

Slide 1 – Header – Welcome, Introductions, RECORD

We will be exploring five wines tonight, one from Galicia, the region in blue in the upper left of the map, and four from Castilla Y Leon [\[kas'tiʎa i le'on\]](#), right next to Galicia in green. These are two of the five areas that we did wine tastings at in the Spanish Wine Tasting trip Beth and I took last September. That trip is being offered again this year and if you have any interest, I will introduce you to the person who has led this trip 11 times. (\$6,800 plus airfare)

To help talk about these areas and the wines I have pictures from that trip. But we will not be drinking wines from the vineyards that we visited. With the geographically diverse group that we have for this tasting, I had to pick wines that were available from Wine.com. The ones that we visited were out of stock so I went to other good wines from those areas so the pictures will not be of the area but not the specific vineyards that we are tasting. I do have slides with recommendations of other Spanish wines that we are not tasting tonight and many of those are ones that we visited on this trip.

I will be posting these slides and my notes on the blog and happy to send them to you if you send me an email asking for them.

Slide 2 – Wines we will be drinking - Here are the five wines we will be drinking tonight. I will talk in a few minutes about my recommendations for letting the wine breathe and getting them to the temperature to enjoy the full taste.

We will drink these wines in the order from left to right. Pour yourself a half glass or so of the Albariño and we will get started.

For most European wines the primary designation is the geographic location, and the secondary designation is the grape. In the US that is reversed and we talk about Cab or Zin, or Chardonnay first and Russian River Valley or Santa Barbara second. Here the first wine and the two Mencia's both put the grape ahead of the region which is unusual for Europe. The 2nd wine has the Rueda region prominently on the label and our last wine also has the Ribera del Duero region on the label.

Slide 3 – La Caña

Our house Albariño is La Caña (*CAHN ya*) which is owned and operated by Jorge Ordoñez. It consistently gets 90-92 points from the reviewers and is about \$18-20 and pretty widely available in the US. It demonstrates the complexity, intensity, and longevity Albariño can achieve when sourced from old vineyards and using serious winemaking practices. They ferment 35% of the wines in small old oak puncheons and 65% in stainless steel tanks. The pressed grapes are left for Sur le aging for eight months and are punched down biweekly.

This is a delightfully crisp dry white wine. The vineyards are right on the ocean, and I sometimes think I get a little of the salt aroma of the ocean but that is probably my imagination. This is one of our two primary seafood wines. I would not limit it to just seafood, I think it is a great cocktail wine as well. The color is straw yellow. The aromas are bright and citrusy, and the palate has a nice medium body. Medium alcohol level at 13.5%. Typically sells for about \$18 and is pretty widely distributed so check your local wine shops. If they have it, you will save money over the Wine.com price plus shipping.

This wine is 100% Albarino. The D.O. does allow some blending of other grapes.

You will see the squiggle above the N in both Albariño and Caña and you heard me add a Y sound in the pronunciation. One of my greatest fears when I stand before St Peter at the Pearly Gates is that there will be a foreign language requirement to enter, and I will be taking the down elevator. But on the wine and location names I will try to give something close to the correct pronunciation so you can ask for it correctly when you are shopping.

The other letter that often comes up related to Spanish wines is the pronunciation of the letter X. In the first line on the slide you will see that the Albariño wines are from the Rias Baixas "Denominación de Origen" or D.O. in Galicia. The letter "x" is pronounced "sh". Rias Baixas is pronounced *Ree as BY shes*. I will talk about why D.O. is a very good indicator of good wine in a few slides.

Slide 4 – Temp and Breathing

Hopefully you had a chance to follow my suggestions and these wines were opened right after your lunch today and the two white wines came out of the refrigerator about 30 minutes ago and the three red wines were in the refrigerator for an hour and just came out. I tried to think of a way where we could taste the difference that the temperature and long breathing time makes, but it would have been too complicated.

You can try it at home with some of your other wines and see what the difference is. For any young red wine use a small juice glass and pour it half full and plastic wrap it when you open it in the early afternoon. When you pour the wine that has been in the refrigerator for an hour before dinner. pour the wine in the into a wine glass and compare the tastes. The small taste will be at room temp and had much less chance to breathe than the one coming out of the refrigerator, and you should get many different aspects off the taste that the other sample does not have. If you have an instant digital thermometer for cooking, check the temp of both wines. The sample that was not refrigerated will likely be around 72° and the one that was in the refrigerator for an hour would be around 62°.

You can do the same with any white wine by pouring a sample glass and keeping it covered in the refrigerator until you are ready to drink it. That wine will not have breathed and will be about 40° while the wine you took out 30 minutes ago would be around 58°.

Slide 5 - Rias Baixas

The Spanish believe that when God finished creating the world he looked down and was very pleased with what he had created. He reached his hand down to touch it and where his fingers touched the Earth he created the Rias Baixas inlets. The darker color segments on the map are sub regions of Rias Baixas which can add their name to the label. One of the recommended wines is from O Rosal.

If you really know the vineyards of Spain or are looking for a specific wine from a recommended vineyard, then the information on the label is probably not very important to you. If you are like me and learning about Spanish wines, then there is one rule that can really help you improve the chance that a wine you select off the shelf or from a restaurant wine list will be one that you will enjoy. That rule is to buy a wine that has a D.O. on the label. This "Denominación de Origen" (designation of origin) lets you know that the wine you are considering has met a set of standards defined by the leading vineyards in a specific geographic area and therefore is likely of good quality. It may not be to your taste, and any bottle can have a bad cork or have been exposed to too high or too low temperatures in transit into this country - so there are no guarantees. Some winemakers feel severely constrained by the D.O. requirements and want the freedom to make their own wines. Wines that do not have a DO have not committed to those standards of quality and could be very premium wines or ones where they are going for high volume over quality and just plonk. If you know nothing about the wine, not having D.O. is a much higher risk.

Spain is divided into 17 Autonomous Communities (AC), which are wine making regions, and they are shown in the map that was on the title slide. In each of those AC's, wine makers in some of the smaller geographic have banded together and defined a set of standards that a wine must meet in order to put DO on the label, e.g., DO Rias Baixas in the Galicia AC. The winemakers agreed on these standards, they were not government imposed. Each DO has a group of members that monitors compliance with those rules and determines who can put that designation on their label. There are approximately 70 DO's in Spain.

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Having a DO defining a fairly small geography lets the standards be set for their specific terroir. Every DO that we were exposed to has a standard for the yield that can be produced, most commonly 20,000 liters of wine for each hectare of vines. That standard requires pruning vines to limit the volume of grapes they produce.

The taste of the grape is primarily dependent on what nutrients and related trace elements that their root system delivers to the grapes. The root system matures and delivers more elements to the grapes as the vine ages. The root system of each vine delivers X volume of different elements to the grapes on that vine. That is divided up by the number of grapes on that vine. The more grapes, the lower percentage of X that they get and the less flavor the wines made from those grapes will have. If the vines are pruned to produce fewer grapes, they will have a higher percentage of X and bring more flavor to the wine. 20,000 liters per hectare was frequently referenced as the highest yield allowed by the D.O. covering the winery we were visiting. But every one of those wineries we visited was committed to a much more aggressive pruning for most if not all their wines to ensure the taste quality they wanted to deliver. 12,000 liters was common and for some wines it was down as low as 8,000 liters.

Asking a winemaker in any country about his yields is a very good way to start a good discussion with them and understand where they are trying to position their wines in the quality/price continuum. It also shows that you can have an intelligent conversation with them about their wine and sometimes that will positively impact the quality and quantity of wines that you get to taste.

Within the Galicia AO the Rias Baixas D.O. is right on the coast of the Atlantic region while the Ribero del Duero D.O. is more inland, so they have entirely different soil, rainfall, and other conditions. Each D.O. has standards defined by the growers in that specific geography so they fit the terroir of that area and the grape varieties that are being grown there. I will only buy Spanish Albariño that has D.O. Rias Baixas on the label. In short, I look for a D.O. on any bottle of Spanish wine that I am not totally familiar with.

We stayed two nights in a beautiful old Parador outside the town of Baiona. Tip of peninsula right on the ocean.

Slide 6 – View from Parador

This is a view from our hotel. The only great sand beaches we saw for swimming in the Atlantic were up in the beautiful town of San Sebastian in the Basque Country region. But the ocean views were great, especially sitting on the patio and enjoying the salt air with a nice bottle of Albarino.

Slide 7 – Albarino street stand

Outside of major cities when we walked into a café and asked for a glass of wine it was usually about 2€ and they put a bowl of nuts or potato chips on the table to accompany it. Walking down the street you will see stands like this selling local Albarino wines for about 8€ and they have the D.O. for about 8€. Very unlike buying wine in Montgomery County MD, and those wines in the stand are generally all sold within 20 Km of the vineyard.

In addition to Albarino wine, the Rias Baixas region is the source of much of Spain's delicious seafood, especially shellfish.

Slide 8 – Seafood

Picture 1 - We took short ride from our hotel to the town of O Grove where we had a chartered boat for just our group. They took us out into the Ria de Arousa where there are over 2,200 of barges or “Bateas” where they raise enormous amounts of shellfish. I was listening to the captain explain the process and taking pictures of one of the crew on one of the bateas, so I did not take notes so this summary is from memory and I hope reasonably close to correct.

Picture 2 - Each of the bateas has 420 ropes hanging down into the water 5-10 meters in the water. Each rope can be used to raise mussels, or scallops, or oysters. The picture shows one of the crew members on the bateas with a rope for each kind of shellfish. Each is seeded with tiny baby shells and put down in the Ria which is very rich in the ocean plant life that the shellfish thrive on. The rope with the mussels can grow about 20 kilos of mussels on each meter of rope in two years and there are about 300 mussels in the picture below. The scallop and oyster ropes each grow a few dozen full sized shellfish in 3 years. Because of the 2-3 year time required, thousands of bateas are needed so a significant crop can be harvested each year.

Picture 3 - We were sitting in groups of six on the top deck of the boat and were then served a platter of very large and very fresh mussels along with a nice bottle of Albariño for each group as shown in the picture. Not surprisingly, the bottle of wine for our group must have had a leak because it was empty very quickly, but a new full bottle rapidly took its place.

Picture 4 – Our second day we had a wonderful luncheon in the town of Vigo which sits on a bay just off the ocean, at the Calle delas Ostras restaurant. We started with a freshly shucked oyster for each of us that was briny and delicious. Then the platter of food shown in the picture showed up and there was one of these platters for every two people! It included: Strong Crab, 2 blue crabs like we get in the Chesapeake, scallops, langoustine, at least a dozen shrimp, mussels, razor clams, a fish filet (sorry, I forget what fish it was), and a bowl with long thin black shells. Those were barnacles where you broke open the shell and sucked out the strip of barnacle. I tried one and can check off barnacle as tried it

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and don't need to do it again. Beth declined to try one. There was a very nice bottle of wine on each table of 6 people and when it got low, another one appeared. The price for this meal, wine, tax and tip included, was only €30! I think it would 3X that to get anything close to the quantity and quality of very fresh seafood that we had. I would not expect that the big platter of food for two people is on their standard menu if you walk into the restaurant. I believe it was something that Howard put together with the restaurant owner as a package deal.

This was our introduction to having our full meal of the day starting sometime between 2:00 and 3:00 each day and running for at least an hour. After a lunch like this you did not even think about food until 8:00 at the earliest and just something light with some wine was plenty.

Slide 9 – Recommended Albarino wines

Martin Codax is a co-op wine that buys grapes from many growers that only grow grapes but don't make wine. Only \$15 at most retail outlets and a very small step below the La Cana in quality.

The Quinta Couselo O Rosal and Turonia were two wines that we tasted on our trip and they are very good but not as easy to find as the La Cana and Martin Codax. You remember the darker areas on the Rias Baixas map? The one right on the Portuguese border was O Rosal and the Quinta Couselo has that on their label. It has some small amounts of other local grapes, Louiero and Caiño, added to the Albariño.

Portugal makes some very good Albariño wines and they call it Alvarinho. Much better than the very simple Vino Verde that is the basic white table wine in Portugal.

What do you think of this Albariño?

Save some and compare to the next white wine which will be very different. Both are dry wines but while the Albarino is noteworthy for its crispy citrus, this Rueda is noteworthy for its full body and complexity.

Slide 10 - Nisia Verdejo from the Rueda region

The grape of the Rueda region is Verdejo and most of the wines will say Rueda, not Verdejo on the front of the label. In this label Rueda appears twice and Verdejo only once in smaller type. Rueda is the region producing the top quality white wine that Spain makes, similar to where Chardonnay fits in the US wine industry. This Rueda consistently gets ratings in the low 90s from different reviewers.

The golden color starts to tell the story that this wine has a rich texture and more complexity in its taste and aroma. It really needs to be about 60° to show all the rich flavors that it has. The passionfruit aroma with some minerality contribute to that rich complexity along with flavors of both yellow and green fruit. A little stronger alcohol at 14%.

The Nisia is from Bodegas Ordóñez who works with exclusively ungrafted vineyards of Verdejo planted in the southeastern subzone of D.O. Rueda, the only part of the appellation that completely resisted phylloxera due to the sandy quality of the soils. The philosophy of the winery is to produce authentic Verdejo the old-fashioned way, by working with traditional vineyard sites and using old school winemaking techniques. Their vineyards are 80 – 100+ years old, and have the label old vines that I will talk about in two slides. In some other vineyards the vines are even much older.

Slide 11 – Wine Regions we are tasting

Looking at a map again, we go down the coast into Portugal to the city of Porto. That is the mouth of the Duoro river. The best Viking cruise that we have taken goes from Porto up to the Spanish border to Salamanca and then back to Porto. The Spanish name for this same river is Duero and as we follow it back to its source, the third green area is Rueda, the home of Spain's best white wine. Just a little bit further back up the river is the Ribera Del Duero which is the D.O. for the last wine we will be having this evening. If you go a little further East and a little North you will see the La Rioja region, the area that Spain is best known for. Rueda and Ribera Del Duero are both D.O.'s in the Castilla Y Leon AC.

Both Galicia and Castilla Y Leon are very wet climates and I will talk more on that.

Slide 12 - Three types of grape vines

One of the things that this weather has done is to have Spain use several alternatives to the traditional way of growing grapes trained on wires as shown is the first picture on the left. This style of vineyard is called Espaldera in Spain. The other two ways of growing vines go back well before the approach of growing wire trained vines and are still in use for several reason.

2nd picture - En Vaso is the oldest style of vineyard and that is shown in the middle picture. In this style each vine is raised as a single plant, like a rosebush, and trimmed to stand on its own. The winemakers we talked with who are using En Vaso are very strong traditionalists who believe they get much better quality this way and prune those vines to only produce about 8,000 liters per hectare. Rueda and Mencia vines are often En Vaso but we saw other vineyards right next to them that were in the Espaldera wire trained style.

3rd picture - The third style is called Pergolas and it uses a wire trained approach but the wires are much higher and used to make a canopy of grape leaves over the vines as shown in the third picture. This is done in areas where there is a lot of rain and when the grapes get wet they absorb moisture through osmosis and the juice gets diluted and makes very poor wine. Also they are much more susceptible to rot. The leaf canopy of the Pergolas keeps the rain off the bunches of grapes. The Pergolas style is frequently used in Galicia for the Albariño vines and also in Castilla Y Leon for a grape called Treixadura and one of the recommendations of other Spanish wines to try is for our favorite Treixadura wine.

Slide 13 - Very old En Vaso vines

One of the terms used in wine making is old vines. Unfortunately, there are no guidelines for what that term means and it is not uncommon that it is a marketing decision and not information on how old the vines were that make up that wine.

When vines pass their middle age, they have a very well-established root system and are bringing up different trace elements from the soil that give them interesting tastes. They also start to produce fewer grapes so all the interesting things that are coming up from the well-established roots are being distributed to fewer grapes, so those grapes bring much more flavor to the wine. That is why the term old vines was added to the label to show that this was a premium wine made from the smaller amount of very flavor filled grapes.

- Cabernet Sauvignon vines start to show this aging process at about 40 years old but it is not uncommon for vines that are 30 years old to be called OV.
- Pinot Noir vines start to show their age at about 60 years old and by the time they get to 75 years old they are producing such few grapes that they need to be pulled out and a new vine started in its place. Burgundy does a good job of only putting the “Vieille Vignes” label only on wines with a significant concentration of juice from vines over 60 years old.
- Zinfandel vines have a pretty long life. The Dry Creek Valley in Sonoma County has many vineyards that are older than 100 years and they are making some very good Zinfandel at great prices.
- Grenache, or Garnacha in Spain, is the most planted grape in Spain. It also has a pretty long life and vines 115-120 years old are still producing enough high quality grapes to make them worthwhile.
- But Verdejo in Rueda wins the prize. The big picture is a Verdejo vine in a vineyard we visited that is over 200 years old and still being harvested each year. The dark clump under the leaves is the vine and it looked like a stump that had been left about 6” in diameter, but it had branches off it with clumps of grapes on those branches. The leaves on the left are one of the branches off of that vine. The little picture is a new Verdejo vine too young to produce grapes good enough to go into the wine.

Slide 14 – Topographic Map of Spain

Many, but not all, of the Mencia and Verdejo vineyards that we saw were En Vaso. And many of the Albarino vineyards were Pergolas. The reason for this is the rain. The red dots are where the wines we are drinking came from. They are all in what the map shows as green.

The Central part of Spain is a large plateau or elevated plain running all the way across the country. For you My Fair Lady fans, the rain in Spain falls seldom on the plains. When we flew into Madrid in September I was so surprised looking down from the plane that everything was just a dark tan color with occasional bits of green color. And where's that blasted rain – not the plains, not the plains. The water coming in from the Atlantic hits the Pyrenees and runs along it and that is where Spain gets by far the biggest rainfall. When we talked with people in Madrid on where we had been, they said we were in Green Spain, it had that nickname.

Slide 15 – Recommended Rueda Wines

We visited the Javier Sanz vineyard and that is where we saw the 200 year old vine. I would have loved to have used one of these two wines for this tasting but Wine.com shows them as out of stock. No way of knowing if they plan to order more. For those local to DC, Calvert Woodley has both in stock. If you like the Nisia, I encourage you to try these two wines.

The Malcorta is a clone of the Verdejo that Javier found. The name simply translates to “bad cut” and this clone is very difficult to harvest the grapes from. For that reason it carries a higher price tag.

What did you think of this Rueda?

We were at a Spanish wine tasting dinner last week at one of DC's top Spanish restaurants and the dinner started with an Albarino and then moved to the Malcorta Rueda for second course. It was about a 50-50 split of which one people liked the best, but most really liked one of them and found the other just OK. We are fans of both, but for different menus.

Slide 16 – Matilda Nieves Mencia – now getting to the 3 red wines

(“Men-THEE-ah”) is the pronunciation of the grape.

What makes Mencía special is it has shown the ability to age like other fine wines and it offers rich aromas in the glass. If you love Pinot Noir and other aromatic reds (like Gamay or Cab Franc) then Mencía is something I think you will like. We really enjoy it with a wide variety of different dishes.

This grape is only grown in Spain and Portugal. Mencía is labeled as Jaen (“jyne”) in Portugal.

This first Mencia is from the Ribera Sacra D.O. The second one is from the Bierzo D.O. and that is by far the largest producer of Mencia. This wine is 85% Mencia with 8% Garnacha and 7% Souson. It is a medium bodied wine but with a very deep red color. The aroma is rich with dark plum, blackberry, and mulberry notes. That rich plum aroma carries over to the taste. For a young wine the tannins are velvety and not intrusive when the wine has been given the long time to breathe that we did tonight. I very much agree with the tasting notes on Fresh, Vibrant, and Silky. At \$16 I definitely consider this to be a Best Buy.

Mencía was primarily a light table wine for many years. Beginning early in the 20th century a number of wine makers applied fine wine making techniques to the Mencía grapes which resulted in a medium body wine with great flavor and the popularity of that wine is now growing rapidly. Some of the key actions that led to the significant improvement include:

- Vineyards planted on the south facing side of higher altitude hills.
- Pruning the vines to limit the yield to get grapes with more flavor. In the Bierzo D.O. wine makers are allowed to harvest enough grapes to produce 20,000 liters per hectare. But most of the wine makers that are producing good Mencía are trimming their vines to only produce 12,000 liters per hectare and for some of the premium Mencías, they only get 8,000 liters per hectare, so the grapes have much more flavor.

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- Nurturing old vines to produce smaller quantities of grapes with very rich flavors to be added to the gapes from vines in their peak growing years.
- Maceration and fermentation, with yeasts in contact with the skin of the grapes at 25°C for 15-20 days in a stainless steel tank.
- Very little oak is used in the Mencía process as it can significantly impact the flavors in this medium body wine. When it is used, the wine does have softer tannins.

Slide 17 – Casar de Burbia vineyards

One of the visits we liked the best was to the Casar de Burbia vineyard. We have gotten some of their wines from MacArthur Liquor in DC but they have a very a limited selection and not always in stock. But we loved their wines and I am continuing to look for a source for them.

Our day started when we got off our comfortable bus and climbed up onto the back of a flatbed truck and drove for 20 minutes up into the hills with the winemaker to one of his En Vaso vineyards.

2nd picture - Part of the transition of Mencia into making quality wines mentioned on the last slide was south facing slopes at higher elevations and the middle picture is from we got all the way up in the hills to that vineyard.

3rd picture - The picture on the left is the winemaker in a black shirt talking to us about the vines, pruning them to get the volume level he wants for his wine, and not using any herbicides or other additives, an organic approach they have used for over 100 years. They were harvesting and we got a chance to taste the grapes off the vines before the harvest.

Slide 18 – En Vaso vines ready to harvest

This slide shows the individual En Vaso vines with the clumps of grapes ready for harvest. They can only be harvested by hand.

Slide 19 – Wine Making and Tasting

We then were taken to the vineyard where the winemaker walked us through the winemaking process. In the first picture he has barrels of wine going through the fermentation process with the skins and stems in with the grapes. Twice a day the barrels have to be punched down so the skins are in contact with juice and not floating on top so all the flavor in the skins goes into the juice.

2nd picture - They then took us to a lovely outdoor setting under a big tree for a tasting and they had cheese and charcuterie for us to snack on while we tasted the wines and it was about 3 PM then. It was there that I asked when they opened the wines we were tasting since they were so young but tasted delicious. The winemaker looked surprised at the question and said, “As soon as we got in this morning.” We then got into a discussion on letting young wines breathe for 6-8 hours and about making wines that are meant to be drunk between 55° and 60°. I had similar conversations with the winemakers at several other visits and they gave the same answers, and poked a little fun at how Americans drink their wines taking it off the shelf or out of the refrigerator, pulling the cork, and drinking it. That led to the suggestion that I made for opening the wines and getting them to the desired temperature tonight and I look for your feedback on that at the end of this tasting.

3rd picture - Three of the five wines they gave us are shown in this picture, two of the wines have two bottles in the picture. For each one they poured a nice taste and the winemaker talked about it. When he had gone through each of the wines they put multiple bottles of each of the table for us to pour more of any one we wanted and pass around to the rest of our group of 23 people. The first two wines were their white wines which were made with the Godello grape. This was another wonderful grape that we discovered on this trip but I thought trying to have six wines to taste would be too much, and Godello is not easy to find in the US. The three Mencia wines are on the Recommended slide which follows our next wine.

Slide 20 – Ultreia St. Jacques Mencia

Raul Perez is a very highly regarded Spanish wine maker and this is his entry level Mencia. It is made from very old vineyards planted on clay-calcareous soils. The harvest is carried out manually. Once the grapes arrive at the winery, they ferment in oak barrels with a capacity of 3,000 to 5,000 litres, without temperature control. It is aged in old French oak vats so very little oak flavor from just using old oak. It is not filtered or clarified.

It is a medium bodied red, more like a Pinot Noir than a Cabernet Sauvignon. It does have a dark red color. The aroma has spicy notes and I am not sure what underbrush smells like but that was in the tasting notes from the vineyard. What we like most about the taste is the nice structure and balance and the length of the taste through the finish. Alcohol was 13.5%.

I chose a second Mencia to show that Mencia is also made at higher quality levels with a higher price tag. I really enjoy that prior wine but this one consistently gets in the mid 90's from reviewers which is very good for a \$26 wine. The Casar de Burbia Tebaida that is on the recommendation slide is in the same price range and well worth the extra cost over the nice entry level Mencia wines.

Slide 21 – Wine Folly Graphic

Wine Folly has a very nice write up on Mencia on their website and I pulled this graphic from that. Having tasted two different Mencia's I thought this summary would be of interest. I'll give you a few minutes to look at it while you enjoy the second Mencia.

Slide 22 – Recommended Mencia Wines

The first three wines on this list were from the winery we visited and I highly recommend them, if you can find them. The last one got very good reviews and I tried it and thought it was comparable with the wine we just tasted.

Slide 23 – Bodegas Valderiz Ribera Del Duero

Spain is best known for its red wine from La Rioja, and the wines from that D.O. are very good to great. But most of the reviewers have been in agreement that the very best red wine in Spain is made in the Ribera del Duero D.O. This area was originally Garnacha vines but they replaced with Tempranillo to get better yield. The goal was to make more money by having more wine to sell. The result was making much more money by having very high-quality wines to sell.

The Valderiz is a totally organic wine, with vines over 25 years old. It is dark ruby red in appearance. It is the highest alcohol we have had tonight at 15%. The dense, polished texture carries rich, harmonious flavors. Blackberry and currant notes mingle with espresso, mineral, licorice and spice accents. Lovely floral hints emerge on the long, clean finish. Beautifully sculpted.

The fermentation process is very gentle without intensive extraction, in stainless steel tanks with a capacity of 20,000 kg. During production no enzymes or yeasts are used that do not come naturally from the grapes themselves. Aged two years in French oak, 50% new oak.

94-96 Points from The Wine Spectator in six consecutive vintages. **The Wine Spectator** - "A harmonious red that marries power with finely detailed grace, offering a dense core of tannins tightly meshed with flavors of ripe black currant, fig cake, wild sage and mocha that slowly unfurl on the palate. Sleek and silky in texture, with a firm, lingering and well-spiced finish. Best from 2024 through 2032."

Slide 24 – Two pictures – countryside and in the cellar

One of our other great winery visits was to a vineyard with a similar name, Bodegas Valduero and the next pictures are from that visit. Their one wine that is generally available in the US was out of stock so I had to switch to the Valderiz but I have the Valduero's wines we tasted on the Recommendation page.

The picture on the left is from the winery looking over one of their vineyards down to the Duero River. The other picture is one of their people doing tests on the wine from this year's grapes, while they are fermenting in the barrels. I chose this picture to show what she is wearing in the cellar, a heavy long-sleeved shirt and a quilted vest over it. You will see in some of the next pictures that we were all bundled up for our tour through the cellars. They are below 60° down there and the wine is made to be drunk at that temperature, not 72°. I will stop harping on that subject.

Slide 25 – three pictures – punch down, drinking from the barrel, caves

I could talk for at least 30 minutes about our tour and tasting lunch at Valduero but all the bottles of wine would probably be empty and all of you asleep by then if I did that. These three pictures are from down in the cellar and the first one is this year's vintage, about 3 weeks old in the barrel, being hand punched down.

2nd picture - What was different here is our guide then took glasses and scooped up from that barrel a glass with the fermenting juice and all the skins that were in contact with it. It was starting to taste like wine but was just 3 weeks into the long process and gave us an idea of how the juice turns into wine. Tasting the grapes off the vine, then the juice starting to ferment into wine, and then the latest vintage of that wine out of the bottle at lunch helped us understand the process of making really good wine. The crushed grapes, with seeds, did not add anything pleasant to the tasting from that barrel. BETH INPUT. You see us all bundled up to be warm down in the cellar.

3rd picture - The last picture is shooting down one of the caves that they use to store the wine in barrels for several years before bottling.

Slide 24 – two pictures – wine tasting lunch at Valduero

This was one of our several headline meals that we had on this trip. Our group was seated in a room on the 2nd floor of the winery with glass walls on three sides looking out over the vineyards. We tasted six wines with the meal. The first was their one white wine which was very nice. Then we did four of their standard bottlings, one of which got 95 points from Wine Decanter and one got 97 points. All four of those wines are on the Recommended list two slides from now. I'll talk about the 6th wine on the next slide.

Their specialty was wood roasted lamb and that is the plate that one of the waiters is serving to each person. The entire meal was delicious but the lamb was spectacular.

Slide 25 – Decanting the 5 Liter bottle

The person leading this trip, Howard Freedman, had been one of their importers for years and as a special treat they had him pick one of the 5 liter bottles that they had in the cellar and they took that up to the dining room and after we had enjoyed at least a glass of each of the five wines we had from their wine store, they decanted this bottle and we all enjoyed it after the meal. The little tag is all that was on it and we have no idea if this was a different vintage of one of the four red wines we had tasted or something completely different. This was the 11th time Howard had brought a group there for the tour, tasting, and lunch, but this was the first time they had done this for him, a complete surprise.

The larger the bottle, the better it ages so this five liter bottle will have aged much faster than the 750 ml standard bottles.

Slide 25 – Recommended Ribera Del Duero Wines – update slide

The first four are the ones we had at Valduero. I have not found a local source and will be looking at online sources to try to find them. I did bring back a bottle of the Reserva Premium. The last wine on the list I have in my cellar and is very good and under \$20. Wine.com has at least 6 Ribera del Duero wines that are over \$500.

What did you think of our last wine?

Slide 26 – Other Recommended Spanish wines – add 2 Riojas

We'll finish up with four other recommendations, each from a D.O. that we did not sample this evening.

Ramon Canals Reserva Rose Cava – One of the other top D.O. in Spain is the Penedes which is outside of Barcelona. The Penedes makes some great Cab and other wines but is best known for its Cava, sparkling wine that we prefer to Champagne, and not just for the price. Ramon Canals also makes a Reserva Numerada at the same \$16 price that is a sparkling white wine if you prefer that over Rose. For those in the DC area, it is in stock at Calvert Woodley.

Finca Vinoa is a first cousin to our first wine, the Albarino. It is made from the Treixadura grape and is also a very crisp dry white wine, but with a little more complexity to the taste. Pretty widely available at \$22-25 and highly recommended. It is also on the shelf at Calvert Woodley.

Evodia Old Vine Garnacha – Spain is the 2nd leading wine producer in the world and Garanacha is the grape use to produce the most wine in Spain. This is a great table wine for under \$15.

Bodegas Exopto – We had this last week at the Spanish Wine Tasting Dinner we went to, and it was great with the lamb chops we were served. Very good example of a good Rioja wine. The LAN Crianza Rioja is also one of our favorites from the Rioja D.O.

I also have all of the recommended wines in a list that will be available for download from the Blog or send me an email requesting it if you don't want the full set of slides, or you want both.

Slide 27 Discussion and Feedback

I hope you enjoyed the wines this evening and seeing some pictures and learning a little about two of Spain's A.C's that produce some great wine.

The floor is open for comments and questions. This was the first time we did a wine tasting after the dinner hour, did that work better or worst then the earlier start times that we had.