83 September-December 2011

SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

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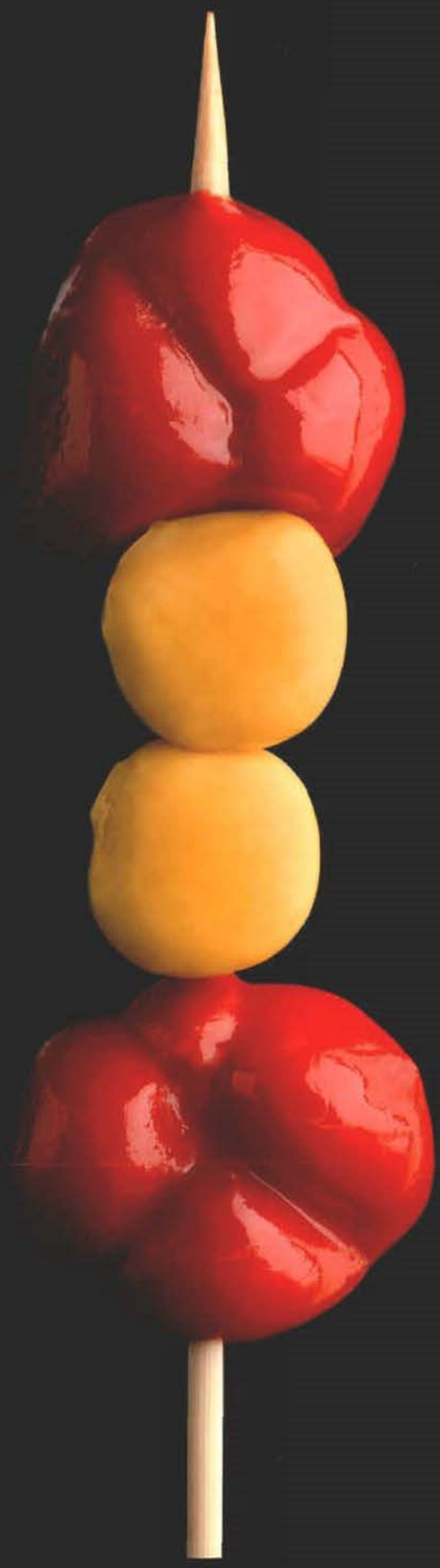

Dehesa. Heart of Oak

Dessert Wines Old and New

Apple. The Oldest of Fruits

Spanish Pickled Vegetables, a Way of Life

83

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SPAIN GOURMETOUR

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EDIT

Many of our readers will be surprised to learn that Spain is a producer of mineral water. Yet it is found here in abundance in underground aquifers—a resource of which the Romans and, later, the Moors were well aware and of which they took full advantage. Subsequently, a long period of disuse was brought to an end in the 19th century, when "taking the waters" at health spas created around thermal springs became all the rage. Now, in the 21st century, water's curative properties are making waves again.

Dessert wines from Spain sound far more familiar, as well they might, since they receive honorable mention in the works of Shakespeare. In this issue we bring you up to speed on today's approach to this pedigree product and on another traditional Spanish favorite, vegetables pickled in vinegar, which is currently acquiring fans abroad.

Apples, surely among the most universal of fruits, are grown in Spain and exported to the rest of Europe, North Africa, the Persian Gulf states and South America.

Our photographer has been out and about on your behalf exploring the areas of wooded pastureland known as dehesa that constitute an intrinsic element of the Spanish landscape, of which it accounts for 3.6 million ha (8.9 million acres). The dehesa is the natural habitat of Ibérico pigs, fighting bulls and various other animals from which we obtain incomparable delicacies. This ecosystem, created gradually over the centuries by human intervention, is now under threat from that very same source, this time in the form of climate change. Top-flight Ibérico ham producer and exporter Joselito has responded by launching a conservation scheme which has just earned it FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification.

And finally, with London, Tokyo, San Francisco, New York and Buenos Aires already under our belt, our worldwide tapas trawl stops off this time in Melbourne, Australia.

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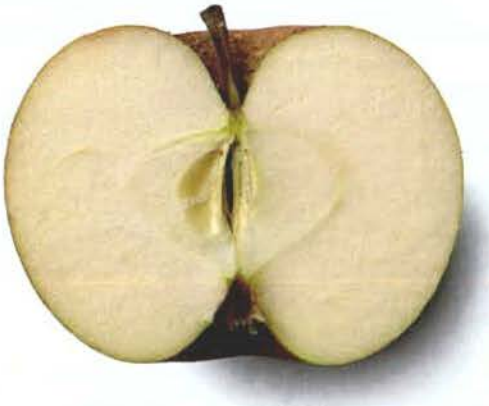

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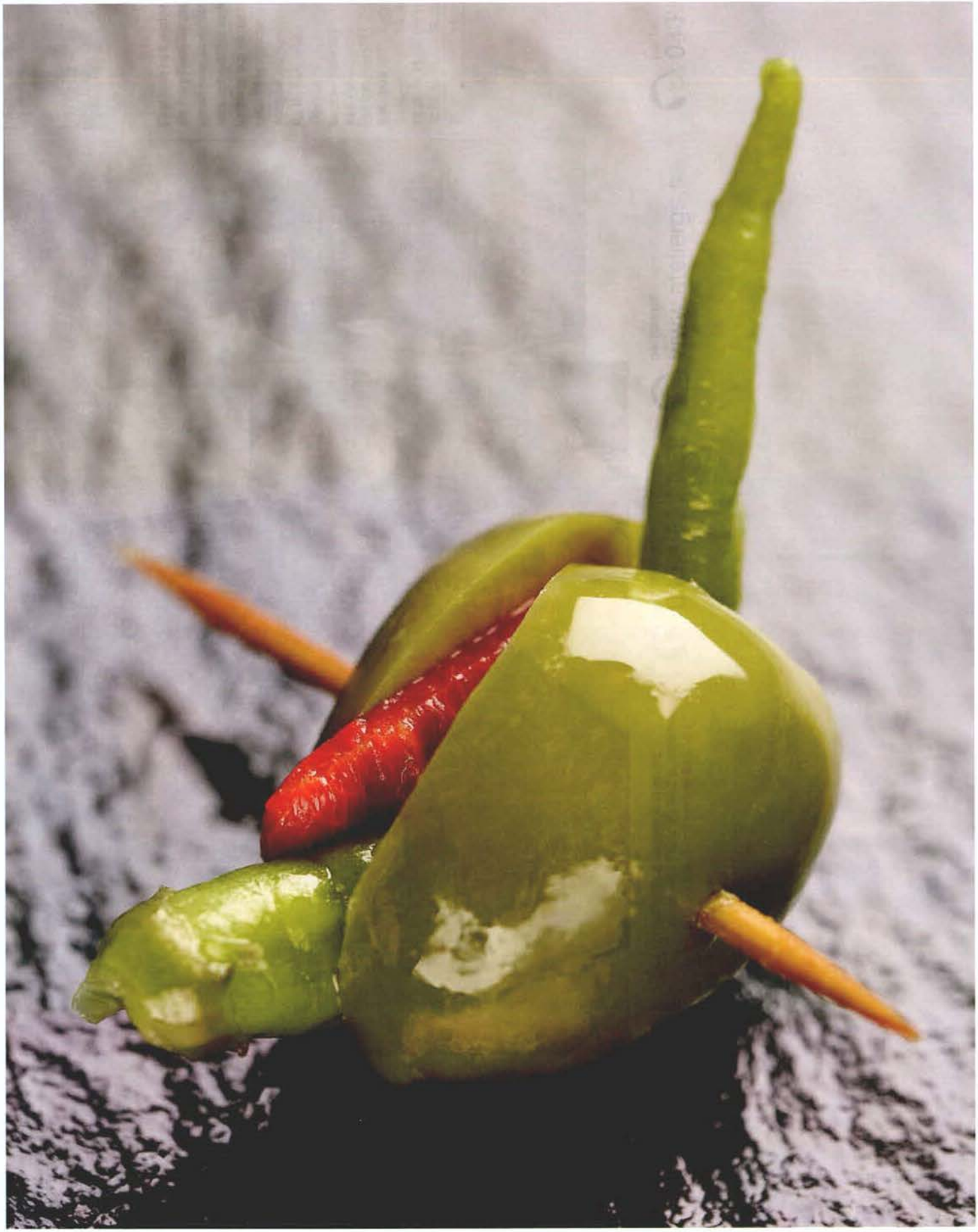
Spanish Pickled **Vegetables**



A Way of LIFE

The first time I tried pickled garlic over a decade ago, I admit to some reticence, though I consider myself a true aficionado of all things pickled. After all, I was new in Spain back then, and worried about putting off the few friends I had with garlic breath. But no one could have prepared me for the pleasure that morsel created in my mouth. It was crunchy, salty, spicy and delicate, with a slight hint of cloves. Imagine my delight when I discovered that it was only the tip of a Spanish pickle iceberg.

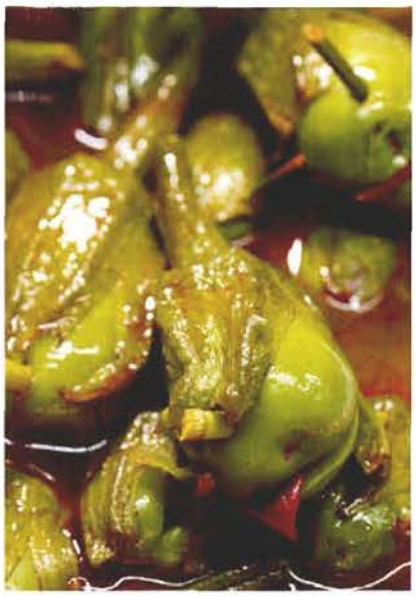
TEXT
ADRIENNE SMITH/©ICEX

PHOTOS
AMADOR TORIL/©ICEX

Pickling vegetables has been used for their preservation all over the world for millennia, and the custom probably invaded the Iberian Peninsula with the Romans, whose use of this practice was documented by such chroniclers as Pliny the Elder (23-79 AD; Roman naturalist). In pickling, also known as brining, vegetables are placed in very salty water (brine), which triggers a lactic acid fermentation of their sugars. The new pickles are then typically stored in vinegar or another substance (acetic acid) with a pH of less than 4.6, which is acidic enough to kill harmful bacteria. Non-fermented pickles can also be made by placing foods directly in the vinegar solution. In both cases, it's common practice to add herbs and spices such as mustard seed, cloves, cinnamon and garlic, which have

antimicrobial properties and enhance the flavor and aroma of the food.
In Spain, pickled gherkins, pearl onions, garlic cloves and other pickled vegetables are known as *encurtidos*, and they are officially defined in the Royal Spanish Dictionary by the presence and aroma of vinegar in their preparation. Although all olives might meet the English definition of pickles, in Spain only olives that have been seasoned with vinegar dressings—a common practice in some areas—are considered true pickles. Whatever the vegetable, these sour, salty, sweet and crunchy pickled foods are everywhere you look: in shops, bars, restaurants and people's homes. They are present in every social situation and are widely consumed as *tapas*, in traditional recipes, and even in some of the country's most avant-garde cuisine. Their regional variety reflects Spain's diverse agricultural

wealth and rich local gastronomy, while their ubiquity in Spain reflects a way of life and traditions that are wonderfully shared by all. Additionally, the export success of these products has made them true symbols of what seems authentically Spanish to the rest of the world. According to data provided by the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX), 2010 exports of these products reached a value of nearly 71 million euros, a 30% increase from the previous year. They are exported to over 100 countries, with a particular emphasis on the United States, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Mexico, Canada and Australia.
An ideal place to get a glimpse of the variety of pickled vegetables in Spain is on Sunday mornings at Madrid's bustling flea market, the Rastro. This is also a good place to see them in action, so to speak. Halfway down Ribera de Curtidores street, the market's sloping main artery, a long line snakes around the corner from a narrow store that's packed so full of people that, if it weren't for the sign outside reading Aceitunas Jiménez (Olives Jiménez), you might never know what it was selling. At the front of the line you finally catch a glimpse of dozens of mismatched bowls, heaped with tiny sweet and sour gherkins, capers and thumb-sized caper berries, tender pearl onions, crunchy garlic cloves, slender green chili peppers, and a huge variety of seasoned olives from every corner of the country. Fermented, vinegared, stuffed and speared, the food is arranged in an endless variety of combinations, some of it stuck on toothpicks and given evocative names like *banderillas, toreras* and *Gildas*. A big bowl of glistening pickled eggplants sits by the door, just begging to be gnawed on like drumsticks. Outside, people are doing just that, while others are happily munching from paper cups filled with this staggering array of pickled vegetables from all over Spain, their juices dripping down many a contented chin.
This element of social interaction is what Spanish pickled vegetables are all about, and it provides the key to understanding what makes them unique. Pickled vegetables are essential to social events, and Spanish people of all ages love to eat them anytime, anywhere. For many people, pickled vegetables are often their first savory food of the day. Thought to "open the appetite", they are frequent accompaniments to a before-lunch aperitif of beer, wine, sherry or vermouth. Pickled vegetables are often the first thing placed on a table or bar at the beginning of a meal and the last thing to be removed. In addition, they are consumed just as often inside as outside of the home. In fact, according to 2008 Moving Annual Totals (MAT) statistics on table olives, compiled by Symphony IRI Consultancy Group, three quarters of all olive consumption takes place in people's homes. It's difficult to understand the significance of these foods until you understand the way people interact socially in Spain. Joining friends or family for a meal involves more than just arriving



and sitting down at the table to eat. Whether at home or in a restaurant, people typically begin by having a drink and a tapa that includes some assortment of pickled vegetables.

Pickled all over

Of course depending on where and what you are eating, the selection of pickled vegetables can vary dramatically, or hardly at all. According to Carlota González, director of Grupo Rafael González, "The world of pickled vegetables includes a wide range of products from distinct regions that have adapted to the cultivation of certain products according to the conditions of their area." However, technological advances and an expanding marketplace have meant that, for some products, these regional definitions are no longer as true as they once were. On the one hand, pickled vegetables such as gherkin pickles (*pepinillos*), pearl onions (*cebollitas*) and garlic cloves (*ajitos*) are now being produced all over Spain. But on the other, some pickled products, such as *berenjenas de Almagro* (eggplants), *guindillas de Ibarra* (chili peppers) and *alcaparras de Ballobar* (capers) are specialties, made from vegetables that can be cultivated and prepared only in specific geographical areas.

The pickled snacks known as banderillas and *kimbos* lie somewhere between these two extremes. Both names describe different combinations of pickled vegetables. Kimbos are typically pitted olives, especially the variety called gordal, stuffed with a gherkin pickle, although they are known by different names in different parts of Spain. Banderillas present another wide range of possibilities. Named after a dart-like stick used in bullfighting and also called toreras, banderillas can come in an endless variety of combinations. In Madrid, the most classic version has a pickle, onion and olive. However, the most unmistakable banderilla in Spain is perhaps the Gilda, which is made with a green hot pepper, olive, gherkin and anchovy. It will forever be associated with the city of San Sebastián, where it was invented in 1946 and named after the famous character brought to life by Rita Hayworth in Charles Vidor's movie that same year. The story goes that, like the character, the banderilla was both salty and a little spicy.

Regional traditions have an impact on the huge variety of olives that are grown and seasoned in different parts of Spain. The *aliños* or dressings that are used to season pickled olives (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 70) are often indicative of their geographic provenance and have been passed down through generations. In the town of Aljarafe in Seville province, for example, the local gordal olives are soaked in brine for two to three months and then seasoned with red and green peppers, bay leaves, thyme, oregano, vinegar and salt.

The Spanish pickled vegetable market thrives off of all of these products and their numerous variations. According to the aforementioned study of 2008 MAT, pickle sales (excluding olives)

totaled at almost 60 million euros, with gherkin pickles, banderillas and chili peppers accounting for the highest sales and production volumes, respectively. Grupo Rafael González is an excellent example of this diversification. Located in the fertile region of La Rioja, this family business has specialized in making gherkin pickles and other pickled vegetables for over 50 years. While their dedication to these traditional products has remained unchanged, the company has broadened their product line to include other vegetables like carrots, beets, celery, cauliflower and sprouts. This expansion is symptomatic of the growth that this market is experiencing. According to Carlota González, it's important to respect traditional products and recipes, and at the same time be aware that people's palates change and the market must adapt. González also attributes the increasing popularity of different types of pickled products to their nutritional qualities. "The future of this sector is very bright and

growing. Every day we're more aware of eating a balanced diet. Pickled vegetables are a healthy product that is very easy to use and combine with other things, and very adaptable to current trends." In addition to their low fat content and other nutritional qualities, lactic-acid fermented vegetables have been proven to contain probiotic microbes that promote the growth of healthy intestinal flora and aid in digestion. As such, they are recommended for macrobiotic diets.
On an international level, the company's most popular product is its gherkin pickles, which are mainly exported to North America and Europe. While other European countries like France and Germany have a large stake in this market, González believes that the way to make these Spanish products stand out is through demonstrating their quality and tradition. Another company, Amanida (Zaragoza), is planning to introduce new products to international markets. They consider themselves pioneers

Spanish Olives, A Category of Their Own

While not all Spanish olives are considered true pickles, there is no doubting the reality of their success in the national and global marketplace (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 70). Spain is, in fact, the world's top producer, exporter and consumer of table olives. In the words of Antonio de Mora, Director of the Association of Exporters and Manufacturers of Table Olives (ASEMESA), "In Spain, the olive forms a part of our culture and idiosyncrasy. It has been and continues to be a source of wealth for our country, with regards to its cultivation, transformation and export, in which we are world leaders. And of course, it's ever-present on our table, whether in the form of a typical tapa or ingredient in our gastronomy."

According to data provided by the Olive Oil Agency (AAO) for the 2010/2011 season, Spain produces 30% of the world's table olives, with an average annual production of 526,000 tons. This puts Spain well above its nearest competitors: Egypt (13%), Turkey (10%) and Syria (8%). The same is true for olive exports, for which Spain also dominates the world market at 30%, with average annual exports of 272,000 tons.

Although Spanish olives are enjoyed in 120 countries around the world, 40% of all production is consumed on a national level. This is not surprising, given their important role in Spanish culture as not just tapas or ingredients, but also as elements of social interaction and tradition that have come to symbolize that which is "typically Spanish". In short, Spanish olives are as indispensable as it gets!

in the commercialization of Spanish pickled garlic, which they currently export to 21 countries. Their best client is the United States, to which they export 150,000 kg (330,693 lb) of garlic a year. According to Amanida's director, José Luis Simón, "People in the US are starting to associate this product with Spain in general." Apart from its more traditional pickled vegetables, the company has recently launched a line of innovative products such as gherkin pickles with green tea marinade and pesto-flavored pearl onions.

Baby eggplants

At the other end of the spectrum are Spanish pickled vegetables so specialized that they can be produced only in certain areas in accordance with centuries-old traditions. As previously mentioned, these famed products include Almagro eggplants, Ibarra chili peppers and Ballobar capers. It's important to point out that their uniqueness is not only geographic in nature, but also relates to their impact on an area's culture and gastronomy. In addition to their strong presence in the culinary traditions of the past, these products are so respected that they are also being incorporated into the recipes of many of Spain's most renowned chefs.

The most recognizable of these products is without a doubt Almagro eggplants, a food designated with a Protected Geographic Indication (PGI). This genetically singular species (*Solanum melongena*) is cultivated in six towns of Campo de Calatrava, an area located in the center of the province of Ciudad Real (Castile-La Mancha, center of Spain), which is romantically named for the Order of Calatrava knights who defended it in the 12th century. The Moors introduced the plant in the 10th century, as well as the recipe that is still used today. A quasi-wild plant, it's mostly grown on small, family farms of only 1 to 2 ha (2.5 to 5 acres). According to Vicente Malagón, whose father founded the first commercial business (Vicente

Malagón S.A.) for this product, the plant's high yield makes the harvest a social event that typically involves entire local families. Vicente stresses the importance of this tradition, which contributes to preserving the natural and traditional characteristics of this product. Eggplants are harvested from late summer to early fall while still young (about the size of a rosebud). They are characterized by their small size, thin stems and dark green fruit, which can be tinged on the outside with purple and black tones. According to a study carried out by the Polytechnic University of Valencia, these eggplants also have an extremely high concentration of polyphenoles—antioxidants that may help to prevent certain types of cancer, reduce signs of aging, and lower cholesterol.
Unlike other raw pickled vegetables, the eggplants are cooked, fermented and then seasoned. This process is still carried out in homes throughout the region. The classic *berenjenas aliñadas* (seasoned eggplants) are dressed with the recipe of sunflower oil, wine vinegar, locally-grown purple garlic (PGI Ajo Morado de Las Pedroñeras), cumin, rock salt and paprika (Protected Designation of Origin, PDO Pimentón de la Vera). The *berenjenas embuchadas* (stuffed eggplants) are stuffed with a red pepper and skewered with a stick of locally grown wild fennel. Their texture varies, ranging from chewier leaves on the outside, to the smooth and yielding flesh of the eggplant itself. Although the flavor is characterized by the aroma of vinegar and cumin, the taste is delicate and unlike anything else you've ever tried. Usually eaten whole, but sometimes cut into smaller cubes, it's no wonder that bars along the Plaza Mayor of the historic town of Almagro (Ciudad Real) go through dish after dish of these pickled treats.
The quality and originality of this local product has also led to its use in innovative dishes created by some of the region's best chefs. Every few years the Regulatory Council for PGI Berenjenas de Almagro hosts a gastronomic competition in which area professionals are challenged to create original tapas using this ingredient. Past competitions have seen this pickled vegetable deep-fried, caramelized, made into mousse, stuffed with meat, turned into foam, infused into bread and laminated like carpaccio, among other things.

Cool peppers

Heading north about 965 km (600 mi), pickled Ibarra chili peppers are also being lauded for their culinary applications. I should note that pickled green peppers have been used all over Spain for generations as traditional accompaniments for classic Spanish stews and legumes. One of the most traditional dishes from Madrid, *cocido madrileño* (a stew made with chickpeas, vegetables and meat), wouldn't be the same if served without the accompanying plate of pickled

green peppers. The vinegar provides a crisp contrast to both the creaminess of beans and the fat found in sausages like *chorizo* (a type of cured red sausage), often used for flavoring. In Ibarra, the local specialty legumes, *alubias de Tolosa* (black beans from Tolosa, Guipúzcoa), are also served with a generous helping of *piparras* (as they are often called in the Basque Country), on the side. Despite similar applications and appearances, it's important to differentiate these slender green chilies from the pickled variety that is traditionally found in other parts of Spain. The true Ibarra peppers are only cultivated in specific areas in the northern province of Guipúzcoa. Other characteristics of these peppers include their thin skins, meaty flesh, greenish-yellow hues, and soft flavor. But for most people the greatest distinction of all is that, unlike peppers from other areas, the Ibarras are not spicy. According to José Antonio Urrozola of Ibarraco Langostinoak, one of six companies that produces Ibarra

green peppers, the town of Ibarra is historically known as a source of vegetable seeds and seedlings. People come from all corners of Spain to buy tomatoes, lettuce and the very same pepper seeds that are planted here. The difference is that, cultivated in other places, the resulting vegetables are spicier and have a stronger flavor. José Antonio says that this distinction comes from the area's microclimate of mild temperatures, sparse sun and plenty of humidity. Iñaki Labaien of Agiña Piperrak S.L. also attributes the difference to the area's soft soils and the fact that there's not much difference between nighttime and daytime temperatures. Both producers stress that vegetables are typically planted, harvested, sorted and pickled by hand using traditional recipes that have been used in people's homes for centuries. At Iñaki Labaien's suggestion, I got in touch with renowned chef Pedro Subijana of famed Akelarre Restaurant in nearby San Sebastián. Pedro often uses Ibarra green peppers on his menu, and values them both for what they signify on a traditional level and because they "have a perfect texture, an exact touch of vinegar, and aren't spicy." He stresses that, "We use them in endless preparations... They adapt perfectly to haute cuisine, and the flavors of these (traditional foods) are permanently registered on our palates. We've used them in a number of formats, including spherification, caramelization, and injected and stuffed."

Hot capers

Despite being geographically unique products, both Almagro eggplants and Ibarra green peppers have been esteemed throughout Spain for generations. In the case of the pickled capers and caper berries of Ballobar, this singular and traditional product from the Monegros Desert in Huesca (Aragón, northeast Spain) is just starting to regain its former renown. In general, Spanish capers are an extremely well-known product in the rest of the world and are exported with great success. Indigenous to the Mediterranean and arid areas of the Iberian Peninsula, capers (*alcaparras*)

Pickled Vegetables and Sherry
Pairing Two of Spain's Great Traditions

While there can be no doubt about the wisdom of combining pickled vegetables with a traditional aperitif of beer or vermouth, pairing them with wine can be a little trickier. The acidity found in most wines can often clash with the vinegared notes of pickled vegetables. However, there are certain properties found in the aged fortified wines (sherries) of Jerez that makes them ideal for pairing with the sour, salty and even sweet flavors of pickled vegetables. In Andalusia, where these famed wines are made, there is a long-standing tradition of just that. Just ask José García of the Taberna La Manzanilla, a Cádiz institution where his family has been serving hundred-year-old sherries since 1942: "The aging of wines like Amontillado, Palo Cortado and Oloroso in wood casks gives them the body and dryness needed to stand up to the strong flavors of vinegar."

Miguel Llanos, the sommelier of the Jerez winery, Bodegas Tradición, agrees. He explains that sherries that begin their aging process under the indigenous *flor* (a combination of yeasts responsible for the biological ageing of fino wines) are structured and dry, and therefore soften and harmonize with the vinegar's pungent notes. Additionally, both this type of aging and the vinegar and salt of the pickled vegetables cause the palate to produce more saliva, which also helps to maximize flavors and aromas.

Founded in 1650, Bodegas Tradición makes three dry sherries: Amontillado, Oloroso, and Palo Cortado, all of which are aged for a minimum of 20-50 years. Stored in traditional stacked barrels, known as *soleras*, these wines are slowly aged and gently oxidized, favoring the development of deep, complex flavors. I arranged to meet Miguel and Lorenzo García-Iglesias, the head of the winery, at El Yantar de Ayer, the incomparable pickled vegetable stand in Madrid's Mercado San Miguel. We paired these three wines with a selection of pickled vegetables ranging from olives to pickles, caper berries, red peppers, garlic cloves, and finally, eggplant from Almagro. Without a doubt, the wines that paired the best with the vinegar notes were the subtly salty, nutty, and slightly bitter orange peel, almond and hazelnut tones of the Amontillado and Palo Cortado, which had both partially aged underflor. Once again we confirmed the excellent union of these two vitally important Spanish gastronomic traditions!

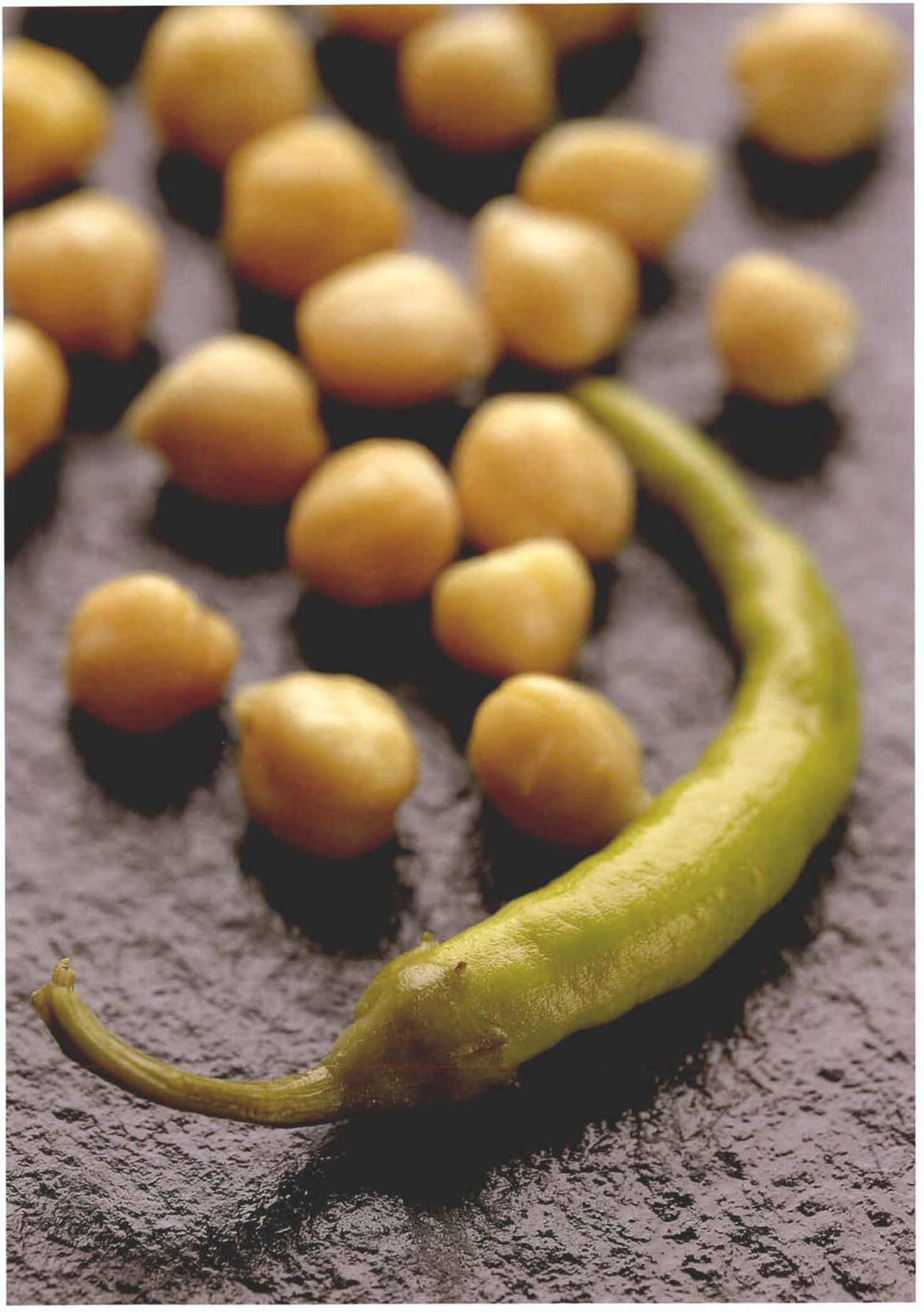
and caper berries (*alcaparrones*) have been harvested for food here for centuries. The more commonly eaten capers are actually the closed buds of these wild plants (*Capparis spinosa*), which are collected in early summer. Left to bloom into delicate purple and white threaded blossoms, the plant later produces its fruit, the caper berry.
Historically, capers have been produced in large quantities in Almería, Murcia and parts of Córdoba. They are also a very important agricultural and gastronomic product in the Balearic Islands, where they are called *tàperes*. The 2008 MAT study rated capers the fourth most important pickled vegetable in Spain in terms of volume, with sales exceeding 3.2 million euros.
Within this larger context, Ballobar capers, a Slow Food flagship food (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 82), are unique for a number of reasons. Thought to have been introduced by the Moors or Greeks, legend has it that they were so prized in the 14th century that they were traded to the Tsar's court for golden caviar. These wild plants are adapted to the extreme heat of the Monegros Desert, where their roots typically grow 30 m (98.4 ft) long in search of water. Temperatures here can reach 50°C (122°F) in summer. This makes the manual harvesting of the spiny caper bushes doubly hard, not to mention that it takes around 6,000 buds to constitute only 1 kg (2.2 lb) of capers. These extreme conditions have led to the near disappearance of this product

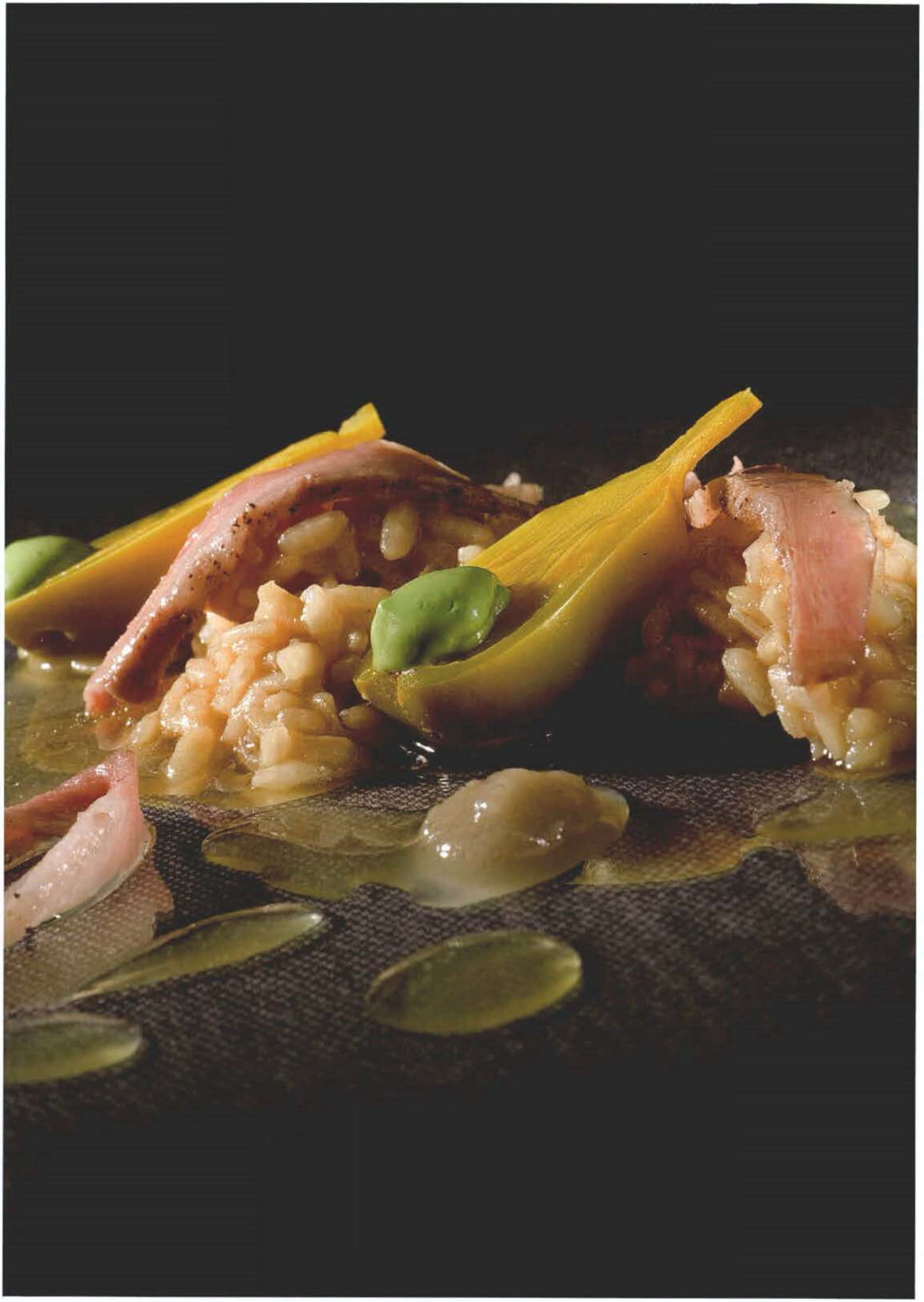
for several years, but thanks to the efforts of local people like Miguel Ángel Salas, this traditional pickled vegetable is making a comeback. Miguel Ángel and his partners are now harvesting around 600 kg (1,322 lb) of capers a year.
The process is carried out manually, and once harvested the capers are pickled by two sisters at a local factory—all under the watchful eye of town matriarchs who have lent their wisdom to the endeavor. The pickled vegetables are prized locally, and their very production depends on a community effort. In any case, everyone who tries these organically-prepared capers agrees that they are unlike any other capers on the market. According to Miguel Ángel, they have a delicate aroma reminiscent of olives. British company Brindisa, which imports these and other Spanish foods, describes them as less bitter than typical capers and with a more tender skin.

A stronger endorsement comes from Chef Josean Martínez Alija, of the world-famous Guggenheim Restaurant in Bilbao. He told me that, among other things, he appreciates the purity of their flavor: "This caper has an intense and pleasant taste, a slightly crunchy texture and a special perfumed aroma. The quality and method of their preparation makes them special and their flavor doesn't saturate dishes but, rather, presents a balance with an aroma that I haven't experienced with other (capers)."
Josean often uses this product in a variety of dishes. Past creations have included Steamed *rey* (a local fish) with broth made from wild garlic, Ballobar capers, and lemongrass, and Idiazabal cheese cream with sautéed Ballobar capers, tender herb shoots and crunchy crostini.
Spanish pickled vegetables are not only holding their traditional ground, but are also prospering at new levels in export and modern gastronomic applications. In the end it comes down to the fact that Spaniards themselves relish these traditional foods that are so interwoven with the country's cultural and social traditions. Since my first bite of pickled garlic years ago, I can absolutely see why!

Adrienne Smith is a sommelier, chef and freelance writer. She has spent the last decade eating and drinking her way through Spain.

We would like to thank Mercado de San Miguel *for contributing to this photo report.*





Paco Pérez*

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

Photos
Toya Legido
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Wines chosen by
Toni Gata, sommelier
at Restaurante Miramar.

Rice with ALMAGRO PICKLED EGGPLANT and Ibérico pork

(Arroz con berenjenas de Almagro y secreto Ibérico)

I love rice, so I devised this simple rice dish with eggplant and Ibérico pork, preferably the smoked pork made by my friend Julio de Casalba.

SERVES 4

100 g / 3 1/2 oz smoked Ibérico pork (preferably the secreto cut); 4 Almagro pickled eggplants.

For the Ibérico pork consommé: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz Ibérico pork; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz spring onion; 50 g / 2 oz celery; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz carrot; fresh ginger; 1 bay leaf; 2 l / 8 1/2 cup mineral water.

For the eggplant juice: 4 eggplants.

For the onion base: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz spring onion; 1 garlic shoot; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz tomato sauce; 50 g / 2 oz white wine.

For the rice: 200 g / 7 oz rice; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz onion base; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz eggplant juice; extra virgin olive oil; 1 l / 4 1/4 cup Ibérico pork consommé.

*For a more in-depth look at the chef, see Close-up

Thinly slice the smoked Ibérico pork and the pickled eggplants and set aside.

Ibérico pork consommé

Roast the Ibérico pork and remove any excess fat. Meanwhile sauté the vegetables. Place the roast pork, vegetables, ginger and bay leaf in the water and cook until reduced to 1 l / 4 1/4 cup.

Eggplant juice

Roast the eggplants over charcoal. Peel then liquidize.

Onion base

Gently fry the onion with the garlic shoot. Add the tomato sauce and wine. Simmer until the tomato is reduced and the wine has evaporated.

Rice

Add the rice to the onion base and stir for 1 minute over the heat. Gradually pour in the Ibérico pork consommé, and cook. When cooked, add the eggplant juice to give a creamy texture.

To serve

Serve the rice and top with thin slices of Almagro pickled eggplant and smoked Ibérico pork. Add a touch of extra virgin olive oil.

Preparation time

2 hours

Recommended wine

To bring out the very best of this dish, we suggest the outstanding Ex Ex 7 (DO Empordà) from the Castillo de Perelada winery. This 100% Monastrell wine has a bright cherry color and a powerful aroma and gives the balance we need for this very original rice dish.

IBARRA CHILI PEPPERS with two anchovies

(Guindillas de Ibarra y dos anchoas)

Ibarra chilies and anchovies are two great ingredients. When combined in this interpretation of the classic *Gilda* tapa they make a very special aperitif, one that is reminiscent of the bars in the old quarter of San Sebastián.

SERVES 4

4 whole Ibarra chili peppers; 4 fresh anchovies.

For the cream of chili: 80 g / 3 oz Ibarra chili pepper (preserve); 80 g / 3 oz extra virgin olive oil; 20 g / 1 oz chili pepper water; 10 g / 1/3 oz white wine; 0.2 g / 0.007 xanthan.

For the anchovies in brine: 4 anchovies in brine; extra virgin olive oil.

For the tomato water: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz whole tomatoes.

For the tomato granita: 200 g / 7 oz tomato water; half a sheet of gelatin; pepper.

Cream of chili

Place the chilies, extra virgin olive oil, chili pepper water, white wine and xanthan in a blender. Blend to a purée. Strain and set aside.

Anchovies in brine

Wash under cold running water and remove the bones.
Pat dry with paper towels.

Tomato water

Freeze the tomatoes for 24 hours. Cut into pieces and place in a strainer to drain overnight at room temperature. Collect the water.

Tomato granita

Heat one quarter of the tomato water (about 50 g / 2 oz). Soak the gelatin in cold water and dissolve in the tomato water. Add the rest of the water and season with pepper. Freeze. For serving, scrape to form the granita.

To serve

Open up the fresh anchovies and insert a chili pepper. Close and serve. Decorate the dish with the cream of chili, the tomato granita and a few dice of anchovies in brine with a touch of extra virgin olive oil.

Preparation time

1 hour

Recommended wine

In our search for a powerful wine that could stand up to these strong flavors, we came to Laguardia in La Rioja Alavesa. And, yet again, we chose Artadi Pagos Viejos 2004 (DOCa Rioja) by the Artadi winery. This is a wine that makes its presence felt with its aromas of graphite, blackberries and cranberries with floral notes. And it offers layers of flavor, as well as pleasant tannin well integrated with the wood. The ideal companion for a Gilda.

Dessert **Wines**

All countries with a great winemaking tradition boast a few historic dessert wines, some of which have a mythical resonance, and Spain is no exception. But the tremendous transformation of the Spanish wine world over the last 25 years has included a low-key but truly exciting revolution on the sweet front.

OLD & NEW

TEXT
AMAYA CERVERA/©ICEX

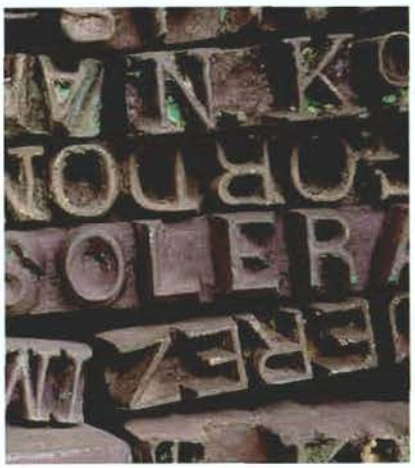
PHOTOS
JUAN MANUEL SANZ/©ICEX

TRANSLATION
JENNY MCDONALD/©ICEX

Spain's dessert wines have a glorious history. There were the "mountain wines" from Málaga, the Alicante wine said to have brightened the last few days of the Roi Soleil (Louis XIV of France, 1638-1715), the sherries and Canary Sack extolled by Shakespeare (1564-1616), the Malvasía wine from Sitges (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 82) and that of Banyalbufar in Majorca, the Ribadavia *tostadillo*... Most of these wines, probably fortified with grape spirit so that they could withstand sea travel, together with Port and Madeira, were traded throughout Europe by English merchants between the 16th and 18th centuries. Although it is almost impossible to draw a straight line between these famous products of the past and those being made today, interest in the sweet side of Spanish viniculture is increasing. Many growers are taking a new look at the wines of the past and renewing styles to make them more appealing to today's consumers.

Sweet means more

In the world of wine, sweet is synonymous with concentration and with grapes that have a higher sugar content than is needed to make dry whites or reds. In ancient times, sweet wines were considered the most noble. They were more intense, more flavorsome, and they traveled and lasted well. The first description of a raisin wine appears in *Words and Days* by Hesiod, written in the 8th century before



Christ. In fact, deliberate dehydration of the grapes until they become raisins was the first formula used by man to concentrate not only the sugars but all the elements inside the grapes. Later on, it was discovered that a similar effect could be achieved by cold temperatures (*eiswein*—ice wine—is basically made from frozen grapes) or by the *Botrytis cinerea* fungus (which leads to outstanding sweet wines such as the French Sauternes and the Hungarian Tokaji wines). But these two variables are associated with cold climates, whereas Spain is a sunny land in which grapes often become overripe. Throughout the Mediterranean Basin excellent grapes for dessert wines such as Moscatel and Malvasía grow well, and in Spain production techniques and raisin wines have a history dating back to the Phoenician presence around 1100 BC.

Concentrated sugars

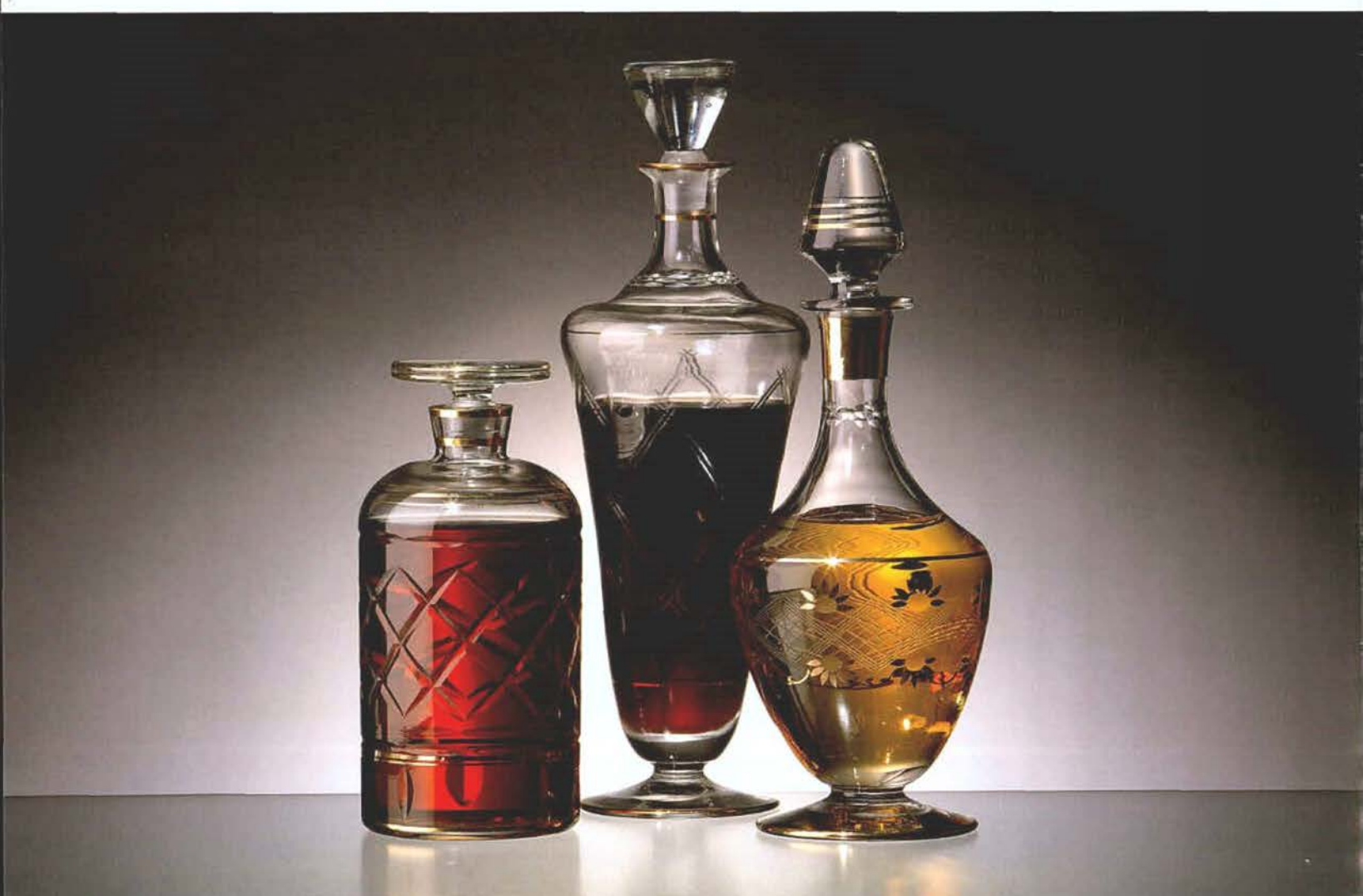
The most extreme example of a raisin wine is probably PX, a pasty, concentrated and tremendously sweet wine that may contain as much as half a kilo (1.1 lb) of sugar per liter (4.2 cups). The name comes from the Pedro Ximénez grapes grown in various Designations of Origin in Andalusia (southern Spain)—Málaga, Jerez (Cádiz) and, especially, Montilla-Moriles (Córdoba). The latter is also allowed to supply the other two. In fact, it has to provide Jerez as the Pedro Ximénez variety is practically non-existent there, although there are a few notable exceptions such as Ximénez-Spínola, which is made only from grapes grown within the Sherry Triangle.
PX is a sweet wine that has been fortified by adding pure grape spirit to the must. Fortification is necessary because the huge amounts of sugar obtained by air-drying the grapes prevent the yeasts from working naturally. The secrets behind this wine lie in the sunshine received by the grapes before the late summer rains, very laborious pressing to extract the "soul" from the raisins and the *solera* aging system used. Aging helps enhance flavor concentration and acidity and reduces the alcohol content. The longer it lasts, the better. The result is a sublime experience: density with complexity (aromas of toffee,

WINES & WATER

nuts, coffee, raisins, caramel, etc.) and an infinite, velvety persistence. The oldest soleras at Alvear, Pérez Barquero and Toro Albalá at Montilla-Moriles, the *trasañejo* made by Bodegas Málaga Virgen in Málaga and the greatest PX from Jerez (Gran Orden by Garvey, Viejo Rare by Osborne, Venerable by Domecq, Noé by González Byass and others) are expensive, rare jewels that deserve a place amongst the world's great dessert wines. But PX is also synonymous with pleasure at a good price. The top-selling Montilla wine, Gran Barquero (by Bodegas Pérez Barquero), is aged for 4-6 years and costs under 12 euros on the Spanish market. This winery exports 43% of its production to 45 countries all over the world. The best connoisseurs of PX wines are said to be found in the United Kingdom, Holland, Italy, France, the United States and Japan. And PX wines have been keeping up with the times. Today, several Montilla wineries produce a young version of some of their dessert wines. These wines are not aged, are orangey-amber in color, offer immediate aromas of raisin and caramel and can be drunk very cold. And Alvear, another important exporter, is making vintage PX wines that are aged statically for about six years in the barrel and two in the bottle. These are wines that can be tasted vertically, comparing the different vintages.

Málaga, sweetest of all

This is the only Spanish designation that makes only dessert wines.



The "Málaga sacks" (the term comes from *saca*, the Spanish verb for "take out" because these wines were "taken out" of their growing area, or exported) and the mountain wines from the steep slopes of the Axarquía district were much appreciated in Europe in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Today Málaga has a huge number of traditional types and enough production methods and blends to keep a doctoral student busy for several years. Didier Bricout, general manager of the hundred-year-old firm Bodegas Málaga Virgen, confesses that consumers are generally unaware of the variety of Málaga wines. This winery combines high-production wines such as Málaga Virgen, a blend of up to four types of sweet wine, with two excellent trasañejos (blends of wines aged for about 30 years using the solera system), and modern, naturally sweet Moscatels in which all the sugar and alcohol come from the grapes. A fresh and fragrant example is the firm's Tres Leones. According to Bricout, "The drying process is key for modern, naturally sweet wines." The grapes undergo what the locals call *asoleo corto*, a short drying process, to achieve just the right concentration of sugar.

In traditional, concentrated dessert wines, the process is *asoleo largo*, long drying, so the starting point is much drier grapes.

The larger the amount of sugar, the more difficult fermentation becomes, so alcohol is added and the wines are then classified as fortified, or liqueur wines.

The renewed popularity of Málaga Moscatel wine has come with *Moscatel de Alejandría* in combination with modern production methods that bring out the grapes' full potential. Naturally sweet wine has made a definite comeback. This is the sort that we can assume was made locally before the 17th century, when the need to travel made it necessary to add alcohol. There have been two main protagonists in this story. The first is Telmo Rodríguez, who has been focusing on forgotten Spanish varieties and terrains and was keen to recover the old mountain wines from the Axarquía district. After what may well have been his most

Dessert wines: a complex world waiting to be discovered

Except for the radical differences between wines in which the alcohol content and sweetness come exclusively from the grape and those to which alcohol or other sweetening agents from grapes may be added (the so-called liqueur wines or fortified wines), many of the characteristics that figure in the table (page 35) are not necessarily exclusive. Borderlines tend to be hazy in the world of sweet wines. Within a single growing area and for a single variety, different harvesting, production and aging methods may be adopted. Also important, as explained in this article, is that tradition and history are being newly interpreted by today's producers and, in many cases, styles have been modernized. Today, for example, it is possible to find young or vintage PX as well as the traditional solera-aged PX.

exciting project, he is now producing Moscatels from grapes grown on hot, slaty mountain terrains and air-dried. His Molino Real (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 81), which made its first appearance with the 1998 vintage, is an icon among the new Spanish dessert wines. With a production of just over 6,000 bottles, aged for 20 months in French oak, the best vintages combine the characteristic sweetness of the variety with delicate, fresh, primary aromas and herbal touches. And this is a wine that develops well in the bottle.
The second is the US importer of Spanish wines Jorge Ordóñez, who has Malagan blood in his veins. Unlike other initiatives of his in Spain for which he works in partnership with other producers, this is a personal project and the only one to bear his name (Bodegas Jorge Ordóñez & Co.). With the technical expertise of the Austrian Kracher family, which specializes in sweet wines, he now produces four labels with increasing levels of concentration—from the youngest, fermented in stainless steel, No. 1 Special Selection and No. 2 Victoria, to No. 3 Viejas Viñas which ferments and is aged for 18 months in French oak, and the original Esencia, a unique product in this area made from drier Moscatel raisins. This is a dense, deep wine, not unlike the Hungarian Tokaji Essencia wines, with over half a kilo (1.1 lb) of residual sugar and an alcohol content of barely 4°.

The other Spanish Moscatels

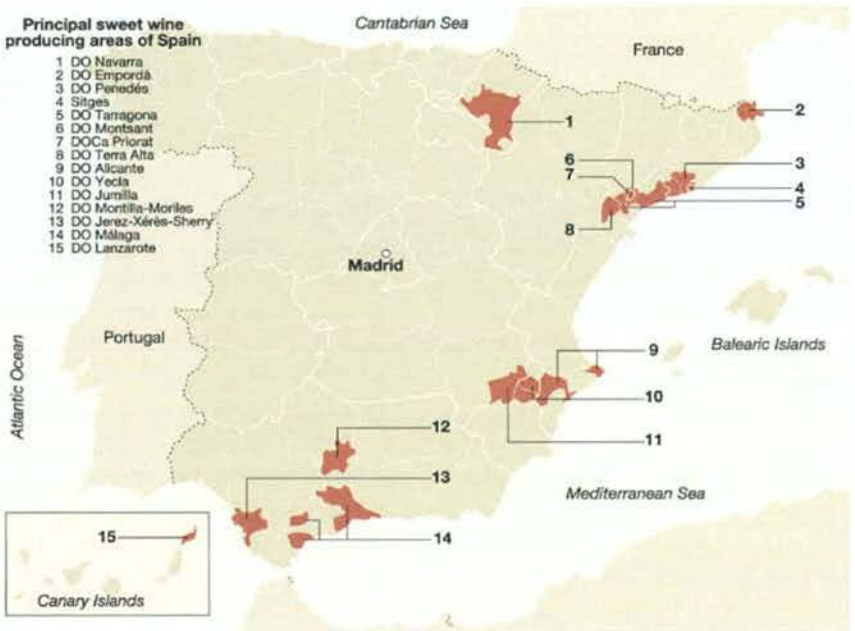
But the pioneer of modern, naturally sweet wines in Spain was a Navarran Moscatel, Ochoa, launched in 1994. It is produced by Javier Ochoa, who back then was heading Navarre's Winemaking and Enological Station (EVENA), the leading research center within the DO Navarra. This new wine achieved a dual objective: to represent the new generation of Moscatels from Navarre which until then had been conceived as oxidized liqueur wines, and to restore the almost extinct small-grain Moscatel grape based on careful selection of wood from old vineyards. The result was a clean, fragrant, fresh and fruity wine that captured the crispness and delicious flavor of the grapes. Harvesting is carried out late, fermentation is stopped using cold stabilization, and the alcohol content is about 12.5% by volume. The residual sugar content varies from year to year. This is one of the most important of the dessert wine labels and one that comes at a very good price.
This style has gained many followers and, although production is very limited (just 0.2% of the DO's production in 2010), it is now considered one of the outstanding categories of Navarran wine (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 81).
Fernando Chivite went a step further by introducing barrels, taking his inspiration from the classic European dessert wines and by also adding Botrytis, unusual for Spain. His Chivite Colección 125 Vendimia Tardía is made from overripe Moscatel grapes harvested in very small batches from mid-October to early December. This is a complex, very concentrated dessert wine. It has a good acidity level and develops exceptionally well in the bottle. To my mind, it is one of Spain's best.
The other main area for Spanish Moscatel grapes, Alicante (southeast Spain), has also undergone its own revolution. The most outstanding of the wines come from the La Marina region, close to the sea, where the Moscatel de Alejandría has always flourished. The leading pioneer here is Felipe Gutiérrez de la Vega, an opera-lover who has built up a following with his Casta Diva wines. These have reaped huge success in the US. The range is extremely varied, from the fresh Casta Diva Furtiva Lágrima, fermented in stainless steel, to his star wine Casta Diva Cosecha Miel, which combines raisins and very ripe grapes, fermented in steel tanks and aged for 12 months in French oak. Next comes the more concentrated Casta Diva La Diva, a naturally sweet wine made from sun-dried grapes and aged in wood. Now in charge of production is Violeta Gutiérrez de la Vega, who was trained in Sauternes (France). She admits that frontiers are difficult to draw in the world

of sweet wines. For stopping fermentation, she always prefers to add alcohol rather than sulfur. This opinion is shared by Pepe Mendoza at his family-run winery in Alfaz del Pi, Enrique Mendoza. His firm, the first to produce quality red wines in the DO Alicante, has two Moscatels on the market for which the traditional method in this region is adopted, that of stopping fermentation with alcohol, but the former oxidative processes are avoided. Its Moscatel de la Marina is made from grapes harvested at a potential *baumé* (the estimated alcohol content based on sugar concentration in the grapes) of 12.5° and offers a newfound varietal freshness, whereas the Moscatel de Mendoza, which comes from more mature grapes, is macerated with the skins and aged in the barrel, making it more complex and giving it greater weight in the mouth. For Pepe Mendoza, who has managed to place his dessert labels on markets in the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Mexico and the United States, "in Mediterranean culture, all meals must end with something sweet."

Monastrell and Fondillón

The Alicante sweet wine of greatest fame, however, is Fondillón. It is made from overripe Monastrell grapes that almost turn to raisins on the plant. This is a naturally sweet wine, so the alcohol comes exclusively from the fermentation process. The DO Alicante Regulatory Council requires the use of native

yeasts and a minimum 10 years aging, which may be static, that is, in the same barrel, or may adopt the solera system, in which case the youngest wine may not be less than four years old. It has set up a specific monitoring committee just for this dessert wine, which is only made at a dozen wineries in the area.
Although there is little documentary evidence establishing a clear link between today's Fondillón wines and those of the past, what is clear is that the very Mediterranean Monastrell grape (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 75) has all it takes to reach high levels of maturity and concentration. The clear oxidative component of the most traditional Fondillón wines has been updated by the Gutiérrez de la Vega winery, which took its inspiration from the Huerta de Alicante wines, sweeter and thicker than those from Monóvar. This firm has brought out two small-scale, artisan versions aged for 10 and 15 years and fermented in open barrels. The resulting wine is closer in concentration and fruity expression to a vintage Port than to the mellow, drier flavors made by other producers in the DO.
The Mendoza family adopts a freer approach with its Dolç de Mendoza, a modern Monastrell wine. This too is made from grapes that dry on the plant. After aging in French oak for 3-4 years, as is to be expected, the end result is both dense and fruity.
Similarly, the former Mistela wines (grape must to which a small amount of grape spirit is added) made from Monastrell in Yecla and Jumilla (in Murcia, southeast



Spain) have given way to sweet reds that retain more of the grape's character. This focus on varietal identity has also been taken up by the fruity, dry reds that are now coming from these DOs in Murcia.
It all started out with Bodega Olivares, in DO Jumilla, which decided to give up barrels in order to preserve maximum fruity expression. Using old, ungrafted vines, they allow the grapes to become overripe on the plant until late October or early November. Fermentation is stopped using alcohol, but the wine macerates with the skins for over 30 days. It is bottled in June and stored for two years before being sold. In 2003, the DO Jumilla changed its regulations to cover this type of fortified or liqueur wine, so Olivares is now able to sell it with the DO's back label.
In the DO Yecla, Bodegas Castaño is working along similar lines. Its sweet red Monastrell, which is now being exported successfully to Europe, the United States and Asia, is fermented until it has an alcohol content of 3-4°, the aim being to bring out the fermentation aromas that are missing from Mistela wines. Cold maceration then extracts the aromas and, unlike the Olivares method, this wine spends a period of 8-10 months in the barrel. Predominant in this Murcian Monastrell are flavors of very ripe, black grapes, figs and the balsam touches of Mediterranean scrub.

Other sweet wines

In Catalonia (northeast Spain), it is Garnacha (both red and white) along with Moscatel that serve to produce the traditional dessert wines—Mistela, *rancio* (wines that are aged oxidatively in glass demijohns), and naturally sweet

	Characteristics	Wines
Harvesting	Late harvests and grapes that are overripened to different degrees	· Most sweet wines start out from grapes with a high sugar content
	Grapes overripe or sun-dried on the plant	· Fondillón · Malvasías and other sweet wines from the Canaries · Many Catalonian liqueur wines
	Grapes air-dried off the plant	· PX (Málaga, Montilla, Jerez) · Moscatel from Málaga · Some Malvasías and sweet wines from the Canaries
Production	Naturally sweet wines, with sugar and alcohol from the grapes	· Fondillón and other sweet Monastrells · Malvasías from the Canaries · New Navarran Moscatels · Some sweet wines from Málaga, especially Moscatels · Sweet rancio wines from Priorat and modern-style sweet wines from Priorat and from Catalonia in general
	Liqueur wines with added alcohol and/or concentrated must and other sweetening substances from the grapes	· Málaga · Traditional Catalonian wines: Empordà, Montsant, Priorat, Tarragona, Terra Alta · Some sweet Moscatels · Jerez (Moscatels and fortified liqueur wines) · PX (Montilla, Jerez, Málaga) · Traditional Moscatels from Alicante, Navarre, Aragón, Catalonia, Canaries... · Canary · Mistelas · Malvasía from Sitges
Aging	No aging in wood	· Young Moscatels and Malvasías · Young PX · Some Mistelas
	Sun and aging in glass demijohns	· Sweet rancio wines, especially from Catalonia
	Solera method	· PX from Jerez and Montilla and some from Málaga · Other sweet sherries · Many Garnachas from Empordà and some Catalonian liqueur and rancio wines · Malvasías from the Canaries · Fondillón
	Static aging in wood	· Some rare examples of vintage PX aged in casks · Fondillón · Most of the Málaga sweet wines · Most of the Catalonian sweet wines, including the Sitges Malvasía · Most Moscatels and modern-style sweet wines

wines. The DO Empordà in Girona, and the DOs Terra Alta, Montsant, Priorat and Tarragona in the province of Tarragona have been especially active on the dessert wine front, although today these represent just a tiny proportion of total production (4% in Empordà, 2.5% in Tarragona and less than 1% in Terra Alta).
With the exception of some sweet rancio wines such as those from Priorat, the normal working method is to take fully ripe grapes and fortify the must with alcohol. This means that most of Catalonia's sweet wines are classified as liqueur wines. The main bastion for classic methods is the hundred-year-old firm De Muller in Reus, which makes 200,000 to 300,000 bottles of dessert wine a year and exports all over the world, except for Australasia. One of its jewels is Pajarete, from a 150-liter barrel that dates from the year the winery was founded (1851), with only 100 bottles being produced a year (and sold on the Spanish market at the very affordable price, considering their history, of 75 euros). The barrel is filled with only the winery's best wines. Its soleras (1926 Tarragona from white Garnacha, 1918 Priorat Dom Berenguer from red Garnacha and Moscatel Solera 1926 Tarragona) are all priced at 50-60 euros a bottle. This aging system of transferring the wine from one barrel to another is not applied as strictly here as it is in the sherry region and is usually used in Catalonia for rancio wines and most of the Empordà Garnacha wines.
Modernization in Catalonia has come either with technology (Gramona, in the Penedès, with its Riesling and Gewürztraminer ice wines made by cryoextraction or artificial freezing of the grapes after harvesting), by updating traditional styles (as with the excellent Vins Piñol Mistelas from the DO Terra Alta, which reach the consumer in seductive bottles and with greater fruitiness and vivacity than is usual in such wines) or by personal selection in the vineyard. An emblematic example is Dolç de l'Obac, which Carles Pastrana, one of the DO Priorat pioneers, has been making since 1991 at his winery in Gratallops. Pastrana realized that when Garnacha grapes are exposed to the north wind they become overripe without problems or rotting. This leads to grapes with a sufficiently high alcohol potential for making a dessert wine in which, as he puts it, "the alcohol, acidity and sugar all come from the grape, and that's all you need." Fermentation is stopped by cold stabilization and the result is "a red wine with high residual sugar" of about 70 g (2.5 oz) per liter and 16% alcohol.
From the technical viewpoint, naturally sweet wines are always more complicated, but they express the fermentation better and offer more aromas than fortified wines. They are certainly a challenge for producers who have to work exclusively with what the grapes have to offer, without any help from outside.

The Malvasía route

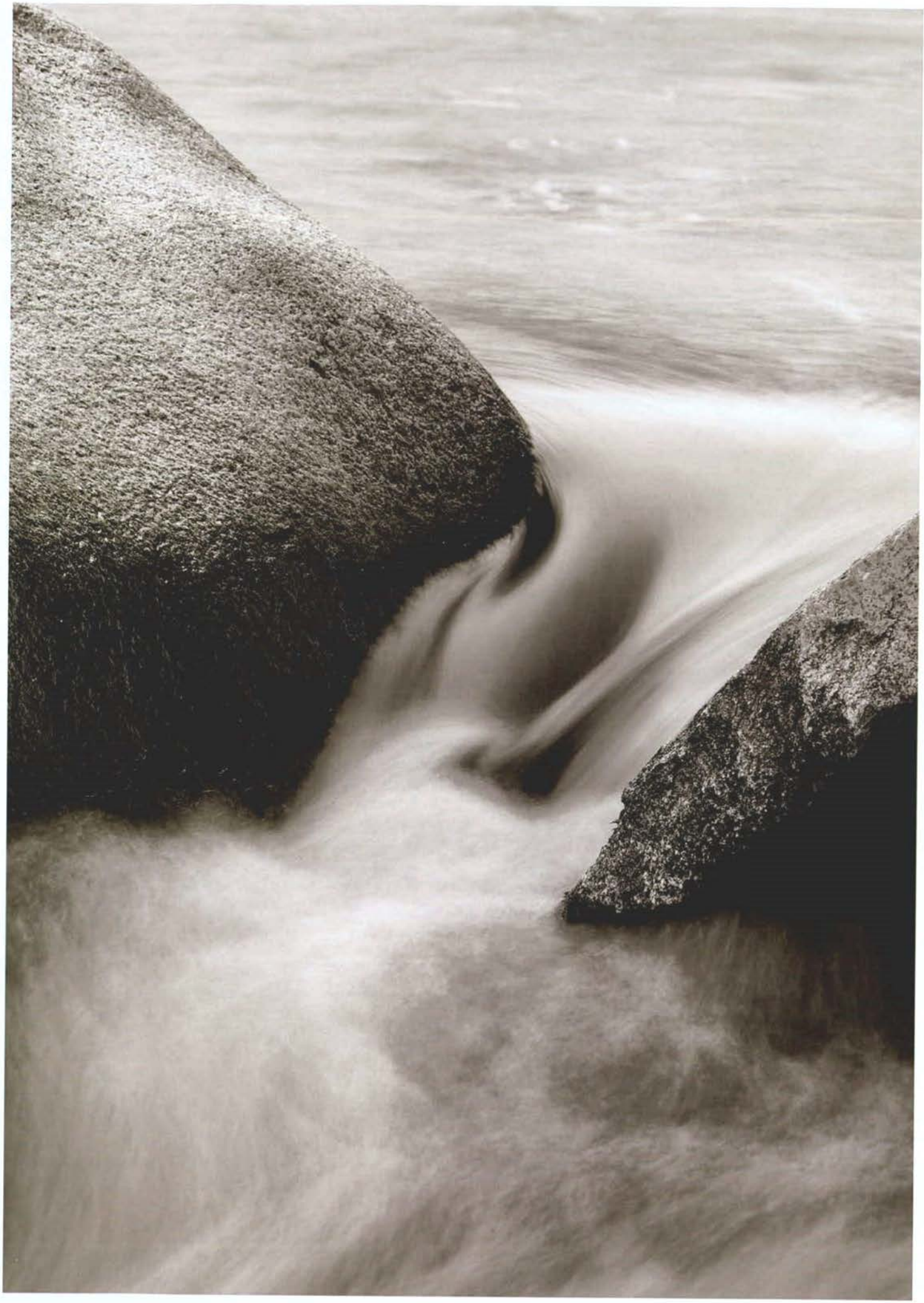
Alongside Moscatel is Malvasía, the other great variety with a natural vocation for dessert wines. Venetian merchants took their wines around the Mediterranean, and this variety, which feels most at home by the sea, has had an especially strong presence in Italy and Spain. In the latter, plenty of vines are called Malvasía, but only those grown in Sitges (Catalonia) and the Canaries are the real thing, with its characteristic aromas and similarities with Moscatel. DNA testing has shown that the Sitges grapes are the same as those in Lipari (Italy), Sardinia and Croatia, and as those in most of the Canary DOs (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 80), with the exception of Lanzarote. What has recently been named "volcanic Malvasía" (in reference to this latter volcanic island's striking lunar landscape where vines are grown in pits) actually comes from a marriage between the Sitges Malvasía and a local grape, probably Marmajuelo.

Lanzarote is considered home to the largest Malvasía growing area in Europe today, although dessert wines account for only 8% of total wine production in the DO Lanzarote and, of them, only 4% are Malvasía. This variety is mostly used for naturally sweet wines. The style ranges from young, fruity wines like El Grifo to others that are aged using the solera system, as at the Bermejos and Stratvs wineries (the latter uses six large oak vats instead of barrels). The grapes are usually air-dried to concentrate the sugars so they end up with clear raisin notes. The "Canary" wines are Malvasías made like liqueur wines and taking their inspiration from the famous wines that were much in favor in England in the 16th and 17th centuries. At the El Grifo winery, Juan José Otamendi explains that these old-style Malvasías were wines that left the Canaries while young to be subsequently fortified with alcohol upon arrival in England. His Canary is a liqueur wine made from Malvasía grapes that are air-dried off the plant to keep in all the aromas. It starts out with old wines from the 1950s, '60s and '90s that have been kept in barrels and aged under the solera system, thus gaining outstanding complexity and persistence.

The world of dessert wines is an intricate combination of late harvests and prolonged, sometimes extremely long maturation aiming to obtain the best possible balance between alcohol, sugar and acidity. Considering all the complications, there must be a good reason why so many Spanish winemakers continue to explore the sweet potential of their vineyards. Sitges, a beauty spot on the Tarragona coast, is better known today as a tourist attraction than as the home of the once-famous Malvasía, which now grows on only a handful of estates.

The wine has survived thanks to diplomat Manuel Llopis, who bequeathed his Aiguadolç vineyard to the Sant Joan Baptista Hospital in Sitges on the condition that it continued to produce sweet Malvasía. In Majorca, the Malvasía de Banyalbufar cooperative is returning to this variety and is already bringing out a light, aromatic and medium-sweet wine. In northern Spain, the first late-harvest txakoli wines have appeared whose secret stems from the cool northern climate. A few years ago, the Ribeiro cooperative in Orense (Galicia, northwest Spain) restored the tradition of the Ribadavia tostadillo wines, made from grapes that are air-dried for several months. Dinastía Vivanco, a Rioja winery now famed for its fantastic Wine Museum in the town of Briones, is restoring the *supurado* tradition, that is, wine made from raisins pressed around Christmas and slowly fermented for months. The winery is working on an updated version, with grapes harvested in January once they have fallen prey to the "noble rot" brought by morning mists over the Ebro Valley. Clearly, the dessert wine revolution in Spain is by no means over.

Amaya Cervera is a wine writer specializing in Spanish wines. She was editor-in-chief of Sibaritas *journal and formed part of the tasting committee for* Guía Peñín. *She has also written for the* RobbReport. *She is currently in charge of content for* Todovino *and is a member of the* Guía Todovino *tasting committee.*



CRYSTAL CLEAR Flavor

Spanish Mineral **Waters**

Water, many of us were taught in school, is a colorless, odorless, flavorless liquid also known as the "universal solvent". In those terms, drinking bottled water probably seems a little extravagant, and one brand of water should be very much the same as the next. Anyone who has visited a city other than their own and put a glass of water to his or her lips, however, knows this not to be true. Who hasn't thought, at some point, how different the water tasted from the one back home? Saul Aparicio dives in to find out why that is and why it matters.

TEXT
SAUL APARICIO HILL/©ICEX

PHOTOS
FERNANDO MADARIAGA/©ICEX

Drinking water is not merely two atoms of hydrogen bound to one of oxygen. A number of substances, naturally present or added artificially, contribute a wide range of flavors. If we can agree on this statement, then the first question that probably comes to mind is: how do these flavors and components become a part of the water? In the case of tap water the answer is fairly obvious: drinking water is treated with chemical compounds, such as chlorine or fluoride, to eliminate health hazards or produce beneficial effects (such as the hardening of teeth enamel).

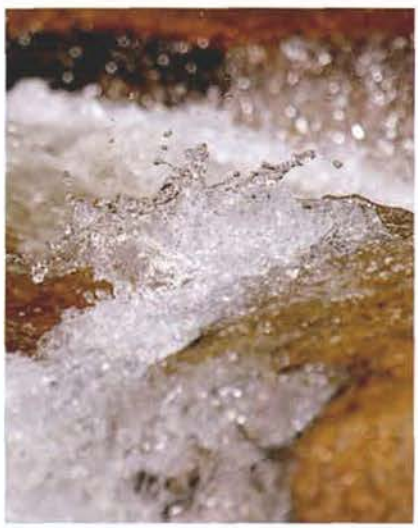
Different names for different waters

The case of bottled waters can be different. Although the legal definitions of different waters can vary from country to country, there are three main types of water that we can find in a bottle. The first is treated water, by which we mean waters that have been manipulated in some manner before being made available to the public. This water may come from a variety of sources, but all of it has been treated to alter its composition. This would be the case of brands that "purify" water, removing chlorine and other elements from tap water and re-selling it bottled.
Another category is spring water. This refers to water that comes from a natural underground source—whether it springs spontaneously or is drawn by mechanical means—and is fit for consumption virtually untreated (filtering of particles such as excess sulfur and iron is allowed). In order to sport the spring water label, it must be bottled at the source.
Finally, we have natural mineral waters: these waters are rich in minerals, which accumulate in the water as it seeps down from the surface through earth and rocks for periods that range from decades to centuries. Sometimes, these waters filter down into an underwater reservoir, where they remain protected from external pollutants. Water such as this is not only immediately fit for human consumption, but also has a constant amount of minerals and other compounds in its composition, which remains unaltered despite being drawn. Again, this product must be bottled at the very source in order to be able to bear the words "mineral water" on the label.
Since the flavor and character of a water depends on the land through which it travels down into a reservoir, it would be fair to say that each natural mineral water has its own distinct *terroir*. In fact, given that distilled water is flavorless and that—as sommelier and water tasting pioneer Manuela Romeralo explains—"in order to be called mineral water, a water's composition cannot be altered after leaving the source", a natural mineral water tastes exclusively of the place it comes from. It is water molded into the image of the earth from which it springs.

Water taster

A sommelier by trade, Romeralo's life journey to an unconventional place—water tasting expert—is marked by a number of unconventional turns. Though she trained to be psychologist, she took such an interest in cocktails that she ended up working in the sector professionally. She was then entrusted with the care of the wine cellar at Valencia restaurant La Sucursal, where, after years spending her tip money on wine books (which she read avidly), she became a respected sommelier. Her inquisitiveness led her to take an interest in waters and to become one of the first people in Spain to provide guided tastings. Today, she is a pivotal part of the team at Vuelve Carolina restaurant, the brainchild of chef Quique Dacosta, internationally renowned for his two Michelin-starred eatery El Poblet. Her transition to water expert required considerable time and effort. Romeralo herself confesses

that learning how to identify what elements distinguish waters in a blind tasting takes a lot of training. "After all," she says, "we are talking about micrograms of substances in the composition of one glass of water." The slightest outside influence can overpower and drown out the subtleties in a glass of the clear liquid. "Whenever I have people over for a tasting," she points out, "I insist that they not wear any perfume or creams, which can completely obscure the subtleties in the water."
The persistence of the taste of water in the mouth, for instance, is extremely short: a couple of seconds at best. A wine's taste, in contrast, can last several minutes.
Another aspect to look out for, she explains, is the texture of the water: the "feeling" it leaves on the palate. Waters with high amounts of calcium, for instance, are often referred to as "hard", due to the sensation they leave on the palate. Some may identify it as roughness, others as a light dryness and puckering of the mouth that is reminiscent of astringency in wines.
Though the subtleties of different components can be difficult to get a handle on, some are easily identifiable. Certain mineral waters have a salty tanginess to them.
If this is the case, it is a safe bet to say that the sodium content is high.
A hint of sweetness can indicate the presence of fluoride, and iron can transmit a metallic tint. Other naturally and commonly found substances in mineral waters are



magnesium (Mg), calcium (Ca), potassium (K), sulfate (SO4), bicarbonate (HCO3), silica (SiO2) and trace elements such as iron (Fe), iodine (I), copper (Cu), fluoride (F^-) and zinc (Zn). Each of these has its own properties and tastes, which become noticeable at certain concentrations.
This means that, if used wisely, one can use waters to compensate or balance a meal, much like a good sommelier does with wine.
If having a dish of anchovies, for instance, one would be wise not to choose a water with a substantial sodium content, since the water taken to relieve the saltiness would be salty itself.
Another example is sparkling waters. Naturally sparkling mineral waters tend to come from deeper sources located at places where they are subject to considerable heat. This means that, through the years, they tend to accumulate higher concentrations of minerals and have a stronger taste. So, texture and feeling aside, their more flavorful nature make them more interesting to accompany strong-tasting foods, helping to wash away flavors in between bites. If we add to this the refreshing effect that the carbonic gas has, one can see why they are ideally suited to dishes such as red meat or hearty stews. However, a more delicate food—such as fillet of sole or a meringue—will be ill-served by these powerfully flavored waters, and combine better with a slightly acidic water with medium-to-low mineral content.

The taste of Spain

If mineral water has the taste of the earth it came from, one can imagine that the more diverse the terrains and soils in a region, the higher the likelihood of big variations in flavor from one natural mineral water to another. Spain is, in this respect, a privileged country. Most of it is quite mountainous and sparsely populated, and therefore ideal when it comes to finding relatively isolated areas in which water can spend its long journey down and then back up the soil layers undisturbed. But, more importantly, Spain exhibits tremendous climatological and geological contrasts, from snow-topped mountains to barren deserts, with everything from grass-covered hillocks to Mediterranean forests in between.
The calcareous aquifers in Asturias and Cantabria (north coast of Spain), for instance, produce waters that are rich in calcium bicarbonate, whereas waters that filter through the granite-rich soils of Catalonia (northeast Spain) and

Galicia (northwest) tend to be rich in silica. The difference in composition, flavor and texture is therefore substantial.
If we add to this a sizeable amount of natural spas and thermal springs (of volcanic origin) in Spain (which can result in the extremely rare wonder that is naturally carbonated water), this means that the range of tastes in Spanish natural mineral waters is extraordinary.

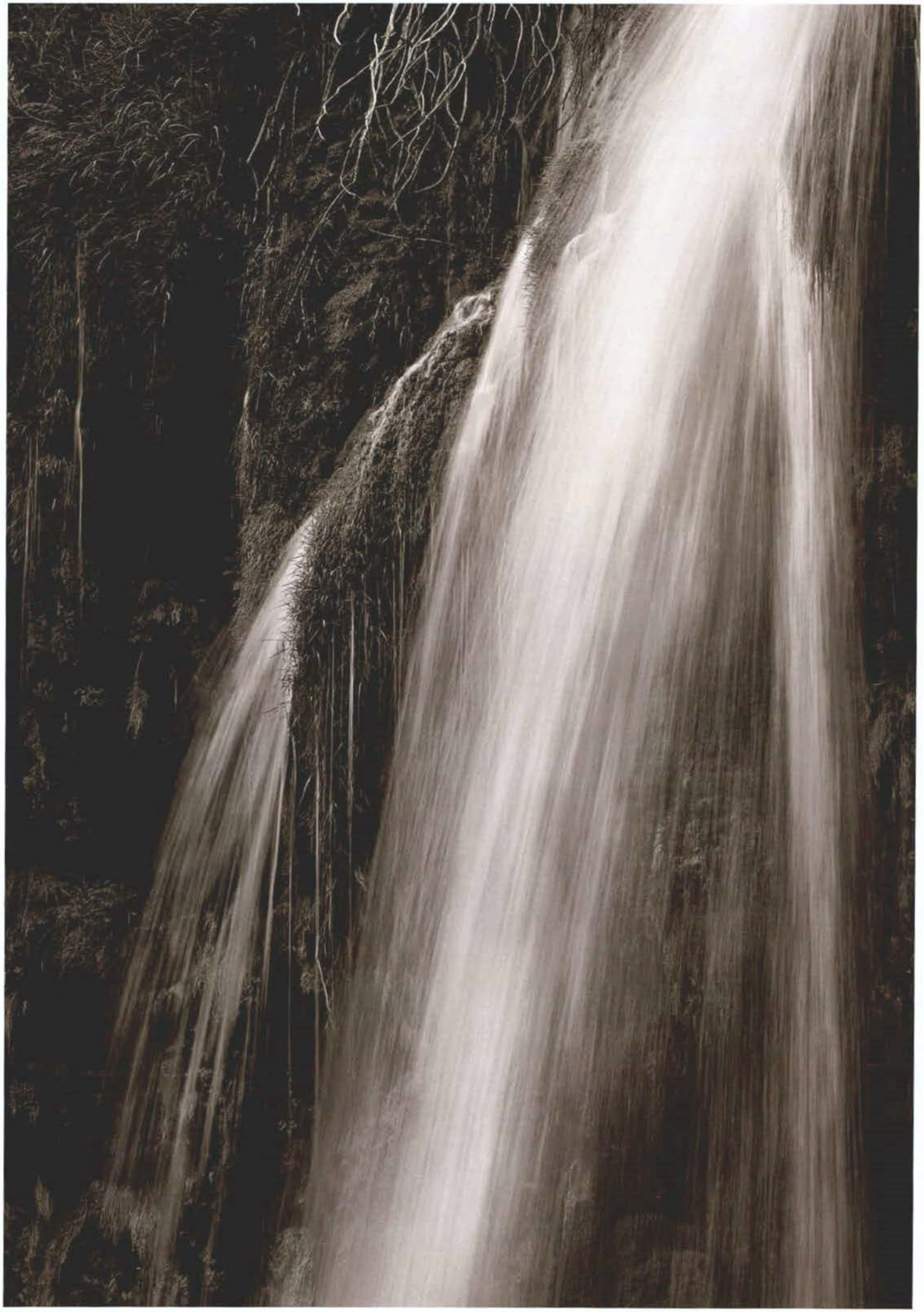
The dry land of many waters

When one thinks of a land with plentiful water, however, Spain probably isn't the first country to come to mind. And, indeed, it is not a place with an abundance of surface waters. Despite a number of major rivers, most of Spain (excluding the green pastures of the north), tends to be dry, verging on arid. Then how is it that colonizing Romans and Arabs came to write of a land of abundance and crafted it into their empire's granary?
Part of the answer is the astounding wealth of underground water sources. According to ANEABE, Spain's most representative bottled water association, there are over 1,000 natural springs in Spain, yielding the pure water that results from decades or centuries of droplets filtering through earth and rock, leaving behind any impurities or microorganisms. There, confined by impermeable rock (normally clay or shale), they remained untouched, unpolluted and isolated from contact with the outside world. Until one day a crack in the earth—natural

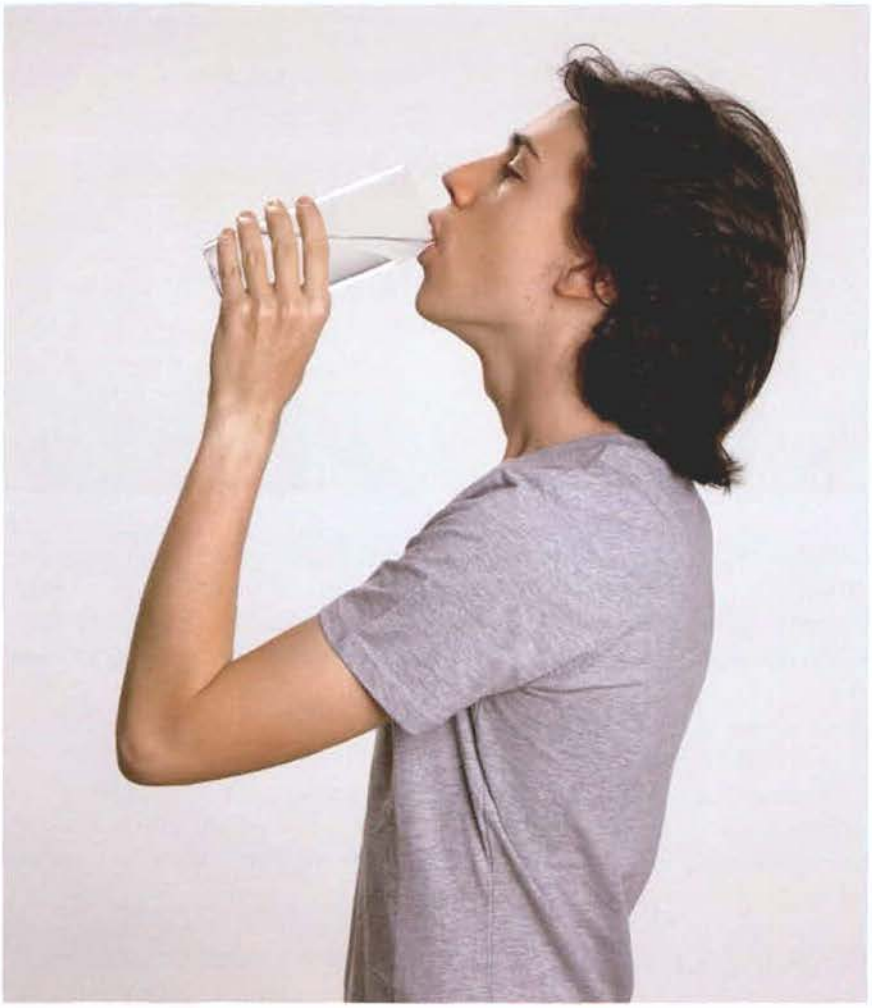
or man-made—splits the ground to release its bounty.
This precious underground resource was harnessed to great potential by Romans and Muslims both: they had a healthy obsession with cleanliness, and the perceived purity of underground water was canalized for its inhabitants to drink and to bathe in. The perceived healing properties of pure water that came untouched from the bowels of the earth saw the Spanish landscape become littered with Roman *thermae* and Arab *hammams*. Although many of these places, judged to have "special" water, came to be in disuse in the Late Middle and Modern Ages, the interest in the medicinal properties of mineral water was revived in the late 18th and 19th centuries, the golden age of spas. Many of these were built in the late 1800s in Spain, and act as signposts of the sources of some of Spain's most famed bottled waters.

Be still, water

Take, for instance, the springs of Peñaclara (La Rioja, northern Spain). The first written reference to this source, found deep in the Cameros Mountain range, dates back to 1029 AD, though it is more than likely that it had been in use as far back as the Pre-Roman Celtic period. In 1861, this water source was declared of public utility, and one of the first spas of the wine region of La Rioja was founded on the site. Built to explore the curative properties of a 550-m (1,804-ft) deep artesian well (an artesian aquifer is an underground body of water subjected to positive pressure so that, not unlike an oil well, water rises to the surface naturally), the spa was unfortunately abandoned in the mid-20th century. The water, however, remains unchanged: the same richly mineralized liquid continues to surge upwards at a constant temperature of 22°C (71.6°F), rain or shine, winter or summer, day or night.
The composition of the water has remained unchanged and continues to feature a fairly high concentration of calcium sulfate, appreciable amounts of bicarbonate, magnesium and calcium, and significant concentrations of trace elements such as fluoride and strontium. The only real difference, then, is that the same water that filled the pools of the spa is now directed to a state-of-the-art bottling plant. Although it is, by definition, a medium-mineralized water, the presence of flavorful minerals



makes it a distinct and recognizable water: refreshing, full of character and palate cleansing. Peñaclara, in fact, is a staple of the restaurants of La Rioja, the Basque Country, Cantabria, northern Castile-Leon and Navarre, regions where it is one of the market leaders. The company, however, has recently begun to look outwards and showcase its premium water, aptly called 22, abroad. And with some success, as General Manager Ignacio Evangelio explained when contacted by this publication. "We just heard that we have received a 3-star superior taste award from the iTQi (International Taste & Quality Institute). It is an award granted by an international panel of chefs, sommeliers and culinary associations, so you understand that we are absolutely thrilled to have received it just as we're beginning to focus more on exports. We already have some presence in the UK, Belgium, Luxembourg and France, especially in restaurants, and we are going to be making a big effort to make it into the Netherlands this year."



Famed retreat

Another of the waters to have received a 3-star superior taste award this year has a very similar story to Peñaclara. Mondariz water (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 81), from the municipality of Mondariz in the province of Pontevedra (Galicia), began to be bottled and sold in 1877. Once again, written records of the spring are much older and some references in Roman texts are thought to refer to the Mondariz spring. Noting that many of the locals used the water to cure superficial wounds, local Galician businessman Enrique Peinador Vela built a spa, which rapidly became one of Spain's most famed and popular. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Mondariz was one of the favored retreats of the royal family and the Spanish upper classes, and Mondariz water was transported to Madrid in large amounts and sold for medicinal purposes.

Later analyses have revealed that the water at Mondariz, which flows out at a steady temperature of 16.5°C (61.7°F), spends anywhere between 60 and 150 years underground, resting in granite reservoirs, before reaching the surface; this accounts for its varied composition. That said, it is what is called a "weakly mineralized water", meaning it has a low concentration of minerals, which makes it especially advisable for people with kidney stones or a

tendency to get them. The most distinct character trait of Mondariz, though, is a substantial (compared to the rest of the elements in it) amount of iron, which gives it an absolutely unique taste. As one of the older players in the bottled water game, Mondariz exports to 29 countries and is one of the most commonly drunk mineral waters in Spain.

Royal favor

Another of the most commonly drunk waters in Spain is Solán de Cabras, which hails from the province of Cuenca, southeast of Madrid. The area was often frequented by the Spanish royals in the 17th century, for hunting trips. A friend of King Charles III (1716-1788), in fact, claimed to have been cured of his ailments by the water, which led the king to have a boarding area and baths in 1775. In 1790, the king's successor, Charles IV (1748-1819) was so enchanted by the place and its waters that he declared it a royal site and had water brought to him in Madrid on a daily basis. By the 1900s, Solán de Cabras water could be found in many pharmacies in Madrid and other Spanish cities. The first known analysis of the water was commissioned by Charles III in 1786, and it is safe to say that the composition, since then, has remained unaltered. This is because unlike other mineral waters, produced from rainfall seeping through the earth, Solán's water is the result of flowing underground currents rushing through permeable limestone layers until they reach a natural deposit whose only exit is the Solán spring. If we were to highlight one aspect of this weakly mineralized water, it would probably have to be the high proportion of magnesium, which is rare in waters with low calcium levels. Again, the taste is exceedingly clean and balanced, with a hint of fluoride-related sweetness offset by the sharpness of its minerality.

Other notable still mineral water brands in Spain include Bezoya (in Segovia, in the center of the country), Solares (Cantabria, on the north coast) and Font Vella (Catalonia, in the northeast), which tend to be in the medium-to-low range for mineral content. For more intense mineral taste, both in Spain and most of the world, one normally has to turn to sparkling waters.

Sparkling personality

Naturally carbonated water is the rarest occurrence in the world of bottled waters. A very unique combination of geological factors —normally found in areas with volcanic activity—needs to occur for water to have sufficient amounts of CO_2 to produce a "fizz". It seems unsurprising, therefore, that springs and sources that produced carbonated water became incredibly famous in the heyday of spas, back in the 19th century. As we mentioned above, many of

the places that were home to "medicinal waters" (as they were then called), became home to spas in which people could bathe and drink until their troubles were "washed away". Eventually, those resorts began to sell their water for guests to take home and later on bottling it to offer their goodness in lands further away. Two of the world's most renowned bottled waters, Perrier (France)

and San Pellegrino (Italy), cemented their fame on natural carbonation of their water. In Spain, so did Vichy Catalan, the country's most renowned mineral water.

The absolute classic

The bountiful land around Caldes de Malavella (from the Catalan *caldera*, meaning cauldron), in Catalonia, has been continuously inhabited since the Paleolithic Age, probably due, in no small measure, to the water in the region. Rainfall, which is fairly constant outside the summer, filters down granite to great depth, where volcanic activity heats it up, allowing it to accept large quantities of minerals and carbon dioxide. The heat and pressure make the water shoot up at great speed, until it spouts out of three sources in three adjoining mountains at a temperature of 58 to 60°C (136.4 to 140°F). Girona-based doctor Modest Furest Roca knew of the springs due to the house calls he made in the region and bought the properties of the springs in 1880. In only eight years, the healthful properties of the waters and the success of the spa and bottling plant he built were such that Vichy Catalan was allowed to participate in the 1888 Universal Expo, receiving a gold medal. Further accolades followed in the 1889 Universal Expo in Paris, leading to it being authorized for medical use by the Argentinean government in 1890, making it the first Spanish water to be exported. Then, as now, reports underscored the rarity of a water with high levels of bicarbonates and sodium and low levels of calcium, properties that were deemed to aid with heavy digestion. Today, Vichy Catalan water can be found all over the world and is commonly recognized as one of the most unique natural mineral waters available, due to the high amount of carbonic gas and mineral concentration. Its flavor and character have made it a sought-after ingredient by renowned Spanish chefs, who have included it in recipes and cocktails. Culinary titans such as Ferran Adrià, Joan Roca, Carme Ruscalleda, the recently departed Santi Santamaría, Juan Mari

What's that taste?
Some common tastes in mineral waters

Sodium (Na): waters with a high sodium content have a distinct saltiness to them.

Magnesium (Mg): magnesium-rich waters tend to have a bitter component to them.

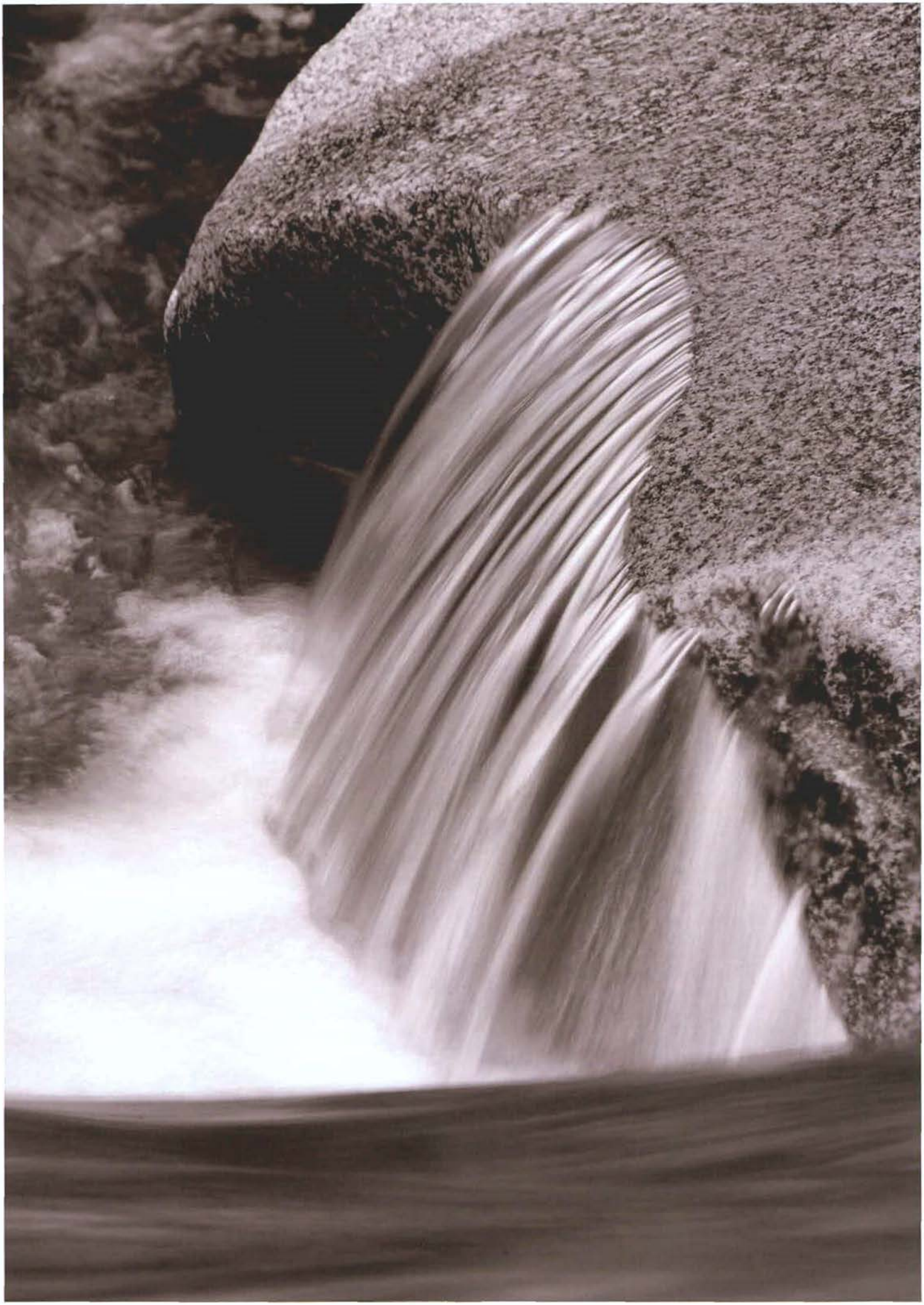
Fluoride (F^-): naturally fluoridated waters, in contrast to magnesium-rich waters, tend to have a hint of sweetness.

Calcium (Ca): excess or artificially added calcium can taste chalky, but reasonable or naturally occurring amounts can be very tasty, leaning towards bitterness.

Iron (Fe): the presence of iron can produce waters with a steely taste which can feel very clean.

Sodium bicarbonate: sodium bicarbonate can intensify other tastes in water and lower acidity, apart from adding a tanginess itself.

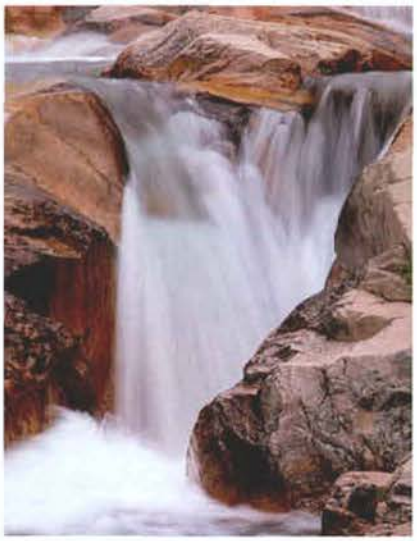
Ph (acidity or alkalinity): naturally acidic waters (ph lower than 7) have a certain sharpness that can be extra refreshing. Basic or alkaline waters (ph higher than 7) in contrast, tend to be more rounded and sweeter.



Arzak and Pedro Subijana have all included this bubbly, transparent water in their creations.

Volcano-infused

Contrasting with the centuries-old tradition of Vichy Catalan, Magma is a slightly carbonated water by Galician bottling firm Cabreiroá which has only just been made available. The firm follows a similar path to one of the others mentioned above: local tradition spoke of healing waters which, when tested (undertaken, in the case of Cabreiroá, by Nobel prize-winner in medicine Santiago Ramón y Cajal in the early 20th century), proved to be exceedingly clean of impurities and with an interesting mineral content. The owners of the property rapidly protected the source and set up a fountain, beginning to sell the water to local visitors and building a bottling plant in 1906 and a spa in 1907. The coming of the Civil War in 1936 saw the spa close down, but the bottling of water prospered until it became one of Spain's most recognizable brands, under the name Cabreiroá.
In November of 2010, however, the company launched a rather special water, taking advantage of its peculiar spring. The rainfall in the region seeps down to approximately 3,000 m (9,842 ft) underground, along the volcanic fault of Regua-Verín. There, at temperatures of 100°C (212°F) and higher, the water comes into contact with volcanic magma fumes, which infuse the water with a slight carbonation before



generating great pressure that shoots it up into a natural underground reservoir. In this reservoir, completely protected from the outside at 150 m (492 ft) deep, the water retains some of its slight, but natural, carbonation. Instead of drawing it out through the topmost fountain, making it lose its gas, Magma is extracted at that depth and bottled in black, opaque aluminum bottles. Why black? The underwater reservoir is, of course, pitch dark. By drawing and bottling at depth, the people at Magma ensure that the first time their water sees the light is when the customer opens the bottle. Magma, too, has made a splash among chefs, and cooperates with a number of renowned Spanish names, such as the Michelin-starred Pepe Solla and Xosé Torres, who have come to think of the water as a good complement to their Galician seafood-based cooking, "thanks to its combination of very fine bubbles and bicarbonate, which stimulates the taste buds." Given the fact that so many elements are present in water, that it can be acidic or alkaline, salty or sweet, sparkling or still, it is hardly surprising that chefs care what one drinks with their creations. But, as they say, the proof is in the pudding: next time you find yourself at a gourmet shop, why not try to taste two mineral waters side by side and let your taste buds tell you why?

Saul Aparicio Hill is a Madrid-based freelance journalist whose work as a writer and broadcaster has appeared in media in Spain, the UK, Ireland, India, Australia and the USA, among other countries.

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www.aneabe.es
Spanish Association of Bottled Water Companies, ANEABE. Close to 100 members which account for 98% of bottled water production in Spain. Spanish.

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A Pasture and its **Products**

Covering an area the size of Belgium, the vast *dehesa* is not only Spain's most widespread ecosystem, but it is also the sustainable provider of some of its most emblematic food products. Paul Richardson goes on a journey through a landscape as generous as it is beautiful.

Text
Paul Richardson/©ICEX

Photos
Matias Costa/©ICEX

HEART OF OAK

I drove and drove on Extremadura's empty roads, through some of the most sparsely populated countryside in the whole of Europe. To left and right unfolded a landscape of tough-looking trees, each growing at some distance from its neighbor, with a verdant ground-cover of pasture in between. There seemed to be no end to this expanse of dark-trunked trees with their tight foliage of grey-green; they stretched away into the distance, punctuated by nothing more substantial than the occasional meandering stone wall, a brook, or a straggle of low hills.

This landscape, known in Spanish as *dehesa*, came into being through a gradual clearing of the original dense forest to provide grazing land for livestock. The dehesa is a domesticated woodland, a managed wilderness. Its main living constituent is the holm oak or holly oak, *Quercus ilex*, a non-deciduous member of the oak family whose acorns, as well as the variegated grasses and aromatic plants that grow around the trees, provide nourishment for the animals that graze here. Covering an area of some 3.6 million ha (8.9 million acres), according to the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture (MARM), of which Extremadura (southwest Spain) harbors 35%, Andalusia (southern Spain) 27%, Castile-La Mancha (central-southern Spain) 21%, Castile-Leon (central-northern Spain) 14% and Madrid (central Spain) 3%, it is no exaggeration to describe the dehesa as the quintessential Spanish landscape, more typical even than the sandy Mediterranean beach.

Dehesa is a noun; or to be nitpickingly correct, it is two nouns in one, referring both to a type of landscape, an ecosystem, and to a concrete example of the genre. The etymology of the word tells us something about the nature of the beast. Dehesa comes from the Latin *defensa*, meaning "defended" or "enclosed". It is true that most of Spain's *dehesa* landscape is parceled up into privately-owned fincas sometimes measuring hundreds or even thousands of acres. Yet it's also true that there are

public dehesas—areas of what was once common land like Madrid's Dehesa de la Villa or Girona's Parc de la Devesa—as well as *dehesas boyales* or *comunales* like the Dehesa Monte Porrino in Salvaleón (Badajoz, southwest Spain), a huge country estate belonging to the village for which it constitutes a priceless agricultural resource (see below).

Holm, sweet Holm

The dehesa represents agriculture at its simplest and most sustainable. In its truest form the dehesa is made up of holm oaks and/or cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) and/or Pyrenean oak (*Quercus pyrenaica*) in concentrations defined as between 5 and 20% of the total surface area (according to the MARM), with plenty of pasture between the trees. Its greatest natural asset is the acorn—the irreplaceable sustenance of the Ibérico pig, which supplements its acorn diet with insects, tubers, and grasses of all kinds—for the pasture between the oaks is also a valuable food resource, whether for cows, sheep, goats or pigs. Nothing is wasted in the dehesa; everything is well used. Prunings from the trees are first left on the ground, to be denuded of their leaves by cattle, then chopped for firewood or burned for charcoal (the *picón* with which rural Spain still keeps the cold at bay, mostly by means of a brazier under the kitchen table). Such an

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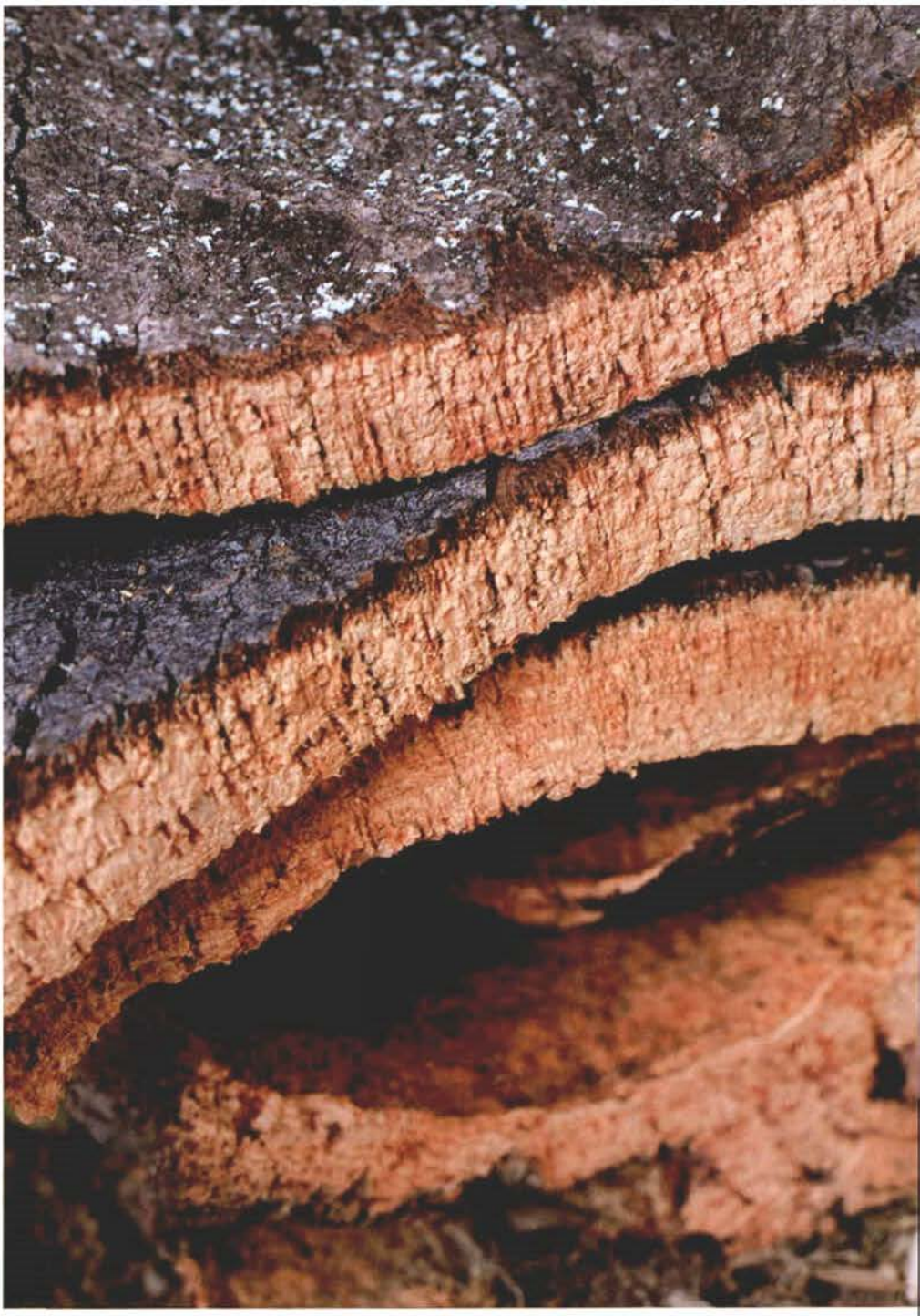
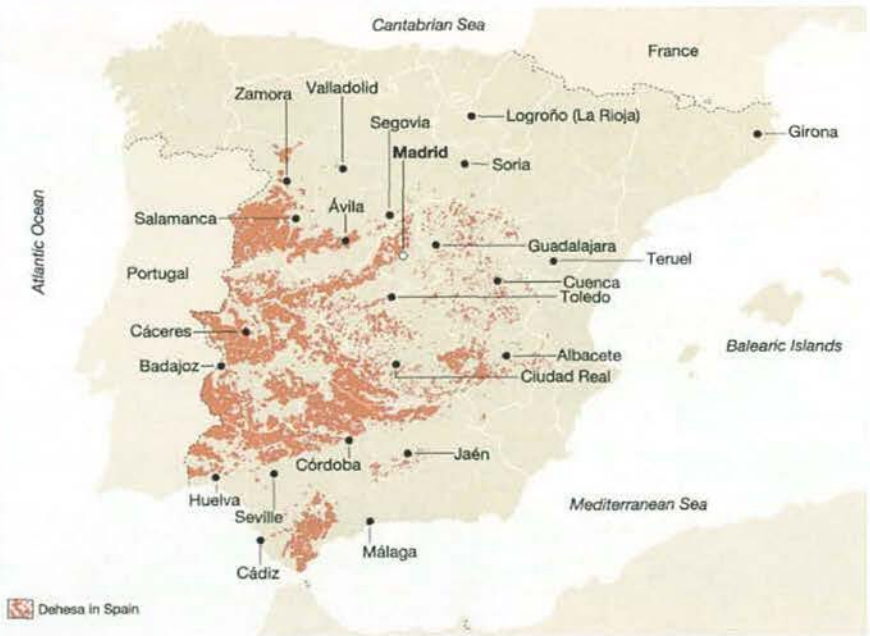
- www.terneradeextremadura.org
- www.tortadelcasar.eu

extensive landscape is a rich hunting ground, at the right time of year, for wild game, wild mushrooms like the *criadilla de tierra (Terfezia arenaria)*, and woodland vegetables like thistle stalks and garlic. (A handful of companies, among them Productos Silvestres Julian Martin in Moraleja and Industrias León in Torrecillas de la Tiesa (both in Cáceres, southwest Spain) specialize in bottling these products for sale on the Spanish market.) The *toro de lidia* (fighting bull) is one of the major occupants of the dehesa, with thousands of acres tied up in private cattle ranches, and the bullfighting industry makes a convincing case for the role it plays in the conservation of this noble landscape. As if all that weren't enough, the cork oak dehesa represents a vitally important resource, even in these days of plastic stoppers and screwtops, for the makers of fine wine. Spain's dehesas supply as much as 26% of the world market in wine corks, according to industry figures. During the 1960s and 1970s, the dehesa as a generator of rural prosperity was thoroughly eclipsed by the boom-town glamour of the Mediterranean coast. Holm oaks were regularly uprooted to make way for irrigation schemes or plantations of eucalyptus. For a number of years the Ibérico pig as a breed, if not quite extinct, hovered dangerously close to oblivion. Nowadays, thankfully, the dehesa as an ecosystem and natural resource is more highly valued, in every sense, than ever before. Ecologists praise its highly



evolved functioning, its exemplary sustainability: the naturalist Joaquín Araújo (first Spaniard to be awarded, back in 1991, the UNEP Global 500 award), who lives on a farm in Extremadura, describes the dehesa admiringly as "an example of synchronicity between culture and nature."

Those who make their living from the dehesa are passionate in their defense of it. José Gómez of Joselito (see page 90), the famous producer of peerless Ibérico hams and charcuterie, calls the dehesa a "highly prized" environment and a "fundamental" element of the company and its products. Gómez points out that it's not only the acorns that matter, though the oils and enzymes they contain are crucial in the production of fine Ibérico hams. It is the roots of the trees that bring water and nutrients to the surface, allowing grass to grow, preventing soil erosion, lowering the temperature in summer, increasing the relative humidity of the air and providing shelter for the animals.



Protected status

The Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) involving products of the Spanish dehesa might be divided into those whose connection with this ecosystem is direct and necessary, and those whose association is less clearly defined, but nevertheless real. Into the first category go beef: Carne de Morucha de Salamanca, Carne de la Sierra de Guadarrama and Ternera de Extremadura; veal: Carne de Ávila (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 67); as well as lamb: Cordero de Extremadura. The black longhorns I once saw among the holm oaks and granite rocks of Ciudad Rodrigo (Salamanca) were in all probability moruchas, a breed directly descended from the primitive *Bos taurus ibericus*, and highly valued for its excellent, lean and fine-flavored meat. The morucha, basis of the PGI Carne de Morucha de Salamanca, is kept in largest numbers in the provinces of Salamanca, Valladolid, Zamora, Ávila, Cáceres and Badajoz, always in an extensive regime, its natural hardiness requiring no other shelter than the shade of a holm oak or aleppo pine (*Pinus halepensis*). A recent census of the morucha breed in Spain counted around 120,000 animals, divided into small herds of around 80 to 100 breeding cows.

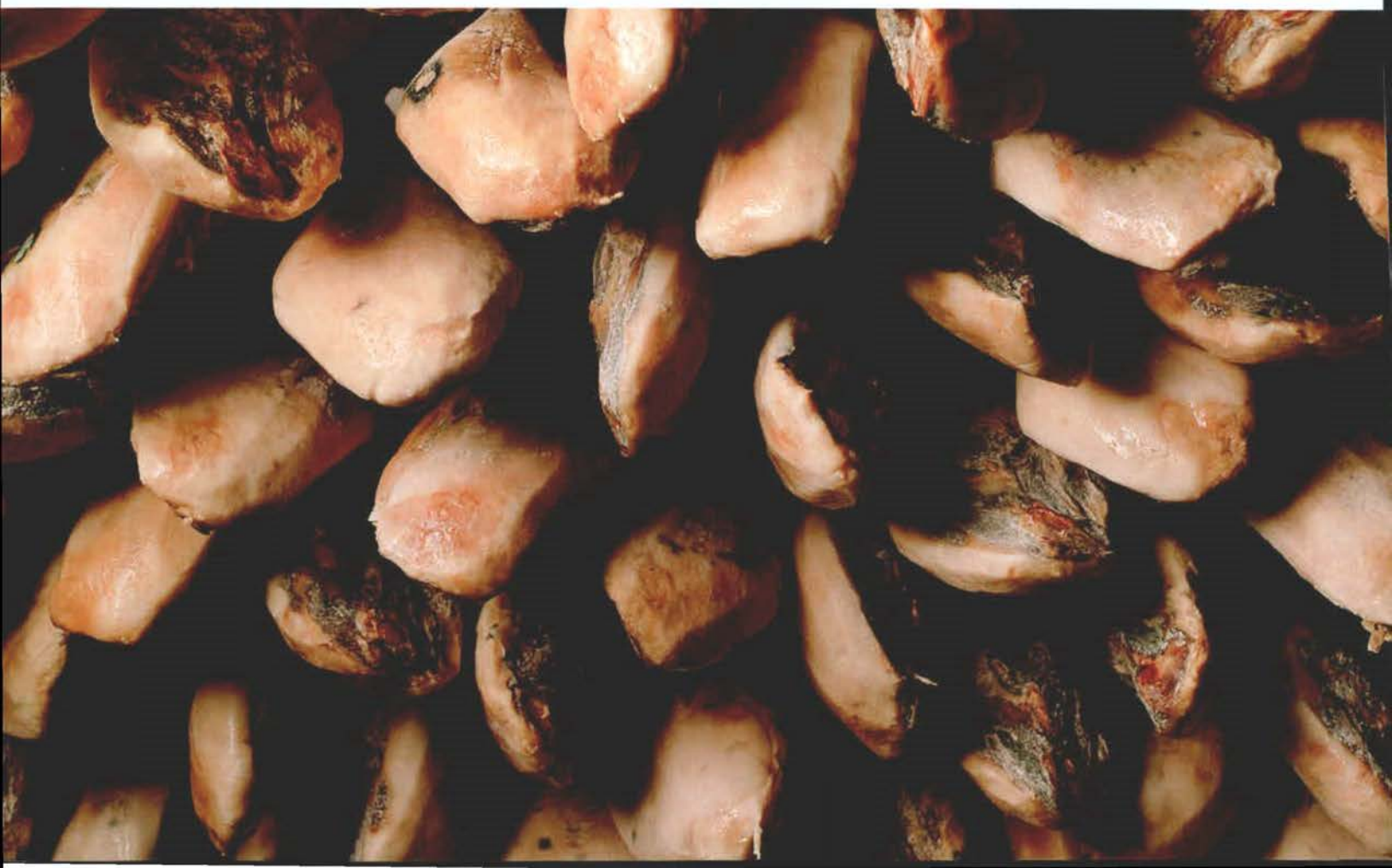
Meanwhile the Avileña-Negra-Ibérica breed, basis of the PGI Carne de Ávila, is also black, and, like the morucha, hardy and long-lived, but found over a wider geographical area taking in not only the provinces of southern Castile-Leon (its historic homeland) but extending to Huelva, Jaen, Seville, Teruel, Ciudad Real, Toledo, Cáceres, Badajoz, La Rioja and Madrid. The Regulatory Council of the PGI has traced the lineage of the breed to the Castile of the 14th and 15th centuries, and further back, to the bulls that pulled carts in Roman times. The Avileña-Negra-Ibérica is superbly adaptable, tolerating both the extreme winters of the high sierras and the fierce summers of the Extremaduran dehesa. Avileña-Negra-Ibérica, plus Limousin and Charolais, are the breeds required by the PGI Carne de la Sierra de Guadarrama, based in the mountain dehesas around Madrid. Two other beef breeds well adapted to the conditions of the dehesa are Retinta, common to both Extremadura and western Andalusia, and Blanca Cacereña (white, from Cáceres). Both are admitted by the PGI Ternera de Extremadura, along with the other above-mentioned classic breeds more typical of Salamanca and Ávila, in addition to the Berrenda en Colorado and Berrenda en Negro breeds. Consideration of the dehesa as a meat-producing scenario would not be complete without mentioning the PGI Cordero de Extremadura (also known as Corderex), an appellation covering

Extremaduran lamb from the Merino breed. Sheep and Extremadura go way back. A plausible theory holds that the name of this autonomous community may derive from the verb *extremar*, meaning to separate female sheep from their lambs. A famous livestock census in the 18th century, the Catastro (Cadaster) del Marqués de la Ensenada (1703-1781; Spanish statesman), counted as many as 1,300,000 merino sheep in the region. Then as now, lamb formed the centerpiece of Extremaduran cooking, starring in such dishes as *caldereta de cordero* (lamb with onion, tomato, garlic, pepper, ham and parsley) and *chanfaina* (lamb with onion, garlic, laurel and hot red pepper). The merino sheep also being a dairy breed, celebrated Extremaduran cheeses like the Torta del Casar and Torta de la Serena (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 75) may be considered among the dehesa's worthiest contributions to the genre.

High-flying pigs

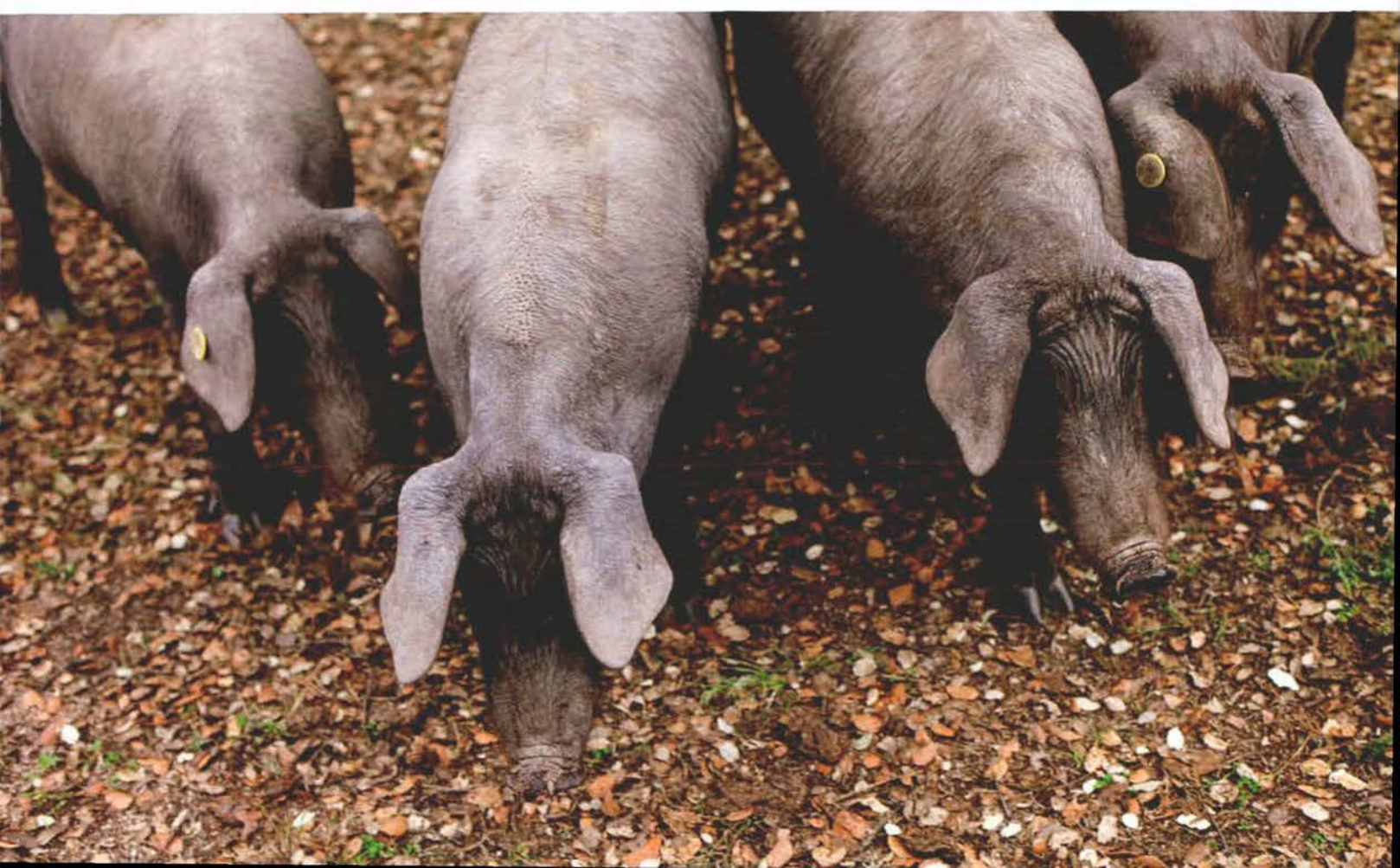
What this ecosystem is best at producing, however, is pork. Extremadura possesses in its Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Dehesa de Extremadura one of the noblest expressions of the dehesa in the form of exquisite acorn-fed Ibérico hams. The PDO is widely regarded as one of the most proactive of all such quality seals. It stipulates a series of strict controls which the Regulatory Council defines in three ways: *Control de campo* (referring to the animals' pedigree and welfare), *Control de proceso de elaboración*

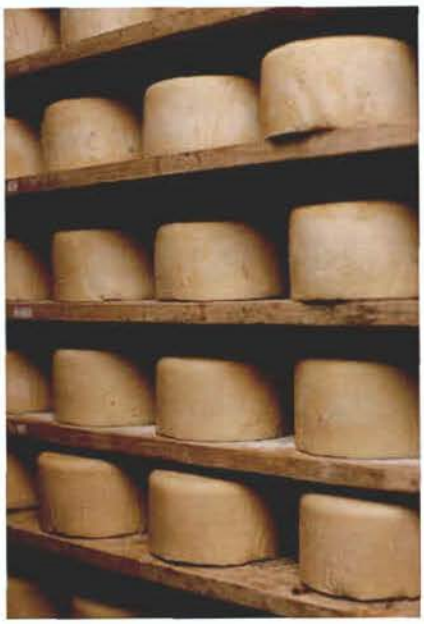
(regulating the production process) and *Control del producto final* (quality control of the finished product). For all its excellence, however, Dehesa de Extremadura has powerful rivals in the products of Salamanca, Córdoba (home of the new Los Pedroches Ibérico ham PDO) and Huelva (headed up by the famous Jabugo). The PDO Guijuelo has a reputation for the finest hams in Spain and for a range of classic charcuterie including *lomo embuchado* (cured loin), *salchichón* (a type of sausage similar to saucisson or salami) and *chorizo* (a type of cured red sausage), all Ibérico. Not everywhere can provide both ideal living conditions for the Ibérico pig and a climate suitable for curing hams, but the southern end of the province of Salamanca is one of them. The municipality of Ciudad Rodrigo, for example, has dehesa in abundance, plus dry, cold winters perfect for a natural cure of its acorn-fed pigs. The Hernández family belongs to this culture and is one of its best ambassadors. The family firm (Ibéricos de Bellota Felipe Hernández) in Ciudad Rodrigo, an hour south of Salamanca, is known above all for its superb hams and sausages, most of which proceed from the pure-bred Ibérico pigs they raise on their 300 ha (741 acre) family farm outside the town. There are five Hernándezes: Felipe, the patriarch, his two sons José and Ramón, and their wives. The family has its HQ on a crossroads just outside the walls of the old city, with a shop at the front which acts as a showcase for the work going on at the back. José, a galumphing young man in a white suit stained with *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain) and white boots, led me briskly through a maze of chambers culminating in the upper galleries where many hundreds of hams hung from the ceiling in serried ranks,



slowly drying and curing in the cold dry darkness. I leant in close to one that hung at eye level; it smelt, not so much of meat, as of herbs and resin. Grayish molds and blackish stains had crept over the surface during its 24 months of ageing, like a sympathetic echo of the dehesa's lichen-covered trunks.

The value of a proper cure is undeniable. An even more important part of the process, however, is the pig's three-month stay on the dehesa. On the Hernández farm at Dehesa de Valverde, there are 1,500 holm oaks for 300 animals: a generous ratio, all things considered. Until the acorns form on the trees in late fall, the pigs are given a mixture of ground wheat, barley and maize. On November 1st, All Saints' Day, they are let loose on the dehesa for a period of concentrated feeding known as the *montanera*—a pig-out of stupendous proportions during which the animals put on an average 40% of their final body weight. They fatten up so quickly you can practically watch them. José Hernández told me that, when the acorns are thick on the ground and the pigs are gorging, they might be putting on a kg (2.2 lb) a day. "Some of the trees give a sweeter acorn than others," said José. "And the pigs, they know which are the sweeter trees, and head for them first. They're real gourmets. Did you know they peel the acorns in their mouths and spit out the hard bits?" I didn't. But I did know that acorns, rich in natural glycides and oils, constitute one of the best and most perfectly balanced animal feeds known to man. The holm oak acorn contains a high percentage of oleic acid, the same monounsaturated fatty acid found in olive oil; it follows that the fat from the Ibérico pig can actively reduce "bad" cholesterol (LDL) and keep up levels of "good" cholesterol (HDL).





The Ibérico pig is a descendant of the wild boar *Sus mediterraneus*, which once roamed the forests of the Mediterranean Basin. For centuries it was the only pig breed of any importance in Spain, until the arrival of "white" breeds like the Duroc and Landrace from northern Europe, with their lean meat and adaptability to the new intensive farming. The Ibérico pig is umbilically linked to its habitat. So much so that writers on the subject habitually use the French term *terroir*, borrowed from the world of wine, to refer to the set of environmental factors which make Ibérico ham what it is. The pig and the dehesa were, almost literally, made for each other. The whole process, from holm oak to ham, is in fact a system so perfect that it seems almost impossible that it was achieved empirically.

The big cheese

A few weeks after my explorations in Castile, I took a weekend off to visit a friend whose family runs a marvelous small hotel in the Sierra Norte, an hour north of Seville. Trasierra, as the estate is called, is surrounded by dehesa in its most authentic form, with holm oaks and cork oaks and all kinds of livestock grazing among them, from Retinta cattle and Merino sheep to Ibérico pigs. Gioconda Scott, chef at the hotel, uses the meats of all these dehesa-based breeds in her cooking, and has high praise for the dehesa as a source of first-class ingredients of all sorts. She relates how she once held a food workshop at Trasierra with a countryman from Cazalla de la Sierra (Seville) who knew everything there was to know about *collejas* (*Silene vulgaris*), *tagarninas* (*Scolymus hispanicus*), wild garlic, sprue asparagus, *lengua de buey* (wild spinach, *Anchusa azurea*), and other free-range vegetables found at certain times of year in the dehesa.

One Sunday morning Gioconda took me to meet a remarkable woman whose cheeses, made from goats' milk on a farm outside Castilblanco de los Arroyos (Seville), had frequently formed a perfect pairing with those wild salads.

A number of Spain's cheeses are associated with the dehesa in some way, their PDO reflecting their origin in extensive pasture systems. Extremadura's Tortas (disc-shaped cheeses), Torta del Casar and Queso de la Serena, are examples of cheeses for which the dehesa is, if not the essential and irreplaceable factor that it is for Ibérico ham, a prime habitat for the Merino sheep supplying the milk. The same is true with the PDO Queso de Ibores (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 74), whose geographical origin is defined as "Mediterranean" with the dehesas of Ibores, Villuercas, La Jara and Trujillo (municipalities of southeastern Cáceres) being predominant.

Certain individual cheeses are also closely linked to the dehesa—but none so closely, I would suggest, as the goats' cheeses made by Mare Nostrum in Castilblanco de los Arroyos.

A giant holm oak stood outside the door of the dairy: a symbol, or a statement of purpose. María Orzaez, creator of Mare Nostrum's raw milk goats' cheeses, buys milk exclusively from a local goatherd, Manuel Fernández, who keeps his 200 animals, belonging to the Florida and Retinta breeds, on a 100 ha (247 acre) farm within sight of María's house and dairy. She chose the site and her milk supplier with great care, valuing the "impressive" conditions of the dehesa hereabouts and the excellent health of traditional livestock farming in this part of Andalusia. The milk, she says, has a superb aromatic richness derived in part from the animals' diet, which is based on the plants and herbs of the dehesa. (The goats also eat the holm oak acorns, and María swears she can taste a faint bitterness in the cheeses she makes from November onwards.) She gives me to taste the small two-month-old cheese, gooey inside and powerfully rich in the French style, which she dusts with holm oak ash

to create a grayish rind. (Another of her products features a sprig of dehesa lavender, simply placed inside the paper wrapping for a delicate fragrance to percolate the cheese.) Over the road, the herd is quietly sitting among the holm oaks, surrounded by the lush spring pasture of the dehesa and its impressionist wash of colors: purple lavender, white *jara* (*Cistus ladanifer*), yellow broom, red poppies. The smell is so delicious you wonder why no-one has patented a floral cologne inspired by the fragrance of the dehesa—NB to Spanish perfume houses.

A hive of activity

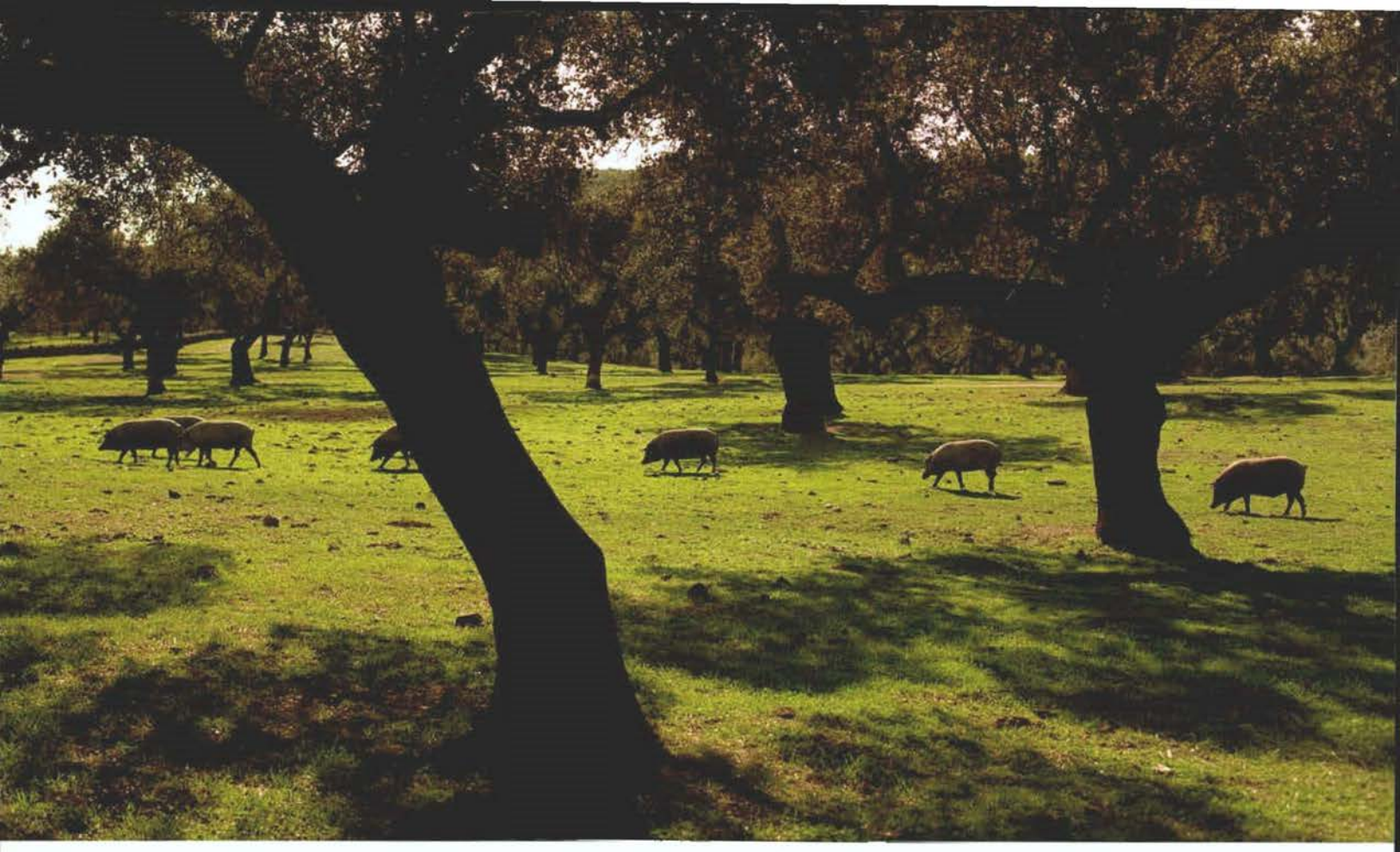
While on the subject of flowers and fragrances, there is one other dehesa product that that makes good use of both. Bee honey is an ancestral delicacy produced in most of Spain's

natural spaces, and the dehesa is no exception. In the old days, the beekeepers of Spain preferred hives made of cork—an ideal material for the purpose, being both lightweight, insulating, and easily obtained from the dehesa's millions of specimens of *Quercus suber*.
But the role of the dehesa in Spanish apiculture is more complex than you'd think. According to Ramón Rodríguez of Euromiel, an important honey cooperative based in Mérida, the hives of Extremadura essentially produce two major harvests: milflores or multifloral honey, when the flowers of the dehesa burst into spring bloom, and holm oak honey, in Spanish *miel de bosque* (woodland honey). This unique product is unlike other honeys in several respects: its striking color, which is dark brown, resembles that of molasses, and its mineral composition, rich in iron, allows it to be considered as a medicinal product recommended for the elderly and those suffering from anemia and digestive problems (notably diarrhea). Most significantly, holm oak honey proceeds not from flowers but from the bark of the holm oak and the developing acorn. Both secrete a sweet, sticky substance on which the bees feed in the heats of high summer, when flowers are conspicuous by their absence in the dehesa.
Euromiel markets as much as 1,300 tons of holm oak honey, and exports a full 35% of the total Spanish production of this remarkable honey, mostly to Germany where it is widely used in blends described as Waldhonig (forest honey).
Anastasio Marcos of El Tio Picho, one of Extremadura's best-known honey producers, calls holm oak

honey the "number one in honeys", the *pata negra* of the genre. When I call him on his mobile phone, he happens to be standing in a finca outside Plasencia (Cáceres), about to strike a deal with the owner by which he will leave his hives on the finca during the summer holm oak honey season. Extremadura is the main producer of this kind of honey, Anastasio tells me, though the dehesas of Salamanca, Zamora and Ávila also play their part. Beekeepers are great travelers, and the rows of hives deposited in the dehesas of southern Extremadura often belong to honey producers from the north of the region, especially those of Las Hurdes and Las Villuercas. (The latter is home to Extremadura's only honey, Miel de las Villuercas, an excellent product with a fine reputation.)

Monte Porrino: a special dehesa

"Salvaleon: Cuna del Ibérico" reads the sign outside the village. "Cradle of the Ibérico"; it's an exaggeration, but not by much. Salvaleón and other villages like it in the far south of the province of Badajoz (Extremadura) subsist to a large extent on their rearing of Ibérico pigs in conditions that correspond precisely to the ideal.
This out-of-the-way region of southwestern Extremadura, by the Portuguese border, almost certainly harbors more pigs than people.
As for holm oaks, there may be hundreds, thousands even, for every single inhabitant of these rolling southern sierras. With 727,587 ha (1,797,906 acres), Badajoz province has the largest surface area of dehesa of any Spanish province (followed by Cáceres with 662,968 ha / 1,638,229 acres, Córdoba with 452,813 ha / 1,118,925 acres, and Seville with 250,978 ha / 620,180 acres, according to Encinal, a conservation group).
And the good news is that brown-leaved or leafless trees are nowhere to be seen. Mention *la seca* (Health and safety. The future of the dehesa, page 65) around here, and people give you blank looks.
A rural village of 2,100 souls, Salvaleón possesses both Spain's only museum dedicated to the dehesa as an ecosystem, and one of the country's largest areas of public dehesa, located just outside the village and easily visitable.
The Dehesa Interactive Center, opened in 2003, aims to shed light on the complex relationship between the landscape and the humans who manage and exploit it in their various ways. As well as illustrating the dehesa's rich natural history, the museum's large ethnographical collection includes a replica of the kind of round hut or *chozo*



lived in by shepherding families on the dehesa as recently as the 1960s. After a look around the museum I made my way out of town towards the Dehesa Monte Porrino, a 1,690-ha (7,176-acre) area of holm oak pasture where the head of every family in Salvaleón (a total of 870) has a right to pasture animals—a unique legacy dating back centuries. On a warm spring day the dehesa was a sensational explosion of greenery, fragrant with the scents of rock rose, broom, lavender and heather. It had the feeling of a well-maintained safari park: I saw hoopoes and storks, eagles and vultures—just a small sample of a natural biodiversity covering birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals large and small, and a huge range of native flora. Occasionally a circle of ashen grey reminded me that the craft of charcoal burning is still very much alive in southern Extremadura.

From the Dehesa Monte Porrino there is a certain logic in heading for Monte Porrino, a co-operative Ibérico ham factory named after the dehesa for an overriding and obvious reason. The co-operative's members are all inhabitants of Salvaleón who, when the company was founded in 1982, had been used to taking their pigs up to the Dehesa Monte Porrino for the winter acorn season. Many *porrineros* (as folk from Salvaleón are known) had been forced to emigrate to Switzerland, Belgium, and France, and the co-op was posited as a way in which these emigrants might be able to make a living in their home town. The origins of the co-op, said Gracia, its spokesperson, were humble indeed, with just 30 pigs and a one-room factory. The Dehesa Monte Porrino was the winter home of all Monte Porrino Ibérico pigs. Nearly 30 years later the company (Co-op Monteporrino) manages between 14,000 and 16,000 pigs a year (all Ibérico, it goes without saying), has begun to export, and the business has been such a success that many of its members have been able to buy private dehesas of their own. The unique factor of Monte Porrino, in any case, remains its absolute loyalty to the local sphere: the furthest farm from the factory lies in Barcarrota, 6 km (3.7 mi) away, while the majority of the pigs are still raised in the dehesas of Salvaleón. As Gracia points out, the advantage of this fact in terms of a short journey time to the factory, keeping the animals' stress to a minimum, cannot be overestimated.

She opened the window: a cool breeze wafted in. The view was of holm oaks as far, literally, as the eye could see. "The *guarros* (porkers) are just over there, on that hill. You can practically see them!" she said, pointing into the gently waving expanse of grayish-green. "If the dehesa still exists, it's thanks to those pigs," Gracia told me, not without a quiver of emotion in her voice. "The dehesa is a resource that belongs to all of us here, and always has done. Really, it's one of those things that you'd have to be without to realize just how important it is in your life."

Paul Richardson lives on a farm in northern Extremadura. A freelance travel and food writer, he is the author of A Late Dinner: Discovering the Food of Spain *(Bloomsbury, UK, and Scribner, USA).*

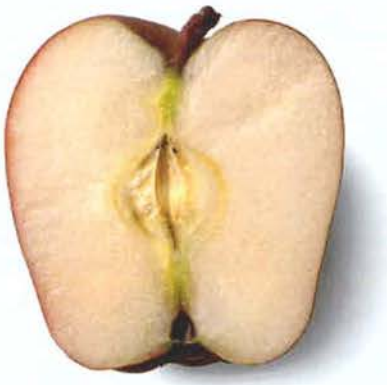
Health and Safety:
The Future of the Dehesa

The dehesa has a problem, and it's called la seca. A disease whose causes are mysterious and many-faceted, la seca (seco in Spanish means dry) first appeared in the early 1980s and has become extremely virulent in the last few years, causing the sudden death of thousands upon thousands of trees. Conservation group Encinal (*Foro para la Defensa y Conservación de la Dehesa*, Forum for Dehesa Defense and Conservation) says the scale of the problem varies according to the province in question: in Badajoz, for example, with a total of 727,587 ha (1,797,906 acres) of dehesa, only 30,000 ha (74,131 acres) are thought to be affected by la seca, whereas in Cádiz, with 128,533 ha (317,611 acres), the disease is rampant over 70,000 ha (127,973 acres). Though various remedies have been tried, including a vaccination injected directly into the trees, the alarming fact is that there is, as yet, no cure for la seca.

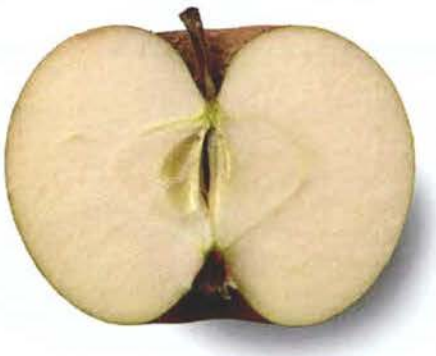
As leaders in the Ibérico sector, managing as much as 100,000 ha (247,105 acres) of dehesa across southwest Spain and Portugal, the people at Joselito are very much aware of the problem and its potentially horrific effects both on the ecosystem and the multiple trades that depend on it. José Gómez, CEO at Joselito, describes the causes of la seca as "environmental pollution, the falling water table, the gradual acidification and consequent loss of biodiversity in the soil. The roots of the holm oak harbor organisms called mycorrhizae which exist in symbiosis with the tree, helping it to assimilate certain nutrients from the surrounding soil. The decline of these organisms is another contributing factor in the phenomenon known as la seca." As is climate change: the naturalist Joaquin Araujo believes its effects can already be seen in the landscape. "Climate change is affecting the dehesa, there is less regeneration, and la seca is boosted by the huge ups and downs in temperature and rainfall," he writes. "You only have to see the millions of holm oaks and cork oaks that have died to realize that climate change has already presented its visiting card in the landscape of Extremadura."

What is to be done? For its part, Joselito is taking the lead in a number of ways. First, the company is replanting holm oaks and cork oaks in the dehesas it manages to the tune of 70-80,000 trees a year, with an objective of 2,400,000 new trees in the next 30 years. Second, it is careful to reduce the stress on this delicate ecosystem by keeping a low ratio of animals to surface area of dehesa (Joselito's lucky pigs enjoy up to 4 ha / 9.8 acres each) and minimizing the use of underground water. The company's conservation policies have recently made Joselito the first meat-producing business in the world to receive the seal of the Forest Stewardship Council.

The long-term consequences of a massive and uncontrolled dieback of Spain's holm oak and cork oak population are almost too appalling to contemplate. Thankfully we are nowhere near the tipping point yet, but the Ibérico sector, especially, must be on its guard. What is needed, perhaps, is a little more respect for an ecosystem as delicate as it is generous. If the dehesa offers a rare example of balance between the needs of man and those of nature, it is crucial that balance be energetically maintained.



Consider the APPLE



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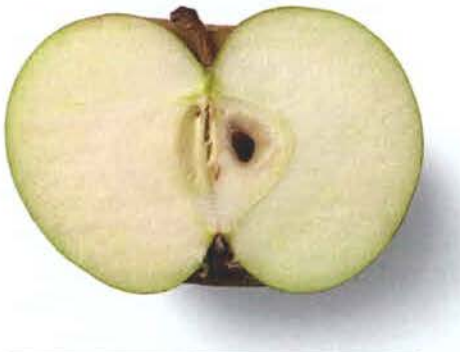

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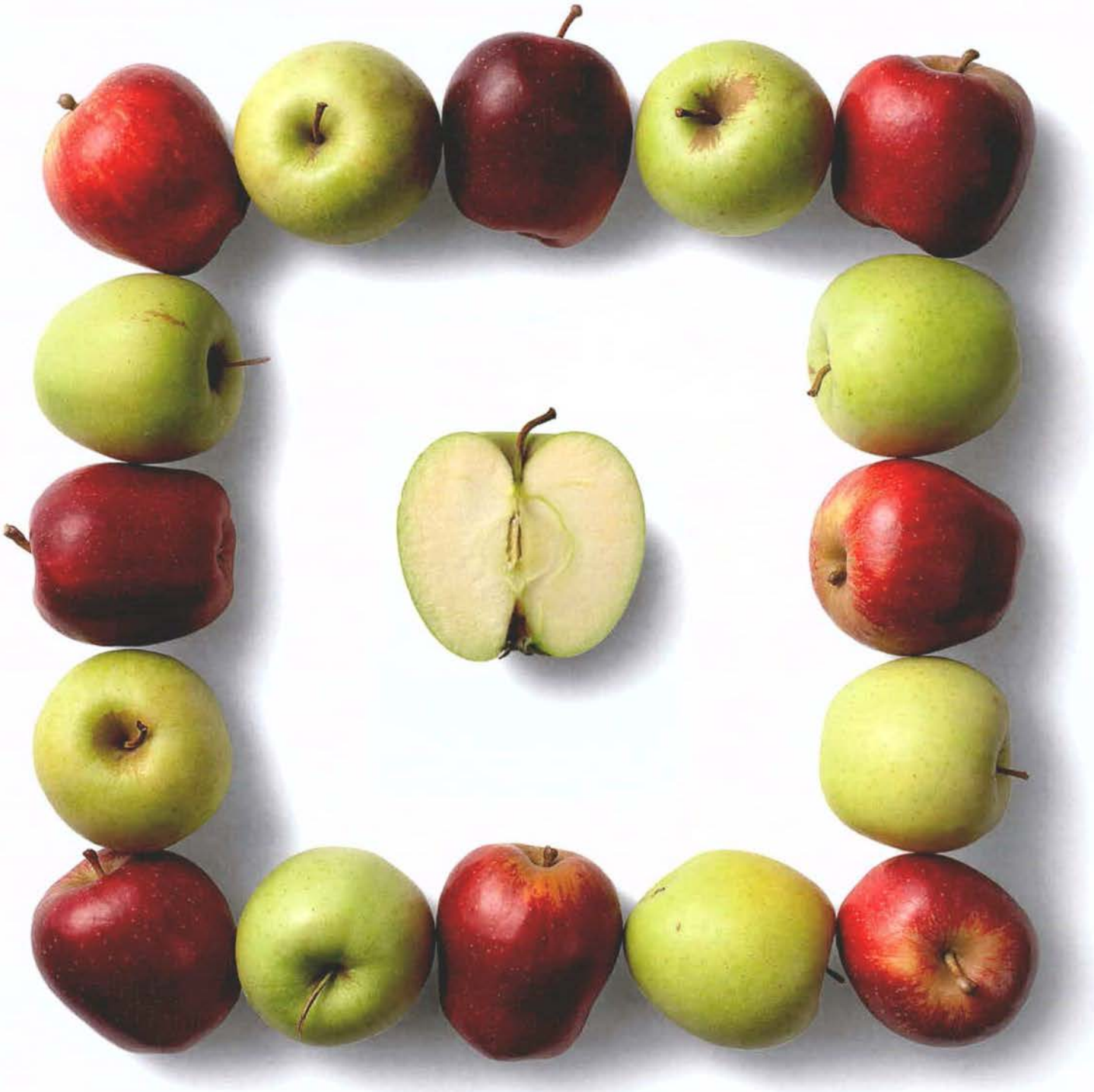


Spain's New Love Affair with the Oldest of Fruits

John Barlow goes in search of the humble apple and discovers a world of ecologically sustainable production, technological wizardry, and widespread innovation. But more than that, he finds that Spain's traditional relationship with this fruit is as healthy as ever, and that new ways of appreciating it are turning the apple into one of the country's most prized crops.

Watermelons? Yes, watermelons. With global production at a cool 100 million tons annually, it's the world's biggest fruit crop. Then again, a single watermelon weighs about as much as an overfed donkey, and it's mostly skin and water (the melon, not the donkey), so the stats perhaps flatter to deceive. The real top fruits, as you might have guessed, are banana, apple and orange. These three, along with the thick-skinned donkey, are the most-consumed fruits in the world.

Of the three, which do you like the best? The banana is clearly the children's favorite. Convenient, simple and fun, it's a true party fruit. At the other end of the scale is the orange, an adult fruit *par excellence*, to be crammed into one's mouth with quasi-sexual urgency, its tingling juices dribbling down hands and chin, sticky-sweet and utterly irresistible.

Now consider the apple... Exactly. The apple is altogether less extravagant. Modest and self-contained, you might say. If fruits were people, the apple would work in a bank. Yet despite its staid image, the apple brings with it a lot of "baggage". A dispute over a golden apple, we recall, led to the Trojan Wars. Even before that, an apple got us all kicked out of Paradise. Also, whereas Europe enjoyed the influx of "exotic" fruits post-1492, including the orange and banana,

the apple is indigenous to both Europe and Asia, having been cultivated here for thousands of years, perhaps longer than any other plant. Quite simply, it's been around forever. Not the most glamorous item in the fruit bowl, and easy to take for granted. Let's stop doing that for a moment, and instead see how far, and how deliciously, the apple can go in Spain.

Spanish apples

I'm standing on a steel walkway above a tank as big as a municipal swimming pool. In ten parallel lanes thousands of shiny red apples bob gently as they are carried along on the flow of the water. These fruit have just come out of storage, where they have been since harvest seven months ago, kept at a humidity-controlled 1°C (33.8°F) and with oxygen at just 1%.

To my mind they look pretty much like any other apple, and in a couple of days, after being crated up and sent via container truck to London's New Covent Garden market, they will be picked off the shelf and eaten by people in Hampstead and Hackney without the slightest thought that this fruit was harvested 30 weeks ago, yet has the crunch and tastes of an apple plucked from the branch this morning.

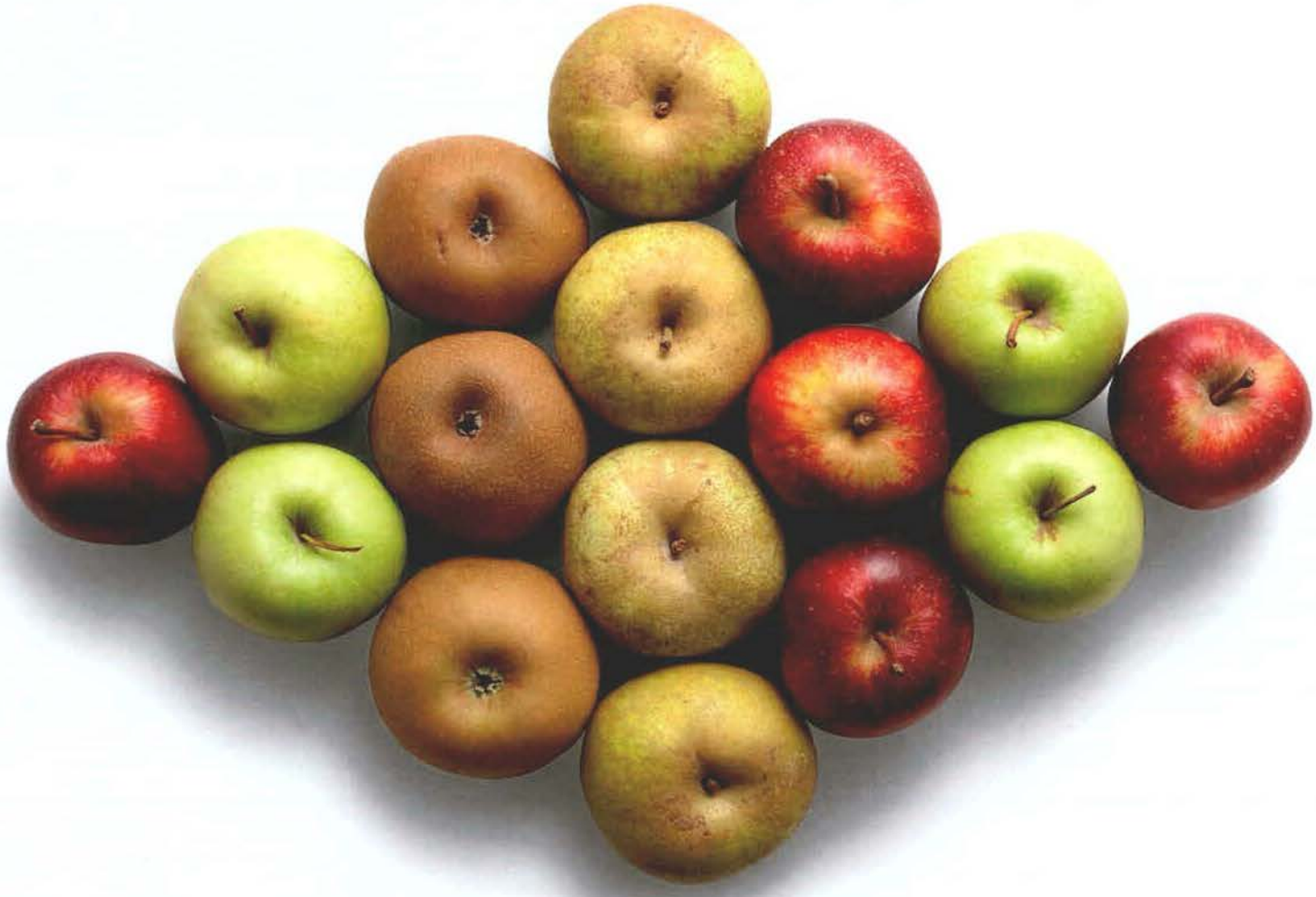
Spain is a major player in the $70 billion global apple industry. It produces over half a million tons a year, making its per capita production 11th highest in the world, and its gross output 15th, according FAOSTATS, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Exports go to most of Europe, as well as North Africa, the Persian Gulf and South America. And the objective is always the same: that when you take that first bite, the apple is crisp and tree-fresh.

Neighbors France and Italy beat Spain in terms of brute tonnage. Italian company La Trentina, for example, produces almost twice as many apples per year as the whole of Spain. Then there's the matter of new varieties, which are increasingly important in the European market, and where once again Italy and France are most active. So where does Spain fit in to the picture?

Well, new varieties are also being produced here. The Pink Lady, current star of the apple firmament, is grown by several of Spain's biggest producers. But Spain has also adopted a second means of positioning itself in what is a highly competitive global business.

Poma de Girona

Girona Fruits, where I am standing today, is one of three companies, all based in the Catalonian province of Girona (northeast Spain), that promote their fruit under the banner *Poma de Girona* (literally "Apple from Girona"). The cultivation of apples is an old tradition here, along with that of nectarines, peaches and pears. But it's the apples that really prosper, and these days growers are specializing more and more in the single fruit. Taken together, the three companies of Poma de Girona outproduce the largest single apple grower in Spain (associated in the company Fruilar). Their specific focus, though, is not on quantity but quality, having achieved the coveted PGI recognition for their apples in 2001, the only Spanish producer to have done so. Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) is a European Union standard that recognizes products which are still made or grown within their historical areas of production and which also satisfy very tough guidelines on quality. It is, then, a mark of authenticity *and* quality.



Part of the explanation for the push for quality here in Girona is that the regional government of Catalonia has invested heavily in agricultural science, with apples a major concern. Since Catalonia produces two thirds of all Spanish apples, this kind of attention is clearly worth it.

Earlier today I visited the laboratory at Mas Badia (Girona), part of the region's Institute of Research and Technology in Food and Agriculture (IRTA), and watched as several perfectly healthy-looking apples were subjected to more tests than I thought possible for the humble fruit. The lab provides intensive technical back-up for growers, with apples from every plot on every plantation tested throughout their growing life. A Google Maps application is used to chart the exact location of pests and diseases, leading to swifter, more effective localized treatment and, hence, a reduction in the use of pesticides. Indeed, PGI growers work under a number of certification regimes, including GLOBALG.A.P (a private sector body that sets voluntary standards for the certification of production processes of agricultural products around the globe), BRC (British Retail Consortium) and IFS (International Food Standard), as well as Catalonia's own integrated production system for increased sustainability and quality, which aims at ongoing, progressive reductions in the use of pesticides.

When the apples are harvested, there's more analysis in the lab. Sugar content is assessed, along with acidity, firmness and starch content, all of which allows optimum storage life to be

calculated (more starch generally means longer storage is possible), and explains why varieties which typically harvest for less than a month in the fall can be bought off the shelf, fresh and crisp, for a good portion of the year.
I actually start to feel sorry for the poor apples, prodded and poked and scrutinized their whole lives, then the dark silence of the low-oxygen chill room. But issues of fruit abuse aside, the hi-tech, sustainable approach to apple production in Girona has not only resulted in a more ecologically-sound, higher-quality product, but has also helped a network of small-scale, local growers to survive. The three companies of Poma de Girona all began as co-operatives, and their independent producers, some with no more than a handful of acres, get an incredibly sophisticated level of technical support.
Whole banks of data are kept permanently updated on each individual plot of every producer: growing plans, treatments, herbicides, watering regimes, fertilizers, technical visits, quality control, plus, of course, final crop quality (hence payment). After the harvest season ends, they tell me, some growers get addicted to their computer screens as they wait for their apples to be graded.
Jordi Bagudà, of Bagudà Fruits, is a young producer who, together with his father, runs a small family company producing PGI-recognized apples in Girona,

about 8 km (5 mi) from the coast. They have 84 ha (207.5 acres) of orchards and some 16 (39.5) dedicated to other crops. "Right now," he explains, "we do a significant amount of replanting of key varieties so that our production

Spanish traditional cider

As in many other European countries, sweet, carbonated cider is drunk in Spain. However, for any cider lover the real hidden gem is traditional cider, produced in Asturias and the Basque Country (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 74) in the north of the peninsula. Traditional cider is perhaps closest in character to the French Cidre Brut, or to a light, crisp English scrumpy. What makes it stand out from both of these, however, is its unique freshness and a light, almost imperceptible carbonization, with dry, aromatic fruit in the mouth and a beguiling balance of acidity and bitterness, often followed by a pronounced dryness at the end. A hearty yet subtle product, to be drunk by the mouthful, not sipped.

The best Asturian cider now has its own Protected Designation of Origin recognition (PDO Sidra de Asturias). Only producers who use fruit from a list of 22 approved native Asturian varieties of cider apples can carry the PDO label. These are all cider apples, not eaters, and range from acidic (Durona de Tresali) to sweet (Verdialona, Ernestina), and the whole range of basic taste groups in between: bitter-acidic, bitter-semiacidic, bitter-sweet and semiacidic.

With such close scrutiny of quality, the production of high-quality traditional cider is moving ever closer to the kind of standards seen in the wine industry. The Trabanco company's Cosecha Propia, for example, is a gourmet cider made exclusively from native Asturian apples from the company's own plantations, and this year it became the first cider in Spain to be granted the *Manzana Seleccionada* (Selected Apple) seal following the results of an independent tasting panel organized by Bureau Veritas.

Over in the Basque Country something similar is happening. This year 20 Basque cider producers have begun selling traditional cider under the Eusko Label banner, a mark of quality established by the Basque regional government. Once again, only traditional, local varieties of cider apples are permitted (Errezila, Goikoetxe, Mozoloa, for example). More producers are set to join the scheme, which has resulted in an increased interest in local varieties by apple growers. Protected Designation of Origin status is the next logical step.

Traditional cider from Asturias (PDO Sidra de Asturias)

http://www.sidradeasturias.es/

Traditional cider from the Basque Country
http://www.sidraeuskolabel.net/es/productores.html

is the most modern and attractive to the market." As far as the extremely strict production guidelines imposed by Poma de Girona, he says, "The PGI represents a guarantee, given that all producers work within the same rules, which are continuously evolving... The PGI gives us a public image of the product and of the area, and is the best way for the consumer to know about the kind of quality we have here."

In the kitchen

Chef Juan Roca is a big fan of the local apples. "They are vitally important to us," he says. "I always look for products close to home." Indeed, apples from Girona feature in some of the classic dishes on the menu at El Celler de Can Roca (3 Michelin stars), not least the Timbal of apple and foie gras with vanilla oil, which uses local Golden Delicious. "The quality of Catalan products," he explains, "and more specifically those from Girona, such as the apples, are the reason that my creations are what they are and why they have had such recognition. I like to stress territoriality in my cooking." Another innovative use of the apple is Roca's sauce for sea bass: liquidize the peel (and some pulp) of Granny Smiths, then reduce until dense; incorporate olive oil a little at a time until emulsified. Simple, sharp, and smooth.

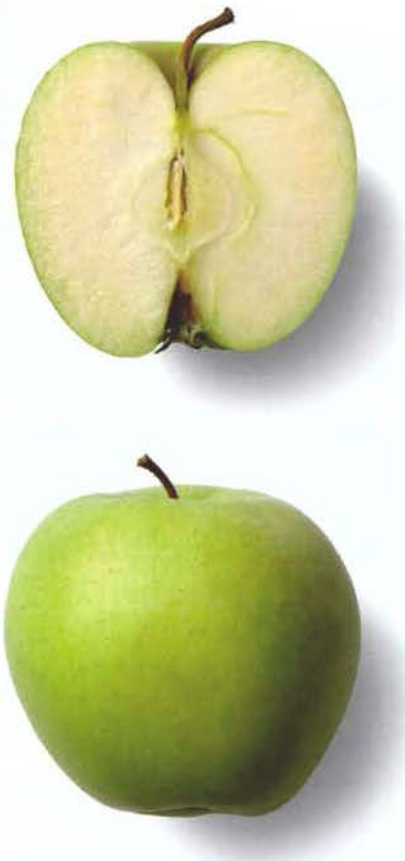
Food in this part of the world isn't all about Michelin stars and Pellegrino positions, though. I'm on my way to the sleepy, picture-postcard village of Peratallada to try *botifarra dolça (butifarra dulce* in Spanish), a traditional course-grained pork sausage which is unusual in that it contains sugar, lemon peel and sometimes cinnamon. In the restaurant Cas Nau they cook it the old way, with apples.

Andreu Castells, the elderly owner of Cas Nau, opened for business in

1974, although the house itself has been in his family's possession for 250 years. When you walk inside, it does indeed feel like someone's home; four small dining rooms give it an old-world, old-European feel, where the very sweetness on the air seems to offer comfort.

As I order, Mr. Castells makes a succinct but well-reasoned speech to the effect that when someone wants sweet sausage and apples as a starter he says no (wagging a finger). The sweetness on the palette, he explains, spoils the savory course to follow. The fresh botifarra dolça is normally cooked through in a little water, or fried. You add pieces of apple to the pan and leave them to soften before serving. In Cas Nau the apple comes as a compote, and it's a heady mix—sweet sausage and still sweeter apple. Incidentally, he was right about ordering. Having finished my botifarra, I have Catalonian-style peas and beans, which are great, but somewhat overpowered by the lingering sweetness of the previous course. You have been warned.

Another traditional apple recipe in these parts is *Relleno de manzanas* (Stuffed apples). You take cored apples and fill them with a mixture of minced pork (lean), ground almonds, sweet biscuit, eggs, sugar, a pinch of salt, lemon peel and cinnamon. Brown the stuffed apples in olive oil then place in a pot, over which you dribble caramelized sugar. Add sticks of cinnamon and some lemon peel and cover the apples with water. Bring to a boil and simmer for at least two hours. Leave to cool overnight, and the following day simmer an hour and a half more. Add more water as necessary.



The more you cook them the better they are is the accepted wisdom, and as I talk to more and more people about stuffed apples, it becomes clear that three or even four days of cooking is not unheard of, by which time the apples are richly, darkly done.

Pedigree *pomas*

Most of Girona's apples are grown in an area known as the Ampurdán (Girona province), blessed with an ideal apple-growing climate: sunny and humid in the summer months, but for the rest of the year cooled by the Mediterranean and the Pyrenees. The soil, meanwhile, is formed from rich fluvial deposits and has optimum drainage.

The place itself, then, is the most significant factor in the quality of the apples here.

Technological wizardry, though, does help. And the four varieties carrying PGI recognition—Golden and Red Delicious, Granny Smith and Royal Gala—are the real apple aristocrats. Not only are they pampered and cosseted throughout their lives by men in lab coats, but the cultivars are constantly being improved and interbred for better color, sweetness, juice and crunch. The process reminds me of pedigree dog breeding. Apple trees, though, do not pant and salivate uncontrollably and develop internal organ disorders because they've been bred to have cuter noses. No, pedigree apples are a good thing.

The Ampurdán is bisected by the Montgrí Massif mountain range. Known locally as the Dead Bishop, the range is said to resemble a bishop reclined in funeral pose, the

square outline of Montgrí Castle, which sits on one of the central peaks, like a bejeweled ring on his finger. I can confirm that, if seen from up in the north, it does indeed look uncannily like a dead bishop. But from anywhere to the south it looks more like a naked belly dancer sprawled on her back in the freezing cold.
My next stop in Girona is up past the bishop/belly dancer and out to the coast, just below the Bay of Roses. Sant Pere Pescador is a fishing village of some 1,700 inhabitants, although it doesn't look much like a fishing village. Every road out of the place has orchards on both sides and there are fruit trees all the way to the shore. Many growers here supply Fruticola Empordà, another of the Poma de Girona companies, which again offers small, local growers access to international markets.
I get talking to Isidre Solà from the company. Interestingly, he says that some people think too much attention is devoted to the appearance of apples these days. In terms of Galas, for example, growers up here are switching from Galaxy to Brookfield, because although the two strains taste the same, the Brookfield has a better base color of green against which its red striping stands out (it is also, in truth, a bit firmer).
I don't really understand this suspicion of producing pedigree fruit with great coloration. Ten minutes up the coast from Sant Pere

Pescador is El Bulli, where the way food looks has always been taken pretty seriously. Food is, at least partly, about the call to the eye, its appearance getting the juices flowing long before the taste buds have their chance. Personally I love colorful apples, especially if they're from Girona. And if you've got fruit-shy kids, I'm sure you do too.

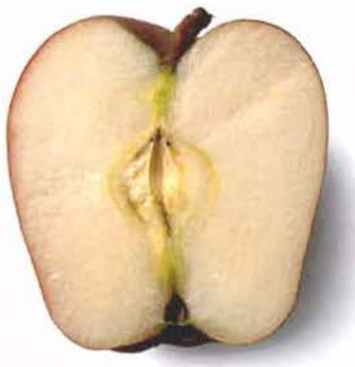
PDO status

One apple that needs no interbreeding at all is the Reineta from the El Bierzo (Leon) area of northwest Spain. A large, fat russet-like fruit, the Reineta carries PDO status (Protected Designation of Origin), an indication of just how seriously Spain is now taking its apple production. The reason for the PDO is that these El Bierzo Reinetas are amazingly good, far better than the same variety produced anywhere else.
The growing conditions themselves are, once again, the prime reason for the exceptional quality, a fact which the Romans must have been aware of, since it is thought that the Reineta apple was first brought to the area during the days of the Roman Empire.
The apple itself has extremely firm, compact flesh and no flouriness, giving it a good crunch. Despite this firmness, however, there's masses and masses of juice, very sweet but balanced out with a decent bit of acidity. The Reineta simply ticks all the boxes of what a perfect apple should be, the kind you just go on eating until there's none left.
If there ever was an apple in Paradise, it was probably a Reineta.

Flower power

There remains one facet of the apple which we have so far ignored: the blossom. And if you want flowers on your food, nobody does it with more knowledge and passion than TV chef Iolanda Bustos. With partner Jacint Codina, she runs the restaurant La Calèndula in the center of Girona city, and I'm having dinner there.
Today's "flower menu" at La Calèndula includes a variety of floral delights: Fresh cheese and marigold petal salad, Duck breast with pickled fruits and daisy petals, Apple tatin with rosemary blossom... However, I have special needs, and Iolanda has agreed to

prepare me a special menu using not only local apples but also their blossom, picked from wild apple trees by the chef herself.
La Calèndula has a fresh, cool look, with an open-plan kitchen bang in the middle of the dining room. After Cheese and marigold croquettes, I have Crispy cod skins with an apple compote and apple blossom. Funny thing, apple blossom. One petal can be utterly innocuous, and the next a beguiling combination of sweet perfume and a distant bitterness. Apple blossom (petals only, the rest of the flower is too bitter) is good for respiratory problems, and also helps to reduce body temperature and blood pressure, so you really can't go wrong.
Next comes one of the best salads I've ever eaten, and I live with a vegetarian, so I know all about meatlessness. Tonight's version, Spring salad with sweet and sour apple and foie gras, is an explosion of color on the plate, and the taste is magically piquant, creamy and fragrant all at once. The fact that it helps get my blood pressure down is an added bonus. Lamb stuffed with apple and cream cheese follows, and the meal is rounded off by Elder blossom marzipan with a strawberry soup and a glass of elderflower champenoise.
Then, just when I'm thinking I can't possibly get any more amazed at the humble apple, I am served a hot infusion of fresh apple, dill and liquorice. You can try that one at home. Use the cork and,



particularly, the peel. Granny Smiths do the best job.

A toast...

So, there's a lot going on in Spain when it comes to apples, from the peel to the petals, from high-pedigree sustainability in Girona to the Protected Designation of Origin Bierzo. And I didn't even get over to Valencia, where the old Esperiega apple is being brought back to life by the CHEGA Co-operative, and was recently recognized by the Slow Food Organization.
However, I thought I'd finish off by toasting the Spanish apple with a glass of beer, Moska de Girona Poma to be precise. Independent brewer Josep Borrell adds a unique touch to this bottle-conditioned brew by macerating Granny Smiths in it. The result is a dry, crisp beer with delicate, almost cheeky notes of apple. Surprising and innovative, and a most appropriate way to end this brief journey of discovery into Spain's very modern take on the oldest of fruits.

John Barlow's fiction and non-fiction has been published in eight languages. His latest book, Everything but the Squeal, *describes a year-long sojourn in his adopted homeland of Galicia, northwest Spain, exploring the gastronomic and cultural significance of pigs.*

Websites

- **www.pomadegirona.cat**
  Poma de Girona. Catalan.
- **www.sidradeasturias.es**
  Asturian Cider. English, French, Spanish.
- **www.manzanareinetadelbierzo.es**
  Reineta del Bierzo apple. Spanish.

Paco Pérez*

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

Photos
Toya Legido
and Tomás Zarza/©ICEX

Wines chosen
by Toni Gata, sommelier
at Restaurante Miramar.

GIRONA APPLES
with sweet sausage

(Manzanas de Girona y butifarra dulce)

This is a typical dish in the Ampurdán district of Catalonia but is little known elsewhere. I have included it by way of tribute to a friend of mine, a butcher and lover of good food.

SERVES 4

For the baked apples: 4 Golden PGI Poma de Girona apples; cinnamon stick; vanilla pod; Moscatel wine; brown sugar; 150 ml / 2/3 cups mineral water.

For the puréed apple: 300 g / 10 1/2 oz Golden PGI Poma de Girona apple; 70 g / 3 oz sugar; vanilla caviar.

For the mini sweet sausages: 200 g / 7 oz Ibérico pork, preferably the pluma cut; 175 g / 6 oz sugar; grated lemon rind; powdered cinnamon; salt; butter; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sweet Garnacha wine.

For the jus: 300 g / 10 1/2 oz beef; a splash of Cognac; 500 ml / 2 1/6 cups mineral water; 3 g / 0.1 oz kudzu *(Pueraria lobata)*.

*For a more in-depth look at the chef, see Close-up

Baked apples
Remove the hearts from the apples, then bake with the cinnamon, vanilla, sugar and mineral water at 160°C / 320°F for 45 minutes. Half way through, add a splash of Moscatel wine.

Apple purée
Peel the apples and cut into pieces. Place the pieces with the sugar and the vanilla caviar in the microwave at the maximum setting for 24 minutes, stirring every two or three minutes. Then blend to form a fine purée.

Mini sweet sausages
Mince the meat and mix in the sugar, lemon rind, cinnamon and salt. Form into sausages and sauté lightly in butter. When half cooked, add a splash of sweet Garnacha wine.

Jus
Roast the meat in a pan and add the cognac. When reduced, add the mineral water. Reduce again to about 250 g / 9 oz and leave to cool. Add the kudzu and bring to a boil.

To serve
Place the burst baked apple in the center of the dish. Top with the sautéed sweet sausages cooked in sweet wine. Decorate with a few drops of apple purée. Add the sausage cooking juices to the jus and use as a sauce.

Preparation time
1 hour

Recommended wine
Fefiñanes III 2004 (DO Rías Baixas), by Bodegas del Palacio de Fefiñanes. This Albariño wine from Rías Baixas, with its freshness and aromas, achieves a perfect balance between the primary aromas of the apples and the acidity of the wine. A very pleasing combination.

APPLE, AJOBLANCO and sardines

(Manzana, ajoblanco y sardinas)

In summertime, a fantastic way of cooling down is a bowl of *ajoblanco*, and combined with apple it becomes even more appetizing. Sardines are at their very best in the summer, especially when eaten in the open air, preferably on a balcony overlooking the sea.

SERVES 4

500 g / 1 lb 2 oz fresh sardines (200 g / 7 oz to be used to make the sardine oil).

For the sardine oil: 200 g / 7 oz sardines; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sunflower oil.

For the apple juice: 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb White PDO Reineta del Bierzo apples; parsley.

For the apple granita: 300 g / 10 1/2 oz White Reineta apple juice; 1 sheet gelatin.

For the apple jelly: 350 g / 12 oz White Reineta apple juice; 1.2 g / 0.04 oz agar agar; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz cold apple juice.

For the ajoblanco: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz almonds; half a clove of garlic; 200 g / 7 oz breadcrumbs; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz olive oil; 700 g 1/ 1 1/2 lb mineral water; 1 small tsp sherry vinegar; 0.4 g / 0.01 oz xanthan; salt.

Sardines

Remove the heads from the sardines and place in iced water for 20 minutes. Drain then fillet. Just before serving, cut into very small dice to make a tartar.

Sardine oil

Sear the sardines over charcoal, then place in a frying pan with the sunflower oil at 80°C / 176°F. Leave to infuse until the oil has the desired flavor, then strain and keep the oil.

Apple juice

Cut the apples and blend to obtain the juice. Insert some sprigs of parsley in the juice to prevent it from oxidizing.

Apple granita

Soak the gelatin then drain and stir into 50 g / 2 oz of juice. Then add the rest of the juice and freeze. To make the granita, scrape the frozen juice.

Apple jelly

Add the agar agar to 100 g / 3 1/2 oz of cold juice and bring to a boil, stirring constantly. Add the rest of the juice and stir well. Pour onto cold serving dishes and leave to set.

Ajoblanco

Soak the breadcrumbs in the water for 1 hour. Blanch the almonds then peel them. Place the garlic and the almonds in the blender with a little salt and grind. Add the soaked breadcrumbs and blend while gently pouring in the olive oil. Bind slowly with the vinegar and the water used to soak the breadcrumbs. Add the xanthan to bind fully.

To serve

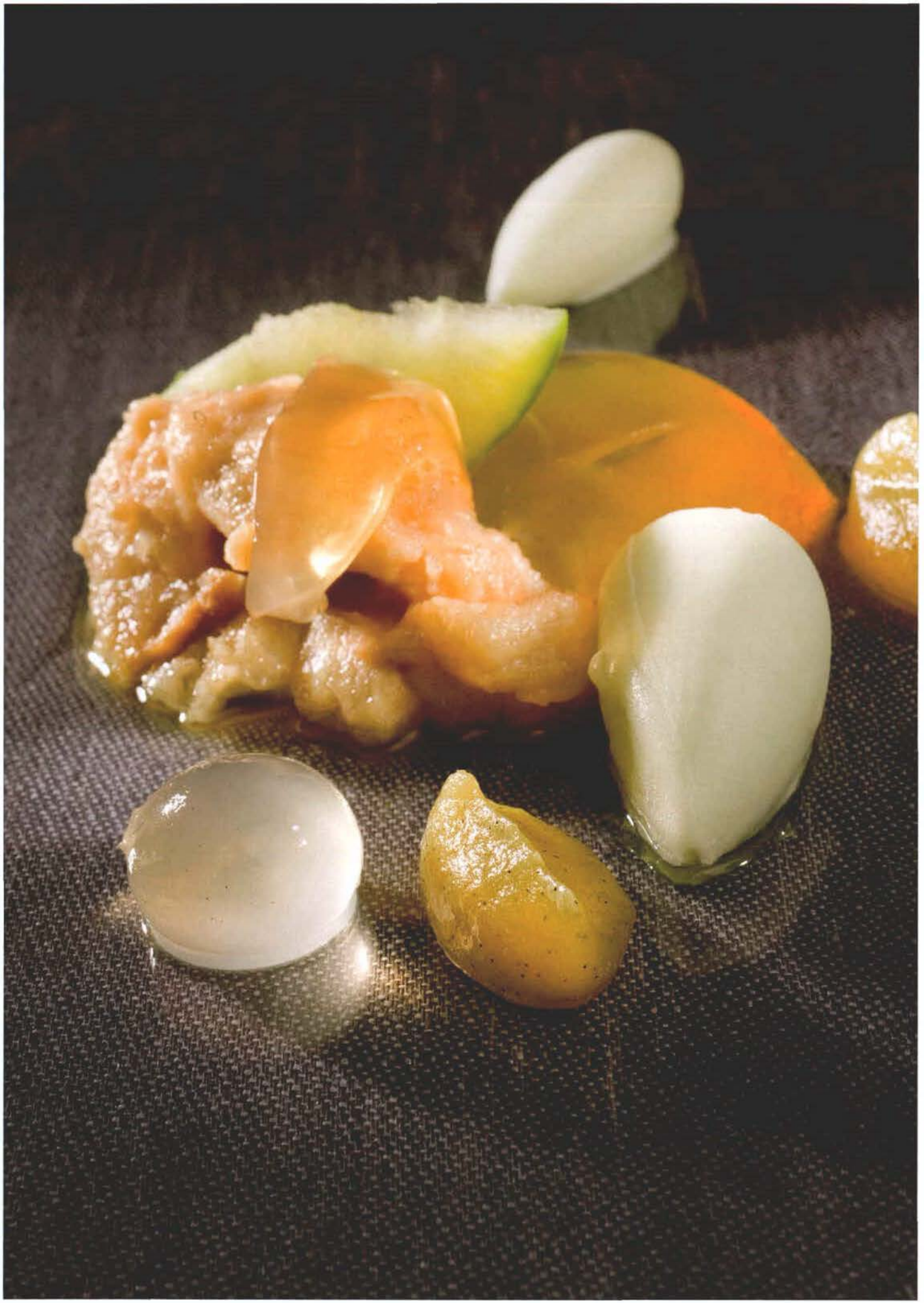
The apple jelly should have set on cold dishes. Add the sardine tartar. Next to it place the apple granita and some ajoblanco. Decorate with a few drops of sardine-flavored oil.

Preparation time

1 hour 30 minutes.

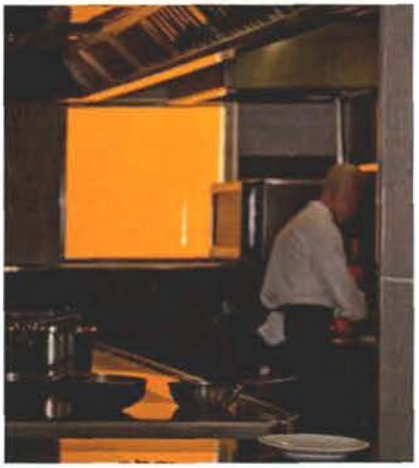
Recommended wine

A wine with structure is needed for the strong flavors in this dish. We chose El Transistor 2009 (DO Rueda) by Compañía de Vinos Telmo Rodríguez. Typically for a Verdejo wine, it brings a surprising explosion of aromas and its touches of plum and peach balance out its acidity.



Diversity

IN APPLE



(Diversidad en la manzana)

Apples are full of potential. Here we offer them as a dessert, with a diversity of textures that are both fun and flavorsome.

SERVES 4

For the baked apple: 10 Golden PGI Poma de Girona apples; 5 cinnamon sticks; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz sugar; 200 g / 7 oz mineral water; 400 g / 14 oz mineral water.

For the apple purée: 700 g / 1 1/2 lb Golden PGI Poma de Girona apples; 70 g / 3 oz sugar; half a vanilla pod.

For the baked apple juice: apple skins and hearts; 400 g / 14 oz mineral water.

For the apple juice: 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb Granny Smith PGI Poma de Girona apples; parsley.

For the apple sphere: 200 g / 7 oz baked apple juice; 25 g / 1 oz sugar; 4 g / 1/6 oz Gluco; 0.4 g / 0.01 oz xanthan.

For the apple jelly: 175 g / 6 oz baked apple juice; 0.6 g / 0.02 oz agar agar.

For the apple granita: 200 g / 7 oz Granny Smith apple juice; half a sheet of gelatin.

For the apple ice cream: 550 g / 1 lb 4 oz Granny Smith PGI Poma de Girona apples; 20 g / 1 oz dextrose; 38 g / 1 1/2 oz Procrema; 0.8 g / 0.02 oz ascorbic acid.

Baked apple

Bake the apples with the cinnamon, sugar and 200 g / 7 oz water at 150°C / 302°F for 30 minutes. Leave to cool then drain and deglaze the pan with the 400 g / 14 oz water. Use the liquid to make the sphere and the apple jelly. Place the apples with their skins and without removing the hearts on a pan and heat.

Apple purée

Peel the apples and remove the hearts. Use the skins and hearts for the baked apple juice. Place the peeled apples with the sugar and vanilla on a dish and cook for 24 minutes in a microwave oven at the maximum setting, stirring every 5 minutes. Blend and strain.

Baked apple juice

Add the mineral water and the peelings and hearts used to make the purée to the pan on which the apples were baked. Infuse for 30 minutes, then strain and set aside.

Apple juice

Cut the apples and blend to make the juice. Add a few sprigs of parsley to the juice to prevent it from oxidizing.

Apple sphere

Blend the baked apple juice with the sugar and xanthan, then add the Gluco.

Apple jelly

Heat the baked apple juice to 60°C / 140°F then add the agar agar, stirring constantly, and bring to a boil.

Apple granita

Dissolve the gelatin in the warm apple juice then freeze. Scrape to form the granita.

Apple ice cream

Liquidize the apples, with the dextrose, Procrema and ascorbic acid, then freeze in the Pacojet.

To serve

Arrange the different preparations as you wish. Finish with the ice cream.

Preparation time

3 hours

Recommended wine

For this dish we headed south for a wine devised by the Kracher family (see Dessert wines old and new, page 26). Our choice is Botani 2010 (DO Sierras de Málaga), by Jorge Ordóñez & Co., a fantastic partner for this fun assortment of fruit textures. This 100% Moscatel has floral touches, just the right acidity and some sensational flavor notes.

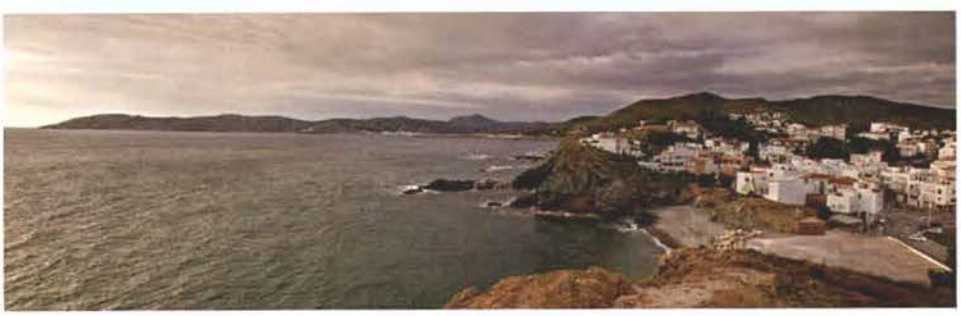
Paco **Pérez**

Text
Almudena Muyo/©ICEX

Photos
Tomás Zarza and
Toya Legido/©ICEX

Translation
Hawys Pritchard/©ICEX

from the ART HEART



Sincere, honest, flavor-driven, creative, surprising... that just about sums up Paco Pérez's style of cooking. Backed up by his tenet that "everyone should do what he knows in his heart he really ought to be doing, and not deny his principles", it has earned him three Michelin stars: two for Miramar, his trademark restaurant in Llançà (Girona, eastern Spain), and another for Enoteca, located within the Hotel Arts in Barcelona. His laid-back manner belies a packed schedule, which also includes running the restaurant of the hotel The Mirror, again in Barcelona. And things are about to get even busier with the launch of new venture—a restaurant called Five by Paco Pérez—in Berlin.

The *tramontana* strikes again. I seem to be doomed. It's enough for me to go anywhere near the Ampurdán coast (which I do about twice a year) for this dismal north wind to start blowing. My visit to the Hotel Restaurante Miramar in Llançà (Girona, eastern Spain) is no exception. I'm here to discover the key features of the Paco Pérez approach to cooking, but the tramontana is no respecter of such missions, and the bout of bad weather that this unpleasant inland wind typically carries along with it is stirring up the waters of this stretch of the Mediterranean. Against this backdrop, Paco Pérez's affability beams out in contrast. A "self-made" chef with a low-key approach to life, he avoids the circuit of media events, conferences, and hoo-ha generally. We sit on the covered terrace of his restaurant looking out over the sea, and chat about his (nearly) 20 years at the helm of a gastronomic enterprise (running Miramar and acting as advisor to two restaurants-within-hotels in Barcelona—Enoteca in the Arts, and The Mirror) that has earned him three Michelin stars, two for Miramar and one for Enoteca. So far, so good, but when the conversation turns to his scheme to go international with another restaurant within another hotel, this time in Berlin, I can't help feeling the stirrings of alarm, as if a tidal wave was gathering. The new restaurant, to be known as Five by Paco Pérez, is in Berlin's 5-star Das Stue Hotel. There's a double objective to the exercise: "To sustain the vitality that characterizes Miramar: it's the crux of the whole enterprise, the place where I'm able to give free rein to the creative aspects of my work, and where I'm receptive to inspiration. And closely related to that objective is the parallel one of trying to improve the quality of life for all the people who have been with me at Miramar for so many years so that they can take things a bit easier and have more

time to spend with their families." However, it turns out that increasing family time for his team will mean, paradoxically, having to reduce the time he has to spend with his own, and Paco is a man for whom the family is of talismanic importance. "I have hardly any time to spend with my family these days: until a couple of years ago I used to have breakfast with my wife, Montse, nearly every day and we used to spend most of our time together. I'm very aware of the situation and of the fact that, even though all the decisions were taken jointly, there are unsatisfactory areas. But we have to take this opportunity and live with the consequences. Things will change because being with the people I love most is the most important thing there is." But having said all that, to keep a space like Miramar buoyant, it's important to get out there and get noticed. The logistics are complicated: Montse Serra spends the week in Barcelona, at Enoteca in the Hotel Arts, where her eldest daughter is also involved. Paco goes there on Mondays, Miramar's closing day, returning to Llançà on the Tuesday to take delivery of supplies, of which (as the staff informs me) he does all the buying himself: "Nobody's as knowledgeable about fish as he is, and he likes to handle and check over what he's buying." Then on the Wednesday he goes back to Barcelona, this time to The Mirror, where he stays for one or two days, depending on what needs doing; then it's back to Llançà for the weekend. I have to ask the obvious question: how on earth can opening a restaurant in Berlin be fitted into this already crammed schedule? Paco has thought it all through: "It's only two hours away by plane. It often takes me less time to get there than to drive to Barcelona! Once everything is ticking over, the plan is for me to pop over to Berlin once a month, traveling on Sunday as soon as Miramar closes (after serving lunch) so that I spend what's left of Sunday and the whole of Monday

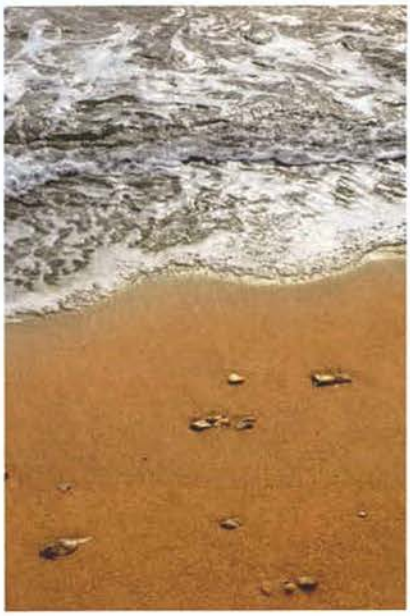
there. And if everything's going smoothly and my actual presence isn't needed, I'll be permanently available by phone. When I do have to go, we'll just have to organize things to make it possible. My teams' well-being is the important thing: we constantly do our best to ensure that they are all happy in their work and doing what they feel they should be doing." And in the long term, his own well-being and family life depend on it.

Hands-on

Paco not only directs the teams; he cooks, too. "I'm a chef. I cook every day," he says. His passionate interest in food and cooking dates back to early childhood. While still at primary school he used to love slipping into the kitchen to watch what was going on and then try to imitate what he saw. Later, his pursuit of what was clearly a vocation began with taking a job in a little tapas bar owned by his family, starting off as a waiter and then graduating to the kitchen. "That experience of dealing with the public was key. Being in direct contact with the customers means that you can observe how they react to various tastes and smells—vital information that doesn't reach you when you're behind the scenes in the kitchen."

His schooldays over, he set about becoming a member of the food world, spending several training periods in France on placements with Michel Guérard (one of the progenitors of *Nouvelle Cuisine*) until he was called up to do his (then obligatory) military service back in Spain. This was when Montse appeared on the scene, turning what would have been just a temporary interruption into a permanent one. "While I was doing the *mili* in Madrid, a friend told me that his parents, who ran a little hostal near the beach in Llançà, needed help over the Easter period. I decided to give them a hand and spend my holidays there."

And there he stayed. The original plan to return to France to continue his training dissolved in the face of his desire to remain with Montse, sister of the friend who had introduced him to Miramar, for whom he had fallen in a big way. However, he continued studying and acquiring skills and soon after made contact with Ferran Adrià. Indeed, it was at elBulli that he came to understand the nature of his attitude to cooking, "... an approach to food that involves the senses—you take in the look of it, the smell, the feel, you eat it, taste it, experience the pleasure of it and retain it in your memory." Many have described his style of cooking as "elBulliesque", which he takes as a compliment. "To me, cooking in the style of elBulli involves being consistent, creative, humble and hard-working, so I'm delighted if that's what people say."



In those days, Miramar was a little sea-side boarding house: except for having expanded in size, it had changed little since 1939, when Grandma Julia used sleep on the beach so that her bedroom could be let to visitors. Paco and Montse decided to take over what was essentially a small-scale hotel-cum-restaurant. "Unfortunately, however, we lost my father-in-law in '97. Taking it on was quite a risky thing to do: our intention was to turn it into a good restaurant and, with that in mind, we decided to invest in doing up the kitchen and staying open all year round. Bear in mind that Llançà isn't on the way to anywhere significant, it's a destination in its own right—a little town of around 4,000 inhabitants, with pronounced seasonal differences in the weather and very long winters and short summers. We decided to capitalize on that, making a feature of the variation: we kept the six rooms with beach views, opened up the dining room so that it gave onto the promenade, and extended the kitchen to make the most of the seaside light," Paco recalls. By 2006, his style of "...sincere, honest, flavor-driven, creative and—I believe—surprising" cooking, to quote Paco himself, had won him his first Michelin star. "Getting the star changed things in that it attracted more customers, but the real upheaval came in 2009 when they awarded us the first Michelin star for Enoteca, and then again last year when we got the second for Miramar. The rhythm of work has accelerated hugely, but the lovely thing is that our customers keep coming just as often as before, now joined by new ones who come to find out what we're all about."

Next stop: Berlin

It was while all these changes were going on that seeds of the Berlin scheme were sown. "A customer friend of mine owns the 5-star Das Stue Hotel (previously the Danish Embassy), and three years ago he asked if I would of take charge of the gastronomic side of it. At first I protested that it was too far away, and I couldn't quite get to grips with it as a proposition, but he suggested I go and see it without any obligation. The building is in that style typical of pre-Second World War Germany—very severe—but the thing I noticed most of all was that it had the date it was built, 1939, on the façade. Oddly enough, Miramar was built in that same year, and what with that detail and my friend's insistence, I found myself thinking Why not? There comes a time in a chef's life when he has to take a leap forward, as Ferran has done, and I decided to make my move by promoting Spanish gastronomy and products in Germany."
The Das Stue Hotel is part of the Spanish chain of Whim Hotels, and the building it occupies (situated in the Tiergarten area) was originally designed by Johann Emil Schaudt, well-known architect of Berlin's KaDeWe department stores. There is to be a pre-launch event for the new hotel in October of this year, followed by its official opening in December. "I'll be there for both occasions, and I'll take advantage of Miramar's being closed in January and February 2012 to concentrate on Five by Paco Pérez over that period to ensure that it's up and running by the time I leave."
And what sort of food does he plan to serve Berliners? "The Berlin restaurant will be like an extension of Miramar, serving the same cuisine." In fact, it will serve dishes that featured on Miramar's menu the year before. "We know those dishes through and through; all the spadework is done already and the dishes are fully fledged, though they can still be developed further." He observes that there are enough conceptual differences to deal with already: at Enoteca, the keynote approach avoids the spectacular but is punctilious in matters of cooking time—very simple dishes in which surf and turf, seafood and rice dishes top the bill. The cuisine at Miramar is more urbane, with impeccably finished dishes served in a modern environment against a Mediterranean backdrop. Considerable creative effort goes into creating a specific tone and keeping it consistent.
Paco Pérez's chosen strategy for Berlin is to let the tone evolve, launching with a menu that is full of light and sunshine—a taste of the Mediterranean for his German customers. He has been advised, by his friend Ferran, among others,

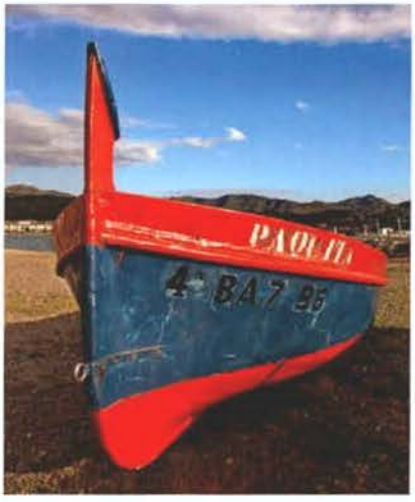
that Berlin leans towards the traditional in gastronomic matters, but he is confident that the freshness of his products—*espardeñas (Stichopus regalis*, a.k.a. sea cucumber, or royal cucumber), peas from Llavaneras, cured Ibérico ham, oysters, razor clams—and the imaginative use he makes of them will strike just the right note for a city reputed to be one of the most avant-garde in Europe.

The thrill of it all

Miramar menus are, after all, designed to be exciting—a no-holds-barred approach where sole and john dory feature alongside the most outré tapas. Quail's egg tempura served with soy sauce and sake is a wonderful example. As you bite into the delicate tempura batter, the rich egg yolk is released into your mouth, where it fuses in perfect harmony with the soy sauce and sake. Razor clams in Thai broth is another... Paco works a combination of the avant-garde and the traditional; the tasting menu is totally avant-garde, but the main menu will feature dishes designed to showcase a particular product and others that exhibit his mastery of technique. *Espardeñas Ibéricas a la brasa* (Griddled Ibérico sea cucumbers), for example, are presented under a transparent glass dome containing a miniature fog of trapped smoke from burning vine shoots which, when the dome is lifted at table, the diner experiences as a heady whiff which whets the appetite for the delicious sea cucumber to come... and all within sight of the Mediterranean. Even the tramontana failed to undermine the magic when I was served this dish. Eating at Miramar is undeniably an intriguing—and often very beautiful—sensory experience that stimulates response at an emotional level. Wild morel mushrooms (*Morchella vulgaris*) with cream and powdered foie ice cream is a representative dish (and one that has acquired classic status, Paco tells me) for the way in which the powerful flavor and amazing texture of the morels combine with the cold of the chilled powdered foie in a fabulous fusion that seems to stimulate all one's taste buds at once. Paco Pérez's mastery of technique is impressive, and he deploys it in the service of a style of cuisine in which synthesis is a watchword and products of topmost quality are showcased. It finds its most quintessential expression in the tasting menu: "It's cooking the way we feel it ought to be, food that's exciting in the true sense of the word."

Art and gastronomy

For Paco, the creative process begins and ends with work, and thinking time has to be fit in where possible. "Every day we set aside a few minutes for creative thought. Everyone contributes their ideas. Some things crop up naturally, while others we go looking for; nothing comes about by accident—it's all worked on in-depth beforehand." Seasonality is one example of the sort of the things he is talking about: "Since we're already familiar with what products each season brings, we consider their potential in



advance, and when they arrive we're ready for them. We pick them up, handle them, taste them and put our ready-thought-out schemes into practice. Sometimes, you need only a couple of elements to construct a complex dish, because of their textures and different flavors, different colors—it all depends on what you're aiming to do and on your belief in the viability of the end result. You can make a very complex dish only to find that your customers don't get the point, or a simple one that people love."
The capacity to gauge his customers' emotional responsiveness is clearly part of the magic and artistry of a gifted chef.
Seaweed is currently the focus of Paco's attention and experimentation. "We're working with seaweed from Antonio Muiños (*Spain Gourmetour*, No 72); we're already using a natural seaweed gel—it looks just like a jelly—that we make primarily from kombu (*Laminaria saccharina*). Kombu is brown seaweed that tastes strongly of the sea and gives off a pungent scent suggestive of ripe olives, freshly-cut grass, celery and mustard against a background of iodine. I'm tempted to declare that everything about Miramar reveals creativity of one sort or another. This sounds rather gushing, but closer inspection of the restaurant décor makes it seem less so. Paintings of various sizes line the dining room walls, and I notice that the particularly engaging smaller ones all seem to share a common feature that I can't quite identify. The explanation turns out to be that they are all painted on old Miramar menus which, when they are out of date, the restaurant donates to painters in the artists' colony of Cadaqués (Girona). That explains the sweep of blue suggestive of a stretch of coastline that all the pictures incorporate to a greater or lesser degree. Signatories include big names, among them Catalan painters Antoni Pitxot (a friend of Salvador Dalí's) and Carlos Pazos (winner of the Spanish National Plastic Arts award in 2004), Japanese painter Koyama, and Uruguayan artist Ignacio Iturria (the oil paintings in the various dining areas are also by Iturria). Not for the first time, I note the affinity between top chefs and the art world. They're a creative lot, whatever their medium.

Journalist **Almudena Muyo** *worked for over twelve years as a reporter on her special field of international trade before joining the* Spain Gourmetour *team as editorial co-coordinator.*

Restaurant MIRAMAR
www.miramar.cat

Restaurant ENOTECA
www.hotelartsbarcelona.com/sub/20/32/es/restaurantes-enoteca

Restaurant THE MIRROR
www.themirrorbarcelona.com/restaurante.php

A Question of PRESTIGE

Gourmets love it. Restaurateurs rave about it. Cured ham from the free-range, acorn-fed Ibérico pig has always been appreciated in Spain. But now it is making its mark around the world and one firm stands out for the quality of its product. It is located in the west of the country where pastures dotted with oak trees stretch to the horizon.

TEXT
DAVID BAIRD/©ICEX

PHOTOS
JOSELITO

Travel to Spain's western provinces and you find a land of rolling grasslands and big skies. Centuries ago this majestic but unyielding terrain produced the *conquistadores*, desperate adventurers from Extremadura who traveled to the New World in search of fame and fortune. Today this region bordering Portugal has its own source of wealth—one which attracts the interest of gourmets worldwide.
An army of pigs roams over endless pastures, gorging on the abundant acorns from the thousands of oak trees. From these animals comes an important Spanish export: succulent hams and an array of other pork products.
A certain mystique has grown around Spanish cured ham and, among the cognoscenti, the town of Guijuelo in Salamanca province (Castile-Leon) has acquired a reputation for producing the finest examples. In fact, while the hams are cured here, the pigs are to be found largely in the Extremadura region.
Of all the ham producers, none enjoys greater prestige than the family firm of Joselito, which exports its products to 48 countries and now has China and the United States in its sights. Hams from Joselito, among the most expensive on the market, have won acclaim from leading chefs. According to Basque maestro Juan Mari Arzak and Carme Ruscalleda (her restaurant near Barcelona and one in Tokyo boast a total of five Michelin stars, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 74), Joselito's is "the best ham in the world."

More than raising pigs

On a recent visit to Guijuelo, Robert Parker, considered the most influential

wine critic, praised Joselito's hams as "Spain's greatest culinary treasure and one of the world's finest natural products." As for the renowned Ferran Adrià, he says: "Joselito is my life."
So what is the secret of this success? Astute marketing is undoubtedly part of the answer. But there is more to it, as a visit to the company's headquarters reveals.
At first sight, Guijuelo (population 6,000) is an unremarkable sort of place. But, thanks to its flourishing business in pork products, it is one of Spain's most prosperous communities, with relatively few unemployed. There may be an economic crisis in other parts of Spain, but not here. At 1,000 m (3,280 ft) above sea level, the town enjoys an ideal climate for curing pork: chilly in winter, hot in summer. There are many curing sheds (*secaderos*), but that of Joselito surely has the most impressive entrance—an imposing ultra-modern façade of steel, glass and timber. Step inside and you discover that there is a good deal more to the ham business than merely raising pigs and hanging up raw meat to cure for a few months.

Presiding over Joselito is Juan José Gómez, the fourth generation of a family which started the business in the late 19th century. José's sophisticated palate has developed over the 30 years he has worked in the family business; he started at the age of 15. And there is no more enthusiastic promoter of his product. "The taste of our ham is something special," he asserts. "It lasts for maybe two hours and it is different from other gourmet foods. I like caviar but I tire of it, and the same goes for truffles. But I never tire of ham."
While his brother Juan Luis concentrates on administering the breeding and rearing of the company's many herds of pigs, José is an indefatigable global traveler as he expounds the qualities of his firm's products. "We've invented nothing," insists José. "The curing methods come from the time of the Romans. We follow a long tradition, but until recently nobody investigated exactly why one ham turned out better than another. Now we have a laboratory staff who analyze our products and methods so that we can improve in all areas."

Nature and research

Joselito's cerdos ibéricos de bellota roam over more than 100,000 ha (247,105 acres) of *dehesas* (Heart of oak, page 50), much of it the company's property and the rest rented, in the Extremadura and Andalusia regions, Salamanca province and Portugal. As part of a 30-year reforestation plan, every year the company plants 70 to 80 thousand trees, mostly holm oaks (*Quercus ilex*) and cork oaks (*Quercus suber*). The company's efforts were rewarded this year with a management certificate from

the Forest Stewardship Council (FCC), a non-governmental organization promoting responsible forest management worldwide. It is the first time a business of this type has been selected anywhere in the world.
A key aspect in producing quality hams is the animals' freedom to roam. Each pig forages for food and water over 2 to 4 ha (4.9 to 9.8 acres) of pasture. This keeps them in shape, which contributes to the particular texture of their flesh. During *la montanera*, the months between October and February, each pig eats about 15 kg (33 lb) of acorns a day. When the two-year-old pigs weigh about 180 kg (396 lb), 40,000 or so are transported to Guijuelo to be slaughtered. The hams are stored in sea salt for a week or so, then washed and hung in the secaderos, with immaculately maintained, carefully ventilated chambers. In summer heat, the hams sweat and the outer fat melts and penetrates the muscular fibers, a process vital in making the meat tender and aromatic.
For further maturing the hams are stored in dark *bodegas* at temperatures between 14 and 18°C (57.2 and 64.4°F) and humidity between 60 and 80%. More than 400,000 hams, from the years 2004 to 2011, hang in Joselito's installations. Hams from the *paleta*, or shoulder, are cured for a minimum of two years, and hind-leg hams, known as the Gran Reserva, for at least three years. A select number, vintage hams known as the Colección Premium, are matured for more than 82 months. Most of these hams are pre-sold and, according to José Gómez, demand exceeds supply.
During the curing process, an expert *jamonero* checks quality by thrusting a bone probe (the *cala*) into the flesh and then sniffing it. Experience is highly valued among Joselito's 50 employees at Guijuelo. Many have decades of service, and when 29 shared in a 41-million-euro win on Spain's national lottery four years ago, most of them chose not to retire, but to continue working for the company.
The succulent meat in Joselito's hams is purple-red and marbled with veins of pinkish fat. It is, claims the firm, a healthy product, containing oleic acid, vitamins and natural antioxidants which help reduce cholesterol and the risk of arteriosclerosis. Joselito backs this up with the results of scientific surveys, and points out that 100 g (3.5 oz) of their ham contains fewer calories than a plateful of rice of the same weight. To improve quality, a staff of 15 in Joselito's research and development department analyzes everything, from the pig's diet to the final product.
Authentic hams from the acorn-fed pigs are clearly identified with numbered labels. Clients order their hams at least two years in advance. Most of those maturing in Guijuelo bear labels indicating they are already sold to gourmet shops and top restaurants, a system of advance purchase found only in premium products like vintage wine.
While the final product is not quite worth its weight in gold, it is highly valued by gourmets—and they are willing to pay for it. A Gran Reserva ham weighing 8 kg (17.6 lb) sells for around 560 euros in the gourmet department of El Corte Inglés (Spain's leading department store).

Headed for premium markets

Every year the company markets some well-aged hams in designer packages for its Colección Premium. Last year 55 hams of this special edition sold for 2,500 euros each. The boxes containing the hams, designed by the Moneo Brock Studio, were works of art which could be converted into elegant lamps. At a charity auction in Poland last year, a seven-year-old Joselito ham in a Moneo box went for no less than 23,000 euros.
Joselito also markets pork loin and various varieties of pork sausage, *chorizo, salchichón* and *longaniza* (spiced with pepper, salt and garlic), all from free-range Ibérico pigs and naturally cured.
Around 20% of Joselito's production is exported and for much of the year director José Gómez is on the road, working with a marketing team. The company uses seminars and tastings to spread the word and it collaborates with Dom Pérignon, presenting ham as the perfect accompaniment to champagne. But personal contact is all-important and José has forged links with leading restaurants and gourmet shops, including Harrods and Fortnum & Mason in London, KaDeWe in Berlin and Hédiard in Paris. Among the leading restaurants

serving Joselito hams are Cracco Peck in Milan, L'Atelier de Joel Robuchon in Paris, Carme Ruscalleda in Tokyo, Akelarre in San Sebastián and La Viña del Ensanche in Bilbao.
Traditionally, Europe has been the strongest export market. Britain is the longest entrenched, but Germany, Italy, France, and Scandinavia are not far behind and Asia, Australia and Latin America are increasing in importance. Recently Russia has entered the scene. "They've given our product a great welcome and we're very pleased with our progress there," says the company.
Joselito is preparing to export to the US, a particularly tough challenge. American aficionados love Spanish ham but only small quantities reach the US market and it is little known among the American public at large. The first hurdle, acquiring official sanction to import Spanish pork, requires the Guijuelo installations to be inspected so that they can be certified as up to US health standards. This should be no problem for Joselito, but the greater obstacle is making Spanish ham as familiar to American consumers as Italy's prosciutto.
The Italian ham is as well-established in the US as Italian olive oil, so it's a question of raising awareness. "The Italian lobby is very strong in the US, but we are working to market our product there," says José.
Then there is China, potentially the biggest market of all. An estimated 100 million Chinese consumers have a high level of purchasing power, and by 2015 up to 300 million may be as affluent as the average European.
But, as José Gómez knows, the new superpower presents special difficulties. "We have already been checked out by their health inspectors and shown our products there," he says. "Our hams are appreciated by many of the elite. The Chinese like small snacks similar to *tapas* (bite-sized portions) and they like pork. Being able to buy and consume a product like our best ham is a question of prestige.
"I have visited China seven times and will be going again this year. It's going to be a task of 15 to 20 years to make our hams widely known. But first we have to be sure to appoint the right importer and distributor."
Spain exports annually around 20,000 tons (40 million lb) of cured leg and shoulder hams, from all breeds, representing sales worth more than 170 million euros. Only 10% of Spanish cured ham comes from the Ibérico breed, but it is this product which sets the standard and reinforces the country's prestige in foreign markets. In the words of Ferran Adrià: "Hams like those of Joselito are the standard bearer of a sector which the whole world can enjoy."

David Baird, born in England, has worked on newspapers and magazines in the UK and around the world, including Canada, Australia and Hong Kong. Since the 1970s he has been based in Spain and has covered the country, in words and pictures, for a variety of international media. Twice winner of Spain's national award for foreign travel writers, he has also written a number of books, fact and fiction.

Cárnicas Joselito

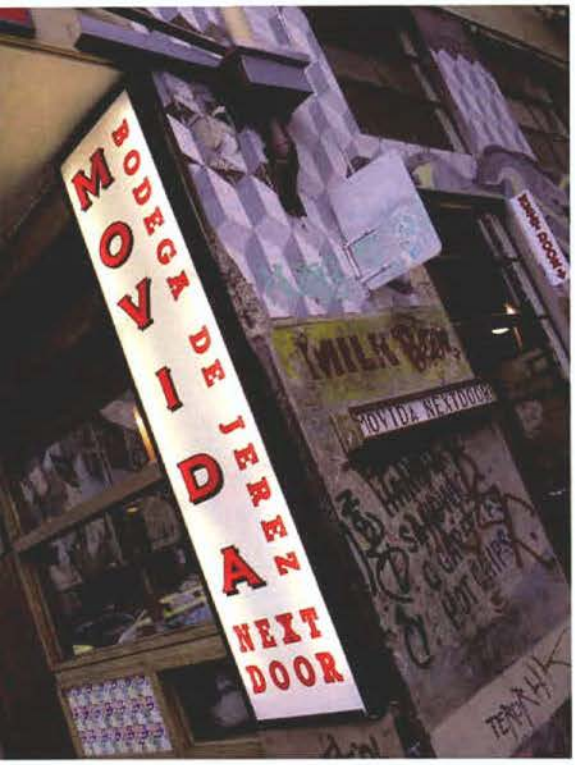
- **Founded:** late 19th century
- **Workforce:** 50
- **Sales 2010 (estimated):** 60 million euros
- **Export quota:** approximately 20%
- **Main foreign markets:** Australia, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Scandinavia and the United Kingdom.
- **Products:**
  Joselito Gran Reserva Ham, cured for a minimum of 36 months.
  Joselito Gran Reserva Paleta (ham from the front leg) with a minimum curation of 24 months.
  Joselito Loin, smoked in natural coal and wood ovens and cured in natural drying rooms for 5-6 months.
  Joselito Chorizo, produced with premium cuts of meat, cured for 6 months in natural drying rooms and cellars.
  Joselito Salchichón, produced with premium cuts of meat, cured for a minimum of 6 months in natural drying rooms and cellars.
- **Website:**
  www.joselito.com (English, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish)
- **Address:** Santa Rita, 8
  37770 Guijuelo, Salamanca
- **Tel.:** (+34) 923 580 375
- **Email:** marketing@joselito.com

Have a Spanish **Break!**

Text
Richard Cornish/©ICEX

Photos
MoVida

Richard Cornish from



In the heart of Melbourne, at the end of a graffiti-lined cobbled lane, is a small Spanish bar with an open kitchen. Inside, on the little charcoal grill, cook plump quail. Next to them is a 100 kg (220 lb) slab of scorching hot steel on which sizzle and splutter a handful of fresh wild-caught prawns. Seasoned with a pinch of salt, a hit of garlic and a drizzle of sherry vinegar, they are sent out to a young couple sitting by the window of this busy bar on the ground floor of an old apartment building. This is MoVida Next Door, the younger sibling to MoVida, the flagship Spanish restaurant of Barcelona-born, Cordoba-raised and 37-year resident of Melbourne, Australia, Frank Camorra.

"We opened MoVida in late 2003," says the self-effacing Camorra. In his early career he trained under one of Melbourne's best Italian chefs before returning to Spain for several years to immerse himself in the culture of his birth country and understand the foundations of Spanish food. "Australians were used to eating an entrée, a main dish and dessert," he explains. "It took a little while but they soon embraced the idea of *tapas* (small bite-size portions of food) and *raciones* (larger portions, ideal for sharing). We cook refined versions of Spanish classics using ingredients every Spaniard would recognize using methods and elaboration that is very modern but still maintains the integrity of the dish."

When a space a few doors down became available in 2008, Camorra and his team, including MoVida Next Door Chef Jimmy Parker, were able to fulfill their dream of creating a bar inspired by their frequent trips to the south of Spain where Camorra's family still lives. By day the room is filled with light, yet it is still intimate. At night it looks out onto the brightly-lit icons of Melbourne: trams, historic Flinders Street Station, Federation Square and the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Inside, old Spanish terracotta roof tiles hang as light fittings and there are just two framed bullfighting posters. The daily specials, straight from the market, are written on blackboards above the bar in Spanish. It is not a pastiche of Spanish aesthetic but, rather, a simple space where the food, wine and the patrons themselves

MELBOURNE

take center stage. The bar staff might slice a few *lonchas* (slices) of Carrasco Ibérico ham to be served with a glass of chilled La Goya manzanilla (a type of fino sherry) or open a tin of Cuca *mejillones en escabeche* (mussels in brine) served with a glass of Moritz beer.

Parker is constrained by space, so the food is very simple with wild-caught seafood being the specialty. Sitting on a bed of ice waiting for their time on *la plancha* (the hotplate) are mussels, freshwater crayfish, large prawns and small bay fish. There is generally a selection of oysters, both native Australian and farmed Pacific which, opened à la minute, are the perfect salty foil for a refreshing glass of cava from Penedès.

The wine list is exclusively Spanish, with a large selection of textural whites from Galicia and Catalonia to match with the seafood-heavy specials menu. Parker mixes traditional cooking techniques, such as the charcoal grill (*la parilla*) and the hotplate with modern technology—so a lamb neck may spend 48 hours cooking in a chilindrón sauce of red peppers, tomatoes, onion, fino (a dry sherry), garlic and thyme inside a plastic sous-vide bag. The end result is a super succulent dish, its richness perfectly balanced by a glass of Tempranillo from DOCa Rioja.

With one of Melbourne's busiest rock venues next door and being within walking distance of the Melbourne Tennis Centre, the crowd who eat and drink at this little 50-seater bar changes as the night goes on. From business people catching up for a bite after work, to Gen Y "food tragics" (that's Australian for foodie), middle-aged couples eating before or after the theater to the post-concert crowd, MoVida Next Door could serve more than 300 people over the course of the night.

MoVida Next Door
Corner Hosier Lane and Flinders Street. Melbourne VIC 3000, Australia. www.movida.com.au

Richard Cornish is a Melbourne-based food writer and an award-winning author of cookbooks, including four on Spanish food.

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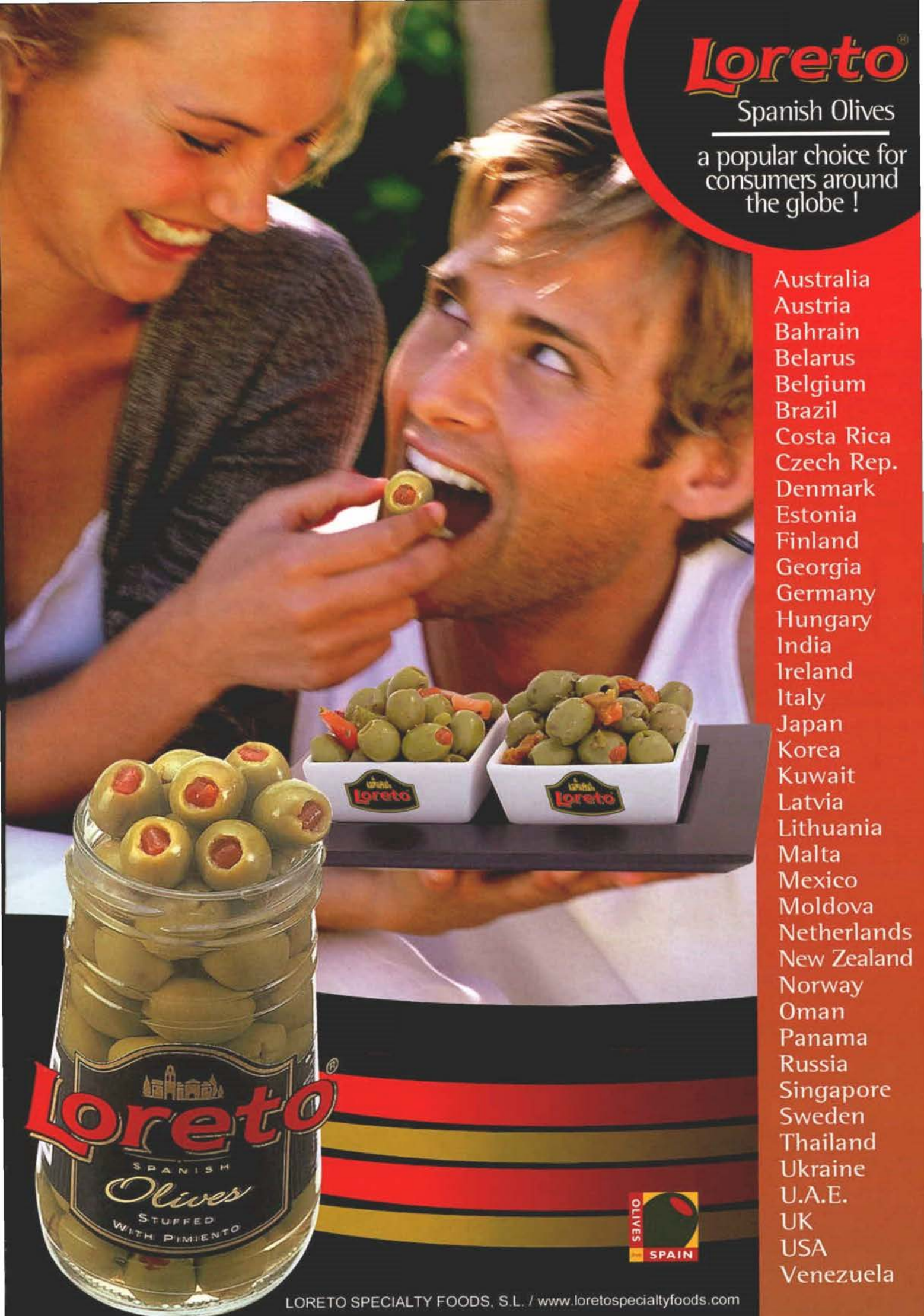
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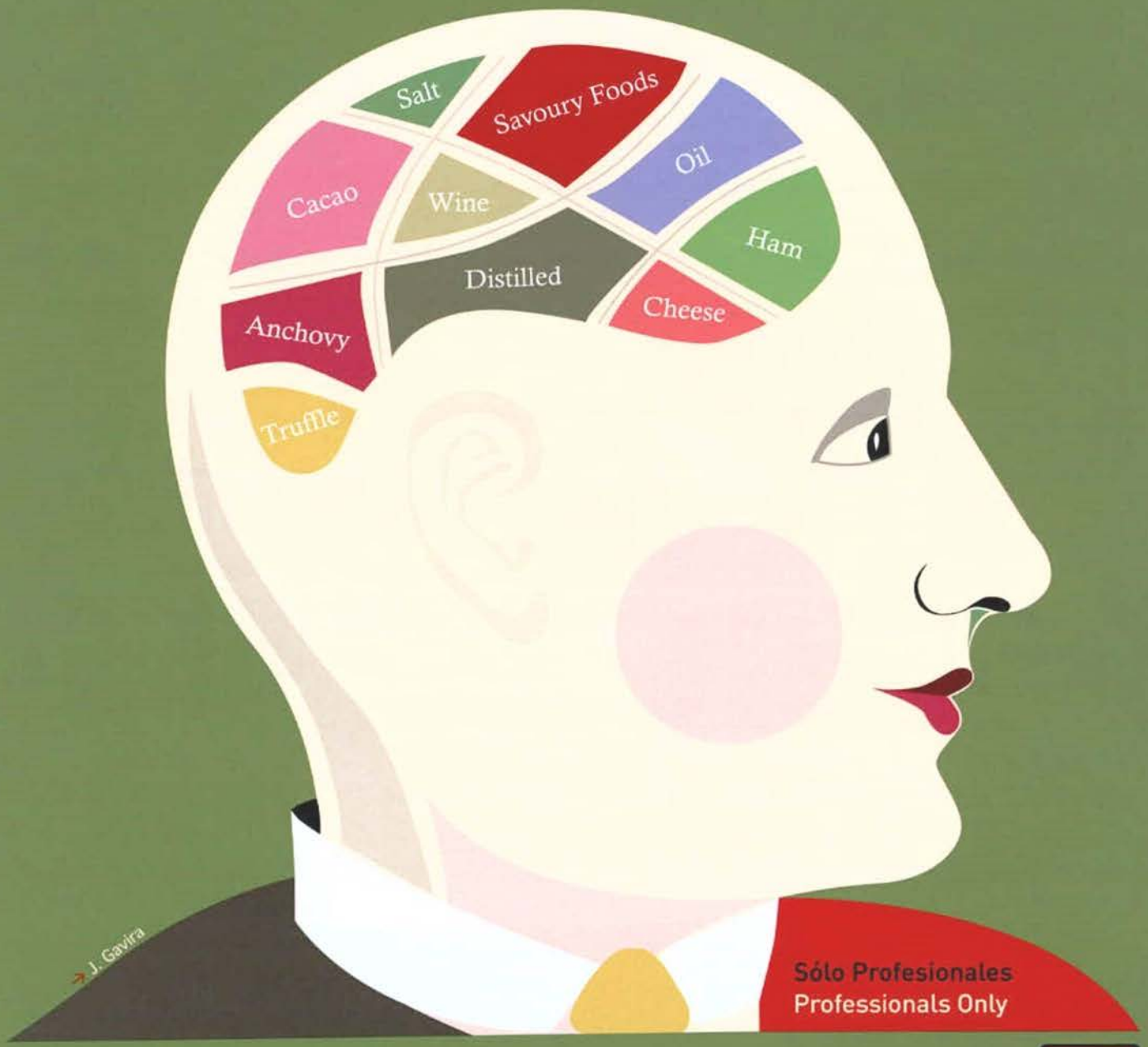

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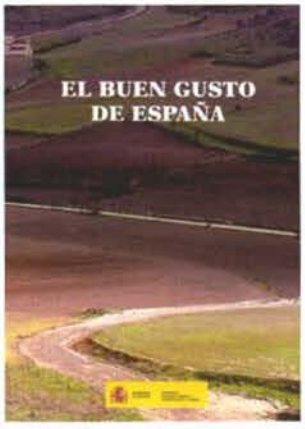
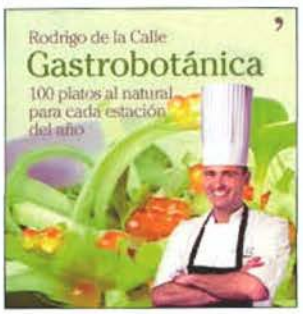


El buen gusto de España

(Spain's Good Taste) by Gonzalo Sol and María Jesús Gil de Antuñano. English, Spanish. This book was first published in 1990. Now in its fourth edition, it continues to garner acclaim, taking home second place at the 2010 Gourmand Awards in the Best Culinary Travel book category.
The text showcases Spain's countless top-flight products with a focus on the environment "as a fundamental ingredient behind their excellence." It pays homage to Spain's land and attributes, which provide quality products and, consequently, quality cuisine. Learn about the country's products and recipes, in short, its food culture, by means of a comprehensive overview of its many gastronomic landscapes—from farmland to fishing territory. Its diversity has given rise to countless Designation of Origin and Protected Geographic Indication products, from hams to olive oils to wines, which are featured here. With an excellent, detailed narrative and truly spectacular photographs, readers are invited on a journey: through Cantabria, the Balearic Islands, along the Ebro River, through Spain's pasturelands, along the Mediterranean coast. Indubitably, a book of this kind would not be complete without a selection of regional recipes, both traditional and modern, some recommended by top chefs (re: Subijana, Adrià), including Sea bass with goose barnacles, olive oil pearls and rocket, Stewed rabbit, Roast chicken with lobster, and Rice with black sausage and sea urchin. In short, this text packs a delicious punch of information and images. *(Spain's Ministry for the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs, https://aplicaciones.mapa.es/tienda)*

La cocina en su tinta

(Cuisine, in its Own Ink) by Spain's National Library, et. al. Spanish. This book is a catalogue of the three-month exhibition of the same name organized by Spain's National Library. The exhibition offers an in-depth look at gastronomy and cooking, a chronological journey on the subject, using an extensive selection of the library's materials. According to Ana Santos, the Library's Cultural Director: "Start with the appetizer—the Middle Ages—and finish with dessert—i.e. current-day." The event covers a range of topics, from the history of sweets and pastries and the evolution of food and gastronomy in Spain, to kitchen utensils and technology and innovations in cooking. This text comes in a sleek black case and includes a DVD on the exhibition with commentaries from participants, as well as a small historical recipe book. *(Biblioteca Nacional de España, http://publicaciones.administracion.es)*



Gastrobotánica. 100 platos al natural para cada estación del año

(Gastrobotanics. 100 Dishes for Every Season) by Rodrigo de la Calle. Spanish. Aranjuez-based chef Rodrigo de la Calle is the maximum proponent (along with his partner in crime, biologist Santiago Orts) of "gastrobotanics", a term coined by the pair but which has nonetheless caught on, referring to the importance of vegetables and their seasonality and quality, and with a focus on using sustainable raw materials. They work to bring long-forgotten veg back to the fore, giving them pride of place in creative dishes. Here De la Calle has compiled a selection of 100 light recipes where the protagonist is vegetables; they are not, however, vegetarian recipes. They simply highlight cooking which is natural, healthy, and environmentally friendly. Suggestions include Aranjuez strawberry tempura with chocolate and pepper soup, Anchovies in a wild chard marinade, and Veal, cardoon and cauliflower stew. The book is divided into appetizers, entrees and desserts, with suggestions in line with winter, spring, summer and fall, enabling chefs at home to buy items which are in season. And rest assured, all of the vegetables included in the book are easily found in the market. The text also includes specific information on the veggies covered in the book, culinary techniques, and general tips on dish presentation. Looks like it's time to welcome a new and delicious trend into your kitchen! *(Ediciones Planeta, S.A.,www.planeta.es)*

Las cocinas del Camino de Santiago

(Cuisines of Santiago de Compostela) by various authors. Spanish. Every year thousands of people take to St. James' Way, making the pilgrimage to the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral. It is, indubitably, a spiritual journey. But it's also a delicious one. This book features the trip from a gastronomic perspective, highlighting the cuisines found on the way. As the route's roots can be dated to Medieval times, this text has a lot to cover, including: recipes, culinary traditions and customs, and food products from areas on the three main routes (France, the coast, and the Vía de la Plata). Each chapter covers a different region through which the camino travels and includes information on its traditional cuisine, history, and wines, as well as a selection of restaurant suggestions. The book is a little big to take with you, but it is an indispensable tool when planning your trip! *(Algusto Ediciones, S.L., editor@algustoediciones.com)*

6 cocineros de Castilla y León

(6 Chefs from Castile-Leon) by Fernando Lázaro Arranz. Spanish. Some time ago, an event was organized in Spain's Castile-Leon region by the Valladolid city government and the local wine museum whereby 6 Michelin-star restaurants got together and planned a special meal, open to the public, every Friday. Each chef prepared six tasting menus, each comprising six dishes and created over the course of six months. These evenings were called "Dining with the Stars." *6 Chefs* showcases this extraordinary dining experience, and each restaurant is featured separately with excellent details about both it and the project, along with the chefs' thought processes. These pages also include their outstanding dishes, such as Warm pumpkin gazpacho with fresh Burgos cream cheese and olive oil snow, Roast pigeon with quinoa and apple stew, and Mushroom, Norway lobster, saffron and ham ravioli. *(Editorial Everest, S.L., www.everest.es).*

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