

SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

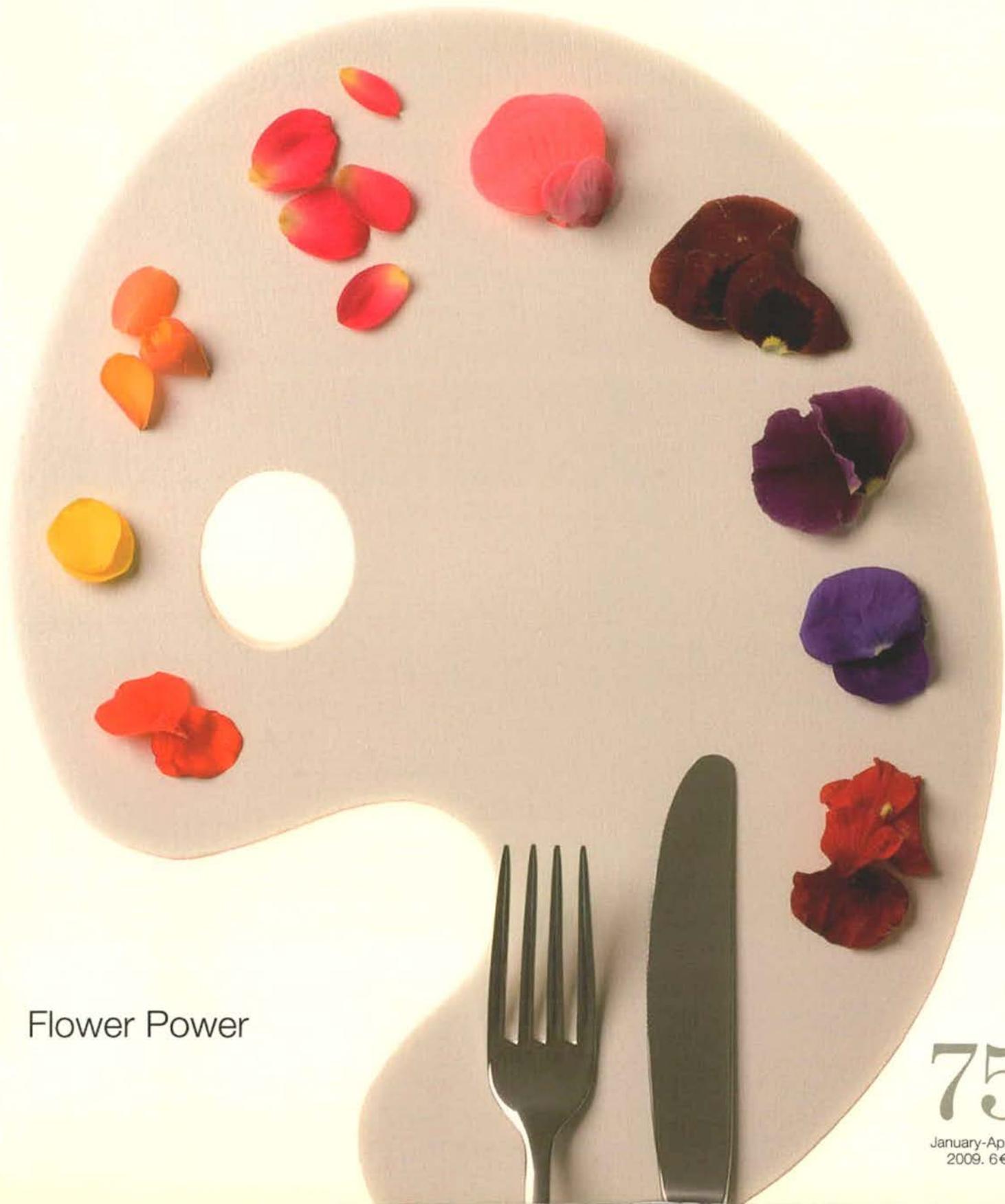
Monastrell
in its
Element

Soft
Cheeses

Mariano García,
Oenologist
with a History

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Editor-in-chief

Cathy Boirac

Publication Coordinators

Almudena Muyo

Almudena Martín Rueda

Photographic Archive

Mabel Manso

Editorial Secretary

Ángela Castilla

Design and Art Direction

Manuel Estrada, Diseño Gráfico

Layout

Chema Bermejo

Maps

Javier Belloso

Color Separations

Espacio y Punto

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Advertising

CEDISA

Tel: (+34) 913 080 644

Fax: (+34) 913 105 141

pcyc@retemail.es

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State Secretary for Tourism and Commerce

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Tel: (+34) 913 496 244

Fax: (+34) 914 358 876

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Had Wordsworth been alive today, not only would his heart have danced with the daffodils, but he might have dreamed of *eating* them too! Yes, flowers are in fashion again. The Romans seem to have appreciated them, as have chefs in the Middle East since ancient times. Now see what state-of-the-art Spanish cooking is doing with them.

Tradition and renovation are two words that sum up the approach of a man whose name commands respect throughout the Spanish wine world and beyond: Mariano García, head of Vega Sicilia for so many years. We trace his career and those of his sons.

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Enjoy the trip!

Cathy Boirac
Editor-in-chief

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GOURMETOUR
JANUARY-APRIL 2009
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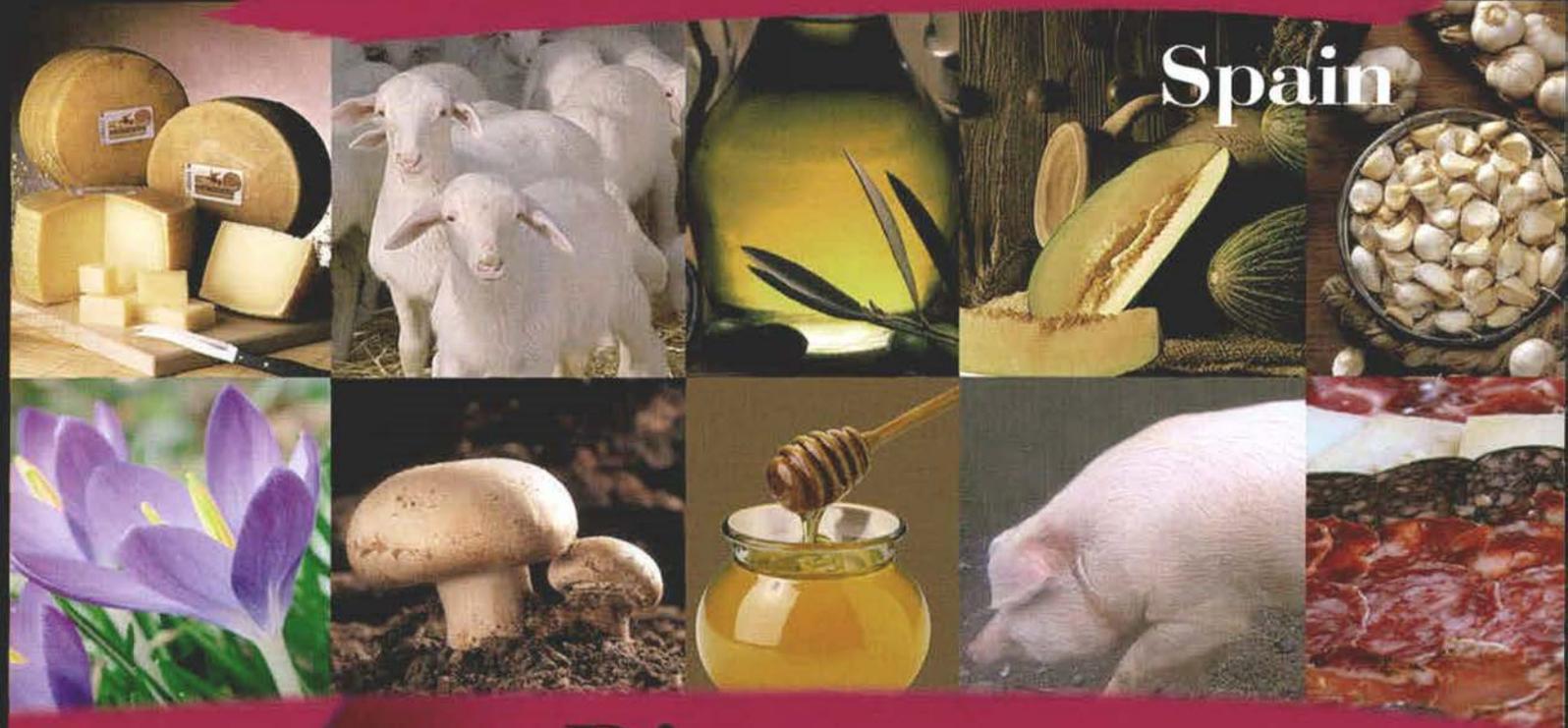
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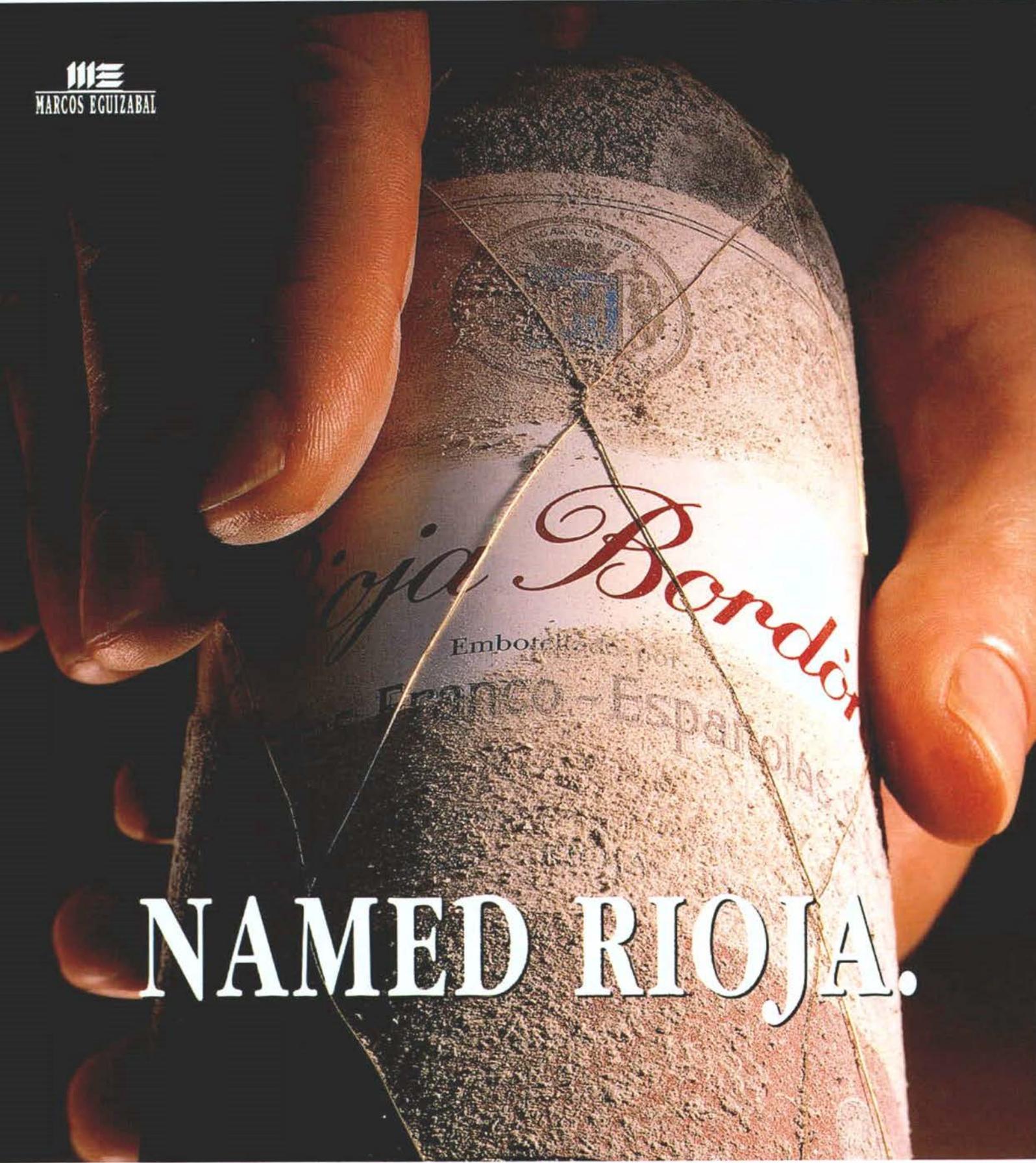
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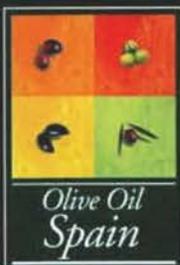

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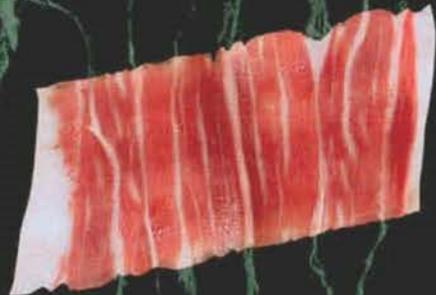


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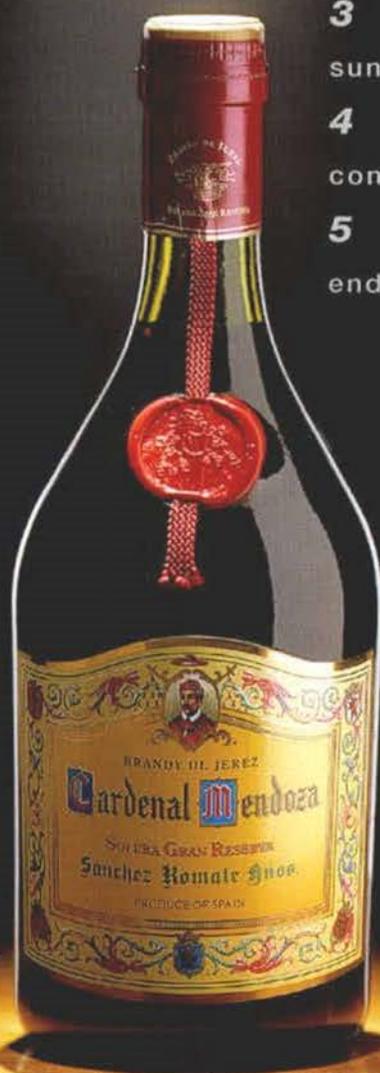
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Among the culinary trends of the last few years, edible flowers have emerged as a badge of avant-garde cuisine. Spain's top chefs, gastronomic pacesetters for the start of the new century, use flowers for their color and plasticity, but more importantly for their distinctive flavors and aromas. Their myriad of nuances and textures contribute an extra dimension, turning dishes into edible gardens and landscapes, recreations of nature. In response to increasing demand from the culinary world, some Spanish companies have focused their attention on growing and marketing flowers of all kinds. They use sustainable, organic farming methods and are experimenting with recovering lost plants and flowers (mainly herbs and salad leaves such as purple basil and pimpinella) and adapting species brought in from abroad. All in all, it is a specialized market and, judging by recent performance, an expanding one.

power

FLOWER





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One of the most fascinating aspects of contemporary cuisine is its apparent ability to evolve and reinvent itself at a speed that can leave one reeling. One of the principal attributes of turn-of-the-century gastronomy was its receptivity to new products and techniques. There was a veritable explosion of new culinary tendencies, and the ideas and approaches of world-famous trailblazers—like Ferran Adrià—became all the rage, and then even familiar. Something similar happened with using flowers in food. In the 1990s, two French chefs—Michel Bras and Marc Veyrat (both three Michelin star holders)—started experimenting with using flowers in their cooking, largely as an expression of their culinary philosophy of engaging with nature and the environment. Since that time, flowers have gradually caught on in the upper echelons of the restaurant world, though lower down the scale they are still used timidly, in a rather token way. Though we may think of it as a cutting-edge phenomenon, eating flowers actually dates back many centuries. The letters of Cicero (Roman

philosopher, 1st century BC) inform us that he ate meat stews dressed with chard and mallow flowers; in the 1st century AD, Apicius (Roman gastronome and presumed author of the cookbook *De re coquinaria*) gives a recipe for rose wine for which he recommends the use of fresh flowers with the white part of the petals removed. Flowers were also used in food in the Middle Ages to enhance its visual appeal. It was no accident that the introduction from the Orient of flowers such as orange blossom, violet and jasmine preserved in sugar coincided with the famous medieval crusades. In France, the first flower recipe book was written in the 16th century by Doctor Michel de Nostredame (better known as Nostradamus), though he was more

concerned with their medicinal attributes than their gastronomic ones. Flowers and aromatic herbs have, of course, been used throughout our history for their many proven therapeutic properties: they are certainly an essential element of the traditional Asian pharmacopoeia. Dahlia, chrysanthemum and lotus flowers, used for their medicinal effects throughout history, also feature as seasonings in Asian food. Asian cuisine celebrates the bounty of the earth, and each flower is used for the spiritual associations it contributes to the food on one's plate. In the Middle East, rose, orange, and lemon flowers were in use centuries ago to aromatize many different dishes and, particularly, in delicious sweets redolent of their scent. On the other side of the Atlantic, in South America, flowers have always played an important role in food. In Mexico, for example, this phenomenon was observed and reported with fascination by the early chroniclers of the conquest of the New World. Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún (16th century Franciscan monk, author of several works now considered seminal







sources for reconstructing the pre-Hispanic history of Mexico) records the different flowers used in a cacao drink, and others used by the natives: pumpkin, yucca, maguey, lime, nopal cactus, bulrush, bean... He also notes that "a mallow" and "an orchid" were added to drinks; these were, more specifically, hibiscus (whose use was disseminated by the Spanish colonizers) and vanilla. So there's nothing new about eating flowers—what is new is what contemporary cuisine is doing with them.

Flowers in contemporary Spanish cooking

We have been eating flowers for thousands of years, it seems. Some are ordinary and familiar; even though we think of artichokes, cauliflower and broccoli as vegetables, they are classified botanically along with pansies, nasturtiums and calendula.

Saffron, an irreplaceable condiment in Spanish cooking, is also a flower—or at least a flower pistil. But what we refer to here is using flowers in such a way as to conjure up garden evocations—splashes of color, subtle hints of sweet, piquant, bitter or acid flavors, silky or crunchy textures, unexpected fresh aromas and nuances. This all adds up to a new approach, a different appeal, and explains why flowers fit in so perfectly with the mindset behind avant-garde cuisine, with its commitment to pleasing all the senses and its ability to thrill and transcend the issue of taste alone.

Many of Spain's contemporary chefs use flowers. Ferran Adrià of elBulli, the three-Michelin-star restaurant in Rosas (Gerona province, northern Catalonia) uses them often, and indeed was one of the first to do so. Examples from his repertoire include: an attractive, supremely delicate edible flower paper; some of the finely nuanced dishes served during the 2008 season, such as his highly original mandarin flower, marrow oil and mandarin pip iced cream; a dish he calls *Water lilies*, in which cashews are served over an infused soup of tea, geranium leaves and white begonia flowers; and his flower canapé—beautiful to look at and an aromatic delight to eat, with a pine meringue base topped with elder and borage flower sorbet.

The Roca brothers (of two-Michelin-star El Celler de Can Roca, Gerona) also use floral aromas in their food. For the last four years they have been developing a range of desserts that are tributes to well-known brands of perfume (Bulgari, Calvin Klein, Lancôme...), breaking each one down into its components and using various

ingredients (flowers not least among them) to create parallel fragrances on the plate. They use them in savory recipes too, as in their famous dish entitled *The plant: root, stem, leaf and flower*, a layered, but upside down creation, consisting of a distillation of earth with truffle (the root), fennel (the stem), and lemon flowers and bergamot (leaf and flower)—an excellent example of an edible "landscape" generally conducive to Proustian recall.

Edible landscapes, intended to play tantalizingly with the senses, have become an innovative culinary concept in which flowers play a vital role. One leading exponent is Quique Dacosta of the restaurant El Poblet in Denia, Alicante, on the Mediterranean coast (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 54), whose reinterpretations of nature are stunningly beautiful creations. His *Bosque animado* (Enchanted forest), for example, evokes the woods and mountains using wild thyme and rosemary flowers and countless sprigs of greenery and flowers in a dish of enormously complex flavors and aromas.

Honing down

However, the archetypal exponent of this type of horticultural cuisine in Spain is Andoni Luis Aduriz, owner/chef of the two-Michelin-star Mugaritz (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 65) in Rentería (the Basque Country, northern Spain). In the ten years since he opened his restaurant he has found his own style, which is essentially to look on cooking as the ultimate expression of nature. He has done a lot of research into plants, herbs and

F L O R A R I U M

If a classified collection of dried plants used as material for studying botany is known as a "herbarium", then there is a good case (with a little linguistic license) for calling an array of the flowers most often used in cooking a "florarium". First of all, however, there are a few conditions that need to be pointed out. Not all flowers are edible—some of them are poisonous—and flowers bought at a florist's just won't do. They need to have been grown organically, free from pesticides and preservatives, and to be as fresh as possible. They must be washed with great care, removing the stamens, pistils and the petals' white base, which can taste bitter. They keep well (up to a week) in the fridge, stored in a container with a damp cloth to prevent loss of freshness and color. It is, of course, vital to buy or pick them just before use, to guarantee that their scent and flavor are intact.

The most popular flowers used in cooking in Spain today are:

• **Begonia** (*Begonia semperflorens*)

A very suitable flower for culinary use in that it contributes beauty, color, acidity and texture. Its pink, red or white flowers are used in savory dishes and desserts. The many varieties of this plant are grown for their distinctive acidic, lemon flavor which makes them combine so well with salads and fish. At Vivaldi, for example, Carlos Cidón's menu features a salad of peppers with cockscombs, pineapple and begonia

vinaigrette. Meanwhile, Ferran Adrià's 2008 elBulli menu includes a soup infused with tea, nasturtium flower and leaf, and white begonia.

• **Borage** (*Borago officinalis*)

Borage can be eaten as a vegetable in its own right, but its flowers, with their lilac-blue petals, taste very much like cucumber, with hints of bitterness; for this reason they add a fresh zing to salads. They can also be caramelized and used in desserts and as decoration for cakes. At El Café de Paris, Juan Carlos García serves avocado with prawns and borage flower, while at Mugaritz, Andoni Luis Aduriz offers baked hake loin with borage and salted anchovy jus, and borage stems and flowers.

• **Zucchini flower** (*Cucurbita pepo*)

These large, orange-colored bell-like flowers, both male and female (the difference is that female ones are attached to a mini-zucchini) are smooth-textured and sweet-flavored, and their firm petals make them a prime choice for stuffing or dipping in batter and frying. Their delicate quality is almost certainly what makes them one of the most popular flowers.

• **Garlic flower** (*Tulbaghia*)

Garlic flower is similar in characteristics to cultivated garlic. Its purplish flower has a powerful, fresh flavor that is good in salads and stews or braises. Ideally, it should be used raw. Aduriz does just that in his sautéed baby cuttlefish served in a rich ink sauce with spring onion fragments, garlic flower and chive twirls.

• **Geranium** (*Pelargonium spp.*)

With their eye-catchingly vivid colors and

acidic, fruity taste, geranium flowers make a lovely addition to salads, and pasta and rice dishes. Nowadays, lemon geranium (*Pelargonium crispum*), with its very lemony taste, seems to be the geranium of choice. Cidón's fresh pasta with potatoes, pancetta and geraniums is big success at Vivaldi.

• **Jasmine** (*Jasminum officinale*)

Jasmine has a very characteristic scent that makes its white flowers an attractive ingredient in salads, with fruit, and in sauces to accompany fish, as well as a fragrant aromat, especially good in infusions.

• **Nasturtium** (*Tropaeolum majus*)

This classic spring flower, vividly-colored and with rounded, shield-like leaves, was introduced into Europe from the New World by the Spanish. It has a distinctive peppery piquancy and there is also a hint of watercress in its flavor, though not in its scent. It is excellent in salads, Spanish omelettes, with cheeses and sorbets, and also in herb butter. Cidón serves a salad of salt-cod marinated with nasturtium and onion in sweet and sour salad.

• **Orchid** (*Orquidea sp.*)

Orchids—so stunningly beautiful and delicate—are grown for their culinary properties as well as for their good looks. There are over 25,000 species of orchid all over the world: their petals are fleshy and their essence sweet and aromatic, making them suitable for use mostly in desserts, ice creams and sorbets. They also combine well with fruit and with meat (especially game) dishes. elBulli serves a dish known as *Orquidea de la pasión* (Passion orchid) in which orchid plays the leading role.



• **Pansy** (*Viola x wittrockiana*)

Fall to early spring sees the arrival of many varieties of pansy whose color range (purple, white, yellow, two-tone) makes them a very attractive addition to dishes. Sweet-and-sour in flavor and rather oily and silky in texture, they are particularly good in mushroom dishes and are widely used in salads and desserts such as Iker Erazukin's creation entitled *Acid sensation*, featuring passion fruit, red fruits and pansies.

• **Rose** (*Rosa spp.*)

Roses are Middle Eastern in origin, and there are over 100,000 varieties whose range of colors and subtle differences is enormous. The rose is the edible flower par excellence. Its flavor can range from sweet to hot, so it is compatible with a wide range of sweet and savory dishes. It is usually made into jams, jellies, butters, ice creams and crystallized petals. Erazukin has invented an imaginative dish of rose ravioli served in consommé.

• **Sichuan button, or Toothache plant** (*Spilanthes acmella*)

This plant is commonly known as *flor eléctrica* (electric flower) in Spanish because of its effect in the mouth, as it sets off a mini-explosion of piquancy/acidity, rather like putting one's tongue on the two poles of an old-fashioned battery. Originally from the Amazon, this plant's yellow flowers—hitherto always used as an anesthetic and for treating toothaches—have now been taken up by avant-garde cuisine. Aduriz was the first chef to use it in Spain: he incorporated it into a salad of fruits, shoots and flowers served with a warm Idiazábal cheese consommé. At



elBulli, Adrià has been known to serve an "electric milk" and an equally surprising "electric biscuit".

• **Violet** (*Viola odorata*)

The perfume and charming appearance of violets have always been celebrated in cosmetics. They taste rather sweet, smooth and delicate; confectioners have been using them for years in the famous form of candied violets, and in irresistible combinations with chocolate. However, they also have a place in savory cooking, contributing subtly to endives, salads and Spanish omelettes and, of course, providing an attractive garnish. Aduriz goes for the salad option with his dish of prawns with leek compote, spring zizas (St. George's mushrooms), violet oil and petals, and sheeps' milk aromatized with violet essence.





flowers, and become quite an expert in the process. "When I came to Mugaritz in 1998," he explains, "I wanted to work from one basic idea: simplifying, or honing down. Until that time, Spanish cuisine—indeed all cuisine—had been constructed on foundations consisting of complicated dishes with lots of ingredients. Herbs were used in the French way—little *bouquets garnis* of parsley or thyme. Everything was overblown, dishes were 'finished' with sprigs of parsley—a nonsensical gesture, especially since no one ever ate them. That was why we embraced the idea of honing down: creating dishes composed of just a few elements." Once engaged in this approach, he started noticing his environment, the verdant landscape around him. Andoni started collecting plants, creating his own kitchen garden, experimenting and working in collaboration with botanists. The next step was to use flowers because, as he sees it: "It was a natural sequel to use a product that is an iconic expression of nature and beauty." This mindset made Andoni a pioneer in the use of flowers. "When we started to work with them," he explains, "we realized that we had to consider two things. First we had to ensure that all the flowers of aromatic herbs possess the character of the parent plant, but in a very subtle form. If I want rosemary—which is very powerful—in a dish, but an elegant version of it, I can use its flowers, which have a fabulous aroma, rather than rosemary as such. Another thing we like about them is their texture; some of them have a very special texture."



Andoni doesn't think that using flowers in cooking is a passing trend because: "...increasingly, they are being used in an even-handed way. I don't put flowers in all my dishes; I use them where, in my opinion, they are going to communicate something, like another ingredient." And his favorites? "At the moment, I'm very into the flowers of resinous rosemary, which impart not just that hint of rosemary, but a touch of resin as well—more complex, more individual. Daylily is something I use quite a lot; it's an odorless flower, but its petals are very fleshy and have a unique crunchy texture. Elder flowers are marvelous—they smell honeyish and sweet, like Muscatel grapes. If flowers have essential oils, I like to sprinkle them on at the end, placing an accent on the dish. Big flowers can be stuffed or cooked, while little ones are more delicate and melt in the mouth." His garden makes him self-sufficient, and his cooking makes a feature of the changing seasons.

Scents and sensibility

Perhaps it has something to do with aesthetic sensibilities. A woman, Montse Estruch (Recipes, page 88), has emerged as standard-bearer for cooking with flowers. From her Catalan restaurant El Cingle, in Vacarisses (near Barcelona, northeastern Spain) she has created a series of dishes in which flowers play a significant role, making what amount to edible gardens full of scents and subtleties. Montse, who has been a one-Michelin-star holder since 2004, took her first steps into this curious world 15 years ago, quite by chance. There used to be a tradition of making elderflower *buñuelos* (fritters) in Catalonia; in the process of reinstating the custom, she started experimenting with the pretty white flowers of this Mediterranean tree, and the rest just seemed to follow on naturally. She tried pansies and orchids, as "...they



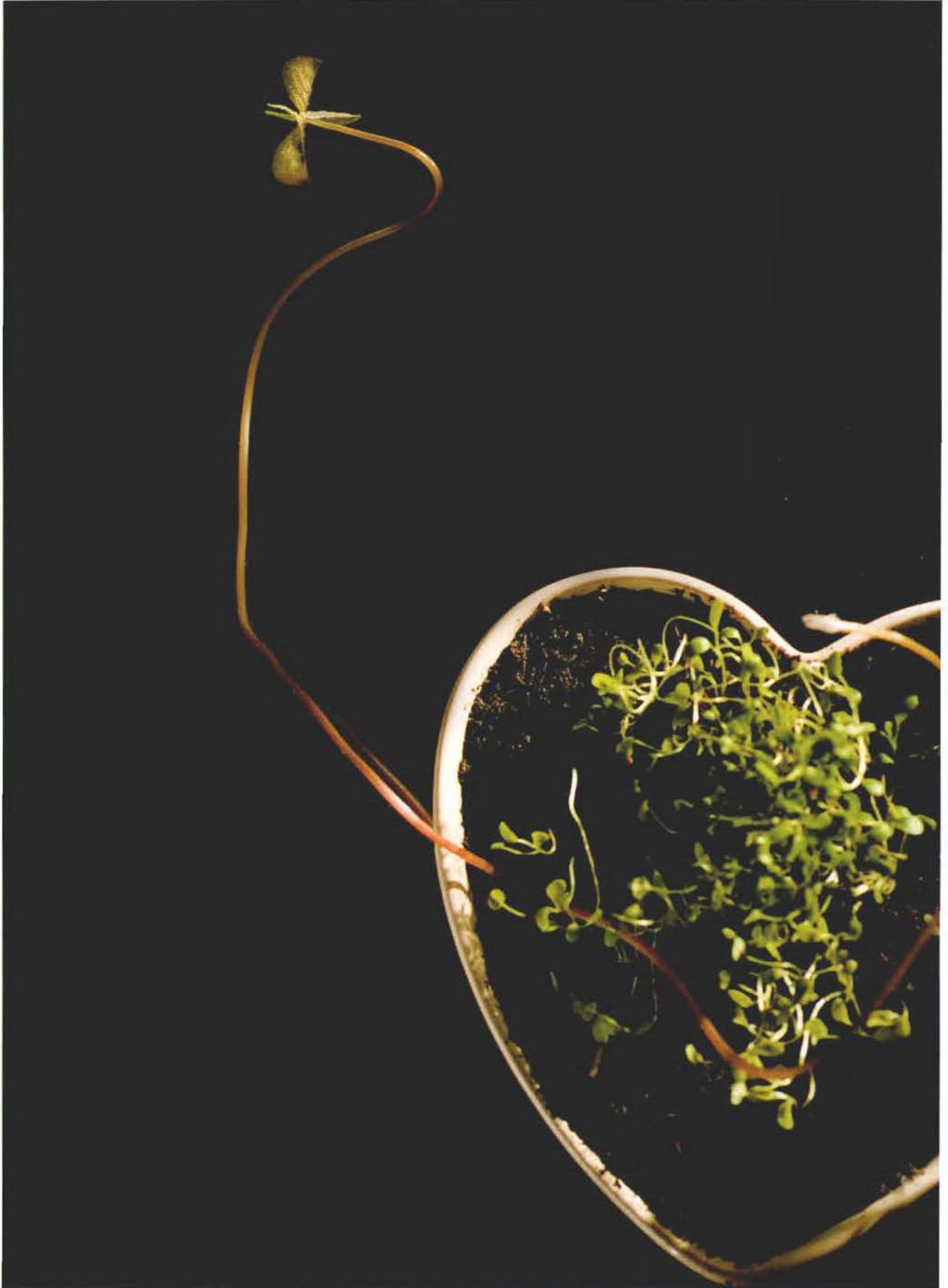
were fashionable at the time because Asian cuisine was enjoying a boom then," she explains. Many of her dishes, both sweet and savory, contain flowers because: "...they contribute not only beauty and color but also that subtle hint of flavor: nasturtium has a hot mustardy zing about it that I love with chocolate. Lavender has an evocative smell that triggers all kinds of recollections, just as spices do. For their appearance, I use rose, orchid, calendula and pineapple sage, which is a very pretty red. For its texture—the pansy—which is delicate and velvety; orchid has a certain fleshiness about it; nasturtium is subtle, and melts in the mouth; violet is very delicate; rosemary flower tastes of the forest; pimpernel is piquant and clover is bitter." Her particular floral lexicon contains hundreds of flowers, from wild rocket to the gelatinous aloe vera flower, hibiscus, chive flower and borage. These, and many others, appear in her delicately beautiful dishes, some simple, others sophisticated, but all lightweight and elegant, be it cream of squash with lavender, sole with violets, or cheese, flower and herb "garden". Malaga-based chef Juan Carlos Garcia of the one-Michelin-star Café de Paris (in Malaga, on the south Mediterranean coast) has been using flowers for years. Like many of his colleagues, he did so at first for purely

aesthetic reasons (with rose petals, actually) and gradually moved on to exploring ways of using them "...as an important ingredient that gives you a new take on my dishes and makes my cooking distinctive," he explains. Hence his use of borage flower, cucumber-like in flavor, in an avocado and prawn dish; and garlic flower in his refined version of *ajoblanco malagueño* (cold almond soup); and orchid alongside a dish of char-grilled fruit and vegetables. All that said, he has no illusions about the likely reaction of "... the man on the street—you can't go serving him too many flowers, you have to hold back. They're not completely accepted yet; they're for very specific customers." Among the few Spanish books about the culinary uses of flowers, there is one that stands out from the rest: *El sabor de las flores* (The Taste of Flowers), by Iker Erauzkin (Basque-born chef, now settled in Catalonia), published by Océano Ambar. The book covers the species most commonly used in gastronomy, ranging from those that—from a scientific point of view—contribute their botanical characteristics, to those that—from the practical point of view—contribute interestingly to a whole range of dishes. These days, Iker gives cooking classes, writes books, and is working in conjunction with a Catalan company on launching new

products; one of the most recent is a *butifarra* (a typical Catalan pork sausage) that includes roses among its ingredients. He is still very interested in flowers, intrigued by "...their flavors, their different connotations translated into a dish and combined with other ingredients." His current work with flowers entails rediscovering extracts, aromats, essences, conserves and juices, "so that they can be enjoyed out of season." Many of his dishes offer an opportunity to do just that: sashimi tuna pie with essence of violets; chicken breast with gardenia cream sauce; steak tartare with rose water and petals; and piña colada with jasmine conserve. All provide surprises and unexpected pleasures.

Herb and flower producers

In response to increasing demand for flowers from restaurateurs, various Spanish companies have been set up to grow and sell them, aimed almost entirely at the national market. In many cases, what they produce reflects the results of researching new products and growing methods, experimenting with both rehabilitating native flowers and plants and acclimatizing herbs and flowers from all over the world to the terroirs and climatic conditions in which the farms are located. Some are





newly created companies, while others are traditional family firms, and in many cases they work hand in glove with Spain's top chefs, supplying what they order and even growing specific plants specially to accommodate their gastronomic inventiveness.

One of the most firmly established of these companies is a family-run horticultural firm called Pàmies Horticoles, based in the Lleida province (Catalonia, northeastern Spain). It has been growing and selling flowers, wild and aromatic herbs, baby vegetables, decorative squash and medicinal plants since the 1990s. One of its proprietors, Josep Pàmies, is keen to point out that the company "presents new products on a regular basis, fulfils commissions from professional chefs and also acts on its own initiative."

The company owns 12 ha (30 acres) of cultivated land and 1 ha (2 1/2 acres) of hothouses in which, using sustainable farming methods, they grow many flowers and plants as yet unknown in cooking. Between commercial and experimental varieties there are around 70 in all, which they

sell all over Spain. "I'm not in favor of exporting," he declares, "because I believe that each country should supply its own local markets; we should all consume what our own country can provide." Based on his commitment to seasonality, quality and freshness in his products, his motto—an unusual one in business—is to not grow too much, to undertake only as much as can be produced in top condition, largely because, as he explains: "I want to keep in touch with the soil and not just be an executive." Even so, the company has grown considerably over the last few years, and can now justifiably describe itself as a supplier to Spain's top chefs. Another important company in the field is Aroa, which is based in Guetaria (Guipúzcoa province, in the Basque Country, northern Spain). This company specializes in authentic teardrop peas: rare, expensive (100-150 euros for 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb) and 100% gourmet, and certain other vegetables including baby broad beans, leeks, baby chard, baby carrots and tomatoes, all of superb quality. Indeed, it was the fact that they grow these

vegetables (as they have been doing for the past 22 years) that brought them to the attention of the Basque Country's big-name chefs, under whose influence they then added other products to their list: mustards, narrow-leaved Spring Beauty, *shiso* or Japanese savory, pimpinells, seeds, sprouts, aromatic herbs, flowers (which vary seasonally) and a range of salad leaves, which they sell as an assortment called *mesclun*, of 20 or more different types.

Aroa owns 5 ha (12 acres) of cultivated land and 3,000 sq m (32,291 sq ft) of hothouses, plus a small laboratory in which they conduct experiments with new products. Committed to sustainable farming since 1989, their entire production is organic, though it is not marketed as such. They sell to the whole of Spain and export to France, Sweden, Italy and, occasionally, the US and Japan (processed products only in the case of these two last because of the difficulties that fresh ones entail).

Owner Jaime Burgaña acknowledges that flowers are in style. "When haute cuisine starts using flowers and herbs, there's a knock-on effect as others

AROMATIC HERB FLOWERS

• Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)

Basil leaves are dark green, silky textured, and highly aromatic. The plant's little white or bluish flowers appear as spikes from which an essential oil can be extracted that can be put to many uses in cooking. With their pleasant, slightly salty flavor, basil leaves and flowers are perfect for mixing into sauces and for flavoring dishes that require long, slow cooking. Basil is, of course, closely identified with Mediterranean food.

• Lavender (*Lavandula dentata*)

The delicate, lilac-colored flowers of the lavender plant are much more widely used than those of the other aromatic herbs. It will come as no surprise to learn that they are used for aromatizing creams, emulsions and salads, to which they contribute their gentle piquancy; however, their performance in combination with rabbit, chicken and even red meats reveals an unsuspected versatility. They hit the spot in sweets and ice creams, and are spectacularly good in chocolate-dominated desserts.

• Lemon thyme (*Thymus x citriodorus*)

Thyme (*Thymus* spp) is one of the most popular herbs in the Mediterranean: it was often used by the Egyptians, Etruscans, Greeks and Romans both for its culinary and medicinal properties. Lemon thyme is just one variety of the *Thymus* family, and is very useful in cooking, given its strong thyme scent with hints of green lemon. Its small plants produce clusters of little white flowers whose fresh, penetrating scent is perfect for contributing nuance to fatty meat dishes and for aromatizing salads, fruit, sorbets and sweets.

• Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

This aromatic plant, rich in essential oils, is found in abundance throughout the Mediterranean. It is habitually used to flavor dishes with red meat, chicken, rabbit (both in stews and char-grilled), and salads. It also works well as a flavoring in cookies, jellies, jams, mixtures of fruit, ice creams and sorbets, and with cheese. The flowers, which grow from the leaf axils, are purplish-blue, small and fragile, with a bitter aftertaste that is a fainter version of that of the leaves.

• Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

The sage group consists of numerous species with pretty blue, purple, pink, white or red flowers that grow all over the world. The leaves and flowers of the sage plant have a sweet, fruity scent and recognized culinary and medicinal properties (the very name, *salvia*, is derived from the Latin *salvare*, to cure). Sage flowers work well in salads and with oily fish, legumes and pasta.

• Wild basil (*Calamintha nepeta*)

There are many varieties of this plant, both cultivated and wild. Its versatility means that it can be used successfully in all kinds of dishes, to which it contributes its enlivening menthol scent and flavor. It makes a good addition to both fruit and vegetable salads, boiled vegetables, fish and meat, and can be relied upon to add zing to desserts.



follow suit. But flowers aren't a product that go down well in middle-of-the-road restaurants—their customers don't see the point, and flowers are expensive!" For example, 100 g (3 1/2 oz) of mallow are listed at €7 at distributor's prices, and most

trays of flowers, containing about 10 each, cost between €2.50 and €3.50 wholesale.

Sabor y Salud grows its products in the warm climate, clean air and sunshine of the area of Malaga (Andalusia, southern Spain) that lies at the foot of



FLOWER WATERS, SUGARS AND VINEGARS

The delicacy, texture and scent of flowers—nearly always added fresh and at the last minute—contribute subtle grace notes to dishes. However, flowers can also be made into various, and sometimes surprising, preparations that make them more versatile and their scope much wider. Carlos Cidón, proprietor/chef at Vivaldi (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 69) in León, a proponent of putting flowers to different uses in cooking, has brought out a fascinating cookbook with recipes that illustrate his point. *Flores, aromas nuevos en tu cocina* (Flowers, New Aromas in Your Kitchen) is packed with interesting suggestions and is accessible to complete beginners as well as by professionals.

• Crystallized flowers

These are usually made with rose, violet or pansy petals. After washing and drying, they are dipped in egg white and then sprinkled with white sugar and left to dry. Perfect for decorating.

• Flower aromatized sugar

There are two methods for making this: either place whole petals in a closed container with sugar and leave it for a day, or grind the flowers and sugar together and dry in the oven at 50°C / 122°F until the mixture turns crunchy. Cidón recommends white sugar for this recipe and suggests using the end product in desserts or infusions (herbal teas).

• Flower waters

Rosewater is perhaps the best-known of these, though the petals of any flower can be used. Flower waters are generally used for aromatizing desserts, stews and braises. They are easy to make: place two parts petals to three parts water in a pan and simmer very gently for an hour. Pour the mixture through a sieve, then add the same quantity of petals again, bring back to a boil, simmer for another hour, then strain again. Flower water becomes more concentrated the longer you cook it, so you can make it as strong as you like.

• Flower oils and vinegars

Flower oils are very attractive because of their color and aroma, though flowers do not manage to transfer their flavor into them. To make a flower oil, mix 1 l (4 1/4 cup) of mild oil with 100 g (3 1/2 oz) of chopped, dried petals, leave to macerate for 24 hours, then strain. Flower vinegars acquire not only color from the flowers in question, but the acids in the vinegar are also aromatized by them. To make a flower vinegar, add 10 g (1/3 oz) fresh flowers, or 70 g (3 oz) petals, to 1 l (4 1/4 cup) of vinegar; place in a glass bottle and leave undisturbed for one month, then strain it. It is then ready for use.

• Jams

Flower petals can be used for making excellent preserves, jams and jellies. For jam, simply macerate 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) petals

with 300 g (10 1/2 oz) sugar until the flowers have given off all their liquid. Place the mixture in a bain-marie in the oven for an hour and then blend.

• Flower breads

This concept comes from chef Montse Estruch, of El Cingle restaurant. She starts off with a batch of white bread dough into which she mixes flower petals, vanilla and orange before baking, and then makes into a sort of flower cake, using violet and rose jam to echo and add flavor. This new approach to bread is original, unusual and an aesthetic treat.

• Flower butter

This idea also comes from Estruch, who loves making nasturtium butter, for which she uses softened butter. Her technique calls for a certain sleight of hand because petals have to be spread out on a butter base which is then rolled up and cut into little rounds for spreading on brown or white bread, for example, to be eaten with sweet-cured ham, or sprinkled with sugar. Estruch also makes aromatic herb butters using lavender and rosemary flowers.

the natural park made up of the Tejada, Almjara and Alhama mountain chains. This company was set up four years ago by plant-loving German couple, Peter and Tekla Kurpjuweit. Their aim was to grow plants in a climate mild enough to enable them to



maintain constant production levels. Though both enthusiastic exporters, they have ended up concentrating on the Spanish market "...largely because of transport and the problem of keeping flowers in top condition," explains Peter.

They grow their crops on two farms near the coast, and use no chemical pesticides or fertilizers; this has been an environmentally-friendly venture from the start, although not certified as such. In total, the Kurpjuweits grow around 100 different species of leaves for mesclun mixes, aromatic plants and flowers. Their product list includes over 40 flower varieties, with which they supply Spain's most famous chefs.

"We do a lot of playing around with plant tastes and textures with a view to coming up with ones that are relevant to cooking," explains Peter, going on to say, with undisguised pride: "Because of our quality, service and product range, there's a big demand for what we supply." Along with herbs, leaves, flowers and condiments, they make and sell their own orange and aromatic herb jellies, rose petal and basil syrups, and an unusual pesto made with rocket rather than basil.

Raquel Castillo is a food and wine writer. She heads the gastronomy section of the financial paper Cinco Días, and writes regularly for specialist journals such as Vino y Gastronomía, Vivir el Vino, Vinoselección and Sobremesa, among others. She is also co-author of the book El aceite de oliva de Castilla-La Mancha (The Olive Oil of Castile-La Mancha) and the restaurant guide Comer y Beber en Madrid (Eat and Drink in Madrid).

RESTAURANTS

elBulli

Cala Montjoi
17480 Roses (Gerona)
Tel: (+34) 972 150 457
www.elbulli.com

El Celler de Can Roca

Can Sunyer, 46
17007 Gerona
Tel: (+34) 972 222 157
www.cellercanroca.com

El Cingle

Plaça Major, s/n
08233 Vacarisses (Barcelona)
Tel: (+34) 938 280 233
www.elcingle.com

Mugaritz

Otzazulueta baserria.
Aldura aldea 20 zk
Errenteria 20100. Gipuzkoa
Tel: (+34) 943 522 455 / 518 343
www.mugaritz.com

El Poblet

Carretera de Las Marinas, km 2.5
03700 Denia (Alicante)
Tel: (+34) 965 784 179
www.elpoblet.com

Restaurante Café de París

C/ Vélez Málaga, s/n
29016 Málaga
Tel: (+34) 952 225 043
www.rcafedeparis.com

Restaurante Vivaldi

C/ Platerías 4
24003 León
Tel: (+34) 987 260 760
www.restaurantevivaldi.com



MONASTRELL

in its element



Text

Almudena Martín Rueda/©ICEX

Photos

Patricia R. Soto/©ICEX

Translation

Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

It is the third most widely-grown red variety in Spain, yet Monastrell continues to be little known in many international markets. A Mediterranean variety par excellence, it is present in practically all designations of origin on the Mediterranean side of Spain. But where it has really made its mark over the centuries is in

the southeast—Valencia, Alicante and, above all, Murcia—where it accounts for 85% of the grapes in the Murcian DOs (Jumilla, Yecla and Bullas). Our fact-finding tour around the region of Murcia shows that most of the local wines are based on Monastrell, either in monovarietals or as the majority grape in the final blend.





In 2006, Robert Parker described Murcia as one of the world's most promising winegrowing areas. This came as a surprise to many people, even in Spain, because from the late 19th century until the mid-20th, the region of Murcia was famed for producing high-alcohol, strong-colored wines that oxidized fast. The secret lies in the Monastrell variety, a historic one in this area and one which has been the subject of keen interest on the part of wineries since the end of the last century. They are now bringing it to the forefront in wines which are fast finding a niche on the market, thanks to their personality and unique territorial characteristics.

Monastrell is known in France as Mourvedre and in the US and Australia as Mataro. Within Spain, one of its other names is Murviedro, which is very similar to the French

name and points to its possible origin in Sagunto, a Valencian town and port known in medieval times as Morvedre. Since it was normal at that time to name varieties after their growing area, most historians consider Sagunto to be the home of the Monastrell grape. The name Monastrell, from the Latin *monasteriellu*, suggests that it must have been monks who took the variety to other parts of southeastern Spain. Archaeological evidence indicates that a semi-cultivated vine may have existed in Murcia 5,000 years ago, and clear proof exists of cultivation during the Iberian period (5th-6th centuries BC) on sites in Mula and Jumilla. It was probably the Romans that developed the crop for the purpose of winemaking, as suggested by the archaeological remains found in Yecla of a Roman winery dating from the 1st century,

believed to have been in operation up to the 15th century.

There are many written references to grape cultivation in the region of Murcia from different periods, but it was only in the 19th century that people started to establish distinctions between the different varieties, and at that time Monastrell, under names such as Morrastel or Casca del País (a name still used by certain older farmers in the Bullas area), was already the main variety for winemaking.

Extreme Mediterranean conditions

This historical background explains why growers and producers in the three DOs in Murcia talk about Monastrell as if it belonged to them,





and suggests that it has adapted over the centuries to the harsh local climate. On the high Murcian plains, where the Jumilla and Yecla DOs are located, temperatures vary from 45°C (113°F) in summer to -10°C (14°F) in winter, and rainfall rarely exceeds 350 mm (1.4 in) a year, “only if we’re lucky,” says Fernando González, General Secretary of the DO Jumilla. Bullas, which is only 80 km (50 mi) away, has a slightly milder climate with a little more rain and more influence from the Mediterranean. But it is still extreme because some of the vineyards lie at an altitude of 1,000 m (328 ft) and have to withstand sharp temperature differences both between summer

and winter and between day and night, sometimes as much as 20°C (78°F); this is a feature of all three DOs.

The Monastrell variety comes from plants that have adapted very well to their environment. In general, the vineyards are not irrigated and the vines are grown in the traditional vase shape; however, in Yecla, in a lower-altitude area called Campo Abajo, and in Bullas, there are some espaliered plants that receive irrigation. The stocks are fairly disease-resistant; they are hardly affected at all by powdery mildew and only moderately by downy mildew. The plants are erect, which helps ensure they are well-aired, and

tend to send out shoots late, which makes them more resistant to spring frosts than other locally-grown varieties. The bunches are medium in size and very compact, with small berries. The grapes also ripen late, and at their peak they must have high sugar content (probable alcohol content between 13 and 14.5°) in order to prevent grassy flavors in the wines.

The vines mostly grow on lime-rich soils, although a closer look at the textures shows that they have in fact adapted perfectly to different soil types. But the soils are always poor, with little organic matter. In the case of Jumilla, they are sandy in texture, which means that phylloxera spread



less in this area, with the result that there are still some Monastrell grapes growing on ungrafted vines. All such ungrafted vines in Spain are at least 30 years old because they were prohibited in the mid-1970s in order to prevent further infestation by phylloxera. Some oenologists consider that such plants give wines that express the variety better, with more marked aromas and more body, explains José María Vicente, oenologist at the Jumilla winery, Casa Castillo. With grapes from ungrafted vines planted in 1942 by his grandfather, he produces Casa Castillo Pie Franco, a wine that clearly reflects the variety's personality. Its aromas include

stewed fruit with underbrush, and the sweet tannins give a sugary touch in the very long aftertaste. José María's guiding principle is crystal clear: "What I want is to make Mediterranean wines, so I focus on Monastrell."

The variety makes the difference

José María welcomes us to the DO Jumilla, the largest of the three designations of origin which together grow the largest amounts of Monastrell in the world. Its surface area is 30,000 ha (74,132 acres), of which approximately 55% are located in the province of Albacete

(Castile-La Mancha), also part of the DO Jumilla. But 90% of the wine is produced in wineries in the municipal district of Jumilla. The landscape is one of broad valleys and plains surrounded by low mountains, between 300 and 900 m (984-2,952 ft) above sea level. It produces almost 90,000 tonnes of grapes, resulting in 2007/2008 in over 22 million l of DO wine, of which about 11 million were bottled.

The highest peak in the production area is El Carche, and the area around it is protected as a natural landscape. At its foot is Casa de la Ermita, which in just 10 years has become one of the best-known of

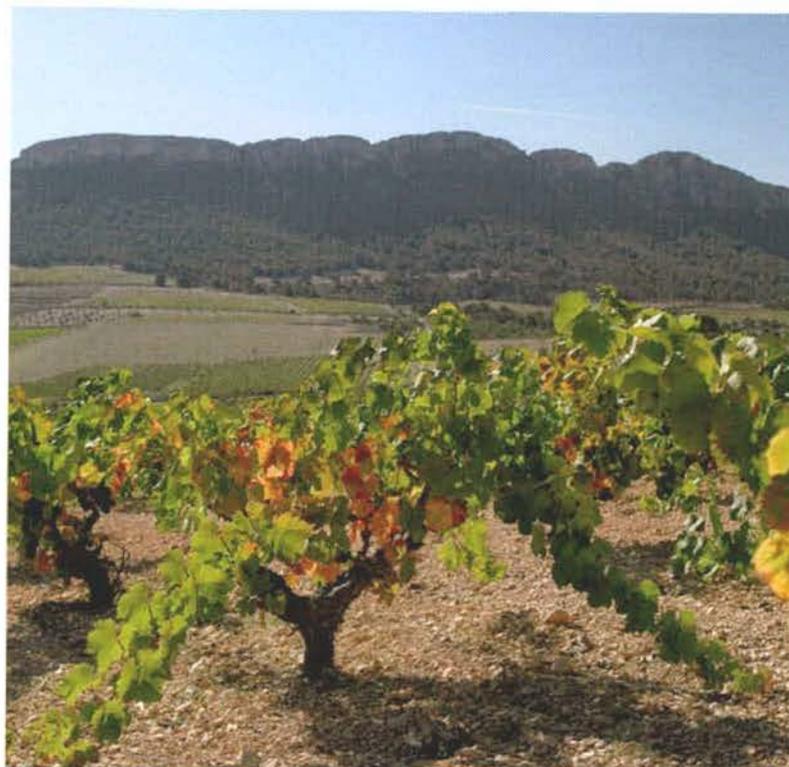


O N T H E M O N A S T R E L L T R A C K

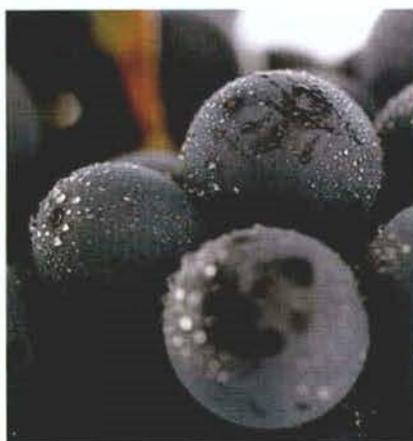
the Jumilla wineries, exporting to more than 40 countries. Here Marcial Martínez produces wines from the grapes on the company's 120 ha (297 acres) of vineyards. These are fleshy, warm-in-the-mouth wines thanks to the Monastrell, which forms part of all the reds, with the exception of some monovarietals made from imported varieties. Marcial considers Monastrell to be the region's pre-eminent grape. It gives rise to warm, concentrated, Mediterranean wine with no aggressiveness, and differentiates it in the market. The same concept is applied at BSI (Bodegas San Isidro), the 500-member cooperative in Jumilla. In the 1990s, they decided to focus their efforts on quality, knowing they had the necessary raw material. They also understood that it was Monastrell that would be their distinguishing feature, setting them apart from other producing zones. They continue to produce bulk wines, but when they set up a system of quality premiums, wines such as Gémina, 100% Monastrell, started to appear. This wine is made in a small bodega that belongs to the cooperative and makes only prime-quality wines. Oenologist Francisco Pardo is convinced that what Monastrell needs to ripen fully is a very long summer, precisely what it gets in the region of Murcia. As a result of the dry climate and the variety's resistance to the most common grape diseases, growers are able to avoid aggressive vineyard treatments in Murcia. At Bodegas

In both the DO Jumilla and the DO Bullas there are wine routes certified by ACEVIN (Association of Spanish Wine Cities). The Ruta del Vino de Jumilla (Jumilla Wine Route), the oldest of the two, suggests four itineraries around the mountains that surround the town as well as a one urban tour. It organizes visits to traditional wineries, oil mills, dairies and pastry kitchens, as well as tours along the routes, and provides information about the restaurants and hotels on the way, one of which is the Finca Luzón Hotel, located in the midst of the Luzón vineyards. The website (Websites, page 45) gives full information, with tourism packages including visits to wineries, wine tasting sessions, certified

restaurants and accommodation. A delightful spot to begin the Ruta del Vino de Bullas is the Museo del Vino de Bullas, a small, very informative museum on the site of one of the 221 old bodegas that have been catalogued within the town's old quarters. Consult the website (Websites, page 45) for information on visits to wineries and restaurants and on accommodation for both independent travelers or for those joining one of the two suggested tourism packages. The DO Yecla has recently started preparing its own route. Meanwhile, some of its wineries receive visitors on request, and one of the most attractive is Señorío de Barahonda. In a beautiful location surrounded by vineyards, not only does it produce some very elegant wines, but it also boasts a striking, glass-walled restaurant on the upper floor where visitors can enjoy wonderful views as they dine.



Bleda, Alfonso Hernández explains that their 220 ha (494 acres), 98% Monastrell, could almost be described as organic, although they are not yet officially certified as such. This winery, whose most outstanding wine is Divus—95% Monastrell and 5% Merlot, aged in new French oak barrels for 9 months—started bottling wines 60 years ago and now exports 80% of its products to Europe and the US. Organic methods are also to be found at another of the large Jumilla wineries, Luzón, where the certified organic part of the vineyards produces the grapes for organic wines. After joining up with Grupo Fuertes, a large Murcian business group working mainly in the agri-food sector, Luzón is now giving the final touches to the new winery they have built to produce their flagship wines: Altos de Luzón and Alma de Luzón. In both cases, Luis Sánchez, a local who gained extensive experience working in La Rioja in wineries such as Ysios, complements the Monastrell with other varieties. In his opinion, Syrah gives the wine an intense color and the flowery touches not found in Monastrell on its own. “It’s the ideal partner,” he says, and the resulting blends are tested at the Oenological Research Center in Jumilla, (dating from 1911, it is one of Spain’s oldest), where for years they have been experimenting with the Monastrell variety from all parts of Murcia. And, finally, we come to the family



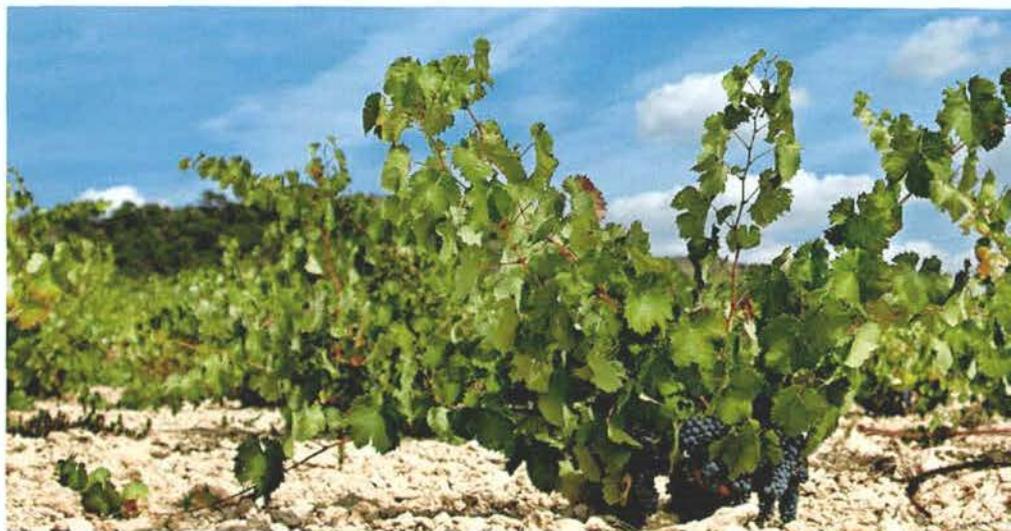
that has probably contributed most to the international recognition that the Monastrell variety enjoys today. Miguel Gil, an aeronautical engineer who chose to take on the family wine business, eventually set up Bodegas Juan Gil after gaining experience in a number of different companies in the wine sector. This winery, at an altitude of 700 m (2,296 ft), produces only Monastrell-based wines. But it was Bodegas El Nido, set up by Gil in association with US importer Jorge Ordóñez, that took a Jumilla wine to a star position in wine guides in the world’s main markets. Bartolomé Abellán, the company’s young oenologist, receives advice from Chris Ringland, an Australian oenologist who has brought to El Nido’s small winery not only all of his experience, but also the best technical methods from different parts of the world.

Off to Yecla

On the other side of El Carche and at the foot of the Salinas Mountains is Yecla, which differs from Jumilla in that it does not live primarily off the land. Yecla’s strong furniture sector dominates the local economy, but the furniture entrepreneurs and workers possess vineyards which supply the town’s second most important sector: winemaking. The DO Yecla covers vineyards on 7,000 ha (17,297 acres), 85% of which grow Monastrell, in two areas differentiated by their altitude (400-800 m / 1,312-2,624 ft). On the high, dry-farmed lands in Campo Arriba, Monastrell is the main variety, whereas on the lower Campo Abajo it grows under mostly irrigated conditions alongside other red varieties (Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Merlot, Garnacha, Garnacha Tintorera and Petit Verdot) and some whites (Airén, Macabeo, Merseguera, Malvasía, Chardonnay, small-grain Muscatel and Sauvignon Blanc).

But wine is not only important in the economic life of Yecla. Its social importance is clearly reflected in the size of the vine growers’ cooperative, which boasts 1,200 members. In fact, Bodegas La Purísima appeared in the *Guinness Book of Records* back in 1973 as the cooperative with the highest level of production in the world—at the time a total of 60 million l of wine a year. Those were the years of “plenty of alcohol and

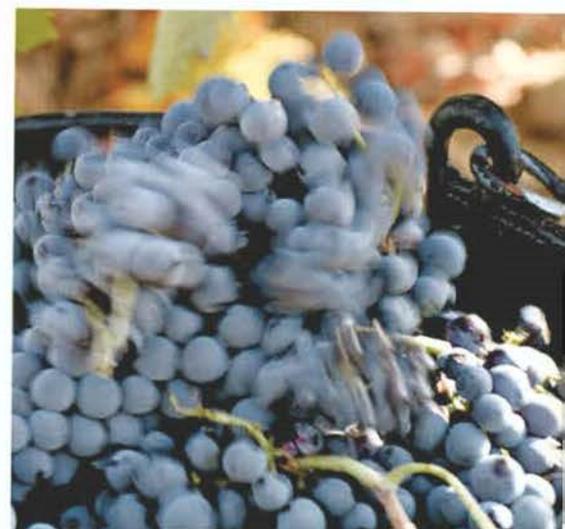
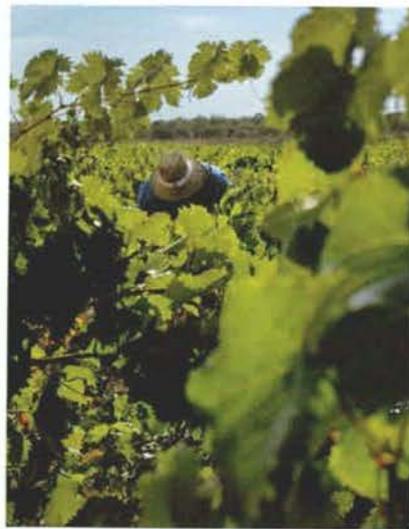
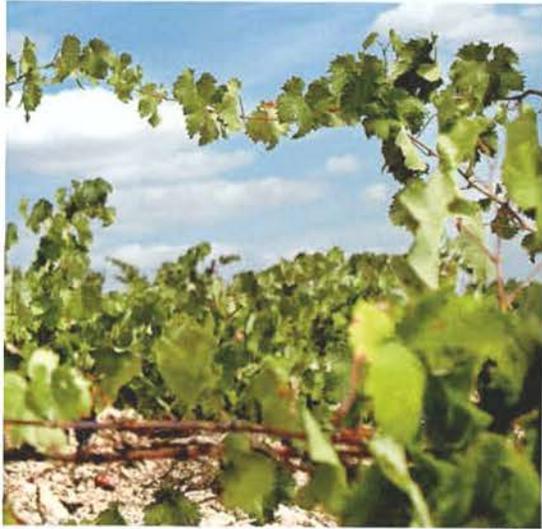




color so that the wines would sell abroad," explains Pedro José Azorin, the cooperative's oenologist. In our conversation with him, we notice a word that keeps cropping up—organization—because, although they no longer have to produce the record 90,000 tonnes, they are still working with 14,000 tonnes. And their organization is based on a computer program that identifies the plots by the variety grown, age of the vineyard, type of soil and other technical characteristics. The data is controlled by two agronomists who have to give their authorization before any grapes can be brought into the winery. They obviously continue to produce bulk wines, but now they use their best Monastrell from ungrafted stocks growing in 50-year-old vineyards for their top-quality Trapiro wine (the name is a

bullfighting term referring to a good stance and attitude in a bull). This brings us back to the subject of the tradition and personality they achieve in their Monastrell wines, which Pedro José describes as very fruity, with hints of plum and other dark fruit. "It's an easy-going variety," he says. It ages well in the wood and takes from it touches of scrub—thyme and lavender—and sometimes may even be reminiscent of liqueur cherries. An organic, 100% Monastrell wine is also produced, Valcorso Ecológico, the only Spanish organic wine to have reached the list of the 100 Top Wines at the London International Wine & Spirits 2008 Fair. If there is any single winery in Yecla that exemplifies the demand for singular, characteristic Monastrell wines it is Bodegas Castaño. The

Castaño family, now in its third generation of winemakers, exports 85% of the almost three million bottles it sells bearing the DO Yecla back label. They focused on Monastrell years ago, before it was known on the international scene. Today, they are phasing out other monovarietals because the Monastrell wines offer "exceptional quality and, above all, authenticity." And this is exactly what consumers are looking for. Their oenologist, Mariano López, considers that maximum expression is achieved when aging is not too long, just long enough for the wine to gain complex, intense aromas of plum jam and compote and a dense, velvety texture, full of body and power. At Castaño, they achieve high quality by recognizing that work has to begin in the vineyard



because, to balance the alcohol in the end product, it is first necessary to achieve balance on the vine. For this purpose, they have two field specialists watching over the winery's 500 ha (1,235 acres). They were the first in Yecla to reject systemic pesticides, replacing pest control with pheromone-based sexual confusion treatments, which are now applied on almost all of the DO Yecla vineyards.

Towards the Mediterranean

It seems reasonable to assume that as we move further south to the DO Bullas, conditions will be harsher, but here the vineyards enjoy protection from two allies: the Andalusian mountain range (*Sistema Bético*), which forms high plains and

cool mountain valleys at 600-1,000 m (1,968-3,280 ft), and the Mediterranean Sea, which brings in the necessary moisture when the wind blows from the east. The DO Bullas is the smallest of the three Murcian designations, covering little more than 5,000 ha (12,355 acres) of vineyard. Known in the 18th century as the largest winery in the Kingdom of Murcia, its vineyards were almost completely wiped out as from 1894 with the arrival of phylloxera. But stocks were replanted during the 20th century, and in 1994 Bullas was awarded Designation of Origin status; one of the main driving forces behind it was the Bodegas del Rosario cooperative. The original DO Bullas regulation made it compulsory to include at least 60% Monastrell in red wines. This obligation has

recently been lifted but, as stated by José Sánchez Lozano, President of the Regulatory Council, this is unlikely to have much effect on the structure of the wines, as 85% of the vines are still Monastrell. Controlling 80% of the total Bullas vineyards is Bodegas del Rosario, a cooperative that has upgraded its operations. Having been one of the largest bulk producers, it is now also producing high-quality wines, some of which have been successful at international competitions, such as its Las Reñas wine, the winner of several awards at the World Wine Fair in Brussels. This is the result, above all, of careful tending of the vines and also of new winemaking technology based on advice from foreign experts. The latest wine they launched on the market, called 3000 Años, is made from grapes from the



MONASTRELL IN SPAIN AND FONDILLÓN FROM ALICANTE

Monastrell is authorized in 15 designations of origin, almost all of them along the east coast of Spain; however, its contribution is generally small, with the exception of the three DOs in Murcia, and the Alicante and Valencia DOs. It can be found in Catalonia (Costers del Segre, Penedès and Montsant) and on the Balearic Islands at the Binissalem-Mallorca and Pla i Llevant DOs. Further inland, but still in eastern Spain, it also features in two of the Aragonese DOs—Calatayud and

Cariñena—and in the DO Almansa in La Mancha. The odd ones out are DO Ribera del Guadiana, in Extremadura in western Spain, and DO Cava. In Alicante it is gaining increasing recognition thanks to wines such as Estrecho by the Enrique Mendoza bodega. But it is the real star in the traditional wine known as Fondillón, made exclusively by the DO Alicante, necessarily from Monastrell alone, using grapes that are over-ripened on the vine. The must reaches 16° probable alcohol content and then ferments (some of the time with the skins) with native yeasts until it gains a natural alcohol content, that is, without the addition of sugars and

without fortification, of as much as 18°. It is then aged for a minimum of 10 years in oak casks, using a system similar to the one used in Jerez. The result is a robust, rancio wine, the color of old gold, with toasty aromatic notes and sweet flavors, generous and creamy in the mouth. It became famous in the 19th century and then almost disappeared after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). Fortunately, in the 1960s, Salvador Poveda, owner at the time of the family's Alicante winery of the same name, recovered a barrel dating from 1871 and went on to reinstate this jewel of a wine.

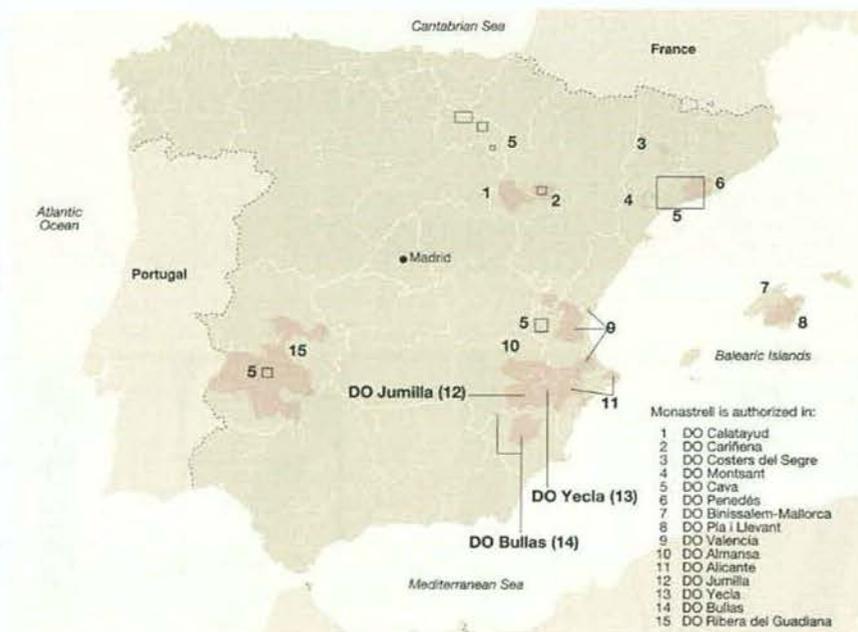
oldest Monastrell stocks, aged 50-60, together with Syrah grapes. The oenologists behind it are Master of Wine Norrel Robertson, a Scot who also works at the DO Calatayud in Aragón (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73), and the winery's own Luis Javier Pérez Prieto.

In the beautiful Aceniche Valley formed by the Sierra Espuña Mountains, a family of six siblings decided in 1998 to withdraw from the cooperative and set up their own winery, Bodega Balcona. The decision was triggered by a lecture given by oenologist Josep Lluís Pérez Verdú from the DO Priorato. Pepi Fernández, one of the six who now manages the winery, says a whole world of possibilities opened up for her when she learned that by

properly caring for the vineyard, selecting the grapes in the field and transporting them in crates, the Monastrell variety which her family had owned for decades could give top-quality wines. Alongside their old Monastrell stocks, they planted some espaliered Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot with the idea of giving their wines some specific touches. Their working philosophy is that everything needs to be carefully timed. Harvesting must take place when the grapes reach the exact degree of ripeness, and each variety needs to be given time to attain the concentration that is right for the aged wines they produce. To ensure that the different varieties blend well with the wood, bottles are racked for up to five years before

being placed on the market. The firm only produces about 50,000 bottles of red wine under two labels—Partal and 37 Barricas—both of which are based on 65% Monastrell, which affords style, elegance and sweetness. Pepi, too, emphasizes the concept that has guided our tour of the Monastrell vineyards: "It's the Monastrell grapes that give our wines their personality."

Almudena Martín Rueda is a publication coordinator for Spain Gourmetour.



W E B S I T E S

www.vinosdebullas.es

DO Bullas (Spanish)

www.rutadelvino.bullas.es

Bullas Wine Route (Spanish)

www.vinosdejumilla.org

DO Jumilla (English, Spanish)

www.rutadelvinojumilla.com

Jumilla Wine Route (English, Spanish)

www.yeclavino.com

DO Yecla (English, Spanish)



A WINE

Mariano García and his family have played a special role in the story of Spanish wine in the last half century; they have participated in birth, discovery, maturation and now re-discovery. It is ironic that, although Mariano's home is in northern Spain's revered Ribera del Duero region, with a vinous history that extends back to the Visigoths, the DO Ribera del Duero (Castile-Leon, in central Spain) was formed in 1982, only a generation ago. Mariano and his sons, Alberto and Eduardo, are excited and creatively energized by their winemaking odyssey and the potential of their high-profile projects in the Ribera region and in the emerging DOs Toro and Bierzo. They combine the best traditional and modern methods of viticulture and winemaking to produce authentic wines with a sense of place. Mariano and his sons have a keen ability to see opportunities and great potential in undeveloped regions, and it's clear that the García family is adding new pages in the venerable chapter of Castile-Leon's winemaking history.

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Family's Place in History

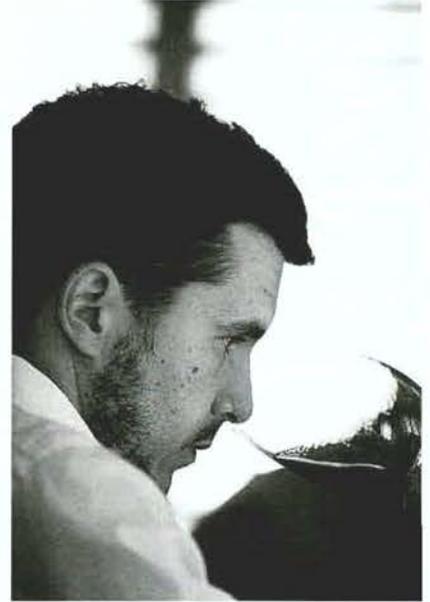
MAKING

During lunch at Mesón Zurita in Tudela de Duero, Mariano, 64, recounted his history at Vega Sicilia. He is his usual self: warm, engaging, and honest, very similar to the characteristics one finds in his Mauro wines. He almost seemed surprised that I was listening so intently to his answers that I ignored the excellent food. Ever the attentive host, he insisted on filling my plate several times during our talk. Eduardo García, 31, claims the three the García men engage in “healthy competition” and “push each other” regarding winemaking decisions. “We agree on all the big issues; it’s the small issues where we disagree

sometimes: how long to rack, which barrel to blend with others...” Eduardo feels this interplay of opinions between his father and his brother ultimately improves the quality of the wines. Against expectations, at lunch, Eduardo and Alberto, both 33, preferred Mauro Vendimia Seleccionada 2004, a more traditional wine, to Terreus 2004, while Mariano clearly felt the latter, more modern-style wine showed better. Alberto joked, citing a university study which found that the older palate loses its ability to discern complexity and merely prefers ripe, sweet flavors. Undeterred, Mariano would have none of it. On the

family’s projects, Alberto observes: “There is such diversity. Each project has a different identity and the wines are different expressions of various places. This makes for very interesting work.” After lunch, Mariano and I visit the La Oliva vineyard, not far from the restaurant, with mostly 25-year-old vines, northern exposures and limestone soils. His eyes gleam with pride and anticipation as he talks about the quality of the grapes and the future of this vineyard. Most of these grapes will go into Mauro, while selected older vines will go into Vendimia Seleccionada. This vineyard is a prized possession that will help





make his family's wines better in the future.

Early years at Vega Sicilia

Mariano began working at Vega Sicilia in 1968 as head winemaker. A graduate of the School of Winemaking and Viticulture in Madrid, Mariano was Vega Sicilia's first trained oenologist and he soon became Technical Director, a position he held until he left in 1998. Important mentors to Mariano during his days as a young winemaker at Vega Sicilia were the bodega's General Director, Jesús Anadón, Prof. Andrés Mareca at the Madrid School of Winemaking, and Jesús Marrodán, a renowned consulting oenologist who worked for many bodegas in the 1960s, most notably Marqués de Murrieta in Rioja. Mr. Marrodán taught Mariano an important winemaking concept that he remembers to this day: "Big problems come from small details." Marrodán

taught Mariano that it's vital to be clean when racking the wine, and to be fastidious with cellar work. Gradually, the quality and reputation of Vega Sicilia's wines rose in Spain and abroad. During his time at Vega Sicilia, Mariano utilized very traditional winemaking methods brought from La Rioja that had changed little in decades, and he progressively introduced some modern methods, like reducing barrel aging periods. In the mid-1980s, Bodegas Alión was Mariano's concept for Vega Sicilia to produce a more contemporary wine from DO Ribera del Duero. Made from younger vines than Único or Valbuena 5°, Alión is a wine to enjoy upon release and it can improve with bottle age, if not the decades intended for Valbuena 5° and Único. Mariano's years at Vega Sicilia were a formative time. Following his oenological studies, he gained decades of experience working at one of the premier bodegas in Spain, utilizing traditional winemaking methods while

learning about the best terroir and grapes in DO Ribera del Duero.

Mauro: freedom to experiment

Mariano believes that leaving Vega Sicilia was "a natural split" that would have happened sooner or later. Though he loved making both Vega Sicilia and Mauro wines, Mariano never gave Mauro serious thought for the future, and his bodega's success in the 1990s came as a surprise. To begin his project, he bought prime vineyard parcels in Tudela. He wanted the freedom to experiment while making a personal wine that would remain true to Tinto Fino (the local name for Tempranillo) and its terroir. Mariano is Technical Director while Eduardo is Head Winemaker for Mauro. In recent years, Eduardo has taken a larger role in day-to-day winemaking operations, while Mariano is more of a senior consultant who advises at a strategic level. Alberto is

General Manager for almost all the family projects, and the fact that he is an active presence for most of these bodegas in over 30 global markets points up how busy he is.

In addition to mostly old Tinto Fino, Mauro vineyards include Garnacha and Syrah. Because Mauro lies outside the DO Ribera del Duero limits, Mariano and Eduardo are free to include other grapes in their blends. Mauro's first vintage was 1978, while the bodega itself was founded in 1980. A few years ago, production at Mauro had outgrown the capacity of the historic 17th-century winery in Tudela de Duero. A new winery, completed in 2004, now lies just outside town and has recently been expanded. In this modern, functional winery, there's a complete lab for analysis, a refrigerated room to receive the harvested grapes, and a temperature-controlled room for malolactic fermentation.

Mauro's vineyard soils are a blend of sand, clay, calcareous clay, limestone,

chalk and trace minerals like iron and schist. These soils match those best found near DO Ribera del Duero's historic wine towns of Pesquera, Peñafiel and Valbuena, including the vineyards of Vega Sicilia, Pesquera, Emilio Moro and Alión. In general, these soils yield grapes that make Ribera del Duero wines with the most finesse, elegance and balance, due to the percentage of important limestone and calcareous clay components.

Mauro Tinto is a distinctive wine with traditional Ribera characters and a remarkable ability to age well for its category, similar to Pesquera Tinto from Alejandro Fernández. The wine has bold, spicy wild cherry fruit, with warm notes of herbs and toasted oak. For the last few vintages, Mauro Tinto has included around 10% Syrah, which lends the wine intriguing, spicy aromas and a peppery edge. Mauro Vendimia Seleccionada is a more traditional Ribera wine made from 100% Tinto Fino from old vines, 60-

80 years old and older. This wine blends power and finesse, with broad red and black fruit flavors on the palate, and a mineral edge, in the manner of a First Growth Pauillac or Pomerol, and it can age for decades. Terreus is a modern-style wine made with grapes from old vines in a single vineyard, Paraje de Cueva Bajo, on the Duero River's right bank, near Tudela. This wine has powerful depth, dark berry ripeness and a serious tannic structure built for long aging.

Aalto: Ribera's ultimate boutique winery

As Aalto owner Javier Zaccagnini drives me to his new winery, he discusses the genesis of the project. He and Mariano met in 1998, and circumstances found both of them interested in beginning a new venture. They had an idea to make a 100% Tinto Fino wine from DO Ribera del





Duero using only the finest grapes from selected, old clones of vines at least 60 years old. Javier and Mariano wanted their project to “make a wine that could be the equal of Chateau Lafite or Mouton, and the best red wines in the world, in 15 to 20 years time.” The new winery, just off the N-122 highway near Peñafiel, has sleek, clean lines of which famous Finnish designer Alvar Aalto, the bodega’s namesake, would be proud. “Our concept was to begin with a blank sheet of paper. I asked Mariano, Aalto’s

Technical Director: “If you could design a winery and do anything you want, how would you build it?” The building’s main feature is the transfer of grapes, must and wine solely by gravity, so Javier and I tour the building “as if we were grapes”: from top to bottom, through five stories which are mostly underground, built into the side of a hill. Javier explains that “the winery was designed by Mariano, a great winemaker who has many years of experience, and now that we’ve made

three vintages here, working in the winery has shown us that it’s now easier for us to make better wine.” There are fermentation tanks in concrete, French oak and stainless steel, the latter a custom, conical design by Mariano that helps to spread out the cap during fermentation to obtain an optimal, softer extraction of tannins. Three types of fermentation tanks give Mariano and the other Aalto winemakers maximum flexibility when vinifying parcels of grapes with different characters.



The vistas from Aalto's offices look out onto the surrounding *páramos*, the tops of the valley slopes that appear to have been dramatically flattened, and the Duero Valley forms a swath cut deep into the geology of the hills, revealing striations of various soil geology, like a rock layer cake. Javier pointed to the young vineyards fronting his bodega: "Mariano and I searched for this site for six years. This slope forms a protected microclimate. The soils are very similar to those found near Valladolid, with calcareous clay, stones and limestone." Limestone is a very important component for finesse and complexity in the wines. "We will wait until these vines are at least 20-25 before we use them for Aalto. Planted from selected cuttings of the very old clones of Tinto Fino from various locations, the growers call these Tinto Aragonéz." According to Mariano and Eduardo, Tinto Aragonéz vines produce concentrated fruit with the best aromas, color, palate flavors,

tannins and polyphenols. Aalto shows proud bramble, blackberry and black raspberry aromas, along with cassis, leather and licorice notes. There's a focus of fruit on the palate, with a lush, creamy character, and with tangy, sweet notes like an orange bell pepper. With solid structure, the tannins are sublime and soft. Aalto PS shows more black fruit, depth and complexity, with notes of dark chocolate, espresso and toasted oak, and overall the structure and tannins call for some bottle age.

Astrales: Eduardo's "Burgundy Project"

This project began when the Romera de la Cruz family, three generations of grape growers, stopped selling grapes to bottle their own wine. They hired Eduardo as Technical Director in 2000. The bodega farms 20 parcels in different villages near the town of Anguix, not far from La Horra and Roa

in northern central DO Ribera del Duero. The oldest vineyard is called Fuentesanta, with 85-year-old vines. Eduardo strictly utilizes organic viticulture, with copper and sulfur treatments used only when absolutely necessary. He believes it's necessary for his grapes to reach optimal maturity in the vineyards, so almost all winemaking has already been done there, utilizing old clones. Eduardo explains: "The clones of Tinto Aragonéz in Anguix are different than La Horra, than Aguilera, than Tubilla; for me, in each village the Tempranillo is different, the morphology is different. The Tinto Aragonéz in Toro, in Ribera, in Tudela, in Cigales, in other places, it's a clone with lots of hair, more leaves, the grapes are smaller, more concentrated, and you find it in many places. People have taken cuttings from many parcels and for over three or four centuries, the vines change and adapt to their parcels. In the end,

it's still Tempranillo."

Walking DO Ribera del Duero vineyards, it's easy to see why the region is ideal for winegrowing. The days are sunny, hot and dry, while the nights are very cool and fresh, similar to Napa in the US, although visually Ribera looks more like Utah or Nevada. Eduardo notes an overnight temperature gradient of 22-23°C (71.6-73.4°F), which is very important for the grape skins to develop acidity and phenolic ripeness. Initially, Eduardo's cowboy swagger seems cocky, but when you see him deftly check vine leaves and taste grapes, he seems like a father checking to see that his son's coat is buttoned before sending him off to school. His confidence comes from an impressive knowledge of his vineyards and wines, which he refers to like they're people. We visit parcels near Anguix, and Eduardo explains the soil types in DO Ribera del Duero. "In Anguix, you have limestone, clay and sandy soils. Here, in Ribera, you have different kinds of soils. It's incredible—it's different in each village: in one place there are no good vineyards, but just 100 m (328 ft) higher, you have perfect terroir.

I don't like too much ripeness, powerful wines with too much fruit and alcohol. I prefer wines with aromas and acidity, balanced flavors and tannins, and finesse. It's most important for us to respect the Tinto Fino grape, and to respect the typicity and the characters of the different terroirs in our parcels."

During vinification, Eduardo is conservative; there are no overly technical methods like "cold soak" or extended maceration, but short macerations, and careful oak aging. Astrales has pure black fruit and wild herb aromas; on the palate there's



depth with a character of *sous-bois*, or forest undergrowth. The tannins are always paradoxically structured yet soft.

San Román: a pioneer in Toro

In 1994, Mariano investigated vineyards in DO Toro for Vega Sicilia and Mauro projects. Toro has numerous incredible old vines, planted *pie franco*, on ungrafted rootstock unaffected by phylloxera, which is thwarted by DO Toro's very sandy soils. These original vines produce concentrated fruit with superior aromas, color and palate flavors. With a vegetative season lasting five months, compared to only four for DO Ribera del Duero, DO Toro grapes have greater ripeness and tannins. Year to year, the climate here is more consistent than Ribera, so it's a more reliable place to make wine.

Mariano recognized the potential of these treasures, and he bought vineyards. Maurodos was established in 1995, and San Román 1997 was the first modern Toro wine, vinified at the old Mauro winery. In 2000, a functional, gravity-only winery was built, where, similar to other family projects where both men work, Eduardo works as Head Winemaker, overseeing daily operations, while Mariano functions as Technical Director, helping make strategic decisions.

Unlike DO Ribera del Duero, DO Toro is noticeably flat vineyard land, and the relentless sun prompts me to apply sunscreen. Alberto shows me several different parcels in the towns of Villaester, with sandy, clay and gravel soils. In one parcel, he picks up a chunk of clay rich in red iron. I take it and try to break it, but it's like concrete. Parcels in San Román de Hornija are covered with stones, many of which are the size of



footballs, similar to the many stones, or *galets*, in Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape. "In Toro, you don't have limestone, you have a lot of sand and clay, and you have stones in the parcels in Villafranca and San Román; in El Pego, it's only sandy, and in Morales it's a mix, so we don't like to have a wine of one soil, of one terroir. We prefer to have a lot of different terroirs and areas. This way you can have a lot of complexity in the nose."

Two wines are made here: San Román, aged for 22-23 months in new French and used American oak barrels, and Prima, a young, crianza-style wine aged for 11-12 months in 2-3-year-old French and American oak barrels. Both wines have aromatic depth with herbal and mineral notes. Prima has fresh, dark berry fruit while San Román shows structure and velvety smooth tannins. In blind tastings, the impressive San Román has repeatedly placed ahead of all other wines from DO Toro.

Paixar: a unique expression of Mencía

The project is named for the local term *paixares*, meaning extremely high, old mountain vines surrounded by chestnut and oak trees. Initially, Mariano consulted with his sons on the potential of this forgotten area, located in Castile's northwest corner, about a five hour drive from Toro.

Alberto and Eduardo are the project's General Director and Technical Director, respectively.

DO Bierzo (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72) is a verdant, green, extremely mountainous area with a wet, cool Atlantic climate; it couldn't be more different from DO Toro or DO Ribera del Duero. The mountain vineyards are in a protected microclimate, made of small parcels at 700-1,000 m (2,296-3,280 ft) elevation with southern exposure, planted on very raked slopes (some of which attain a 48° angle) that

surround the village of Dragonte, on one of the hilltops. The most difficult vineyards in the Mosel, Douro and the Rhône have nothing on these. The soils are almost pure, fractured brown and black slate. Similar to those found in DO Priorat, and due to the elevation, harvesting occurs two weeks later than in the rest of Villafranca, the local village.

Taking direction from Eduardo, winemaker Matthieu Barrault, 29, carefully walks up and down these vineyard slopes every day. He leads an arduous, almost monastic existence tending the vines, many of which are 60-105 years old. With prior experience in Toro, St. Emilion and the Loire, he contends with *jabali* (wild boar) and birds that eat the old vines' meager production. Chestnut trees, planted generations ago by local farmers as a cash crop, have extensive root systems that take water from the vines. Matthieu calls them "another problem." Paixar is a very singular expression of Mencía, and the slate soils lend a pronounced charcoal minerality, along with vibrant acidity and an intriguing, bell pepper spice, similar to Petit Verdot or Cabernet Franc.

Praise from winemaking peers

Mariano and his family are greatly respected and admired by their peers. Jesús Madrazo, Chief Winemaker at Viñedos del Contino in Rioja Alavesa, says: "The most important thing about Mariano is his humanity. It's much more important than if you're a top winemaker. A friend of mine, a wine geek, had a tasting group in Barcelona. A few years ago, he and his friends organized a vertical tasting of Mauro



Vendimia Seleccionada and Terreus in magnums. They couldn't find a bottle of the Terreus 1998, so my friend called the Mauro bodega to find out where they could buy it. Somehow, Mariano ended up speaking to my friend, and upon hearing of the tasting, he found a bottle of Terreus 1998 and drove it to them personally. He joined the tasting and he wouldn't let the group pay for the wine... There is humanity, there's passion, there is something of Mariano's soul in all his wines. Every year, his wines are very good to excellent. And for me, it's really important to see the communication of winemaking tradition in the family, from father to son. If you look at his sons, you see reflections of Mariano."

Peter Sisseck, winemaker at Dominio de Pingus and Hacienda Monasterio, feels that "Mariano is a great guy and a great professional, and he also has something very important that many of us don't have. He's been making wine in Ribera since '68, his family has known the area

for many generations and that gives what is so often missing in new areas: a sense of history, the ability to connect to how things were and how people in Ribera used to work. He is also extremely privileged to have worked with Ribera's best grapes at a house known for great quality."

The García family moves ahead

The excellence of craft in Mariano's 40 years of winemaking is astounding, like an immense body of work by Pablo Picasso. The Garcías were pioneers in DO Toro, and their interest in DO Bierzo and in DO Ribera del Duero's town of Anguix has spurred interest and activity in these areas. Comparable to Mariano are the late Henri Jayer in Burgundy, Gérard Chave in the Rhône, and Tom Dehlinger, Paul Draper and the late Andre Tchelicheff in the US. These winemakers pursued projects that ultimately influenced others and helped promote the quality of their regional

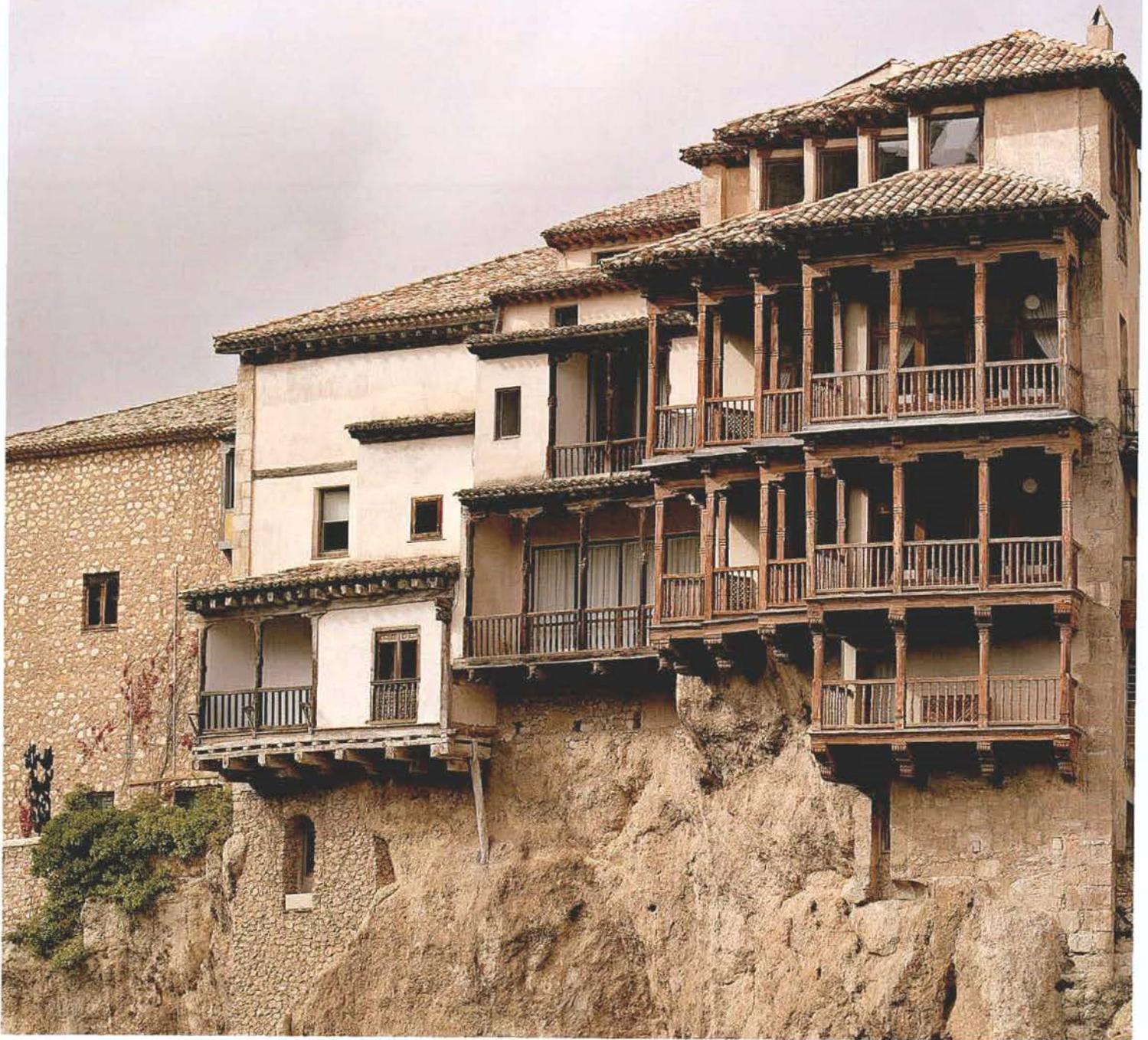
wines around the world. Mariano and his sons have shown others the potential of Castile-Leon. Utilizing a blend of the best traditional and modern winemaking methods, along with conservative winegrowing, the Garcías are making several benchmark wines in DOs Ribera del Duero, Toro and Bierzo. Uncork one of the bottles made by Mariano and his sons and you'll have a liquid bit of Castile-Leon wine history in your glass. As for where the Garcías are headed next, their future appears as bright, attractive and filled with infinite promise as a glass of one of their many sublime wines.

Chris Fleming is a New York-based freelance wine writer who has written for Robb Report and winereviewonline.com. Most recently, he was Technical Advisor on a Rioja DVD produced for the Culinary Institute of America by the Vibrant Rioja PR campaign in the US. He's also Internet Communications Manager at Frederick Wildman & Sons.



Alcalá. Hospital de Amézana

The **WORLD**,
Our Heritage



Cuenca. Hanging Houses

The World Heritage Convention came into being in 1972 under the auspices of UNESCO with the imperative and ambitious goal of protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage so important to us all. Today, almost 900 sites worldwide benefit from such protection, and Spain, home to 40 of them (13 of which are entire historic city complexes) happens to be one of the

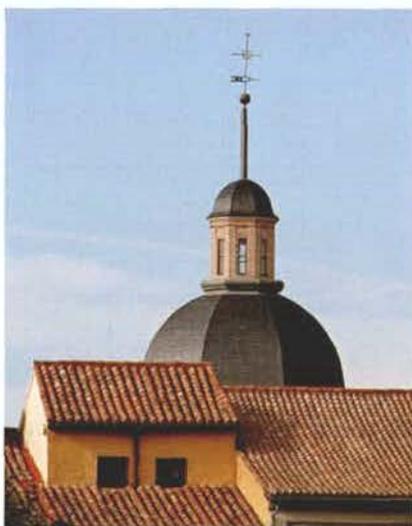
countries with the largest number listed. Toledo, Segovia and Santiago de Compostela are names familiar to many, but in this series of three articles, we will take you along to a number of lesser-known (but by no means less interesting) World Heritage cities. First in line are Alcalá de Henares and Cuenca, and a tale of two cities that could not be more different.

TEXT

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PHOTOS

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According to its mission statement, it is the primary goal of the World Heritage Convention to "encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity." But while this may sound simple, the Convention and the 185 countries that have ratified it to date face a formidable task. Possible threats to current and potential World Heritage sites come from both natural and, sadly enough, past and ongoing man-made disasters such as pollution, wars, terrorism, unsustainable urbanization, tourism, simple indifference, and abandonment. Fortunately, none of the Spanish sites are under direct threat and new venues gradually join the already lengthy list. These magnificent examples of human achievement often cast in spectacular natural environments are not concentrated in specific areas; they are spread throughout the country.

Visiting them becomes a particularly gratifying experience as it not only enables us to put a relevant part of European history in context, to behold splendid works of art and architecture of all times, and to become immersed in constantly changing landscapes, it is also a unique opportunity for active tourism and, last but not least, to feast on Spain's ever-surprising cuisine and great wines.

The lettered city

In view of the relative proximity of both cities, we propose a roundtrip starting from Spain's capital, Madrid. Alcalá de Henares lies at a comfortable half hour ride by car or train. This "lettered city" (*Ciudad de las Letras*) not only holds the earliest specifically laid out university complex, i.e. the first campus, but it is also the birthplace of Miguel de Cervantes, author of the renowned novel *Don Quijote de La Mancha*. It is the world's second most widely translated book after the Bible

and, not surprisingly, it is intrinsic to Alcalá de Henares' nomination as a World Heritage site. This nomination is based on three pillars: the city's 15th-century layout as a modern university city; the more lofty concept that it represents the Augustinian ideal of *Civitas Dei*, the City of God, as a model of knowledge, solidarity and high moral standards; and its contribution to universal culture through language and, more specifically, through Cervantes.

However, a fourth pillar should be added: it has a lively atmosphere that immediately invites the visitor to partake. Alcalá de Henares is marked by many small terraces and countless benches, crowded with people from all walks of life, all generations, and of course lots of students, with the unique Calle Mayor (the longest porticoed walkway in Spain) as its central artery and the Plaza de Cervantes at its core.



Home of Cervantes

A bit of background

But let us, for a moment, turn back the clock and briefly put the city in a historical context. Alcalá owes its full name to the river Henares. The site gained its first great relevance as a strategic location in the very center of the Iberian Peninsula under the Romans when it was called Complutum.

A new period of revival came in the 8th century under the Moors, who built a fortress that gave the city its present name (*qu'alat*, or castle). Although practically nothing remains of the original site, the influence of Arab culture appears repeatedly in the beautifully intricate *mudéjar* (a fusion of Christian and Arab elements) ceramics and wood-carved ceilings, like that of the Auditorium of the magnificent University's Colegio Mayor de San Ildefonso. It is here where the annual prestigious Cervantes Award ceremony (the Nobel of Spanish literature) takes place.

After being recaptured in the 12th century, the city became the seat of the Archbishop's palace of Toledo and started to thrive, in large part owing to a large Jewish merchant community. But it is indeed the avant-garde University of Alcalá that took the city to new heights from the 15th century onward, thanks to the visionary Cardinal Cisneros (1436-1517). Adjacent to the medieval city, he proceeded to build a university complex specifically laid out in grid-like squares and offering full service to scholars and students, including colleges, residences, a hospital and even a jail. Vicente Pérez, an expert historian at Alcalá's city hall, explains that brilliant students without means were granted scholarships, academicians were brought in from all over Europe, and there were exchange programs with other university cities that mutually accepted credits. In the midst of such a universal academic melting pot, it comes as no surprise

that not only was Europe's first vernacular grammar written here (*Gramática de la lengua castellana* by Antonio de Nebrija, 1441-1522), but it is also where the first polyglot Bible appeared as a compilation of the original (but not necessarily identical) versions in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic.

This set the stage for Spain's Golden Age (16th and 17th centuries) which, in terms of literature, greatly evolved around Alcalá. In addition to relevant clerics such as Mazarin (1602-1661) and Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), and famous writers and poets including Lope de Vega (1562-1635), Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) and Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), mystics such as Teresa de Jesús and Juan de la Cruz left their imprint here. And then of course there is the towering figure Cervantes, who was born here in 1547 and, although he did not work in Alcalá, he is claimed to be the city's most outstanding offspring.



Corral de Comedias

For political reasons, all academic activities were moved to Madrid during the 19th century, but the university reopened in 1977, occupying the original buildings that, thanks to a most laudable initiative from a consortium of locals, had been kept from major decay. This has enabled a more than 500-year-old university complex of great monumental value to continue its modern day activities in much the same way as it had done in the past.

Alcalá today

Today Alcalá is a modern city with large industries on its outskirts, yet thanks to its historic center, it has become one of the most interesting places to visit within a short radius from Spain's capital. This was, of course, fully recognized in its nomination as a World Heritage City in 1998.

"It has definitely made a difference," says Ana Magallares, the dynamic

Director of the Tourism Excellence Plan, which aims at improving, structuring, innovating and consolidating tourist activities in and around Alcalá, also with the city's candidacy for Cultural Capital of Europe in 2016 in mind. "Becoming a World Heritage city has provided a great value-enhancing impulse," she comments. Not only have people in Spain and tourists from abroad become increasingly interested in visiting, it has also spurred locals to take pride in their town.

But authorities in Alcalá are looking ahead and taking a great number of practical and creative steps to further Alcalá's appeal, not only as a tourist stop, but also as a linguistic and congressional destination, where culture goes hand-in-hand with fun. In this vein, two areas stand out in particular: theater and gastronomy, and all throughout the year, events and re-enactments are organized, often combining the two. From The Nights

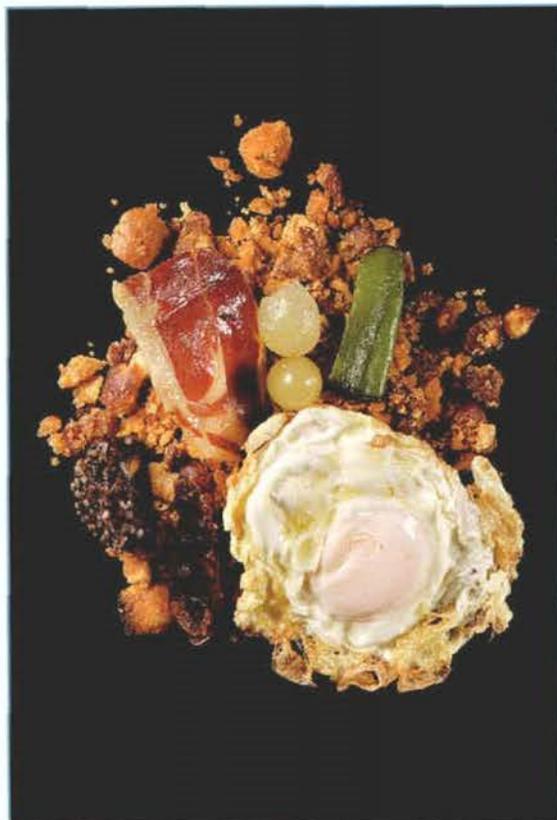
of Don Juan, Classics in Alcalá and the Week of Cervantes, to the Tapas Route and Gastronomic Week, 2010 will be Alcalá's gastronomic year, when food-related events on many levels are planned.

Although there are guided tours, a great thing to do is to simply take a map and just stroll through the streets. There are sites you really should see: the emblematic Colegio Mayor de San Ildefonso, with its magnificent 16th-century Plateresque façade, its patios, and the aforementioned Auditorium; the porticoed Calle Mayor, where you'll find the reconstructed Home of Cervantes, the nearby Hospital de Antezana, and where you can enjoy a wide range of tapas on any of its numerous terraces; and the Plaza de Cervantes and its endearing Corral de Comedias, a 16th-century theater (rehabilitated several times) where all kinds of performances are held, from classic theater to jazz. You can walk freely in and out of the magnificent



Calle Mayor

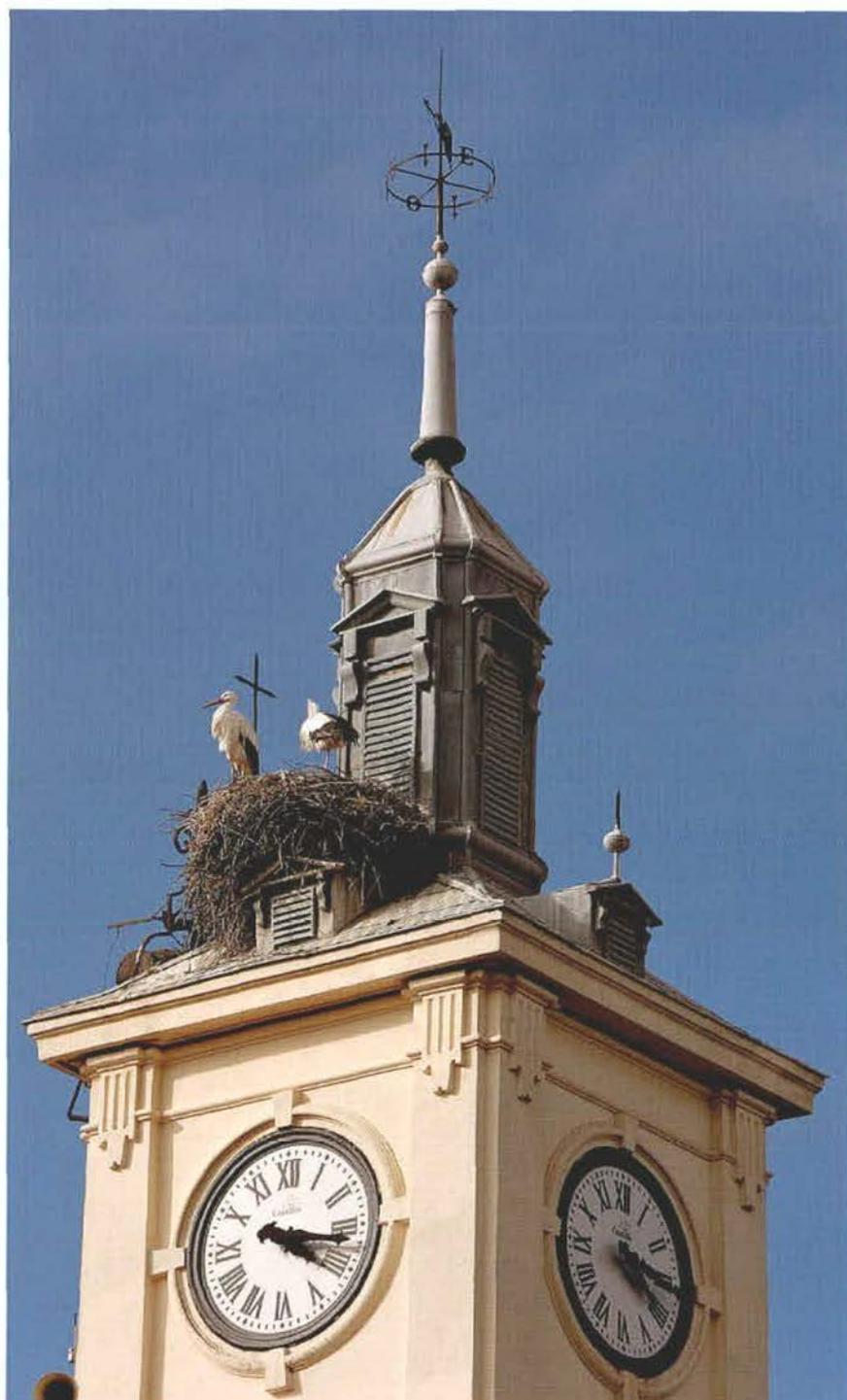
M I G A S T O C O M P A R E



This trip wouldn't be complete if you didn't have migas on more than one occasion. This legendary Spanish folk fare is mentioned several times in *Don Quixote* (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 64). At the Hostelería del Estudiante in Alcalá (opened in 1929, it is the first and now only Parador left to be only a restaurant), they are rich and packed with *tropezones* (morsels of fresh bacon, ham and chorizo), while at the Parador Convento de San Pablo in Cuenca, they are served plain, but equally delicious. Migas may be served with fried eggs, green peppers, crispy *morcilla* (blood sausage), *lomo en orza* (pork loin traditionally preserved in terracotta) or sardines, and always with fresh grapes to clear the palate. And then there is a modern restaurant, in the modern section of Cuenca with a modern chef and a modern menu, yet its name is as quixotic as can be. At *Bálsamo de Fierabrás* (the all-curing remedy repeatedly mentioned by Cervantes), chef Jesús Segura offers a most delicate sampler menu, reinterpreting traditional dishes without interfering with their original ingredients and flavors. Quite a feast and a wonderful gastronomic experience. Who needs to compare?



college buildings and their patios, but make sure to look up from time to time to admire the many cupolas and turrets, and to get a glimpse of the storks that fly in and out of the roughly 100 registered nests. Mandatory stops include Salinas in the Plaza de Cervantes to sample the famous *costradas de Alcalá* (a light puff pastry with cream and meringue, topped with crushed almonds and lightly oven broiled). According to

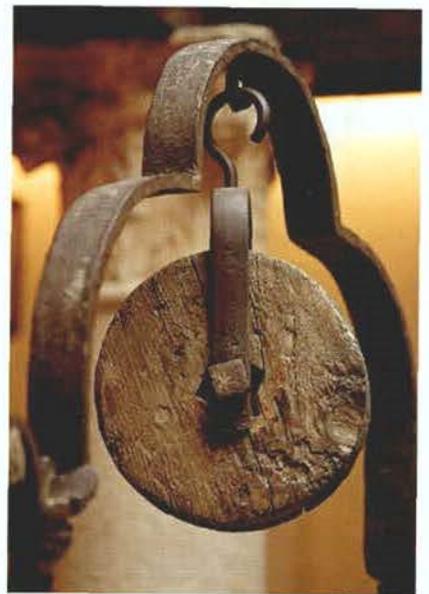


baker Manuel del Rosal, they were already a tradition here before the shop opened in 1846. Another not-to-be-missed treat are the typical sugar-coated almonds that you can purchase, while you recite an "Ave Maria", after passing through a small revolving door at the Clarisses Convent just off San Diego Square. Finally, if you happen to be here on a Sunday, especially with children, do as the Spaniards do and enjoy an afternoon of *migas con*

chocolate (fried breadcrumbs with chocolate) at the classic Hostelería del Estudiante (Migas to compare, page 61). Also have a peek across the street at the impressive and innovative Parador (Spanish heritage hotels, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 69) that opened last October. With its intricate rooftop garden, it represents a great architectural feat (the model was shown at the MOMA in New York in 2006) and it epitomizes Alcalá's



Patio at the Colegio Mayor San Ildefonso

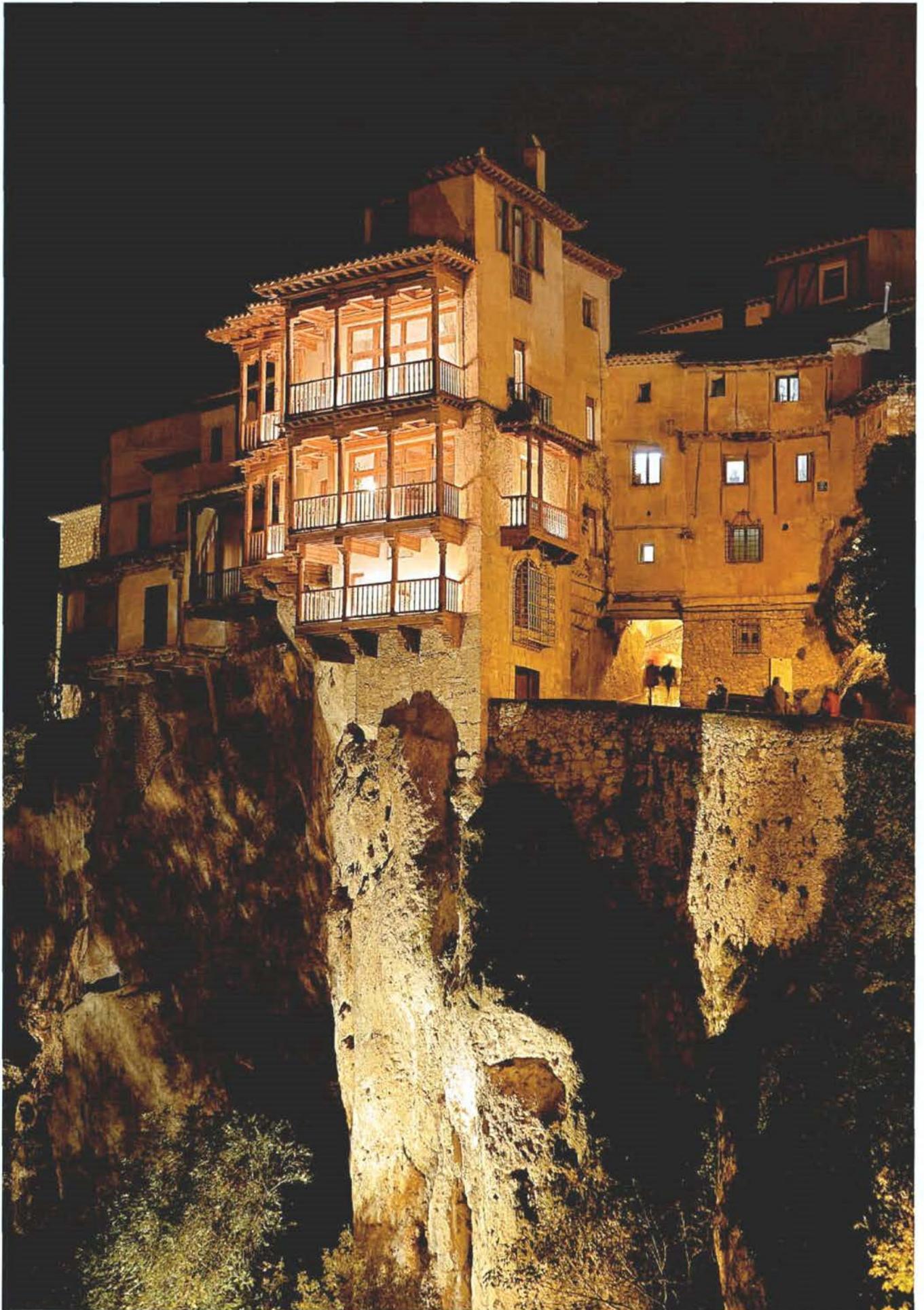


symbiosis between old and new. It is also a valuable asset to a city that is so effectively bringing the past into the future.

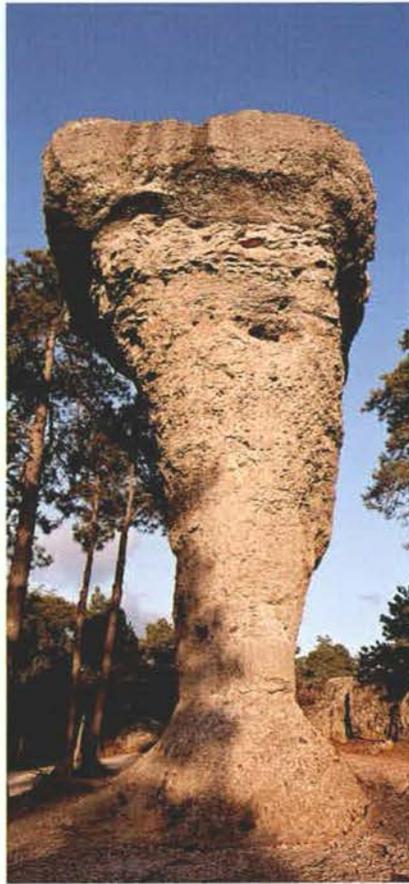
Through sunflower fields and canyons

The journey to Cuenca, our next World Heritage treasure, takes us along route N-320 through the region of La Alcarria, famous for its prestigious





Museum of Abstract Art



Enchanted City

PDO Miel de la Alcarria honey, which can be found in any of the charming villages along the highway. Crossing a picturesque rural landscape covered with wide expanses of bright yellow sunflowers and bordering the edge of the Serranía de Cuenca, we are gradually prepared for what is yet to come.

If you have the time, a great alternative is to make a detour along the Wicker Route (a longstanding, but dwindling handcraft) into the Serranía, with its breathtaking *hoces* (steep canyons flanked by spectacular rock formations carved out by rivers now far below), abundant wildlife, rich flora (including wild orchids, a wealth of mushrooms and splendid fall foliage) and springs producing famous mineral waters. Solan de Cabras, which is especially well-known, comes in attractive blue designer bottles and, while already popular in Spain, they increasingly adorn restaurant tables throughout the world. It is also a paradise for nature sports, and its *vias ferratas* (ironways for climbers) are considered among the best in Europe. Just before arriving at

the capital of Cuenca, this loop culminates in *La Ciudad Encantada* (the Enchanted City) where erosion has shaped the *hoces* into genuine sculptures which vividly arouse the visitor's imagination.

Inevitably, one's first impression upon reaching Cuenca is disbelief: is this real or is it an illusion? Reminiscent of Breughel's *Tower of Babel*, embraced on either side by the Júcar and Huécar Rivers and perched high up against the rugged *hoces*, the city looks allegorical. Indeed Cuenca is first and foremost the city of the *Casas Colgadas* (Hanging Houses). This seemingly inexplicable wonder of popular architecture, veritable skyscrapers of up to 12 stories, fully blends in with its most peculiar natural setting and never fails to fascinate. It clearly constituted the primary precept to the designation of Cuenca as a World Heritage city in 1996. Here, too, this status has made a difference. Cuenca-based Marian Revuelta, the global coordinator for tourism at the recently-established Group of World Heritage Cities in Spain, explains that in

addition to new tourists coming to visit specifically for this reason, it has also stimulated support for new development policies, and funds have been made available for promotional campaigns.

Acting as a perfect natural defense system, Cuenca's tall ridges were first turned into a fortress by the Moors. Once recaptured and much less exposed to invasions, the city expanded and gradually became a flourishing center of textile manufacturers, especially the famous Cuenca tapestries and carpets. From this period, and alongside the vertigo-producing popular architecture, an important number of noble houses have been preserved.

One of the world's loveliest museums

That's how James Michener (American Pulitzer Prize-Winning Novelist, 1907-1997) described Cuenca's Museum of Abstract Art when Fernando Zóbel took him for a visit just after it had opened. Indeed, a sea change came in



Museum of Abstract Art



Antonio Saura Foundation

the 1970s thanks to Zóbel, an artist and art collector. At the instigation of Gustavo Torner, an artist from Cuenca whose work was already being shown in collections in Europe and the US, he found in the *Casas Colgadas* of Cuenca the long sought-after home for his fascinating private collection. The museum opened in 1966 and soon turned into a center of cult in the contemporary art world. Many artists flocked from their hubs in Paris and New York, and the likes of Rueda, Millares, and Saura, among others, effectively lent their support and took up residence, thereby contributing to the gradual rehabilitation of some of the houses in decay. Their presence also had a symbolic value, as their abstract work centered attention on a country, still thoroughly turned inward and anchored in tradition, as it opened up to modernity.

The museum's different levels, narrow winding stairs, irregular spaces and little nooks confer it a sort of domestic intimacy, which, together with the fabulous views over the hoces and the Parador across the precipice, propitiate a serene and personal relationship with the invaluable yet small number of works on display. This contemporary art collection, now donated to and managed by the prestigious Juan March Foundation, is one of the largest in Spain.

True nirvana

Then, in 1998, the Antonio Pérez Foundation opened its doors in the beautifully rehabilitated Carmelite Convent. This is the perfect place to go

WINES TO BE WATCHED

In the south of Cuenca lies the area called Ribera del Júcar, hugging the river of the same name. In 2003, a group of five cooperatives and two private bodegas covering an area of some 9,000 ha (22,239 acres) obtained their Designation of Origen Ribera del Júcar status (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73). Juancho Villahermosa, Director of the Regulatory Council, explains that the area has an output of some 28 million l of wine, of which only the top million goes towards the production of DO wines. After thorough restructuring, today not only autochthonous varieties like Tempranillo and Bobal are carefully grown and vinified, but Cabernet, Syrah, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, etc. are too. The recovery of the traditional small grain muscatel, now used to produce

interesting monovarietal dry white wines or sweet dessert wines like Lágrimas de Casa Gualda from a 50-year-old cooperative in Pozoamargo deserves a special mention. Its Petit Verdot and Bobal coupage were recently rated 90 by Robert Parker. And that's also the score the Adar 2005 kosher wine from Bodegas Illana received on Stephen Tanzer's list. Another outstanding product is an increasingly exported ecological red coupage, exclusively from Bodegas La Morenilla.

One thing is sure: good things are happening at the banks of the Júcar and its wines are to be closely watched.



Cuenca's Cathedral Square

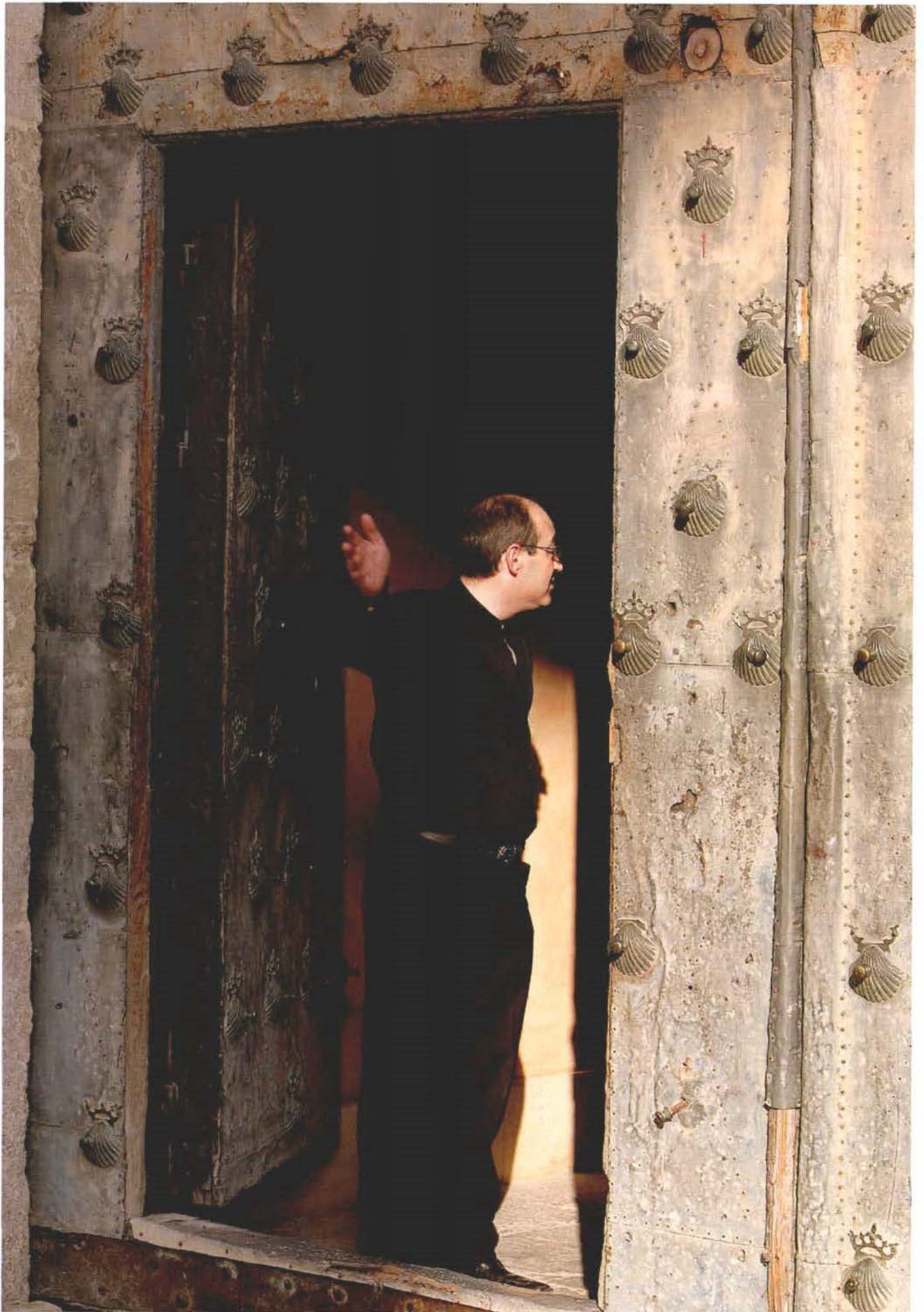
when you are in a bad mood; within the first few minutes, your spirits will be lifted. You will feel like Antonio in Wonderland, where his magnificent contemporary art collection is interspersed with his own work, an inspiring and smile-provoking project called *Found Objects*.

The latest addition to this nirvana for contemporary art lovers, and for those who on their way to becoming ones, is Espacio Torner in the Iglesia de San Pablo next to the Parador, which offers gorgeous views of the city. And don't miss the Antonio Saura Foundation, housed in Casa Zavala, originally home to the now deceased painter, and looking out over the other side of town on the Hoz del Júcar.

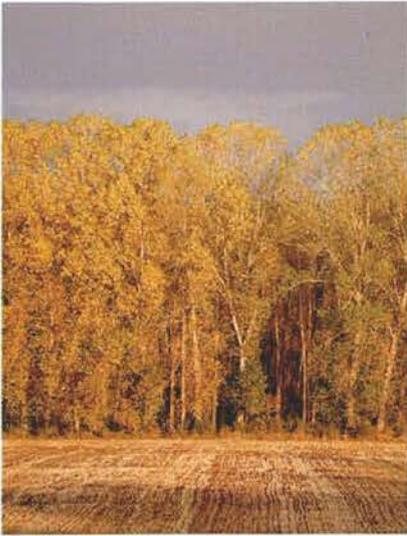
Imagine all of this being set in a place that has changed little in over 400

years. Marta Tirado, Provincial Director General for Tourism, explains that considerable rehabilitation and restructuring projects have been carried out and are still under way in an ongoing effort to preserve, improve and further dynamize the city, further boosted by Cuenca's candidacy as Cultural Capital of Europe, for which it competes with Alcalá. The original *rondas*, for example, have been fully recovered. These walkways offer spectacular views of both canyons, connected by the emblematic San Pablo footbridge, and they set the stage for a pleasant stroll through the narrow, sloping streets and the Plaza Mayor. You can stop at the many monuments and places of interest, including small shops like Jesús Parra's ceramics store, where his wife Julia

sells the products that Parra makes at his pottery workshop in Priego (on the Wicker Route), keeping with the family tradition. Or swing by El Convento, a small charming food store that sells local and regional specialties such as *Torta de Alajú*, a flat round honey and almond based sweet bread. In addition to the aforementioned modern art venues and the Casas Colgadas, there is the early-gothic, several times rehabilitated Cathedral and its adjacent Diocesan Museum, the Town Hall, the outstanding Torre de Mangana with its clock and regularly tolling bells, and the Archaeological Museum, among other sites. And last but not least is the Posada San José, an officially protected building and longtime hallmark of Cuenca. Dating from the 17th century, this school for



Episcopal Seat



the San Jose choirboys later became the home of Velázquez's (1599-1660) son-in-law, the painter Martínez del Mazo (1612-1667). Today, Jennifer Morter and her husband Antonio Cortina have just celebrated their 25th anniversary running the place; now it is a charming hotel featured in *Rusticae*, a great source for hotels with flair in Spain. Jenny doesn't like the word "austere"; what really applies here is "genuine." The rooms, which differ in both size and distribution throughout all four floors, are decorated distinctly, but simply and with lovely details; some have small terraces, and the majority offer views of which one will never tire. The dining room is lively and offers excellent cuisine, which is unsurprisingly simple and genuine, courtesy of their youngest son.

And the magic goes on

It is in this stimulating scenario that other cultural initiatives have definitely added to Cuenca's international prestige. Created in 1962, its Religious Music Week had already found a niche in this rather specialized area, and concerts were mainly performed in local churches. However, as explained by Javier Ávila, the passionate President of its Board of Trustees and President of the Provincial Delegation

C A S T I L I A N B O N A N Z A

Angel and his brother Rafael opened La Ponderosa over 25 years ago when the TV series *Bonanza* was very popular in Spain. Since then, together with their wives, who take turns in the kitchen, they have served essential regional dishes using only top-quality products and treating them with utmost care. Try, for example, the typical *ajoarriero* (a creamy paste made with garlic, salt cod and mashed potatoes), *morteruelo* (a fine ragout of hare, partridge, rabbit,

ham, liver and rustic bread), or their stellar dish, *perdiz en escabeche* (partridge pickled in their cooking juices with vinegar and flavoring).

Four years ago they started up a small canning industry. Their products can now be found in many top-of-the-line stores and no less than five of them are featured in Garcia Santos' annual publication *Best of Gastronomy*. Exports are taking off slowly; "It's the price," says Angel, "but what can I do? The best ingredients are expensive," and that includes exclusive mineral water from Solan de Cabras.





Enchanted City

of Cuenca, a great impulse came in 1994 with the inauguration of the spectacular new auditorium. One of the star performances of 2008 was Bach's *Passion according to Saint John*, by the famed English Soloists Ensemble and the Monteverdi Choir, conducted by Sir John Eliot Gardiner. A more recent contribution came in 2006 in the form of the International Film Festival called *Mujeres en Dirección* (Women Directing). "Surprising things have already happened," says Javier, its original organizer, amused. Two films first featured here won first prize at the Sundance Festival and an Oscar nomination for best foreign language movie in 2007, respectively. Not a bad start.

And of course, here in Cuenca, as in Alcalá, there are numerous popular festivals, particularly the widely recognized and officially protected Holy Week celebrations that draw large crowds.

But man does not live on culture alone, so leaving Cuenca without having visited La Ponderosa would be a serious omission. Located in a small cul-de-sac on Calle San Francisco right next to the majestic Provincial Delegation Offices is a gastronomic haven for those with a penchant for simple and authentic top-class food, even if they have to eat standing up. "There's a Dutch couple that returns to Cuenca every year for ten days," says its co-owner Angel, "and they come over for lunch and/or dinner practically every day" (Castilian bonanza, page 69).

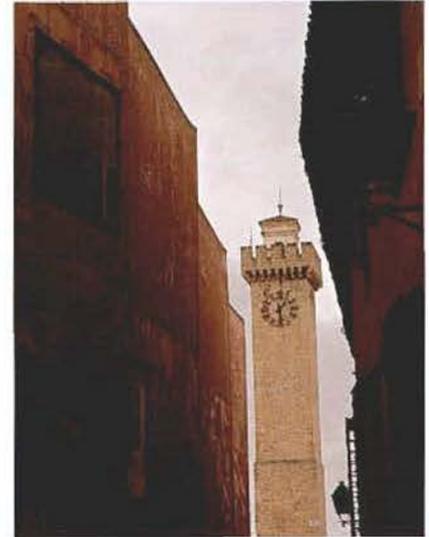
Closing the loop

We can now either take the highway directly back to Madrid or, like modern-day Quixotes, we can drive through what gradually becomes the typical landscape of La Mancha, with gently sloping grain and sunflower fields and vast vineyards, and we can

make short detours in this area south of Cuenca specked with small villages and castles, idyllic churches and typical windmills. A curious place to visit is pretty Villanueva de La Jara, where, just outside the village, carved into the rust-red soil, we can still find former mushroom caves where the lucrative cultivation of "white gold" started some 50 years ago. "Although conditions in the caves were optimal," explains Joaquín Peraile, whose family runs a local canning industry, "there was neither electricity nor water." Operations have therefore been moved to technologically updated facilities and today the area, which produces some 50 million kg (110,231,131 lb) a year, is Spain's largest cultured white mushroom producer. About 30% of it is canned and the remainder is sold fresh. Of Joaquín's total production, about 90% goes to the hotel and restaurant business in Spain, but the company is taking its first steps towards exporting.



Cathedral



From here it is worth making the short drive through the DO Ribera del Júcar (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73) vineyards (*Wines to be watched*, page 66) to the village of Las Pedroñeras, not only because it holds the first garlic Protected Geographic Indication for its wonderfully flavorful purple bulbs, but foremost because stopping here will put the final touch on this rewarding trip with a meal at Manuel de la Osa's

widely-praised one-Michelin-star restaurant, Las Rejas (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 47). Here you will be treated like Don Quijote, but you are expected to bring Sancho Panza's appetite. From here your very own Rocinante will take you on the new highway back to Madrid in about an hour.

Now wouldn't it be great to have been living in the right place at the right time? To have been in Alcalá during

the Golden Age and to have become imbued with the spirit of learning and literary achievement, or in Cuenca in the 1970s, and have been part of this circle of young, active vanguard artists. While that will remain wishful thinking, this trip demonstrates that World Heritage cities are far more than beautiful monumental sites, often in splendid natural settings. They transmit the spirit of what once was, and what can still be captured today and in the future, thanks to combined efforts to preserve this invaluable heritage that we can all share in together.

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





CHEESES



Quintessential
Flavors

A Soft Touch

Spain has quite a catalogue of soft cheeses, some made from raw and others from pasteurized milk. They come lightweight and smooth-tasting, like PDO Cebreiro; full of flavor, like PDO Torta del Casar and PDO Queso de la Serena; gooey, like PDO Queso Tetilla and in any of the various versions of PDO Afuega'l Pitu... The repertoire is wide, varied and exciting.

TEXT
ISMAEL DÍAZ YUBERO/©ICEX

PHOTOS
FERNANDO MADARIAGA/©ICEX

TRANSLATION
HAWYS PRITCHARD/©ICEX



The earliest history of the Mediterranean Basin countries offers many references to cheese as a food. At later periods, it is mentioned as a product in the contexts of trade, production, industrialization, monetary value, and so on. Its historical importance has been reinforced by the fact that the elements used in its manufacture are resistant to the passage of time and are therefore often turned up during archaeological digs. The frequent references to cheese in mythology (Amalthea, Polyphemus), literature (Virgil, Pliny, Apicius) and history (the diet of Roman legionnaires, cheesemaking in monasteries, donations of food to pilgrims, for example) make it clear that cheese has been a significant foodstuff since the dawn of time. That cheese should be important in Spain is unsurprising given the ancestral presence here of the species (cows, sheep and goats) that provide

its raw material. Furthermore, the species in question are represented by very diverse breeds, all with their own idiosyncrasies as to what time of year they produce milk, and the characteristics of that milk. Then there are the varied terrains, assorted microclimates (and, by extension, pasturage), different techniques (bequeathed by the traditional practice of transhumance), not to mention the cultural input contributed by all the people that have passed through the Peninsula over the course of its history... These all help explain the existence of so much variety among Spanish cheeses.

The earliest cookbooks

The earliest cheeses were made to be consumed immediately, or within a few days at most: ambient conditions were only minimally controllable and it was

difficult to keep things edible for long. Cheese was both a dish in itself and an ingredient in many other dishes, as we learn from early works of Spanish literature. *El libro del buen amor* (The Book of Good Love) by early 14th-century poet Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, recommends a dish called *Torta de habas frescas* (Fresh broad bean flat cake) made by cooking the beans in milk, and then mixing them with cut up pork and very finely chopped fresh cheese. Mid-15th-century author Ruperto de Nola uses fresh cheese in many of the recipes featured in his cookbook *Libro de cozina*. Among the most interesting are *Almodrote que es caprotada* (Chicken with cheese sauce and bread) which he suggests should be made with light Aragón cheese; an onion stew known as *cebollada*; *Rebanadas o tajadas de queso que es fruta de sartén* (Fried slices or chunks of cheese); and *Potaje dicho morteruelo* (spiced game stew, still made today).



Francisco Martínez Montañón, Marqués de Villena, (chef to the Royal Household in the early 17th century) recommends the use of fresh cheese for his *Cazuela de natas* (creamy casserole) recipe, adding “and should you be unable to find it, use the freshest you can find, and made not with rennet but with cardoon flower.” Juan de Altimiras (pseudonym of Franciscan monk Fr.

Raimundo Gómez, late 17th century-1769), who gives a recipe for making curd cheese, is another of the many authors throughout history who have given widely varying examples of the use of cheese in cooking. And they are still at it today: Ferran Adrià’s *Piruletas de queso* (cheese lollipops) and Toño Pérez’s *Secreto de ibérico con DOP Torta del Casar* (Ibérico pork fillet with PDO

Torta del Casar cheese) are fantastically cutting-edge.

The range of soft cheeses

Cheesemaking manuals vary considerably in their way of classifying cheeses: grouping can be based on rind type (invaded by molds or washed); on whether or not protein-breaking enzymes are at work within the curd (these function best when it is only mildly acidic); and also on the predominant pattern of maturation, namely “from outside inwards” or “from inside outwards”. However, to be able to include all the Spanish cheeses within this complex group, it is more useful to focus on why their paste is soft-textured when they reach the consumer. There can be various reasons for this: there is no time for them to solidify because they are eaten very fresh (fresh cheeses); the



CEBREIRO

Region: Galicia

Milk: Rubia Gallega, Alpine Brown and Friesian cows

Shape: likened to a chef’s hat or a giant mushroom

Size: 275 g to 2 kg / 10 oz to 4 1/2 lb

Organoleptic properties: metallic touches, slightly acidic taste and strong smell



hardening process has been slowed down or prevented altogether (matured soft-textured cheeses); vigorous proteolysis (breaking down of proteins) has been triggered, causing the cheeses to spread and flatten out (*torta*, or disc-shaped, cheeses); or the already solidified cheese has been re-fermented with the aid of milk, fresh rennet or distilled liquor, in particular environmental conditions (Re-fermented cheeses, page 79).

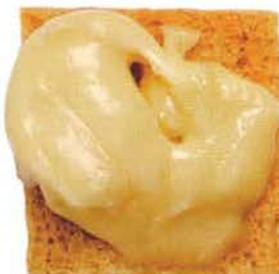
FRESH CHEESES WITH PDO

These cheeses are made with sheep's, cows' or goats' milk, or a mixture of milks. In some cases, sheep's milk has been totally or partially replaced by cows' because industrial cheesemakers prefer to use it in hard cheeses intended for long maturation. The fact

that current taste inclines more towards milder-flavored cheeses has also been influential. Certain cheeses in this group are, almost exclusively, eaten freshly made, although at times of year when the animals give birth and milk production peaks, some are set aside and left to mature.

Cebreiro

This Galician mountain cheese is made from milk obtained from Rubia Gallega, Alpine Brown and Friesian cows. Goats' milk is sometimes included in spring, when kids are being born, but as the regional herd is small and the



ARZÚA-ULLOA

Region: Galicia

Milk: Rubia Gallega, Alpine Brown and Friesian cows

Shape: cylindrical with rounded edges

Size: around 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb

Organoleptic properties: oozes pleasantly in the mouth, with a smooth flavor and a good, quite forcible aroma

THE FULL RANGE OF SOFT-TEXTURED MATURE CHEESES

production period short, it is almost always made entirely of cows' milk. The maturation period, which is tending to get shorter, lasts around 10 days, meaning that nowadays these cheeses are nearly always eaten fresh and soft-textured. They have no rind, although in more mature cheeses, a thin coating is just about discernible encasing the soft, oozy smooth, slightly granular paste. Among PDO Cebreiro cheese's idiosyncratic features are the metallic edge to its slightly acidic taste, and a strong smell, while its shape—variously likened to a chef's hat or giant mushroom and created by the paste overflowing its mold during pressing—is unique among cheeses. All in all, PDO Cebreiro could not be described as run-of-the-mill. It shows its gastronomic credentials to full advantage when mixed with a little butter and spread on rye bread, with a glass of DO Ribeiro wine (another Galician specialty) on the side.

MATURED SOFT CHEESES WITH PDO

These are cheeses that have matured to some degree without being allowed to become firm. To achieve this, the curds

El Til-lers is an interesting cheese, known by the name of the company that makes it in Sort (Lleida province). When its rind is covered in white molds, it looks rather like a Camembert or Brie, but when treated with salt and yeasts, it turns a reddish color reminiscent of Livarot, which it also resembles organoleptically. Small and cylindrical, each cheese weighs around 200 g (7 oz).

The Pas Valley in Cantabria has a long tradition of producing a cheese known as Pasiago, historically a prime feature at rural markets. It can still be found in local and regional markets, sometimes crossing the borders into northern Castile and the Basque Country. Its flattened cylinder, disc-like shape is broad based and can vary in height, though it is always much wider than it is high. There are two versions of it: unpressed Pasiago, which is fresh and intended for immediate consumption, and pressed Pasiago, which is matured for barely two weeks, during which time the rind appears, albeit vestigial and slightly moldy and sticky. The flavor is buttery, like fermented cream, and it is either eaten fresh or used for making the famous local dessert *quesadas pasiegas* (cakes made with fresh cheese, eggs, flour, sugar, butter, lemon and cinnamon). The variant on this cheese made in Ampuero, known as Las Garmillas, is held in justifiably high esteem by cheese connoisseurs despite the fact that its fragility is something of a commercial handicap.

The Babia and Laciana Valleys, in the south face of the Cantabrian Mountain chain in northern León, are the source

of a traditional cheese whose production area now extends as far as El Bierzo, on the border with Galicia. This is a goats' milk cheese, for the most part lactically coagulated though nowadays helped along by rennet. These cheeses used to be put in canvas bags to drain off the whey, and they also acquired their cylindrical shape in the process. Nowadays, perforated molds combined with slight pressure are used for shaping and draining. The rind is slightly moldy and the paste very buttery, flavorful and slightly acidic, with hints of cereals and mushrooms. Literary references dating from the late 17th century speak highly of it as an *asadero* (an old term referring to cooking cheese on the griddle), a guise in which it still appears—fried and in batter—in the cuisine of El Bierzo as something of a specialty.



are not pressed, or if they are then only gently, so that they retain some whey; this is what will give the cheese its unctuous texture later on. Another necessity is that maturation should take place in an environment where the temperature is low and moisture levels are very high so that the rinds do not dry out.

These cheeses traditionally come from parts of the country with a reputation for their cows' milk (of which all are made).

Arzúa-Ulloa

These cheeses, made with pasteurized cows' milk, are matured for around

two weeks; some are ripened for longer periods, however (sometimes well over three months), and are considered a great delicacy. The yellowish rind is smooth and elastic, with discernibly present molds. The paste, which is soft and dotted with small eyes, oozes pleasantly in the mouth, releasing a delicate flavor and a good, quite forcible aroma. The cheeses are cylindrical with rounded edges, and generally weigh in at just under 1 kg (2 1/4 lb). They also come in a special edition, made from milk given by cows after eating turnip tops (as they do in late winter and early spring). The resultant "turnip top cheeses" still display all the qualities described above but become runnier almost to the point of liquefaction. Traditionally, this is signaled by presenting them within a plaited straw support. The characteristics of this variant can be attributed to the fact



QUESO TETILLA

Region: Galicia

Milk: Rubia Gallega, Alpine Brown and Friesian cows

Shape: convex, similar to a breast

Size: approximately 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb

Organoleptic properties: mild flavor with a delicately delicious aroma

that the flowering turnip stalks the cows eat encourage the activity of microbial flora whose intense proteolytic effect breaks the protein chains, as in Extremadura's flat disc cheeses. These are supremely smooth cheeses with a very pleasant, clean flavor. Their only drawback is that they do not travel well, with the result that they are sold and eaten only within the production area.

Queso Tetilla

This is another highly characteristic Galician cheese, though produced in smaller quantities than the previous one. It takes its name, which means "titty", from its breast-like shape topped by a little nipple. Measuring around 20 cm (8 in) across the base and 10 cm (4 in) in height, each cheese weighs around 1 kg (2 1/4 lb). The rind is smooth and so fine as to be barely distinguishable from the paste, which is soft and unperforated, or sometimes randomly dotted with eyes. Its very mild flavor reveals its qualities when it melts in the mouth, and the aroma is delicately delicious.

Afuega'l Pitu

PDO Afuega'l Pitu is an interesting cheese from Asturias. Its name refers to its curious property of adhering—although not unpleasantly—to the throat on the way down (*afuego* means "choking" and *pitu* means "throat" in Bable, the Asturian dialect).

In the old days, coagulation was left to natural acidification, a method that is still used, and made a feature by those who do, though it is gradually being ousted by the use of commercial rennet. PDO Afuega'l Pitu is a difficult cheese to classify because the method by which it is made qualifies it as a fresh cheese, a soft cheese, and even a hard cheese

depending on its stage of development. In shape, these cheeses are reminiscent of the cloth in which they are wrapped to help drain the whey off the curds, though increasingly they are made in molds, either bucket-shaped or cylindrical. Eduardo Méndez Riestra (Chairman of the Academia de la Gastronomía Asturiana) explains that

R E F E R M E N T E D C H E E S E S

These are fascinating ancestral cheeses, brought into being by a determination to salvage cheeses that had become inedibly hard. The secret is to create a second fermentation by adding milk, new rennet, liqueur or a mixture of these to the old cheese.

An example from the Basque Country is Gaztazra (the name means "old cheese" in Euskara), which uses past-it Idiazábal cheese as its point of departure. A similar technique is applied to Roncal cheese in northern Navarre, where the ingredients are mixed together in an earthenware vessel, kneaded, and left to rest. The resultant cheese—very piquant and strongly flavored—is eaten spread on bread and washed down with a glass of well-chilled *aguardiente* (marc) or *pacharán* (sloe liqueur).

Tupí cheese is made in the Catalan Pyrenees, particularly in the Arán Valley, using cheeses made from cows', sheeps' or goats' milk. These are broken up into small pieces and placed in an earthenware vessel (or *tupí*), where they are mixed with fresh rennet and, sometimes, a little aniseed liqueur or *aguardiente*. The resultant paste, which

is very strongly flavored, is spread on bread with the optional addition of mayonnaise, honey, jam or quince paste. It is sold in tubs.

La Armada cheese, from León, originally used to be made with colostrum, or "first milk", whose high protein content made the paste very crumbly and liable to crack, so that the cheeses aged very readily. Rather than waste them, they were mixed with fresh rennet and kneaded repeatedly, creating a creamy paste with a strong, very piquant flavor, known as Quemón. This tradition is still carried on today, though the basic cheese is now made from cows' milk, or a mixture of cows' and goats' milk.

In Asturias, they use the same method to make the most of Cabrales cheeses that have become too old, dry, or moldy. The final paste is known as Picañón, and the versions made in Océño, on the hillside beside the Cares River, and the in the Andara caves are spoken of with reverence by those in the know.



OTHER TRADITIONAL FRESH

Queso de Burgos

Queso de Burgos is a typical example of the way in which fresh cheeses acquire a particular identity. It is named after the big weekly market in Burgos at which all the area's producers used to converge to sell their wares. The fact that two very different breeds of sheep are raised in the region (Castellana to the south of the provincial capital and Churra to the north) is detectable in these cheeses' organoleptic properties, which vary according to where they come from. Another factor that contributes to differences among them is that the maturation period is often tailored to suit the producer or to fit in with the rhythm of attending the market. A prototypical Queso de Burgos would be made using fresh milk with the enzymatic aid of rennet. This cheese is eaten fresh, within 10 days of being made. Although it traditionally used to be made with sheeps' milk, it is now made with cows', which gives a white, soft paste cheese, cylindrical in shape and weighing around 1.5 kg (3 lb 5 oz). The flavor is very lactic, sweetish and smooth and varies noticeably as the pasture changes according to the season. The fact that it is very readily digestible makes it a favorite among people with digestive problems, and its low calorie content makes it the dieter's cheese of choice.

El Villalón or *pata de mulo*

This interesting cheese is similar in character to the previous one. It takes its name from Villalón de Campos, the town in Valladolid whose big market was once the commercial hub for all the region's cheeses. Villalón is made with very fresh milk; although historically this would have been sheeps' milk, it is made nowadays with cows', or sometimes a mixture of the two. It is minimally matured and is available for sale virtually as soon as it is made; consequently, its flavors are still very lactic, slightly salty and leave a sweetish aftertaste. Its shape, unique among Spanish cheeses, is the result of being wrapped in a cloth into a cylindrical shape. Dimensions can vary, but Villalón cheeses are generally around 40 cm (16 in) long and 12 cm (5 in) across—hence, presumably, its alternative name *pata de mulo* (mule's leg). They are occasionally matured for long periods.

Valencia's fresh cheeses

The Valencia region is home to small, fresh cheeses made primarily with cows' milk, although goats' and sheeps' milk are sometimes mixed in. These are smooth, lightweight cheeses whose flavor clearly communicates the type of milk from which they are made. Their highly characteristic shapes are often the source of the names



C H E E S E S

by which they are known: for example, the cylindrical shape and concave top of a Cassoleta cheese is suggestive of a cooking vessel. Cassoleta cheeses weigh under 100 g (3 1/2 oz) and are sweetish in flavor with an acidic zing. They are stored in brine, and therefore become saltier the longer they are kept before eating.

Servilleta cheeses owe their name to the cloth in which they are wrapped for shaping and draining off the whey, and which leaves its imprint on them. This cheese is eaten very fresh, to the extent that it often resembles junket, and its flavors and aromas are very milky. The cheeses usually weigh around 500 g (1 lb 2 oz) though they are occasionally made larger, particularly if they are going to be matured (as they occasionally are); they then resemble Mahón-Menorca cheeses (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 74) in both shape and flavor. Alicante cheese is also known as La Nucía, and although it is currently made throughout the province, it used to be made only in the town of La Nucía, on the Alicante coast. This is a bucket-shaped cheese, flattish with almost vertical sides, and rather cake-like in appearance. Its smooth, very lactic flavor makes it suitable for various dishes, but it is particularly good in salads.

Other fresh cheeses

Catalonia's Mató cheese belongs to this family. There is some confusion about how it should be categorized because it is sometimes confused with *requit*, which is a sort of cottage cheese. Mató is a fresh cheese whose shape, size and weight vary considerably depending on the vessel used to mold it. Though originally a goats' milk cheese, it is now made with cows' milk, and vegetable rennet has now been replaced by an industrial substitute. Its mild flavor, with just a slight acid edge and very little salt, is just right for the traditional combination of *mel i mató* (mató with honey), in which the sweet and lactic flavors contrast deliciously with each other. Other classic combinations are Mató with sugar or caramel, aniseed liqueur, and fortified Penedès or Priorato wine.

The Abredo quarter of Coaña (Asturias) produces a cheese that is very fresh, gooey, fatty and similar to set yoghurt in texture. On the east coast, near Llanes, they make a junket (known in Bable as *cuayau*) which, after a brief maturation period, takes on the name of its place of provenance. As the most productive places are Vidiago and Porrúa, these are the names by which it is generally known in the principality. The cheeses are cylindrical in shape and, although other characteristics may vary slightly, all share the same smooth, rather

fatty yet gelatinous paste, an absence of eyes, and a very fresh flavor.

Close to the border between Soria and La Rioja, two goats' cheeses are made that are very alike in shape because both are drained in little baskets which also serve as molds, leaving the imprint of the wicker of which they are woven. One of them comes from Cameros (La Rioja) and is usually sold fresh, unmatured and barely shaped, although a medium-cured version is now starting to appear. The other, from Soria, has a white, compact, eyeless paste whose slightly salty taste is dominated by goats' milk notes which themselves are influenced by where the animals have grazed, so that there is a very clear difference between cheeses made in spring and fall.

Málaga goats' cheese is generally eaten fresh, though some are allowed to mature, in which case the paste becomes hard. This is a big cheese, around 30-40 cm (12-16 in) across and 8 cm (3 in) high. The rind is striated and imprinted with the patterns of its braided esparto mold, and the paste dense, white and delicious. The first *Catálogo de quesos españoles* also included the very similar Queso de Cadiz; however, both these traditional artisan products are in the process of being replaced by new, modern cheeses. Packed with flavor and with the bonus of being made from top quality Payoya goats' milk, these are being very well received.





the cylindrical shape harks back to a period in history when flexible strips of dried chestnut wood were used to form them, creating the elongated cylinder still replicated today. One of the ways in which PDO Afuega'l Pitu is sold is freshly made, when it has no rind and consists of a creamy mass, generally eaten spread on bread. The flavor is acidic, pronounced and buttery on the palate. It also comes in another, briefly

fermented, variety; the action of certain molds turns this version an orangey color and it also loses its initial punch and some of its stickiness in the throat. Its evolving flavor develops greater complexity. The last variety takes its name from the part of Asturias where it was first made: *Pimentonado de Aramo* is a PDO Afuega'l Pitu made orange or red by the addition of *pimentón* (Spanish paprika), which also contributes

varying degrees of piquancy. The maturation period for these cheeses is variable, and their out-of-the-ordinary sensory qualities earn them a gourmet reputation.

Queso de L'Alt Urgell y La Cerdanya

This cows' milk cheese is made in Alt Urgell y La Cerdanya, the area of the Catalan Pyrenees where the provinces



AFUEGA'L PITU

Region: Asturias

Milk: Friesian and Asturian Valley cows

Shape: reminiscent of the cloth in which they are wrapped to help drain the whey, also shaped like a bucket or an elongated cylinder

Size: from 200 g to 600 g / 7 oz to 1 lb 5 oz

Organoleptic properties: acidic, pronounced and buttery on the palate



of Lleida and Girona meet. Flattish, wide-based and cylindrical in shape, each cheese weighs around 2.5 kg (5 lb 10 oz) and must undergo maturation for at least two weeks—a process that takes place in moisture and temperature conditions that make its orangey-red rind go sticky. The lightly pressed paste is white or ivory colored, soft-textured, creamy, smooth and pleasant, with a nicely balanced aroma. This is not a traditional cheese, but rather a recent addition to the repertoire, similar in character to certain French cheeses from across the border.

FLAT –TORTA– CHEESES WITH PDO

As they mature, all cheeses undergo certain biochemical processes in which their component substances (carbohydrates, proteins and fats) play a key role in changing their texture, flavor, aroma and color, and giving each its own specific character. In

effect, these processes have been harnessed to produce particular results.

However, results are not always predictable, and when a cheese's evolution diverges from the norm, its organoleptic properties will not be as expected. Certain cheeses said to share characteristics with Manchegos, such as those produced in the province of Cáceres, in the La Serena and Los Pedroches Valleys, and some other parts of Spain, used to be particularly prone to this syndrome. It took many years to understand fully a mysterious phenomenon that caused them sometimes to settle and spread into a *torta* (pancake, or flattened cylinder shape). Declared "spoiled" and therefore considered unsaleable, they were eaten up by shepherds, who would even hide them away to avoid being reprimanded by the estate owner. Ironically, it was an estate owner who eventually tasted one and not only enjoyed it, but actually issued instructions that when such cheeses

"occurred" they should be reserved for him. As word got round their reputation grew, yet it was not until 1969 that a description of *Torta del Casar* was included for the first time in the *Catálogo de quesos españoles* (Catalogue of Spanish Cheeses) published by Spain's Directorate General for Livestock. An earlier mention, by Gregorio Sánchez in 1791, of the fact that the cheeses of this area were acceptable currency for payment of taxes referred to its traditional ones, which were hard cheeses.

Not only did *Torta del Casar* cheeses become well-known and in demand, they went on to become something of a yardstick of quality. The cause of these occasional anomalies had formerly been variously attributed to: certain grazing areas; the fact that the milk had coagulated at the time of the full moon; genetic strains of sheep that were different from the rest, even within the native breeds; the use of cardoon flower coagulant; and so on...



While there might have been a grain of truth in all these theories, the real explanation was that when it rained a lot in spring (hence the observation that *tortas* occurred some years and not others), the abundance of moist pasturage this produced was populated by proteolytic microbial flora which contaminated the milk (which was always raw, never pasteurized).

Combined with the fact that the curds were only mildly acidic, having been coagulated with vegetable rennet, this fostered the microorganisms' characteristic casein chain-breaking effect, thereby creating the soft texture, and the aromas and flavors, so typical of these cheeses.

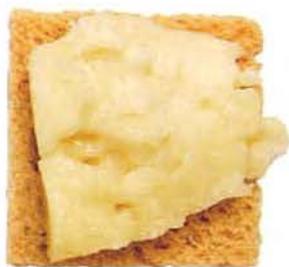
Thanks to the wonders of science, it proved possible to select proteolytic fermenting agents that could be perfectly controlled rather than being a contaminant, acidity levels in the paste could be kept low, and ripening

conditions could be managed. All in all, the process was thoroughly understood and its results could be replicated systematically.

Torta del Casar

El Casar, from which this cheese takes its name, is a little municipality not far from Cáceres. The cheese is also made

in the nearby villages of the Los Llanos district of the Sierra de Fuentes and in Montánchez. This is a region of short, mild winters and long, very hot summers—semi-steppe territory where pasturage is seasonal, in plentiful supply for only short periods that occur in spring and sometimes fall. The soil is sandy and granitic and



QUESO DE L'ALT URGELL Y LA Cerdanya

Region: Catalan Pyrenees, in the L'Alt Urgell y la Cerdanya district

Milk: Friesian cows

Shape: flattish, wide-based and cylindrical

Size: approximately 2.5 kg / 5 lb 10 oz

Organoleptic properties: creamy, smooth and pleasant, with a nicely balanced aroma



vegetation sparse but quite varied, and this contributes to the superb quality of the milk produced here.

These cheeses are made with raw milk obtained from Merino and Entrefina sheep, one of whose characteristics is that their milk yield is low but of top quality, being very rich in fats and proteins. *Cynara cardunculus* (cardo)

flower) is used as the coagulant, and the cheese is cured for at least two months. The rind, which sometimes splits open because of pressure from within as the paste increases in volume during maturation, is leathery and dull yellow or ochre in color. The paste is creamy, spreadable and eminently melt-in-the-mouth, revealing complex

aromas and a rich long-lasting taste with a very characteristic bitter edge.

Queso de la Serena

This is another modern cheese. Until a mere 25 years ago, the cheese produced in this eastern area of the province of Badajoz was a traditional hard cheese very similar to Manchego both in characteristics and in the way it was made. Technological progress turned what had been an occasional product into an ongoing one.

Gradually, all the local cheesemakers started making La Serena, popularly known as Torta de la Serena.

It is made with milk obtained from Merino sheep which graze on land of sharp slaty soil and typically spontaneous, endemic vegetation that varies greatly according to weather conditions. As a result, production is



TORTA DEL CASAR

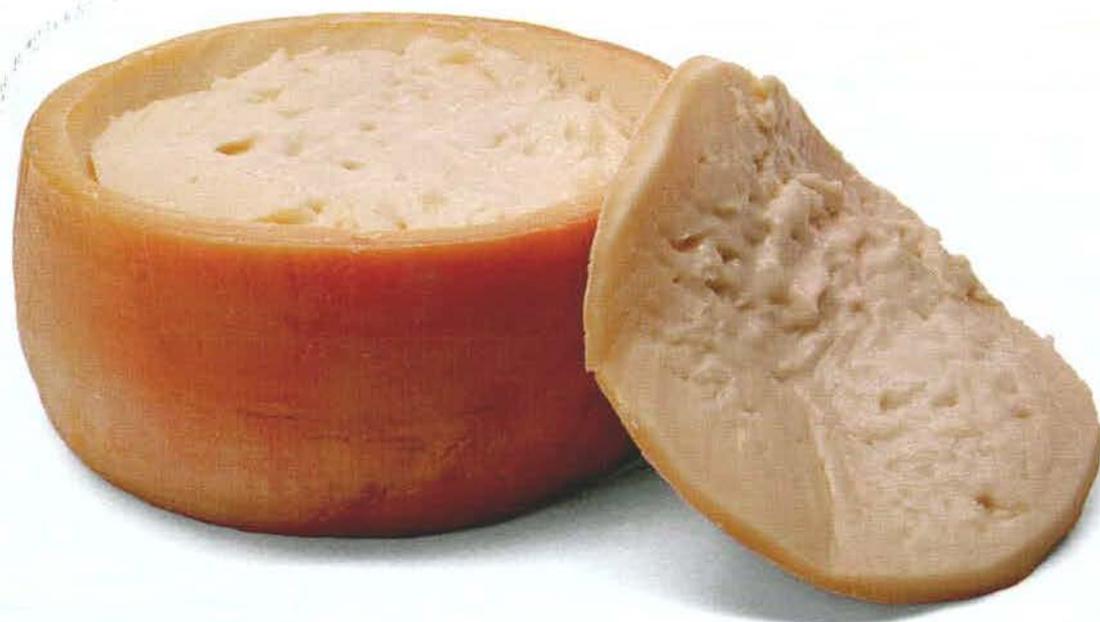
Region: Los Llanos district, Sierra de Fuentes and in Montánchez (Cáceres)

Milk: raw, from Merino and Entrefina sheep

Shape: cylindrical

Size: 500 g to 675 g / 1 lb 1 oz to 1 lb 8 oz

Organoleptic properties: cardoon flower used as coagulant. Creamy, spreadable paste. Complex aromas and a rich long-lasting taste, with a very characteristic bitter edge



concentrated in spring as it is closely associated with lambing. As in the previous case, the milk is very rich in nutrients and is set using cardoon flower, known locally as *yerbacuaajo*. Its maturation period is similar to that of the cheese described above, and its sensory characteristics are also very similar. However, there are appreciable differences between cheeses produced by different makers. Although conforming to type in general terms, the end result is influenced by various factors: how the milk is obtained, whether the products of different milkings are mixed, how much rennet is used, variations in temperature and duration of setting, draining off the whey, granule size, conditions in the maturation cellar, and so on. PDO *Torta del Casar* cheeses are enjoying such success that it is being replicated in other areas such as *Los Pedroches* (Córdoba) and *Tierra de Barros* (Badajoz), using sheeps' milk in both cases. In the *Montes de Toledo*

and *Seville's Sierra Norte*, interesting results are also being achieved with goats' milk, though the more complex structure of this type of milk makes the cheesemaking process less straightforward.

Ismael Díaz Yubero is a member of the Spanish Academy of Gastronomy and coordinator of the Ferran Adrià Chair of Gastronomic Culture and Food Sciences (Camilo José Cela University, Madrid). He has also occupied the posts of director-general of Spanish Food Policy, president of INDO, Spain's permanent representative at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and director-general of Food Safety and of the Spanish National Consumers' Institute.



QUESO DE LA SERENA

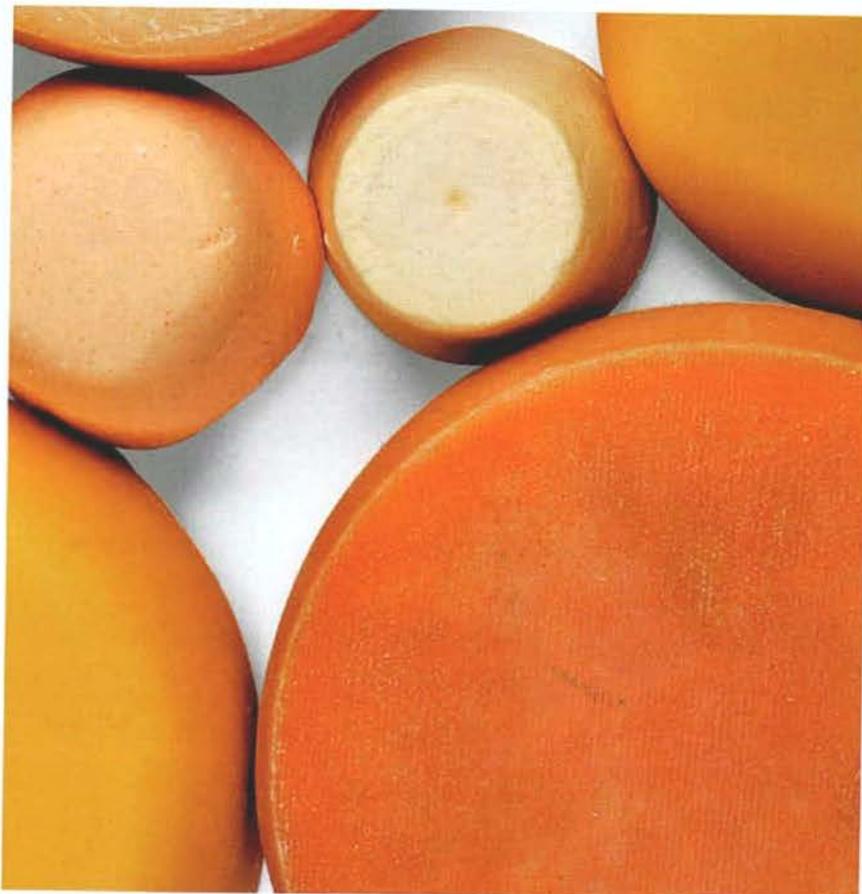
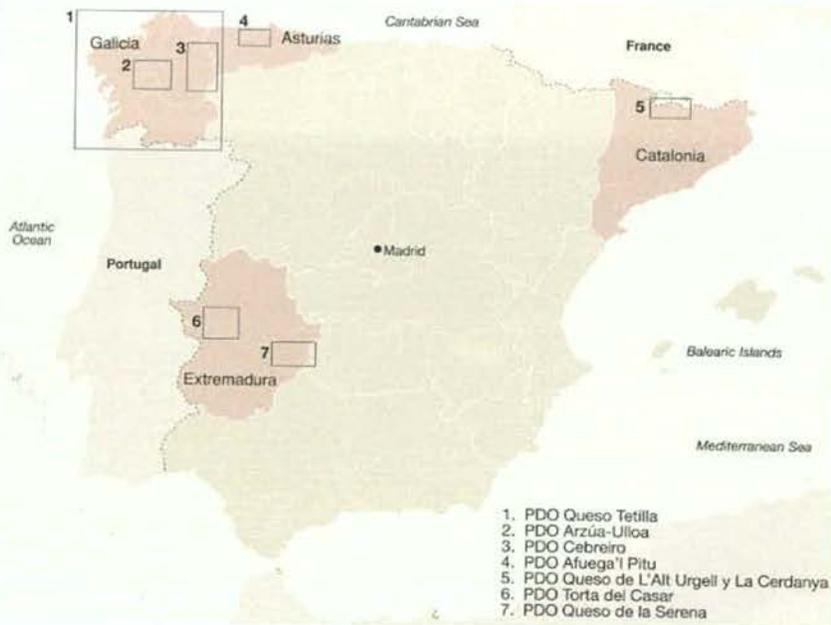
Region: La Serena (Badajoz)

Milk: Merino sheep

Shape: cylindrical

Size: from 750 g to 2 kg / 1 lb 10 oz to 4 1/2 lb

Organoleptic properties: cardoon flower used as coagulant. Properties vary depending on the cheesemaker, generally similar to *Torta del Casar*



WEBSITES

www.doafuegalpitu.org

PDO Afuega'l Pitu (Spanish)

www.mapa.es/es/alimentacion/pags/Denominacion/queso_lacteo/arzua_ulloa.htm

PDO Arzúa-Ulloa (Spanish)

www.cebreiro.es

PDO Cebreiro (Spanish)

www.mapa.es/es/alimentacion/pags/Denominacion/queso_lacteo/queso_alt_urgell.htm

PDO Queso de L'Alt Urgell y La Cerdanya (Spanish)

www.quesoserena.com

PDO Queso de la Serena (Spanish)

www.tortadelcasar.com

PDO Torta del Casar (English, French, German, Spanish)

www.queixotetilla.org

PDO Queso Tetilla (Spanish)



Introduction
Almudena Muyo/©ICEX

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

Photos, recipes
Toya Legido/©ICEX

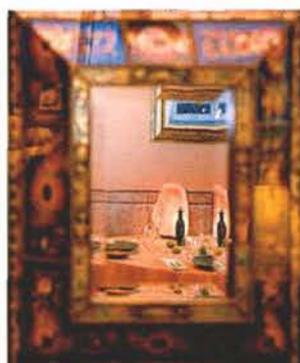
Photos, introduction
Tomás Zarza/©ICEX

Restaurante El Cingle
Plaza Mayor, s/n
08233 Vacarisses
(Barcelona)
Tel.: (+34) 938 280 233
www.elcingle.com
montse@elcingle.com

Restaurante
El Cingle

10 RECIPES

Cuisine based on sensations and essences, cuisine that's creative. These are some ways to describe the culinary skills of Montse Estruch, a woman with ideas who decided a number of years ago to devote herself to gastronomy. She took over an old, Mediterranean-style construction inland, very close to Montserrat mountain in the province of Barcelona, which belonged to her family. She named it El Cingle, after a nearby peak, and eventually won it a Michelin star. The keys to her career are respect for the traditions she inherited from her mother, the techniques she learned from experts such as Pierre Hermé, Ferran Adrià and Mey Hofman, and special dedication to top-class ingredients. The ultimate expression of her savoir-faire appears in her use of flowers and plant shoots. She now has her own kitchen garden at El Cingle, where she can pick pansies, nasturtiums, calendulas, begonias, rosemary, thyme... Initially, Montse used flowers to add a touch of color to her dishes, but she soon discovered they have surprising textures and flavors, so many of her creations now include edible sprouts, bulbs, petals and roots. The wines were chosen in collaboration with Fernando Riquelme, sommelier at El Cingle.



Feminine complexity, between the sea and flowers (Complejidad femenina entre el mar y las flores)

As I see it, this is a feminine dish, with subtle aromas and the perfume of flowers. We serve it as three dishes in one, or you could prepare and serve each fish on its own, increasing the quantities accordingly.

SERVES 4

For the sea bass: 50 g / 2 oz sea bass; 30 g / 1 oz strawberries; black pepper; butter; 300 ml / 1 1/4 cup strawberry pulp; 1 thin slice of strawberry.

For the sole: 50 g / 2 oz sole; 30 g / 1 oz banana; 30 g / 1 oz clarified butter; 5 g / 1 small tsp curry powder; 100 ml / 1/2 cup cream; 1 thin slice of banana.

For the red mullet: 50 g / 2 oz red mullet; 1 orange, peeled and in segments; juice of 1 orange; 25 ml / 2 tbsp coconut milk; 5 g / 1 small tsp dried orange peel; butter.

Others: salad shoots; escarole; basil; dianthus; calendula (pot marigold); pansy; baby mesclun leaves; violets; spring onion microgreens; nasturtiums; one mizuna leaf; Hawaii salt; extra virgin olive oil.

Using a very little oil in a frying pan, sear the three types of fish, skin side down first. Then turn and sear until thoroughly cooked. Set aside.

Sea bass

Liquidize the strawberries, strain and reduce in a small pan until syrupy in texture.

Sole

Brown the banana on both sides in the clarified butter. Keep the butter. Reduce the cream to sauce consistency, then add the curry powder. Mix well and set aside.

Red mullet

Slightly reduce the orange juice and add the coconut milk. Reduce until sauce consistency, then add the dried orange peel and set aside.

To serve

Plate the three fish into bite-size pieces, each with its accompaniments: the sea bass with a thin slice of strawberry, escarole, dianthus, basil microgreens and strawberry sauce; the sole with a thin slice of banana, baby mesclun leaves, violets, spring onion microgreens and curry sauce; and the red mullet with a large orange segment inside, together with the nasturtium, the mizuna leaf, basil, Hawaii salt and the coconut and orange sauce. Add a little extra virgin olive oil.

Preparation time

45 minutes

Cooking time

2 minutes

Recommended wine

Mysti 05 (DOCa Priorato, made from Garnacha, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon), by Celler Mas de les Pereres. This powerful, deep-colored wine, fruity in the mouth and with touches of oak is a delight for the taste buds and perfect to accompany this fish dish with its feminine touches.



Stuffed, fried zucchini flowers

(Flores de
calabacín
rellenas
y fritas)

The crisp texture of the fried flowers, especially with this filling, transports our senses directly to the peace and calm of the countryside.

SERVES 4

5 zucchini flowers (male), slightly open with a 3 cm / 1.2 in stem; sunflower oil; salad of seasonal green leaves and flowers.

For the filling: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz black and white Vacarisses butifarra sausage; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sweet Figueras onion; thyme; 15 g / 1 tbsp sugar; 50 ml / 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil.

For the batter: 400 ml / 1 3/4 cup water; 300 g / 10 1/2 oz flour; 6 g / 1/6 oz salt; 40 g / 1 1/2 oz yeast.

Clean the flowers.

Filling

Peel and sauté the black and white butifarra sausage together without adding seasoning. Confit the onion (starting with cold oil) with the sugar and the olive oil. Once any water has evaporated, add the thyme and season with salt.

Place the filling in a piping bag and fill the flowers halfway.



**Batter**

Mix the water, flour, salt and yeast and mix until smooth, then coat the zucchini flowers and fry in sunflower oil at 170°C / 338°F. Drain.

To serve

Serve hot with the seasonal greens and flowers (violets, nasturtium and begonia, etc.).

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

35 minutes

Recommended wine

Mas de Sant Iscle Picapoll, from bodegas Mas de Sant Iscle (DO Pla de Bages). This wine is made with 100% autochthonous Picapoll grapes and, with its strong floral bouquet, goes perfectly with this dish.



SERVES 4

For the tomato and rose jam:

100 g / 3 1/2 oz tomato jam; 2 sheets gelatin;
2 drops essence of rose; rose petals.

For the transparency of muscovado sugar:

1 1/4 1/4 cup syrup (1 1/4 1/4 cup water +
500 g / 1 lb 2 oz sugar); 8 sheets gelatin; 100
g / 3 1/2 oz muscovado sugar.

For the vanilla cream:

1 1/4 1/4 cup cream;
70 g / 3 oz sugar; 200 g / 7 oz egg yolks;
10 g / 1/3 oz gelatin; 2 vanilla pods.

For the foamed cream:

600 ml / 2 1/2 cup
cream; 30 g / 1 oz sugar; 10 g / 1/3 oz
lavender; 1 1/2 sheets gelatin.

For the strawberry granita: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz
strawberry purée; 500 ml / 2 1/6 cup syrup (1
1/4 1/4 cup water + 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz sugar).

For the strawberry velvet: 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb
strawberries; 200 g / 7 oz sugar; 100 ml / 1/2
cup water.

For the meringue: 90 g / 3 oz egg whites;
75 g / 3 oz sugar; 75 g / 3 oz superfine sugar;
1 sheet red coloring.

For the hibiscus soup: 1 1/4 1/4 cup
water; 60 g / 2 oz hibiscus; 80 g / 3 oz sugar;
3 sheets gelatin.



Hibiscus soup with letters

(Sopa de hibiscus y letras)

This dessert is out-of-the-ordinary, complete with letters spelling *flores*, the Spanish word for flowers, and strong but feminine aromas.

Tomato and rose jam

Chop the rose petals, add to the tomato jam and heat. Add the gelatin and rose essence. Stir and set aside.

Transparency of muscovado sugar

Soak the gelatin in cold water. Heat the syrup and mix in the muscovado sugar. Strain.

Vanilla cream

Bring the cream to a boil with the vanilla and leave to infuse. Mix the egg yolks with the sugar and beat until pale. Mix with the cream to form a custard, then add the softened gelatin.

Foamed cream

Mix the cream with the sugar and lavender and leave to infuse. Add the gelatin and strain. Chill for 12 hours, then beat until fluffy.

Strawberry granita

Mix the purée with the syrup. Freeze.

Strawberry velvet

Mix all the ingredients and place in a bain-marie.

Meringue

Beat the egg whites with the sugar, then add the superfine sugar and then the coloring. Gradually fold in using a spatula. Bake at 100°C / 212°F. Cut to form the letters of the word "flower".

Hibiscus soup

Infuse the hibiscus with the water for 4 minutes. Strain, stir in the sugar and, when dissolved, add the gelatin. Chill.

To serve

Plate the 6 elements (transparency of muscovado sugar, tomato and rose jam, vanilla cream, foamed cream, strawberry granita and strawberry velvet) forming a circle and top each with a meringue letter, forming the word *flores*. Serve the hibiscus soup separately.

Recommended wine

Cava Duc de Foix Reserva, by Viñedos y Bodegas Covides. A cava with personality, its aromas of ripe fruit, flowers and wood make it the ideal accompaniment for this creative dish. Its straw-yellow tone blends in with the predominant color of the ingredients.

The sweet world of roses

(El mundo de las rosas en dulce)

Subtle and smooth in the mouth, these small rose cakes with a rose cream are ideal as a summer dessert, served in the garden with a glass of chilled tea, or they could make breakfast or snack time into something really special.

SERVES 4

100 g / 3 1/2 oz flour; 6 g / 1/6 oz baking powder; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz butter; 2 eggs; 60 g / 2 oz sugar; 12 rose petals.

For the rose cremeux: 100 ml / 1/2 cup water; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sugar; 12 rose petals; 200 g / 7 oz rose jam; 2 g / 1/9 oz agar agar.

Beat the eggs with the sugar, and melt the butter and leave to cool.

Sift the flour with the baking powder and fold into the egg and sugar mixture. Then add the melted butter. Pour the mixture into small cake molds. Crush the rose petals with a little sugar in a mortar to form a creamy paste. Add to the mixture and bake at 180°C / 356°F for 5 to 7 minutes.

Rose cremeux

Prepare a syrup and add the rose petals. Bring to a boil and add the rose jam and the agar agar. Leave to cool. Blend to a fine purée.

To serve

Serve a line of little cakes together with the rose cremeux.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

30 minutes

Recommended wine

Hisenda Miret by Parès Baltà (DO Penedès), 100% Garnacha. This is an elegant wine which is sweet on the palate. Its aromatic complexity—with flowery fragrances, creamy notes and forest fruits—make it excellent company for this visit to the world of roses. The aftertaste is of spice and toast.



Garden of cheeses, flowers, herbs and pebbles

(Un jardín de quesos, flores, hierbas
 y piedras del camino)

My idea here is to form a garden of cheeses. As in any garden, it has flowers, grass and pebbles. And the aromas and flavors offer a little of everything—sweet, savory, bitter, dairy, piquant... If we close our eyes, this gastronomic stroll will lead us wherever we desire.

SERVES 4

BASE

For the sand: 600 g / 1 lb 5 oz softened butter (soften, but do not liquefy, by heating to no more than 30°C / 86°F); 60 g / 2 oz sugar; 60 g / 2 oz ground almonds; 240 g / 8 1/2 oz superfine sugar; 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz flour; 200 g / 7 oz egg yolk.

Gradually add the sugar, ground almonds, superfine sugar and flour to the butter. Then add the egg. Stir until smooth. Cook, then leave to cool, forming a cookie.

For the sand grains: 250 g / 9 oz cookie (see above); 250 g / 9 oz superfine sugar; 1 packet Fisherman's Friends lozenges; 25 g / 1 oz cocoa.

Blend the sugar with the lozenges in the Thermomix. Then do the same with the cookie, adding the cocoa. Sift.

For the cheeses: 80 g / 3 oz A Fuega'l Pitu; 80 g / 3 oz Arzúa-Ulloa; 80 g / 3 oz Cebreiro; 80 g / 3 oz Queso Tetilla.

PEBBLES

For the caramelized almonds: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz almonds, peeled and toasted; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sugar; 30 ml / 2 heaping tbsp water; 10 g / 1/3 oz butter; cooking chocolate; cocoa powder.

Make a syrup with the sugar and water. When thick, add the almonds and stir until well coated. Remove from the heat, add the butter and turn onto a silicone baking sheet.

When cold, coat the almonds with melted chocolate. Stir until cold, then gradually add cocoa powder, separating the almonds.

For the chocolate cremeux: 30 g / 1 oz white chocolate.

Freeze the white chocolate, then grate using the microplane. Set aside in the freezer.

For the chocolate algae: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Valrhona chocolate; superfine sugar.

Place plenty of superfine sugar on a tray. Place the melted chocolate in a piping bag and squeeze out into algae shapes onto the sugar. Chill in the freezer.

For the flower cake: 300 g / 10 1/2 oz egg; 180 g / 6 1/2 oz sugar; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz flour; 150 g / 5 1/2 oz cocoa; 60 g / 2 oz ground almonds; flower petals (pansy, rose, nasturtium, begonia and lavender).

Others: nasturtium and pansy flowers, pea and basil microgreens.

Beat the eggs with the sugar until light, sift the flour with the cocoa and fold in. Add the ground almonds and flower petals and transfer to molds. Bake at 180°C / 356°F for 30 minutes.

To serve

Make a base of "sand", top with the flower cake, the chocolate cremeux, caramelized almonds, white chocolate, chocolate algae, and flowers and salad shoots, and add the delicious cheese on top.

Preparation time

60 minutes

Cooking time

30 minutes

Recommended wine

Gramona Brut Imperial (50% Xarel-lo, 40% Macabeo, 10% Chardonnay), a classic, stylish cava. With its touches of apple, cookie, spice, flowers, sea breezes and nuts, it marries well with the varied flavors in this special garden.





Transparency of tomato,

Queso de la Serena, and herbs
and flowers on black bread

(Transparencia de tomate, Queso de la Serena,
hierbas y flores sobre pan negro)

This dish offers a colorful combination of flavors and colors on a bread base for a summer evening, or perhaps for a candlelit dinner in the right company, made special by the shimmer of gold.

SERVES 4

For the transparency of tomato: 6 beefheart tomatoes, weighing approximately 650 g / 1 lb 7 oz; 2 sprigs basil; 3 sheets gelatin; 10 ml / 2 tsp sherry vinegar; edible gold powder; 500 ml / 2 1/6 cups extra virgin olive oil; salt; white pepper; fleur de sel.

For the Queso de la Serena bars: 250 g / 9 oz Queso de la Serena; 0.100 g edible flowers; 0.050 g finely chopped chives; 40 g / 1 1/2 oz mizuna leaves.

For the black bread: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz flour; 30 g / 1 oz sugar; 20 g / 1 oz salt; 20 g / 1 oz fresh yeast; 120 ml / 1/2 cup water; 20 g / 1 oz squid ink.

Transparency of tomato

Soak the gelatin sheets in iced water, then strain.

Peel the tomatoes, then blend in the Thermomix. Add the basil leaves, extra virgin olive oil and sherry vinegar, season with salt and blend again. Strain. Heat and add the softened gelatin.

Pour the tomato mixture into a mold 1.5 cm / 3/4 in deep covered with plastic wrap. Shake gently until perfectly smooth. Chill. When set, cut into rectangles 10 cm / 4 in long, and set aside.

Queso de la Serena bars

On a sheet of plastic wrap, form bars of cheese 10 cm / 4 in long and 2 cm / 1 in high. Sprinkle with the petals, chives and mizuna leaves. Chill.

Black bread

Thoroughly mix the flour, salt and squid ink (just enough to make the mixture black) in the breadmaker. Add the yeast with the sugar and mix in. Gradually add the water until the mixture is smooth.

Sprinkle a flat pan with flour, add the dough and stretch into a rectangle with your fingers. Leave to rise, covered with a damp cloth to prevent a dry crust from forming. When risen, turn the dough onto a slightly deeper, floured pan and bake for 15 minutes at 170°C / 338°F until completely risen.

To serve

Cut a piece of black bread the same size as the tomato transparency and glaze with olive oil. Wrap the tomato transparency around the cheese bar and place on top of the black bread. Sprinkle with a little powdered gold, some extra virgin olive oil and fleur de sel.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

15 minutes for the bread.

Recommended wine

+7 (DOCa Priorato, made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Garnacha), by Bodegas Pinord. The complex fruity aromas with notes of jam and minerals and the red berry flavors with just a hint of smokiness make this the perfect partner for this cheese dish.

Herb salad with Queso Tetilla and tomato nectar, on aromatic earth

(Ensalada de hierbas con Queso Tetilla y nectar de tomate, en tierra aromática)

I always feel salads look their best served in a glass dish so that we can see all the different components and pick out whichever we like, separately or together. A good option is to use bamboo tongs. In this case, the salad comes with delicious white bread.

SERVES 4

For the herb salad: 200 g / 7 oz tomato nectar (see below); baby mesclun; red endive; basil; quince; violet jam; pumpkin seeds; Aragonese olives; pine nuts; strawberries; cranberries; figs; enokitake; a Jerusalem artichoke; thyme; seasonal flowers (nasturtium, begonia, pansy, lavender and dianthus).

For the aromatic earth: 300 g / 10 1/2 oz bread; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz smoked bacon; 5 g / 1 tsp powdered orange peel; 5 g / 1 tsp powdered juniper; 5 g / 1 tsp dried thyme; salt; pepper.

Others: 120 g / 4 oz Queso Tetilla; extra virgin olive oil; Modena vinegar.

HERB SALAD

To make 200 g / 7 oz of tomato nectar, take 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb of red plum tomatoes, blanch and then peel and seed.

Cook at a low flame with extra virgin olive oil, salt, pepper and thyme until the liquid has evaporated. Season with salt and crush, then strain and set aside.

Stone the olives and crush in the mortar with a little extra virgin olive oil and thyme.

The enokitake mushrooms should be washed and served raw, and the Jerusalem artichoke should be peeled, boiled and sautéed.

Aromatic earth

Break the bread into crumbs by hand, fry and drain off the oil. Push through a sieve.

Cut the smoked bacon into julienne strips and fry very slowly on its own until crisp. Drain, and when cold, crush and leave on a paper towel so that any remaining fat is absorbed. To make the powdered orange rind, place the rind in a syrup (from equal amounts of water and sugar), then dry it in the oven for about 6 hours at around 100°C / 212°F. Leave to cool, then grind and sieve.

Mix all the ingredients for the aromatic earth and place between two paper towels for any fat to be absorbed.

Queso Tetilla

Cut the cheese into small cubes to form the basis for the salad.

To serve

In a transparent dish, mix the salad ingredients, alternating the colors and sizes. Just before serving, dress with a mixture of olive oil and Modena vinegar.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

6 hours

Recommended wine

Emendis Trio 2007 (DO Penedès), by Masia Puigmoltó: 55% Chardonnay, 25% Macabeo and 20% Muscat. This wine's unusual aromatic touch of rosemary and menthol with a slightly sweet, almost caramelized fruitiness coming from the clay soils where the grapes grow brings us in line with this salad, filled with colors and flavors. The wine can be seen as one of the salad ingredients.





Trinxat from La Cerdanya

with Queso de L' Alt Urgell y La Cerdanya, pork belly confit, boletus and lemon thyme

(Trinxat de la Cerdanya con Queso de L' Alt Urgell y La Cerdanya, pancetta confitada, setas de La Cerdanya y tomillo limonero)

Trinxat is a typical dish from the Catalonian district of La Cerdanya (made of cabbage, potatoes, pork belly, garlic, olive oil and salt). The cheese, vegetables, pork and delicious mushrooms found in La Cerdanya give the characteristic aroma of this region, one that is well worth visiting for its idyllic and mysterious landscapes.

SERVES 4

For the trinxat: 2 potatoes; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz winter cabbage; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Queso de L'Alt Urgell y La Cerdanya; 50 ml / 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil; 1 clove garlic, chopped.

For the pork belly confit: 1 piece of pork belly, preferably from the top end; salt; pepper; thyme; sugar; extra virgin olive oil.

For the boletus: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz boletus, extra virgin olive oil; salt; white pepper.

Others: lemon thyme; extra virgin olive oil; fresh herbs.

Trinxat

Boil the potatoes and purée. Blanch

the cabbage. Fry the chopped garlic, add the cabbage mixed into the potato purée and the cheese. Season with salt. Just before serving, fry quickly to brown.

Pork belly confit

Marinate the pork for 24 hours. Place in a vacuum pack with the extra virgin olive oil, salt, pepper, thyme and a little sugar and steam for about 3 hours. When cold, cut wafer-thin slices using an electric slicer. Just before serving, sear in a frying pan until crisp and golden.

Boletus

Clean the mushrooms with a damp cloth and trim the bases. Lightly sauté in a non-stick pan with extra virgin olive oil, and season with salt and freshly ground white pepper.

To serve

Serve the wafer-thin slices of pork alongside the trinxat and top with the boletus mushrooms alternating with the fresh herbs. Add a little extra virgin olive oil and the lemon thyme.

Preparation time

45 minutes

Cooking time

30 minutes / 3 hours to confit the pork

Recommended wine

Gaintus, by Heretat Mont-Rubí, made 100% from Sumoll grapes, a native Catalonian variety. This wine gives a touch of style to this simple dish from La Cerdanya.

Pumpkin secret

with Torta del Casar cheese and meatballs

(Secreto de calabaza con queso Torta del Casar y albóndigas)

This dish takes me back to my childhood. Pumpkin is a wonderful product and I add my personal touch with the Torta del Casar cheese served in cubes. Another option would be to leave the cheese whole and serve it in spoonfuls with the beaten cream.

SERVES 4

For the pumpkin secret: 4 small pumpkins; 1 sweet onion; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz butter; 60 ml / 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil; salt; pepper; 2 sprigs fresh thyme; 50 ml / 4 tbsp cream; 6 lavender flowers; water; Maldon salt.

For the meatballs: 250 g / 9 oz of chopped, lean Ibérico pork; 150 g / 5 1/2 oz chopped chicken breast; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz chopped pork belly; 1 egg; garlic; parsley; 10 g / 1/3 oz salt; 2 g / 1/9 oz black pepper; 1 1/4 1/4 cup mineral water.

Others: 120 g / 4 oz Torta del Casar; 120 g / 4 oz toasted bread; Maldon salt.

Pumpkin secret

Empty out the pumpkins and discard the seeds. Cut the flesh into small pieces and set aside. Dry the pumpkin shells in the oven with a little water inside for 45 minutes at 100°C / 212°F and set aside.

Peel the onion and cut very finely. Sweat in a pan together with the pieces of pumpkin, the extra virgin olive oil, a little sugar and the butter. Season with salt and pepper, add the thyme and lavender flowers. Cover with water and simmer for about 30 minutes. Blend, strain and add salt to taste. Keep warm.

Just before serving, beat the cream until thick.

Meatballs

Mix all the ingredients, season with salt and pepper and form into small balls. Dip into flour and boil. Set aside.

Queso Torta del Casar

While cold, dice and set aside for adding to the cream at the last minute.

Croutons

Cut frozen slices of farmhouse bread into small cubes and sauté lightly in a non-stick pan with a little extra virgin olive oil. Set aside.

To serve

Fill the pumpkins with the cream of pumpkin, the small meatballs (6 per person), the cheese cubes, some beaten cream, a drop of extra virgin olive oil and a little Maldon salt. Serve the croutons separately, in small containers.

Preparation time

1 hour 15 minutes

Cooking time

60 minutes

Recommended wine

Perinet 2005 (DOCa Priorato), by Bodegas Mas Perinet (Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Garnacha). This intense, deep-red wine with fine, fruity aromas makes a delicious foil for the velvety pumpkin and the meatballs.





Sardines with rosemary in movement with Cebreiro cheese, red berries, figs and touches of green

(Sardinias al romero en movimiento con queso
Cebreiro, frutas rojas, higos y toques verdes)

Here we have simple sardines—but presented as if they were moving—dressed internally with a delicious filling of cheese, spinach and fruit. This is a versatile dish that can be used as a starter or an entrée, with 3 sardines per person, accompanied with a generous slice of rustic bread with fig jam. Totally delicious, and feminine.

SERVES 4

Ingredients: sardines; extra virgin olive oil; fleur de sel; salt; rosemary; red Ezpeleta pepper; white pepper; 200 g / 7 oz small spinach leaves; 4 cherries; 1 Granny Smith apple; 2 figs; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz Cebreiro cheese.

Wash the sardines and remove the scales. Remove the backbone but not the head or tail, leaving the fish whole. Marinate for 6 hours with the Ezpeleta pepper, extra virgin olive oil, salt, rosemary and freshly ground white pepper. Chill.

Wash the spinach and blanch for 2 minutes in boiling salted water. Refresh with ice, drain and press. Cut the fruit into small cubes. Blend the spinach leaves to a fine purée. Remove from the blender and add the cheese, fruit dice, 40 ml / 3 tbsp of extra virgin olive oil, and a pinch of salt and of white pepper. Chill.

Remove the sardines from the marinade and drain. Keep the marinade juices.

To serve

Place a spoonful of filling in the center of each sardine and gently shape them into circles, with the head meeting the tail. Use a spatula to smooth down the sides. Remove any surplus filling and brush the sardines with the marinade oil. Season with fleur de sel and serve very cold.

Preparation time

6 hours

Cooking time

5 minutes

Recommended wine

Rosat de Llàgrima 2007 (100% Merlot), by Mas Comtal. This wine offers an herbal nose—with touches of fennel and aniseed—and a sweetness reminiscent almost of balsamic strawberry candy. It's the perfect partner for this dish.

When fall arrives in mid-October, saffron-growers prepare for the tough job of harvesting the saffron flowers. Back in the 1920s, Spain produced over 100,000 kg (110 tonnes) of saffron, but today's growing area is a tiny part of what it was then, and production has shrunk accordingly. Even so, 90% of the world's trade in saffron is in the hands of Spanish companies.

VERDÚ CANTÓ SAFFRON SPAIN

Threads of Gold



For more than 100 years, saffron packers and distributors have been concentrated in the Alicante town of Novelda where, paradoxically, not a single saffron crocus is grown. This is the location of Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain, a name that bears great weight in its sector where it is considered a global leader. Towards the end of the 19th century, many of the poorer inhabitants of Novelda had to leave the town and look for a living elsewhere. José Verdú Cantó, the founder, started to buy saffron from growers in La Mancha and sell it in Alicante, where it was a popular condiment for rice dishes. Even then, he aimed to select

only the best saffron and pack it correctly, and that spirit remains in the company today after more than a century.

The Verdú Cantó family and heirs continued with the business, but decided that it wasn't enough to sell exclusively in Spain, so, in 1920 they began to sell their product abroad, establishing a branch in India and sending regular consignments to Japan, Sweden and Canada. Their foresight enabled them to lay the foundations of a company which today exports to 140 countries. After the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), when sales began their slow recovery, they

created two brands: Pote for the Spanish market, and Syren for export. Distinct and attractive packages were designed for both, with the aim of catching the eye of potential customers. In this, too, Verdú Cantó was ahead of its time with an effective, though small-scale, marketing campaign based on intuition. Subsequently, in 1980, the business was completely restructured, with the creation of one company for exports (Saffron Spain) and another to develop the domestic market (Sucesores de J. Verdú Cantó SL). New business schemes were drafted, and the company's capacity for buying during

TEXT
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PHOTOS
VERDÚ CANTÓ SAFFRON SPAIN

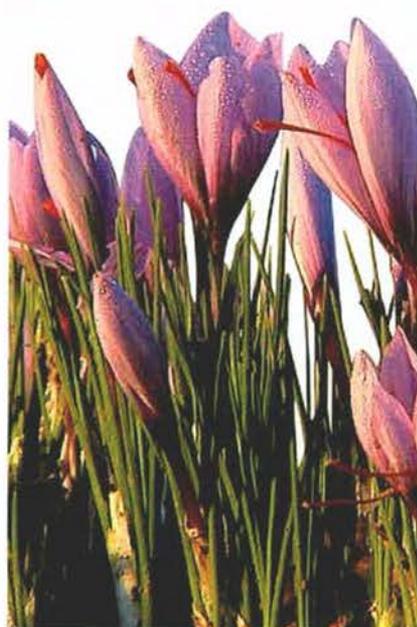
TRANSLATION
JENNY MCDONALD/©ICEX

the saffron harvest was stepped up with the aim of guaranteeing a stable supply to all markets at competitive prices.

World leaders

During the 1990s, the company, still a family concern, set up a strategic plan involving a change in the management team and the merger of the two companies into one new one: Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain. The goals were clear: to control and promote product quality, to foster biological and gastronomic research of saffron and to diversify exports.

Today, Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain sells 6,000 kg (6 tonnes) of saffron a year (in threads, crushed and powdered), of which 60% goes to international markets. This makes it the world's leading company in quantity and quality, with a consolidated distribution network in Europe, America and the Persian Gulf, the latter considered to be the most promising foreign market because of the volume and regularity of sales. "In all Arab countries," says Patrick de la Cueva, Manager of Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain, "the saffron culture has strong roots. We arrived in the Gulf at the right time, just when quality controls were being stepped up, and we were able to meet their



expectations. We're now reaping the rewards of many years of hard work, the advantage of having been pioneers. It's a stable, easily accessible market, unlike the US, where the distribution system is so complex that it's impossible to control your product all along the chain."

Azafrán de la Mancha, added value

A few years ago, Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain bought a small saffron plot certified by the PDO Azafrán de La Mancha Regulatory Council, from

which all the saffron is packed under the Zafferania brand, a label for gourmet markets the world over and one which gives added value to the company's international image. "The saffron business," explains De la Cueva, "has always been rather unique, so the company has had to be very adaptable and change in line with market demands. Our only commitment is quality, and we believe this is the only way to achieve credibility."

A total of 200,000 flowers are needed for 1 kg (2 1/4 lb) of saffron. The sky-high prices it fetches are not only due to the large numbers of threads needed, but also to the very difficult process involved.

Picking starts at dawn when the flowers open up, and must be completed before the heat withers them, and handling must be meticulous as the pistils lose their flavor if crushed. Having spent all morning in the fields, the afternoon is devoted to removing the stigmas from the flowers by hand, and the evening to drying them. The whole process has to take place in a single day to preserve the full aroma. Toasting uses large sieves over hot embers, with neither flames nor smoke. This is what sets the La Mancha saffron apart from others: in other countries the threads are dried in the sun, where they lose some of their aroma.



a research project on saffron which should soon be coming out in book form. "The idea is to rediscover saffron," affirms De la Cueva with enthusiasm. "We are trying to show that it's not as expensive as it might seem because you can get wonderful results with tiny amounts. This should help us strengthen markets that already consume saffron by opening up new sales channels. For example, in just two years, Italy has surpassed Spain in consumption. This scientific research, which goes together with development of saffron's culinary potential, should help consolidate the market. What makes our company different is that we're doing something no one else does. We're trying to determine the exact dose of saffron needed in different dishes. At the same time, we're working on solutions in water and fats, in stock, bread, egg, cream or syrup, and testing different preparations such as saffron honey, oil, salt, and butter. That's where the future lies, though it's still too early to see these things in the stores."

Other spices and seasonings

With the aim of diversifying their business and not depending solely on saffron, one year ago Verdú Cantó Saffron Spain created its Toque Especial brand, a line of seasonings that allows cooks to change the flavor

of simple dishes (pasta, rice, salads) just by adding herbs and spices. It's like a gastronomic tour of the world—from Provence to Mexico—in the form of 12 easily-recognizable flavors packed in attractive, user-friendly grinding mills. A total of 700,000 units have already been sold (10% was exported to the Persian Gulf, Mexico and Germany), and in 2008 they received the Product of the Year Award in the condiments category, granted by Spanish consumers. "We're especially proud of this," says De la Cueva. "The idea came from one of my trips aimed at gaining a global view of consumer tastes and discovering market niches. We have a sound distribution structure in Spain and abroad, so why limit it only to saffron? If we want to grow and improve, we have to take risks. That's been the philosophy of Verdú Cantó from the start, and we're convinced we're on the right path."

Julia Pérez is a food writer and has worked for over 15 years as the food and wine editor for several magazines including Mia Cocina, Vogue, Gala, Biba, and Elle. She writes regularly for the newspaper El Mundo and for the magazines Esquire, Spanorama and Vino+Gastronomía, as well as for other Spanish and foreign publications. She has published several books and restaurant guides and, in 2005, received the Spanish National Gastronomy Award for the best journalist.

VERDÚ CANTÓ SAFFRON SPAIN

Date of foundation: 1890
Activity: Packaging and sale of saffron and spices
Workforce: 32
Turnover for 2007: 7.5 million euros
Export quota: 55%
Main export markets: France, Persian Gulf, Sweden, United Kingdom.
Headquarters:
 Sargento Navarro, 7
 03660 Novelda (Alicante)
 Tel: (+34) 965 600 078
 www.saffron-spain.com



TEXT

ALMUDEÑA MUYO/©ICEX

ILLUSTRATIONS

JAVIER VÁZQUEZ

TRANSLATION

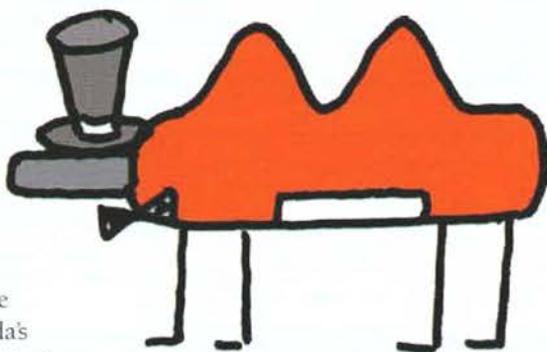
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On the Move

Bodegas Roda does well in Dubai

Dubai's prestigious Burj Al Arab hotel, the world's first of only two seven-star hotels (located on an artificial island, 270 m (886 ft) from the beach) has added Bodegas Roda's Roda and Roda I (DOCa Rioja) to its wine list. The hotel has nine restaurants: Al Mahara, held to be one of the ten best restaurants in the world, is particularly outstanding. As Sara Fernández Bengoa, Export Manager of Bodegas Roda, observes: "This contract is important not only because of the prestige that attaches to two of our wines featuring on these restaurants' wine lists, but also because of the potential business opportunities that might arise through the hotel's distinguished clientele."

In Fernández's opinion, it was the personality of the chosen wines that opened doors: "...their fruity notes—red in Roda, black in Roda I—with hints of mineral, providing complexity, and attractive balsamic qualities contributing freshness. Added to all that is their engaging amplitude and silkiness combined with plenty of body and structure. These are very elegant wines indeed, and they have a lot to say for themselves."



Bodegas Roda's foray into the Persian Gulf began in Dubai in 2007, when they started distributing their wines there, and has since moved on to the United Arab Emirates, where their strategic plan, to be implemented immediately, entails presenting their various wines at promotional days featuring Spanish products to be held throughout the year. "The UAE is a very wealthy country and as such is a great showcase for top quality products. It's an important market as regards our brands' future development," declares Fernández, confidently.

Aware of just how important it is to establish an international presence for their brands, Bodegas Roda inserts their wines into quality-orientated markets. Consequently, their wines are currently sold in over 60 countries, the most important being the US, Germany, Switzerland, the UK, Sweden, Japan and Australia. They

have recently added Hong Kong and the Ukraine to their customer list, and have become something of a benchmark winery for the Amanresorts hotel chain.

Date of foundation: 1987

Activity: Making and marketing wines

Workforce: 30 employees

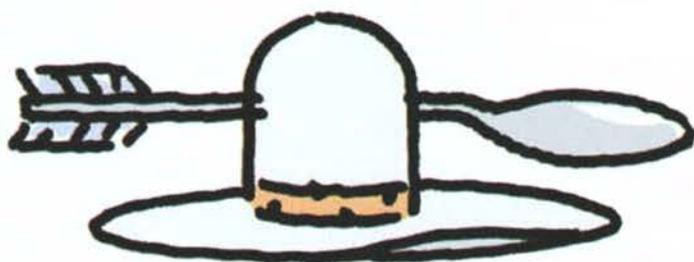
Turnover: 6.4 million euros

Export quota: 50%

www.roda.es

Dhul goes to Wal-Mart

After two years of intensive negotiating, Dhul has succeeded in penetrating the US market via Wal-Mart, into whose shops it is introducing five desserts: egg flan (custard), 0% flan, *crema catalana* (crème brûlée), profiteroles and tiramisu. The desserts will be on sale in approximately 600 of the chain's shops on the east coast of the US and in Texas. Furthermore, under the terms of a strategic alliance with American company Gourmet Selections, delivery of Dhul's products will be channeled through 15 Wal-Mart distribution centers. Dhul's presence in the US marketplace is a consequence of Wal-Mart's decision to revamp its hitherto jelly-dominated range of desserts and opt for ones with greater added value.



According to Grupo Dhul's Export Manager, Gonzalo Sánchez, "...turnover for the first year is expected to be around 6 million euros."

This agreement has also had the knock-on effect of getting other Grupo Dhul-owned brands into Wal-Mart; one example is Trapa chocolates, now available at the retailer's shops in Mexico. In the short and medium term, Sánchez hopes to expand Dhul's presence in the aisles of Wal-Mart to include its fruit desserts, cheesecakes and rice puddings.

This agreement strengthens Dhul's export strategy over the last few years still further. Whereas 2007 was the year its sales outside Spain trebled, 2008 has seen those exports consolidated, with the brand taking off in markets such as Poland, Hungary and Russia.

To date, Grupo Dhul, which encompasses Dhul, Clesa (both milk product brands) and Trapa (chocolates) among others, has a market presence in 40 countries.

Date of foundation: 1967
Workforce: 500 employees
Activity: Producing and selling refrigerated products
Turnover for 2008: 115 million euros
Export quota: 10%
www.dhul.es

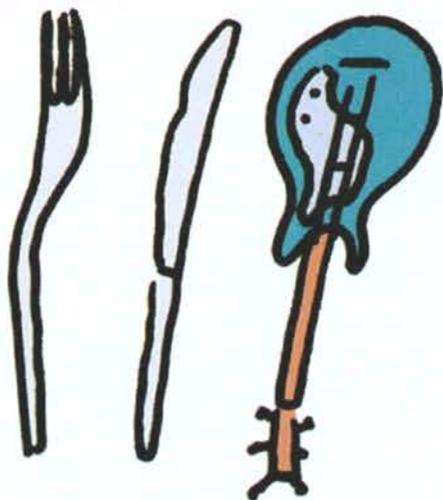
La Taberna del Alabardero opens in Seattle

Seattle (US) has acquired a new Spanish restaurant. La Taberna del Alabardero opened recently in Belltown, "a neighborhood with lots of character," to quote Francisco Pena, Manager of Washington DC's Taberna del Alabardero, near the famous Pike Place Market. "The restaurant can cater for 120 in the dining room, 50 at the bar and 40 on the terrace. It has plenty of light, high ceilings and the added attraction of a view from the bar of the ferries criss-crossing the bay."

Seattle's Taberna del Alabardero specializes in classic Spanish cuisine, serving a varied menu of meat and fish dishes, stews, vegetables and legumes, though pride of place is given to rice dishes (starring paella) and gazpacho. Ever since Taberna del Alabardero opened in Washington DC in 1989, brand owner Grupo Lezama has been hatching plans to open another restaurant in the US. Pena explains: "Seattle was always our first choice because of its business network, and the presence of world-famous, top-flight companies such as Amazon and Microsoft. Furthermore, the city is by no means swamped with restaurants, particularly Spanish ones. It's a friendly, dynamic place with a youthful, well-off population and a

European approach to life, which was why we thought that our restaurant concept would fit in nicely."

Date of foundation: 1974
Workforce: 282 employees
Total turnover in 2008: 15.94 million euros
Turnover for 2008 in the US: 2.25 million euros
www.grupolezama.es



Photos
©Prado National Museum,
Madrid, Spain

Translation
Hawys Pritchard/©ICEX

Autumn, or The Grape Harvest

GOYA

Francisco de
Goya y Lucientes
(1746-1828)

Though more transient, less formal and perhaps less intimate than others, wine and gastronomy are starting to be considered an art form. A very different one from painting, it must be said, but both share the power to stir our feelings. And since pleasure is rooted in a mixture of amazingly diverse sensations, then contemplating a painting in which art comes together with food and wine and their allied culture ought to move us all the more. It is with pleasures of this kind in view that we launch a series of visits to the museums of Spain to see works by our great painters. Some will associate wine with the gods, others with bacchanalian revels, some will seat commoners and kings together at the same table, others depict them at the grape harvest, but all will engage our senses to the full. Where better to start than at the Prado National Museum with a work by Goya: *Autumn, or The Grape Harvest*.

Merriment and vivacity emanate from this slice-of-life painting depicting the grape harvest, an event that marks the arrival of fall. Goya painted *Autumn, or The Grape Harvest* at the high point of his courtly career, and it forms part of a set of paintings associated with the seasons. This painting was done as a

model for tapestries that were to decorate the dining room of the Prince of Asturias (the title taken by the heir to the Spanish throne) in El Pardo Palace (one of the residences of the Spanish royal family). Goya's painting—still neoclassically pyramidal in composition and

populated by rotund figures—combines an engaging folk scene with a certain degree of symbolism. This is expressed via the contrast between the activities in which the peasants and aristocrats are engaged and the difference in their approach to the task of picking grapes. All in all, sensory delight on many levels.

Autumn, or The Grape Harvest / 1786-1787 / Oil on canvas, 268x190 cm
©Prado National Museum / Francisco de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828)

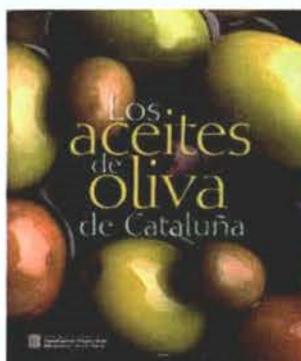


LASTING IMPRESSIONS

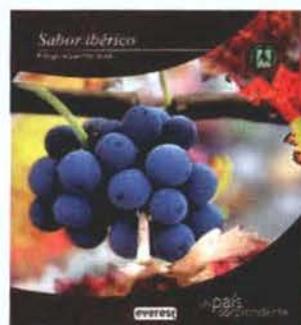
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Samara Kamenecka/©ICEX



El agua en la gastronomía del siglo XXI (Water in 21st-century Gastronomy) by the Academia Española de Gastronomía. Spanish. It's the lifeblood of humans, an indispensable component of our bodies, vital for our wellbeing, balance, and, of course, an essential ingredient in any kitchen. It's water. Everest Editorial and the Academia Española de Gastronomía teamed up with International Expo Zaragoza 2008 to put together this detailed study which covers different types of water, its role in the Mediterranean diet, tasting sessions, consumption and scarcity, distribution in the body, and its many facets within Spanish and global gastronomy. This book also includes a selection of traditional recipes, from countries that attended the Expo and top restaurants in Spain, in which water plays a vital role in their preparation. (Editorial Everest, S.A., www.everest.es)



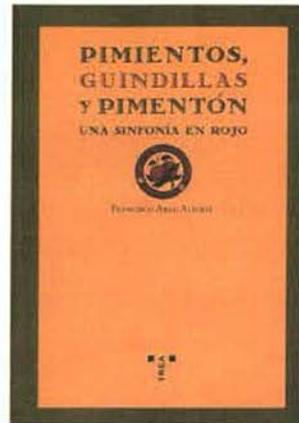
Los aceites de oliva de Cataluña (Olive Oils of Catalonia) by the Generalitat de Catalunya. English, Spanish. Catalonia has always stood out for its production of top-flight virgin olive oils. This text provides additional insight on this subject, combining awesome photography and a thorough glossary to provide an in-depth look at the product from various perspectives: agricultural, cultural, gastronomic, and nutritional; it also includes details on production and preparation. Chapters cover specific information such as symbolic and ritualistic aspects, olive oil cooperatives, the sensorial characteristics of virgin oils from Catalonia, the region's PDO products, oil's role in the Catalan economy, the future of oil, oil and culinary creativity, and its function in healthy eating. (Ediciones 62, S.A., www.edicions62.cat, info@ediciones62.cat)



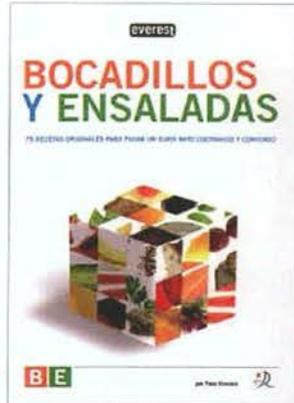
Sabor ibérico [Un país sorprendente] (Ibérico Flavor [A Surprising Country]) by María Pilar Queralt del Hierro, Susana Vergara Pedreira, Javier Tomé. Spanish. Spain is in a truly privileged location where its fields and mountains, rivers and seas, and diverse climate give rise to the production of excellent food, unique festivals and wonderful locales. The many civilizations that have called Spain home have given it both an ancestral and emerging identity, and shaped its flavors and aromas. This book aims to summarize these multitudinous flavors through the country's most representative foods, places and events. The 68 examples include elaborate information and stunning photos ranging from Rioja wine, *turrón* from Jijona, and Toledo's Corpus Christi procession to Holy Week in León, the chocolate museum in Astorga and hazelnuts from Rues. (Editorial Everest, S.A., www.everest.es)



Neurogastronomía (Neurogastronomy) by Miguel Sánchez Romera. Spanish. With more than 20 years of experience in the fields of neurology and neurophysiology and 12 in neurogastronomy, this doctor-cum-chef has many an innovative idea about cooking and what he calls “culinary emotional intelligence”. Sánchez Romera maintains that neurology and cuisine are linked, and here he aims to show how culinary experiences are the result of sensorial perception. Learn more about his ideas on food and science, cuisine from a neurological standpoint, the role of the five senses in the kitchen (hearing being the most important, surprisingly enough), “brain foods”, and cuisine and art. He also expounds on concepts such as organic expressionism, culinary constructionism and “TotalCooking”... some serious food for thought. (Saned y Ediciones, S.L., www.gruposanes.com, saned@medynet.com)



Pimientos, guindillas y pimentón (Peppers, Chilies and Pimentón) by Francisco Abad Alegria. Spanish. The pepper is a protagonist and/or a fundamental ingredient in countless traditional Spanish recipes, hailed for its distinct color, smell and often-spicy flavor. Served cooked, raw, dried, diced or pickled, the pepper has always been a key player in the country's culinary identity. And for anyone looking for the whole story behind the pepper, here is everything you ever wanted and needed to know on the subject. From the history of its arrival in Europe from America and its subsequent dissemination worldwide, its organoleptic qualities, medicinal uses, and much more, as well as extensive info on chilies and *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain), this fascinating text will truly spice up your reading list. (Ediciones Trea, S.L., www.trea.es, trea@trea.es)



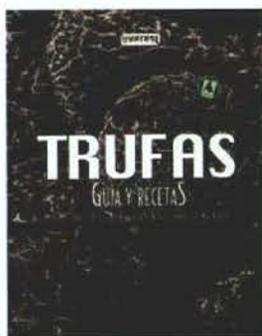
Bocadillos y ensaladas (Sandwiches and Salads) by Paco Roncero. Spanish. Interactive, clever, and downright fun, this unique cookbook takes a new spin on the sandwich and salad genre. The pages are divided into three separate flaps, allowing readers to select their bread and/or dressing from the top set (options include cherry bread, dietetic wasa bread, lime mayonnaise, and lentil and mustard vinaigrette), sandwich ingredients and lettuce bases from the middle section (try the banana, toffee and cream cheese, the chicken with peanut butter, or the avocado and cilantro salad), while the bottom flap offers beverage possibilities (white sangria or Coca-cola and vanilla shake, anyone?) Choose from a wide range of options, mix ingredients and textures, and most of all, surprise yourself and your guests! (Editorial Everest, S.A., www.everest.es)



Echaurren, el sabor de la memoria (Echaurren, the Taste of Memories) by Francis Paniego, Marisa Sánchez. Spanish. Echaurren is indubitably one of La Rioja's finest establishments, and this book offers a look at the professional career of Sánchez (named best chef by the Academia Española de Gastronomía), who has been the driving force behind the restaurant-hotel for more than 50 years. Her son Francis followed in her footsteps, opening El Portal de Echaurren (boasting the only Michelin star in the region), and putting a more avant-garde spin on his mother's traditional dishes. Their more than 80 recipes include suggestions such as potato and truffle carpaccio, and scallops served over cream of cauliflower with pepper and pineapple, proof that mother and son are a delicious duo indeed. (Montagud Editores, S.A., www.montagud.com, montagud@montagud.com)



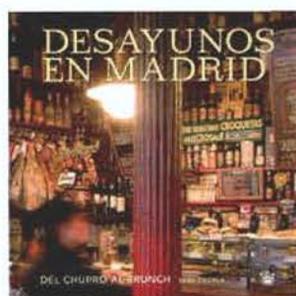
Más que tapas (More Than Tapas) by the Junta de Andalucía. English, Spanish. Andalusia is renowned for its stellar ingredients, which are reinterpreted as they travel the globe and meet new chefs. This book focuses on how Andalusian products are used around the world. Olive oils; wines and vinegars; Ibérico ham; cheeses; fish and seafood; and honey and rice are discussed in great detail, as are the chefs, the restaurants in which they work, and their professional stories. From the pigeon marinated at a low temperature with Sherry gelatin and Seville olives (China) to the sirloin steak with smoked mashed potatoes and cured Trévez ham dust (Argentina), it's clear that the flavors of Spain are pleasing palates in new and interesting ways all the world over. (Editorial Almuzara, www.editorialalmuzara.com, info@editorialalmuzara.com)



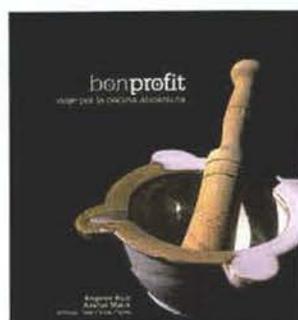
Trufas, guía y recetas (Truffles, Guide and Recipes) by Sergio Azagra, Emilio Ubieta, José de Uña. Spanish. Welcome to trufflemania, where it's all truffles, all the time. This book delves into the wonderful world of this mythical mushroom to discuss, in great detail and with extraordinary photographs, the relevant terminology, their general characteristics, anatomy and physiology, the methodology for their identification and study, their cultivation, how they are found, and their commercialization; it also includes a portrait of 12 species that have a special place in gastronomy. Fifteen chefs (including Juan Mari Arzak and Andoni Luis Aduriz) put forth their favorite recipes with truffle, which include hen and truffle broth; meatballs with liquid truffle and apple cream; and potato salad, avocado and summer truffle. (Editorial Everest, S.A., www.everest.es)



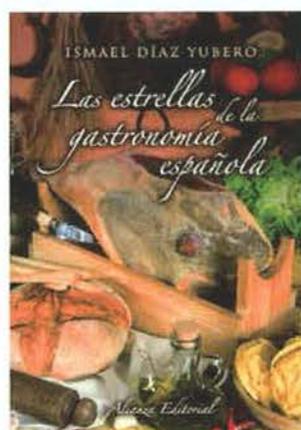
Carme Ruscalleda's Mediterranean Cuisine by Carme Ruscalleda. English. It's hard not to get excited about the five-Michelin-star chef Carme Ruscalleda's cookbook, jam-packed with easy and wholesome recipes. Here are 100 proposals for delicious meals using fresh, seasonal, quality products, complete with info on the level of difficulty, nutritional breakdown and if the dish is suitable for freezing. In this day and age, we eat a lot of ready-made meals, but Carme's recipes are "designed for the times we live in: fast, modern and healthy." From starters and fish dishes to meat and desserts, 5-star suggestions include pumpkin consommé with porcini mushrooms, eggplant and brown rice; rabbit cutlets with a cucumber and yoghurt dip; and sweet semolina croquettes. (Salsa Books, Grup Editorial 62, S.L.U., correu@grup62.com, grup62.com)



Desayunos en Madrid (Breakfast in Madrid) by Sara Cucala. Spanish. Newsflash: Madrid in the morning is more than *churros* and chocolate; breakfast in the capital is a whole world with never-ending options. This book takes a mouthwatering morning journey around more than 60 spots offering Madrid's best breakfast options, from traditional cafes to off-the-beaten path options. Find out where to enjoy everything from regional, international and chocolate-based breakfasts to brunch. Beautiful photos accompany summaries of each suggestion with details on their specialties, opening days and hours, and prices. From the Ritz to the casino to the soccer stadium café, you can splurge on an exquisite 60-euro buffet or get to munching on your 2-euro toast and coffee. Whatever you decide, it will be a tasty way to say *buenos días*. (RBA Libros, www.rba.es)



Bonprofit by Ángeles Ruiz and Azahar Maris. Spanish. Fact: the best way to get to know an area is through its cuisine. Fact: Alicante gastronomy is based on a combination of seasonal products, healthy eating and imagination. Fact: this is a wonderful book with recipes from all over the region, providing a stellar representation of each area. Published by the White Coast's Provincial Tourism Board, this text focuses on products that are native to Spain's southeastern region because they are top-quality and have special gastronomic qualities. With a wide-ranging focus that highlights everything from olives, garlic, artichokes and dates to figs, legumes, wheat and grapes, you've never tasted an Alicante as delicious as this one, and right in your own home. (*Patronato provincial de turismo de la costa blanca*, www.costablanca.org)



Las estrellas de la gastronomía española (The Stars of Spanish Gastronomy) by Ismael Díaz Yubero. This book pays homage to the products of Spain and to the people that have, over the years, produced, preserved and processed them. It salutes those that have used Spanish products to create imaginative cuisine, catapulting them to their prestigious and world-renowned status today. The text deals with tons of products in intense detail: borage from Aragón; asparagus from Navarre; chickpeas from Fuentesauco; oysters from Arcade; salmon from Cantabria; cold cuts, from Ibérico ham to blood sausage from Burgos; partridge and suckling pig; Galician meat pies; wines, from Penedès to Somontano; olive oils, such as Arbequina; spices like saffron; cheeses; Valencia oranges; sherry, and the list goes on... (*Alianza Editorial, S.A.*, www.alianzaeditorial.es)



Guía Peñín de los Vinos de España 2009 (Peñín Guide to Wine in Spain 2009) English, German, Spanish. With 19 years under its belt, *Guía Peñín* has become the unofficial authority on Spanish wines. This book includes more than 13,500 wine reviews, as well as info on 200 more wineries than last year's edition. It also offers a fascinating introduction, guiding readers through the winemaking process and wine tastings, and providing information on the history of wine production, soils, varieties and winemaking in Spain. (*Peñín Ediciones*, www.grupopenin.com)



Menú del día (Menu of the Day) by Rohan Daft. English. In 1965, the Franco government passed a decree that called for the provision of good, cheap food for workers and something other than sun for tourists, and thus the menu of the day was born; today it is a Spanish institution. Comprised of a first and second course, coffee/tea/dessert, and wine/beer/another beverage, the menu varies widely according to the region, but they all have one thing in common: they are delicious! This book offers information on typical Spanish foods together with recipes, from *salmorejo* to *marmitako* to *flan*, giving readers the tools and the insight to create a Spanish *menu del día* in the comfort of their own homes. (*Simon & Schuster*, www.simonandsays.com)

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AUSTRALIA
Edgecliff Centre, Suite 408
203 New South Head Road
Edgecliff NSW 2027 Sydney
Tels: (2) 93 62 42 12/3/4
Fax: (2) 93 62 40 57
sidney@mcx.es

CANADA
2 Bloor St. East, Suite 1506
Toronto Ontario, M4W 1A8
Tel: (416) 967 04 88
Fax: (416) 968 95 47
toronto@mcx.es

CHINA
Spain Bldg., 5th-6th Floor
Gongtinanlu A1-b, Chaoyang
District
100020 Beijing
Tel: (10) 58 799 733
Fax: (10) 58 799 734
pekin@mcx.es

25th Floor, Westgate Mall
1038 Nanjing Xi Road
200041 Shanghai
Tel: (21) 62 17 26 20
Fax: (21) 62 67 77 50
shanghai@mcx.es

DENMARK
Vesterbrogade 10, 3^o
1620 Copenhagen V
Tel: (33) 31 22 10
Fax: (33) 21 33 90
copenhagen@mcx.es

HONG KONG
2004 Tower One, Lippo Centre
89 Queensway Admiralty
Hong Kong
Tels: 25 21 74 33/25 22 75 12
Fax: 28 45 34 48
hongkong@mcx.es

IRELAND
35, Molesworth Street
Dublin 2
Tel: (1) 661 63 13
Fax: (1) 661 01 11
dublin@mcx.es

ITALY
Via del Vecchio Politecnico, 3 16^o
20121 Milan
Tel: (02) 78 14 00
Fax: (02) 78 14 14
milan@mcx.es

JAPAN
3Fl, 1-3-29. Roppongi
Minato-Ku
Tokyo 106-0032
Tel: (3) 55 75 04 31
Fax: (3) 55 75 64 31
tokio@mcx.es

MALAYSIA
20th Floor, Menara Boustead
69, Jalan Raja Chulan
50200 Kuala Lumpur
P.O. Box 11856
50760 Kuala Lumpur
Tel: (3) 2148 73 00
Fax: (3) 2141 50 06
kualalumpur@mcx.es

NETHERLANDS
Burg. Patijnlaan, 67
2585 The Hague
Tels: (70) 364 31 66/345 13 13
Fax: (70) 360 82 74
lahaya@mcx.es

NORWAY
Karl Johansgate, 18 C
0159 Oslo
Tel: (23) 31 06 80
Fax: (23) 31 06 86
oslo@mcx.es

RUSSIA
Ul. Vozdvizhenka, 4/7
(enter via Mokhovaya 7,
Business Centre Mokhovaya,
3rd Floor)
125009 Moscow
Tels: (495) 783 92
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moscu@mcx.es

SINGAPORE
7 Temasek Boulevard,
#19-03 Suntec Tower One
038987 Singapore
Tel: 67 32 97 88
Fax: 67 32 97 80
singapur@mcx.es

SWEDEN
Sergels Torg, 12, 13 tr.
SE-111-57 Stockholm
Tel: (8) 24 66 10
Fax: (8) 20 88 92
estocolmo@mcx.es

UNITED KINGDOM
66 Chiltern Street
W1U 4LS London
Tel: (20) 7467 23 30
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londres@mcx.es

UNITED STATES
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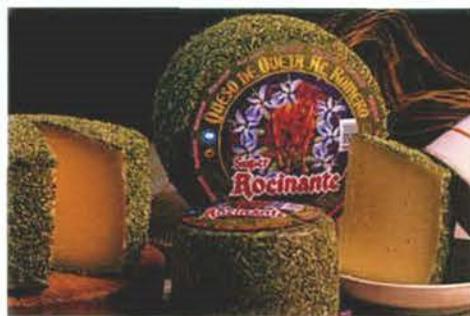
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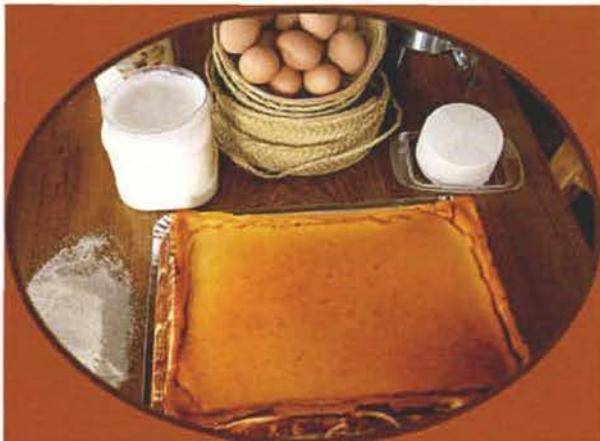


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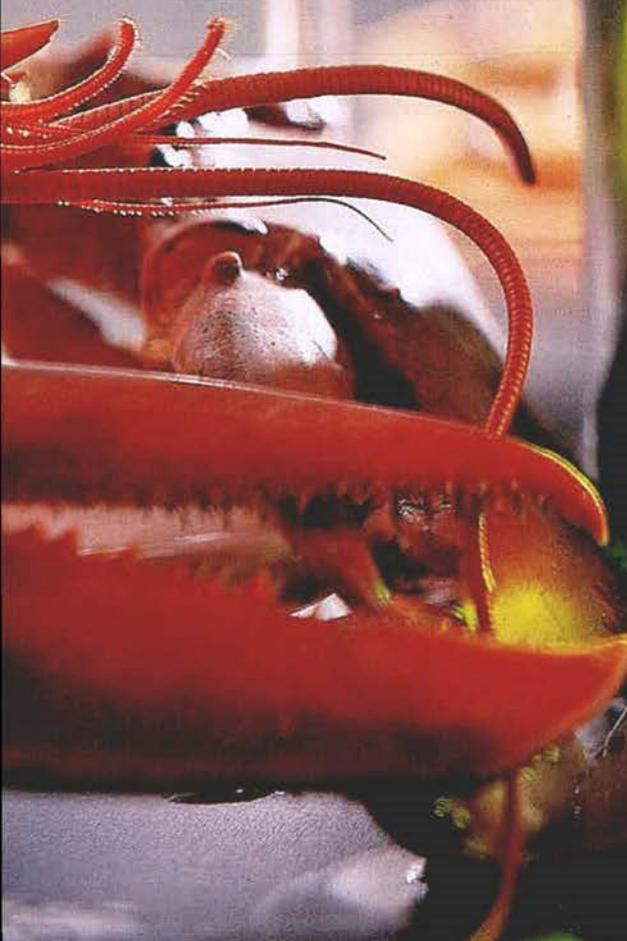
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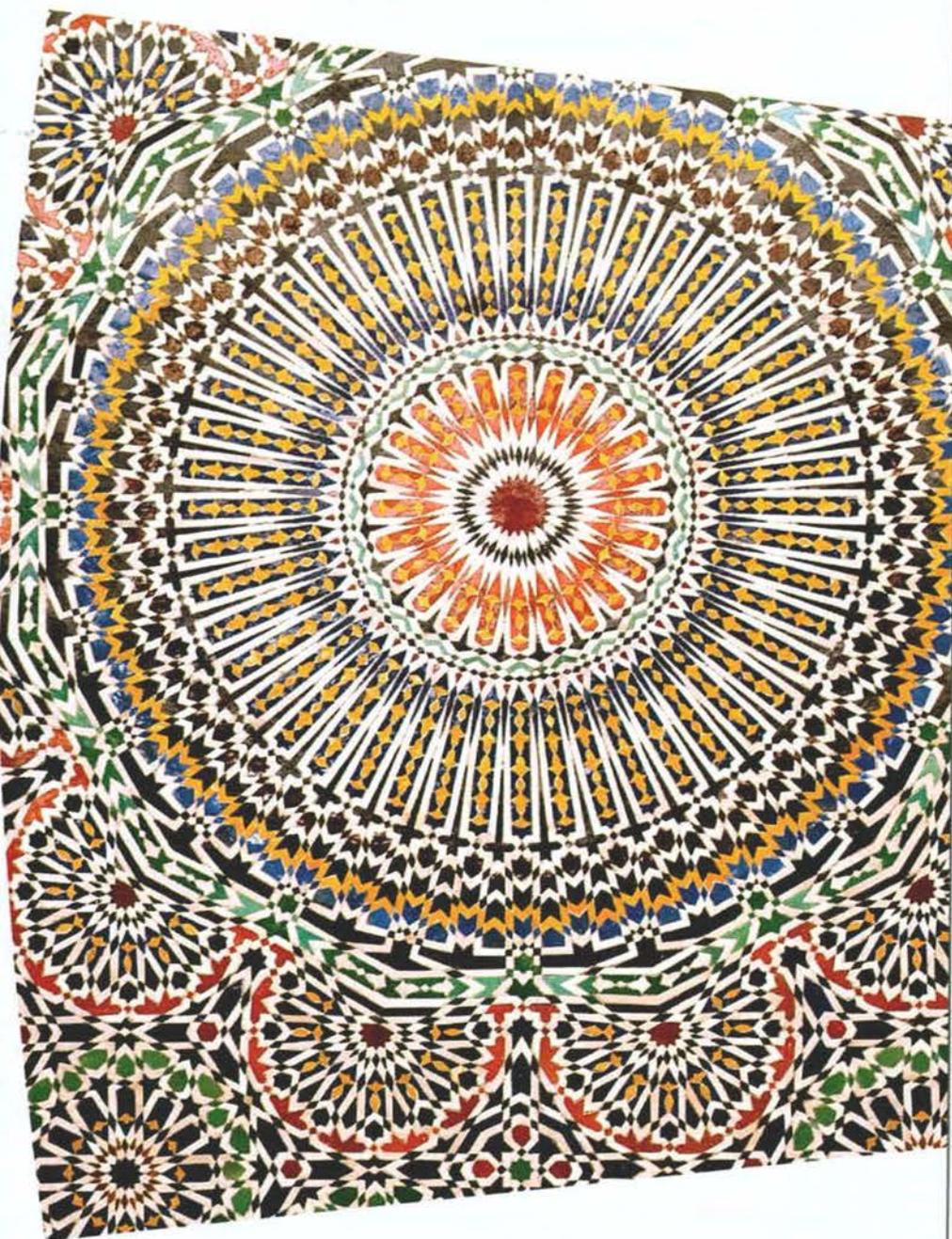


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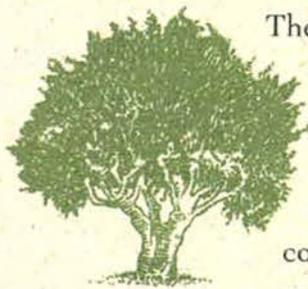
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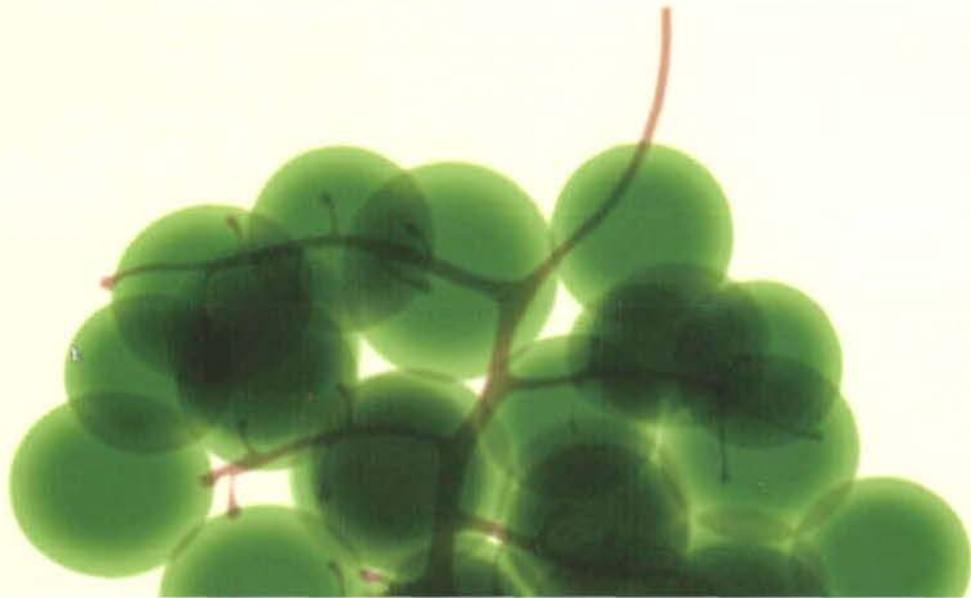
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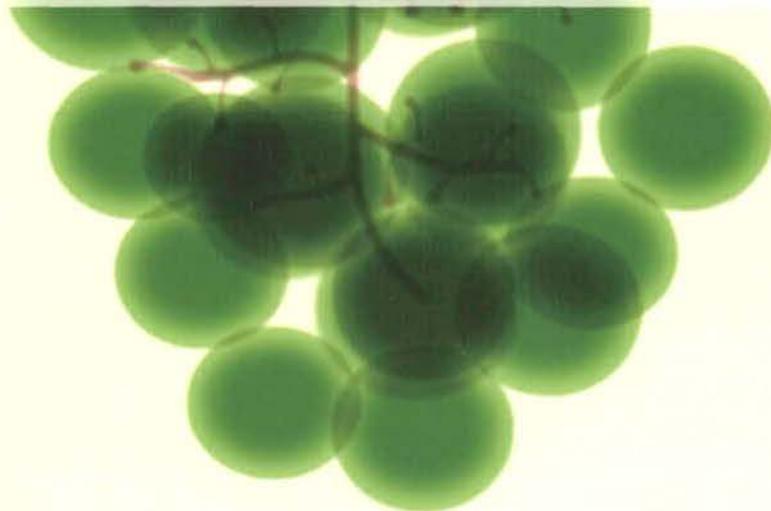
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