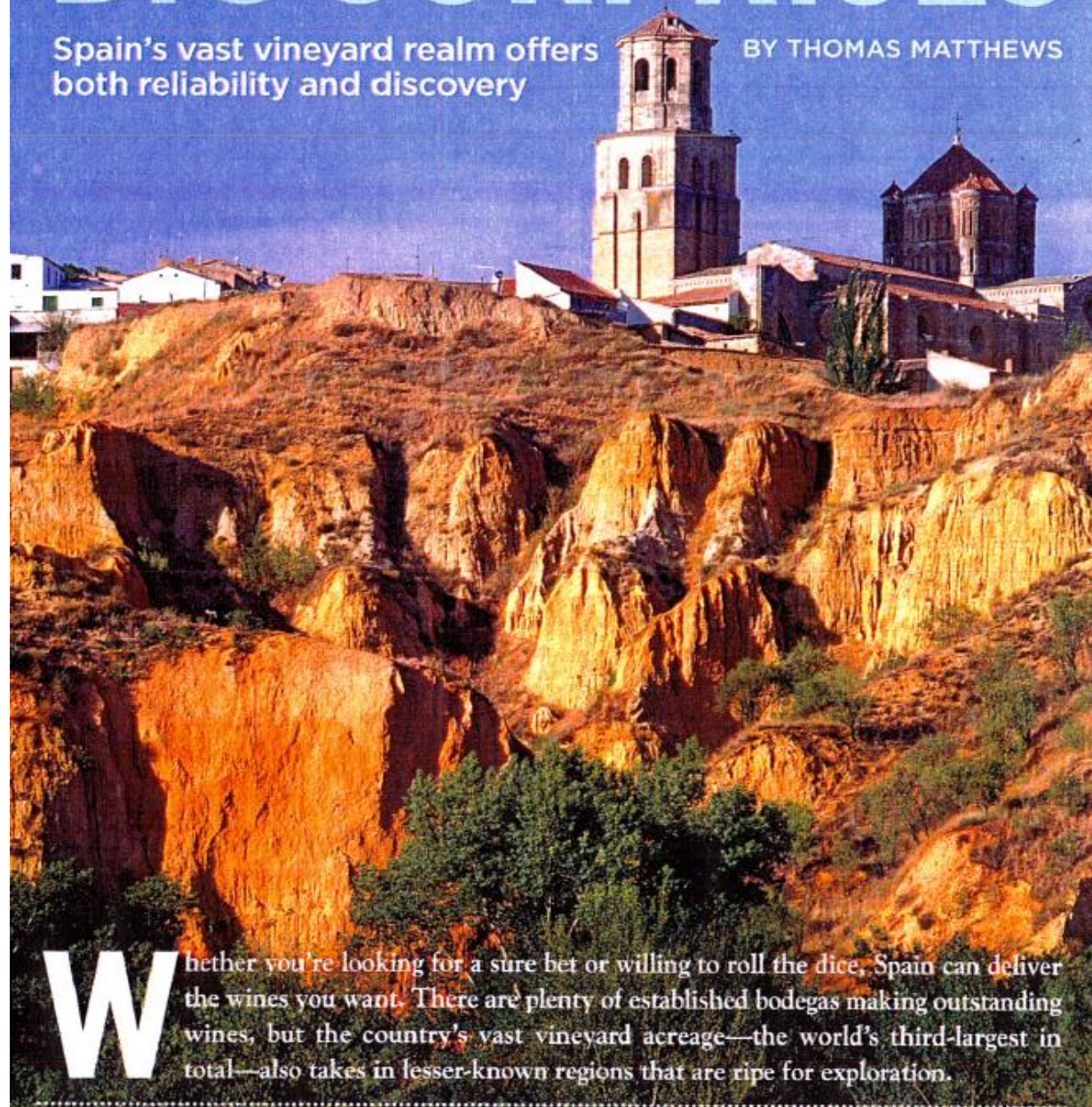


BRIGHT STARS & BIG SURPRISES

Spain's vast vineyard realm offers both reliability and discovery

BY THOMAS MATTHEWS



Whether you're looking for a sure bet or willing to roll the dice, Spain can deliver the wines you want. There are plenty of established bodegas making outstanding wines, but the country's vast vineyard acreage—the world's third-largest in total—also takes in lesser-known regions that are ripe for exploration.



Based near Ribera del Duero, winemaker Mariano García has also found success in Toro, where his Maurodos winery crafts an outstanding red called San Román.

This past year, for example, as I sifted through our reviews of nearly 675 Spanish wines blind-tasted since our previous report ("Tradition and Innovation," Oct. 15, 2010), diamonds kept emerging from the rough *terroir* of Toro, a small Denominación de Origen in west central Spain.

Of the 26 reds from Toro I reviewed for this report, half earned outstanding scores of 90 points or higher on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale. That's an impressive ratio, given that about 15 percent (slightly more than 100 wines) reached that quality threshold from Spain overall.

Rioja leads the way with three dozen outstanding wines, both reds and whites. Ribera del Duero, Priorat and Bierzo are the other regional leaders. This year's report, however, includes no wines earning classic ratings of 95 points or higher. (A free

alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.winespectator.com/101511.)

I attribute this to the predominance of the lighter 2007 and 2008 vintages among Spain's current releases. After a series of warm, ripe growing seasons from 2003 to 2006, the next two years each saw cooler summers, with rainy harvests.

Still, the 2007 and 2008 vintages delivered many wines of balance and pleasure, with generally lower alcohols, higher acidities and more leafy, herbal and red fruit flavors. Though there are plenty of accessible, food-friendly wines from both years, most of the bottlings I reviewed don't show the concentration—or promise the ageability—of wines from warmer growing seasons.

Reports indicate that the upcoming 2009 and 2010 vintages are back on form, and some of the early-release wines show promise. But the top bottlings from these younger vintages are still maturing in winery cellars.

Toro's evolution mirrors Spain as a whole: ancient renown, long obscurity, recent revival.

Toro's historic claim to fame is that Christopher Columbus stocked its wines on his first voyage to the New World. Yet the region fell off the radar for centuries. It wasn't until the 1970s that its reemergence began through the work of Manuel Fariña, the son of a local grower. Fariña returned home from his enology studies and introduced modern innovations such as stainless-steel fermentation tanks.

The DO was established in 1987, with four wineries operating in the region. It is located west of Ribera del Duero, down river toward Portugal, centered on the town of Zamora. About 14,000 acres of grapes are cultivated, mostly Tinto de Toro, a clone of Tempranillo that has adapted to the local *terroir*. Many of the vines are more than a century old, head-trained and planted on their own roots, gnarled survivors of phylloxera and modernization.

The soils are a mix of sand and clay, and the climate, though hot and dry, is tempered by the altitude (2,000 to 2,500 feet above sea level), which brings cool nights that help preserve acidity. The region has always been known for high-alcohol wines. One of Fariña's improvements was earlier picking, thereby reducing average alcohol levels from 16 percent to 17 percent to a more balanced 13 percent to 14 percent.

The first wave of outside investors was led by the Eguren family from Rioja, who established Numanthia-Termes, the region's first truly world-class winery, in the late 1990s. (It was purchased by the French luxury conglomerate Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton in 2008.) Today, more than 40 wineries make wines there. The best of them are dense, powerful, full-bodied reds, offering black fruit flavors that show notes of earth, mineral and game, with muscular tannins that can be smooth or chewy.

The best Toro I tasted this year was J. & F. Lurton's Campo Eliseo 2005 (94 points, \$95), a collaboration between the Lurton family of Bordeaux and consulting enologist Michel Rolland. The wine marries plenty of toasty oak and concentrated sweet black fruit flavors

DESPITE THEIR COOLER SUMMERS AND RAINY HARVESTS, THE 2007 AND 2008 VINTAGES DELIVERED MANY WINES OF BALANCE AND PLEASURE.

VINTNERS TELMO RODRÍGUEZ AND MIGUEL TORRES ARE ALIKE IN THEIR DEVOTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL WINEMAKING.

with a sanguine earthy note that harmonizes the international style with local character. Campo Eliseo has earned outstanding scores in every vintage since 2001.

Numantia-Termes' top cuvée, Termanthia, is just a step behind, with the 2008 (\$200) scoring 93 points. The bodega's other cuvées in '08—Numantia (91, \$60) and Termes (91, \$30)—demonstrate that Manuel Louzada, LVMH's new winemaker, has proven himself a worthy successor.

The Egurens have moved on to another project in the region, called Teso La Monja. They followed up an outstanding debut in 2007 with three more winners from 2008: the Alabaster (92, \$243), Victorino (91, \$69) and Almiré (90, \$30) bottlings. As with Numantia, the wines are ripe yet sleek, with opulent fruit, polished oak and great balance.

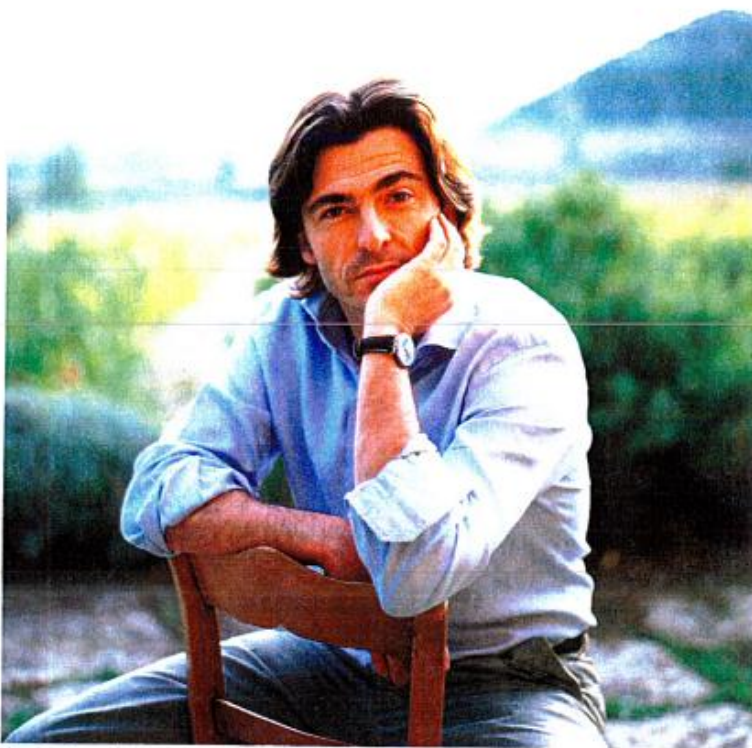
Mariano García, whose Bodegas Mauro is located nearby just outside the Ribera del Duero DO, scores big with two vintages of his Toro winery, Bodegas y Viñedos Mauros. The 2006 and 2007 San Román bottlings, each 93 points and \$70, show the characteristics of their respective growing seasons: The younger wine is brighter, with plum, blueberry and cassis flavors and lively acidity, while the older is full and sweet, with dried fig and dark chocolate notes.

Telmo Rodríguez also achieves two outstanding ratings, for his Gago 2007 (91, \$30) and more powerful G Pago La Jara 2006 (91, \$71). Like the Mauros wines, the '07 shows more acidity, the '06 more structure, but both are balanced and sleek.

Rodríguez, 48, is one of the most intriguing stories in Spanish wine today. His career makes an interesting counterpoint to that of Miguel Torres of Catalonia, whose innovations since the 1960s in many ways foreshadowed Rodríguez's ventures.

Both men brought international influences to Spain, especially from France. Torres, 69, was among the first, and arguably the most influential, of vintners to plant French grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay in Spain; his "Black Label" Cabernet (now named Mas La Plana) has long been a benchmark. The 2007 (90, \$63) is dark and well-structured, with dried herb and mineral notes.

Rodríguez began his career at his family's Bodegas Remelluri in Rioja, after studying in France and working in Bordeaux and the Rhône Valley. At Remelluri in the 1990s, he was a pioneer in his focus on estate-bottling, developing a fresher, more concentrated style of Rioja. (The winery's top cuvée, the Colección Jaima Rodríguez, has earned outstanding scores in all three



Telmo Rodríguez has been at the forefront of Spanish winemaking for two decades. Starting out at his family's Rioja winery, Bodegas Remelluri, he now makes high-end bottlings and values in regions throughout the country.

vintages I've reviewed: 2001, '02 and '03.)

Torres and Rodríguez have expanded well beyond their home bases. From Catalonia, Torres first moved south to Conca de Barberá and Priorat, then more recently west to Ribera del Duero and Rioja. Rodríguez established his own company in 2001 and now produces wines from nine different regions, mostly in the western half of the country; besides Toro and Rioja (he returned to Remelluri in 2010), they include Ribera del Duero, Cigales and Valdeorras in Galicia.

Both vintners focus on value. From Torres, the 2010 Sangre de Toro Viña Sol (85, \$111), made from the indigenous Parellada grape, is a soft-textured white with notes of melon and pear, while the 2010 Sangre de Toro de Casta (84, \$10), a refreshing dry rosé from Garnacha and Cariñena, shows creamy raspberry and wild strawberry flavors. Rodríguez delivers the 2010 Basa (85, \$15), a Verdejo-based white from Rueda that's focused and flinty, and the 2009 Al Muvedre (85, \$15) from Alicante, a supple, spicy red made from Monastrell.

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BONUS VIDEO: Meet Carlos Falco, the Marqués de Griñón, as he talks about the dramatic red wines he makes at his pioneering Dominio de Valdepeña estate in Castilla-La Mancha. [VIEWER PICK AT WWW.WINESPECTATOR.COM/101511](http://WWW.WINESPECTATOR.COM/101511)

Perhaps their most important similarity is their devotion to the environment and natural winemaking. Rodríguez is moving all of his vineyards toward biodynamic cultivation, while Torres is a global leader in combating climate change through the use of renewable energy and reducing carbon footprints. Both vintners support indigenous grapes and despite—or perhaps because of—their understanding of international trends, are fiercely devoted to making Spain's wines not only as good, but as "Spanish" as possible.

Torres and Rodríguez have also put extensive effort into white wines. Long seen as the stepchildren of Spanish wine, whites are now a strong suit, providing great diversity and enjoyment.

In this year's report, 11 whites earned outstanding scores. Five were made from Godello, an indigenous grape that only a decade ago was nearly extinct and is still largely confined to the small regions of Valdeorras and Bierzo in northwestern Spain.

Bodegas Godeval in Valdeorras deserves credit for reviving Godello, and the winery makes what I consider to be the benchmark version. Both the 2010 and 2009 rated 90 points and cost a very reasonable \$18. The wines are balanced and expressive, crackling with acidity that carries mineral, citrus and herbal flavors.

Some wineries are successful with oaked versions. The most powerful I tasted this year is from Avanthia, also in Valdeorras; its 2009 (93, \$31) is rich with tropical fruit and toasty vanilla flavors, with a sweet acidity that keeps the wine juicy and fresh. The barrel-fermented 2009 from Dominio de Tares in Bierzo (90, \$29) has a voluptuous texture, but retains a firm backbone of acidity, with pear, grapefruit and mineral notes.

Viura, the signature white grape of Rioja, also lends itself to oaked and unoaked styles. The oaked versions come in both modern and traditional profiles. Among the former, look for the 2009 Erre Punto from Bodegas Fernando Remíz de Ganuza (91, \$29), solid and smooth, with pear and hazelnut flavors. The bottlings from R. López de Heredia define the traditional style. This year, I especially like the Gravonia Crianza 2001 (91, \$30), with its characteristic notes of dried apple, beeswax and vanilla.

The unoaked versions are direct, lively and clean. Cune's Monopole 2009 (87, \$15) is light and crisp, with apple and herbal flavors, while Bodega Bretón Criadores' round Iuvene 2009 (86, \$12) also shows herbal notes, along with peach and lemon.

Other fresh, expressive and food-friendly whites hail from Rueda (based on Verdejo), Rías Baixas (Albariño) and Penedès (Parelada and others). And don't overlook cava, Spain's traditional-method sparkling wine. Jaume Serra, for example, turns in an excellent showing this year, with four bottlings at 84 points or better, three of them priced at \$10 and one at \$15.

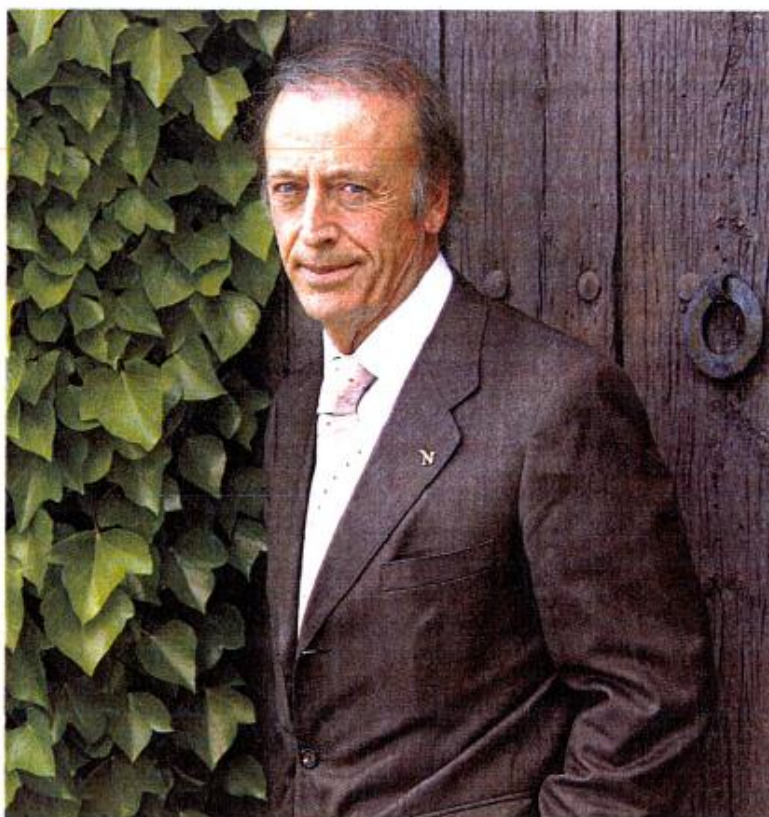
Overall, nearly 30 whites that cost \$15 or less scored in the very good range (85 points or higher), while 15 more rated at least 80 points while selling for \$10 or less. That's a lot of low-risk exploration with a high rate of pleasure in return.

Despite the growing quality of Spanish whites, red wine still represents the bulk of the country's exports to the United States. Americans drink slightly more white wine than red overall, yet when it comes to Spanish wine, more than 75 percent of our consumption is red. (That's about the same ratio as the wines reviewed for this report.)

There is plenty of value to be found among Spain's red wines. Of the 500 reds reviewed this year, more than 65 scored 85 points or higher yet cost \$15 or less. An additional three dozen in the good range (80 to 84 points) are priced at \$10 or less. They come from every corner of the country.

From Alicante, in the southeast, comes the Bodegas Volver Tarima 2010 (86, \$8), fresh and lively, based on Monastrell. Due

LONG SEEN AS THE STEPCHILDREN OF SPANISH WINE, WHITES ARE NOW A STRONG SUIT, PROVIDING GREAT DIVERSITY AND ENJOYMENT.



Miguel Torres is a key figure in the evolution of modern Spanish wine. A native of Catalonia, where his family's wine empire is still based, Torres has recently established beachheads in Ribera del Duero, Rioja and Priorat.

west, the Bullas region also relies on Monastrell; Bodegas del Rosario made five good value bottlings in this report, led by the muscular Estratos Crianza 2007 (87, \$15).

Moving to the north central region of Campo de Borja, look for lively, fruit-driven Garnachas; Bodegas Borsao delivers reliable values. In nearby Cariñena, Bodegas Virgen del Aguila also makes delicious Garnacha blends. Farther west, Navarra offers a range of indigenous and international varieties; Julián Chivite is a well-established family winery, and Bodega Nekeas is a consistent source of value reds, whites and rosés under the Vega Sindoa label.

Perhaps the most prolific source of values is Viño de la Tierra de Castilla. This broad region encompasses much of central Spain, a high plateau south of Madrid. A number of bodegas that are well-established in other regions have begun producing wines

here, including Bodegas Eguren, Bodegas Berberana and Ramón Bilbao (under the Volteo label) from Rioja, and Bodegas Navarro López from Valdepeñas.

One of the most impressive values I found this year, however, is Bodegas Resalte de Peñafiel's de Restia Selected Harvest 2004 (93, \$15), a crianza-level red from Ribera del Duero. Maturing now, it's a beautifully balanced wine, with fresh ripe fruit deepened with notes of cedar, tobacco and mineral. Impressive, but hardly a surprise; the bodega earned outstanding ratings for four different bottlings in this report, and in 2010, its 2005 Crianza ranked No. 26 in our Top 100 wines of the year.

Ribera also produced many of my top-scoring reds. The Bodegas Los Astrales 2008 (94, \$70) is alluring and graceful, perhaps a result of the cooler vintage, yet stays firm and focused. The 2005 Gran from Tábula (93, \$83) is a muscular wine, balanced and still lively.

But Rioja remains Spain's biggest stage, unmatched for its diversity of style on offer, its range of vintages in current release, and its historic prestige. (In fact, nearly 40 percent of the market for DO wine within Spain belongs to Rioja; the next closest region is Ribera, with 9 percent.)

If you enjoy the modern style of red Rioja, with ripe fruit and toasty oak, try Bodega Roda's Cirson 2009 (93, \$250). This unique wine is produced from selected clusters of berries from the oldest of Roda's Tempranillo vineyards. These clusters show polymerization of tannins and anthocyanins while the fruit is still on the vine, thus reducing the need for extended oak and yielding wines that marry density with grace.

Baron de Ley's 7 Viñas is an homage to traditional Rioja. The wine is a blend of all seven grape types permitted by the DO (including three white varieties), aged in a mix of American and French oak. The 2005 Reserva (92, \$20) shows a vibrant core of black cherry and blackberry, with licorice, smoke and mineral notes.

Completing the stylistic spectrum, Bodegas Beronia's Gran Reserva 2001 (90, \$28) embodies the classic style. Supple and racy, this red offers dried cherry and tobacco character, with leafy and spicy notes, well-integrated tannins and balsamic acidity. It's a fully mature wine, but still has life.

Whether you rely on established stars or search for new discoveries, Spain delivers a wide range of wine styles at fair prices. In my opinion, it continues to be the most dynamic wine country in Europe, and as the 2009 and 2010 vintages come on line, there should be plenty of quality and excitement ahead.

Executive editor Thomas Matthews is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Spain.

Rating Red Wine Vintages in Spain

Priorat

2008	86-89	Sleek, expressive wines, with bright red fruit flavors and supple tannins	NYR
2007	89	Supple wines, showing red fruit and herbal notes	Drink or hold
2006	90	Bright and lively, with good focus and some depth	Drink or hold
2005	95	Balanced and expressive, with red fruit and spice flavors	Drink or hold
2004	93	Ripe and dense; the best marry concentration and elegance	Drink or hold
2003	91	Heat gave ripe fruit and concentration; top wines show great balance	Drink
2002	90	Despite the cool growing season, many wines show ripe, concentrated fruit	Drink
2001	95	Fine summer; ripe, powerful wines are benchmarks for the region	Drink or hold

Ribera del Duero

2008	87-90	Balanced, polished wines, with bright fruit and fresh acidity	NYR
2007	88	Cool season gave fresh wines, tender and expressive	Drink or hold
2006	89	Firm, with ripe fruit and good balance	Drink or hold
2005	95	Assertive wines with chewy tannins; the best have great depth	Hold
2004	96	Powerful yet balanced, with deep, pure fruit	Drink or hold
2003	91	Scorching heat gave ripeness; cool nights kept wines fresh	Drink
2002	87	Warm summer, rainy harvest; firm structure, with mineral and earth	Drink
2001	94	Powerful wines, with ripe fruit, good balance and great aging potential	Drink or hold

Rioja

2008	85-88	Balanced wines, focused and expressive, with bright acidity	NYR
2007	86	Cool growing season; many wines light, best are elegant	Drink or hold
2006	88	Fresh, supple wines, with crisp red fruit flavors	Drink or hold
2005	93	Lively, balanced and graceful; firm yet expressive	Drink or hold
2004	93	Balanced, with ripe black fruit flavors and lively acidity	Drink or hold
2003	86	Hot year; ripe fruit with good concentration, but some overripeness	Drink
2002	84	Cool summer, rainy harvest; most are supple, some are light and herbal	Drink
2001	93	Hot, dry weather produced ripe wines with fresh flavors and balanced structures	Drink or hold

A score range indicates preliminary analysis based on barrel samples and/or a limited sampling; many wines of the vintage not yet reviewed.

Vintage ratings: 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended. **Drinkability:** "NYR" means the vintage has not yet been released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature.

RECOMMENDED WINES FROM SPAIN

Nearly 675 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/101511. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
BODEGAS LOS ASTRALES <i>Ribera del Duero 2008</i> Alluring blackberry, huckleberry, lilac and licorice notes mingle in this graceful red, which is supple, yet firm and focused.	94	\$70
BODEGAS LEDA VIÑAS VIEJAS <i>Viño de la Tierra de Castilla y León 2005</i> Dense, almost syrupy, this powerful, brooding red offers currant, blackberry, anise, espresso and hoisin flavors.	94	\$45
J. & F. LURTON <i>Toro Campo Eliseo 2005</i> Savory and sanguine notes add focus to the ripe, sweet fruit flavors of blackberry, fig and chocolate. Broad but smooth.	94	\$95
VALL LLACH <i>Priorat 2006</i> Rich and bold, this expressive red delivers black cherry, blackberry, espresso, mineral and mountain herb flavors.	94	\$95
AVANTHIA <i>Godello Valdeorras 2009</i> This muscular white offers a ripe core of pineapple, mango and honey, framed by toasty vanilla and exotic spices. Impressive.	93	\$31
BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS MAURODOS <i>Toro San Román 2007</i> There's plenty of oak in this expressive red, but the ripe, bright core of plum, blueberry and cassis keeps it all balanced.	93	\$70
BODEGAS MEDRANO IRAZU <i>Rioja Luis Medrano 2008</i> Aromas and flavors of boysenberry, dark chocolate, spice and mineral mingle in the plush texture of this exotic red.	93	\$75
NUMANTHIA-TERMES <i>Toro Termanthia 2008</i> Dark, fine-grained and solid, this polished red is like ebony. Powerful yet sleek, with a core of cassis, plum and fig flavors.	93	\$200
BODEGAS RESALTE DE PEÑAFIEL <i>Ribera del Duero de Restia Crianza Selected Harvest 2004</i> This maturing red is beautifully balanced, with fresh, ripe fruit flavors of black cherry and blackberry.	93	\$15
BODEGAS RODA <i>Rioja Cirsion 2009</i> Showing both power and grace, this is dense, yet stays lithe and balanced, with blackberry and wild plum fruit.	93	\$250
BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS TÁBULA <i>Ribera del Duero Gran 2005</i> Ripe plum and blackberry fruit flavors are still fresh, backed by cocoa, licorice and mineral notes. Balanced and lively.	93	\$83
DOMINIO DE TARES <i>Bierzo Tares P.3 2006</i> An elegant beauty, this polished red shows black cherry, chocolate, licorice and mineral notes that are intense yet harmonious.	93	\$92
VALL LLACH <i>Priorat Idus 2006</i> Dense, rich and chewy, offering dark chocolate, black cherry and licorice flavors, with fig pudding and mineral notes.	93	\$50

TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
BARON DE LEY <i>Rioja 7 Viñas Reserva 2005</i> Licorice, smoke and mineral notes accent black cherry and blackberry fruit in this firm, focused red. Tempranillo blend.	92	\$20
SANCIUS <i>Ribera del Duero Vallemon de Sardilici 2006</i> Dense yet vibrant, offering plum, fig, cola, sanguine and loam flavors framed by muscular tannins. Shows plenty of character.	91	\$19

TOP VALUES (continued)

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
BODEGA DEL ABAD <i>Godello Bierzo Abad Dom Bueno 2009</i> This firm white has real drive, with a hearty core of pear and melon flavors framed by smoke, mineral and grapefruit.	90	\$18
BODEGAS GODEVAL <i>Valdeorras Viña Godeval 2010</i> Crackling acidity carries focused flavors of mineral, grapefruit and fresh herbs in this nervy white. Bracing and balanced.	90	\$18
DOMINIO MANO A MANO <i>Viño de la Tierra de Castilla Venta La Ossa 2008</i> This chewy red marries ripe fruit and toasty oak, with bold flavors of huckleberry, blackberry, chocolate and smoke.	90	\$20
PAGO DE VALLEGARCÍA <i>Syrah Viño de Montes de Toledo 2008</i> This modern-style red delivers ripe flavors of roasted plum, hoisin sauce, licorice and espresso in a plush texture.	90	\$22
BODEGAS RAMÓN BILBAO <i>Rioja Reserva 2005</i> Smoke and toast frame cherry, cedar and tobacco in this supple red.	89	\$20
BOUZA DO REI <i>Albariño Rias Baixas Lagar 2010</i> This white offers good density, with plenty of structure. Pure fruit.	89	\$14
BODEGAS JUAN GIL <i>Jumilla 2008</i> A focused red, with bright cherry, cola, leaf and mineral flavors.	89	\$16
HIJOS DE ALBERTO GUTIÉRREZ <i>Rueda Verderol Spring in a Bottle 2009</i> This white features drive and power, with juicy flavors. Verdejo.	89	\$14
BODEGAS MONTECILLO <i>Rioja Reserva 2005</i> Still fresh, with cherry, licorice, raisin, citrus peel and spice notes.	89	\$18
BODEGAS EMILIO MORO <i>Ribera del Duero Finca Resalso 2009</i> Dense, with cherry and plum leading to tar, mineral and hoisin sauce.	89	\$16
BODEGAS PROTOS <i>Verdejo Rueda 2008</i> Firm and crisp, offering grapefruit, almond and smoke flavors.	89	\$12
VITIVINÍCOLA DEL RIBEIRO <i>Ribeiro Viña Costeira 2009</i> A focused white, delivering notes of lemon and honeydew melon.	89	\$15
BODEGAS VALDEMAR <i>Rioja White Conde de Valdemar Finca Alto Cantabria 2009</i> Offers baked apple, lemon verbena, tarragon and beeswax flavors.	89	\$15
BODEGAS CAMPANTE <i>Ribeiro Viña Reboreda 2009</i> Pretty flavors of peach and honeysuckle mingle in this round white.	88	\$11
CUNE <i>Rioja White Viña Real 2009</i> A silky texture carries lush flavors of melon, kumquat and pastry.	88	\$12
FELIX SOLIS <i>Tempranillo Valdepeñas Viña Albalí 2009</i> Medium-bodied, showing dark berry, black cherry and cassis flavors.	88	\$7
BODEGAS FRUTOS VILLAR <i>Toro Muruve 2009</i> A lively red, with racy notes of berry, vanilla, cola, graphite and herbs.	86	\$9
BODEGAS VOLVER <i>Monastrell Alicante Tarima 2010</i> Floral and licorice notes frame cherry and berry flavors in this firm red.	86	\$8
BODEGAS BORSÃO <i>Campo de Borja Viña Borgia 2010</i> A supple, juicy Garnacha, with ripe raspberry and blackberry flavors.	85	\$6
MARQUÉS DE CÁCERES <i>Rioja White 2009</i> Pear and golden apple flavors are honeyed in this ripe, round white.	85	\$9