



An influential figure in modern Spanish wine, Mariano García stands in the cellars of his Bodegas Aalto estate in Ribera del Duero, where he made one of this year's top-rated reds.

wine, and the 2014 (93, \$40) is typically graceful and harmonious. Buil & Giné offers a rare and distinctive rosé (rosat in Catalan); the 2014 (90, \$23) blends Garnacha (80 percent) with Merlot for a dry, firm and full-bodied version, a good match with food.

Another small region making a big impact is Toro. Of the 36 wines I reviewed, 20 rated 90 points or higher, including two at 95 points. Located in north-central Spain, west from Ribera del Duero, Toro grows its local version of Tempranillo to make rich red wines. Rustic in the past, the wines are more plush and modern in style today, offering flavors of black fruits, tar and earth.

The two classic-scorers both lean toward the modern style, but temper ripe fruit with muscle and minerality. The Bodega Numanthia Termanthia 2012 (95, \$228) is a rich and polished version of this perennial leader, while the powerful Bodegas Maurodos San Román 2012 (95, \$65) is a testament to the skill of veteran winemaker Mariano García. Only a step behind is the dense and balanced Alabaster 2013 from Teso la Monja (94, \$234), the winery established by the Eguren family after they sold Numanthia.

Ribera del Duero counts the greatest number of classic-scoring wines in this report, with six. At the pinnacle is the Parcela El Picón 2010 (96, \$240), an old-vine, single-vineyard bottling from Pago de los Capellanes, a bodega that works only with estate-owned

vineyards around Pedrosa de Duero, in the heart of the appellation. Pago de los Capellanes also fields another of the year's classic-scorers, its Reserva 2012 (95, \$52), along with two outstanding bottlings, the Parcela El Nogal 2011 (93, \$75) and Crianza 2012 (92, \$34), all of them balancing power and grace, fruit and minerality.

Other highlights from Ribera include the Bodegas Aalto PS 2012 (95, \$115), another project from Mariano García; the Unico Reserva Especial NV from Bodegas Vega Sicilia (94, \$500), spicy and vibrant; the Bodegas Valderiz 2011 (94, \$29), a great value; and the Bodegas Montevannos Reserva 2006 (92, \$30), a new release showing traditional characteristics of dried cherry, tobacco and orange peel, a testament to the ageability of Ribera reds.

Rioja remains Spain's most important region. Of the more than 250 wines under review, nearly 100 earned outstanding ratings, including one classic-scorer, the Trasnchocho 2009 from Bodegas Fernando Remírez de Ganuza (95, \$135). This modern-style red is produced from grapes grown in vineyards more than 60 years old, but only destemmed berries from the shoulders of the bunches are used. Press wine is obtained by a unique method using a water-filled bag inserted into the fermentation tank; it is then aged for 24 months in new French oak barrels. The result is dense yet fresh, with vibrant black fruit and mineral flavors.

Among white Riojas, my favorite this year is from R. López de Heredia, whose ethereal whites are distinctive and enticing. The Viña Tondonia Reserva 2003 (93, \$54) carries lively flavors of dried apple, quince, wildflower and tarragon on a lean texture.

Rioja is also an excellent source of values. Cune's Crianza 2012 (91, \$13) leads the way among reds, offering cherry, leafy and vanilla flavors, light and balanced, while its Monopole 2015 (90, \$13), a Viura-based white, is fresh and bright, with depth and firm acidity.

Spain is too vast, and its wines too diverse, to detail all the highlights. But here are a few more that stand out for me.

White wines make up only about 20 percent of the country's production, yet quality has soared in recent years. Crisp, fruity Albariño from Rías Baixas has become deservedly popular, while the fleshier Godello grape, which is more herbal in character, is finding success across multiple regions. Excellent versions of Godello come from Godelia and Castro Ventosa in Bierzo, Campante in Ribeiro, and Rafael Palacios and Godeval in Valdeorras.

On the island of Mallorca, which has a long history of viticulture, a group of new wineries are recuperating old grapes and making exciting wines. Ànima Negra, founded in 1994, now has 200 acres under vine, mainly indigenous grapes farmed biodynamically. The flagship ÀN bottling is mostly Callet grapes, fermented in concrete then aged in new French oak; the 2012 (90, \$50) is savory and lively. The white Quíbia 2013 (88, \$16) is a blend of Premsal and Callet, made in a somewhat oxidized style, yet still lively and focused.

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