

## Spain, The Duero: Influenced Regions

October 30, 2015



*The Duero River, as it crosses Quintanilla de Onésimo, is a much smaller river than can be found in the Portuguese Douro. Here you can almost cross it on foot.*

The Duero is one of the great rivers in the Iberian Peninsula; from its source in the province of Soria, it flows all across northwest Spain to Oporto in Portugal where a couple of letters are switched in the name and it turns into the Douro. The Duero/Douro is a 900-kilometer long river. Wine wise, the Ribera del Duero appellation in Spain is the one that uses the name for its wines. They do not allow others to use it, which may seem unfair, because plenty of other wines are born on its banks or its area of influence, most notably Toro. In Portugal, the Douro table wines and Port are produced with grapes harvested on its steep slopes, and some Vinho Verde is also produced nearby. In Spain there are other zones, more or less close to the river, that I'm grouping because of their geographical proximity and/or similar wine styles. Ribera del Duero and Toro have their own articles, and the rest of the wines are here bundled together.

Once again, the Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla y León appellation gets the lion's share in terms of wines tasted and high scorers. It's the largest and most important of the 'other Duero' appellations, although its extension is larger and also covers regions in León and Zamora that are closer to Bierzo/Galicia. First, because top producers like Mauro or Abadía Retuerta, that fall just outside the limits of Ribera del Duero, release their wines under the appellation. And second, because a significant number of the quality whites that would be from Rueda if things were normal (more on that later), do not sell their

wines as Rueda, even if they are within its limits and the grape used for them is Verdejo. I've included all those whites here.

### **The Best of the Rest**

Mauro and Abadía Retuerta need no introduction, but the news is that they are both making better wines than ever! Besides the limited and more expensive single vineyard bottlings, Abadía Retuerta's *basic* offering, Selección Especial produced in the 350,000-bottle range, has been unloaded of all the oak from the initial vintages and in 2012 is simply superb. Mauro's current wines go back to the quality of the glorious 1996, a vintage in which their Vendimia Seleccionada can compete among the best Tempranillos in the whole of the Duero; that's a tasting I should do one of these days. Anyway, 2013 Mauro is one of the best in its price range and category, and 2012 Terreus and 2010 VS (Vendimia Seleccionada) are simply world class. Other than the quality of their best known wines, the big news is that the Mauro team are building a new winery in Ribera del Duero, Garmón Continental, a family project of 50,000-60,000 bottles in Olivares de Duero, just across the bridge from Quintanilla de Onésimo by the Duero River. All the vineyards are in the villages of La Aguilera, Moradillo and Baños-Tubilla. They have already fermented 38,000 kilos of grapes in 2014 and were harvesting their last 2015 grapes a few days ago. I'm really looking forward to tasting these new Ribera del Duero proper wines from the García family of Mauro. See also their Toro wines in the article on that same region.



*Left to right, Mariano, Alberto and Eduardo García from Mauro.*

Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla y León is a regional catch-all appellation that includes all the wines produced within the autonomous community of Castilla y León that, for whatever reason, do not merit inclusion in any of the other appellations. Spain is divided into 17 of these autonomous communities, varying wildly in size, Castilla y León being the largest of them all. It includes the provinces of Ávila, Burgos, León, Palencia, Salamanca, Segovia, Soria, Valladolid and Zamora, a huge extension of some 95,000 square kilometers, more than double the size of Switzerland!

We could include here some even more generic wines, as some producers do not even bother being included in Castilla y León and they just sell their wines as what used to be *Vinos de Mesa* (table wines), which is now a generic category called *Vino de España* (wine from Spain). The most notable of these are the wines from Galia, and some of the offerings from *vigneron* Ismael Gozalo.

Galia is the name of the small personal project of French winemaker Jérôme Bougnaud with some other partners. He works for Quinta Sardonía (also in Castilla-León) and El Regajal (Madrid), and consults for Pingus. Galia has just moved into its new small winery in the village of Villanueva de Duero in an old building with brick walls belonging to Bougnaud's wife's family. Villanueva is the first village in the Rueda appellation as you move in from Ribera del Duero. The effect should be visible in the quality of the wines from the 2015 vintage onwards. He has also extended the surface of vineyards he controls to ten hectares split into 53 separate plots in different places, some quite far away from each other, mostly in Piquera de San Esteban close to Atauta in Soria and Cuevas de Provanco, province of Segovia, outside Ribera del Duero. From the 2013 vintage there will be a new Galia "Grand Cru" - that I didn't taste as it was not yet bottled - from ungrafted, old vines in the village of Piquera de San Esteban, where in 2017 he plans to plant a further 0.5 hectares, also ungrafted. This is one of the most exciting new projects in the Duero zone, and even if the results are great already, I have the feeling that the best is yet to come.



*Ismael Gozalo produces no less than EIGHT! whites with Verdejo grapes, and they are all different and full of character. Rack was my favorite of them.*

Gozalo is the *vigneron* from Ossian. He started there with Javier Zaccagnini (Aalto) as a partner, because he does not want to be involved in the commercial side of the business. When Zaccagnini sold his share of Ossian to Pago de Carraovejas (from Ribera del Duero), he continued his role as the winemaker and vine grower for Ossian. But long ago he had started a small side project where he wanted to give free rein to his creativity, produce some crazy wines (sometimes), break all the rules and have joint-ventures with fellow *vignerons* from different regions in Spain. The range here is quite eclectic (he even produced some mead) and the wines have a marked personality, with its ups and downs of course. He has a small winery in the village of Nieva where he has room to produce some 10,000 bottles per year. I've used his name, as it's what appears on the labels today, but he has created a new name he's starting to use, MicroBioWines. 60% of his production is exported. I tasted a very unusual collection of wines, no less than eight Verdejos from different plots and produced in different ways. Many of these wines are almost academic, as quantities are really small. But they show how many different things can be achieved with the reviled Verdejo grape. I wish more 'natural' wines were like these. He also showed me four reds, including a Rufete from Salamanca, one Syrah, one Mencía and one Tempranillo. His personality and creativity certainly transcend appellations and although his Mencía should really be published with Bierzo, I thought it was a bit silly to separate it, and it made more sense to include it here in his profile.

**Call Me Rueda, Call Me Verdejo, Call Me Vino de la Tierra de Castilla y León.**



*Verdejo grapes about to be picked during the 2015 harvest.*

And now that we've talked about some of the best and personal Verdejos to be found, let's take a look at the rest. The situation in Rueda remains similar to what I described in my previous article from August 2014, "Rueda: Lost in the Supermarket?" The title of the article in itself might give you a pretty good idea of what's going on, but let me refer you to that article for background information. The current state of affairs is shameful, quite a weak 2014 after the catastrophic 2013 vintage, lawsuits against the appellation's president, all sort of stuff flying around, and the quality producers (or at least some of their wines) abandoning the sinking ship. The wines continue their path towards cheap supermarket wines of little interest for our readers, the very reason why they do not merit an article on their own. As a great majority of the interesting ones are sold as Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla y León, they are all included here.

I've already talked about Ismael Gozalo's offering, that should also include the whites from Ossian. Another favorite of mine is the small project Barco del Corneta. Beatriz Herranz has produced her best wines so far in 2014, with the addition of a new, more approachable Verdejo Cucú and in 2014 its sibling Barco del Corneta has had its label updated. She has also started a small project in Arribes (del Duero) that I hope to review next time, as I didn't yet find much to write home about. These forgotten appellations on the banks of the river are really transition zones between Spain and Portugal on steep terraces by the river and its tributaries. Would Barco del Corneta and Beatriz Arranz be the ones responsible for waking Arribes up? We'll see...



*Barco del Corneta, among my favorite Verdejos and perhaps the name to wake Arribes (del Duero) up?*

There are always notable exceptions to the wild generalizations we tend to make, and of course some quality producers remain in Rueda, most notably Belondrade y Lurton, whose 2012 is one of the finest vintages to date, somehow similar to a favorite of mine, the 2007. Surprisingly a new name, Máquina & Tabla arrives making quite a lot of noise (quality wise) with the same labels and names as they do in Toro (see the Toro article for more info). It's a young *négoçiant* operation set to produce quality wines from autochthonous grapes, including two from Rueda. And Marqués de Riscal, the winery that invented Rueda as we know it today, is coming out with a new top-of-the-range white with the name Barón de Chirel (same as in Rioja). But as they are one of the ones actively fighting against the nonsense happening in the appellation of origin, they were not sure if the wine was going to be labeled Rueda or Castilla y León at the time of writing this article. In any case, it's a noteworthy addition to the whites from the cooler part of Segovia.



*Jean Belondrade and Marta Baquerizo with one of their finest vintages to date.*

To close the Verdejo Rueda-no Rueda stuff, the old traditional style of the region has to make a comeback sooner or later, even if it's on a very small scale. I'm talking about a style of wines still existing in the regulations, a wine that has a lot in common with Sherry, with aging biologically under *flor* and slowly oxidizing in crystal demijohns kept under the sun, rain and stars. It's not possible for one of the traditional, historical wines from the region to be lost forever. Very few - almost nobody - are keeping the flame alive, mostly in private *soleras* belonging to their families. I'm looking forward to telling you about the next Pálido or Dorado de Rueda being bottled and sold again soon.

Going around the other zones, Sierra de Salamanca is perhaps one of the smaller and younger appellations that seem more active. The delicate Rufete grape is able to produce bright ruby-colored wines with floral aromas and a fresh palate that very much fit the mold of what many consumers are looking for: drinkability and personality. The small Mandrágora Vinos de Pueblo operation has improved its already great debut with the 2013 Tragaldabas, and 2014 promises even better things, including a new single vineyard bottling. Other than La Zorra that was the revelation last time, I've now added a couple of new names here, most notably the Rvfian from Ismael Gozalo and Corneana from a project called Cuatromil Cepas.



*The Sierra de Salamanca is producing some outstanding reds with the local Rufete grape.*

With regards to the rest of the appellations, Arribes that I've already mentioned, Arlanza or Cigales remain pretty static. In Arlanza, the name to go to continues to be Olivier Rivière. In Cigales I missed a couple of the names included last time, so the representation is rather poor. But there's nothing exceptional going on in the appellation, which is still to be awakened.





*In Arlanza, the name to look for is Olivier Rivière.*

—Luis Gutiérrez