72 January-April 2008

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Olive Oil Cuisine. Textures of the Future

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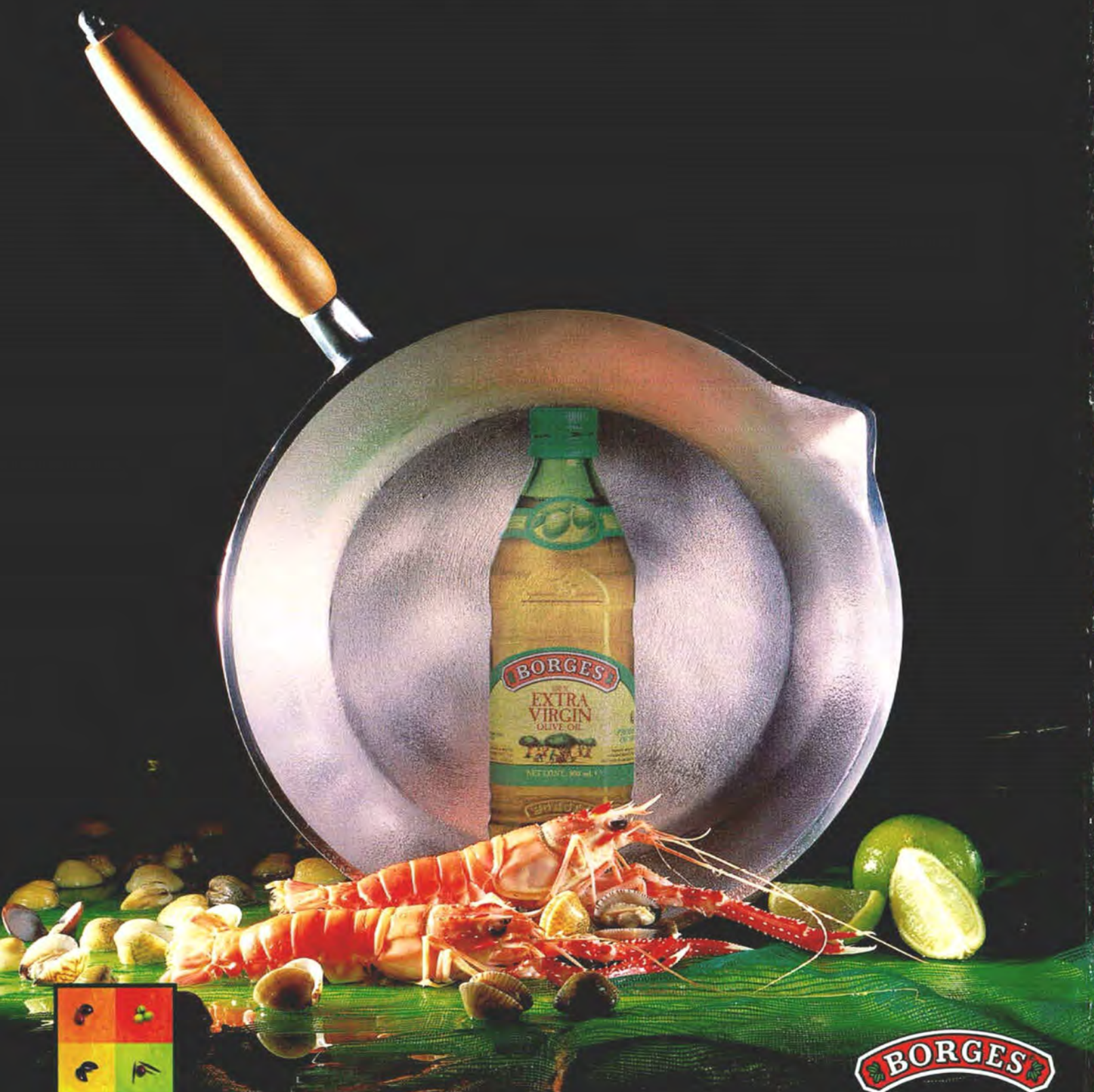

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Editorial Secretary
Ángela Castilla

Design and Art Direction
Manuel Estrada, Diseño Gráfico

Maps
Javier Belloso

Color Separations
Espacio y Punto

Printed in Spain
Egraf

Advertising
CEDISA
Tel: (+34) 913 080 644
Fax: (+34) 913 105 141
pcyc@retemail.es

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ICEX
State Secretary for Tourism and Commerce
Pº de la Castellana, 14
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Tel: (+34) 913 496 244
Fax: (+34) 914 358 876
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Juan Manuel Sanz

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Olive oil forever! Long recognized as a source of good health, it is now also proving to be a source of inspiration with which our top chefs are producing magical results. In this issue, we also bring you the pomegranate, the Garden of Eden's other fruit and such a pleasurable feast of color and texture.

Much the same description could apply to the rather special ramblers' paths along which you can cycle your way into secret areas of little-known Spain, far away from beaches and tarmac.

Getting a taste for discovery? Then come with us to Bierzo, the region that Frenchman Emile Peynaud, "the father of modern winemaking", predicted back in the 60s was destined to become one of Spain's leading areas for great red wines.

And now a date for your diary: from June 14th to September 14th next year, Zaragoza will be hosting Expo 2008, where the main theme is water, an increasingly scarce resource. If you make it, you'll be needing our guide to the top tapas venues in the town that was originally known as Caesaraugusta under the Roman colonists, then as Saraqusta during the Arab occupation, and became capital of the Kingdom of Aragón in the 12th century, only to be laid waste by the Napoleonic troops in 1808.

Finally, we have a new scheme to announce: a one-year grant program for non-Spanish promising, young professional chefs.

Happy reading!

Cathy Boirac
Editor-in-Chief

CONTENTS

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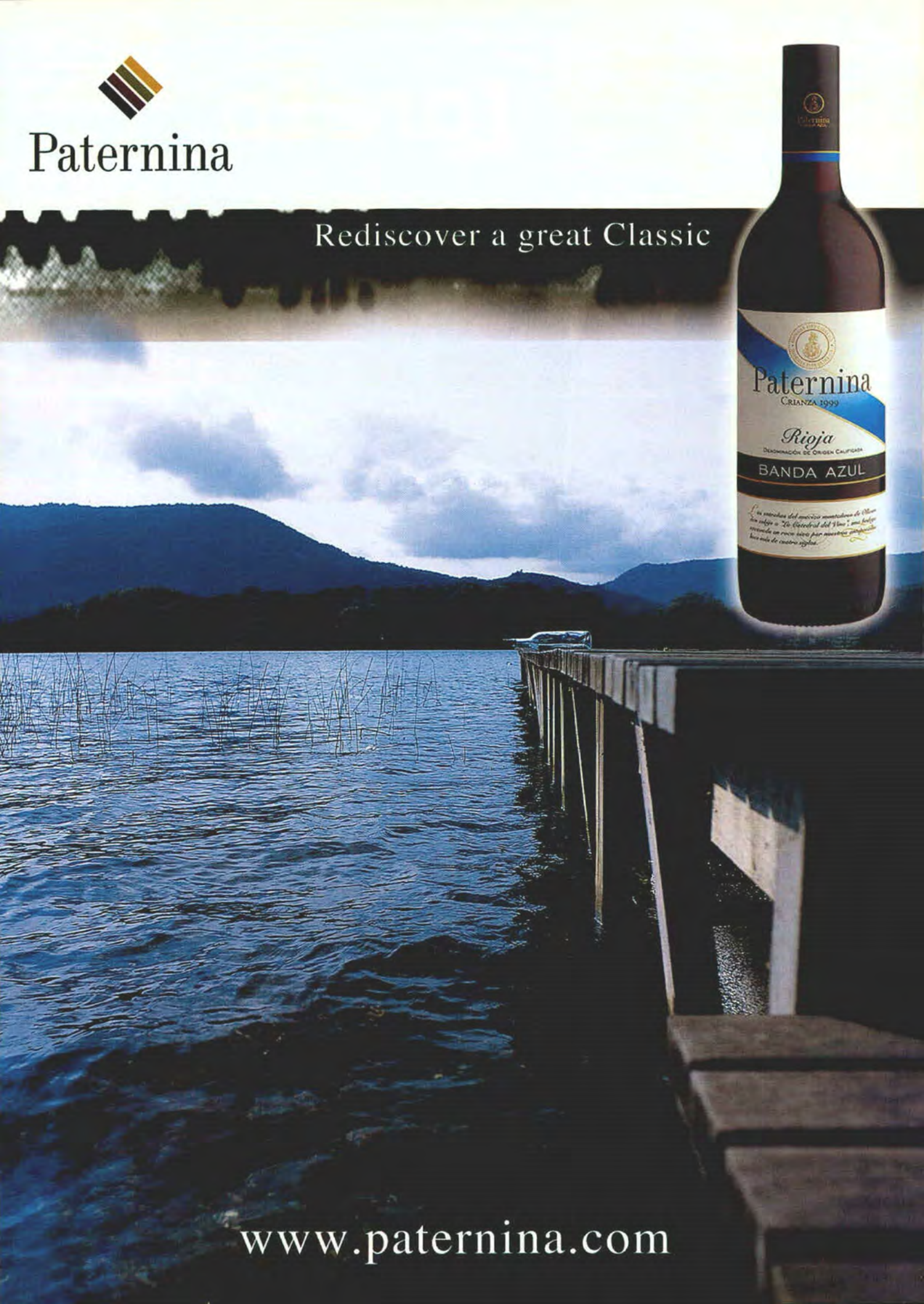
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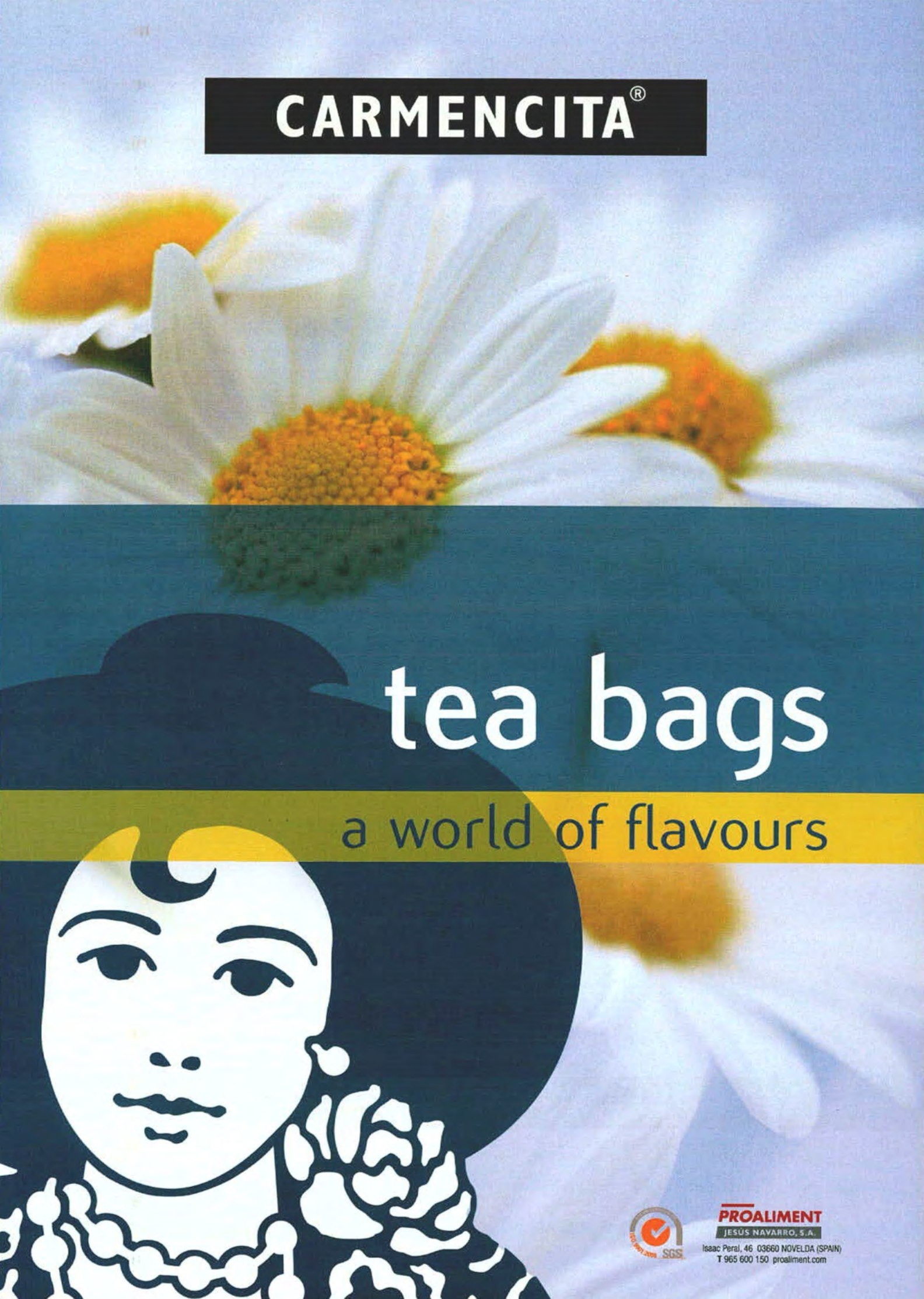

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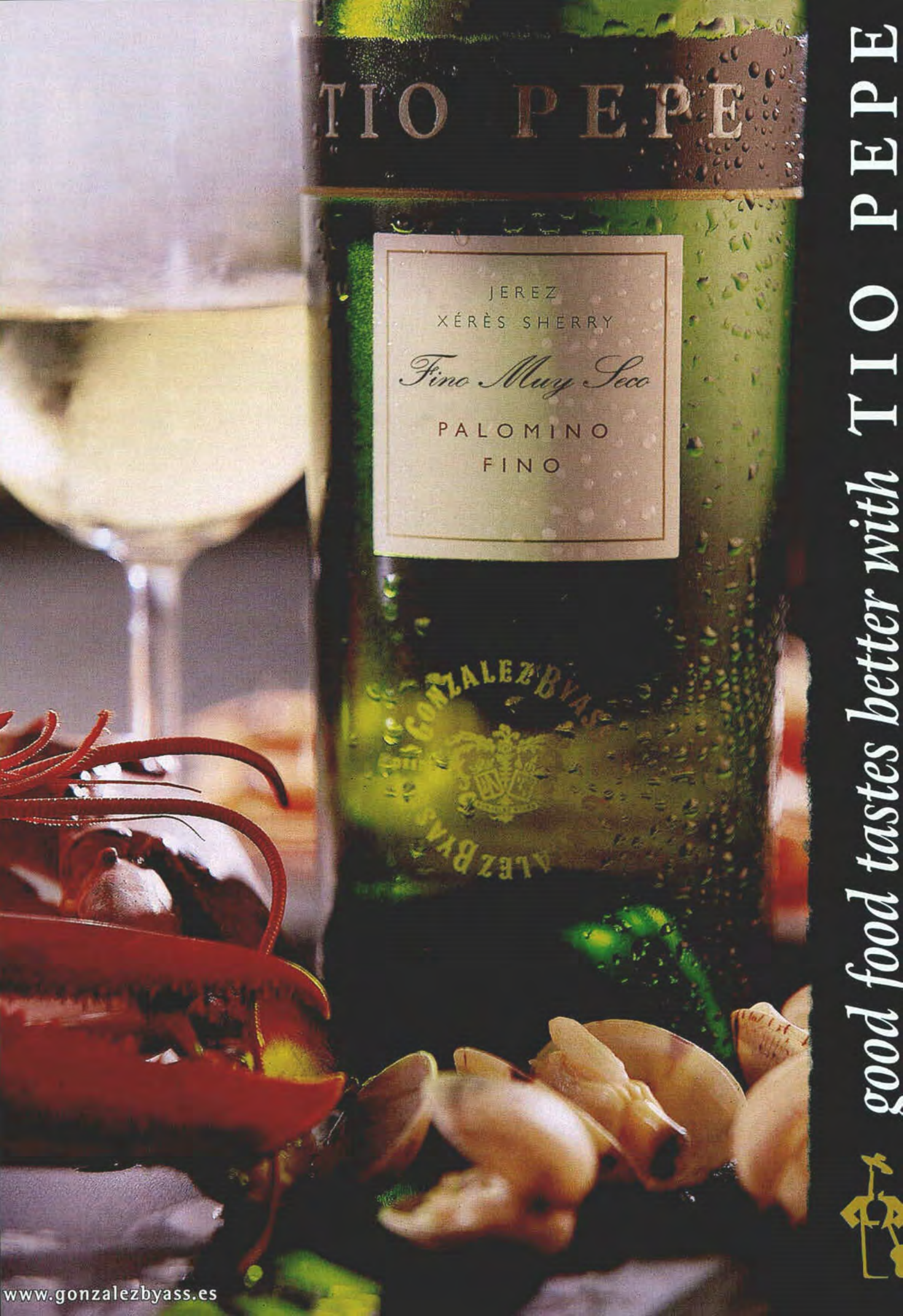
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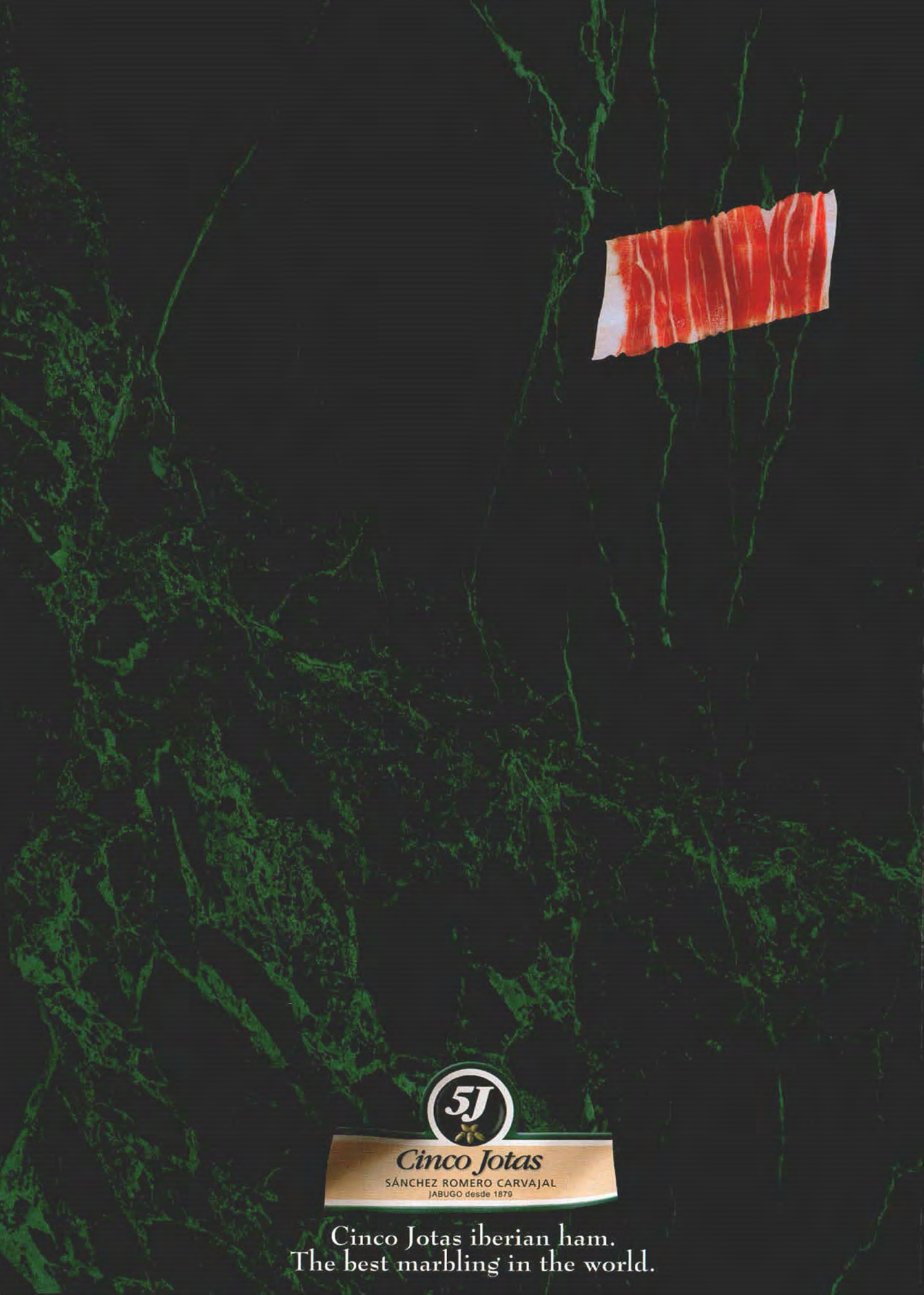
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Olive Oil Cuisine

There's nothing new under the sun, especially if we're talking about one of the world's most ancient fruits–extra virgin olive oil. But recent technical advances and the inventiveness of a group of young Spanish chefs have subjected this age-old product to all manner of interpretations, and new creations with olive oil take our taste buds to territories both familiar and unknown, but always along unexplored paths. The actual role of olive oil is undergoing a metamorphosis. From being the guest of honor in salads, fried foods and cooked dishes, it now often features as the star ingredient and is preparing to steal the show in the 21st century.

TEXTURES of the FUTURE

TEXT
DAVID CÁNOVAS WILLIAMS

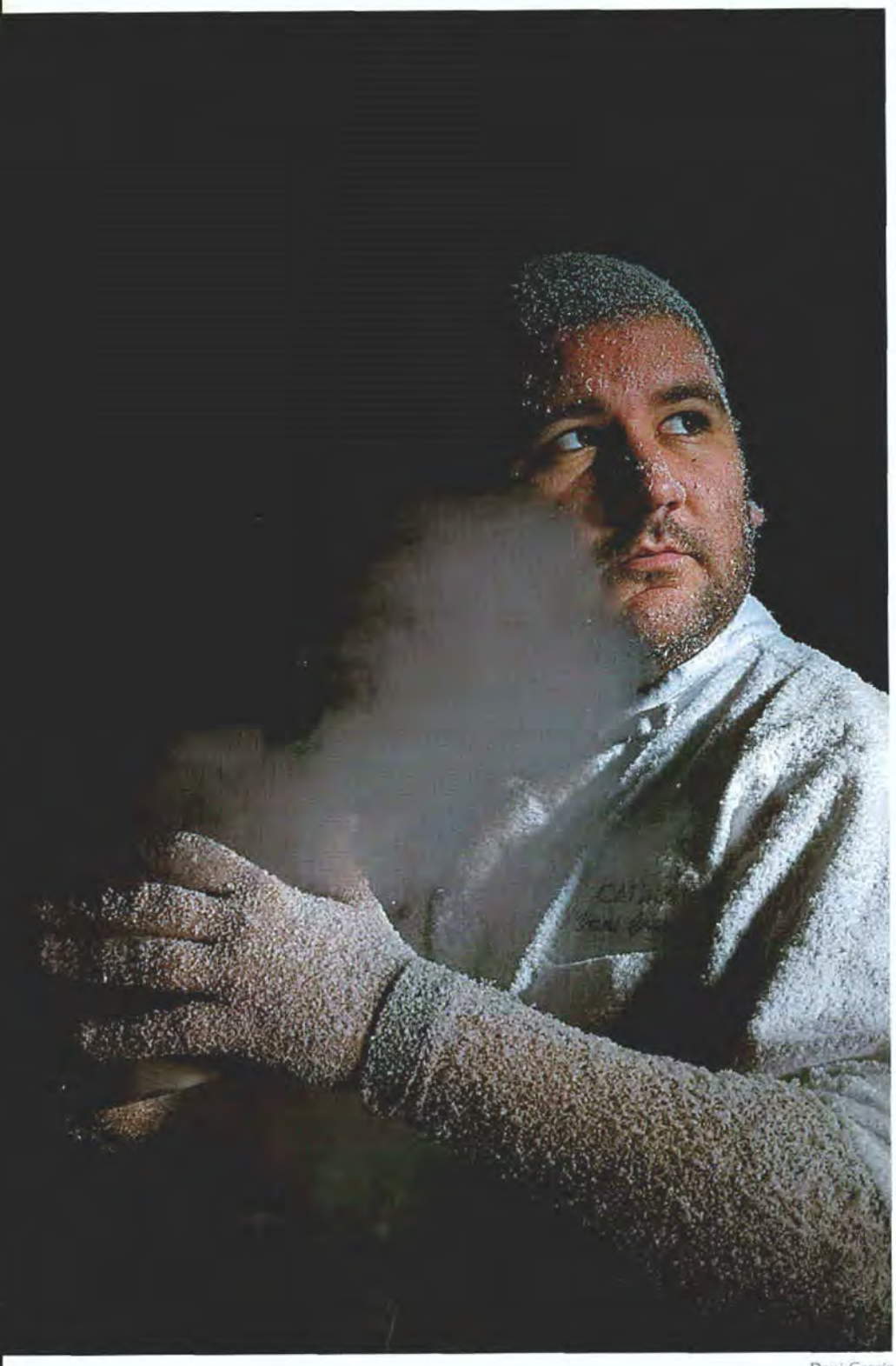
TRANSLATION
JENNY MCDONALD

PHOTOS
TOMÁS ZARZA
TOYA LEGIDO/ICEX

Just as modern aircraft took their inspiration from the flight of birds, at the end of the 1990s Martín Berasategui dared to break the rules, taking his inspiration from local customs. This three-Michelin-star chef was interested to learn that in some parts of Provence in France, people used to place olive oil in the fridge so that it could then be spread on bread like butter. His curiosity about the physical changes in oil led him to devise a new recipe, now a classic: olive oil ice cream. That first departure from traditional extra virgin olive oil was not initially applied to desserts, as you might expect. What Berasategui did was use this finding in savory dishes such as marinated scallop with monkfish liver or marinated albacore tuna, which he served with a garnish of olive oil ice cream. "As far as I'm concerned, extra virgin olive oil and cooking necessarily go together. Olive oil is the equivalent of good cooking. Extraction techniques and oil quality are improving year by year, to the extent that we can now devise recipes on the basis of the varied aromas and flavors of olive oil–acidity, bitterness, etc. And that includes desserts." This is Berasategui's explanation of the developments seen over the last two decades in the use of this Mediterranean ingredient. But the changes go even further back. While it was Berasategui who invented olive oil ice cream, it was another chef who first tested these techniques.

When the time is ripe for a new idea, history always makes sure there is someone who can put it into effect. That was more or less what happened at Lúculo, the first creative cuisine eatery in Madrid. Hundreds of miles from Berasategui's restaurant in the Basque Country and almost 15 years earlier, the young Ange García was experimenting with vegetable sorbets when he decided to start including extra virgin olive oil. In 1983, after reaping success in Perpignan at his restaurant L'Apero, he was prepared to revolutionize cooking in the Spanish capital. "At Lúculo we were very creative and audacious. I remember Santi Santamaría and Ferrán Adrià coming along to see what we were up to," says Ange García. Today, after setting up one of London's first creative tapas restaurants (Albero & Grana) and participating in projects as adviser or chef in restaurants all the world over, he is now in charge of the gastronomic section of Lavinia, one of the largest wine stores in Spain, with establishments in Madrid and Barcelona as well as Paris, Geneva and Ukraine. When I ask about his early sorbets, he thinks back.

"Now sorbets are made of all sorts of



Dani García

things, but at Lúculo we were the true pioneers. Sorbet can't be made with water because it goes hard as a rock. You need a turbine, some sort of fat and the ingredients that give the flavor. Extra virgin olive oil sorbet was born because we were keen to replace the cream and butter with olive oil to get a creamier texture." It was 1984 and his restaurant was producing sorbets with tomato, green pepper, celery... "They all included a large percentage of extra virgin olive oil. I remember we made one from just olive oil, cooked Aragonese olive paste and a touch of salt. Another contained truffle and garlic-flavored olive oil. Personally, I almost always prefer Arbequina olive oil because of its fruitiness and delicate flavor." Like Berasategui, Ange García used these sorbets as a garnish for savory dishes: gazpacho, cold soups such as cream of white beans, and carpaccios. "My father is from Reus and my mother from Perpignan, so I've been very influenced by the Mediterranean and olive oil has always been part of my cooking. It was only natural for me to include olive oil in sorbets." And he states categorically, "Nothing comes out of my kitchen that doesn't include extra virgin olive oil."

Those early experiments had a tremendous impact and today many restaurants serve olive oil ice creams and sorbets either as dessert or as a garnish for savory dishes. Today, Spanish companies such as the newly-created KitCream, which specializes in organic ice creams, offer flavors such as olive oil and dill. Temperature variations were one of the first ways of changing the texture and consistency of extra virgin olive

oil. The appearance of new techniques and technologies marked developments in the use of olive oil. In the words of José Andrés, ambassador of Spanish cuisine in the US, "Technological advances such as the Pacojet have led to new applications for oil, as with olive oil ice cream." Other important innovations in recent years have been the use of new thickeners and emulsifiers, as well as liquid nitrogen, otherwise known as dry ice.

Cooking between -319ºF and 356ºF

Dani García holds up a siphon. Before him is a smoking container of liquid nitrogen. He has just sprayed olive oil over a gas at -195ºC (-319 ºF). Seconds later, he extracts tiny golden pearls: it's his famous olive oil semolina. On the tongue, the little balls immediately disappear into thin air in a retronasal explosion of aroma. This is pure virgin olive oil but it doesn't leave behind a single trace of fat on the palate. It is probably the first time in history that people are eating oil from a spoon without it being cod liver oil or castor oil to treat anemia or some similar ailment. This is one of the new, pleasurable applications of virgin olive oil.

About five years ago, Dani García, dubbed "King of Cold" by food writer José Carlos Capel, and chef at the restaurant Calima in Málaga (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 70), started experimenting with olive oil at extremely low temperatures. He started out by contacting Raimundo García del Moral who is not only a lover of gastronomy but also professor of forensic anatomy at the University of Granada. In mid-2003, the two Garcías joined forces: one was to come up with the ideas and the cooking utensils and the other was to provide the laboratory and technical know-how on how food breaks down.

They soon found that when extra virgin olive oil was placed in liquid nitrogen its properties changed radically. "Normally, because of its molecular characteristics, it is practically impossible to freeze olive oil," explains García del Moral, "but at temperatures of -195ºC (-319ºF), it vitrifies. Its molecular structure changes completely, turning it into a sort of white dust." Achieving this different texture went a step further than the process of making olive oil ice cream. This was their first conclusion. But, if it hadn't been for another quality of olive oil, its melting temperature, this finding would not have been particularly useful, given that creative cuisine did not include freezing the tongues of its customers in order to experience new sensations. "The advantage of olive oil is that it has a very low melting point, just 40 calories per gram," continues the scientist. But before readers give up, overwhelmed by a surfeit of technical jargon, perhaps we should talk about the other member of the tandem. At the recent seminar 'Andalusian cuisine and olive oil in the 21st century', held in Seville in early July last year, Dani García explained some of his olive oil and liquid nitrogen creations. "Fats melt fast, which is why it's

more pleasant to eat an ice cream than an ice sorbet." It's as simple as that. And from this happy combination of physical properties the first olive oil semolina was born. This discovery took place a number of years ago, but Dani García is still just as enthusiastic as he was then. "The texture is incredible. Using nitrogen allows us to eat olive oil, literally." He is also excited by his olive oil and tomato popcorn, a version of olive oil that includes 50% raf tomato juice and a pinch of agar agar as a thickener. "The dish is almost three years old now, but every time we make it we still feel the same thrill."

Tomato with olive oil is probably one of the most classic Spanish gastronomic combinations, so it is perhaps no surprise that these

DANI GARCÍA

Technique: Liquid nitrogen

Olive oil semolina and olive oil popcorn with raf tomato are the two main recipes devised by Dani García using liquid nitrogen, but he was also behind one of the most brilliant recipes of recent years–the gold ingot–achieved by changing the molecular structure of olive oil (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 70). First he creates olive oil semolina and then places it in a Pacojet to convert it into a paste. Then it is transferred to a mold, bathed in liquid nitrogen and coated with an olive water and gold dust gelatin. Finally, he adds a spoonful of Andalusian Riofrío caviar. "Olive oil has often been called liquid gold, so I decided to have some fun with this idea," he says.

Coupage of Picual olive oil with Arbequina aromas (skin of green tomato, lychee, peach, green apple and almond)

Because of the molecular structure of extra virgin olive oil, when we add it under pressure to liquid nitrogen, it breaks up, forming small particles that we call olive oil semolina. This dish is particularly interesting as it produces a surprisingly pleasant sensation in the mouth. The fruity aromas of the Arbequina (represented in this recipe by the fruit and almond aromas) refresh the Picual and round off its pungency. It should be served at -15ºC (5ºF) because the olive oil semolina sublimates in the mouth and disappears almost instantaneously, revealing all the aroma of the Picual extra virgin olive oil in the aftertaste.

SERVES 4

300 ml / 1 1/4 cup Picual extra virgin olive oil; 3 green tomatoes; 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz peaches; 1 sheet gelatin; 150 g / 5 1/2 oz fresh almonds; 150 ml / 2/3 cups milk; salt; 2 lychees; 1/2 green apple; various small flowers.

Picual olive oil semolina

Lightly confit the skin of the green tomatoes in the Picual extra virgin olive oil for 25 minutes. Once the oil has taken on the flavor, season and place in a siphon. Attach two cartridges and spray towards the liquid nitrogen. This will form a frozen, tomato-flavored Picual semolina. Set aside at -30ºC / -22ºF.

Peach gelatin

Liquidize the fruit, pour through a cloth filter and freeze only the liquid obtained. Soak the gelatin until soft, drain and add. Chill the mixture and set aside.

Fresh almonds

Peel the almonds and place in the milk. Add a little salt and crush very finely. Strain through a fine chinois and, just before serving, beat to form an emulsion.

TO SERVE

Place the Picual extra virgin olive oil semolina in the center of a cold plate. To one side, place the peach gelatin, the almond emulsion and a julienne of green apple with pieces of lychee.

Preparation:
20 minutes

Cooking time:
2 minutes. The cooking process uses cold rather than heat, with liquid nitrogen.

Recommended wine:
Antonio Ramírez, sommelier at the restaurant Calima, suggests the cava Kripta Gran Reserva 1999 (from the Agustín Torelló Mata winery) because of its clean, fruity aroma with marked touches of ripe fruit and slight toasty notes, "perfect to balance the flavor of the Picual and give verve to the accompanying fruit."

ingredients should inspire such a revolutionary recipe. But it is precisely here where the riskiest of initiatives goes hand-in-hand with tradition. "In our cuisine, we value the concept of taste memory. Even if new techniques are adopted, we want dishes to remind us of the flavors of our childhood, well-known territory," says Dani García, hinting at the thought processes that go into his work in the kitchen.
But liquid nitrogen is not the only way in which this young Andalusian chef has put extra virgin olive oil to the test. In a radical move, Dani García decided to focus on the other temperature extreme: frying.
The Andalusian coast is something of a theme park of fried fish. Dogfish, anchovies, sardines, red mullet, whitebait, wedge sole, baby hake, etc. all pass religiously through the deep fryer. The quality of many of the restaurants that specialize in frying is often very high so, according to Dani García, it would have been very rash on his part to try to improve on what they were doing. But fish is generally fried in small portions, and that was where he saw potential for innovation. This suggestion, too, came from García del Moral, who had noted the use of an age-old technique in Casa Joaquín, a restaurant in Málaga. "I love visiting these places to learn and see how I can introduce innovations from a scientific point of view," he says. At Casa Joaquín, Encarnación Godoy fried whole fish in such a way that the scales acted as a ready-made papillotte. So the skin fried while the flesh, which is separated from it by a layer of air, cooked in its own juices. The effect is surprising as the fish blows up like a balloon and floats on the surface of the oil.
Dani García decided to adopt this technique with large fish. Sole and turbot were the first candidates for this treatment at 182°C (359.6°F) and the result was so positive that they were included on Calima's menu. Dani García serves the fried sole with the flesh separated from the skin so that he can fry the latter a little longer, making it crispier.
But his research in the field of frying did not end there. "Right now I'm working on a new project with Bodegas Campo, a restaurant in Almería with both a kitchen and a laboratory so that chefs can work side-by-side with scientists all day

long–in search of optimal frying conditions. All deep fryers have a USB port so the temperature can be controlled very precisely. "We're going to study the effect of different temperatures on the olive oil so that we can develop an olive oil blend that is special for frying," adds García del Moral. But temperature is not the whole story.

A matter of consistency

In addition to Dani García, the seminar 'Andalusian cuisine and olive oil in the 21st century' also featured Paco Roncero, one of Ferrán Adrià's star pupils who is making his mark today on the cuisine at La Terraza del Casino in Madrid (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71). At the start of his presentation, Roncero explained how he started out experimenting with extra virgin olive oil. "I was asked by the food writer José Carlos Capel to speak at one of the first Madrid Fusion congresses. I was a bit reluctant at first but thought about it and realized that if we want to be creative chefs, we should never set limits to what can or cannot be done."

Roncero's first ideas take us back to the early 1980s, to the inroads being made by Berasategui and Ange García. "If we place a bottle of oil in the fridge, its texture changes, so just by altering the temperature we can cause changes. But Dani García was already working along those lines. We Spanish chefs are fairly honest and don't like to step on eachother's toes, so I chose another path, that of gellifiers, thickeners, etc. That was what elBulli was doing at the time." Oriol Castro, Ferrán Adrià's right-hand man, explains some of the research being done over the last few years. "Not only did we work with oil texturized by cold treatment, as in 1999 we developed butter based on this technique, but we also focused on thickeners. In 2006, we created an extra virgin olive oil caviar using alginate, a thickener made from seaweed. We are also carrying out spherification with olive water. Spherification results in an olive-sized mouthful that contains the water from a dozen olives. The flavor is really amazing."

After seeing how some of these techniques were being applied in the elBulli workshop, Roncero decided to work on a specific line of research. His first creation was the extra virgin

Paco Roncero

olive oil gum drop. "The process is perfectly simple. First you make a syrup with sugar and mix in the olive oil. Then you add a sheet of gelatin and leave it to cool. When we did this hot, the sugars separated from the oils, so we decided to use a mayonnaise technique. Now we are making gum drops with different flavors using fruit juices, such as passion fruit." And here Roncero lays down one of the rules of the game. "When you make dishes based on extra virgin olive oil, you have to add something to clean the palate: a cold soup, something acidic, etc."
But things had only just started. From then on, toiling in the workshop built on the Casino premises, Roncero gradually started using different thickeners. The first was cocoa butter. "I love going to a restaurant and being served butter with my bread, so I thought we could replace the butter with olive oil, a much healthier option. That led me to the idea of creating an olive oil butter with a technique different to that of elBulli. We did lots of tests and eventually ended up with a mixture of oil heated to 35°C (95°F) and 10% cocoa butter." In his restaurant, this butter is served in toothpaste tubes, just for fun.
Roncero places great importance on the varieties of oil he uses in his menus. "People are used to cooking with extra virgin olive oil, but we need to go a step further. I think we should focus on the types of olive used. An Arbequina olive is not the same as a Picual or a Picudo. The flavors and aromas are completely different, and you can say the same for the region they come from. An Andalusian Arbequina oil is very different from one produced in Catalonia. We always try to ensure that the extra virgin olive oil we use matches the dishes we offer."
One of Roncero's simplest and most masterly creations is, without a doubt, his spherified tomato. Based on the same ingredients that Dani García uses for his olive oil popcorn with tomato–raf tomato water, extra virgin olive oil and salt–this Madrid-born chef achieves a completely different result by applying a different technique. Using alginate as a thickener, Roncero has created a gelatinous sphere containing tomato water and extra virgin olive oil in suspension. If the Mediterranean had a flavor, this would probably be it.
Methylcellulose is another of the thickeners that features in these recipes using extra virgin olive oil. But, unlike locust bean or xanthan gums, it gels not with cold but with heat. This property was the key to creating olive oil spaghetti. Based on Japanese *soba* soup, discovered during one of his visits to Tokyo, Roncero created some very unusual noodles. He uses an emulsion of extra virgin olive oil with methylcellulose to create a cream which is injected into the hot soup using a syringe to form perfect spaghetti. This same technique

PACO RONCERO

Technique: Gelling agents and thickeners

Undoubtedly one of the main exponents of contemporary cuisine using extra virgin olive oil, Roncero has developed a whole menu focusing on olive oil, from starters (oil butter, spherification of tomato water with olive oil, tanned oil, olive oil treated with liquid nitrogen) to desserts (orange sorbet with olive oil, olive oil gum drops, choco-oil lollipops) and including main dishes (Japanese soba soup with olive oil noodles, coulant of olive juice, Norway lobster with quinoa and oil honey, lobster in oil soup). Today, as chef at El Casino de Madrid, he is also working on a range of olive oil jams. "So far we have produced tomato, Seville orange, banana, passion fruit, pineapple and strawberry jams, all with olive oil, and we're currently working on how to market them." Roncero's fascination for extra virgin olive oil has even led him to consider the possibility of offering his customers a mini-olive press from which they can extract their own olive oil at the table.

Olive oil rice with lobster

This recipe is the result of our research into extra virgin olive oil and how it interacts with different food additives, in this case, with methylcellulose. The idea was to create what looked like a very traditional rice dish but replacing the rice with grains of olive oil.

SERVES 4

1 kg / 2 1/4 lb lobster; 1 bundle wild asparagus; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz cauliflower.

For the paella stock: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz fish; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sea crab; 10 g / 1/3 oz parsley; 5 g / 1/6 oz garlic, peeled; 20 g / 1 oz red salad tomato; 1 g / 0.03 oz sweet *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain); 50 ml / 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil (acidity 0.4º); 250 ml / 1 1/8 cups water; 50 g / 2 oz onion; 10 g / 1/3 oz bomba rice.

For the rice water: 500 ml / 2 1/6 cups water; 20 g / 1 oz Arborio rice; 5 g / 1/6 oz salt.

For the methylcellulose base: 80 ml / 1/3 cup water; 2 g / 0.07 oz methylcellulose.

For the tears of olive oil rice: 50 ml / 4 tbsp of the water and methylcellulose base; 150 ml / 2/3 cups Arbequina extra virgin olive oil; 100 ml / 1/2 cup rice water; 2 g / 0.07 oz saffron strands; 5 g / 1/6 oz salt.

Lobster

Place the lobster in boiling salted water for 1 minute, then refresh in ice water. Remove the claws, return the body to the same water and cook for approximately 6 minutes. Shell the body and the claws and chill the flesh. Keep the shells and the head for the paella stock.

Paella stock

Fry the crabs in a paella pan and set aside. Fry the fish and the lobster trimmings and set aside. Fry some of the garlic, pimentón, tomatoes and parsley. When soft, add the crab and fish and cover with water. Simmer gently for about 15 minutes. Strain and set aside. Fry the onion, add the remaining garlic, tomatoes and pimentón and gently fry together for one hour. Add the strained stock and the rice and cook for about 25 minutes until the rice is overdone. Blend in the blender, season with salt and strain.

Rice water

Bring the salted water to a boil and add the Arborio rice. Simmer for 30 minutes, then strain through a wire strainer. Leave to cool.

Methylcellulose base

Place the water and the methylcellulose in a blender and blend until a gluey paste forms. Transfer to a container, cover and chill for at least 24 hours so that the methylcellulose becomes fully hydrated.

Tears of olive oil rice
Mix the rice water with the salt and the water and methylcellulose base. Emulsify with the Arbequina extra virgin olive oil and add the saffron strands. Transfer the mixture to a syringe, and squirt drop by drop into the hot paella stock to gel and form the olive oil rice. Keep hot until finished.

Mini-asparagus
Remove the small shoots around the asparagus bud and peel. Blanch in boiling salted water and then refresh in iced water. Dry between sheets of cellulose and chill.

Cauliflower
Remove tiny shoots from the cauliflower. Blanch in boiling salted water and then refresh in iced water. Dry between sheets of cellulose and chill.

TO FINISH
Sauté the tears of extra virgin olive oil in a non-stick skillet and gradually moisten with paella stock. Place the lobster body in the boiling paella stock, cover and boil for 2 minutes. Sauté the mini-asparagus and the cauliflower and add to the paella pan.

TO SERVE
Arrange 3 lobster medallions on the dish forming a triangle, then add the tears of olive oil rice with the vegetables in the center. Finish with a few vegetable shoots.

Preparation time
60-90 minutes

Cooking time
15 minutes

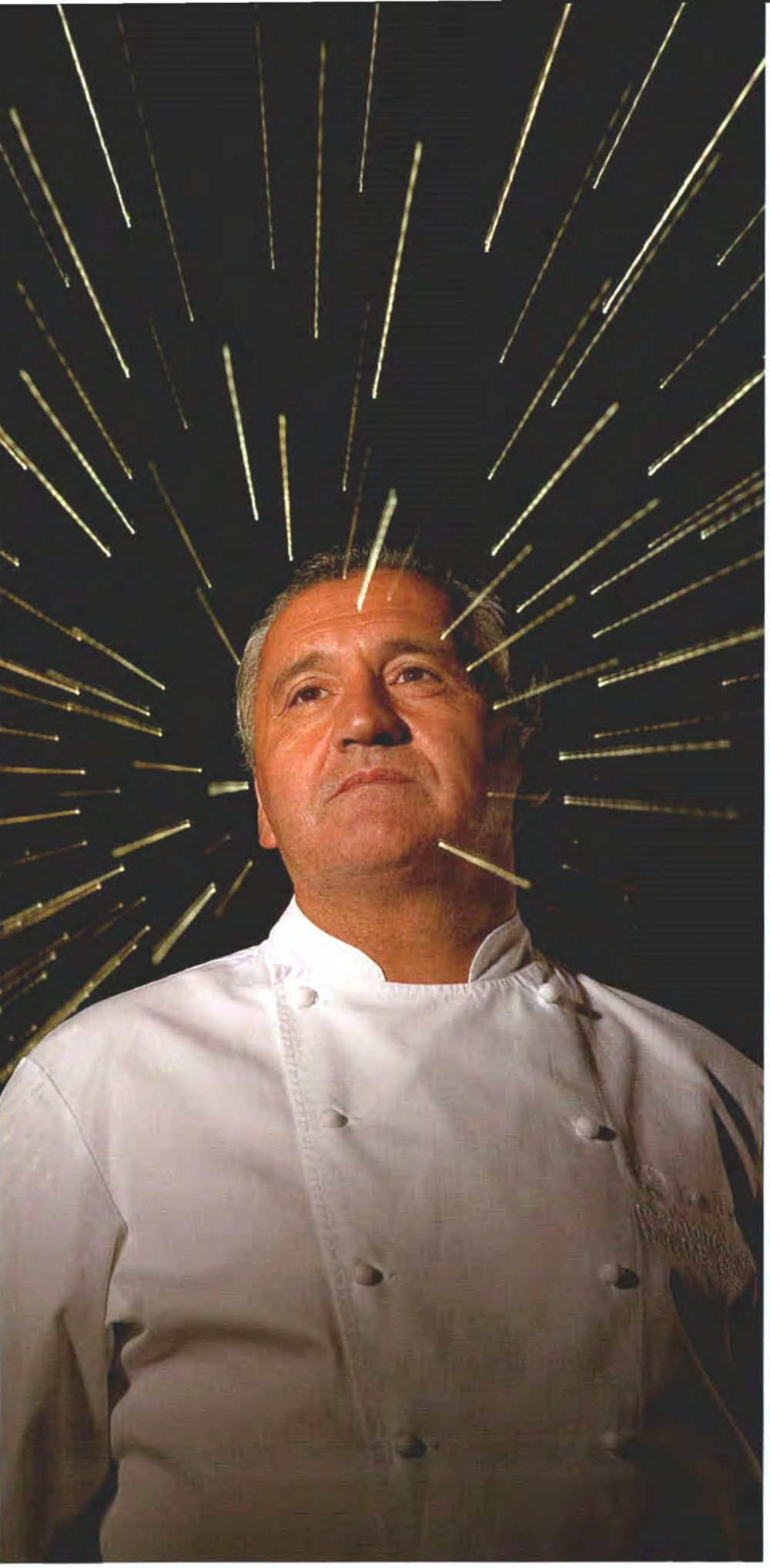
Recommended wine
Maria José Huertas, La Terraza del Casino's award-winning sommelier (Sommelier L'Avenir 2005), suggests Juvé & Camps Millesimé 2001 to bring out the flavors and refresh the mouth. "It's a cava with a light toasty color and a nose of white fruit, apple and fine toast."

allows him to create one of the most scandalously unorthodox paellas in living memory (See recipe, page 26). Another unexpected creation is olive oil parmesan. Here the technique is very different. The key is to replace the animal fats in the cheese with extra virgin olive oil. The resulting cream is very similar to Extremaduran Torta del Casar or Torta del Serena cheeses. This process borders on another of the most fertile territories amongst the new applications for extra virgin olive oil.

The perfect substitute

At the '5th International meeting on cooking with extra virgin olive oil', held at the end of June last year at the Laguna Hotel and Catering School in Jaén, in the heart of the Andalusian olive groves, culinary schools from all over Europe–from Italy to Bulgaria–gave demonstrations on the versatility of extra virgin olive oil. When the turn came for the York Hotel and Catering School (United Kingdom), the chef Pietro Salvatore surprised the audience with what seemed something of a gastronomic sacrilege: chocolate pudding made from olive oil instead of butter. All of a sudden, a traditional Anglo-Saxon dessert adopted a Mediterranean pose. But this is not the only case. Together with Jordi Butrón, Xano Saguer is one of the founders of Espaisucre, the world's first center to combine a school and a restaurant for desserts. When considering the new trends for using olive oil, Saguer agrees with Roncero that it is essential to cast off any prejudices. "We look at patisserie abstractly. We analyze each ingredient's function and see how they work. That meant we've had no doubts about using olive oil as a substitute for butter." And this approach is based on a basic motivation. "We patissiers no longer just interpret recipes, we create them." At Espaisucre, they have worked with olive oil ice cream, olive oil gum drops and cakes using a Manzanilla olive cream, and they have created olive oil clouds (an update on the classic marshmallow), but Saguer insists that the presence of olive oil should meet the needs of a recipe without being conditioned by culinary tradition. "What is fundamental is the flavor, and that's what we're most interested in when we use olive oil. And, in my opinion, we often forget how important the variety can be. We tend to prefer Picual oil because of its power and intensity."

In Elda (Alicante), the Totel patisserie, bastion of Paco Torreblanca–considered by the press to be one of the world's best pastry chefs–uses the same technique but for a different purpose. As the philosopher said, I agree, but for opposite reasons. "For the last two years or so, we have been replacing butter–or some of it–especially in the cream inside chocolates. What we care about most is texture. Olive oil is a fat that crystallizes in a different way, whereas butter hardens with the cold. With oil, the product takes much longer to oxidize so the



Paco Torreblanca

texture is much creamier and elastic," says Torreblanca during the introduction for a chocolate tasting session held in Madrid. And he adds, "Obviously, we are also interested in certain aspects of flavor. Depending on where the chocolate comes from, we decide on the variety of extra virgin olive oil we want, on whether we want more or less fruitiness. We use Arbequina, Picual and Hojiblanca, but mostly Arbequina because of its smoothness and fruity flavor. We've discovered some very interesting Andalusian Arbequina oils. And sometimes, in chocolates with 80% cocoa, we use Picual." As with many of the other new applications of olive oil, decisions are made on the basis of sound technical arguments, rather than personal preference. "What we need to do is to unify the vegetable ingredients. If we use butter, we are adding an animal fat, whereas if we mix cocoa butter and olive oil we are combining vegetable fats, so we get a more harmonious result." So Roncero added cocoa butter to olive oil, and Torreblanca adds olive oil to chocolate. Their paths meet once again.

Together with Paco Torreblanca, other companies are now also questioning the sovereign position of butter in the production of chocolates. One such case is the Catalonian Cacao Sampaka, which has recently introduced a range of chocolates using olive oil.

But the world of patisserie is not the only one in which animal fats are giving way to extra virgin olive oil. The Andalusian government has set up an R&D complex that focuses exclusively on olive oil called Geolit, the Olive Oil and Olive Cultivation

Science and Technology Park. Citoliva is a foundation that operates within this park, advising companies on ways in which olive oil can be used in their production processes. Its star program is Olivissimo, which has developed a worldwide patent for replacing animal fats with extra virgin olive oil. Since 2005, several Andalusian companies in the meat sector have decided to take part in this initiative. La Real Carolina, which produces top-of-the-range pâtés, and Crismona, an agri-food company, are two examples of companies that have launched product ranges under the Olivissimo label. "Not only are they developing healthier products, but they are also opening new doors for selling olive oil," says Antonio Guzmán, manager of Citoliva. However, even though extra virgin olive oil has health benefits, there are still challenges to be faced.

A stable relationship

Oil and water have always been used as an allegory of incompatibility. However hard you try, they will always end up separating. Even the simple act of making a vinaigrette goes against nature. Just a few minutes after making it, the ingredients will have separated. As we have seen, chefs have searched for ways to get around this problem. They use thickeners and emulsion agents, such as soy lecithin, but in most cases these bring with them unwanted flavors, do not achieve stable emulsions or require thermal treatments that affect the quality of the oil. That was until the arrival of aerosil. José Luis Navas, from the restaurant La Espadaña in Jaén, and Juan Gutiérrez, from the Bodegas Campo R&D laboratory, yet again under the watchful eye of García del Moral, are investigating applications of this silex mineral which could be the new Holy Grail of creative cuisine. Top-ranking chefs such as Ferran Adrià and Quique Dacosta are currently trying out culinary applications with aerosil. The nanoparticles of this colloidal silex dioxide are odorless, colorless and tasteless and can be applied in microscopic amounts to achieve

PACO TORREBLANCA

Technique: Substitution of olive oil for animal fats

Torreblanca has been using olive oil in his cakes for many years, but in chocolates this is a fairly new initiative. "In addition to the chocolates we make entirely of olive oil, we are now using it for the fillings in others such as our tea and pepper chocolates." The elasticity and smoothness of olive oil make it useful in other applications as well. He hints, "We also use olive oil in the chocolate covering for cakes, as it prevents cracks."

Olive oil chocolate

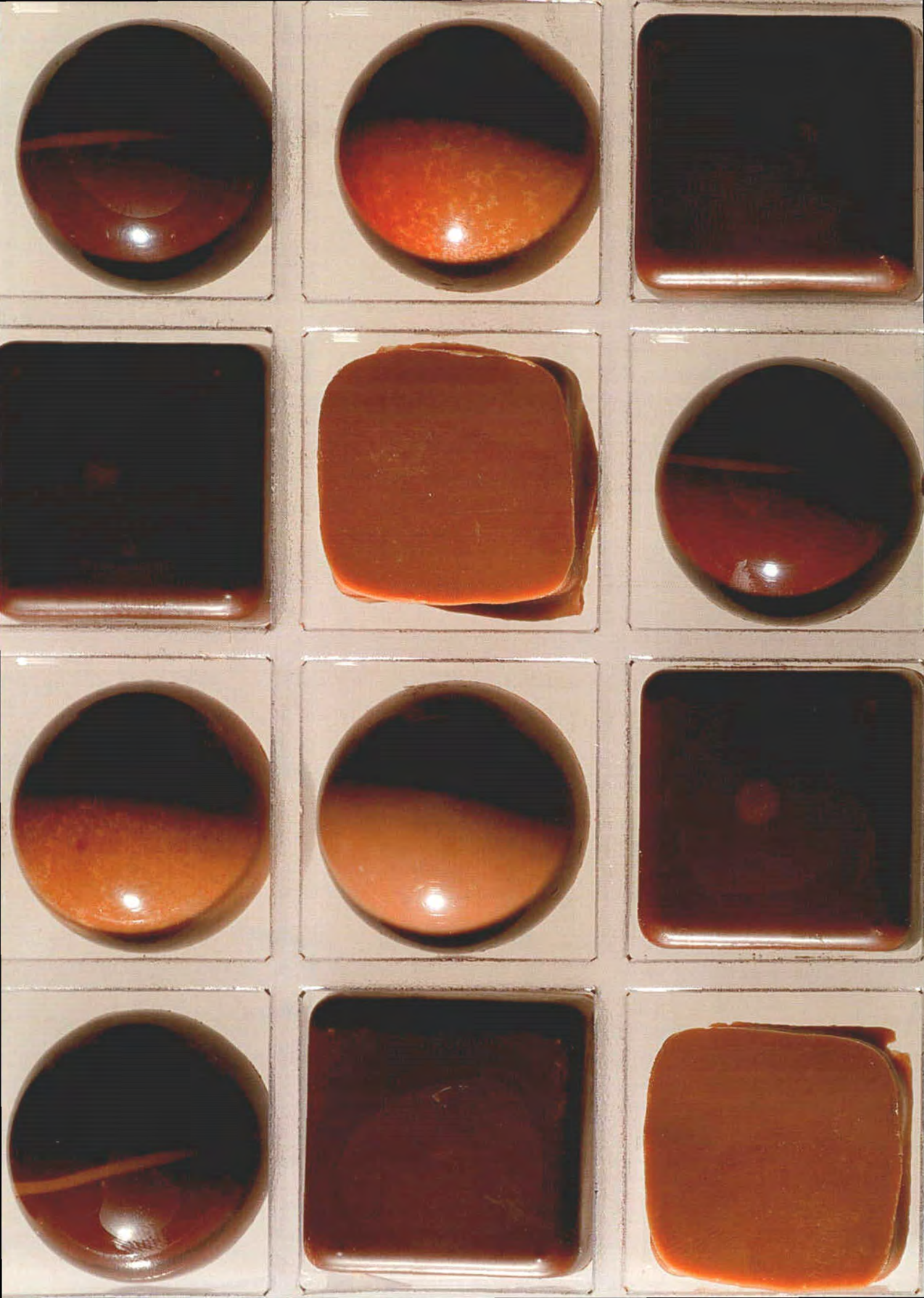
I always thought extra virgin olive oil would go well with chocolate so, in some of our recipes, we use it instead of butter. The olive oil chocolate is a good example because of its amazing textures, creaminess and flavor.

FOR ABOUT 75 CHOCOLATES
180 g / 6 oz cream (32% fat content); 30 g / 1 oz glucose 42 DE; 200 g / 7 oz Madagascar 64% covering; 200 g / 7 oz Callebaut white chocolate covering; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Arbequina extra virgin olive oil.

Mix the cream and glucose and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat. When the temperature drops to approximately 80ºC (176ºF), pour onto the chocolate coverings to melt them. Mix until smooth. At 35ºC (95ºF), add the Arbequina extra virgin olive oil and stir in carefully. Pour the mixture into a chocolate frame and leave to set for 12 hours at a temperature of 16ºC (60.8ºF). Brush with chocolate on one side and cut into squares of the desired size. Coat with the warm covering. Keep the chocolates at a temperature of 12-14ºC (53.6-57.2ºF), with humidity between 50-60%.

Preparation time
60 minutes

Recommended wine
In the opinion of Manel Pla, Spain's best sommelier of 2001, the higher the proportion of cocoa, the headier and fruitier the wine should be. He suggests a Pedro Ximénez, or a Muscatel or raisin wine. "The tannins in the chocolate offset the wine's fruity flavors, balancing and rounding off the alcohol content and ripe fruits."



emulsions never imagined before. The public presentation of aerosil took place at the congress 'Long live vegetables' held in Navarre last May, when García del Moral, Navas and Gutiérrez revealed some of its qualities. By changing the amount used and the temperature, they showed that it is possible to create a stable foam, like a purée.
In combination with extra virgin olive oil, aerosil opens up a huge range of options. Because of the thickening qualities has aerosil when its temperature is raised, Navas has created another version of the elBulli essential olive. First he liquidizes a black olive paste and thickens it by adding aerosil. When it's cold, he forms an emulsion with olive oil until the consistency and shape of an olive are obtained.
One of the most interesting applications of aerosil is perhaps aromatization of olive oil without using maceration techniques or temperature changes. "The end result is amazing. All you need to do is add a liquidized fruit or vegetable to extra virgin olive oil, add a tiny proportion of aerosil, mix it in the blender and leave it to stand for 20 minutes. The water separates from the olive oil but the aromatic particles remain in the oil. This gives us a solution with the same color and flavor as the oil, but with the essential aromas of the liquidized substance we added." If the liquid is first heated with aerosil and then left to cool before emulsifying with the extra virgin olive oil, the result is a perfect blend of the two liquids. These techniques make it possible to prepare recipes such as a green lemon sorbet with an emulsion of olive oil with gin, juniper, pineapple and orange, or mackerel in a warm cava pickle sauce with an emulsion of garlic, tomatoes, green olives and lime. At La Espadaña they also offer extra virgin olive oil tasting sessions and, after deciding the predominant notes (fennel, tomato, olive leaves and almond), a liquid made from the appropriate plant is added to bring out the oil's natural flavors.
So aerosil allows chefs to extract all the aroma and flavor of a product and transfer it to olive oil.

Aromatization of olive oil was carried out in ancient times by maceration and infusion, but recently the process is undergoing many innovations.

Aromatized olive oil

Is it possible to cook with charcoal aromas without the coal? This was the question asked by Francis Paniego, chef at Echaurren in Ezcaray (La Rioja) and advisor to the Marqués de Riscal Ciudad del Vino restaurant designed by Frank Gehry in La Rioja.

Francis Paniego

"About five years ago we had a problem. We wanted to use vine wood to aromatize meat but we didn't have grills, so we thought of using aromatized olive oil, and that was how we devised wood-flavored oils." Paniego's research in this field started out through a collaboration with Bodegas Roda in La Rioja to determine how oaky aromas are transferred to wine from the barrel. "At Bodegas Roda, we developed an empirical formula which we applied to other types of wood such as holm oak and beech, as well as oak and vine wood. We then tried to transfer the aromas of different types of wood to oil by combustion inside a pressure cooker (See recipe, page 34). This method, originally devised by Ferrán Adrià for his famous smoke foam, had to be changed a little for our purposes. He smoked water in a pressure cooker and we swapped the water for extra virgin olive oil." After these experiments with pressure cookers, they then experimented with aromatizing olive oil in a microwave. "The idea is to toast the wood in the microwave, making it very aromatic so that it works like a cinnamon stick. Then we heat the olive oil and insert the wood, so it's really a sort of infusion." This method is much faster, but Paniego only uses it with less intense extra virgin olive oils. When asked to express his preferences, Paniego is clear: "Arbequina, Hojiblanca and Redondal are the ones I use most. I love the olive oil produced in my local region and really like to use Dauro oil." Then he talks about the origins of the different varieties. "Each area has its own magic. La Rioja is a discovery, Catalonia and the Balearics never fail and Jaén in Andalusia is elegance and balance." Grupo Pons, a Catalonian company founded in 1945, has chosen a different path. The Mas Portell range of oils uses a crushing process that extracts the essential oils from the skin of citrus fruits the same time the oil is extracted. For the time being it offers two varieties, lemon and mandarin, but over the next few months it plans to launch an extra virgin olive oil aromatized with orange. The citrus-aromatized Mas Portell oils are excellent for salads but can also be used in desserts, chocolates and ice cream.

Olive oil culture

All these innovations–liquid nitrogen, aerosil and new crushing methods–form part of a much bigger

FRANCIS PANIEGO

Technique: Aromatization

Francis Paniego specializes in aromatizing extra virgin olive oil with different types of wood. One of his favorites is vine wood, reminiscent of roasts after the vine harvest and the flavor used in this recipe for veal cheek. Olive oil smoked with vine wood also plays an important role in his 'Vegetable ragout. Veal snout and Ceasar's mushroom beneath wafers of confit of cardoon with king prawns smoked over vine wood'. Paniego reserves his holm oak smoked oil for his 'Grilled sea bass with clams and mushrooms over pumpkin'. For this Riojan chef, wood is considered to be an ingredient, alongside curry and other spices, thanks to olive oil's capacity for retaining and conveying aromas.

Veal cheek cooked in olive oil aromatized with vine wood

The grapevine and vine wood are essential elements of our cuisine in La Rioja, and at Echaurren we often try use this natural fuel, although the tall flames and short-lived embers do not make things easy. As a result, we have developed a method of trapping the aromas of the wood and conveying them to a more versatile element which can then pass them on to the food. The means chosen is extra virgin olive oil, which also contributes its own virtues.

SERVES 4

8 veal cheeks; 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb vine wood; 1 l / 4 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil; 125 cl / 1/2 cup red wine; table salt.

For the cheek sauce

Cheek trimmings; 3 onions; 2 carrots; 1 leek; 1/2 head garlic; 3 black peppercorns; 1 bay leaf; clove; sprig parsley; 250 ml / 1 1/8 cups sherry brandy; 1 l / 4 1/4 cup red wine; 3 l / 13 cup meat stock; table salt to taste.

For the salad garnish

Rocket; red chard; lollo rosso; escarole; chervil; 3 spears green asparagus per person.

For the apple purée

6 Reineta apples; 500 ml / 2 1/6 cups water; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sugar; salt.

Olive oil aromatized with vine wood

Place the vine trimmings chopped in pieces in a large pressure cooker and set on fire. When burnt down to the embers, insert a metal container–you can use a cake tin with wires attached to form handles–containing the extra virgin olive oil. Cover the pressure cooker to smoke the olive oil for 45 minutes.

picture. Olive oil is crossing frontiers (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 65) and is crying out for a place of its own in today's cuisine. There are now many restaurants that offer trolleys of extra virgin olive oil for tasting by way of aperitif, and themed menus based on extra virgin olive oil have become "the in thing". "In the mid-1980s, we were one of the first restaurants to offer an olive oil trolley," recalls the 3-Michelin-star chef Pedro Subijana. "Back then, it was very difficult to find artisan extra virgin olive oils, but today there is an amazing variety of quality olive oils. We work with Marqués de Valdueza and Pagos del Olivar. Every day we offer a special olive oil." Today the menu at his restaurant, Akelarre, also includes dishes such as olive oil pearls with an emulsion of liquidized pepper, and olive oil sorbets.

Moreover, people are becoming increasingly familiar with different varieties and brands of olive oil. Juan Gutiérrez, from the restaurant Café de Paris in Málaga, confirms this trend. "Customers know more and more about olive oil and some even ask for a specific brand." At his restaurant, a selection of three olive oils is offered as a starter. Perhaps one day extra virgin olive oil menus will become as common as wine lists. Certainly, the future prospects for extra virgin olive oil seem as bright as its past.

David Cánovas Williams *has worked as a journalist in digital media and as a freelance translator. He was an intern journalist with* Spain Gourmetour *until September 2007.*

Veal cheeks
Wash the cheeks well, season and place in a vacuum pack with 500 ml / 2 1/6 cups extra virgin olive oil aromatized with vine wood and the red wine. Cook in a steam oven or a bain-marie at 70ºC /158ºF for 35 hours. Cool quickly, then extract the meat and set aside the juices. Cut into squares each weighing about 150 g / 5 1/2 oz, then sear in a non-stick skillet with some extra virgin olive oil aromatized with vine wood so that the meat looks as if it was cooked over a griddle.

Veal cheek sauce
Soak the cheek trimmings for about 4 hours to remove any blood. Meanwhile, gently fry the onions, carrots and leeks with the herbs and spices until they begin to turn brown. Add the trimmings and fry together. Add the sherry brandy and the wine, leave to reduce, then add the juices from the vacuum-cooking process together with the meat stock. Leave to reduce, then strain and bind.

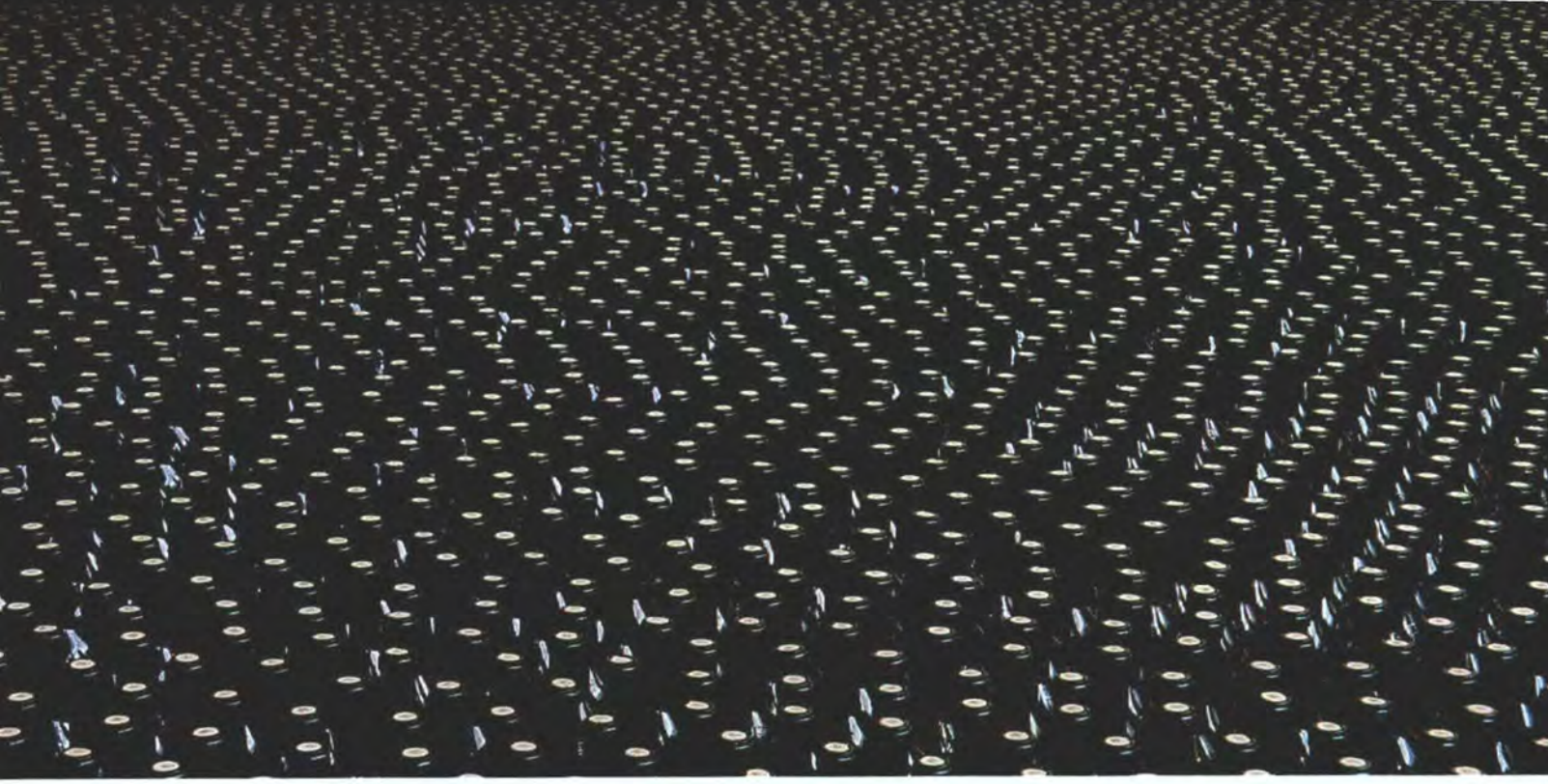
Apple purée
Make a syrup with the water and sugar. When it begins to thicken, add the chopped apples. Leave to cook, then texturize in the Thermomix. Season with salt to taste.

TO SERVE
Serve a quenelle of apple purée and top with the seared veal cheek. Arrange the salad to one side (a few leaves of rocket, red chard, lollo rosso, escarole and chervil) with the sautéed green asparagus, and add some sauce.

Preparation time
5 hours 10 minutes

Cooking time
35 hours

Recommended wine
Francis Paniego himself, who created this dish, recommends Trasnocho by Fernando Remírez de Ganuza (DOCa Rioja). "It has the perfect combination of elegance, modernity and classicism for this dish, giving the ideal balance."



BODEGAS O. FOURNIER

Hooked on Wine

My first impression of José Manuel Ortega Fournier, president of Bodegas O. Fournier, was that he was a glutton for work. The first time I contacted him it was via an e-mail I sent from Santiago, Chile. I was at home, feeling like a martyr to journalism because I was working after 10 p.m. It was the summer of 2005 and Ortega was finalizing the purchase of a winery in Chile. Before shutting off my computer, I decided to send him another e-mail to check some information. I was just going to bed when I noticed, to my surprise, that a reply had come in no more than five minutes later. I was grateful, and I commiserated with him for working so late. He replied immediately, laughing at our shared situation, commenting that he was not in Chile but in Ribera del Duero, thousands of miles and several time zones eastwards. For him, it was 3 a.m. "I have to work hard to get what I want," he wrote. In real terms, that means five wineries in four countries, a dream that is fast coming true.

TEXT
PATRICIO TAPIA

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

PHOTOS
BODEGAS O. FOURNIER

For much of the 1990s, Ortega, who was born in Burgos, Spain, was traveling around South America for Banco Santander. But what he was really doing, he says, was saving up "to buy my own business," and wine seemed like a good idea. "I was living in the United Kingdom and I realized that wine could be a good investment, even on a collector's scale, so I started collecting great Spanish wines, ones that didn't appear much at auctions. That was how it all started. Then I got hooked, and wine became a passion."

The bug for collecting moved towards producing. The adventure started out in South America, a subcontinent that he knew well from his life as a banker. In late 1999, a friend phoned from Argentina to tell him that there was a property for sale in the foothills of the Andes in the Argentinean province of Mendoza. So off he went with a group of advisors. In 2000, they bought 263 ha (650 acres) and immediately started planting.

"There were a number of reasons for choosing Argentina," says Ortega. "The first was that Argentina produces some very good wines, but not many of them, so there was potential for growth. We loved the climate, the soil seemed just right and land in Argentina at that time was cheap."

The chosen area was La Consulta, at an altitude of 1,200 m (3,940 ft) in the Uco Valley. It is now recognized as an excellent location and is even starting to rival in prestige with other traditional areas in Mendoza such as Agrelo and Perdriel. But in the late 90s, it was home to just a couple of wineries–until O. Fournier came along.

With alluvial soil, rich in sand and stones, La Consulta–like all of Mendoza–is practically a desert with rainfall that hardly ever exceeds 200 mm (8 in) a year. The main problem is water. On the O. Fournier property, wells had to be dug to a depth of 160 m (525 ft) to reach the aquifers. Even today, after seven years with the

production plants in operation, the place still feels like an oasis in the middle of extensive areas of sand and dirt tracks against the spectacular backdrop of the snow-capped Andes, just 15 km (9 mi) away.

The first plantations covered 80 ha (198 acres) with Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc and, above all, Tempranillo, which occupied more than half of the vineyard. "That must have been because of the Spanish blood in me," says Ortega, although he accepts that the climate, with hot summers but sharp differences between daytime and nighttime temperatures, also helped convince them that Tempranillo could do well. Their decision was proven right when they discovered that just a mile away to the southwest, there was a small, old vineyard growing this Spanish variety. Once they tried the fruit, they realized that the emphasis on Tempranillo was not just a matter of nostalgia. They used their first grapes to make (in rented facilities) the company's first great wine: ACrux 2001, a blend of 70% Tempranillo, 20% Malbec and 10% Merlot.

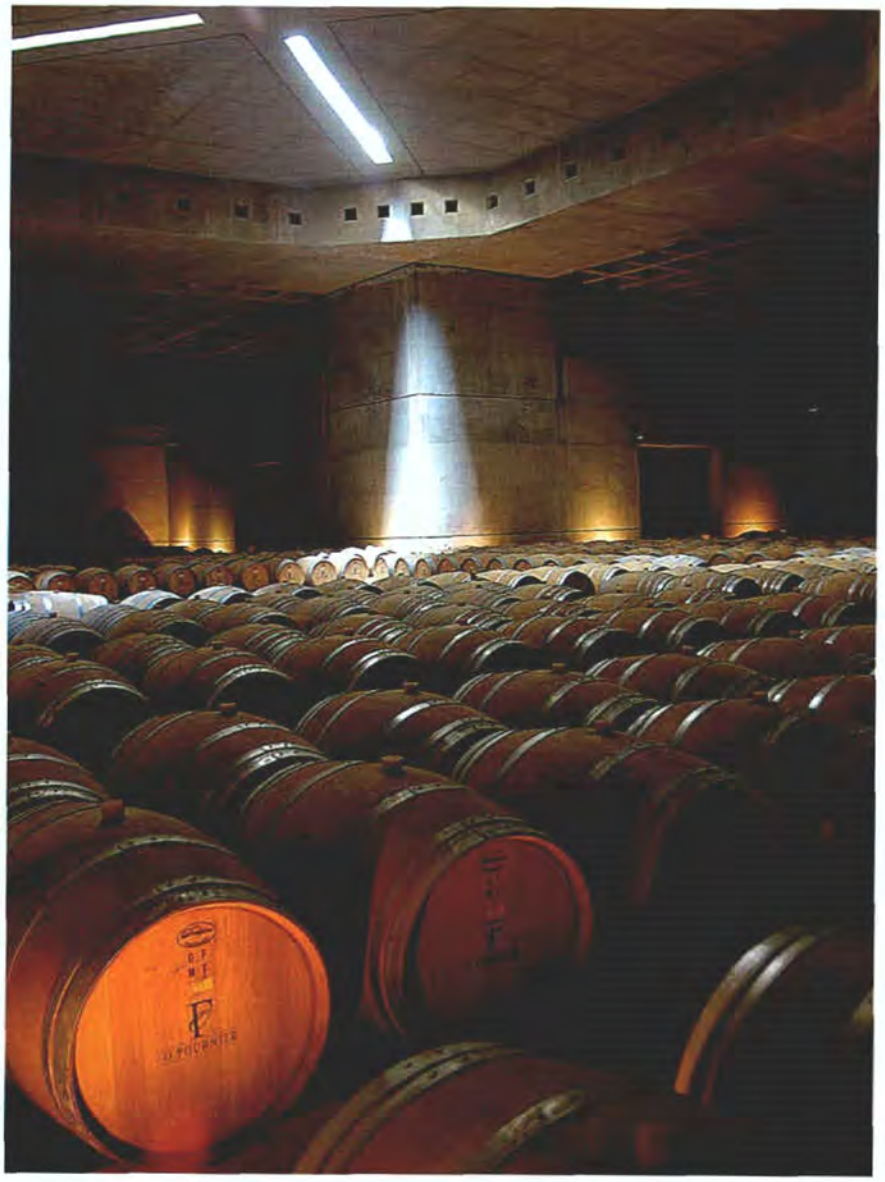
The next step was to build the winery. Work started in October 2002 and, four years later, the impressive building was the talk of the town, with architecture that made it look more like something from outer space than a winery. "Since it was the first plant, we wanted something emblematic, a landmark, so I asked the architects for an innovative, striking design, one that people would talk about, for better or for worse."

Today there is now a modern restaurant seating 60, run by Nadia, Ortega's wife, attached to this "flying saucer", and plans are underway to build a luxury hotel with 36 rooms where Ortega can house some of the many tourists that are beginning to flock to Mendoza.

The choice of an unknown spot paid off. It soon attracted the attention of the international press within the Argentinean context, and sales have grown in parallel. This was partly thanks to the efforts of the president himself who is happy to act

simultaneously as sales manager, public relations officer and general dogsbody, serving wine to journalists or to tourists coming along to his restaurant. And it seems to me his success is partly thanks to his skilled use of mobile technology. Never have I seen anyone write faster on the tiny keyboard of a cell phone.

the best region, which happens to be where I was born," states Ortega. The region chosen was Ribera del Duero. They bought up a small winery which they modernized and expanded to a capacity of 325,000 l (85,839 gal). But, more importantly, they bought the vineyards that went with the winery from the San Juan López family. This Finca el Pinar has 60 ha (148 acres) under vines aged between 23 and 57 years. "Our philosophy is to try to base our quality on old grapes. That's what we did in Mendoza and it was our first priority in Ribera del Duero."
The Ribera del Duero winery, located in the Berlanga de Roa area in the



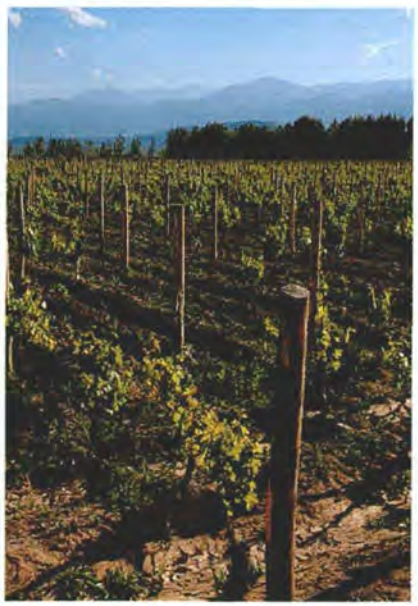
Back to their origins

The basic premise behind the O. Fournier project was the need to minimize the risks involved in an enterprise that depends on the whims of Mother Nature. That was one of the reasons for creating a group of wineries spanning the two hemispheres, in the old and the new worlds of wine. Once the project in Mendoza was underway, their attention turned to Spain, with the idea of setting up a winery with financial contributions from Ortega's father and three new partners. "We wanted a winery in Spain for the simple reason that we were Spanish, but it couldn't be just anywhere. It had to be in what we consider to be

province of Burgos, is not so striking in architectural terms as La Consulta, but its wines are of equally good quality. The first vintage was 2002 with the Spiga line. Two years later, having gained experience with the vineyard, they were able to make an O. Fournier that was 100% Tempranillo, the top-ranking grape in the Spanish wine world. This strategy was also followed in Mendoza with the 2002 grapes, but there the old vines were Syrah.
Ortega's idea is to consolidate the winery in Ribera del Duero, preferably with wines achieving the same impact as their peers in Mendoza, but he knows competition is fierce and his project is a new one. "We've only been in the Spanish wine market for two years and, though we've had good reviews and comments, we still need to consolidate our sales operations. We believe it's just a matter of time."
But before that goal is reached, he has decided to focus on his latest project: Chile.

Across the Andes

In 2004, both the Ribera del Duero project in Spain and the Mendoza project in Argentina were making progress. It was time to look for further growth, this time in Chile. "From the start we focused on Chile for several reasons. Its climate is ideal, it has a great diversity of soils and temperate climates and its market is sound. Its success over recent years in opening up foreign markets is proof of this."
But things were not easy. As in Spain, they wanted to start out in a prestigious area in Chile. The valley they selected was Colchagua, 150 km (93 mi) south of the capital city of Santiago, the location of other wineries based on Chilean capital (Viña Montes) and foreign capital (Casa Lapostolle) that have been very successful internationally. But, after almost three years of trying to find the right spot, they gave up. "Instead of placing our bets on a safe location in Colchagua, we were advised by local experts to try out regions with unexplored potential." That was how they reached the Maule Valley, an area 250 km (155 mi) south of Santiago.
Within Chile, the Casablanca, Maipo and Colchagua Valleys are considered to have the greatest prestige. Everyone wants to invest



there. Maule, on the other hand, has a longstanding vine-growing tradition but has not yet been able to get rid of its reputation as a bulk producer of poor quality wines. Today, thanks to a small group of growers, its image is gradually changing. It was precisely this undiscovered potential that attracted Ortega. "The challenge of Maule is similar to what we did in La Consulta. The possibilities are as great as they were there and, according to our enologist José Spisso, the Maule reds have a freshness and character that he has never seen anywhere else."
So they rented a winery in the Maule Valley and started producing wine in 2007. They also took out a long-term rent on a vineyard with old vines, "the most attractive plot I saw in the three years that I was looking in Chile." The idea is to exploit the potential with Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Carmenère, as well as Cariñena, a variety considered to be a very good prospect in this area. The Chile project also includes whites. In fact, the first wine they made is a Sauvignon Blanc under a new label, Centauri, from grapes bought in Leyda, a valley close to the Pacific coast that is currently attracting great interest in Chile. But the winery's plans go beyond Leyda to include an adjacent area that is much colder and more complex, with less fertile soils and limited water availability. The area is called Lo Abarca and is perhaps the group's most risky project yet. "We're aware of the problems, but we've decided to take the risk because of the climate and the soil characteristics. We're convinced it could be one of the best terroirs for Sauvignon Blanc in the world."
O. Fournier has bought 35 ha (86.5 acres) of steeply sloping land and plan to plant Sauvignon Blanc, as well as Riesling and Pinot Noir, all of which should adapt well to the cool temperatures at a distance of just four km (2.5 mi) from the cold Pacific Ocean. They also plan to build a winery that will be as modern as the one in Mendoza but smaller, with a capacity of no more than 100,000 l (26,412 gal).

For Lo Abarca, there is also a project to build a restaurant and perhaps, according to Ortega, a small, charming hotel. But these ideas will develop in parallel with the company's new challenge: another winery on the Douro, in Portugal, their fourth country. After that, he says, as if it were easy as pie, the plan is to create a second winery in Spain–four countries, five plants–all under the O. Fournier umbrella, but each with its own labels. That was the business he was dreaming of while he worked for the bank. Sometimes he feels nostalgic about those times back then when he traveled less and earned more, but he confesses that he's caught the wine bug. Wine is now his passion, his obsession.

***Patricio Tapia** is a specialist wine writer. He writes about South American and Spanish wines for* Wines & Spirits *in New York.*

WEBSITES

www.ofournier.com
Information on all of the Bodegas O. Fournier wineries and wines.

Treasure Trove

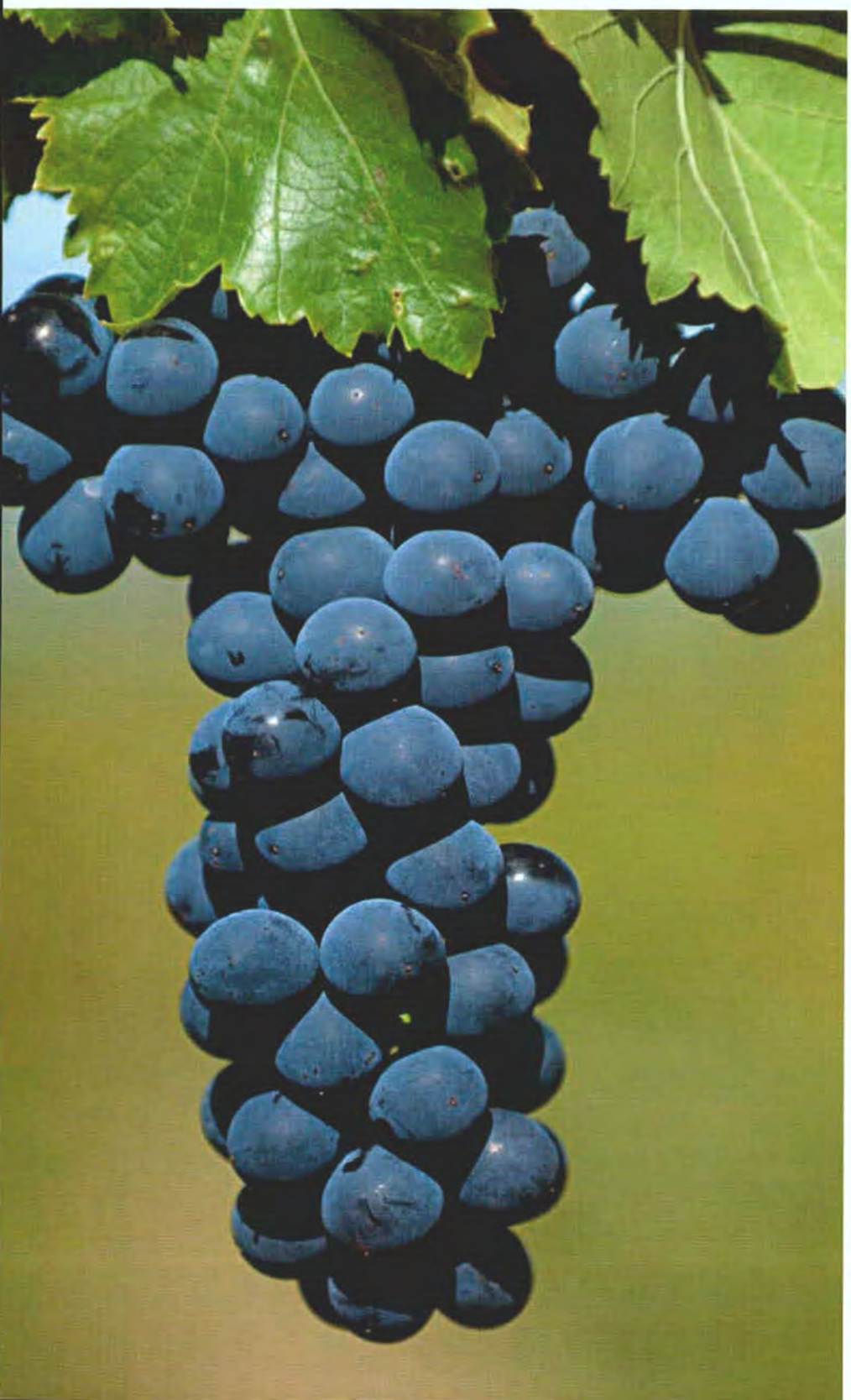
A mere 20 years ago, even the most committed optimist would not have predicted the dazzling future that lay ahead for the wines of Bierzo, then still entrenched in a lackluster past. Yet it should not have come as such as surprise. Back in the 1960s, France's Emile Peynaud, later to be hailed as "the father of modern oenology", had predicted that this little area of León, with its long winemaking history, would some day become one of Spain's top sources of great red wines.

High Times in BIERZO

Text
Bartolomé Sánchez

Translation
Hawys Pritchard

Photos
Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX



Peynaud's prescient theory was based on the combination of conditions in this land of opposites that make it ideal for distinctive, individualized, richly-nuanced viticulture. Bierzo occupies a privileged geographical location, between rainy Galicia and Spain's central plateau with its characteristic contrasts of extreme temperatures, and is protected from the cold Asturian winds by the Montes de León mountain chain. It also has: an Atlantic microclimate, annual rainfall of over 700 l / 185 gal per m², vines growing at altitudes between 450 and 1,000 m (1,475 and 3,280 ft), over 2,000 generous hours of sunshine a year, predominantly slaty soils, and an unusual grape variety–Mencía–with very individual aromas, color and texture that, most importantly, consumers can readily identify. Clever harnessing of this extraordinary assemblage of conditions by a new generation of highly-trained growers and winemakers has made Peynaud's prediction come true. Bierzo, traditionally dominated as it was by cooperatives and big wineries still producing overly-conventional wines in the style popularized in the 1950s (lots of wood aging, half-hearted color and a lightness on the palate that all too often verged on the banal) has been revolutionized in the process.

Bierzo's new wave wines began to acquire impetus at the end of the last century, though intimations of promising things to come had been provided some years earlier by the conviction-fuelled activities of a few far-sighted local figures. Among them was: José Luis Prada, founder of Prada a Tope, a dynamic company

processing natural Bierzo products and a successful restaurant franchise, Antonio Pérez Caramés, then already engaged in organic growing–a complicated and little-appreciated pursuit at the time, and Luna Beberide, notable for having introduced foreign varieties, hitherto unknown in that part of the country, such as Gewürztraminer, Merlot and Chardonnay.

All three shared a can-do attitude and an unconventional approach to the wine trade and they attempted to bring a breath of fresh air into the comarca. Their concept revolved around decidedly modern wines that captured a wealth of fruit and tannins in the bottle and were diametrically different from the area's predominant wine styles and methods. Years later, Bierzo's new wave was to coincide with the arrival on the scene of Álvaro Palacios, already an established figure in DOCa Priorat, accompanied by his nephew Ricardo Pérez, or perhaps vice versa. His approach was redolent of such conviction that it inspired local winemakers, especially the younger ones, who immediately opted to ride the wave that was eventually to make such a name for the new wines of Bierzo both in Spain and abroad.

High-level viticulture

The winery owners and winemakers of new-era Bierzo have been sleuth-like in tracking down old plantations; plots of vines growing in poor, slaty soils high up on steep slopes are highly desirable because their yield is low–a guarantee of quality wine. They embody a magic formula: very old vines have learned to pace their growth harmoniously and to produce fruit with a perfect internal balance between water and solid matter (such as tannins and other polyphenols). The high altitude means that they experience a greater temperature difference between day and night–essential for developing and fixing aromas and acidity, that zing that gives a wine freshness, while the slaty soils scent the must with deep, mysterious, flinty aromas, one of the attributes associated with great terroir wines. Moreover, the scarcity of nutrients in the soil imposes a Spartan discipline on the plants' roots, sending them deeper in search of nourishment so that they absorb them from the various strata through which they pass and enrich the cocktail in the process.

However, not all winemakers and growers are prepared to tread such a safe path; indeed, there are those

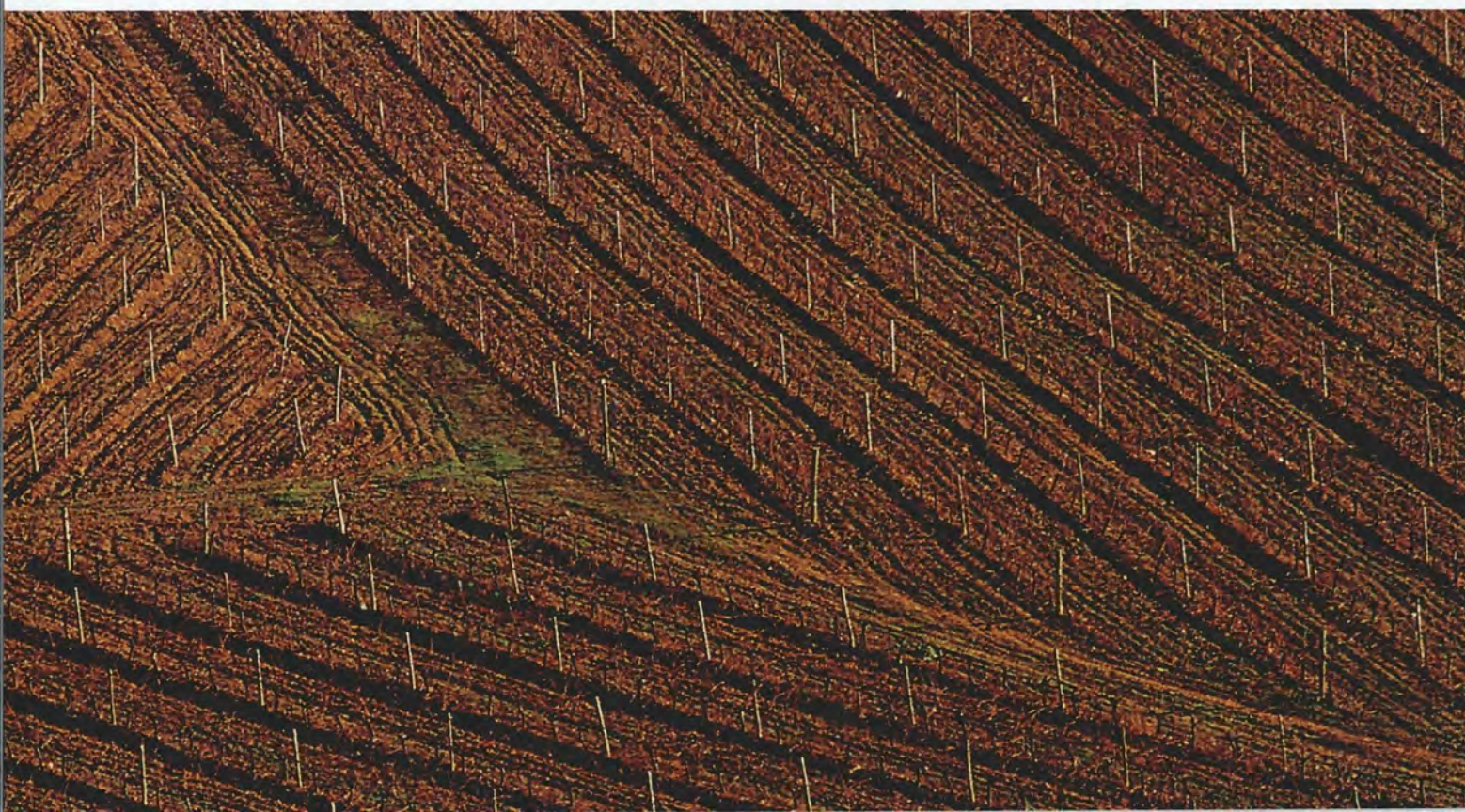
that prefer a riskier approach. Some devotees of the Mencía variety, among them Amancio Fernández, formerly an oenologist at Dominio de Torres and now involved in a project of his own, have taken the experiment a step further. While the general technique for achieving top quality is to seek out high-altitude vines growing on steep, slaty hillsides, it occurred to him to wonder what would happen if the same variety were to be grown in clay-rich soil. The results of his experiment were frankly surprising. For one thing, the grape skins were thinner, creating a gentler structure and smoother-textured wines. Acidity, the backbone of this region's wines, has a subtler presence. The end results are superb: supremely elegant wines that can be enjoyed young, unlike those of slaty soil provenance which have to be kept for years to temper their strength. This style, which is still at the project stage, is a treat for the palate and of course opens up new experimental possibilities for Bierzo wines.
Winemakers have been competitive in tracking down and lavishing care and attention on small plantations of old vines, and those owners are now the makers of wines with top-flight reputations. The prime material that these vines produce is worth a lot. And it is by a mere stroke of luck that they have survived: they could so easily have suffered the same fate as old vines (of equal oenological significance) in other wine-producing areas of Spain, and fallen victim to one of the reforms or systematic uprootings of vines that periodically devastate the nation's vineyards. Because each plot possesses unique character traits, the grapes derived from them are pressed separately, and a number of estate wines have appeared as a result. The outstanding characteristic of these vineyards is that they are tiny and scattered: many of the plots measure less than a *cuartal* (a local measurement equal to 500 m^2 (5,380 sq ft)). It is an eloquent statistic that the 4,000 or so ha (9,884 acres) of registered vineyard are distributed among nearly 4,000 growers.
Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Bierzo wines is the way in which they reflect their geographical provenance: a patchwork of little plots planted with gobelet-trained vines, almost impossible to reach with modern farming machinery to the extent, in some cases, that horse-drawn equipment has had to be brought out of retirement for plowing and maintenance. The predominant approach in Bierzo involves meticulous vineyard management and making wine in small, easily-controlled quantities. This explains why no enormous wineries designed by famous architects (which are becoming so fashionable in other winemaking areas) have so far appeared on the scene. One could interpret this as signifying that hereabouts they believe in the oft-repeated (but not always applied) maxim that "a good wine is made in the vineyard" and prefer to concentrate on the land. In this intriguing, demanding terrain it is more a matter of necessity than choice.

These days, every winery and every oenologist makes a single-vineyard wine that starts out in very expensive "boutique" casks and ends up in top brand bottles with eye-catching designer labels. Often, batches barely amount to a few thousand bottles–sometimes even under a thousand–and prices are on a par with famous estate wines. Ricardo Pérez, of Descendientes de J. Palacios, makes up to four wines of this type, some of which sell for over 100 euros.

Emancipated youth

As we have seen, it is not just the Palacios that attain such heights. Young, local winemaker Raúl Pérez, one of the area's most distinguished and prolific oenologists, makes great Mencía wines such as Utreia de Valtuille. He is a prominent member of the Pérez family, owners of Bodegas y Viñedos Castro Ventosa, though at the moment he is taking a break in the family bodega. Raúl runs the dynamic Bodegas Estefanía where he makes the consistently good Tilenus in various versions (young, crianza), but his outstanding products are a couple of splendid single vineyard reds. One of these is Cova de la Raposa of which barely 500 bottles are issued, and even then only in years when the grapes are considered to be of fine enough quality to bear exposure to market assessment. He also provides professional advice to other winegrowing areas such as nearby Ribeira Sacra. Indeed, his authoritative influence extends as far as DO Vinos de Madrid, where he is part of a laudable project in San Martín de Valdeiglesias to save 25 ha (62 acres) of old Garnacha vines owned by Bernabeleva, a company associated with forestry management, hunting activities and the exploitation of natural resources. He is also doing interesting work with Tempranillo in the harsh, rocky terrain of Valtiendas (in the Segovia province, very close to Ribera del Duero).

Bierzo seems charged with dynamism. Alliances have formed among the children of veteran winemakers, eager to move on from the wines made by the previous generation. For example, Alejandro Luna (son of Luna Beberide) and brothers Alberto and Eduardo García (sons of Mariano García from Bodegas Aalto and Mauro, both in Ribera del Duero), have teamed up with Gregory Pérez, another top local oenologist. This team of professionals has achieved a lot: from five ha (12 acres) of vineyard



composed of two plots of old Mencía vines that they managed to buy in the village of Dragonte, they have produced a wine that is virtually a collector's item. Appropriately named Paixar (which in local parlance means a plot or vine on the highest ground), this is a top-flight wine.
Gregory Pérez (from Bordeaux, though originally Spanish) discovered Bierzo some years ago and became so involved with the place that he has no intention of severing the connection. He has just started a very promising new project called Mengoba with two other partners, for which they have rented a winery in Sarribas, near Cacabelos. The project is primarily focused on the Godello variety. Already this year he has 10,000 l (2,641 gal) of lees contact wine with a spell in the cask to make it longer lived. He is making a classically picturesque Mencía too, of course, derived from old plots still worked by oxen: some 7,000 bottles can be expected in two years time.
Women are also making their mark in the traditionally male-dominated oenological arena. Ada, the daughter of José Luis Prada, has gone into business with Ricardo Sanz (oenologist at Bodega de Crianza de Castilla la Vieja, DO Rueda), and acquired control of 40 ha (99 acres) of prized old vines in the course of her winemaking activities. Her wine is called Ambos (Bodegas Mencías de Dos). The word *ambos* means both, and the wine does indeed reveal the trained skills of two young professionals, both apparently endowed with innate expertise.
In Valtuille, a little village that has become a focal point of Bierzo winemaking, the oenologist Elena Otero, one of a family of famous

oenologists, works at Vinos Valtuille, a winery owned by Marco Antonio García (a childhood friend of Raúl Pérez). Her Pago de Valdoneje wines are refined, beautifully balanced and possess that whiff of authenticity that consumers like so much.
Also in Valtuille is the Peique winery, run by current representatives of many generations of winemakers who have brought their most valued assets–the old family vineyards–to the party. Because of their approach to viticulture, which prioritizes top-quality raw material over quantity, they have had to make the effort and acquire more vineyards. The know-how and experience he has acquired in other big-name designations of origin, such as Ribera del Duero (where he works as an oenologist at the Marqués de Vargas Group's Bodegas y Viñedos del Conde de San Cristóbal), have placed the winemaker Jorge Peique in good stead, and the wines he has created here are elegant, balanced and eloquent. His Peique Selección Familiar (the 2003 vintage was named International Trophy Winner at the awards ceremony in December 2007) is a good example of the change of style taking place in Bierzo. A collaboration involving the local oenologist Amancio Fernández (currently working on a different project), Mario Rico, Fermín Uría and others, also produced excellent results in terms of wine and gaining more fans. They set up a winery called Dominio de Tares and used the opportunity to give free rein to their oenological ambitions. Their main objective was to try get the utmost out of the small plots with which they were working (24 owned by them), while supervising the management of 45 more. Although the volume they produce–400,000 bottles–is large in this context, the attention devoted to their raw material has paid off and their wines represent excellent value for money. It is unsurprising to learn that Tares P-3, one of the wines derived from this terroir, is considered to be one of Bierzo's best.
The project in which Amancio is currently engaged is on a bigger scale, not least in the number of partners involved. He and Guillermo Prada, who also runs Val de Sil in Valdeorras, have succeeded in gathering 30 more backers from various professions for an ambitious scheme based in the pretty village of Pieros. The idea behind their winery there is to bring in highly-prized grapes from those barely accessible vineyards and vinify each plot's fruit separately so that its properties are highlighted. So far, small batches have been made from the 2005 and 2006 harvests.

Word gets around

Bierzo's burgeoning reputation and drive have attracted prestigious companies from other DOs, for example the Galiciano Group which, as well as its flagship Adegas Galegas in Galicia's Rías Baixas, also owns

wineries in various DOs including Montsant, Valdeorras and Vinos de la Tierra de León. Its Bierzo winery is called Viticultores Bercianos. Martín Códax, originally of DO Rías Baixas, has also moved into Bierzo where it produces Martín Sarmiento reds at the winery with the same name (named after the local Benedictine sage, poet and writer Fray Sarmiento, 1695-1772). The O Rosal zone of Rías Baixas is represented by the Terras Gaudas winery, which has also turned to this area for its reds, acquiring a majority share holding in the local winery Pittacum. Even the company that owns Pago del Vicario (the La Mancha bodega known for its "modern" wines) and an interesting tourist complex in Ciudad Real, has set up a winery here under the name Pago de San Clemente.

Powerful business groups in the food and allied sectors have also established a presence in Bierzo, among them Grupo Begar, which encompasses construction, services and real estate companies. The group owns Bodega del Abad and, judging by the quality of its new Gotin del Risc range of wines, it has its sights set on joining the field's leaders. There is an interesting background story to Bodegas Estefanía, which is owned by the heavyweight company Quesos Frías: it was originally a dairy factory and was converted into a winery when that business was no longer viable. The happy ending is that owners and workers (some of whom date back to the factory's previous incarnation) are still as enthusiastic about their now not-so-new venture as they were when it was launched.

Treasures of the Sil

The main variety used for Bierzo reds is Mencía, to which their specific character can be attributed. The DO's regulations actually require a minimum of 70% of this variety for young reds. Mencía is of uncertain origin, and one long-established theory associates it with the French variety, Cabernet Franc. However, according to Félix Cabello, researcher at IMIDRA (Madrid Institute for Rural, Farming and Food Research and Development), who manages the biggest collection of vine varieties in Spain, this is an erroneous notion triggered by a description of Mencía by the author Nicolas García de los Salmones in which he mentions that it tastes like Cabernet Franco, meaning that their grapes have a similar flavor. Research carried out at IMIDRA has shown Cabernet Franc and Mencía to be unrelated. As Félix Cabello declares: "There is no connection between these varieties except for the faintly herbaceous flavor of their grapes." He goes on to quote the study, of which he is part author, entitled 'Characterization of Spanish grapevine cultivar diversity using sequence tagged micro satellite site markers', which appeared in the magazine *Genome* in 2003 and uses data obtained from six micro satellite site markers to demonstrate that these are two different varieties with few links between them.

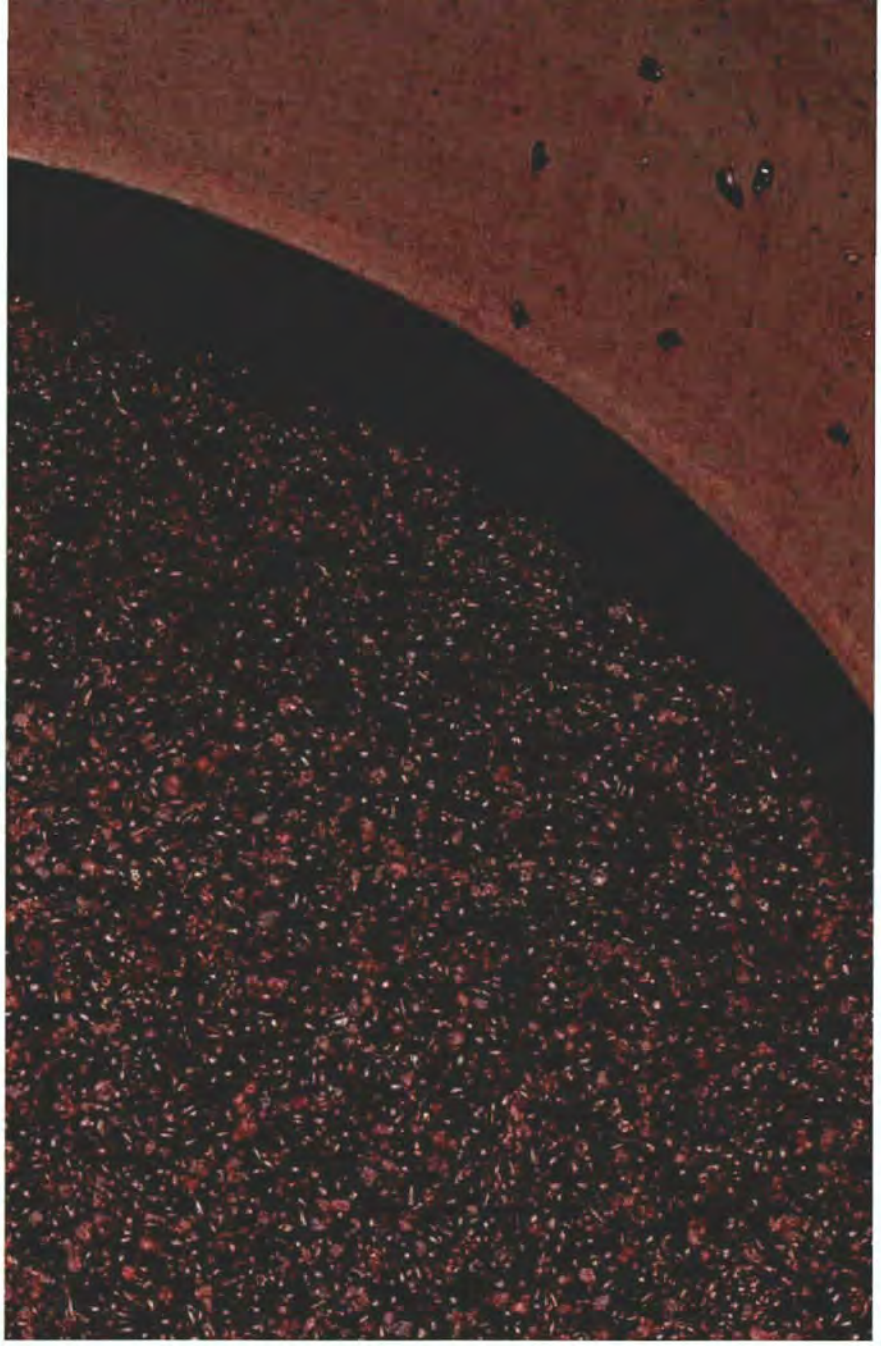
Mencía is a deep, delicate and pleasantly Atlantic grape, with that acidic hint of strawberry that provides its characteristic freshness. This variety had always been thought to lack the necessary body to withstand crianza, but many of the new wave wines, some of which have been aged for 18 months in new oak casks, have put that hackneyed notion to rest. True, to fulfill its potential in this regard it does need to be grown in poor, preferably slaty, soils that keep its production in check. This variety's strong personality gives rise to wines quite unlike any others from mainland Spain, particularly so in the case of those derived from the slaty soils that imprint their characteristic marked mineral stamp, full of distinctive tastes and aromas. These wines represent a whole new area of choice, an alternative to the Tempranillos, Garnachas and Cabernets with which Spain is awash.

Bierzo wines appeal to many different palates, and the grapes from

which they are made are a key element in this–not just Mencía, but other varieties native to the area as well. One of the most important among these is Godello, the so-called "diva of the Sil", which stands out as different amid Spanish winemaking's varietal repertoire. Until relatively recently this was a very low profile variety, having been deployed in such a way that its notable attributes were defused. Thanks to the work of experts in Galicia and Bierzo, Godello has been re-evaluated and is now a significant contender.

Another aspect of Bierzo's new trajectory is that winery owners are keen to raise the profile of their white wines. Godello, Bierzo's best white wine option, offers oenologists plenty of scope. Typically, Godello wines have refined aromas, body and oiliness and respond amazingly well to ageing in tanks, fermentation and ageing in casks and especially long periods in the bottle. Some of the region's wineries are already offering fine examples of what can be achieved with Godello.

The one small snag is that there is very little of it in Bierzo's vineyards–less than 1.5% of the total. There are also other DO authorized varieties which, though lower in the white grape ranking, are useful for making relatively large quantities of straightforward, pleasant young wines. This echelon is occupied by white varieties such as Palomino, Malvasía, Doña Blanca (also known as Valenciana and being touted by some oenologists as the "next big thing"), and the red variety Garnacha Tintorera. Discussions are currently underway with the regulatory council with a view to modify the statutes and possibly add other reds such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo to the list of authorized varieties. Given that there are a few plantations of these in the area, they may be



SNAPSHOT

Authorized varieties:

- **Reds:** Mencía, the main variety, occupying 65% of Bierzo's vineyards, and Garnacha Tintorera, which accounts for 5.5% of the total area under vine.
- **Whites:** Godello, 1.5% of the total under vine; Doña Blanca, 10%; Palomino, 15%; and Malvasía, 3%.

Altitude of vineyards: 450-1,000 m (1,475-3,280 ft)

Average annual rainfall: 721 mm (28 in)

Average annual hours of sunshine: 2,100-2,200

Hectares of registered vineyard: 4,161 (10,282 acres)

Number of growers: 3,867

Grape production (2006): 20,500,000 kg (45,194,763 lbs) – 143,500 hl (3,790,868 gal)

Sales (2006): 6,850,907 x 0.75 l (0.20 gal) bottles

Export quota (2006): 3.29%

Principal export markets: United States, Switzerland, Germany, Sweden and Mexico

Source: Regulatory Council of Designation of Origin Bierzo

granted official recognition, but for the most part winery owners are in no doubt that Mencía is the variety that contributes the crucial differentiating element. Big-name white varieties Gewürztraminer and Chardonnay are also likely to be authorized eventually on the grounds that plots of them have existed here for some years. Incorporating additional varieties is one of the most problematic issues when it comes to modifying regulations. Were they to be modified, minimum percentages would need to be established for the new varieties.

Wine and its landscape

This broad sweep of land borderded to the north by the Montes de León mountain chain, dominated by the majestic bulk of Monte Tileno, is particularly picturesque when they are snow-covered, as is the case several times a year despite the threat of global warming that hangs over us like the sword of Damocles these days. Within this amphitheatre, little valleys configure a rugged terrain of dizzying slopes. The central valley where the majority of the vineyards are concentrated, in and around its 22 towns including Villafranca, Cacabelos, Upper and Lower Valtuilles and Dragonte, is beautiful, enigmatic and dotted with vineyards. Other valleys, such as the one in which Carracedo is located, grow different crops and one can drive along in the shade of apple, pear and cherry trees for mile after mile. Vines are grown in that valley too and, because the soils are considerably richer there, give higher, though never lavish, yields. But it is those other, older vineyards up on the high ground and hillsides, where Mencía vines have to fight to get what they need from the hard slate, that have worked the new Bierzo miracle. The other side of the valley is dominated by the Aquilianos Mountains which closes it off to the south. Altitudes here, with the eminence of La Silla de la Yegua towering over 2,000 m (6,560 ft), are the highest in Bierzo. Through this dedicatedly winegrowing landscape, the river Sil wends its way.

Onward and upward

The irresistible rise of Bierzo's wines has brought many benefits to a region where other industries, such as mining, are in undeniable recession. Having barely paid its way in the past, the region's wine is now a prestigious product that can offer its young people a promising future. It is tempting to hope that, if current conditions are sustained, winegrowing will provide a population historically doomed to emigrate with a reason to stay put rather than having to exchange this lovely landscape for an uncertain future.

The wine sector exerts its pull on both locals and outsiders, but for the people of the area it is also inspiring to discover that their land and vineyards

can produce something so highly regarded by the rest of the world. The last few years have seen an extraordinary increase in the number of wineries registered with the DO's Regulatory Council: the current total stands at 54. Eagerness to do more is in the air. The younger winery owners have set up an association known as Autóctona to which 20 wineries belong. Its aim is to spread wine culture among its members, staging periodic tastings of wines from other regions, bringing in wine experts to give master classes and helping promote their wines abroad.

Like a volcano, Bierzo is seething, with new projects following hot on the heels of the last, overlapping, combining and dissolving. The vineyard is taking on increasing importance, and plantations of old vines are venerated and sought after like hidden treasure. Oenologists change jobs and wineries more readily here than in other, more established winegrowing areas. The dynamism is palpable: this part of Spain is enjoying the heyday of a cherished product.

Food and wine critic ***Bartolomé Sánchez*** *has a special interest in wine. He is assistant director of* Opus Wine, *publisher of* Vinum España *and* MiVino *magazines.*

WEBSITES

www.crdobierzo.es
The website of the Regulatory Council of DO Bierzo includes information about local history, geography, grape varieties, wines, wineries and DO activities. (Spanish)

www.turismobierzo.com
The ASBITUR (Association of Rural Tourism Businessmen of Bierzo) site provides local information with a touristic slant: routes, festivals, where and what to eat, accommodation and a useful map. (Spanish)

VÍAS

Conquering the Heart of Spain

Spain is often said to be a small continent of its own. From snowy peaks to sandy beaches, from rustling creeks to vast plains, from dark forests to rocky mountain ranges, in whichever direction you turn, you'll find a fascinating variety of starkly contrasting, unspoiled and breathtakingly beautiful landscapes. With a view to revealing the splendid interior, the very heart of Spain, to a wider and increasingly environmentally and health-conscious public,

VERDES (I)

since 1993, the Spanish Railroad Foundation has been coordinating the rehabilitation of obsolete railway tracks. Its goal is to turn them into a country-wide network of comfortable walking, cycling and horse riding trails, the so-called Vías Verdes or Greenways. This is the first of three articles that will take you through Spain, and there is no better place to start than where Spanish culture was born.

TEXT
ANKE VAN WIJCK ADÁN

PHOTOS
JUAN MANUEL SANZ/ICEX

The Greenways are a nationwide network of non-motorized, well-surfaced routes that have been specifically planned to accommodate hikers, bikers, and in most cases, the physically challenged. What makes these Greenways truly special is their convenience and natural beauty. They follow, in entirety, former railway tracks in disuse. As tradition has it, railways are structured to be as flat and straight as possible, so their Greenways offspring are not only easily accessible, safe and comfortable, but in cutting across the countryside, at every turn, they offer different, yet always fascinating scenery, and a chance to truly experience nature.

What makes traveling the Greenways even more interesting is the fact that Spain's countryside is speckled with picturesque villages that rival Roman aqueducts, Moorish castles, Romanesque bridges and medieval monasteries, as Spain also happens to hold one of the world's largest number of cultural, historical and natural National and World Heritage sites. And last but by no means least, there is Spain's gastronomy, both traditional and innovative, that over the last decade has earned more superlatives worldwide than any other. Whichever Greenway you decide to take, it will no doubt be a feast for the senses.

This first installment, which focuses on northern Spain, will take us along both the *Vía Verde del Río Oja* and the *Vía Verde de la Sierra de la Demanda*, two almost contiguous routes that, while very different, also have many aspects in common, since what separates them is the majestic Sierra of the same name.

How it all came about

Until the end of the 19th century, due to taxing orographical conditions, a great portion of Spain had remained barely accessible. The railway seemed an appropriate response to the increasing demand for goods, especially ore and coal, in areas where they did not originate. Consequently, a considerable number of narrow tracks were laid throughout the country, but soon became obsolete or were never even put to use due to the development of road structures soon thereafter. As a result, over 7,500 km (4,657 mi) of often seriously dilapidated, overgrown or flooded railway tracks throughout the country have been patiently awaiting an alternative use. This moment came when, in 1993, the Spanish Railway Foundation commissioned a nationwide inventory that not only revealed the abovementioned length of tracks but also nearly a thousand stations, another thousand bridges, five hundred tunnels and a hundred mining facilities. Its commissioner, the then Ministry of Public Works, Transport, and Environment, provided the initial funding to jump-start rehabilitation of a select number of routes.

Procedures and funding for the creation and maintenance of past, present, and future Vías Verdes can be rather complex, especially as in each case the players involved are different. "Each Vía Verde is a world of its own," explains Carmen Aycart, the director general of the Spanish Railway Foundation. Always under the auspices and coordination of her organization and in collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, there can be any confluence of citizen associations, town and regional councils, the Ministries of Transport, Labour and Tourism, the

Department of Forestry, etc. And of course, there is the crucial role of the national Spanish railway companies (Renfe, Adif and Feve) that have readily granted both the use of many of their tracks and buildings as well as their know-how to these ends. Full and swift rehabilitation of the available tracks at times is thwarted by a series of complexities. As some stretches and edifices are in private hands, expropriation and other legal issues can be rather painstaking. Additionally, the tracks run across the countryside and existing rights of way, some of which are centuries old, must be safeguarded at all times. And finally there are also the huge costs of planning, demolition and resurfacing, reconstruction of tunnels, bridges, underpasses and intersections, as well as appropriate signage, to name just a few.
Yet with ever increasing enthusiasm, towns and villages (generally grouped in ad hoc associations) that pride themselves on having a potential Greenway in their territory, are jumping on the bandwagon.

With small-scale rural and agricultural activities in decay and keenly aware of the natural and historical treasures that these removed areas hold, mayors throughout the country now welcome and effectively target the new trend of active nature tourism. "Tourism is clearly heading in the direction of more sustainable products with the added value of territory and nature," states Mónica Figueroa matter-of-factly. Figueroa, who is the dynamic and committed director general of tourism for the region of La Rioja, adds that what enhances the value of the Greenways is the fact that they offer an alternative to existing tourism products. They are enormously user-friendly, utilize and improve existing structures while fully respecting their natural setting and, as Julio Verdú, in charge of the Vías Verdes in La Rioja explains, they provide an educational aspect through their comprehensive signage which includes landscape evaluation, interpretation of the environment, ornithological and archaeological information, railway history, and of course maps and directions. "We want the Vía Verde to be more than a sporting route," he claims. Traveling the tranquil Greenways not only allows us to enjoy a wealth of natural and historical legacies at a slow pace, but it also allows us to interact with the locals. Furthermore, the Greenways have been shown to incisively effect the social fabric of adjacent villages through the rehabilitation of monuments and natural spaces, often in collaboration with local handcrafters and workshops, by providing jobs and encouraging local participation. The fact is, throughout Spain, at this point, not only 64 Greenways with a total length of 1,600 km (994 mi) have been made available to the greater public, but a sizable number of new ones are being programmed or are about to be implemented.

Getting underway

This article is not meant to be an accurate guide to the Vías Verdes; for that we refer you to their

comprehensive website and published travel guides which also provide useful information about rentals, accommodation, etc. This is more of a travel log, a series of impressions and experiences aimed at whetting your appetite.

Our first trip will take us over 26 km (16 mi) through the valley of the small Oja River from which, as most sources agree, the world famous wine region borrows its name. We will start at the northern end of the Vía Verde, in a small town called Casalarreina. It is located some ten minutes from Haro, the town that features the largest concentration of renowned bodegas in Spain and is widely known for its yearly Battle of the Wines (June 29th). It's likewise known for its excellent gastronomy, especially in the form of *tapas* or *pintxos* (in Basque) that can be sampled along the lively streets of *La Herradura* (the Horseshoe).

Casalarreina features a number of interesting buildings among which the well-kept 16th century *Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Piedad* (Monastery of Our Lady of Piety) clearly stands out. The adjacent Hospedería Señorío de Casalarreina has been transformed into a charming hotel, the perfect place to inaugurate your trip or eventually return to. It comes recommended by Rusticae, an internet portal offering carefully-selected and closely-monitored off-the-beaten-path small to medium-sized hotels that somehow give you that instant feeling of being in the right spot. The Hospedería is no exception. The old and the new live in perfect harmony. Jacuzzis are present in all 15 rooms, and other modern details have been fitted in so well between wooden beams, brick walls and ceilings made of wine barrel staves that they seem to be part of the original early 16th-century structures. Frescoes conjure up merry scenes from Renaissance tales of chivalry and romance, enlivened by the rustling sound of water. As Casalarreina's subsoil is an aquifer, as a means of controlling ground water humidity, the option was made to let it run freely through an open indoor canal in the original wine cellar which was once connected to the monastery, and is now a cozy lounge with two of the original 8,000 l (2,112 gal) barrels still in place.

Being in the midst of wine country, the Hospedería is among a number of hotels in the area where the organization Vinoterapia, as its name clearly suggests, offers wine therapy treatments. This is not about immersion or luxurious spas, of which there are quite a few in La Rioja; it is about relaxing in the intimacy of your own room at a very reasonable price. "The Spa designed by Frank Gehry for the Marques de Riscal winery (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 70) has become world famous, but few can afford it," explains Cristina Gómez, the Hospedería's welcoming manager. She continues, "We all want to be pampered at times and the therapies here are more affordable, and in fact they have given us quite a bit of publicity." Angel Retana, Vinoterapia's founder, couldn't agree more. "Monuments are easily forgotten, but experiences remain and are passed on by word-of-mouth," he remarks convincingly. In a relaxing atmosphere created with

tiny wax lights, soothing chill out music, and the smell of incense wafting through the air, a team of two will first offer a wine tasting. It is ensued by a deep skin cleansing treatment with a peeling product made of Tempranillo grape pips and grape skin tannins, followed by a soothing massage. The team will prepare your Jacuzzi before they leave.

And now, to experience true ecstasy, how about dinner at La Vieja Bodega? The restaurant is just a ten minute walk from Casalarreina's center and is paradigmatic of the right way to interpret and renew traditional cuisine: using first-class fresh and preferably local or regional products while interfering as little as possible with the original flavor and texture. The restaurant's setting equally reflects this philosophy: it is a fully restored 17th-century wine cellar that simultaneously meets modern day requirements.

Joining the pilgrims

After a sound sleep and an invigorating breakfast, we will pick up our bikes at the Hospedería's special storage room (most hotels in the area have such facilities), cross the beautiful old stone bridge over the Oja River right in front of us and be on our way. This rural route will take us through flat wheat and barley fields, occasional patches of vines and sizable plantations of peas and green beans. Not so long ago there were mostly potatoes. Some locals still remember that the train would skid and have to reduce its speed because of potato bugs invading the rails. In the areas immediately around the villages dotting this route, especially in Castañares and Bañares but also further south, we still find patches of bean plants strung up high. They produce the famous *caparrón*, a tiny red-brown or speckled dried bean that is the main ingredient of one of the most traditional dishes in the area. Roberto Bañares, a commercial grower, explains that the ones strung up are generally for domestic use.

On a larger scale, bean plants now are kept low and are mechanically harvested, which is far more cost-effective. "Over the last six or seven years consumption has grown again, as legumes are an important ingredient of the highly acclaimed Mediterranean diet," he says. This tiny bean is one of the factors that links our two routes. Here it is called *Caparrón de Anguiano* (red) or *Caparrón de Castañares* (speckled) and on the other side of the Sierra de la Demanda, it is known as *Alubia de Ibeas*.

Just after having crossed an ancient Roman road that also used to be part of St. James' Way, we will pass by the ruins of the old station of Bañares, bearing witness to a now defunct railroad. Further along however, we will find several nicely rehabilitated stations. We may also be sharing our Greenway with locals that use it as a source of exercise or to comfortably reach nearby villages. "This is a rural area and not so long ago nobody would ride a bike," says Ollero, the owner of a bicycle store in Santo Domingo, "but since we have the Vía Verde, people here buy them more and more. They appreciate having no traffic to worry about."

Not too distantly afar we can now distinguish the spire of the Santo Domingo de la Calzada Cathedral, for over ten centuries an obligated stop on St. James' Way. Here we will join the pilgrims who, alone or in small groups, trickle in from all over the world, often headed straight towards the Pilgrims' Inn which was founded by Santo Domingo in the 11th century. Exactly like their predecessors over a thousand years ago, they can stay overnight for free, although any voluntary contribution is of course welcome. The cathedral, home to the tomb of Saint Domingo, is certainly well worth a visit, especially since you will surely be surprised by the crowing of a rooster coming from high above. They are the life relics of Saint Domingo's most telling miracle: saving a young pilgrim from death by hanging. But how it all came about is for you to find out.

However, not everything is mystical about this town. A five minute walk from the cathedral on the main shopping street, at the pastry shop Isidro (Pinar, 52), Ana Hernando and her brother are the third generation in

making *ahorcaditos*, a wonderfully light, shell-shaped (the universal symbol of St. James' Way) puff pastry filled with almond cream with the golden brown-baked image of the famous young man hanged on top. But you'd be better off saving them for later, because by now you will have worked up enough of an appetite for a good, energizing meal. The Hidalgo is your place (Hilario Pérez, 10). It is a small first floor restaurant on a narrow street that leads up to the cathedral. Their daily menu goes for 15 euros, and although the selection is extensive, this certainly is the place to acquaint yourself with the delicious traditional red bean stew called *caparrones "coloraos" de Anguiano,* lovingly prepared by Maria Luisa who reigns in the kitchen, or her slightly spicy but surprisingly light *callos a la riojana* (tripe) and homemade desserts. It is wise to reserve a table beforehand and then wait to be seated in their bar across the street while having a *marianito* (a small vermouth on the rocks) and a wedge of their trademark *tortilla de patatas* (potato omelette).
Now before heading south for a pleasant afternoon ride, and provided you have made a previous appointment, Blanca Pozo will be happy to show you her collection of *almazuelas*, an old traditional handicraft in La Rioja that had almost died out, but has been recovered thanks to the efforts of local and regional administrations. Fifteen years ago Blanca took her first course and became so fascinated that she has not only made it her business, but now she gives courses throughout La Rioja.

The almazuela is a manual skill very similar to patchwork, but as Blanca emphasizes, its patterns are always rectilinear. This craft, born out of the need to reuse the best pieces of old, worn-out clothes, is a luxury today. Blanca's almazuelas are made of elegant fabrics and come in beautiful, often intricate, patterns in the form of bedcovers, wall hangings, handbags, etc. and can also be made to order.

Towards the Peña de Torcuato

While up to now our Greenway has been "a piece of cake", from now on we will notice how it starts sloping slightly towards the foothills of the Sierra de la Demanda. Although it will require some extra muscle work, it is well worth it to abandon our route and visit the little villages nearby, like Santurde and Santurdejo, but especially Ojacastro, which is reached descending from its former station (now a retirement home for nuns) and crossing a stone bridge over the Oja. Besides a small, 13th-century hermitage, a beautiful church and a square, what stands out here is the well-preserved traditional mountain architecture. Right next to the church we will find a small glass workshop called Fungiola run by Gabriela Lamas. She not only makes colorful objects, but also jewelry, all made of glass. Her clients are mostly from nearby Ezcaray, but since she put up a small sign at the edge of the Vía Verde, she has noticed a marked increase in visitors.

Ezcaray is the last stop on our ride along the Oja River. But first we will enjoy what certainly is the prettiest stretch of this Greenway. With the background of the Peña de Torcuato, a protruding cliff that is the hallmark of this area, festooned with ferns and bright purple thistles, our path now takes us in and out of railway trenches carved out from the surrounding forest. We will end up at Ezcaray's perfectly-restored railway station, now a very popular restaurant that receives not only a great number of bikers, especially in summer, but also skiers from the nearby Valdezcaray ski station. Now we just cross another pretty stone bridge over the Oja River, and Ezcaray is ours.

This small town, full of balconies overflowing with brightly-colored geraniums and pastel hydrangeas,

borrows its name from the aforementioned Peña de Torcuato (*Aitz-Garai* or tall cliff in Basque). The Basque influence is long standing from when the language was spoken in the fairly isolated valley of the Oja River. This is clearly shown in the many Basque toponyms. More recently, during the industrialization of Bilbao, doctors consistently sent over patients with respiratory problems to recover in Ezcaray's clean and dry mountain air. Since then many have built a second home here, and today it is a thriving tourist destination and residential area. As follows from its natural setting at the foot of the Sierra de la Demanda, historically Ezcaray was important for its iron, its minor gold mines and its timber, but what made it internationally famous were its wool and fabric industries. Indeed, King Charles III (18th century) founded the Royal Cloth Factory here, which today has been restored and turned into a large inn. Yet, of the almost 30 textile factories, today only one is extant.

Hijos de Cecilio Valgañon, S.A. is run by five brothers and produces gorgeous hand-woven lightweight and artfully colored mohair blankets and throws, as well as cashmere shawls and scarves at affordable prices. While many clients come specifically to buy here, they also get orders from Ralph Lauren, Loewe and Zara. Apparently, no commercial sign is needed; only a street level window of the well-restored building featuring a huge antique loom where the sheep were once kept does the trick. "Anybody here will direct you," says one of their nephews, Andrés Valgañon. Besides a small charming inn called La Cuculla, Andrés runs a company that offers what is precisely one of the main attractions of Ezcaray: nature sports. Apart from renting bicycles, he organizes biking, hiking, climbing, skiing and other excursions in the area, on request. "The Vía Verde is definitely the easiest," he says reassuringly. With all this activity going on, it comes as no surprise that food is also a prominent player, and Ezcaray also has the emblematic restaurant Echaurren as its ambassador. Many people, especially from the Basque Country, come over just to enjoy *pintxos* in the many cafés and restaurants in the Plaza del Quiosco and Plaza de la Verdura. Key to regional gastronomy, and again closely linked to its mountainous location, are both game and mushrooms. Luis Angel Sotanas, a member of the local hunting association, explains that while hunting is strictly controlled by the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, game is abundant, which includes fowl like woodcock, wood pigeon and wild mallard, but more importantly wild boar, deer and roebuck. Most is for local and domestic use. Besides wonderful dishes, game is used to make *chorizo* (a type of red sausage made with pimentón, a type of paprika from Spain) or *cecina* (air-dried pieces of beef, served in very thin slices). And then there are mushrooms! Up to 418 different varieties–of course not all are edible and some even

deadly–were exhibited last season during the 15th edition of the yearly mycology weekend (2nd weekend in November) which attracts over a thousand people from all over the country, but especially Basques and Catalans from regions with a long tradition. During this period, all bars and restaurants prepare mushroom-based dishes and pintxos.
"Mushrooms have unlimited possibilities," says Carmelo Ubeda, a local amateur mycologist and organizer of the event, and adds that mushrooms are no longer an accompaniment, but have gained full gastronomic recognition on their own merits. Both in Ezcaray and in surrounding villages, besides an array of other attractions like the yearly jazz festival or classic marches, everybody can join in the succession of traditional meals, normally coinciding with the celebration of the respective patron saints. Huge cauldrons produce countless portions of traditional dishes like *patatas a la riojana* (potatoes with chorizo), *patatas a la Demanda* (potatoes with green peppers and onions) or *habas de San Antón* broad beans with ham and chorizo.

The birthplace of the Spanish language

To reach our next Greenway, we leave the eastern flank of the majestic Sierra de La Demanda, surround its foothills and then brave its western face. What catches our attention on the way are the plantations of *pimientos choriceros* (the oblong red pepper that, among other uses, produces *pimentón*, the dried, red pepper powder that is an indispensable ingredient in the ubiquitous chorizo), but more importantly the typical *pimientos riojanos* (see box on page 67). And among a number of places well worth visiting, a mandatory stop is San Millán de la Cogolla.
Reaching San Millán, among gentle slopes and open forests, everything points us to our final destination: The Yosu (lower) and Suso (upper) Monasteries, declared a World Heritage Site in 1997. Suso, which lies on the outskirts of today's village and offers spectacular views, was built around the original cave that was home to the hermit San Millán and dates from the 7th century. It boasts a number of caves, an 11th-century gallery of splendid horseshoe-shaped Mozarabic arches, and a 16th-century necropolis. But first and foremost, it is here where the first written testimony of both the Spanish and the Basque languages originate. The so-called *Glosas Emilianenses* are a number of annotations that an anonymous 11th century copyist made in the margin of a Latin text. Not only were these

MORE ABOUT MORCILLA

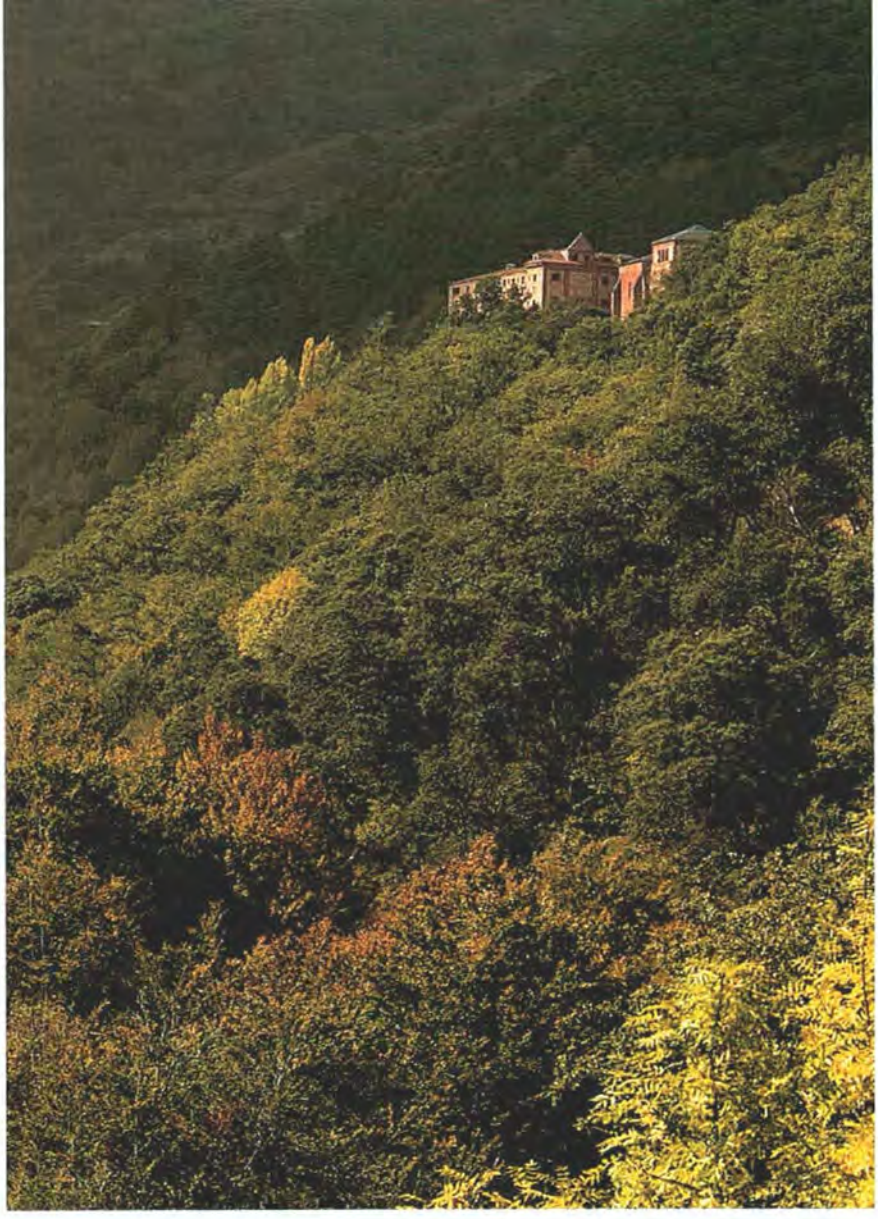
"It is a deeply-rooted product," says Roberto da Silva, the president of the Association of *Morcilla de Burgos* Manufacturers. Strict directions as to how *morcilla* (blood sausage) should be made were laid down in a royal decree as early as the 16th century. If by now it does not yet have a quality designation of origin, it is, as Da Silva explains, because although they are very similar, officially there are three different procedures depending on the specific zones in Burgos where they are made. The main ingredients in all of them are onions (preferably the autochthonous *cebolla horcal*), first quality rice from Valencia, lard, pig's blood and spices. Where they differ is in proportions, the use of raw or parboiled rice, the type of lard, casings and of course spices that may range from pepper, *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain) and oregano to cumin, aniseed, cinnamon, cloves or caraway. Since the Spanish gastronomy boom, several members of the association are now exporting not only to Europe, but also to Korea and Japan. Although used in many recipes, even in nouvelle cuisine, the most prevalent way to savor morcilla is cut in slices and then crisply fried. An accompanying glass of Ribera del Duero can do no harm.

text-related notes written in a romance language from which today's Spanish directly derives, but he also wrote some of his own comments in Basque.
A minibus will take us back to Yuso, built in the 11th century, but also rebuilt and added upon several times. It has an impressive cloister, beautiful wall and ceiling paintings and one of the most important monastic libraries in Spain, zealously guarded by the worldly and garrulous Father Ortega, a medievalist, writer and bibliophile himself. But what perhaps most interests visitors are the perfectly-kept, huge, leather-bound *cantorales* (chant books), some of which weigh 20 kg (44 lbs) and measure one m (3.28 ft) high. The few remaining monks are indeed keeping with the times and, as Father Ortega explains, have ceded the original Abad's residence to the regional government. Today it is a hotel and restaurant.

Binoculars in hand

After visiting San Millán de la Cogolla and still imbued with a sense of spirituality and wonder, we will go southwest and follow a winding road squeezed in between the steep rocky walls of the Sierra de la Demanda and the Najerilla River. On our way, we should make a point not miss the village of Anguiano with its three beautiful bridges. It is not only famous for its previously mentioned caparrones, but moreso for the magnificent spectacle of their colorfully-dressed stilt dancers who give a special performance on July 22nd every year. Nearby is the mountainous Monastery of Valvanera. It was built in the 11th century and its façade bears a Romanesque, stone-carved medallion of the Virgin of Valvanera, La Rioja's patron saint. We now continue our route deeper into the Sierra along the Embalse de Mansilla, a spectacular reservoir near the Najerilla River. After a while one falls silent, awestruck by the sheer majesty of these slate formations, rendered even more dramatic by giant Griffon vultures slowly circling above them.
In the meantime, we will have inadvertently crossed into the province of Burgos and soon will approach the small village of Monterrubio de la Demanda where, at present, abandoned copper and silver mines are under restoration. This is where the mining railway ended and where our next Greenway begins. The time has come to prepare our binoculars, as over the next 55 km (34 mi), nature will be our main companion. At times, the silence will suddenly be broken by the arrhythmic yet harmonious and cheerful ding-dong of cowbells. Although most of the mountain villages on our route are equipped with the latest communications technology, occasional signs warning of crossing cattle give an idea of how rural they still are. It's better to heed those warnings and be able to brake in time to give way to leisurely grazing solitary cattle or whole herds of sheep and goats, on and alongside both the road and our Greenway. This also means that, as Nacho from Valencia points out, from time to time you will have to be ready to avoid the visible proof of their passage. Since his father, Alberto Mambrillo, took him on St. James' Way when he was only 12, several times a year they travel the Vías Verdes together, especially the Vía Verde de Ojos Negros which they reach by train from Valencia. They decided to do the present Greenway after watching the corresponding documentary produced by the Spanish Railway Foundation on television.

The bliss of the Vía Verde



Just like on the other side of the Sierra de la Demanda, for centuries the main activity in these remote mountain villages had been transhumant sheepherding, meaning that in winter, herds were taken along official trails (*cañadas reales*) as far as Extremadura in southwestern Spain. Although its heydays by then were largely over, it was the Civil War which meant the demise of large scale transhumancy, even though local sheepherding continued. However, several of the villages along our route, like Barbadillo de los Herreros or Riocavado de la Sierra, also became the center of a rather short-lived revival of mining activity. The railroad track that we are following now was laid at the end of the 19th century by the British Sierra Company Ltd. with the sole purpose of transporting the coveted iron ore to the smelters in Bilbao. "It didn't last long," says Vicente Merino with a hint of irony. He is a descendant of one of the influential sheep-owning families and has great interest in the area's history. "The iron ore here was of excellent quality, but had a lot of sulphur and other residues which eventually made its extraction too costly," he explains. Merino is now retired and spends more time with his wife Jacqueline, in charge of Barbadillo's cultural affairs, at their beautifully restored *casona*, the large centuries-old family house. For his daily walks into the forest he regularly takes the Vía Verde. "It makes walking truly comfortable," he says.

Barbadillo still has quite a few of these casonas, although not many have been restored as yet. The most important is the 18th-century Casa del Mayorazgo, now a local inn which also houses an intact traditional kitchen that tourists can visit. Throughout the area, hopes to recover some of its former wealth undoubtedly lie in tourism. "The Vía Verde has meant a significant change, it has blown new life into the village," says its mayor, Ángel Orodeta. They have experienced an important new influx of tourists not only in summer and during weekends, but also in October and November when all of the Sierra de la Demanda is ablaze with bright autumn colors and mushrooms are in season. "Now they arrive in entire coaches," says Ordeta enthusiastically. "They are dropped off at the Puerto del Manquillo, midway through the Vía Verde, and are picked up here."

Those who do not come by bike, but traditionally are a relevant source of income in this entire area, are hunters. Shoots for non-locals are assigned in public auction and game is abundant. Of the pieces yielded, about a third remains in the village, where the sale of homemade wild boar, deer and roebuck chorizo also contributes to the domestic economy. As does honey. In season, there may be up to 1,300 beehives, many brought in from as far as Valencia. The area has a wealth of wildflowers, but more important is the widespread presence of oak trees. Its acorns secrete a sugary substance that specifically attracts bees and gives the honey a darker color and a fuller taste. Mushrooms of course are a token. "At the height

of the season, we may collect 100 kg (220 lbs) of boletes in one day," says Orodeta.

And finally, a most relevant legacy of Barbadillo de los *Herreros* (blacksmiths) is its well-preserved conic foundry, all built in stone. This peculiar edifice is readily visible from a vantage point on the Vía Verde reached via a nicely-restored tunnel. This is the place where iron ore once was actually processed and, in the nearby smithy, made into tools, gridirons and large ingots to be transported to Bilbao.

We will now continue our winding Greenway to Riocavado de la Sierra. The village is reached by descending a side road that first leads us to a quiet and shady recreational area with a natural pool in the Pedroso River. It is flanked by a well-kept lawn with benches and barbecues for public use. From here a narrow path leads us into the forest to the restored mouth of an iron mine from where the ore was transported in small hopper cars (an original one is still on display) across the river and up the mountain along a skid (the locals still use the English word) to be dumped into the railway wagons waiting above. Entering the village we are immediately struck by both the towering Romanesque church of Santa Coloma and the nearby stump of an elm tree. There is sorrow in their voices when the locals explain that their beloved elm would have been a thousand years old, but in the 1980s it fell victim to *graphiosis*, or elm disease, a pandemic that felled elms throughout Europe. They point you to a discolored picture of a leafy elm in the local bar where we can also enjoy the daily menu. "Not so long ago you couldn't reach this place by bike, but now we get many cyclists," says the owner, Maria Dolores.

In line with his colleague's train of thought, the mayor Martin Hoyuelos is acutely aware that in order to boost tourism it is important to promote a traditional image. A decree has been issued that, in exchange for a tax relief, all newly-built homes must at least have façades made out of stone, and he enthusiastically encourages restoration of the original, now abandoned houses. Hoyuelos is a relatively young retiree who was born here and now wants to give back. "All my ancestors are from Riocavado," he says proudly. He is also the president of the newly constituted Association of the Vía Verde de la Demanda. "Our primary purpose is maintaining the Greenway in optimal conditions," he says. To that end, they not only keep it clean of weeds and debris and look after the rest areas, but they are also recovering the multiple natural springs that used to be kept up by shepherds. This is also useful for the game and mushroom hunters who invade the area year after year, while the latter have notably increased since the Vía Verde was inaugurated.

RED IS FOR PEPPER

The *pimiento riojano* is a large, sweet, red pepper that holds the quality designation PGI (Protected Geographic Indication). This fleshy red pepper has a very thin skin, is triangular and pointed, measures about 12 cm (30.5 in) and weighs up to 1 lb (0.45 kg). This makes it especially suitable for roasting. Over half of the area's total production (some 380,000 kg (837,748 lbs) of certified production in 2006) is canned, which is still predominantly a traditional process. Carlos Bricio, president of the IGP's Regulatory Council, mayor of Tricio and a grower and canner himself, proudly shows his old oven where the peppers are roasted and then hand peeled, transferred to jars and sterilized. The result is a totally natural product and his brand, San Bartolomé (named after Tricio's patron saint), featured several times among Spain's best products in Rafael Garcia Santos' yearly guide called *Lo mejor de la gastronomía* (a gastronomic reviewer, who organized an international gastronomy congress in Spain).

The mayor has no qualms about promoting the boom in Atapuerca, which will certainly help to promote the entire area. In the meantime, high on Hoyuelo's agenda is the urgent need for accommodation.

The final stretch

On our way out of Riocavado, we will pass a most idyllic rest area below centuries-old oak trees and beeches and here and there a blue-berried blackthorn. In their midst stands the beautiful Fuente de Monzabaya fountain, which provides the thirsty traveler with cool, clear spring water. Nearby are tables and benches, a barbecue and a small hut for refuge in case of inclement weather. From now on we will be meandering through age-old forests, trenches, and meadows, along embankments, ridges, gullies and impressive slate formations and over rushing streams. This central stretch of our Greenway leading up to the Puerto del Manquillo, a pass at 1,450 m (4,756 ft), is certainly not for beginners, and even inured bikers will have to step down and walk up the rather steep incline. The old train would have had cleared this stretch through a tunnel, but over time nature took over. Now the tunnel is flooded, overgrown and in such disrepair that available funds were not sufficient to restore it, at least for the time being. Yet our effort certainly pays off: a splendid view opens up all around us! And from now on we are going downhill, and our path will follow the Arlanzón River (which begins in Riocavado) until we reach Pineda de la Sierra. What truly stands out in this pretty mountain village full of flowers and beautiful casonas is its 12th-century Romanesque Church of Saint Juliana. Built in dark red stone, it features a most magnificent portico. And Pineda is also a strategic point to stop at the appropriately named La Casona. It is an inn with comfortable rooms, a typical dining room with soul-warming food, and of course a space to store bicycles. Ana and José Antonio Aranda, and their two sons in their early teens are just having a drink. Ana explains that, "as you never know if and where you'll find a place to eat," they bring their own food and stop at one of the regularly dispersed rest areas. The Arandas are regulars on the Spanish Greenways. "We've done quite a few," says José Antonio, explaining that it is a great way to travel with the family. "You're exercising, you're undisturbed by cars and you just look at things from a different perspective."

We now continue our route towards the Embalse de Arlanzón, a huge reservoir surrounded by slopes which a profusion of heather turns into giant purple carpets. We are at the foothills of the Sierra de la Demanda and the landscape, although invariably pretty, offers few surprises as it slowly descends towards the gently undulating wheat fields around Burgos. And now along a festive heather and fern-lined path with bramble berries everywhere for the taking, we make our joyous entrance into Arlanzón where our Greenway comes to an end. Nonetheless, some excitement lies in store.

Treasures from the trenches

Indeed, while the Vía Verde ends in Arlanzón, the original railway track continued almost to the gates of Burgos. The primary purpose of building the railway was to transport iron ore which, up until then, had traveled in horse-pulled carts from the villages in the Sierra de la Demanda to Burgos and from there on to Bilbao. In many places the railway track was literally carved out through forests and hills. And it was in Atapuerca where luck struck. A 20 m (65.6 ft) high trench unveiled

what was to become the largest paleontological excavation site in Europe, declared a World Heritage Site in 2000. If it hadn't been for the railway, all this might still be undiscovered.

And even though it is better not to think about what may have been lost, the railway trench made for a perfect cross-section of this layered environment, ready to be explored. However, it was not until the 1960s that a team of archaeologists realized what the railway had laid bare: a register of human evolution. From then on, Atapuerca has garnered an impressive record. Not only does it hold evidence of the earliest human presence in Western Europe, the earliest signs of cannibalism and funerary rites, the world's most complete human skull and the largest single concentration of pre-Neanderthal remains, but more importantly it brought to light the remains of an as yet undocumented human species, the *Homo antecessor.* Guided tours are available not only along the actual excavation site but also through the exhibition area and through what is especially attractive and formative for youngsters: a theme park that walks us through the main periods of prehistory, from the Palaeolithic to the age of metal. It is advised to make reservations beforehand as groups are taken to the actual site by coach from the ticket office in nearby Ibeas de Juarros.

Now does this ring a bell? Do you remember the plate of caparrones de Anguiano which Maria Luisa so lovingly prepared? Well, here, as we know, they are called *Alubias de Ibeas* and in many a back garden in this village we will still find the typical strung up bean plants. But in this area the tiny red beans primarily make their way into the *olla podrida,* a stew which, as in addition to red beans, has *morcilla de Burgos* (see box on page 64), chorizo, pig's ears and feet and marinated ribs of pork, fresh bacon, and some chefs even add cecina. And you've lucked out again: Los Claveles, a restaurant famous for its olla podrida, is right here in Ibeas. A dessert, *queso de Burgos* (the typical fresh white ewes' cheese), honey and walnuts could just be the right thing to conclude your trip on a high note.

More than a sporting route

There is no doubt that the Spanish Greenways offer an alternative way to temporarily extricate ourselves from the hassles and hazards of modern life. Here we have only had a peek at two of them, but we trust that your are curious enough to continue discovering the many hidden corners of multifaceted Spain. Julio Verdú was right when he said that he wanted the Vías Verdes to be "more than a sporting route." They expose us in a very different way to the myriad of treasures that Spain's inland has in store. If, as we have seen, the Vías Verdes make a difference to the people from adjacent villages, they also make a difference to the people who travel them. They are not only a means to enjoy nature, visit places and sample traditional gastronomy, they also give us a sense of coming closer into contact with that which surrounds us. Unfortunately, the Greenways remain primarily the territory of nationals and are visited only in small numbers by tourists from abroad. The word needs to get out, so we hope you that will join us on our next trip and that the Greenways will also conquer your heart!

Anke van Wijck Adán *is a sociologist and has a Master's degree in gastronomy from Boston University. Her articles have appeared in* The Boston Globe.

Currently there are 64 Greenways which may be used fby walkers and cyclists. This means that, of the more than 7,000 km (4,347 mi) of railway tracks in disuse, 1,600 km (993.6 mi) are available for use. Here were offer you a list of the best Greenways in the northern third of the Iberian Peninsula. For more extensive and up-to-date information, please visit the Greenways' official website: www.viasverdes.com

ASTURIAS

Vía Verde del Eo:

12 km (7.5 mi) between San Tirso de Abrés and Villaodriz (Asturias and Lugo, Galicia).

Natural environment: Riverside woodland with intensive eucalyptus replanting.

Cultural heritage: Prehistoric burial chambers and dolmens. Pacio Palace (18th century) in San Tirso. Santa. María Church (17th century) in Conforto (A Pontenova).

Vía Verde de la Camocha:

6.5 km (4 mi) between the La Camocha mine and Tremañes district.

Natural environment: Asturian countryside.

Cultural heritage: Gijón's city center.

Vía Verde de Fuso:

25.5 km (16 mi) between Tuñón and Oviedo.

Natural environment: Valley and meadows.

Cultural heritage: Oviedo's monumental heritage site.

Vía Verde de la Senda del Oso:

29 km (18 mi) between Entrago and Tuñón, with a 10 km (6.2 mi) branch line between Caranga and Quirós.

Natural environment: Mountain valleys, narrow passes and Atlantic woodland.

Cultural heritage: La Plaza and Muñón churches, national monuments. Palaces and large fortified medieval towers. Traditional architecture. Interpretation center in Tuñón.

Vía Verde del Tranqueru:

1.2 km (0.7 mi) between Perlora and Xivares.

Natural environment: Cliffs.

Cultural heritage: Asturian farmhouses. Campa Torres Natural and Archaeological Park. Monte Areo Necropolis. More than 30 burial chambers and tumuli from the Bronze Age.

Vía Verde del Valle de Turón:

12 km (7.5 mi) between Reicastro en Ujo and La Molinera in Urbiés de Turón, Concejo de Mieres.

Natural environment: Protected mining area with forests of different tree species (chestnut, oak, etc.).

Cultural heritage: Mining towers in Figariedo, San José, Santa Bárbara and, above all, Espinos. Mines in Santo Tomás, San José, San Pedro, Fortuna, Podizo and Corrales. Arnizo Bridge and the Pomar Bridge built by a disciple of Eiffel. Güeria mechanical rooms. Ethnography of the villages Villandio and Enverniego.

CANTABRIA

Vía Verde del Pas:

34 km (21 mi) between Astillero and Ontaneda.

Natural environment: From the Cantabrian valleys to the Bay of Santander.

Cultural heritage: The spas of Alceda and the Viesgo Bridge. El Soto Tower. Cave paintings in the Viesgo Bridge caves.

Vía Verde del Piquillo:

1.5 km (0.9 mi) between Ontón (Castro-Urdiales) and Cobarón (Vizcaya). Here it joins with the Itxaslur which ends at La Playa de la Arena Beach (Muskiz-Vizcaya).

Natural environment: Cantabrian fig trees and holm oaks.

Cultural heritage: Church of Santa Maria de la Asunción (13th century), Faro Castle, Roman Milestone (61AD), Medieval Bridge, Santa Ana Hermitage, Town Hall (16th century), Ocharan Palace and Castle (20th century) in Castro Urdiales.

CASTILE-LEON

Vía Verde del Esla:

11 km (6.8 mi) between Valencia de Don Juan and Castrofuerte (León).

Natural environment: Riverside woodland and cereal plains.

Cultural heritage: Valencia de Don Juan castle.

Vía Verde del Ferrocarril Santander-Mediterráneo.

3.7 km (2.3 mi) between Burgos and Cardeñadijo and 6 km (3.7 mi) between the municipality of Modúbar and Cojóbar station.

Natural environment: Cardeñadijo River valley.

Cultural heritage: Burgos monumental heritage site. San Pedro de Cardeña Monastery. Altotero Modúbar Neolithic Site. San Cristóbal Cojóbar church (13th century).

Vía Verde de Laciana:

6.3 km (4 mi) between Villablino and Caboalles de Arriba (León).

Natural environment: Riverside woodland, Cantabrian deciduous woodland and meadows.

Cultural heritage: Industrial mining archaeology. Urogallo Interpretation Center.

Vía Verde de la Sierra de la Demanda:

54 km (33.5 mi) between Monterrubio de la Demanda and Arlanzón (Burgos).

Natural environment: Beech and pine forests.

Cultural heritage: Pineda de la Sierra Historic Artistic Site. Atapuerca Archaelogical Site, close to where the route begins.

Vía Verde de Tierra de Campos:

4.5 km (3 mi) between Cuenca de Campos and Villalón (Valladolid).

Natural environment: cereal crops.

Cultural heritage: Pillory (1523), the churches of San Miguel Arcángel (14th century), San Juan Bautista (15th century), San Pedro (18th century) and the Virgen de Fuentes Hermitage (18th century), Dovecotes in Villalón. Churches of San Justo y Pastor, Santa María del Castillo and the San Bernardino Hermitage, Dovecotes in Cuenca de Campos.

LA RIOJA

Vía Verde del Cidacos:

34 km (21 mi) between Calahorra and Arnedillo.

Natural environment: Riverside woodland.

Cultural heritage: Calahorra y Arrendó monumental heritage site. Vico Monastery. Quel, Arnedo y Arnedillo Castle. Icnitas Archaelogical Site.

Vía Verde de Préjano:

5 km (3 mi) between Arnedillo station and Préjano (and a further 4 km (2.51 mi) on the Vía Verde del Cidacos).

Natural environment: River canyon, fruit and pine trees.

Cultural heritage: Préjano city center.

Vía Verde del Río Oja:

28 km (17 mi) between Casalarreina and Ezcaray.

Natural environment: Riverside woodland beside the Oja River. Patches of deciduous woodland between Ojacastro and Ezcaray.

Cultural heritage: Casalarreina and Santo Domingo monumental heritage sites. Bañares Church. Ezcaray city center and a parish church.

NAVARRE

Vía Verde del Bidasoa:

29 km (18 mi) between Santesteban and Endarlatza.

Natural environment: Atlantic woodland, riverside woodland and meadows.

Cultural heritage: Rural architecture.

Vía Verde del Ferrocarril Vasco-Navarro (II):

25 km (15.5 mi) between Antoñana (Álava) and Murieta (Navarre).

Natural environment: stream-fed ravine, with kermes oaks and sessile oaks Hundred-year-old lime and yew trees.

Cultural heritage: Ibernalo sanctuary in Campezo. Remains of medieval walls, noble manors, 17th century windmills and tower-houses in Antoñana and Campezo. Vasco-Navarro railway stations.

Vía Verde del Plazaola:

40 km (25 mi) between Lekunberri (Navarre) and Andoain (Gipuzkoa).

Natural environment: Valleys with replanted Atlantic woodland and pine trees. The Leitzarán Valley has been classified as a Natural Biotope.

Cultural heritage: Traditional architecture in Mugiro, Lekunberri and Leitza. Casa Astuitza Tower (16th century) in Andoain.

BASQUE COUNTRY

Vía Verde de Arditurri:

11.5 km (7 mi) between the Bay of Pasaia and Arditurri (Guipuzkoa).

Natural environment: Oiartzun Valley and the Aiako Harriak Natural Park (Peñas de Aia). Beech woodland.

Cultural heritage: Arditurri mining site. Oiartzun, Altzibar and Ergoien districts.

Vía Verde de Aráosla:

5 km (3 mi) between Apartamonasterio (Atxondo) and Arrazola (Vizcaya).

Natural environment: Limestone slopes and dense forests in the valley.

Cultural heritage: Farmhouses and tower-houses in Marzana and small, rural hermitages all along the trail.

Vía Verde de Atxuri:

5 km (3 mi) between Mungia and the district Maurola (Artebakarra) (Vizcaya).

Natural environment: Atxuri Valley. Uriguen de Mungia Park.

Cultural heritage: Zabalondo stopping point, the Atxuri rural center, San Martín hermitage and Landetxo Goikoa farmhouse.

Vía Verde del Ferrocarril Vasco Navarro (I):

22.8 km (14 mi) between Vitoria-Gasteiz and the Laminoria tunnel (near Ullíbarri-Jáuregui), with a branch line between Andollu and the Estíbaliz Sanctuary (Álava).

Natural environment: Agricultural land, patches of oak woodland.

Cultural heritage: Vitoria-Gasteiz city center. Estíbaliz sanctuary (12th century). Aberasturi manor house and the old Vasco-Navarro railway stations.

Vía Verde de Galdames:

15 km (9 mi) between Gallarta (Abanto-Zierbena) and La Aceña-Atxuriaga (Galdames) (Vizcaya).

Natural environment: Patches of adler and beech woodland. Replanted forests.

Cultural heritage: Churches of San Pedro (Las Carreras) and Santa Juliana in Abanto. Torre del Barco Palace in Sanfuentes. Basque Country mining *museum in* Gallarta and the El Pobal forge en Muskiz.

Vía Verde del Urola:

21 km (13 mi) between Azkoitia - Zumárraga - Urretxu - Legazpi (Guipuzkoa).

Natural environment: Valley, ravines and mountains.

Cultural heritage: Homes and palaces in Azkoitia and Zumárraga. Megalithic dolmens and tumuli in Zumárraga. Loiola Basilica in Azpeitia. Railway Museum in Azpeitia.

Vía Verde del Zadorra:

15 km (9 mi) between Vitoria-Gasteiz and the Puerto de Arlabán (Álava).

Natural environment: Wetland with significant bird population. Oak groves and woodland.

Cultural heritage: Vitoria-Gasteiz city center. Churches of Gamarra Menor, Durana and Landa. Arzamendi Palace in Luko and the old Vasco-Navarro railway stations.

SHARING Culinary Craft

Text
Rodrigo García

Translation
Jenny McDonald

Photos
Fernando Madariaga/ICEX

Spain, a School for Foreign Chefs

Seasonal produce, new wave techniques, traditional roots and a working philosophy based on quality and shared ideas. These are four basic traits of the Spanish haute cuisine that is so widely admired amongst cooking professionals in the rest of the world. Since last September, a group of young chefs from a number of different countries have been getting to know what's cooking in Spanish kitchens, thanks to a training program set up by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade together with some of Spain's top restaurants. After a one-month introductory course on Spanish culture and gastronomy, and 11 months of hard work alongside Juan Mari Arzak, Sergi Arola and Santi Santamaría, among others, they should have gained plenty of insight into this magical moment in Spanish gastronomy. We will be telling their story in a new series of articles, starting out with their first steps in Spain, then an article at the halfway mark and another when this culinary experience is drawing to a close. We will be watching over the progress of the interns and reporting back with their impressions and those of the Spanish mentors who are welcoming them into their restaurants for almost a year.

"I'd been hoping to come to Spain to spend one or two months in a restaurant, but I'd never dreamed of spending six months at La Alquería in the elBullihotel at La Hacienda de Benazuza (Sanlúcar la Mayor, Seville) and another six months in elBulli (Rosas, Girona) under Ferrán Adrià." These were the words of one of Denmark's most promising young chefs, Ronny Emborg, who is 25 years old. So far he has worked for seven years in some of his country's best restaurants, including Geranium in Copenhagen, but he is unlikely to forget 2007. In May he was named Chef of the Year in Denmark and in September he arrived in Spain to participate in a top-flight culinary adventure, precisely alongside the main protagonist of Spanish avant-garde cuisine.

Ronny is one of the 15 young chefs from Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, the US and Japan who is participating in the first edition of the training program for young foreign chefs in Spanish gastronomy. It is organized by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX) in collaboration with some of Spain's most prestigious restaurants, all of them proud holders of Michelin stars, as well as the internationally-renowned pastrycook Oriol Balaguer. This pilot experience, this gem of a long-term project, addresses young chefs under 30 with at least three years experience in prestigious restaurants and a working knowledge of English. The idea is that they come into direct contact with the world of Spanish gastronomy today, with its fascination for innovation, its insistence on careful selection of raw materials and its place in the limelight.

The project started out in Spain's Economic and Commercial Office in Copenhagen. Ángela de la Rosa, who is responsible for the office's public relations and image, explains. "Back in spring 2004, the Danish chef Bo Bech spent a week at Sergi Arola's La Broche restaurant in Spain. It was a brief stay but it was sufficient to inspire him to hold a Madrid Gastronomy Week in his restaurant upon his return home." This experience set in motion a pilgrimage of Danish chefs to different Spanish culinary temples, such as elBulli, La Broche and Mugaritz. "The interest shown by young Danish cooks in such courses and their enthusiasm for Spanish gastronomy and food products led commercial attaché Robert Cuñat

and I to think up a method of institutionalizing the support we had been giving them in Denmark so that our experience could be useful for other countries," says Angela.
"The best thing about this project is that it has been taken up across the board at every stage, from the initial creation through the development and analysis, with involvement by the Spanish Commercial Offices in different countries, the training division, the Agrifood Promotion division and the ICEX periodicals department based on its two decades of experience with the magazine *Spain Gourmetour*," states Maria Naranjo, director of the ICEX training division. But that's not all. "We held discussions throughout 2006, first in San Sebastián with Basque chefs, then in Madrid with chefs from other parts of Spain. And at these meetings, not only did we note the excellent relationships amongst them all, but we were able to hear their ideas and suggestions for the program."

One of the contributions made by these great names in Spanish cuisine was that the program should focus on assisting young chefs with great professional potential, keen on sharing information and expanding their culinary horizons. This ties in with one of the main goals of the internships: that of making Spain's gastronomic reality known beyond its frontiers, in addition to its agri-food products. Javier Serra, director of the intern program, explains the additional goals: "It's always good to encourage the best-known Spanish restaurants to become more international, not only by opening up franchises or branches in other countries, but also by creating gastronomic consultancy services. The program helps set up a network of international contacts comprised of Spanish chefs, the young interns who will be working with them over the course of the year, the Commercial Offices, ICEX and culinary training schools."
For the coming years, the idea is to select the young participants in collaboration with well-known hospitality schools, increasing both the number of spots in the program and the young chefs' countries of origin. "We hope to find prestigious partners that can offer the guarantees we need when selecting professionals. Such collaboration with cooking schools or even with hotel chains could be very useful for future campaigns to promote Spanish agrifood products and wines abroad," says Javier. And the plan for next year's edition is to include chefs from the Shangri-La Academy in Beijing (China).

An unconventional course

The selected trainees start out with an intensive Spanish language course in their respective countries, lasting approximately two months. After landing in Madrid and before leaving for the individual assignations in a

selection of Spain's best restaurants, they begin a process of immersion in Spanish cuisine, with a course on Spanish culture and gastronomy devised and directed by Sonia Ortega, formerly the publication coordinator for *Spain Gourmetour*. This lasts three weeks and is difficult. Not only do the interns attend talks by professionals and participate in roundtable discussions and tasting sessions on different Spanish products including extra virgin olive oil and wine, but they also travel–by plane, train, bus and even boat–over 4,500 km (2,794 mi) throughout the country.

The stop-offs are at some of Spain's main gastronomy shrines–traditional and avant-garde restaurants, long-established food markets, farms, wineries, cooking schools–with plenty of opportunities along the way to take in the sights in cities such as Segovia, Toledo, Córdoba and Santiago de Compostela, as well as some outstanding landscapes in the Basque Country, Catalonia and La Rioja.

Early mornings, hotels, food talk with Spanish chefs, with the goal not to exhaust the young chefs, but to inspire them to keep their eyes open and their palate always ready to try out new sensations. Sonia Ortega says, "They're all young, so we expect them to stand up to the trials of so much travel with so much to take in. Amongst other things, they will be seeing how certain Spanish products are produced, tasting wines from different producer regions and getting to know some of the stars of the Spanish culinary revolution."

The young chefs coped admirably with their heavy agendas. Rene Frank, a German chef and pastry-cook, was clear: "I don't mind it being so intensive. If Sonia were to suggest giving up any of the planned activities, we would say no. We're really enjoying the visits to new restaurants, discussing the menus and the way food is served. The only minor problem is that sometimes it's a bit hard on our stomachs. When I received the schedule by e-mail back in Germany, my first reaction was that it seemed impossible to see so many places, people and restaurants in such a short time. But now that we're here, I'm quite sure this is the best way to do it." At the end of the introductory course, each chef left for the internship at the assigned restaurant for an 11 month period, ending in October 2008. In some cases, the time will be divided between two restaurants, half in one and half in another. This is the case for Gian Durisch from Switzerland, who will learn two very different styles in different regions of Spain–first in Casa Gerardo in Asturias in northern Spain, followed by Atrio, a temple of signature cuisine in Extremadura in the southwest.

On the forefront with olive oil

Spain Gourmetour was keen to see how things were going for these young chefs on their tour a round Spanish cuisine. We joined them halfway through the introductory course on one of their short stays in the capital when they had already traveled around Castile-La Mancha, the Basque Country and La Rioja, but still had another two full weeks ahead of them (see box on page 79). The first contact was at the epicenter of Madrid's new wave cuisine, the laboratory at the La Terraza del Casino restaurant headed by the chef Paco Roncero. This session, starting at 9:30, was to be one of the most exciting on the course, at least so far: a private demonstration of the research being carried out by Roncero's team on Spanish extra virgin olive oil. The group was divided into two, one to see the hot preparations, led by Fernando López, and another to hear from Javier Alonso about cold preparations, in fascinating demonstrations lasting about two hours. Both Fernando and Javier collaborate closely with Roncero in the research laboratory set up on the restaurant premises. "Roncero has based most of his research on olive oil because the La Terraza del Casino team considers it to be Spain's principal product," states Fernando. "We know everything there is to know about olive oil–from olive cultivation to oil processing and the possibilities it offers in our restaurant."

Olive oil honey (using glucose, extra virgin olive oil at a very low temperature to increase its density, and isomalt), olive oil gum drops (extra virgin olive oil honey and gelatin), olive oil soup (with xanthan gum), the famous olive oil spaghetti... Then Fernando surprised the young chefs with the latest scoop: grilled extra virgin olive oil, a creation that was to make its public debut the very next day at the

'Three cultures, two seas' congress, part of the Andalucía Sabor agri-food fair to be held in Seville. The interns were amongst the first to hear about this dish...and to taste it!
Some of the chefs were taking notes, while others asked technical questions such as the exact temperature or timing, and the reason why the textures change. Nicolai Tram was especially interested, as his destination was precisely La Terraza del Casino. "I'm fascinated by these laboratory experiments with textures, flavors, substances and additives. They help increase the spectacular side of haute cuisine so that we can surprise our customers." After working in the kitchens for the Danish Royal Household and in the M/S Amerika restaurant in Copenhagen, Nicolai is about to enter a new stage in his career. "In the restaurant I come from, we don't use ingredients such as liquid nitrogen or xanthan gum. But I had heard about these techniques and I had been experimenting at home when I got back from work. And now it turns out that I will be working in one of the world's most creative kitchens, one that collaborates with Ferrán Adrià." His expression is a combination of awe and curiosity. "So what happens when one of these culinary preparations goes wrong in the laboratory?" he asks Fernando. "Well, I usually just smile and then try again, and make some sort of change in the process," is the answer, pointing once again to the age-old process of trial-and-error.

Covering topics such as spherification, soy lecithin, locust bean gum (a stabilizer and natural gelling agent) and the inclusion of liquid nitrogen for the "air" technique, time passes quickly. Soon it's back to the bus and off to a business school at the other end of the city for two talks. One is presenting the future Spanish Gastronomy Institute, an ambitious project supervised by the Culinary Institute of America and set to open next summer in Sigüenza (Guadalajara, Castile-La Mancha), and the other is called 'Cooking with words', to be given by Edouard Cointreau, president of the Gourmand World Cookbook Award organization, on the publication of cookbooks and including a display of titles on Spanish gastronomy for consultation.
At lunchtime, the young interns are received by Juan Pablo Felipe at El Chaflán, a permanent feature in Madrid food guides and the allocated restaurant for the German

chef Maximilian Denk. We arrange to meet again the next day, 375 km (232 mi) eastwards at an appealing destination, the Mediterranean coast.

Butter beans, eels and tiger nuts

We wake up in Valencia to a slightly misty morning, with a natural screen that dims the bright Mediterranean light. We meet up with the group next door to go to the amazing City of Science and Arts designed by the architect and engineer Santiago Calatrava, and leave for a necessary port of call for anyone interested in good food–the Valencian Central Market.
The modernist market building turns out to be located in the same square as the equally impressive Lonja, one of Spain's best-preserved Gothic civil buildings. Inside the impression it gives is that of a palm grove, with the spiraling columns being the trunks and the vaulted ceiling the sculptured branches of the palms, a tree that makes its presence felt in many parts of the city. For centuries, the Lonja served as a guildhall, the place where merchants dealt in products such as silk. Since 1920, the commercial activity in this square has been focused on the Central Market next

door, where the best produce from the sea and land are on display.
We go in by the main door but the young chefs are quick to disperse, on the trail of the products that are new to them but are everyday elements in Valencian kitchens. Some of them stop at the traditional charcuterie stalls, interested in the different types of chorizo and longaniza and cheeses, including those made from Guirra ewes' milk (a red sheep, native to the Valencian region). Others are attracted by the stall that offers mushrooms, before the start of the season. Then their attention is called by Sonia. "Come and see some of the essential ingredients in a genuine Valencian paella." She refers to the three types of green beans that are local natives–Garrofón, Ferraúra and Tavella–and should be included with the better-known ingredients: rice, water, saffron, chicken, rabbit and salt. One of the stallholders cracks open a bean pod to explain the difference between the three types.

TRAVELING SCHOOL

The possibility of getting to know the cultural and gastronomic map of Spain, not to mention working alongside some of the great names in Spanish cooking, is one of the greatest incentives of this internship program set up by ICEX. Over three weeks last September, in addition to talks and roundtable discussions, the participants attended olive oil and wine tasting sessions, ate in several of the restaurants participating in the program and discovered a wide range of regional gastronomy, combining traditional and innovative cuisine. After landing in Madrid and enjoying several of the capital's restaurants, the group visited the city of Segovia to try its most universal dish, roast suckling pig. Two days later they discovered the cultural melting pot of Toledo with its Santo Tomé pastry kitchen, home of traditional marzipan candy, before traveling to the Basque Country and La Rioja. There they visited Bilbao, San Sebastián, Gernika and Hondarribia, dined in one of the gastronomic associations and saw for themselves how the exquisite, highly-acclaimed tear drop peas are farmed. In La Rioja the focus was on wine, with visits to the stunning, brand new Marqués de Riscal winery and the contrasting, age-old Bodega López de Heredia. Back in Madrid they were invited to enter Paco Roncero's laboratory, then they moved off to Valencia and Catalonia with stop-offs at the Mercado de la Boquería, tapas bars and delicatessens in Barcelona and the Codorniù cava facilities in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia. Galicia, in the northwestern corner of Spain, was next on the list, to see the mussel platforms on the Ría de Arousa and the Ramón Peña canning plant, as well as visiting the old parts of the monumental city of Santiago de Compostela and trying the local cuisine.

Then they went from the northernmost part of Spain to the south. In Andalusia, the young chefs were able to enjoy the artistic treasures of Córdoba, Seville and Jerez de la Frontera in between trying tapas and wines–tasting session included–with visits to wineries in the DO Montilla-Moriles and the DO Jerez. By then it was October and time to get down to work, but some surprises are still in store for 2008: a visit to the Madrid Fusion gastronomy congress, trips to several olive mills in Andalusia and a excursion to Extremadura to experience the pig slaughtering ritual, to explore the pasturelands where the Ibérico pigs graze on acorns and to see how local products are made, such as *Torta del Casar* cheese, *Pimentón de la Vera* (a type of Spanish paprika) and Ibérico ham.

Then on to photograph the stalls offering dried salted tuna and roe, the most traditional of the local salt fish products, and the vegetables in which the Valencian tomato–large, fleshy and intensely aromatic–is the star. Then there are fruit stalls and butchers selling lamb, beef and even kid. There's also a product seldom seen in other Spanish markets: snails–varieties such as Baqueta and Choveta–used in stews or rice dishes. A popular Valencian countryside recipe is snails with peppers, tomato, onion and a touch of spice.

Then we move on to the fish section, a must in any Mediterranean port, offering about 130 different species, some commonplace, others unique to this area such as *llus*, a sort of beach hake. We also come across mantis shrimp, once considered the poor man's shellfish, and now much in demand amongst Valencian chefs.

There are two more stops before we leave the market. First we visit a stall with fish tanks containing slippery eels–eel *all i pebre* is a traditional Valencian dish in which the eels are boiled and flavored with garlic, *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain), chili and pepper, and the stall run by Vicente, president of the Market's Stallholders Association, who has been selling dried fruit and nuts, crystallized fruit and pickles for decades. He shows us some dried tiger nuts, a tuber grown only in the Valencia area. He recommends, "While you're here, you must be sure to try *horchata*. Cross over the road to the Horchatería El Collado."

There's not much time left but we follow his advice and enter this establishment founded in 1892, where we try–many for the first time–this iced drink made from crushed tiger nuts, water and sugar. As we leave, the comments are varied: "I find it refreshing" and "Perhaps it's too reminiscent of grass or even vegetables such as carrots." These young people use their five senses when judging but obviously the most hard-worked of their senses are smell and taste. María Antonia Fernández-Daza, a wine consultant who prepared one of the wine-tasting sessions held on the training course, reflects, "They had only been in Spain for three days but they didn't miss a single detail during the tasting session." They tried 12 wines–from cavas to Pedro Ximénez and rosés, whites and aged reds. "It was a trip around Spain to see the products from large and small, old and modern wineries." Of special interest to them was the Tempranillo grape. They promised that by the end of their year in Spain they would be able to distinguish a Tempranillo by its place of origin. Will they keep their promise?

Rice dishes to suit all tastes

Towards midday we set out for Sueca, a nearby town where the Regulatory Council for the Arroz de Valencia Designation of Origin is located. The council's manager, Santos Ruiz, meets us at the bus and invites us to a short seminar to hear about the start of rice cultivation in this area (Valencia was the first Spanish region to grow rice) and about the differences between the Senia and Bomba varieties.
Both absorb the flavor of the ingredients with which they are cooked, but Bomba rice performs better if cooking goes on too long. "The best chefs and expert housewives prefer Senia rice," says Santos. "Those of us who love rice but don't like taking risks in the kitchen opt for Bomba." The chefs examine the different varieties, grasping fistfuls of rice. Takayuki Kikuchi, the only representative from Japan in the group, tests the raw grains in his mouth to find variations in texture, hardness, acidity and even moisture content. One of the best ways of trying this very Valencian product is in the delicate, tasty rice dishes prepared at Casa Salvador, a restaurant in Cullera, on the shores of a fresh water lake that links up with the Mediterranean Sea just a few meters away from the restaurant. It is 2:30 pm and now, and sitting at our tables we have time to enjoy the famous, energy-giving Valencian light. Salvador and his family prepare a menu offering us seven different rice options: Valencian-style rice, *reguerot* (with boned duck, garlic and artichokes), *senyoret* (with cuttlefish, shrimp and garlic shoots), black rice (with squid and squid ink) and then three soupy rice dishes–rice with monkfish, Dublin Bay prawns and mushrooms, rice with lobster and soupy reguerot rice. All of them are served with red and white wines from DO Valencia.
Some of the chefs felt the meal was too copious. What with their full stomachs and the effect of the Valencian sun, a drowsy feeling sets in. But Brenda Ramirez from the United States resisted it and took a brief stroll along the beach, paddling in the warm Mediterranean waters. She came back quickly when she saw the group entering the kitchens to see where the famous rice dishes had been prepared. Then we set off to another Mecca of Valencian cuisine, but this time an ultra-modern one.

Quique and his surprises

Denia is a coastal town at the border between the provinces of Alicante and Valencia, the closest point on the Iberian Peninsula to the Balearic island of Ibiza. During the 60-minute journey from Cullera to Denia, Brenda told me she felt very fortunate to be seeing the "magical moment" of Spanish gastronomy for herself. She is to be working for six months in the 3-star restaurant Akelare in San Sebastián with Pedro Subijana and another six in El Racó de Can Freixà in Barcelona with Ramón Freixà. Unlike some of her intern colleagues, Brenda confesses a great interest in traditional cuisine. "I really loved today's visit to Casa Salvador. I'm quite convinced that you need to know a lot about traditional cooking styles and about where products come from before you can be innovative."
Her compatriot Mathew Lightner, in

the seat in front, also talks about the importance of the raw materials. Mathew is to work alongside Andoni Luis Aduriz in his restaurant Mugaritz (two Michelin stars, in Rentería in the Basque Country). "One of the things I like best about Andoni is the way he conceives new wave, organic cuisine, based on a dialogue with nature and carefully-selected fresh ingredients." After three years in a California restaurant, Mathew acknowledges that he needed to get away from the US and "expand his gastronomic horizons". And there could be no better choice than Spain. "This country is firmly on the path of innovation and forms part of the world history of cooking. A lot has been written and will be written on what's happening here and, when I'm 60 years old, I'll look back on my Spanish experience and will be proud to say I was here at the time."

This American chef also stresses the importance of the course duration. "Such courses usually last one or two months, but we will be here for 11 months. This gives us the opportunity to really get involved in the day-to-day activity of the restaurant and to get to know all the seasonal products, to see how they change in the landscape, in the light and on the restaurant's menu."

Our conversation helped to make the trip a short one and we reached Denia with time to rest before entering one of Valencia's cutting-edge culinary venues, Quique Dacosta's restaurant El Poblet, which received its second Michelin star in 2007. With a sampler menu comprising ten dishes and three desserts, Quique showed the foreign chefs some of the creations that set him on the way to fame: his 'chicken that lays a golden egg', 'the Guggenheim oyster' and 'the forest', in short, imagination by the truckload and a focus on the most natural of flavors and aromas. AsbjØrn Frank was taking it all in and took advantage of a quick visit to the glassed-in kitchen to introduce herself personally to the owner who is to be her boss and culinary guide over the next 11 months. Then Quique came up to the table where all the participants were sitting and congratulated them on their admission to the internship program. His words were not just a formality. They were sincere, but came with a warning: "You've come to Spain to work, to work hard."

And the hard work continued the next morning when the group was ready at dawn to drive up the Mediterranean coast towards a very special destination: elBulli and El Celler de Can Roca, magnificent examples of the great culinary work being done in Catalonia. Ronny Emborg, the young Dane who had dreamt of spending a month in a Spanish restaurant, will now be see his dream come true. He will meet Ferrán and start gaining an insight into the elBulli philosophy which he has read so much about–on the Internet, in books and in journals–and which he himself will be putting into practice until October 2008. Enjoy!

Rodrigo García Fernández *is a journalist and has worked with the* El Mundo, La Verdad de Murcia *and* Heraldo de Soria *newspapers. Currently he works on the editorial team of www.spaingourmetour.com.*

WEBSITES

www.restaurantabac.com
Àbac – Xavier Pellicer

www.akelarre.net
Akelarre – Pedro Subijana

www.arzak.es
Arzak – Juan Mari and Elena Arzak

www.restauranteatrio.com
Atrio – Toño Pérez

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Casa Gerardo – Pedro and Marcos Morán

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El Bohío – Pepe Rodríguez Rey

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El Chaflán – Juan Pablo de Felipe

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El Poblet – Quique Dacosta

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www.martinberasategui.com
Martín Berasategui – Martín Berasategui

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Mugaritz – Andoni Luis Aduriz

www.oriolbalaguer.com
Obrador Oriol Balaguer – Oriol Balaguer

THE PIONEERS

Participants on this first edition of the ICEX gastronomy internship program, in order of country of origin:

GERMANY

Maximilian Denk
Home country restaurant: Weisses Brauhaus (Munich)
Assignation in Spain: El Chaflán (Madrid) and Àbac (Barcelona)

Anton Glasner
Home country restaurant: Hotel Die Gams (Beilngries)
Assignation in Spain: Café de Paris (Málaga) and La Broche (Madrid)

Rene Frank
Home country restaurant: Schwarzwaldstube (Baiersbronn)
Assignation in Spain: Obrador Oriol Balaguer (Barcelona) and Akelarre (San Sebastián).

Magdalena Koch
Home country restaurant: Steigenberger Hotel (Bad Kissingen)
Assignation in Spain: Las Rejas (Las Pedroñeras, Cuenca) and El Bohío (Illescas, Toledo).

DENMARK

Mie Bostlund
Home country restaurant: Café A'Porta (Copenhagen)
Assignation in Spain: Arzak (San Sebastián, Guipúzcoa)

Anton Eff
Home country restaurant: Sortebro Kro (Odense S.)
Assignation in Spain: El Racó de Can Fabes (Sant Celoni, Barcelona)

Ronny Emborg
Home country restaurant: Geranium (Copenhagen)
Assignation in Spain: elBulli (Rosas, Girona) and La Hacienda de Benazuza (Sanlúcar la Mayor, Seville)

Rasmus Fischer
Home country restaurant: SØllerØd-Kro (Holte)
Assignation in Spain: Martín Berasategui (Lasarte, Guipúzcoa)

AsbjØrn Frank
Home country restaurant: MR (Copenhagen)
Assignation in Spain: El Poblet (Denia, Alicante)

Lars Lundo
Home country restaurant: Prémisse (Copenhagen)
Assignation in Spain: El Celler de Can Roca (Girona)

Nicolai Tram
Home country restaurant: M/S Amerika (Copenhagen)
Assignation in Spain: La Terraza del Casino (Madrid)

UNITED STATES

Mathew Lightner
Home country restaurant: J. Taylor's (San Diego)
Assignation in Spain: Mugaritz (Guipúzcoa)

Brenda Ramírez
Home country restaurant: Windows Restaurant (Shanghai, China)
Assignation in Spain: Akelarre (San Sebastián) and El Racó d'en Freixa (Barcelona)

JAPAN

Takayuki Kikuchi
Home country restaurant: Sant Pau (Tokyo)
Assignation in Spain: El Portal de Echaurren (Ezcaray, La Rioja)

SWITZERLAND

Gian Durisch
Home country restaurant: Klubhaus Swiss Re (Zürich)
Assignation in Spain: Casa Gerardo (Asturias) and Atrio (Extremadura).

Further information available from:
Javier Serra (javier.serra@icex.es)
Economic and Commercial Offices of the Spanish Embassies (page 148)

SECRET

Tasting tapas in Zaragoza

Tradition, history, personality, cordiality, culture, gastronomy and flavor are some of the offerings made by Zaragoza to its visitors in the run-up to the Zaragoza 2008 International Exhibition, which has water and sustainable development as its main themes. From its privileged location, at a crossroads

STORE

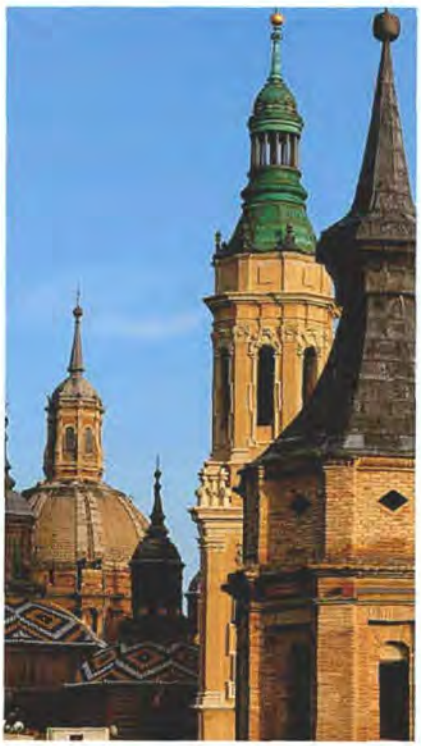
on the Ebro River, this city looks towards the future with energy and determination, revealing a whole universe of sensations for visitors to experience in the company of the best possible hostess: gastronomy. A stroll round the city, sip by sip and bite by bite, is a unique experience and a long-established custom for the locals in the capital city of Aragón in ther quest to unravel its secrets. All it requires is a relaxed attitude, pleasant company and a willingness to enjoy the hospitality offered in every corner.

TEXT
JUAN BARBACIL

TRANSLATION
JENNY MCDONALD

PHOTOS
FERNANDO MADARIAGA/ICEX

Tasting tapas is a must in Zaragoza. This gastronomic custom developed, or so the story goes, as a result of a ruling by Alphonse X the Wise (1221-1284) that the inns of Castile should offer something to eat when serving drinks. Ever since, these miniature gastronomic pleasures have never ceased to evolve in taste and sophistication.
In the collection published by Ibercaja, *¡Aquí...Zaragoza!*, written by José Blasco Ijazo, we find several references to what in the mid-19th century were known as *botillerías* or "bottle stores" in Zaragoza, in which patrons sought refuge. These were stores in which aromatic, brewed coffee was served alongside iced alcoholic drinks. The author writes, "The streets were narrow, affording shadows and seclusion and lit by oil lamps with multiple wicks that cast light on ornamental cornucopias. Drinks with hyperbolical names and tasty tidbits charmed the patrons. The glasses were made of thick glass and, instead of trays, the waiters used cane baskets to hold the bottles of different liqueurs". The impression is one of rather somber places, away from the usual circuits. It is estimated that about ten such stores existed at that time but not for long, because a new fashion was to replace them–that of cafés.
Cafés met the need for real meeting points, places for relaxation and camaraderie. The first cinema opened in 1905 and radio did not yet exist, so cafés became the best place to meet up with friends. The cafés in Zaragoza soon formed an essential part of the city landscape. This city was inconceivable without its cafés, some of which were so large that they had orchestras, with several



dance floors and large gardens where drinks were served, and some even had horse riding circuits. Today this seems amazing. Some writings tell us that Zaragoza was known at the time as the city of cafés.
Then, in about 1930, the city center started to be invaded by modern bars and taverns and life in the cafés languished. The most famous of them all, the Gran Café Ambos Mundos, closed down on September 2nd, 1955. In a book entitled *Tapas y aperitivos* written by José Sarrau in the first quarter of the 20th century, the author distinguishes between the different types of bars and their varying nomenclature–*bar, colmado, taberna*–but is clear that tapas were sold in all of them, and the bar was considered to be the most elegant of the three.
Then there were the *tascas* that served wines and liqueurs to be consumed at tables or bought in bulk. The bustle of modern life had done away with relaxed conversation and people were interested in faster options. They preferred to eat while standing and talking at the bar. And that was when the bars started to offer small morsels of food to accompany the glasses of wine–on sticks, on bread or in small dishes. As in other cities, these early tapas were slices of cured meat products, pickles, olives, anchovies, vinaigrettes in general and whatever could be sourced locally costing no money, just time, such as snails, mushrooms, etc. It was, after all, the grim 1930s.
The years went by and the custom took root. People soon demanded more variety so new options had to be found. By the early 50s, tapas were becoming more interesting although they were still mostly cold–pickles, mussels in tomato sauce, stuffed hard-boiled eggs, selections of cheese and spicy peppers. Other alternatives included liver with garlic, lambs' trotters, *madejas* (plaited lambs' intestine), cooked shrimp, sardines and the ubiquitous, classic Spanish *tortilla* (potato omelette).
But then a new invention appeared–the deep fryer–opening up a whole new repertoire for bars. Things changed drastically and, ever since, tapas have constantly been developing, going on to include excellent fried foods.

The tapas ritual

So, by the 1950s, the tapas custom formed part of Zaragozan life and this led to a new way of

drinking–trailing from bar to bar to discover each one's small edible offerings, the essence of tapas as we know them today.

Going out for a few drinks and tapas is a healthy habit and one that is becoming increasingly popular. There are certain areas of Zaragoza that are considered a must for discovering small-scale culinary versatility, the practical application of Aragonese and Zaragozan cuisine in small portions. But it is not just a matter of gastronomy. It is a pleasurable way of passing the time, so it must not be done in a hurry. The idea is to stroll from one bar to another, most of them in the most emblematic and attractive parts of the old city, in the company of groups of friends and family, always willing to participate in the conversation which is necessarily good-humored. The trick for

making contact with the barman is to offer a smile and good manners, or a comment on the day's selection of tapas. The drink comes as a symbol of friendship and the tapa as a sign of generosity. These are the essentials of the ritual and the success of the outing will depend on the variety of tapas available, on the tone of the conversation, on the number of people and on the fair sharing of the costs. When out for tapas, people eat and drink for pleasure, not out of thirst or hunger, and this is the reason why tapas are becoming increasingly refined and complex, giving rise to tapa technique–micro-cuisine that expresses itself in the form of real miniature delights.

Zaragoza, pioneer in tapa contests

Zaragoza was one of the first Spanish cities to hold tapa contests and exhibitions, starting back in the mid-1990s. These proved that Zaragoza was a source of innovation in the art of eating standing up, with establishments that led the way in research and the development of new micro-cuisine for the fans of this traditional but very relevant custom.

On April 19th, 1994 at 7 pm in the Boston Hotel, the awards for the 1st San Jorge Tapa Contest were presented by the Association of Café and Bar Entrepreneurs. The event has been repeated every year since then, always characterized by a high

Cojonudo

Take a slice of toasted bread, top with a griddled slice of ham then two fried quail's eggs. The customer then chooses one of the following as a topping–piquillo pepper, foie gras (the most popular), *gulas*® (imitation baby eels) or chistorra sausage. Cojonudos are only made to order, on the spot.

Prepared by: **Casa Luis**

level of professionalism and style. It could be said that 1994 marks the year when this everyday activity received official status. Tapas had become fashionable and this required confirmation. The association set to work and showed that tapas in Zaragoza represented an explosion of skill by the professionals behind the city's bars and in its kitchens.

It was in 1997 that the first Tapa Gastronomy Exhibition in Zaragoza took place, organized by the Aragonese Down's Syndrome Foundation (FASD). This unprecedented initiative involved almost 30 establishments displaying and selling tapas over three days. It was hugely successful and was repeated in 1998 and 1999. The foundation's opening remarks stated, "In order to create awareness amongst the general public about Down's syndrome, an idea was chosen that was latent in the catering and hospitality sector in Zaragoza, that of a gastronomic event promoting one of the best-established values of our society–tapas–an element of great cultural and economic importance."

When tapas really made it in Zaragoza was at the 5th Tapas Contest, with the same sponsors and the same basic approach, but this time with a closing celebration and prize-giving held in the Aljafería Palace, the seat of the Aragonese Parliament. The contest

Snails (Caracoles)

First clean the snails carefully. In an earthenware dish, place a generous amount of Bajo Aragón extra virgin olive oil, a head of garlic, a little thyme and rosemary, a few bay leaves, a few peppercorns and a little ham. Add the snails and cook very, very slowly for about two hours. Salt to taste before serving.

Prepared by: **Casa Pedro**

also gave pride of place to alabaster, an important regional product, and the tapas were displayed on alabaster trays. Never had tapas and bars enjoyed such public and political acclaim and in such palatial surroundings. That was May 20th of 1999.

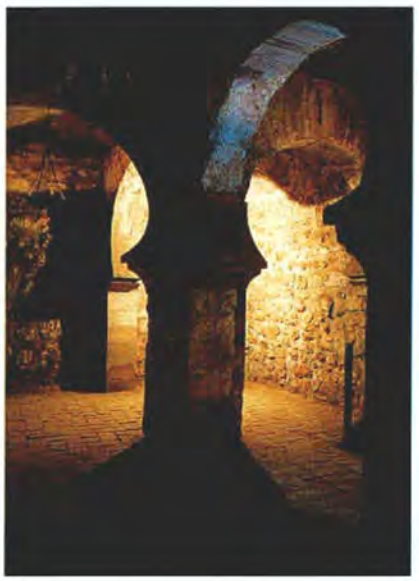
With the arrival of the new millennium, the 6th Tapa Contest joined forces with the 4th Tapa Exhibition. The Zaragozan Association of Cafés and Bars decided to give the event added impetus and took charge of organizing the provincial exhibition. The Boston Hotel was chosen once again for the closing event and well-known food writers such as José Carlos Capel traveled to Zaragoza to express their opinions about the local tapas. An innovation this year was a new category: the Mudéjar tapa, in honor of the Mudéjar art left behind by the Muslims in the capital of Aragón. The late Antonio Beltrán, president at the time of the Aragonese Academy of Gastronomy, said, "Let time pass. Don't kill it, enjoy it by placing, between your tongue and your palate, thousands of years of culture, the wisdom of Muslims, Jews and Christians, that is, a synthesis of Aragón. And do not hesitate to pass from tapas to meals because the Mudéjar culture in Aragón, today Heritage of Mankind, left behind plenty of delicious recipes."

The Zaragoza Tapas contest has now become a landmark on the province's social and gastronomic calendar. Its wide appeal and the level of participation grow year by year. And the professionals–who make things increasingly difficult for the panel of judges–consider it to be an opportunity to galvanize their businesses while promoting

Sailor-style croutons with Dublin Bay prawn (Migas a la marinera con cigalita)

Cut some stale bread into pieces and soak in a little water. Fry onion and garlic with Bajo Aragón extra virgin olive oil. Add baby octopus, prawn, squid and sweet *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain). Season with salt and reduce. Add the pieces of stale bread and stir vigorously until they are soft and spongy. Serve in individual earthenware dishes. Open up a Dublin Bay prawn by slitting along the belly lengthwise, griddle and place on top.

Prepared by: **La Taberna del Pescatero**



the most popular feature of the city: its gastronomy.

What to drink

A beer, a fino or manzanilla, spirits, cava...but, above all, wine. Wine and beer are the most common drinks for accompanying tapas in Zaragoza's bars and cafeterias. The emphasis is always on variety, and different tapas suggest different drinks.

In the wine-producing region of Aragón, the locals are rightly proud of their wines. Those from the four designations of origin (Cariñena, Campo de Borja, Catalayud and Somontano) as well as the *vinos de la tierra de Aragón* are the favorites, but the offer always includes wines from other parts of Spain–Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Navarre and Penedés, among others.

After wine comes beer as an accompaniment for tapas, a versatile drink that can be served in several ways: in a *jarra* (a glass with a wide neck and mouth, holding over 330 cl / 110 oz), a *tubo* (a straight, tall glass as its name indicates, holding 330 cl / 110 oz), a *caña* (a glass containing 200 cl / 66 oz) and a *penalti* (a short, wide glass containing 100-120 cl / 33-40 oz). And Zaragoza has its own brand, Ambar, made locally by La Zaragozana, whose main products are Ambar 1900, Marlen, Export and Ambar Negra.

Apart from wine and beer, other favorites are vermouth with or without alcohol, fino, manzanilla, cider and even cava, an increasingly popular partner for tapas. As with any gastronomic offering, the scope for marriages is huge but it is perhaps even greater with the multiplicity of tapas available.

Tapas tours

There are several parts of Zaragoza that, at midday and in the afternoon, are frequently combed by tapa-lovers in search of their micro-specialties. The narrow lanes in the historic quarter (*Casco Antiguo*) offer the greatest blend between tradition and innovation, but they are followed close behind in popularity by the city center, which is full of establishments offering excellent samples of micro cuisine, and by the university area. But the fact is that every district has bars catering to the tapas trend, each featuring its own distinctive specialties.

Altogether, the street map offers plenty to choose from for fans of these small gastronomic pleasures. In an attempt to help out, the Zaragoza Tourist Office has joined forces with the Association of Cafés

and Bars to bring out the *Tapas Guide for 2007*, an ambitious document published in French, English and Spanish and available from tourist offices and information points in Zaragoza, with 52 pages of suggestions for locals and tourists alike of where to go and what to try. The guide establishes seven routes (Center-Historic quarter, Gran Vía-Sagasta, San José-Las Fuentes, Almozara-Delicias, University, Torrero-La Paz and Actur-La Jota-Jesús) and aims, according to the councilor for tourism, Elena Allué, "to celebrate tapas as one of Zaragoza's greatest attractions for gastronomes and tourists. We compare well with any of the other cities that have traditionally reached fame for their tapas. In Zaragoza, the quality, variety and originality are outstanding."

The **Center-Historic quarter** is home to hundreds of establishments that are difficult to resist. In one of the most well-to-do parts of the city, close to the business centers and designer stores, is Café Babel, a meeting place for groups of friends or executives closing deals over a glass of vermouth. Every day, Marta Navarro, the owner and chef, fills the bar with an appetizing selection. Her innovations include exotic creations such as *harissa* (an accompanying sauce made from chili pepper). Her Mudéjar chicken *pastilla* (chicken with spices on a sheet of filo pastry with harissa and yogurt) earned Babel a prize in one of the contests held by the Zaragoza Association of Cafés and Bars. Other in-house recipes are mousse of foie gras, potatoes with lobster, pheasant in a pickle sauce (cooked in extra virgin olive oil, vinegar and herbs) with endives and a selection of pastries. Every day she brings out a special tapa.

Not far from here is Vinos Bole, a bar that is attractive for both its décor and the way it serves wine,

Ibérico pork cheek with mango purée and red wine reduction (Carrillera ibérica con puré de mango y reducción de vino tinto)

Cook the pork cheek in the traditional way by simmering it with onion, carrot, green pepper, garlic and a little brandy. Take a small piece of meat cut in half and place on a small slice of bread, add mango purée and top with the other half. Fasten with a cocktail stick. Pour over a little red wine reduced with sugar. Decorate with a dried DO Melocotón de Calanda peach.

Prepared by: **Hermanos Teresa**

the undoubted star feature. The sommelier, José Luis Borlán, invites customers to try a wide range of varieties, served at the optimum temperature. The bottles are stored in a spectacular wine cellar and a blackboard offers a list–which changes every two weeks–of the wines that would make good partners for tapas. Trying the minicuisine that is displayed on the bar every day is a memorable experience. The surprising proposals include *empanadico de foie* (a pastry filled with foie gras), ravioli with *longaniza* sausage, *chireta* (a typical Aragonese dish made of lambs' tripe filled with seasoned rice and sweetbreads) with wild mushrooms or marinated tuna. At the back of the bar is a small but welcoming restaurant seating 30 where the pleasant service ensures that patrons return at their earliest convenience.

The next stop on our itinerary is Concolias, a well-decorated bar with a lively atmosphere and a splendid location, ensuring that people are always coming and going. The tapas proffered here include *chistorrina* (a chistorra sausage made from pork, garlic, salt, pimentón and herbs), *montaditos* (small sandwiches made with rolls), *cazuelas* (casseroles) and a large variety of seafood in vinegar, such as anchovies, tuna, etc. The fried tapas include *inglesitos* (little Englishmen, made from a thick bechamel with ham and cheese, dipped in breadcrumbs and fried), *pencas rellenas* (stalks of Swiss chard filled and fried), croquettes (made from bechamel with added ingredients, covered in breadcrumbs and fried) and spinach balls. Both the bar and the tables are usually chock-a-block, especially on the weekends. And the drinks are the usual–wine, beer, natural cider and vermouth with soda water. A few months ago the owners opened up a new establishment, also in the old town, with the same products and the same characteristics.

The most traditional bars are located in the picturesque streets of the old town. One of the most renowned spots for its tapas is Los Vitorinos, and many people say its tapas are the best in town. Named bar of the year by the *Gourmet Guide for 2007*, it has received many awards, but perhaps the most important recognition of all is that of its patrons, who are there at all hours, every day of the week. The

Fluvi

The Fluvi figure is formed by placing pizza dough in a mold. Add bacon crisp, *morcilla* (blood sausage), tomato and goats' milk cheese. Cover with another base cut in the same shape and brush with a very light, sweet blue gelatin. Top with two rings of morcilla to represent Fluvi's eyes.

Prepared by: **La Estrella de La Jota**

Los Vitorinos bar is overloaded with enticing morsels and specialties, each with its own name, making it very difficult to choose. The selection includes: stuffed boletus mushrooms in sauce, cream of vegetables with duck, artichoke stuffed with hare, cooked mushrooms with foie gras, peppers stuffed with bull meat, foie gras with raspberry, truffled stewing hen, black rice with cod, veal cheeks in red wine, poached egg with white Piamonte truffle, fairy ring mushrooms filled with duck liver or, in season, fresh artichoke stuffed with rabbit.

Another popular, classic tapas bar that has managed to keep its place amongst the top few is the Alta Taberna Pedro Saputo. Here they suggest freshly fried morsels such as fritters stuffed with *Cabrales* (a type of blue cheese made in Asturias, in the north of Spain), fritters stuffed with Swiss chard and prawn, Ibérico ham croquettes, assorted vegetables and seafood and some outstanding goose canapés. A feature of the tapas in this bar is the top-quality shellfish that is used in many dishes, one example of which is chickpeas with lobster. They are also experts with mushrooms, and one of their latest creations is a magnificent fairy-ring mushroom filled with sirloin and foie gras with a black truffle sauce.

Very close to Saputo, as it is known locally, Casa Luis offers one of the best *cojonudos* (toast topped with quail's eggs, ham and pepper). Here they are experts with cooked dishes, from meatballs in almond sauce and lambs' trotters to stewed ox tail and eggs with *salmorejo* (a cold soup made from water, tomato, vinegar, extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper), a classic Aragonese dish served with style. Traditional cuisine survives side by side with new creations at Casa Pedro, an establishment that is over 50 years old and today still makes some of the old favorites such as snails, tripe and trotters, while also trying out new creations such as little bags of spicy meat and toast with foie gras and caramelized onion.

Now moving on from tradition to the latest vibes in the world of tapas, we arrive at Méli Mélo. The keys here are originality and on-the-

Spring lamb with grilled alioli and soft-fried onion (Ternasco confitado con alioli gratinado y cebolla pochada)

Bake potatoes then leave to cool. Meanwhile, confit the lamb by submerging it in extra virgin olive oil and cooking it at a low temperature, without allowing the oil to boil. Cut a slice off the potatoes and hollow out. When the meat is cooked, chop finely and mix with *alioli* (a sauce made from extra virgin olive oil and garlic). Fill the potato with the mixture, cover with more alioli, brown quickly under the grill and decorate with soft-fried onion and a little meat sauce.

Prepared by: **Méli Mélo**

Marinated Teruel rib of pork (Costilla adobada de cerdo de Teruel)

Salt the whole pork rib cage, adding pimentón and crushed garlic to the salt. Leave hanging for a few weeks. Cut and cook in Bajo Aragón extra virgin olive oil for 25 minutes. Transfer to earthenware jars to keep. When prepared this way, meat can be kept for several months. It can then be eaten cold, the traditional way in the Aragonese villages, or it can be cut into portions and heated up.

Prepared by: **La Jamonería**

spot preparation. Some of the star tapas are: roast potato filled with confit of lamb in *alioli* (a sauce made of extra virgin olive oil and garlic), accompanied with soft-fried onion and demi-glace (brown sauce), which won first prize in last year's tapas contest, boletus croquettes, goats' cheese tapas, and the very popular *butifarra* sausage containing wild mushrooms and served on borage with Ainzon Muscatel alioli.

Another option in this part of town is Las Palomas, which offers a self-service buffet of tapas including both classic Aragonese recipes and new creations.

Now on to the **Gran Vía-Sagasta** neighborhood, where there are a number of places not to be missed. Antiguo Paraíso offers a pleasant ambiance and is well served by the owner-manager, Carlos Navarro. The bar displays an assortment of options, including *morcilla* (blood sausage), with pride of place given to the prize-winning stuffed rib of lamb on a puff-pastry. Wine, taken directly from the cellar, is served by the glass.

For fried food lovers, the classic destination is Marly, a small but crowded bar where not only the patrons but also the specialties come and go, with the constant turnover that is so characteristic of tapas bars. The kitchen constantly churns out croquettes, brochettes, egg and prawn, ham and pâté, chistorra sausage with green pepper, hard-boiled eggs stuffed with meat, and many others. The idea is that patrons keep the cocktail sticks and pay according to the number of sticks left on their plate. Alternatively, you can order a selection of fried foods for take out, to be eaten in more peaceful surroundings.

In recent years, a bar in the center of town called Pic-Nic has built up a reputation for its excellent tapas as a result of winning first prize in the 1st National Tapas Contest held in Zaragoza. Its creations are both modern and exquisite. They include *currítos* (toast with foie gras), the award-winning *paulita* (cream of cheese with crispy prawn) and *Joselito* (Dublin Bay prawn with mango sauce), alongside *huevos rotos* (fried eggs and french fries with chorizo or morcilla), morsels of sirloin and a vegetable puff-pastry with piquillo peppers. Here you can enjoy a meal comprised of tapas, but if you want to be seated you will need to book a table. You can round off the meal with delicious desserts and some outstanding chocolates.

Another place that is well worth a visit is Café de Levante, a delightful bar reminiscent of old-fashioned cafés and steeped in history. It is a real luxury to enjoy its unique atmosphere while trying one of its specialties such as artichoke stuffed with cheese and salmon, tuna with ham, and a large number of fried delicacies.

Mushroom fans should not miss Txoco, a bar with a Basque name that specializes in Basque wines and whose kitchen constantly produces top-quality variations on the mushroom theme–fried, grilled, raw, with cheese–all of them excellent. Other possibilities include pork sirloin wrapped in bacon and albacore tuna with onion.

Moving on to the **San José-Las Fuentes** area where the main landmark is the renowned Hermanos Teresa, with its haute cuisine in miniature. The classic dishes here are black sausage pie with rice and a pacharán sauce (a type of sloe gin), Spanish tortilla with pimentón and cumin sauce,

smoke-flavored borage croquette, sirloin morsels with almonds and cream of Idiazábal (a ewes' milk cheese made in the Basque Country and in Navarre), *fritada aragonesa* (a dish made from zucchini, potato, red peppers, tomato, Albacore tuna in pickle sauce, egg and extra virgin olive oil) with snails, grilled alioli, piquillo pepper stuffed with hen in a pepper sauce and squid filled with curry sauce. Some recent creations whose fame is spreading like wildfire are sardine in a pickle sauce with white vermouth foam, Galician-style octopus on creamed potato and black squid with Cordoban *salmorejo*. This bar is a regular on the podium at tapas contests.

In the **Almozara-Delicias** district, the main destination is Cervino, a popular haunt with a regular clientele who come for its grilled longaniza sausage, Greek moussaka, *morica* (an eggplant pie with morcilla cream) and the classic brains fried in batter.

The **University** district is home to a number of establishments that display their best tapas in the window. One example is El Peirón de la Manduca, which produces a constant flow of small dishes to be eaten in the conventional manner with a knife and fork. Try the classic *peirones* (Ibérico pork sirloin with different garnishes) or *manduco* (bread with ham and fried zucchini with a brandade of cod in a pilpil sauce and topped with American sauce), a prize-winning tapa, or veal cheek with foie gras, trotters with morcilla, parcel of spring lamb or ox tail with pine nuts. Along the same road is La Taberna del Pescatero, which specializes in seafood. Try their sailor-style *migas* (croutons) with Dublin Bay prawn, salt cod tripe and a selection of shellfish: shrimp, prawns, squid, etc.

The next stop is a bar that specializes in small portions of pork products. La Jamonería is the ideal spot to try out the Aragonese charcuterie and cheeses, homemade marinades, *papas arrugadas con mojo picón* (a typical Canary dish made with unpeeled potatoes cooked with

Graus sausage ravioli (Ravioli de longaniza de Graus)

Cook sheets of fresh pasta, then leave to cool. Roast fresh Graus sausage with herbs in the oven for 15-20 minutes. Make a cream of potato with 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb potatoes, 1 1/2 l / 6 1/2 cup water and 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz butter. Mix this cream with the roast sausage in a Robot but without breaking up the sausage too finely. Place this mixture on the pasta sheets and fold over to form into ravioli. Finally, drizzle with basil oil.

Prepared by: **Alta Taberna Pedro Saputo**

plenty of salt and served with a sauce made of garlic, vinegar, cumin, pimentón, extra virgin olive oil, hot red pepper, water and salt) and brandade of cod. But the bar is especially proud of the ham the owner selects personally from the DO Jamón de Teruel, cured for 30 months and sliced with skill in the presence of the customer. At the helm of the bar is Félix Martínez, a professional ham slicer, chef and sommelier, who offers exquisite service.

In the area of **Torrero-La Paz**, tapas lovers are in their element at La Bodega del Tío Jorge, an old-style establishment where the locals mix with visitors from other parts of the city to try tapas such as *pisto* (a vegetable stew) with albacore tuna and quail's egg, or duck confit with orange sauce, with which they won first prize in the 2001 tapas contest in Zaragoza. Other options are shellfish in individual portions. Close by is Gran Venecia, a bar offering a large selection of tapas, including pickles, shellfish, mushrooms and traditional fried products, all of which are carefully prepared. The main specialty is tapas with anchovies, especially the *nórdica* (an anchovy served with crushed ice and lemon).

Our next port of call is **Actur-la Jota-Jesús**, on the outskirts of Zaragoza, where many modern-looking bars are springing up. One of the early arrivals is Fausto, which is well-known amongst the locals but is increasingly attracting visitors from other parts. Located in the 70-year-old cellar of a former wine wholesaler, the main request is for its homemade vermouth served with soda water and its salt fish, direct from the Cantabrian Sea. These are good-sized anchovies, properly cured and carefully cleaned by Encarna in the kitchen. This establishment also specializes in squid.

And in the Estrella de la Jota bar you can try a Fluvi. The Expo mascot has joined the tapas bandwagon and the result will be participating in the next tapas contest in Zaragoza. It is made from pizza dough and offers contrasting sweet and savory flavors with bacon, morcilla, tomato, goats' cheese and a blue gelatin.

***Juan Barbacil** is a food writer, gastronome and gastronomic adviser. He coordinates the Aragón government's Gastronomy Plan and the Gastronomy Section in the city council's Tourism Excellence Plan. He is responsible for gastronomy for the Grupo Z in Aragón (publishers of* El Periódico de Aragón*), and writes regularly for a number of specialist journals and publishing houses.*

Joselito

Peel and clean a whole Dublin Bay prawn, removing the head and claws, so that you are left with only the trimmed tail. Dip in a mixture of egg and bran and fry at 160ºC / 320ºF for 15-20 minutes. Drain on absorbent paper. Prepare a sauce with crushed, strained mango and mayonnaise. Serve the prawn tail with the sauce to one side for customers to use as a dip.

Prepared by: **Pic-Nic**

Tapas routes in Zaragoza

Center-Historic Quarter

Café Babel
Zurita, 21
50001 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 225 449

Vinos Bole
Francisco de Vitoria, 3
50008 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 223 016
info@vinosbole.com

Condolías Tasca
Zurita, 17
50001 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 221 418

Condolías El Tubo
Estébanes, 9
50003 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 396 465

Los Vitorinos
José de la Hera, 6
50001 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 394 213

Alta Taberna Pedro Saputo
Antonio Agustín, 19
50002 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 293 144

Casa Luis
Romea, 8
50002 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 291 167

Casa Pedro
Cadena, 6
50001 Zaragoza
Tel:(+34) 976 291 168

Antigua Casa Paricio
Coso, 188
50002 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 293 341

Méli Mélo
Mayor, 45
50001 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 294 695

Las Palomas
Plaza del Pilar, 16
50003 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 392 366
www.restaurante/laspalomas.com

Gran Vía-Sagasta

Antiguo Paraíso
Dato, 4
50005 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 221 107

Marly
Gran Vía, 50
50005 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 212 958

Pic-Nic
Laguna de Rins, 10
50005 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 210 402

Café de Levante
Almagro, 4
50004 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 223 676

Txoco
Doctor Horno, 26
50004 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 211 554

San José-Las Fuentes

Hermanos Teresa
General Ricardos, 11
50013 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 425 212

Torrero-La Paz

La Bodega del Tío Jorge
Mesones de Isuela, 50
50007 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 275 107

Gran Venecia
Antonio Adrados, 22
50007 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 377 951

Almoraza-Delicias

Cervino
Ainzón, 18
50003 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 434 777

University

El Peirón de la Manduca
Bruno Solano, 4
50006 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 557 255

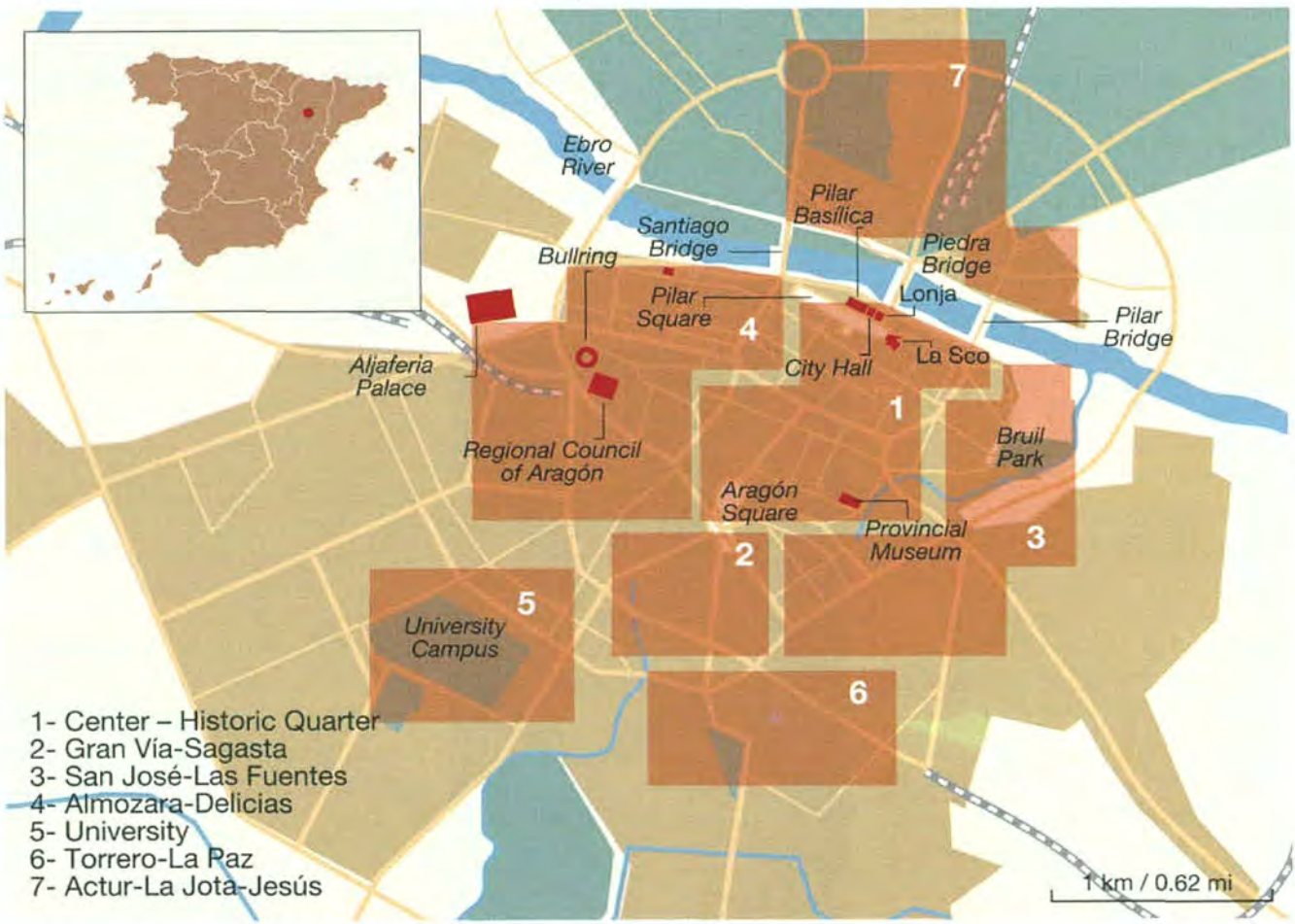
La Taberna del Pescatero
Bruno Solano, 6
50006 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 550 438

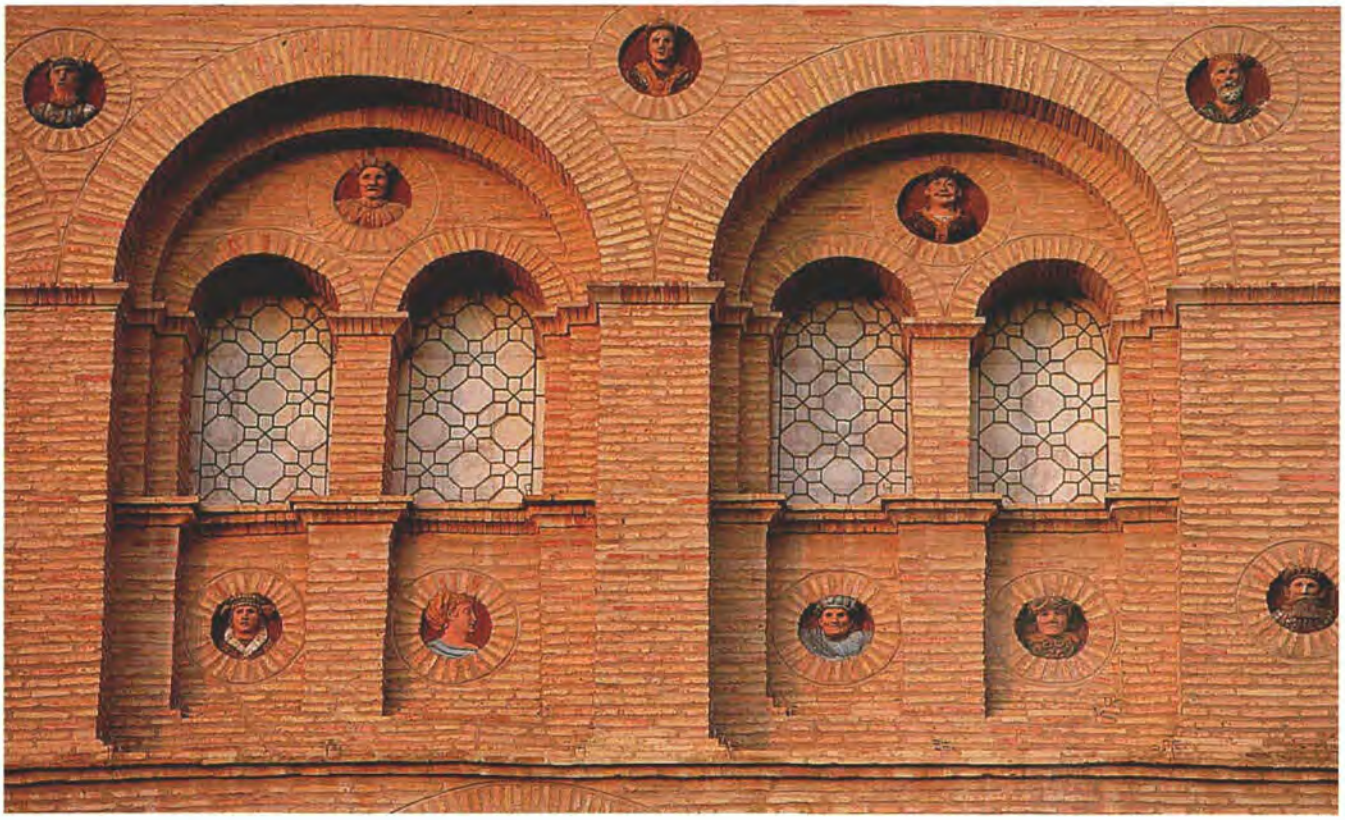
La Jamonería
Bruno Solano, 16
50006 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 566 268

Actur-La Jota-Jesús

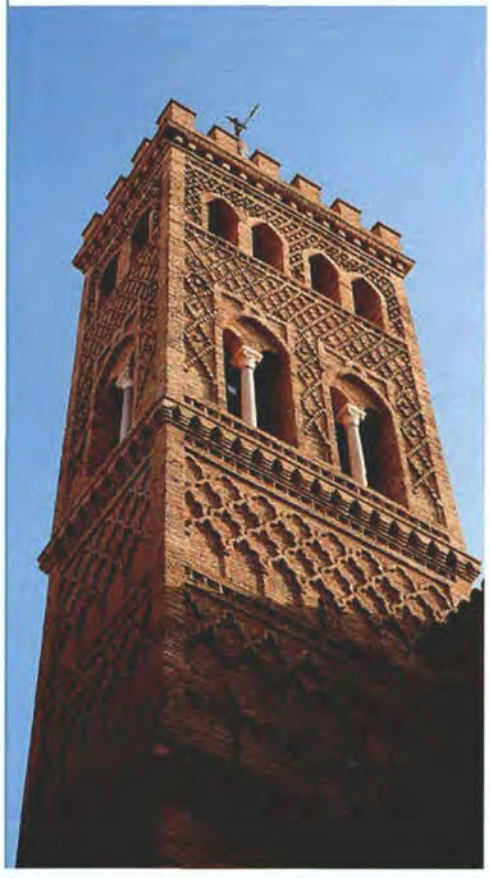
Fausto
Jesús, 26
50014 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 293 268

La Estrella
Pascuala Perie, 2
50014 Zaragoza
Tel: (+34) 976 291 133





WEBSITES



www.gastronomia-aragonesa.com

The goverment of Aragón's website dedicated to regional gastronomy, with an extensive section on tapas in the three provinces of Aragón and with street maps. The references to establishments include addresses, telephone numbers, specialties, closing days, etc. (Spanish)

www.redaragon.com/gastronomia/restaurantes

A very thorough portal on gastronomy, restaurants, bars and tapas routes in all parts of Aragón. Some recommended restaurants and suggested tapas routes. (Spanish)

www.atapear.com

Website on the world of tapas, with information on the history of tapas, a guide to over 1,500 establishments all over Spain, recipes and advice for tapas addicts. (Spanish)

http://cmisapp.zaragoza.es/ciudad/turismo/

The city council of Zaragoza's official website, with full, up-to-date information on tourist routes, services, activities and news. (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish)

http://zaragozaturismo.dpz.es/

Website for the Zaragoza provincial government tourism office, with all sorts of information on leisure activities, accommodation, tourist offices, museums, restaurants, cultural activities and news. (Spanish)

www.turismodearagon.com

Official website for the Aragón government tourism office, with detailed information on regional matters. (English, French, Spanish)

www.zaragoza-ciudad.com/turismo/index.htm

Website on places of interest, shops, services, bars, restaurants, pubs, tourist and gastronomic routes and information on Expo 2008. (Spanish)

EDEN'S

other fruit

An increasingly common sight in our supermarkets, the world's total area given over to their cultivation is growing exponentially year on year, as is the number of Google entries and column inches devoted to them in the press. Catapulted to stardom thanks to their health-giving properties, pomegranates are the 21st century's latest must-have product. Yet our love affair with the pomegranate dates back a very long way indeed: some even believe that this was the forbidden fruit disobediently picked by Eve. We are off to the Alicante coast, famous as a tourist magnet and now also the epicenter of Europe's pomegranate production. Our mission is to look into the credentials of the world's sweetest pomegranate: Mollar de Elche, which is grown exclusively in the Spanish countryside.

TEXT
CELIA HERNANDO

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

PHOTOS
TOYA LEGIDO/ICEX
TOMÁS ZARZA/ICEX

"The city of Elche can be recognized through the date palms that cover its entire district. (...) For a moment, one believes himself to be transported to the plains of Syria or to the shores of the Delta." The words of the French traveler Alexandre de Laborde still apply even 200 years later. Despite the buildings that now inevitably punctuate its present-day landscape, this Mediterranean coastal town–a little powerhouse of world pomegranate production–still has a distinct look of Al-Andalus about it. Its *Palmeral* was declared a World Heritage Site in 2000: this area of formally laid-out date palm groves is an eloquent example of man's battle against the elements to transform a hostile, arid environment into fertile land. The Islamic colonizers of the Iberian Peninsula brought with them their traditional mastery of the oasis principle: this amounted to a sustainable, revolutionary irrigation system for carrying out intensive horticulture. Rows of date palms helped create a benign microclimate, making it possible to grow fruit trees and other plants previously unknown in the Christian world. Among these was the pomegranate, which soon became the sultan's favorite. As Ibn Said, respected chronicler of the period, records: "Abd al Rahman I planted strange seeds brought to him from Syria by his ambassadors, which bore curious fruits. The monarch was delighted by the loveliness and beauty of the pomegranate and disseminated it the length and breadth of al-Andalus." This Arab legacy found a second home on Spain's east coast. Those early pomegranates adapted readily to the hot Mediterranean climate, saline soil and scant rainfall characteristic of this part of the world. While the genetic changes they have undergone through the centuries have not been precisely identified, the two varieties currently grown in the Spanish countryside, Valenciana and Mollar de Elche, are known to be exclusive to this area. Though they are grown all over the world nowadays, the history of pomegranates stretches back several millennia to western Asia. From Iran to northern India, pomegranates were cultivated by various civilizations, starting with the Egyptians–a picture of a pomegranate adorns the tomb of Rameses IV–and subsequently the Phoenicians. Having become firmly established on the Iberian Peninsula under Arab domination, they crossed the Atlantic to the Americas on the ships of Spanish missionaries who disseminated them, along with their religion, in the state of California. It is a story of peaceful conquest whose final chapter has yet to be written. As we speak, different varieties of pomegranate are extending their domain on every continent. We tracked down the sweetest of the lot to the costal area of eastern Spain known as El Levante.

Thousand-year old orchards

"These trees have been here forever! You have only to drop a seed on the ground and a pomegranate tree grows." A wander around the area that lies between Elche and Albatera, in the south of the Alicante province, is enough to reveal the truth behind this nugget of local folk wisdom. Fields of pomegranates and oranges stretch as far as the horizon in a flat expanse nevertheless endowed with a spectacularly dizzying skyline worthy of Manhattan, with majestic,

centuries-old palm trees interposed among the crops. We are in the Vinalpó Valley, an area of fertile open ground and orchards bounded by the calm waters of the Mediterranean to the east and the mountains of the Betic System to the north. This comarca is the source of most of the 25,000 tonnes (55 million lbs) of pomegranates that constitute Spain's qualification as Europe's only large-scale producer (it is beaten in the world ranking only by Iran, India and Pakistan). Furthermore, much of its production is destined for the international market, making the region a heavyweight exporter on a global scale. When the first truckloads of pomegranates to venture beyond local boundaries set off almost a century ago, they were headed for Barcelona and Madrid. Other destinations in the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Russia and Malaysia would soon be added to the list, building up to a current export quota that accounts for an impressive 80% of total production.

While other types of fruit would be lucky to survive such long journeys, pomegranates arrive at each of their destinations in perfect condition. "They were one of the favorite fruits of nomadic people precisely because of their astonishing keeping capacity," we are informed by André Irles, director of the Cambayas Cooperative, one of the biggest in the district. He also tells us that the secret lies in picking them off the tree at just the right time: "Not too early because, once picked, pomegranates halt the ripening process abruptly, and not too late because they are then at risk of splitting open." In calendar terms, the "right time" occurs in September-October in this part of the world. That said, the harvest is not a one-off affair. Pomegranate trees flower sequentially, creating the need for phased harvesting which is, by definition, manual and selective. Over a period of four weeks, the same tree can be picked two, three and even four times to ensure that each pomegranate is harvested at its optimal stage of ripeness.

"My father can judge by eye when to start the harvest," smiles Celia Mas as we stroll about her little plot of land on the outskirts of Elche. Her holding is typical of the local plantation pattern: the overall view is made up of tiny plots–few over a ha (2.5 acres)–that have been handed down from father to son for generations. Having sold their produce to big local traders for decades, Celia decided to set up a business on her own account and today she sells her pomegranates and their juice–100% natural, as she is quick to point out–on the internet. Her policy of favoring quality over quantity has produced results: the products of her family firm, Campo de Elche, have been honorably mentioned by top chefs and are sold by some of the best fruit shops in Madrid–Frutas Vázquez, suppliers to the Spanish Royal Household. Although pomegranate trees reach peak productivity from their seventh year on and, in theory, start to decline after 40, her grove has trees that are centuries old and perfectly healthy, "thanks to my father's care and attention," says Celia proudly. Despite being over 70 and retired, not a day goes by without his

patrolling the plot. "He knows it like the back of his hand."
Sounds of lively activity from a nearby plot attract our attention. A group of day laborers has already started picking reddened Valenciana variety pomegranates. They tell me that of the two types grown in Spain, this is the first to ripen, flushing pink-to-red before the other. It is early September and the sun is still hot, but the team of workers–parents, children, cousins, friends–are, without exception, wearing long sleeves. "Whether it's pelting with rain or blazing hot, this outfit is essential, otherwise, by the end of the day your arms are covered in scratches," explains one of them, demonstrating the reason why. The pomegranate tree, variously categorized as a small tree or a tall shrub, conceals sharp thorns on the ends of its branches. Its thorny nature and deep red flowers (known as *jullanâr*, and often celebrated by Arab and Persian poets) are characteristics that it shares with the rose.
The pomegranate blossom was replaced months ago by the fruits that now, in September, fill the harvesters' crates. This first picking of Valenciana pomegranates serves as a warm-up for another, later and perhaps more eagerly awaited harvest of the Mollar de Elche variety, unchallenged monarch of the Alicante countryside.

Deceptive appearances

Accustomed as he is to the flavor of the Mollar de Elche variety, Domingo Arce, director of the Albafruits Cooperative, the biggest in Albatera, can barely contain his mirth when he recalls his first taste of a foreign pomegranate. "I thought it was a different fruit altogether! It was as sour as a lemon!" Comparisons may be odious, but there is no denying that, for sweetness, the pomegranates grown hereabouts stand out proudly from all the rest. Spanish-grown pomegranates have a characteristic caramel flavor that gives them a big advantage in an increasingly competitive market. But the high concentration of sugars is not Mollar de Elche's only advantage: it also has very small, soft, yielding pips that are barely discernible in the mouth so that this variety is very easy to eat.
As in the wine world, variety is just one factor in the fruit's overall character. To borrow wine terminology, this part of Alicante is the equivalent of a *terroir* that stamps its indelible imprint on the Mollar de Elche pomegranate. Like vines, pomegranate trees survive in conditions that few other plants can tolerate. They cope well with drought and thrive in poor soils, to which they respond by sending out deeper roots in search of nutrients. This explains why the pomegranate has found an apparently ideal habitat in this area: completely flat terrain at sea level, and occasionally below, with just the right salinity levels. The Mediterranean, only a few kilometers away from the fruit groves, functions as a filter that takes the edge off temperatures and staves off the dreaded frosts that can ruin entire harvests.
People around here maintain that: "...pomegranates need moist sea air. They can't survive without it," and to

NATURAL MEDICINE

Babylonian soldiers used to chew pomegranate grains before going into battle, convinced that the fruit's characteristic resilience would make them invincible. Hippocrates, who in classical Antiquity launched the famous "let food be your medicine" principle, used to recommend that his patients drink pomegranate juice to bring down a fever, while Discorides, surgeon to the Roman army, considered it the best remedy for flatulence. Throughout the centuries, healers from various cultures have prescribed pomegranates for ailments ranging from conjunctivitis to hemorrhoids, with pharyngitis and laryngitis in between. What in olden times was intuited empirically has now been validated by scientific testing. Modern medicine has shown that far from being an old wives' tale, this fruit does indeed possess health-giving properties that qualify it as a super-food. (This term, referring to foodstuffs that prevent the progressive deterioration responsible for common pains and diseases, was popularized in 2004 in the blockbuster book by Canadian nutritionist Steven Pratt).
Pomegranates now rank alongside berries and green tea in the pantheon of foods with outstanding nutritional and anti-oxidant properties. Instrumental in their ascent have been scientists such as Dr. Michael Aviram, also an exponent of the benefits of wine-derived tannins. His research at the University of Haifa, Israel, has recently shown that pomegranate polyphenols lower cholesterol levels in the blood, thereby reducing the risk of a heart attack. Research by Dr. David Holtzman, Head of Neurology at the University of Washington School of Medicine, has found that these polyphenols also appear to have neuroprotective properties. Still in the US, in 2005 the University of Madison published the results of several studies affirming that regular consumption of pomegranate juice inhibits the growth and progress of prostate cancer, a claim seconded by Dr. Alan Pantuck, urologist at the University of California's Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center. Many more beneficial effects are attributed to pomegranates, including that they are estrogenic, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and aid digestion. And all the indicators show that the list is far from complete just yet.

judge by the size and weight of the specimens before us, there's a lot in what they say. Having said that, the outer look and color of a pomegranate should not be taken as an indicator of quality. Strangely enough, even the ripest pomegranates in the Mollar de Elche family never go bright red. Their natural color range lies between tones of orange and deep pink. That being the case, how does one know when the fruit is at its peak? Pepe Botella, director of Elche's Copelche Cooperative, reveals two basic yardsticks: perfectly rounded shape and a good weight to size ratio (irrefutable evidence that the pomegranate in question is full of juice). "Today's consumers are learning how to select them in the supermarket," he comments. "After years of buying tomatoes that look perfect but lack flavor, we know that appearances can be deceptive when choosing fruit." Mollar de Elche pomegranates may be unlikely to win first prize in a beauty contest as they have a less pronounced outer color than other varieties, but they are packed with a secret treasure in the form of delicious, sweet, red pulp-encased seeds known as arils.

Natural spheres

These days, the notion of seasonal fruits is something of an illusion. Increasingly, many crops are grown in both hemispheres and maintain a presence on our supermarket shelves throughout the year. Tomatoes in winter, oranges in summer... thanks to globalization, they find their way

READY TO EAT

While some enjoy the ritual of cutting a pomegranate in half and carefully extracting its tiny grains, or arils, others can't be bothered. Aware of the fact that pomegranates can be perceived as "hard to eat", several European producers have been casting about over the last few years for new, more user-friendly presentations. More specifically, companies from Spain, France, Israel and Greece joined forces in 2000, under the EU's financial umbrella to develop technology capable of peeling pomegranates, separating their arils by color and packing them in convenient containers.

Spain's representative in the project was Altabix, whose premises we are visiting today. Santiago Mira, founder over 50 years ago of a company that is now one of the biggest agricultural enterprises in Elche, hands me a gown and advises me to put it on before entering the next room. The department where the arils are removed and packed is something of a separate entity with respect to the premises as a whole: "It's our operating room, our cutting-edge technology laboratory." In an icy cold and practically sterile environment where the air is renewed every minute, several workers are keeping an eye on the mechanical aril extraction machine. Surprisingly, it seems to be quite straightforward: compressed water and air are used to gently deseed the whole pomegranates. The gleaming, ruby red arils are then transferred to another piece of equipment which uses artificial vision to group them by different shades of color. This is the first machine of its kind in the world and was developed in conjunction with the Valencian Institute for Agrarian Research (IVIA). "There were already machines on the market capable of separating many fruits by color, but pomegranates posed an extra problem because their arils are so tiny and tend to stick together because of their high concentration of sugars," explains José Blasco, head of the artificial vision laboratory at IVIA's agricultural engineering center. It took them four years to put the final touches on a machine that, today, can process between three and six tonnes (13,227 lbs) of arils per week. Packed in trays, and without the aid of coloring or preservatives, they leave the Elche plant bound for the food halls of Marks & Spencer in the UK and many other destinations all over Europe.

Applying the ready-to-eat approach to one of the oldest fruits in the world has been a great success, and pomegranates needed a radical makeover to bring them up-to-date. Nonetheless, the more nostalgic among us will be relieved to know that we can still buy our pomegranates whole and set about eating them in the traditional way.

to our tables from all corners of the planet. There are still some romantics around who refuse to yield to this kind of internationalization and prefer to wait patiently for the fruits in their own territory to ripen. Among those at the forefront of this school of thought are chefs, who are perfectly willing to scour the world for new flavors, yet stout defenders of products from their home patch. In the Alicante province, many of them have been hanging on for the better part of a year: pomegranates are a winter fruit in this part of the world, making an appearance in September or October and remaining available until January or February. During that period, they feature on the menus of many local restaurants, such as two-Michelin-star-holder El Poblet in Denia, an engaging town on the Alicante coast. Head chef Quique Dacosta is showcasing Spanish pomegranates on his menu again this year. "I think I've been using them since I started here," he beams, "and I've always tried to capitalize on their texture, which is crunchy and sweet and juicy at the same time, with acidic, bitter overtones." Among the dishes coming out of his kitchen today are eye-catching crystallized apple bow-shaped puff pastries with aloe, sweet leaf tea and pomegranate. He is also into exploring textural interplay at the moment–"very simple, but the results are magic." Here's just one example: freshly made creamy mandarin sorbet to which unadorned fresh pomegranate arils are added just as it goes into the sorbetière.

Leaving the sea behind us, we now head for inland Alicante. Kiko

SWEET MEMORIES

Certain products make their mark on *Spain Gourmetour's* editorial team. Pomegranates are a case in point: for our colleague Carlos Tejero, they trigger vivid childhood memories. He shares them with us here.

As well as being an inexhaustible fount of popular sayings, my grandfather was a convinced herbalist. He maintained that pomegranate root was good for getting rid of tapeworms (a parasite from which, I'm pleased to report, no-one in my family had ever suffered). Nevertheless, worrier that he was, he decided to plant a pomegranate tree in his orchard so as to have an effective vermifuge on hand just in case.

As time went by and the plant grew, I was never aware of any root removal taking place, which was, I suppose, a good sign. What I do remember is that around May or June, the tree would come into bloom. It did so timidly, over several weeks, unlike the almond trees which bloom almost overnight. The flowers, large, bell shaped and bright orangey red, would appear gradually. Later, the fruit would appear in the calyx, a green berry that grew into a spherical shape over the following weeks.

By October, the fruit would be almost completely grown, its skin a glossy yellow or red, depending on how much it had been exposed to the sun (surprisingly, the most intensely colored arils in a pomegranate occur in that part of the fruit that has had the least amount of sun). By chance, this pomegranate tree had been planted between a loquat and a willow, taller and leafier than itself, so that the sun's rays had little effect on it.

My grandfather did not look after the pomegranate tree much. I was to learn later that because it was watered only erratically while it was growing, the fruit cracked open when ripe, revealing their inner treasure. That was the point at which I would pick and eat them, so my brain associates maximum sweetness with a pomegranate that has split open of its own accord. But that's not how you find them in the shops. For obvious commercial reasons, the fruit on offer is whole, with smooth, satiny skin. No-one will buy a split pomegranate.

The orchard where the pomegranate tree once stood no longer exists, so if I need pomegranates I have to shop for them these days, and that's not as simple as it sounds. As far as I'm concerned, eating a pomegranate is a ritual that starts with selecting the fruit. If I know and trust the fruit seller, I take his advice. If not, or if I'm shopping at the supermarket, I observe certain guidelines. I buy just the one pomegranate, for eating that same day; it must weigh between 200 and 300 g (7 and 10 1/2 oz) and be perfectly shaped; it must be yellow-to-red in color; the skin must not be too smooth; it must be firm but not too hard to the touch and, like a melon, its weight should be proportional to its size. If all these requirements are met, there is every chance of finding fruity perfection when I cut it open.

I rarely get excited about food, and when I do it is probably about something rather basic. Enjoyment, now, is quite another matter. I always enjoy eating, but getting a thrill out of food, a real thrill, is not something I experience often. One of the few things that does the trick is sitting down to an enormous, round, ripe pomegranate. I go off on my own, ignore all distractions, and with an almost ecstatic absorption, launch into the ritual.

I place the pomegranate on a plate. Using a very sharp knife, I cut discs about 6 cm (2.4 in) in diameter from the crown and base. I then score four radial cuts whose purpose is to help divide the fruit into four portions. The cuts need to be quite shallow, just deep enough to go through the leathery skin

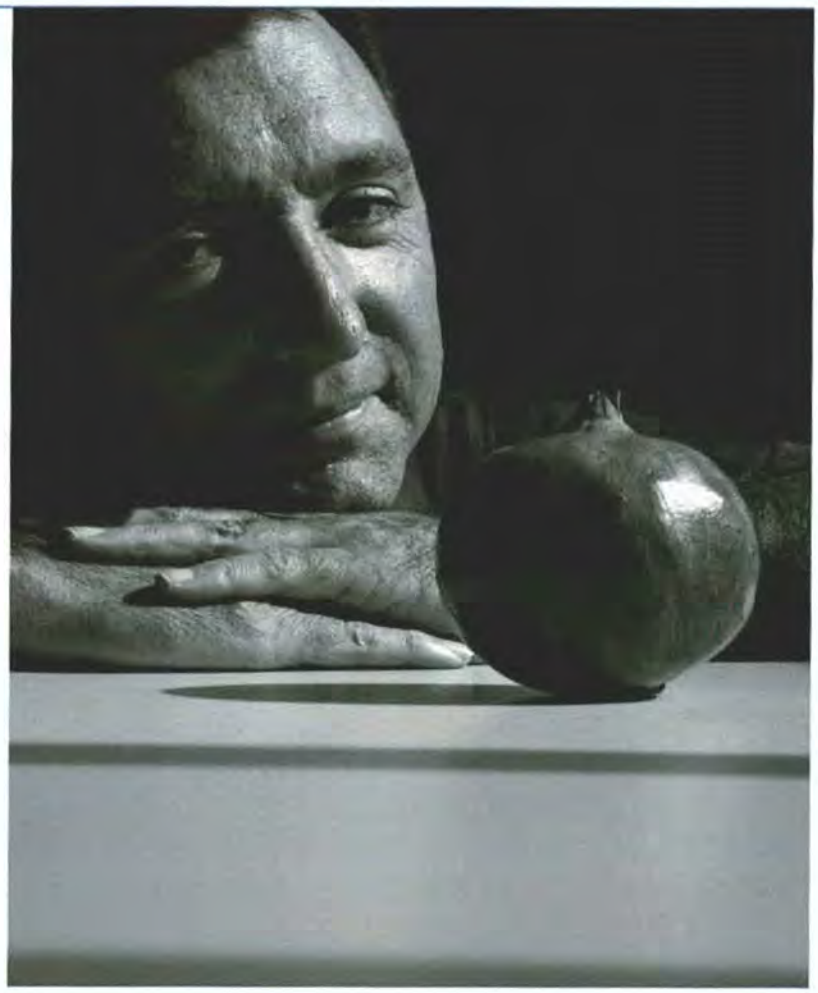
Moya, who runs the one-Michelin-star restaurant L'Escaleta in Cocentaina, loves pomegranates. "Those trees have been there all my life. They were the backdrop to my childhood," he recalls. "In the local repertoire they are categorized in the dessert department, but pomegranates are such a versatile fruit that they can be used throughout the menu." Like Quique, Kiko emphasizes the importance of their exceptional texture. "Visually, the red grains have the same jewel-like look as fish roe. Those little natural spheres burst in your mouth, leaving a sensation of freshness, sweetness, acidity and bitterness all at the same time. It's quite an explosion of flavors." As our conversation draws to a close, he tells me about his latest experiments with unusual combinations of ingredients: "I associate pomegranates with Arab culture. That in turn suggests rose water, ginger, cinnamon, dates, saffron..." he explains. "I'm only trying out tentative combinations so far, but I know for certain that something good will develop!"

As it happens, doing unconventional things with saffron was what earned María José Román a place in the food and wine pages of *The New York Times*. This enquiring, self-taught chef experiments with new products in her restaurant, Monastrell, on a daily basis. Her saffron period would seem to have been succeeded by a Mollar de Elche pomegranate one or, more specifically, its concentrated juice reduced down into a paste: "...like our traditional Spanish *arropes* and *melazas* (grape and

without damaging the arils within. That's the preparatory stage. Next, I grasp the fruit in both hands over the plate and firmly but gently prise the sections apart, relishing the crunch between my fingers as the first jewels fall. I then proceed to separate the arils from the pericarp and the various cuticles that divide up the fruit's interior. With patience worthy of a Franciscan, I gradually build up a heap of polyhedric arils, looking like little juicy building blocks irregularly hewn by Mother Nature.

Prompted by my salivary glands, at last I dig in pleasurably with my spoon. Yes, a good old-fashioned spoon is my utensil of choice for scooping up the prepared pomegranate grains. Few pleasures can compare with that first spoonful of ruby morsels that explode in my mouth as I chew, releasing their fresh sweetness. It's the taste of my childhood.

Journalist and pomegranate-lover ***Carlos Tejero*** *is editorial co-coordinator of spaingourmetour.com.*



honey syrups) except that in this case pomegranate rather than grape must is cooked down slowly," she explains. María José uses the resulting syrup as an accompaniment to countless dishes. "Its properties are similar to, or even better than, those of balsamic vinegar," she explains. "Its heady aroma enhances the flavor of walnuts and indeed nuts in general, sharpens the flavor of poultry and pork, gives a little acidic zing to fish and a touch of astringency to salads." She admits to having looked to the traditional cooking of such countries as Iran and India for her inspiration, where pomegranates are a common ingredient in everyday cooking. "When the season starts, pomegranate juice is one of the most popular choices at street stalls," she explains, "and in Turkey, pomegranate juice is used like vinegar for dressing salads."

The stuff of legend

Cairo-born food writer Claudia Roden, acclaimed expert in the history of Mediterranean food, coined the adage "a country's food reflects its history". She has studied Jewish culinary tradition and its links with that of Spain, which she defines as a happy fusion of Sephardic and Muslim food. In her *Book of Jewish Food*, she mentions the symbolic significance of pomegranates, particularly during the solemn yet festive Jewish New Year celebrations, when they symbolize "fecundity and renewal... Oriental New Year meals end with fresh dates, figs and above all pomegranates–all of which are mentioned in the Bible–as the new fruits of the season. In Egypt, we thought pomegranates would cause our family to bear many children". Pomegranates are also popularly believed to contain 613 seeds, the same number as there are commandments mentioned in the Torah.

Fertility, abundance, perfection, carnal desire, hope... The pomegranate's exotic nature evokes associations with abstract nouns. According to Greek mythology, the first pomegranate was planted by

Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty; however, in the story of Persephone, daughter of Zeus, who was led astray by grains of pomegranate, the fruit symbolizes evil sweetness. When Roman brides wore a headdress made of pomegranate branches, it represented a future blessed with many children, while for St. John of the Cross, figurehead of Christian mysticism, the pomegranate exemplified the innumerable divine perfections, eternity and spiritual joy.
Mentioned in the Torah, the Koran and the tales of *The thousand and one nights*, the pomegranate has left its mark on legends, stories and poems. André Gide, Nobel Prize Winner for Literature, described the pomegranate's fascinating structure as "hidden treasure, wrapped up in tulle", while the revered Persian poet Ferdowsī declared that "only the blushing cheeks of the beloved can compare with it".
Federico García Lorca devoted a long poem to the pomegranate, praising its beauty along these lines: "It is a tiny beehive/with a bloodstained honeycomb/for it was shaped by its bees/from womens' mouths./That is why it bursts open laughing/with the red of a thousand lips..." Who needs an advertising campaign?

***Celia Hernando** is a journalist that has worker with the radio stations* Cadena Ser *and* Punto Radio *and is a trainee journalist at* Spain Gourmetour.

WEBSITES

www.campodeelche.com
Campo de Elche's company website tells you everything you need to know about Mollar de Elche pomegranates: their provenance, nutritional properties, related articles and so on. Orders for fruit and juice of this variety can be placed via this site.
(Spanish)

www.altabix.com
Altabix's website provides information about the company and sells its products on the internet.
(Spanish)

www.cambayas.com
Cambadas Cooperative of Elche's website. This company sells figs, oranges and vegetables as well as pomegranates.
(English, Spanish)

Recipes
Kiko Moya

Introduction
Almudena Muyo

Translation
Jenny McDonald

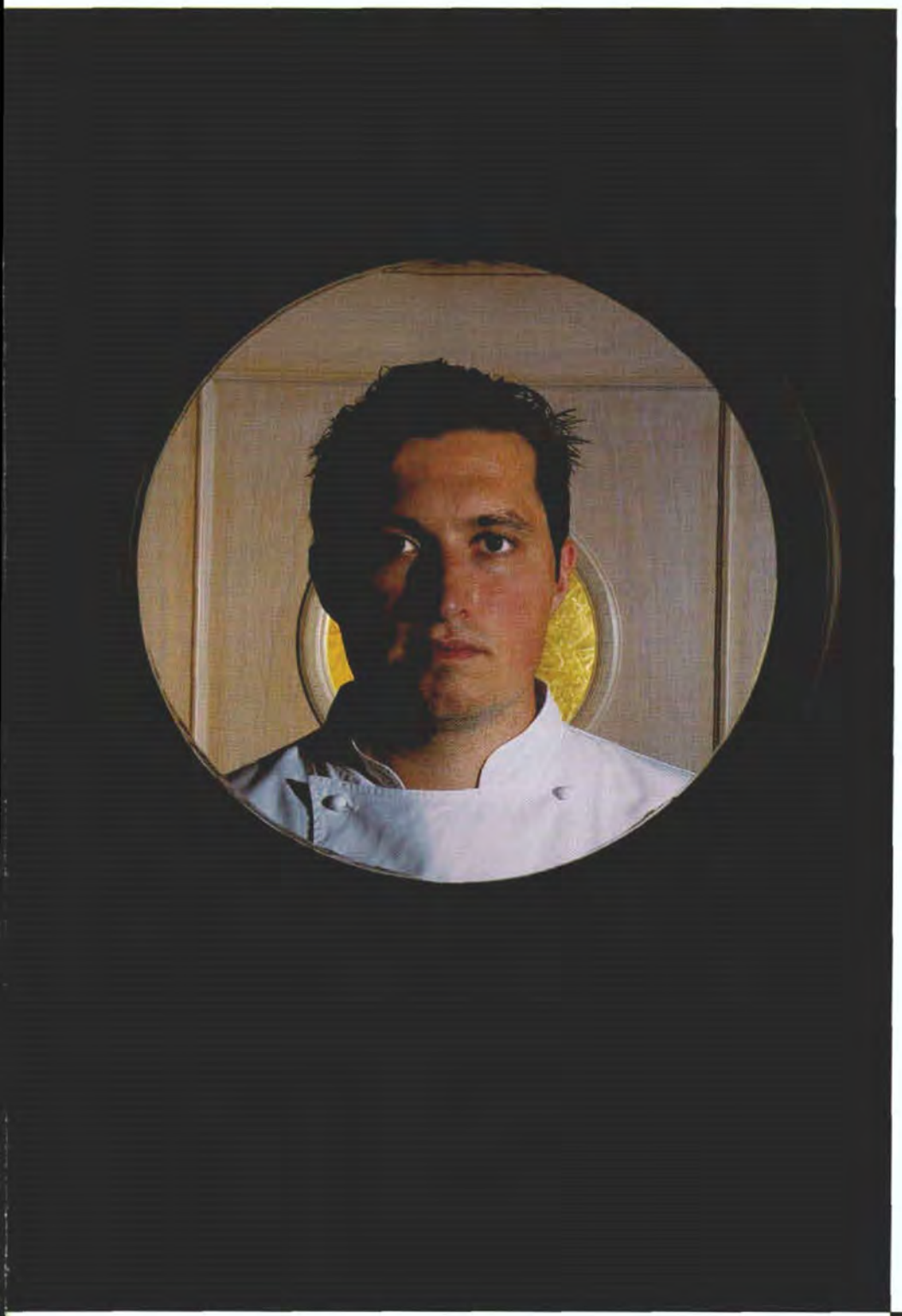
Photos, introduction
Tomás Zarza/ICEX

Photos, food
Toya Legido/ICEX

Restaurante L'Escaleta.
Subida Estación Norte, 205
03820 Cocentaina, Alicante
Tel: (+34) 965 592 100.
www.lescaleta.com

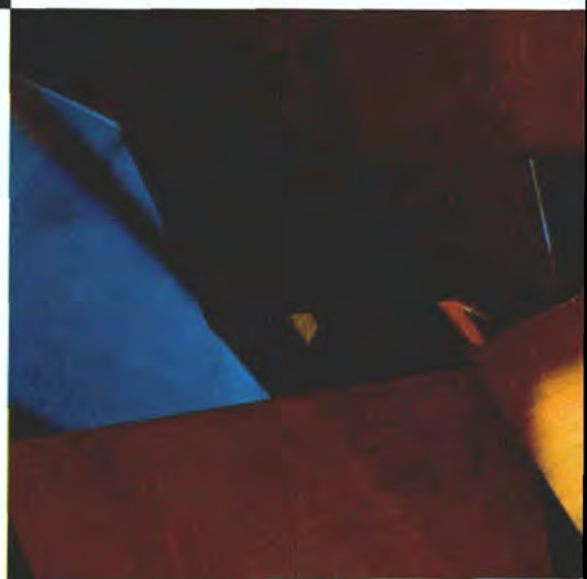
Restaurante L'Escaleta

They say you can know a person by what he does. If this is true, Kiko Moya is a devoted, careful and knowledgeable chef. He and his cousin, Alberto Redrado Calavia, took over a family-owned restaurant and, following in the footsteps of their parents, brought



5 RECIPES

L'Escaleta up to Michelin-star standard. The chef and sommelier, respectively–the latter chose the wines for our recipes–are staunch advocates of culinary coherence: everything used in a dish must be there for a reason. Their creations are based on excellent products–cooked impeccably and decorated with style–and on the preservation and renovation of legendary flavors. The results are thus original, and often surprising, yet not outlandish.



Pomegranate seed salad and roe with ginger ice cream (Ensalada de semillas de granada y huevas con crema helada de jengibre)

The legends relating pomegranate seeds with paradise were the starting point for this salad. It is simplicity itself: all we do is dress the seeds with extra virgin olive oil and accompany them with ginger ice cream.

SERVES 4

1 pomegranate; 1 tomato; 1 passion fruit; 5 g / 1/6 oz dried basil seeds; 15 g / 1/2 oz trout roe; extra virgin olive oil; fresh basil shoots; chervil; Maldon salt.

For the ginger ice cream: 1 l / 4 1/4 cup whole milk; 250 g / 9 oz sugar; 90 g / 3 1/4 oz powdered skim milk; 60 g / 2 oz atomized glucose; 40 g / 1 1/2 oz inverted sugar; 10 g / 1/3 oz neutral stabilizer; 200 g / 7 oz fresh ginger; 340 g / 12 oz cream (35% fat); 120 g / 4 1/4 oz egg yolk.

Seed the pomegranate, tomato and passion fruit. Retain just 2 passion fruit seeds per person and set aside. Place the basil seeds in water and leave to soak.

For the ginger ice cream

Mix the solid ingredients (sugar, powdered milk, glucose and neutral stabilizer) and then mix the liquids (whole milk, inverted sugar, cream and egg yolk). Combine the two mixtures and bring to a temperature of 85°C / 185°F. Remove from the heat and add the ginger cut into pieces. Leave to infuse for at least 8 hours. Strain, then transfer to the ice cream maker.

To serve

Place the seeds together with the trout roe, basil shoots and chervil. Dress with extra virgin olive oil and top with ginger ice cream.

Preparation time

20 minutes

Cooking time

8 hours for the ginger ice cream

Recommended wine

Pedrouzos 2005 (DO Valdeorras) by Bodegas Valdesil. Pedrouzos is the oldest Godelló vineyard in Galicia. Its extremely slaty soil brings out the most jovial side of the Godelló variety. The notes of white flower (aniseed), pitted fruit and minerals (especially silex) marry perfectly with the balsamic and salty flavors in the salad (provided by the basil and the roe), with the citric taste of the ginger and the sweetness of the pomegranate and tomato. The wine's firm palate and marked density, with slight touches of vegetable and bitterness, lengthen its effect in the mouth, bringing to mind memories of salads made from early spring produce.

Red tuna belly with beetroot and pomegranate (Ventresca de atún rojo de remolacha y granadas)

The attractiveness and incomparable texture–both crisp and sweet–of a salad containing pomegranate make the jewel-like seeds a frequent ingredient in traditional salads. Here they serve as a foil to salty and mineral flavors.

SERVES 4

250 g / 9 oz red tuna belly; rock salt; fresh ginger; 4 Marcida olives; salad shoots (rocket, beetroot and dandelion); 1 pomegranate; capers.

For the beetroot vinaigrette: 400 g / 14 oz beetroot (200 ml / 3/4 cups beetroot juice); 40 ml / 3 tbsp soy sauce; 2 g / 1/9 oz xanthan gum; 50 ml / 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil.

For the salt-cured tuna belly

Without trimming the tuna, cover it in rock salt, chill and leave to cure. The

time it takes will depend on the size of the piece. A piece measuring 6 x 6 x 20 cm (2 x 2 x 8 in) should take about 24 hours, but it is best to test it before removing the salt. When fully cured, wash and remove the skin and any flesh that has been in direct contact with the salt. Wrap in film and chill.

For the beetroot vinaigrette

Wash the beetroot and liquidize. Take 200 ml / 3/4 cups of the resulting juice and mix in the soy sauce and xanthan gum, being careful not to make any lumps. Add the oil but do not beat. Cut the tuna into very thin slices (3-4 mm / 0.12-0.16 in), lay out on a dish and brush with the beetroot vinaigrette. Grate a little ginger over the top. Remove the seeds from the pomegranate and chop the olives.

To serve

First arrange the tuna slices (3-4 per person), then top with the salad shoots and pomegranate seeds. Dress with the beetroot vinaigrette and garnish with olives and capers.

Preparation time

25 minutes

Cooking time

24 hours to cure the tuna

Recommended wine

Manzanilla Pasada Pastrana (DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry, Manzanilla-Sanlúcar de Barrameda) by Bodegas Hidalgo-La Gitana. After aging under a veil of yeasts, this Manzanilla is left for up to 12 more years for what could be called a process of semi-oxidation. The result is greater complexity and an even nuttier aroma, while maintaining the freshness and salinity that are features of Manzanilla sherries. This powerful yet delicate character is needed to accompany a salad in which the dominant flavors are salty tuna and earthy beetroot, alongside sweet pomegranate, sharp vinaigrette and bitter salad leaves.

Wood pigeon marinated in pomegranate juice, and saffron gold (Paloma marinada en jugo de granadas, y oro de azafrán)

Our aim with this dish was to reflect the Arab origins of the pomegranate on the Iberian Peninsula. The aromas are reminiscent of a period when the pomegranate was venerated not only for its beauty but also for its medicinal properties. The rich juice is enhanced by spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, jasmine and rose water. Saffron, one of Spain's gastronomic treasures, shines from the dish like a jewel, reminding us of the luxury and ostentation of those golden times.

SERVES 4

2 whole wood pigeons; 4 slices bread; 200 g / 7 oz butter; 100 ml / 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil; Maldon salt; anise flowers; chives.

For the marinade: 5 pomegranates (1 l / 4 1/4 cup pomegranate juice); 1 l / 4 1/4 cup red wine; 1 cinnamon stick; 5 green cardamom seeds; 5 juniper seeds; 1 star anise; 6 green aniseeds; 200 ml / 3/4 cups rose water; 12 jasmine flowers; 5 Jamaica peppercorns.

For the dark pigeon stock: bones of 2 wood pigeons; 1 carrot; 1 turnip; 5 shallots; half a leek; 1 1/2 l / 6 1/2 cup water; extra virgin olive oil.

For the saffron gold: 200 ml / 3/4 cups clarified dark stock; 1/2 g / 0.02 oz saffron; 2 g / 1/9 oz xanthan gum; 3 g / 0.10 oz powdered edible gold.

For the marinated wood pigeon

First make the pomegranate juice by removing the seeds and liquidizing them. This should result in 1 l / 4 1/4 cup of juice into which the other marinade ingredients should be placed.
Remove the breasts from the two pigeons but do not bone. Use the rest of the birds for the dark stock. Place the breasts in the marinade and leave for about 8 hours. Remove and keep the skins. Dice the flesh into 5 mm / 0.20 in cubes.

For the dark pigeon stock

Brown the pigeon bones together with the thighs. Add the diced vegetables and bake until caramelized. Pour over the water and simmer for 4 hours, without reducing too much. Strain and clarify with a vegetable brunoise and a beaten egg white. Strain again.

For the saffron gold

Roast and crush the saffron and add to the clarified stock. Reduce to 200 ml / 3/4 cups, thicken with xanthan gum, check the salt and try to avoid lumps. Finally, add the powdered gold. Soften the butter, then beat in a Robot until fluffy. Turn into a mold and, when set, cut into cubes. Trim the slices of bread to 5 x 10 x 0.5 cm (2 x 4 x 0.20 in), sprinkle with extra virgin olive oil and toast. Strain the marinade and reduce to form a thick syrup (2 l / 8 1/2 cup). Brown the pigeon skins in a non-stick skillet and cut into julienne strips.

To serve

Arrange the breast of pigeon on the toast and drizzle with extra virgin olive oil. Sprinkle with Maldon salt and pour over some of the reduced marinade. Decorate with the julienne strips of skin and chopped chives. Dress the dish with the saffron gold and add the butter cubes.

Preparation time

35 minutes

Cooking time

8 hours for the marinade

Recommended wine

Lustau Almacenista Oloroso Pata de Gallina 1/38, by Bodegas Emilio Lustau (DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry, Manzanilla-Sanlúcar de Barrameda). Here we need a well-rounded wine to bring together the different textures, one that has character and strength to stand up to the marinade as well as sufficient acidity to partner the poultry. Juan García-Jarana sells small amounts from his 38 barrels of this wonderful Oloroso to the Emilio Lustau winery, which distributes it as part of the Almacenista range. Pata de Gallina has a powerful, concentrated aroma with traces of fruit, chocolate, coffee and wood, and an exquisite, intense flavor. The sweetness of its alcohol content gives way to a slightly acidic finish, making it the perfect partner for this dish. It allows us to enjoy the meat while leaving us a wonderful aftertaste of toast and sweet spice with each sip.

Almond milk, rose-flavored spun sugar and pomegranate (Leche de almendras, algodón de rosas y granadas)

The keys to this dish are the pomegranate texture and the way it tastes. The flowery combination formed by the honey, almond and rose is enhanced by the small bursts of flavor that come when you bite into the sweet and sour pomegranate seeds.

SERVES 4

1 pomegranate

For the almond milk: 500 ml / 2 1/6 cups water; 600 g / 1 lb 5 oz Marcona almonds; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz honey; 25 g / 1 oz sugar.

For the rose jelly: 1 whole rose; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz rose water; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz water; 20 g / 1 oz sugar; 2 g / 1/9 oz xanthan gum.

For the rose-flavored spun sugar: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sugar; 8 dried rose petals.

Remove the seeds from the pomegranate and set aside.

For the almond milk

Crush the almonds with the water and leave to stand for 12 hours. Liquidize the mixture, blending it three times until a dry paste forms. Take about 200 g / 7 oz and make into iced powder using a Pacojet. Mix the honey and sugar into the rest of the almond milk (1 l / 4 1/4 cup).

For the rose jelly

Mix the water and rose water, add the xanthan gum and sugar. Use a blender to avoid the formation of lumps. It is then necessary to remove any air by placing it in a vacuum pack. Brunoise the rose petals and add to the jellied liquid.

For the rose-flavored spun sugar

Place the sugar in a candy spinner and spin, then add the crushed, dried rose petals.

To serve

Place the pomegranate seeds on a plate with the rose jelly and the iced powder. Top with the spun sugar. Finally, drizzle the almond milk which will immediately melt the spun sugar and the iced powder.

Preparation time

25 minutes

Cooking time

24 hours for the almond milk

Recommended wine

For a dessert in which the flower and red fruit flavors dominate and in which the main element is almond milk, we have chosen a Nadal 1510 late harvest (2000) (DO Penedès) by Nadal Cava. It is a sweet white made from Macabeo grapes harvested under the effect of "noble rot" (*Botrytis cinerea*) and aged carefully in oak. The low level of acidity, a sugar content slightly higher than that of the dessert, clear floral notes, slight touches of honey, lychee and balsamic touches from the botrytis make it a good match for the almond milk. Then comes a finish of orange blossom and citrus fruits, reminiscent of Alicante-style turrón.

Pomegranate with Muscatel,
citrus confit and eucalyptus ice cream (Granadas con moscatel, cítricos confitados y helado de eucalipto)

An excellent Muscatel brings out the best from this classic dish.

SERVES 4

1 pomegranate; 2 mint leaves; seasonal flowers; 2 cubes (5 x 5 x 5 mm / 0.20 x 0.20 x 0.20 in) arrop i tallaetes (pumpkin in fig syrup).

For the muscatel jelly: 500 ml / 2 1/6 cups Casta Diva Cosecha Miel (Bodegas Gutiérrez de la Vega); 5 g / 1/6 oz xanthan gum.

For the citrus confit: 1 orange; 1 lemon; 1 l / 4 1/4 cup water; 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb sugar.

For the eucalyptus ice cream: 1 l / 4 1/4 cup whole milk; 250 g / 9 oz sugar; 90 g / 3 oz powdered skim milk; 60 g / 2 oz atomized glucose; 40 g / 1 1/2 oz inverted sugar; 10 g / 1/3 oz neutral stabilizer; 80 g / 3 oz eucalyptus leaves; 340 g / 12 oz cream (35% fat); 120 g / 4 1/2 oz egg yolk.

Seed the pomegranate and cut the "arrop i tallaetes" into cubes.

For the muscatel jelly

Add the xanthan gum to the Muscatel and mix until smooth, with no lumps. Some bubbles will appear because one of the qualities of this gelling agent is that it retains air, which can be removed by transferring the mixture to a bowl and placing it in a vacuum pack. This process is best carried out 12 hours in advance so that the xantham gum gels.

For the citrus confit

Blanch the citrus fruits in three changes of water. Make a syrup with the sugar and water and pour over. Confit for at least 24 hours. Drain and cut into cubes.

For the eucalyptus ice cream

Mix the solids (powdered milk, sugar, atomized glucose and stabilizer) and then the liquids (whole milk, inverted sugar, cream and egg yolk). Combine the two mixtures and raise to a temperature of 85°C / 185°F. Remove from the heat and add the eucalyptus leaves. Leave to infuse for about 12 hours. Strain and make into ice cream.

To serve

Add the pomegranate seeds to the Muscatel jelly. Gradually add the flowers (possible autumn flowers might be jasmine, rosemary and nasturtium) and the citrus confit. Cut the mint leaves into julienne strips and add. Finally, top with a quenelle of eucalyptus ice cream.

Preparation time

25 minutes

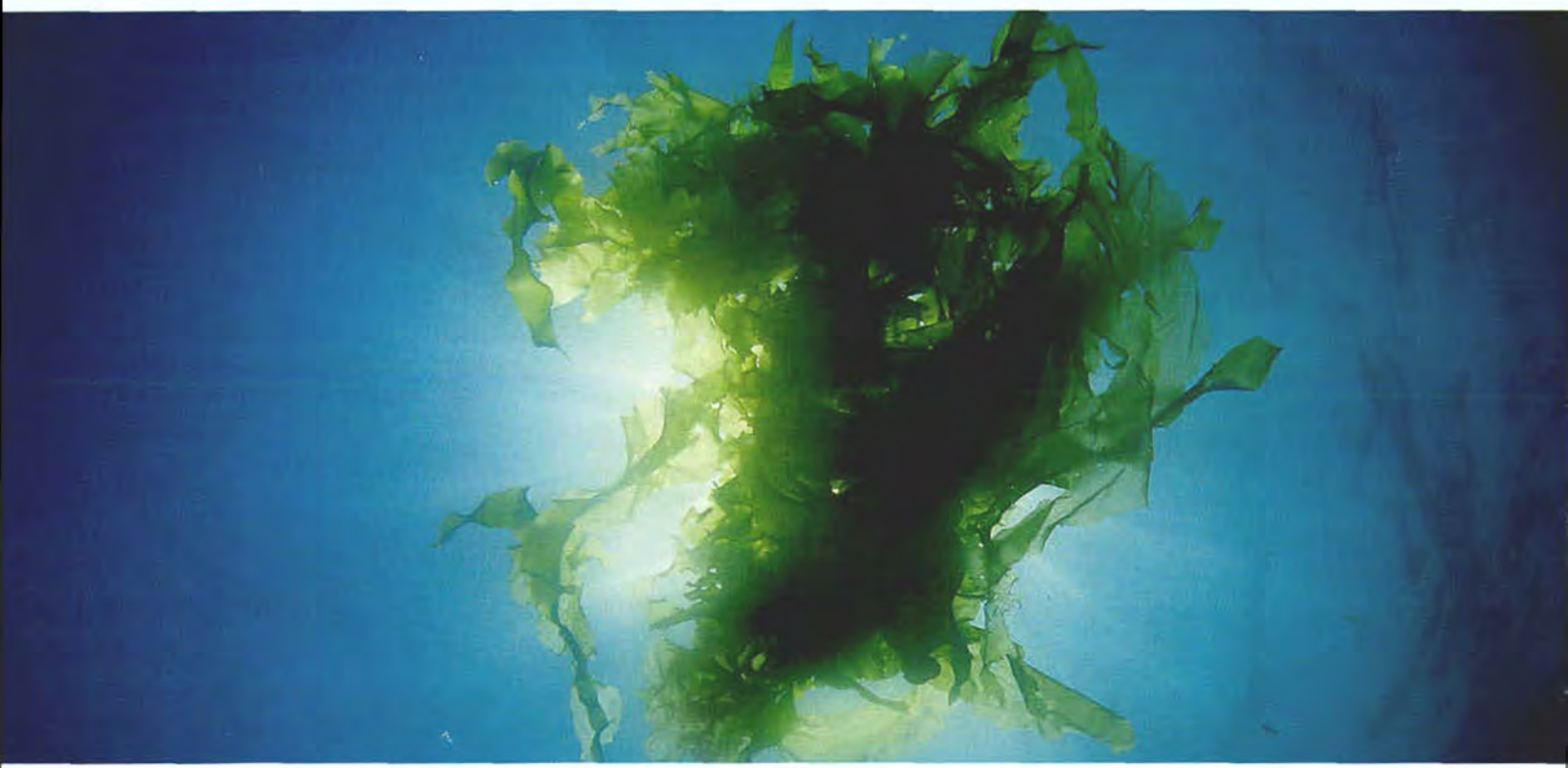
Cooking time

24 hours for the citrus confit

Recommended wine

Casta Diva Cosecha Miel 2005 (DO Alicante) by Bodegas Gutiérrez de la Vega. By choosing the same wine that is included in the ingredients, the aromas and flavors are appreciated twice over, from the spoon and from the glass.

A TASTE OF THE SEA



Porto-Muiños

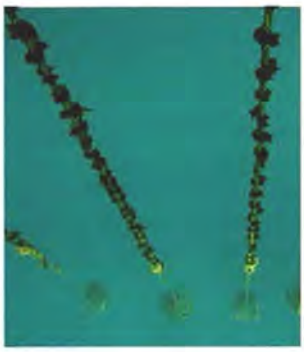
Not so long ago, edible seaweeds were something we associated almost exclusively with oriental cuisine. Now they have started appearing in top-flight European restaurants. More than 600 varieties of algae grow on the Galician coastline in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, just under 20 of which are sold by Antonio Muiños and Rosa Mirás through their company, Porto-Muiños. They have cleverly launched a major informative campaign to educate potential consumers about how to eat them and what their nutritional attributes are.

Text
Almudena Muyo

Translation
Hawys Pritchard

Photos
Porto-Muiños

Sea vegetables. That's what Antonio Muiños likes to call seaweed. We are in a remote part of Spain's northwestern edge, near Cambre (La Coruña) on the Atlantic coast, and Antonio is doing me the honor of showing me his personal "market garden" from which he collects a proportion of the 110 tonnes (242,508 lbs) of seaweed that his company, Porto-Muiños, processes each year. "I don't bring many people here," he admits, concerned that increasing demand and unscrupulous harvesting might exhaust supply. I feel privileged, not only because he clearly thinks I'm trustworthy, but also because I have been lucky enough to come here on a day when the Atlantic is in a benevolent mood and well-behaved. The sea is particularly calm, its waters luminous and they are an intense blue that, but for the cliffs, is reminiscent of another, gentler, sea. Furthermore, the tide is conveniently out. This means that Antonio is able show me, alongside the goose barnacles and mussels attached to habitually wave-battered rocks, seaweeds such as sea lettuce (*Ulva rigida*), "which is harvested by selecting the healthiest, cleanest, most vigorous examples, still attached to the rocks and free of residual sand"; nori (*Porphyra purpurea*), "which awakens from dormancy in spring and then develops spectacularly, later losing its color and dying from too much sunshine and extreme temperatures", and sea spaghetti (*Himantalia elongata*) which "as if by magic, appears in the depths of winter every year and grows at an amazing rate so that by the middle of spring its long ribbons become flavorful, tender and nutritious," and a selection of other varieties still being studied for their commercial potential. He gives me some to try and, indeed, the taste is



One recent result of the research project in which Porto-Muiños is currently engaged in conjunction with the University of La Coruña is that eight new species have been made available to haute cuisine. Meanwhile, research continues regarding their properties and combinations to be applied in home cooking. The new species will join the ranks of the seven already available in the shops, whose organoleptic properties and nutritional and gastronomic attributes are no longer a mystery.

Sea spaghetti
(Himanthalia elongata)

A beautiful and distinctive Atlantic seaweed with strap-like fronds that grows abundantly on tide-washed rocks along clean, wave-battered coasts.

• **Properties:** Its fleshy fronds have a delicate sea flavor, very similar to clams and cockles. It is particularly notable for its high content of vitamin C and assimilable iron.

• **In cooking:** As it comes or dressed with young garlic. It combines very well with rice dishes, pasta and legumes, and is also useful as a garnish for fish and for making soups, fritters, scrambled egg dishes, croquettes, pies, canapés, etc.

Kombu
(Laminaria ochroleuca)

A brown seaweed that grows on clean coasts battered by the Atlantic, where it forms underwater forests. Its palmate blade, divided into several ribbons, grows from a long, thick stem firmly attached to the rocks.

• **Properties:** Its ribbons have a strongly iodized, slightly smoky sea flavor. It is exceptionally abundant in calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, iodine and vitamins B and C.

• **In cooking:** Because of its glutamic acid content, it enhances the flavors of the foods with which it is cooked, and is also a very effective thickener because it contains a great deal of soluble fiber, which is particularly useful for making sauces. It can also be used as a garnish or a layer in meat and fish dishes, for wrapping rice, fish and meat, and it can be incorporated into stews, soups, rice dishes, croquettes and hamburgers. When lightly baked and ground up, it makes a marvelous seasoning.

Sea lettuce
(Ulva rigida)

This blade seaweed adheres to the rocks by means of a little disk, and grows in well-lit, nutrient-rich waters. It is small and bright green in color.

• **Properties:** Thin and cartilaginous, it has a delicate texture when fresh and a flavor suggestive of crustacean seafood. It is very high in protein and also rich in calcium, magnesium, potassium, vitamin C and niacin.

• **In cooking:** It can be dressed in a salad, baked or fried, and makes a good ingredient for sauces, soups, savory purées, legume dishes, croquettes and pies. To enhance its flavor, it can be lightly baked in the oven and then used to wrap up rice with raw or marinated fish.

Sugar kombu
(Laminaria saccharina)

A cold-water species that forms lovely underwater meadows on sandy coasts where the waters are clean and currents are strong.
• **Properties:** Fleshy and slightly crunchy, this is very pleasant to chew and has a characteristic sweetish, mild, marine flavor. It is rich in calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, iodine and vitamins B and C.
• **In cooking:** *Au naturel*, cut into thin strips, this can serve as a good base for a salad. When added to legume-based stews, it enhances flavors and reduces cooking times. Because of its thickening capacity, it also improves texture, a property that makes it very useful in creating sauces.

Irish moss
(Chondrus crispus)

A small, red seaweed, also known as carrageen, that forms extensive, dense colonies on rocks in the low tide zone and the first few meters of the infralittoral zone in areas of the Atlantic exposed to wave activity.
• **Properties:** With its pronounced crustacean flavor, this species is one of those which has a long-known history as a foodstuff for humans. Thick and cartilaginous, it is a source of substances used by the food industry for making thickeners and gelling agents. It is high in proteins, calcium, magnesium, sterols, vitamin A and antibacterial substances.
• **In cooking:** It is used mostly in desserts as a thickener and stabilizer, though once boiled it can also be used to prepare delicious soups, vegetable purées, stews and legume dishes.

Nori
(Porphyra purpurea)

This blade seaweed is very delicate in texture and red or violet in color with a bright metallic sheen. It can be found on the first coastal rocks adjacent to the extensive, clean beaches on the open Atlantic, where the waters are cold, nutrient-rich and turbulent.
• **Properties:** Thin and cartilaginous with a strong marine flavor, this seaweed is notable for its high protein content which can sometimes be 40%. It is also rich in phosphorus, iron, vitamins A, B and C and niacin.
• **In cooking:** Although the blade is very thin it is also quite tough, so it needs to be boiled, baked or fried. When blanched, it makes a visually attractive, flavorful and nutritious addition to fish and seafood soups and a good ingredient for rice, pasta and au gratin dishes, omelettes, vegetable purées, croquettes, pies and jams. If boiled it is frequently used for wrapping rice with raw or marinated fish. Baked or dried and then flaked, it makes a good apéritif, and when ground up, it's a seasoning.

Wakame
(Undaria pinnatifida)

This originally Asian brown seaweed has become naturalized in the waters of Galicia where it grows on shallow rocks battered by waves. This is one of the species most widely used for food.
• **Properties:** With its oyster-like flavor and delicate, slightly crunchy texture, this seaweed is very pleasant to eat. Because of its high glutamic acid content, it works as a powerful flavor enhancer on the foods with which it is combined. It is also rich in proteins, calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, iron, vitamin B and niacin.
• **In cooking:** This is excellent eaten raw and, with dressing, is delicious in a salad. When boiled or sautéed it becomes smooth-textured and turns a lovely dark green color, suggestive of spinach, for which it can serve as a substitute in many recipes. It can also be used as a garnish or layer for seafood, fish and meat dishes, or it can be added to cooking water. It is also a useful ingredient in soups, rice dishes, legume-based stews, pizzas, lasagna, cannelloni, croquettes, pies and bread. Its own flavor is accentuated by baking, after which it makes a delicious apéritif or, ground up, it's a condiment.

make a show of dishes cooked with Porto-Muiños seaweeds on their menus.

In Spain and beyond, Antonio can boast (though he doesn't) that his seaweeds are eaten at the restaurant La Pergola (3 Michelin stars), at the Cavalieri Hilton in Rome and the Cracco Peck (2 Michelin stars) in Milan, thanks to the culinary inventiveness of Heinz Beck and Carlo Cracco. "Heston Blumenthal of the Fat Duck in Bray, Berkshire, in southeast England (3 Michelin stars) has shown a particular interest in seaweed flours for their potential in newly invented dishes," says Rosa. This vote of confidence from the culinary fraternity, combined with placement in leading specialist chains in Italy, France, Greece, Germany and the UK, is reflected in an export quota of 15%. "Looking ahead, the US is our next challenge. We hope to place seaweeds in gourmet shops and to liberate them from the limitations imposed by the health food store niche," she declares in a determined tone.

Night has fallen, so we get into the car and head for Santiago de Compostela, where a concrete expression of this action-packed day awaits us. Marcelo Tejedor is the master of ceremonies: he has put his restaurant, Casa Marcelo (1 Michelin star and situated barely 100 m (328 ft) away from the picturesque Plaza del Obradoiro), at our disposal. We succumb to the delightful dishes he prepared, some of them experimental and "made with seaweeds we brought him this very morning," explains Antonio, and others more familiar, though all of them are amazing. He talks us through each dish and watches for our reactions, "... Especially Antonio's, as he considers him to be an expert and sets great store by his opinion," Rosa explains for my benefit. This comes as no surprise, as Marcelo describes Antonio as "Galicia's seaweed guru". After dinner he joins us at our table and we exchange impressions. By the end of the evening, I find myself coming to the same conclusion that I have heard expressed several times in the course of the day: "Seaweeds have a very distinct personality and you have to learn how to eat them; they contribute new flavors that have to be introduced into dishes with a subtle hand."

Almudena Muyo, *who has over 12 years of journalistic experience covering international trade, is currently editorial co-coordinator of* Spain Gourmetour.

PORTO-MUIÑOS

Date of foundation: 1998

Activity: Harvesting and selling seaweed on the Galician coast in the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, and other products of the sea such as monkfish liver and sea urchin caviar.

Workforce: 6 employees

Turnover for 2006: 806,000 euros

Export quota: 15%

Headquarters: Santa María de Vigo
15659 Cambre – A Coruña
Spain

Tel: (+34) 981 671 224

Fax: (+34) 981 671 547

www.portomuinos.com

muinos@telefonica.net

On the Move

TEXT
CELIA HERNANDO

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

ILLUSTRATION
JAVIER VÁZQUEZ

European launch for KitCream

A little more than a year ago, Esteban Bartolomé and Francisco García, founding partners of KitCream, were finalizing their definitive list of suppliers of organic basic ingredients. Now their organic ice creams–trailblazers in Spain–are already on sale in France's Les Nouveaux Robinson "green" supermarket chain and will soon be available in specialist shops in Portugal and Germany.

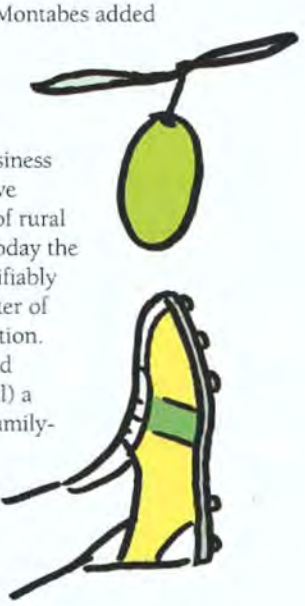
"Although we started off as an artisan ice cream company, we always had our sights set on the organic market." Having surmounted the initial difficulties entailed in assembling a broad portfolio of suitably green Spanish suppliers–"working within the ecological farming network is always more complicated because you are dealing with tiny companies"–they set about creating a repertoire of unconventional flavors. Olive oil, Pedro Ximénez and Jijona-style turrón are a small selection from a list of over 40. Even so, if a client doesn't find what he's after, "we adapt to special requirements," declares Bartolomé happily. Indeed, KitCream has designed exclusive "made-to-measure" ice creams working together with various restaurants and even five Spanish olive oil mills.

Production and sales of organic foodstuffs must comply with EC Council Regulation 2092/91, and the makers of these organic ice creams (sold under the Biocream brand) are proud of their sophisticated, continuous system of traceability monitoring. "Our rigorous system watches over the whole process so we can guarantee that our product is free from transgenics, pesticides, herbicides and other chemical elements," declares Bartolomé. But what this young company is most proud of is the flavor of its ice creams. "If you simply use strawberries instead of adding strawberry flavoring agents and colorants, the end result speaks for itself!"

In addition to its green principles, which are soon to be extended to producing ice creams for vegans and celiac sufferers, KitCream observes the essential tenets of Corporate Social Responsibility and works in conjunction with several local NGOs. Some of its staff come from *Plataforma sin barreras* (Platform without barriers), a scheme for integrating disabled people into the workplace. "Making the best ice cream in the world is all very well and good, but what's the point unless your company is social responsible?" he concludes.

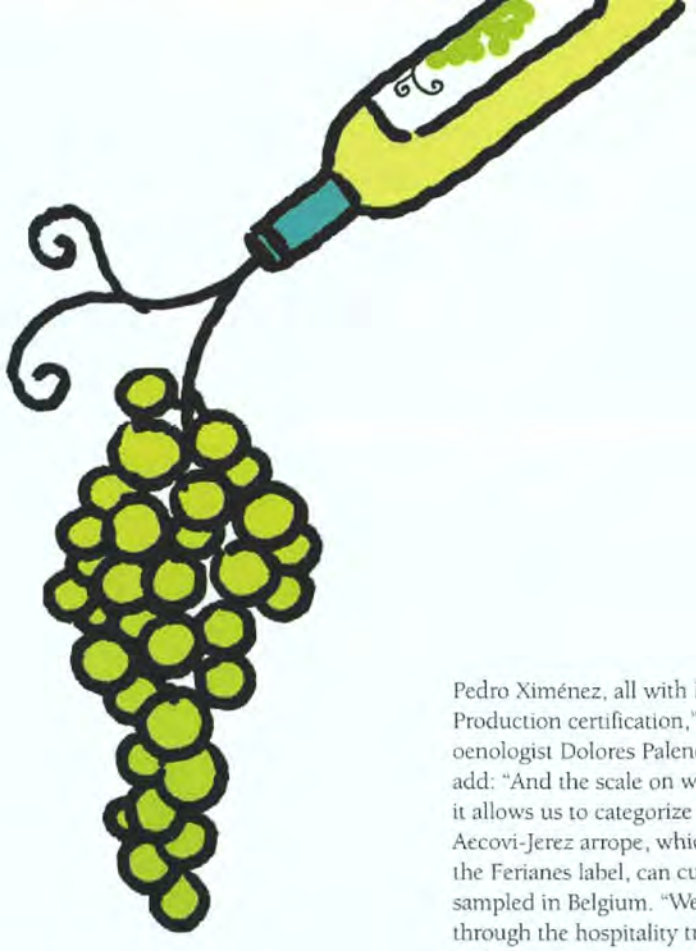
Date of foundation: 2004
Activity: Ice cream production and sales
Workforce: 9 employees
Turnover for 2006: 900,000 euros
www.biocream.es

Monva opens shop in Brazil



When Francisco José Montabes added 50,000 olive trees to his Sierra Mágina estate in the 1980s, few were convinced that it was a viable business venture. Yet events have proved this visionary of rural Andalusia right, and today the Jaén province can justifiably claim to be the epicenter of world olive oil production. Even producing around 800,000 l (211,337 gal) a year, Monva is still a family-run company.

"Despite that, our size has never been an obstacle to selling abroad," declares the founder's son and export director Luis. "Working through our distribution company, Comova, we started in Japan and now have a presence in Korea, the US, Canada, Mexico, Switzerland, China



and, more recently, Brazil, where we hope our oil's market position in specialist shops will open other commercial doors for us."
Monva, which still upholds its founding principles, is ranked alongside the world's top producers of estate-produced extra virgin olive oil. "We're the opposite of what my father used to call 'oil traffickers', meaning those big dealers who buy their olives elsewhere," states Luis. The company's entire production originates exclusively from its groves on the Virgen de los Milagros estate, deep in the Sierra Mágina Natural Park from which the designation of origin takes its name. "It's a privileged environment that provides the perfect altitude conditions for growing Picual olives, the DO's predominant variety."
This company's olive oil, which is 100% extra virgin, is sold under three different brand names: Montabes, Vallemágina and Dóminus. Dóminus is an oil for committed gourmets: the label is used only for oil that wins DO Sierra Mágina's most prestigious award, the Alcuza Prize. "We came in first in the last competition, but we've also won it before in 2000 and 2006," Luis informs us proudly. "Given the standard of competition, need I say more?"

Date of foundation: 1972
Activity: Processing DO Sierra Mágina extra virgin olive oil of the Picual variety
Workforce: 35 employees
Turnover for 2006: 3.5 million euros
Export quota: 50%
www.monva.es / www.comova.es

Aecovi-Jerez grape syrup goes international

There can be few products with such a long history as *arrope* (grape must syrup). We know that in Ancient Rome it was customary for grape juice to be subjected to a long, slow cooking process lasting for days to obtain a syrup that served as a powerful natural preservative for fruit. Although this type of reduced must syrup survived down the centuries in various Mediterranean cultures, its presence seems to have become more tenuous with the approach of modern times. After several years of research, the Andalusian cooperative Aecovi-Jerez has now rescued it from oblivion and wants the whole world to know how delicious it is. "It's perceived as a strange, exotic product in many countries, but that translates into a competitive advantage these days when such value is attached to authenticity and specific provenance," explains the sales director, Juan González. Attractive quarter liter bottles (0.07 gal) are to be accompanied by a range of recipe books to show international consumers the enormous versatility of arrope, an essentially sweet sauce with a zing of bitterness and acidity. "We make it from the grape varieties traditional to the sherry region: Palomino, Muscatel and Pedro Ximénez, all with Integrated Production certification," stresses oenologist Dolores Palencia, going on to add: "And the scale on which we produce it allows us to categorize it as artisan."
Aecovi-Jerez arrope, which is sold under the Ferianes label, can currently be sampled in Belgium. "We're selling it through the hospitality trade channel and in delicatessens. Our target customer is sophisticated, cultured, has a high disposable income and enjoys experimenting with new ingredients when cooking." Aecovi-Jerez capitalized on the Spanish Wine Cellar & Pastry 2007 Fair to promote it in the US and will soon be doing so again at the New York Fancy Food Show.
Along with Ferianes arrope, the Aecovi-Jerez cooperative–to which over 1,000 small grape-growers belong, accounting for 20% of the total area under vine in the Cádiz province–also sells the various wine types covered by DO Jerez (fino, amontillado, oloroso, cream muscatel and Pedro Ximénez), DO Sanlúcar de Barrameda manzanilla and sherry vinegar.

Date of foundation: 1989
Activity: R&D projects, technical support for growers, sales
Workforce: 11 employees
Turnover for 2006: 3 million euros
www.aecovi-jerez.com

De luxe Orgániko chocolate

"Chic organic chocolate." Carlos Ortiz and Eugenia Pozo, founding partners of Chocolate Orgániko, scanned the shelves of many shops for a product matching this description, without success. "We realized that we'd spotted a very attractive

gap in the market and just had to fill it," explains Carlos. The fact that their professional experience had hitherto been in the advertising world did not stand in their way. "We took a few courses and then opened our chocolate factory in Madrid in January 2006." Two years later, these new master chocolatiers' unconventional designs are on sale at Metro shops in Germany and London's prestigious Fortnum and Mason. Meanwhile, they have just sealed a distribution deal in Portugal with the Solinca Group's Porto Palace Hotel Congress and Spa, and with the Spa Well Domus (both in Porto).
They believe that the secret of their success is "the combination of a quality product and eye-catching packaging." Their chocolates and sweets are made entirely of organic raw materials. "The cacao, honey, even the rosemary and cinnamon we use in our truffles–they're all organic," they insist. And the packaging design is up to standard with the contents: chocolate "laminae" are packed in vivid, slickly-designed wrappers, while their spiced truffles are presented in cylindrical tins. Each of these own-label creations has won various international awards for Spain. "We won the Great Taste Awards prize at the most recent edition of Specialty Foods Fair in London and our rosemary chocolate truffle won an award at the German fair Anuga." Their international career looks very promising indeed.

Date of foundation: 2006
Activity: Organic chocolate production
Workforce: 4 employees
Turnover for 2006: 45,000 euros
Export quota: 55%
www.chocolateorganiko.es

Morocco welcomes Soria Natural

The pristine environment surrounding the town of Soria, located in the central northern part of the Iberian Peninsula, provided the inspiration for setting up Soria Natural, a company devoted to producing and selling organic foodstuffs and natural medicines. Twenty-five years on, the company, which still upholds its original principles, has added a new market to its portfolio: Morocco. It has signed an exclusive distribution contract to establish its Soria Natural Golden Class franchise scheme there, starting with Casablanca, Rabat and Marrakech. As well as selling Soria Natural products, the establishments involved will also offer sophisticated beauty treatments.
"Morocco has a stable macroeconomy and has invested in its infrastructures, so that the logistics of distributing our products there are now perfectly feasible," explains the export director Tito Hermasanz. "What's more, the terms of this agreement enable us to place the majority of our products in the Moroccan market." The name Soria Natural encompasses different divisions: Soria Natural (medicinal herbs), Homeosor (medicines) and Aecosor (organic foodstuffs).
Soria Natural owns over 180 ha (444.8 acres) of organic crop growing land situated 1,200 m (3,936 ft) above sea level, in one of the most rural, and therefore cleanest, regions of Spain. "This area's extreme continental climate imposes a very short cycle on vegetable crops," he explains, "and this enhances concentration of the plants' active ingredients." An R&D laboratory adjacent to the growing area processes the varied range of products that are currently exported to herbalists, pharmacies and organic establishments in over 20 countries. Mexico, Belgium, Germany, Portugal and the US are Soria Natural's principal markets.

Date of foundation: 1982
Activity: Growing, producing and selling organic and natural medicinal products
Workforce: 350 employees
Turnover for 2006: 35 million euros
Export quota: 15%
www.sorianatural.es

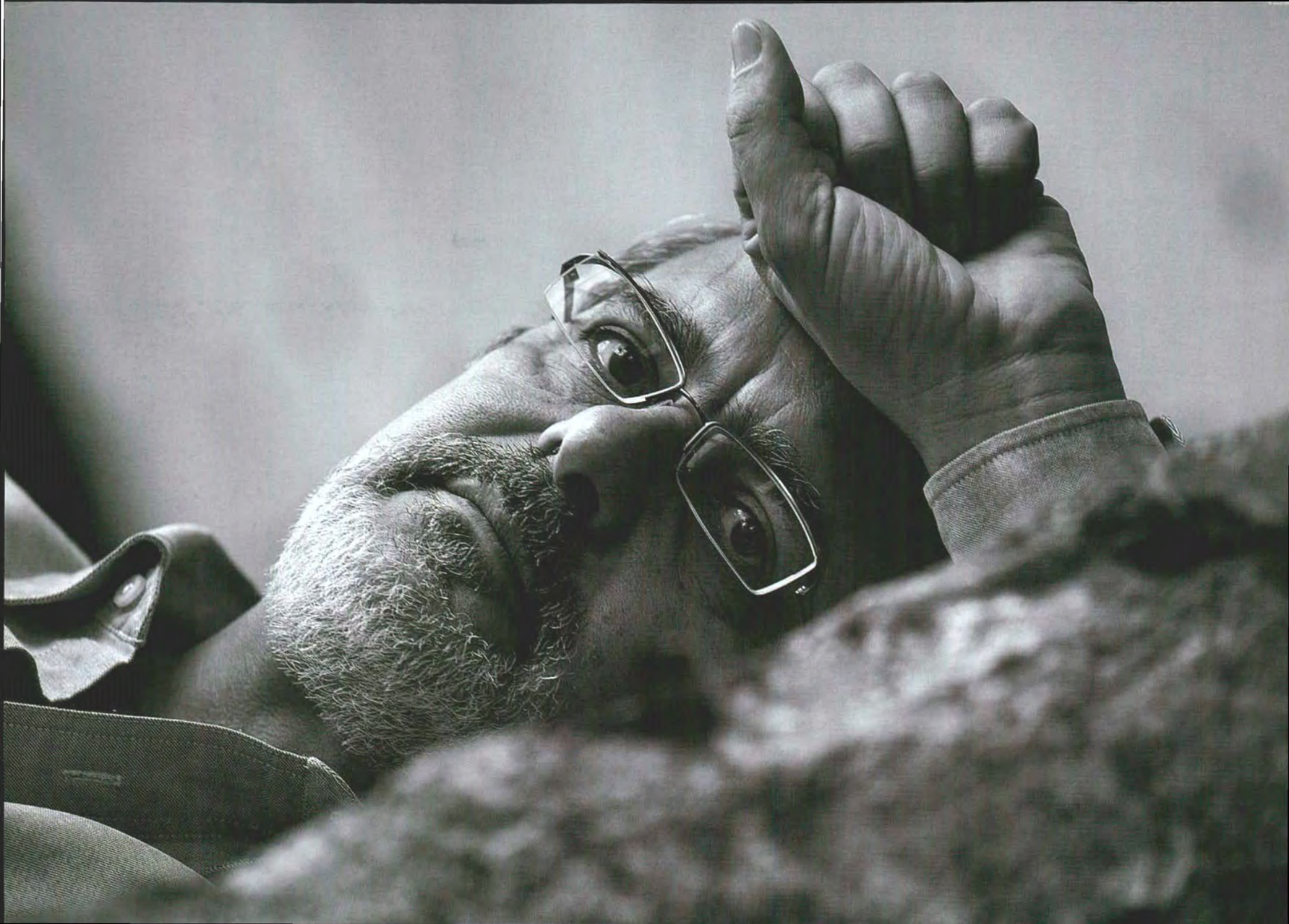
More news
www.spaingourmetour.com

COMIDA

Sergio Volturo, Cultural Advisor

Calabria-born Sergio Volturo has lived in Spain since 1995. An expert in design, though not a designer, he describes himself as a cultural advisor. After studying philosophy in Milan, he worked in the marketing and communications field for big Italian companies such as ENI and Italcementi. He was then appointed director of the Madrid branch of the Istituto Europeo di Design (a private design school founded in Italy in 1966), a job at which he remained for ten years. Later, he opened La Casa Prestada, a restaurant, cultural hub and bar all in one. He is currently head of Madrid's Matadero Design Center, a multidisciplinary space devoted to art sponsored by the city council in conjunction with other public and private bodies. In parallel, Sergio also works for Orphanage Africa, an NGO of which he is president of the Spanish delegation.

Spanish at Heart



Our conversation takes place in a former *matadero* (abattoir), a complex of several buildings occupying a 187,500 square yard (156, 773 m²) site beside the Manzanares River that would have been on the outskirts of Madrid when it was built in 1925. Now it is in the process of being cleverly restored: beams and walls have been left stripped, exposing the original iron and brick. "New elements have been added without altering the identity of the buildings. Spaces can sometimes be ruined by too much modernity. This happens when new materials are allowed to take over to such an extent that they destroy the spirit of the place. The results may be aesthetically beautiful, but they're cold–lots of glass, lots of metal, lots of Design with a capital D. Design should contribute soul to things rather than taking it away."

The abattoir is being turned into a complex whose purpose is to foster creativity in such areas as architecture, theater, visual arts, music, literature and design. As for design, a generous space is to be allocated for exhibitions and for training, initially in graphic design and then extending to industrial design and corporate identity, the idea being to make these services available to companies in the future. The Madrid Association of Designers (DIMAD) is very actively involved in the project and was, in fact, responsible for proposing the appointment of an expert such as Sergio Volturo to run it.

"There's another facet of design that I'd like to initiate here, too: "food design", a concept that's very widespread in Italy but of which there's very little awareness in Spain, so there's an enormous potential market for it." Food design is an umbrella term that covers a very wide field, ranging from the look of food and the containers in which it comes to the places where it is eaten (shops, restaurants...) and all the related elements in between: labels, menus, cutlery, crockery, furniture, kitchen equipment, staff clothing, etc. "Nowadays, we don't just eat with our palates, we eat with all the other senses too," declares Sergio. This inevitably brings up the name Ferrán Adrià, the first Spanish chef to describe the act of eating as a sensory experience (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 10) and who this year took part in Documenta Kassel (the international contemporary art show), triggering a debate about whether his cooking qualifies as art or not.

"The Adrià-Kassel controversy is all very Spanish. Other countries aren't so dogmatic about what is art and what isn't. I have an open mind about it, though I would say that haute cuisine is more like design

TEXT
CARLOS TEJERO

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD

PHOTOS
PABLO NEUSTADT/ICEX

than art. It involves the same creative process: knowing your ingredients (or materials), knowing how to harmonize them and present them in an aesthetically pleasing way, but never losing sight of the fact that, in design, as in cooking, the whole point is to fulfill a function. Artists can afford the luxury of being provocative, while designers and cooks cannot. Of course one can think of examples of designers who have become artists and occasionally of artists becoming designers, but there is a fundamental difference: art is unfettered, and as such it does not need an objective; design, on the other hand, has to be functional, it has to be useful. A logo has to do its bit to make a product known, a table has to have the attributes of both beauty and utility because, when all's said and done, it's a product that has to hold its own in the marketplace. Design has limits–aesthetic and cultural, but functional ones too–and these are imposed by the market. In design, the question: "Do I like it or not?" is unimportant; the relevant question is: "Does it work or not?" Confronted with a machine or tool, few of us will have much to say about its design, but show us a drawing or illustration and we all have an opinion. Is graphic design the Cinderella of the design world, perhaps? "It is in a way, because people don't know enough about it. They think that graphic design consists of merely drawing something, a logo for example, about which they all feel qualified to give an opinion according to their own aesthetic standards. But there's more to graphic design than that. As Manuel Estrada puts it, design isn't just the icing on the cake. Behind every logo there's a whole communication concept upon which a company's corporate identity depends... now that's important!"

Positive energy

Sergio finds Spain's energy and drive very attractive: the nation's economic growth is reflected in various aspects of creativity, among them graphic design, food and architecture. This is thanks largely to a can-do attitude on behalf of both private enterprise and public bodies, who are prepared to take risks as clients. The Agbar Tower in Barcelona and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao are good examples of this. This kind of energy contrasts with the stagnation affecting other European countries where "...they've lost the nerve to undertake spectacular projects. In Italy, the policy is to leave things as they are on the grounds that everything is historical and monumental, but as a result there's no innovation. The only interesting building to have gone up in the last 20 years is the Fiera Milano Congress Center."

"You (the Spanish) may not be aware of it, but the world is starting to talk about a 'Spanish model'. What this is referring to is clout, social energy and economic growth being cleverly combined with a good quality of life–this doesn't happen in most well-off countries. Let me give you an example: statistically, Andalusia is one of the poorest regions in Western Europe, but when you go there you find good restaurants, good services and infrastructure, *joie de vivre*... I love going to Trujillo or Segovia or Cuenca on the weekend and seeing how people stay up all night enjoying themselves until seven in the morning! You don't find that anywhere else."

This same dynamism is also reflected in design, though so far Italy still leads the way in such areas as industrial and fashion design. "Italy is the country of design because it has been historically 'infected' by so many cultures; it is crammed with art and as a result, aesthetic taste is embedded in its society. But an additional factor is that, after World War II, Italian business realized that there was more to design than the merely decorative. In Italy, design was business-driven rather than the other way around because businessmen understood what a vital element it was in marketing and image."

Marketing–the exam that Spanish companies never quite manage to pass! "Spain has very good products but it doesn't know how to get the message across." Sergio has put his finger on something that is easy to spot when shopping in the smart food shops of London, Paris and New York. "In Italy, the food industry realized many years ago the crucial importance of packaging. If you go there you'll find a hundred stunningly designed bottles of olive oil–which, by the way, are often from Spain. Spanish cheeses have practically no packaging. But having said all that, there has been some progress in these last few years, especially in the wine sector for which marvelous labels have been created by graphic designers such as Alberto Corazón, Oscar Mariné and Isidro Ferrer, among others."

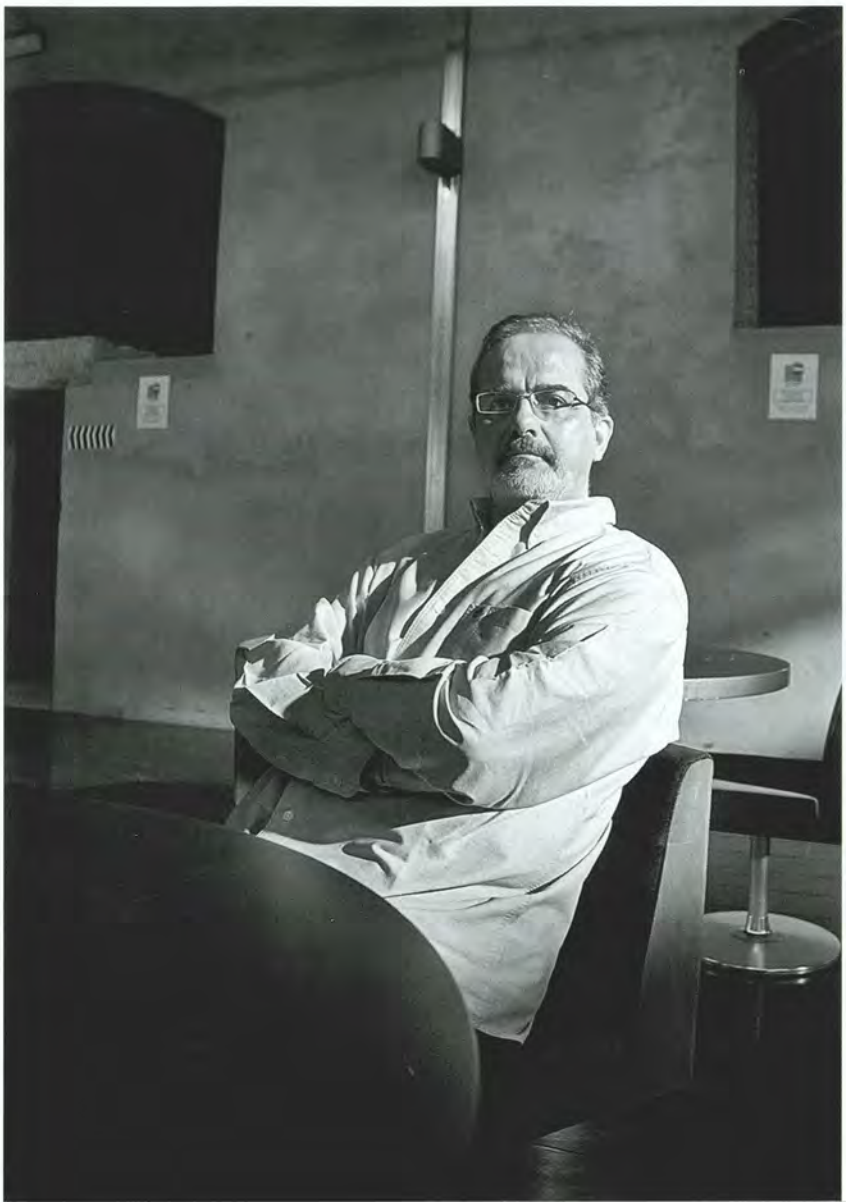
Sergio loves Madrid. "At this point in time, it's one of the most tolerant cities in the world. A six-foot-four drag queen can go into a café and the waiter will serve him without batting an eyelid, just like any other customer. In Milan, they'd call the *carabinieri*! I lived there for 30 years and yet I consider myself more *Madrileño* than Milanese. I feel more comfortable here. Other foreigners that I know say the same. The cliché that Madrid is quick to integrate all sorts of people really is true.

"And then, of course, the food is so good, though that's true of the country as a whole." Sergio is something of a hedonist and appreciates life's pleasures. Good food and wine are an essential element in his approach to life. "I love *cocido madrileño* (Madrid's answer to *pot au feu*, eaten as sequential courses) and the whole ritual that goes with it, and also game, which we've lost in Italy because everything has become so urbanized. Galicia's fish and seafood are spectacular. They treat fish very simply in Galician cooking, which is similar to the Italian way, so I like it. The average quality and freshness of products in Spain is very good wherever you go. The same is true of house wine in restaurants. And as for prices: you can get a good lunch-of-the-day for 15 euros here. You wouldn't find that anywhere else in Europe.

"One thing you haven't got in Spain, though, is decent boiled ham." This leads the conversation into controversial territory. "As for cured ham, I prefer Parma to Serrano, though I must admit that acorn-fed Ibérico is unbeatable. Don't export it!" he warns ironically. "Once the Chinese find out about it there'll be none left for the rest of us!

"What do I like least about Spain? An expression that you never hear in Italy: 'It can't be done'. The spirit of enterprise is still very underdeveloped in Spain. An Italian company is making a fortune out of selling nails in China, simply by flavoring the nailheads with lemon, strawberry and so on (it is common practice for workers to hold nails in their mouths as they work). This sort of bright idea, with the readiness to take the risks that it implies, is encountered more frequently in Italy than in Spain. Perhaps it's a question of character: Spaniards are too serious and the Italians are more laid-back. We live in a fast-moving world and there just isn't time to think about things too much. That's why the Spanish miss opportunities: they don't commit to a business venture until they've dotted all the i's and crossed all the t's. That's not the Italian way. Of course, many businessmen do go broke, but then get back on their feet again and start another business. If a businessman fails in Spain, he probably won't try again."

Journalist ***Carlos Tejero*** *is editorial coordinator of www.spaingourmetour.com.*



LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Combina tu cocina (Combine your cooking) by Asier Abal, Rubén Trincado, Juan Pablo Bassi and Edorta Lamo. Spanish. Four chefs prove to be better than one in this collaborative, instructive and clever cookbook which brings together the Basque Country's finest. Each chef selects one ingredient and offers a series of four recipes with varying levels of difficulty. Then one creation from each chef's selection of four is chosen and combined into a final recipe, one of which is grilled scallops with paprika bread, sautéed wild asparagus and cauliflower soup. In addition to the wonderful photographs, the final recipe pages also include an "Other Possibilities" section with alternative combinations and ingredients. Combat day-to-day monotony in your kitchen and get experimenting with these 320 recipes where the operative word is "combine". *(Ediciones Ttarttalo S.L., ttarttalo@ttarttalo.com, oihana@ttarttalo.com)*

Flores: aromas nuevos en tu cocina (Flowers: new aromas in your kitchen) by Carlos D. Cidón. Spanish. Recently-cut rose petals, magnolias, jasmine, violets, dandelions–these are just a few of the ingredients that should be on hand in your kitchen, according to renowned chef, Carlos Cidón (1 Michelin star). Add an exotic and surprising touch to many dishes, wines and liqueurs with edible flowers. In addition to their unusual aromas and flavors, they also provide an attractive visual quality to our food. From fresh asparagus with lavender mayonnaise to chocolate sponge cake with rhubarb, tomato sauce and daisy ice cream, it's clear that if you add a little flower power to your cooking, there's no telling what novel and delicious dish you may make. *(Editorial Everest, S.A. www.everest.es, info@everest.es)*

Gastronomía saludable (Healthy gastronomy) by Rafael Ansón and Gregorio Varela. Spanish. In this book two very important concepts come together: dietetics and gastronomy. With an extensive overview of the world of food, chapters include a wealth of information on everything from dieting, energy and nutrition and food groups to obesity, nutritional content labels, special diets for people with health problems and much more. Enjoy the 60 low-calorie, high-quality recipes from Juan Mari Arzak, Martín Berasategui and Santi Santamaría and savor the grilled monkfish with clams or the partridge stew, not to mention the healthy spins on traditional favorites like Asturian fabada and cocido from Madrid. There's no better book which helps readers understand the importance of a healthy and balanced diet that's also nutritional and tasty. *(Editorial Everest, S.A., www.everest.es, info@everest.es)*

Text
Samara Kamenecka

Un paseo gastronómico por España (A culinary trip through Spain). Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish. Clearly a country comprised of diverse regions such as Andalusia, Aragón, the Canary Islands and the Basque Country has developed a complex culinary art. Diverse climactic conditions and the different needs of different areas over time have given rise to different culinary customs. This book provides an extremely thorough look at all of the regions and what sets them apart through recipes, photos and very detailed information. From the tapas culture, migas, ajoarriero and hunting in the Pyrenees in Aragón to Galicia's orujo, albariño, empanadas, oysters and octopus, this book offers a luscious look at Spain and its culinary wonders. (*Tandem Verlag GmbH, www.tandem-verlag.de; Culinaria Könemann*)

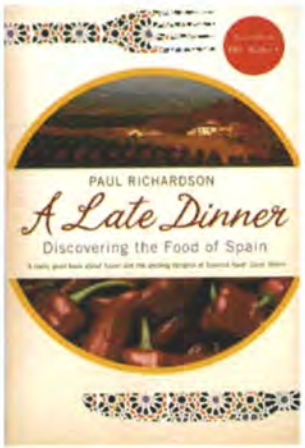
Arquitectura y cultura del vino II, bodegas de Castilla La Mancha (The architecture and culture of wine II, wineries in Castile-La Mancha) by Diego Peris Sánchez. Spanish. The vineyard is the immortal soul of Castile-La Mancha. Its 600,000 hectares (1,482,632 acres) not only comprise the region's landscape, but play a vital role in the area's history and culture. Today the sector in Castile-La Mancha is more dynamic, modern and prestigious than ever, and this book offers an overview of wine and its culture, going beyond the physical walls of the bodegas to look at how it has shaped a social movement, a distinct business culture and the development of the area. Organized by designation of origin and by winery, learn about the evolution of the sector, from technology to marketing and from Almansa to Valdepeñas. (*Editorial Munilla-Léria, munillaleria@jazzfree.com*)

elBulli desde dentro, biografía de un restaurante (elBulli from the inside, biography of a restaurant) by Xavier Moret. Spanish. elBulli, sacred temple on Cala Montjoi in Girona, home to the most famous, influential and admired chef in all the world: Ferrán Adrià. Pick up this book and find out about the man behind the apron, why people wait years for a reservation and how what appears to be just another restaurant on the beach has become a cutting-edge institution in global gastronomic research. Embark on this chronological and sentimental journey about the restaurant and all of its chefs, past and present, filled with anecdotes and stories which make up the locale's history, and get a taste of the new culinary language from the genius who wrote it. (*RBA Libros, S.A., rba-libros@rba.es, www.rbalibros.com*).

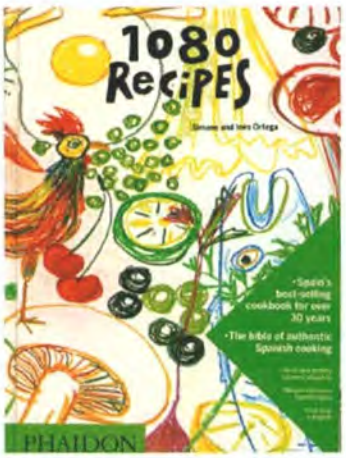
La Rioja, paisajes gastronómicos (La Rioja, gastronomic landscapes). Spanish. La Rioja's gastronomy has been a fundamental element in forging its unique character and identity. Its gastronomy is tied to the land from which it comes, changing like the seasons as time goes by and wise from inheriting culinary traditions over the years. Here, 13 young and influential Riojan chefs regale us with their recipes, like Fernando Andrés and his sea bass stuffed with large red prawns, pumpkin cream and saffron, and Pedro Masip and his venison with apples. With recipes, photos and information on La Rioja, this book proves that the region is much more than wine country–it has an exceptional variety and quality of food. (*Gobierno de La Rioja, Consejería de Agricultura y Desarrollo Económico, publicaciones@larioja.org, www.larioja.org/publicaciones*).

Las mejores pizzas del mundo (The best pizzas in the world) by Fabián Martín. Spanish. You've eaten them a million times, but you've never eaten one quite like this. Meet Fabián Martín, the man who is revolutionizing the world of pizzas. Officially considered to be the best pizza-maker on the planet, he's the winner of the World's Greatest Gourmet Pizza Award in New York, not to mention the International pizza dough acrobatics champion in 2006.
With his book you too can be part of the fun. Martín has come up with a universal recipe, a paradigm for gastronomic simplicity for a dish which has reached new heights in terms of quality culinary innovation. It's where non-conformity and creativity come together in a new concept in pizza.
They say you can't reinvent the wheel, but he sure has come a long way from tomato sauce and cheese. Try any of his "traditional" recipes for instant success in the kitchen: Ibérico ham, ham and cheese, spinach, capers and anchovies or tuna. Or take a walk on the wild side with his more unusual dishes which feature everything from flowers to edible gold to truffles, not to mention toppings like garlic and leek, kiwi and bananas or chocolate pizza and pizza fondue.
From insiders tips for making different types of bases, to calzones, sauces and a short selection of additional recipes, Martín shows that the possibilities are endless if you have some flour, water and an open mind. *(Editorial Planeta, S.A., www.editorial.planeta.es, www.planeta.es)*

Aloña [solo pintxos] (Aloña [just pintxos]) by Javier Urroz. Spanish. Pintxos, with "tx", are more than just a snack to tide you over until the next meal; on the contrary, they are extremely exclusive form of gastronomic expression and nobody does it better than Aloña Berri de Gos, Spain's best pintxos bar according to the *Gourmetour Guide 2006* and winner of countless awards in local and national competitions.
The story behind the bar's 20 years in existence is told through its most well-known pintxos, 80 recipes which shed light on this legendary Mecca in San Sebastian and its unique "haute bar cuisine".
The book is divided into 3 sections: Zarra (Classic), Berri (Modern) and Sormen (Cutting-edge), and the creations pay homage to traditional Basque cuisine, but at the same time are prepared with just the right touch of modernity, creating a symphony of balanced flavors. From the cream of peas with yogurt flan and eggplant to the foie and strawberry millefeuille or goats' cheese with nuts and quince jelly to the sea urchin, each dish is a gem of high-quality gastronomic design. Aloña is a true trendsetter for this type of cuisine, reinventing it on a day-to-day basis and doing nothing less than setting the benchmark in the sector. With a wine and coffee list, elaboration and presentation instructions, special hints and a recommended wine for each recipe, Jose Ramón Elizondo and Kontxi Bereciartúa, the masterminds behind Aloña, show that good things really do come in small packages. *(Cre & Com S.L., gastromapa@euskalnet.net)*



A late dinner, discovering the food of Spain by Paul Richardson. English. Like so many people before him, Paul Richardson initially left the UK and came to Spain for a visit, until he ended up moving there. He was so taken by the culinary culture that today, an acclaimed food and travel writer, he has written a book about his experiences on the peninsula. At the heart of his love affair with Spain is Spanish food, and understandably so. Spain offers a rich mix of gastronomic traditions all over the country, many of which he documents here. He discusses the dramatic changes that have taken place in the nation during the last 25 years, reveals the fascinating fusion of old and new within Spain's culinary world, ponders how it has shaped a truly diverse culture and contemplates how it has transformed Spain with time. Almost like picking up someone's diary, this book, complete with a glossary, offers a journey around the country, an in-depth and well-informed firsthand account of one of Spain's many unique characteristics, a story which he tells through personal and personable anecdotes and adventures in a truly hilarious and fantastically observant style all his own.
From the traditional to the most avant-garde, from the pig slaughter to the fish auction, from Cádiz to Barcelona and from typical Spanish coastal cuisine to shepard's cooking in the mountains, Richardson's book goes beyond "paella, oranges and gazpacho" to give the true low down on Spanish cuisine.
(Bloomsbury Publishing, www.bloomsbury.com/paulrichardson)



1080 recipes, by Simone and Inés Ortega. English, Spanish. Into every kitchen there must come a book which changes the way food is cooked, which transforms the way meals are made. This is that book. Simply put, *1080 recipes* is nothing short of the authentic Spanish cooking bible. While the popularity of Spanish food has gone through the roof and all the world raves about Spanish cuisine, and rightfully so, those cutting-edge and innovative recipes are all based on traditional ones–that's right–good, wholesome, simple, straightforward, healthy, classic recipes.
This masterpiece is the work of a legend in the sector, Simone Ortega who, with five decades of experience under her belt, is considered to be the foremost authority on traditional Spanish cooking. The book, originally published more than 30 years ago as a collection of her homemade creations, today is Spain's best-selling cookbook, and has been for the last three decades with roughly millions of copies sold, making it something of a staple in more than a few households.
With recipes from every Spanish region and chapters including appetizers, sauces, stews and soups, legumes, vegetable and mushroom dishes, eggs, flan and souffles, shellfish, meat, poultry, game, fish and desserts, as well as a selection of recipes of Spanish or Spanish-inspired dishes from international chefs, insider's cooking tips, a list of places to buy high-quality Spanish products around the world and a recipe index, it's impossible to ask for anything more in a cookbook. 1080 recipes,1080 satisfied stomachs. *(Phaidon Press, www.phaidon.com,)*

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ADINDEX

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Page: 4

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Page: 7

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Page: 11

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Page: 154

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Page: 147

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Page: 8

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Page: 9

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Page: 15

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Page: 12

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Page:6

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Page: 13

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Page: 15

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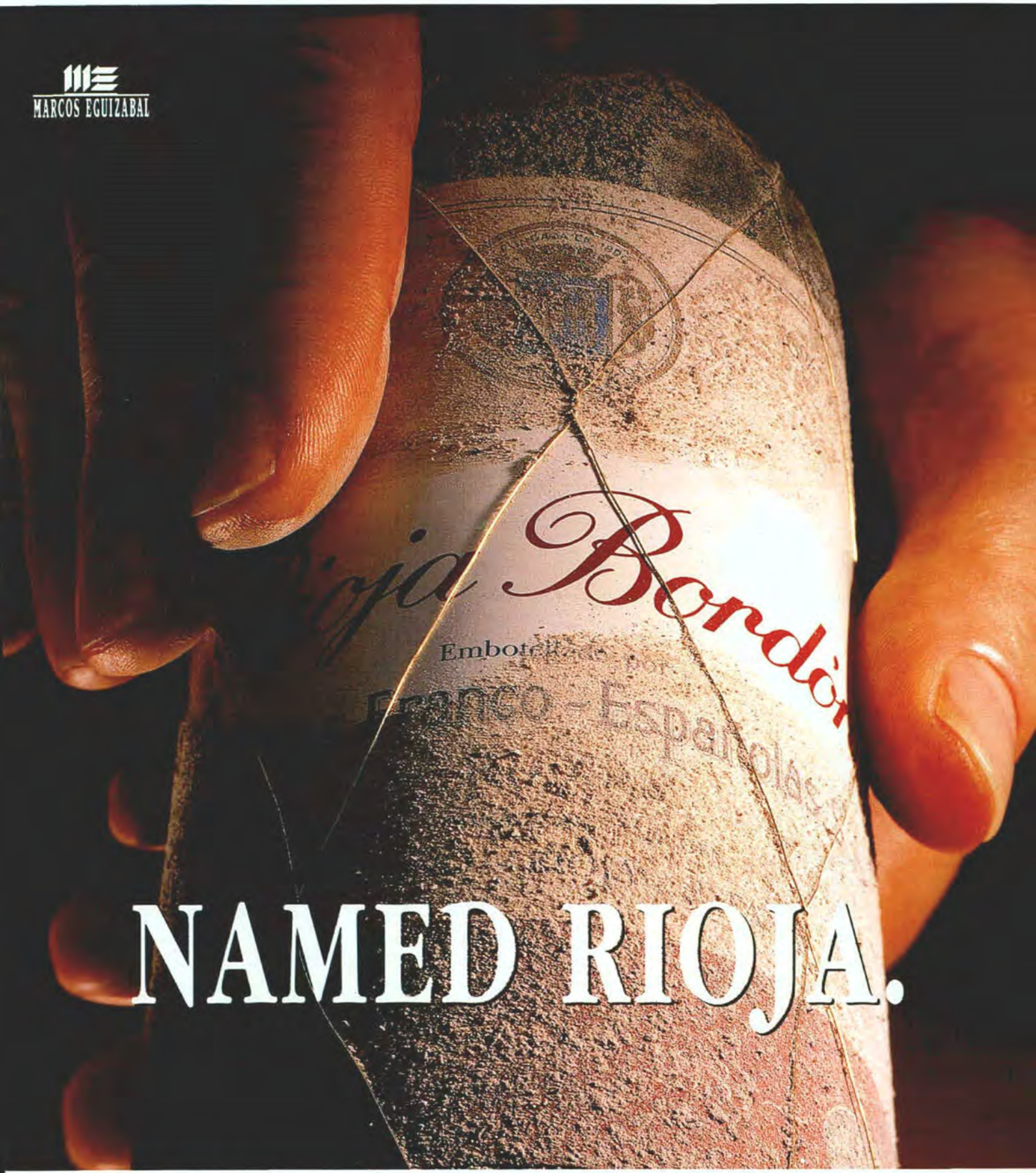

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Contents

p. 2 Toya Legido and Tomás Zarza/ICEX
p. 3 From top to bottom: Toya Legido and Tomás Zarza/ICEX; Fernando Madariaga/ICEX; Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX; Bodegas O. Fournier; Toya Legido and Tomás Zarza/ICEX

Olive Oil Cuisine

p. 16 – 35 Toya Legido and Tomás Zarza/ICEX

Spanish Roots Abroad

p. 36 – 41 Bodegas O. Fournier

High Times in Bierzo

p. 42 – 45 Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX
p. 46 Top: Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX. Bottom: Juan Ramón Yuste/ICEX
p. 47 Juan Ramón Yuste/ICEX
p. 48 – 51 Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX
p. 52 From left to right: Miguel Sánchez and Puri Lozano / ICEX; Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX
p. 53 Map: Javier Belloso

Vías Verdes

p. 54 – 63 Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX
p. 64 Toya Legido/ICEX
p. 65 – 67 Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX
p. 68 Map: Javier Belloso
p. 69 – 71 Juan Manuel Sanz/ICEX

ICEX Gastronomy Internship Program

p. 72 – 83 Fernando Madariaga/ICEX

Tasting Tapas in Zaragoza

p. 84 – 89 Fernando Madariaga/ICEX
p. 90 From left to right: Turespaña/ICEX; Fernando Madariaga/ICEX
p. 92 – 97 Fernando Madariaga/ICEX
p. 98 Map: Javier Belloso
p. 99 Fernando Madariaga/ICEX

Pomegranates

p. 100 – 110 Toya Legido and Tomás Zarza/ICEX
p. 111 Pablo Neustadt/ICEX
p. 112 Toya Legido and Tomás Zarza/ICEX
p. 113 Map: Javier Belloso

Recipes

p. 114 – 115 Tomás Zarza/ICEX
p. 116 – 125 Toya Legido/ICEX

Porto-Muiños

p. 126 – 132 Porto-Muiños

Business Watch

p. 133 – 135 Illustration: Javier Vázquez

Spanish at Heart

p. 136 – 140 Pablo Neustadt/ICEX

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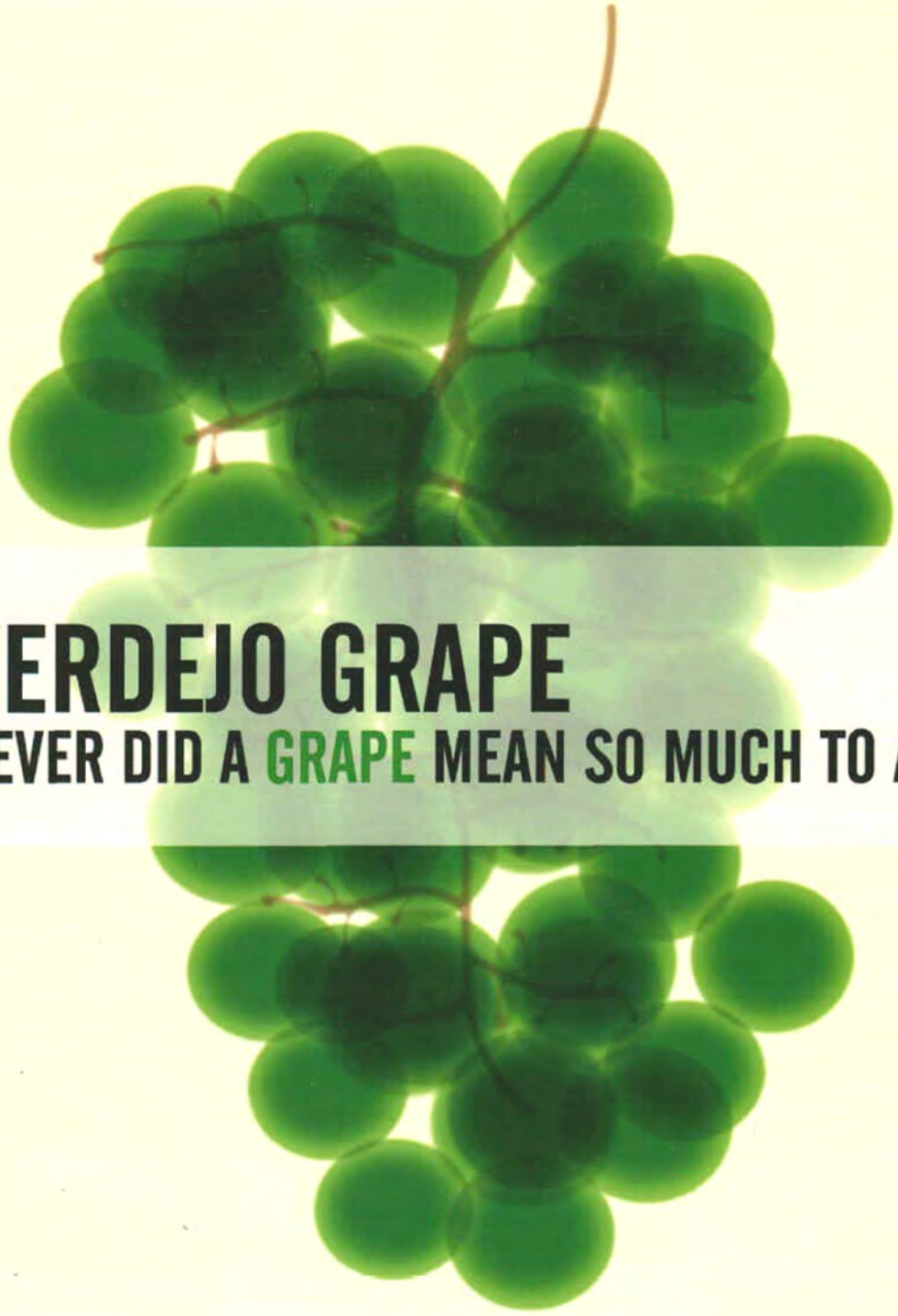

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