

WINE News

*From Cava to the Canary Islands,
we find fantastic Spanish wines.*



MARCH 27, 2017 FEATURES

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The New and Old Classic Wines of Spain

By Joe Manekin

It's hard to believe, but another year has already passed, and just as I did last March, I am helping to put together our annual Spain newsletter feature. Joining me once again will be Redwood City's Heather Gowen, getting serious about Priorat and one of its most talented new faces, on page 2, and LA's Ivan Diaz, who will explain why Can Mayol Loxarel makes some of our favorite sparkling wine from anywhere in the world, also on page 2.

Also joining me over the past year have been many of you who regularly host parties with bottles of Cava, eat and drink your way through Rioja and neighboring País Vasco, and continue to show so much support for the great wines of Spain. We thank you for that, and we hope to build upon all those successes, as well as the exciting new regions and the vibrant culture that Spain continues to contribute to the world of wine.

Mas Codina Cava Brut Reserva Penedès (\$12.99) Recently back in stock! Mas Codina is a 40-hectare estate in Penedès which dates back to 1681—that's 1681! This Brut Reserva Cava was hand-harvested from 20- to 30-year-old vines and estate bottled. Grapes include Macabeo, Xarel-lo, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Not surprisingly, this has become one of our most popular bubbly over the years, for its bright and fresh fruit with impeccable balance.



2010 La Rioja Alta "Viña Alberdi" Reserva Rioja (\$17.99) Upon first whiff, the 2010 Viña Alberdi is spicy, with cedary oak notes nearly stealing the show. There are of course baking spices and pretty fruits as well, which both become more evident on the palate, where they combine with the oak for a nicely balanced, "bien clasico" expression of Rioja. This level of quality and traditional craftsmanship at under \$18 makes this a must in your regular rotation! **95 JS, 91 RP.**



2005 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos Reserva Rioja (\$19.99) This is one of our single most popular wines—from anywhere. If you are one of the few who have not have enjoyed this wine's complex, savory, purely fruited character, then it's time to get caught up. A perennial staff favorite for a good reason, the Lesmos Reserva might be my favorite \$20 red. Drinking perfectly now. **92 JS.**



2012 Marqués de Murrieta Reserva Rioja (\$19.99) This might even top their 2010 Reserva, one of our best-selling wines of 2016. On the nose rich cherry compote, red fruits, saddle leather, sweet spices and hints of new oak and cedar—a classic Murrieta profile. The flavors of fresh, firm fruits are poised and bright—this must be the Mazuelo and Garnacha talking! Fantastic Rioja to buy/hold, buy and drink, or ideally, to buy/drink/hold! I would load up on this one. **95 JS, 92 RP.**



Priorat Terroir Unlimited at Terroir al Limit

By Heather Gowen

Priorat has long been respected for its picturesque terroir and unique style of wines. Some wine drinkers have come to associate the region with opulent, fruit-forward wines, often with a hearty oak influence. But what happens when an intrepid, famous South African winemaker (Eben Sadie) and a passionate German foodie and wine lover (Dominik Huber) join forces?

In the Terroir al Limit wines made by Huber (who runs the winery), we have the rare opportunity to experience an established wine region in a whole new light. The wines bring new meaning to the famous terroirs of Priorat.

Most accessible in terms of price and current drinkability is the **2014 Terroir al Limit “Torroja” Priorat (750ml \$39.99; 1.5L \$79.99)**. It is considered the flagship wine, sourced from a couple of vineyard sites in the village of Torroja. Made from 50% Garnacha and 50% Cariñena, the wine is whole-cluster pressed and fermented in concrete and large format, neutral oak. The resulting wine is well-structured, with clean black currant and plum on the palate, highlighted by a savory mushroom note. **92 RP.**



On the higher tier, we have very small amounts of the single vineyard bottlings, all hailing from the excellent (some say best ever) 2013 vintage. A very limited number of magnums of the Les Tosses and Les Manyes are also available.

The **2013 Terroir al Limit “Arbassar” Priorat (\$69.99)** is the most open and accessible of the three for drinking now, farmed in a high-elevation vineyard of 90-year-old Cariñena vines. On the palate the wine is incredibly lifted and aromatic, with licorice, black cherry and floral notes—quite elegant and feminine in style. **95 RP.**

The **2013 Terroir al Limit “Les Tosses” (750ml \$199.99; \$399.99 1.5L)** is also all Cariñena, though of a more intense and structured style that highlights the slate soils in which it is grown. On the palate the wine demonstrates brooding, meaty and earthy notes, with smooth, full-bodied black fruit and beautifully integrated tannins. The finish is incredibly long. **96 RP.**

Comparatively, the **2013 Terroir al Limit “Les Manyes” Priorat (750ml \$199.99; 1.5L \$399.99)**, composed of all Garnacha, is a bit lighter and more elegant a wine in style. Luis Gutiérrez of Wine Advocate describes the wine as, “stunning, perfumed and floral, with subtle aromas of Mediterranean herbs and flowers.” **97 RP.**

The Naturally Fresh Bubbles of Can Mayol Loxarel

By Ivan Diaz

Founder and winemaker Josep Mitjans made his first bottle of bubbles in 1985 at only 16 years old, and registered the Loxarel name in 1987 as a tribute to the primary varietal used in the wine, the indigenous Xarel-lo. Ever since, he has been determined to take the utmost ecological care when creating these wines and in 2002, in addition to farming organically, the winery went Biodynamic. What this all adds up to is a collection of sparkling wines with highly distinctive flavor profiles and textures. All of these wines are also made in a “Brut Nature” style, which means there is no sweetened dosage added to the wine between first and second fermentations. This ensures a level of freshness and uninterrupted terroir expression, allowing all the nuanced fruit and mineral flavors to shine through without a manipulated layer of richness to mask them.

2013 Can Mayol Loxarel “Refugi” Brut Nature Penedes (\$17.99)

Their current release of the entry-level “Refugi” is bone dry, with crisp green apple and lemon flavors that are bright up front. But the star of the show here is the compellingly chalky minerality. The bubbles are ultra-fine and moussy while a backbone of saline acidity provides the finishing touch, giving a textural tension to the interplay between fruit and terroir, creaminess and raciness. **92 RP.**

2013 Can Mayol Loxarel “999” Brut Nature Rosat Penedes (\$12.99)

This wine gains its gorgeous ruby color by blending 60% Xarel-lo Vermell and 40% Pinot Noir. While it shows more fruity richness than the Refugi, this is still a Brut Nature and is utterly dry. Restrained strawberry, dried cranberry, tart citrus and orange peel all wash across the palate with a bracing acidity and tickling bubbles.

2010 Can Mayol Loxarel “Reserva Familiar” Brut Nature Penedes (\$19.99)

The 2010 is another restrained, linear offering featuring consistent flavors of lemon and stony/chalky minerals, but also gains a certain roundness from orchard fruit flavors and extra time (six-plus years) on the lees. Instead of crunchy green apples, the profile here shows more ripened, baked golden apples, hints of baking spice and cleansing bubbles.

These profound and versatile bubbly will pair perfectly with the same foods you might pair with Champagne, from creamy Mahon cheese to fresh yellowtail crudo, or even buttermilk fried chicken. Enjoy!





Bryan MacRoberts in Rioja.

We've Always Got Something New From Old Rioja

By Joe Manekin

Change has been afoot for a while in Spain's most successful wine region. A growing number of very good to great producers are restless, looking for ways to make the best wines possible, and just as importantly, trying to find a way to communicate some of what makes their wines so unique on the label. Without getting too bogged down in the D.O. region's politics, let's just say that some very talented winemakers are producing some of Rioja's most exciting new wines and are committed to letting the quality and terroir do the talking.

This past fall, I visited three such producers, two of whom we recently began to import as part of our Direct Import (DI) program.

Laventura

Laventura is a Rioja winery started by native South African Bryan MacRoberts. How did he end up in Rioja, Spain? Let's just say that he met a girl! That said, he is quick to point out that he has long admired Rioja's great wines, particularly its fantastic whites. MacRoberts grew up in a farming family in South Africa, and has been quietly making some of that country's best wines. His good friend and mentor, the highly respected Eben Sadie, has helped Bryan hone his winemaking style along the way. A proponent not only of organic viticulture, but also a strong believer in the importance of legacy organic vines on top quality sites, Bryan is picky about where he grows and sources fruit. The Laventura white, made from Viura grapes, is set to arrive later this spring. It's a killer, currently my favorite white in the category. His red is no slouch, either, and has really started to open up in the past few months.



2014 Laventura Rioja (\$19.99) This features organically farmed Rioja Alavesa Tempranillo with some Rioja Baja Garnacha and Rioja Alta Mazuelo (from San Vicente) blended in as well. It is a tense and taut style, very mineral, and not at all weighed down by oak. Some whole clusters are used. This is a very well made, wholly original take on red Rioja, with loads of crunchy red fruit, some spice, and off-the-charts limestone minerality! **90 RP.**

Honorio Rubio

Honorio Rubio is a Riojano white wine specialist. In a land best known for its incredibly age-worthy reds, it is undoubtedly the

traditional whites which—at least for many die-hard Blanco Rioja fans out there—represent Rioja's finest and most original wines. But these days, outside of López de Heredia (whose whites are increasingly difficult to find) and the odd older bottles of Ygay Blanco, traditional white Rioja is tough to source. That's why we are excited to be selling the wines of our newest DI producer, Honorio Rubio. Based in the high-altitude Rioja Alta village of Cordovín, Honorio Rubio has spectacular Viura and Malvasa vine holdings, and chooses to turn them into classic, traditional white Rioja.



Honorio Rubio "Añadas" Blanco Rioja (\$39.99) This is a blend of primarily Viura with some Malvasia, and contains several vintages or "añadas" blended together. This wine was bottled in 2012, with several years of aging in barrel followed by another several in bottle prior to release. Think Tondonia for this bottling. **93 RP.**

2012 Honorio Rubio "Lías Finas" Blanco Rioja (\$27.99) Lías Finas reminds me a bit of a less oaky, more steely and Burgundian Viña Gravonia. Mineral, saline, yellow fruited and somewhere at the crossroads of Roulot, Equipo Navazos Manzanilla and a bygone era of oak-aged Rioja whites.

Artuke

Last but not least, there is Artuke. Arturo and Kike (Artuke, get it?) Miguel Blanco produce wines from high-quality, organically farmed vineyards, and carefully considered oak usage. They are less concerned with the typical aging conventions (Crianza, Reserva, Gran Reserva) of the past, and more focused on defining a new path for village and vineyard-defined wines. Their vineyards are in Baños de Ebro, Abalos and San Vicente.

2014 Artuke "La Condenada" Rioja (\$59.99)

Featuring old vines including Tempranillo, Garnacha, Graciano and even white Palomino plantings from a sandstone vineyard, this bottling is wonderfully fresh, with an intensity that would allow it to stand toe-to-toe with Premier Cru Burgundy from Chambolle or Nuits-St-George. Lovely fruit purity and concentration all but hide any evidence of oak aging as it is typically done in Rioja. **93 RP.**





The Spanish Sampler

By Joe Manekin

While the other articles have focused on some of our top values and specific regions or producers, in this one I'm simply going to highlight some new arrivals of wines I think are super tasty and fun to drink. Of course, with a couple Direct Import Albariños and two first-time DI Riojas (everyone please join me in welcoming Castillo de Viñas to the DI stable) there is also plenty of value in the mix here. Thirsty? Cool, let's get into it then.

2015 Valtea Albariño Rias Baixas (\$14.99) Our second vintage of this DI Albariño, this wine shows everything we like in the grape: hints of lemongrass, lively stone fruit and a brisk, saline-tinged palate. From the sub-zone of Condado do Tea, where the days are a bit warmer and evenings are slightly cooler, this wine has a wonderful mid-palate presence to complement the typically lean and mineral qualities of Albariño. A classic with any shellfish, especially Dungeness crab!

2014 Valtea "Finca Garabato" Albariño Rias Baixas (\$19.99) Finca Garabato is a parcel of Valtea's oldest vines. You will notice that it says "2° Año" on the label, which refers to the fact that it ages in tank on its lees for a year following fermentation. This gives the wine a lovely richness that, particularly in a cooler vintage like 2014, really ramps up the flavor and textural qualities of the wine. Still refreshing, only richer and ready to take on a meal.



2014 Castillo de Viñas Crianza Rioja (\$9.99) Our newest DI Rioja comes from Rioja Baja, where the climate is a bit warmer and more Mediterranean, but where the Garnacha is arguably the best in all Rioja, the Graciano ripens more easily and shows great promise, and Tempranillo, planted on choice parcels like it is here, is also quite good. Castillo de Viñas is a label put together for us by one of our contacts in Rioja, and is made by the Burgo Viejo winery, a group of growers who have some great quality vineyards in the area. Juicy red and mixed berry fruit, with some gentle spiciness and toast, make for a Rioja that is plenty authentic, easy drinking and tough to beat for the price.



2012 Castillo de Viñas Reserva Rioja (\$17.99) The Reserva quality fruit, combined with a warmer, more structured vintage, make this bottling a bit more deeply pitched, with darker fruit and the ability to beautifully complement a nice cut of meat or lamb chops. Solid and super tasty.

2015 Los Bermejos Malvasia Seco Lanzarote Canary Islands (\$19.99) Bright, citric and balanced, with just a perfect amount of fruit, this Malvasia from volcanic soils on the island of Lanzarote is one of our favorite Canary whites. The minerality and pitch-perfect fruit combine for a refreshing white to enjoy on its own, with seafood (sushi, ceviche, or whole grilled fish), or for a taste of the Canaries, with some herb-roasted chicken, papas arrugadas and mojo!



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