche Caballero sells some 925,000 nine-liter cases a year in Spain alone.
With the world's third biggest liqueur-drinking market on its doorstep—Spain is only led by the United States and Germany—there was little need to go looking for exports. But, four years ago the family decided to strike. Export manager Juan Llopart said it is now sold in nearly 40 countries, the biggest markets being Canada, South Africa, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the east coast of the United States.

COCKTAIL RECIPES

Selected by Martine Beaulieu

With marc or Galician orujo

PLAY BOY
In a large glass, mix grapefruit rind, two ice cubes, the juice from 1/2 grapefruit, 30 ml of marc or Galician orujo, and top off with tonic.

COBBLERS
Mix crushed ice and sugar to taste, a dash of Angostura bitters, 60 ml of marc de cava or Galician orujo, add seasonal fruits and stir. Serve in a large bowl-shaped glass with straws.

With cider aguardiente

CIDER COCKTAIL
Fill one quarter of a cocktail glass with crushed ice. Add one small jigger of cider aguardiente. Add a dash of sugar syrup, two dashes of Angostura bitters, and two of orange liqueur. Adorn with half a lemon slice.

RICKY
In a chilled tall glass mix two tablespoons of crushed ice, two teaspoons of sugar syrup, 1/4 part of lemon juice, one part cider aguardiente, 1/2 part rye whisky.

With anís

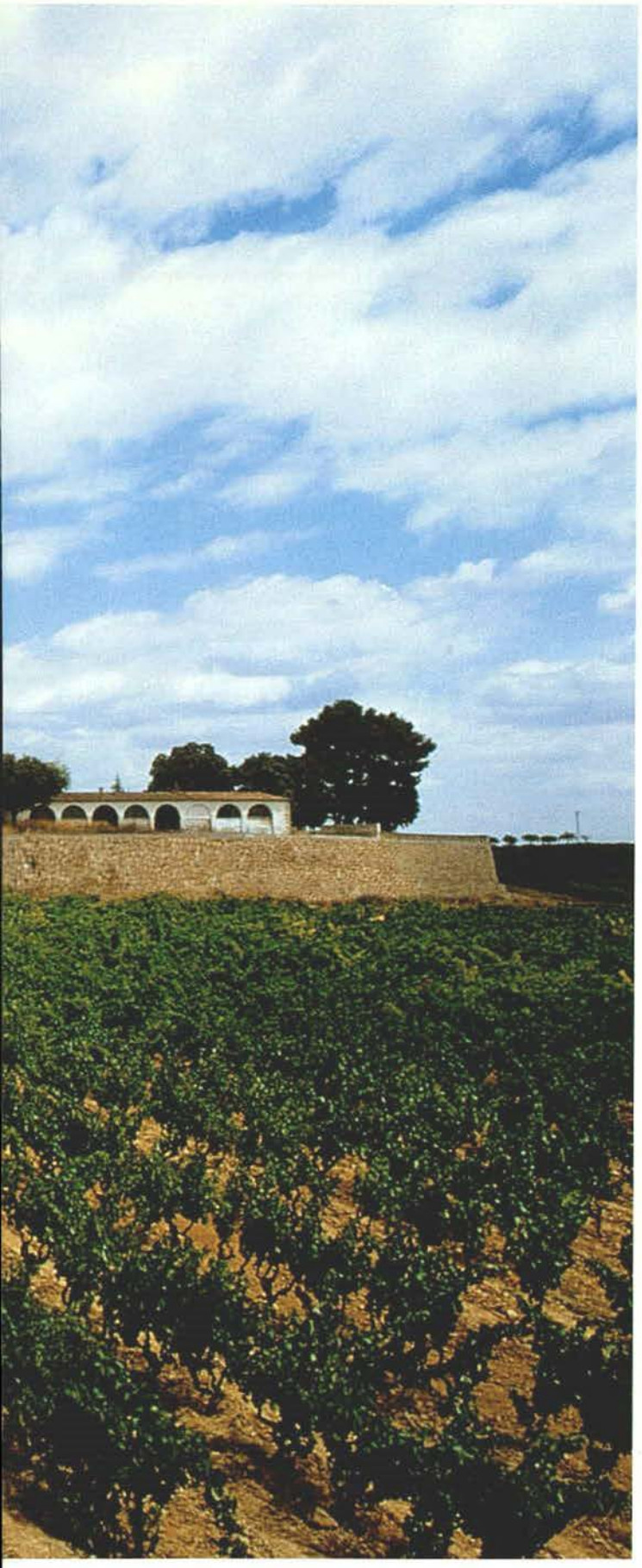
ANÍS COCKTAIL
In a cocktail shaker with crushed ice, pour one jigger of anise, one dash of Angostura bitters, 1/2 glass of water. Shake vigorously, strain and serve in a well-chilled glass, previously placing a slice of lemon on the bottom.

With kirsch

LA VIE EN ROSE
In a cocktail shaker with crushed ice, pour one jigger of grenadine liqueur syrup, 1/2 lemon juice, and one jigger of cherry liqueur. Shake vigorously and strain. Serve in a chilled glass. Add seltzer or club soda and serve with straws.

TANAGRA
In a cocktail shaker with ice, pour one part lemon juice, one part cherry liqueur, and one part dry white vermouth. Shake and serve in a well-chilled old fashioned glass lined with crushed ice. Serve with straws.

JUVÉ Y CAMPS:



Well into its eighth decade, Juvé y Camps is Spain's premier producer of deluxe *cavas*. Over the last fourteen years, under the patient care of export director Mariano Fuster, the company has been pursuing a painstaking campaign to secure only the most select outlets in Europe, Japan, Great Britain, the U.S., and Latin America.

A Commitment to Excellence

Text: **Nick Lyne** Photos: **Juvé y Camps/ICEX**

JOAN JUVÉ SANTACANA, GRANDSON OF THE FOUNDER OF THE WINERY, HAS A LIST OF EVERY OUTLET DETAILING HOW MANY BOTTLES THEY REGULARLY ORDER, SO THAT NOBODY GETS MORE THAN THEIR FAIR SHARE.

"The truth is, there's not much to tell," is export director Mariano Fuster's modest reply when asked what's been going on at Juvé y Camps recently. And this from the man who was brought into this traditional, family-run company in 1984 to define an export strategy. Since then he has established the company an international reputation shared with only a handful of other Spanish firms.

"Up until then, the company was content with the domestic market," he observes, looking out from the terrace of the eleventh century Casa Vella—the old house—at Juvé y Camps' Espiells estate close to the village of Sant Sadurní in the heart of the Penedés region on a bright midwinter's day. "And even now, we only let around ten percent of cava go abroad."

Juvé y Camps produces a little over two million bottles of cava a year—and has no immediate plans to increase production. This means that the couple of hundred thousand bottles of cava allowed out of the country annually are targeted at only a few lucky retail outlets and restaurants.

The firm's export strategy is very much a reflection of the domestic distribution process. Mariano Fuster laughs and tells how Joan Juvé Santacana, grandson of the founder of the winery, has a list of every outlet detailing how many bottles they regularly order, so that nobody gets more than their fair share. When Mariano Fuster embarked on his task of establishing export markets he had a very clear idea of where he wanted to see those precious bottles of cava. "We only market in four areas of the U.S.: the East Coast, the northern midwest, California, and Florida," he notes. There are barely 100 outlets on the East Coast, and every one of them was handpicked by Mariano Fuster. Then, with the help of the importer (just one for each region), the slow process of visiting each establishment began. "Sometimes it takes up to a year to get our cava in the right place," he points out, giving the example of one of Miami's finest restaurants, which, with a limited wine list, and little understanding of Spanish wines, took some convincing. "But I knew that was where we wanted to be, and eventually, when the moment was right, we got in there," he says proudly.

In Britain, Juvé y Camps' cavas are distributed through some 100 high profile shops and restaurants, among them Fortnum and Mason's and Harrods. The same applies to Germany, where around 35,000 bottles of cava and wine are sold, as well as to Japan, where the company has established a key niche for itself over the last eight years.

Champagne Rivals

"I don't know if we are the biggest of the small, or the smallest of the big," muses Mariano Fuster when asked how Juvé y Camps sees itself in Spain. The company has, through careful marketing and aided by the perfect product, successfully distanced itself from those cavas produced by Freixenet and Codorníu—the two giants who between them control almost 80 per cent of the domestic market. None of the smaller producers even come close. This means that when a Spaniard thinks of buying a fine drop of cava, Juvé y Camps is one of the brands that comes inevitably to mind.

The picture abroad however, is quite different. Spanish wines still suffer from associations of poor quality, and British and Americans in particular are loath to take them seriously. "In Britain and the U.S., if someone is going to spend more than $15 on sparkling wine, then they'll go for champagne. There's nothing I can do about that. For the moment," accepts Mariano Fuster.

Marketing cava abroad, in the way that Rioja has, for example, has so far proved an arduous task. For the moment, says Mariano Fuster, it's probably better if the respective bodegas find their own place in the overseas market, and once each of them has established a clear identity for their respective products, then maybe a more concerted effort can be made.

The fundamental problem, insists Mariano Fuster, is overcoming perceptions in the minds of overseas buyers that cava is cheap and cheerful. For the moment, though, that is the way most cavas are marketed.

"People still tend to drink cava as dessert wine, or for making a toast," observes Mariano Fuster. But Juvé y Camps markets its cavas as a fine wine and is determined to establish its cava as a deluxe product.

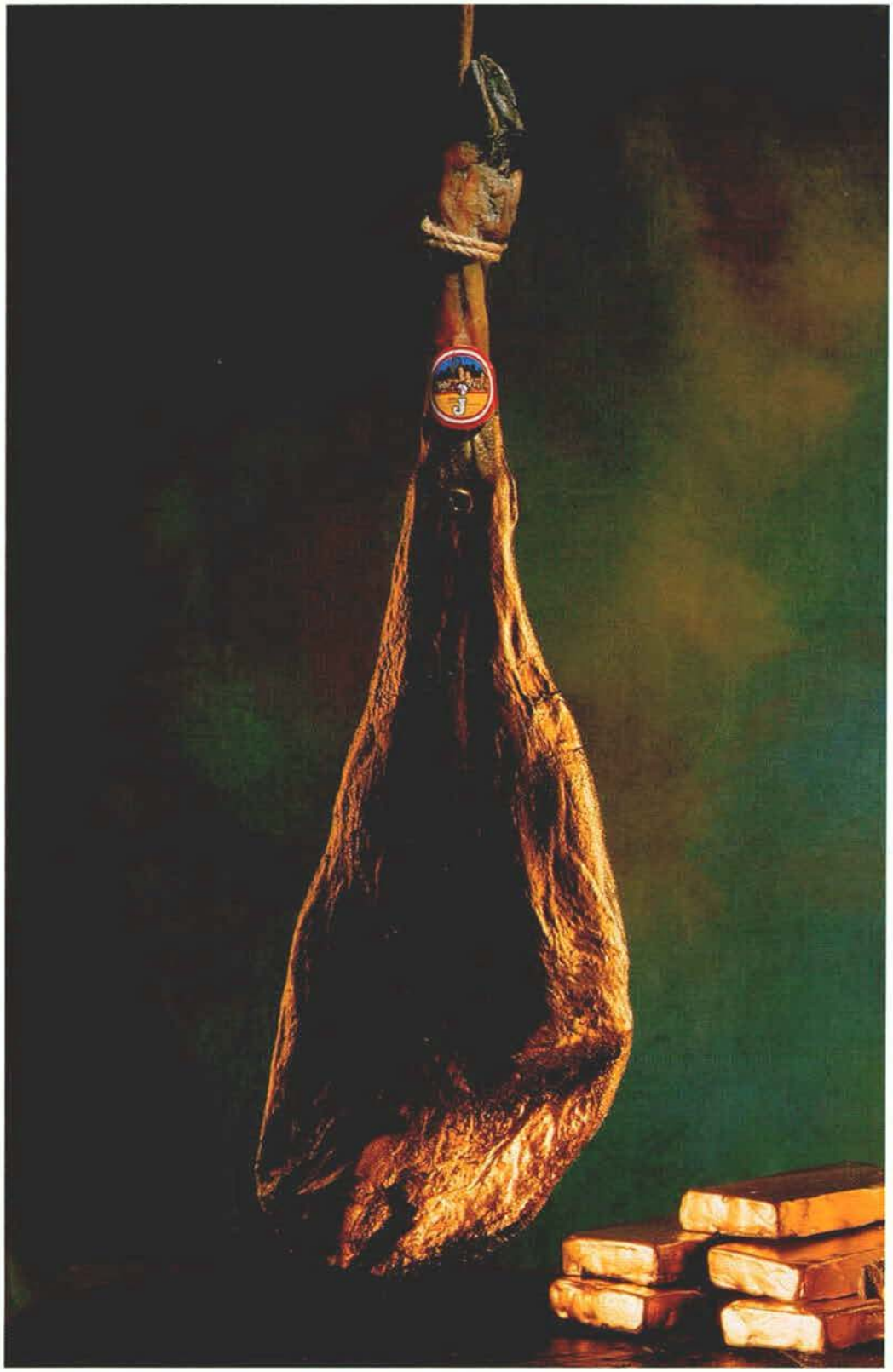
It is logical then, that Juvé y Camps sees champagne, rather than other cava producers as its rival. "We have to educate people," he laughs. And that education lies in making people aware of the superiority of a fine cava. Mariano Fuster explains, "Restaurants are the best way to get people to know our cava. In a shop, a customer is less likely to take a chance on buying our cava over champagne—unless the owner invites him to a glass." But in a restaurant, he notes, cava has a number of advantages over champagne: it is less acidic, and can be drunk throughout a meal, as it accompanies almost anything, particularly the increasingly popular Mediterranean diet. A look around the tables of any of Barcelona's better restaurants will bear this out.

Quality, Not Quantity

Despite its place in the market and a growing international reputation, Juvé y Camps is still very much a small scale operation, with a management team made up of the grandson of the founder, Joan Juvé Santacana, his cousin Joan Juvé, and Joan Juvé Camps (see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 24). The success of the company is based in part on a highly personal approach, which means that Mariano Fuster spends a lot of time with his customers. "Our customers value being able to talk directly to me, or to one of the family," points out Mariano Fuster.

Located in the Penedés region of Catalonia, Juvé y Camps has a total of 400 hectares (988 acres) producing its own grapes. Aside from the Espiells estate, a couple of kilometers out from the village of San Sadurní—the heart of the cava producing area—which grows Xarel-lo and Macabeo varieties, a 170 hectare (420 acres) vineyard at Can Massana, some 20 kilometers (12 miles) away, produces Parellada grapes. A third, 30 hectare (74 acres) estate at La Cuscona nearby produces Macabeo as well. These three varieties, mixed 40 percent Macabeo, 20 percent Xarel-lo, and 40 percent Parellada, make for classic cava. Juvé y Camps also has a number of local grape

PURE GOLD.



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JUVÉ Y CAMPS DOESN'T ADVERTISE. "WE SELL EVERYTHING WE MAKE ALREADY. IF WE STARTED ADVERTISING THE PRODUCT THEN WE WOULD BE OBLIGED TO PRODUCE MORE," EXPLAINS MARIANO FUSTER.

growers who, under strict supervision, supply the firm.

Mariano Fuster explains that Juvé y Camps is always experimenting with new ideas—including a batch of Chardonnay cava reposing in the cellar at the main offices in Sant Sadurní.

Juvé y Camps currently produces four cavas: the best-known Reserva de la Familia, with a minimum bottle aging of three years, the Gran Juvé, in the bottle for four years, and the younger Reserva vintage, in the bottle for two and a half years. The latest addition to the range is the Brut Rosado, made from Monastrell grapes, and matured for over four years in the bottle.

Yet the decision to extend the range has been slow in coming. In the early 1970s, as Spain's economy took off, Juvé y Camps took the decision to remain small, and to concentrate on a small number of highly selective products. Thus was born the Gran Reserva de la Familia, which was added to the renamed Gran Juvé y Camps, formerly the Gran Cru. These two wines still make up the vast bulk of Juvé y Camps' sales, with 1.5 million bottles of Gran Reserva sold annually, and around 120,000 Gran Juvé.

Boom Years

When Juvé y Camps started out back in 1921, there were but a handful of cava producers. Now, the Penedés region has around 280, with more than 100 centered on Sant Sadurní. The boom years of the 1980s and early 1990s saw dozens of new producers appear. Production soared to the current level of around 150 million bottles a year, while exports have grown by some 20 percent since the beginning of the decade. The biggest market is far and away Germany, occupying around 15 percent of exports, and a market which has doubled over the last five years. The U.S. remains a steady market, taking some 12 million bottles a year, while Britain has grown steadily, and is now the destination for some six million bottles a year.

Juvé y Camps doesn't advertise. "We sell everything we make already. If we started advertising the product then we would be obliged to produce more," explains Mariano Fuster looking out across the 200 hectare (494 acres) Espiells estate. "Of course we could increase sales," he continues, but we have to be very careful in maintaining the balance between being able to produce cava the way we want, and meeting the needs of a large market."

However, despite the temptations of a growing export market, and the emergence of new markets in Eastern Europe, Juvé y Camps refuses to be distracted from its long-term commitment to quality. "We don't use chemicals at any stage in the process," emphasizes Mariano Fuster. Vines are changed every 25 to 30 years, and the land left fallow and then planted with wheat or melons during seven years, before returning to vine rearing.

Cava carrying the Juvé y Camps label differs from its rivals in many ways, not least among them the speed by which the grapes used in its manufacture are processed. The company has processing facilities of around half a million liters a day, however, during the pressing period, barely 150,000 liters are pressed every 24 hours. This translates into immediate pressing as soon as the grape trailers are brought in. The company prides itself on a four-hour turnaround from vine to vat.

Perhaps the most telling commitment to tradition is Juvé y Camps continued use of *removedores*. As part of the fermentation and maturation process, which in Juvé y Camps takes from four to five years, each bottle of cava is laid in a *pupitre*, or rack, with the neck tilted at a slight downward angle.

Juvé y Camps has a team of six removedores, whose job is to turn, by an eighth, each bottle every day for three weeks, gradually increasing the angle of the bottle so as to collect the sediment in the neck. Skilled craftsmen who pass their art on from father to son, a practiced removedor is able to turn up to 50,000 bottles a day.

Cava provokes passion in Mariano Fuster, and as he tours the cellars and production facilities, it is evident that he has been inspired by the love and care with which Juvé y Camps prepares its wines. "You have to make this business your life, you have to live and breathe it," he confesses.

Looking to the Future

Juvé y Camps is now set to consolidate its position as a producer of top-quality cavas with a range of three still wines. This year will see the Ermita d'Espiells dry white—the same blend as cava, and which Juvé y Camps have been producing for 15 years—joined by a Chardonnay, Miranda d'Espiells, and a Cabernet Sauvignon: Casa Vella d'Espiells.

The aim is to reach sales of around a million bottles a year of these three still wines. But it will take well into the first decade of the next century before that is achieved, given their respective times needed to repose in the bottle. Some 200,000 bottles of Ermita d'Espiells are produced each year. For the last four years some 100,000 of the Miranda have been laid down for their two year rest, and around 60,000 of the Casa Vella red were bottled last year, none of which will see the light of day for four years.

These wines will help consolidate Juvé y Camps' export position, explains Mariano Fuster, although they are to be introduced into new overseas markets gradually.

From the terrace of the Casa Vella, Mariano Fuster points away over the vineyards to a rise where the new production and storage complex for still wine production can be seen taking shape. Closer inspection reveals yet another facet of what makes Juvé y Camps so successful: tradition blended with the best possible infrastructure.

Walking through the vast chambers which house the storage tanks, Mariano Fuster explains that the new winery has been built using the firm's own capital. "It has taken time to build, but we're getting there," he points out. The design is functional, but elegant; in keeping with the tradition Barcelona has established for itself as the style center for Spain. Below, the finishing touches are being put to the bodegas which will house the one million bottles a year of still wines which will represent the next phase of measured growth for Juvé y Camps.

Nick Lyne *is a full-time journalist who has lived in Spain for more than seven years. He has edited a number of guides on the capital, Madrid, and swears that one day he'll finish that novel he came here to write.*

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Madrid, Capital of the Tapas

It had been a long time since I'd had the chance to enjoy a weekend in Madrid. I yearned for those strolls through the El Retiro park, and for the pastries which, following the Spanish holiday ritual, my family would buy for dessert on Sunday. Later, there'd be an outing with friends in the evening to go and see a Spanish movie.
However, I must admit that the attraction of this bustling—at times uncomfortably bustling—city would be seriously diminished were it not for that healthy habit we Spaniards have of eating and drinking between our excursions to the park or to the cinema. Madrid offers one of the most varied and interesting cuisines in Europe, especially when it comes to those small, varied portions served in bars and taverns. I'm referring, of course, to *tapas*.

It's a proven fact that the percentage of bars and taverns, cafés and restaurants per square meter in the center of Madrid is higher than in any other European capital.
On this occasion my culinary jottings take us to the most picturesque and oldest district of the city, the Madrid of the Habsburgs, where we will wander along the Cava Baja and Cava Alta, the Plaza de la Paja and the Calle del Nuncio. Many of the taverns and *mesones* of this area have acquired considerable prestige over the last few years, especially since the dwellings in the neighborhood, in tastefully restored buildings, have been selling like hot cakes to Madrileños who after a brief dalliance with life in the suburbs and the endless commute have decided they want to live in the center of the city, after all. Yet the atmosphere and style of these taverns has changed very little in spite of the neighborhood's new-found affluence.
Casa Lucio is the perfect place to start our tour. Aside from its restaurant, here one finds an excellent selection of cold and hot tapas. Especially noteworthy are the oysters, Iberian ham and cured pork loin, as well as the selection of Spanish cheeses and regional dishes. Among these, of course, are the classic *callos a la madrileña* (tripe, Madrid style): spicy, flavorful, and as typical as the owner of the establishment, Lucio himself, who is the archetypal Madrid innkeeper, convivial and keen to ensure that his patrons are always satisfied. For drinks, I recommend a glass of sherry *fino*, here served chilled to perfection. **Casa Lucio. Cava Baja, 35. 28005 Madrid. Tel: (34) 913 653 252.**
On the same street is La Posada de la Villa. Both the selection of wines and the house bread are among the best to be found in this part of town. Each different wine has its recommended tapa, and the *raciones* (larger portions) served here are traditional and varied: *torreznos* (fried pork crackling), anchovies pickled in vinegar, and the delicious homemade fish or chicken croquettes, among others. **La Posada de la Villa. Cava Baja, 9. 28005 Madrid. Tel: (34) 913 661 860.**
La Taberna del Almendro is one of those places you return to time and again. The locale is pleasant and tastefully decorated, but the accent is—as it should be—on the service and the cuisine. Well-schilled draught beer, fino and oloroso sherry from Jerez, and a good selection of wines from a range of Spanish Denominación de Origen (see Glossary on page 150) districts are the perfect accompaniment to the wide range of tapas and dishes. Aside from the more common offerings, there are omelets of wild asparagus, tasty soups, and bread rings with fillings of sausage, black pudding and other savories. The selection of specialties is long, and it is worth making repeat visits to work your way down the list. **La Taberna del Almendro. Almendro, 13. 28005 Madrid. Tel: (34) 913 654 252.**

Last but not least, La Taberna de los Cien Vinos is a quaint and unique modern tavern, offering many of the best things you can savor in Madrid today, starting with an unbeatable selection of wines, sold by the glass or bottle according to the customer's wishes.
I had the opportunity to chat with the young chef who over the last six months has been in charge of the culinary offer at this establishment. The menu, chalked onto a blackboard hanging on the wall, changes every twenty days and the cooking, which is well-made yet not traditional fare, is of Basque/French inspiration and in addition has certain Moorish sweet-and-sour nuances. Among the original *pinchos* (as are called those delicious tidbits served on a slice of country bread) are *gambas al cremat* (shrimp au gratin with garlic mayonnaise), red cabbage glacé, anchovies with sweet tomato, marinated salmon and red pumpkin pie. Among the larger servings and hot dishes, I enjoyed the Les Landes salad (marinated and sautéed chicken livers on a mixed salad), the *morcilla de cebolla* (black pudding made with onion) and the scrambled eggs with garlic shoots. I also sampled the dishes chosen by my companions: the *porrilla* (a sort of thick *gazpacho*, a specialty of Cordoba and similar to the *porra* of Antequera in Málaga) and the *civet de ciervo* (jugged venison, marinated in sweet wine, juniper and cloves). **La Taberna de los Cien Vinos. Calle Nuncio, 17. 28005 Madrid. Tel: (34) 913 654 704.**

It is true that when it comes to choosing a bar or restaurant the recommendations of my friends are the most reliable source, but there are also useful tips to be had from guidebooks which have been mentioned previously in our section "Lasting Impressions," namely the guides published by El País-Aguilar in cooperation with the Sherry Regulatory Council, generically titled *Guías con Encanto* (Guides with Charm). They include a series of small booklets called *De Tapas por...* (Tapa hopping in...) which present the best of this bite-sized style of cuisine in the major Spanish cities. To date, there are guides to tapas bars in Barcelona; Bilbao; Cádiz and the Jerez area; Granada; La Coruña, Ferrol and Santiago; Málaga, Marbella and Torremolinos; Oviedo and Gijón; Pamplona; Salamanca; San Sebastian; Santander and Castro Urdiales; Seville; Valencia; Zaragoza and, of course, Madrid. **El País-Aguilar. Torrelaguna, 60. 28043 Madrid. Tel: (34) 917 449 060. Fax: (34) 917 449 093.**

Back in London, we head for the prestigious kitchens of the Four Seasons Hotel on Park Lane, where each year a banquet is held in honor of

the men (and, thus far, one woman) of note in the world of Spanish wine: **"The Order of the Caballeros del Vino."** In the United Kingdom, especially in gatherings where wine is the central theme and there are more than 300 participants, little importance is normally granted to the food, which tends to be so-called French cuisine—that is, lots of sauce but not much substance. This is not the case with the Caballeros del Vino dinner, which in the last two or three years has become the most important culinary event of its type in the country. Following is the menu and the wines chosen for the 1998 investiture ceremony.

For starters, fino sherry and manzanilla from Sanlúcar de Barrameda were served at the reception, while the investiture ceremony was accompanied by a glass of delicious sparkling cava, Heredad Brut Reserva from Segura Viudas.

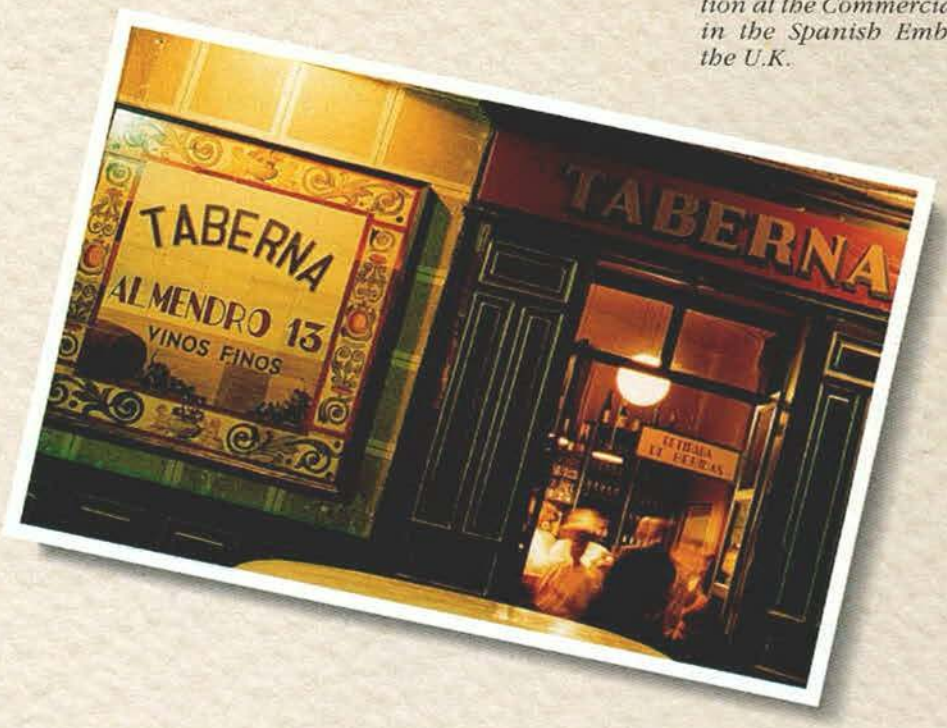
The dinner—and I do not exaggerate when I say it was truly exceptional—started with a prawn soup or, rather, three cups with three different soups in which prawns were the star ingredient. To accompany this we drank a white Mantel Blanco, Verdejo Sauvignon 1996 from the Rueda D.O., fragrant, fresh, and complex. Following this, and to demonstrate that in Spain it is not considered a sin to serve red wine with fish, the Caballeros chose a young and powerful Marqués de Murrieta 2100 1996 from the Rioja D.O.C., which was the perfect companion for a suprême of brill with squid and wheat grains cooked in the same wine. Two of the new Caballeros invested during the ceremony had been born in Navarre: Javier Ochoa and the late Julián Chivite, who was proclaimed a Caballero posthumously. A *jarrete de cordero* (lamb shank) cooked with vegetables, saffron and other spices was served in their honor, for few dishes are as traditionally Navarrese as this one.

The wine was Navarrese, but not the traditional kind: it was a Castillo de Monjardín Merlot 1994 from the Navarra D.O., a delicious new-style wine for wine drinkers who demand quality and variety. When the time came for cheese, the chef opted for a mature Zamorano cheese and a blue cheese, Picón, from the Liébana region of Cantabria to go with a classically smooth Campillo Reserva, 1988 from the Rioja D.O.C. For dessert, we enjoyed a "History of Chocolate" (six assorted chocolates: white, hot, truffle...) and a glass of Pedro Ximénez from Bodegas Valdespino in Jerez, and to continue the festivities a sparkling cava from Catalonia, in this case Castell de Vilarnau from González Byass.

From the exquisite preparations of The Four Seasons we go to the more down-to-earth filling fare, such as the battered-fried potatoes, which the chef from the Hotel Virrey in Burgo de Osma (Soria) included on the menu of a new Mediterranean-Spanish restaurant recently opened in the heart of London's Docklands. This district, until some years ago a post-industrial wasteland of cranes and grimy black barges, has been restyled with futuristic architecture, little canals and picturesque old boats now anchored in perpetuity. Here, bankers, journalists, and consultants work in gleaming buildings of glass, metal, and concrete. Needless to say, they like to eat well and are increasingly adventurous in their search for the new flavors with which they have become acquainted thanks to travel or television. The Hotel Virrey's Señor Gil was in charge of a series of gastronomic sessions revolving around the cuisine of Castile-Leon, sponsored by the regional government of that Spanish Autonomous Community.

The menu featured Ávila veal chop, roast suckling pig, beans, lentils, and chickpeas from the region, *cecina* (cured beef) from Leon, Iberian cured ham from Guijuelo, sausages... So authentic and extensive was the offer that it even included *candeal* bread brought specially from El Burgo. This filling bread made with the wide-grained candeal wheat of Castile is exceptionally white in color and dense in texture and, when it is stale, is perfect for preparing a delicious Castillian style garlic soup. A resounding success. **Baradero. Turnberry Quay, off Pepper St. London E14 9RD (Docklands) Tel: (44 171) 5371666.**

Author and broadcaster ***María José Sevilla*** *is a specialist in food and wine and teaches at the Culinary Institute of America, in the Napa Valley. She is responsible for gastronomy and food promotion at the Commercial Office in the Spanish Embassy in the U.K.*



RECIPES FROM ANDALUSIA

Recipes selected by Mark Little
Wines recommended by María Jesús Gil de Antuñano

Artichokes with Sanlúcar Prawns

El Faro del Puerto is the best-known restaurant in El Puerto de Santa María. Their cuisine relies on the freshest of locally caught fish and shellfish. This recipe combines artichokes and wild mushrooms with the famous langostinos, jumbo prawns, from nearby Sanlúcar, cooked in *oloroso* sherry.

SERVES 6:
3 kg artichokes
A bunch of tender garlic shoots
1 kg large prawns, peeled
150 ml oloroso sherry
100 ml olive oil
Juice of 1 bitter orange
100 gr wild mushrooms
Salt

Cook the artichokes until tender, and set aside. Finely chop the garlic shoots and brown in the oil, add the artichokes, the peeled prawns, the wild mushrooms, the oloroso sherry and the orange juice. Sauté for one minute and serve with the pan juices.
Recommended wine: The same oloroso sherry used in the cooking, or with a Palomino oloroso from the Condado de Huelva. The special flavor of artichokes, which will even change the taste of water when you eat them, is notoriously difficult to match with wine. Artichokes require a wine of sufficient strength to envelop, but not disguise the delicate, and at the same time strong, flavor of the vegetable. As here they are cooked in oloroso sherry, this would be the most suitable companion. The dish would also go well with an oloroso from the Condado de Huelva, provided it was a Palomino varietal with a good intensity of aromas of vanilla, toffee, and coffee, well combined with aromas of dried fruit, hazelnuts, and walnuts which indicate proper aging in the cask.

Sailors' Rice Stew

José Antonio Romero Valdespino is dedicated to recovering traditional Andalusian recipes, which he serves up in his Jerez restaurant, La Mesa Redonda. This is a classic fisherman's dish in which simple, readily-available ingredients are combined to make a tasty and nutritious dish.

SERVES 4-6:
1 kg rock fish such as rascasse or gurnard
250 gr onions
100 gr green peppers
250 gr ripe tomatoes
250 gr small clams
200 gr large prawns
300 gr rice
200 ml olive oil
1 gr saffron
100 ml dry fino sherry
200 gr small shrimp

Clean and remove bones from the fish. Boil the bones and head in one liter of water with an onion, a celery stalk, and a bunch of parsley to make a stock. Chop the onions, peppers, and tomatoes into medium-sized chunks. Finely chop the garlic. Pour oil into a pot and heat over medium flame. Sauté the vegetables until they start to brown.

Add the cleaned fish, the clams, and the rice to the vegetables and sauté for a few minutes. Add the strained fish stock and the wine. Take care not to oversalt.

Simmer over a medium flame for twenty minutes. Five minutes before this time is up, add the shrimp and prawns. Season to taste. Remove from heat and let sit for ten minutes before serving.

Recommended wine: A Pedro Ximénez varietal white wine from the Montilla-Moriles *denominación* area, or a white from the Condado de Huelva, in either case a wine of a low alcohol level.

This rice dish with its strong taste of the sea, lightly perfumed with saffron, calls for a light white wine, chilled to 8°C (46°F), with a low alcohol level. A Pedro Ximénez white from Montilla-Moriles, where the classic aromas of the very ripe fruit are tempered by the light texture and flavor of a dry white. It could also be accompanied by a Zalema varietal white from the Condado de Huelva, with a similarly low alcohol level, light density, ripe fruit aromas, and light flavor.

RECIPES

Turbot Fillets in Amontillado Sherry

Amontillado sherry adds a subtle dimension to the fine-flavored flesh of the turbot in this preparation from La Mesa Redonda.

SERVES 4:
4 fillets of turbot, 250 gr each piece
150 gr onions
50 gr celery
25 gr parsley
150 ml amontillado sherry
125 ml virgin olive oil
20 gr paprika

Fillet the turbot, leaving the skin on. Sauté the fish bones and head in 75 ml oil. Add 100 ml of amontillado sherry, and let liquid reduce for a few minutes, then add half a liter of water, the onion, the celery, and a bit of parsley.
Brush the fillets with virgin olive oil, dredge in bread crumbs, score, season with paprika and salt, and place in medium oven with skin side up until done. Take some of the fish stock, reduce and whisk into a sauce with a bit of olive oil and a few dashes of amontillado. Season the sauce to taste, and pour over the turbot fillets.
Recommended wine: The same amontillado sherry used in the cooking, or a Palomino varietal white from the Jerez area.
A fish as flavorful as turbot would go well even with a young red wine, but being cooked in amontillado sherry and further perfumed with this wine at the last moment, the best option is to carry the theme through and accompany the dish with the same amontillado. It would also go well with an unaged Palomino white varietal, fresh and light, served at 8°C (46°F).

Baby Lamb Chops in Sherry Vinegar

In this recipe from the master chefs at Málaga's hotel and catering school, Escuela de Hostelería La Cónsula, the rich flavor of sherry vinegar is the perfect complement for the mild-flavored baby lamb.

SERVES 4-6:
20 baby lamb chops
1 shallot, chopped fine
100 gr butter
200 ml sherry vinegar
100 ml of the juices from the lamb
1 sprig of mint
Salt and pepper

Season the lamb chops and sauté in butter until done. Remove and keep warm.
In the same pan, substitute the remaining fat with a bit of butter, sauté the shallot and deglaze with the sherry vinegar. Add the juices from the lamb, and let liquid reduce to half its volume. Add the mint and the remaining butter, and whisk into a sauce. Season to taste and pour sauce over the lamb chops. Serve with a vegetable such as spinach, carrots, or broccoli.
Recommended wine: A Muscatel varietal sweet white from Málaga.
Normally, a young, mild-flavored suckling lamb goes perfectly well with a Málaga white made with Airén and Doradilla grapes, aromatic and smooth to the taste. But as this dish is accompanied by a sauce made with butter, vinegar, and mint, all of which are difficult companions for wine, here we would suggest a more assertive Málaga white made with Muscatel, whose fruity sweetness will stand up to the aromatic force of the vinegar and mint, and cut through the butter used for the sauce.

Amontillado Sherbet

For dessert, the chef at El Faro del Puerto suggests a refreshing sherbet with a scintillating sherry flavor.

SERVES 4:

350 ml amontillado sherry
1 liter water
400 gr sugar
1 egg white, whipped stiff
Seedless raisins macerated in amontillado sherry

Boil water with sugar to make a syrup. Cool. Mix the wine and the syrup, add the whipped egg white. Place in an ice cream maker, or churn freeze to desired consistency. Decorate with the seedless raisins before serving.

Recommended wine: A Palomino and Pedro Ximénez oloroso sherry. This is one of those desserts which will admit a Pedro Ximénez oloroso whose sweetness is smoothened with the presence of the Palomino grape, a wine with aromas of aging and liqueur notes, together with hints of coffee, dried fruit such as figs or prunes, sweet but not exceedingly so. As the coolness of the sorbet subdues the sweetness of the syrup used, it does not call for an excessively sweet wine such as a Pedro Ximénez varietal.

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 milliliters = 1/3 ounce
50 milliliters = 1 3/4 ounces
100 milliliters = 3 1/2 ounces
250 milliliters = 8 1/2 ounces
500 milliliters = 17 1/2 ounces
1 liter = 1 3/4 pints
1 teaspoon = 5 milliliters
1 tablespoon = 18 milliliters
1 ounce = 28 milliliters
1 pint = 570 milliliters
1 quart = 1.14 liters
1 gallon = 4 1/4 liters

Fluid Measures
METRIC/U.S. STANDARD

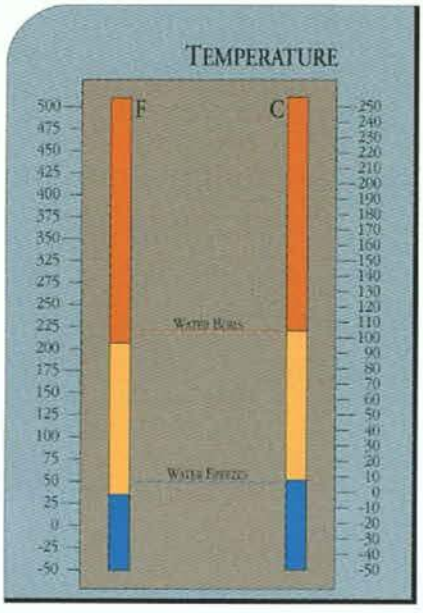
10 milliliters = 2 teaspoons
50 milliliters = 3 tablespoons
100 milliliters = 3 1/2 ounces
250 milliliters = 1 cup + 1 tablespoon
500 milliliters = 1 pint + 2 tablespoons
1 liter = 1 quart + 3 tablespoons
1 teaspoon = 5 milliliters
1 tablespoon = 15 milliliters
1 ounce = 30 milliliters
1 cup = 235 milliliters
1 pint = 475 milliliters
1 quart = 850 liters
1 gallon = 3 3/4 liters

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 = 250°F/120°C	= 1/4
Slow = 300°F/150°C	= 1
Moderate = 350°F/180°C	= 4
Hot = 400°F/200°C	= 6
Very hot = 450°F/230°C	= 8



MAIN EXPORTERS

CHEESE

An additional list of Spanish producers of this product is available as a brochure, on diskette, and via Internet. For more information see page 15.

CONSORCIO DE LOS QUESOS TRADICIONALES
DE ESPAÑA, S.A.
Ed. Plataforma Frigorífica. C/ Fraguas, s/n
Pol. Ind. URTINSA - 28923 MAJADAHONDA (Madrid)
Tel: (34) 916 443 195 - Fax: (34) 916 440 756
Afuega'l Pitu, Abumado de Aliva, Gamoneu, Garrotxa, Ibores, Los Beyos, Majorero, Rondeño, San Simón, Sierra de Gata, Torta del Casar, and Pata de Mulo

CONSORCIO EXPORTADOR IBERICO, S.A. (CEISA)
Camino de Morgán, 30 - 48014 BILBAO (Vizcaya)
Tel: (34) 914 763 993 - Fax: (34) 914 760 390
San Simón, Torta del Casar, and Majorero

QUORUM INTERNACIONAL DE VINOS
Y DELICATESSEN, S.L.
Huertas, 18
28610 VILLAMANTA (Madrid)
Tel: (34) 918 136 335 - Fax: (34) 918 136 335
Garrotxa, Ibores, Los Beyos, San Simón, Torta del Casar, Pata de Mulo, and Majorero

INDUSTRIAL QUESERA CUQUERELLA, S.L
Ctra. Toledo, s/n; Apdo. correo 15
13420 MALAGON (Ciudad Real)
Tel: (34) 926 800 215 - Fax: (34) 926 802 643
Ibores

LACTEAS DEL JARAMA, S.A.
Ctra. Alcalá-Torrelaguna, km. 25,1
28140 FUENTE EL SAZ (Madrid)
Tel: (34) 916 201 061 - Fax: (34) 916 200 039
Pata de Mulo

Source: ICEX

CURED HAM

An additional list of Spanish producers of this product is available as a brochure, on diskette, and via Internet. For more information see page 15.

Iberian Ham

REAL IBÉRICO/CONSORCIO DEL IBÉRICO
General Yagüe, 12-2º1
28020 MADRID
Tel: (34) 915 560 110 - Fax (34) 915 560 161

CONSEJO REGULADOR D.O.DEHESA DE EXTREMADURA
Cánovas del Castillo, 16.2º - 06800 MÉRIDA (Badajoz)
Tel: (34) 924 330 203 - Fax: (34) 924 315 101

CONSEJO REGULADOR D.O. GUIJUELO
Alfonso XIII, 57. 1ºB - 37770 GUIJUELO (Salamanca)
Tel: (34) 923 581 514 - Fax: (34) 923 580 097

CONSEJO REGULADOR D.O. JAMÓN DE HUELVA
Enlace 1 - 21290 JABUGO (Huelva)
Tel: (34) 959 121 1 97 - Fax (34) 959 121 143

Serrano Ham

CONSORCIO DEL JAMÓN SERRANO ESPAÑOL
Moralzarzal, 80 1º. A. - 28034 MADRID
Tel: (34) 917 350 501 - Fax (34) 917 350 503

CONSEJO REGULADOR D.O. JAMÓN DE TERUEL
Av. de Sagunto, 52.3º - 44200 TERUEL
Tel: (34) 978 606 550 - Fax: (34) 978 606 550

D.O. BIERZO WINES

CONSEJO REGULADOR D.O. BIERZO
Los Morales, 1.2º/Apdo. 41 - 24540 CACABELOS (León)
Tel: (34) 987 549 408 - Fax (34) 987 547 077

BODEGA COOPERATIVA VINÍCOLA DEL BIERZO
Ctra. General, s/n
24412 CABAÑAS RARAS (León)
Tel: (34) 987 421 755 - Fax: (34) 987 421 755

BODEGA PÉREZ CARAMÉS
Peña Picón, s/n
24500 VILLAFRANCA DEL BIERZO (León)
Tel: (34) 987 540 197 - Fax: (34) 987 540 314

BODEGAS PRADA A TOPE, S.A.
Cimadevilla, 99 - 24540 CACABELOS (León)
Tel: (34) 987 546 101 - Fax: (34) 987 549 056

BODEGAS SEÑORÍO DE PEÑALBA, S.A.
Polígono del Bierzo, Parcela 31
24560 TORAL DE LOS VADOS (León)
Tel: (34) 987 545 271 - Fax: (34) 987 540 023

BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS LUNA BEBERIDE
Ctra. Madrid-Coruña, s/n - 24540 CACABELOS (León)
Tel: (34) 987 549 002 - Fax: (34) 987 549 002

VINOS DEL BIERZO, S. COOP.
Av. de la Constitución, 106 - 24540 CACABELOS (León)
Tel: (34) 987 546 150 - Fax: (34) 987 549 326

VIÑAS DEL BIERZO, S. COOP
Ctra. Madrid-Coruña, s/n - 24410 CAMPONARAYA (León)
Tel: (34) 987 463 009 - Fax: (34) 987 450 323

Source: Regulatory Council of D.O. Bierzo Wines

HONEY

An additional list of Spanish producers of this product is available as a brochure, on diskette, and via Internet. For more information see page 15.

APISOL, S.A.
Av. Blasco Ibáñez, s/n - 46193 MONTROY (Valencia)
Tel: (34) 962 555 262 - Fax: (34) 962 556 232

COOPERATIVA APÍCOLA LEVANTINA
Doctor Ferrán, 78 - 46600 ALZIRA (Valencia)
Tel: (34) 962 416 832 - Fax: (34) 962 416 832

EL QUEXIGAL
05260 CEBREROS (Avila)
Tel: (34) 916 310 826 - Fax: (34) 916 310 851

GÓMEZ ZARDOYA
Cebollera, 15 - 42166 SOTILLO DEL RINCÓN (Soria)
Tel: (34) 975 273 132 - Fax: (34) 975 273 120

HISPAMIEL, S.A.
Plza. de Manises, 2-17ª
46003 VALENCIA
Tel: (34) 963 918 667 - Fax: (34) 963 919 206

MIELES FERRANDO
General Prim, 7 - 46740 CARCAIXENT (Valencia)
Tel: (34) 962 433 242 - Fax: (34) 962 433 242

MIELSO, S.A.
Pol. Industrial El Mijares, 7
12550 ALMANZORA (Castellón)
Tel: (34) 964 562 851 - Fax: (34) 964 563 522

NATURVAL APÍCOLA
Av. Blasco Ibáñez, 55 - 46192 MONTSERRAT (Valencia)
Tel: (34) 962 999 414 - Fax: (34) 962 998 329

PRIMO MENDOZA JOSÉ LUIS
Corbella, 71 - 46840 CARLET (Valencia)
Tel: (34) 962 531 026 - Fax: (34) 962 531 142

SOC. COOP. APÍCOLA DE ESPAÑA (ANAE)
Pol. Industrial San Antón, s/n - 46620 AYORA (Valencia)
Tel: (34) 962 191 040 - Fax: (34) 961 890 075

SOC. COOP. EL BREZAL
10630 PINOFRANQUEADO (Cáceres)
Tel: (34) 927 674 300 - Fax: (34) 927 674 300

C. R. DE LA D.C. VILLUERCAS-IBORES
Carretera de Berzocana, 5
10136 CAÑAMERO (Cáceres)
Tel: (34) 927 369 348 - Fax: (34) 927 369 348

EXTREMIEL, SOC. COOP. VILLUERCAS-IBORES
Polígono La Colada, s/n - 10136 CAÑAMERO (Cáceres)
Tel: (34) 927 369 251 - Fax: (34) 927 369 251

Source: Inspection Center for Foreign Trade. SOIVRE, Valencia

LIQUEURS and SPIRITS

Anise Liqueur

ALCOHOLERA DE CHINCHÓN
Ctra. Puente de Arganda-Chinchón, Km. 14,5,
28370 CHINCHÓN (Madrid)
Tel: (34) 918 730 006 - Fax: (34) 918 739 216

ANÍS CASTELLANA, S.A.
Pol. Nicomedes García, s/n
40140 VALVERDE DEL MAJANO (Segovia)
Tel: (34) 921 490 690 - Fax: (34) 921 490 657

ANÍS DEL MONO, S.A.
Eduardo Maristany, 115 - 08912 BADALONA (Barcelona)
Tel: (34) 933 888 111 - Fax: (34) 933 888 190

Source: ICEX

Kirsch

AGRUPACIÓN DE COOPERATIVAS VALLE DEL JERTE,
SDAD. COOP. LTDA.
Ctra. Nacional 110, km. 381
10614 VALDASTILLAS (Cáceres)
Tel: (34) 927 476 370 - Fax: (34) 927 476 197

Cider Spirit

SIDRA ESCANCIADOR, S.A.
Maximino de la Miyar, 1 - 33300 VILLAVICIOSA (Asturias)
Tel: (34) 985 890 050 - Fax: (34) 985 891 172

VALLE BALLINA Y FERNÁNDEZ, S.A.
La Espuncia, s/n - 33300 VILLAVICIONSA (Asturias)
Tel: (34) 985 890 100 - Fax: (34) 985 891 654

Source: AESI (Association of Cider Producers)

Galician Orujo

CONSEJO REGULADOR DE D.E. ORUJO GALLEGO
Rua do Paseo, 18-4ª - 32003 ORENSE
Tel: (34) 988 235 906 - Fax: (34) 988 235 906

DESTILERÍAS CANDAMIO
Baravio, 18
15319 BETANZOS (La Coruña)
Tel: (34) 981 771 763 - Fax: (34) 981 770 317

COOPERATIVA VITIVINÍCOLA DEL RIBEIRO
Valdepereira
32417 RIBADAVIA (Orense)
Tel: (34) 988 470 175 - Fax: (34) 988 470 330

VANDAMOR, S.A.
Xil
36968 MEAÑO (Pontevedra)
Tel: (34) 986 747 111 - Fax: (34) 986 747 743

AGUARDIENTES DE GALICIA, S.A.
Cubelas, s/n
15886 SAN PEDRO DE SARANDON-VEDRA (La Coruña)
Tel: (34) 981 502 100 - Fax: (34) 981 502 100

GODEVAL, S.A.T.
Av. de Galicia, 20
32300 O BARCO DE VALDEORRAS (Orense)
Tel: (34) 988 325 309 - (34) 988 320 148

DESTILERÍAS DEL CONDADO, S.L.
Lugar de O Barral
36860 PONTEAREAS (Pontevedra)
Tel: (34) 986 661 527 - Fax: (34) 986 641 925

Source: Regulatory Council of Specific Denomination of Galician Orujo

Catalan Marc

SEGURA VIUDAS
Ctra. San Sadurní-sant Pere Riudebitles
08770 SAN SADURNÍ D'ANOIA (Barcelona)
Tel: (34) 938 997 227 - Fax: (34) 938 996 006

GRAMONA
Industria, 36
08770 SAN SADURNÍ D'ANOIA (Barcelona)
Tel: (34) 938 910 113 - Fax: (34) 938 183 284

Source: Cava Institute

Pacharán

CONSEJO REGULADOR DE D.E. PACHARÁN NAVARRO
Pza. El Vínculo, 3-2ª
31002 PAMPLONA (Navarra)
Tel: (34) 948 229 157 - Fax: (34) 948 226 428

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Source: Regulatory Council of Specific Denomination of Navarran Pacharán

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An additional list of Spanish manufacturers of this product is available as a brochure, on diskette, and via Internet. For more information see page 15.

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Autopista Madrid-Cádiz, Km. 550,6
Apartado 674 SEVILLA
Tel: (34) 954 690 900 - Fax: (34) 954 690 450

ACEITES YBARRA, S.A.
Ctra. Isla Menor, Km. 1,800
41700 DOS HERMANAS (Sevilla)
Tel: (34) 955 661 200 - Fax: (34) 955 660 777

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Source: ASOLIVA (Association of Olive Oil Exporters)

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Source: Regulatory Council of D.O. Ham from Huelva

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Source: Regulatory Council of D.O. Raisins from Málaga

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GARVEY, S.A.
Ctra. Circunvalación, 637,5
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Source: ASEGRE (Association of Production, Aging, and Export Companies of Sherry Vinegar) and Regulatory Council of D.O. Sherry Vinegar

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Source: FRESHUELVA (Association of Strawberry Producers and Exporters from Huelva)

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AD INDEX

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Page: 147

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Page: 55

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Page: 118

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Page: 124

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Page: 102

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Page: 88

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Page: 6

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Page: 131

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Page: 135

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Page: 49

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Page: 63

AD INDEX

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Page: 50

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Page: 100

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Page: 12

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Page: 143

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Page: 4

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Page: 129

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Page: 66

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Page: 145

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Page: 122

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Page: 141

The Venencia: Magic Wand of Jerez

Something as simple as fermented grape juice takes on a character which has influenced, since antiquity, many aspects of life among those peoples who treasure it. In Spain, it is the drink par excellence. Every region—in some cases counties—has its own wine: wines from the Duero region, from Rioja, Albariño and Ribeiro from Galicia, Chacolí from the Basque Country, the Cava of Catalonia, the Andalusian wines of Jerez, Málaga, Montilla... And alongside this oenological wealth, a wide variety of crafts has arisen, linked to the various ways of serving and drinking wine in each area: ceramic cups in Galicia, spouted *porrones* or wine jugs in the interior, leather wineskins in the north, the sherry glasses and *venencias* of the south... In this new series we will be featuring some examples of the Spanish crafts related to that most prized of liquids.

We are in the land of Andalusian horses and golden-hued wines. Many have referred to the zone bordered by the towns of Jerez de la Frontera, El Puerto de Santa María, and Sanlúcar de Barrameda as the "Magic Triangle." Its special climate and the nature of its soil have turned this area into a land of famous wines: dry *finos*, *amontillados*, *olorosos*, *manzanilla*, velvety Pedro Ximénez, *palo cortado*... Together with this winemaking activity there is a rich crafts tradition, from the manufacture of casks, corks, and bottles, to something as unique to the region as the venencia and the *catavinos*, the typical sherry glass of Jerez.

There is evidence that the venencia, the long rod used to draw wine from the cask, was already in use in the times of the ancient Greeks. In the Museum of Historic Art of Vienna, there is a painted ceramic dating from 480 B.C., which shows a figure using a venencia to pour wine into a cup.

We do not know for certain when this device reached the wine country of Cádiz. Although it had been around much longer, the first documentary references to the manufacture of venencias date from around two centuries ago. Originally they were made from cane, then came those made of metal, steel being the most common material since the 1960s. In addition, there have always been deluxe versions made of silver, copper, or bronze.

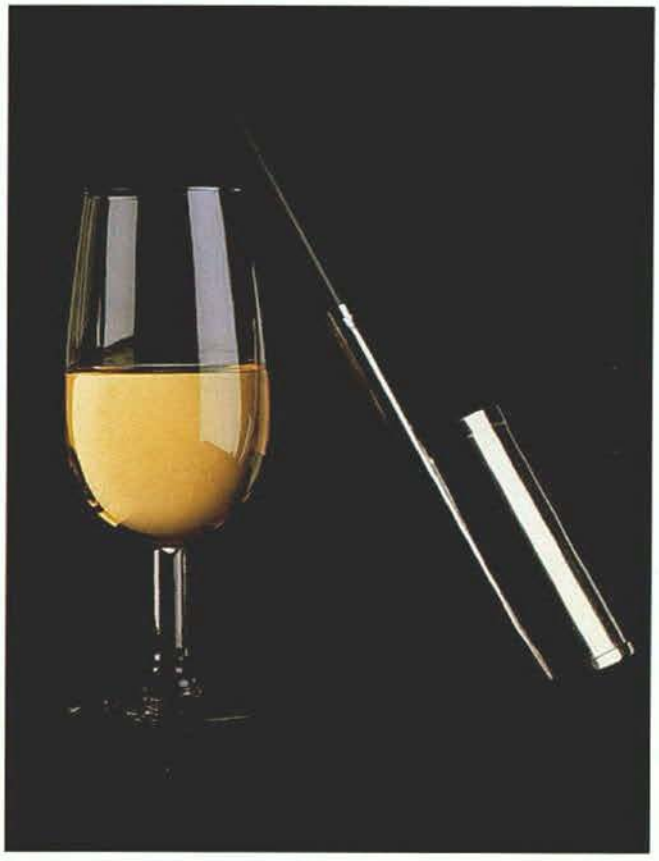
The origin of the name venencia is certainly colorful. In the old days, wine was purchased directly from the winery and the seller and buyer had to agree—rendered in Spanish, they had to reach an *avenencia*, a compromise—over the measure and corresponding price.

The venencia consists of a slender rod and a narrow cup. The rod is rounded and dark in color. At first it was made from baleen (the thin whalebone with which certain whale species filter plankton), but this material has not been used for 40 years. Baleen was replaced by the venencia de *gusanillo*, a metal spring enveloped in a plastic sheath. These days, the rod is more often made from PVC.

The rod is attached to the steel *cazoleta* (cup) and a hook (*rabo*, or tail) with which to hang it beside the *bota*, or sherry butt. The cup should be stored upside down, to prevent impurities from accumulating in the bottom.

Not all venencias are plastic and metal. In Sanlúcar de Barrameda, they still use the traditional ones made from hollowed-out cane, which are more picturesque, although perhaps less practical as they don't last as long and they get dirty more easily. Most wineries in Sanlúcar have people specialized in cutting the cane and fashioning it into a venencia.

The venencia comes in three sizes. The classic one measures one yard (92 cm), and is used for dipping into the traditional 516-liter sherry aging butt. A smaller version came out some twenty years ago, measuring 70 cm (28 inches) for use in casks of 64 liters. Finally, a miniature venencia of 20 cm (8 inches) made its appearance around 15 years ago, as a souvenir for tourists. Prices—aside from silver venencias made to order—range be-



tween 1,000 pesetas for the large model and 650 pesetas for the smaller version.

The Art of the Venenciador

The cellar wine taster, or *capataz*, is the person in charge of classifying the musts and the wines of each year and his mission is to monitor the progress of the different *soleras* (see Glossary on page 150). The tools of his trade are the venencia and the catavinos, and his judgement is based mainly on eyesight and smell, rather than on taste.

In the case of most large *bodegas*, the capataz does not himself use the venencia, but relies on a specialized person—the *venenciador*—who is skilled at drawing wine from the cask and pouring it at arm's length into a fistful of sherry glasses. It is an impressive sight to witness the expertise with which José María Torquemada, who still makes venencias in Jerez de la Frontera, draws wine from the cask and fills the bouquet of sherry glasses he holds in his left hand without spilling a drop. The traditional tulip-shaped sherry glass is transparent, made of fine crystal, supported on a slender cylindrical stem and a wide, round stand. The glass should be held by the stand to keep the hand's warmth from heating the wine, and the glass must never be completely filled.

Each bodega usually has its resident venenciador, and some have risen to prominence, such as the well known Tocino brothers, of whom it is said you can't even tell how many catavinos they're holding, there are so many of them. Other famous venenciadores include Ignacio Torné, from Bodegas Barbadillo, and Genaro, from González Byass. Dressed in a sash, short jacket, and tight pants as if to emulate the shape of the venencia they wield, they can be seen practicing their art at wine fairs and other events. To draw samples from the butt, they may use the *cajillón*, a venencia whose cup is four times the standard size, which avoids breaking the protective layer of yeast, or *flor*, too often. Curiously, the flor takes longer to seal if one uses the old fashioned cane venencia than with the more modern metal ones.

Although it is most strongly identified with the wine-growing lands of Cádiz, the venencia is also used in neighboring Huelva and in the Montilla wine region of Cordoba.

César Justel *is a writer and journalist specializing in travel and traditions. He has been traveling around Spain, gathering information on fiestas and crafts, for the past 20 years.*

Text: **César Justel**
Translation: **Mark Little**
Photos: **ACES/ICEX**

GLOSSARY

WINE AGING TERMS

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. (Note — in several regions the minimum time in cask is 12 months.)

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.

Notes:

1. Many Denominations insist that the oak casks must be no more than 225 liters, however, national legislation allows oak casks up to 1,000 liters.

2. Wines are often kept in vats for a few months prior to aging in casks, so the arithmetic varies for each one.

3. Many *bodegas* age their wines for more than the stipulated minimum periods.

SHERRY

The aging system for sherry is the *solera* system, which is made up of a number of stages through which the younger wines pass, acquiring the characteristics of the older wines, thus ensuring the continuity of style. The butts (oak casks of 500 liters each) in the earlier stages are known as *criaderas*, and the last and oldest butts in the system are the solera stage from which the wine is taken for bottling. The solera stage is topped up from the next oldest stage (the first and oldest criadera) and that in turn is topped up from the next oldest. There is no stipulated number of stages, but four to six would be the average. No more than thirty percent of the wine may be removed from the solera in any one year.

CAVA

This is the Denomination of Origin for sparkling wines produced by the traditional method, that is to say, that the secondary fermentation takes place in the same bottle in which it is sold. The *cava* demarcated region is in several zones, the most important of which is Catalonia. The others are Aragon, Navarre, La Rioja, Castile-Leon, Extremadura, and Valencia. The Cava Denomination should not be confused with other denominations that might be associated with the provinces in which cava is produced. The minimum aging period for cava wines is 9 months in the bottle, though many spend between 18 months and 3 years, and a few up to 5 years.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN (D.O.)

Denomination of Origin is an official designation covering products whose raw materials are produced and manufactured within a specific geographical area, and which have distinctive qualities and characteristics due, mainly, to the natural environment, manufacture, and aging methods.

DENOMINACIÓN ESPECÍFICA (D.E.)

The Specific Denomination covers products characterized by a relation to their geographical setting, with the use of certain raw materials, a determined method of production and/or manufacture, but differs from a D.O. in that these three factors do not necessarily have to coincide.

Each D.O. or D.E. is managed by a Consejo Regulador (C.R.) or regulatory council, which sees to the enforcement of the regulations

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.
The red wine VIÑA POMAL comes from an exceptional vineyard of 100 hectares on the state of Bodegas Bilbainas in Haro, Spain.

VIÑA POMAL RESERVA 1993 comprises 80% Tempranillo, 5% Garnacha and the remaining 15% almost equal proportions of Graciano and Mazuelo grapes.

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