



View from the Cellar # 75 May-June 2018 - The Summer of 2018 Report On Spanish Wines

5 September 2018

“I should take a moment to mention another of the really good Spanish wine importers in the US, who has been sending me more and more very, very good samples in the last couple of years and is worth noting for subscribers who are out in the market looking for great wines at very fair prices. This is Grapes of Spain, whose portfolio of wines is selected by Aurelio Cabestrero. The company has been sending me samples for three years now and I continue to be absolutely blown away by many of the wines, which not only offer outstanding quality for their respective regions, but also, often, truly stunning value! I am getting to the point that when I am in a wine store shopping for Spanish wines and confronted with a lineup on the shelf that is unfamiliar to me, I simply turn over the bottles to look at the importers’ label on the backside. I have often done this in the past and been introduced to new gems from Gerry Dawes or José Pastor in this manner, and now, I would certainly add Grapes of Spain and Señor Cabestrero to my list of “can’t miss” importers whose strip label on the back is about as close as one can come to a “guarantee of quality” for the bottle... To get some idea of just how well they are selecting wines, take a look at some of their outstanding estates in Ribera del Duero (once the poster child for everything that was wrong with modern wine in Spain), as their estates such as Astrales, Finca la Mata, Arrocal and Garmón are really exciting wines and have led me to conclude that Goyo Garcia is not quite as singular in the D.O. as I once thought. And Grapes of Spain is doing stellar work in places like Jumilla and La Mancha as well, to mention a couple of other regions where they absolutely excel.

Cava

“As I have written in the past, my very favorite sparkling wines in the world, after Champagne, remain the top producers of Cava who are part of the “Six Percent Club” (as I have dubbed them) and who grow their own grapes and produce their own wines... [Cava] is the one sparkling wine where I generally tend to prefer Extra Brut levels of *dosage* to Brut bottlings. I do not know why this is so, as in Champagne, I tend to prefer either low *dosage* Brut or generously sweet versions of Extra Brut to those with very low or no *dosage*, but with Cava, it is usually the Extra Brut bottlings that hit the sweet spot on my palate. Perhaps it is the personalities of the three major grape varieties that are used for top flight Cava: Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parellada, or perhaps the style of the *terroir* where the best Catalan examples of Cava have traditionally hailed from, but for whatever reason, Extra Brut is my favorite sweetness level for these lovely sparkling wines.

1+1=3 Cava Brut NV (Lot 17200- Disgorged September 2017)



The most recent disgorgement of 1+1=3 Cava is a blend of forty-five percent Xarel-lo, thirty percent Parellada and twenty-five percent Macabeo. The wine was aged for twenty-one months on its fine lees and was finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a classy bouquet of lemon, tart orange, sea salts, menthol and stony minerality. On the palate the wine is medium-full, crisp and complex, with a nice sense of brininess, a fine core, elegant *mousse* and good length and grip on the balanced finish. I am accustomed to drinking more Extra Brut Cava and the *dosage* here, while done very well, seems to stick out just a bit on the backend of the wine at the present time. It may just need a bit more time in the bottle. 2018-2028. **87+**.

1+1=3 Cava Brut NV (Lot 17028- Disgorged January 2017)

This earlier disgorgement of 1+1=3 Cava Brut is made from a similar *cépages* to the above, but I did not have technical details on *dosage* at my fingertips at the time of my tasting the wine, but I would guess the *dosage* is also eight grams per liter for this release. The wine is just lovely on the nose, wafting from the glass in a fine blend of lemon, a touch of tangerine, lemongrass, a bit of wild fennel, complex, salty minerality and a touch of upper register menthol. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, focused and very nicely balanced, with a lovely core, elegant *mousse* and a long, complex and nicely mineral finish. I am assuming that this is the same blend as the above wine, with just an additional six or seven months to come into balance after its disgorgement, and I like the way the *dosage* here has been eaten up by the minerality inherent in the wine. This is fine juice and makes me think that the above wine will rise in score as it too settles in a bit more. 2018-2028. **89**.

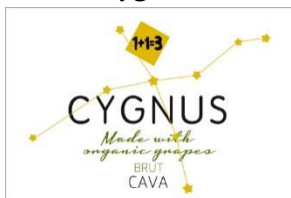
1+1=3 Cava Brut Rosé NV (Disgorged April 2017)



The current release of 1+1=3 Cava Brut Rosé is quite pale in color, with just a gentle kiss of pink. The *cépages* here is again quite unique in my experience for Cava Rosé, being composed of a mix of seventy-five percent Garnacha, fifteen percent Pinot Noir and only ten percent Trepas. It is aged for a minimum of twelve months *sur latte* and again, finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The

bouquet here is quite delicate and stylish, offering up scents of strawberries, a touch of tangerine, gentle smokiness, rose petals and a fine base of white soil tones. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with fine depth in the mid-palate, frothy *mousse* and excellent length and grip on the complex and quite elegant finish. This is lovely juice. 2018-2028. **90**.

1+1=3 Cygnus Cava Brut Reserva NV (Disgorged March 2017)



This bottling of Brut Reserva from Cygnus is quite unique in having come entirely from certified organic vineyards, with the *cépages* being a blend of thirty-five percent each of Xarel-lo and Parellada and thirty percent Macabeo. The wine was aged fifteen months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement and a finishing *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The bouquet is deep and classy, delivering a complex mix of

lemon, breadfruit, a touch of straw, a fine base of salty soil tones, just a touch of menthol and a very discreet topnote of smokiness. On the palate the wine is deep, complex and full-bodied, with a fine core, lovely focus and grip, slightly large bubbles, but good length and cut on the well-balanced



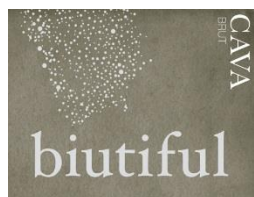
finish. This bottling is not aged as long *sur latte* as several others in this report and this shows a bit in its more adolescent profile, but the raw materials here are excellent and the *dosage* is really beautifully buried in the wine already. Good young juice and a bottle of Cava that would repay a couple of years' worth of cellaring. 2018-2030. **88.**

1+1=3 Cygnus Cava Brut Nature Reserva NV (Lot # 16209)



The current release of Cygnus Brut Nature NV is made from a blend of forty percent of Xarel-lo and thirty percent each of Macabeo and Peralada. Again, this is produced entirely from fruit picked in certified organic vineyards and was aged for twenty to twenty-four months *sur latte*. The wine delivers excellent depth and complexity in its aromatic constellation of breadfruit, sea salts, white soil tones, dried flowers and a nice touch of menthol in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and complex, with beautifully buffered acids, a fine core, very elegant *mousse* and impressive length and grip on the classy finish. This is excellent Brut Nature. 2018-2030. **91+.**

Biutiful Cava Brut NV



The Biutiful Cava non-vintage Brut is made up of a rather surprising blend of eighty percent Macabeo and twenty percent Chardonnay. It is aged only twelve months on its fine lees and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine offers up a nose of peach, apple, salty soil tones and dried flowers. On the palate the wine is young, full-bodied and zesty, with slightly coarse *mousse* and a bit of *dosage* still sticking out on the fairly long finish. This is okay, but could use a few more months in the cellar to better integrate its *dosage*, as today, the impression is that it is a bit sweet for Brut. 2018-2025. **86+?**

Biutiful Cava Brut Nature NV



The Brut Nature bottling from Biutiful has the same *cépages* as the Brut non-vintage: eighty percent Macabeo and twenty percent Chardonnay, but the wine is aged an additional three months *sur latte* prior to disgorgement, to allow the acids to soften up a bit more. The nose offers up a mix of tart pear, straw, salty minerality, a touch of citrus peel and a gently smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and nicely balanced, with a respectable core, pinpoint bubbles and good length and grip on the modestly complex finish. Maybe it is just the rather unfamiliar combination of Macabeo and Chardonnay, but I do not find the same complexity here as with comparably priced examples that include Xarel-lo and Parellada in the blend. I like this better than the Brut NV, but this is still lacking a certain spark. 2018-2025. **87.**

Biutiful Cava Brut Rosé NV



The Biutiful Cava Brut Rosé non-vintage bottling is made entirely from Garnacha, grown in high elevation vineyards in Valencia. It is aged twelve months on its lees and finished with a *dosage* of eight grams per liter. The wine has a lovely, pale salmon color and delivers nice brightness in its aromatic mix of cherries, tangerine, a nice base of salty soil and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and pretty nicely balanced, with frothy *mousse*, bright acids and good length and grip on the focused finish.



Rias Baixas

2016 Albariño “Mar de Viñas”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Val do Salnés)



The Mar de Viñas bottling is the entry level Albariño from Adegas Gran Vinum, with the wine hailing from thirty year-old vines and raised in stainless steel. The 2016 delivers fine aromatic complexity in its mix of lemon, pear, ocean breeze, a hint of beeswax and a nice dollop of soil. On the palate the wine is crisp, fullish and nicely balanced, with a good core and solid complexity on the long and bouncy finish. This is not overly ambitious, but really well done in its style and a good value. 2018-2025. **88.**

2016 Albariño “Esencia Diviña”- Adegas Gran Vinum (Val do Salnés)



The Albariño “Esencia Diviña” from Adegas Gran Vinum is a very pretty wine that is aged three months on its fine lees prior to bottling. The 2016 offers up a bright and inviting bouquet of pear, lime blossoms, salty minerality, a nice touch of gentle leesiness and a topnote of white flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied and racy, with an excellent core of fruit, fine focus and grip and an impressively long, vibrant finish. This has real depth and backend energy! Fine juice. 2018-2025. **91+.**

Ribeira Sacra

2016 Adrás Mencía- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)



The 2016 Adrás Mencía from Isaac Fernandez is another excellent value, as it has been every vintage that I have had the pleasure to taste it. These fifty-plus year-old Mencía vines have succeeded nicely in 2016, offering up a fine aromatic constellation of cassis, pepper, espresso, graphite, a superb base of slate and a topnote of bonfire. On the palate the wine is pure, fullbodied and nicely sappy at the core, with impressive transparency, modest tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. This is still a young wine and will gain in complexity with further bottle age, but it is very nicely balanced out of the blocks and already a pleasure to drink. Quite a classic example of the slightly more delicate style of Mencía planted on the terraces above the Miño River. 2018-2035. **91.**

Bierzo

2016 Godello- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)



The Godello bottling from Bodegas Luna Beberide hails from sixty year-old vines and is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks. The 2016 version is a lovely middleweight in the making, wafting from the glass in a bright and youthful blend of lime, tart pear, a bit of green olive, salty soil tones and white flowers. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and vibrant, with a good core, fine focus and grip, zesty acids and a long, crisp and youthful finish. This is tasty out of the blocks and will only get better as it has a chance to open up a bit from behind its girdle of acidity with some bottle age. 2018-2025. **89.**



2016 Mencía- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)



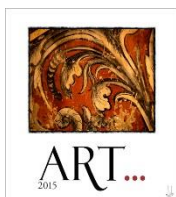
I have been very impressed with the quality of the straight Mencía bottling from Bodegas Luna Beberide in the last few vintages and the 2016 is again, an excellent wine and a superb value. As readers may recall, this is the entry level bottling from the bodegas and is raised solely in stainless steel tanks. The 2016 offers up a fine and impressively complex nose of pomegranate, dark berries, graphite, cola, a fine base of soil tones, a bit of roasted meats, wild fennel and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and marvelously transparent, with a good core, tangy acids and fine focus and grip on the moderately tannic, complex and classy finish. This is still priced well under twenty dollars a bottle and is a stunning bargain. Buy it by the case, as it will age beautifully! 2018-2040. **91.**

2015 Finca la Cuesta (Mencía)- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)



The Finca la Cuesta bottling of Mencía from Luna Beberide is an old vine cuvée, with the vines ranging from sixty to seventy years of age and the wine raised in a blend new and one year-old French barrels. The 2015 version is an excellent follow-up to the fine 2014 bottling, delivering a refined bouquet of cassis, pomegranate, espresso, a complex base of soil, cigar smoke, a touch of tree bark and a very discreet base of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full and plenty solid at the core, with good acids, ripe tannins and excellent focus and grip on the beautifully-balanced, nascently complex finish. This has a bit more mid-palate depth than the 2016 regular bottling of Mencía, as well as a bit more tannin and deserves a year or two in the cellar to start to blossom properly. Another superb value from Luna Beberide! 2020-2040+. **92.**

2015 Mencía “Art”- Bodegas Luna Beberide (Bierzo)



The 2015 “Art” bottling of Mencía from Luna Beberide is from their oldest parcel of vines, ranging from seventy to eighty years of age. The wine sees all new oak during its year and a half of *élevage*, but the old vine depth of fruit here in the 2015 has no difficulties carrying the wood seamlessly. The very complex nose wafts from the glass in a classy blend of dark berries, pomegranate, graphite, dark soil tones, cola, a bit of meatiness, a lovely touch of wild fennel, cigar ash and a very well done framing of new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, pure and fullbodied, with a very refined attack, a lovely core of fruit, excellent soil signature, moderate, seamless tannins and great focus and grip on the very long, complex and impeccably-balanced finish. This is going to be absolutely first class and long-lived Bierzo Mencía! 2018-2050. **93+.**

2015 Paixar Mencía- Bodegas y Viñedos Paixar



The Paixar bottling from this fine winery is made from very old, bush vines, all in excess of eighty years of age and planted on pure slate, which is far more typical in Ribeira Sacra than it is in Bierzo. The wine is raised entirely in new French oak, but I noted that the 2015 version spent twenty months in cask, rather than the twenty-two months of the 2013 version I reported on last year. The 2015 Paixar Mencía is an outstanding young wine, with the new oak beautifully integrated into the fruit and soil elements here. The bouquet wafts from the glass in a very refined constellation of cassis, pomegranate, espresso, licorice, great minerality, a touch of tree bark, cigar smoke and a very well done framing of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively



transparent, with a good core, excellent backend mineral drive, ripe tannins and a long, youthful, complex and tangy finish. This needs at least a couple of years in the cellar to start to blossom and more completely absorb its new wood, but it is very well balanced and will be a superb bottle with a bit of patience. 2021-2050. **93**.

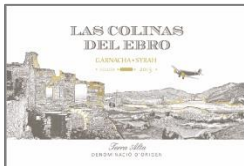
Terra Alta

2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnaxta Blanca- Bodegas Abanico (screwcap)



The 2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Garnaxta Blanca from Bodegas Abanico is again an excellent wine suffering under a reductive screwcap. With some aggressive swirling, the wine unlocks to offer up a fine nose of grapefruit, lemon, salty minerality, white flowers and a touch of green olive. On the palate the wine is even more reductive than the nose and never quite fully blossomed. But underneath the stillborn aspect of the reduction, the wine is full, crisp and nicely transparent, with good focus and grip and a long, potentially complex finish. But, the screwcap has given this a permanent note of reduction already, which comes across as vegetal on the nose and attack on the palate, with a short, clipped finish. This is clearly a closure issue and Bodegas Abanico would be so well-served to go back to natural cork for this wine, as the closure is killing a very, very good wine in its youth. **???**

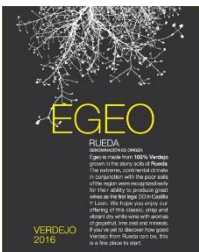
2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Tinto- Bodegas Abanico (screwcap)



The 2016 Las Colinas del Ebro Tinto is composed of a blend of eighty percent Garnaxta and twenty percent Syrah, with the former ranging from thirty to fifty year-old vines and the syrah vines twenty-five years old. The wine is fermented and raised in stainless steel prior to bottling. The 2016 version comes in at 14.5 percent octane and needs a little coaxing in decanter to shake off a touch of early reduction, but it is much better than the 2016 Blanco and eventually blossoms to offer up scents of raspberries, *garrigue*, coffee, a bit of roasted game and stony soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite robust, with a good core, plenty of personality and a long, modestly tannic and ever so slightly hot finish. This is only thirteen dollars here in the states and is a very good value, but I would suggest a change back to natural cork would do the wine good, as there is the depth and structure to age this wine nicely over the mid-term, but I would not trust it under screwcap in the cellar. 2018-2023? **87**.

Rueda

2016 Verdejo- Egeo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)

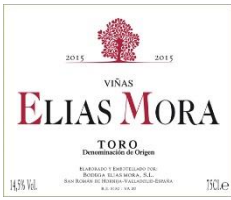


The 2016 Verdejo “Egeo” from Isaac Fernandez is produced from sixty year-old vines planted on sandy clay soils. The wine is lovely, wafting from the glass in a classic bouquet of Granny Smith apple, lime peel, green olive, salty soil tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is crisp, medium-full and zesty, with fine focus and grip, a lovely core, good backend mineral drive and a long, complex and succulent finish. Just a lovely bottle of Verdejo and a superb value! 2018-2022. **90**.



Toro

2015 Toro- Viñas Elias Mora



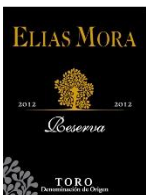
The 2015 Toro from Elias Mora is made entirely from tempranillo, with the vines a good age of thirty-five years of age. This bottling sees all new American oak for its *elevage*, but happily this is only for six months. The wine comes in at 14.5 percent alcohol and manages it quite well, offering up a bright and complex bouquet of sweet dark berries, black cherries, bonfire, a bit of roasted game, smoky new oak and a touch of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, robust and well-balanced, with a good core, focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and robust finish. I like this quite a bit. 2018-2030+. **89**.

2014 Toro Crianza- Viñas Elias Mora



2014 is a slightly cooler vintage than 2015, but the Crianza bottling from Elias Mora tips the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. The wine is made from fifty year-old tempranillo vines and raised for a year in a fifty-fifty mix of French and American oak barrels, which had been used once previously, rather than being new. The wine is ripe and extroverted on the nose, jumping from the glass in a mix of black cherries, chocolate, gentle spice tones, chicory and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and fairly tannic, with plenty of depth in the mid-palate and a long, youthful and chewy finish. Even though this wine was raised in one wine barrels, there is still a bit of wood tannin here that needs time to be integrated into the wine. This should eventually happen, but the wine is a bit rigid on the backend today and needs some cellaring. It carries its alcohol pretty well out of the blocks. 2021-2035. **88+?**

2012 Toro “Reserva”- Viñas Elias Mora



The 2012 Toro “Reserva” from Viñas Elias Mora is again listed at a full fifteen percent alcohol. This is the oldest vine cuvée from Señor Mora, hailing from vines that are fully eighty years old and the wine is raised entirely in new French oak *barricas* for two full years prior to bottling. The wine delivers impressive complexity in its ripe nose of black cherries, roasted game, woodsmoke, a touch of wild fennel, dark soil tones and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and well-balanced for its octane, with a fine core, good focus and a long, moderately tannic and plush finish. There is not heat on the backend, but just a wisp of residual oak tannin still in evidence on the finish. This is riper than I would like, but very well done. 2018-2040. **90**.

2012 Toro “2V Premium”- Viñas Elias Mora



The 2012 Toro “2V Premium” from Elias Mora is a five barrel selection of the above wine. It is aged one year in new French casks prior to the selection, with the five best barrels then separated out into another set of new barrels, so this affectively a two hundred percent new oak wine *à la* Dominique Laurent. The 2012 version is fully fifteen percent alcohol, but does not show this on the nose, which is nicely complex and evolved, delivering scents of dark berries, bonfire, roasted venison, dark chocolate, a touch of coffee grounds and a fairly discreet framing of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and plush on the attack, with a good core, some backend heat and some uncovered oak tannins on the long finish. I am not



overly sanguine about the overall balance of the wine, as this seems as likely to dry out from the oak tannins as blossom. ???

2015 Toro “Prima”- Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman



The 2015 Toro “Prima” from Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman is not made from particularly old vines, with the age ranging from fifteen to twenty years of age, but they are farmed organically. The *cépages* here is eighty-five percent tempranillo and fifteen percent garnacha, with the wine raised for one year in older casks (both of French and American origin). The wine comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, black raspberries, a bit of pepper, a good base of soil, woodsmoke, a touch of cola and hung game. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and nicely spicy, with a good core, chewy tannins and a long, well-balanced and robust finish. This is ripe, but not particularly warm on the backend and is really quite a good example of Toro. 2018-2030+. **89.**

2014 Toro “San Roman”- Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman



The San Roman bottling from the winery of the same name is one of their old vine *cuvées*, produced entirely from tempranillo, with the vines ranging from sixty to more than ninety years of age. The vineyards here are far stonier than those used for their Prima bottling. The wine is raised in fifty percent new oak for two years, with the *barricas* a combination of both French and American oak. The 2014 San Roman comes in at 14.5 percent octane and offers up excellent complexity in its aromatic constellation of cassis, licorice, dark chocolate, a fine base of soil, a bit of saddle leather and a well done base of cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, broad-shouldered and rock solid at the core, with firm, ripe tannins, good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and robust finish. This carries its alcohol pretty well, but it is still a touch warm on the backend. But, in the context of Toro today, this is pretty classy juice. 2020-2040. **91.**

2013 Toro “Cartago Paraje del Pozo”- Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman



This bottling from Bodegas y Viñedos San Roman is a single vineyard wine from the Paraje del Pozo vineyard, which is planted with forty-five year-old tempranillo vines planted at seven hundred meters above sea level. The wine’s *elevage* is quite long at three years, in a combination of both new and older casks, with both French and American oak barrels in the rotation. The 2013 Cartago is 14.5 percent octane and offers up a very fine bouquet of black cherries, cassis, licorice, a bit of roasted meats, dark soil, a touch of nice balsamic overtones and a discreet framing of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and plenty powerful, with a fine sense of elegance to go with its broad shoulders, ripe, chewy tannins and a long, complex finish. Despite this wine having not seen all new oak, there are some wood tannins sticking out on the backend still today, from its long sojourn in oak. I like it quite well, but if one is going to keep a wine this long in cask, I think it would make sense to ensure that none of the barrels are new. But, this is still a good wine. 2020-2040. **89.**



Ribera del Duero

2016 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto (Ribera del Duero)



There is a slight change in the *elevage* procedure for the 2016 Bodegas Arrocal Tinto this year, as the wine saw no new oak in 2016. Previously, twenty percent of the casks were renewed each vintage, but in 2016 the estate decided to just utilize older oak barrels for the wine. The wine is very pretty, coming in at fourteen percent octane and offering up a lovely bouquet of plums, cherries, a touch of mint, cocoa powder, a bit of wild fennel, a very good touch of soil and still a good foundation of spicy oak from the used casks. On the palate the wine is deep, fullbodied and moderately tannic, with a fine core, very good focus and grip and a long, nascently complex and very well-balanced finish. This could use a few years in the cellar to soften a bit more, but it shows fine potential and will be excellent when it has had a chance to blossom. In a region where prices can be a bit steep for what is in the bottle, this is an outstanding value! 2021- 2045+. **91**.

2015 Passión Arrocal Tinto- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)



As readers may recall the Passión Arrocal cuvée also sees no new wood, with its *elevage* done in a fifty-fifty mix of two and three year-old French barrels. The wine hails from the Los Corrales Vineyard, which is planted with forty year-old tempranillo vines at an elevation of eight hundred meters above sea level. The 2015 Passión Arrocal tips the scales at fourteen percent alcohol and is a fine follow-up to the excellent 2014 bottling reviewed last year. The wine offers up a bouquet of black cherries, black plums, a touch of cigar smoke, dark chocolate, a fine signature of soil and a discreet touch of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and very nicely balanced, with a rock solid core, firm, well-integrated tannins and excellent focus and grip on the still quite youthful finish. This is a touch riper in personality than the lovely 2014, but that is the nature of the 2015 vintage, and with sufficient bottle age, it should approach the fine quality of the previous vintage. I would tuck it away in the cellar for five or six years and then drink it with pleasure over the ensuing two or three decades. Fine juice. 2023- 2050. **92**.

2014 Arrocal “Ángel”- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)



The Ángel bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is an old vine cuvée made from seventy-five year-old tempranillo vines grown in the vineyard of El Portillo. The wine is raised entirely in new French oak, with the malolactic fermentation also taking place in barrel. The wine is quite new oaky on the nose, but nicely done in this style, as it wafts from the glass in a mix of red plums, black cherries, cocoa powder, a hint of blood orange and plenty of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, focused and really well-balanced, with a classy core of fruit, fine-grained, well-integrated tannins and excellent length and grip on the nascently. It needs a couple of years to fully integrate its new oak, though it has plenty of depth of fruit to do so with a bit of patience. It will be very interesting to see if it will be as complex as the 2014 Passión Arrocal bottling when it is ready to drink, but it is certainly a step up from that excellent wine in terms of palate polish out of the blocks. This is an excellent wine, but it might be even better with less new oak! 2022-2050+. **92+**.

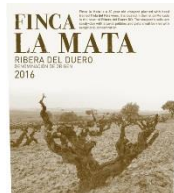


2014 Arrocal “Máximo”- Bodegas Arrocal (Ribera del Duero)



The 2014 vintage of the Máximo bottling from Bodegas Arrocal is their top of the line cuvée, made from seventy-five year-old vines in a prime section of the El Portillo Vineyard. Interestingly, though the 2014 is again raised all in new French barrels, the winery has cut back on the new oak, as the 2011 version I tasted last year had been racked from ne barrels into new casks again, *à la* Dominique Laurent and had used his recipe of “two hundred percent new oak”. The 2014 Máximo was aged in all new French oak for twenty-six months, but at least the racking was not done into another set of new barrels and the wine is much less woody as a result. The bouquet is deep, complex and very refined, wafting from the glass in a mix of black cherries, plums, raw cocoa, a nice touch of Cuban cigar wrapper, a lovely dollop of soil tones and a really well done framing of spicy and nutty French oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and elegant, with lovely complexity, excellent depth at the core, well-measured tannins and excellent length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. I would still love this wine even more in fifty percent new oak, but the wood here is already integrating beautifully and the wine carries it very well indeed. This is first class juice. 2020-2050. **94+**.

2016 Finca La Mata- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribera del Duero)



As I have mentioned in the past, the Finca La Mata bottling is truly and old vine cuvée, hailing from sixty to eighty year-old tempranillo vines. It is raised in a combination of American and French casks, with one-third of the wood new each year. The 2016 Finca la Mata is an excellent young wine, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of cherries, red plums, a touch of clove, good soil tones, a lovely touch of nuttiness and a deft framing of new wood. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and still fairly youthful, with a good core, fine soil inflection, moderate tannins and a long, nascently complex and very nicely balanced finish. This is still in the process of incorporating its one-third new oak and is showing a tad woody on the backend today, but this is clearly only a stage and once this wine settles in, it will drink with plenty of style and grace, so give it at least a few more months. A fine, old school, and quite red fruity example of Ribera del Duero and a great value at under twenty dollars! 2018-2035+. **91**.

2015 Finca La Mata- Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribera del Duero)

The 2015 Finca La Mata is listed at the same fourteen percent as the 2016 version, but it is a riper and more black fruity example of Ribera del Duero, as it should be given the differences in the two vintages. The bouquet is deep and complex, offering up scents of black cherries, a bit of cassis, dark chocolate, cigar smoke, a fine base of soil, a bit of nuttiness and a nicely done base of new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely ripe at the core, with fine focus and grip, well-integrated tannins and a very long, nicely soil-driven and youthful finish. This is probably just a tad higher in actual octane than the 2016 and is a bit more structured out of the blocks, so I would tuck this wine away in the cellar for at least a couple of years and drink the more red fruity 2016 version first. But, this too will be a very tasty and old school example of Ribera del Duero with a bit of bottle age. 2020-2035+. **89+**.

2016 Aptus Tinto- Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz (Ribera del Duero)



I quite liked the 2015 Aptus Tinto from Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz last year and the 2016 vintage is a fine follow-up. Readers may recall that this is a blend of ninety-five percent Tempranillo and the other five percent a mix of Garnacha and Monastrell, with the



vineyards farmed organically and in conversion to biodynamics. The 2016 version comes in at the same 14.5 percent alcohol as the 2015 and offers up a complex nose of red and black cherries, a touch of cassis, cigar smoke, a nice touch of spice, good soil elements and a gentle framing of cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with good soil signature, a fine core, moderate, well-integrated tannins and a long, well-balanced finish. This is not your typical, plush, fruit-driven Ribera del Duero, but a wine with good soil signature and fine promise for down the road, but it will need a couple years in the cellar to blossom. A superb value! 2021-2045+. **90.**

2015 Carravid Tinto- Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz (Ribera del Duero)



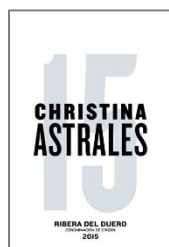
The Carravid bottling from Bodegas Peñalba Herraiz is the next step up in their hierarchy from their Aptus cuvée. The wine is made entirely from tempranillo, with its malo in barrel and its *elevage* done in a mix of fifty percent new French casks and fifty percent used American barrels for eighteen months. The 2015 Carravid tips the scales at fifteen percent octane and offers up a ripe, but not overripe bouquet of plums, black cherries, chocolate, a nice touch of soil and a well done framing of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nascently complex, with a good core of fruit, ripe tannins and very good length and grip on the wellbalanced and promising finish. This carries its octane quite well (though I would love to see it a point lower!) and the wood tannins here are far better integrated in the 2015 than was the case with the 2014 version. This is good juice that could be a great wine if the alcohol level could be reined it just a bit! 2022-2045+. **89.**

2015 Astrales Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)



The 2015 Astrales Tinto is pretty ripe, coming in at 14.5 percent octane, but offers up fine purity in its bouquet of red plums, red and black cherries, cocoa powder, a good base of soil and smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, nascently complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, ripe, seamless tannins and lovely focus and grip on the poised and classy finish. Despite its 14.5 percent alcohol, this wine is cool in the mouth and beautifully balanced. I would give it four or five years in the cellar to allow some of its secondary layers of complexity to emerge. 2022-2050. **93.**

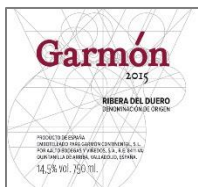
2015 Astrales “Christina” Tinto- Bodegas los Astrales (Ribera del Duero)



As readers may recall from last year’s report on Bodegas los Astrales, the cuvée Christina is produced from a ninety year-old parcel of vines grown at an elevation of nearly nine hundred meters above sea level, allowing for a good diurnal temperature swing during the growing season. The wine is raised entirely in new French wood for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 Christina is a superb follow-up to the very strong 2014 vintage of this wine, offering up a pure and complex nose of red plums, cherries, a touch of pomegranate, cocoa powder, soil tones and a well done framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, complex and rock solid at the core, with lovely focus and balance, ripe, well-integrated tannins and outstanding length and grip on the vibrant and very promising finish. This is still a puppy and deserves some bottle age to fully blossom, but it is going to be very classy wine when it is ready to drink! 2025-2075. **94.**

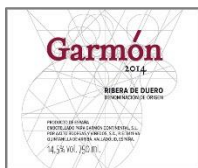


2015 Garmón Tinto



Garmón is the new project from Mariano Garcia and his family, who used to man the helm at Vega Sicilia and is now responsible for such Ribera del Duero icons as Mauro. The 2015 Garmón is 14.5 percent octane, crafted entirely from tempranillo and aged for sixteen months in French casks prior to bottling. The 2015 offers up a fine nose of red plums, cherries, a bit of cocoa powder, good soil tones and plenty of smoky new oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full bodied and ripely tannic, with a good core of fruit, a nice bass line of soil tones and fine length and grip on the nascently complex and focused finish. I find this less extracted than Mauro and therefore, to my palate, even better. This is good juice that needs some cellaring to allow its complexity to start to emerge. 2025-2055. **92+**.

2014 Garmón Tinto



The 2014 vintage of Garmón is listed at the same 14.5 percent as the 2015 version, but it seems just a tad riper in its aromatic profile than its younger sibling. The bouquet is deep and blossoming nicely, offering up scents of black cherries, black plums, Cuban cigar wrapper, a nice touch of soil, woodsmoke and a very well done framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, ripe and very well-balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine focus and grip, wellintegrated, chewy tannins and a long, focused and promising finish. This is a fine wine in the making, but it needs some cellaring time to blossom properly. 2024-2055+. **92**.

Valtiendas

2013 Evolet- Pago el Amendro



As I mentioned last year, Evolet is made from twenty year-old tempranillo vines planted at an elevation of nine hundred meters above sea level in a vineyard with high limestone content. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised entirely in older oak, with a mix of seventy percent French and thirty percent American wood used. The 2013 Evolet is a fine follow-up to the 2012, though a bit tight when first poured and in need of a bit of aeration. Eventually it blossoms nicely to offer up a bouquet of raspberries, cherries, woodsmoke, a good base of chalky soil tones, a touch of clove and a topnote of cigar smoke. On the palate the wine is deep, fullbodied, young and very well-balanced, with a fine core, good soil signature, ripe, well-integrated tannins and a long, tangy and youthful finish. This needs some bottle age to blossom, but will be a very good wine when it is ready to drink and is a fine value. 2022-2045. **90**.

Valencia

2016 Casa l'Angel Cabernet Sauvignon- Anecoop



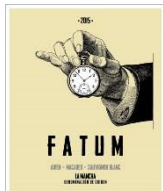
The 2016 Casa l'Angel Cabernet Sauvignon hails from a vineyard lying at six hundred meters above sea level, with good diurnal swings during the growing season. It is raised primarily in stainless steel tanks, with the wine only seeing three months in older French casks during its *elevage*. The wine offers up a good bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar wrapper, a touch of *garrigue*, lovely soil tones and a touch of cedar in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and moderately tannic, with a good core of ripe fruit, gently chewy tannins and a long, youthful and focused finish. This could use a year or two in the cellar to soften up a



bit on the backend, but I like the depth and potential complexity here, and this is a lot of wine for fourteen dollars here in the US! Good honest juice! 2020-235+. **87+**.

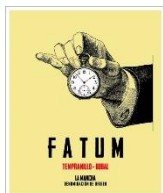
La Mancha

2016 Fatum Blanco- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez



The Fatum Blanco is composed of a blend of fifty percent Airen, thirty-five percent Macabeu and fifteen percent Sauvignon Blanc and comes in at a brisk 12.5 percent octane in the 2016 vintage. The wine offers up a superb bouquet of pear, a hint of green olive, white peach, salty soil tones, a bit of fresh almond and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and not quite as interesting as the nose promises, with a good core, sound acids and grip and a long, well-balanced finish. The palate is not quite as well-delineated as the nose and leaves the wine a touch chunky in personality, but one has to admit that there is a lot of personality here in any case for a wine that only retails here in the US for twelve dollars! If the palate can eventually catch up with the precision of the nose, my score will seem conservative! 2018-2025. **87+**.

2015 Fatum Tinto (Tempranillo-Bobal)- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez



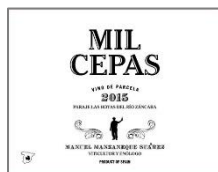
This particular bottling of the 2015 Fatum from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez again is a slightly different blend from the first 2015 version I reported on a year ago, as this time the *cépages* is ninety percent Tempranillo and only ten percent Bobal (the blend is listed on the back label). This version of 2015 is the same octane level as last year, coming in at 13.5 percent alcohol. The new version of 2015 Fatum offers up a fine and more red fruity aromatic constellation of cherries, a bit of blood orange, venison, bonfire, discreet savory elements (wild fennel?) and a good base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, impressive soil signature, moderate tannins and lovely focus and grip on the long and complex finish. Bobal and Tempranillo really work nicely together in this blend! This is again a terrific value! 2018-2025+. **89**.

2015 EA!- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez



The 2015 EA! from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez is another excellent wine. This made from forty to seventy year-old Cencibel vines (the local name for Tempranillo) and these old vines produce a very small, intensely flavored crop each year. The wine is aged in twenty-five percent new French casks. The 2015 EA! offers up impressive depth and complexity on the youthful nose of black cherries, sweet dark berries, a bit of coffee bean, a fine base of soil, cola, wild fennel, a dollop of new oak and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, fullbodied and nicely plush on the attack, with a fine core, good soil tones, moderate, well-integrated tannins and impressive length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is really a terrific wine for its price tag, which is just over twenty dollars here in the US. 2018-2030+. **91**.

2015 Mil Cepas- Manuel Manzaneque Suárez



The 2015 Mil Cepas bottling from Manuel Manzaneque Suárez is a single vineyard bottling of Tempranillo from thirty-five year-old vines that are cropped at a very low fifteen hectoliters per hectare. The parcel is planted on quite sandy soil sand has been farmed organically now for the last five years. The 2015 Mil Cepas was fermented with



indigenous yeasts and included fifteen percent whole clusters this year, with the *elevage* taking place in older French barrels. The wine offers up a superb bouquet, drifting up from the glass in a refined blend of red and black cherries, a lovely touch of cinnamon and clove, plenty of soil tones, cigar ash and a very discreet base of spicy oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, suave on the attack and plenty deep at the core, with modest tannins, tangy acids and excellent length and grip on the complex and very classy finish. This is the most Rioja-like wine I have ever had the pleasure to taste from La Mancha! Fine, fine juice. 2018-2040. **92+**.

2016 Viña Jaraba Cosecha



The 2016 Viña Jaraba Cosecha is produced from a *cépages* of eighty percent tempranillo and ten percent each of cabernet sauvignon and merlot. It sees only four months in a combination of French and American oak casks prior to racking into tank and eventual bottling. The wine offers up a very good bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a bit of cigar smoke and a nice base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows good mid-palate depth, with a bit of backend tannin and good length and grip on the finish. This is not overly complex, but it has depth and plenty of personality and sells for the princely sum of ten dollars a bottle here in the US, so it is an excellent value! 2018-2025+. **88**.

2015 Viña Jaraba Crianza



The 2015 Viña Jaraba Crianza is made from the same blend as the 2016 Cosecha (eighty percent tempranillo and ten percent each of cabernet and merlot), but it spends double the time in barrel- eight months- prior to racking. Again, the casks are a mix of French and American oak. The longer sojourn in barrel has given the wine a bit more refinement on the nose, which wafts from the glass in a classy mix of red and black cherries, a nice touch of tempranillo spice elements, lovely soil, woodsmoke and a bit of cedary oak in the upper register. On the palate the wine is pure, fullish and nascently complex, with a good core, fine focus and grip, a bit more tannin than the Cosecha bottling and lovely precision on the long finish. This is a very good bottle and again, an excellent value, as it retails here in the states for all of thirteen dollars per bottle! 2018-2030. **90**.

2015 Viña Jaraba “Selección Especial”



The *cépages* for the 2015 Viña Jaraba “Selección Especial” is slightly different from the Crianza, as this is seventy percent tempranillo, ten percent merlot and twenty percent cabernet sauvignon. The wine is again raised in a combination of French and American barrels, this time for a period of twelve months. Happily, the wine comes in at the same civilized octane of 13.5 percent as the Crianza in this vintage and delivers a fine aromatic constellation of black cherries, dark berries, a bit of saddle leather, cigar wrapper, soil tones and a nice touch of smoky oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely focused, with a good core, fine-grained tannins and very good length and grip on the quite refined finish. There is a bit of brett here that may scare away some folks (though certainly less than many a vintage of Beaucastel back in the day), but there is fine depth and complexity here as well. 2020-2040. **88+**.



2014 Pago De La Jaraba



The 2014 Pago De La Jaraba is made from the same *cépages* as the Selección Especial, with the malolactic done entirely in new French *barricas* and the wine then aged in a mix of French and American barrels for ten months. Not surprisingly, the wine is a bit oakier on the nose than these other bottlings, but it is well done and nicely integrated into both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a very fine mix of black plums, black cherries, cigar wrapper, a gentle touch of spice, good soil tones and a nice base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and quite elegant in profile, with a good core, impressive nascent complexity and a long, well-balanced and moderately tannic finish. This needs a few years for the tannins to soften (and the bit of oak tannin here to be absorbed more completely), but all of the constituent components are in place and this will be a serious wine when it is ready to drink. 2022-2045. **92.**

2011 Viña Jaraba “Reserva”



The Reserva cuvée from Viña Jaraba is again a blend of seventy percent tempranillo, twenty percent cabernet sauvignon and ten percent merlot, with the wine aged in French and American barrels for twelve months prior to bottling. The wine is evolving very gracefully at age seven, offering up a deep and complex nose of black cherries, cassis, woodsmoke, a nice base of spice elements, just a whisper of the walnuts to come with further bottle age, a bit of chicory and a nice touch of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and resolving beautifully, with impressive complexity, a good core and fine length and grip on the classy finish. There is still a bit of tannin here to continue to carry the wine into the future, but it is wide open today and drinking very well indeed. 2018-2035. **92.**

Navarra

2015 Xi'ipal Graciano “Gracia Vid” - Bodegas Caudalia



The 2015 Xi'ipal Graciano “Gracia Vid” from Bodegas Caudalia is not made from particularly old vines, as these were only planted twelve years ago, but on a fine vineyard of stony limestone soils. Like all of the Xi'ipal bottlings, the vines are farmed organically (though not yet certified) and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts and raised in five hundred liter French oak puncheons for eighteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 Graciano comes in at fourteen percent octane and is a lovey example of this underrated varietal, offering up a complex nose of raspberries, cherries, a touch of *garrigue*, smoked meats, a lovely base of soil, a touch of bonfire and a discreet framing of cedary wood. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and very nicely balanced, with a good core, fine soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and focused finish. This is good juice. 2018-2040+. **91+.**

2015 Xi'ipal Garnacha “La Abejera”- Bodegas Caudalia



The 2015 Garnacha Xi'ipal is a full point higher in alcohol than the Graciano (fifteen versus fourteen percent), but the wine shows surprising precision in its bouquet of raspberries, pepper, *garrigue*, stony soil tones and a topnote of spiced meats. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and nicely soil-driven for its octane, with a good core, but some uncovered alcohol poking out on the long and moderately tannic finish. This is quite good for its high



alcohol level, but the ripeness still gets in the way a bit and the wine is slightly hot on the backend. I would like it far better at fourteen percent! 2018-2030+? **86.**

2015 Xi'ipal Tempranillo "La Abejera"- Bodegas Caudalia



The 2015 Xi'ipal Tempranillo is again very heady, tipping the scales at a full fifteen percent alcohol. As the vineyard is planted at seven hundred and fifty meters, it would seem that it could be a bit lower in octane. The nose shows its ripeness in a jammy blend of raspberries, spice tones, a bit of meatiness, soil and cedary oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and hot, with a good core, a bit of soil tones, moderate tannins and a long, slightly alcoholic and blurry finish. Of the four different varietal bottlings under the Xi'ipal, the Graciano and Syrah are by a good measure the most interesting. 2018-2030+? **85.**

2014 Paal Syrah- Bodegas Caudalia



This is the first time I have tasted the Syrah from Bodegas Caudalia, which is grown in a vineyard up in the Baja Montana at five hundred meters above sea level. The wine is fermented and raised in cement tanks for twenty-seven months prior to bottling. The 2014 version is a touch reductive when first opened (not unusual with syrah), but blossoms nicely with a bit of aeration to reveal scents of black raspberries, pepper, a fine base of soil tones, roasted meats, licorice and a smoky topnote. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced, with a superb core, fine soil inflection, ripe, moderate tannins and a long, focused and classic Syrah finish. There is more than a passing resemblance to old school Cornas here that is quite enticing. Fine juice- just be patient and let it breath a bit before serving! 2018-2040. **91+.**

2014 Xi'ipal Syrah "La Celada"- Bodegas Caudalia



The Xi'ipal Syrah from Bodegas Caudalia is from the single vineyard of "La Celada", which is a very stony *terroir* situated at five hundred meters above sea level. The vineyard is farmed organically (though not yet certified) and the wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks, with the malolactic fermentation taking place in French puncheons. The 2014 version is again a bit reductive when first poured and needs some time in decanter to open up (this is syrah after all), but eventually blossoms to offer up a fine nose of black raspberries, cassis, pepper, a bit of shoe polish, smoked meats, vanillin oak and a very good base of soil. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and very well-balanced, with a fine core of fruit, good mineral drive, ripe, well-integrated tannins and good length and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is very good syrah in the making, but it deserves a few years in the cellar to soften up a bit and more fully blossom. Really quite a serious effort! 2021-2045+. **92.**

Campo de Borja

2017 Garnacha Rosato- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)



The 2017 Garnacha Rosato from Legado del Moncayo is sealed under screwcap, but the wine is still very fresh and vibrant at this stage in its evolution. The pretty nose wafts from the glass in a blend of strawberries, melon, salty spice tones and a topnote of dried flowers. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, juicy and pretty soft in terms of acidity,



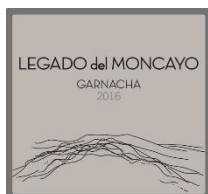
with a good core, nice focus and balance and a long, easy-going and tasty finish. This is not complex, but it offers up good, uncomplicated drinking. 2018-2020. **87.**

2016 Garnacha Blanca- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)



The 2016 Garnacha Blanca from Legado del Moncayo comes in at 13.5 percent alcohol and delivers fine aromatic complexity in its nose of lemon, tart pear, wild fennel, salty soil tones, spring flowers and a hint of beeswax. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and wellbalanced, with a good core, fine soil signature and a long, bright and still quite primary finish. There is a bit of youthful bluntness on the finish today that will work out with a bit of bottle age, but this is a good, solid wine with plenty of personality in the more robust style of white grenache. 2018-2025. **88.**

2016 Garnacha- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)



The 2016 Garnacha Legado del Moncayo from Isaac Fernandez comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and once again is a very well-made wine and a fine value. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a mix of baked raspberries, black cherries, hung game, *garrigue*, wild fennel, a good base of soil and a bit of spice tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullbodied, robust and has plenty of ripe fruit at the core, with moderate tannins, good focus and grip and just a whisper of heat on the long finish. Good juice that could use a couple of years in the cellar to soften up a bit more on the backend. 2020-2040. **88.**

2016 Garnacha “Montaña” Old Vines- Legado del Moncayo (Isaac Fernandez Selección)



The Montaña bottling from Legado del Moncayo is made from forty year-old garnacha vines and aged in used French casks for seven months prior to bottling. The 2016 is a fine follow-up to the lovely 2015, though it seems just a touch riper, offering up a fine bouquet of baked raspberries and cherries, spiced meats, a touch of *garrigue*, coffee, pepper and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and robust in personality, with ripe tannins, plenty of spiciness, good soil signature and a long, complex finish. This is a superb value, though not quite as precise as the 2015 was showing at this stage a year ago. 2018-2030+. **89.**

Calatayud

2016 Garnacha “Acentor”- Isaac Fernandez Selección



The Acentor bottling from Isaac Fernandez has been a consistently well-made bottle of garnacha since the first vintage I had the pleasure to try, which was the 2014. Readers may recall that this wine is produced from vines that are fifty-plus years of age, planted at an altitude of seven hundred and fifty to nine hundred meters above sea level, with the soils composed of iron rich clay. The wine is fermented with indigenous yeasts in cement tanks and aged in a combination of French and American casks. The 2016 comes in listed at the same 14.5 percent octane as the 2015, and this seems just a tad on the low side to my palate in this vintage. Nevertheless, the wine is another very good value, offering up a deep and complex nose of baked raspberries, a touch of fruitcake, hung game, *garrigue*, a fine base of soil tones and plenty of spices in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and really quite well balanced for its octane, with a good core of fruit, impressive soil signature, moderate tannins, impressive nascent complexity



and a long, ever so slightly heady finish. I liked the 2015 vintage here just a tad better, but this too is a serious wine that delivers an awful lot of complexity for its extremely reasonable price point! 2018-2030. **89+**.

Priorat

2014 Genium “Costers Vi de Guarda” Tinto



The 2014 vintage of Costers Vi de Guarda from Genium is again a very ripe wine, as these old vines seem to often bring in wine above fifteen percent. The 2014 is a full 15.5 percent alcohol on the label and is actually, quite well balanced for such a hefty octane- though still hot on the finish. The bouquet offers up a very ripe, but surprisingly fresh blend of black raspberries, *garrigue*, hung game, pepper, a bit of stony soil tones and cedar. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied and powerful in profile, with a fair bit of chewy tannin on the long and hot finish. Honestly, I do not quite understand wines like this, as with more than ninety year-old vines, one would think there would be some way to tame the alcohol and really let the old vines express themselves more fully! This is the best 15.5 percent wine I have tasted in a year, but bring it down a point or a point and a half in alcohol and it might be really something special and far, far more drinkable. 2020-2030+? **87**.

2013 Genium “Poboleda” Vi de la Vila Tinto



The 2013 Genium “Poboleda” is composed of a blend of sixty-five percent garnacha and thirty-five percent cariñena. The wine was aged for one year in new French oak and is listed at fifteen percent octane. The nose is nicely black fruity from the cariñena in the blend, offering up scents of sweet cassis, black raspberries, marinated meats, a bit of chocolate, woodsmoke and a touch of licorice in the upper register. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and ripely tannic, with a fine core of fruit, lovely focus and a fair bit of heat sullyng what would be a long finish. As I have written before, I really like the inherent elegance found across the board in the Genium wines, but to get to the next level, they have to figure out some way to lower the octane. Add four points to my score if you do not mind overt and uncovered alcohol on the finish. 2022-2035. **87**.

2013 Genium “Ecològic” Tinto

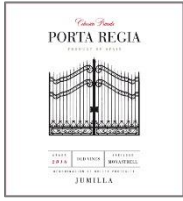


The 2013 Genium “Ecològic” Tinto comes in at the customarily hefty fifteen percent octane that seems to be typical of so many reds from Priorat. The wine is a blend of sixty-five percent Garnacha, fifteen percent Cariñena, eight percent each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot and five percent Syrah. It is raised in fifty percent new French casks and bottled unfiltered. The wine offers up an overripe bouquet of stewed raspberries, spiced meats, raisins, *garrigue* and cedary new oak. On the palate the wine is plush, full-bodied and hot on the backend, with some chewy tannins and good length and grip on the finish. I really do not know what to say about this wine, which is well-made enough in its idiom, but leaves me as cold stylistically as it is hot on the finish. I just do not understand wines like this. 2020-2030+? **84**.



Jumilla

2016 Monastrell “Old Vines”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)



The 2016 Monastrell “Old Vines” from Porta Regia is once again a terrific wine for its price tag, and I was absolutely delighted this year to see it sealed under a natural cork, rather than the synthetic cork of the last couple of years. The bouquet is deep and beautifully expressive, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black raspberries, *garrigue*, spiced meats, a touch of chicory, woodsmoke and a fine base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is deep, fullbodied and beautifully balanced, with a velvety attack, plenty of mid-palate stuffing, refined, seamless tannins and excellent focus and grip on the complex finish. This has to be one of the greatest bargains to be found anywhere in the world of red wine, as this sells for all of thirteen dollars here in the states! Great juice. 2018-2030+. **90.**

2016 Monastrell “Barrica 5 Meses”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)



As I mentioned last year, the Monastrell “Barrica 5 Meses” from Porta Regia is essentially the same wine as the above, except that it is aged for five months in “one wine” casks, whereas the Old Vines bottling spends its entire *elevage* in stainless steel tanks. The 2016 Barrica 5 Meses is another excellent wine, showing just a bit more precision on both the nose and palate from its short stay in barrels than the regular Old Vine bottling. The nose offers up a fine blend of black cherries, roasted meats, chicory, beautiful, salty soil tones, wild fennel, a touch of oak and a topnote of bonfires. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied, focused and complex, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, suave tannins and impressive length and grip on the very well-balanced finish. Fine, fine juice. 2018-2030+. **91+**.

2015 Monastrell “Barrica 12 Meses”- Porta Regia (Bodegas Sierra Norte)



This is the top of the line bottling from Porta Regia, produced from fifty year-old vines and raised in two year-old barrels (forty percent American oak and sixty percent French oak) and it is excellent in 2015. The bouquet offers up lovely depth and complexity in its constellation of dark berries, woodsmoke, hung game, a complex base of soil, cigar ash and just a touch of oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and suavely tannic, with a fine core of fruit, excellent soil drive and a long, complex and perfectly balanced finish. Monastrell is a terrific grape variety and this is a first class example (not to mention a bargain)! 2018-2035. **92.**

Rioja

2016 Rioja Blanco “Solarce”- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)



The Rioja Blanco “Solarce” from Bodegas Casa La Rad is composed of an unorthodox blend of fifty percent Chardonnay, thirty percent Malvasia and ten percent each of Viura and Tempranillo Blanco. The chardonnay portion of the blend is barrel-fermented and raised in French oak, while the remainder of the blend is fermented and raised in stainless steel tanks prior to blending in preparation for bottling. The 2016 version of Solarce offers up a unique and complex blend of apple, a touch of casaba melon, coriander seed, salty soil tones, a hint of beeswax and vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is deep, ripe and focused, with good depth at the core, fine acids and a fair bit of new oak that has not yet quite integrated completely into the wine. There is fine depth here, but the wine is still on the young side and



needs a bit of bottle age to better integrate its components. With time, it will be a good drink, though with half its *cépages* made up of chardonnay, this does not have a classical white Rioja profile. 2019-2030. **88+**.

2015 Rioja Blanco- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)



The regular bottling of Rioja Blanc from Casa La Rad is again a rather surprising blend of fifty percent Chardonnay, thirty percent Malvasia and twenty percent Viura. The chardonnay vines are fully forty years of age, so obviously this has been an important component here for quite some time. The chalky vineyards are farmed organically and the wine is barrel-fermented and then aged in one hundred percent new French *barriques* for twelve months prior to bottling. The 2015 Blanco offers up a pretty nose of white peach, coconut, limestone soil tones, a bit of almond and a well done framing of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, nascently complex and very nicely balanced, with a fine core and good acidity, lovely focus and a long, quite classy young finish. I have no experience with how a Rioja Blanco with this much chardonnay in the blend will age, but this seems to have the balance to do so. Good juice in a rather unique style. 2018-2030+? **91+**.

2016 Rioja “Solarce”- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)



The Rioja “Solarce” from Bodegas Casa La Rad is produced from an interesting blend of sixty percent Tempranillo, thirty percent Garnacha and five percent each of Maturana and Cabernet Sauvignon. The wine is fermented in stainless steel and raised in new French barrels for eight months prior to bottling. The 2016 Solarce offers up a fine nose of raspberries, cherries, lovely Rioja spice tones, a fine base of soil, a touch of coconut and a fairly generous framing of cedary French oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and focused, with classic Rioja velvetiness on the attack, a good core, but a bit of uncovered oak tannin stiffening up the long and complex finish. I really love the wine here, but I am not in love with the oak treatment, which is not as deftly done as the winemaking itself. The oak tannins stick out a bit on the finish, which takes away a couple of points from the score, but the raw materials here are first rate and the potential here is outstanding. This is only eighteen dollars retail in the US, which makes it a pretty good value, but without buying new oak and seasoning up the barrels in the cellar with a few more vintages, this could become one of the greatest bargains in all of Rioja, as the underlying wine is that good! My score reflects that the wine is slightly over-oaked, but it is still a good drink in this condition, and if the Bodegas can start using older casks for the *elevage*, this is going to be a name to watch in Rioja! 2018-2030+ . **88**.

2015 Rioja Tinto- Bodegas Casa La Rad (Rioja Baja)



The 2015 Rioja Tinto from Casa La Rad is produced from forty year-old bush vines in the La Rad vineyard, with the *cépages* ending up forty percent each of Tempranillo and Garnacha, ten percent Graciano and ten percent Maturana. The wine undergoes malo in eight hundred liter oak barrels and this is aged in all new French *barricas* for fourteen months prior to bottling. The 2015 comes in at fourteen percent alcohol and delivers a deep and serious bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar smoke, Rioja spice tones redolent of cloves and nutmeg, a fine base of soil and a very suave, understated framing of nutty new oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and nicely light on its feet, with a good core, lovely focus and grip, plenty of complexity and a long, moderately tannic and quite promising finish. The new oak is a bit more evident on the palate than it is on



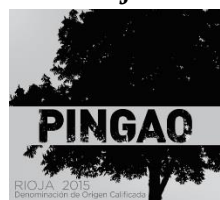
the nose today, but there seems to be sufficient stuffing to absorb the wood nicely with a bit of cellaring. This is a young and very good bottle of Rioja in the making, but it will need at least four or five years in the cellar to start to blossom properly. Fine juice. 2023-2050+. **92+**.

2016 Rioja “Campellares” - Bodegas San Pedro Apostol (Rioja Alta)



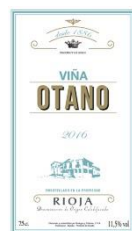
The 2016 Rioja “Campellares” from Bodegas San Pedro Apostol is produced from vines in excess of fifty years of age, but the wine is raised entirely in stainless steel tanks and made for early accessibility. The 2016 offers up a fine bouquet of black cherries, cassis, a nice dollop of Rioja spices, a good base of soil and a touch of cigar wrapper in the upper register. On the palate the wine is bright, full-bodied and tangy, with a good core, just a bit of backend tannin and fine focus and grip on the nascently complex finish. This is the bodegas’ entry level bottling and it is very well made, but I keep thinking fifty year-old vines deserve some extended aging in older American casks! This is a veritable steal at twelve dollars a bottle here in the US. 2018-2025. **89**.

2015 Rioja- Bodegas Pingao (Isaac Fernandez Selección)



As readers may recall, this bottling from Bodegas Pingao is produced from old vines in Rioja Alta, fermented in stainless steel tanks and aged for a few months in a combination of seventy-five percent American and twenty-five percent French barrels prior to bottling, so this is what many *bodegas* would call their “Joven” bottling. I tasted the 2013 vintage, but seemed to have missed the 2014. The current release is from 2015 and offers up a fine bouquet of red and black cherries, a nice touch of spices meats, fresh nutmeg, a touch of wild fennel and a judicious base of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is pure, full-bodied and impressively complex, with a good, solid core of fruit, lovely soil signature, moderate, well-integrated tannins and very good length and grip on the well-balanced finish. This is a very good bottle of Joven and a great value at under fifteen dollars here in the US! A couple of years in the cellar would not hurt this wine one iota, but it is very easy to drink already. 2018-2030+. **89+**.

2016 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco- Union de Viticultores Riojanos (Rioja Alta)



As I mentioned last year, the Viña Otano Rioja Blanco is produced from thirty year-old Viura vines and is fermented and raised entirely in stainless steel. I note that the 2016 is now sealed with a screwcap. It offers up a bright and wide open nose of lime, green apple, salty soil tones, dried flowers and a touch of wild fennel in the upper register. On the palate the wine is crisp, full and precise, with good depth at the core, bright acids and good length and grip on the finish. This seems a touch pinched already on the finish from the screwcap and I sense that reduction is going to become an issue for this wine in six months or so. Therefore, I would drink it young, though if it were sealed under cork, it would have no problems aging ten to fifteen years. 2018-2021+? **87**.

2016 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco “Fermentado en Barrica”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos

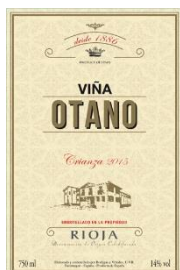


I had not loved the 2015 version of this wine, but the 2016 is a notable step up and far more interesting. The barrel-fermented version of 2016 Viña Otano Rioja Blanco is a blend of seventy-five percent Viura and twenty-five percent Tempranillo Blanco, with the wine aged for four months in the French wood. Interestingly, only the Viura is barrel-fermented in new casks, while the Tempranillo Blanco is fermented in stainless



steel. The new vintage of 2016 offers up a fine nose of yellow fruit, white soils, a bit of citrus peel, wild fennel and a gentle base of vanillin oak. On the palate the wine is crisp, full-bodied, young and nicely balanced, with good acids, fine focus and grip and a long, still quite primary finish. This is quite tasty today, but only hints at the complexity to come with bottle age. Good juice. 2018-2035. **89**.

2015 Viña Otano Rioja “Crianza”- Union de Viticultores Riojanos



The *cépages* of the 2015 Viña Otano Rioja “Crianza” is the same as last year, ninety percent Tempranillo and ten percent Mazuelo, with the wine raised for one year in a combination of American and French, older casks. The 2015 is a bit more black fruity in profile than the 2014 was on the nose, offering up a superb blend of black cherries, Rioja spices, cigar smoke, an excellent base of salty soil tones, a touch of celery seed and a well done framing of oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and shows off excellent mid-palate depth, with moderate, well-integrated tannins, good acids and fine focus and grip on the long, nascently complex and stylish finish. This is much more ready to go out of the blocks than the slightly stern 2014 and is an excellent bottle in the making. 2018-2040. **89+**.

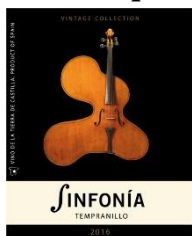
2012 Viña Otano Rioja Graciano- Union de Viticultores Riojanos (Rioja Alta)



I have seldom tasted a one hundred percent Graciano bottling from Rioja, other than the version made at Contino, so I was quite intrigued to try this 2012 from the Union de Viticultores Riojanos. The wine spends two years in cask, which is a combination of American and French barrels. The 2012 is excellent, offering up a deep and nicely sappy bouquet of cherries, cloves, cigar ash, a complex base of salty soil tones, a bit of spiced meats, incipient nuttiness and a nice framing of older oak. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, focused and nicely velvety on the attack, with a fine core, excellent soil signature, moderate tannins and a long, tangy and complex finish. The balance is impeccable here and this wine will age very nicely, but it is going to be very hard to keep one’s hands off in its relative youth, as it is already very tasty! Impressive juice. 2018-2040. **92+**.

Vino de la Tierra de Castilla

2016 Tempranillo “Sinfonía”- Bodegas Abanico



The 2016 Sinfonía” Bodegas Abanico is yet again a ringing success (I was very impressed with both the 2014 and 2015 versions) and is about as fine a substitute for the great old wines that used to hail from Ribera del Duero in the 1980s as I can think of today. The bouquet jumps from the glass in a classic combination of plums, black cherries, lovely spice tones, a nice touch of meatiness, sandy soil tones, cigar smoke and just a bit of coconutty oak influence in the upper register. On the palate the wine is ripe, full-bodied and impeccably balanced, with a good core of fruit, fine soil signature, ripe, suave tannins, good acids and excellent focus and grip on the complex finish. As I mentioned last year, this wine is crafted from forty-plus year-old tempranillo vines in the hills outside of Madrid, where the elevation gives a nice diurnal temperature swing and keeps the wine light on its feet. The 2016 version again comes in at fourteen percent octane and is perfectly balanced. At under fifteen dollars a bottle here in the US, this is an absolute steal! 2018-2035. **91**.

