

# SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

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Aragón:  
A Wine Region  
Ripe for  
Rediscovery



Women Chefs.  
Over a  
Hot Stove



Blue Cheese.  
The Birth  
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Farmed Fish.  
The Blue  
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# 73

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*Cherchez la femme!* In some walks of life, women are few and far between.

Yet, since time immemorial, it is womankind that has ensured the subsistence of our species—hunting is all very well, but someone has to make the spoils edible! Still, even today, it is rare to find a woman among the pantheon of top chefs, and those that do scale the heights are largely ignored by the food critics. Encouragingly, there is good news on that front from Spain, where women chefs are forging ahead undaunted. We follow their progress in this issue and the next.

And while we're on the subject of subsistence, consider our overexploited oceans. Like it or not, the time has come for even the most discerning palates, used to only the finest seafood, to give aquaculture products of a try. With its 4,000 km (2,485 mi) of coastline, Spain occupies an advantageous position in this new sector: it accounts, for example, for 80% of Europe's turbot production.

As always, there is plenty going on in the wine world. In this issue, we focus on 21<sup>st</sup>-century DOs and quality wines from Aragón, the area of Spain that produced Buñuel and Goya.

Cheese has been neglected in our pages recently, but we make up for it this month with a visit to northern Spain and its legendary blue cheeses.

And (almost) last, but by no means least, take a look at the astonishing kitchen equipment produced by ICC.

Cathy Boirac

Editor-in-chief

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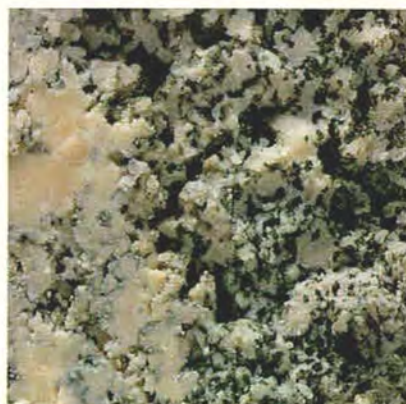
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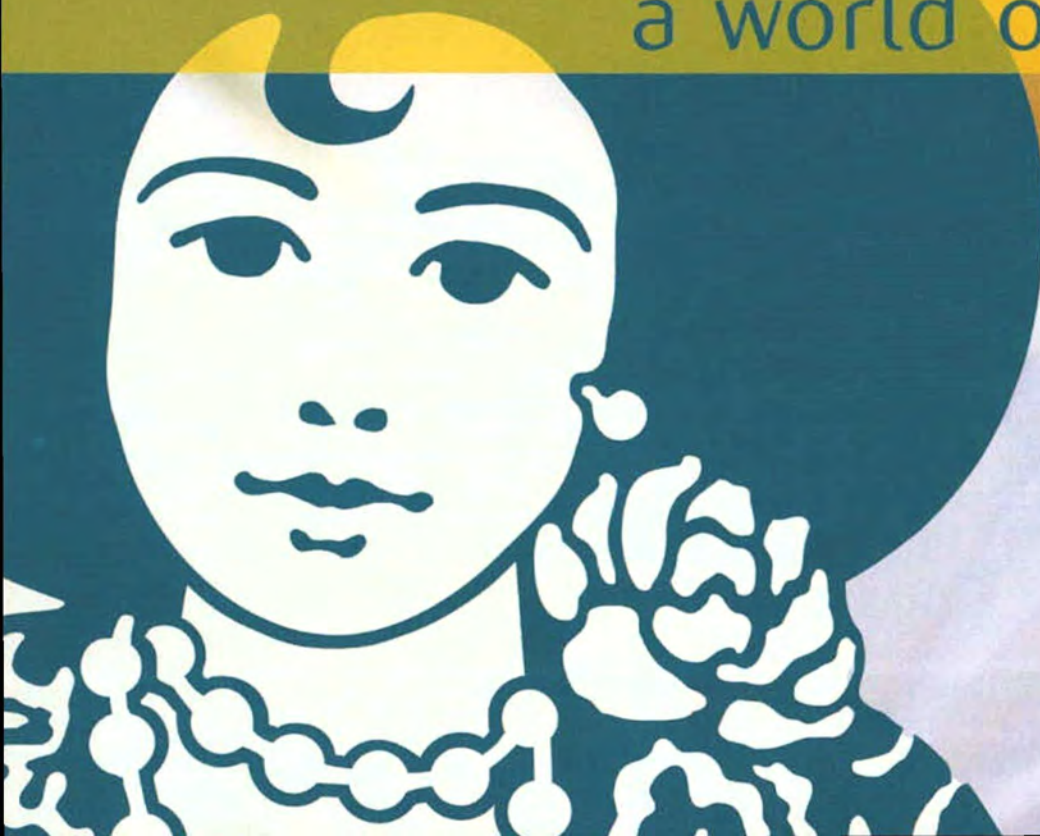
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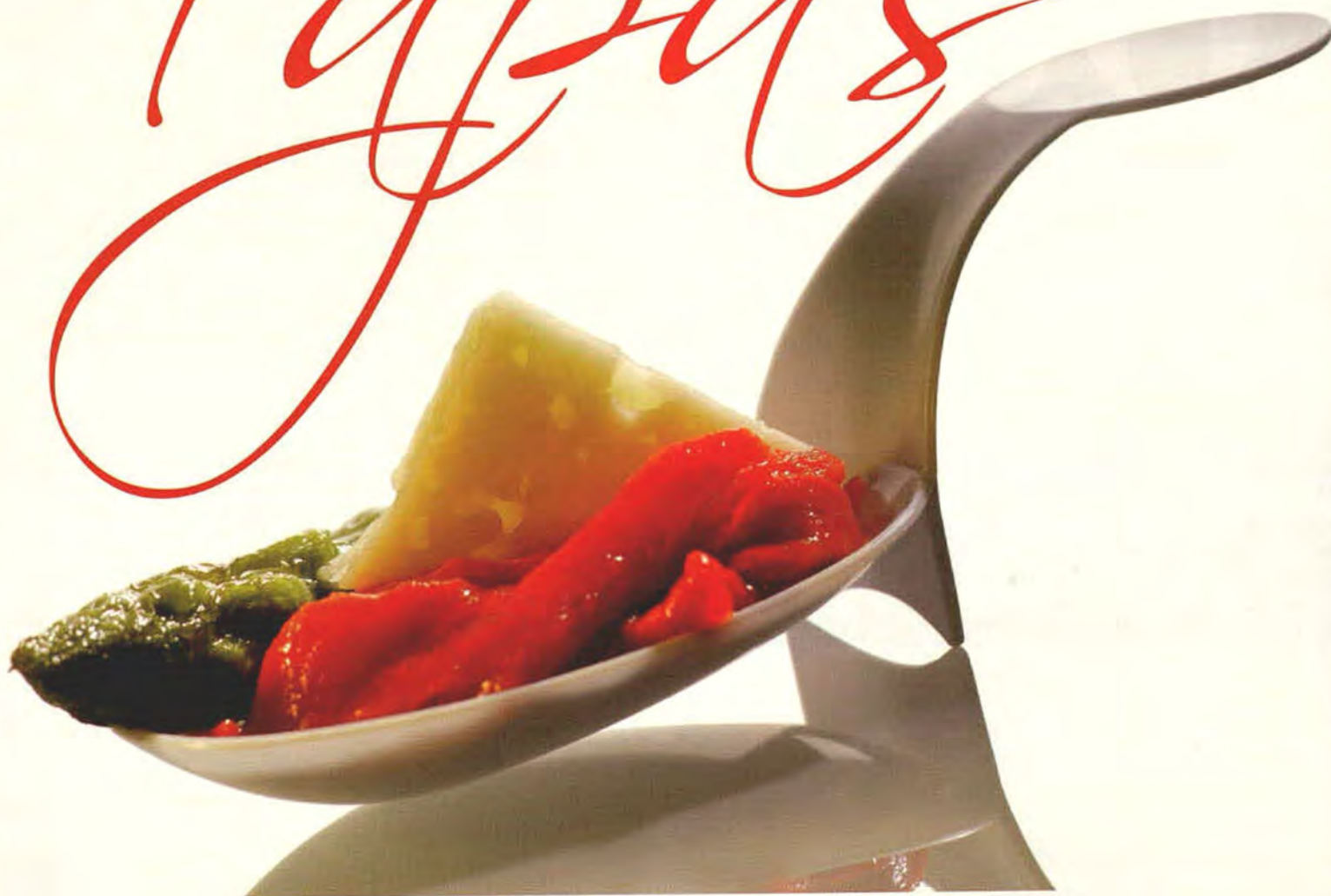
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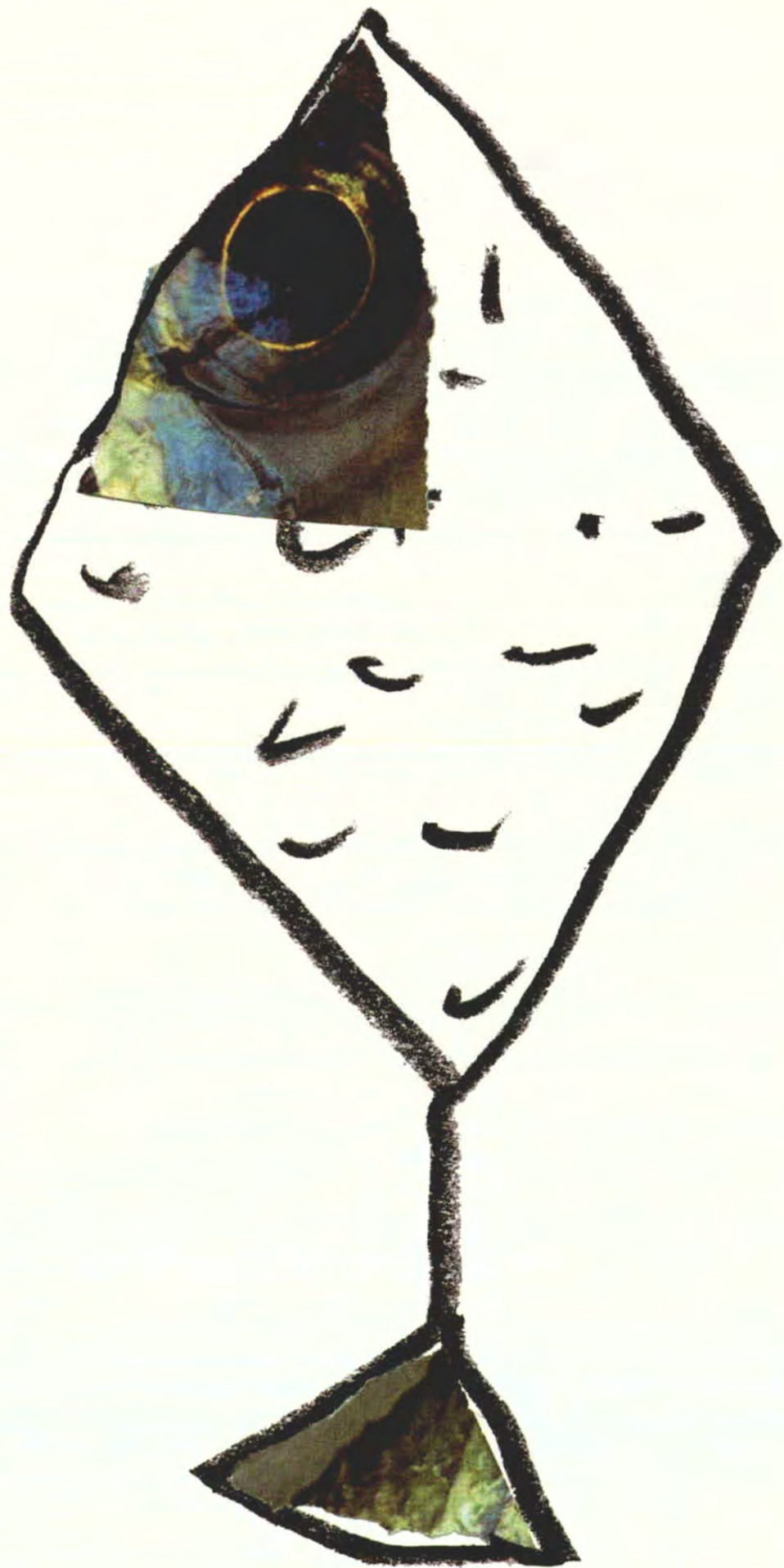
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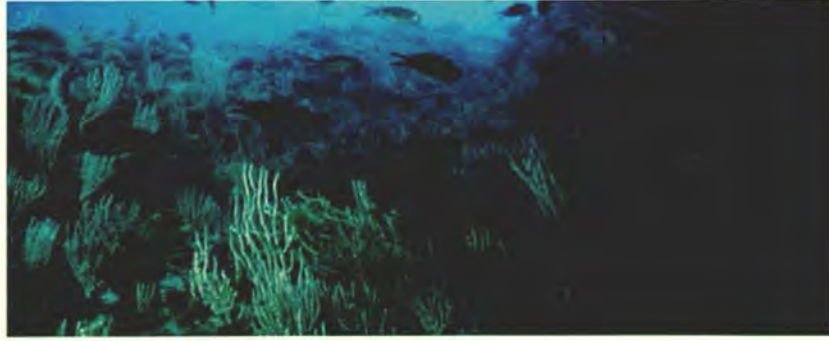
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# The BLUE Revolution

The enormous advances in agricultural machinery and technology achieved during the so-called "Green Revolution" halfway through the 20<sup>th</sup> century were reflected in exponentially increased yields. A new movement is now gathering momentum. With our oceans exhausted by centuries of over-exploitation, modern aquaculture is finally shaping up and tackling the problem posed by unsustainable demand on fish resources. The crucial question is whether it can manage the feat of both alleviating the pressure and supplying a high quality product. Given the varied coastline and waters that surround the Iberian Peninsula, Spanish fish farms have a valuable head start in the race to capitalize on the opportunity that aquaculture represents. Whereas other countries have specialized in one single species, Spain farms ten or more, each of which have been tried out on its own, highly-discerning, domestic market. Even so, the range is regarded as not yet complete and various companies, universities and research institutions strive daily to extend this varied and appetizing repertoire. It's just a matter of time until they do.

## Farmed Fish

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TEXT  
CELIA HERNANDO

---

TRANSLATION  
HAWYS PRITCHARD

---

PHOTOS  
JUAN MANUEL SANZ/ICEX

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Can one improve upon crystal clear water from mountain springs? At the Piscifactoría de Sierra Nevada sturgeon farm (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71) located in a lush, green valley west of Granada, they know that one can and, in their case, must. Such is the degree of environmental finesse with which they are required to operate if they aim to continue selling their products under the “organic” label. To comply with a set of requirements that even the most militant green activist might consider rigorous, the fish farm’s used water undergoes a natural purification process before being returned to its parent stream. In a huge pool, microscopic macrophages work their mini-miracle and transform the sturgeons’ waste products into top quality organic compost.

Over 1,000 km (620 mi) away, in the far northwest of the Iberian Peninsula, a million red sea bream now dart about once more in the chilly Atlantic waters that wash the coast of Galicia. Decades of indiscriminate fishing have reduced this native species to the point of virtual extinction so that, today, breeding in captivity represents its last

hope of survival. After years of research, local company Isidro de la Cal (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 68) has achieved impressive advances in breeding red sea bream in captivity. Furthermore, although for the moment every fish born within its premises has to resign itself to swimming about in prison—albeit in the form of perfectly comfortable sea cages—this company’s future plans include the possibility of using red sea bream to repopulate the waters where they once reigned supreme.

You don’t need a magnifying glass to detect evidence of environmentally-friendly practices in Spanish aquaculture. The R&D departments of involved companies are unremitting in their efforts to find ways of minimizing the impact of what they do on the natural environment within which they function. Society, increasingly committed to protecting the environment, is also keeping a close eye on them. “We can’t take responsibility for what unscrupulous businesses in other parts of the world are doing, just what we are involved in,” declares Javier Ojeda, manager of

APROMAR (Spain’s Marine Fish Farming Producers’ Association). He goes on to add: “Spanish legislation is particularly demanding, believe me.” The latest report by the FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) on the state of our oceans’ reserves portrays a dismal scene: of the 6,000 most economically important species, 52% are currently being overfished. If catches continue at the current rate, many of the species that are a customary part of our diet will have been exhausted before 2050. The sea has nothing left to give. And yet the world’s appetite for fish continues to grow. How does one reconcile a growing world population with an exhausted ocean? The FAO points to aquaculture as the only measure capable of bridging this growing gap, but not at any cost. “It can only be done if aquaculture is taken forward and managed responsibly,” declares director-general Jacques Diouf. Sustainability must therefore become the new watchword for fish breeding in captivity. Having first cast a general eye over the sector as a whole, we scanned Spain’s



4,000 km (2,485 mi) coastline for companies that have done their homework and are active contenders. A snapshot of Spanish aquaculture, with fish farmers growing a wide range of species in their farms, is more like a large family portrait.

## An aquatic zoo

The Spanish like to feel that they possess ancestral knowledge of the art of fishing. They have, after all, been at it for thousands of years. The challenge now is to find a way of satisfying their apparently insatiable appetite for fish. At 34 kg (75 lb) per person each year, Spaniards are the third biggest fish eaters in the world, beaten only by the Japanese and Portuguese. Not even the best-equipped fishing fleet could cater to that sort of demand. Breeding fish in captivity has therefore been focused on as a natural way of filling the gap created by the obligatory reduction in extractive fishing. Taking its cue from the specific needs of its own domestic demand, Spain's fish farming scenario has evolved idiosyncratically. While other countries have focused on one or two varieties of fish, thereby benefiting

from economies of scale and exponentially multiplying their production year by year, Spain has opted for a much more diversified model. "Each region has studied the biodiversity present in its local waters and has started breeding locally native species," explains Juan Ignacio Gandarias, of Spain's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Overall, this amounts to a range of fish that is broad and varied enough to satisfy the most sybaritic of fishmongers.

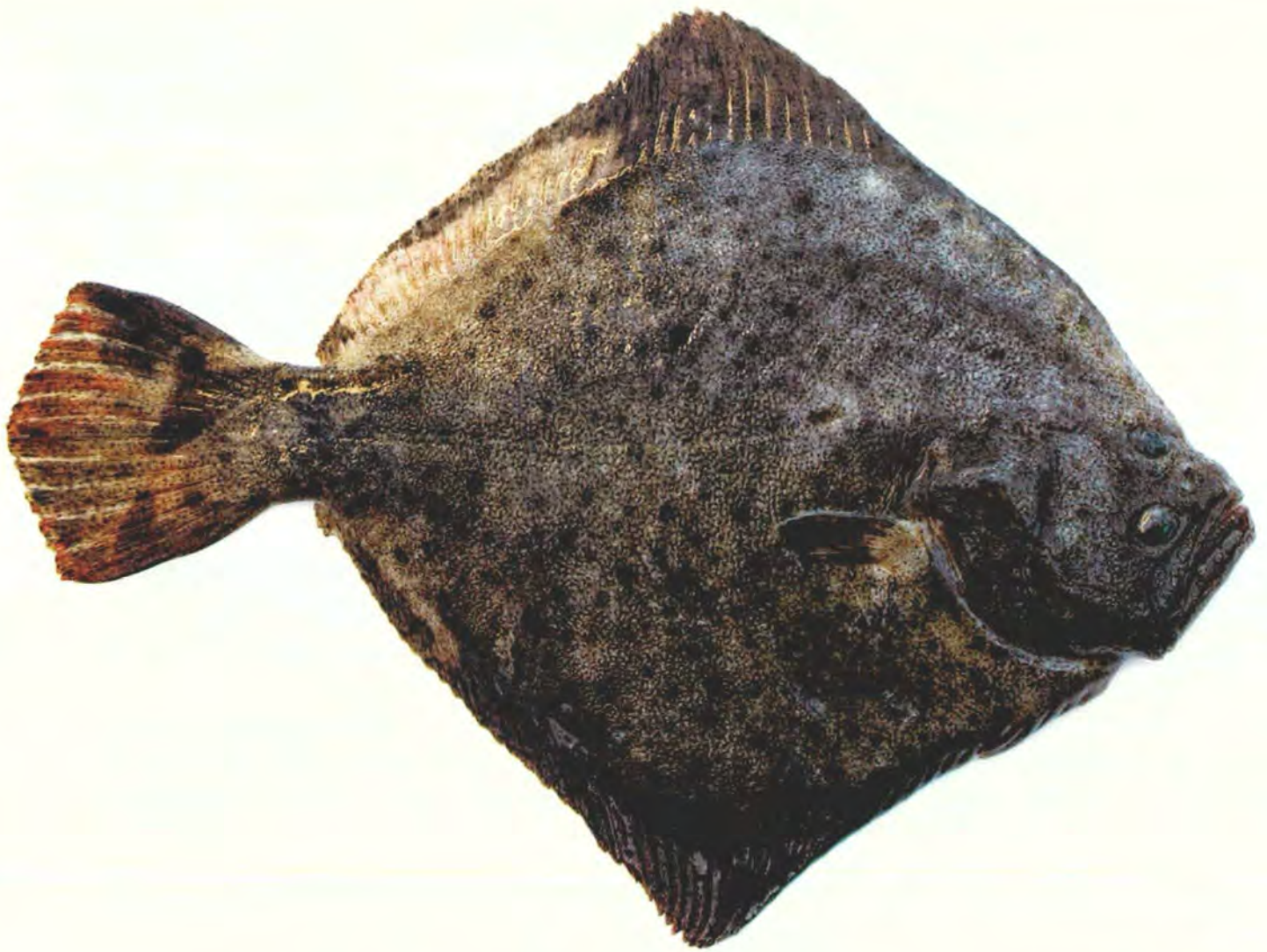
The rough, cold, nutrient-rich waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Bay of Biscay provide the ideal habitat for turbot. Spain's production of this non-migratory species, much sought after for its gelatinous skin and delicious flesh, accounts for more than 80% of the European total. Sea bass and gilt-head bream, on the other hand, inhabit warmer, calmer seas. The Mediterranean coast, from Catalonia to eastern Andalusia, harbors a growing number of floating cages in which these desirable species are fattened, as do the warm tranquil waters around the Canary Islands, whose constant,

year-round temperatures produce fish of enormous size.

Sea bass, gilt-head bream and turbot, in that order, make up the basic trilogy of Spain's fish farming, though the spectrum is extended every year by the addition of brand new species. Meagre and bluefin tuna are now farmed on the Levante coast, sole and eel in the marshlands of western Andalusia, and the latest additions, red sea bream and pollack, are old familiars in Galicia's popular culinary repertoire. And still the research continues. Organizations such as the Spanish Oceanographic Institute are engaged in a daily battle to extend the selection further still. Grouper, for example, will soon be swelling the ranks of fish produced in captivity in Spain (40,000 tonnes / 88,00,000 lb last year).

## Year-round delicacy

Like other migratory fish, the bluefin tuna visits the warm waters of the Mediterranean exclusively in summer months. It does so to reproduce, not suspecting that the journey might be its last. Fish weighing over 30 kg (66 lb) end up in the nets of French,



Italian, Croatian and Spanish boats, or being towed to their coastal fish farms. Bluefin tuna farming, and with it the opportunity to enjoy this delicacy all year round, dates back to 1996. Interestingly, in an effort to mitigate the rigidly seasonal availability of this species, the farms were set up, and they have turned out to be the best way to improve the quality of its meat. All along the Murcian coast, vast marine cages contain living silver treasure: over 2,200 tonnes (4,850,000 lb) of bluefin tuna spend the last months of their lives here (six on average), and do so in style, feeding on an appetizing daily menu of sardine, herring, mackerel and squid. The tuna will have been caught far out to sea and towed to the coast, both enormously complex operations requiring the constant supervision of a team of experienced divers. The journey coastwards can sometimes turn into a long, perilous business, assailed—at a speed of one knot—by strong currents, high seas and raging storms. When the journey takes longer

than it should, the exhausted tuna can lose up to 20% of their weight en route, though they soon regain this once installed in their new gilded cages. El Gorguel cove, near the historic port of Cartagena (southeast Spain), harbors one of these strange marine complexes. It is also the backdrop for the fascinating story of Ricardo Fuentes Herrero, founder of Ricardo Fuente e Hijos, the company that pioneered this sort of business in the Mediterranean and currently controls more than half the bluefin tuna in its waters. “Ricardo built an empire out of nothing,” explains director David Martínez admiringly. “Back in the 1960s, he had a little business selling salted fish. He used to go around the squares and streets of the local towns with just a covered wooden cart hooked onto an old bike.” His six children, all sons, have carried on and expanded the scheme started by the head of the family, and today they have fish nurseries in Spain, Italy, Croatia, Tunisia, Cyprus and Malta, containing

over 7,000 tonnes (15,400,000 lb) of fish. An enormous map of the world on their office wall bristles with colored pins, like a battle plan, marking their entrepreneurial triumphs. “What we are proudest of is the quality of our product,” David tells me with satisfaction. “Japan accounts for 90% of the company’s sales, and if our product more than meets the rigorous demands of the Japanese market... it’s because it’s worth it.” The fact is that, during their months in captivity, the tuna not only increase in size (a 200 kg / 440 lb specimen will put on 25 kg / 55 lb at most), they also improve in color, flavor, oiliness and texture. Strange though it may seem, non-farmed specimens may only just scrape into category B, while nursery specimens make it comfortably into the top category. By now, David has a ready command of Japanese terms that describe the characteristics of bluefin tuna: *yake* means that the fish has suffered too much stress while being killed and has “cooked” its own flesh;



*yamai* indicates that it has developed tumors; *hisu* means that it has received a blow... "At first we didn't quite understand the grounds on which our customers were rejecting certain specimens, but now we know how to avoid them and how to improve the succulence, color and flavor of the tuna so that they always get top marks," he says with a smile.

Tuna farming has had to cope with tough opposition from environmental groups from the start. One of their recurring criticisms is the non-viability of breeding a carnivorous species that needs to ingest between 12 and 15 kg (26 and 33 lb) of fish to increase its own weight by just 1 kg (2.2 lb). The sector's response has been to present its various research projects, some of them still ongoing, into possible alternatives in the form of prepared feed. "Gourmet customers may not approve of the change, but from the point of view of environmental sustainability, it is the only way of reducing the pressure on those species that make up the tuna's diet," declare officials from ANATUN (the Spanish Association of Bluefin Tuna Farmers). The next big challenge for mariculturalists is getting the fishes' complete reproductive cycle to take place in captivity. Various oceanographic institutes in Spain, Greece, France, Italy, Malta and Israel are researching how to achieve this, as are numerous universities throughout Europe and companies in the sector.

They have already succeeded in getting tuna to reproduce during captivity, and maintain that it will soon be possible to keep the larvae alive long enough to reach the fry stage. "The king of the Mediterranean deserves a break." Meanwhile, in other waters, a Galician company is trying to ensure the future of another endangered aquatic aristocrat: the red sea bream.

## House specialties

We're lost. It's a good half hour since we left the streets of La Coruña (on the northwest coast) behind us and headed northwards, but the taxi driver (a city dweller if ever there was one), admits that he's out of his element on the winding roads of rural El Ferrol. I take advantage of this unforeseen opportunity to drink in the dramatic landscape of the Galician coast. Waves break furiously against cliffs topped with green, the chromatic motif of the region as a whole. Camouflaged by the hollow in which it sits, the *Isidro de la Cal* plant blends discreetly into its surroundings. "The quality of our products demands a location as impeccable as this one," points out José Antonio Bretón, vice president of one of the biggest international fish trading groups. "And, of course, we simply had to ensure that our visual impact was minimal; this is a specially protected area."

The species they farm in their complex show their gratitude for the pure

Atlantic water that fills their tanks by growing rapidly. Thousands of minute larvae teem about in the tanks in search of food, a made-to-measure cocktail formulated after years of research. "First of all you have to cultivate various algae to provide food for the brine shrimp, a tiny crustacean that, in turn, constitutes the larvae's essential diet," explains the factory's biologist. "Each company uses a unique recipe for its algae preparation. Believe me, it's a secret almost as closely guarded as the Coca-Cola one!" he adds with a grin.

A mere 20 years ago, the five fishing boats in the adjacent local port of Cedeiro had no trouble returning home with bulging nets of red sea bream. Sadly, this picture is now a thing of the past, a world in which the stories grandparents tell their grandchildren take place. "This alarming drop in the size of catches was what persuaded us to try farming them in captivity," explains José Antonio. The red sea bream satisfied other basic company requirements, too: it was a native species that fetched high prices, and one for which there was an established pattern of consumption in the Spanish market. "We started from scratch," he recalls. "We were global pioneers, so there was no such thing as previous experience of breeding this species to fall back on, or any scientific reports." Starting in the early 90s, and working in tandem with the Vigo Oceanographic Institute,



the company invested enormous efforts which took a decade to show fruit. Today it claims production figures of 150 tonnes (330,000 lb), 60% of the total quantity of red sea bream consumed in Spain, and these figures promise to rise shortly. Although the earliest infancy of farmed red sea bream takes place in tanks on land, they spend more than three-quarters of their life in marine cages. Isidro de la Cal's enclosures are situated on the beautiful *Lorbe ría* (a fjord-like estuary) not far from La Coruña, amid mussel rafts, bright little fishing boats and hungry gulls. "Unlike sea bass and gilt-head bream, it takes red sea bream as long as four years to reach a commercially viable 600 g (1.3 lb)," explains José Antonio. "We spend

so much time together that I almost know them all by name!" he jokes. For the moment, Isidro de la Cal's hopes are pinned on the red sea bream. Having said that, its R&D department is also test breeding two new species, also common in these waters. The pollack, very similar to the cod with its white flesh and low fat content, has successfully completed its reproductive cycle in captivity and is about to make the leap into industrial production. The grouper, an impressive fish that can reach up to 1.5 m (5 ft) in length, is not far behind. Several specimens are trying to adapt to their relatively recent captivity. "We took them out of the sea over a year ago but they still haven't reproduced," says José Antonio sadly.

No one knows for sure how long it will be before they lay their first eggs. It was 18 years before the sturgeon at the *Piscifactoría de Sierra Nevada* got round to it...

## River dinosaur

Sturgeon was reserved for special occasions in Ancient Rome, and its caviar would be brought to the table heralded by a flourish of trumpets. Gourmets in the second century BC are known to have paid over a hundred sheep for one serving of the delicacy. The sturgeon is something of a living fossil: it was already swimming up our rivers over 250 million years ago, when dinosaurs ruled the earth. Mankind's depredations were to prove

## ASK THE CHEFS

Is there really a discernible difference in flavor between farmed and wild fish? Since the jury still seems to be out on this question, I sought the considered opinion of a few chefs. Koldo Royo is highly qualified to comment on the way fish farming is going in Spain: he uses farmed fish as a matter of course, "and without excuses," as raw material in his



restaurant in Palma de Majorca. "Years ago, the fish used to be just big enough for one serving, but these days the fish farms supply us with specimens weighing 2 to 3 kg (4.4 to 6.6 lb)," he assures me. And whereas in those days the size of the fish in question betrayed its provenance, without that basic clue it is no longer easy to tell wild from farmed. "I really enjoy organizing blind tastings for the critics and foodies in general. Hardly anyone can ever tell which is which." How should we cook farmed fish to make the most of its potential? Koldo believes that the secret lies in taking advantage of the freshness of this type of fish. "There is no fresher product anywhere in the market," he declares emphatically. "And that shows in its good appearance and smoothness. That's what makes it suitable for every sort of recipe: you can cook it in a sauce, on the griddle, in the oven..." Carlos Gamonal, head chef at *Mesón Drago* (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 68) in Tenerife, uses farmed fish for his raw fish dishes like carpaccio and sushi. "I don't have to freeze it first because the rigorous monitoring carried out in

the fish farms guarantees that the product is anisakis free," he explains. "I can also capitalize on the more discreet palate of this type of fish when the occasion calls for it." It is a fact that wild specimens are characterized by stronger flavor and harder flesh, the unsurprising consequence of a more active life. "When it's caught at just the right time of year, extractively-caught fish is superb, but there are times when wild fish is not in such good shape because it has eaten less," observes Andoni Luis Aduriz (*Mugaritz* restaurant, two Michelin stars). "In fish farming, on the other hand, the product is always the same." Pedro Larumbe, Madrid's seafood guru, prefers to avoid controversy. "You just can't compare extractively-caught fish and farmed fish, not for price, appearance, or the whole business of supply and sale," he maintains. "I will admit that it's thanks to aquaculture, and not being at the mercy of sea conditions, that we are able to cater a banquet within a specified budget. How else could I promise the bride-to-be to serve turbot at her wedding party?"



too much for it, however, and years of intensive fishing, uncontrolled pollution and indiscriminate dam building brought it to the brink of extinction. Fortunately, this particular story has a happy ending. In the 1980s, a fish farm in Granada made a commitment to ensuring its survival;

today, nearly half a million of these fish, docile by nature despite resembling mustachioed sharks, are building up numbers in their complex again. "The fact that we have turned into a producing company makes quite a good story. It was always our original aim to save the species through

aquaculture," admits José Javier Rodríguez, commercial director of Piscifactoría de Sierra Nevada. This is no idle claim: each year, 40% of the company's turnover is ploughed back into its research department, considered a world yardstick by other companies in the sector from Russia and the United States.

Tucked into a rural mountain valley 60 km (37 mi) from Granada, the Sierra Nevada fish farm obeys the dictates of environmentally-friendly production to the letter. They are proud of being the first, and for the moment the only, fish farm to produce sturgeon and caviar with "green" certification. They practice an approach in which hurrying plays no part and that shares most of the fundamental principles of Petrini's Slow Food Movement. "We let the animal do things at its own pace; we don't speed up its growth with hormones, high-fat feed, or genetic engineering," stresses José Javier. As one might expect, this boundless patience—over 18 years per specimen—is reflected in the superior quality of their products. "Sturgeon need time to synthesize their own fat and for it to lodge intramuscularly, which is where it ought to be." Although an unfamiliar fish to many of us, sturgeon, with its white, dense,

## PLUS POINTS

Extractive fishing, with its romantic connotations, tends to be the gourmet's method of choice. The epithet "wild" exerts a strong magnetic pull for many diners, and any restaurant on whose menu it appears can expect to do well. And quite right too. But farmed fish has many plus points of its own, scoring even higher in certain respects than its wild equivalent.

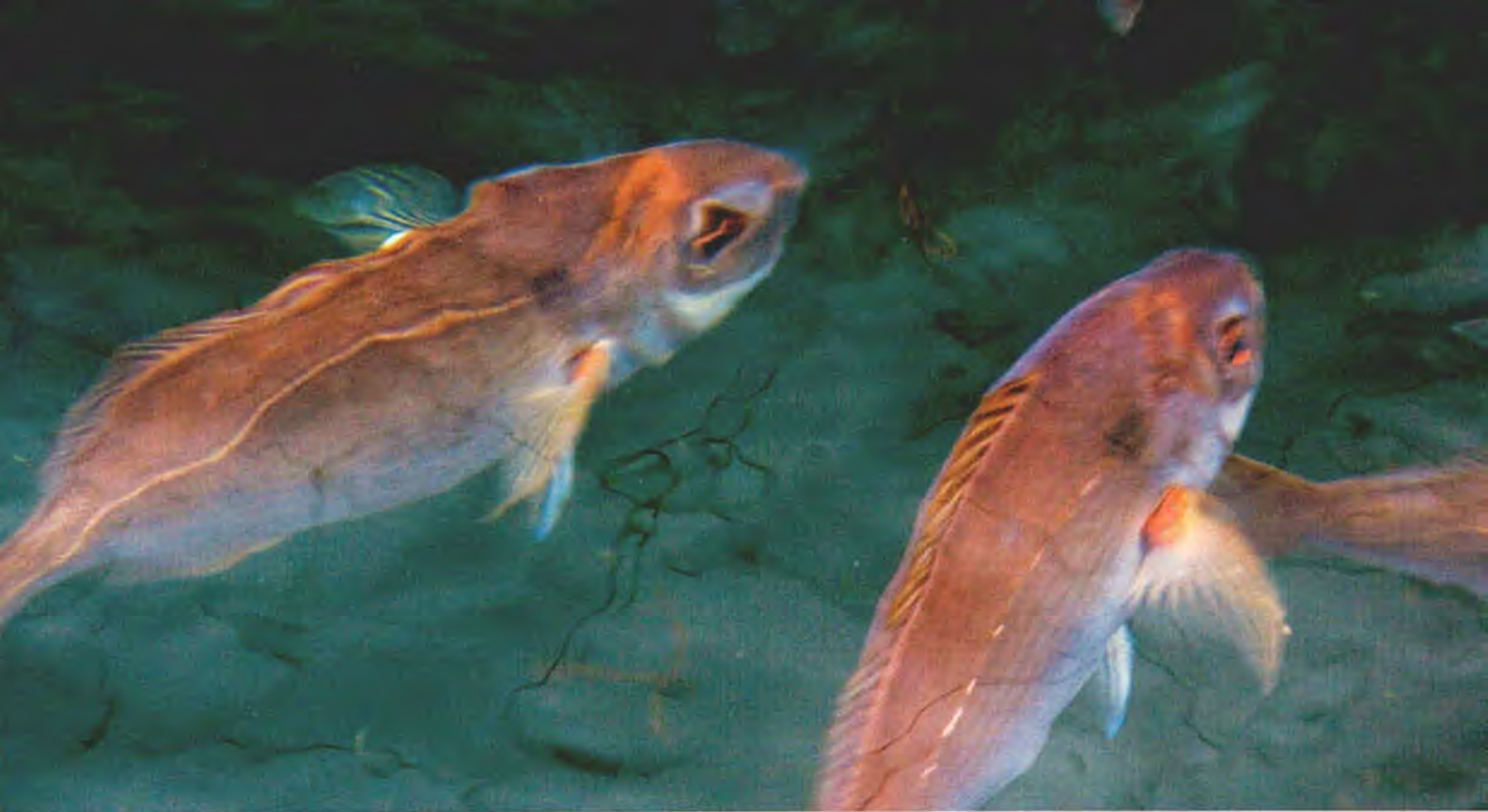
- **Freshness:** While it can take a wild fish several days to reach the fishmonger's slab, farmed fish gets there faster. The fact that fish farms are near the coast means that fish reach their destination in less than 24 hours.

- **Traceability:** Nowadays, the sector uses complicated computerized systems to certify everything that takes place on its premises. Thanks to sophisticated microchips, the parentage of each batch can be ascertained, and

so can the diet on which each fish has been fed. This provides consumers with a convincing guarantee.

- **Dependability:** Unlike extractively-caught fish, farmed fish is available from its producer's premises all year round. Catering companies have aquaculture to thank for being able to guarantee a supply to their customers of the fish they order for a specific date and in specified quantities.

- **Reasonable prices:** If the current pattern continues, wild fish will end up being relegated to the role of an expensive treat to be enjoyed exclusively by the wealthy. Aquaculture redresses the balance by charging stable prices that everyone can afford.



boneless meat, is outstandingly versatile in cooking. Joaquín Felipe, chef at Europa Decó, the acclaimed restaurant within Madrid's luxurious Hotel Urban, is just one of many famous customers who order this exotic fish. Others include Sergi Arola (La Broche in Madrid, two Michelin stars), Martín Berasategui (Martín Berasategui in San Sebastián, three Michelin stars), and Dani García (Calima restaurant in Marbella, one Michelin star).

Even so, it is caviar that is turning out to be the company's star product. This, too, has impeccable "green" credentials, and is sold under the Caviar de Riofrio brand. It is produced to order, free from colorants and preservatives, and 20% of production is sold internationally. Last year, they filled orders for this expensive product amounting to an impressive 1,500 kg (3,300 lb), and they hope to double that quantity this year, Mother Nature permitting. The company is so committed to its green principles that it doesn't make a move without weighing up the possible consequences for the environment. This means that, instead of treating sick specimens with antibiotics, destined to end up irreparably

polluting the river bed, they are developing made-to-measure vaccines in their own laboratory. They do not use herbicides or chemical fertilizers, which poison aquifers, and they ensure that the feed their cosseted sturgeon eat has been produced without squandering other threatened marine species in the process. Further still, they have converted one third of their complex into a natural purification plant, a vast lake whose only job is to clean up the one waste product that the fish farm produces: its sturgeons' faeces. Tiny microorganisms convert nitrites into nitrates and phosphorus into phosphates and *voilà!* Meanwhile, the body of water also fulfills the benign function of providing a home for a large number of native species, some of which, such as bluemouth and cormorant, are under threat of extinction.

## Reviving tradition

The general tendency in the neighboring province of Cadiz is for fish farms to be set up in reclaimed marshland sites. Cadiz's wide bay, open to the Atlantic and below sea level, endows several of its municipalities with a unique aquacultural advantage: the numerous sea water courses that

crisscross this area impelled by tidal forces are just waiting to be capitalized on. Down the centuries, the various cultures that settled here invented all sorts of walls, dykes and sluice gates to prevent the many marine species carried in by the current from escaping. The unusual method of marshland aquaculture that evolved was all but lost when, in the recent past, many of these sites were dried out to be reused as pasture for livestock.

Amid such idyllic surroundings, inhabited by birds, plants and fish of all kinds, I find it hard to imagine the drought-ridden past of this farmstead on the Guadalquivir estuary, right opposite Doñana National Park. "Having bought the site, the Pesquería Isla Mayor Group (PIMSA) re-established the former marshland, flooding an area of over 3,200 ha (7,900 acres) where today we raise sea bass, gilt-head bream, eel, prawn, and meager," explains Manuel Dorado, director of Isla Sur, PIMSA's trading arm. This same pattern has been replicated all along the Cadiz coast, mainly in the marshlands surrounding the tourist towns of Puerto Real, San Fernando and Chiclana. Business is divided between the traditional

marshland farms that follow the principles of extensive aquaculture (namely, simply fattening fish brought in by the tides) and those that boost production by introducing complementary fry. In both cases, it is a characteristic of marshland-farmed fish that they are fed on natural food, primarily small crustaceans, replicating the diet eaten by their wild relatives. Ángel León (Recipes, page 112) set himself the task of “showing haute cuisine what can be done with marshland-farmed fish.” This Cadiz-born chef, self-confessed fish enthusiast and conscientious explorer of his home region’s marine resources left everyone agape at the 2006 Madrid Fusion International Food Congress a couple of years ago when, before an astonished audience, this very young cook performed a ritual never before seen by the general public. Over glowing coals of *salicornia* (a common wild marshland shrub), he proceeded

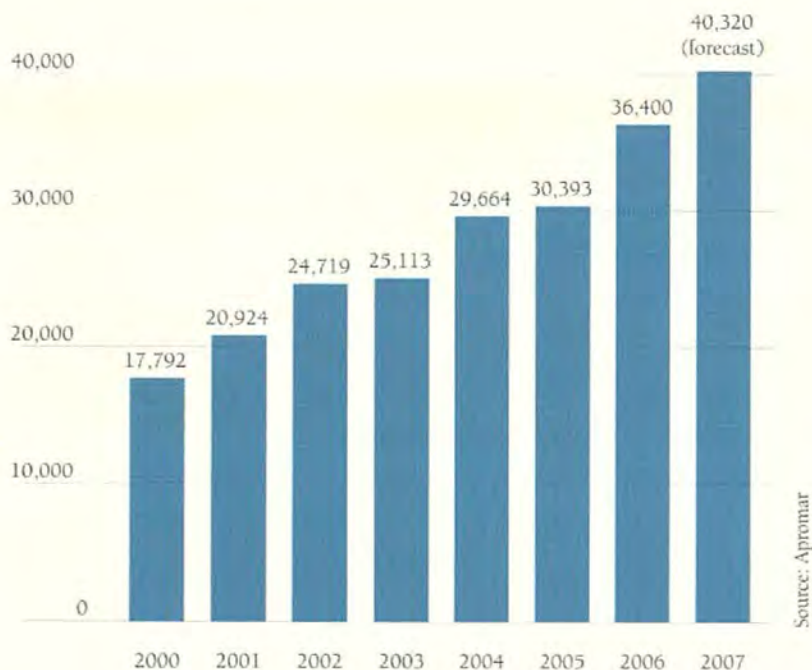


to cook a live, farmed gilt-head bream that he had transported expressly for the purpose in a tank from Cadiz. “In the old days, the owner of the marshland fish farm would invite his workers to get fish out of the ponds once a month,” explains Ángel, “and their dinner that day generally consisted of this simple but delicious recipe, which always accentuates the saline notes in any fish.”

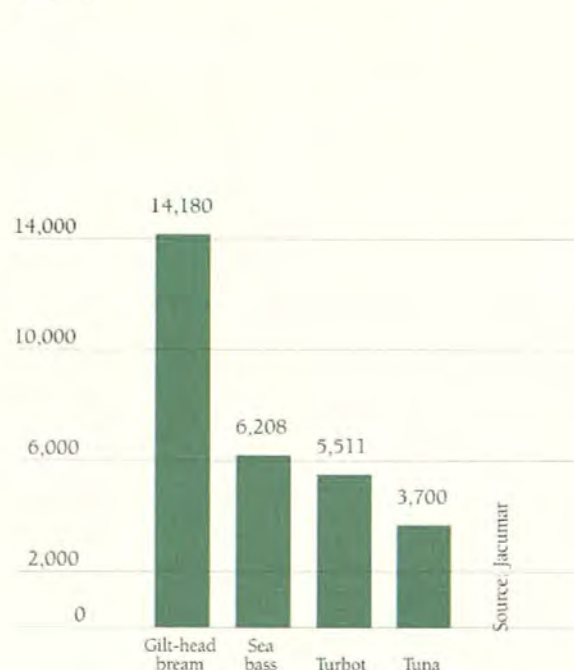
His professional colleague, Dani García, a guiding light among the new generation of cooks responsible for elevating Spanish cuisine to new heights, regularly preaches the virtues of marshland-farmed fish. He takes advantage of any professional get-together, conference or meeting to preach the virtues of this exceptional aquacultural method. “We cannot, and should not, tar all farmed fish with the

## KEY FIGURES

Evolution of marine-farmed fish production: gilt-head bream, sea bass, turbot, eel, red sea bream, meagre, sole. (tonnes)



Aquacultural production of Spanish fish farming’s four most typical species in 2005 (tonnes)





same brush. After all, doesn't a farm-raised chicken taste the same as a free range one?"

So it is starting to look as if the poor reputation that attaches to farmed fish is undeserved. In Spain, at least, unorthodox companies have shown that another kind of aquaculture is possible. Inspirational theory really is put into practice: many fish farms pursue the principle of environmental



sustainability, an approach based on respect for the environment that, in parallel, generates high quality standards in its products. Even so, and compared with other types of farming such as agriculture and livestock, aquaculture is still at the embryonic stage. Can it really satisfy the increasing demand for fish without losing sight of these noble principles? Only time will tell just



how green the blue revolution turns out to be.

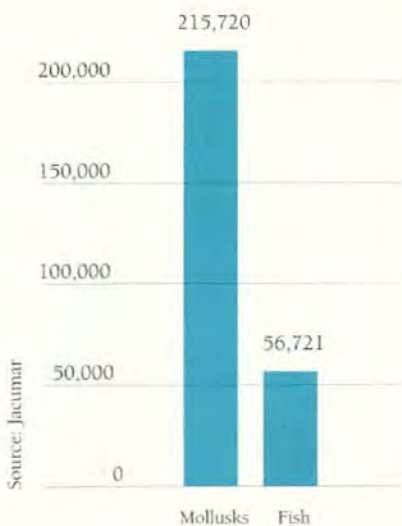
*Celia Hernando is a journalist whose media experience includes working for Cadena Ser and Punto Radio. She is currently an intern journalist at Spain Gourmetour.*

*Recipes page 102*

*Exporters page 144*

## WEBSITES

Aquacultural production in Spain in 2005 (tonnes)



### [www.apomar.es](http://www.apomar.es)

This is the website of Spain's Marine Fish Farming Producers' Association (Asociación Empresarial de Productores de Cultivos Marinos en España) and is useful for information about its members, sectorial reports, etc. (Spanish)

### [www.asema.es](http://www.asema.es)

The website of the Association of Marine Aquacultural Companies of Andalusia (Asociación de Empresas de Acuicultura Marina de Andalucía) contains information about its members and the species in which they deal, and projects and activities backed by the Association. (Spanish)

### [www.mapya.es/es/pesca/pags/jacumar](http://www.mapya.es/es/pesca/pags/jacumar)

This is the website for JACUMAR, the arm of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food concerned with coordination and cooperation on aquacultural matters between the public administration and the producing sector. (Spanish)

### [www.observatorio-acuicultura.org/](http://www.observatorio-acuicultura.org/)

The Spanish Aquaculture Observatory's website aims to provide a platform for contact, analysis and debate for the sector. It catalogues R&D&I institutions and projects in Spain, and universities where relevant research is being conducted. It also provides access to a sizeable archive of sectorial business data, useful for learning about who's who in Spanish aquaculture. (English, Spanish)

### [www.mispecies.com](http://www.mispecies.com)

This website about aquaculture in Spain features in-depth reports, the latest news from the sector, information about producers, conferences, expert opinions, etc. (Spanish)



# ARAGÓN

## A Wine Region Ripe for Rediscovery

The autonomous region of Aragón encompasses four DOs: Campo de Borja, Calatayud and Cariñena are located within the province of Zaragoza, while Somontano is situated in the heart of Huesca to the northeast. Within the same region you can find a remarkable variety of landscapes, from river valleys to almost desert-like areas to foothills, giving rise to great diversity in the wines made here.





TEXT  
PATRICIA LANGTON

ILLUSTRATION  
JAVIER ZABALA

Aragón is home to forward-looking co-operatives, dynamic modern bodegas and ambitious growers who have established their own wineries and wine brands. As a whole, Aragón offers a myriad of wines made from both traditional Spanish and international grapes which meet a range of price points, and there is certainly value for money to be found here. In the following pages, we will look at key players and distinguishing features of each DO, as well as their similarities and contrasts.

## SOMONTANO: a modern wine region

Established as a DO in 1986, Somontano's development has been dramatic and, despite its relatively small size, it is now firmly positioned as one of Spain's most impressive, quality-oriented and innovative regions.

The architects of the Somontano DO, many of whom continue to have important roles in the bodegas today, had little heritage to make use of so



they focused on a thoroughly contemporary approach and, in contrast to the other DOs of Aragón, this Designation of Origin is based on private enterprise and new companies rather than the conversion of co-operatives. As a result, Somontano bears little resemblance to the other three DOs in Aragón or to any other Spanish region.

Somontano, meaning "at the foot of the mountains", is located below the Pyrenees to the west of Catalonia. There are now just over 30 bodegas within the DO, most of them within easy reach of the town of Barbastro, the administrative hub of the region. Its vineyards extend over 4,652 ha (11,495 acres) and the various microclimates allow a broad range of grape varieties to be cultivated. The region offers optimum conditions for the production of quality wines: the climate is typically cold in winter and hot in summer with an average temperature of 11°C (52°F). Rainfall is relatively generous by Spanish standards, averaging 500 mm (20 in) per year, with little precipitation in



July and August.

The soils are well-drained, poor, and offer a good proportion of limestone for vine growing. Other important factors are altitude and shelter: the vineyards lie between 350-650 m (1,150-2,130 ft) and occasionally higher, and they enjoy the protection of the Sierra de Salinas and Sierra de Guara mountains.

Somontano's wines are characterized by good acidity, fresh aromas and expressive fruit and elegance in both reds and whites. The absence of excessively high temperatures and the cool nights during the ripening period mean that the wines are generally balanced and not over-blown.

In 2006, 119,936 hl (5,281,750 gal) of red and rosé wines and 19,175 hl (506,549 gal) of white wine were produced. Somontano's harvest yielded 23.4 million kg (51.6 million lb) of grapes in 2007 compared to around 20.5 million kg (45.2 million lb) in 2005 and 24.5 million kg (54 million lb) in 2004, the highest to date.

## A mix of global and local grapes

The first bodegas to emerge in Somontano's modern era, in the early 90s, adopted international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and even Pinot Noir. They also opted for Tempranillo over local reds such as Moristel and Parraleta, however these varieties still have an important place in a number of wine portfolios. Two decades on, the most exciting wines are based on Cabernet, Merlot, Chardonnay and Gewürztraminer, while Syrah has also been welcomed to the party, and old vine Garnacha impresses in a number of wines. Tempranillo presents a challenge for most winemakers as it struggles to ripen in Somontano. It generally makes an appearance in the entry-point wines of portfolios and as part of a blend; 100% Tempranillos are rarely offered. As Oscar Martínez, winemaker at Irius, says: "Tempranillo is difficult to grow; it can stop ripening in the summer

months, limiting the alcohol content and color. It's a challenge to make a good one."

Red wines, generally with 6-12 months of oak ageing, are by far the most important with most producers, offering at least one white and a rosé. This is not necessarily a place to look for bargains; Somontano's producers pitch at the mid to upper end of the market on the whole, with cellar door prices for the public starting at about 5 euros per bottle.

## Evolution and new bodegas

The three first bodegas to emerge soon after DO status was achieved—Viñas del Vero, Bodega Pirineos, and Enate—have continued to evolve and innovate.

Viñas del Vero sources grapes from 1,160 ha (2,866 acres) (75% owned), taking in a wide range of soils, altitudes and climates, and allowing its winemaking team to work with a wide variety of local and



international grapes. Highlights of the portfolio include Viñas del Vero Syrah "Las Canteras"; Gran Vos Reserva, a blend of the best red grapes; La Miranda de Secastilla, a distinctive Garnacha wine from old vineyards located in the Secastilla area (750-850 m / 2,460-2,788 ft) to the northeast of Somontano, and the white blend Clarión. In 1997, Viñas del Vero acquired Blecua, an 11 ha (27 acres) estate located near Barbastro, with its own boutique winery and an immaculately renovated villa surrounded by olive trees. Winemaker Pedro Aibar, who has directed Viñas del Vero's wine styles for two decades, makes the Blecua red blend here, arguably Somontano's finest to date, from a rigorous selection of the best vineyards and grapes and only in the finest vintages.

Meanwhile, Bodega Pirineos is set for a new phase of development following Spanish sherry and food group Barbadillo's acquisition of 76% percent of the shares in the company, the slice previously owned by the local government and investors,

including other local wineries. The remaining 24% continues to be owned by the Sobrarbe co-operative, a major force in the region since 1964 and supplier of most of the grapes for Pirineos. The involvement of Barbadillo is expected to strengthen the marketing and sales position of Pirineos, especially in the Benelux countries where Barbadillo is well established.

Pirineos offers a point of difference as a loyal supporter of traditional local red grapes, namely the rich, dark and plummy Moristel and cherry-scented Parraleta. Indeed it has sources of these varieties from vines which are over 50 years old. Its broad palette of grapes also includes Macabeo, Gewürztraminer, Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Wines are produced under the Pirineos and Montesierra range. Key wines are the white blend Mesache Blanco, Pirineos rosé (Cabernet/Merlot), Mesache Tinto (Garnacha, Cabernet, Syrah and Parraleta) and Pirineos Moristel. Enate, established in 1992, has positioned itself as one of Spain's

most forward-looking wine producers. The viticultural team here, headed up by Jesús Sesé Buil, believes that handpicking is essential for quality for both the 500 ha (1,235 acres) of vineyards that it owns and a further 100 ha (247 acres) supplied by growers. Cabernet and Chardonnay were the first grapes to be planted by this producer and they have an important role in the portfolio today along with Merlot and more recently, Syrah. Recent developments include the launch of Uno, a top-level Chardonnay from the estate at Planacor (2003 vintage) with an ambitious price of around 300 euros. Enate's main wines include a barrel-fermented Chardonnay, Enate rosé (Cabernet Sauvignon), a Tempranillo/Cabernet crianza and Merlot/Merlot.

In recent years a number of new bodegas have opened their doors. Bodegas Laus was founded in 2002 by the Zozoya family and Mariano Beroz when they decided to pool their resources of old vines from vineyards in the Salas Altas and Salas



Bajas areas. In 2006, a state-of-the-art winery opened, tastefully blending in with its surroundings. Bodegas Laus has set its sights on the premium end of the market and there's great attention to detail here, right down to the elegant looking labels.

Winemaker Jesús Mur has built up a range which includes the impressive Flor de Gewürztraminer from the northern high-lying Huerta de Vero area where conditions are ideal for this grape variety. Other wines of note include Laus Tinto Crianza (Merlot/Cabernet) and Laus Reserva, a Cabernet Sauvignon wine.

In 2007, Bodegas Laus produced around 700,000 bottles, and its intention is to increase production without compromising quality. With a production capacity of 4 million bottles there is certainly scope to do so.

Bodega Otto Bestué, the family-run bodega located near the village of Enate, can trace its grape-growing heritage back to 1640. In 2007, a new winery was completed, allowing the team to specialize in small volumes of premium wine under the Bestué name. Cabernet, "the best

performer in the vineyard and the winery," has star status here. The range includes Finca Rableros (Cabernet Sauvignon and Tempranillo), Santa Sabina (mostly Cabernet Sauvignon), a young rosé (Cabernet and Tempranillo) and, new for 2008, a white Chardonnay including a small amount of Viognier. The winemaking consultant is the Aragonese Jesús Navascués, one of the leading winemakers in Aragón with more than 30 years of experience. Bodegas Olvena was founded in 1999 by the Abbad family, which has a long association with agriculture in the region. They planted Tempranillo, Cabernet, Merlot, Chardonnay and Gewürztraminer in 1999 to add to their 40-year-old Garnacha vineyards and 10-year-old Syrah vines. Their vineyards total 210 ha (518 acres) and the aim is to work exclusively from their own estate. Olvena's first vintage was in 2002, and its export presence is widening, having recently teamed up with Terlato Wines in the US. In August 2005, ex-Rioja winemaker José Luis Ruiz took up the challenge of developing this young producer's



wine styles. Ruiz is determined to make a success of Tempranillo through lower yields and less vigorous clones. Olvena Cuatro, with 45% Tempranillo together with Cabernet, Merlot and Syrah is indicative of the new direction that Ruiz has taken for Olvena. As he says: "We're aiming for an individual style for our wines, starting in the vineyard and aiming to transmit as much character as possible from each grape and wine." Ruiz is also collaborating with French consultant winemaker Michel Rolland to make a Garnacha/Merlot blend.

Irius is one of Grupo Proconsol's recent ventures (the same company and architect, Jesús Marino, is behind Antion in Rioja). It is big, bold and ultra-modern in style, and is set to become one of the largest of its kind with a production capacity of 6 million l (1.5 million gal). Using a design based on cubic forms, Urius rises 20 m (65 ft) aboveground and extends 30 m (98 ft) below it,

providing ideal temperatures for winemaking while also saving energy resources.

Winemaker Oscar Martinez oversees the Absum range which, somewhat atypically for Somontano, includes a 100% Tempranillo in addition to Merlot and Chardonnay. Pinot Noir, Syrah, Garnacha, Cabernet and Parraleta are also used in winemaking at Irius.

## Wine and tourism enjoy close links

Somontano is prepared to make itself known to visitors through a wine route (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 70), jointly developed by the Regulatory Council and the local authorities. It links the region's rich diversity of natural parks and local historic sites of interest such as the Sierra de Guara, and the recently restored fortress town of Alquézar, with its wine producers and an excellent local gastronomy.

The Regulatory Council's headquarters are located in Barbastro right next door to the tourist office, enabling the two parties to fully benefit from each other. Housed in the charming exterior of a former charity hospital, it is a thoroughly modern facility comprising administrative offices, an impressive circular video room, a tasting room, displays of the region's wines and even a restaurant and shop.

With everything now in place for this region, the challenge now is to raise awareness for Somontano based on its three major strengths, as Mariano Beroz, president of the Regulatory Council explains: "Somontano offers excellent conditions for producing quality grapes; it has young, dynamic bodegas equipped with highly-trained professionals and modern technology and, linked to this, the ability to create strong brands. The DO has to be a leader within the DOs of Spain, but it also needs the



main producers to be able to build their own strong brands. I think that Somontano has a good future even though today's wine market is challenging."

Beroz hopes to see the region's exports rise: in 2007 total sales reached 14.5 million bottles with around 25% of this figure accounted for by export markets. The quality of the 2007 harvest should keep Somontano's sales on an upward path. A cool, dry summer encouraged the grapes to ripen slowly and the warm, dry conditions leading up to harvest resulted in good color and aromas as the grapes came into the bodegas. There are high expectations for this vintage across the region.

## The Garnacha Empire

From Somontano we now move southwest to the DOs of Campo de Borja, Calatayud and Cariñena,

where Garnacha is a common strength. These regions are often associated with great value for money, but a number of winemakers are now determined to exploit the potential for top-quality wines with great typicity.

## CAMPO DE BORJA

Campo de Borja, with 7,500 ha (18,532 acres) under vine, has been particularly successful in turning its attention to the export market which now accounts for around 60% of sales. Roughly 5,000 ha (12,355 acres) of Campo de Borja's vineyards are dedicated to Garnacha, much of it valuable, old vines which are 30-50 years old. These old vines have the potential to produce low yields of grapes and powerful, aromatic wines.

This valuable heritage and unique aspect, together with a good value for money proposition, has attracted

interest to the region over recent years and encouraged the Regulatory Council and bodegas to market the region as *El Imperio de la Garnacha* (The Garnacha Empire). This approach is fully supported (for Campo de Borja, Calatayud and Cariñena) by many including Louis Geirmaerd at Axial, who represents a number of bodegas in export. He says: "Garnacha is a major strength. It can make very good wine and the character in the bottle for the price is difficult to beat." With reference to Campo de Borja, local winemaking consultant Jesús Navascúes adds: "I know this variety well and the way that growers handle it in Campo de Borja is incredible. They know exactly how to grow it according to the area where it is planted." Campo de Borja's vineyards are divided into three areas, each giving its own style of wine. In the low lying area (350-450 m / 1,148-1,478 ft) around Magallón and Pozuelo de Aragón, Garnacha ripens relatively



early and produces structured and aromatic wines. Slightly higher in Aizón, Borja and Fuendejalón (450-550 m / 1,148-1,804 ft), the wines are more structured and intense. The highest areas, parts of Ainzón and Fuendejalón as well as Tabuenca and El Busto (550-700 m / 1,804-2,296 ft) are the source of the finest and most elegant styles.

Garnacha is supported by smaller plantings of Tempranillo, Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah and Mazuelo and white varieties such as Macabeo, Moscatel and Chardonnay.

## The leading players

There are 17 wineries within the DO Campo de Borja. The most well-known are Bodegas Aragonesas, Bodegas Borsao and Crianzas y Viñedos Santo Cristo. All three have invested in upgrading their wineries and are increasingly turning to modern viticultural practices to achieve better quality from wines based largely on the Garnacha grape. Bodegas Aragonesas was founded in

1984 to market the wines of the San Juan Bautista Co-operative of Fuendejalón. In 1994 it expanded with the incorporation of another major co-operative, San Cristo of Magallón and the Instituto Aragonés de Fomento, increasing the total number of members today to 1,100. Sales manager Enrique Chueca says: "Our main strategy is to produce high quality wines from old vine Garnacha and in recent years we've positioned ours among the best quality wines of Spain." The producer's top selling wines include Coto de Hayas, Fagus and Don Ramón, and its main export markets are the UK, the US, Holland, Switzerland and Russia.

Bodegas Borsao has also experienced dramatic change in recent years. In 2001, the co-operatives of Pozuelo and Tabuernca joined the founder, the Borja Co-operative, to strengthen the producer's position and reputation. Borsao's exports represent 77% of sales and Garnacha accounts for 70% of its production. In 2005 it launched Borsao Selección

(Garnacha) Rosado, which is part of the Borsao Selección range, along with wines such as the award-winning Tres Picos Garnacha (Decanter World Wine Awards 2007, Challenge International Du Vin 2006). The producer reports strong demand for rosé wines from Canada and the US in particular.

At Crianzas y Viñedos Santo Cristo Co-operative (Ainzón), sales of rosé wines have been growing for the last five years, according to director Juan Ignacio González. Like other producers, Santo Cristo is well-placed to capitalize on the style given the rich resources of Garnacha, which is an ideal variety for the style, as well as other red grapes. Santo Cristo produces various kinds of rosés for its customers along a full range of young wines, crianzas and reservas. Aged wines mature in underground cellars which have been transformed into modern facilities from former cement tanks and naturally provide the ideal temperature and humidity for ageing. Santo Cristo's main-selling wines are Peñazueta, Santo

Cristo, Premium and Quo. Campo de Borja is also attracting interest from outsiders who have identified the potential of its wines. For example, American importers Jorge Ordoñez and Dan Phillips and Australian winemaker Chris Ringland have teamed up to produce

the Garnacha-based Alto Moncayo wines, aimed at the top level of the market.

Turning to the 2007 harvest in Campo de Borja, the crop was abundant and the largest in the history of the DO, reaching almost 39.5 million kg (87 million lb). The

growing season leading to vintage was largely unproblematic and disease free. A cool summer was followed by ideal dry and warm conditions in the autumn, resulting in ripe and healthy grapes at the time of picking. Prospects therefore look good for the 2007 wines.





## CALATAYUD

The DO Calatayud is situated in the western part of the province of Zaragoza. It extends over 5,621 ha (13,889 acres) of vineyards which are located at 500-1,040 m (1,640-3,412 ft) above sea level and are cultivated by over 2,000 growers. Garnacha represents over 50% of the varieties planted in the region and the white variety Macabeo comes second with 16%. There are also significant plantings of Tempranillo and small amounts of Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah and Chardonnay, which have been permitted since 2000; however, Garnacha is also the focus here and the age of the vines is

given particular importance. Data from the Regulatory Council shows four age groups for the variety: vines up to 20 years old, vines 20-30 years old, vines 30-40 years old and vines over 40 years old (the largest group with 1,235 ha / 3,051 acres). As part of the drive for higher quality, the "Calatayud Superior" classification has been introduced for wines made from vines that are over 50 years old and produce no more than 3,500 kg per ha (3,086 per acre). These wines must contain at least 85% of red Garnacha and must be aged for at least 3 months in oak. Since the creation of the DO Calatayud in 1990, export growth has been steady and the production

## F A C T S   A N D   F I G U R E S

|  | DO Somontano                     | DO Campo de Borja                | DO Calatayud                     | DO Cariñena                       |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Registered vineyards                       | 4,652 ha<br>(11,495 acres)       | 7,500 ha<br>(18,532 acres)       | 5,621 ha<br>(13,889 acres)       | 16,000 ha<br>(39,536 acres)       |
| Production (2007)                          | 23,400,000 kg<br>(51,588,169 lb) | 39,500,000 kg<br>(87,082,593 lb) | 19,000,000 kg<br>(41,887,829 lb) | 95,300,000 kg<br>(430,762,598 lb) |
| Average annual rainfall                    | 500 mm<br>(19 in)                | 350-400 mm<br>(13-15 in)         | 300-550 mm<br>(11-21 in)         | 350-540 mm<br>(13-21 in)          |
| Altitude of vineyards                      | 350-650 m<br>(1,150-2,130 ft)    | 350-700 m<br>(1,150-2,296 ft)    | 500-1,040 m<br>(1,640-3,412 ft)  | 400-800 m<br>(1,312-2,624 ft)     |
| Sales (2007) x 0.75 l<br>(0.2 gal) bottles | 14,500,000                       | 18,000,000                       | 5,400,000                        | 36,888,000                        |
| Export quota                               | 25%                              | 60%                              | 85%                              | 59%                               |

Source: Regulatory Councils



of bottled wine has grown significantly in tandem with quality, from 60,000 to over 5 million in 2006. The US and the UK have been targeted as priority markets, topping the export league, and are flanked by other European countries. Bodegas y Viñedos del Jalón, which emerged in 1999, is based in the south of the region and has production facilities at Maluenda, Mara and Manébrega, each focusing on part of the range and serving different vineyards. It has recently increased its selection of wines with the launch of two top level Garnachas—Alto Las Pizarras and Las Pizarras—which are made from very old vines planted at 1,000 m (3,280 ft) and have met with a great response in the US. Meanwhile, its basic range, La Olmedilla, offers young wines, including a Garnacha rosé which sells well in the US and northern European markets. Another important producer is Bodegas San Gregorio, a co-operative with 200 members which was founded in 1966 but has continued to invest and expand its international

business. Most of its wines are based on Garnacha and include a Garnacha/Tempranillo rosé. Its wines include Tres Ojos (Spain and the US) and Espiral, Viña Fuerte and La Sabrosita in the UK. Other leading producers and exporters in the region include Bodegas San Alejandro and Bodegas Virgen de la Sierra. Winemaker Norrel Robertson, known locally as “El Escocés Volante”, is originally from Scotland and has been based in Calatayud since 2003. He says: “Many people still regard Calatayud as ‘España profunda’, or deep Spain. What is really attractive from a wine point of view is the high quality of the raw material combined with the climate which is on the whole continental. Calatayud is an ideal place to make quality wine.” As the winemaker behind a number of wines including Torronero and Papa de Luna from Calatayud (and Marqués de Cruz from Campo de Borja), Norrel’s aim—in Calatayud in particular—is to make wines which “reflect vine age and are site and

microclimate specific” for the super-premium level. He’s particularly enthusiastic about some old Garnacha vineyards in the southeast of the region where the slate character of the soil is reminiscent of Priorat. A top level wine is in the making for 2009. Winemaker consultant Jesús Navascúes believes that the high altitude of most of the region’s vineyards which slows the ripening process, together with the distinctive soils, produces “marvellous Garnachas which can give distinctive wines.” He adds: “Now the challenge is to show these wines to the market place, but investment is needed to do so.” Other recent developments include the opening of the Monasterio de Piedra wine museum, the first stages of the region’s wine route and the inauguration of the new headquarters of the Regulatory Council. In the meantime, what can we expect from the 2007 vintage in Calatayud? The crop reached 19 million kg (41.8 million lb) in 2007,



8.6% more than the previous year. It started on September 18<sup>th</sup> and Garnacha grapes were picked between October 12<sup>th</sup> and November 15<sup>th</sup>, depending on the area of the vineyard. The quality of the grapes was generally described as excellent.

## CARIÑENA

Cariñena, with around 16,000 ha (39,536 acres) of vineyards lying to the east of Catalayud, is the oldest of the Aragón DOs, having been established in 1932. Co-operatives account for nearly 90% of production.

The vineyards extend from the plain of the Ebro River up to the mountains and lie between 400-800 m (1,312-2,624 ft). The climate is continental with temperatures rising to 38°C (100.4°F) in summer and falling to -8°C (17.6°F) in winter, and growers face the challenges of hail, high winds and hot summer temperatures. Low rainfall can also restrict the size of the harvest.

The region takes its name from the Cariñena grape (known as Mazuelo in other Spanish regions and Carignan in France), but this is not the main grape of the region: Garnacha is the most prominent grape, accounting for over half of the

vineyard area. Alongside Garnacha and Cariñena there is a wide range of other grapes including Tempranillo and whites grapes such as Macabeo, Garnacha Blanca and Moscatel, as well as more recent international arrivals such as Cabernet, Merlot, Syrah and Chardonnay.

The adoption of these modern varieties is just one of the changes of recent years as Claudio Herrero, director of the region's Regulatory Council, explains: "Over the last seven years we've seen a lot of changes here. Around 5,000 ha (12,355 acres) of vineyard have been restructured, and we've seen new bodegas emerge and modernization of co-operatives. We've also seen a more modern approach to marketing; in 2006, Cariñena was the second most important region of bottled exported wines."

Herrero is keen to emphasize that the region's exporters follow international trends closely, and although many are now equipped to offer wines with longer ageing, there is strong demand from the international market for *vinos jóvenes* (young wines) typically with three months oak.

He is keen to see the region's infrastructure develop and he'd like

to see enough bodegas reach a level to allow wine tourism to evolve and eventually offer a wine route similar to Somontano.

Meanwhile new bodegas are emerging and modern-day Cariñena is starting to look very different. Two wineries to come onto the scene in recent years are Bodegas Añadas and Bodegas Victoria. Bodegas Añadas was established in 2000 by Ángel Lázaro and Rafael Díaz who, with the collaboration of winemaker Jesús Navascués, have a mission to be "the catalyst for change" in the region and make "the best wines ever produced". Its innovative *Care* range is based on local and international grape varieties and includes a Joven Syrah/Tempranillo.

Bodegas Victoria's focus is on Tempranillo, Cabernet, Syrah and Merlot which are grown in its 72 ha (177 acres) estate. Its flagship wine is *Dominio de Longaz*, a blend of all four grapes.

Co-operatives of note include Covinca, established in 1987, and Grandes Vinos y Viñedos, established in 1997. GVV's new production facilities, following an investment of 10 million euros, were inaugurated in 2002 and are some of the region's most modern.



Producers in Cariñena are optimistic about the wines from the 2007 harvest. It started at the end of August with Chardonnay and Merlot grapes and continued until November. After a slow start in spring due to cold and wet weather, the growing period went well for most varieties. As in neighboring DOs, the summer was mild with hardly any rain but often featured the strong local *Cierzo* wind. The

ripening of the grapes was slow and balanced and the vines were largely healthy with the exception of some instances of oidium which was provoked by the strong winds. The final crop reached around 89 million kg / 176 million lb (75% red and 25% white) compared to 95.3 million kg / 210 million lb in 2006. Most importantly, the quality of the wines is expected to be good.

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## WEBSITES



Below is a list of websites for Aragón's DO Regulatory Councils. They contain basic information regarding each Designation of Origin, characteristics of the production areas, wines, and links to wineries:

**Somontano**  
[www.dosomontano.com](http://www.dosomontano.com)

**Campo de Borja**  
[www.campodeborja.com](http://www.campodeborja.com)

**Calatayud**  
[www.docalatayud.com](http://www.docalatayud.com)

**Cariñena**  
[www.docarinena.com](http://www.docarinena.com)

# FREIXENET

## A Smiling Juggernaut

As anyone who has taken the tour can attest, the most memorable image at the Freixenet caves in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia—just a hop on the highway west of Barcelona—is the vision of the menacingly massive yellow robotic claws that stack individual bottles of cava into giant piles. These intimidating claws, along with seemingly never-ending levels of subterranean industry, give the impression of Freixenet as being an

exemplar of the contemporary gargantuan industrial wine superpower. The numbers back this up: the caves are home to 160 million bottles. Freixenet is the world's largest producer of sparkling wine using the traditional method (the technique for making sparkling wine invented and used in Champagne), produces wine on four continents, and has registered sales in 140 countries.



Wingara Wine Group, Australia

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TEXT  
JORDAN MACKAY

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PHOTOS  
FREIXENET

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Despite appearances and statistics, Freixenet is actually not a cold, industrial company. Talk to almost anyone who works there and you get the opposite impression. According to employees, it sounds like a tight-knit, family enterprise made up of people who gladly dedicate their entire lives to this one company. In several conversations for this story, I was amazed not only by the absence of corporate rhetoric and bureaucratic business speech, but by the presence of joy and humor in everyone with whom I spoke. If the goal is to conquer the world with sparkling wine, it makes sense to have a sparkling personality. And it's that personality, along with a history of savvy moves, that has made Freixenet into one of the ten largest wine companies in the world.

Over the course of its genesis from cava giant to world giant, Freixenet has proven that it's possible to succeed in business without sacrificing one's soul. With all this success, it's easy to see why the company has a smile on its face, but it's also important to understand that the smile is a large part of the secret of that success.

### An uncanny knack for growth

The contemporary history of Freixenet goes back about 100 years; however, the deep roots of the company go back centuries to the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century union of two winemaking families: the Ferrers, who owned a 12<sup>th</sup>-century farming estate known as La Freixeneda, and

the Salas, a Penedès family in the wine business going back to the early 1800s. Both families were successful in their own right, but little did anyone know that the marriage of Pedro Ferrer Bosch to Dolores Sala Vivé would activate in their collective DNA a gene (and genius) for commerce and business, as the next 100 years would mean unabated growth on a scale never before seen in Spanish wine. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, replanting from phylloxera and dealing with a changing market, the family turned the business focus to sparkling wine and, around 1915, created the brand Freixenet. The next two decades were bumpy as the promising business improbably survived the horrors of World War I and the Spanish Civil War, somehow



emerging from that dark period with the energy and strength to launch it into a major expansion that would continue for the next 70 years. Progress continued over several decades as the company continued to expand export markets, while in 1941 introducing the popular Carta Nevada, which charmed buyers with its frosted-white glass bottle. In 1957, Dolores' son, José Ferrer i Sala, became head of the company and by the next decade, it was

producing over a million bottles per year. This grew with another product success in 1974, the brand Cordon Negro. Unabated in 2000, production of cava was estimated at around 150 million bottles per year, and along the way the corporation had created and purchased wineries in seven countries. Of course, the growth was not only due to sheer ambition and good genes. Over time, Freixenet mastered several principles of smart business:

marketing, market expansion, and technological innovation. Regarding the latter, simply put, it is not possible to expand production as quickly and massively as Freixenet did with a time-honored and manually-intensive product as traditional method sparkling wine is without significant research and development. Over the decades, Freixenet made this happen, investing significant percentages of revenues in things like stainless steel



Mexico

Australia

Australia

Argentina

Uruguay

France

United States



equipment and automation (like the robot arms), modernizing vineyard management, and propagating its own yeast strains, all of which has allowed for significant expansion of production while keeping the product consistent, an essential in the sparkling wine industry. Marketing has furthermore always been a hallmark, from the iconic success of a cava sold in a completely black frosted bottle (Cordon Negro) to a mass media

coup in turning the notion of a television commercial from something that annoys viewers into something that people can't wait to see. This is the phenomenon of the famous holiday TV ad for which they hired top Hollywood stars (Penelope Cruz, Sharon Stone, etc.) and spared no expense in production. Within weeks of release, the 2007 spot, created and directed by Martin Scorsese, had already attracted millions of viewers online. While

promoting an air of grandeur and glitz, the spots have been imbued by the very real sense of fun and joy that the company obviously sees in its product. Market expansion, the final key to Freixenet's growth, is something the company has done exceptionally well. But it hasn't accomplished this simply by creating export markets. Rather, as we will see below, Freixenet has integrated exportation, production and



Argentina

France

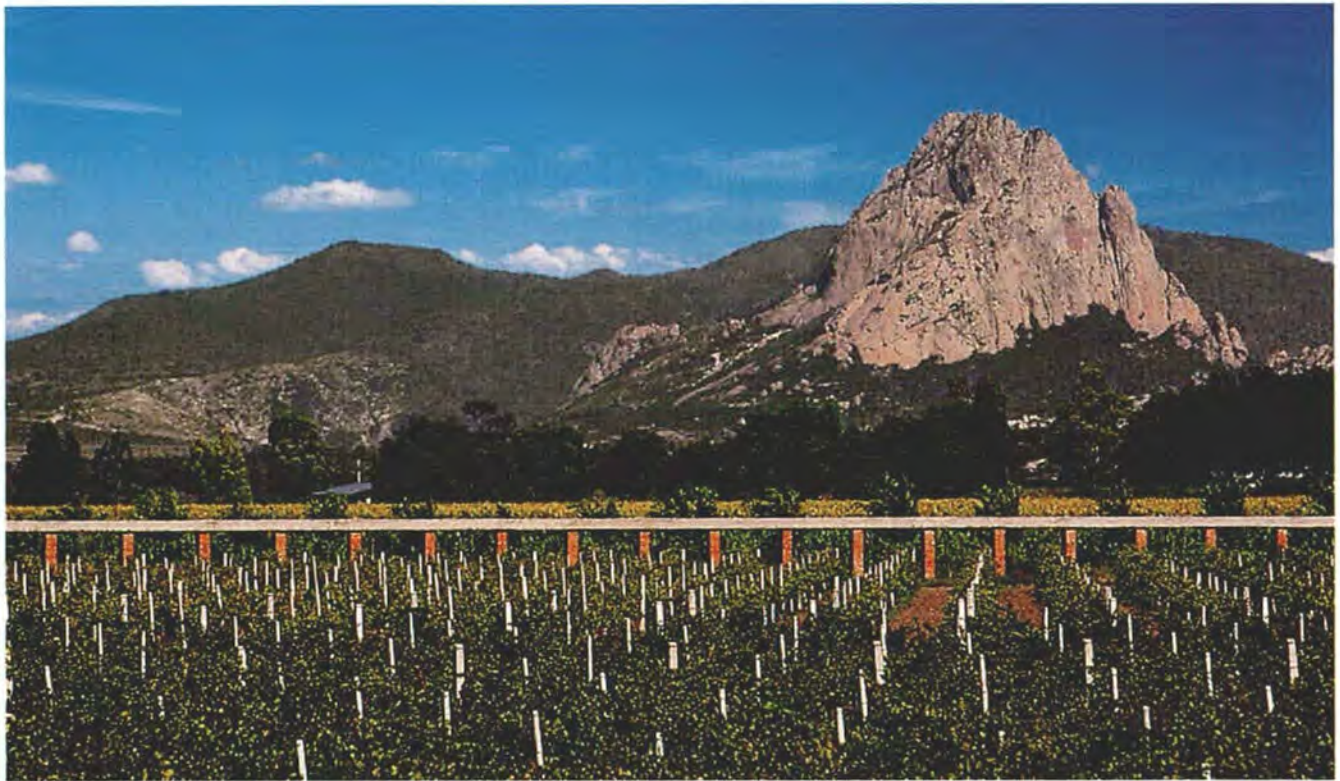
France

France

Australia

United States

France



distribution in a novel and deeply powerful way.

## Two decades of expansion

Juan Furné, president of Freixenet USA, divides the modern history of the company into three phases. The first was the domestic consolidation and initial exportation. Following that there have been two well-defined periods. "The first was in the 1980s," he says, "when Freixenet made a strong move to be a big player in the global sparkling wine industry." Over the period of just a few years, he notes, the company purchased two leading cava houses in Spain, as well as the Champagne house Henri Abelé, and built two sparkling wine facilities—one in the Queretaro region of Mexico (Sala Vivé), and one in Sonoma, California, which they called Gloria Ferrer, after José's wife. These moves solidified Freixenet as the largest bubbly producer on the globe. The second phase described by

Furné involves the company's continuing expansion into still wine. "We achieved the goal of becoming the largest sparkling wine company, and that business has done very well. But that's only a small part of the wine industry, and we know that to be a global player you have to be diversified." To that end, around the turn of the millennium—15-20 years after the first international expansion—Freixenet went on a spending spree in Spain, buying or creating wineries in every major region, giving rise to a cross section of Spanish wine they call the Heredad Collection. Additionally, still wine production kicked into gear in Mexico and California; Bordeaux's second-largest negociant, Yvon Mau, was purchased; and wineries were bought or founded in Australia (Wingara Wine Group), Argentina (Viento Sur) and Uruguay (Arerunguá).

While an analyst might worry that such continuity of management might lead to a company's stagnation, executive vice president

of Freixenet USA, Eva Bertran, says the opposite is true: "The reason things do not get stale is that the Ferrer family keeps buying. I wish we were more stagnant, actually, so we could rest. It's constant movement."

But this constant movement is not solely to increase production. "For every country in which we buy or build a winery," says Furné, "we are also acquiring a network in which to sell our other wines." Indeed, Freixenet USA is not only the import company for Freixenet sparkling wines, the other Spanish wines, Champagne, Bordeaux, Argentina and Australia, but it also sells Gloria Ferrer wines and exports them around the world. Similarly, Catnook from Australia is a product Freixenet can sell abroad, but it's also tied down to a sales network under which it can be used as a pipeline for other products. The key has been in seeing the avenues of commerce as two-way streets, building trust and loyalty over time. "The relationships with US distributors have been decades in the



making," Furné says. "It's not about moving one wine in one direction anymore, but moving all wines in all directions." Given two major investments in South America in the last decade, Freixenet is clearly banking on that continent's development over the next generation as both producer and consumer.

## Family culture rules

Ultimately, though, the heart of this vast and complex company beats in one place—with the family. "It's hard to completely conceive," says David Brown, vice-president of marketing of Freixenet USA, "that this is first and foremost a family company. Everything ultimately comes down to José Ferrer and his three sisters." "They have lunch together almost every day," says Bertran. And Brown adds, "Gloria, José's wife, travels with him most of the time. They've been married over 50 years, and when we have dinner with them, they're often holding hands. It's an amazing testament and an expression of the

soul that's at the base of the company."

Bertran says that all the company executives have been there for at least 20 years. "The family environment makes for stability. It's hard to leave." The closeness of the company is almost extreme: Brown and Bertran are themselves a married couple. "I'm married to another executive of the company," she says, "and in many places that would be frowned upon or even illegal, but here they were so excited."

In terms of action, Brown says that the family structure allows for decisions to be made swiftly and efficiently, but in terms of culture, he says, "there's an element of trust and belief that only comes with family. And their style is similar. They like to be hands on, but always trust your judgement. It's management by getting to know you and by bringing you closer, not keeping you farther away. How many companies can say that?"

Indeed, not many. A top ten global wine company being managed by

four siblings around a lunch table. "But that's the wine business," says Furné. "People forget that it's supposed to be fun. And when you're having fun, you're also most likely selling wine."

*Jordan Mackay has written about wine and spirits for a variety of publications including Gourmet, Food and Wine, Decanter, Wine and Spirits and Los Angeles Times. He lives in San Francisco.*

## W E B S I T E

### [www.freixenet.com](http://www.freixenet.com)

Freixenet's website with links to its companies in Germany, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Spain, the US, France, Japan, Mexico, Poland, the UK, Sweden and Switzerland. See Martin Scorsese's video! (English)



Since the start of this century, many Spanish wine territories have achieved their ambition of reaching designation of origin status. What better way to evaluate their health after the struggle to reach the crest of the wave than to take a look at some of their latest top-quality wineries? In this first article, we tour around some of the emerging districts and vineyard terrains in Castile-La Mancha, and pay a flying visit to some of the wildest parts of Málaga.

A Prodigious  
**DECADE**

21<sup>st</sup>-century DOs (I)



## TEXT

ANTONIO MARÍA CASADO

## PHOTOS

PATRICIA R. SOTO/ICEX  
FERNANDO MADARIAGA/ICEX

## TRANSLATION

JENNY MCDONALD

Many wine writers are talking about the emergence since 2000 of new designations of origin in Spain. They refer to their moving out of the shadows of oblivion to a position center stage, but what they do not realize is that this emergence also ties

in with another concept that is essential to the identity of the new wineries: altitude.

The news on wine over the last seven years takes us back to Don Quixote and his travels round La Mancha, an ancient province created in 1691 to

bring together 21 Castilian provinces under the capital of Ciudad Real. La Mancha (from the Arabic "Manxa" or "Al-mansha", meaning dry land) is basically the central part of a plateau, the Central Meseta, the most ancient unit of relief on the Iberian Peninsula. It includes parts of the provinces of Albacete, Ciudad Real, Cuenca and Toledo, precisely those included on this trip. These are generally high, flat lands bordered by towering mountains. It so happens that Spain's three mountain ranges (Iberian, Central and the Cordillera Penibética), along with the more humble but no less striking Toledo mountains, surround the geographical area of the designations of origin, set up over the last ten years if that, which are our destinations.

## Round trip

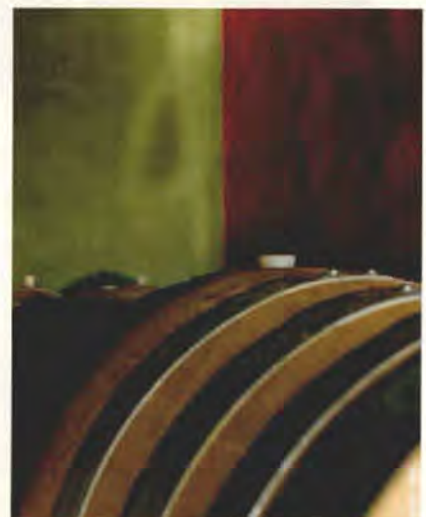
Our tour of the new DOs begins in Madrid. The first stop, just 70 km (43 mi) from the Spanish capital along the A-3 highway to Valencia, towards Cuenca, takes us to Uclés, a historic town (and home to Roman, Visigothic and Arab settlements). The name Uclés was chosen by those in charge of the Designation because it gave a clearer identity to the district rather than Tarancón, a larger town sometimes considered to be the capital of La Mancha Alta, and located at an altitude of 810 m (2,690 ft). The DO Uclés, set up in 2003 but only given official backing in 2005, is divided down the middle by the Altomira range



(reaching as high as 1,200 m / 3,937 ft), forming two completely different areas and giving rise to two different microclimates: one to the east that comes under the influence of the Mediterranean, and one to the west affected by the Atlantic. These add exceptional diversity to the vineyards located in 25 municipalities in the province of Cuenca and three in Toledo. The key to vine-growing here, apart from the altitude and the dry farming (in an area where there is practically zero rainfall during the summer months) is the common denominator of their varied soils, that of their depth, this being a typical feature that results from the complex local hydrography. This makes red wines the stars of this DO, especially those from the old Tempranillo stocks that offer fresh, concentrated fruity notes with very fine mineral touches. Alongside this

traditional variety are red Garnacha and the imported but acclimatized Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Very recently, in December 2007, approval was given for the inclusion of white varieties—Verdejo, Chardonnay, small-grain Muscatel, Sauvignon Blanc and Macabeo—to make white wines and traditional sparkling wines. An indication of the potential of the DO Uclés is the sharp increase in production over recent years. Whereas the 2006 harvest brought in about 200,000 kg (440,900 lb), in 2007, the figure reached 600,000 kg (1,322,000 lb) of very select and outstandingly healthy grapes. The Designation was originally promoted by an enthusiastic group of eight wineries, and their achievements are admirable, but now work is going on behind the scenes to contact sommeliers and restaurants, making sure the wines

make an appearance at tasting sessions and presentations. The highly elegant events in a tapered bottle also helps. Thus, the DO Uclés has become the stage to show off the new Cuenca wines, a sort of boutique designation in which the local wineries can display their latest, innovative wines, those that have been carefully prepared and bottled relatively recently, even though many brands continue to use the *Vino de la Tierra de Castilla* back label. These include Bodegas Fontana, which bottles their exceptional coupages of Syrah and Tempranillo under the name *Misterio de Fontana*, and *Finca La Estacada*, with its impeccable Tempranillo from old stocks named *Senda Paloma*. Altogether, the future of the DO Uclés looks more than promising, especially considering that some of traditional local cooperatives, such as *Nuestra*



Señora de la Soledad in the district of Fuente de Pedro Naharro (with its Bisiesto brand), have understood the quality requirements of today's market and have boarded the technology train with authority.

## Active cooperatives

Our next stop is in the Cuenca town of Pozoamargo, which has been the home base of the DO Ribera del Júcar's Regulatory Council since the Designation was set up in 2003. Not only have the

co-operatives here worked in exemplary fashion to combine quality with tradition, but they have a good understanding of international markets and of how to reap success from them. One co-operative, Nuestra Señora de la



Cabeza, with its inimitable Casa Gualda label, is already exporting about 20% of the 5 million l (1.3 million gal) it bottles. And in the district of Casas de Benítez, the San Ginés Cooperative is sending up to 60% of its Cinco Almudes label outside Spain. These paint a portrait of one of the most dynamic of the new designations. The Pozoamargo vineyard and those in the other six districts forming the DO Ribera del Júcar (Casas de Benítez, Casas de Fernando Alonso, Casas de Guijarro, Casas de Haro, El Picazo and Sisante) are located on a plateau close to the Júcar River at an average altitude of about 750 m (2,460 ft), where the clay-lime soils are deep and covered with the stones and gravel that are characteristic of this farming land. With a total population that barely reaches 6,000 and little more than 9,000 ha (22,239 acres) under vine, the new "Ribera" (meaning river bank) of Spanish wine is determined to be more than just another DO. Not only do they plan to sell quality wines, but this is also a socio-economic project that aims to retain the local inhabitants (many have left over recent years for the big cities) by also developing alternative activities such as wine tourism. But the real driving force behind the DO Ribera del Júcar is a small group of new wineries producing top-of-the-range wines and meeting one of the main needs of today's market: the right combination of quality and price. That is what Elvi Wines is



doing, which could be described as a winery without a winery. Their magic formula is to avoid the cost of fixed assets by forming alliances with other wineries, thus producing less expensive wine and establishing a presence in up to five Designations of Origin (Utiel-Requena, Priorat, La Rioja and Cava, as well as Ribera del Júcar). This practical philosophy has enabled the Jewish owners of Elvi Wines, Anne Aletà and Moisés Cohen, to give added impetus to this emerging district where not only have they taken on one of the legendary figures in Spanish winemaking—José Luis Pérez, owner of Mas Martinet in Priorat—but they have also achieved a splendid marriage, if we may use the term, with one of the district's most modern wineries. In this way, they are able to produce several of the DO's flagship wines under the roofs of Bodegas y Viñedos Illana, with the

added peculiarity that three of the products made for Elvi Wines—the Adar, Ness and Viña Encinar brands—are *kosher*, that is, made in accordance with the rules that allow them to be consumed by the orthodox Jewish community. But the most important quality of their wines lies in the way they are made, before aging. Chance may have a role to play, but the pumping over sequence is key. This is performed remotely (necessarily by a rabbi) using a precise computer pattern and shorter periods but greater in number, resulting in surprising young wines with fully-polished, perfect tannins, like those produced by long aging.

And from Illana, the young winery that houses both its own production and the Elvi initiative, we see something similar: scrupulous polishing of the tannins. Here the people in charge are another couple (enologist Carolina Hernández and Javier Prósper, an agriculturalist, enologist, heir to the historic Finca Buenavista where they are based, and the current president of the Regulatory Council). The prime virtue of their brand, Casa de Illana, is the expression of fruitiness in both their young wine (the only one in which they use a large proportion of Tempranillo, over two thirds) and in their Bordeaux-style Selección (80% Cabernet Sauvignon and 20% Merlot) as well as their Tresdecinco, which gives pride of place to ripe Merlot, but in the excellent company of Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon.

## Manchuela on the march

Just before the end of the last century, several districts of Castile-La Mancha initiated a clear move towards independence from their former parent and protector, the extensive La Mancha Designation of Origin. This was one of the first, having received official recognition back in 1932 (although the Regulatory Council, in its current form, was only set up in 1973), and one of the most traditional in Spain. The DO La Mancha had been criticized, perhaps because of its size, for being unable to defend the idiosyncrasies of each of the different districts and vineyards it aimed to protect. Originally, Manchuela was part of a provisional Designation of Origin which was much larger than today's and included another three within Castile-La Mancha: the

aforementioned La Mancha, Almansa (again an Arabic word meaning high, flat land with little grass) and Méntrida, all of which had achieved recognition long before. In 1997, a group of hard-working winemakers and *bodegueros*, aware of the potential of the many distinguishing features of the district's vineyards and winemaking, sought recognition of these differences. But approval from the ministry only came in July 2000, setting up Manchuela and placing its almost 70 municipal districts (between Cuenca and Albacete) on the map of the Spanish wine designations. Fuentalbilla, the home base of the DO Manchuela Regulatory Council, is located on the N-322, the road linking it with Utiel-Requena and the Mediterranean, which crosses a paradise of rocky crags and mists over the deep gully formed by the Cabriel River, a tributary of the Júcar.

The first winery to devote an unusual degree of energy (even abroad, where it sends 70% of its bottles) to promoting the quality of the new Designation was Finca Sandoval, a project that was set up in 1998, spearheaded and closely supervised by the journalist and gastronome Víctor de la Serna, with 10 ha (25 acres) of Syrah, which, over the years, have become the most outstanding example of the Rhône grapes in Spain. Next, with a large group of co-operatives, came two young wineries. The first, Bodegas y Viñedos Ponce, in Iriesta (Albacete), places the emphasis on careful interpretation of tradition. They believe in the heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation, the winemaking of their grandfathers, with occasional departures into biodynamics, based on vase-shaped, dry-farmed vines of the local Bobal variety. The results



are La Casilla (from 60-year-old vines on chalky soils), Clos Lojén, and P.F. (for *pie franco*, ungrafted stock), real landmarks linking the historic Manchuela to that of the future. The second, Altolandón, offers a varietal philosophy that is quite the opposite, with a predominance of foreign varieties, but is still easy to identify with Ponce because of the way in which they both encourage the wine “to speak”. Its location in Landete (Cuenca), at an altitude of over 1,000 m (3,280 ft) gives an exceptional tannin grip, to the extent that we can talk of perfect “Altolandón tannins”, referring to both their Altolandón brand and the more recent L’Ame de Malbec, of which they export a remarkable 70%.

## A different Málaga red

Before returning to Madrid, we turned southward in search of one of the extremities of the Mediterranean basin. In 2006, the Málaga and Sierras de Málaga DOs exceeded, for the first time, the figure of 1 million l (264,000 gal) sold in international markets. But this milestone was based on the renovation of the Málaga DO almost five years earlier. (Its Regulatory Council, which dates from 1933, is one of the oldest in Spain). In 2001 and after almost two years of waiting, the previous regulations were abolished and new ones came into force. This turned out to be something of a revolution because, without neglecting the

province’s more traditional styles—mostly centered round sweet Moscatel wine—the accent was now placed on dry wines, especially rosés and reds, that were more in line with modern tastes. And the place generating this change was the sub-

zone traditionally called Serranía de Ronda—covering the municipal districts of Arriate, Atajate, Benadalid, Gaucín and Ronda—where a number of projects were brewing, which looked promising for the DO but inevitably involved the



introduction of more varieties. So, in addition to those already allowed for the DO Málaga (Pedro Ximénez, Moscatel de Alejandría, Moscatel Morisco or small-grain Moscatel, Lairén, Doradilla and Romé, a red variety exclusive to this region), together with Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Macabeo, the gates were opened to the great non-Spanish red varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet franc and Pinot Noir) and Spanish Tempranillo and Garnacha. This brought tremendous opportunities for a completely new, red Málaga wine. But to what extent is it possible to produce a quality dry wine in the harsh summer temperatures of that region? Doesn't the sun eliminate the essential balance between acids and sugars? The answer once again involves an aspect that is transforming modern winemaking: altitude. It is synonymous with temperature differences and therefore offers sufficiently slow maturation to preserve the balance. There are a number of different wineries and wine personalities of note in this area, but one of the most striking is the Cortijo Los Aguilares, an enormous 800 ha (1,976 acres) estate where the Basque entrepreneur, José Antonio Itarte, and his wife Victoria, with the technical support of the ubiquitous Telmo Rodríguez, have given shape to an integrated cultivation system which, without the use of pesticides and herbicides, is able to achieve wines that combine a miraculous



Pinot Noir (even more difficult in these latitudes) with Tempranillo, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Another is the Juan Manuel Vetas winery, where the owner himself, a French-trained enologist who was responsible for the quality surge in the wines from the Cortijo las Monjas (possibly the first Spanish *château*, formerly owned by Prince Alfonso de Hohenlohe whose name still appears as the official owner of the winery), focuses on a Petit Verdot for which he confesses to being a total fanatic. Descalzos Viejos is a winery located in a renovated, former monastery looking over the impressive Tajo de Ronda gorge and owned by local entrepreneur Francisco Retamero, where the best dry white Sierras de Málaga wine is made from Chardonnay full of fresh fruit with balsamic and citrus notes. Finally is Los Bujeos, a winery and minimalist hotel (Hotel-Bodega El Juncal), the



property of Manuel María López, who also owns the top-class, local Tragabuches restaurant. He has received advice from Ignacio de Miguel for the production of his two labels, A Pasos and Pasos Largos, both of which, like the other Ronda wines, bring out the best of the red French varieties in this corner of southern Spain.

## Singular estates, plural wines

Strangely enough, it was precisely in 2000 that we set the cut-off point for our discussion of the emerging designations, that a group of long-standing, prestige winemakers set up the Grandes Pagos de España association with the aim of promoting vineyard terrains (*pagos*), an eminently Spanish concept that refers to a specific location or vine-growing district with distinct

weather and soil characteristics. These owners of “single, unique vineyards” sought recognition with the aim of subsequently aspiring to become a designation of origin and thus protecting their wines. These wines were considered to be singular not only from the quality point of view—both critics and consumers agreed—but also because the grapes came from a single vineyard, from selected varieties grown using vinification techniques in line with the characteristics of the soil and climate, with both processing and aging taking place in a winery actually on the estate. The keen enthusiasm of these winemakers whose properties we describe below had the desired effect and, from 2002, the vineyard terrains gradually became designations of origin.

## The Bonillo bonanza

The district of Campo de Montiel, recently attached to Sierra de Alcaraz, another historic district in La Mancha, is one of the sub-units into which Spain’s broad Central Meseta is divided. Although population density on this part of the plain is very low, there is one town with just 3,000 inhabitants that is home to two DOs: Finca Élez and Pago Guijoso. The geographical feature that offers such tip-top conditions for vines once again has to do with hydrography, as Bonillo is the watershed between two river basins: the Guadiana (leading to the Atlantic) and the Lezuza (a tributary

of the Júcar, flowing towards the Mediterranean). But there is another key: altitude. The municipality of Bonilla includes the second highest peak in the district, Los Barreros, 1,102 m (3,615 ft), from which a multitude of streams spring. This

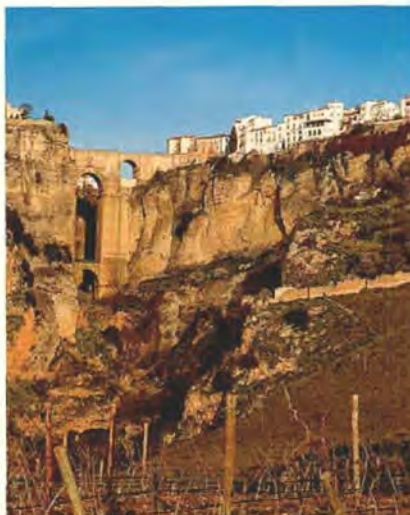
plateau was spotted by Manuel Manzanque, founder and owner of Finca Élez—which was recognized as a Designation of Origin in 2007—and Eduardo Sánchez-Muliterno, a very popular, small industrialist known as the “King of the Ballpoint” (his Styb



ballpoint factory in Albacete exports to 60 countries all over the world) who, after a number of years in France, decided to try out these poor soils for the French varieties he had become familiar with while there. Altitude is not the only characteristic shared by the two properties. Both cover about 40 ha (98 acres), both are the result of their owners' love of foreign varieties and both have the same terroir, giving wines that inherit the flintiness of their loamy-sandy soil, to the extent that some critics even relate the term *quijote* to *guijote*, from the Spanish word *guijo* meaning stone. No small comparison.

## From stone to stone

On the way back to Madrid (just 170 km / 105 mi from the capital) and at the penultimate stop-off on this tour of the Meseta and the Málaga mountains, we visit more stony but no less admirable ground at the heart of the Toledo mountains, the range that separates the Tagus Valley from that of the Guadiana. Here, in the town of Retuerta de Bullaque, on a 22 ha (54 acres) plot at a height of 900 m (2,952 ft), grapes have been growing since the late 1980s, again on stony, clay ground with a low organic content. The results are the wines of the Dehesa del Carrizal vineyard terrain, recognized as of 2007 as a Designation of Origin in its own right. In 1985, Marcial Gómez Sequeira, by his own definition, "a doctor, entrepreneur and, above all, a hunter", and also a great fan of travel and of Cabernet Sauvignon, decided to buy the estate on which he was to plant 8 ha (19



acres) of this noble French variety. Only with the first harvests was the full potential of the soil and altitude revealed. The day and night temperature differences obviously give a longer vegetative cycle to these northern varieties, which are not used to the excessive heat and early maturation that are characteristics of Spanish viticulture. In 1997, the vineyard was expanded to include Syrah, Merlot and Chardonnay, and the project was completed in 2000 with the inclusion of Spanish Tempranillo as well as another 5 ha (12 acres) of Syrah, Merlot and Merlot in 2006 and 2007. From the first vintages, the deft hands of Ignacio de Miguel were in charge of the property's wine production. He has always favored a monovarietal character for the French grapes from this corner of the Toledo mountains. So Syrah and Chardonnay feature in his catalogue, together with an outstanding Colección Privada that blends Cabernet and Syrah with Merlot, and his latest label, MV, adds Tempranillo to the French trio. All the wines are deliciously flinty,



proving that by no means did their efforts "fall on stony ground".

## Aristocratic labels

Our tour of La Mancha comes to a close just 100 km (62 mi) from Madrid and 50 km (31 mi) from Toledo at one of the most clearly defined districts in Toledo, La Jara, crossed from east to west by the Tagus River. Dominio de Valdepusa, in the municipal district of Malpica de Tajo and the property of Carlos Falcó, Marquis of Griñón, became the first Spanish winery to have its own Designation of Origin in 2002. Starting out with 14 ha (34 acres) of Cabernet Sauvignon planted in 1974, the plantation was then expanded in 1991 to include Chardonnay, Merlot, Syrah and Petit Verdot. Although the altitude is only just above 400 m (1,312 ft), the limey-clay soils are especially suitable for grapes. In his endeavor to get the best out of these foreign varieties, Carlos Falcó took on Julio L. Mourelle, an enologist trained at Davis University in California and a

dab hand at avoiding the unwanted vegetable aromas that are often associated with these grapes. The Dominio de Valdepusa label covers an extensive catalogue of monovarietals (Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon), together with Emeritus and Summa Varietalis, which combine these three grapes in varying percentages but always achieving the same top quality, even on international markets which receive almost 70% of the bottles.

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## KEY FIGURES

|                              | 2006 Production              | 2006 Sales                   |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Uclés                        | 392,400 l<br>(103,661 gal)   | 85% Spain;<br>15% abroad     |
| Ribera del Júcar             | 750,000 l<br>(198,129 gal)   | 50% Spain;<br>50% abroad     |
| Manchuela                    | 1,500,000 l<br>(396,258 gal) | 65.4% Spain;<br>34.6% abroad |
| Málaga and Sierras de Málaga | 1,911,775 l<br>(505,037 gal) | 58% Spain;<br>41% abroad     |
| Finca Elez<br>(2007 figures) | 200,000 l<br>(52,834 gal)    | 65% Spain;<br>35% abroad     |
| Pago Guijoso                 | 330,000 l<br>(87,176 gal)    | 100% Spain                   |
| Dehesa del Carrizal          | 90,000 l<br>(23,775 gal)     | 80% Spain;<br>20% abroad     |
| Dominio de Valdepusa         | 260,000 l<br>(57,200 gal)    | 35% Spain;<br>65% abroad     |

Source: Compilation of data from Regulatory Councils and the *Peñin Guide to Spanish Wine 2008*.

## WEBSITES

[www.vinosdeucles.com](http://www.vinosdeucles.com)

DO Uclés Regulatory Council  
(English, Spanish)

[www.vinosriberadeljucar.com](http://www.vinosriberadeljucar.com)

DO Ribera del Júcar Regulatory Council  
(English, Spanish)

[www.do-manchuela.com](http://www.do-manchuela.com)

DO Manchuela Regulatory Council  
(Spanish)

[www.vinomalaga.com](http://www.vinomalaga.com)

DO Málaga and DO Sierras de Málaga  
Regulatory Council  
(Spanish)

[www.manuelmanzanaque.com](http://www.manuelmanzanaque.com)

DO Finca Elez. The Finca Elez vineyard  
terrain owner's website (Spanish)

[www.sanchez-muliterno.com](http://www.sanchez-muliterno.com)

Bodegas y Viñedos Sánchez Muliterno,  
including the DO Pago Guijoso (English,  
Spanish)

[www.dehesadelcarrizal.com](http://www.dehesadelcarrizal.com)

DO Dehesa del Carrizal  
(English, Spanish)

[www.pagosdefamilia.com](http://www.pagosdefamilia.com)

Information on the wineries owned by  
Carlos Falcó, Marquis of Griñón, including  
Dominio de Valdepusa, a vineyard terrain  
with its own Designation of Origin  
(Spanish)



# Ore No More **VÍAS**

The genesis and further development of most Spanish Greenways, or Vías Verdes, is and will remain strongly linked to the history of ore mining and its demise. Such is the case of the evocatively but somewhat equivocally named *Vía Verde de Ojos Negros*. This “Greenway of the Dark Eyes” will be our protagonist in the second of three articles on the countrywide network of perfectly accommodated walking and biking paths traced over obsolete railway tracks. They allow us to experience, at a slow pace, the



# VERDES (II)

other side of the country: its magnificent interior and all the natural, cultural, and gastronomic treasures it hides. This time it's eastern Spain's turn and this Vía Verde will take us where Romans, Visigoths, and Arabs roamed before us, along the natural gateway and passage from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast. The complete Greenway stretches from the village of Ojos Negros in Teruel where the ore was originally mined, to the port city of Sagunto in Castellón where it was shipped or smelted.

TEXT  
ANKE VAN WIJCK ADÁN

PHOTOS  
JUAN MANUEL SANZ/ICEX

In 1993 the Fundación de Ferrocarriles Españoles (Spanish Railway Foundation) launched its first Greenway in an effort to make a considerable number of railway tracks that were no longer operative available to the general public. The goal was not only to meet a growing need and demand for sustainable leisure activities for everyone, including the mobility impaired, but also to change habits and thus promote the use of non-motorized means of transport between localities. Today the foundation is a leading member of the permanently expanding European Greenways Association.

An additional goal of rehabilitating these generally flat or slightly sloping former tracks is to open up the

interior, as traditionally the primary tourist attraction in Spain has been and still is its coastal areas. However, the country—and particularly its interior—also holds an astounding variety of natural, historic and cultural venues yet to be discovered by the majority of Spain's close to 60 million yearly visitors.

### A tale of dark eyes

It may be somewhat disappointing at first that the name *Ojos Negros*, literally Black Eyes in Spanish, does not derive from a tale about a beguiling dark-eyed hero or heroine. The true story, however, is no less intriguing. The word *ojos* here is a slight variation of the word *hoyo*, which refers to large black spots

produced by slag from the nearby iron ore mines. Archaeological findings have revealed early mining activities in Sierra Menera (*mena* is the Spanish word for ore) by Celtiberian dwellers, Romans, Arabs and other settlers. Renewed interest was shown by a company from Bilbao which, in 1900, founded the *Compañía Minera de Sierra Menera*. Key to the success of any mining operation is ready access to the nearest port, as maritime transport tends to be far less costly. As negotiations with the firm owning the existing railway failed, the company decided to build its own practically parallel railway and a pier in the Mediterranean. Sagunto was the port city of choice, and owes much of its fame to this mining





operation. A smelter was built there in 1917 and operated until 1984; closure ushered in the final demise of mining in Ojos Negros.

What is left is a somewhat eerie but fascinating landscape, the manmade product of open-air mining. The emerald green color of a crater-like lake contrasts sharply with the surrounding steeply carved out rust-colored gullies. The ruins of the few still-existing row houses for miners and the screeching sound of low flying crows only add to this grim but gripping picture.

In Ojos Negros and a few adjacent villages the original railroad tracks are still in place. Lorenzo Vallés, the municipal secretary of the village, explains that the plan is to integrate them into the *Vía Verde*, and allow visitors to get a glimpse of the past by covering this stretch with specially designed railway carts and bikes.

## A worthwhile detour

Before leaving the area to head further along the *Vía Verde*, it is worth visiting the small but well-known *Museo del Azafrán* (Saffron Museum) in nearby Monreal del Campo which, under the name *Azafrán de Jiloca* (after the river in the area), produces a small yearly quantity (some 9 kg / 20 1/4 lb) of exquisite saffron each year. At the 2004 Terra Madre forum in Torino (organized by Slow Food), it was declared the best in the world. Saffron has been grown on this *meseta* (a high plateau) since it was brought over by the Arabs. José María Plumed, who grows and sells saffron, explains that, based on continued outstanding analytical results, the Jiloca Saffron Producers Association has applied for the Designation of Origin *Azafrán del Jiloca*. The primary purpose is to encourage people in the area to

increase production, as demand for this top-quality, ecologically-sound saffron is by far exceeding supply. In an effort to ensure quality, Plumed is looking to modernize the drying procedure. The rest will remain just as it has for thousands of years (see p. 66).

## Finally the *Vía Verde*

The time has come to head to the outskirts of Cella where we get on the first stretch of our *Vía Verde*. Having left the Sierra behind us, we quickly find ourselves before an immense, almost horizon-less plain of endless grainfields. Traveling this section of the Greenway in winter takes on heroic dimensions as the notorious *Cierzo*, a bone-chilling northern wind, sweeps these plains remorselessly at that time of the year. Our hero goes by the name of Alfredo Abada Ruiz. It is not even noon and he is already on his way



back to Teruel (some 25 km / 15.5 mi) where he lives. "From now on it's a piece of cake," he explains, because he will have the wind at his back and the Via Verde goes downhill ever so slightly. "It's quite the contrary on the way over," he laughs, as he volunteers some useful advice: "The best time of the year to really enjoy this part of the Via Verde is spring and early autumn." Abada is a regular on the Ojos Negros Greenway and often takes his bike on the train from Teruel to Puebla de Valverde, from where he heads in the opposite direction towards the friendly citrus orchards of Castellón.

Most of the villages lie right next to the Via Verde. In Cella, for example, there is an well from which the Jiloca River begins. Discovered by the Knights Templar in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it is said to be the largest artesian well in Europe. The oval parapet which encloses its crystal

clear waters was designed by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Italian architect Domenico Ferrari. It is surrounded by a small park with plenty of benches to enjoy a few quiet moments. Nearby Conclud, a village with a pretty 18<sup>th</sup>-century church and several cave dwellings lends its name to *Hipparion Concludense*, a Pliocene equine unearthed in its outskirts. It is just one of the many prehistoric species found in an area which must have been a genuine Jurassic Park.

Gradually the landscape starts sloping and scattered sabina trees and arizonic cypresses are making their peculiar appearance. We now approach Teruel and although our Greenway surrounds the city, a 2 km (1.25 mi) long road takes us into the center. The city was proclaimed a World Heritage Site in 1986, specifically for its extraordinary and well-preserved examples of *Mudéjar* art and

architecture. Five magnificent towers mark the city center. *Mudéjar* style developed in Spain from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a fusion of Christian and Arab elements. As we can clearly observe, characteristic of *Mudéjar* style is the use of small bricks in intricate patterns often interspersed with colorful or gilded ceramic ornaments. On our walk through town we will also see the monument El Torico (little bull) which is the symbol of Teruel and appears in its coat of arms. But Teruel also prides itself as being a city of lovers. Here it is neither Romeo and Juliette nor Girolamo and Silvestra, but rather Diego and Isabel who, cast in marble, symbolize eternal love through their mutually tragic death. After our stroll, we may treat ourselves to dinner at one of the city's outstanding restaurants, and right behind the cathedral we find La



Tierreta. Luis Estopiñán, the chef and co-owner, makes it a point to give a truly vanguard edge to regional products and traditional gastronomy. Each of the eight enormously creative courses in his sampler menu has what Estopiñán calls "a regional touch". But while he doesn't use regional products exclusively, he does demand that all of his ingredients be top quality. That translates into, for example, grating a big, fresh, black truffle, found locally, (see p. 69) right at the table, followed by saffron monkfish with chanterelles, and chocolate truffles covered in puff pastry with orange ice cream. A most congenial staff, headed by his partner Oscar Paris, makes this a memorable experience.

Yet before leaving Teruel another fascinating experience lies ahead that will take us millions of years back in time when this area was inhabited by some of the largest creatures the

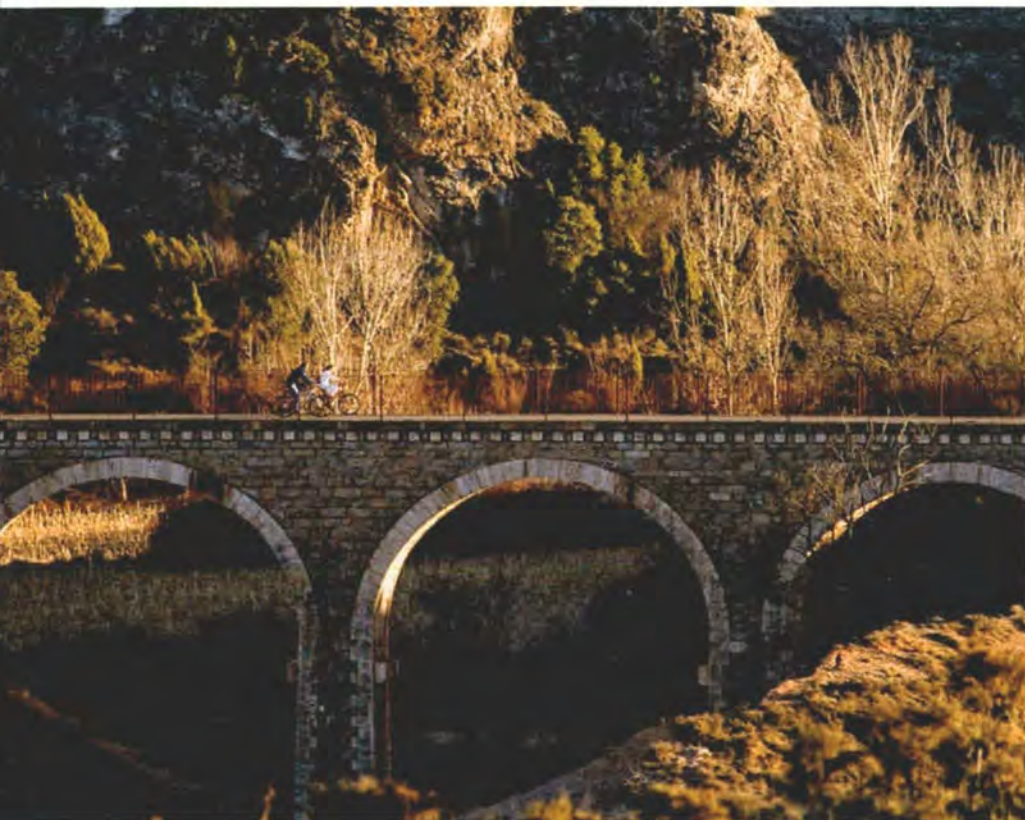
world has ever seen. Territorio Dinópolis offers a unique opportunity to learn about prehistoric life at a complex of educational, research, and exhibition centers, as well as theme parks, spread over five localities in and around Teruel. Together they constitute the largest paleontological exhibition area in Europe and presumably the most modern in the world. Like a time machine, it allows visitors to experience the fascinating world inhabited by creatures long ago. After this visit the landscape will undoubtedly take on a new meaning as we resume our travels on the Via Verde.

## Getting halfway and beyond

On our next stretch, the landscape alongside the Greenway will monopolize most of our attention as we slowly climb towards the

Escandón Pass (1,242 m / 4,075 ft) and cross wide ravines over a number of elegantly arched viaducts that once carried the thundering ore trains on their way to Sagunto. Through open forests, the horizon is only interrupted by the trenches sharply cut into the bright, rust-colored hills that starkly contrast with the dark green sabina, juniper and pine trees.

Drinking in the landscape, we will have inadvertently entered an area with natural and planted formations of different oak species, the ideal environment for the prized black "nuggets" we call *Tuber melanosporum*, or truffle (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71). "What they learned from the French and Italians, we in turn learned from Catalans and Basques," says Daniel Bertolin, president of the Teruel Association of Truffle Growers. Thus, after having watched strangers digging around for some years, it was in the late 50s



that locals in the area around Sarrion began searching for the aromatic and flavorful treasures which—for long unbeknownst to them—their soil was hiding (see p. 69). Our taste buds and stomachs should now be ready for *patatas a la baturra* (oven-baked potatoes with cod, a typical Aragonese peasant dish) and a plate of fried eggs with Teruel ham sprinkled with truffle at Serrón, a small restaurant in Sarrion's main square, where the owners, Isabel and Palmira, make us feel right at home. From now on, we will increasingly find perfectly recovered and automatically lit tunnels. No one would ever notice that, with the railway no longer in use, several of these dark, cool, humid spaces used to provide the perfect environment for mushroom cultivation by local growers. Crossing yet another viaduct offering spectacular views, we reach the village of Venta del

## THE GOLD OF THE POOR

"Saffron is a very social crop," says Mari Fuertes, the Saffron Museum's coordinator. Only a very small piece of land is needed for a good return. Harvest time (generally the second half of October) is everybody's business and most village activities come to a standstill for the fortnight during which time the harvest of the ephemeral saffron rose, "the flower of dawn", lasts. The scent of saffron fills the village air. Food is prepared in advance. A local doctor used to say that saffron was the best medicine, as nobody would get sick during this time. Harvest starts at dawn (when the flower is still closed and thus easier to pick without being damaged) and often continues until noon, when the purple content of tall, cotton-lined wicker

baskets is strewn out on large tables and the delicate job of separating the bright red stigmas lasts well into evening. Then it is time for drying by gently warming the little strands in a flat round sieve over an earthenware coal heater for about 35 minutes, further reducing the already surprisingly small amounts to a fifth. Over 150,000 flowers are needed for 1 kg (2 1/4 lb) of saffron. Each step along this process requires a considerable level of expertise which is typically passed on from generation to generation.



Aire, which generally honors its name with sustained mountain winds. Not surprisingly it houses a considerable number of dry curing facilities which produce the famed DO Jamón de Teruel ham, as well as other dry cured white pork products.

The village of Barracas lies at the border between Teruel and Castellón and our next stretch of Greenway is controlled by the regional transport authorities. The Vía Verde de Ojos Negros is one more example of how great ideas often stumble on the complexity of execution (territorial issues, available budgets, local support, different administrative bodies involved, etc.), yet it is also a good example of both insight and foresight. Prior to starting rehabilitation, it was agreed that the overall mileage should follow that

of the original railway running from Ojos Negros to Sagunto. This means that here we take off from km 122 and from now on villages succeed each other more rapidly. Also, from here on, the Vía Verde features a two-purpose surface: 2 m (6.5 ft) of the total width features a double surface treatment to accommodate bikers and another 1.5 m (5 ft) has compacted gravel for walkers and runners. "In the summer there may be 10°C (50°F) difference between one and the other," explains Paco Morata, the young, dedicated forest guard who works for PYG, S.L., the maintenance company.

From the rest area near the old station of Torás we enter the region of Alto Palancia. Gradually, landscape and climate—influenced by the Mediterranean—start changing, and the Greenway becomes surrounded by olive and almond

groves. "There are three magic moments on this journey," says Luis Llorens, who confesses that being in charge of the Greenway on behalf of the Department of Transport is an ongoing pleasure. The first is when almond and cherry tree blossoms turn the whole area from the Height of Ragudo to the village of Caudiel in a succession of white and pink scented carpets. Another is when the barren wheat fields of the meseta become a sea of green, bedecked with multicolored flowers, and the third moment is when cherries ripen and trees all around Caudiel fill with garnet earrings. "For centuries," adds Llorens, "the harvest culminates with a huge fest in the village where everybody is invited to a bowl of their famous *olla* and, of course, cherries for desert." Last June this translated into over 3,000 portions of *olla* and 700 kg (1,543 lb) of cherries. *Olla* (meaning stew) is a traditional peasant dish that has as many versions as there are chefs and seasons, but here it basically consists of white beans, cardoons, potatoes, cabbage, turnip, onion, pig's head, onion, blood sausage, bone marrow, lamb shoulder, saffron, olive oil, and water, gradually cooked together into a nourishing stew.

## Versatile as a Vía Verde

Soon after leaving Caudiel, we get to a rest area with a lovely view over the town of Jérica and its pretty Mudéjar bell tower, the only one in the region of Valencia. Once there, next to the arched town hall building, we find a small bakery called Castillo de Jérica. It is run by



Cipriano and Conchi Cortés who continue to make traditional products like *pingano*, an artfully carved, flat round loaf made of wheat flour, olive oil, salt, yeast and *llavorettes*, as the locals call star anise seeds. It is a batter which, as Conchi explains, goes back in time and is eaten both with salty and sweet accompaniments. One of their prominent products is the *coca de cebolla*, a large rectangular rolled-out piece of dough topped with thinly-sliced caramelized onions, shredded salt cod, pine nuts and beaten egg, oven-baked for about 40 minutes. It is just one more example of the enormous capacity in the Mediterranean to create delicious all-in-one dishes with a perfect nutritional balance, using simple and locally available ingredients. Leaving Jérica, we get to another rest area with a splendid view over the Embalse del Regajo, a large reservoir surrounded by pine woodland. A little further on, a small former railway guard house has been restored by the Alto Palancia Workshop-School, a social institution where young people are taught different ad hoc crafts. In this area we will also see a number of pretty stone bridges crossing the trenches high above us and soon we reach Navajas. It is a peaceful village with lots of second residences and a conveniently located camping a stones throw from Segorbe. Yet before we get there, it is worth paying a visit to Alfarería La Esperanza, the last extant workshop where José Magdalena still handcrafts the traditional ceramics from Segorbe. Among them are his famous *botijos de engaño*, earthenware drinking jars "with a trick," beautifully glazed in

typical green and blue patterns. "There used to be 14 workshops in Segorbe," Magdalena says wearily, but "now I am the only one left." He is about to retire, and after four generations nobody is following in his steps.

Quite the contrary has happened at Bastones Sucesores de Manuel García. Walking sticks are another traditional craft in Segorbe. Luis García's great-grandfather started making them in an area rife with the perfect raw material, the *almez* (*celtis australis*), a malleable wood with an excellent weight-resistance ratio. Of course they still make the traditional simple wooden walking stick with the rounded handle, but things have changed and the Garcías have kept up with the times. They are about to inaugurate a huge modern factory and García's top-fashion walking sticks can be found anywhere, from Europe to Japan to Saudi Arabia.



## A delightful province town

Segorbe is the capital of the Alto Palancia region and a charming elevated, erstwhile fortified town with some interesting places to visit, a good reason to stay here overnight and have dinner at the excellent restaurant at Hotel María de Luna. "We get people from the Vía Verde regularly," explains Javier Simón, its chef and owner. This means some 10 to 12 guests a week, more in summer than in winter, who stay at the hotel, stroll through Segorbe, and enjoy his culinary arts. It was at Simón's initiative and in collaboration with 11 other restaurants in and around Segorbe that last November the First Mushroom and Lamb Gastronomic Event was held, where each restaurant presented a sampler menu and served Orero Selección 2005, an



excellent regional red wine. Simón's menu included dishes such as lamb cannelloni in saffron milk cap sauce (*lactarius deliciosus*) and walnut pie with mushroom marmalade and a cloud of hazelnut. It's quite an autumnal experience made all the more pleasant by Javier's wife, Ana, who runs the front room.

Segorbe is especially famous for its festival called the Entrance of Bulls and Horses. It is unique in Spain and was first documented in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In 2005 it was declared of International Tourist Interest and indeed attracts a considerable number of visitors from Spain and around the world. Every second week of September for seven days at 2 p.m., a group of previously selected bulls comes running into town, but at the very entrance they are met by a number of horseback



## S N U F F L E F O R T R U F F L E



Daniel Bertolín was still a little boy when he first accompanied his father. Today, with his wife María, they produce some 200 kg (441 lb) a year, and like other growers in the area, are in full expansion. In their hometown of Sarrión, the Bertolíns also operate a consultancy for truffle growers and a nursery where, under strict control by the Aragón Department of Agriculture, some 15,000 oak seedlings a year receive the corresponding mycorrhization (inoculation with *T. melanosporum* spores) treatment before being planted. It will take some five years before the first truffles appear, and not without the inestimable assistance of specially prepared dogs like old Tato who, despite the competition from his offspring, carefully bred and trained by the Bertolíns, is still their favorite and regularly accompanies them on their

searches. "He only signals the perfectly ripe ones," says María proudly while she kneels on a tiny pillow and, with a special tool, gingerly unearths the dirty lump, shakes it off, and transfers it to a wicker basket, rewarding Tato with a biscuit. Every Sunday from roughly December 15<sup>th</sup> through March 15<sup>th</sup> there is a fresh truffle market in Sarrión (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71) where prices are established weekly. While at the very beginning of the season the price may start off at some €400 per kg (2 1/2 lb), it may hit €1,000 around Christmas. It is clear that there is no limit to the increasing globalization of food products and worldwide interest in the many top quality Spanish food products; in fact, Bertolín was featured in a *New York Times* article last year.

riders in a V formation who skillfully guide the bulls through the streets packed with people and into the square where, throughout the week, a bull breeders contest is held.

This is also the time when the yearly Traditional Ham and Sausage Fair takes place. At the foot of the cathedral, worth visiting for its beautifully-painted dome, we find a small butchery where, for four generations, the Pesón family has been producing typical sausages from Segorbe. They make *morcilla de pan* which, as Paco Pesón explains, is a blood sausage made of lard, bread crumbs, salt, cinnamon, black pepper and anise seeds, and *gueñas*, thin sausages made of pork innards, meat, lard, and *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain) together with the above spices.

Whatever cured meats we will see, like DO Teruel hams, pork loins, and chorizo, come from the dry curing facilities the family owns in Venta del Aire.

Just across the street we find Mauro Torres' bakery and pastry shop with a charming little outside terrace to enjoy a cocoa-topped foamy cappuccino or *chocolate a la taza* (a very thick hot chocolate), accompanied by any of their specialties. "We make everything from natural regional products, doing things traditionally," says Mauro, a fifth generation baker. He calls it post-war pastry as people were forced to "make very special things with few means." Special indeed! Their confited, pear-filled marzipan made with pear syrup, fresh eggs and the wonderfully plump local Marcona almonds is ordered every year as a gift to the



Royal Family. Then there is the crisp *guirlache*, made with almonds and sugar, *turrón*, Spain's ultimate Christmas treat, and last but not least, their famous *Jericanos*, a puff pastry covered with meringue and topped with chocolate fondant.

## Approaching the Mediterranean

As we approach the Mediterranean, we now see occasional plantations of both medlar and the somewhat awkward looking persimmon trees, stripped of all their leaves by the time the fruit ripens. Yet we are still also in the foothills of the Sierra de Espadán on one side and the Sierra de Calderona on the other. Here olive groves share the territory with the vineyards that today produce some 700,000 l (184,920 gal) of Vins de la Terra de Castelló (wines from Castellón with Protected Geographic Indication since 2003).



Just a few kilometers from the Via Verde, Guzmán Orero proudly shows the 19<sup>th</sup>-century estate, Masía de la Hoya, where in 2002 he planted the first grape varieties, especially Monastrell, Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. He confesses that it has been a period of trial and error, but his 2005 Orero Selección was rated 87 in the *Peñín Guide to Spanish Wine*. Things are off to a good start. Orero was the first winemaker in Castellón to use corks from the nearby company Espadan Corks. The recurring chromatic pattern of dark red and green appears again in the Sierra de Espadán, but here it no longer comes from ferrous soils but from the large extensions of autochthonous cork trees. Entering Altura, our next village, we pass a magnificent municipal swimming pool and recreational grounds which are accessible to everyone. Altura is no exception, as



most villages on this stretch feature pools and well-accommodated camping grounds. A little further we find the local olive oil cooperative where, in the fall, growers patiently wait in line to drop off freshly picked olives, often until well after dusk. The type of olive grown here is the Serrana, an native variety that has been recovered to produce a fruity yet full-bodied olive oil under the brand name Oliespal. It is now recognized under the Designation of Origin Aceites de Valencia which comprises nine regional areas. "Altura has traditionally had an important production," explains Miguel Abad, who is president of the DO's Regulatory Council and heads this technologically up-to-date co-operative that also features bottling and packing installations. In 1880 olive oil from Altura had already won a quality award. In order to promote their top-quality regional products more efficiently,

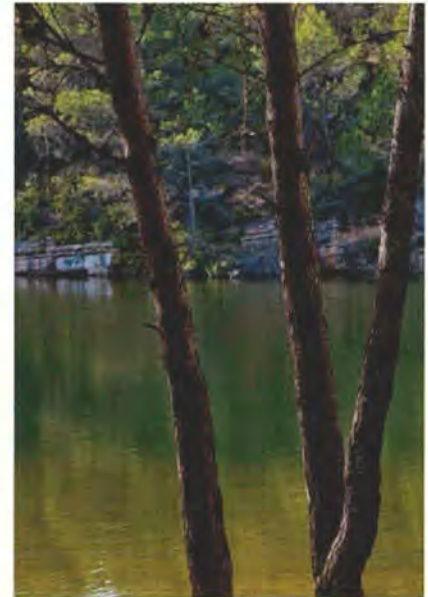
the co-operative, together with a number of producers of wines, jams, honey, turrón, and cheese, have created a consortium under the name Sol de Sierra.

A prominent member of the consortium is Quesos y Postres del Niño, owned and run by José Antonio and Aurelio Torres. At facilities featuring the latest, FDA-approved technology, they are still making traditional cheeses: *servilleta*, typical in interior Valencia, means napkin, and the cheese owes its name and peculiar package-like shape to the impression of the linen cheese cloth which, with its four corners tightly knotted together in the center, is used to press the cheese. This goat's cheese has a minimal ripening period of two months, during which time it is manipulated some 25 times by hand to rub in the natural mold which forms on its outside. The result is a beautiful ash-grey rind and a milky

yet intense flavor with a deep aftertaste. *Tronchón* originates on the border area between Teruel, Castellón and Tarragona. This cylindrical sheep's milk cheese features a characteristic round cavity on top with a subtle fleur-de-lis design and is cured for at least three months. It has a robust flavor reminiscent of dried fruit. Although their principal client is the high-end market in Spain, they also export to many European countries, the United States, and South America.

## The last stretch

From now on we increasingly happen upon orange orchards, which are a feast for the eye, particularly around year's end when myriads of oranges stand out sharply against the green perennial foliage. Wafts of the unmistakable aroma of *flor de azahar* (orange blossom) fill one's nostrils at every breath from



November through March. One last trench and we reach the villages which, until the remaining stretch to Sagunto is completed, mark the end of this *Vía Verde*. Algar de Palancia, Algimia, and Alfara de Algimia, whose toponymy clearly reveals their Arabian past, are sleepy little villages that still mostly live off citrus culture, but are slowly gearing up for tourism as a welcome addition to present and future growth. "As the *Vía Verde* passes at a very close distance, it encourages people to visit us," says Eva López, the enthusiastic director of the Office for Local Development at Alfara. Her village, full of flowery balconies, has many interesting historical sites, like the municipal wash house (still in use) or the *cisterna* (cistern), both of Arabian origin, the colorfully-painted Church of Saint Agustin, or the small white hermitage towering over the village. It is also host to multitudinous fests which provide

an excellent occasion to sample local specialties. Encarna Molina is, at 83, one of the few women left to make *orelletes*, a honey sprinkled flower-shaped fried dough. So what better to leave the *Vía Verde* de Ojos Negros than on this sweet note? We have come a long way, but precisely one of the great advantages of this Greenway is that it runs almost parallel to the official railway and thus allows us to do smaller stretches at a time and avoid passes. But this is not just the *Vía Verde* and the national railway. Where the *Vía Romana* once ran, the Arabs marched and medieval roads are still extant, now the splendid new Mudéjar highway uses this natural corridor to connect Valencia with Zaragoza, the city that will host the 2008 World Exhibition, expected to draw millions of visitors from all over the world (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72). By efficiently opening up the hinterland, the Mudéjar highway is a

real boon for the interior in many aspects, including easy access to our *Vía Verde*. Whereas beaches are similar all around the Mediterranean, the Greenways are an unparalleled means to make contact with and drink in the essence of a different culture with such varied a landscape and so rich a heritage as Spain.

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## CYCLING AND WALKING IN EASTERN SPAIN

Of the 64 Vías Verdes in Spain, below is a selection of the best Greenways for cyclists and walkers on the eastern Iberian Peninsula. For more extensive and up-to-date information, please visit the official Vías Verdes website: [www.viasverdes.com](http://www.viasverdes.com)

**ARAGÓN****Vía Verde de Ojos Negros II:**

43 km / 26 mi between Barracas (Castellón) and Puerto del Escandón (Teruel).

Natural environment: Mediterranean woodland: pine trees, oak groves and dwarf junipers. Dry riverbeds.

Cultural heritage: Sarrión and La Puebla de Valverde city centers. Teruel monumental heritage site.

**Vía Verde de Val de Zafrán:**

29.5 km / 18 mi between Valjunquera/Valljunquera and Arnés-Lledó station (Teruel-Tarragona).

Natural environment: Mediterranean olive fields, almond trees, vineyards, kermes oak and pine tree woodland.

Cultural heritage: Churches, castles, archeological sites, bridges and stately homes, porticos, old jailhouses and town halls in the different municipalities.

**CATALONIA****Vía Verde del Baix Ebre:**

26 km / 16 mi between El Pinell de Brai station and Roquetes (Tarragona).

Natural environment: Ebro riverside and karstic canyons.

Cultural heritage: Tortosa's historic sites. Xerta diversion dam.

**Vía Verde del Carrilet (I):**

54 km / 33 mi between Olot y Girona.

Natural environment: La Garrotxa volcanic natural park. Ter and Fluvià riversides.

Cultural heritage: Anglès, Sant Feliu and Girona city centers. Romanesque hermitages. Castillo d'Hostoles castle.

**Vía Verde del Carrilet (II):**

39 km / 24 mi between Girona and Sant Feliu de Guíxols (Girona).

Natural environment: Mediterranean woodland.

Cultural heritage: Girona and Castell d'Aro monumental heritage sites. Tower castles in Quart, Cassà, Llagostera and Santa Cristina.

**Vía Verde del Ferro i del Carbó:**

12 km / 7.5 mi between Ripoll and Cargadero de Toralles (Girona).

Natural environment: Ter valley. Sierra Caballera mountains.

Cultural heritage: Santa María de Ripoll monastery, Ripoll ethnography museum. Sant Joan monastery, Sant Pol church and Gothic bridge in Sant Joan de les Abadesses.

**Vía Verde de la Terra Alta:**

23 km / 14 mi between Arnes-Lledó and El Pinell de Brai stations (Tarragona).

Natural environment: Pine woodland. Breathtaking karstic landscape: canyons and cavities. It's advisable to bring a flashlight for the tunnels.

Cultural heritage: Fontcalda sanctuary (16<sup>th</sup> century). Sant Salvador d'Horta convent in Horta. Sant Josep en Bot hermitage.

**VALENCIA REGION****Vía Verde de Alcoi:**

12 km / 7.5 mi between Alcoi - La Canal (Alicante).

Natural environment: Carrascal de la Font Roja natural park.

Cultural heritage: Alcoi town center. Moros y Cristianos festival.

**Vía Verde del Maigmo:**

22 km / 13.6 mi between Agost and Puerto del Maigmo (Alicante).

Natural environment: Mediterranean woodland. Gypsum ravines.

Cultural heritage: Alfarería museum (pottery) in Agost.

**Vía Verde de Ojos Negros (I):**

70 km / 43.5 mi between Torres-Torres (Valencia) and Barracas (Castellón).

Natural environment: Palancia valley, Toro and Espadán mountains. Gardens and Mediterranean woodland.

Cultural heritage: Monumental heritage sites in Segorbe and Jérica.

**Vía Verde de la Safor:**

7 km / 4.4 mi between Gandía and Oliva (Valencia).

Natural environment: Marjal de Pegó-Oliva natural park.

Cultural heritage: Monumental heritage sites in Gandía and Oliva.

**Vía Verde de las Salinas:**

6.7 km / 4.2 mi between Torreveja and Los Montesinos highway (CV-945) (Alicante).

Natural environment: La Mata lagoons and Torreveja natural park.

Cultural heritage: Salt industry interpretation center and other museums.

**Vía Verde Xurra:**

15 km / 9 mi between Valencia and Puçol (Valencia).

Natural environment: Ravines.

Cultural heritage: Valencia's historic sites. Orange groves. Irrigation canal network. El Puig monastery.

**Vía Verde del Xixarra 2:**

15 km / 9 mi between Las Virtudes sanctuary and Biar (Alicante).

Natural environment: Mariola mountain. Vinalopo, Agres and Serpis valleys. Ravine in Agres.

Cultural heritage: Historic quarter and Bihar castle.

**MURCIA****Vía Verde del Noroeste:**

48 km / 30 mi between Baños de Mula and Caravaca de la Cruz (Murcia).

Natural environment: Badlands and pine tree mountain areas. Mula valley.

Cultural heritage: Mula, Bullas, Cehegín and Caravaca de la Cruz town centres. El Niño sanctuary. Ruins of Begastri. Railway viaducts.



## Over a Hot Stove

They came late to the professional culinary world, but on the domestic front women have been heirs to and conveyors of gastronomic knowledge and culture for generations. Until fairly recently, that was their main contribution to cuisine. But today a number of Spanish women chefs are showing what they can do at the helm of their own restaurants. Whether traditional, classic or decidedly modern, they are receiving recognition, good reviews and even the much sought-after Michelin stars. But things have not been easy, and women still appear in the media much less than their male colleagues, with one exception. Carme Ruscalleda is the only female chef in the world to hold five Michelin stars. We will be telling their story in two installments, adopting for practical purposes a geographical dividing line: the Atlantic and the Mediterranean sides of Spain. In this first article we attempt to clarify the role played by women in cuisine today.

# WOMEN chefs

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TEXT  
RAQUEL CASTILLO

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PHOTOS  
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TRANSLATION  
JENNY MCDONALD

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The kitchen has always been female territory, at least on a domestic level. Cooking in Spain cannot be imagined without the quiet, profound influence of women. The teachings of grandmothers, mothers and aunts represent an invaluable heritage stemming from traditions passed on over a hot stove. Women are the backbone of cooking. It is impossible to conceive of modern gastronomy without the essential contribution made in the background by hundreds of women who, over the centuries, have kept culinary traditions and methods alive that would otherwise have fallen into oblivion. Perhaps everything began back in the Neolithic period with primitive, basic cooking—quite the opposite of how we see it today—because there were no pleasurable, playful aspects involved. It was just a matter of subsistence, of survival. But then came seasoning, testing and experimentation. Cooking implements became more sophisticated and imagination was put to the test. Through soups, stews, roasts, and herbs, cuisine began to put down roots, and thousands of years later it is a witness to ways of living and feeling. And women today have inherited a culture that is still valid and has helped form the basis of culinary artistry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Without their contributions, Basque and Catalan cuisine would have been impossible. And the richness of Spanish regional cuisines would have been unimaginable without the

recipes recorded by Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921, a Galician writer and essayist), the Marquise of Parabere (1879-1949, pseudonym of María Mestayer Jacer, under which she wrote her *Historia de la Gastronomía*, considered one of the bibles of culinary science), and the *Sección Femenina* (a women's association founded in 1933 which disappeared with the arrival of democracy) and its very practical manual on Spanish regional cuisine. These are our ancestors, even the very conservative *Sección Femenina* which, under the aegis of the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) and based on the doctrine of the Catholic church, championed women's roles as wives and mothers. Many opinions have been expressed along these lines. The late Catalan gastronome and writer Nestor Luján, who was one of the fathers of food writing in Spain, wrote as follows: "I could almost say I've visited thousands of restaurants, and have had the good fortune of getting to know women's cuisine in its most discrete and gracious terms (...); and while I'm excited about new creations, felicitous inventions, daring combinations of flavors, I also love conservative cuisine that links up with both tradition and perfection." But two centuries before, Grimod de la Reynière, the famous French gourmet who lived between 1750 and 1830, stated categorically, "Women's cuisine is simply THE cuisine, true cuisine. It's both real and the first!"

But there's no need to go back so far in history. At the end of January this year, during the talk he gave at the 6<sup>th</sup> international Madrid Fusión International Gastronomy Summit, the Italian chef Fulvio Pierangelini, from Gambero Rosso (two Michelin stars), stated that he found it particularly gratifying that the critics should have defined his cooking as feminine because of the pleasing aesthetic of his dishes. This chef and professor from the University of Parma stated, "Women have natural, ancestral tastes which are missing in men."

If we start out with the premise that, from a cultural and social point of view, home cooking has been the preserve of women, then crossing the threshold from the private to the public scene, to professional cooking, has been very difficult. Still today, they continue in the minority in Spanish restaurants and perhaps even throughout the world. Their numbers are rising but, when we talk about chefs, mentions of women are few and far between. There are, of course, many reasons for this difference (never-ending working hours, very few days off, the need for constant, time-consuming training, etc.), all of which make reconciling this profession with family life very complicated. And, in addition to the perseverance and sacrifices inherent in this career, it cannot be denied that extra courage is needed to penetrate certain circles in which a macho or even misogynistic approach often prevails. Just a few



Marisa Sánchez

years ago, the three-Michelin-star Paul Bocuse, one of the high priests of worldwide cuisine, stated on one of the leading French television channels that women had little to offer to cuisine. He must surely have repented since then—at least in private—and realized that his arguments were the result of narrow-mindedness and lack of vision, because women do cook, and very well at that.

Fortunately, there are now more and more women chefs on the same footing as their male counterparts. They are the subject of reviews by food writers, they figure in gastronomic guides, they share the limelight with their male colleagues at national and international culinary events; they are developing their own styles and working methods, creating a following, training students and running businesses. What is important is not who does what but that everything is done well. Juan Mari Arzak, the Basque initiator of new Spanish cuisine and the proud holder of three Michelin stars, says that there are only two types of cooking, “good and bad.” And these two adjectives can be applied to traditional, modern or avant-garde cuisine, whether the chef is a man or a woman.

But the fact remains that there are still fewer women than men in haute cuisine, unlike other types of restaurants, such as regional ones. Why is this? Firstly, it's a matter of time. Women have found a place in the professional cooking world later than men, and are thus at a disadvantage. And the same has happened with culinary training. Many of today's women chefs taught themselves; the same goes for many male chefs but mostly from an earlier generation. And although young women are now finding places in catering schools, the men are still in the lead. The equation is clear: the fewer the female students, the fewer

the female chefs. Another consideration of no little importance is the increasing need to travel, around Spain and worldwide, to receive training and work alongside renowned professionals, getting to know other styles of cooking, keeping up to date with the latest innovations and attending professional fora. This has not always been possible for women chefs, most of whom work in small-scale family concerns or have unavoidable family responsibilities. It's just like any other profession. So reaching the top, gaining power, setting trends, for the time being, is only possible for the lucky few.

## The forerunners

Spanish literature is full of references to fresh-faced waitresses and buxom innkeepers enveloped in homely flavors and aromas, and to stews and soups that bear witness to a tradition carefully preserved and tended by female hands. From the Middle Ages to the Golden Age, in inns, taverns and hostleries, a gradual ascent took place marked by local customs, by copying and by repetition of popular recipes. Home cooking has always given rise to irrefutable chefs, tied to the land and to tradition who, often, out of pure necessity, found themselves cooking outside the home.

One outstanding case is **MARISA SÁNCHEZ** who, at the age of 74, has just been awarded the top-level Labor Award by the Spanish Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Her restaurant Echaurren has seen four generations of women chefs and has reached its position today as one of the best-known establishments in Spain largely thanks to Marisa's efforts.

At the beginning of the last century, Echaurren was a stopover for travelers. Marisa's predecessors gradually built it up, but it was

Marisa that eventually turned it into a hotel and restaurant with outstanding cuisine. Today, however, the reins are held by her son, Francis Paniego, who won a Michelin star for Portal de Echaurren, so it now ranks amongst the best. But he owes a lot to his mother, to her way of cooking with only top Riojan raw materials, fish from the nearby Cantabrian Sea, locally-reared meat and vegetables from the valley of the river Ebro (which flows from Cantabria via Rioja to the Mediterranean Sea). Again tradition and know-how—passed down from mother to daughter—come together at Echaurren, and this knowledge has been taken up by Paniego but with a different vision, a different aesthetic and a different concept of cuisine. Here the two different styles co-exist. The duality between tradition and novelty can be seen not only in the dishes but also in the techniques and methods used. Marisa (whose methods are still followed) focuses on simplicity, on impeccable taste, on hearty, finger-licking good recipes. Her famous croquettes are unrivalled, as are her potatoes with chorizo and old-style lamb. Featuring alongside her son's contemporary dishes, they enhance the menu and give personality to the restaurant. Though now retired, Marisa spent over five decades in the kitchen and is still very much in touch with what's going on there. Her career started out when, at the age of just 15, she spent more than three days helping prepare for a wedding celebration, slaughtering and removing the feathers from chickens, and cooking hake and rice. Her culinary instinct thus developed and her vocation grew but, when recreating dishes, she was determined to lighten the traditional local cuisine. “I made sure the Rioja dishes were not so hot, and I made them less fatty,” she says. But behind her contributions was plenty of

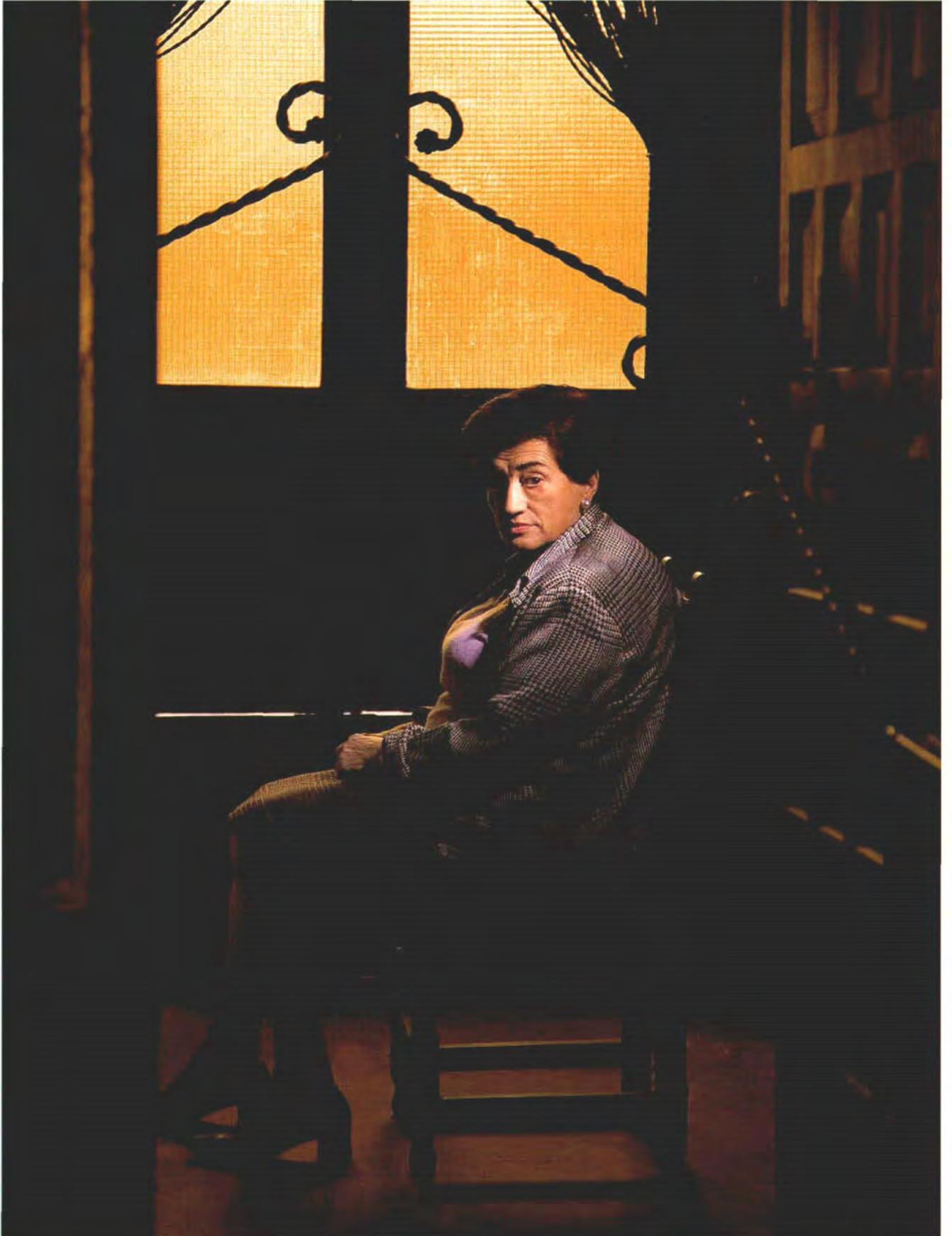


Atxen Jiménez

intuition, piles of books and tremendous curiosity. The list of groundbreaking women chefs must necessarily mention the nine Guerediain sisters, nicknamed the “Pocholas”, who became a real institution in Pamplona (Navarre, northern Spain). The prestige they built up on the basis of culinary tradition is still remembered today. They were working until just 15 years ago, but only two of them are

still alive, and in their nineties. There have been many others. **ATXEN JIMÉNEZ**, who is responsible for the restaurant *Túbal* where for 31 years she has been offering product-based, traditional cuisine, although with certain concessions to modernity (especially now that she’s working with her son Nicolás); still, her cuisine is always light, uses short cooking periods and is rich in textures.

Atxen introduced gradual changes. She loved cooking and was certain that she wanted to carry on her parents’ business, a bar serving *pintxos* (the Basque word for tapas) and small aperitifs in a simple dining room. It was not easy, because her father thought it was a crazy idea for his only daughter to take over the restaurant, but she did, and is still there today, making the same dishes as before. “The cuisine of every



Seri Bermejo

town, of every city should have its own character," she says, "with basic flavors that must be present and recognizable, but always evolving with a little imagination and attractive presentation."

Túbal has kept up-to-date without relinquishing its past. And the same has happened for the Hartza sisters, also from Navarre.

#### **JULI, MARI and MANOLI**

**HARTZA**, have had a restaurant bearing their surname in Pamplona for 35 years. The youngest of them, Manoli, aged 63, recalls that, "initially it was just a job." A family of cattle breeders, when their father died they ended up in the capital of Navarre after a brief experience in catering. They decided there and then to set up a restaurant together and, within the year, had achieved such a following that it was full every day. Today the three of them continue unmarried and hard at work, with Juli and Manoli in the kitchen and Mari in the restaurant, doing the only thing they've ever done and doing it well. Their culinary style takes little from modern trends, but focuses on excellent, seasonal products, wholesome stews and classic tastes. They have always enjoyed traveling, seeing how other people do things and adapting, where possible, to the demands of their customers. They appreciate contemporary cuisine but do not practice it themselves because, they say, "it wouldn't be natural."

In another region and another province, in the Castilian town of Aranda de Duero (Burgos) is El Mesón de la Villa and a woman, **SERI BERMEJO**, who has been cooking for over 50 years. A welcoming, voluble person, she worked with her partner and husband Eugenio until his death two years ago. She continues to head her restaurant but "with the help of a great team." At 77, her vitality belies

her age, as she is certainly one of the oldest of the Spanish women chefs. Over her many years of experience, she has seen and tried almost everything. She says, "You can't just cook. Dishes have to have flavor and aromas, and must look enticing." She believes that interest in modern cuisine flags after a while, whereas traditional food will always have customers.

Slow cooking and traditional values: that's what Seri's dishes are all about and that's what her customers want. She offers the typical Castilian roasts, stews, *pepitorias* (in which poultry is cooked slowly with a hearty almond and saffron sauce), pickled poultry or rabbit, eel in green sauce (vinaigrette with extra virgin olive oil, garlic and parsley), *chilindrón* (lamb in a pepper sauce), pigeon with rice, hake with onions... flavors to be remembered, carefully-tended dishes and years of experience. Seri says proudly, "In my restaurant, customers rarely leave a dish unfinished."

## Developments

In Spanish cuisine today there are a number of women chefs who, at the peak of their careers, are renowned for having developed their own style, and their efforts have been acknowledged with a Michelin star. There are cases all over Spain, but the majority are located along the Mediterranean coast, which we will discuss in our second article. But a characteristic they all share, which is of no little significance, is that they own and run their own restaurants. Many of them, the older ones, have developed gradually, reconsidering their cooking methods and adapting to the tastes, techniques and trends of culinary art today. Others followed a path laid out before them, with a preconceived idea as to what they wanted, and joined what could be called modern or contemporary

cuisine. Most of them are self-taught. They have learned their trade over the years, reading and experimenting, living and eating. They champion excellent raw materials, seasonal produce, and the particular characteristics of their surroundings. If a single common denominator can be found, it is their roots, fondness for their land, taste memories, and almost always, deliberately light preparations, with the concept of a good diet being indissolubly linked to gastronomic enjoyment.

It is not easy to classify the style of their cooking because, although they share certain viewpoints, they all focus on the local products and traditions existing in their respective locations, this being one of the main strengths of Spanish cuisine.

**PILAR IDOATE**, however, believes that women chefs are more sensitive and thoughtful, "and that is very important in cooking." She bases this opinion on her 30-some odd years in the kitchen of Europa, a hotel-restaurant in Pamplona, on which she has gradually imprinted her personality and methods. She learned her trade reading, traveling round Spain, testing and tasting. She also had the help of a top-class gastronomic advisor, Xavier Gutiérrez, Juan Mari Arzak's right-hand man. As a result, Europa has built up a great reputation and has been awarded a Michelin star. Her traditional dishes based on Navarran produce start out, inevitably, with vegetables: a medley (in which each vegetable is prepared separately, to retain its texture and color), springtime asparagus, *pocha* beans (the young white beans that are typical of Navarre and La Rioja) in late summer, winter stews and rice dishes. All light, unhurried dishes, then steamed fish, slowly-cooked roasts. Because Pilar appreciates what is natural (she even offers some organic dishes), and believes we



Pilar Idoate

should care about what we eat. The most modern touches appear in the desserts and in some starters, although these are not her forte. "I try to be up-to-date, but without losing sight of what the customers coming to Navarre want, which is mainly good local produce." Turning westwards, we come to the Fogón Retiro da Costiña in Santa Comba, a village in the Galician province of La Coruña. On entry,

you feel as if you have been invited into a private home, because the restaurant concept here is different. You come into the wine cellar, where you can enjoy an aperitif and a good wine, then you go upstairs to a dining room which has just seven tables. Afterwards, there is a comfortable, private lounge area with sofas and a fireplace where you can enjoy a post-prandial conversation with a selection of

spirits, coffees and cigars. And "enjoy" is the key word in this traditional, 17<sup>th</sup>-century country home that has been a family-run business for the last four generations. It is now in the hands of **PASTORA GARCÍA**, her husband and their two children. Pastora and her daughter Nochi are in charge of the kitchen, but it is very different to the traditional eatery they took over from the in-laws. They gradually



Pastora García

started doing what the mother-in-law described as “odd things.” And their experience, plus the result of reading, traveling and getting out and about helped them gradually introduce changes. Pastora says, “Great dishes often result from great flops.”

This year the restaurant has obtained its first star in the 2008 edition of *The Michelin Guide*, and they are delighted. The cuisine they offer is

simple, with quality products and many local accents. The dishes all receive a personal touch. Their de-structured scallop pie is prepared in individual portions and cooked in three minutes, with a tomato reduction, scallop stock and a ham crisp. Updated tradition, excellent raw materials, a modern contribution and plenty of flavor. Another three Galician women chefs share the same common sense, the

same love of their homeland and the same one-star rating by *The Michelin Guide*. Their names are Toñi Vicente, Ana Gago and Manicha Bermúdez.

**TOÑI VICENTE**, chef and owner of the restaurant that bears her name (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 50), was a pioneer in new Galician cuisine. She was the first to step outside the box, because this part of Spain is one of the most orthodox in its eating habits. Galicia produces a wealth of

raw materials that have traditionally been prepared simply, without disguise. Paradoxically, Toni feels that the wonderful ingredients were holding back Galician cuisine, restricting it to "grilling or stewing." She was a trendsetter, introducing signature cuisine against the grain, to the extent that at times even she considered she may have gone too far. But that was not the case. She learned to cook in her family's restaurant in Tomiño (in the Galician province of Pontevedra), where her mother, an excellent, old-style chef, carefully produced traditional dishes. She went to France to work with Michel Guérard and, on her return, set up her own restaurant in Vigo, called Síbaris, in 1982, when she was in her early 20s. Seven years later, her modern Galician cuisine (very modern for the times) got her the first Michelin star for a Galician restaurant. In 1992, she moved to a new establishment, to which she gave her name, in Santiago de Compostela. She maintained the same culinary philosophy (signature and product cuisine) and the following year her new restaurant was awarded a star, the first for an establishment in Santiago. Since then, this 55-year-old continues to work wonders, applying know-how and sensitivity. She has perhaps been slightly eclipsed by her male colleagues, who have been giving tremendous impetus to Galician cuisine over the last five years, but Galicia and modern Spanish cuisine owe a lot to this audacious, resolute woman.

Traditional Galician cuisine is present on the menu presented by ANA GAGO in Casa Pardo. The sea contributes ingredients to 90% of the dishes, and Ana still uses some old recipes that she was taught by her mother-in-law, although she updates them as she sees fit. Simplicity is the key, with light preparations, exactly the right amount of cooking, and

total respect for the raw materials used. She is a great admirer of chefs such as Juan Mari Arzak and Ferrán Adrià, and is fascinated by what they are doing. "They are real geniuses, and have made tremendous culinary breakthroughs. The rest of us try to follow in their footsteps, at a different level, adapting things to our respective locations, our restaurants and what our customers want." Ana, like many women, knew nothing about cooking when she married. But her husband had a restaurant and she was game, so her mother-in-law taught her and she never looked back. She is now 54 and has been cooking for 32 years, more than 20 as chef at Casa Pardo. She still loves her profession, but says she does not like to do the same things every day.

The last in this quartet of great Galician women chefs is **MANICHA BERMÚDEZ** who, like Ana Gago, obtained her first Michelin star in 1996. Her restaurant La Taberna de Rotilio is a real tribute to the sea. The restaurant looks over the fishing harbor at Sanxenxo (on the *ría* in Pontevedra) and the very personal menu reflects the aromas and flavors of the sea. The duality between tradition and modernity, between everyday tastes and more creative dishes appears throughout. This intelligent approach has marked her career and her life.

Like many of her colleagues, Manicha started cooking as a matter of course, and helping her mother who, in 1950, opened up a small guesthouse offering meals. "When I was small, my mother used to sit me on a bench in the kitchen so that I could stir the butter," she recollects. "That way, I could watch her making the puff pastry for the meat pies." Manicha continues to make pastry the old-fashioned way—one reason why people come from far away for her meat pies—which forms part of the culinary heritage passed on from

mother to daughter. So far, her children do not seem interested in carrying on in the family business and La Taberna de Rotilio, the gastronomic restaurant in a hotel which forms part of the family business, is run by Manicha, now aged 57, and her brother Rotilio. However, their grandmother, now over 80 years old, still keeps a watchful eye on what's going on. Almost completely self-taught, although she has attended the odd course and never misses a gastronomy congress, Manicha takes her inspiration from tradition and works with Galician recipes and products. She cannot conceive of cooking with different roots, because she likes to think of herself as typically Galician. "I always use local fish and shellfish, cheese, and meat. They're our brand; they help us stand out. Otherwise, all the different cuisines would be the same," she says. She endeavors to always use top-class products and achieve excellence in whatever she does, and the impression received on entry into the restaurant is just that, with a display of oysters, goose-necked barnacles, clams, Norway lobsters, it's a feast for the eyes. The "classics" on the menu are untouchable though, presented in a modern style: monkfish *caldeirada* (a stew with potatoes), scallop pie, Galician-style tripe (with chickpeas)—but none are too heavy. And alongside them are the more creative dishes on the sampler menu: sea soup (with spherified seaweed), spider crab lasagna, and apple with wakame pearls (a type of seaweed, see *Spain Gourmetour* No. 72), stuffed baby sardines, oysters fried with crisp baby vegetables, eel in tempura with peas. All these speak of her and the flavors of her homeland. This is faithful, balanced cooking, cooking that feeds the senses and makes sense.



Toñi Vicente



Ana Gago

## The future ahead

It is too early to talk about a group of young women chefs that are attracting the interest of the national and international food writers. For the time being, the best-known case is **ELENA ARZAK** in San Sebastián (see page 88).

With the exception of Elena (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 53) in this part of northern Spain, which has always been a matriarchy, there are few women chefs who are really on an equal standing with men. Nor are there any relevant cases of women chefs owning their own restaurants, which seems all the more

surprising considering that this region has always been at the forefront in the Spanish culinary business. It was the cradle of the new Basque cuisine—the spearhead of the Spanish culinary revolution—and is home to some of Spain's, and the world's, top restaurants (Arzak, Martín



Manicha Bermúdez

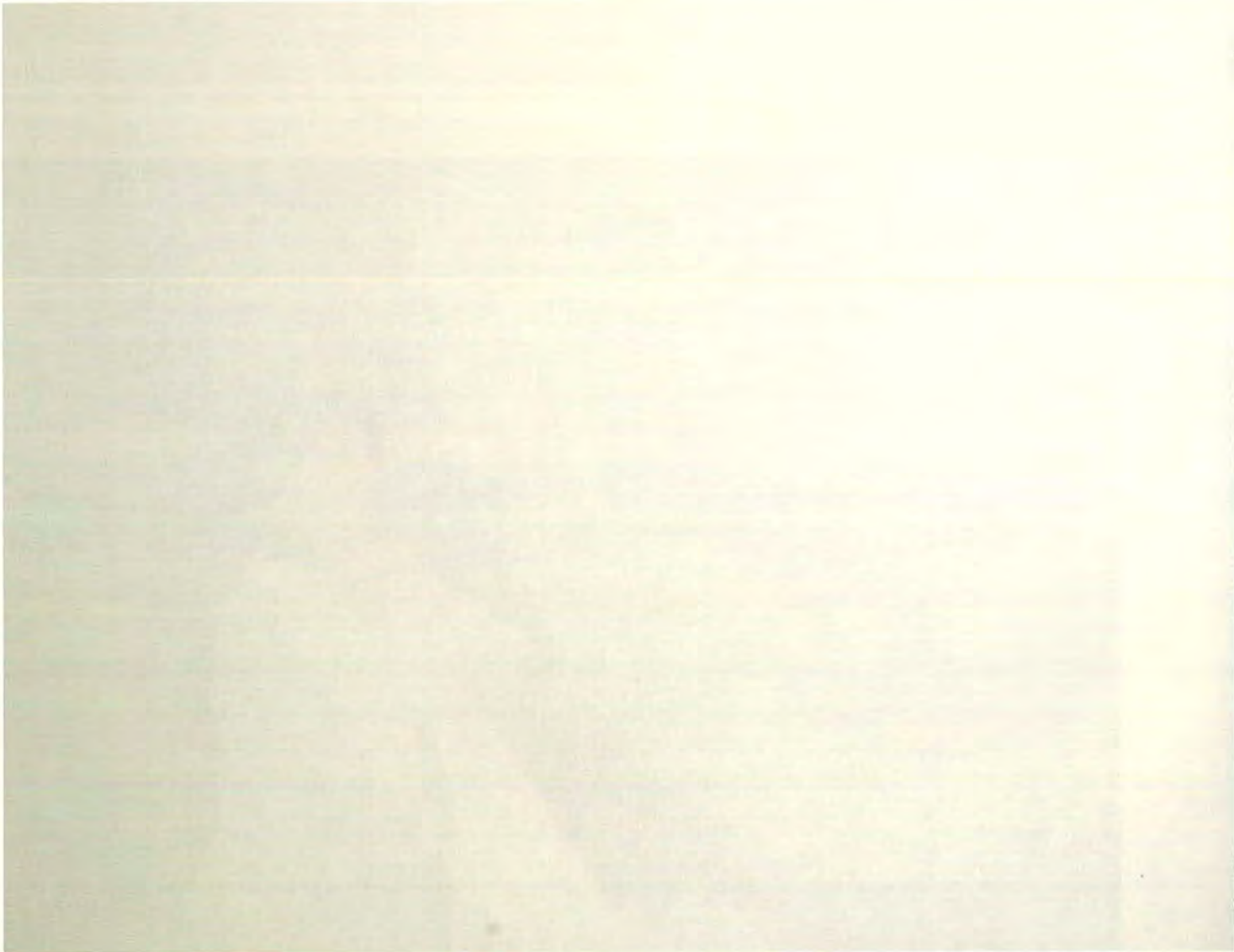
Berasategui, Akelarre, and Mugaritz).

Nor do there seem to be many young women chefs prepared to change the status quo in the north or in the whole of this Atlantic side of Spain. It may be just a matter of time, of opportunity, of waiting until the moment is ripe for sharing

the reins. Reconciliation of professional and family life is always a problem for women, and even more so in a profession that is so demanding. But the hospitality schools, especially those specializing in cuisine, are producing growing numbers of women chefs who are brimming

with enthusiasm. The future of Spanish cuisine will undoubtedly be marked by them.

*Raquel Castillo is a food writer.*



E L E N A   A R Z A K .  
A L T E R   E G O   O F   J U A N   M A R I   A R Z A K

Elena Arzak (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 53) is the daughter of Juan Mari Arzak, whose restaurant has held three Michelin stars since 1989. She belongs to a family of chefs and a generation that has been able to receive thorough training. She studied in Switzerland, then carried out internships in Lucerne, London, Paris, Italy and Spain, always learning alongside the best European chefs and, obviously, from her father. In 1994, after several years away, she returned to the family restaurant in which her mother, Maite, responsible for the administration, is also one of the mainstays. In fact, this famous Basque restaurant is almost completely

female territory: women account for 80% of the kitchen and 100% of the restaurant.

She is multilingual and a perfectionist and has enjoyed cooking since she was a child, when she remembers making truffles and cleaning squid. Today, at 38 and with two small children, she prefers not to travel, so she shares the responsibility for creating and finishing dishes with Juan Mari, to the extent that customers are unable to tell which of the two did what. Together they work on new ideas in the restaurant's research kitchen.

"We use many novel techniques and ingredients, but the emphasis is always

on taste. Technique is important, but it's just a means to an end." Father and daughter agree on most things but, she says, "Sometimes my father is a bit too daring. I like to take risks but I'm more cautious."

This duo can be expected to continue working together for many years because Arzak is always full of ideas, but Elena is destined to ensure continuity at the restaurant, a gastronomic emblem in Spain and worldwide.



Elena Arzak

## ATLANTIC SPAIN

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The Birth of the Blues

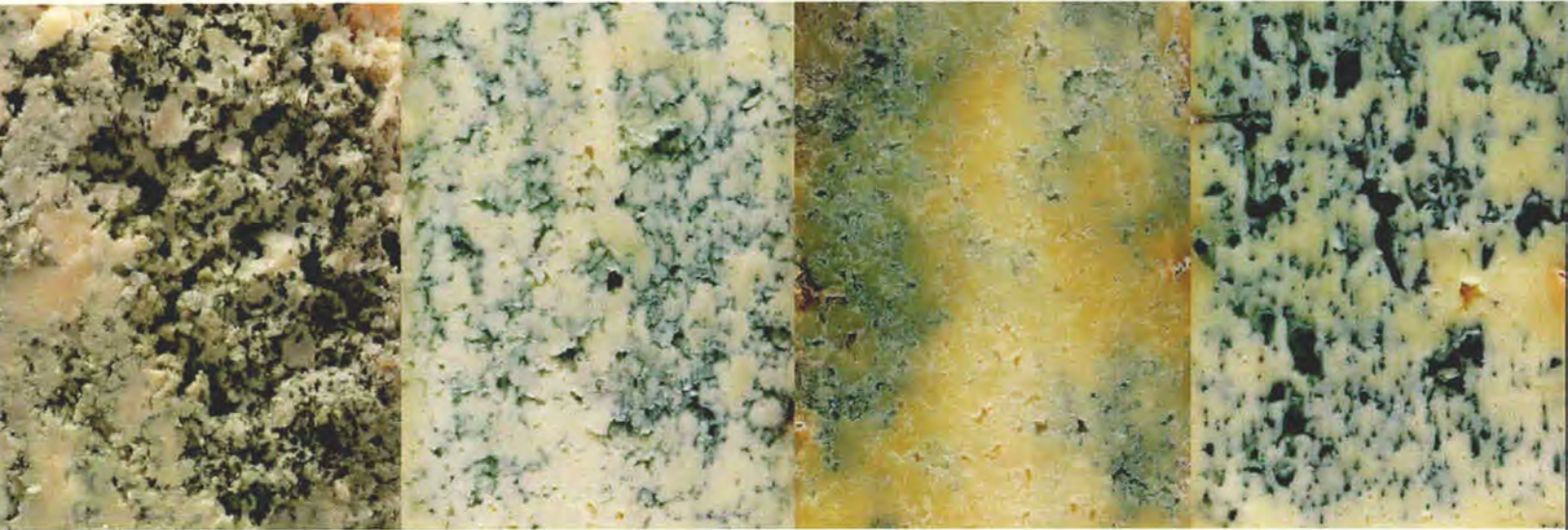
# BLUE CHEESE

Spain's blue cheeses are distinctive, with a character all their own. These are cheeses that make their presence felt. Nature intervenes while they mature, contributing special microorganisms that inhabit caves in the highest of the Picos de Europa mountains in northern Spain. These molds belong to the same family as those that produce penicillin and those involved in curing acorn-fed Ibérico ham. The cheeses combine pronounced flavor with smooth texture, and their overall appeal to the senses earns them the position of honor on a well-selected cheeseboard: they are left for last, knowing that their aftertaste will linger on in the nicest possible way.

TEXT  
ISMAEL DÍAZ YUBERO

PHOTOS  
LUIS CARRÉ/ICEX

TRANSLATION  
HAWYS PRITCIARD




Legend recounts how a shepherd, about to tuck into the meal of curds that he had just prepared, looked up to see a beautiful girl moving among the trees in the distant woods. Abandoning his meal and his sheep, he set off in pursuit, walking many miles without success. Returning in disappointment to retrieve his flock, he found his dish of curds where he had left it, now covered in mold. He was so hungry that he ate some anyway, and found that it tasted rather good. The shepherd repeated the original process and ascertained that, even when he wasn't ravenously hungry, the end result still tasted remarkably pleasant. He observed that the flavor was now much more nuanced; the aroma, though very intense, was more elegant and delicate; the texture was much smoother, much more buttery and tended to disperse slowly in the mouth, allowing the aromas and flavors to be appreciated to their fullest; furthermore the developing mold had dotted the interior of the cheese with pretty, greenish-blue marks.

Opinions differ as to where all of this took place. If the cheese in question is Roquefort, then it happened in France; if it's Gorgonzola, in Italy; if it's Stilton, in England; and if it's Cabrales, it happened in the Picos de Europa. Whatever their true origins, blue cheeses, which are made in both Europe and America, have many devotees who appreciate their particular organoleptic qualities.

## Mighty molds

The distinctive characteristics of this type of cheese can largely be attributed to the effects of a mold, a *Penicillium*, that is a close relative of the one studied by Fleming and from which he obtained the first antibiotics, to date the most significant discovery in the struggle against infectious diseases. It used to be known as *Penicillium roqueforti*, but strains have been discovered that differ from it in certain respects, known as *Penicillium cabraliensis*, *Penicillium gorgonzola*, *Penicillium stiltonia*, and so on, depending on location. These same molds are also responsible for the

aromas and flavors of other cheeses such as Camembert and Tiétar goat's cheese, and of some charcuterie, such as certain *salchichón* and *longaniza* sausages, for example, and even cured ham. In acorn-fed Ibérico ham, the mold diversifies in the course of the long curing period and strains of blue, grey and purple molds appear. The molds do not always behave consistently, however, since they are influenced by the vagaries of the environmental conditions within which they thrive and exert their beneficial effect. Although molds are laboratory-selected nowadays, *Penicillium* is a widespread presence in nature and can be induced to grow simply by leaving a slice of moistened bread, preferably high fiber dark rye, in a place that it is known to inhabit. Once mold has appeared on it, the bread can be dried and *Penicillium* spores will be perfectly preserved which can later be used to make the cheese. *Penicillium* can be grown by adding a culture to curds so that it can develop during maturation. It can also be rubbed into cheeses so that it makes its way into them slowly, or it can be



added by injecting the cheese with impregnated needles. This last method usually leaves traces in the form of straight, easily discernible, vertical lines. In some cases, there is no need for *Penicillium* to be grown because the molds are present in the environment: this is particularly true of specific natural caves where they will gradually work their way into the cheese from the outside. For this reason the color is more intense in the part of the cheese nearer the surface and less so in the center. This describes the majority of Spanish blue cheeses which provides them with authenticity and, along with that, added value.

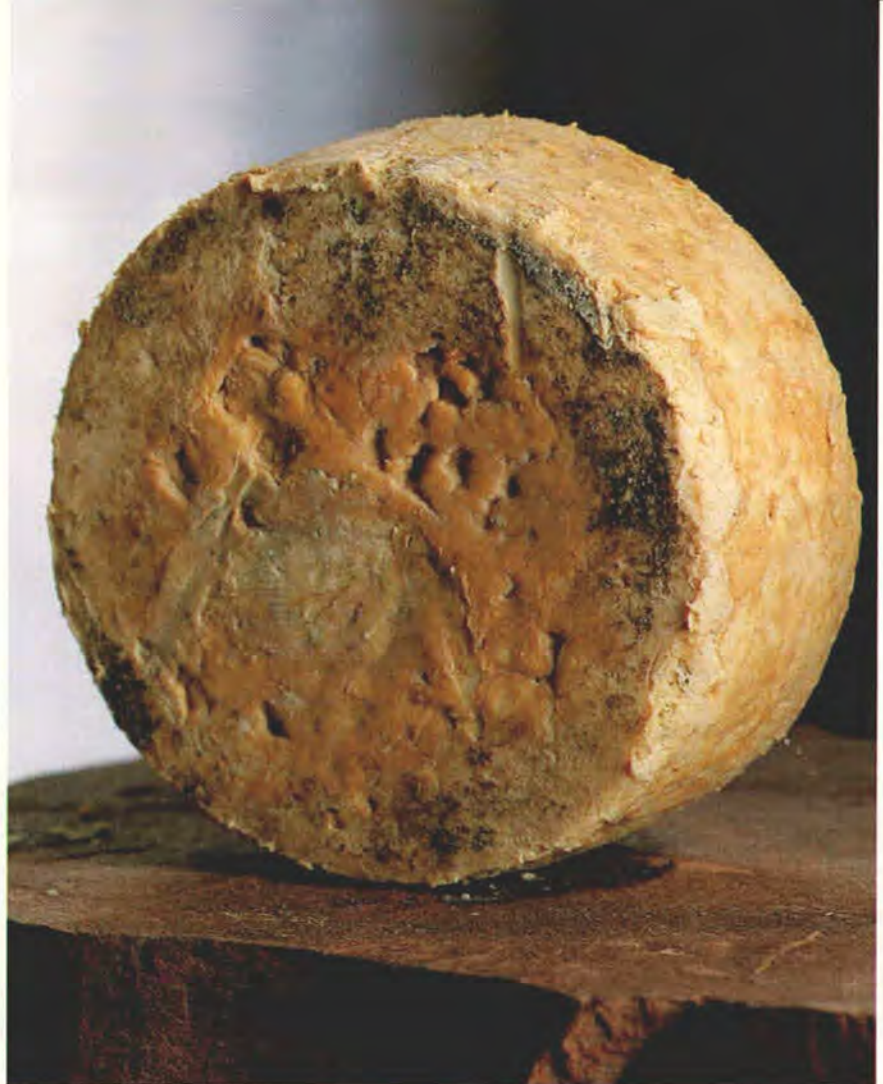
For the molds to develop in these natural conditions, special measures must be taken from the very start of the cheesemaking process: it is essential that the curds be very acidic, for which purpose the temperature of the milk must be kept below 30°C / 86°F both while it is coagulating and throughout the several hours that the whole process lasts. The curds must be spongy in texture—only very slightly pressed or not pressed at

all—so that they still contain enough oxygen to allow the molds to proliferate consistently. The cheese must be left to mature in an environment where the temperature is constant and moderate, that is sufficiently well-ventilated to air it thoroughly, and where the moisture level is between 85% and 95%. All these factors influence the quality of the end product, and Spain's blue cheeses are produced in conditions that combine them all. The process is longer but pays dividends in the form of authentic cheeses that belong at the top of their range.

Things can be speeded up to get a blue cheese onto the market in just a few days. Indeed, a significant proportion are made in this way and are usually very competitively priced, but they lack the properties that make those produce by the traditional method outstanding. Run-of-the-mill blue cheese is easy to produce: it just requires raising the temperature at the setting and maturation stages, injecting molds in large quantities, storing the cheeses in dry environments, and so on.

## Spain's blue cheeses

Cheese was invented as a way of preserving surplus milk. Geographical location has exerted a profound influence over how the traditional cheeses of the various producing areas are made and preserved. Specific methods have survived in the most isolated parts of the country where contact with population centers has been historically tenuous and where milk had to be turned into cheese before being sent off to market. This describes the situation in the Picos de Europa perfectly, and explains why the cheeses still made in the area occupied by Asturias, Cantabria and Leon share similar characteristics yet also possess qualities that distinguish them from each other. This is reflected in the existence of two PDOs (Protected Designations of Origin): Cabrales and Picón-Bejes-Tresviso, and one PGI (Protected Geographic Indication): Valdeón. Nearby, on the northern slopes of this mountainous area,



another blue cheese is made whose characteristics are different; known as Gamoneu o Gamonedo, it also enjoys PDO status.

Cheesemaking is more technological these days, with the result that blue cheeses can be made anywhere by creating the necessary environmental conditions artificially and manipulating fermentation and curing. They are produced in different presentations and with different sensory characteristics, though always with the molds' trademark effect on the end product. Interestingly, though cheeses of this type can be made anywhere, they are largely produced by industrial firms concentrated on the Cantabrian *cornisa* (the northern mountainous strip facing the Bay of Biscay).

## Cabrales

In the autonomous community of Asturias, on Spain's northern coast, local lore relates how, once upon a time, French pilgrims were given

Cabrales cheese to eat on their journey towards Santiago de Compostela.

They were so impressed by its quality that they traced it to source, observed how it was made and took the information back with them to Roquefort, thereby implanting one of the most emblematic of France's blue cheeses. This story somehow lacks truth, not only because Cabrales is known to date back a long way, but because there is evidence that Roquefort is just as old. In fact, both areas have caves within which environmental conditions are similar and equally propitious to fostering the fungal flora needed for maturing this type of cheese, so is quite possible for Cabrales and Roquefort to have developed at around the same period. Defenders of the Asturian theory cite the fact that Asturian-born politician and leading figure of the Spanish Enlightenment, Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos (1744-1811), refers to Cabrales cheese in one of his *Cartas del viaje por Asturias* (Letters from a journey around Asturias) written in

1788. Later written references to Cabrales are plentiful and usually mention it in the same appreciative breath as Roquefort. Some reveal little-known facts such as that Clemenceau was a Cabrales devotee and would have a cheese sent to him every year. This is reported by journalist Victor de la Serna (1896-1958) in his book *Nuevo viaje de España. La ruta de los foramontanos* (A new Spanish journey. The Foramontanos route).

Cabrales is a mountain cheese, and originally a seasonal one made in spring and summer exclusively from the milk made available by the birth of young animals at that time of year. Nowadays, Cabrales is made mostly with cow's milk, but incorporating milk from other species unquestionably contributes other characteristics and, indeed, better quality to the end product. Cabrales cheeses made with mixed milks are the ones sought by connoisseurs and traditionally take the top prizes in the competition held annually in Arenas de Cabrales on the last Sunday in





August. The winning cheese is auctioned immediately after the judges' decision is announced. In 2007 it went for an impressive 4,206 euros. Cabrales cheese is made in 18 municipalities in the area from which it takes its name, and three in Penamellera Alta, making up the geographical zone covered by the designation of origin. The livestock farmers make it on their own premises using the following method: the milk is filtered and rennet is added so that it curdles. It is then kept at a temperature of between 26 and 30°C (78.8 and 86°F) so that the curd forms slowly and becomes intensely acidic. The curds are then cut using a stainless steel wire "harp", releasing the whey from the solids, which form granules one to two cm / 0.4 to 0.8 in in diameter. The curds are pressed together, salted, finely "milled", and then put into casts known as *arnios* which are placed on trays where whey can be readily drained off. The top surface is then salted and the cheese is left to sit for 12 hours, after which time it is turned over and the other surface is salted.

After resting briefly, the cheeses are removed from their casts and transferred to a naturally ventilated room where they are placed on their sides and left to air. About two weeks later they are taken to the caves for the next stage in the ripening process. The maturation caves are karstic (formed by erosion in soluble limestone) and have to be vetted by the PDO Cabrales Regulatory Council. Moisture levels inside the caves are high and the temperature very constant, ventilation being provided by drafts of air (known as *soplados*) that enter through natural chimneys. These were described early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Alvarado brothers, the first scientists to study this cheese in depth. (They were disciples of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, the Free Institution for Teaching, a progressive educational enterprise influenced by German philosopher KCF Krause). The cheeses remain in the caves for at least two months, more usually three or four, during which time they have to be systematically cleaned, rubbed and moistened to prevent clogging of

the pores through which the air laden with spores that will develop within them must make its way. As the cheeses ripen they take on the texture, aromas and flavor for which they are famous. In preparation for sale, each cheese is wrapped in green foil stamped with the Regulatory Council's logo and numerical code, other required labeling data and producer information. The tradition of wrapping them in sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) leaves has had to be abandoned for health and safety reasons.

A Cabrales cheese is cylindrical in shape and between 7 and 15 cm (3 and 6 in) high with a proportional diameter. The rind is soft, thin and grey colored with reddish-yellow patches, while the interior is white with green or grey patches where the mold has grown, and compact in texture with no "eyes". The flavor is very pleasant and broad ranging, leaving a slightly piquant, enduring aftertaste that is more pronounced when it contains a high proportion of sheep's and goat's milk. It smells very

strong indeed. Novelist Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) summed it up accurately as a "pestifera fragancia" (foul fragrance) reflecting the fact that, after the initial impact, one begins to discern pleasant, highly idiosyncratic, characteristic notes.

The PDO also includes cheeses from Arangas (another district covered by the Cabrales local authority), which makes a point of specializing in very traditional cheeses produced seasonally, in spring, using sheep's and goat's milk exclusively, and cheeses from Rozagás, a district of Peñamellera Alta, which claims to have pasture that produces milk which is ideal for making blue cheeses. In some catalogues they feature as cheeses in their own right, separate from Cabrales, and they were considered as such for many years, yet their characteristics both extrinsic (shape, size, presentation, etc.) and intrinsic (aroma, flavor, texture, etc.) are almost identical.

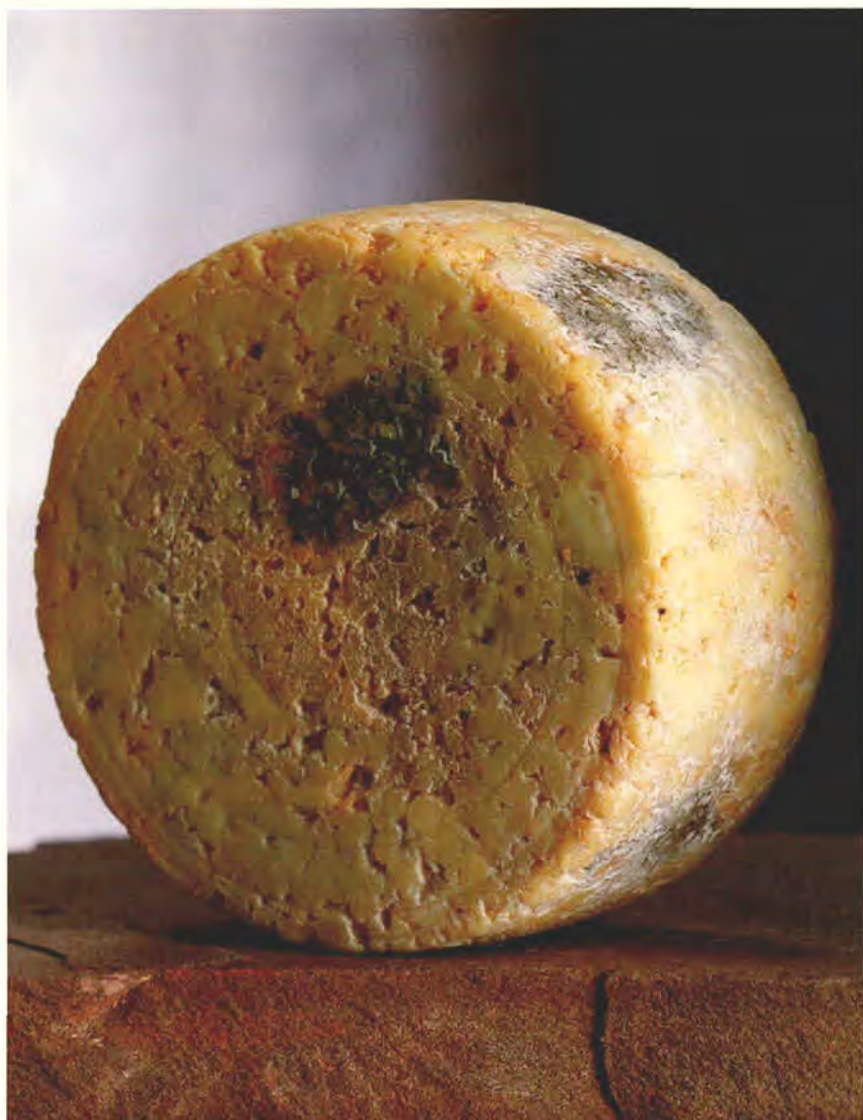
## Picón-Bejes-Tresviso

Tradition has it that after the Battle of Covadonga (fought between Christian and Muslim troops in 722 and generally considered as the first battle in the Christian campaign to reclaim the Iberian Peninsula from its Arab invaders), the people of Tresviso presented Reconquest hero Don Pelayo with a Picón cheese so big that it had to be carried on a special cart. He expressed his delight by granting the donors noble titles.

This traditional story is useful for dating Picón cheese. Other clues are to be found in the 10<sup>th</sup>-century records of the Santo Toribio monastery in Liébana and in the *Diccionario Geográfico* (Geographical Dictionary) of politician Pascual Madoz (1806-1870). It differs from other Picos de Europa cheeses in some of its characteristics, important among them the fact that it uses milk obtained from specific breeds: Tudanca,

Alpine Brown and Friesian cows; Pyrenean goats (whose milk contributes an acidic zing); and Lacha sheep (whose milk makes the cheese more buttery and smooth). Another factor that has a differentiating effect is that the pastures on which the animals graze are situated in eastern Cantabria on chalky soils and frequently at great heights above sea level, which means that during the hardest winters they are covered in snow for long periods. The municipalities authorized by PDO Picón-Bejes-Tresviso Regulatory Council lie within the Liébana district and the Peñarrubia local authority area.

As in the method for Cabrales, when making Picón cheese the curds have to form slowly and at low temperatures so that they are acidic enough for satisfactory microbial activity to take place. The granular curds must be packed loosely in the casts and not over-compressed, ensuring that the



mass is porous enough to allow the molds to develop.

The cheeses are aged in chalk-walled caves where drafts of air are provided by ventilation shafts, an essential addition to those that lack the natural *soplados* characteristic of this region's palaeozoic slate geological formations.

When conditions permit, and out of preference on the part of some producers, cheeses are sometimes transferred for ageing to now abandoned mines formerly exploited by the Real Compañía Asturiana; these mines are devoid of drafts of air, so temperature levels are higher and moisture levels lower.

The end result is a very natural, powerfully-aromatic and flavorful, smooth-textured cheese. Its maturation is closely monitored and rigorously controlled, lasting for at least two months, though top quality cheeses of this type require longer periods of up to five months for their characteristics to develop fully.

## Valdeón

This cheese is produced exclusively in the municipality of Posada de Valdeón in the north of the León province (northwest Spain). Situated very high above sea level, this area had a long history of isolation that was alleviated only by the building of roads that made the Panderruedas, Pontón and Pandtrave mountain passes accessible and negotiable.

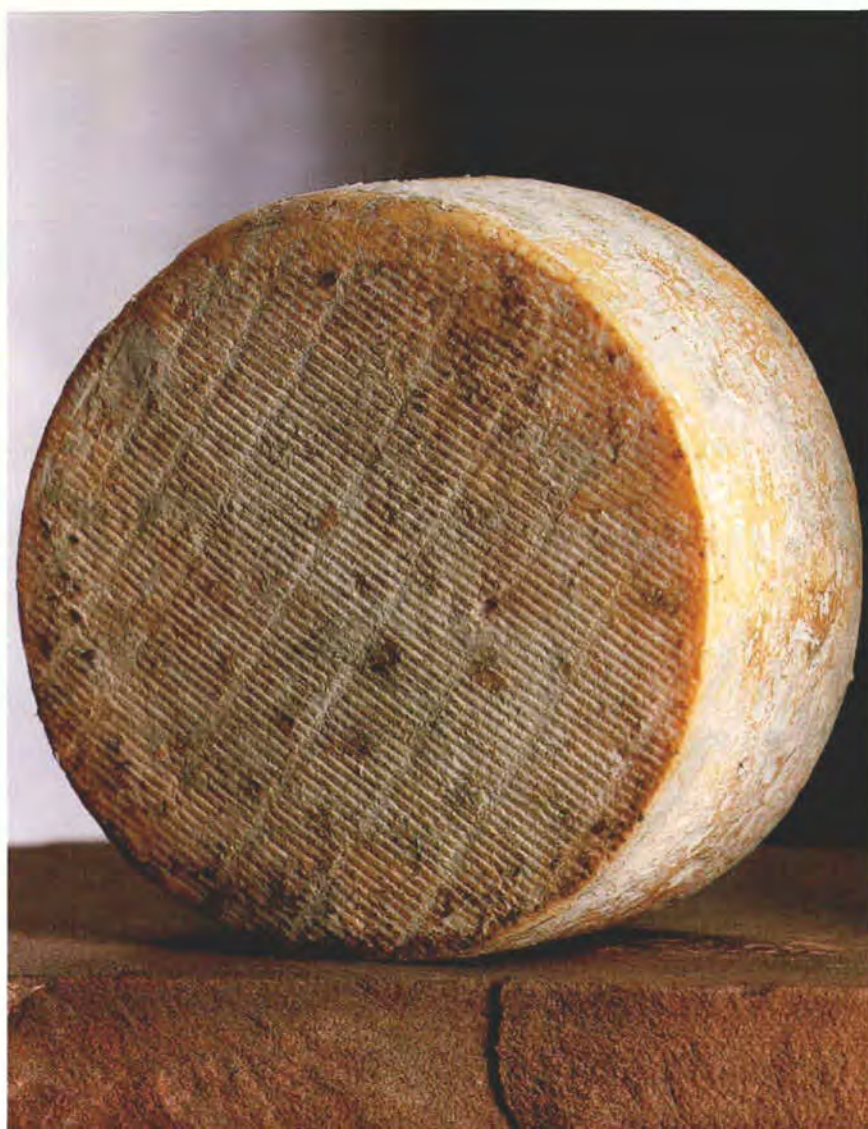


Frosts occur more than 100 days a year here, and the winter snows last for several months; high rainfall completes a combination that provides perfect environmental and grazing conditions for producing this cheese, whose original function was to preserve milk over the long periods when the area's inhabitants were virtually sealed in.

The atmosphere is less moist here than in the Cabrales and Picón producing areas, which explains why the molds in a Valdeón cheese and its rough, irregular rind develop with less intensity. It is made with cow's milk, with a lesser proportion of goat's milk and occasionally sheep's milk. The best examples are obtained when the three different milks are used,

capitalizing on their availability when the animals have just given birth. This cheese is made by a method very similar to that for Cabrales and Picón, and it is of a similar size, though it sometimes appears in smaller presentations. The flavor is intense and just slightly piquant, the aroma rich and the texture buttery, melting readily in the mouth and leaving a long aftertaste.

One often finds a specialty product for sale, made from cheeses approved by the Regulatory Council of PGI Queso de Valdeón. The rind is removed and the cheese is cut up and whipped, without any additives, then packed in glass jars. The resultant product differs from the original in both texture and intensity of aroma and taste, both of





which are perceived as milder owing to the air now incorporated into the cheese.

## Gamoneu/ Gamonedo

This is also a blue cheese, though *Penicillium* plays a lesser role in it than in the cheeses considered thus far. Combined with the fact that it is also lightly smoked, the sensory characteristics of the end product are significantly different.

Like the other cheeses, this is also made with cow's milk, though the addition of sheep's and goat's milk gives rise to a cheese that acquires superior quality during the maturation process. Many experts consider this the smoothest, most elegant and unique of all of Spain's blue cheeses. A *Real Provisión* (legal administrative ruling) issued in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century provides evidence of the age of this cheese. It records the fact that King Philip IV (1605-1665) was petitioned by local inhabitants to prohibit the grazing of horses on their meadows

## L A P E R A L E T A L

In Illas, a mountainous rural area not far from Avilés (Central Asturias), members of the López León family exercise their artisan skills to make a blue cheese known as La Peral. Produced semi-industrially for over a century, it has a well-established market presence and appears in all Asturian cheese catalogues. La Peral is made by adding *Penicillium* cultures to pasteurized milk which, at the appropriate temperature, coagulates. Once the whey has been separated off, the curds are put into casts, salted and punctured with stainless steel needles to encourage mold spores to develop. The cheeses are cured in cellars with high moisture and low temperature levels for three months, during which time they acquire consistently fine sensory characteristics. In combination with attractive presentation, these properties guarantee La Peral's success in the marketplace.

Spanish cheese expert Enric Canut has described another artisan cheese which, like La Peral, is made by a family firm: Blau d'Osona, which takes its name from the Barcelona district of Osona where it is produced. It is a cylindrical, moderately blue cheese with smooth and creamy texture and a barely-formed rind.

Monje Picón, another artisan blue cheese, is made by Manuel Monje Torre in Panes, a little town in the Asturian district of Peñmellera Baja. Like Cabrales, this has a semi-hard rind and is made from unpasteurized cow's milk to which yeasts and rennet are added. The temperature is raised to 35°C (95°F) and after 40 minutes the resultant curd is cut into pea-sized pieces. The cut curd paste is pressed together, separating off the whey, and then placed in casts. The cheese's outer surfaces are salted and it is left to mature in a very moist environment for a minimum of three months.

Industrially-produced blue cheeses include those originated by the dairy product company Arias. With a pedigree dating back 150 years, this company can be credited with having introduced various new products. Industrias Lácteas Asturianas has taken up the baton, introducing a blue cheese that is marketed under its deservedly prestigious Reny Picot brand.



since they ate so much of the available grass, causing the production of cheese, a staple of the local diet, to suffer. Traditionally, cheesemaking would have been more intensive in spring and summer to capitalize on the higher milk yields generated by the nourishing highland pastures of the Puertos (Cangas de Onís and Onís mountain passes) to which their herds were transferred at that time of year. Lower down in El Valle, the livestock grazes on gently sloping meadows which, at their most productive, can be mown to provide hay for the winter months. The *gamones* (asphodels) that give their name to the district and its cheese are a common feature of the area's pastureland. Though things have changed since the old days, the custom still survives of suffixing an indication of provenance to a Gamoneu/Gamonedo cheese. This explains the existence of cheeses labeled Gamoneu/Gamonedo del Puerto or Gamoneu/Gamonedo del Valle, whose slightly different

characteristics can trigger long debates among local sybarites. The production area lies within municipalities belonging to Asturian local authorities Cangas de Onís and Onís. These cheeses are made by a slightly different method from those described above. Penicillium plays a lesser role here, so the curds need not be so acidic and can be submitted to greater pressure. The smoking process is also responsible for triggering specific aromas and flavors. The size limits imposed by the Regulatory Council of PDO Gamoneu o Gamonedo and are very elastic and its cheeses can vary considerably in this regard, with weights ranging between 500 g and 7 kg (1.1 to 15 lb). For obvious reasons, the bigger ones take longer to mature. The most gastronomically desirable ones are those weighing around 3 kg (6.6 lb), though from the commercial point of view smaller ones are preferable. The smoking process causes a noticeable golden brown rind to form,

and the interior is semi-hard and not especially dense, crumbling readily when cut. White or yellowish white in color with slight bluish patches generally close to the surface, it has a few small irregularly scattered "eyes" and occasional small cracks. This cheese has a clean smell, significantly less pronounced than that of Cabrales and with a noticeably smoky tang. The flavor is intense, delicate and persistent, and includes among its nuances an interesting, long-lasting hazelnut aftertaste. This is a melt-in-the-mouth cheese with a particularly pleasant buttery texture.

## Blue cheeses in gastronomy

Any cheeseboard worthy of the title will include blue cheeses, whether Spanish varieties or an international selection. They should be placed last in order of consumption because of their intense flavor, but there are other options too. A board composed of only

blue cheeses, for example, provides an opportunity to appreciate the nuanced diversity of their ever-intense aromas, the complexity of their flavors, their color differences, and their varying textures (all of which share the characteristic of melting readily and creamily in the mouth). A good way to eat them is to spread them on slices of whole-wheat bread, or better yet spelt, so that their aroma and flavor are revealed to best effect.

Blue cheeses can be whipped up with milk, cream or cider to create an easily spreadable paste that is particularly good with salads, especially escarole or endive, providing a good foil for their bitterness.

Cheeses of this type also fit in nicely alongside typical canapé and snack ingredients, both sweet and salted. They harmonize beautifully with nuts, especially almonds, hazels and walnuts, and their flavor is accentuated in association with dried apricots and dates. It used to be common in traditional cooking to serve blue cheese with red meat (ox or beef chops and steaks), a combination that is still an enduring favorite in many classic restaurants. Interestingly, the same combination has emerged in modern cuisine, with blue cheese featuring in various meat dishes as well as in sauces for fish such as hake and monkfish.

Blue cheeses can also be served with desert, accompanied by fruit preserves and, especially, quince paste with which it provides an intriguing contrast, creating a marvelous amalgam of sweet and salty flavors ranging from mild to intense.

## What to drink with blue cheeses

Cider and blue cheese are a traditional match that seems just right in the informal setting of a *chigre* (Asturian cider bar) yet, considered objectively, the flavor of the cheese almost overwhelms the taste of the cider. The same thing happens with beer, which becomes just another liquid that helps

the cheese on its way without much flavor of its own.

Experience has shown that blue cheeses demand full-bodied *crianza* wines from the likes of La Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Bierzo and Toro, but they actually harmonize better with other, smoother, more delicate wines with a hint of sweetness such as port, oloroso and amontillado sherries, and even some young whites such as Gewürztraminer varietals. Eaten at the end of a meal, they are beautifully complemented by an *orujo* (eau-de-vie) from Potes (Cantabria) or an apple pomace, sturdy enough themselves to hold their own in the flavor stakes.

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## WEBSITES

### [www.fundacioncabrales.com](http://www.fundacioncabrales.com)

The website of PDO Cabrales' Regulatory Council is packed with information about this highly individual cheese: its history, how it is made, characteristics, producers, recipes, etc. It is also a useful source of information on Cabrales cheese and cider-related tourist activities. (English, French, Spanish)

### [www.quesogamonedo.com](http://www.quesogamonedo.com)

The website of PDO Gamonedo's Regulatory Council places this cheese in the context of its natural environment: livestock, pasturing practice in the Picos de Europa, production area, etc. It also provides a list of producers, detailed descriptions of the different varieties, unusual recipes and other information. (Spanish)

### [www.alimentosdecantabria.com/certificados\\_calidad/certificados.php?id=3](http://www.alimentosdecantabria.com/certificados_calidad/certificados.php?id=3)

The Cantabrian government's website features all the foodstuffs with quality certification produced within the autonomous region. These include PDO Picón-Bejes-Tresviso blue cheeses, whose particular qualities are described here. (Spanish)

### [www.queseriaspicosdeeuropa.com](http://www.queseriaspicosdeeuropa.com)

This is the site to consult for information concerning the Regulatory Council of PGI Queso de Valdeón, how the cheese is made, suggestions about how to eat and store it, labeling explanations, and awards it has won. (English)

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Ángel León's cuisine reflects his love of the sea and everything related to it. A great advocate of marine resources, he uses every part of the fish—scales for emulsions, eyes as a binding agent—and firmly believes in farmed fish. He could be defined as the discoverer of simple things—carefully-defined flavors, seaweed and fish brushed with spice-flavored olive oil, textures and densities that he interlaces using smoked driftwood, or his latest culinary find, olive pit charcoal. The resulting aromas would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain by traditional methods. Though not much of a student in his schooldays, Ángel now regularly visits research laboratories at both university and corporate levels, and this has led him to some important culinary finds such as his microalgae filter for clarifying stock. This device, the Clarimax, received the award for technical development at the Madrid Fusión 2006 International Gastronomy Summit. The wines accompanying his recipes were chosen by the restaurant's maître d', Pedro José Pérez Roldán.

# Restaurante Aponiente



# 10 RECIPES

**Introduction**  
Almudena Muyo

**Translation**  
Jenny McDonald

**Photos, recipes**  
Toya Legido/ICEX

**Photos, introduction**  
Tomás Zarza/ICEX



## Marine hotpot of sole with chickpeas and seaweed

(Caldereta marina de lenguado con garbanzos y algas)

A *caldereta* is a traditional stew, in this case one with marine flavors. The sole is cooked with chickpeas and flavored with seaweed, an outstanding combination.

### SERVES 4

4 farmed sole, weighing about 400 g / 14 oz; 2 medium-sized onions; 1 green pepper; 2 cloves garlic; 4 ripe tomatoes; extra virgin olive oil; 1 1/2 l / 6 1/2 cup water; 200 g / 7 oz chickpeas (soaked overnight); La Vera pimentón (a Spanish type of paprika); 30 g / 1 oz kombu seaweed; a splash of wine from the DO Manzanilla-Sanlúcar de Barrameda.

Slice the 2 onions and place in an earthenware dish with extra virgin olive oil and cook very slowly. When soft, add the thinly sliced garlic and the green pepper in julienne strips. Cook together, then add the grated tomatoes and cook for another 10 minutes. Add a splash of Manzanilla.

Add water and bring to a boil. Add the chickpeas and the kombu seaweed. Simmer for approximately one and a half hours. When the chickpeas are soft, stir in half a teaspoon of La Vera pimentón and remove from the heat. Place the scaled fish on top and leave to cook from the heat of the dish for about 10 minutes.

### To serve

This dish is best served in the traditional way: place the dish at the center of the table and invite those around it to serve themselves.

### Preparation time

2 hours (plus 12 hours for soaking the chickpeas)

### Cooking time

1 1/2 hours for the stew, plus 10 minutes for the sole

### Recommended wine

Mestizaje 2005 (DO Vino de la Tierra El Terrerazo), by Bodega Mustiguillo. This young red wine, made mostly from Bobal grapes, offers strength and intensity, with clear notes of ripe fruit and toast from the wood, both of them well integrated. It undoubtedly marries well with this dish by helping combine the brininess of the seaweed with the floury texture of the chickpeas.

## Red sea bream en papillote with a marine base and consommé of baked plums

(Besugo en papillote con fondo marino y consomé de ciruelas asadas)

An infallible way of cooking fish is to wrap it in foil before baking to ensure that the flesh remains moist.

### SERVES 4

2 farmed sea bream, filleted; 2 shallots; a splash of Manzanilla; extra virgin olive oil; 4 red plums; 400 g / 14 oz wakame seaweed; 2 cloves garlic; sugar; 2 l / 8 1/2 cup mineral water.

Place the filleted red sea bream on a sheet of foil, add the shallots and Manzanilla and wrap. Bake in the oven at 170°C / 338°F for approximately 10 minutes, but bear in mind that the cooking time will depend on the thickness of the fillets. Separately, make another papillote with the plums and a little sugar. When cooked, remove the pits, add the mineral water and blend. Strain through a cloth filter to create a light, tasty broth. Sauté the seaweed with garlic and extra virgin olive oil.

### To serve

Serve the sautéed seaweed and top with the red sea bream with some of the cooking liquid. At the table, pour over the hot plum consommé.

### Preparation time

1 hour

### Cooking time

40 minutes

### Recommended wine

Viñátigo Gual 2005 (DO Acoden-Daute-Isora), by the Viñátigo winery. This is a wine from the Canary

Islands that has an herbal nose, is fresh and slightly bitter on the palate and has a full aftertaste. Its flowery notes contrast with the sweetness of the plums and offer an excellent foil for the fish.



# Pollack grilled over olive pits with mint and cumin-flavored hummus

(Abadejo asado al hueso de aceituna con hierbabuena y humus de comino)

Of special interest in this recipe is the use of olive pit charcoal for grilling the fish, a new technique that is full of culinary potential.

## SERVES 4

4 portions of farmed pollack, weighing about 200 g / 7 oz each; 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz olive pits; 4 mint leaves; 250 g / 9 oz chickpeas, 2 g / 1/12 oz cumin; juice of 1/2 lemon; extra virgin olive oil; salt.

## For the grilled pollack

Take 1/2 kg / 1 lb 2 oz of carbonized olive pits and place beneath the grill until they start to burn. Sear the fish skin side down on the grill, then place on a rack over the hot olive charcoal (like a barbecue). Use a hairdryer to keep the charcoal red-hot.

## For the cumin-flavored hummus

Cook the chickpeas in a pressure cooker with water and cumin for 15 minutes. When cooked, blend in a Thermomix with extra virgin olive oil and lemon juice, and season with salt.

## To serve

Make a base of cumin-flavored hummus and top with a fine julienne of mint. At the table, top the hummus with the fish.

## Preparation time

40 minutes

## Cooking time

25 minutes

## Recommended wine

Vallegarcía Viognier 2004 (DO Vino de

la Tierra de Castilla), produced on the Vallegarcía vineyard terrain. This complex wine from the Toledo mountains offers a bright golden color, with notes of white fruit and well-

integrated wood. In the mouth it is full and creamy and has plenty of body, making it an excellent partner for the fish flavors that are intensified by the olive pit charcoal.





## Eel confit with consommé of dried salted tuna and apple

(Anguila confitada con consomé de mojama y manzana)

In this marine dish, the eel is served with a consommé made from dried salted tuna, typical in Andalusia, and the flavors are brought out by the contrasting sharpness of the apple.

### SERVES 4

**For the eel confit:** 1 farmed eel, filleted; mild-flavored extra virgin olive oil; peppercorns; cardamom seeds; 1 Granny Smith apple.

**For the dried salted tuna consommé:** 1 1/2 / 6 1/2 cups water; 50 g / 2 oz kombu seaweed; 80 g / 3 oz fermented red soy; 80 g / 3 oz fermented white soy; 200 g / 7 oz dried salted tuna, flaked.

### For the eel confit

Cover the eel with extra virgin olive oil and add the peppercorns and cardamom seeds. Cook for about 40 minutes over the lowest possible heat, making sure that the temperature of

the oil never exceeds 80°C / 176°F.

### For the dried salted tuna consommé

What's most important about making this consommé is that it must not boil. First cook the kombu seaweed in the water for about 20 minutes. Add the two types of soy and cook for another 20 minutes. Add the flakes of dried salted tuna and continue to cook gently for another 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and leave to stand for half an hour. Pour into a Clarimax (Business Watch, page 124) to convert into a very clear yet flavorsome consommé.

### To serve

First cut the eel confit into even-sized pieces. Add some sticks of unpeeled Granny Smith apple. Finally, pour over the very hot, clear consommé.

### Preparation time

2 1/2 hours

### Cooking time

1 hour 50 minutes

### Recommended wine

Cava Raventós i Blanc Gran Reserva Personal 1998 (DO Cava), by the Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc winery. This 7-year-old cava has slight smoky and yeasty touches, with a fine sparkle, an elegant palate and a persistent aftertaste. It is an ideal accompaniment for this dish.



## Turbot and noodle casserole with egg yolk alioli (Fideuá de rodaballo con alioli de yema)

This is a simple but memorable dish, accompanied by a full-flavored alioli enriched with egg yolk. *Fideuá* and alioli always make for an excellent pair.

### SERVES 4

#### For the turbot and noodle casserole:

1 farmed turbot, filleted; 1 onion; 1 red pepper; 1 green pepper; 2 cloves garlic; 150 g / 5 1/2 oz fried tomato; 800 g / 1 3/4 oz fine noodles; 1.6 l / 6 1/2 cup fish stock.

**For the alioli:** 4 egg yolks; 1 clove garlic; salt; juice of 1 lime; mild-flavored extra virgin olive oil; a little toast.

### For the turbot and noodle casserole

Gently fry the garlic, onion, peppers and tomato until soft and well-blended. Fry the noodles separately then add to the vegetables and cook for 3 minutes. Add the fish stock (made from fish trimmings, leek and scallion) and cook until the noodles have absorbed all the liquid. Remove from the heat and add the turbot, cut into pieces. Cover with a cloth so that the fish cooks in the heat given off by the noodles.

### For the alioli

Make an emulsion with the extra virgin olive oil, garlic, egg yolks, toast, lime juice, and a pinch of salt.

### To serve

Offer individual servings of the casserole, with the alioli in a separate dish so that each person can take as much as they like.

### Preparation time

1 1/2 hours

### Cooking time

1 hour

### Recommended wine

Sketch 2004 (DO Rias Baixas), from Bodegas Castroventosa in Galicia. This dry, creamy wine with hints of ripe tropical fruits is one of the trilogy produced by enologist Raúl Pérez. An Albariño monovarietal produced in limited amounts, it partners with the turbot and noodle dish without overwhelming it.

## Carpaccio of red tuna on a bed of breadcrumbs with Gamonedo sticks and ginger oil

(Carpaccio de atún rojo sobre migas, con galletas de gamonedo y aceite de jengibre)

The flavor of red tuna is very much appreciated by the locals in the Cádiz area, but here it comes with an unexpected accompaniment: smoky Gamonedo cheese.

the fish giving an excellent end result. Its saline touches, nuttiness and slightly bitter finish sustain the

contrast in flavors between the Gamonedo cheese and the ginger.

### SERVES 4

1 piece of red tuna fillet, weighing approx. 1 kg / 2 1/4 lbs; 200 g / 7 oz PDO Gamonedo cheese; 2 pieces ginger; 300 g / 10 1/2 oz dry bread; 100 ml / 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil; sunflower oil; 50 g / 2 oz butter.

### For the Gamonedo sticks

Slice the cheese using an electric slicer set at 2 mm / 0.08 in and then cut with a round pastry cutter.

### For the ginger oil

Place the ginger in sunflower oil and confit for 1 hour.

### For the breadcrumbs

Dry the bread in the oven, without browning. Use a rolling pin to crush, then cook in extra virgin olive oil and butter until hazelnut color and crisp.

### For the red tuna carpaccio

Trim the tuna, forming a cube. Slice as thinly as possible using the electric slicer.

### To serve

Arrange the tuna carpaccio on a bed of breadcrumbs. Top each slice with Gamonedo sticks and finish with ginger oil.

### Preparation time

1 hour 40 minutes

### Recommended wine

Fino Antique Fernando Castilla (DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry), from the Rey Fernando de Castilla winery. This 5-year-old fino from Cádiz, a wine with plenty of personality, complements





## Valdeón with grilled endives (Valdeón con endivias a la parrilla)

This cheese is one of my favorites because of its strong flavor, slight piquancy, aroma and creaminess. It is perhaps one of the least aggressive of the Spanish blue cheeses, making it a perfect partner for endives.

### **SERVES 4**

8 endives; 200 g / 7 oz PGI Queso de Valdeón cheese; 50 g / 2 oz cream.

Blanch the endives in salted water for 10 minutes to bring out their color, cut in half and sear on the grill. Melt the cheese

and add cream to tone down the strong flavor.

### **To serve**

Place 4 endive halves on a plate and pour over a little of the cheese sauce.

### **Preparation time**

10 minutes

### **Recommended wine**

Lustau East India Solera (DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry), by Lustau. The powerful flavors in this combination of endives

with blue cheese (PGI Queso de Valdeón) go perfectly with this cream sherry made of Palomino grapes with a little Pedro Ximénez. Its balsamic and glycerin touches provide a long aftertaste.

## Picón-Bejes-Tresviso cheese fondue with truffle-flavored bread, seeds and acidic flowers

(Fondue de Picón-Bejes-Tresviso, panes de trufa, semillas y flores ácidas)

This cheese makes an excellent, creamy fondue.

### SERVES 4

600 g / 1 lb 5 oz PDO Picón-Bejes-Tresviso cheese; 1 large round loaf of bread; 1 black truffle; sesame seeds; oats; edible flowers; fruit salt.

Melt the cheese in a fondue pan. Cut the loaf into small cubes and place in a hot oven until crisp. Meanwhile, cut the black truffle into very fine julienne strips and sprinkle over the crisp cubes of bread. Dip the edible flowers into fruit salt and dry out in the oven.

### To serve

Place the fondue at the center of the table and sprinkle with the oats, sesame seed and dried flowers. The diners spear the bread and dip it into the fondue.

### Preparation time

40 minutes

### Recommended wine

Gutiérrez Colosía Palo Cortado (DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry), by Bodega Gutiérrez Colosía. This fortified wine from Jerez is powerful, slightly piquant on the nose and offers bitter and spicy notes in the mouth, blending well with the PDO Picón-Bejes-Tresviso blue cheese.





## Liquid Gamonedo pastry and roasted almond oil with orange blossom aroma

(Empanadilla líquida de gamonedo con aceite de almendras torrefactas al aroma de azahar)

Gamonedo is again the star in this dish, this time wrapped in pastry so that it can be eaten in almost liquid form.

### **SERVES 4**

8 sheets wonton pastry; 200 g / 7 oz PDO Gamonedo cheese; beaten egg; extra virgin olive oil.

Use the wonton pastry to make ravioli-style packages containing a little Gamonedo cheese. Seal with beaten egg. Fry in very hot oil and finish by heating briefly in the oven.

### **For the roasted almond oil:**

150 g / 5 1/2 oz almonds; 150 g / 5 1/2 oz orange rind; 150 g / 5 1/2 oz lemon rind; 50 g / 2 oz fennel.

Bake everything together at 120°C / 248°F for 20 minutes, then blend in the Thermomix. Push through a cloth filter to create a roasted almond oil with orange blossom aroma.

### **To serve**

First arrange a small salad of fresh leaves, then add the pastries and sprinkle with the roasted almond oil.

### **Preparation time**

20 minutes

### **Recommended wine**

Dolç de l'Obac (DO Ca Priorat), from the Costers del Siurana winery. This sweet Catalan wine, with toasty notes and hints of raisin, figs and dates, blends perfectly with the roasted almond flavor and the crisp wonton pastries.

## Fried Cabrales cheese with cherry compote (Cabrales frito con confitura de cereza)

This recipe combines sweet compote with strong Cabrales cheese, a favorite because of its excellent flavor, but here served in an unusual fried version.

### SERVES 4

600 g / 1 lb 5 oz PDO Cabrales cheese; flour; egg; breadcrumbs; extra virgin olive oil.

**For the compote:** 240 g / 9 oz cherries, pitted; 60 ml / 1/4 cup water; 180 g / 3/4 cup sugar.

Cut the cheese into 50 g cubes, dip in flour and egg and fry in very hot oil.

### For the compote

Cook the cherries over a low flame. When dry, add the water and sugar and cook for about 45 minutes until the right consistency.

### To serve

Serve three pieces of fried cheese per person with the compote in a bowl on the side so that people can serve themselves.

### Preparation time

1 hour

### Cooking time

45 minutes

### Recommended wine

Oloroso Tradición VORS 30 Años (DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry), by Bodegas Tradición. This fortified dessert wine with its toasty, balsamic and nutty notes makes an ideal partner for the intense flavors of the PDO Cabrales cheese and its sweet garnish.





On the  
**FRONT**  
**LINE** of Cuisine

From Bean Stew  
to Signature Chocolates

They're hard at work, experimenting, creating and learning. Good produce, traditions, professionalism, and a warm welcome. Five of the ICEX gastronomy interns report on how things are going after the first few months working side-by-side with some of the great names on today's Spanish culinary scene. The are contrasts and surprises, exactly what you would expect from an authentic sampler menu.



**Text**  
Rodrigo García Fernández

**Translation**  
Jenny McDonald

**Photos**  
Toya Legido/ICEX  
Tomás Zarza/ICEX  
Miguel S. Moñita/ICEX

Three hectic weeks packed with discoveries: tastes, smells, places and people, shaping the profile of Spanish gastronomy. More than 20 days during which the participants on the first edition of the Training Program for Young Foreign Professionals in Spanish Gastronomy, set up by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX), had the great opportunity of seeing for themselves the backdrop for tradition and new expertise in Spanish cuisine (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72).

This training course, which took the form of lectures, discussions and travel over much of the Spanish food and wine map, was their introduction to the country where they would be based for the duration of the internship. The initial phase came to a magnificent end in early October last year with a dinner at Casino de Madrid, a spectacular, 100-year-old building in the city center. The event marked the end of their travels and the start of the next chapter in the unusual logs being kept here in Spain by the 15 young chefs from Denmark, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, and the US. It was a relaxed dinner enjoyed by all and which heralded the real privilege that awaited them as from the next day: working side-by-side with the main protagonists of a unique gastronomic movement at the vanguard of Spanish cuisine. Some left in the morning, some in the afternoon, but everyone headed off to his or her respective destinations on October 7<sup>th</sup>. The different restaurants and one pastry kitchen that awaited them all enjoy



great prestige and recognition in the professional guides but, more importantly, they all represent Spanish haute cuisine, with all the necessary respect for tradition, products, and creativity implied. From day one, work was, to say the least, intense. There was no time to lose and they all had to follow the unwritten rule for those starting out in this profession: "Keep out of the way". Space in restaurant kitchens is limited; everything has to be in its place, and there is something going on in every corner. Order and planning are essentials for Juan Pablo Felipe, owner of El Chaflán in Madrid

(one Michelin star), one of the city's first to join the bandwagon of creative cooking. "What I try to teach young chefs is that they need to carefully organize and plan their work. There can be no room for improvisation. The kitchen is like an engine that has to run to perfection. If a single part fails, the engine stops working, and that must be avoided at all cost."

## Down to work

This chef has crystal-clear ideas. His penetrating eyes help him express what he is saying. "Working in haute cuisine is the hardest and most martial of all the options existing in the world of gastronomy. If they are going to take full advantage of these internships, these young chefs must be prepared to work hard. Max is clear about that. In exchange, we offer a top-quality environment and a warm welcome."

Maximilian Denk, from Germany, has been working with Juan Pablo for three months. During the first few weeks, not only did he have to get used to a new city but he had to find his place in the El Chaflán kitchen, with limited knowledge of Spanish. "The language barrier is not insurmountable," says Juan Pablo. "There are people of many different nationalities in my kitchen, but I encourage them to make the effort to learn Spanish. As far as I'm concerned, it's extremely important. Speaking the language helps them understand what sort of products we use and where they come from." Max tries to follow Juan Pablo's

advice and even prefers us to conduct the interview in the language of Cervantes, reflecting the determination that is said to mark the German character. "I would like to become more and more involved in the work of the restaurant, so the language is very useful." This young chef's career has taken a sharp upward turn since his arrival in Spain. Before coming, Max worked in one of the best-known, traditional Bavarian restaurants in Munich, the Weisses Brauhaus, an enormous eatery with several floors, all full of tables, where food and drink strictly follow local tradition.

Now, in El Chaflán, things are radically different. Culinary broadmindedness is a must. "I'm working in every section of the kitchen. We are constantly changing from cold dishes to hot to desserts... El Chaflán cuisine is more individualized, with sampler menus and just a few tables, and this is all new to me."

He also stresses the different mindset needed in a restaurant such as Juan Pablo's, where Spanish regional cuisine blends seamlessly with modern techniques and surprising presentations. "We offer Spanish *tortilla* in a foam. It looks nothing like the classic potato omelet, but it's made with the same ingredients," says Max.

His time at El Chaflán has allowed him to make many discoveries about Spanish cuisine. "In Germany, we don't use so much olive oil but here it's essential. Extra virgin olive oil adds wonderful aromas and flavors

to many of the dishes we prepare." Anyone who visits this restaurant will see, just as soon as they enter, that olive oil is not just another everyday ingredient; on the contrary, in the middle of the dining room, among the tables, is an olive tree. It is one of the three key design elements in this restaurant—the olive tree, the skylight and the glassed-in kitchen. And what's more, Juan Pablo markets his own olive oil in collaboration with the Borges Blanques oil mill. It is an extra virgin olive oil made from the Arbequina variety, grown in the province of Lérida in Catalonia.

Max was especially surprised by one feature of the menu. "In the restaurants I worked at in Germany, we didn't work much with fish. Here

it is the star ingredient." It turns out that one of Juan Pablo's favorites is tuna caught by the *almadraba* trap-net method in Andalusia, and he is a great devotee of the Andalusian fishing tradition. His menu includes dishes with bluefin tuna belly and neck, sole from the lagoons created beside the salt marshes around the Bay of Cádiz, and Rota-style red-banded sea bream (with tomatoes and peppers, as made by the people of Rota, near Cádiz).

After his four months at El Chaflán, Max will pack his bags and set off for the restaurant Ábac in Barcelona, recently awarded its second star in the 2008 edition of the Michelin guide. There Max will be working with chef Xavier Pellicer who will no doubt lead him along new culinary paths.





## An unexpected invitation

Our research into the progress of some of the interns in Spain then took us northwards, away from Madrid, to the Principality of Asturias. There we were welcomed into Casa Gerardo (one Michelin star), the restaurant run by Marcos Morán. It was a Sunday morning and the small town of Prendes, just 7 km (4.3 mi) from the city of Gijón, was still half asleep. Everything was silent. The air was fragrant with the fresh smell of the meadows opposite the restaurant, a typical local construction made of stone, with a balcony looking over the peaceful surroundings dotted with occasional houses.

We were taken straight into Casa Gerardo's large kitchen, where about 15 people were already working quietly. Marcos, son of the owner, Pedro Morán, was carefully cleaning several black truffles (*Tuber melanosporum*). Our conversation took place in a small dining room next to the kitchen, that was separated from it by a glass partition

so we could still see what was going on. This room is one of the results of the latest renovation carried out in this restaurant, where Marcos represents the fifth generation in the family business.

"We have only good things to say about Gian," he says. Gian is a young Swiss chef who has been working in this top-flight restaurant in Asturias, an establishment that combines earnestly traditional dishes such as *fabada* (Asturian bean stew) and rice pudding with cutting-edge creations based on high-quality local produce. "From day one, he's been one of the team here at Casa Gerardo. We were keen for him to get to know all the different sections in the restaurant, from making lunch for the staff to helping prepare the avant-garde sampler menu," says Marcos who, though now in charge of the kitchen, is still under the watchful eye of his father. Pedro Morán is known as the man behind renovation in Asturian cuisine.

When Gian heard about his internship destination, little did he know he would be participating in one of the most gratifying

gastronomic events of 2007. At the beginning of last December, the Morán family invited everyone who's anyone in Asturian and Spanish gastronomy to celebrate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Casa Gerardo.

Many of the great Spanish chefs came along to Prendes to celebrate the never-ending success of the restaurant: Ferrán Adrià (elBulli, Roses), Hilario Arbelaitz (Zuberoa, San Sebastián), José Andrés (Jaleo, Washington), Juan Mari Arzak (Arzak, San Sebastián), Quique Dacosta (El Poblet, Denia), Dani García (Calima, Marbella)—a whole host of stars, alongside the many Asturian chefs who are admirers of the Morán family.

The fact that so many well-wishers were present says a lot about the respect shown towards Pedro's family by his professional colleagues. "It was just a party of friends," says Marcos modestly. "It just so happens that our friends are top chefs." Gian had the opportunity to meet them all personally, eat with them and have his photo taken alongside some of the leading figures in Spanish cuisine today.



Gian's time in this restaurant has allowed him to get to know more about the extra virgin olive oils that are regularly used in Spanish haute cuisine kitchens. And he was surprised to learn about some of the work being done recently by Marcos with fish offal (Madrid Fusión, International Springboard, page 120). "Here they do interesting things with red mullet liver that in Switzerland we would never dream of doing, and now I know all about the best *jamón ibérico*," he says with enthusiasm. This knowledge was to stand him in good stead for his next destination. In the month of April he changed the lush green Asturian countryside, which is so similar to that of his native Switzerland, for a completely different environment. He is now working at Atrio, a two-Michelin-star restaurant in Cáceres, in southwest Spain, under the orders of Toño Pérez. Here the landscape is stark and the climate dry. This is the land of Ibérico ham and fresh pork (DO Dehesa de Extremadura), and of the Serena and Torta del Casar cheeses.

## T R A V E L I N G   S C H O O L   I I

The first three weeks they were in Spain, the young chefs traveled all over the country to discover its gastronomy and wines, not to mention its artistic treasures and landscapes (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72). But the course program devised by Sonia Ortega, who for two decades coordinated the printed edition of *Spain Gourmetour*, also included a second traveling school, including Madrid, Andalusia and Extremadura. After attending the Madrid Fusión International Gastronomy Summit (page 120) in late January, the interns traveled to Granada where they were able to visit treasures such as the Alhambra and the Albaycín district with its narrow lanes and Moorish ambiance, and taste the traditional local tapas.

While still in the province of Granada, they visited Riofrio to see the world's only organic sturgeon fish farm, the Piscifactoría Sierra Nevada (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71). They saw for themselves how the fish are bred, tried the exquisite caviar that is produced there and learned different ways of preparing the fish. Then the bus moved on to Baeza, a beautiful town in the province of Jaén (Andalusia) and one of the locations of the magnificent Tierras de Oliva exhibition, which offers an excellent introduction to the world of olive oil. It was olive harvesting time, and they were able to see a mill in action preparing Castillo de Canena extra virgin olive oil.

Then they headed to Extremadura. One of the chosen stop-offs was Rocamador, a former convent converted into a luxury hotel, in the midst of hilly countryside affording plenty of pasturelands for the Ibérico pig. Here the young chefs saw a traditional pig slaughtering, how the pork products are produced, how good Ibérico ham should be sliced, and learned about the best cuts of Ibérico pork. Other high spots on the second part of this traveling school were La Vera pimentón (a Spanish type of paprika) and Torta del Casar cheese presentations and a meal at the Atrio restaurant in Cáceres.

## MADRID FUSIÓN. INTERNATIONAL SPRINGBOARD



The sixth edition of Madrid Fusión (January 21-24, 2008) will leave an indelible mark on the memories of these 15 chefs. Before the start, an informal meeting was held with the foreign journalists who had come to Madrid to cover this not-to-be-missed event on the gastronomic calendar. Lars Lundo, from Denmark, acted as spokesperson for the group, and described his experience at Celler de Can Roca (Girona, Catalonia).

The four days of Madrid Fusión offered them all sorts of surprises. On the first day, just ten minutes before the talk given by Carme Ruscalleda, the woman chef with the greatest number of Michelin stars in the world (*Culinaire Fare* p. 74), the interns were invited onto the platform along with Andoni Luis Aduriz, one of the Spanish chefs participating in this pioneering initiative organized by ICEX. They received warm applause from the large audience, while the cameras flashed, taking their

picture for the press and for the official Madrid Fusión program to be handed out the next day.

Then, on day two, Marcos Morán, chef from Casa Gerardo, offered his talk on fish offal. He was assisted by three members of his team, among them the Swiss intern Gian Durish. They prepared dishes such as red mullet liver and heart of bonito, giving the audience plenty to think and talk about. Day three featured Takayuki Kikuchi, a sommelier who is working at El Portal de Echaurren (Ezcaray, La Rioja) this year, and who joined a team of international experts—John Radford, Gerry Dawes, Rodolfo Herschmann and Andrés Proensa—for a tasting session featuring DOCa Rioja wines. In the afternoon, he was a member of the jury that selected the winner of the 2nd National Contest for Sommeliers.

Thursday, the last day of the congress, was an exciting one for some of the young chefs from Denmark. First Juan

Mari Arzak demonstrated some of his latest proposals, and then he introduced the members of the team accompanying him. Amongst them was Mie Bestlund whom he described as "very special". "I could say plenty about her, and it's all good," he said. Later on, Mie was back on the main stage at Madrid Fusión to assist Bo Bech, one of the Scandinavian chefs who were the stars of this year's edition. With her were two compatriots who are also ICEX interns this year, Nicolai Tram and Ronny Emborg. These were some of the outstanding moments in their rising careers.



## Master of maestros

Near the Miracruz summit on the old road to Irún, in an area which now forms part of San Sebastián's urban profile, is a Mecca of Spanish gastronomy: the Arzak restaurant (the first Basque restaurant to be awarded three Michelin stars). Juan Mari Arzak still keeps in touch with what's going on there even though he now runs the restaurant with his daughter Elena (Culinay Fare, page 74).

Juan Mari, one of the founders of the New Basque Cuisine movement in the late 1970s, is one of the most widely-respected personalities on the national gastronomic scene, partly because of his seniority but especially for his career. Many people consider him to be the perfect maestro, and Mie Bestlund from Denmark has been soaking up his wisdom during her assignment at this restaurant.

And Arzak describes her as the perfect pupil. "The whole team in the restaurant is convinced that this girl has what it takes to succeed in the sector. She's sweet, cheerful and hard-working, three characteristics that fit in perfectly with our philosophy. She's very keen to learn, so we are giving her increasingly complex things to do, things that require technical skill,

concentration and creativity."

"I was obviously very enthusiastic but rather awed to be here, alongside Arzak, one of the most relevant figures in gastronomy," says Mie.

"Never before had I seen so many chefs working in the same kitchen, and I didn't know where to go, but they welcomed me in. Elena and Juan Mari suggested we sit down and chat for a while before getting down to work. Even today, after four months, they still stop me in the kitchen to ask me if everything's going well!" Mie says one of the things that most caught her attention was the artistic slant of the dishes.

"The food is brilliant on its own, with wonderful flavors and the best local produce, but the presentation is really spectacular."

Mie is keeping a diary to note down everything she learns during her stay in Spain. The entries include comments on the spices used in the Arzak kitchen, many of them prepared on site using techniques such as freeze drying. Other discoveries included "a small, sweet fruit called a medlar, and various *mojo* sauces created as marinades for fish and meat. The recipes are secret, although I've found out some of them for myself; but rest assured, I will never reveal the formulas."

Mie will be working hard at Arzak



until October; the last month, however, is going to be very special. She will change from the kitchen to the laboratory to work with Elena Arzak, Xabi Gutiérrez and Igor Zalakain, creating flavors, textures and culinary wonders. This will be a reward for her good work, a privilege for a trainee and a very special gift for this promising young Danish chef. Another memory she will cherish for the rest of her life are the meals she shares every day, before the first customers arrive, with the whole team at the restaurant—about 40 chefs, all seated at the same table together with Juan Mari, Elena and other members of the Arzak family. It's a time for jokes, chit chat, rest and, it goes without saying, good food.



## WEBSITES

**Akelarre**

[www.akelarre.net](http://www.akelarre.net)

**Arzak**

[www.arzak.es](http://www.arzak.es)

**Casa Gerardo**

[www.casa-gerardo.com](http://www.casa-gerardo.com)

**El Chaflán**

[www.elchaflan.com](http://www.elchaflan.com)

**Oriol Balaguer**

[www.oriolbalaguer.com](http://www.oriolbalaguer.com)

### The latest in sweets

The last stop on this tour is Barcelona, a cosmopolitan yet Mediterranean city, open to the winds of gastronomic innovation. Here we find Oriol Balaguer and René Frank from Germany who, for the first five months of his internship, has been working alongside this well-known Catalanian pastry chef.

"How things have changed! Twenty years ago nobody would have dreamed of coming to work in our restaurants," says Oriol, who worked for seven years with Ferrán Adrià at elBulli. He is like a steam engine that is constantly churning out new projects. He heads a team that launches up to four collections of chocolates and two of pastries every year. "This is the first time this has been done in patisserie. Our customers appreciate what we're doing, and by working this way we're always highly motivated and never get trapped in a routine."

This chocolate trendsetter is an avid advocate of sweet cuisine, the perfect complement for savory food. "Most young chefs want to be a new Ferrán Adrià or Santi Santamaría, but there's a fascinating gap to be filled in haute patisserie." Oriol is very clear about what he wants to transmit to the young chefs working with him. "I

want to teach them my philosophy, which is based on hard work, professionalism, quality, design and research." René, who had already worked as a pastry chef in restaurants in Germany, stresses the last of these: "Here they give priority to research, and we all participate in the process, trying out the latest creations and giving our opinions." For this young German chef, who knows all the basics of traditional German patisserie, working with Oriol has been a challenge. "The system here is very organized. It's like a small production plant, but with a huge dose of creativity." One of the things he has appreciated most has been the warm welcome received from his colleagues. "There's no noise in the kitchen. The work is strenuous but the atmosphere is one of concentration, which is very different to what I was used to. And when I've made mistakes, such as getting the proportions of the ingredients wrong, my colleagues have always encouraged me to try again."

Oriol had a busy start to 2008: cooking for foreign journalists at Madrid Fusión, a trip to Tokyo where he has a store (European things are popular in Japan, and Spain is in fashion—its design, architecture and gastronomy) for a series of seminars,



preparation of a new collection of sugar-free chocolates and pastries in unusual shapes, the inauguration of his new store in Madrid, and the launch of his products on the market in Hong Kong and Australia. René completed the first stage of his internship in April, after which time he headed to Akelarre (San Sebastián), the three-Michelin-star restaurant run by chef Pedro Subijana, where he will complete his stay in Spain. René will be swapping pastries for Basque haute cuisine. Meanwhile, Oriol never stops. As always, it's a whole whirlwind of activity on the Spanish culinary scene.

*Rodrigo Garcia Fernández is a journalist and has worked for El Mundo, La Verdad de Murcia and Heraldo de Soria. He is currently a member of the team at [www.spaingourmetour.com](http://www.spaingourmetour.com).*

## I N H E R O W N W O R D S

The American chef Brenda Ramírez sent in a note to *Spain Gourmetour* on the first part of her ICEX gastronomy internship. Coming directly from the Chinese Windows Restaurant, she was assigned first to San Sebastián under Pedro Subijana (Akelarre, three Michelin stars). After that, she moved on to Barcelona, with Ramón Freixa (El Racó d'en Freixa, one Michelin star).

When I thought about the prospect of going to Spain and working in Michelin-star restaurants, I wondered if my adventure would be a success or an opportunity that I would fail to fully appreciate. I was afraid my previous experience was not enough to get me through the rigors of working in some of the world's best kitchens, but with the encouragement of friends and family, and remembering all that I have learned over the years from teachers and fellow chefs, I went into the program confident I would do well and ready to take in as much as possible. Once in Madrid I could not wait to get started traveling and visiting the numerous towns, restaurants and bodegas that were part of our cultural and gastronomical tour of Spain. After three weeks of tasting and drinking just about everything Spain has to offer, I was eager to head to San Sebastián and to begin my adventure at Akelarre, where I was sure I would gain another perspective on Spanish regional and nouvelle cuisine.



Arriving that first day to the restaurant, unsure of where to go and hoping to find other interns like myself, I was nervous, excited and a little bit in awe of the idea of working in a restaurant and for a chef I had only read about on the internet and had heard about from Spanish friends interested in the culinary scene. Soon, though, other interns and chefs began to arrive, including two other women, which made me feel a little more at ease. After a quick tour of the restaurant, we were immediately assigned to our sections, in my case the cold kitchen, and put to work, leaving no time for nerves. Little by little, I have become accustomed to the kitchen's rhythm and routine and have adapted to the often demanding work load that a busy service can bring. I've been working at Akelarre for three

months now, and not a day goes by where I do not learn or see something new. My time here has been made even better by the incredible patience and willingness of the chefs to explain unfamiliar techniques and correct mistakes, and by the camaraderie with the other cooks who are always willing to lend a hand or explain something that my Spanish kitchen vocabulary does not cover.

It has been an incredibly rewarding experience working at Akelarre, both in terms of the people I have come to know and learn from, as well as for the products, dishes and techniques I am now familiar with. And while the end of my time at Akelarre approaches, I look forward to what awaits me in the next chapter at Barcelona's Raco d'en Freixa.

# High-tech Cooking ICC



For the last ten years, Spanish cuisine has been in the throes of what can only be described as a revolution. Thanks to Ferrán Adrià and many other like-minded chefs, and to industrial initiative, world gastronomy is in the process of being reinvented. Among those who have contributed to making this happen is ICC, a small Catalan company that provides chefs all over the world with the very latest in sophisticated cooking equipment. Its unique tools and appliances are designed to keep pace with the unflagging creativity typical of what Pau Arenós (Spanish National Journalism Prizewinner for food writing in 2005) calls “techno-emotional cuisine”.

Barcelona, with its Gothic Quarter, the Sagrada Família, Güell Park and Agbar Tower, is synonymous with the avant-garde, cutting-edge design and modernism. The capital of Catalonia (northeastern Spain) has always been receptive to new influences and, indeed, has been a trendsetter in its own right, acquiring a deserved reputation for bold innovation. In the city center, right at the heart of all this, near the Passeig de Gràcia, site of some of Gaudí's most outstanding buildings, and the Ramblas, where artists and tourists mingle with students and assorted trendies, International Cooking Concepts (ICC) has established its headquarters. The company's founder, Marc

Calabuig, welcomes me to its premises on the ground floor of one of the stately buildings along the Gran Via des Corts Catalanes. ICC moved here early in 2007, setting up a small office (the company employs barely half a dozen people) and a vast kitchen in which they stage demonstrations of the assorted pieces of equipment they develop and market. These are intriguingly-named inventions—Roner, Gastrovac, Rotaval—and seem more akin to lab instruments than to kitchen utensils, yet they can be credited with challenging cooking conventions in many parts of the globe, blurring the boundaries between kitchen and laboratory in the process.

## Super siphon

Before setting up ICC, Marc worked in his father's firm importing and distributing raw materials for the confectionery trade: cream, nuts, powdered egg, paper, and so on. “We had a customer in Croatia whose sales of cream far exceeded what might have been expected from such a small, exotic country, particularly one recovering from a war,” he recalls with a smile. “So I went to visit him and discovered his secret: along with our cream, he was selling siphons that gave it a special texture that people loved.” The siphon was produced by an Austrian manufacturer, and as there was no Spanish distributor for it, Marc

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TEXT  
ANDRÉS RAMÍREZ SOTO

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PHOTOS  
ICC

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TRANSLATION  
HAWYS PRITCHARD

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took it on and began promoting it back home. This was in 1996, and some of his customers commented that they had seen Ferrán Adrià do amazing things with the same device. "Ferrán who?" wondered Marc, jotting down the name on a piece of paper that was to remain untouched on his desk for many months. When he eventually did get round to calling him, he learned from Adrià that the siphons were the key to a whole new culinary world. "At that time, elBulli was making foams out of everything, even smoke, and being deliberately provocative," he recalls. "We met, we got on well, came to an agreement and decided to produce the first recipe book of foams, explaining the technique and presenting recipes for dishes served at elBulli. Though the product was still the same, with this completely new conceptual presentation the siphons started to sell." In fact, they were an instant success, to such an extent that distributors for his father's firm could not meet demand. "We were working at a ridiculous rate, generating enormous demand but lacking a well-organized distribution network." That was when he decided to set up his own company and, in 1998, after agreeing with elBulli to continue with the siphon collaboration, he established International Cooking Concepts.

For the first few years, ICC did

nothing more than distribute the siphons and occasionally other, very specific, machines such as the Pacojet sorbetière. "We gradually acquired a reputation in the market as the company that sold weird machines and special instruments for particular tasks. This led to our being approached by chefs with very precise requirements, and we started working with them to produce highly function-specific utensils and small-scale machines." The Roner was one example. The first of their appliances to be manufactured in-house, this invention was developed by Joan Roca (El Celler de Can Roca, two Michelin stars) and Narcís Caner (La Fonda Caner). The only difference between a Roner and a traditional bain-marie is the apparently minor, but actually inspired, feature of the water being kept in constant motion. The effect of this is that the temperature remains constant and identical throughout the receptacle, giving the chef greater control and also making it possible to cook at low temperatures, allowing the best ingredients to maintain their stellar qualities. ICC gradually developed and produced several more pieces of equipment, among them the Fakircook grill (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71), designed by Jordi Herrera, the inert fabric Superbag, and the Gastrovac. The latter, another revolutionary ICC appliance, looks

more like a space-age pressure cooker; it was jointly invented by chefs Javier Andrés (La Sucursal, one Michelin star) and Sergio Torres (El Rodat) and a team from Valencia's Polytechnic University. It works by creating an artificial low pressure, oxygen-free atmosphere, thereby reducing cooking temperatures and creating a sponge-like effect; when the pressure is restored, the food absorbs the liquid around it. Some of today's top chefs such as Wylie Dufresne of New York's WD-50 restaurant (one Michelin star), Norway's Eyvind Hellström from Bagatelle (two Michelin stars), and Italy's Carlo Cracco from Cracco Peck (two Michelin stars) are exploring the exciting new areas that this appliance opens up.

## Techno-emotional tools

Many readers will be appalled at the idea of cooking being reduced to a series of laboratory procedures. Marc has his defense ready: "Just because you use technically-advanced equipment doesn't mean that the food you produce will be sterile and soulless. Chefs who have adopted this approach are just as impassioned as those who shun cutting-edge technology, perhaps even more so!" And it is a fact that this trend has been influential in serious food circles for

several years now, earning itself various labels: "molecular cooking", "the foam revolution" and, of course, "techno-emotional cuisine". "Pau Arenós' coinage sums up the current situation rather well," observes Marc. "The chefs involved may use highly-specialized equipment but they will also select top-quality food products and be just as emotionally committed; it's just that they use different approaches, different tools. They demonstrate the fact that, though there's a lot of technology involved, there's plenty of passion, too."

Clearly, Spanish cuisine is in a state of flux. "We're on the move: I don't know whether backwards or forwards, but there's a definite shift. And we at ICC are contributors to it, just as the manufacturer of the best cooking knives is, and the maker of comfier chef's jackets, and the grower of more flavorful vegetables," declares Marc modestly. In his opinion, dialogue and collaboration have provided the basis for this shift of direction and have been the driving force behind Spanish gastronomy for the last decade.

"Everybody shares recipes, information, and know-how. If we were all to play our cards close to our chests, things wouldn't be the same. There would just be elBulli, which would still be elBulli, but there wouldn't be any siphons, or canned textures, or Roners..."

As the end product of close collaboration among university, chefs, laboratories and company, ICC appliances reflect this conviction perfectly. "Our products always emerge as a result of a particular chef recognizing a gap in the restaurant equipment at his disposal, and realizing that a specific procedure really calls for a purpose-made appliance," explains Marc. Between research, making prototypes and fine-tuning, it can take as long as three years from that initial idea to the appearance of the first model of a new product. Prototypes are issued to a select group of chefs all over the world to be put through their paces and, if

necessary, reinvented. In the process, each of them will discover a new use for the device in addition to the one originally intended, and will suggest modifications: What about a pressure control valve here? And a transparent lid for keeping an eye on the cooking process? "One has to take all of them on board, consider them, and eventually put into application modifications that are worthwhile in terms of cost, utility and feasibility." Those who see this sort of high-tech equipment as relevant only to complicated avant-garde cuisine may be surprised to learn that one of the best-known traditional restaurants in Segovia (heartland of the Castilian roast) uses a Roner for cooking its legendary milk-fed lamb. Meanwhile, ICC's latest creation, the Clarimax, could be equally useful in an haute cuisine restaurant or a hospital kitchen. This revolutionary piece of equipment, developed by Angel León from the restaurant Aponiente (Recipes, page 102) and Cadiz University, capitalizes on the properties of diatomic algae to clarify broths and eliminate cholesterol without affecting the flavor of food.

The Clarimax is this year's latest ICC product, but Marc reveals that there are already more things in the pipeline. "I'd be satisfied with producing one new machine a year: an enormous amount of work goes into developing, modifying and marketing each one. They aren't just run-of-the-mill

products," he declares. Even so, he is already exploring several new avenues; he is obviously a dynamic, inquiring, hard worker and it therefore comes as no surprise to learn that he is juggling various schemes at once. "We want to build up exports of our technology, both utensils like the Fakircook and compact appliances like the Clarimax," he informs us. To that end, ICC is staging hundreds of presentations: "Recently we brought a group of Norwegian chefs to Barcelona to show them our products and what can be done with them. We stage demonstrations for 2,000 or 2,500 chefs a year in Spain alone, aside from the ones we do abroad." In addition to traveling all over the world presenting ICC's products to chefs, he has just created Hobbychef. Aimed at private individuals, this new company sells cooking utensils and other items, and also organizes courses for both professional and amateur cooks. As we are saying our goodbyes, he casts an eye round the premises and comments: "We could have a little shop here later on." And with that it becomes more than clear that we'll be hearing plenty more about International Cooking Concepts.

*Journalist Andrés Ramírez Soto has worked for the France-Press agency and at the Spanish Embassy's Economic and Commercial Office in Rabat. He is currently an intern journalist at Spain Gourmetour.*

## I N T E R N A T I O N A L C O O K I N G C O N C E P T S ( I C C )

**Date of foundation:** 1998  
**Activity:** Manufacturing and distributing specialist cooking equipment  
**Workforce:** 6 employees  
**Turnover for 2006:** 2.8 million euros  
**Export quota:** 30%  
**Headquarters:** Gran Vía de les Corts Catalanes, 649  
08010 Barcelona  
**Tel:** + 34 932 531 210  
**Fax:** +34 932 127 425  
[www.cookingconcepts.com](http://www.cookingconcepts.com)  
[icc@cookingconcepts.com](mailto:icc@cookingconcepts.com)





# On the Move

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TEXT  
ANDRÉS RAMÍREZ

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ILLUSTRATION  
JAVIER VÁZQUEZ

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TRANSLATION  
HAWYS PRITCHARD

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## Aracol exports know-how to Latin America

Snails are eaten throughout the Mediterranean area. Spain alone consumes some 16,000 tonnes (35,000,000 lbs) a year, the majority of which are simply gathered in the wild, thereby putting some of the most sought-after species at risk of extinction. Having spotted a market niche and growing demand, Zaragoza-based company Aracol (Aragonesa de Caracoles) has been breeding snails in captivity since 2002. Today the company has an annual turnover in excess of half a million euros and has exported its industrial model farm for fattening hatchlings to several Latin American countries.

At the end of 2007, the company finalized an agreement with the Biotechnology Institute of Bogotá University and the Association of Colombian Heliciculturists (ANHELCO) to carry out a project designed to develop snail rearing in Colombia based on Aracol's production system. The key to Aracol's approach has been standardizing its snail farming model so

that it can provide technical and production advice to other snail farms engaged in fattening hatchling snails. In 2005, the company began exporting its farming model to Latin American countries, successfully meeting the region's growing demand for snails in the process. "Each country has its own way of doing things, so agreements and schemes have to be negotiated accordingly," reports the company's founder, José Melero Abadia, who is already working with farms in Chile, Nicaragua and Colombia. Aracol is engaged in various ongoing research projects with a view to increasing the profitability of farms in those countries with which it has entered into a commercial agreement.

**Date of foundation:** 2002

**Activity:** Snail breeding and fattening; design and management of fattening farms; manufacture and distribution of snail products

**Workforce:** 7 employees

**Turnover for 2006:** 500,000 euros

**www.aracol.com**

## Citron: a taste of Aragón in China

Four agri-food companies from the Aragón region (northeastern Spain) have formed a new export consortium with the aim of introducing their products into Southeast Asia. The new company, known as Shanghai Citron Trading Co., has already established an operational base in Shanghai (China) which will



serve as a hub for its activities throughout the region in the near future. The consortium's constituent companies, Bodegas San Valero, Cexcar, Grandes Vinos y Viñedos and Portesa, have devised a joint plan to internationalize and export their respective products. The products in question—wine, meat, cured ham and charcuterie—constitute an

attractive range of Spanish foodstuffs, and the four companies aim to capitalize on the potential synergistic benefits of this selection to make a bigger impact on the Asian market. They are currently making initial contact with distribution firms, putting the finishing touches on their center of operations in Shanghai, and hiring local staff.

Bodegas San Valero is one of DO Cariñena's best-known wine producers and, founded in 1945, is also one of the oldest. Its 3,500 ha (6,640 acres) of vineyards produce a wide variety of wines—*young*, *crianza* and *reservas*—which are distributed all over the world.

Created in 1997, the *Grandes Vinos y Viñedos* winery encompasses five winemaking cooperatives in the Cariñena region. Since its inception, the company has based its business strategy on quality and innovation, creating wines that are highly distinctive in their areas of provenance.

Cexcar, which has production plants in Zaragoza, Huesca and Teruel, processes over 6 tonnes (13,000 lbs) of pork and

1.8 tonnes (3,900 lb) of beef a week, both for distribution in domestic and international markets and for processing into products such as cured ham and chorizo and *salchichón* sausages.

Portesa produces, processes and distributes pork products under the auspices of *DO Jamón de Teruel*. The company controls the entire production process, from raising the animal (on Portesa-made feed) to distributing the end product (cured ham, pork loin, bacon, etc.), thereby guaranteeing quality.

Through Citron, which in Chinese means "excellent West", these four companies aim to act as standard-bearers for products and know-how from Aragón in the Asian marketplace.

**Date of foundation:** 2007

**Activity:** Exporting agri-food products

**Workforce:** 7 employees

[www.grandesvinos.com](http://www.grandesvinos.com),

[www.sanvalero.com](http://www.sanvalero.com), [www.cexcar.com](http://www.cexcar.com),

[www.porcinoteruel.com](http://www.porcinoteruel.com)

### Agnus Verus: ready-roast lamb for Asia

Ribera del Duero is famous among gastronomes; the region's outstanding wines are known all over the world, and its roast lamb enjoys quite a reputation as well. Devotees of this traditional roast used to have to rely on local *asadores*, restaurants where this was precisely their specialty. Now, however, the *Lechazos* Ribera del Duero company (whose products sell under the *Agnus Verus* label) has decided to make this classic dish available to everyone, even exporting it to several Asian countries since last year. "We cook it according to the traditional recipe and then vacuum pack it so that all our customers have to do is heat it up and enjoy," explains Enrique Mínguez, head of the company. Folk wisdom, handed down from

generation to generation, knows that the best way of cooking lamb is also the simplest: tender, *lechazo* lamb (that has been fed only on its mother's milk) is seasoned with a little salt and then roasted slowly in its own juices. It becomes indescribably delicious in the process, "particularly when there's a Ribera del Duero wine to go with it," advises Enrique.

This little Castilian company, which was formed specifically to export this product, has successfully introduced it into several foreign markets since 2003. Its objective over the last year has been to establish a foothold in the Asian market. Gourmet food stores already carry its products, and Hong Kong's Spanish restaurants are also among its customers. Meanwhile, negotiations with distributors in Malaysia and Singapore are well underway, as product samples have been met with considerable interest.

In addition to milk-fed lamb, the company also sells sucking pig, cooked with the same traditional recipe and to identical standards of quality and excellence.

**Date of foundation:** 2002

**Activity:** Producing and selling food products

**Workforce:** 8 employees

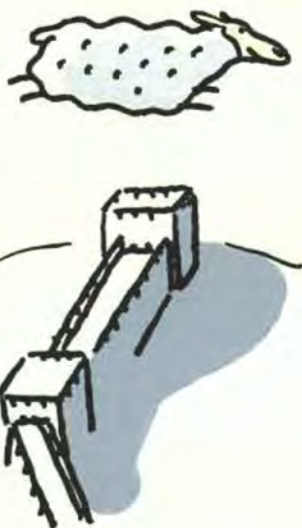
**Turnover for 2006:** 300,000 euros

**Export quota:** 70%

[www.agnusverus.com](http://www.agnusverus.com)

### Bodegas Peique now exports to Canada

Bodegas Peique has reached an agreement with Canadian distributor Christopher Stewart Wine and Spirits for "the distribution of its wines in the state of Alberta". Canada is a difficult export market for drinks, as bureaucratic requirements are complicated and the local importers cautious. "Although we



first made contact in February 2007, we didn't send off our first shipment until this year," says *Damián Cánepa*, Peique's commercial director.

Peique is a small family winery in the Bierzo region, founded in 1999 and dedicated to growing, making and ageing quality wines using a combination of innovative and artisan methods. The young owners of this bodega have a long winemaking pedigree that goes back three generations.

While it expands into Canada, Peique will lean initially on its already-established position in the US market. "Canada is heavily influenced by critics in the States, so that's where we're concentrating our efforts for the moment. We're also aiming for media coverage that will be effective in both countries at the same time," explains *Damián*.

The wines of Bierzo (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72), a region of Spain with a long winemaking history, are starting to make their mark internationally. The consummate skill demonstrated by its new generation winemakers has attracted interest from wine professionals, closely followed by consumers all over the world. A young Peique Tinto Mencía 2005 that earned 90 points in a Jay Miller tasting for the Parker guide was what prompted the Canadian distributor to get in touch with the winery. "Mind you, that could turn out to be a double-edged sword: if you don't score as well as usual one year, it might result in lower



sales than you anticipated," *Damián* observes cautiously.

**Date of foundation:** 1999  
**Activity:** Winemaking and ageing  
**Workforce:** 8 employees  
**Turnover for 2006:** 395,000 euros  
**Export quota:** 15%  
[www.bodegaspeique.com](http://www.bodegaspeique.com)

### Tapelia: paella for the Muscovites

Tapelia, trade name of the Alicante-based Restoralia Group, is to open approximately 100 restaurants in Russia and other Eastern European countries, having entered into an agreement with Russia's Universal Resources Group. The first of them is due to open this year, not far from Moscow's legendary Bolshoi Theater.

The restaurants are to be managed directly by the Russian partner. Several of its executives were sent to Spain at the end of 2007 to gain firsthand experience with Restoralia products and familiarity with the company's philosophy and management methods.

Restoralia will contribute know-how and is responsible for designing the restaurants' menu, featuring their Mediterranean and traditional Spanish dishes made from raw materials which they supply. They will also be involved in creating an identifiably Spanish personality for the new restaurants. The key to all this is Restoralia's Culinary Workshop in Elda (Alicante) where all the products served in the 50 restaurants they own in Spain are prepared, either totally or partially, and which will also be sole supplier to the new Eastern European establishments.

Tapelia uses innovative processes which allow it to offer quality cuisine, specializing in rice dishes and paellas along with other recipes typical of eastern Spain. For its new venture, the



company has adapted its repertoire to suit local tastes and added new dishes, particularly soups, to the menu. Restoralia intends the opening of the new premises in Moscow to mark the start of a new phase of expansion, the aim being to establish around 140 restaurants in Russia and Eastern Europe in the next ten years. Meanwhile, it is looking into forming new partnerships to replicate the formula in different countries, including France, the UK, China and Panama. "We aim to be the world benchmark company for top-quality Spanish artisan cuisine. It's a very ambitious goal but we have the necessary team and technology to achieve it," declares *Pedro Fernández Maciá*, the group's expansion director.

**Date of foundation:** 1992  
**Workforce:** 105 employees  
**Turnover for 2006:** 12.5 million euros (headquarters) plus 30 million euros (restaurants)  
[www.restoralia.com](http://www.restoralia.com),  
[www.tapelia.es](http://www.tapelia.es)

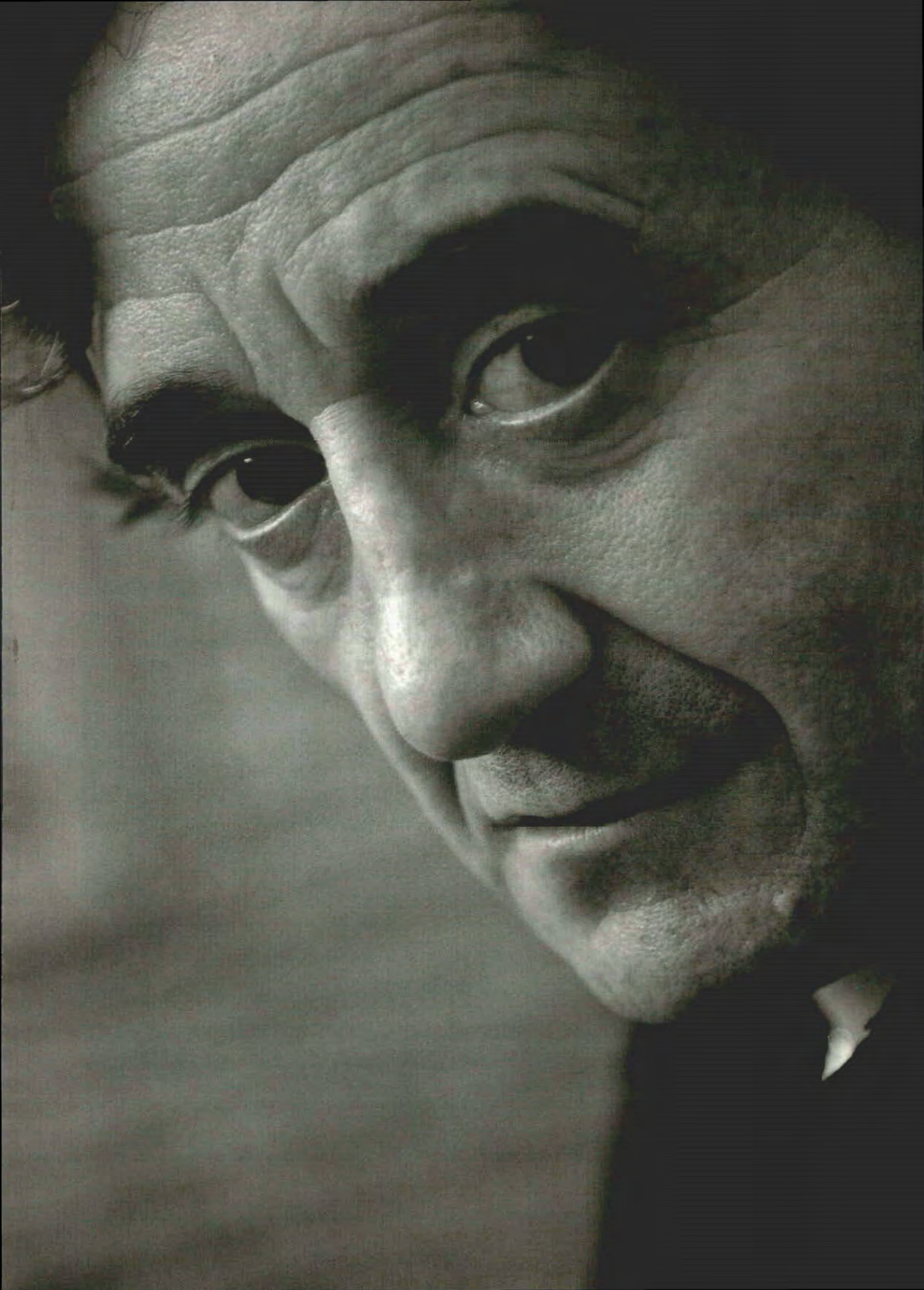
More news  
[www.spaingourmetour.com](http://www.spaingourmetour.com)

# MASTER at WORK

## Florencio Sanchidrián: Ham Slicer Extraordinaire

You don't have to be a gypsy to be a good flamenco singer, or Andalusian to be a good bullfighter. Skilled ham slicer Florencio Sanchidrián comes from Avila, a province with many claims to fame but not known for pig breeding. When Florencio sets about an acorn-fed Ibérico ham with his expert knife, he enters into dialogue with it. Here he shares the many secrets he learns in the process.

Unsung  
Heroes



## TEXT

CARLOS TEJERO

## PHOTOS

PABLO NEUSTADT/ICEX

## TRANSLATION

HAWYS PRITCHARD

Houston airport, Texas. An airplane, passengers already on board and seated, is about to close its doors. It is suddenly announced that the flight will be delayed, and Mr. Florencio Sanchidrián is requested to make himself known to a member of the cabin crew. Florencio is told that he must get off the plane and is escorted to a small room by two policemen:

"The bag you checked in contains dangerous weapons."

"They're ham slicing knives."

"They're what?"

"I'm a ham slicer."

"You're a chef?"

"No, a ham slicer."

"That's a job?"

Things are not going well. Florencio is not fluent in English and the burly Texan policemen think that he's pulling their legs. They don't seem to find his explanation convincing, but Florencio suddenly remembers something that might help get him off the hook. A collection of photographs in his hand luggage includes one of him slicing acorn-fed Ibérico ham for the President of the United States. The policemen are astonished to see George W. Bush smiling at their suspect as he accepts a slice of ham from his professional slicing knife—a tool that could indeed be a very

dangerous weapon in the wrong hands. The situation is defused amid jokes and laughter.

This is one of many stories from Florencio's anecdotal repertoire. Like the one about Richard Gere who told him that acorn-fed Ibérico ham was absolutely delicious but that he found watching him slice it just as enjoyable. Most of the stories are unrepeatably, however, because they feature world-famous politicians, businessmen, athletes and stars of stage and screen. "I've seen very important people forget their manners over a plate of ham." Florencio spends more than half the year away from home, slicing away at all kinds of events, ranging from the Madrid Fusión International Gastronomy Summit (which is where our conversation takes place) to a Hollywood premier or a private party on a yacht in the Mediterranean. Florencio has even sliced acorn-fed Ibérico ham in Dubai (one of the Arab Emirates where the predominant religion is Islam and eating pork is forbidden).

"So how does all this dashing about fit in with family life?"

"Badly, but it's my job."

Florencio is committed to a profession about which few can claim any knowledge or understanding, even in Spain. Is it really possible to earn a

decent living just by slicing ham? Florencio does, and has done for the last 25 years.

## How it all began

Florencio Sanchidrián is a native of Avila. That was where he chose to set up his restaurant, and where he first came into contact with ham and all that it entails. "I started slicing and just got hooked!" He became a very skilful *cortador* (slicer) and plucked up the courage to enter various competitions, from which he emerged victorious. He is a four-time winner of the *Cuchillo de Oro* (Golden Knife), Spain's top award for ham slicers, and was declared World Champion at an event held in Paris. Florencio's skills are such that he can cut a thin slice of ham almost 12 m (40 ft) long; however, as in so many walks of life, it takes more than technique to be the best at what you do. He brings an emotional component to his work, which is something that can't be learned: you either have it or you don't, like bullfighters and flamenco singers. Florencio treasures a photo album crammed with pictures of the most dazzling international celebrities. Most people would be proud to show photographs of themselves alongside Robert De Niro, Pope John Paul II, Al



Pacino, Victoria Beckham, Naomi Campbell and the like, but Florencio's heroes move in more local circles.

"In my Avila restaurant (unsurprisingly called *El Rincón del Jabugo*, meaning Jabugo Ham Corner), I have just two photos: one of me with the bullfighter Curro Romero and another with the late flamenco singer Camarón de la Isla." Neither of these figures is exactly famous outside Spain, but Florencio is clearly modest. His jet-setting life hasn't changed him. Whenever they meet, King Juan Carlos ("a good ham slicer himself") hails him with a familiarity that many prestigious figures would find enviable, but the honor doesn't go to Florencio's head. Another anecdote sheds further light on his character: about 15 years ago, with several Cuchillo de Oro awards already to his name and acknowledged as an unrivalled slicer in Spanish gastronomic circles, he arrived at an event in Extremadura where he was to give a demonstration.

"I set about slicing a ham. A local man approached and stood watching me. After a while he came closer and scolded me: 'How many prizes are you supposed to have won? Forgive my saying so but you're not slicing that ham properly.'"

Florencio reeled...

"Give me the knife," the man demanded, going on to explain: "You are using it in a completely horizontal position, whereas you ought to be holding it at an angle; that way you get the different flavors from both edges, combined in the same slice." Different? Florencio was amazed. But he tasted the ham and had to admit that it was true. The unknown man carried on, giving him advice and offering explanations. He said that the same ham yields different flavors according to which part the slice comes from and how that slice is cut; sometimes it's better to slice upwards and other times downwards, depending on the grain.

"It was like a revelation," admits Florencio. "I said to myself: I'm completely ignorant about all of this." His technique was good but he hadn't acquired and understanding of his product, and to slice jamón properly you have to understand it. Florencio, now a man obsessed, quickly bought himself four acorn-fed Ibérico hams (each from a different region) and a stack of books and reports on cured ham and retreated to a monastery for nine days. He spent the whole time experimenting with slicing techniques,

tasting the results and trying to analyze the organoleptic secrets of acorn-fed Ibérico ham.

"I lost 3 kg (6.6 lbs). I ate nothing but ham and drank nothing but water. Today I slice the way I do thanks to that man from Extremadura." (He was, as it turned out, a pig breeder in Jerez de los Caballeros, Badajoz, and he and Florencio have since become good friends).

## Singular and scarce

Florencio has carved many, many hams, both Serrano (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 63) and acorn-fed Ibérico (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 66), which are two completely different products.

"Acorn-fed Ibérico ham is one of the world's great delicacies, ranked alongside caviar, foie gras and truffles, albeit less well-known. Even the Spanish haven't really come to grips with it, so it still has great unrealized potential. The trouble is that the acorn supply is only enough to feed 250,000 pigs a year—the equivalent of 500,000 hams. Producing more is an impossibility, yet demand is growing day by day. I just got back from San Diego (US) where I sliced the first Ibérico ham to be imported into the country (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 67) amid tremendous excitement. There is a waiting list of people prepared to pay \$900 for an acorn-fed Ibérico ham (about double the price in Spain)."

Big new markets are opening up in, for example, the US and also in China where, in November 2007, a protocol was signed that will soon allow fresh and cured meat to be imported from Spain.

Florencio's right when he says, "We're going to have to get used to paying more."

The market tries to impose uniformity on products so as to achieve stable sales figures, but the standardization that this implies makes it neither a possible nor advisable option in the case of acorn-fed Ibérico ham.

"It isn't just any old product, it's complex, like wine. So much depends on the year: whether acorns have been

## SERRANO AND IBÉRICO: TWO DIFFERENT PRODUCTS

Serrano ham (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 63) is obtained from breeds of white pig imported into Spain during the last century. They are intensively reared and fed a fodder-based diet.

Ibérico ham (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 66) comes from Ibérico pigs, a native breed notable for their dark skin and black hooves. They are free-range reared on forested grassland, principally in Extremadura, Andalusia and Salamanca. Ibérico ham comes in three categories: *cebo*, when the pig has been fed exclusively on fodder; *recebo*, when it has been fed on acorns and fodder during the final fattening phase; and *bellota*, when it has been fed exclusively on acorns during that final phase.

This means that not all Ibérico hams are acorn-fed, but all acorn-fed hams are Ibérico. In other words, there is no such thing as an acorn-fed Serrano ham.

Acorn-fed Ibérico ham is the more highly regarded of the two and therefore more expensive. The problem is that acorns are scarce: they are obtained solely from the dehesas, wooded grassland areas home to holm, cork and gall oak, all of which are slow-growing and slow-fruiting species. To complicate matters further, they can yield a lot one year and little the next, making the acorn supply impossible to predict.

plentiful or not, how cold it has been, how much it has rained... all these factors affect the properties of acorn-fed Ibérico ham, even though the same procedure is closely adhered to during the curing process."

Florencio has acquired a great deal of knowledge and understanding over the years. With the first cut he can tell whether a ham is male or female which not an easy task ("Female is better because it has more infiltrated fat, and that makes it juicier and more aromatic"). He has also identified seven different flavors within one acorn-fed Ibérico ham according to which part of the joint a slice comes from.

"What's your favorite part?"

"The *punta*, which is the tip of the joint at the opposite end to the hoof, because the ham is hung from the hoof throughout the curing process and the fat gravitates down to the *punta*, giving it the flavor and aroma I like best."

"Any slicing hints?"

"Just be motivated and do it in a pleasant environment. In my experience, the happier I am, the better I slice!"

Ham is best when eaten in good company, and taking plenty of time to savor it. It's a classic example of unadulterated slow food.

"Acorn-fed Ibérico ham is such a special product that it deserves to be treated with respect. It's important to do things properly. I've seen people who call themselves professionals, slicing a ham on top of a Coca-Cola crate and wearing shorts! I call that sacrilege!" When he's slicing, Florencio adopts a bullfighter's stance.

"I always do, even when I'm alone. It's a way of showing respect. I think of ham as a living product with which I engage in a dialogue, and my knife is the instrument through which we communicate."

And what does an acorn-fed Ibérico ham have to say for itself? It speaks eloquently of a native breed of pig reared in almost total freedom. Of centuries-old holm and cork oaks. Acorns. Scrubland redolent of aromatic herbs. Cold weather. Slow curing in a cellar. Subtle flavor variations within the same joint.

"People need to have all that explained to them. A slicer should do more than just provide the food; he must pass on what he learns from the ham."

This explains why Florencio insists that there be no more than 30 people present when he stages a tasting.

"Do you find English a problem when you're abroad?"

"Actually, a ham slicer shouldn't speak English. It doesn't seem right. It's the same as for a bullfighter—he loses authenticity! Seriously though, my English is just about good enough to get me through airports. What I can't do is communicate, in a language that is not my own, everything that needs to be said about what an acorn-fed Ibérico ham is, what it stands for, and what I experience when I'm slicing it. I prefer to delegate that job to a translator." Florencio is riding the wave. He has just published a book, *El jamón ibérico en la gastronomía del siglo XXI* (Lasting Impressions, page 136), jointly with other authors, which includes recipes from Spain's top chefs. He owns two schools for cortadores, in Valencia and in Barcarrota (Badajoz), with plans to open one in Madrid in the pipeline. He is also working on a scheme with chef Paco Roncero (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71) and a prestigious food company to open a chain of tapas bars in the US called *En Estado Puro* (Unadulterated). "Acorn-fed Ibérico ham and charcuterie will be the star attractions, with wine in a supporting role rather than the other way around!"

Journalist **Carlos Tejero** has been a regular contributor to *Spain Gourmetour* since 2003.



## A H A M S L I C E R ' S R U L E S

—By hand or by machine?

—Always by hand. Machine slicing requires the ham to be deboned, and it loses many of its aromas in the process. Furthermore, a mechanical knife scorches the meat, which adversely affects the flavor.

—Should all hams be sliced in the same way?

—No, because they don't all have the same marbling or the same grain.

—Where should one start slicing?

—You should place the ham in the stand hoof upwards and start slicing the *maza*—the widest, fattiest part; the fat will gradually work its way downwards to the *babilla*, the narrowest, leanest area, which tends to be less succulent.

—Describe an ideal slice.

—5 cm (2 in) wide, cut with the grain and very thin, though not necessarily translucent. There should be enough meat for you to know it's there.

—Would it be a crime to cut it into chunks?

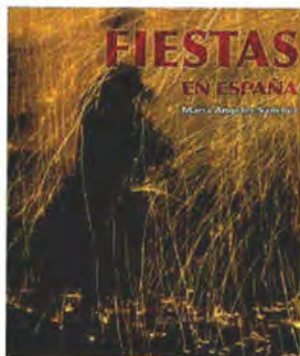
—No, not at all. In fact, when you're reaching the end of a ham and there are some areas close to the bone where you can't get proper slices, cutting chunks is preferable. Better a good chunk than a bad slice.

—Is it alright to touch the meat with one's fingers?

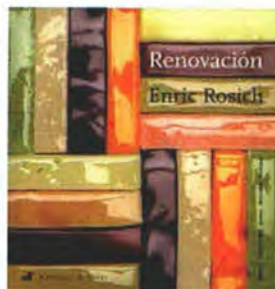
—As little as possible. It should go from knife to plate or directly into the hands of the eater. I don't believe in using tongs, though they are preferable to a fork; you should never puncture a slice of ham with a fork.

# LASTING IMPRESSIONS

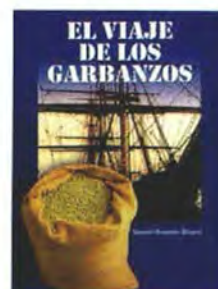
**Text**  
Samara Kamenecka /  
Almudena Martín Rueda



*Fiestas en España* (Festivals in Spain) by Maria Angeles Sánchez. Spanish. One could argue that Spain is the most festive country in Europe (and maybe the world). Its *fiestas*, however, go beyond a few running bulls and some flying tomatoes. Experiencing one of its countless festivals is like being a part of history, and these experiences allow participants to enter into the very soul of Spain. In addition to the brief but detailed history of events such as Carnival, Holy Week and San Juan, this book offers a breathtaking photographic journey through Spain's festival circuit, from the religious to the intimate to the extraordinary. If you can't make it to the actual event yourself, this book will make you feel as if you were there. (Lunwerg Editores, [www.lunwerg.com](http://www.lunwerg.com))



*Renovación* (Renovation) by Enric Rosich. Spanish. A *renovación* is precisely what the sector needs, according to Enrich Rosich, and after 25 years in the business, it's clear that he more than knows what he's talking about. Step inside his revolutionary proposal for fresh, healthy, tasty pastries, an idea in line with the changing times. Purity, lightness, optimization, diversity and ease are the five basic pillars of his work, which pave the way for innovative, quality creations. This text takes a serious look at the scientific side of pastry-making with a special focus on the elaboration and application process, respect for the materials, packaging, presentation, profitability and successful sales. The many delicious recipes are well-thought-out and inspired. This is a book where science, technique and art come together. (Montagud Editores, [www.montagud.com](http://www.montagud.com), [montagud@montagud.com](mailto:montagud@montagud.com))

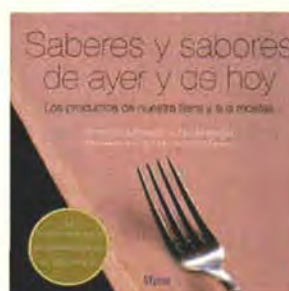


*El viaje de los garbanzos* (The journey of chickpeas) by Benjamin Hernández Blázquez. Spanish. What's cheap to grow, easily conserved, fantastically nutritious and can flourish in arid areas? If you guessed the chickpea, you must be familiar with this gem of a legume. In this book the author shares stories, memories and reflections from his youth, as well as a plethora of information on chickpeas: different varieties; production in Spain; recipes from the Golden Age; regional and international dishes; nutritional qualities; and of course, succulent recipes (try the creamed chickpea curry with duck liver and crispy onions, or the chickpea salad with warm pheasant broth). Both a subsistence food for the poor and a delicacy for the rich, learn more about the many faces of this gastronomical treasure. (Fundación Universitaria Española, [fuesp@fuesp.com](mailto:fuesp@fuesp.com))



**El jamon ibérico en la gastronomía del siglo XXI** (Ibérico ham in gastronomy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) by Academia Española de Gastronomía. Spanish. Enter into the unique and magical world of Ibérico ham, a passionate world all its own. Healthy, tender, and rich in unsaturated fatty acids, fabulous as a solo act, delicious in countless combinations, its very Spanish flavor is not only revered by the most demanding and refined of taste buds, but Ibérico ham is by far the most representative item in the Spanish kitchen. This book brings together great specialists, including cattle farmers veterinarians, gastronomes and enologists, to dissect the Iberian world from all possible points of view. The topics discussed in depth include different types of breeds; the current situation in the pork sector; grazing grounds' ecosystems; an analysis of microbiological characteristics; the production process; how to care for ham at home; the art of cutting; nutritional, health

and artistic points of view; different designations of origin; and ham and technology. Top chefs offer an original and varied selection of more than 60 recipes with ham as their base product, including Ferrán Adrià, Sergi Arola, Juan Mari Arzak, Carlos D. Cidón and Paco Roncero. Try the pumpkin and ginger soup with Asian style ham and scallops, the Ibérico ham with melon and basil ice cream, or the honey shrimp with ham crisps over strawberries. One look at this book and it's clear that there's nothing like it in the world. It is undoubtedly the great ambassador of Spain's culinary culture. (Editorial Everest, S.A., [www.everest.es](http://www.everest.es), [comunicacion@everest.es](mailto:comunicacion@everest.es))



**Saberes y sabores de ayer y de hoy, los productos de nuestra tierra y sus recetas** (Know-how and flavors from yesterday and today, products and recipes from our land) by Ymelda Moreno y de Arteaga. Spanish. Spain is on the cusp of culinary world recognition, and it's high time an adequate reference manual for the kitchen was available. That day has come. This book is an indispensable guide for anyone who truly loves to cook. Featuring an extensive selection of the principal foods from Spain, chapters feature everything from saffron, rice and olive oil to cherries and lamb. Each item is featured in an introductory text with information on its sensorial and gastronomic characteristics, how to use it in the kitchen, and its designation of origin and geographic protected indication categories. Every product appears in two subsequent recipes, one of which is signature cuisine and the other more traditional, the idea being to marry products from classic

recipes with modern creations. The recipes come from none other than a selection of Spain's most highly-acclaimed chefs, including Ferran Adrià, Adoni Luiz Aduriz, Dani García, Francis Paniego and Carne Ruscateda, among others. Suggestions include Aranjuez strawberries with vinegar ice cream, smoked salmon terrine with anchovy butter, and beef cheek prepared with red wine and served with fresh cheese, garlic brochette and black olive marmalade. All of the best Spanish recipes are together at last so go ahead and set the table, it's time to eat! (Styria de Ediciones y Publicaciones, S.L., [www.styria.es](http://www.styria.es), [comunicacion@styria.es](mailto:comunicacion@styria.es))



**Cerdo ibérico, las mejores recetas** (Ibérico pork, the best recipes) by Manuel Sánchez Gómez-Merelo. Spanish. Loin, suckling pig, sirloin... Ibérico pork is considered to be the grand jewel of pork products. Not only does it offer an amazing range of dried meat, it also stars as the primary ingredient in many of Spain's most traditional dishes and around the world. This book offers information on the history of the Ibérico pig and a selection of 200 recipes, each with its own personal touch, and organized according to the cut of pork. From the sirloin millefeuille with quince sauce to pig's ear and snout with chocolate to presa with pistachio vinaigrette, if your mouth is watering, then this book's for you.

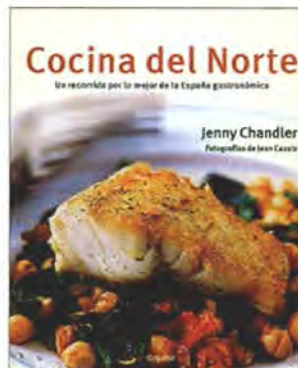
(Santillana Ediciones Generales, S.L., [www.elpaisaguilar.es](http://www.elpaisaguilar.es))



**Comer en España, beber en España, un viaje culinario región a región** (Cook España, drink España! A culinary journey around the food and drink of Spain) by John Radford and Mario Sandoval. English, Spanish. From Andalusia to Valencia, the author offers a cultural overview of each of Spain's 17 regions as well as information on regional wines, the best wineries and three recommendations for each recipe. Sandoval proposes a series of traditional, avant-garde and modern dishes inspired by each area, all the while letting his unique style shine through.

Old favorites share the pages with new ones. Try the *salmorejo* from Cordoba, Galician potage, sweet Calasparra rice with king prawns from the Mar Menor and red wine-scented cheese, or white asparagus tempura with Roncal cheese mayonnaise.

(Mitchell Beazley, Octopus Publishing Group Limited, RBA Libros, S.A., [www.rbalibros.com](http://www.rbalibros.com), [rba-libros@rba.es](mailto:rba-libros@rba.es))



**Cocina del norte** (The cuisine of northern Spain) by Jenny Chandler. English, Spanish. Menus change radically in northern Spain, from the Basque Country to Cantabria to Galicia, and local dishes are an intriguing part of each region's identity. Chandler's travels have come together in this book where she presents ingredients, proposes a selection of wines and cheeses and offers a collection of more than 130 recipes, many of which are old classics with a surprising twist. From *fabada* to pepper, leek and king prawn salad with pheasant eggs to chestnut flan with chocolate ice cream and ginger syrup, this text is a pleasure for the senses, paying homage to the old school culinary customs of the north, and teaching us how to rediscover them.

(Random House Mondadori, S.A., [www.randomhousemondadori.es](http://www.randomhousemondadori.es))



**Nueva Cocina Española, New Spanish Cuisine.** English, Spanish. In today's day and age, creativity in the kitchen is an absolute must. Luckily, time-honored flavors lay the perfect foundation for new and innovative creations in Spanish cooking. Vichy Catalan and Buffet&Ambigú teamed up to create a contest in search of the most ingenious dishes which successfully combine tradition with technology. This wonderful book features those cutting-edge recipes, as well as an index with a list of winners, finalists, and their restaurants. The beautifully-presented recipes and photos include celery soup with lime and dill-coated tuna and cockles, olive oil globes with pepper nectar and cod fish soup emulsified with Vichy Catalan, and marinated salmon, trout caviar and orange air... redefining delicious.

(Buffet&Abigu, S.L., [www.catalogobuffet.com](http://www.catalogobuffet.com), [info@catalogobuffet.com](mailto:info@catalogobuffet.com))



### 2008 gastronomy and wine guides

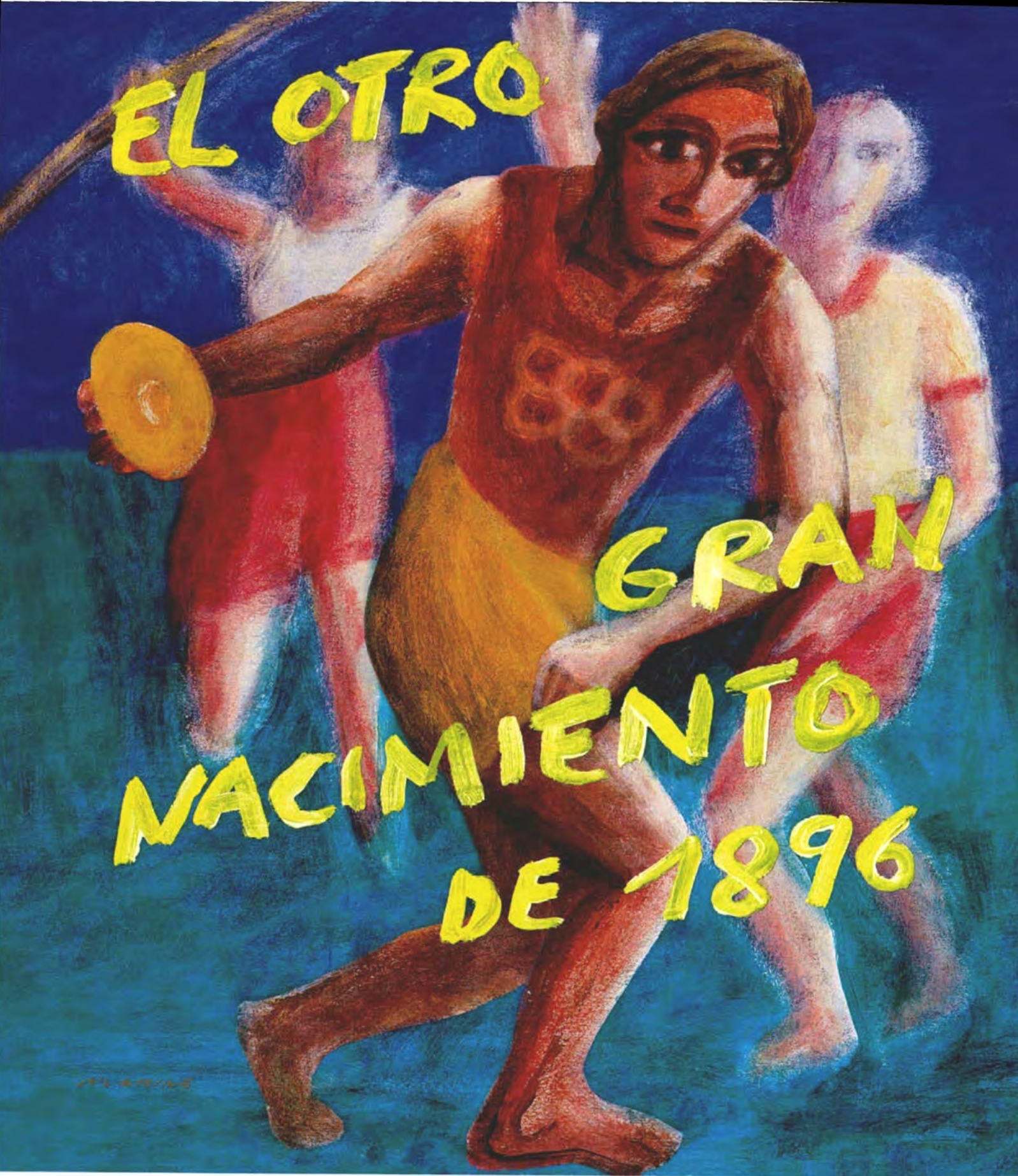
We begin with three road guides with information about hotels, restaurants and wines: *Guía Campsa España 2008* (Campsa Guide 2008; Repsol YPF, [www.guiacampsa.com](http://www.guiacampsa.com); Spanish), *Guía Michelin de España y Portugal 2008* (Spain and Portugal Michelin Guide 2008; Michelin, [www.viamichelin.es](http://www.viamichelin.es); and *Guía de hoteles y restaurantes de España* (Guide to Spain's hotels and restaurants; El País Aguilar, [www.elpaisaguilar.com](http://www.elpaisaguilar.com); Spanish). We continue with the guide *Lo mejor de la gastronomía* (The best of gastronomy; Ediciones Destino, [www.edestino.es](http://www.edestino.es); Spanish), a comprehensive review of the best chefs and the regional specialties served in their respective restaurants. A classic among guidebooks about Spain is *Guía gastronómica y turística de España Gourmetour* (The Gourmetour guide to gastronomy and tourism in Spain; Grupo Gourmets, [www.gourmets.net](http://www.gourmets.net); Spanish). Finally, the *Anuario de la cocina de la Comunitat*

*Valenciana* (Annual guide to gastronomy in the Valencian Community; Editorial Prensa Valenciana, [www.levantemv.com](http://www.levantemv.com); Spanish), which focuses primarily on gastronomy and restaurants in Valencia. We wish to highlight the following wine guides: *Guía Peñin de los vinos de España 2008* (Peñin Guide to Spanish wines 2008; Peñin Ediciones, [www.grupopenin.com](http://www.grupopenin.com); English, German, Spanish), *La Guía TodoVino MMVIII* (The 2008 TodoVino guide; TodoVino The Spain Wine Shop, [www.todovino.com](http://www.todovino.com); Spanish), *Guía de vinos gourmets 2008* (Gourmet wine guide 2008; Grupo Gourmets, [www.gourmets.net](http://www.gourmets.net); Spanish), *Guía Proensa de los mejores vinos de España 2008* (Proensa Guide to the best Spanish wines 2008; Vadevino Editorial, [guia@proensa.com](mailto:guia@proensa.com); Spanish), and *La guía de oro de los vinos de España 2008* (The gold guide to the wines of Spain 2008; N&A - Naturaleza y Ambiente, +34 91 316 36 00; Spanish). All of these reference books contain information about wine-producing regions.

### Spanish regional gastronomy

Because of its tremendous diversity, Spain is a gastronomic world in and of itself. Each region has its own specialties based on local products, history and culture. As evidence of this point, a number of recently published culinary guides take root in the regional environments that mark their respective origins. In this issue we wish to highlight the following: *Cocina Vasca. En el Bodegón Alejandro*. (Basque gastronomy; in Bodegón Alejandro). Martín Berasategui. (Spanish) The author began his career in the family restaurant Bodegón de Alejandro from which he highlights 135 recipes that demonstrate the breadth of Basque Country culinary arts. Additionally the book includes a list of the local providers that supply the Bodegón de Alejandro restaurant. (Gourmandia, [www.gourmandia.es](http://www.gourmandia.es)) *Álava. Aquella gran cocina y su innovación* (*Álava: great gastronomy and its innovation*) Fernando González de Heredia "Tote." (Spanish) After providing a brief summary of Álava's

gastronomic literary references, critic Fernando González de Heredia reveals the most traditional recipes and typical pastries of Álava, ending the guide with a discussion on modern gastronomy. (Álava Local Government, [www.alava.net](http://www.alava.net)) *Navarra a la carta* (Navarre à la carte) Pedro Luis Lozano Úriz. (English, Spanish). Organized in the style of a restaurant menu, this book offers a tour of Navarre by way of its typical products. The guide presents various items, their respective places of origin and a recipe for each of the featured delicacies. (Navarre Institute of Food and Agriculture Quality - ICAN, [www.icannavarra.com](http://www.icannavarra.com)) *Maestros de la Cocina Extremeña* (Masters of Extremaduran Gastronomy) Mari Cruz Vázquez and César Serrano. (Spanish) Fourteen Extremaduran chefs show off this region's gastronomy with their culinary creations. (Department of Economy and Labour, Extremadura Regional Government, [www.juntaex.es](http://www.juntaex.es))



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Fax: (+34) 968 447 221  
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www.culmarex.com

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Fax: (+34) 928 732 260  
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www.dylcan.es

**Frescamar, S.L.**  
Tel: (+34) 964 587 068  
Fax: (+34) 964 586 321  
info@frescamar.es  
www.acuicolamarina.com

**Isidro de la Cal**  
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Fax: (+34) 981 217 303  
grupo@isidrodelaalcal.com  
www.isidrodelaalcal.es

The following list includes a selection of exporters. It is not intended as a comprehensive guide and for reasons of space, we cannot list all the companies devoted to export of the featured products. The information included is supplied by the individual sources.

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Fax: (+34) 938 157 452  
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www.conei.com

**Piscifactoría Sierra Nevada**

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Fax: (+34) 958 321 114  
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**Ricardo Fuentes e Hijos**

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Fax: (+34) 968 165 324  
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www.ricardofuentes.com

**Stolt Sea Farm, S.A.**

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**Source:**

Asociación Empresarial de  
Productores de Cultivos  
Marinos (Marine Fish Farming  
Producers' Association,  
APROMAR)  
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Fax: (+34) 956 403 388  
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www.fundacioncabrales.com

**PDO Gamonedo Regulatory  
Council**

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Fax: (+34) 984 844 230  
info@quesogamonedo.com  
www.quesogamonedo.com

**PDO Picón-Bejes-Tresviso  
Regulatory Council**

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Fax: (+34) 942 269 856  
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www.alimentosdecantabria.  
com/certificados\_calidad/13

**PGI Queso de Valdeón  
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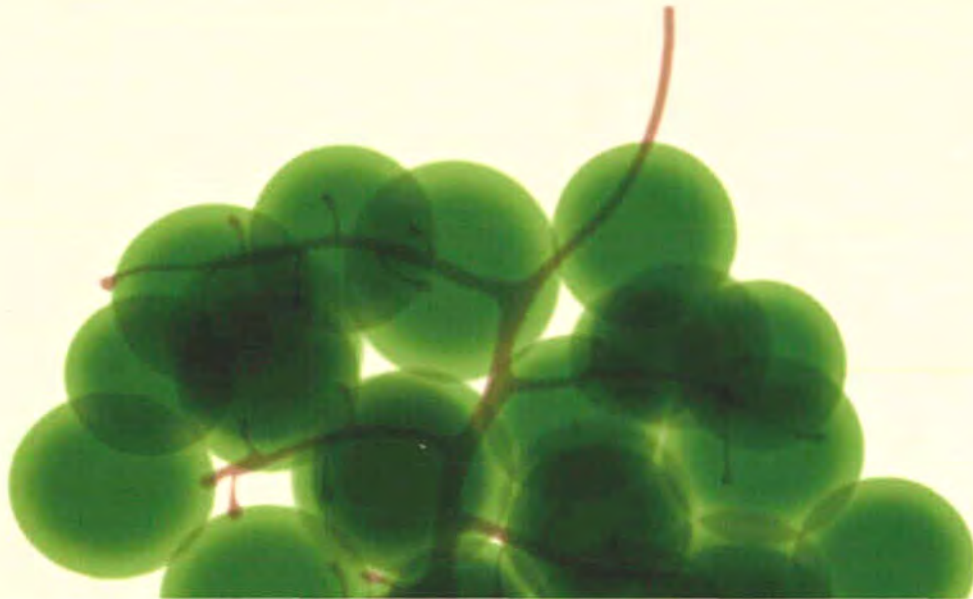
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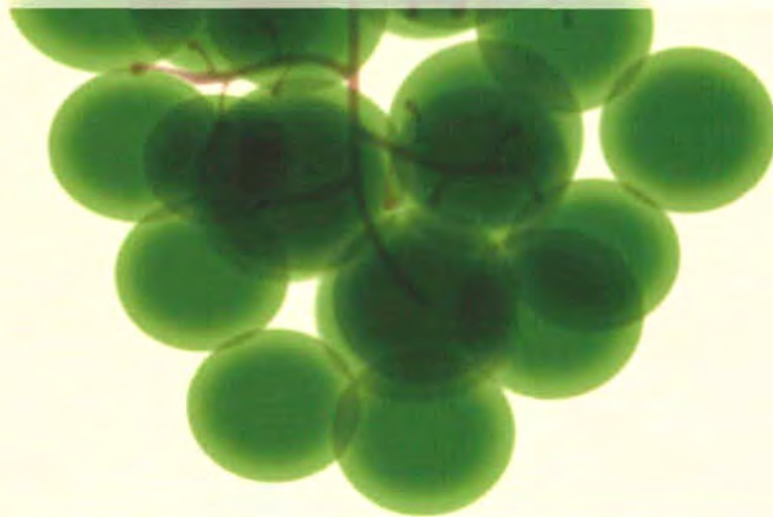
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