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Great new Spanish wines

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Spain is on fire – almost literally in terms of the economy, politics and unemployment, but I'm not referring to that ugly side of the country. I'm talking about the recovery of wine regions and local grape varieties, about the diversity of wines and the excitement of new names and faces appearing daily. I complained bitterly when most Spanish wines seemed so uniform, when there was so much Tempranillo and new French oak (Tempranillo is exceptional, but it cannot be the only thing...) that it was difficult to tell a Rioja from a Ribera del Duero, a Navarra from a Somontano. But in a mere five years the situation has changed dramatically.

While I must admit to not buying or drinking Spanish wines during this dark period (yes, the wines were dark, in all senses), I now feel very excited about the current state of Spanish wine and even more so about the potential for the future. On the other hand, wine consumption in Spain keeps going down, so I wonder what we are doing wrong. Because we must be doing something seriously wrong.

I guided you a few months ago through some [regions that were off the beaten track](#), and I believe it's time for a quick update. I've selected 10 new wines that have attracted my attention in the last few months, but there could have been more, and they could have been from several different regions. Galicia keeps producing new wines all the time, with focus on new – or rather old – varieties, as well as more of the well-known Mencía and Godello, and in Penedès the Xarello revolution is unstoppable, so I would like to talk to you about a couple of new ones, even after introducing quite a few recently. I also tried to look at other regions and found a truly exciting white from Rueda, something fresher than anything I can remember in this appellation for years, and I made a few discoveries in the Mediterranean regions as well: a new Monastrell, this time from Valencia, which joins the ranks of Pie Franco, Estrecho and Alfynal; a truly exceptional white from Priorat; and an unusual Atlantic red in Tarragona. This is not a tasting; this is a selection of the best new wines in Spain. I hope new stuff like this will keep coming. Again, tasting notes with lots of context, notes that you should read. Here you will find them in geographical order, following the clock and starting at 12.00, north east to north west. Quoted prices are retail in Spain.

WHITES

[Terroir al Límit, Pedra de Guix 2010 Priorat](#) 18 Drink 2013-2018

Terroir al Límit, the winery owned by Dominik Huber and Eben Sadie in Priorat, is really taking things to the limit. They are going a lot more natural with their wines, and they are experimenting a lot, even with an orange wine made with Muscat grapes in contact with their skins and aged in a big glass demijohns. But the wine that really caught my attention this year was their white. It's easy for Priorat whites to be alcoholic and low in acidity. Well, this is exactly the opposite. Third vintage for this unusual white, a blend of 80% Garnacha Blanca, 18% Pedro Ximénez and 2% Macabeu (aka Viura, the grape responsible for the majority of whites in Rioja) from vineyards at 400 to 600 metres of altitude. This is part of the range they call (in Catalan) Vi de Coster or slope wines, as the vineyards are situated on very steep slopes. The must is fermented in used oak and aged for 24 months in 500-litre demi-muids (and yet it's fresh as a daisy, no signs of oxidation whatsoever) and bottled without filtration or clarification. Again, the price tag here will scare many.

Very light in colour. Toasty notes, reminiscent of sesame seeds, lees, somewhat initially reduced. With time a mineral note of flint starts emerging making it a very interesting nose. It's clearly more mineral than fruity, seems made with stones rather than grapes. It's very dense, but with plenty of compensating acidity, still marked by the wood, with a bitter note in the end. Makes you salivate and want more. Very tasty. With time its Mediterranean origin is clearly revealed. I'd love to follow its evolution in bottle. (LG) 13% €50

[Ton Rimbau, Porcellànic Vino Sur-Lie Xarello 2011 Penedès](#) 17 Drink 2013-2017

The natural wine scene in Spain is a piece of patchwork, and I must say that I really like the whites more than the reds. This is a Xarello from Penedès with no added sulphur which is made following the biodynamic calendar. But Ton Rimbau is going to much further extremes: he uses ceramic bottles to protect his wines from the light (think of those old beer bottles), and stores them standing up in an underground pool of water in non-negative geological areas to keep the temperature stable until the wine is shipped from the winery. The flasks come with a wooden label hanging from the neck and are sealed with wax, all as natural as he can think of, giving it a most unusual look. He wanted to call this wine Ceramic but they had some problems registering the name, so they went for porcellànic, which is a Catalan word trying to mean more or less the same – but based on porcelain. Now, going beyond these esoteric details, the Xarello grapes come from 30-year-old vines planted at 292 metres above sea level in a plot called La Llaona. The vineyards are not worked; they are left to develop their own ecosystem – which he sees as a forest – especially without sowing to avoid dust or other particles in the air. The grapes are hand-picked, softly pressed in a vertical press, macerated and fermented in new French oak barrels at a low temperature. Each process is carried out according to lunar cycles. Raised during nine months in French oak barrels (Allier) on its fine lees, and all without any added sulphites. A wine of strong personality, clearly not made to please all palates. Confused? However, the most disturbing detail is really the price tag.

May be a bit cloudy. Very closed at first, different, incense, earthy, soil, phenolic, chalk, stone, lees, smoke, ripe skins (sometimes moving into dangerous territory: cider). It reminds me of the Sancerres from Vatan or the whites from Quinta das Bageiras in Bairrada (Portugal). It might have some residual sugar, but most of the time it feels quite dry; it is a chameleon of a wine, ever changing. At the end, the truth is in the lees! (LG) 12.5% €75

[Recaredo, Can Credo Xarel-lo 2009 Penedès](#) 16.5 Drink 2013-2016

I couldn't resist adding just one more Xarello, as I loved this wine. I tasted 2009 even

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though I think I liked both 2008 and 2010, both cooler vintages, better than 2009. I've just realised there are no notes in our database for Recaredo, which in my opinion is the leading Cava producer together with Gramona (which is also absent!), so I should try to fix that sooner rather than later. For now, here we have a still wine made from Xarello (most of their Cavas are also Xarello-based), from grapes grown in one of their vineyards in the village of Subirats in Penedès, 50 kilometres away from Barcelona. The chalk-rich vineyard is cultivated and certified organic and biodynamic. The grapes are macerated with their skins and slowly pressed and the must fermented and aged in oak barrels for one month. This is only the second vintage for this wine, and 6,620 bottles were produced. It comes in an antique-looking bottle and closed with a nice, unbleached cork. Can Credo is the local nickname by which the Recaredo family is known. This 2009 smells very much like a Cava with ripe apples in the nose, but I remember tasting other cooler vintages that showed a more mineral edge. In the mouth it has precision; it's clean, with good acidity, but unequivocally Mediterranean. (LG) 12.5% €20

Beatriz Herranz, Barco del Corneta Verdejo 2011 Rueda 17 Drink 2013-2015
This is only the second vintage of this wine, made in minuscule quantities by Beatriz Herranz, girlfriend of Daniel G Jiménez-Landi from the [Jiménez-Landi](#) winery in Gredos. She is from Rueda, the white wine region close to Ribera del Duero, mostly in the province of Valladolid, where white wines from the local grape Verdejo are produced. Only 1,000 bottles of this 2011 were produced, but she has made wine to fill 7,000 bottles in 2013 and hopes to reach 10,000 in 2013. Beatriz had rented space in a winery, but she's now getting her own space in the village of La Seca. The vineyard is not particularly old (an understatement, as they were planted in 2008!), at 700 metres altitude, but the wine has the old-vine intensity, which she thinks is just the reflection of the soils in some of the better areas of the appellation, Cantarranas in La Seca. She does not add or take away anything, aiming at expressing the soil, climate and grape variety in her wine. The wine is fermented with natural yeasts and aged for eight months on its lees in 300-litre used French oak barrels. Fresh air for Rueda. Very clean colour, the smells remind me of the Ruedas from the 1980s and 1990s, with freshly cut grass, some bitter almonds, ripe musky apples, quince and hay, with tension, firm acidity, with the texture of a Riesling but with a bitter finish. With time and air it develops quite a strong mineral feeling. A soil-driven [rather than yeast-driven?] – JR] Verdejo? (LG) 13.5% €17

Epicure Wines by Franck Massard, Audacia Godello 2011 Valdeorras 17 Drink 2013-2019
Epicure Wines is the company of Franck Massard, a French sommelier who came to Spain to work for Torres, and settled in Cataluña. He sources and makes wines throughout Spain. His wines are made by Dominique Roujou de Boubée, a Frenchman who has been living in Spain for the last 10 years, but who studied oenology in Bordeaux and is a disciple of Denis Dubourdieu and Jean-Claude Berrouet. Even if this wine is sold by Massard's company, it's a joint venture between Massard, Roujou and his wife, also an oenologist, Laura Montero, in a project they call Les Trois Amis. Roujou and Montero moved from Barcelona to Galicia to be closer to the land they really love, and to make their dream white wines. The three friends have also produced an Albariño under the name Alma. Both are very much worth seeking out. Godello from two different vineyards between 400 and 650 metres above sea level with complex soils with clay, sand, quartz and slate. The peculiarity is that the wine was aged for nine months in stainless steel tanks on its own lees. It has 7.3 g/l total acidity. Subtle, elegant and complex in the nose. Very mineral. In the mouth it is a bomb, intense, concentrated, and full of flavours. They call it discreet and elegant, I'd say powerful and elegant – what a great white should be. A big surprise, and one of the best examples of what the Godello grape is capable of. (LG) 13% €13

REDS

Vinves del Terrer, Nus del Terrer 2008 Tarragona 16 Drink 2013-2017
The appellation Tarragona is overwhelmed by nearby Priorat and Montsant. This comes from an unusual area, quite flat, two kilometres inland, at only 20 metres above sea level, very close to the Campo de Tarragona high-speed train station that you take to go to Priorat. So, what is the interest of yet another Cabernet blend? Well, what is different here, and this is the battle that proprietor Eduard Morell has taken on as a personal crusade: to show the unique terroir they have in their family vineyard. This terroir is called lumaquela, a calcareous formation rich in marine fossils. Here they have 7 ha of land where they have planted nine different plots of vines since 1989. This is a blend of 67% Cabernet Sauvignon and 33% Garnacha Tinta, where both varieties complement each other perfectly, making a wine that is serious but fresh and easy to drink. Its bigger brother, Terrer d'Aubert, is more concentrated, pure Cabernet, but not necessarily better, less Mediterranean, more Atlantic, and just different. 2008 is a cool vintage for the region, one for slow maturation. This wine is quite dark with the typical Cabernet rim. A serious wine that transmits a sensation of harmony, with the black pepper from the Cabernet Sauvignon and the pleasant fruitiness of the Garnacha, subtle and without any edges. Very drinkable. (LG) 14% €19

Los Frailes, 1771 Monastrell 2011 Valencia 17.5 Drink 2013-2020
I love Monastrell, and I have just tasted one that I feel will join the trio of Pie Franco, Estrecho and Alfynal which are my favourites, about which I've written already. This is so new that not only has it not yet been released, but the release date has not yet been decided, the label has not yet been designed and the price has not been set. But I loved it so much, I found it so elegant and refined, that I fell in love with it immediately. This is grown in the south of inland Valencia, a region called Terres dels Alforins, where a few young wineries are making exciting wines, trying to find their identity, in many cases looking at traditional methods – read amphora – and grape varieties such as Monastrell, which was probably the main variety in the region before phylloxera. It's the property of the Velazquez family, unrelated to the great Spanish painter as far as I know, Velazquez being quite a common surname in Spain. It's a big estate, with some 130 ha of vineyards. The wine is made by Dominique Roujou de Boubée, a Frenchman who is consulting and making wines in Valencia, Priorat, Galicia and Extremadura. Here he followed the old traditions and used as little technology as possible. The result is stunning. This is still a barrel sample waiting to be bottled. Bright ruby translucent colour, the colour of the wines from the past. This particular wine has not yet been released, it has not even been bottled, so look out for it in the future if you know someone who sells or imports the winery's wines. The nose screams Monastrell. Violets, tree bark, scorched wet earth and black truffles. In the mouth it's also very typical, with the tell-tale elegant rusticity, an apparent contradiction in terms, but something that you find in the best authentic, unpraised wines in the world, fine tannins and very fresh. So good now, with an even better future. A legend in the making. (LG) 13.5% €20

Raúl Pérez, Vino de Familia 2011 Vino de la Tierra Castilla y León 16 Drink 2014-2018
How can you talk about new wines, regions and grape varieties in Spain and not talk

about Raúl Pérez? I could tell you that he has a new 40,000-bottle project in Bierzo called Vizcaina de Vinos, that he's making a wine in Mallorca with the grape variety Gorgollasa, that in Ribeira Sacra, after La Tentación (the temptation) came El Pecado (the sin) and now La Penitencia (the penance!) is here, but no, I'll go to one of my favourite regions, the Gredos Mountains, halfway between Madrid, Toledo and Ávila, where stunning high-altitude Garnacha is being produced by a bunch of pioneers. This wine, still unreleased, is a joint venture between Raúl and the guys from La Tintorería, a wine shop in Madrid worth a visit if you're in town, one of the few true cavistes with a really different Spanish wine selection. They sell Raúl's wines, and it was only a matter of time before they made a wine together. I'm sure it won't be the last. This comes from a granite-rich, north-facing, steep old vineyard at 800 metres above sea level, a late-ripening plot, harvested after all the others nearby, and when the norm was 15% this was 13.5%. Whole clusters were fermented in oak vats and aged in 225- and 500-litre barrels. Apparently this *Vino de Familia* (family wine) was spectacular in barrel, so it must have closed down when bottled.

Quite dark and still marked by the wood at this very early stage. It even has a feeling of Priorat in it, although it doesn't come from slate but from granite soils. Bottled in November 2012, it had not yet recovered from bottle shock when I tasted it in January. To be followed up. (LG) 13.5%
€30

Verónica Ortega, ROC 2010 Bierzo 17 Drink 2013-2018

Verónica has an impressive CV, with stints in many different parts of the world, Priorat (Clos Erasmus and Álvaro Palacios), New Zealand, Burgundy Comte Armand and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti) and the northern Rhône (Domaine Colombier). Last summer I bumped into her at Niepoort in the Douro, where she was doing the harvest, so she is more than experienced when it comes to world-class wines. She is from Jerez and very much in love with sherry, but her first wine is from Bierzo, where she is a protégée of wine-wizard Raúl Pérez. This wine is a *Mencia*, from a selection of different old-vine and organically farmed vineyards on clay and sandy soils in the area of *Valtuille de Abajo* in Bierzo which are harvested by hand. The 2010 is the first vintage with half of the grapes fermented in whole clusters in an open 600-litre barrel, doing soft vinification with pigeage, and after a 30-day maceration, pressed in a vertical press. Malolactic was carried out in 228-litre used Burgundy barrels and bottled with very light filtration in May 2012. Sadly, only 600 bottles were produced of this stunning 2010, but she hopes to gradually increase production with the idea of reaching a maximum of 15,000-20,000 bottles in 2015. Buy it if you can find it, and you'll see the elegance Bierzo is capable of. Very perfumed, with lots of flowers (violets). Lots of flavour too, very fine-grained tannins, with acidity and glycerine that give it a velvety texture, somewhere between burgundy and the northern Rhône. Elegance in a bottle. (LG) 13.8%
€25

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