

WINE News

Spain offers more options for adventurous palates than ever before. Follow our footsteps as we travel deep into Spanish wine country...



MARCH 3, 2014 FEATURES

- 2 Adventures in Ribeira Sacra
- 3 Spanish Classics from Jerez and Rioja; DIs from Ribera del Duero
- 4 Going Underground: Post-Punk, Hip-Hop and a Basque Cellar

On the Spanish Wine Route

By Joe Manekin

This will be my seventh year working at K&L and my fifth consecutive year traveling to Spain (nice work if you can get it!). As an avid consumer of European wines and an increasingly big fan of what I truly think is California's second golden age of winemaking, I still believe Spain to be the most dynamic wine producing country in the world today. My goal for this year's Spain newsletter is to read like a travelogue, written partly by me while on the wine road last month, with strong support from a few of my colleagues who have also traveled to Spain and who wanted to share their perspectives on some of our favorite Spanish regions and wines. Our adventures in Spain are made possible thanks to the labor and the art of our Spanish grape-growing and winemaking friends, along with the support of K&L ownership, my team at the Redwood City store and colleagues at our other locations. Most importantly, however, these adventures continue because of you, our customers! A huge thanks to all of you.

Below are just a few selections that show the depth and diversity of Spain's wines. For any questions, or if you would like to be added to my personal Spanish wine email list, please email me at JoeManekin@KLWines.com.

EXPLORE SPAIN'S DIVERSITY *Five Wines to Try Now*



2012 Zudugarai "Amats" Getariako Txakolina* (\$12.99) A K&L

Direct Import from verdant hillside vineyards near San Sebastian with picturesque views of the Cantabrian Sea. This lip-smackingly crisp number makes the perfect post-work glass of white.

2007 Marques de Legarda Reserva Rioja* (\$19.99) A K&L Direct Import. Generous, ripe berry fruit with a hint of savory earthy notes and the tannin structure to make it an

ideal accompaniment to rich legume-based dishes, braised or grilled meat and lamb.

2010 J.A. Calvo Casajus "Vendimia Seleccionada" Ribera del Duero (\$29.99) Unapologetically rich Tempranillo from Ribera del Duero. Very bold, deeply extracted and richly fruited, this is perfect if you're a Cab fan just getting into Spanish reds. 94 points RP.

2011 Bernabeleva "Viña Bonita" Garnacha Vinos de Madrid (Gredos) (\$46.99) The Château Rayas of Spain? We are huge fans of the Grenache grown in San Martin de Valdeiglesias, about 90 kilometers west of Madrid in the foothills of the Gredos Mountains.

Bernabeleva's crus in particular are sublime: intensely fruited, mineral, floral and simply beautifully balanced. The 13.5% ABV or lower crowd is missing out here, which only means more for the rest of us! 93 points ST.

2011 Bodegas y Viñedos Ponce "La Casilla" Manchuela (\$19.99) Juan Antonio Ponce is making some of Spain's most complex, exciting, and delicious Mediterranean reds. A true vigneron, Ponce's organic vineyards are in nearly perfect equilibrium, and his winemaking talents are considerable. 93 points RP.

—Joe Manekin

Adventures in Ribeira Sacra

By Joe Manekin

Reading about Ribeira Sacra, the region with the steeply sloped granitic, slate and schist vineyards overlooking the river in the rustic, interior portion of Galicia, is one thing. Seeing pictures of the precariously steep vineyards (70-degree inclinations are common) is another. Visiting the region, however, getting lost in the villages, following a mountain road until it dead-ends into the driveway of a 17th century farmhouse, forcing you to back up, uphill, without much room for error if you don't want to get stuck in the mud and possibly go tumbling downhill, is yet another. I'm relieved to say that I have not only survived my two-day crash-course in Ribeira Sacra, but I learned a lot about the region and a few of the area's star producers. I had the opportunity to meet our own star producer, Carlos Diaz of Estrela, as well.

Carlos Diaz

Based in Amandi, the Ribeira Sacra subzone with the largest number of bodegas, Carlos Diaz (along with his sister, Estrela, and 90-plus-year-old parents!) lives and breathes agriculture. When he is not teaching agriculture to children of varying ages, he is likely tending his two hectares of vines spread across six different parcels. Typical of the region, Carlos' parcels have both granite and slate soils with hints of quartz and traces of other minerals. He is adamant about organic viticulture, and refuses to ever use herbicides, preferring to cut the plants and grasses himself. A native plant known as *tojo* is harvested and applied as ground cover to protect the soil's moisture in the scorchingly hot summers.

Carlos makes one wine: **2012 Carlos Diaz "Estrela" Ribeira Sacra (\$14.99)**. It's brightly fruited, fresh, slightly peppery and very mineral. It's a humble and delicious red from *la zona* that would work beautifully with a traditional *cocido gallego* (mixed boiled veal, pork, meats, garbanzos and cabbage, pig ears and pig lips optional). Not altogether unusual for the area, Carlos includes a tiny portion of Garnacha Tintorera to add structure and depth to this wine, which for a simple tank-aged *joven*, it has in spades.

Bodegas Guimaro

Pedro Rodriguez at Guimaro is young, well-traveled and ambitious. With 10 hectares of vines, primarily on steep, prime parcels, he likes to explore the possibilities of Mencía when blended with grapes such as Brancellao and Mouraton (as the old timers did, he says). The **2010 Guimaro Mencía "Meixeman Viñas Viejas" Ribeira Sacra (\$39.99)** is intensely fruited, spicy and surprisingly elegant given the heft and impact of the wine, surely due to the excellent terroir, viticulture and fine-tuning in the cellar. Foot-treading for gentle extraction, longer macerations with stem inclusion and the use of older barrels form an important part of the wine's style. Think very good Crozes-Hermitage. 92 points RP.

Algueira

Fernando Martinez at Algueira has earned a reputation for producing one of the widest, most eclectic and universally loved lines of



Estrela's Carlos Diaz in one of his parcels in the Amandi subzone of Ribeira Sacra

Ribeira Sacra wines. The **2011 Algueira "Merenzao" Ribeira Sacra (\$39.99)** is produced from Merenzao, also known as Trousseau. Limpid ruby colored, it is a very fresh, acid-driven, highly drinkable wine that has lovely tension to the structure as well.

Dominio do Bibei

The lone representative from outside the Amandi subzone, Dominio do Bibei, based on the eastern edge of the Ribeira Sacra in the Quiroga-Bibei subzone, is arguably the most ambitious and exciting project in Ribeira Sacra. While I could fill at least a page describing my visit with the dynamic, highly personable Javier Dominguez, I will (for now, anyway) let his wines do the talking. The **2010 Dominio do Bibei "Lalama" Ribeira Sacra (\$32.99)** is a blend of Mencía, Brancellao and Mouraton. It is lighter on its feet, more red fruited than the Mencía-based wines in the Amandi subzone. Macerated, spicy cherry aromas lead to a richly red-fruited palate, with hints of sandalwood and cardamom. It's a delicious red for fans of both Pinot Noir and more elegant Rhône reds.

Ribeira Sacra is not up and coming; it has arrived. Given the players involved, their dedication, willingness to experiment and desire to truly get the best out of their wines, it's an area well worth seeking out—just be careful if you're driving there!



Guimaro's Pedro Rodriguez gives some perspective to the steep, terraced vines of the Ribeira Sacra.

VALDESPINO AND LA RIOJA ALTA *Spain's National Treasures*

Spain is home to many fine producers throughout its numerous winegrowing regions, but in the classic regions of Jerez and Rioja, two producers continue to set the standard by which all others are measured: Valdespino of Jerez and La Rioja Alta of Rioja.

Valdespino dates back to the 13th century, but was officially registered as a producer of wines aged in *solera* in 1975. It was sold in 1999 to Jerez native Jose Estevez, who relocated the casks to a facility outside Jerez in order to restore the soleras while preserving the natural yeasts and biological memories of each cask, cultivated over decades. (Some are more than 100 years old!) The process took three years to complete, but the results are some of the best examples of Sherry available on the market to date.

Valdespino “Inocente” Fino Jerez (\$24.99) Most Finos are blended from many vineyards and aged two to three years, so this stands out as a single-vineyard Fino aged for an average of 10(!) years in solera under *flor*. Its vibrant saline quality, with chalky minerality, lemon curd aromas and brined apple flavors make it the perfect apéritif. 94 points RP, 92 points WS.

Valdespino “Tio Diego” Amontillado Jerez (\$24.99) This starts life as a Fino, but once the flor dies it begins a period of oxidation during which aromas of salted caramel, roasted walnuts and sandalwood develop. Complex and surprisingly versatile, this is terrific with hard cheeses, *jamón* and savory, hearty fare. 92 points RP, 92 points WS.

Founded in 1890 in the village of Haro, in the heart of the region, La Rioja Alta continues its legacy as one of Rioja's benchmark producers. Their wines are made primarily from estate vineyards and aged according to Rioja tradition in American oak that is imported and assembled into casks at their own cooperage. The wines are known for their depth of fruit, their “classic” aromas and flavor profiles, and their ageability. I have tasted many library wines from this producer and they never cease to impress.



2005 La Rioja Alta “Viña Arana” Reserva Rioja (\$26.99) Composed of 95% Tempranillo and 5% Mazuelo, this is undeniably Rioja with its earthy burnished leather nose and rich core of Luxardo cherry on the palate, pushing an espresso and spicecake finish. Think gingerbread with a touch of olive oil rosemary cake. No need to wait—get drinking! 93 points RP, 93 points WS and 92 points ST.

2004 La Rioja Alta “Viña Aranza” Reserva Rioja (750ml \$29.99; 1.5L \$79.99) Their flagship, this blend of 80% Tempranillo from Rioja Alta vineyards and 20% Garnacha from Rioja Baja is loaded with baking spice, cedar and tobacco aromas, with raspberry coulis and cherry compote flavors. Bottled in 2008, this has been resting gently waiting for you. 94 points and Top 100 Wines WS; 93 points RP.

—Keith Mabry

LAMBUENA RIBERA DEL DUERO *Direct to Our Shelves*

In June of 2012, I joined 18 other wine professionals from the United States in Ribera del Duero to participate in the inaugural week-long “Drink Ribera, Drink Spain” passport campaign. There are 8,356 growers and 270 wineries producing a mere half million liters of wine a year there. It is at high elevation (2,500 to 2,800 feet), and though the climate is very extreme—snow in the winter and blistering heat in the summer—it is perfect for quality winemaking. I met many enthusiastic people and tasted many lovely wines, but the wines of Bodegas Lambuena were what really stood out. I was very impressed by the organically farmed 2009 Crianza. Silky, balanced, full of fruit, but elegant and graceful, Lambuena showed great promise. When I got back to K&L, I had samples airmailed from the winery so our buyer Joe could taste them. **Read more from Sarah's travels on K&L Uncorked!**

—Sarah Covey

Thanks to Sarah's set-up, I made plans to visit Lambuena after tasting samples of their Ribera del Duero. I loved the traditional flavor profile: dark fruits that are not so rich nor so lavishly oaked as to obscure the mineral character or diminish the drinkability of the wine. For a region known for its “bigger is better” mentality, I found Lambuena to be a refreshing throwback. Later, upon visiting the bodega and meeting Pedro Cabastrero (one of the brothers who run the winery), I learned about the ideally situated vines on varying soil types (chalk, clay, calcareous, alluvial). Viticulture is primarily organic (non-certified) and skillfully carried out by Cabastrero.

Interestingly, there is a touch of Cabernet and Merlot grown on the property, two grapes that actually have more than a 125-year history in the Ribera del Duero zone (primarily due to Vega Sicilia's efforts). Winemaking is traditional, with fermentation always using indigenous yeasts and aging in American and French oak barrels, most of which range in age from one to four years old. My kind of Tempranillo-based wine! A K&L Direct Import.

—Joe Manekin

2012 Lambuena Roble “4 Meses en Barrica” Ribera del Duero* (\$12.99) The perfect introduction to the organically farmed wines of Lambuena, this spends four months in barrel and is wonderfully bright, friendly and drinkable now...and so affordable! —SC

2010 Lambuena Crianza Ribera del Duero* (\$19.99) Red cherry, red currant, red plum, cassis, and notes of coconut from the American oak, this is bright, fresh and very drinkable! —SC Aromas of plum, dark cherries, mocha, subtle vanilla and a hint of wood smoke lead to a balanced, lightly savory palate. This classically styled Crianza is great now, but structured to age for at least seven to eight years. —JM

2006 Lambuena Reserva Ribera del Duero* (\$39.99) This really impressed me on my visit. A step up in intensity, elegance and structure from the Crianza, it has just entered its early drinking window with savory secondary flavors emerging, playing a supporting role to its powerful fruit and tannin structure. Enjoy now with lamb chops or a ribeye, or lay away another five or (many) more years. —JM

Joe Goes Underground: Post-Punk, Hip-Hop and a Basque Cellar

By Joe Manekin

For as long as I can remember, I've been a huge fan of musical history. Wait a second, you may be asking yourself, *isn't this supposed to be a report on some visit to a Basque cellar, with descriptions of dusty bottles, tales of rare vintages, and how—if you are a fan of fine and rare wines—you need to be buying as much older Rioja as you can afford?* Yeah, that part will come, but for now, please bear with me. I have always loved music, but often artists and bands other than what was popular at the time. For example, at around eight years old, when my friends were blasting “Appetite for Destruction”, I was slow-jamming to Lionel Richie and in a “New York State of Mind” with Billy Joel. Later, thanks to my brother and music magazines, I discovered post-punk. In college, as I got deeper into jazz and funk, of course I had to check out Leroi Jones’ *Blues People*. I continue to love hip-hop, inspired more than any other musical genre by its creative use of source material. I've always taken an interest in music from the past and valued its ability to inform what is going on in the present.

And—cue segue—I feel exactly the same way about Rioja.

Rioja is a region that offers wine drinkers the opportunity to drink from a diverse range of vintages, and in doing so it offers a better understanding of how the wines from decades ago have aged, not to mention how that 15-year-old traditional bottling is drinking now and how that more new-wave '01 is showing by comparison. All of this helps to inform how some of today's current releases will cellar.

Apart from these considerations, Rioja simply makes delicious wines, most of which do not cost an arm and a leg. I cannot tell you how many times we hear from our customers comments like, “I really am curious about my '86 Lafite, but knowing the market value of that wine, how could I not put it up for auction?” With Rioja, you can drink a well-aged, elegant bottle of wine without any hesitation. So it follows, we are always on the lookout for well-stored bottles of Rioja, which brings us to our Basque cellar adventure.

I first heard about this cellar from a good friend and valued commercial partner of ours. She is from Bilbao, resides in Rioja, and though she would no doubt be embarrassed to hear it put this way, let's just say that she is extremely well-connected. The short version of this story is that an owner of a restaurant outside of Bilbao had bought his Riojas (in very large numbers, often by the pallet) direct from the bodegas over the course of 30 or so years. The wine traveled the brief one-hour trip from the bodega north to his naturally temperature-controlled cellar under-



1969 Muga Reserva, the winery's first vintage.

neath his apartment on the side of a hill in a seaside village outside of Bilbao. (If you've ever visited Basque country, then you are well aware of its nearly constantly cool, foggy, damp climate.) Initially, we purchased a few bottles each of 12 different wines from this collection to taste and see for ourselves how the wines were showing. They were showing quite well. I had to see this cellar myself. Now, having recently done so, I can confidently report that it is literally a treasure trove of Riojas from the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. Going forward, our intention is to bring in a variety of wines, and in cases where there is some quantity available, offer them primarily on a pre-arrival basis (payment is taken in advance, and the wine will arrive around its stated ETA, typically three to four months after our offer). Please email me if you are interested in hearing about these old treasures. For now, here are a few wines, which are available for purchase now and are slated to arrive by mid-April:

1973 Bodegas Olarra Cerro Anon Crianza Rioja (\$99.99) A staff favorite! I learned why this mere Crianza has held up so well. It was made, I believe, by Ezekiel “El Brujo” Hernandez, former Cune winemaker and one of the all-time greats of winemaking.

1973 Bodegas Berberana Reserva Rioja (\$149.99) Just keeps on opening up and developing more complexity. A marvel.

1964 Bodegas Berberana Reserva Rioja (\$199.99) A very solid wine from the great '64 vintage.

1964 Glorioso Reserva Rioja (\$139.99) Another '64 for your collection. Shows the breed and elegance of the vintage.

1964 Faustino I Gran Reserva Rioja (\$199.99) This 50-year-old is more than alive and well; it is absolutely singing!

K&L REDWOOD CITY

3005 El Camino Real, Redwood City, CA 94061
P (650) 364-8544 F (650) 364-4687
HOURS M-F 10-7, Sat 9-7, Sun 10-6
LOCKERS M-S 10-6, Sun 11-5

KLWINES.COM

Toll Free (877) KLWINES (877) 559-4637
Email: Wines@KLWines.com

K&L HOLLYWOOD

1400 Vine Street, Hollywood, CA 90028
P (323) 464-WINE (9463) F (323) 836-0853
HOURS M-S 10-8, Sun 11-6

K&L EVENTS & TASTINGS

We host regular evening and Saturday tastings at each K&L store as well as many special events throughout the year. For the complete calendar go to KLWines.com/Local-Events.

K&L SAN FRANCISCO

638 Fourth Street, San Francisco, CA 94107
P (415) 896-1734 F (415) 896-1739
HOURS M-F 10-7, Sat 9-6, Sun 11-6

We accept American Express, Discover, Visa and Mastercard.

For Order Inquiries, Shipping Information, Local Events, Policies and Up-to-the-Minute Inventory, visit KLWines.com

🍷 FOLLOW OUR BLOG UNCORKED FOR THE LATEST NEWS, REVIEWS, AND UPDATES FROM K&L STAFF 🍷