

# SPAIN GOURMETOUR

Food, Wine & Travel Magazine

Traditional  
Sweets.  
Memories are  
Made of This

DOCa Rioja:  
Grape Varieties  
Under the  
Spotlight

Grapefruit.  
Pulp  
Non-Fiction

Rosé Wine.  
A Flush  
of Pink



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the hands on the clock  
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# EDIT

Just as in the fashion world, the fruit and vegetable year has its seasons. Forward-thinking buyers will already be deciding what to order and, with you in mind, this issue previews an attractive winter product for when things start turning chilly: grapefruit. Not a fruit generally associated with Spain (not even by the Spanish!), but one that we do rather well, as France and Germany have been finding increasingly these last few years.

Exporting traditional sweets, cakes and biscuits is a trickier business—national preferences vary so much, and we all have our childhood favorites, so often endowed with the power of Proustian recall. Few foreigners would think of turning to Spain as a source, yet some of our specialties are in great demand in New York and beyond. There's an enormous variety to choose from! Give them a try!

DOCa Rioja wine needs no introduction—its reputation precedes it – but you may not have heard about changes on the varietal front. We bring you the latest. Meanwhile, our range of rosés continues to get bigger and better. Read all about it.

Spanish olive oil is settling nicely into the Chinese market, which (partly) explains why Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos did its harvesting by moonlight last winter. Our special envoy had fun. As does John Barlow, with his delightful picnic made up of the sort of unusual products, some on the brink of extinction, that qualify for inclusion in the Slow Food movement's Flagship.

Here's wishing our readers in the northern hemisphere an enjoyable summer break, and happy reading to all.

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In Spain there are more than 10.000 wines. It is little wonder that there are so many places to enjoy them.

In a country that has 90 grape varieties making more than 10.000 magnificent wines in 65 world class Denominations of Origen, it is not surprising to find so many places to enjoy them.





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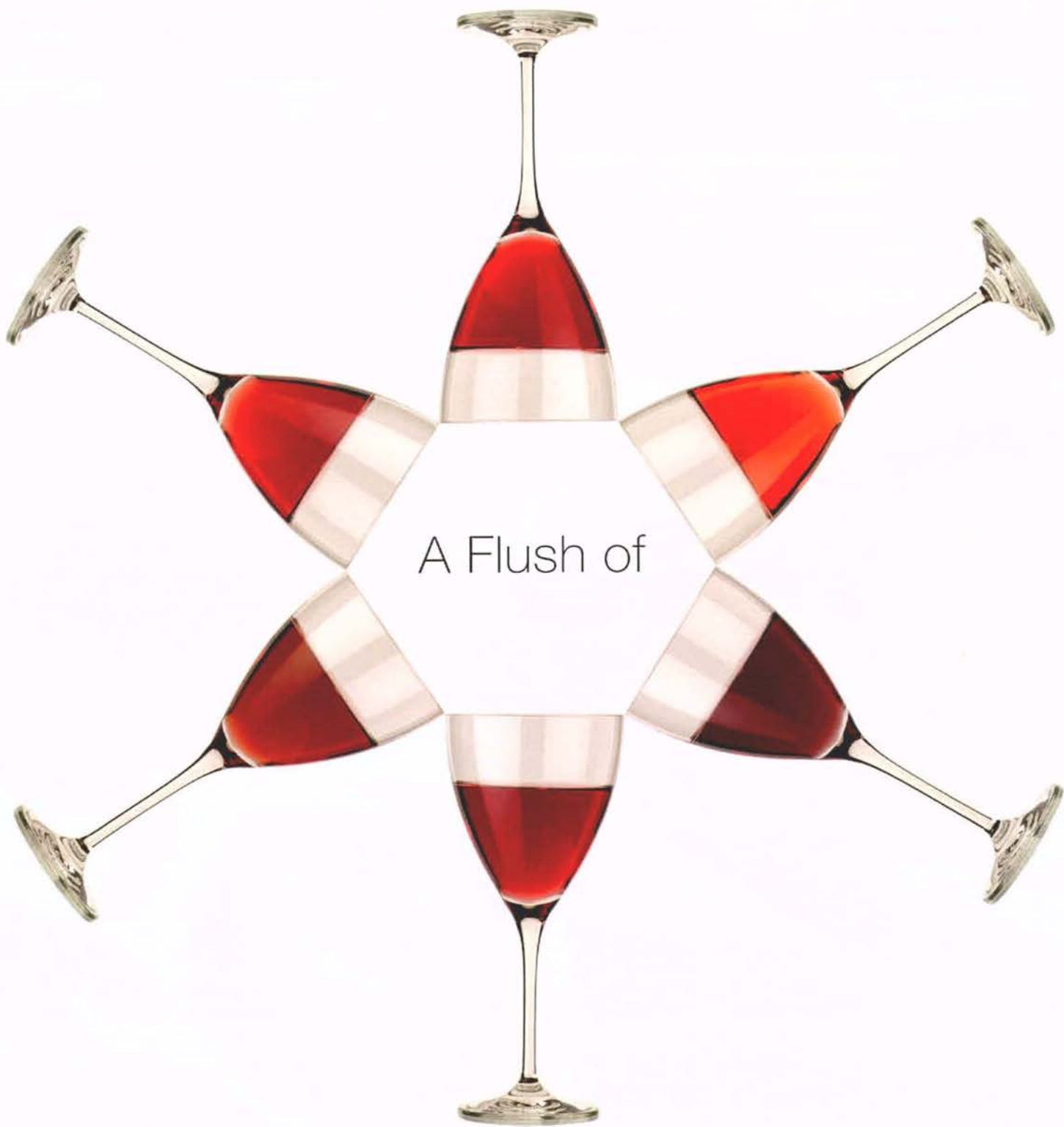
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Production of rosé wines in Spain is entering a new era. The former conflicting opinions—contempt amongst connoisseurs and popularity amongst consumers of light, low-tannin wines—are being ironed out by the surge in quality. Creative oenologists, selection of varieties and careful vinification have now brought us a rich range of new rosés to choose from.





A Flush of

# PINK

ROSÉ WINE





## TEXT

FEDERICO OLDENBURG/©ICEX

## PHOTOS

JUAN MANUEL SANZ/©ICEX

## TRANSLATION

JENNY MCDONALD/©ICEX

When I first came to Spain, over two decades ago, I was truly delighted to find such a varied wine scene. At the time, things were waking up after a long period of hibernation and the search was on for quality. But I have to confess I was disappointed by the rosés. With just a few exceptions, they seemed to me a second-rate beverage that consumers turned to only as a substitute for red wine in hot weather. In my visits to wineries, I soon discovered why quality was so poor. Most rosés were being made with the worst quality grapes but, to remedy their defects, various corrective techniques were being applied (manipulation of acidity, "a la carte" selection of yeasts to obtain artificial aromas of banana, raspberry, etc., chaptalization, i.e., the addition of sugar to the must prior to alcoholic fermentation). These and other industrial practices focused on achieving not quality but, above all, an attractive color. The fact is that I had to taste many Spanish rosés before I could find any that escaped from the common denominators: a loud pink color, artificial aromas of fresh red berries, a flavor that disappeared fast, excessive sharpness, and an aftertaste of strawberry candy. It was hardly surprising because rosé wine producers at the time were torn between two opposing passions: that of near-teetotalers who tended to choose a rosé so they didn't have to cope with the tannin grip of red wines or the

sober acidity of whites, and rejection by serious wine-lovers who felt that rosés negated the pleasure of wine drinking.

## Historic clarets

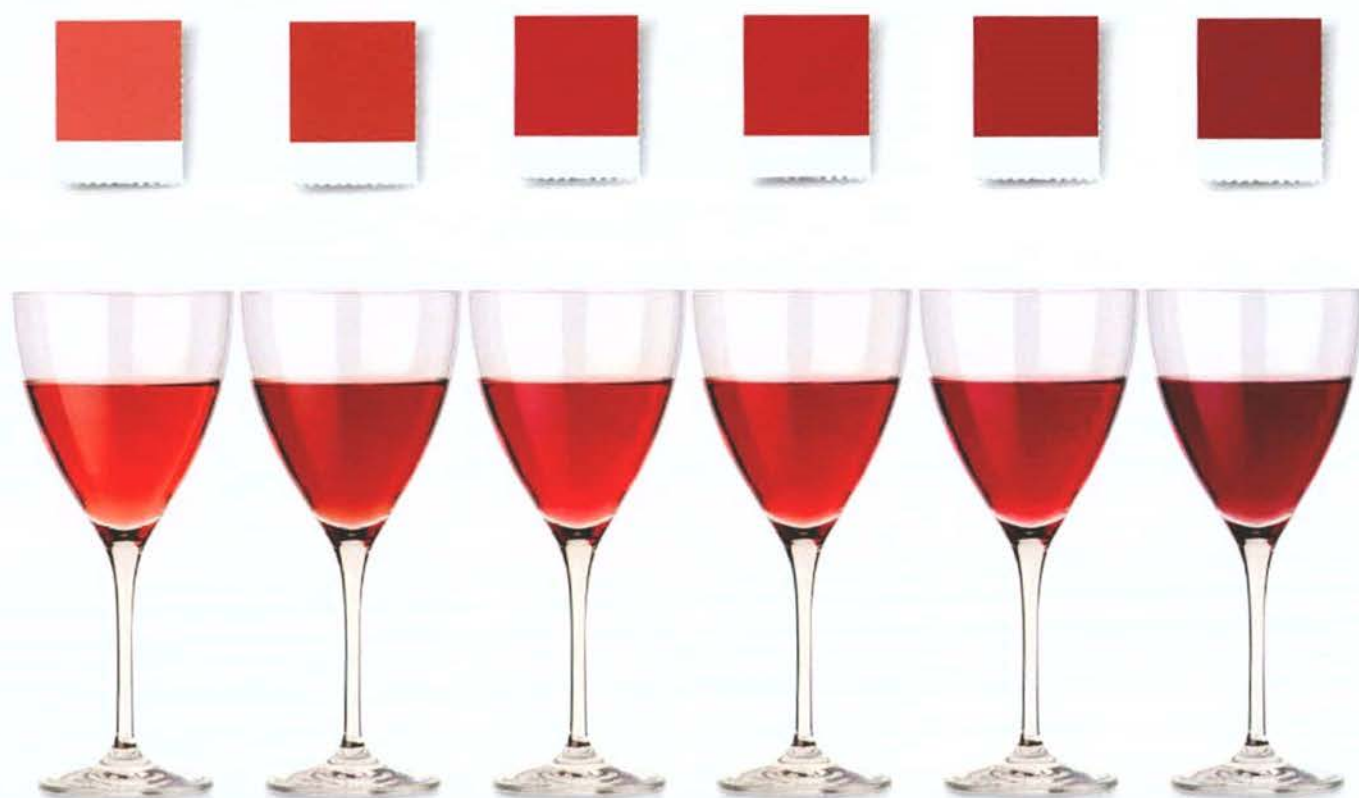
When I became so interested in Spanish wine that I started delving into its history, I discovered that rosés in this country descended from some illustrious predecessors: clarets. These were wines with a very light reddish color that were popular way back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when the first wine-growing districts were becoming consolidated in Spain, and were produced in the top third of the Iberian peninsula, from the Duero to Valdeorras. Probably the most famous were the Cigales wines that are on record as having been served at the Spanish Court when it was based in Valladolid (13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries).

But claret wines are not rosés. There is a subtle, but significant, difference. In both cases, the must is macerated with the grape skins (usually red ones) for two or three days. In the case of rosés, these skins are removed prior to fermentation but, for clarets, they remain in the vats while the yeasts do their work, as with red wine. So claret was just a red wine with a light color and expression, which in fact was sometimes made even lighter by adding white wine. So we know that the Castilian and Navarran clarets were popular at the time of the Valladolid court, but

back then, in the early years of the wine industry, this was only to be expected, as 90% of wines produced in the world before the 18<sup>th</sup> century were clarets. Not because the winemakers wanted it that way, but because they were not yet able to fully control the processes of fermentation and maceration. And the resulting wine came from a mixture of varieties, pressed using primitive methods (treading) and short maceration. All the same, the claret tradition spread until relatively recently. The DO Ribera del Duero, a region that today enjoys international fame for its succulent reds, mostly produced claret wines until the 1980s, until the great Vega Sicilia reds started to set an example that others followed en masse.

## The great leap forward

If we focus on a strict definition of rosé wines, then the history of Spanish rosés is much shorter. It was only in the middle of the last century that Spanish wineries started to search for methods to emulate the French rosés that were enjoying such popularity amongst consumers who wanted alternatives to red wine. Or, to be more exact, it was the Navarran and Catalanian producers who led the way. Since then, Navarre has been acknowledged as an ideal location for the production of this type of wines, and the merit is largely due to oenologists such as Luis



Estefanía, who visited French vineyards back in the 1950s to learn all the techniques for making quality rosé wines. On his return, at Bodegas Las Campanas, he adopted the French *saignée* techniques, as well as fermentation at below 16°C (60.8°F) to preserve the full expression of the grapes. The story goes that fresh, fragrant rosé wine from Las Campanas—the oldest of the DO Navarra wineries, founded in 1864—was a favorite with writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), who recommended it among his artistic and literary friends, helping it on its way to popularity. Many others followed this example, creating a huge demand for Spanish rosés in the 1970s and 80s. These were wines that were not aged in barrels, that had a bright, attractive color, clear fruity aromas and a light, refreshing taste. Unfortunately, their success also led

to a profusion of average quality wines, such as those I found on my arrival in Spain, as I explained at the start of this article.

### Leaving behind old prejudices

So, the model was successful but it was not always applied wisely—fresh fruity notes often gave way to artificial flavors that came from perfunctory mass production—so we had to wait for a new generation of oenologists to see the best rosés in the history of Spanish wines, those being made today. This surge in quality came not only from new vinification techniques, but also from a change in certain models that had previously seemed inalterable. Spanish rosés of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are not made only from Garnacha and Tempranillo—like those early Navarran pioneers—nor are they necessarily

the sort of simple wines that are ideal for cooling down on a hot beach in summer.

At last Spain had left behind its old prejudices and had started making rosés of outstanding quality and, more importantly, a wide variety of them.

Clearly, one of the main characteristics of the new Spanish rosés is their eclecticism. They offer a broad range of profiles, are made using different methods, and can be enjoyed in all sorts of circumstances, from a humble picnic in the park to the smartest of avant-garde taster menus. One of the surprising new features is the leading role being played in rosés by certain native varieties. Garnacha certainly continues to be a goldmine, and the Navarrans are well aware of this. They embrace the top international varieties—Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Tempranillo, Chardonnay, etc.—



for red (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 81) and white wines but are still faithful to Garnacha when it comes to designing a good rosé. Some wineries even combine it with other grapes to get a more complex result. This is the case of Azul y Garanza, whose vineyards are located on the edges of the Bardenas Reales desert. They combine Tempranillo with Garnacha to make their exuberant Rosa de Azul y Garanza 2009. Julián Chivite, one of the cutting-edge wineries in the DO Navarra, also chooses Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon as companions for the native Garnacha in their Gran Feudo Edición Rosado Sobre Lías 2008, a wine that has revolutionized the production of top-quality rosés. Aged in French barrels for six months, it scales unimaginable heights: a pale color reminiscent of onion skin, complex vinous aromas of fading flowers and incense, and an elegant, delicate taste with excellent acidity and the almost oily texture that you find in a classy white wine.

## Garnacha everywhere

But on today's Spanish rosé scene, Garnacha is found not only in Navarre. In Catalonia, for example, Portal del Montsant, owned by well-known architect Alfredo Arribas, makes the most of the Garnacha stocks that grow on this estate's white clay with granite in the DO Montsant. Their Brunus



Rosé 2009, a fresh, cheerful monovarietal, has received top marks from wine writers in Spain and around the world. Garnacha also grows, of course, in the DOCa Rioja, where some wineries are still faithful to the traditional-style rosés that are more complex, less fresh. One example is Muga, which produces its excellent Muga Rosado 2009 by combining two red varieties, Garnacha and Tempranillo, with a white, Viura, to give a salmon-colored wine with aromas of peach, pineapple and kiwi and a light, easy-to-drink taste with just the right degree of acidity. This Muga rosé, fermented and aged for two months in wooden casks, offers the charm of the sort of historic wine that is difficult to find today. Setting aside Garnacha, at the DOCa Rioja there are also rosés that are the complete opposite—outright modern—while also being great quality. One example is Alma

de Tobía 2009, presented by the young winery founded by Oscar Tobía in 1994 in which Tempranillo is the dominant grape. This is a rosé “with a soul”. It is fermented in French Allier oak barrels, then remains on its lees in the same barrels for five months, ending up with a bright raspberry color like that of a claret wine, appealing aromas with notes of fresh raspberries and strawberries against a balsamic, mineral background and a full, fresh, round lingering taste.

Tempranillo also gives rise to excellent rosés beyond the DOCa Rioja. In the various Designations of Origin in Castile, this grape is at the forefront of some of the most interesting new rosés. A good example is La Rosa de Arrocal 2009, a Tempranillo monovarietal from the DO Ribera del Duero. This is a simple wine, with a clear fruitiness and a refreshing taste, made by the young Arrocal winery, which had already indicated its promise with some tasty reds at affordable prices. This same grape is the one that gives vivacity to Quinta Clarisa 2009, the first non-white to be produced by Didier Belondrade, author of the famous barrel-fermented Verdejo Belondrade y Lurton. The DO Rueda, home to this French winemaker since 1994, only allows the production of white wines, so Belondrade had to apply for certification under Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla for this rosé, which he named after one of his daughters, a



## Three techniques for a wine

A couple of years ago, in the summer of 2009, a controversy brought European rosé wines unexpected media attention, placing them on the front pages of the main European newspapers. This was when the European Union proposed authorizing the blending of red and white wines to make rosés. The proposal failed, but it gave European winemakers the opportunity to defend "traditional rosé wines" and to inform consumers about the techniques involved in making them.

The *Manifesto in defense of European rosé wines*, published at the time by the Spanish Conference of Wine Regulatory Councils stated, "Rose wines are quality wines resulting from a particular vinification process comprising the fermentation of grape must, mostly from red grapes, which are first macerated to establish the color and flavor of the wine by leaving the grape skins in the must for exactly the right amount of time."

But this statement did not clarify the three methods usually adopted for maceration:

- **direct pressing**, in which red grapes are mechanically pressed until the must gains the desired color.
- **saignée**, in which the must is obtained by stacking up the grapes so that the weight of the grapes does the crushing. The skins are then removed.
- **short maceration**, in which the skins remain in contact with the must until the desired color is obtained.



charming personal tribute. The wine is marked by raspberry notes and a touch of sweetness.

Further north, in Zamora, we find a controversial grape, the Tinta de Toro. Some experts insist it is just a Tempranillo clone (*Caracterización del Banco de Germoplasma de la Vid de El Encín*, IMIDRA, 2000) that has adapted to the stony soils and harsh climate (with extreme temperatures and scarce rainfall) of Toro. Others claim, on the basis of historical and even literary references (*Libro del Buen Amor*, Arcipreste de Hita, 1284-1351) that it is a variety that has its own distinguishing characteristics and originated in Zamora. Whatever the truth of the matter, the variety can be used to make both the dark, powerful wines full of ripe, red fruit aromas that have brought fame to Toro and singular rosé wines. That at least is how it is seen by Bodegas Fariña, a family-run winery founded in 1942 which has been a pioneer in the production of quality wines in this area. Its *Colegiata Rosado 2008* brings out the full potential of the Tinta de Toro. It is a rosé with plenty of color, aromas of peach and plum and a round, well-structured flavor.

## A touch of the exotic

For those looking for something different, one of the most appealing features of the pink revolution taking place in Spain is the rediscovery of some native varieties that are less well-known than Tempranillo and Garnacha. The Prieto Picudo, originally from the region of Valdevimbre-Los Oteros (Leon, in Castile-Leon, northern Spain), has recently been rehabilitated as a grape for bright reds with a marked, ripe fruitiness. But this variety was traditionally used in the area of Leon to make rosé wines using an unusual technique called *madreo* in which whole, unpressed bunches of grapes were added to the fermenting must, making up about 5% of the total volume. The Dominio Dostares winery has restored this custom using the Prieto Picudo grape in its *Tombú 2009*, a rosé that wins over even the most determined of red wine lovers. This is a wine with a generous alcohol content, an intense, bright color, explosive notes of raspberry, pomegranate and grapefruit, and a full, lingering flavor.





Also from the province of Leon, the area known as El Bierzo (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72), where the terrain is rugged and much influenced by the Atlantic, is the Tinta Mencía grape, one that offers quite the opposite. Over recent years, the reds from this area, with a lighter profile than most of the Castilian wines though still with a refined elegance, have afforded pleasant surprises on the Spanish wine scene. But the rosés from El Bierzo are another way of bringing in support for the Mencía variety.

A taste of the Tres Obispos Rosado 2009, made by the Pittacum winery, Pittacum, seduces with very clean aromas of strawberry, raspberry and flowers and a rich smoothness in the mouth. Though not in the limelight like Mencía, the Parraleta variety was growing in the area of the DO Somontano (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73) long before the local winemakers embraced the better-known international varieties (Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, etc.). In spite of the rather sad

paradox that this variety is considered exotic even in its homeland, the Parraleta is now making a comeback and being featured in a limited number of wines. One is Alodia Parraleta 2009, a rosé being made organically by the Alodia winery from the last surviving stocks of this grape that are still growing in Adahuesca, at an altitude of 650 m (2,132 ft) on the lower slopes of the Guara and Sevil Mountains. Partial fermentation in the barrel on the lees gives this wine an unusual spiciness. This, together

with the citrus and white fruit notes of the variety, make the Alodia a very original rosé.

## Restored varieties

Other native varieties that are also being featured in rosés can be found in vineyards close to the Mediterranean.

One of them is the Monastrell grape (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 75), which grows mostly in the Designations of Origin in Murcia (Yecla, Jumilla, and Bullas). Thanks to the great prestige of the fortified wines from Murviedro (today's Sagunto), this variety was even exported to southern France, where it was called Mourvèdre. Today, Monastrell is again in fashion for its rich, fruity reds. And it is also used in excellent rosés such as the Castaño Monastrell Rosado 2009, in which its very Mediterranean character, reminiscent of very ripe red fruit, is combined with the freshness and structure of the two leading lights on the international wine scene, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon. Another Mediterranean variety that is again receiving much attention is Bobal (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 77), which grows both along the east coast of Spain and inland in the small DO Manchuela (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73). In Utiel-Requena, where this is the predominant variety, the reds are becoming increasingly good and there are also some noteworthy rosés, such as the Aula Bobal Rosado de Lágrima 2008 (Bodegas Coviñas), a wine with a



pronounced strawberry color, aromas of herbs and fresh fruit and a clean, refreshing flavor. Further north, in Catalonia, there are two native varieties that have recently been acknowledged, by winemakers and consumers alike, as producing excellent rosés. The Sumoll, from the Penedès region, was almost completely abandoned and is still not included in the DO's list of authorized varieties, even though in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was the predominant variety in this part of the country. But it has been making a comeback, easily winning supporters when they taste the Pardas Sumoll Rosat 2009, which the Celler Pardas winery presents as the "rehabilitation of our roots". This is a wine with a bright color, touches of balsam, mint, licorice, blackberries, strawberries and orange skin, with a creamy, lingering flavor. Since this wine is made from the unauthorized Sumoll grape, it cannot be included as a DO Penedès wine, so it is sold as *vi de taula* (table wine). Other firm advocates of the Sumoll are found at the Heretat Mont-Rubí winery, in the Alt Penedès region, which has just launched Advent Sumoll 2008, an unusual sweet rosé wine made from

bunches of this variety that are first dried in a barn for 120 days. After fermentation in the barrel and ageing on the lees, the Advent Sumoll offers complex notes of honey, dried apricots and fading flowers with a creamy, balanced flavor. The other Catalonian grape that is being retrieved from oblivion is Trepát, which still survives in the vineyards of Costers del Segre and Conca de Barberà. It is considered an interesting alternative to the usual Merlot and Pinot Noir in the production of rosé wines, both still and sparkling. Generally speaking, these are light, easy-to-drink wines, whose main appeal lies in their clear raspberry notes which last just a few months after bottling. Amongst the most fragrant rosés made from this variety is the Portell Rosat Trepát 2009, made by the Vinícola de Sarral in the DO Conca de Barberà; it is a fresh, cheerful wine, with pleasant hints of peach and well-integrated acidity and it is well suited to spicy Asian food. This section on Spanish rosé wines produced from native varieties must necessarily also include a most unusual wine, the Brumas de Ayosa Malvasía Rosado 2008, made by the Bodega Comarca Valle de





Güimar, on the Canary Island of Tenerife (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 80). This is an exquisite sweet wine, which achieves a delicate contrast between its richness and its acidity, this being a typical characteristic of the best Malvasía wines from the Canaries, with the added plus of an exotic hint of fresh guava in its bouquet. This is the only wine on the market to feature the Malvasía Rosada, a variety that is all but extinct.

## With a French accent

Of course, it is not only native varieties that are behind the Spanish rosé boom. Varieties such as Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Petit Verdot are also playing their part. Of all of them, the one that seems to be the center of attention for rosés in Spain is Merlot. In fact, Merlot rosés are coming from a wide range of DOs. Amongst the single-variety rosés, one of the best I have tasted is Olvena Rosado 2009 (DO Somontano), which is very faithful to the typical Bordeaux aromas—intense notes of fresh red fruit, against a

background of violets—and an enticing full, balanced flavor. Another is Castillo de Monjardín Rosado 2009, from DO Navarra, which offers the freshness typical of the more northern Merlot vineyards in Spain. And in combinations with other varieties, the Arrayán Rosado 2009, from the DO Méntrida, offers a dialogue between Merlot and Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot, giving a wine with exuberant notes of cherry and white blossom and a creamy, refreshing flavor. Syrah is another of the French varieties that leads to interesting results in rosé wines. An example is Primeur Rosado 2009, a monovarietal produced by the Gramona family, which has now been working in the Penedès region for 130 years. This wine offers intense berry aromas and a fleshy, full flavor. The same can be said about Cabernet Sauvignon, which is the star in Enate Rosado 2009, by Viñedos y Crianzas del Alto Aragón, one of the leading wineries in the Somontano district. This is a rosé with fine aromas of cranberries and raspberries, and a full, succulent flavor with a vivacious acidity.

But undoubtedly the most exotic of the Spanish rosés made from French grapes is the Petit Verdot 2009, a surprise from the winery and hotel Pago del Vicario, in Ciudad Real (Castile-La Mancha, central Spain). A Petit Verdot rosé from the banks of the Guadiana River may seem strange, but this is a wine with a very marked color—closer to a light red than a real rosé—with fresh aromatic hints of sharp strawberry and cherry candy against a backdrop of violets, and a taste that is full of body and richness. A magnificent example of the diversity of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Spanish rosé wines.

*Federico Oldenburg is a Swedish-Argentinean journalist who has been living in Spain since 1989. He has written on food, wine, spirits and lifestyle for publications such as Vogue, Gentleman, Sibaritas, El Mundo, Diario 16 and El Economista. His latest book is Saber de vino en 3 horas (2011, Ed. Planeta).*

*We would like to extend our thanks to the wineries for sending bottles for the photo report.*









## Grape Varieties Under the Spotlight

After years of resistance, in 2007 DOCa Rioja introduced a selection of additional red and white grape varieties, including some from outside the region. Patricia Langton looks at what has changed so far, which new varieties are finding popularity, and the valuable role played by minority grapes such as Graciano, Garnacha, Viura and Malvasia.

# DOCa RIOJA

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TEXT  
PATRICIA LANGTON/©ICEX

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PHOTOS  
PATRICIA R. SOTO/©ICEX

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When a new trend has emerged from DOCa Rioja in recent years, it has generally been as a result of winemaking innovation or oak usage rather than the arrival of a new grape variety. Here, probably more than in any other Spanish region, traditional local grapes have been defended with determination, while grapes from outside the region have, until now, been kept in the shadow.

However, in 2007, and following a lengthy research program, DOCa Rioja's *Consejo Regulador* (Regulatory Council) gave the green light to no fewer than nine additional grape varieties. The new arrivals comprised six varieties with local origins (three red: Maturana Tinta, Maturana Parda and Monastel, and three white: Tempranillo Blanco, Maturana Blanca and Turruntés) including a number of ancient varieties which were on the verge of extinction. More controversially, three far more familiar white grape varieties from outside the region (Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Verdejo) were also given the Consejo's seal of approval.

This was the first change to the selection of grape varieties which was established when DOCa Rioja emerged as Spain's first DO in 1925 (the superior DOCa status was granted in 1991). The original group—Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuelo, Graciano, Viura, Malvasia and Garnacha Blanca—still define DOCa Rioja wine styles,



but today Tempranillo is by far the most widely-planted grape, while some of its more challenging siblings play a lesser role in the contemporary DOCa Rioja wine scene.

Indeed a quick glance at some of the Consejo's statistics reveals that plantings of Tempranillo almost doubled from 1990 to 2005, and by 2010 the variety accounted for 51,440 ha (127,111 acres) of the total 63,200 ha (156,170 acres). Of course, this trend has not been unique to DOCa Rioja. Plantings of Tempranillo have increased in many other regions of Spain as well, perhaps making the authorities in DOCa Rioja mindful of the need to offer a point of difference in the region's wines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Maturana Tinta gains followers

Four years after the additional grape varieties were permitted, it is timely to look at what has changed, what we might expect in the future

thanks to the newcomers, and how they fit in with their more established siblings.

Anyone expecting dramatic change will be disappointed; new plantings in European regions usually mean that something else has to be uprooted first or new planting rights obtained. New vine material also has to be made available, which is more complicated in the case of ancient varieties. Finally, the adverse economic situation does not favor experimentation and innovation, and some bodegas may have put plans on hold. But despite the adversities, there are wines to taste and analyze and they are certainly enough to excite the palate. Of the recovered ancient red varieties—Maturana Tinta, Maturana Parda and Monastel—only the first of this trio, Maturana Tinta (see Maturana Tinta (from Navarrete), page 21), has been adopted by producers to date. On my recent visit I was keen to see where the new Maturana Tinta vineyards are, how the grape performs in different areas of the region, and what kind of role it might play in the future.

I was also curious to know why it has attracted a group of enthusiastic supporters. My starting point is the Finca Fuentelacazuela estate at Baños de Río Tobía on the Rioja Alta. This is home to Maturana Tinta guru Juan Carlos Sancha who, together with fellow researcher Fernando Martínez de Toda, identified this





## Maturana Tinta (from Navarrete)

**The story so far:** The variety is identified in 1989 in a vineyard in Navarrete in the Rioja Alta sub-zone to the southwest of Logroño. Unlike other ancient Riojan varieties discovered at a similar time, no historical reference is found for Maturana Tinta in the region. A selection of the vines from the Navarrete source, which are thought to be around 115 years old, is made in a nursery and a small number of plants become available to researchers and eventually bodegas.

**Character profile:** Maturana Tinta is characterized by its small berries (around half the size of Tempranillo) and therefore offers a greater skin-to-pulp ratio than many other red varieties. It features small and compact clusters. Bud break comes late but the variety is vigorous and ripens early in the season, at a similar time to Tempranillo.

**In the vineyard:** The vine is relatively easy to cultivate but Botrytis can be a

potential problem. Careful vigilance is required at harvest time to avoid herbaceous, green flavors. Maturana Tinta likes a warm location and needs little water. The variety adapts well to many different soils, though chalky/clay soils are preferable.

**The finished wine:** A good Maturana Tinta wine offers great depths of color with a hint of violet. The wine shows great depth of flavor and sweet dark fruit along with balsamic notes, hints of spice and chocolate. Acidity levels are generally high, and higher than Tempranillo, making the variety an ideal partner for the latter and a welcome new addition for DOCa Rioja wines in general.

**Where in DOCa Rioja?** As yet plantings are relatively few, but Maturana Tinta vineyards are taking root in a fairly diverse range of areas including Badarán, Baños de Río Tobía, Briones and Fuenmayor in the Rioja Alta, Oyón in the Rioja Alavesa, and in Villamedina and Ausejo in the Rioja Baja.

grape as one of the ancient minority grapes worthy of recuperating and being given a place in the modern DOCa Rioja winemaking scene. The vineyard was established in 1917 and originally belonged to Sancha's grandfather but, with the exception of some highly prized 90-year-old Garnacha vines, most of the vines are Maturana Tinta planted ten years ago, making them some of the more established plantings of the variety in the region. "This is one of the coldest areas of DOCa Rioja and it's challenging to get grapes to ripen here, but we get higher acidity levels. We've planted Maturana Tinta on south-facing slopes and we practice organic viticulture," says Sancha. He's particularly pleased with the 2009 vintage of his Ad Libitum Maturana Tinta, a year which brought near perfect dry conditions in this area. This wine certainly has plenty of character, with attractive balsamic notes on the nose and an elegant, perfumed fruit on the palate, bearing some similarities to

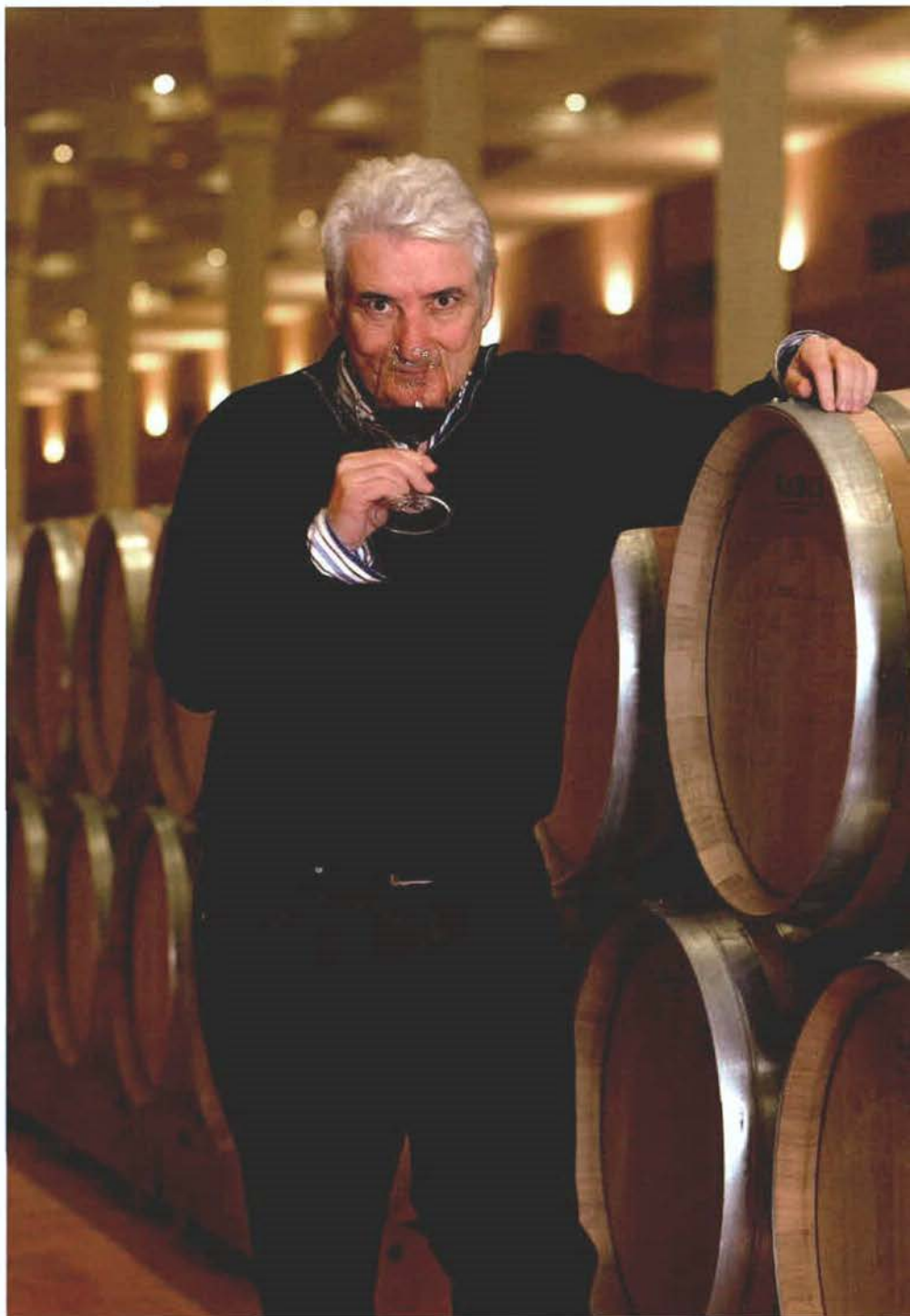


Cabernet Franc or Petit Verdot. Moving towards the heart of the region, other Maturana Tinta vineyards have been established by Bodegas Pedro Martínez Alesanco in Badarán. In 2004, they made their first vintage from the new variety in collaboration with the University of La Rioja and, encouraged by initial results, the bodega now makes both a blend and a varietal wine from the variety. Indeed, as oenologist Pilar Torrecilla explains, the variety offers a number of advantages over others for this bodega: "Due to the particular microclimate of this part of the Rioja Alta, we can only make wines with Tempranillo and Garnacha, as Graciano and Mazuelo don't ripen sufficiently. So Maturana Tinta is an interesting new proposition for us, providing both greater complexity in aged wines and vinified on its own." Indeed, the variety gets Torrecilla's nod of approval in both the vineyard and the winery. She finds it very easy to grow, but emphasizes the need for particular vigilance in the last stages of ripening to avoid the appearance of herbaceous flavors in the wine.

## Alternative to Cabernet Sauvignon?

Maturana was discovered in the heart of La Rioja at Navarrete, and one of the bodegas closest to the original vineyard and with fledgling

Carlos Martínez Bujanda. Finca Valpiedra







Maturana Tinta vineyards is Finca Valpiedra, near the town of Fuenmayor. Here I met with oenologist Lauren Rosillo, who told me about why he is keen to support the grape. On joining the bodega in 2007 he was given the go-ahead to replace Cabernet Sauvignon and Mazuelo with other varieties that he felt would offer better results, and under his guidance Maturana Tinta and more plantings of Tempranillo are being undertaken. "Maturana Tinta has similar characteristics to Cabernet Sauvignon, but it is easier to lose the pyracine flavors (green vegetal notes). The grape also reminds me of Carmenère when it ripens well." Rosillo shows me the young Maturana Tinta vines, which are located very close to the banks of the tree-lined Ebro River. This is a remarkably scenic location, but what influence does the river have? "There is greater potential for Botrytis here, but it hasn't been a problem yet... and on hotter days the river can have a positive cooling influence on the vines," Rosillo explains. He encourages good exposure to the sun by a vertical training system without wires. It's early days for Maturana Tinta here, but its role already seems to be established. When the vintage is particularly favorable for the variety—and Rosillo has high hopes for the 2010 vintage—it will be blended with Tempranillo and a little Graciano for the top level Finca Valpiedra wine, which is aged

in French oak, and when it doesn't excel it will be used for the second tier Cantos de Valpiedra.

Other producers who have adopted this variety include Viña Ijalba, a bodega located on the outskirts of Logroño and one already respected for its work with minority grapes, including Graciano. The first Maturana Tinta vines were planted here in 1997; they produced the fruit for its first Maturana Tinta wine, Dionisio Ruiz Ijalba, in 2001. Occupying 1.5 ha (3.7 acres) alongside the bodega, these vines are under organic viticulture and yield 5.9-7.8 tons (6-8,000 kg) of grapes each year for this wine. Four more hectares (9.8 acres) at Villamediana de Iregua, slightly further east and just within the borders of the Rioja Baja, will allow for greater selection from the fruit, and ultimately the aim is to include Maturana Tinta in blends here. For now Maturana Tinta is a solo act and it's getting better with every vintage; I'm particularly impressed when we taste the 2009 from the barrel as we tour the cellar. This wine is maturing gracefully, no doubt helped along by the choice oak—French Burgundian oak with a medium toast—and it already shows very elegant tannins and delicious mouth-watering dark fruit. Bodegas Valdemar in Oyón was also one of the first to offer a Maturana Tinta wine as part of its range of monovarietals. The view here, as at Viña Ijalba, is that local grapes of character should be defended even if it is not possible to make wine

Chema del Rto. Bodega Barón de Ley







from some of them from every vintage. In 2001, Bodegas Valdemar made its first Graciano wine at a time when plantings of this grape had fallen to perilously low levels in La Rioja. At around the same time, oenologist Gonzalo Ortiz started to experiment with other varieties, including Maturana Tinta, by vinifying small amounts of wine and studying the wine's evolution in different types of oak.

In the 2005 vintage, he was sufficiently convinced by the variety to offer it to the market under the Inspiración Valdemar label. Indeed, this impressive wine was the first wine which attracted my attention to the variety. Here too the choice of oak is French with a light toast and the wine spent 20 months in the barrel. Ortiz has to be completely convinced by a vintage to offer Maturana Tinta under the Inspiración label. The next vintage will be the 2008, and this wine has spent a slightly shorter time of 16 months in oak; it also contains a little Tempranillo to enhance the wine's aromatic profile.

So far the bodegas working with Maturana Tinta that I've mentioned are located in the central areas of the DOCa Rioja region. However, I'm told that the variety can adapt to a wide range of soils, it has good resistance to drought, and it likes warmer though not excessively warm areas. So could the Rioja Baja, the driest and warmest sub-zone of the region, offer good potential for this grape?

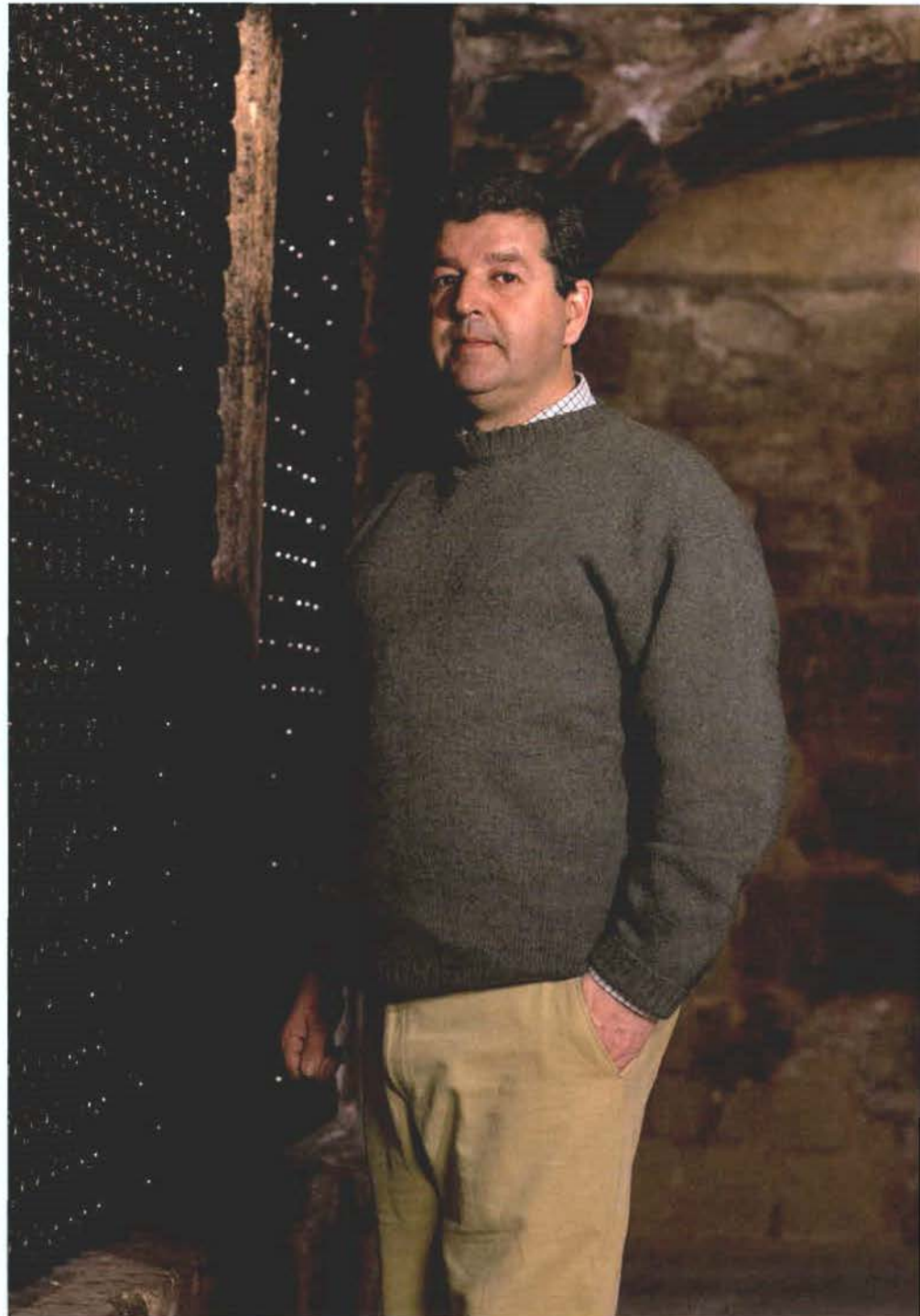


To find out, I head to one of the most innovative producers in the Rioja Baja: Barón de Ley, a bodega located at Mendavia, to the north of the Ebro River. Over the last decade, this producer has broadened the range of grape varieties with which it works. Tempranillo vineyards of various ages account for by far the largest share of plantings, but Garnacha and Graciano have become more important.

In the last few years Barón de Ley has also planted Maturana Tinta. By the time of the 2010 harvest, around 2 ha (4.9 acres) were in production and more will come on stream in the next few years, including 20 ha (49.4 acres) planted at its vineyard in Ausejo in 2009. The bodega's oenologist, Chema del Río, has made two vintages of Maturana Tinta, so I'm interested to hear his views about the variety and, of course, taste the wines: the 2009, which has already had time in oak, as well as the 2010. It's early days for the 2010 Maturana Tinta, which was picked earlier than the previous vintage to avoid excessively high alcohol, but I'm intrigued by the particularly seductive 2009 wine, with its deep inky color, intensity of flavor and elegant tannins.

Del Río is particularly enthusiastic about the variety's potential in Rioja Baja. He says: "It delivers massive color and structure as well as remarkable smoothness. I think that it will make an excellent contribution to blends." He is also finding that the variety responds well

Jesús Madrazo. Contino







when it is aged in both French and American oak and, in Barón de Ley's vineyards, he's seeing a fairly regular pattern in the grape's performance from one vintage to the next.

I leave Barón de Ley increasingly convinced that this variety is a grape of interest for the future and it seems likely that we will see it emerge from a variety of areas, each offering their take on the grape.

## Graciano revival

While still in the Rioja Baja, it's encouraging to see a healthy number of wines featuring a very distinctive grape—Graciano—a minority grape found in the vineyards of La Rioja and, to a lesser extent, Navarre.

Although the variety offers good resistance to disease, many areas of the Rioja Alta and Alavesa are not warm enough or suitable for this late-ripening grape, and many producers who do offer a Graciano wine in these two areas—including Contino, Bodegas Valdemar and Casa Primitiva—aren't able to do so every year.

By 1990, the number of hectares of Graciano had fallen under 200 (494.2 acres) as producers replaced it in favor of the increasingly popular, easier to grow and less risky Tempranillo.

Thankfully, its fortunes have been reversed, due largely to the dedication of a number of producers in the Rioja Baja, including the previously mentioned Barón de Ley, the Viñedos de Aldeanueva co-operative, Bodegas



Telmo Rodriguez

del Medievo (also located in the Aldeanueva area) and Bodegas y Viñedos Ilurce in Alfaro.

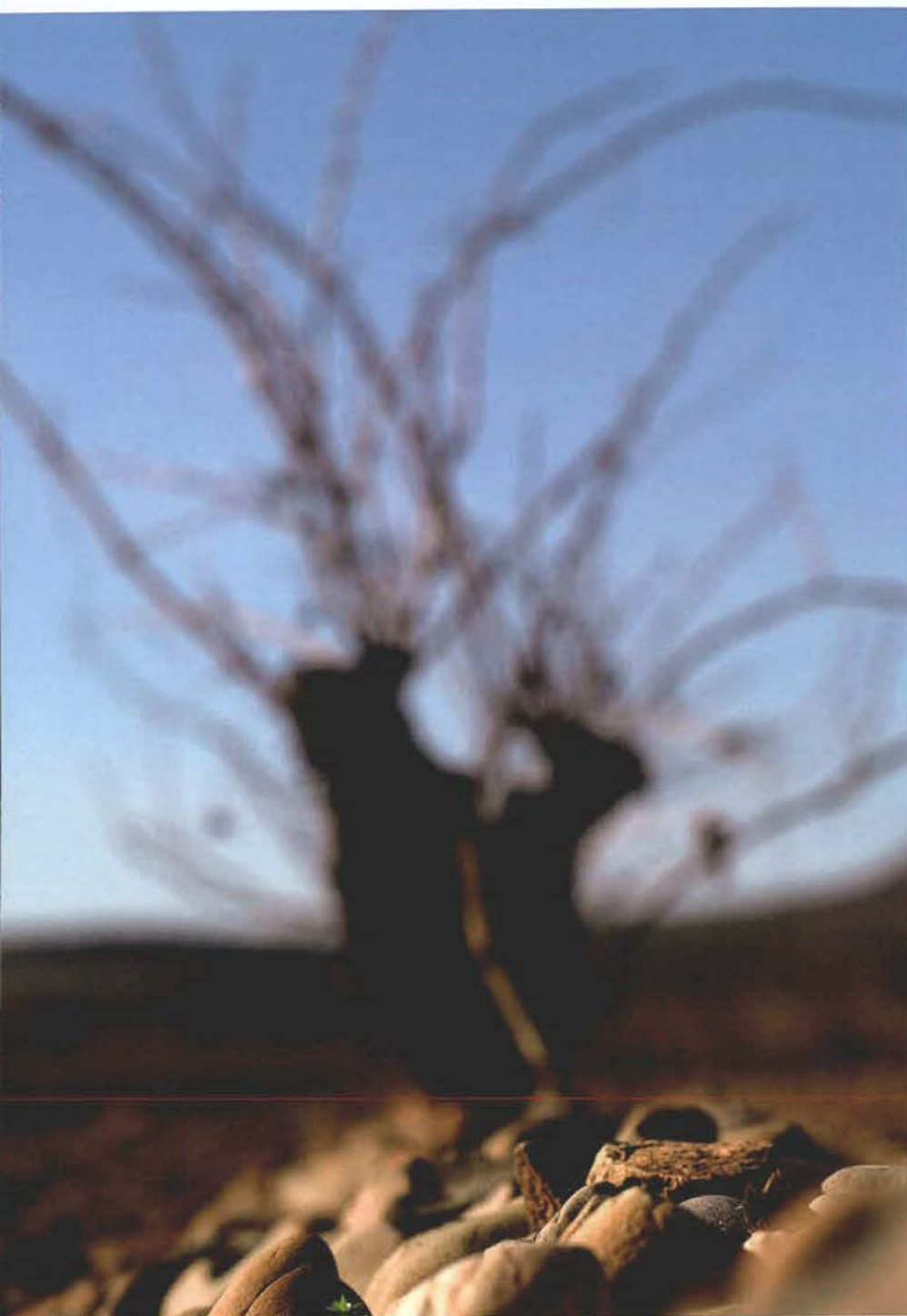
Viñedos de Aldeanueva has a relatively large resource of Graciano with 100 ha (247 acres) spread across its members. The producer offers a Graciano wine under its Azabache range of varieties, and in the best vintages a reserva wine is also offered; the 2005 Reserva that I taste at the bodega is incredibly intense and has great potential for ageing. It is also definitely a wine for the table. General manager Abel Torres sees a bright outlook for the variety. He says: "Graciano will grow in importance in the next ten years in DOCa Rioja, but it needs to be planted in the right place."

Santiago Garde, oenologist at Bodegas de Medievo, firmly believes in the existing red local grapes. He says: "In DOCa Rioja, in the case of red varieties, we have shown that we are able to make the different kinds of wines that the market needs. In the 1990s, when some were convinced that Bordeaux varieties should be allowed to provide wine with deeper color and complexity, others chose to recover Graciano for the same result."

For Bodegas del Medievo, Graciano offers something completely different to other grapes, such as Garnacha, which is used by this producer to make young, everyday wines. Graciano has a much more sophisticated role, either supporting other varieties such as Tempranillo in blends or, with the right care and attention in the vineyard to tame







yields and achieve optimum ripeness, it makes an “extraordinary monovarietal wine” for the connoisseur and the wine expert. However, the traditional grape of the Rioja Baja is Garnacha, and this variety has also lost out to Tempranillo in recent years, though in its case the tide could also be turning.

Alvaro Palacios divides his time between his bodega in DOCa Priorat and Bodegas Palacios Remondo, established by his parents, in Alfaro in the Rioja Baja. He firmly believes that Garnacha is best suited to the dry, Mediterranean climate here and the chalky clay soils and, indeed, to most of the Rioja Baja area. He says: “Now the Rioja Baja is mostly planted with Tempranillo; this is a big mistake. This area is one of the real sources of classic Garnacha.” Half of the family’s 100 ha (247 acre) estate was planted to Garnacha by his father, and Palacios is keen to replace most of the remaining Graciano and Tempranillo with Garnacha—around 20% of non-Garnacha vines will be kept. He’s also buying small parcels of old vineyards at higher altitudes and he’s experimenting with different clones and rootstocks in a bid to make far more complex wines from the variety, just as he has done so successfully in Priorat.

## New white grapes divide opinions

The six white grape varieties which were approved for planting in 2007

have reignited debate about the role of foreign varieties in DOCa Rioja, but first let's take a look at the response to them.

The group includes three local varieties: Tempranillo Blanco, Maturana Blanca and Turruntés. Tempranillo Blanco, which was developed from a Tempranillo vine which had lost its color through natural mutation, seems to be the most popular choice of the three to date. Plantings of this variety stood at 16 ha (39.5 acres) in 2010, while those of Maturana Blanca are less and those of Turruntés smaller still. The other three grapes making up the group are Verdejo, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc. These well-known grapes look set to be planted more widely. By 2010, plantings stood at 51 ha (126 acres) for Verdejo, 38 ha (93.9 acres) for Chardonnay and 22 ha (54.3 acres) for Sauvignon Blanc; however, they will only be permitted as part of a white wine blend with Viura. Some believe that there is a need and a place for the foreign white varieties to enable DOCa Rioja to compete more effectively in the white wine market. Iker Madrid at Casa Primicia is one of those in favor. He says: "Viura and Malvasia leave us lagging behind in terms of quality compared to the best white grape varieties both Spanish and international—varieties such as Albariño, Verdejo, Chardonnay, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc. In my view, Viura and Malvasia are too neutral on the nose and the palate, so I think that by introducing the foreign varieties we

Mercedes López de Heredia. Bodega López de Heredia





R.López de Heredia-Viña Tondonia.



can improve the quality of the white wines from DOCa Rioja."

Santiago Garde at Bodegas del Medievo agrees that DOCa Rioja needs grapes with "more fruit intensity" and explains why this bodega plans to plant Chardonnay (in the Aldeanueva area). "The extreme climate in our area makes it difficult to grow Verdejo or Sauvignon Blanc. Chardonnay is better suited to this part of DOCa Rioja; we can already see that it grows well in nearby areas in the south of Navarre. In any case, it will only be used in limited amounts to support Viura."

But many others have an opposing view. Indeed it's hard not to believe that DOCa Rioja has something to be preserved and indeed nurtured when you taste wines with such dramatically different styles such as López de Heredia's fabulous aged Viña Tondonia Viura/Malvasia wines and the same two grapes as a fresh, vibrant young wine made in a thoroughly contemporary style such as Amaren Blanco from Bodegas Luis Cañas.

I was also pleased to try two new wines of my recent visit which will reach the market this year: Contino Blanco 2009 (Viura, Malvasia and Garnacha Blanca), which is aged in French oak, and Barón de Ley's Blanco Reserva 2008, also made from the same three grapes and aged in American oak.

Oenologist Mercedes López de Heredia firmly supports local grapes and is against the move to plant foreign white varieties at the family's



vineyards in Haro. She says: "To accept a variety like Verdejo looks like we're acknowledging a lack of quality in Viura." She believes that high yields are the root of the problem for Viura: "When you use high yields of Viura you don't get a young, aromatic wine. Viura is aromatic with 3-4,000 kg (6,613-8,818 lb) per ha (2.47 acres) and Malvasia is a very aromatic variety. We must defend our local varieties." However, plantings of Malvasia in DOCa Rioja are now only half what they were ten years ago as, despite its valuable contribution to white



## DOCa Rioja wines at the table

DOCa Rioja's grapes each have something to offer when it comes to matching the region's wines with food. Here are some examples of the region's more distinctive wines and dishes to go with them.

**Luis Cañas Amaren Blanco Fermentado 2009** (Viura and Malvasia) with marinated salmon. This barrel-fermented wine spends some time on the lees giving it structure, protecting its aromas, allowing it to last in the bottle. The more complex style and the wine's subtle citric flavors make it an ideal partner for richer fish.

**López de Heredia Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva 1987** (Viura and Malvasia) with *caldereta*, Spanish rice stews and stronger flavored fish dishes. The great complexity and honeyed savory character of this golden classic DOCa

Rioja white wine makes it incredibly versatile for food pairing. Mercedes López de Heredia offers this suggestion but, as she also points out, this wine works well with egg—not an easy food to match with wine—so try also tortilla or scrambled eggs with smoked salmon.

**Bodegas Valdemar Inspiración Valdemar Maturana Tinta 2005** with roast lamb, potatoes, carrots and peas. This is Ana Martínez Bujanda's favorite match for this wine from her family's bodega. Maturana Tinta, especially as a solo act, is a powerful wine capable of standing up to a rich meat such as lamb.

**Contino Graciano 2007** with fried spicy *chistorra* sausage. Graciano has very distinctive flavors with a much darker fruity taste than Tempranillo, so its wines can be matched with strong flavors. Contino's Graciano easily meets the

challenge of a spicy Riojan sausage.

**Bodegas Palacio Remondo La Montesa 2008** (Garnacha, Tempranillo and Mazuelo) with Iberico ham. This wine shows three local grapes working in perfect harmony to produce an elegant wine which can be enjoyed with lighter foods.

**Bodegas Mitarte Mazuelo Mitarte 2006** with baked fish, stuffed meats or spicy casserole dishes. Mazuelo varietal wines are rare and very few are made from exceptionally old vines, 100-years-old vines in this case. The grace and maturity of the vineyard is revealed in the wine, which is beautifully structured with intense red fruit flavors and perfectly integrated oak. As winemaker Ignacio Gil suggests, it is a versatile wine that can be matched with both fish and meat.





blends, fewer producers are prepared to accept the challenges of growing the variety in the vineyard. At Bodegas Muga, also located in Haro, oenologist Jorge Muga says: “Malvasia is undoubtedly a difficult variety for both the grower and the winemaker. The grape is sensitive to disease, ripens with difficulty and oxidation can be a problem. There is also a lot of confusion between the different kinds and quality levels of the variety. In our bodega we work with three very different qualities of Malvasia.” Muga believes that Viura should be given far more attention to extract its potential as a quality grape and that Garnacha Blanca also has a valuable role to play in partnership with Viura and Malvasia. When it comes to white grapes, DOCa Rioja is therefore at a crossroads, and now is a time for experimentation and debate. We are certainly likely to see more white wines emerging over the next few years, and hopefully they will attract new interest to the region for their individuality and quality.

*Patricia Langton is an independent journalist specializing in Spanish wines. Her work has appeared in a number of publications and online media including Decanter.com, winesfromspainuk.com, The Drinks Business, Harpers Wine & Spirit, Square Meal and Off Licence News. She is also the co-author of 500 White Wines (Sellers Pub Inc.).*





# The Story of a Cheese that **Came Back to Life**



# SLOW FOOD

in Spain

**Text**  
John Barlow/©ICEX

**Photos**  
Pablo Neustadt/©ICEX

John Barlow travels to the Basque Country in search of one of Spain's most exciting and sought after slow foods. The story of its survival, like those of numerous other Spanish slow foods, is one of an endless passion for food and the enduring belief that our food heritage not only deserves celebrating but desperately needs our active support. It's also about taste. Lots of it.





I'm halfway up a mountainside in the area of Las Encartaciones, 18 mi (28.9 km) southwest of Bilbao (northern Spain). My plan today is to taste some of the most exclusive foods Spain has to offer, and by "exclusive" I mean "rare", foods that have come perilously close to extinction. Kneeling down, I begin to prepare the picnic, carefully removing items from my cooler: *chorizo* (a type of red sausage),

*salchichón* (a type of sausage, similar to *saucisson* or salami), cheese, a bean salad, wine. Fifteen black-faced sheep have joined me. They loiter close by, but turn away, their bells clanging out across the valley as they nudge and bump each other, and I get the feeling that they're showing me their rear ends deliberately. The cheese I am about to eat was made with milk from the very udders between their scrawny black legs. I couldn't be

much closer to the source, but the source doesn't appear to enjoy being so close to me.

This is a story about slow food. You may already know *that* story... In 1986, McDonald's started selling burgers in Rome's Piazza di Spagna. Journalist Carlo Petrini, after choking with indignation on his morning brioche, decided to do something about the advancing ketchup-ization of the world, and set about founding





the Slow Food movement to champion traditional, regionally-produced food as an alternative to fast food.

## Survival

Slow foods don't just need champions, they need saviors. Traditional foods can easily disappear from the face of the Earth, never to return. Indeed, by the time you could

get a Big Mac and eat it on the Spanish steps in Rome, it was almost impossible to find the *carranzana cara negra* cheese traditionally made using milk from the black-faced breed of sheep here with me today. Wolves had made a comeback in the area, and while flocks diminished in size, the sheep's milk also fell from favor. This was partly due to a huge growth in sales of another Basque cheese in the 1980s and 90s, *Idiazabal* (Spain

*Gourmetour* No. 74), which uses milk from the white-faced *carranzana* sheep but not its dark-visaged cousin. The black-faced sheep and the cheese, both native to the Carranza Valley in the Basque province of Vizcaya, were about to fall off the map forever. Extinction is a natural process. As you read this, some unknown strain of Amazonian water gnat is probably biting the evolutionary dust. Do we



care? Too late, it's gone. But when it comes to breeds of animal that have been integral to the human food system for centuries, their extinction impacts on the biodiversity of our food heritage, the living resource that forms the basis of everything we eat. Carlo Petrini never wanted a worldwide ban of McDonald's, he just wanted to ensure that thousands of local "endangered" foods remained available. And eaten. That's where I come in. Let's eat...

## Picnic

The cheese is one of the most distinctive I've ever tasted. For a sheep cheese, there's a surprisingly strong tang to it, more acidity than a typical Idiazabal, for example. It comes in various stages of cure, but semi-cured is ideal. This one is firm, dense, and quite dry; imagine an aged Wensleydale (PDO cheese produced in Yorkshire, England) with a touch of nuttiness and a complex

wash of creaminess following that acidic punch (the milk of the black-faced sheep is high in fat). However, there are also some small pockets of moisture remaining, because these small circular cheeses are pressed by hand, that is, by hands, no weights or pressing plates, just finger power; indeed, the light-to-mid-brown skin is a little irregular, showing the faint indentations of the cheesemaker's fingers. Each cheese is unique, and when you hold one, it feels like an edible testament to the centuries-old rhythms of life in these hard, majestic hills.

I wash the cheese down with a glass of *Malvasia de Sitges*, a malmsey from Sitges, just south of Barcelona. It might not be the obvious choice, but it is rich and fragrant, reminiscent of an amontillado. Given the strength and character of the cheese, it's a pretty amazing match! And in this case we can apply the word "exclusive" with confidence: the

Sitges malmsey is produced from a total of only 2.5 ha (6.1 acres) of vines, mostly by the Hospital de Sant Joan Baptista in Sitges. Equally exclusive is the grape, the *Malvasia de Sitges*, which has thrived in the town for centuries due to a particularly accommodating microclimate and a high acid content. A nice, exclusive marriage of cheese and wine, then. But how is it that the cheese is still here at all? Ten years ago the carranzana black-faced sheep had disappeared from their steep hillside pastures. However, at this point a curious vessel-cum-biblical-metaphor came to the rescue. Captained by Dr. Mariano Gómez, the vessel was called the Ark of Taste.

## Ark of Taste

Seeking to "rediscover, catalog, describe and publicize forgotten flavors", the Ark is in fact a register of world heritage foods that need our support, published by the Slow Food





movement. Whatever the nature of the threat to a particular food, the Ark is about celebrating them and getting us to consume them. From the grey Ukrainian cow and the Madagascan Andasibe red rice to the Montreal melon, many countries are now involved.

Ark foods must be of excellent quality and taste, traditional within a locality or region, and produced on a small, non-industrial scale. They must also conform to the overall food values of Slow Food (high quality, ecologically “clean”, derived from a fair system of production). Spain has about 80 Ark foods, from rare animal breeds, fruit and vegetables, to cider. Those foods in the most dire need of help are given special status as “flagship foods”; in addition to being of fabulous quality, flagship foods normally require direct, immediate intervention (organization, funding, infrastructure, marketing...) to avoid extinction.

There are nine such foods in Spain at the moment, including the carranzana cheese and the Sitges malmsey, and I have most of the others up here on the mountainside for my flagship picnic too. Carlo Petrini implored us to save these foods by eating them: that’s what I intend to do, a modest contribution towards saving the world’s biodiversity, my mini-Kyoto of the stomach.

### Pig revival

Today’s meat comes in the form of cured chorizos and fresh salchichón from the Euskal Tzerria pig, a native Basque breed that was on the verge of extinction when Pello Urdapilleta, a farmer based in the northeastern province of Gipuzkoa (northern Spain), decided to resurrect it, initially for his family’s own consumption. I went to visit Pello yesterday at the palatial *caserio* (farmhouse) that the Urdapilletas

have occupied for generations, and to see the pigs themselves, who live free-range in the surrounding woods and pastures. Thanks in part to the promotional boost that Slow Food can give small producers like Pello, through food exhibitions, tastings, contact with chefs, and in this case the coveted “flagship” status, producing the Euskal Tzerria is now a viable business, a gourmet pig to compete with the best that Spain has to offer.

Pello’s dry cured ham immediately reminded me of Iberico, with plenty of infiltrated fat and that silky sheen on the ham’s surface at room temperature. The flavor of Euskal Tzerria is delicate yet seriously porky, with sweet notes and lots of creamy fat, and it’s a great advert for how food conservation can widen and diversify a market. Both fresh and cured, Euskal Tzerria has become a firm favorite among Basque chefs, and is earning a fine reputation





further afield; a Japanese chef paid the pigs a visit the week before me. Back at the picnic I slice a couple of pieces of chorizo and offer them to my guests. Not the sheep: there are also two humans with me, José Ignacio Isusi, the shepherd, and Mariano Gomez, who these days is President of Spain's Slow Food organization. Mariano's iPhone never stops as he constantly dishes out advice and help to foodies and farmers and Slow Food activists. Meanwhile, José keeps the black-faced sheep in order, and watches as I prepare what must look like the

most pretentious lunch that's ever been eaten in these hills...

## Slow salad

I arrange a white bean salad on a plate. The *Mongetes de Ganxet* are smaller and more delicate than normal beans, hook-shaped, with a buttery texture and skin so fine that it almost disappears in the mouth. They are cultivated in four small areas in eastern Catalonia, where the soil is ideal for this fragile, low-yielding plant, which needs constant watering and is difficult to harvest

without damaging the beans. The ganxet has long been noted for its exceptional quality, but its labor-intensive cultivation and harvesting led to much crossing of the strain. Several years ago a collective was set up to guarantee the production of authentic beans produced on traditional, organic lines. Recognition as a Slow Food flagship food followed, helping to establish the ganxet as a product of supremely high quality. These beans will never replace high-yielding, non-organic beans. At 10 euros per kg (2.2 lb), they're about ten times the cost of the



cheapest dried beans in my local supermarket. Some things just ain't cheap. Try them. They're worth it. They are very special indeed. With a stone-faced shepherd looking on, I dress the beans in the *slowest* way possible. First off, the olive oil is from thousand-year-old trees in the Valencian district of Maestrat (*Aceite de Olivos Milenarios del Maestrat*). Olive trees in other parts of the Iberian Peninsula have been carbon-dated to 2,000 years old, so calling the trees "millenarian" is no advertising hype. Maestrat has one of the world's largest remaining concentrations of such superannuated trees, although to the untrained eye, their fat gnarled trunks, with chaotic branches shooting out of the top, look more like Norwegian trolls in need of a haircut. Until quite recently people used to uproot the trees and re-plant them in private gardens, sometimes overseas. Local man Ramón Mampel decided to take action. Eighteen years of action. The regional government finally granted the trees legal protection, and the association Clot d'En Simó was founded to make oil. The farga olives of Maestrat produce an oil that is fresh and floral, with a hint of spice at the finish. Only perfect examples of the hand-gathered olives are used, cold-pressed within six hours of harvesting, and the juices are not subject to filtering processes, all of which leads to an oil with a hugely smooth, vigorous character. Five or six thousand liters per year (1,320-1,585 gal) are now produced, and

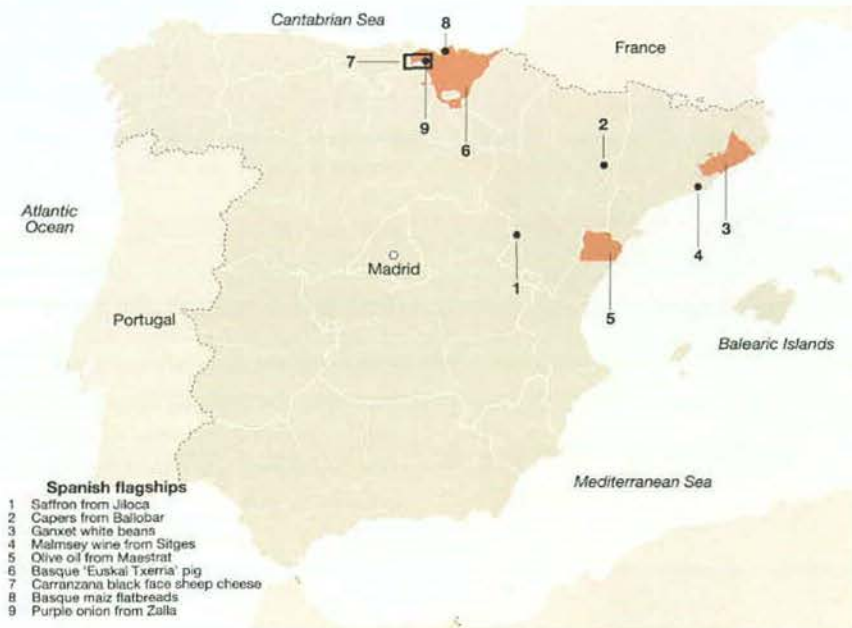


Slow Food's recognition of the oil simply gilded what was already a remarkable story of millenarian conservation. You can also follow seven walking routes in the area, taking you past these amazing trees. Watch out for trolls, though.

## Onions and saffron

In the oil I have softened some purple onions from Zalla, in the Basque Country. These onions carry "flagship" recognition, and again came within a heartbeat of extinction. Only one lady, Ana Mari Llaguno, was still growing them,

and what little she sold fetched around 70 cents per kg (2.2 lb) at a local market. Then four more women became interested, and at the same time Slow Food representatives started showing the onions to local chefs. The Zalla onion has a mild, sweet taste and crunchy, juicy flesh. You can use it raw, but it was also traditionally used in the local *salsa vizcaina* (an onion, tomato and pepper sauce) and in *morcillas* (blood sausages). In other words, an old, traditional product with excellent properties. Chefs immediately agreed, and demand sky-rocketed. The five growers can now charge 3.50 euros per kg, and their purple onions are used in some of Europe's best restaurants. My onion dressing also contains an indecent amount of flagship saffron. It's from the area of Jiloca, in the province of Teruel, eastern Spain (best known for its cured ham), which sits at an altitude of 700-900 m (2,296-2,952 ft) and has the perfect climate for growing saffron: long, cold winters and short, hot summers. Half a dozen small-scale producers continue the cultivation of saffron here, a tradition dating back to the Arab settlement in Spain over a millennium ago. About four-fifths of the world's saffron comes from either Iran or Spain (see Gold Standard, *Rediscovering Fine Spanish Saffron*, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 81), and of the Spanish product, Jiloca is one of the best, 100% organic, and, frankly, cooking with it is about as sexy as



you can get with flower stigmas. José occasionally whistles an instruction to his dog, which darts around the sheep as I finalize preparations for the picnic. It was about ten years ago that Mariano and José tracked down and bought some of the very last black-faced carranzana sheep, to try and halt the breed's seemingly terminal decline. These days they have around 50 head of sheep, with plans to grow to 80 within five years; a few other flocks have also been established, and there are around 200 black-faced sheep now in existence.

### The cheesemaker

With the sheep saved, next came saving the cheese. Cue the girl with

the cheesemaker's fingers. Begoña Isusi, José's daughter, went in search of people still making the cheese, and found one old lady, who was 85 at the time. Begoña learned how to do it. Just in time. Since then production has risen steadily, to a current output of around 4,000 small cheeses (c. 350 g / 12.3 oz). Unpasteurized carranzana milk, organic rennet and organic salt are the only ingredients. PVC replicas of the original circular molds are used, and Begoña's fingerprints can now be seen in restaurants and on connoisseurs' cheeseboards everywhere. It's not available year-round, because although it does keep well enough to guarantee an annual supply, it always sells out. If you can't get any, Slow

### Web sites

<http://slowfood.es>

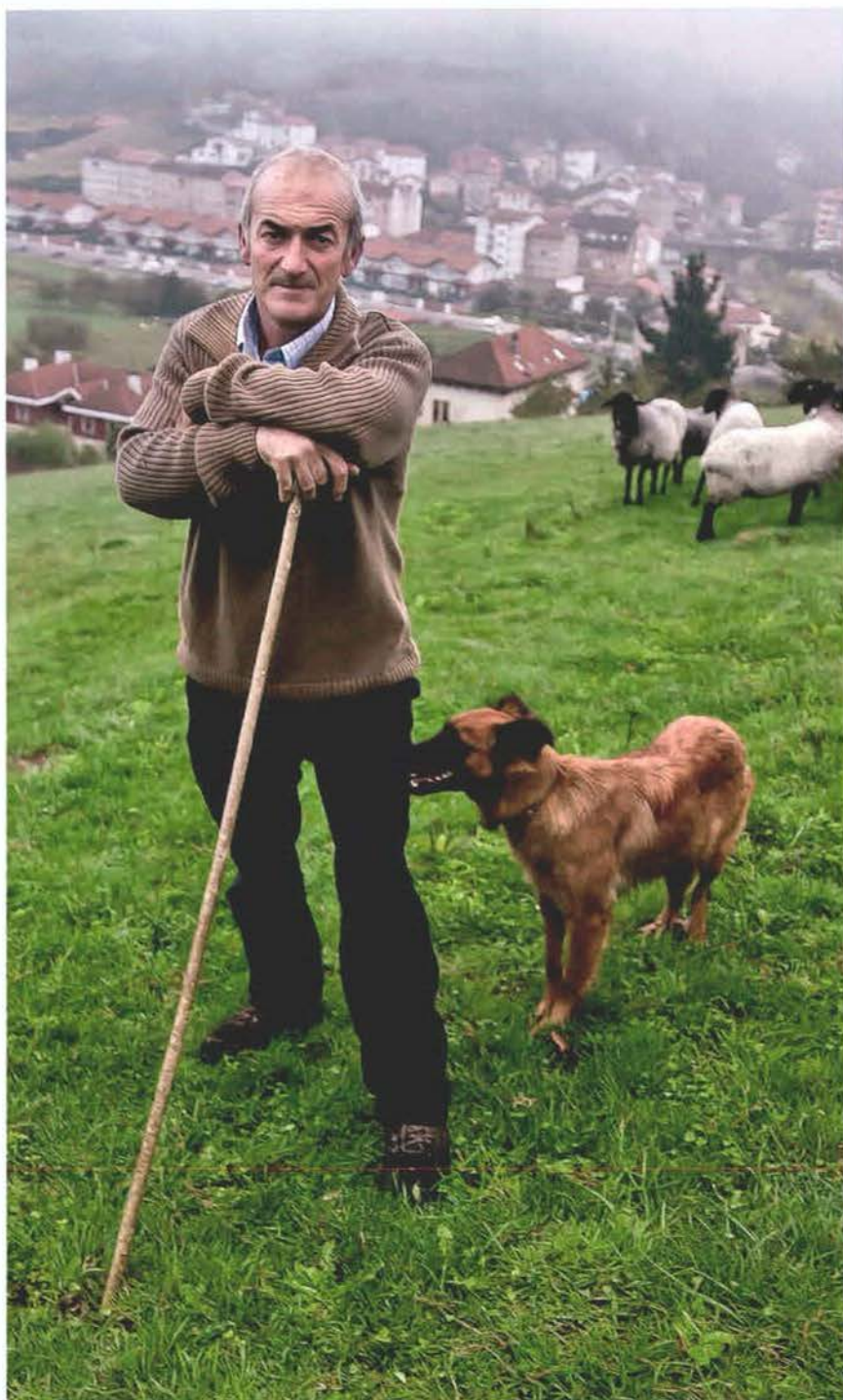
Official site of Slow Food Spain (Spanish)

The current list of Spain's nine flagship slow foods, plus contact information where available:

- **Basque Euskal Txerria pig** (*Cerdo Euskal Txerria*)  
info@urdapilleta.eu
- **Basque maize flatbreads** (*Talo de Mungia*) Local markets in the Vizcaya province
- **Capers from Ballobar** (*Alcaparras de Ballobar*)  
<http://alcaparras.wordpress.com>
- **Carranzana black-faced sheep's cheese** (*Queso de oveja carranzana cara negra*)  
isusi-anaiak@hotmail.com
- **Ganxet white beans** (*Mongetes de ganxet*)  
www.mongetedelganxet.cat
- **Malmsey wine from Sitges** (*Malvasía de Sitges*)  
Specialist wine sellers
- **Olive oil from Maestrat** (*Aceite de olivos milenarios del Maestrat*) <http://www.intercoop.es>
- **Purple onion from Zalla** (*Cebolla morada de Zalla*)  
Local markets in the Vizcaya province
- **Saffron from Jiloca** (*Azafrán de Jiloca*)  
<http://www.azafranjiloca.com/>

Many of these products, together with others from the Ark of Taste, are available from the Slow Food shop, Mercado de La Ribera, 2ª planta, Bilbao.





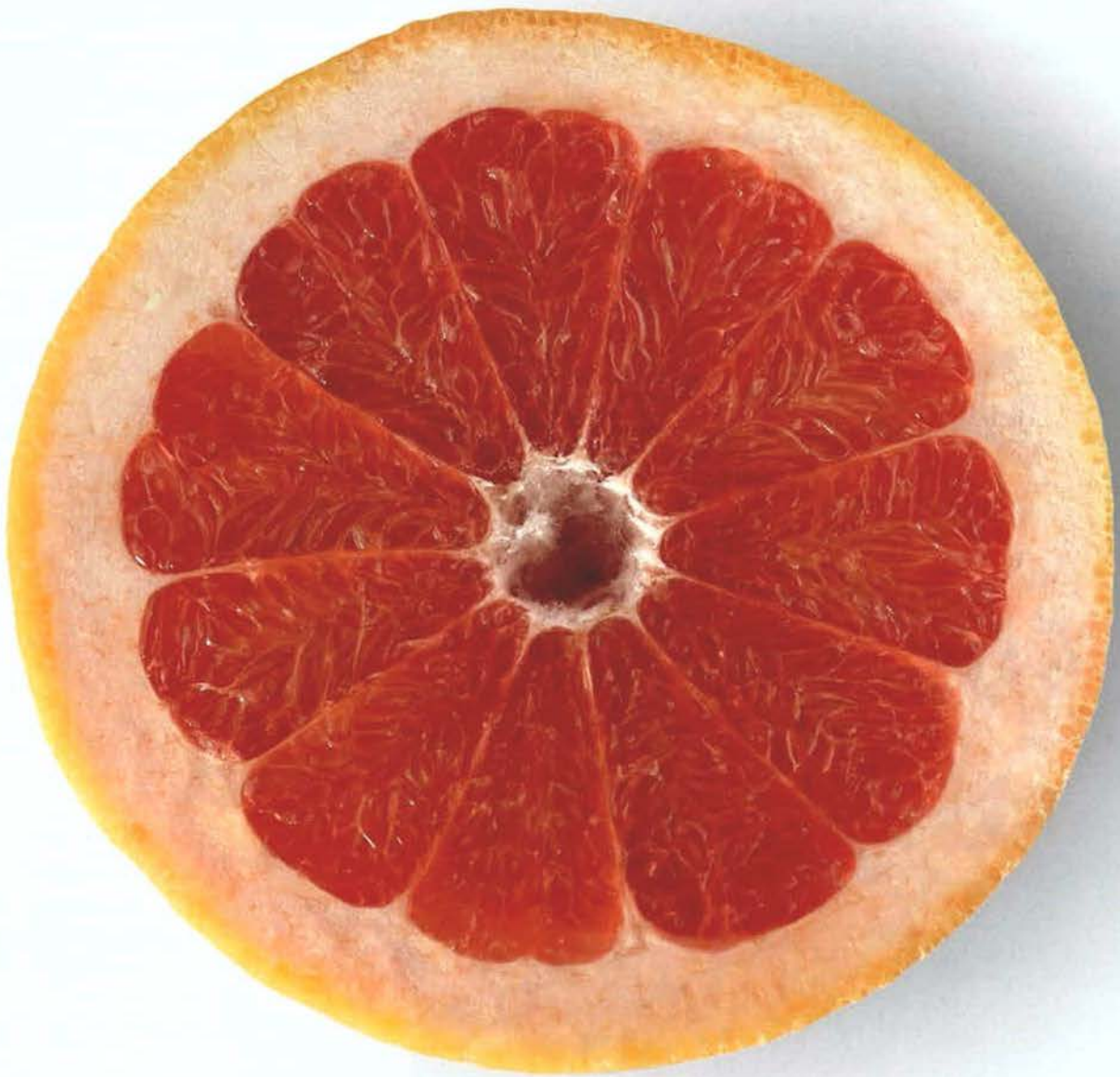
Food has a stall in Bilbao's Ribera Market, where the cheese will cost you 22 euros per kg. If the market is closed, they often have it on the menu at the restaurant of the Guggenheim Museum. In fact, the Guggenheim uses five of the current flagship foods, and many other restaurants are similarly enthusiastic.

So there it is, a story with a happy ending. Resurrecting the carranzana black-faced sheep's cheese implied rebuilding the sheep stock; local pastures could then continue in their ancestral use, and the rural economy benefited. Like the Euskal Txerria pigs, the ganxet beans and the other flagship products, it's a great example of how the demise of a heritage food can be turned around, not through government subsidies, but by reestablishing traditions that can support themselves in the marketplace. Saving rare foods (and breeds) from extinction is about maintaining the biodiversity of our food chain and making non-industrial food production economically viable, and about making sure that these alternatives are the most delicious and authentic possible. Begoña's cheese ticks all the boxes.

*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.*



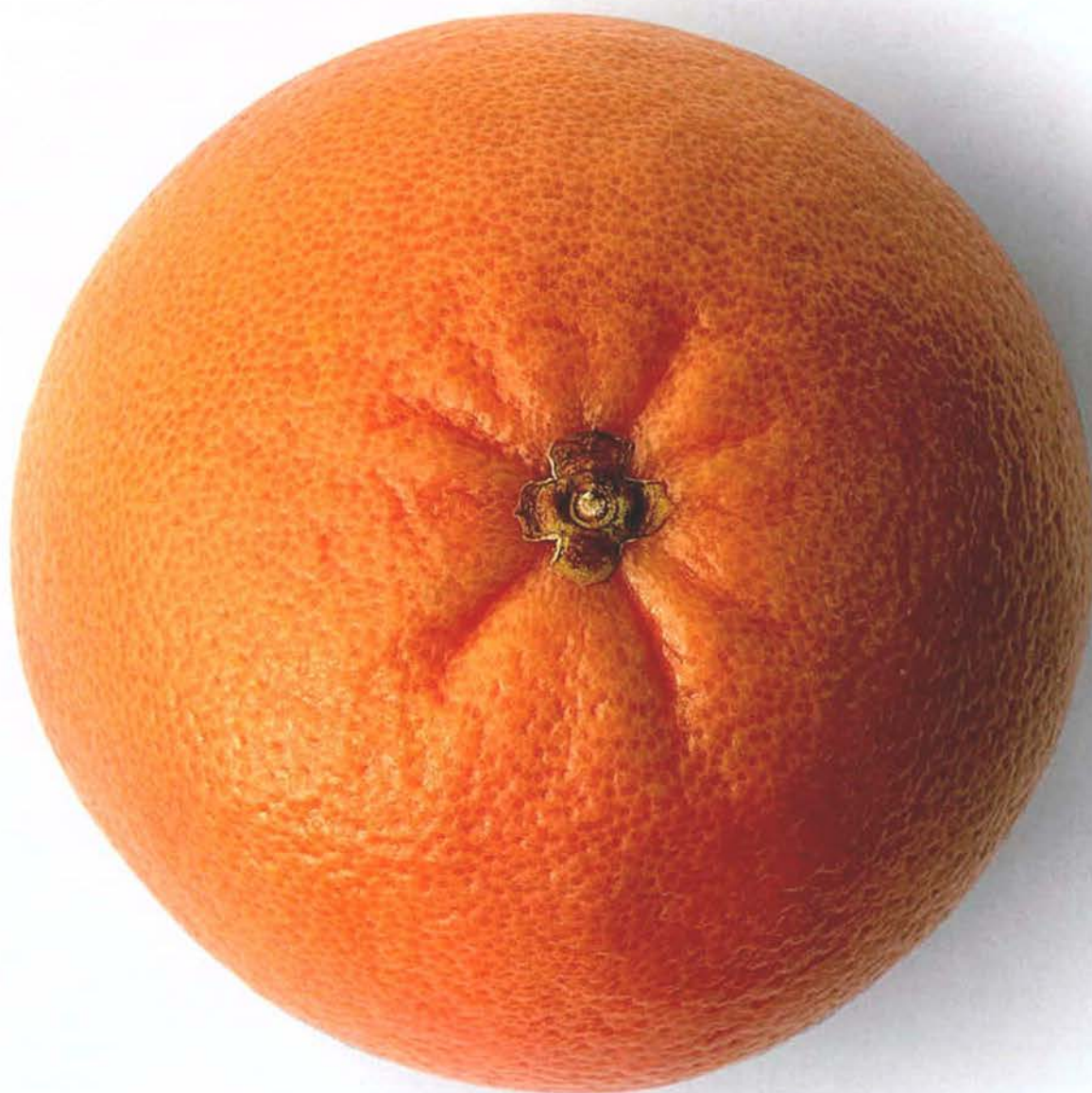
# PULP





# NON-FICTION

Spanish grapefruit is winning friends abroad. Its yellow or blushing peel, tangy red pulp, nutritive qualities and fragrant aromas are helping it conquer a growing share of the import markets in France, Germany and other European countries. In Spain however, grapefruit is virtually unknown on the domestic market and in traditional Spanish gastronomy. In the heart of grapefruit country, farmers from Murcia are doing what they can to help spread the word about this succulent citrus made in Spain.





## TEXT

ADRIENNE SMITH/@ICEX

## PHOTOS

AMADOR TORIL/@ICEX

It's not unusual for people to return from a trip to Murcia with their cars packed full of fruits and vegetables. Located in the southeast corner of Spain, Murcia is snugly nestled between Andalusia, Valencia and the sea. Its semi-arid Mediterranean climate is ideal for growing lettuce, artichokes, tomatoes and Monastrell grapes used for producing the area's excellent, full-bodied red wines. While lemon and orange trees are a common sight, another of the province's important products is grapefruit, which is exported all over the world (albeit in small quantities; the bulk head to Europe). In winter, the first glimpse of these orchards is striking. As the train winds south from Madrid, it snakes through barren apricot, plum and peach orchards, and past brown, stark landscapes dotted with gleaming solar panels. On the outskirts of Murcia, the vivid greenery of citrus trees, laden with fruit, suddenly transforms the landscape into a colorful Mediterranean garden. On my way home from Murcia with a 20 kg (44 lb) box of grapefruit, I had a better grasp of its role in Spain's export market and its bid for recognition here at home.

## Tropical treasure

Grapefruit was discovered in Barbados in 1750 by Griffith Hughes (1707-1758; Welsh

naturalist) who dubbed it the "forbidden fruit", as he had been searching for the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden at the time. Its name was later changed to grapefruit, supposedly because its fruit hangs in clusters much like oversized bunches of grapes. The original grapefruit was an accidental hybrid of two Asian transplants, the shaddock and sweet orange. Shaddock, an ancient citrus thought to have originated in Asia as early as 100 BC, is named for the English Captain Philip Shaddock, who purportedly brought the first of these fruits to Barbados in 1649. Nowadays, it's important to distinguish between grapefruit and shaddock, as the names are often used incorrectly. Grapefruit, called *pomelo* in Spanish, is of the species *Citrus paradisi*, while shaddock (sometimes called pummelo) is of *Citrus maxima*, and is often referred to as Chinese or Asian grapefruit in European markets. Shaddocks look more like giant pears, and have firm or crunchy pulp and a thick peel. Like many New World botanicals, the grapefruit eventually migrated to Spain. However, it never became a traditional Spanish crop or a staple of the Spanish diet. Commercial grapefruit cultivation in Spain only began in the late 1970s/early 1980s, and currently involves about 2,300 ha (5,683

acres) of land. Although grapefruits are also grown in southern Valencia and Alicante, and parts of Huelva and Seville in Andalusia, Murcia is without a doubt the center for all things grapefruit in Spain, accounting for approximately 30,000 of the 55,000 tons of grapefruit produced here annually. This is particularly true in the southern areas of Campo de Cartagena, the Guadalentín Valley and Águilas.

The agricultural wealth of Murcia is a meld of climate and geography: two rivers, the Segura and its tributary the Guadalentín; the Mediterranean Sea; and a series of mountain ranges that cut through and surround the city of Murcia. The landscape varies from piney to deciduous forests; and the terrain, in some places rocky and sharp, later relaxes into fields and sloping orchards. According to José Luis Albacete, whose company Earmur is located on the northern slope of the Sierra de Carrascoy Mountains about 14 km (8.7 mi) southwest of the city of Murcia, there are many reasons why grapefruit is an ideal crop in this region.

A pioneer of grapefruit cultivation in Spain, José Luis started out as an almond farmer, but increasing difficulties in the market steered him towards trying something new. For 50 years, his grandfather had dedicated a small corner of land to experimenting with the then little-known crop of grapefruit. José Luis











was able to observe firsthand the relative ease with which these citrus fruits could be cultivated in this area of plentiful sun, loose soil, and a virtual lack of diseases and frosts. He spent time in Texas and elsewhere, intensively studying grapefruit cultivation. Back home, he began trying to convince his friends and neighbors to follow in his footsteps and start planting the citrus. Earmur currently produces about 3,000 tons of grapefruit, but José Luis predicts that production will increase to 10,000 tons over the next two to three years, when the youngest plantations reach maturity. The company's success with this crop is immediately apparent. On my visit to the plantation in early December, dozens of partridges scurried like mad across a road lined with heavily laden grapefruit trees. The golden fruits grow in bunches that are often concentrated towards the undersides of the tree, reaching down to touch the land like fingertips. It was almost shocking to see so many large fruits on one tree, realizing that they must be harvested by hand, one by one. The area known as Águilas, which is located on the coast, has an even more distinct microclimate, nestled as it is between the sea and the mountains. The weather is very mild with few extremes. This results in lower acidity in the fruit, since acidity is increased by large temperature differences between day and night, and by early winter cold. The company, Grupo G's España, has been cultivating grapefruit around

Águilas for the past 30 years. Part of their orchards are planted on one side of the mountains overlooking the sea, and the rest on the other side, thereby assuring both early and late crops. G's España was a pioneer in bringing the variety Star Ruby to Spain at the end of the 1970s. According to Ponciano Pons, the company's Senior Key Account Manager, the Star Ruby variety grapefruits grown here are noticeably less acidic than their Turkish or Israeli counterparts. Although the company initially planted more varieties, today it exclusively grows the popular Star Ruby grapefruits, with an annual production of around 8,000 tons a year.

## Star Ruby vs. Rio Red

Grapefruits are categorized by color into either colored (red or pink) or white varieties. The two most important types currently grown in Spain are both red varieties: Star Ruby and Rio Red. As grapefruit itself is a hybrid, the different varieties are either natural mutations, crosses, or, more often, developed via bud or seed irradiation. Star Ruby was created in 1970 through irradiation. This seedless variety is characterized by its fine, smooth skin, juiciness and deep, pinkish-red flesh, which is thought to be the most intensely colored of any variety. Rio Red, also a product of irradiation, was developed in 1976. These very juicy fruits tend to be less deeply colored than the

## Healthful Greatfruit

In some ways, the common association of grapefruit with weight loss is not far off the mark. The "grapefruit diet" first appeared in the 1930s and has had several resurgences of popularity ever since. In 2004, Dr. Ken Fujioka of the prestigious Scripps Clinic (San Diego, US), confirmed the weight loss benefits of grapefruit in a 12-week study. One hundred men and women consumed the fruit with every meal and gradually lost 3 to 10 lb (1.3 to 4.5 kg). The researchers detected a link between grapefruit and insulin, an important hormone with regards to regulating fat metabolism.

These benefits are only some of the many nutritional advantages of this citrus fruit. Grapefruit is often recommended by doctors and nutritionists as an excellent source of many vitamins and other nutrients. According to *Nutrition Action Healthletter*, published by the American Center for Science in the Public Interest, it has more fiber than oranges, apples or bananas. This fiber helps prevent constipation and may reduce the risk of colon cancer, while helping to lower cholesterol. Pink and red grapefruit also contain an elevated amount of lycopene, an antioxidant thought to help prevent prostate cancer, as noted in an article published by the University of Toronto Faculty of Medicine.

Grapefruit is an excellent source of vitamins A and C, potassium and folic acid, as well as being very low in saturated fat, cholesterol and sodium. On a side note, grapefruit has been proven to increase the absorption of certain medications. While this can have a positive effect with some drugs, it can lead to undesirable results with others.



Star Ruby variety, have a slightly thicker skin, and contain two to three seeds per fruit. Both varieties were developed by a Texas-based researcher, Richard Hensz. According to José Luis Albacete, the difference between these two varieties can be subtle. To prove his point, he opened one of each variety straight off the trees for me to taste. Both had a refreshingly sharp acidity that was tempered by the sweetness of the fruit and the characteristic grapefruit aroma. Both were the same size and shape, pale orange-yellow in color with deep rosy highlights on the peel, and were the same dark pinkish-red inside. While I found it terribly romantic to be savoring freshly picked grapefruit in the middle of a picturesque citrus orchard in southeastern Spain, I was at a loss to guess which variety was which. As it turns out, the real difference is economic. José Luis explained that the variety Star Ruby is more widely known, but time has revealed it to be somewhat delicate, with less resistance to sun exposure after 15 years, and lower yields. Other grapefruit varieties, like the more robust Rio Red, typically produce fruit for 30 to 40 years, and can live to be 100. A third grapefruit produced in Spain is the white variety known as Marsh Seedless or White Marsh. First planted in around 1860 in Florida, Marsh is one of the oldest grapefruit varieties and the one most commonly planted throughout the world. This



vigorous tree yields small to medium sized fruits with soft and juicy, whitish-yellow pulp. This was the original variety cultivated in Spain, but over the past ten years cultivation has shifted almost entirely to the red varieties. This trend has been repeating itself all over the world. José Antonio García, Director of AILIMPO, the Spanish Lemon and Grapefruit Interprofessional Association, feels that much of this trend is aesthetic, based on a misconception that red grapefruits will always be sweeter than the white varieties. However, José Luis Albacete believes that “anyone who truly appreciates grapefruit likes the red ones best.”

## Forgotten fruit, export success

Whether it's about red or white, the grapefruit debate is likely to be lost

on many Spaniards. In fact, one of the more surprising facts about Spain's grapefruit crop is the fact that very few natives seem to know it exists. According to a July 2010 survey carried out by the Spanish Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs (MARM) at the behest of AILIMPO, a mere 16.4% of interviewed Spaniards consume grapefruit with any amount of frequency. At the same time, just 23.6% identified Spain as a producer of this fruit. Only an estimated 20% of the 55,000 tons of grapefruit produced annually in Spain are sold domestically. According to José Luis's daughter, Nieves Albacete, who now runs Earmur, a large portion of these sales go to hotels or cruise ships, which cater to foreign palates more accustomed to eating grapefruit as a regular part of their diets. Though there are currently only six or seven Spanish companies dedicated to this minority citrus, production quantities in Spain over the past several seasons have either increased or remained stable. The crop is also extremely solid here in terms of price fluctuations. This stability is reflected in the fact that Spanish grapefruit growers are making quite an impact on the European import market. Spain is now the fourth largest grapefruit exporter to the European Union after the United States (Florida), Israel and Turkey. During the 2009-2010 season, the country exported over 43,300 tons to the EU and 2,300 tons to non-EU countries. This was an overall increase of more



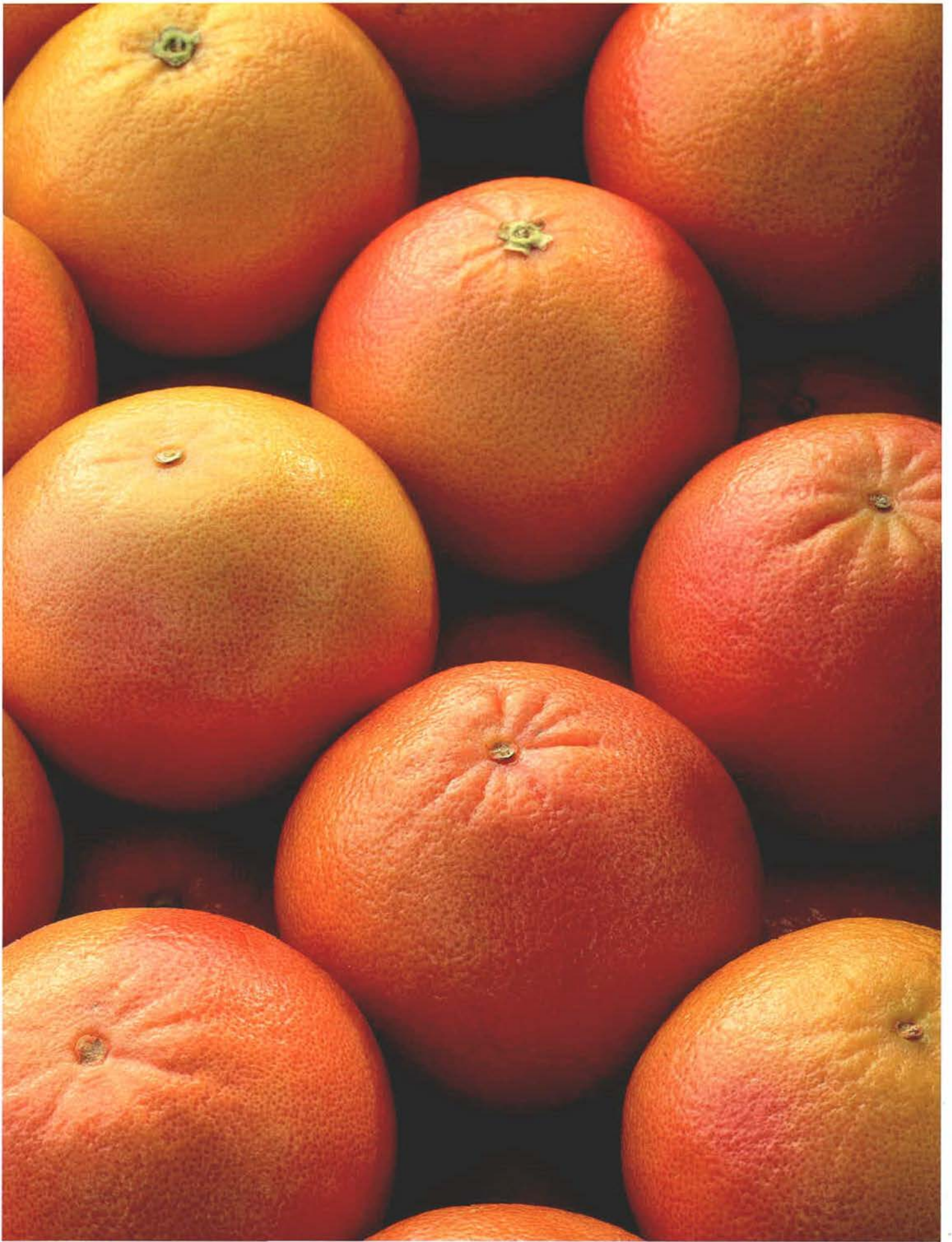


than 7,500 tons from the previous season. For years the international grapefruit market has been dominated by Florida, which, in the 1990s had an average annual production of around 1.6 million tons and accounted for 40-60% of world grapefruit exports. While Florida still leads the world market, its share has declined this past decade due to debilitating freezes, hurricanes, citrus diseases, and other factors such as encroaching land development. In Europe, Florida grapefruits once were 45-50% of imports, but by 2006, the amount had dropped to only 20-25%. For Spain's grapefruit growers, this changing world marketplace has meant opportunity, demonstrated by the fact that 70-80% of Spanish production is currently exported. The majority of these 45,000 tons is exported to France, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic, among others. Increasing quantities are also being sold to Russia, a high-potential new market. The question now for Spanish producers is how to gain an even greater hold on the world market. The obvious solution is to figure out how to differentiate Spanish

## Web sites

· [www.aillimpo.com](http://www.aillimpo.com)  
Official site of AILLIMPO, the Spanish Lemon and Grapefruit Interprofessional Association. (English, Spanish)









grapefruit from its competitors. Although the same varieties are produced all over the world, climate and other environmental factors can have some effect on varietal differences. Spanish grapefruit is known for its perfect uniformity of color and tone, and its usually blemish-free appearance. In terms of individual variety, one differentiating factor is that Spanish Star Ruby fruits are generally larger than their Turkish counterparts. This is important since Turkey is the main exporter to a growing Russian market, which at times demands the larger fruit more available from Spain. In terms of the market leader, Florida, José Luis Albacete asserts that Spanish grapefruit is no more acidic than the famously sweet

Florida fruit, and that the “difference between Florida and Spain is marketing”. He also believes that the perceived lesser sweetness of Spanish grapefruit is something that local producers should resolve together. Spain’s grapefruit season lasts from October to May. However, as the season progresses the fruit ripens and sweetens, meaning that fall grapefruits are much more acidic than fruit harvested in January or February. Early harvesting and export of the more acidic fruits creates a false perception of their overall quality. While countries such as South Africa strictly control their commercialization dates, Spain’s production is controlled by the early market demand, which of course means higher prices for the

first fruits of the season. Small improvements in the already exceptional fruit quality and production practices will probably not improve Spain’s export market share that much. There is one factor, however, that Spanish producers are working hard to exploit, and it’s one that could make all the difference. As the only grapefruit-producing country in the European Union, Spain’s clear advantage comes down to shorter shipping times. Companies like Earmur and G’s España, as well as AILIMPO, are doing what they can to get the word out on the incomparable freshness of Spanish grapefruit.







## The freshest fruit

At Earmur, Nieves Albacete explains that it's not unusual for grapefruits to be picked in the morning, prepared in the factory at midday, and shipped to France in the afternoon. Spain's grapefruits are all shipped via truck, which head directly to supermarkets throughout the EU. Grapefruits are often on the shelves by the very next day, or at most, 72 hours after picking, in the case of the United Kingdom. The same is true for other Spanish producers, and this provides a huge advantage in comparison with other countries. Grapefruits produced in Turkey and Israel are shipped to Europe by boat, which can take at least 7 to 10 days after picking. Fruits from Florida, South Africa, and Mexico can take a month to make the long journey to supermarket shelves in Europe. This extended storage can lead to reduced acidity, insipid

flavor and susceptibility to fungus. Another selling point related to faster delivery is the concept of integrated farming. A broad term that refers to taking an integrated or global approach to agriculture, its practices involve promoting sustainability through methods for reducing waste and residues, and implementing chemical alternatives such as biological pest control. This agricultural technique is especially important in exporting to countries like Germany and France, which put a premium on natural products. The fact that grapefruit grows so easily in Murcia means that farmers use very few chemical fertilizers or pesticides. While the fruits are not considered strictly organic due to the generalized use of mineral supplements, Nieves Albacete points out that grapefruit here is virtually disease-free, so we don't need pre- or post-harvest treatments. Without much need for preservative methods, the

packaging and preparation process is also as natural as possible.

A good place to see this in action is at the G's España factory in Torre Pacheco, about 40 km (25 mi) from the city of Murcia on the road to Cartagena. G's España produces 8,000 tons of grapefruit a year, and the efficiency of their lemon and grapefruit processing plant explains how these products are prepared and shipped so quickly. Grapefruit arrive from the fields and are separated by color along a fast-moving conveyor by a line of efficient women, who Commercial Director Juan Alfonso Sánchez asserts, have "a better sense of quality and aesthetics". The fruit is then washed with a neutral soap and water and coated with a thin layer of wax, which falls on the fruit in droplets that are distributed by fans. This protects the peel and helps prevent dehydration. The grapefruits are checked for quality (size, color, damage) by an



incredible battery of cameras that almost instantly record a 360-degree view of each individual fruit, and sort it according to the established parameters. The final step is packaging, where the fruits are put into the boxes, bags or netting required by each client, and then given an exact time stamp before shipping out. This factory can process up to 20,000 kg (44,092 lb) of fruit an hour—fruit that can be eaten the next day at someone's home in Amsterdam or Lyon. As a bonus for the workers, this modern factory smells wonderful!

## The versatile citrus

While grapefruit has had no discernable role in traditional Spanish gastronomy, it's now present on the menus of many of Spain's renowned, avant-garde chefs, including Rodrigo de la Calle of Restaurante De La Calle in Aranjuez (see Close-up, page 84), Joaquín de Felipe, of the Europa Decó Restaurant in Madrid's Hotel Urban, and Antonio Gras, of Trapería 30 in Murcia. Rodrigo de la Calle, the maestro of gastrobotanical cuisine, loves the versatility of grapefruit, both zest and pulp, its fragrant aromas and flavors, and its freshness and balanced acidity. In his words, "Grapefruit is very interesting for its elegance on the palate, its meaty texture, bold and addictive flavor, and nutritional properties. It's a good accompaniment for sweet

shellfish, as the Citrus subtle acidity that it lends to red prawns, for instance, helps to temper their sweetness. In desserts, I love the combination of grapefruit with nuts, banana or cherimoya creams, which are lightened by the citric notes of grapefruit." This idea is reflected in dishes like his Citrus cup with banana foam and roasted chestnuts (*Copa de cítricos con espuma de plátano y castañas asadas*) and Norway lobster with braised red endives (*Cigalas con endivias rojas braseadas*), which calls for an entire red grapefruit, as well as its zest in the sauce. Rodrigo, who is a self-described grapefruit juice "addict", always prefers red grapefruit for its subtlety and aroma.

Chef Joaquín de Felipe also plays with the versatility of red grapefruit, using it for both desserts and savory main dishes, particularly in *ceviches* like the one that he makes using yellowtail (fish) and chilies, which are macerated with grapefruit and other citrus juices. For him, "grapefruit balances the citrus flavors by adding a completely different and appealing touch of acidity. This adds complexity to the more common flavors of lemon and orange." Another important use of grapefruit in his restaurant is as a palate cleansing, pre-dessert sorbet, where it is often combined with coconut foam. Not only does this refresh the palate, but it also helps with digestion.

One would think that grapefruit might have a larger culinary presence in Murcia, but

I found it only in the modern kitchen of chef Antonio Gras, whose philosophy centers on the use of seasonal products and his belief in the special characteristics of products from Murcia. The grapefruit is one such product, which he believes to be particularly interesting due to its unique aromas and special acidity. These characteristics combine well in sweet breads and pastries, like *Magdalena de pomelo* cake and other desserts like Citrus soup with almond *turrón* (*Sopa de cítricos con bizcocho de turrón*; *turrón* is a type of nougat); as well as with savory dishes using shellfish or mollusks. Additionally, the citric acidity of grapefruit provides an excellent balance to the natural fat in pork. The recent culinary applications of Spanish grapefruit seem to mirror the fact that, in the words of José Antonio García, "grapefruit is Spain's" most modern, large producing crop. It also seems to reflect the burgeoning success of Spanish grapefruit on the European market, where its high quality and freshness relative to competing products is now translating to a greater market share. In Murcia, all of these factors have the potential to spur future growth of this crop—one that seems tailor-made for the varied landscapes and climates of this autonomous community of Spain.

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







Rodrigo  
de la Calle\*

Translation  
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

Photos, recipes  
Toya Legido/©ICEX

The wines have been  
chosen by Cristina  
de la Calle, maître  
at the Rodrigo  
de la Calle restaurant.

Clams in seaweed steam with  
**ESSENCE OF PINK  
GRAPEFRUIT** and curled  
cardoon

*(Almejas al vapor de algas con esencia de pomelo  
rosado y cardo rizado)*

Clams are perhaps my favorite mollusk. Their briny flavor is enhanced by the seaweed steam, and the pink grapefruit gives exactly the right touch of sourness to balance the vegetables with the clams.

**SERVES 4**

450 g / 1 lb large clams; 50 g / 2 oz sea lettuce (*Ulva rigida*); 50 g / 2 oz gigartina; 20 g / 1 oz sugar kelp (*Laminaria saccharina*); 4 large pink grapefruits; 1 stick red cardoon; 1 1/2 sheets gelatin; 1/2 green apple; extra virgin olive oil; salt flakes; glucose.

**Seaweed**

Cook the sea lettuce, gigartina and sugar kelp in 1/2 l / 2 1/6 cups of water for 10 minutes, then drain and chill.

**Clams**

Place the clams in a steamer and cook in the seaweed cooking water. When they have opened, carefully remove the flesh from the shells and set aside. Strain the water used for cooking the seaweed and clams and reduce to 300 ml / 1 1/4 cup. Set using the gelatin.

**Grapefruit essence**

Set aside one grapefruit for grating and another for removing the segments. Carefully peel the remaining two, removing any pith from the skin, then squeeze and strain the juice. Mix with the glucose and reduce to one quarter. Add the grapefruit skins and grated rind, cover and chill. Strain.

**Cardoon**

Wash the cardoon and place in iced water to curl. Cut into small pieces.

**To serve**

On a flat plate serve a few drops of the grapefruit essence on one side and, on the other, the clams, seaweed and cardoons. Finish with a few drops of extra virgin olive oil, salt flakes, some sticks of green apple and pieces of grapefruit segment.

**Preparation time**

40 minutes

**Recommended wine**

Louro do Bolo Godello Lías Finas (2008, DO Valdeorras), by the Rafael Palacios winery. The aniseed and mineral touches alongside the fresh fruitiness of this pale yellow wine make it an ideal partner for the sour grapefruit and the briny flavors of the clams and seaweed.

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







Char-grilled sturgeon with baked potato broth and

# GRAPEFRUIT OIL

*(Tacos de esturión a la brasa con caldo de patata asada y aceite de pomelo)*

The delicate, elegant flavor of the sturgeon, rich in collagen and marbled with fat, is served with a light vegetable broth that accompanies but provides no added flavor. The grapefruit oil just refreshes the broth, helping to lighten the sturgeon fat, and the charcoal smoke brings out all the aromas.

## SERVES 4

4 sturgeon fillets (about 200 g / 7 oz each); 2 small leeks; 1 grapefruit; 1 dl / 4.2 cups sunflower oil; chives; 3 large potatoes; rosemary; extra virgin olive oil; table salt; 1/2 l / 2 1/6 cups of water; extra virgin olive oil; Riofrio caviar.

## Sturgeon

Finely grate half a grapefruit onto table salt and mix with chopped rosemary. Place the sturgeon in this salt mixture for 10 minutes, then remove, wash and dry with kitchen paper.

Place the fillets skin side down in a frying pan with a little olive oil and fry on one side only until the skin is crisp. Just before serving, grill over charcoal.

## Baked potato broth

Carefully wash the potatoes, then cut off peelings 1/2 cm / 0.2 in thick. Bake the potato peelings in the oven at 180°C / 356°F for 40 minutes. Simmer in 1/2 l / 2 1/6 cups of water for 30 minutes, then decant. Cut the leeks into pieces and cook for three minutes in the potato broth. Then brown on the charcoal grill.

Grate the rind of the remaining half a grapefruit and set aside. Cut up the grapefruit flesh and infuse in the potato and leek broth for 2 minutes. Strain and decant.

## Grapefruit oil

Heat the sunflower oil to 40°C / 104°F and add the grated grapefruit rind. Cover, leave for 10 minutes, then strain.

## To serve

Place the pieces of char-grilled sturgeon and leek on a soup plate with a few drops of extra virgin olive oil. Add pieces of the chive stalk and curls, then add the Riofrio caviar. Pour a little potato broth over the dish, and finish with a few drops of grapefruit oil.

## Preparation time

1 1/2 hours

## Recommended wine

Gramona Argent Rosé 2006, by Gramona. This 100% Pinot noir cava is elegant and delicate, with a light alcohol content and an intense aroma of berries with licorice. It blends perfectly with the potato broth and lightens the fattiness of the fish.



# BEETROOT WITH GRAPEFRUIT SALT,

toasted garlic cream and beaten  
goats' cheese whey





*(Remolacha a la sal de pomelo, crema de ajos tostados y suero batido de queso de cabra)*

Beetroot is one of the few vegetables that can be found all year round. Its unique flavor of damp earth gives it an unusual personality and, when cooked with salt, the flavors are concentrated and the texture is emphasized. The addition of grapefruit balances out the sweetness of the beetroot and the cheese brings the various flavors together.

**SERVES 4**

2 fresh beetroots; 1 pink grapefruit; 1 head Chinchón garlic; 250 g / 9 oz organic goats' cheese from Colmenar Viejo; 25 g / 1 oz powdered egg albumen; 2 1/8 1/2 cup vegetable stock; 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz table salt; beetroot leaves.

**Beetroots**

Grate the skin of half the grapefruit into the salt and mix. Bury the beetroots in the salt with the grated grapefruit rind and bake in the oven at 180°C / 356°F for half an hour. Peel and set aside. Grate the other half of the grapefruit into 1 1/4 1/4 cup of boiling vegetable stock and infuse. Add the powdered egg albumen and beat until stiff. Wrap the pieces of beetroot in this meringue-like mixture and bake at 180°C / 356°F for 20 minutes.

**Toasted garlic cream**

Bake the head of garlic at 190°C / 374°F for 1 hour. Remove and peel the cloves and set aside.

**Beaten goats' cheese whey**

Place the goats' cheese in the remaining 1 1/4 1/4 cup of boiling vegetable stock, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Strain and reserve, separately, both the stock and the cheese. Blend the cheese with the baked garlic until smooth and creamy.

**To serve**

Serve a little of the garlic and cheese cream, top with half a beetroot. Pour over the beaten goats' cheese whey and finish with a few beetroot leaves.

**Preparation time**

1 1/2 hours

**Recommended wine**

San Amaro, made by the San Amaro brewery. This artisan, 100% malt beer is a dark toast color and cloudy, with a thick texture and great flavors. Its surprising mild sweetness and caramel touches make it the ideal foil for the sweetness of the beetroot, and its toasted aromas connect well with the earthy tones of the garlic and the cheese.









# SWEETS,

Memories are made of this



Sweetness is the taste we crave the most. The deities of Mount Olympus—untroubled by nutritional issues—were reputed to eat ambrosia and drink nectar, sweet quintessences perceived as appropriate food for the gods. Spain has a whole repertoire of traditional sweetmeats that are not only delicious, but also charged with historical significance and fascinating associations.



## TEXT

LUIS CEPEDA/©ICEX

## PHOTOS

FERNANDO MADARIAGA/©ICEX

## TRANSLATION

HAWYS PRITCHARD/©ICEX

All traditional sweets, indeed all long-familiar sweet tastes, seem to bear an emotive capsule within them. They have the power to conjure up an “atmosphere” within us and to stir up memories associated, more often than not, with tastes and smells first experienced in early childhood from the security of a familiar adult lap. *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of Things Past), surely the most languorous and multipartite 20<sup>th</sup> century novel, begins with just such an evocation which is triggered by the act of dipping a little sponge cake into a cup of tea. For the literary imagination of Marcel Proust (187-1922), this small domestic incident provides the point of departure for revisiting the events, emotions and social settings of the past. Proust’s *madeleine* (for that is what the sponge cake was) has become synonymous with nostalgia, representing the cultural potency with which tastes are imbued, and serving as the prototype for scent-triggered memories. Interestingly, science corroborates the evocative power of scents: according to experts, smell is the most efficient and evocative of all our senses. We remember just 2% of everything we see and no more than 5% of what we hear, but we assimilate and retain as much as 35% of what we smell. In other words, the aromas of sweet foods can justifiably be said to constitute the subtlest—and strongest—element of their appeal.

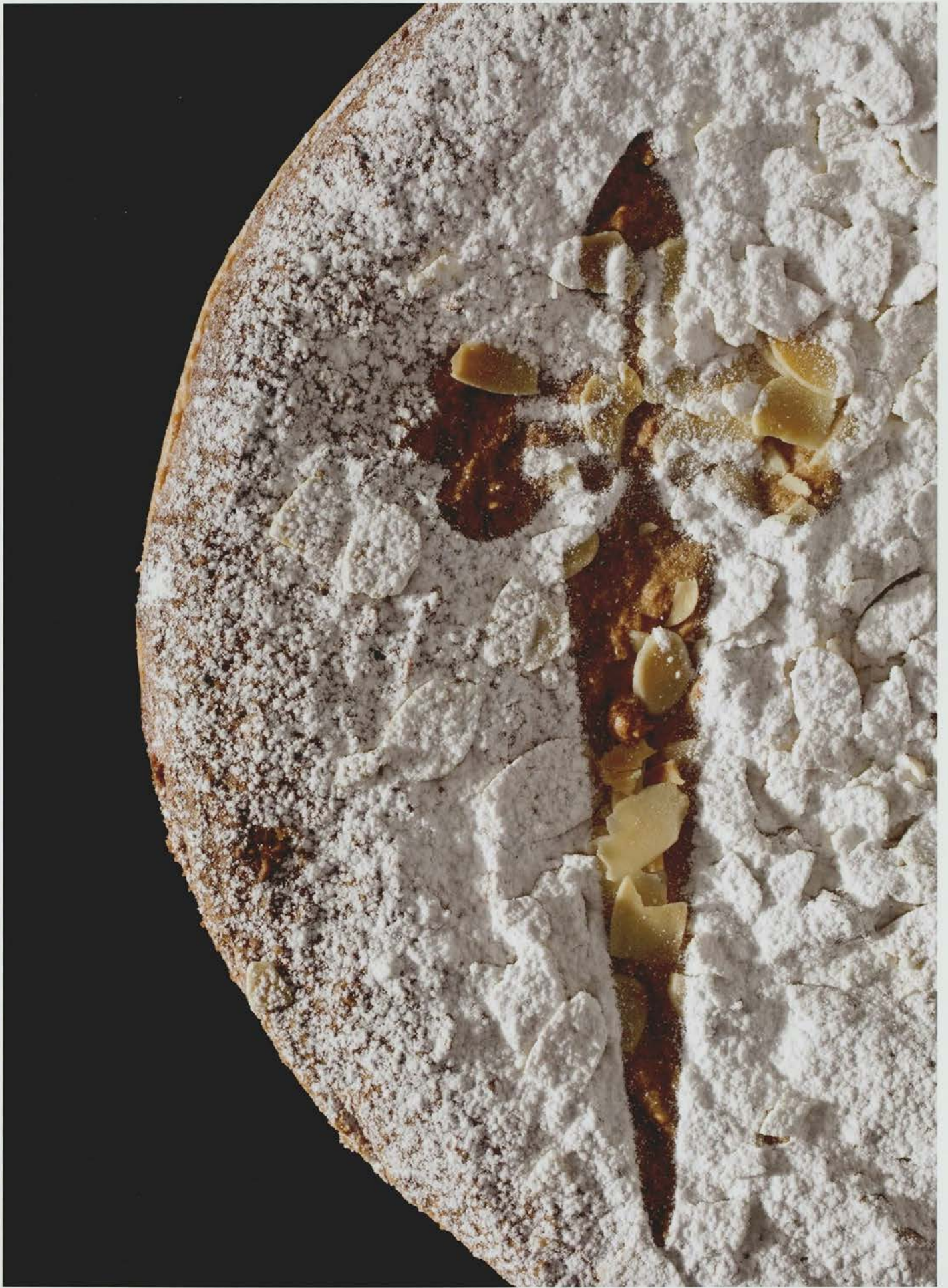
In the field of tastes as a whole, sweetness probably occupies the broadest, and most agreeable, tranche. We find it difficult now to imagine life without ready access to sweetness, yet cane sugar was unknown in the Western world until implanted in the Iberian Peninsula by the Arabs during their long period of occupation (711-1492). By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, sugar cane was being grown as a crop in Spain, and came into popular use around the time of the Crusades (military campaigns conducted between 1095 and 1291) or slightly earlier, along with most spices. Sugar was initially used only as a medicine or preserving agent, a mysterious substance handled by apothecaries, who made a lot of money out of it by making it into the first curative “confections” (the word derives from the Latin *conficere*, meaning “to prepare”) and selling them as a remedy for ailments. In consequence, the new substance acquired a mystique that persisted long after it had become more familiar. In *La physiologie du goût* (The Physiology of Taste), the seminal work of world gastronomy published in 1825, Brillat-Savarin includes a meditation, or apologia, on the subject of sugar. He describes it as the quintessence of positive taste and a *sine qua non* of sweetness. It seems likely that sweetness was the earliest craving experienced by the human palate: tree-dwelling hominids almost

certainly obtained their first pleasant taste sensations from the natural sweetness of fruits. The juice of ripe fruit and honey raided from hardworking insects would have helped palliate the insistent yearning for sweetness that would eventually be catered for specifically by sugar obtained from sugar cane, sugar beet and chemically engineered artificial sweeteners.

## The madeleine effect

It would be a fascinating exercise—and a tribute to Proust—to try to identify which item from our vast array of sweetmeats best replicates the madeleine’s memory-triggering effect for the average Spaniard. I wonder what most of us would vote for if asked. Certainly not the magdalena, despite the fact that this version of the French original has long been a familiar feature of our domestic diet. The magdalena is a traditional type of cake known to have originated in France (where it can be dated back to 1755), more specifically in the Commercy district of the Lorraine region. Madeleines/magdalenas are, essentially, simple homemade individual sponge cakes made with eggs, sugar, butter, wheat flour, yeast and lemon zest. The secret of their characteristically springy texture is stiffly-beaten egg white, whose addition lightens the mixture. Commercy madeleines are





Tarta de Santiago



baked in tins with scallop-shell shaped indentations. Historically, this reference to the symbol (still relevant in France) worn by pilgrims traveling the road to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia made them a popular snack offered for sale at various stages of the route. In Spain, however, the pilgrimage link faded in significance and the shell molds were superseded by individual waxed corrugated paper cases, though the recipe remained unchanged. Magdalenas are still wrapped in much the same way today, and are a familiar sight in Spanish homes, typically eaten for breakfast and *merienda* (late afternoon snack, much like British tea-time).

## In search of an icon

It turns out to be no easy matter to single out from Spain's traditional array one iconic confection that can boast the evocative power of Proust's madeleine. It ought to be something of an everyday nature and eaten by most of us; but our repertoire is an eclectic one, ranging as it does from flights of fancy to markers of key dates on the ecclesiastical calendar, some redolent of local idiosyncrasy and others of the timeless seclusion of convent life. Another differentiating factor is whether they use butter or olive oil as the fatty medium that communicates their flavor—an important difference, according to Catalan gourmet, author and journalist Josep Pla



Mantecada de Astorga

(1897-1981), who summed up the difference thus: "(sweetmeats) made with oil are bright and sunny, while those made with butter are lunar and cheerless."

Spain's traditional sweets are virtually innumerable and always remarkable. Some, for example, are decidedly holy: *torrijas*, made during Holy Week, are slices of bread soaked in milk or wine, then dipped in beaten egg and fried in olive oil; *huesos de santo* (saint's bones) are little cylinders of rolled marzipan. Others are out and out festive, such as *turrón*, which is an almond and honey nougat. Still others are part of almost sacred rituals: *roscón de Reyes*—the ring-shaped loaf of sweet spongy bread embedded with caramelized fruit, eaten on January 6<sup>th</sup> to mark Epiphany, the Feast of the Three Kings. Then there are homemade

sweets in the sense of desserts: *arroz con leche* (rice pudding made with rice, milk and sugar); *flan* (caramel custard made with eggs, milk and sugar); and *leche frita* ("fried milk" made with flour, milk and sugar). Regional specialties in this category include Galicia's *filloas* (pancakes made with flour, beaten egg yolks, milk and sugar), Canary Island *frangollo* (milk, *gofio* [flour obtained from toasted grains], lemon, eggs, sugar, almonds and raisins), and Asturian *frisuelos* (pancakes made with flour, eggs, milk, water, sugar and salt). Then there are the classics with a long pedigree, often associated with outdoor celebrations: *barquillos* (rolled wafers made with plain flour and sugar or honey), *pestiños* (folded fritters made with flour and beaten eggs, fried in olive oil and coated in honey); *merengues*



(meringues, made with beaten egg whites and sugar, baked in the oven); *mojicones* (individual sponge cakes made with marzipan and sugar; and *lenguas de gato* ("cat's tongue" biscuits made with flour, butter, sugar, egg white and vanilla). Local specialties constitute another sub-division, and include: *empiñados* (sweets made of almonds, sugar, water and egg white, coated in pine nuts), made in Valladolid; and Vergara *bizcochos* (sponge cakes filled with egg yolk and dusted with icing sugar). There are posh ones such as *canutillos* (horn-shaped pastries made with flour, oil, milk and lemon) and *crema catalana* (confectioner's custard enriched with egg yolks and topped with caramelized sugar); monastic ones such as *almendras garrapiñadas* (candied almonds); ephemeral ones such as *buñuelos de viento* (little puffy doughnuts made with flour and beaten egg white and fried in olive

oil); obviously Moorish ones, such as *alajú* (a sweet, sticky paste made by cooking honey, breadcrumbs and crushed almonds or walnuts together, served sandwiched between pieces of rice paper) found in Cuenca (Spain) as readily as in Oran. The latter is a prime example of the sweetmeats that constitute just one aspect of Spain's Muslim heritage. Contrary to popular belief, the Muslims did not come bearing cane sugar when they first invaded Spain. They did, however, introduce the use of orange blossom, both as sweet, strongly scented flowers and in the form of orange flower water (possibly an accidental discovery) which bestows a certain elegance on the many sweets in which it features. Seven centuries of Hispano-Arab coexistence in the Iberian Peninsula left their mark, and not just on our repertoire of sweets. They explain why Spain's gastronomy as a whole is so different from that of the rest

of Europe that did not experience the prolonged presence of uninvited guests. Despite the wide variety of Spain's traditional pastries and the cocktail of influences that each of them represents, a pattern of preference does emerge: Spaniards are particularly fond of the fried sweet delicacies known generically as *frutos de sartén* (fruits of the frying pan). In *El Aceite de oliva virgen en la repostería de ayer y hoy* (Extra Virgin Olive Oil in Confectionery Past and Present, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 80), a long overdue defense of the role of olive oil in dessert cookery, author José Oneto points out that *frutos de sartén* are the sole example of desserts in which the use of olive oil has always been accepted.

## Let them eat churros

Churros are the most classic example of *frutos de sartén*, and are an









## Traditional Confectionery

- **Guadalajara**  
La Flor y Nata  
Tel.: 949 22 60 05
- **Madrid**  
El Horno de San Onofre  
[www.hsonofre.com](http://www.hsonofre.com) (Spanish)
- **San Ginés**  
Tel.: 913 656 546
- **Nunos**  
Tel.: 914 092 456
- **Pastelería Salinas**  
(Alcalá de Henares)  
Tel.: 918 881 522
- **Marbella**  
Churrería Casa Ramón  
[www.churreriaramon.com](http://www.churreriaramon.com) (Spanish)
- **San Sebastián**  
Geltoki  
[www.geltoki.net](http://www.geltoki.net)  
(English, French, Spanish)
- **San Ginés**  
Tel.: 913 656 546
- **Seville**  
Confitería La Campana  
[www.confiterialacampana.com](http://www.confiterialacampana.com)  
(Spanish)
- **Toledo**  
Confitería Santo Tomás  
[www.mazapan.com](http://www.mazapan.com) (Spanish)
- **Valladolid**  
Cubero  
Tel.: 983 356 077
- **Majorca**  
Ca'n Miquel. Forn de Sa Pelleteria  
Tel.: 971 715 711



enduring favorite in Spain. These crisp, aromatic loops of fried dough transport one back to childhood. Indeed, watching the churro-maker at work, cylinder of dough on his back, deftly piping just the right quantity for each churro loop into the vat of boiling oil, is still a thrill. In the old days, the churros were threaded onto pliable raffia strips and tied in batches of twelve ready for taking away; meanwhile, women holding flat baskets piled high with *porras* (a thicker version of churros) and *buñuelos* against one hip advertised their wares with cries that were part of the pleasure of Sunday mornings. Churros are still very much with us, but are now to be found in *churrerías* or *chocolaterías*, shops where you can eat them on the spot or buy to take home, freshly fried. Some cafés serve them only first thing in the morning (they lose their charm once they have gone cold), and some exotic restaurants, such as Kabuki in Madrid, have

adopted them as a tribute to local custom, serving miniature ones as a dessert, accompanied by a little cup of chocolate (more on that later). Surprisingly, churros have become more popular as a breakfast item than as a merienda; this late afternoon snack is more likely to involve *picatostes* (sugar-sprinkled French toast fingers). The biggest and most aerated *fruto de sartén* is the *porra*, the batter for which incorporates beaten egg whites. The batter is piped into the hot oil to form huge continuous spirals which are cut up into portions with confectioner's scissors when cooked. The existence and nature of *churrerías* are part and parcel of Madrid's reputation for staying awake until the early hours having a good time: some legendary founts of churros either stay open all night or start serving very early in the morning. *Chocolateria San Ginés* is a famous example, though there are equivalents—both up-market and down—all over Spain. In Andalusia they make a *fruto de sartén* that is a cross between a churro and a *porra*, known as a *tejeringo*, *tallo*, or *calentito*, made from a rather lighter dough and served well-sugared. There are delicious ones to be found in the *churrerías* of Seville and Cadiz, and I also have fond memories of ones eaten in Baez and Úbeda (Jaén), and at Casa Ramon in the Plaza de los Naranjos in Marbella (Málaga), where they are brought to the table as complete spirals, freshly fried in extra virgin olive oil (which is regularly renewed during the long working day).



## Just desserts

The Sunday churros we remember as children tie in with the idea of food as a reward. They were—and still are—deployed as a token of adult approval of a child's behavior. Sweet things are the ultimate reward, as Spanish sociologist Amando de Miguel observes in his *Sobre gustos y sabores: los españoles y la comida* (On Tastes and Flavors: Spaniards and Food; Alianza Editorial, 2004). He recalls that the usual punishment for naughty children was to make them go without pudding and, while on the subject of sweets, informs us:

“There was a great variety in Classical society, made at first with honey and later with sugar. Fruit did not count as a sweet except in dehydrated form, such as dried figs, sun-dried peaches or apricots, raisins and prunes, and crystallized fruit. A taste for sweetness was something that united Moors, Jews and Christians.” One very sweet dessert confection made of egg yolk and sugar, whose dense texture and yellowish color apparently resembled the fatty part of salt pork, was given the name *tocino de cielo* (heavenly pork fat). Given that pork was a taboo food for both Jews

and Muslims, this version was “heavenly” in the sense that it defied religious boundaries by being acceptable to all. It emerges strongly that sweet-associated memories gladden the heart more than savory ones. There is a school of thought that maintains (*pace* the physiologists) that there are really only two tastes (bitter and sweet), acidic and salty being simply sensations or aggressions of differing degrees of intensity, namely (like “hot” in the sense of piquant) slight burns rather than tastes. This theory is not my own, though I do find it reasonably convincing. It is put

Churros





forward in broad terms by Spanish journalist, cosmopolitan chronicler and expert in the physiology of taste, Julio Camba (1882-1962) in his book *La casa de Luculo* (The House of Lucullus) published in 1929. Which brings us neatly to the aforementioned chocolate, in which both those basic tastes are present. It is at once bitter by nature and sweet because of the sugar amalgamated into it to enhance its appeal to the sweet-toothed, both in its liquid form as drinking chocolate and in solid form as bars, bonbons, and confectionery in general. The inclusion of milk and nuts to create

various specialties extended this appeal still further.

### Chocolate *a la española*

The Aztecs' equivalent to ambrosia and nectar was chocolate, which they looked upon as the food of the gods. This aromatic fermented seed of the cacao tree was one of the hitherto unknown and baffling foodstuffs with which the Spanish conquistadores were confronted at the laden table of Moctezuma (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century Aztec emperor).

Much later, 20<sup>th</sup> century Mexican writer José Vasconcelos, promoter of the notion of a “cosmic race”, perceptively summed up how significant these new discoveries were: “A civilization unfamiliar with those flavors could not be considered complete.” Spanish colonizers of the Americas introduced chocolate into Europe as two separate substances—cocoa solids, or cocoa paste, and cocoa butter—which were combined in varying proportions. From the Age of Enlightenment (18<sup>th</sup> century) on, the addition of sugar to the mixture greatly enhanced the appeal of

Sobaos pasiegos





chocolate to a public conditioned to respond negatively to strong bitter tastes at a time when these were associated with poisons. Jesuit missionaries to the Americas were known for promoting acceptance of indigenous agricultural products and livestock, particularly the turkey (at one time nicknamed *jesuita*) and cocoa. Despite a few false starts and initial public mistrust, chocolate soon caught on and was manufactured as a preparation for drinking hot *a la española*, namely thick, dark and fragrant, as it is still enjoyed today (while also being a major component of traditional and

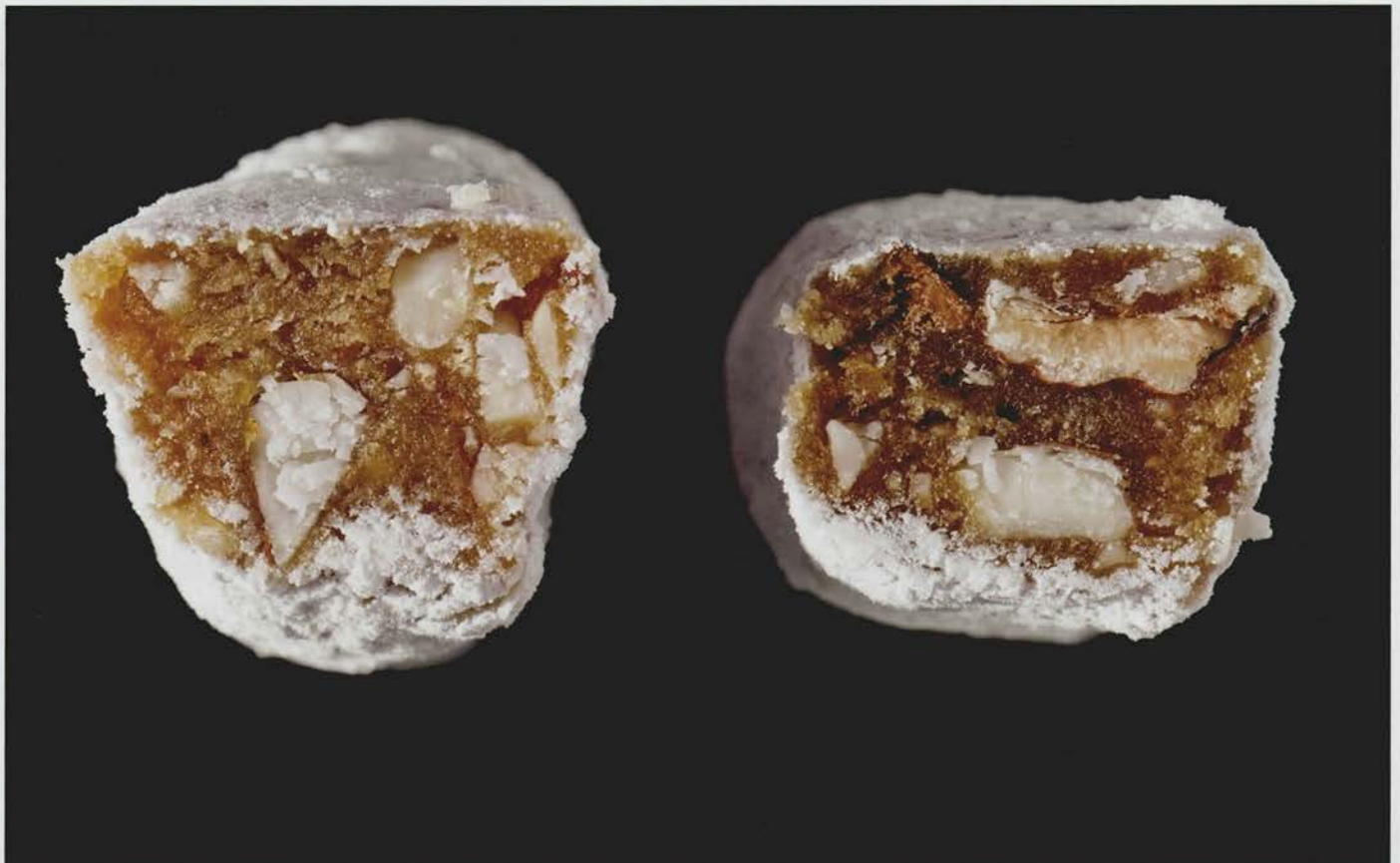
contemporary patisserie and confectionery). In Spain, hot chocolate generally comes with churros or porras which seem to have been invented as the ideal complement; however, there are plenty of equally compatible candidates among our traditional sweet repertoire: *sobaos pasiegos* and Majorcan *ensaimadas* are just a couple of examples...

## Sobaos and ensaimadas

The origins of *sobaos pasiegos* are little documented, though they are

known to have been made for over a century in the Pas Valley (Cantabria, northern Spain) from a recipe created by Eusebia Fernández Martín, cook to a certain Dr. Madrazo (1850-1942) of the Vega de Pas sanatorium. Nowadays, these little sponge cakes enjoy Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) status which guarantees their provenance. In days gone by, they were distributed by early-morning delivery men who replaced any left over from the day before with fresh ones. They are made of a batter of wheat flour, butter, sugar, eggs, lemon peel, star anise, salt

Alfajor de Medina Sidonia





and honey which is poured into molds, baked, then left to cool before packing. They are presented in characteristic rectangular paper cases, cleverly folded for easy extraction. Bright yellow in color with a dense, spongy texture, they make a delicious breakfast or mid-morning snack in combination with hot chocolate or *café con leche*. Note, however, that—unlike *frutos de sartén*—*sobaos* are so absorbent that they should not be dunked: the best approach is to take a bite, then follow it with a sip of chocolate or coffee. The *ensaimada*, a Majorcan

specialty, has always been considered something of a quality item in patisseries and cafés. It takes its name, and sticky texture, from the pork lard (*saim*, in the Majorcan language) that is a characteristic ingredient of its sweet dough (the other ingredients are strong flour, water, sugar, eggs and sourdough starter) which is left to ferment in special cupboards for 12 hours or more before baking. *Ensaïmadas* are shaped into coils of two or three clockwise turns and, once baked, are pale gold and wavy-surfaced, slightly crisp on the outside and soft, close-textured and relatively inelastic on

the inside with an idiosyncratic puff pastry effect that it takes a skilled baker to produce. *Ensaïmadas* are a deeply-rooted traditional product of the island of Majorca (one of the Balearic Islands off Spain's east coast). The earliest written references date from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and mention them as being made specifically for rural festivals and parties. Most of the ovens in which they are baked today are over 150 years old and belong to family-run bakeries. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, *ensaïmadas* were taken up by high society and eaten (with hot

Mazapán de Toledo









chocolate) at breakfast or merienda; a pattern of presenting an ensaimada as a social gift emerged with the result that they became increasingly popular, no longer a mere curiosity mentioned in cookery and travel books. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the ensaimada acquired its current iconic status as a classic tourist purchase: homeward bound visitors to the island carrying the trademark—and sometimes enormous—flat octagonal or circular boxes in which they are sold are a frequent sight at Palma airport. Ensamadas also have PGI status, which covers two types: classic Majorcan type, and Majorcan type filled with golden shreds of candied squash known as *cabello de angel* (angel's hair).

## The most Spanish of cakes

Another distinctive and deeply traditional sweet from the Spanish repertoire is *tarta de Santiago*, a ground almond tart in a pastry case made of a nicely balanced combination of one third almonds, one third sugar and one quarter eggs. Permitted flavorings (in homeopathic quantities) include lemon zest, sweet wine, brandy or marc. Icing sugar also features, but again only in sufficient quantity to sprinkle on top in such a way as to leave the sign of the cross of St. James (emblem of the Order of Santiago) silhouetted across its center. The first written reference to *tarta de Santiago* dates from 1577, and concerns an official visit by Pedro

de Portocarrero, Commissioner General of the Holy Crusade, to the University of Santiago to conduct an enquiry into banquets given in honor of the academic staff during the awarding of degrees. The first recipe for *tarta de Santiago* appears in a manuscript dated 1835 in Monoñedo (Lugo, northwestern Spain), part of the confectionery notebook of Luis Bartolomé de Leybar, a soldier billeted there. Headed *Vizcochada* (sponge cake), the recipe matches almost exactly the current specifications laid down by the PGI for *tarta de Santiago de Compostela*. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cake had acquired its characteristic icing sugar topping, as described in *El confitero y el pastelero* (The Confectioner and Pastry Cook) by Eduardo Merín. In 1924, the St. James' Cross silhouette (created by sprinkling icing sugar over a template which is then removed) became a standard feature, pastry cook José Mora being credited with its introduction. Spain's most readily recognizable cake makes liberal use of almonds, which are typically of the best Mediterranean varieties: Comuna, Majorca, Marcona, Molla, Largueta and Planeta.

## Sacred and secular

There are various versions of how Toledo marzipan came into being. One dates its invention back to 1212 and attributes it to the nuns of San Clemente who created a new delicacy in celebration of the

Christian victory at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa by crushing almonds and sugar with a mallet ("maza" in Spanish, hence "mazapan" [marzipan]). This is unconvincing on various counts, not least its anachronistic mention of sugar which by that date was not yet in widespread use as a sweetening agent. The use of almond and sugar mixtures for making specific sweetmeats, such as marzipan, is rooted in the history of the Eastern Mediterranean, having probably originated in Persia, where sugar cane (originally from India) had

## Web sites

- **PGI Alfajor de Medina Sidonia**  
[http://calidadagroalimentaria.besana.es/web/denominaciones\\_calidad/denominaciones\\_especificas/alfajor](http://calidadagroalimentaria.besana.es/web/denominaciones_calidad/denominaciones_especificas/alfajor) (Spanish)
- **PGI Sobao Pasiago**  
[www.allmentosdecantabria.com](http://www.allmentosdecantabria.com) (Spanish)
- **PGI Mantecados de Estepa**  
[www.afames.com](http://www.afames.com) (Spanish)
- **PGI Tarta de Santiago**  
[www.ingacal.com](http://www.ingacal.com) (Galician)
- **PGI Mazapán de Toledo**  
[www.turismocastillalamancha.com/restaurantes/denominaciones-de-origen/igp-mazapan-de-toledo/](http://www.turismocastillalamancha.com/restaurantes/denominaciones-de-origen/igp-mazapan-de-toledo/) (Chinese, English, French, Spanish)
- **PGI Ensaimada de Mallorca**  
[www.illesbalearsqualitat.com](http://www.illesbalearsqualitat.com) (Catalan, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish)
- **PGI Mantecadas de Astorga**  
[www.mantecadasdeastorga.es](http://www.mantecadasdeastorga.es) (Spanish)



been grown for centuries. The recipe and technique for making this simple, dense sweet was later transported from east to west by land and sea during the invasion by Arabs from Africa or at the time of the Crusades. We do know that mazapán (possibly derived from the Spanish for “March [by implication “Lenten”] bread” or “paste [perhaps meaning “sticky”] bread”) was readily adopted, first of all by Arab and Jewish confectioners and later turning up in convents, where the paste was molded into shapes associated with Christian imagery. One typical eye-catching shape representing an eel—a forbidden fish for Jews and Muslims—must have been a successful selling ploy, reinforcing the Catholic share of the market and keeping quality high so that marzipan (which has also been produced for centuries in Italy, Central Europe and the Americas) in Toledo attained a standard of quality known as “*calidad suprema*” (top quality). In marzipan of this type, a fine-textured dense paste is achieved by mixing ground raw, peeled almonds with different kinds of sugar. It comes in various presentations, the paste being molded mechanically or by hand, and then baked or cooked, sometimes with other confectionery ingredients added. The range of traditional Toledo marzipan products includes filled or coated marzipan, marzipan figures, eels, crescents, magdalena-like marzipan cakes, pine nut-coated marzipan balls, egg yolk cakes, marzipan and



Mantecado de Estepa

meringue cakes, and paste for making almond soup. Confeitería Santo Tomé, the Convento de las Dominicas, Confeitería Telesforo on Plaza de Zocodover (which dates back to 1806), and Pastelería Adolfo are all excellent sources, selling marzipan shapes throughout the year. Don't wait for a special occasion—these examples of top quality artisan confectionery are to be enjoyed just as they come.

## Drunk and sober

Writing *El arte de repostería* (The Art of Confectionery), published in 1747, author Antonio Martín credits Juan de la Mata, pastry chef to the

Royal Household, with the invention of a type of artisan-made sponge cake known as *mantecada de Astorga*, made by baking a mixture of plain flour, eggs, butter, pork lard and sugar. As a general rule mantecadas are presented in individual, open-topped, square paper cases (known as *cajillas*) skillfully folded at the corners for easy extraction of the cake. Each mantecada weighs around 30 g (1 oz), is firm-textured with a domed, golden-baked, sugar-sprinkled top. The crunch of the sugar topping in combination with the spongy texture of the cake is part of its appeal. Mantecadas de Astorga are a traditional local product of the Astorga district of northwest Spain,



where they are baked and packed. They used to be well-known all over the country, not least because they were sold at hub railway stations by vendors advertising their wares with loud cries. Other products sold in the same way were candied almonds in Briviesca (Burgos) and circular cakes known as *tortas de Alcázar de San Juan*, which were sold in the station where travelers changed trains for La Mancha. A high proportion of the mantecadas produced are still sold as a local specialty to tourists passing through Astorga. They are still made to the traditional recipe and are still presented in their characteristic hand-folded *cajillas* (made by local ladies known as *cajilleras*). Another sweet with broad popular appeal comes from Andalusia (southern Spain). As summer fades, Estepa (Seville), a small town of some 12,000 inhabitants, launches into a period of frenetic activity producing *mantecados* in readiness for Christmas. Christmassy smells (sesame, cinnamon, roasted almonds...) waft through the streets of Estepa throughout the fall, emanating from its 20 confectioneries, all busily engaged in producing a total of over 25,000 tons of *mantecados*. *Mantecados* are not to be confused with *mantecadas* (as described above); *mantecados* date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the wheat flour, sugar and fresh pork fat recipe being used by the local inhabitants and Clarissa nuns to make fairly basic shortcakes for their own consumption. A woman called

Micaela Ruiz Téllez, nicknamed *La Colchona* (perhaps best translated as "Chubby"), known for the excellence of her *mantecados*, began sending some for sale in Córdoba, using her peddler husband as transport. So that they survived the journey better, *La Colchona* adapted the recipe to create drier *mantecados*, cleverly managing to produce cakes that were firm and close-textured on the outside and melt-in-the-mouth within. Local confectioners were not slow to imitate the refined product, which met with such success that small factories were set up to meet demand: by 1934 there were 15 registered *mantecado* producers in the town. Today, at least one member of every household in the area is directly involved in *mantecado* manufacture. Guadalajara, the nearest to Madrid of La Mancha's sizable towns,



is home to a curious kind of cake with a very long history, known as *bizcocho borracho* (drunken sponge cake). For many years, *bizcochos borrachos* featured importantly on the product list of all nearly every confectionery and cake shop in Spain. They are harder to come by these days, but a journey to Guadalajara (capital of the Alcarria region) is rewarded by the opportunity to sample one on the spot: they can either be bought to take home from a cake shop such as Catapán, or selected from the dessert menu at the town's cafés and restaurants. *Bizcocho borracho* is arguably the spongier and most flavorful of the entire sponge cake category, its attributes no doubt enhanced by the customary addition of rum, brandy or fortified wine. The recipe is quite conventional except that it is beaten extra thoroughly to ensure that the cake is spongy and absorbent: after baking, a syrup containing rum (distilled from sugar cane) or a sherry brandy syrup is poured over it, leaving it appetizingly aromatic and sweet in an unusual way. Some confectioners prefer to use a sweet wine syrup.

## Arabian aromas

*Alfajores* are little tubular pastries known to have originated in Medina Sidonia, right in the heart of Cadiz province (southern Spain). If their very name provides a clue that *alfajores* are of Arab origin, the list of what they contain leaves no room for doubt: honey, almonds, hazelnuts, flour, breadcrumbs,



herbs and spices (coriander, cloves, aniseed, sesame and cinnamon). All these combine to produce a light brown interior with a delicately spicy aroma and honeyed flavor with hints of nut. The population of Medina Sidonia was originally Phoenician, though it was during the Muslim occupation that this region enjoyed its heyday. The ancestral method for making alfajores is as follows: the honey is heated before adding to it the hazelnuts and walnuts (toasted and split), the breadcrumbs, flour, toasted sesame, coriander, cloves and aniseed and mixed together thoroughly. The resulting dough is cut up while still hot and allowed to cool to room temperature, then shaped into the characteristic elongated cylindrical shapes. The individual alfajores are then dipped in syrup and dusted with sugar and cinnamon before packing. Medina Sidonia's confectionery-making tradition is of considerable historical importance and there are many literary and other written references to it. It is currently the most important center of confectionery production in Cadiz province.

To describe Spain's repertoire of traditional sweets as boundless is little short of the truth. As one starts to explore it, one discovers more and more at every turn and simply has to accept that any attempt at an exhaustive account would be a fool's errand. The best one can hope for is to sketch in the basics and describe their most

salient and best-known characteristics. However, this resolve crumbles in the face of gems of information such as the fact that *Yemas de San Leandro* (rich egg yolk sweets from Seville) owe their survival to the generosity of local winery owners who habitually donated the superfluous yolks left after using egg whites to clarify their wines to the Augustine nuns of San Leandro convent.

This gesture ensured the survival of a sweet famous since the 15<sup>th</sup> century despite the poverty that preceded and succeeded the Spanish Civil War. The pattern was replicated in Avila, where similar sweets, known as *Yemas de Santa Teresa*, are produced in honor of peripatetic mystic Teresa de Cepeda, better known as Santa Teresa de Jesús, or Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), patron saint of Spanish gastronomy. Equally fascinating is the discovery that the candied almonds sold by Clarissa nuns through a revolving hatchway in their convent door are by no means the only local sweet in Alcalá de Henares (not far from Madrid). Alcalá is also the fount of *costradas* (puff pastries filled with confectioner's custard, meringue and almonds) and *rosquillas de lustre* (little sugar-glazed doughnuts), invented by *el maestro* Lino, master confectioner at El Postre. Meanwhile, one is astonished to learn that La Mancha (central Spain, a region known for its restraint) produces one of the most elaborate examples of *fruto de sartén*: the dough (flour, milk, eggs

and honey, flavored with aniseed) is painstakingly stamped out into flower shapes before frying, giving an end product known as *flores del Campo de Calatrava*.

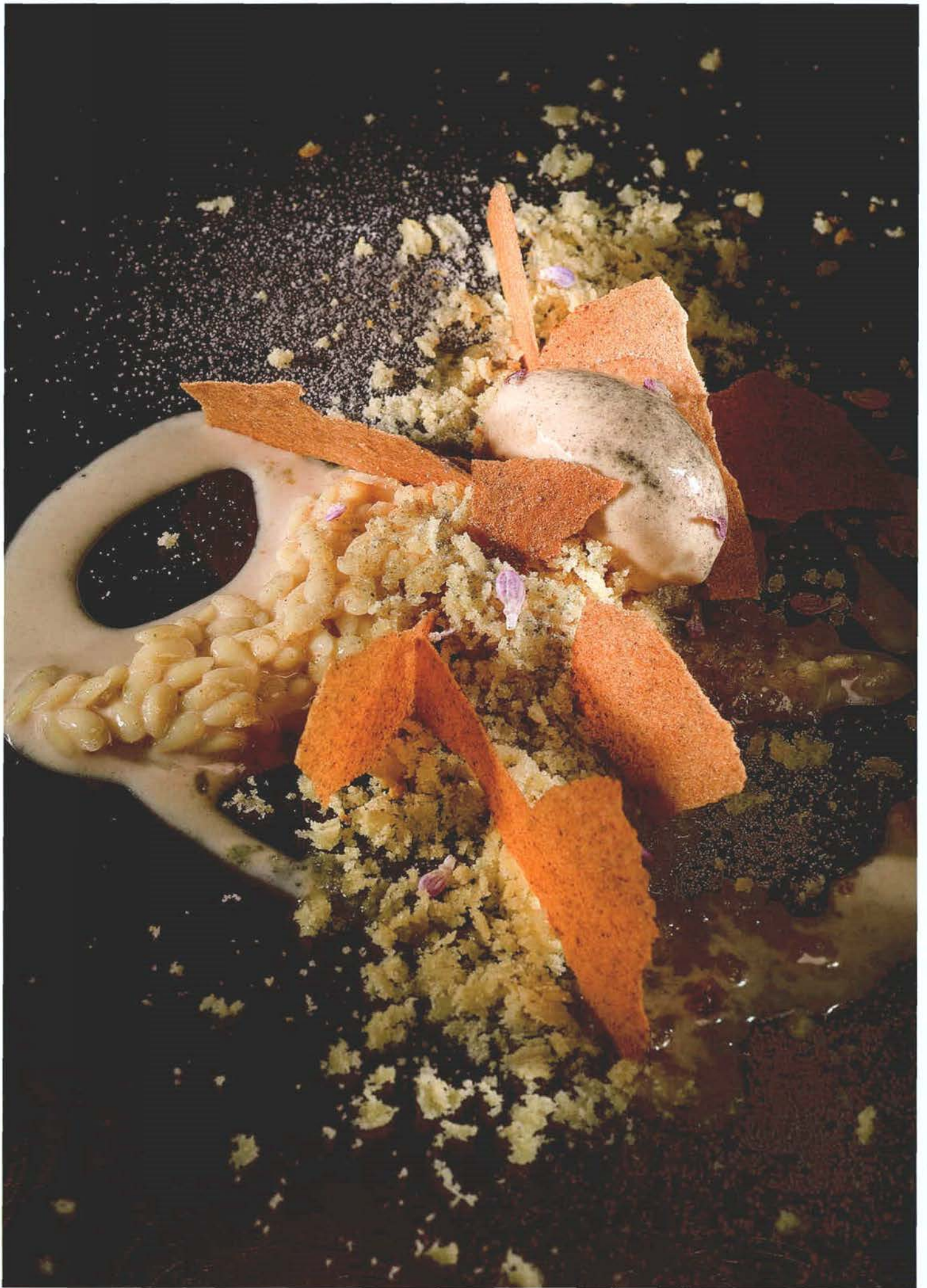
To pop a *pionono de Santa Fe* (rolled-up syrup-soaked pastry topped with toasted cream) into one's mouth is to be reminded that this little town just outside Granada is where the army of the Catholic Monarchs (1474-1516) camped during the campaign that culminated in their reconquest of Granada, the last Moorish stronghold in the Iberian Peninsula. And why, you find yourself wondering, is *turrón*—the *crème de la crème* of Spain's sweet repertoire and enduring representative of Al-Andalus in present-day Alicante—limited to cameo appearances at Christmastime rather than being enjoyed all year round, as its deliciousness and appeal would seem to merit? All in all, Spain's traditional sweets inhabit a mysterious, shifting realm to which history, legend, tradition and memories contribute in equal measure.

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Rodrigo  
de la Calle\*

Translation  
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

Photos, recipes  
Toya Legido/©ICEX

The wines have been  
chosen by Cristina  
de la Calle, maître  
at the Rodrigo  
de la Calle restaurant.

False rice pudding with date milk,

# MARZIPAN AND CINNAMON

*(Falso arroz con leche de dátíl, mazapán y canela)*

At Christmas, in true Toledo tradition, my father always brought out a selection of almond sweets, and almonds have always been one of my favorite nuts for desserts. They are the inspiration for this dish, but they also take us to Elche, an important production area for both Marcona almonds and dates. This dessert has been on our menu since 2005.

## SERVES 4

**For the false rice pudding:** 50 g / 2 oz pasta; 250 ml / 1 1/8 cups fresh cream; 250 ml / 1 1/8 cups milk; 300 g / 10 1/2 oz fresh dates from Viveros Huerto de Elche; icing sugar.

**For the marzipan:** 240 g / 8 1/2 oz Marcona almonds; 250 g / 9 oz sugar.

**For the cinnamon snap:** 50 g / 2 oz butter; 50 g / 2 oz flour; 50 g / 2 oz sugar.

**Others:** Dried flower petals.

## False rice pudding

Place the fresh dates in a vacuum pack with the milk and cream and cook in the Roner at 65°C / 149°F for 1 hour, then strain, retaining the liquid. Cook the pasta in the resulting cooking liquid over a low heat until al dente.

## Marzipan

Soak the Marcona almonds for 3 hours, then dry and grind. Add the sugar and knead for about 15 minutes until the mixture comes together and does not stick to your hands. Form into a roll about 2 cm / 0.8 in in diameter, place on an oven pan and bake at 280°C / 536°F for 10 minutes. Leave to cool.

## Cinnamon snap

Soften the butter, then mix with the sugar and flour to form a dough. Roll out until very thin and bake at 190°C / 374°F for 4-5 minutes.

## To serve

Plate the false rice pudding. Sprinkle with icing sugar and caramelize. Grate marzipan over the top, covering almost all the surface of the rice. Finish with the cinnamon snap and a few dried flower petals.

## Preparation time

2 hours

## Recommended wine

Pedro Ximénez, Vors 30 años (DO Jerez-Xères-Sherry), by Bodegas Harveys. This golden wine with a greenish sparkle is dry and offers aromas of crystallized fruit and nuts. It brings together the different textures and aromas as if by magic, and ends with a lingering aftertaste.

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







# ADAPTATION OF TARTA DE SANTIAGO

with calamondin orange

*(Adaptación de la Tarta de Santiago, con calamondín)*

One of the great Spanish desserts is Santiago tart. It is surprising how well the almond flavors blend with calamondin orange, one of the citrus fruits grown by Santiago Orts at Viveros Huerto de Elche. An excellent winter dessert, full of taste and aromas.

## SERVES 4

**For the cake:** 85 g / 3 oz ground almonds; 215 g / 7 1/2 oz icing sugar; 20 g / 1 oz inverted sugar; grated rind of 3 calamondin oranges; 200 g / 7 oz egg white; 3 g / 0.10 oz baking powder; 100 g / 3 1/2 oz hazelnut butter; 85 g / 3 oz flour.

**For the crystallized calamondin orange:** 250 g / 9 oz calamondin oranges; 250 g / 9 oz sugar; 1/2 l / 2 1/6 cups water.

**For the calamondin orange sorbet:** 250 g / 9 oz calamondin oranges; 1/4 l / 1 1/8 cups syrup; 1 sheet gelatin; 5 g / 1/6 oz glucose.

**Others:** powdered tea; Heartsease flower petals.

## Cake

Mix the grated almonds with the icing sugar, inverted sugar and grated calamondin orange rind. Place the egg whites in a separate bowl and mix without beating. Lightly mix in the baking powder and flour then add the sugar and almond mixture and, finally, the hazelnut butter.

Bake at 180°C / 356°F for 25 minutes.

## Crystallized calamondin orange

Make a syrup with the water and sugar. Bring to a boil and add the oranges. Cover and simmer for three hours.

## Calamondin orange sorbet

Grate, then juice, the calamondin oranges. Mix the syrup with the glucose and gelatin, then add the juice and grated rind. Pour into a sorbet maker and freeze.

## To serve

Break the cake into pieces and serve some on a plate. Pour over some of the syrup used for crystallizing the calamondin oranges and add a little powdered tea. Finish with the sorbet, and top with crystallized oranges and Heartsease flower petals.

## Preparation time

1 1/2 hours

## Recommended wine

Enrique Mendoza Moscatel de la Marina, by the Enrique Mendoza (DO Alicante) winery.

This wine has a clear, transparent yellow color with greenish tinges. Its honey notes blend well with the calamondin oranges, balancing out any bitterness. It is both light and creamy, helping bring together the acidity and the sweetness present in the dish.





# PASSION

and principles





## Rodrigo de la Calle

**Text**  
Almudena Muyo/©ICEX

**Photos**  
Tomás Zarza and  
Toya Legido/©ICEX

**Translation**  
Hawys Pritchard/©ICEX

“Gastrobotanics” is the joint brainchild of restaurateur Rodrigo de la Calle and biologist Santiago Orts. It’s a concept that has turned De la Calle into a champion of undervalued and overlooked vegetable species which, in his hands, become the stuff of haute cuisine. The dishes he creates to showcase the attributes of his raw materials are object lessons in harmony and fine-tuning backed up by considerable technical expertise.





I'm off to Aranjuez (46 km / 28.5 mi south of Madrid), and feeling quite excited at the prospect of eating food cooked by Rodrigo de la Calle (he was named chef of the year for 2011 at Madrid Fusión, the prestigious international gastronomic conference held in the Spanish capital every year). I'm also looking forward to traveling through one of my favorite parts of the country—the fertile fruit and vegetable-growing area beside the Tagus River. Given that it's winter, it won't be looking its best, but I always love it anyway. As it turns out, however, the weather prevents my seeing it at all by veiling it in a dense mist that reduces visibility to just a few feet. I muse on the unpredictability of Nature and on the advisability of reveling in its vagaries rather than railing against them. It occurs to me in retrospect that this brush with Nature put me in just the right frame of mind for grasping the essential point of Rodrigo de la Calle's cuisine, which takes its inspiration from the vegetable kingdom. He is, after all, the inventor (along with biologist Santiago Orts, who runs the Viveros

Huerto de Elche plant nursery) of "gastrobotanics", a culinary concept that ushers unaccustomed vegetable species into the realm of haute cuisine (some of them rescued from oblivion, others simply unfamiliar, but all of them founts of hitherto untapped gastronomic potential). In the setting of the welcoming restaurant that bears his name, located right in the center of Aranjuez, Rodrigo de la Calle wastes no time in determinedly getting the message across: "The idea is to reinstate vegetable species and varieties that possess notable qualities yet have been disparaged, left unexplored, or simply never been discovered—products that contribute added value to gastronomy. Some may already be close at hand, possibly having been cultivated by our forebears, while others will be discoveries made in the course of our research; Nature still has plenty of secrets to keep the spirit of enquiry occupied." But there is more to it than that: the ultimate aim is to endow products that he considers to be

of significant gastronomic interest with the sort of status that makes it a financially viable proposition to grow them as a crop. Obvious examples are fresh dates; finger limes (*Citrus australasica*), little lemon-like fruit with tiny vesicles that look deceptively like Ferran Adrià-type microspheres, that burst in one's mouth releasing a richly acidic taste; and ice plant (*Mesembryanthemum crystallinum*) and ice lettuce (early leaves of the ice plant). The latter two are leading representatives of "desert vegetables", so-called because it rains so rarely in Elche (eastern Spain) where they are grown. Rodrigo's habit of speaking in the plural is a reminder that gastrobotanics is the product of nine years' worth of work and research carried out in close collaboration with his alter ego, Santiago Orts. When Orts joins us later, around lunchtime, he launches immediately into an exposition of his theory that... "the reason for Spain's abundance of vegetable species is that its very specific geographical characteristics



have been conducive to the emergence of interesting species and varieties of this type, many of them originally implanted by the various cultures that, *en passant*, have left their mark on Spain." A book entitled *Gastrobotánica, 100 platos al natural para cada estación* (Gastrobotanics, 100 Natural Dishes for Every Season) is just one tangible product of Rodrigo and Santiago's collaboration.

## Origins

Santiago Orts runs Viveros Huerto de Elche, a family-owned plant nursery that was originally part of the historic Palmeral de Elche, a vast palm grove declared a Heritage of Mankind site by UNESCO. The nursery has now expanded beyond the confines of the Palmeral, having acquired a new role about a decade ago when it was given over to growing dates as a crop instead of ornamental palms. At around the same time, Rodrigo de la Calle took over at La Taula del Milenio restaurant (also owned by the Orts family) armed with experience gained at Madrid's top flight Lhardy and Goizeko Kabi. The day when Santiago offered Rodrigo fresh dates for use in the restaurant proved to be a pivotal one: in fact, fresh dates have since become a signature ingredient. "I still remember that day!" Rodrigo declares passionately. "I'd never tasted fresh dates before. They made such an impression on me that – quite unexpectedly – my professional and personal life took quite a different turn from then on.

I still look forward to the start of the date season in October, and I'm always a bit downcast when it ends in January."

Realizing that exploring the gastronomic potential of fresh dates called for more specifically relevant experience, Rodrigo secured a job at the 2-Michelin-star Mugaritz with Andoni Luis Aduriz—not only a big name, but one with a special interest in vegetable cuisine. The experience of haute cuisine he acquired there was further rounded out by subsequent periods working at 3-Michelin-star Martín Berasategui; at Pastelería Totel with master pâtissier Paco Torreblanca; and at Quique Dacosta's 2-Michelin-star El Poblet. In the course of seven action-packed years, he acquired and mastered cutting-edge techniques and the skills and secrets specific to desserts, patisserie, rice... Meanwhile, his research work with Santiago Orts continued in parallel. Furthermore, he was able to offer consistent supplies of dates and other protégé products to the chefs with whom he worked. In 2005, Martín Berasategui presented the following dessert at the 7<sup>th</sup> Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía Conference (the international food conference held at various destinations in Spain): *Dátil en crudo y en agua con helado de almendra amarga, bomboncitos de naranja y flores de almendra* (Fresh date with bitter almond ice cream, orange bonbons and almond flowers served with fresh date liquor). While it may seem surprising that none of the

other chefs showed much interest in these new products, as Santiago Orts observes: "It was a period of unprecedented creative activity in the gastronomic world, and Spain's top chefs were swept up in such a whirlwind during those years that there was far too much going on to take it all in." On top of which, as Rodrigo points out, "they were bombarded with new products every day, required to make appearances at all kinds of events, both in Spain and abroad. At that pace it was inevitable that many things got little more than a passing glance." Meanwhile, Rodrigo and Santiago were having fun staging their own gastronomic conferences in emulation of the top chefs. It was at one of these, in 2005, that they decided over a glass of wine that the time had come to put a name to their area of research, and came up with "gastrobotanics". They declare unanimously that their commitment to gastrobotanics has been life-changing, has brought them happiness and enabled them to live according to their principles. It is also clear that Rodrigo's gastronomic work derives its very being from Santiago's botanical research and vice versa.

## Restaurante de la Calle

Shortly after his 30<sup>th</sup> birthday, towards the end of 2006, Rodrigo de la Calle decided to open his own restaurant, a showcase for his own auteur cuisine and the gastrobotanics concept. "I'd





accumulated enough experience to be able to cook in my own way. Our menu includes a gastrobotanic option consisting of 5 dishes: *Ostra con caviar cítrico* (Oyster with citrus caviar), *Huevo con trufa y germinados* (Egg with truffle and sprouted seeds); two rice dishes featuring different desert vegetables; and a fruit macédoine that celebrates the diversity of citrus fruits now available.” De la Calle is passionate about food. “I cook the way I do because I follow the dictates of my heart and my instinct,” he declared at intervals throughout the day we spent together. Perfectionist and sensitive by nature, he has always known exactly what he wanted to do, remaining unwaveringly true to his conceptual approach to food even when, in the process of balancing the books, he discovered that only 15 customers had actually ordered his gastrobotanic menu in the first two years: “There was never any question of abandoning the concept: if I couldn’t do gastrobotanics in my own restaurant, I’d take it wherever necessary.” Whether Aranjuez is the ideal location for a restaurant of this kind is not up for discussion at

the moment (romantic attachment to a woman was what took him there in the first place, but she is no longer in his life). Critical opinion has been favorable and has helped build up his by now considerable reputation. He was named Madrid Fusión’s Revelation Chef in 2009, Chef of the Year at the same event in 2011, and meanwhile has been nominated for his first Michelin star. The hoo-hah that inevitably accompanies this sort of success is much in evidence during my winter visit. Manuel de la Osa (of 1-Michelin-star Las Rejas restaurant) has popped in just to say hello; Ignacio Medina, one of Spain’s leading restaurant critics (he won the Spanish Royal Academy of Gastronomy’s national prize for food journalism in 2009) is tucking in to specialties of the house at a table adjoining the one I’m sharing with Santiago Orts; meanwhile Rodrigo de la Calle’s mobile never stops ringing with arrangements for interviews and photographic sessions. Rodrigo can’t quite believe what’s going on, and looks rather wide-eyed as he does what he has to do. He can’t quite credit the fact that he

is being ranked with chefs that were his role models just a short time ago, and he becomes quite emotional (as he did when talking about his cherished products) as he recalls leaner times in the restaurant’s early days, and how the tapas bar upstairs enabled him to carry on producing auteur cuisine.

## Passionate about produce

So what, you may be wondering is Rodrigo de la Calle’s cooking actually like? His style of cooking is out-and-out contemporary, at once flavor-packed and subtle. His dishes are cleverly thought out and their cooking is judged to the second so that their juxtapositioning of flavors and textures can be experienced to the full. Ingredients can sometimes be unexpected yet they take their place comfortably among the rest. The influence of Martín Berasategui is discernible here, albeit slightly toned down. “He was the maestro as far as I’m concerned: my approach to food is just like his. We got on very well together, both professionally and personally. In fact, we used to go for a walk in the





countryside every morning before going to the restaurant." It comes as no surprise to learn that he has adopted Martín Berasategui's motto: "Technique is there to serve the purposes of my cooking rather than my cooking to demonstrate technique." His symbiotic mushroom-and-seaweed dish exemplifies this point beautifully. Rodrigo de la Calle describes his cooking as simple. By this he means that it respects the flavor of the ingredients involved, even when there are three or four elements. This notion was brought home to me perfectly when we sampled his *Cogollo de lechuga embebido en agua de algas, con flores de romero y ralladura de dragonfly* (Lettuce hearts steeped in seaweed-infused water, with rosemary flowers and zest of dragonfly (*Poncirus trifoliata*, a type of miniature orange with velvety skin which gives off a potent, fresh pine-and-woodlands fragrance). In every mouthful of this dish, I can identify the taste of the lettuce heart with the seaweedy salty tang, the Mediterranean grace-note supplied by the rosemary, and the smoothness of the dragonfly, and yet at the same time I can appreciate an overall harmony, the

rosemary enhancing the bitter-saltiness of the seaweed water-soaked lettuce heart and the plangent fragrance of the dragonfly. Top-quality prime ingredients are obviously a *sine qua non* as far as this chef is concerned, and seasonal products are given star billing on a menu that changes with the seasons. When a customer is shown to his table, he finds a little roll of parchment tied with a red ribbon. It contains this message: "Vegetables and their characteristics are the mainstay of our cuisine. We respect fresh produce. We accept its seasonal nature and the fact that it comes and goes. By observing the life cycles governed by the seasons, we are able to present their products at their best and most expressive." That's quite some policy statement, and they really do practice what they preach. "We've lost our links with the agricultural world. We complain that fruit and vegetables are tasteless, yet we don't respect their biological cycle. We expect to eat tomatoes all year round, but if you want them to have flavor it simply can't be done." Rodrigo still looks forward avidly to the start of their products' seasons. "I get quite edgy,

but pleasantly so because there's something special and desirable on the way: I can hardly wait to get my hands on the first asparagus in April and feature it on the menu, and I still get a bit sad when it finishes in June." His love of fresh produce dates back to early childhood: he was brought up in the country and has vivid memories of his father, a farmer, coming home at the end of the day with whatever was then in season, which was what the family ate.

## Harmony

Rodrigo carries perfectionism to the extreme. His dishes are perfectly balanced, each a little concerto of flavors in which every element retains its own identity while playing its part in the overall harmony. Flavors start off specific and develop into the general. I experienced this effect with his *Espeto de trucha con caviar casero y caldo de yuku* (Brochette of trout with house caviar and yuku broth) (yuku is *Citrus junos*, a mandarin hybrid, yellow in color and with a complex sulfuric flavor with hints of clove and oregano). A de la Calle dish allocates top





billing to vegetables and consigns animal protein to a supporting role: “Vegetables are the mainstay of the restaurant, and on the gastrobotanical menu, animal protein features as a garnish: meat or fish, it can appear in many guises—little chunks, or even in a broth, but always in a minor role.” His *Filamentos de lombarda con caldo de chipirón* (Filaments of red cabbage with baby squid broth) is a classic example.

The citrus fruits grown by Santiago Orts provide a leitmotiv, seasoning every dish, from oysters with citrus caviar through to the complete range of desserts. Indeed, acidity is a consistently recurring theme in many of his dishes and even some entire menus: he makes imaginative use of the lemons’ tangy scent, but for flavor uses the sweeter limequat (*Fortunella X citrus limetta*), the perfumed delicacy of sweet citron (*C. Medica X Reticulata*) or the velvety rich orange-blossom fragrance of kumquat (*Fortunella Margarita L*). Rice is another thematic axis in Rodrigo de la Calle’s repertoire. Again in his rice dishes there is that stamp of perfection—grains just the right size, cooked for just long enough—and again one’s palate is introduced to completely new experiences: in his risotto liquen (lichen *risotto*), the symbiotic conjunction of seaweed and mushrooms creates a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Watching things grow in Santiago Orts’ plantations in Elche are Rodrigo de la Calle’s greatest source of inspiration: “When I go there and





see all the produce growing and developing as the months go by, as I pick and taste them I start to see culinary uses for them in my mind's eye—sometimes even the final dish." The creative process may well be triggered in his mind by the sight of something growing in the garden, but a lot of experimenting goes on in the kitchen before the dish is declared complete.

"When Santiago comes up with a new product for me, I find that its organoleptic properties are useful indicators of its culinary potential, and very often I know intuitively which parts to use: the peel, the pith, the flesh, and so on. I've learned to trust my intuition because, on the whole, those first inklings tend to be confirmed when I actually start using the product in the kitchen, and pursuing other possibilities too," Rodrigo de la Calle explains.

It's a long process that can go on for years: Santiago Orts reinstates a

species of vegetable and once it has been confirmed as edible, he shares it with Rodrigo to find out whether or not it is of gastronomic interest. If so, he plants it and observes it for a year to ascertain when it reaches its peak: "We judge whether it's better to use it in winter, when it's more saline, or when it's in flower, since that's when its flavor is at its richest, or perhaps to wait for it to bear fruit. When we've decided at what stage to use it, it is taken to the restaurant and we then decide on the most appropriate preparation method: straightforward boiling, pressure cooking, frying... We consider liquidizing it, infusing it, grating its rind, using it raw... and then decide whether it is star ingredient material or more of a garnish." Once all these questions are settled, Rodrigo's creativity comes into play, and he designs both the content of the dish and the aesthetics of its presentation,

"although the dish isn't launched in the laboratory, but at the table in the restaurant when the customer tucks into it," declares Rodrigo with total conviction. We've been chatting at the table long after finishing our meal. It's been quite a day in gastronomic terms. Before I leave, Rodrigo makes a point of declaring that he doesn't like to be labeled and doesn't belong to any trend. His guiding principle is gastrobotanics. Pure and simple.

*Almudena Muyo worked for over 12 years as a journalist specializing in international trade before taking up her current post as editorial coordinator of Spain Gourmetour.*

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# New Horizons for Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos

# MOON

## Landing



An olive oil maker in Extremadura (southwest Spain) has given a unique new dimension to its star product. Some have called them lunatics, but Vicente Sánchez and family, and their Full Moon oil, are successfully taking on the biggest foreign market of them all.



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TEXT  
PAUL RICHARDSON/©ICEX

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PHOTOS  
PAGO DE LOS BALDÍOS DE SAN CARLOS

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An olive oil made with olives picked under the full moon. It sounded extraordinary, and my curiosity was piqued. A party was to be held in celebration of this product. I had been invited and I was on my way to what turned out to be as exotic and original an event as the product itself. On a dark fall night, I drove through the countryside outside the village of Majadas del Tiétar (Cáceres, Extremadura), finally coming upon a collection of industrial warehouses: the headquarters of Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos, one of Extremadura's most successful olive oil companies. Outside in the courtyard, under the powerful floodlights, was a figure in white silk pajamas practicing what looked very much like kung fu. The ghost of Bruce Lee appears in the wilds of western Spain? It was a surrealistic sight, but in fact there was an entirely logical explanation. The party held by Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos was not only to mark the beginning of the harvest for this year's Full Moon olive oil, but also to bring to our attention the promising debut of this *extremeño* (from Extremadura) brand in the increasingly important Chinese market. Which explains the kung fu fighter, not to mention the Chinese dancers, the famous Chinese singer who gave a priceless performance of *La Paloma* (a classic zarzuela, a type of Spanish Operetta) in highly-accented Castilian, and the throng of Chinese guests devouring the *pinchos* (small bites) of ham and cheese and the *extremeño* red wine, all in a tobacco drying shed kitted out for the occasion.



The Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos is an unusual set-up, no doubt about it. Its unusualness starts with its geographical position in the valley of the Tiétar River, below the Gredos Mountains, a part of Extremadura much better known for the production of tobacco, soft fruits, oranges and cherries than for olives. When Don Vicente Sánchez, a landowner whose 600 ha (1,630 acre) Finca La Laguna was largely given over to the cultivation of Virginia tobacco, made known his plan to make a fine olive oil on the estate, locals thought nothing would come of it. This was not, and would never be, olive-growing land. Vicente forged ahead, however, planting a total of 120 ha (296 acres) of Arbequina and Cornicabra olive trees, varieties seldom found in Extremadura. Eight years after the first plantings and three after the first production of olive oil, the skeptics have been trounced and the vision of this farsighted farmer, entirely vindicated. The Sánchez family's olive oil has won prizes in the world's major olive oil contests, including gold medals at *Extrema Selección* (Spain), *L'Orciolo d'Oro* in Pesaro (Italy) and a silver medal at the Los Angeles International Extra Virgin Olive Oil

Competition (all in 2009). In 2008, its all-Arbequina brand merited a special mention in China's most important olive oil fair, Oil China. Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos is present in the kitchens of premier league Spanish chefs like Arzak, Berasategui, Adrià, Subijana, Arola, Arbelaitz and Dacosta.

## Approaching markets

In terms of exports, the success of the brand has been astounding. In the three years since it started selling abroad, Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos has elbowed its way into no less than 25 countries on all five continents, making it perhaps the single *extremeño* food product with the highest profile on a global scale. According to Maite Parra, the company's export manager, the markets most important to the company are still those of the European Union, logically enough, but Russia, Japan, Singapore, China, Canada, the United States, and Mexico (in that order) are coming up on the inside track. The company has designated exports as a maximum priority, and plans to make 2011 its best year ever in this respect, with as much as 80% of total turnover coming from overseas markets. The idea is to get the oils into the context of connoisseurship and quality, which is to say gourmet food shops, high-end supermarket chains, and the kind of classy delicatessen where price is no object for the customer looking for the best of everything. Few *extremeño* food producers, it





seems to me, are quite so sure-footed in their approach to marketing. At the top of their range of various coupages, each appealing to different world markets (the Arbequina-Cornicabra blend Oro de San Carlos, for example, is big in Germany and France, while the 100% Cornicabra is a hit in Brazil), is the product they call Full Moon. Presented in a cuboid, matte black bottle that looks like a chic designer perfume, the design is curious and attention-grabbing. According to Ana María Sánchez (Don Vicente's daughter), the presentation is just right for the gift market and looks the part in airport shops and upmarket souvenir emporia. She describes a scenario, plausible enough, of a wisened-up gourmet who might take the square black bottle to a dinner party instead of a bottle of wine, delighting the party with this enigmatic and original present.

As for the Chinese market, Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos is hardly the only Spanish olive oil maker chasing the upper echelons of the world's most numerous and second-richest collection of consumers. Though China is not traditionally an olive oil producing country, the Chinese are learning fast not only about olives as a crop, planting thousands of acres per year, but also about Spanish extra virgin olive oil as part of a healthy lifestyle. My Chinese friends tell me that olive oil, though expensive in China, is increasingly popular among a certain sector of the well-to-do middle class as a luxurious and healthful unguent, to be drizzled sparingly on bread as a breakfast food or evening aperitif.

Even so, the market has not been easy to penetrate. "It's been very difficult," admits Maite Parra. "We've been trying hard for three years, and we have realized that China is a very tricky market for high-end olive oils, given that most companies are looking for high volume and low price and ours is obviously not a product like that. Finally, however, we have found the perfect distributor to get us in there, and we hope to build on this promising start and make 2011 the year of our definitive success in the Chinese market."

Luckily, their star product, the Full Moon oil, has an inbuilt advantage as far as the Chinese are concerned (though it pre-dates the company's interest in that market). As Ana María Sánchez points out, in China the full moon is an important national fiesta when family gatherings are common and wishes made with conviction are believed to come true.

All of this may sound like pure marketing blarney, but there is more to Full Moon than a name, a pretty bottle and a shameless attempt to cozy up with the Chinese. In fact, the olives for this oil are gathered in the week of the full moon in October, not necessarily at night, but at a time of the month when the moon is at its

zenith. The result, claims Ana María, is an extra virgin oil whose fruity intensity is even more pronounced than that of the company's standard, non-lunar line. Ana María is quick to suggest that the moon's influence on the cycles of the natural world is both widely documented and broadly accepted in traditional societies, from the Mediterranean to the Far East. Even today, Spanish rural processes like winemaking and pig slaughter (*la matanza*) are commonly guided by the lunar phases of waxing and waning. If the full moon makes the sap move faster around the olive tree, might that not have an effect on the flavor of the finished oil? Quite apart from the appeal of the notion as a marketing tool, the Sánchez family genuinely believes that it might.

## Quality: total control

When all's said and done, however, what really matters is the quality of the product. Here, too, the company has done its homework. Across its range of oils, the overriding impression is of extraordinary freshness, a certain smoothness (there is no pepperiness or bitterness in these oils) and a predominance of fruit, including subtle flavors of almond, apple, tomato and green banana. Acidity is astonishingly low at around 0.08% (a figure which, says Ana María, even the experts cannot quite explain), and the peroxide level, indicating the oil's degree of oxidation, comes in at a very low 3 or 4 (an index of 20 is regarded as acceptable).





Which happens to be just the way the Sánchez family likes it. A central plank of their philosophy as oil makers is total control of the process. It wouldn't do to be reliant on someone else's oil mill, like the vast majority of Extremadura's olive farmers; the company has its own state-of-the-art *almazara* (oil mill), avoiding lines and delays. Both the condition and the speed with which this delicate fruit arrives at the *almazara* are of crucial importance. The olives are picked early, which makes for lower yields but plays up the fruit aromas and avoids the spicy and bitter notes that come later in the season. (Cornicabra grown in the Montes de Toledo, in the center of Spain, for example, is often picked in January, three months after those at the Finca La Laguna). Only olives picked from the tree are used, never those that have fallen or otherwise come into contact with the ground. Arbequina as a variety is notoriously unstable, the oil often going into a steep decline even after six months. If Pago de los Baldios de San Carlos remains as fresh as a daisy more than a year after it was made, I can't help wondering whether the Sánchez's obsession with hygiene might have something to do with it. Meanwhile, in the tobacco drying shed, the extremeño wine flowed freely and the speeches began: first Don Vicente Sánchez, the *paterfamilias*, who spoke of the moon and how it dominates the natural world, the meaning of the moon in China, and Full Moon and its importance to a family (his own) that

has been farming since the year 1760. Then came the mayor of Majadas de Tiétar (where the company is located), permanently amazed at the presence of his tiny extremeño village in the upper ranks of world gastronomy, and the Commercial Councillor of the Chinese Embassy in Spain, who revealed a series of heartening statistics: that Spanish exports to China are growing by 50% year-on-year, and that Spain leads the way in the fast-growing Chinese market for olive oil. The official business over, the guests trooped out into the olive groves, where the full moon shone with an eerie bluish light. Now was the moment chosen for the official inauguration of this year's harvest, and a symbolic picking of the first olives destined for the Full Moon oil. The guest workers busied ourselves as best we could, stripping the branches of the hard, shiny, jade green fruit, which rattled into the buckets around our waists. Beside me a Chinese woman was working hard, her face, wreathed in a smile of satisfaction, seeming to glow under the moonlight. If ever there were an image of the extent and power of globalization in our time, this was surely it. Under the full

moon of October, I made a wish that was more like a fantasy: within five years Extremadura becomes a household name in China, its superb extra virgin olive oils, like those of the Pago de los Baldios de San Carlos, in the kitchens of discerning homes from Shanghai to Beijing. And who knows? The way things are going, it's a wish that might just come true.

*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).*

## Pago de los Baldíos de San Carlos, S.L.

- **Workforce**  
10
- **Gross turnover 2009**  
600,000 euros
- **Export quota**  
50%
- **Foreign markets**  
Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Japan, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Russia, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States
- **Products**  
Extra virgin olive oil: Pago Baldíos San Carlos, Oro San Carlos, Full Moon Pago Baldíos San Carlos, San Carlos Gourmet
- **Web site**  
[www.pagobaldiossancarlos.com](http://www.pagobaldiossancarlos.com)  
(Chinese, English, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish)



# ICEX Spanish Gastronomy Portal

An à la carte menu, superb ingredients, delectable treats and other delicacies in the form of news and feature articles, gastronomic routes, upcoming events, blogs, videos, and more. ICEX (Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade) has launched in March its new Spanish Gastronomy Portal ([www.foodsfromspain.com](http://www.foodsfromspain.com)), providing users with full, up-to-date information on Spanish foods, a sort of virtual sampler menu.



It's been seven years now since the digital version of Spain Gourmetour made its first appearance—seven years since the publication, which aims to promote Spanish food products abroad, decided to showcase itself on the internet. And with time, the possibilities of the world wide web have multiplied even further, with a revolution in online communication resulting in concepts such as the Web 2.0, based on user participation and fast, effective information sharing.

Considering how powerful the internet has become as a tool for communication and promotion, 2011, marks the start of a new website: [www.foodsfromspain.com](http://www.foodsfromspain.com). After almost three years of careful preparation, this new platform has been unveiled, sharing with this magazine both goals and requirements: to provide all the latest on Spanish foods in a reliable, thorough way with contemporary, eye-catching visuals.

Creativity and graphics are trademarks of the new ICEX Gastronomy Portal. The design is fresh and crisp, with a selection of photos, videos and illustrations reflecting the wide-ranging flavors and aromas of Spanish food products and gastronomy. And users are able to find out all they need from the articles, fact sheets on products grown and made in Spain, interviews with well-known chefs, traditional and signature recipes, gastronomic itineraries covering many of the regions of Spain, and suggestions on where products can be bought and tasted in Spain and abroad.

## A well-fed website

Although the new portal mainly addresses professionals—food importers, chefs, retailers, hospitality schools, the media, etc.—the openness of the internet allows us to reach all sorts of users. Each section covers a different type of content, with many cross-references. The homepage includes several sub-

homes as well as direct links to the latest news, blogs, digital fora and a year-long food calendar marking all the gastronomic events in Spain and the rest of the world.

But the backbone of the Gastronomy Portal is the *Products & Recipes* section. This area provides detailed fact sheets on the main Spanish food products, including all those having a quality seal guaranteed by the European Union, specifically, Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographic Indication (PGI) and Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). Alongside this basket of products full of quality and flavor are recipes—traditional ones from all the regions of Spain, and new ones—with tapas and signature dishes devised by some of Spain's top chefs, illustrating the giant strides of avant-garde cuisine in recent years.

## Ideas, advice...

Where is Spain? How many regions are there? These and many other



# CLICK

## to taste

### Text

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### Translation

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questions are answered in the section *Spain & Regions*, a user-friendly source of information about the country, with data on economic, social and cultural aspects and full information on regional gastronomy.

The *Doing Business* section is a juicy source of data for commercial users. A calendar features all the main food trade fairs where you can contact Spanish producers, with a full list of all legislation on the production and sale of Spanish products, directories of Spanish companies in the food sector, contact details of all of Spain's trade offices throughout the world and statistics on Spain's foreign trade in food products.

Users interested in keeping track of Spain's best-known chefs will like the *Chefs & Training* section. In it they will find profiles of more than 100 of Spain's star chefs, as well as videos explaining some of the traditional and cutting-edge culinary techniques used in their restaurants. Users will also be able to take note of the dates

and venues of the most important gastronomy congresses.

### ...and plenty of surprises

Are you planning a gastronomic tour of Spain? Do you need recommendations for places to eat in San Sebastian or Seville? Or maybe you live in New York or Melbourne but want to eat out Spanish-style or buy ingredients for a tapas meal at home. *Shop, Travel & Dine* will help you plan to perfection, with its culinary routes and information on restaurants, food stores, museums and gastronomic festivals in every corner of Spain. It also includes routes with a Spanish flavor in the main cities of the world and suggestions for places where you can try Spanish dishes and products in more than 20 countries. A cornucopia of data on Spain and its gastronomy is available in *Foodpedia*, a small but comprehensive encyclopedia with collections of articles, a who's

who of the most important people on the Spanish gastronomy scene, videos, interactives, a shelf full of books, a gastronomic glossary, etc. And coming soon the archives of *Spain Gourmetour* magazine. Behind all this content is a team committed to the task at hand and to the goals of the Gastronomy Portal.

In addition to the coordination and editorial team in Madrid, we have a network of colleagues and correspondents in different Spanish cities and in the main Spanish food export markets, helping us keep users informed about the Spanish food and gastronomy scene.

This is a pioneering, ambitious project with plenty of surprises in store. Follow the trail of our breadcrumbs throughout the culinary portal with just the click of your mouse. ¡Buen provecho!

*Rodrigo García Fernández is a journalist and member of the editorial team at [www.foodsfromspain.com](http://www.foodsfromspain.com).*





Text  
Raquel Rosenberg/©ICEX

Photos  
Sagardi S.A.

Translation  
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Raquel Rosenberg from

# BUENOS AIRES



When I feel nostalgia for Spain and all things Spanish, I set out for a corner of Spain here in Buenos Aires. Sagardi, a Spanish catering group with ten establishments back in the home country, also has one here, offering genuine Basque cuisine. It is located in an attractive part of the old San Telmo district, and was the first to introduce the locals to the tradition of *pintxos*, the Basque version of tapas. But first I should explain that this way of eating, with no table—just a glass in your hand and something to eat from the bar—is unusual here. Sagardi faced a real challenge. I remember at this company's establishments back in Barcelona it was hard to even make it as far as

the bar. Here things are more sophisticated, with the business being located in a tastefully-renovated, 19<sup>th</sup>-century building, opposite the church of San Pedro Telmo. I find myself a place at the large bar, though most of my compatriots choose to share the huge communal table beyond it. I am immediately served some still cider from Astigarraga (Basque Country, north Spain), poured from a height of about 0.9m (3 ft) so that it splashes into the glass. "That's part of the tradition," says manager Miguel Enríquez, an Argentinian who has been working with the chain for years. Just one sip and I'm almost back in Spain. Then come the *pintxos*, both hot and cold, but

always different, a test of the chef's creativity. The first one I try offers a trendy Japanese touch—a salmon roll with a cheese and fish roe mousse. It's good, but not what I came here for. I prefer what follows: *chistorra* (a thin pork sausage flavored with *pimentón*, a type of paprika from Spain), hake in green sauce, potato omelet and a combination of olives with anchovies and intense olive oil. I love the variety, but my favorite is a simple, noble offering—a chunk of potato en confit with tender octopus and *pimentón de la Vera*. Just a mouthful, but it takes me directly to Spain. By now the cider has given way to a Malbec produced by Sagardi in



# Have a Spanish **Break!**



Mendoza (Argentina), and next is a Tempranillo from the DOCa Rioja, to accompany the piquillo peppers with brandade and the charcoal-grilled portion of steak. I enjoy several more pintxos while I listen to Miguel telling of his adventures on his constant search for quality ingredients. His stories would fill another article. Though the octopus is still lingering on my taste buds, my hosts insist I try what they call their “orgasmic” dessert—a cheese base with walnuts, a pimiento pepper crisp and cranberry jam. The bar is filling up, but the table continues to be more popular with the groups coming in after a week of work. Many of them try a little

something, then move on to the restaurant at the back, where meals are served only à la carte. For Sunday lunch the place is full, but you are more likely to hear Portuguese than Spanish. That’s the day when the Brazilian tourists come in flocks so, if you are looking for peace and quiet, I recommend a weekday visit. It’s time to go but, first, a peek at the top floor. True to the tradition of the old-style taverns, this establishment includes a small hotel upstairs. The flat roof above it affords a magnificent view over the city. Take a glass of your favorite terroir and drink it up here. The magic will transport you to wherever you would most like to be.

## Sagardi Euskal Taberna

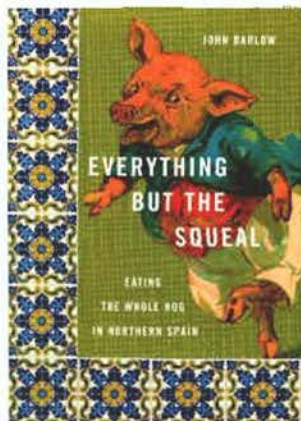
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*Raquel Rosemberg was born and lives in Buenos Aires. She is a graduate in social communication and works as a food writer. She is food editor for the magazine El Conocedor, writes for the Ollas & El Sartenes culinary supplement of the Clarín newspaper, wrote the book Sabores que matan (Editorial Paidós) and in 2010 was appointed Latin American representative for the guide entitled The World’s Best 50 Restaurants.*



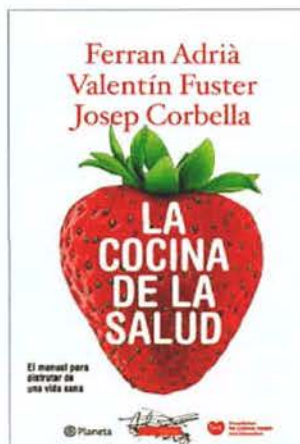
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# LASTING IMPRESSIONS



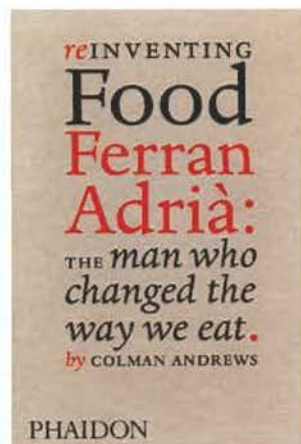
## Everything but the Squeal. Eating the Whole Hog in Northern Spain

by John Barlow. English. Barlow lives in Galicia, in the northwest corner of Spain, known for revering the pig and consuming every single part of it, with the animal ending up as cured hams, *chorizo*, served in *cocido* (a typical stew), and in many forms in between. In this informative and clever narrative, Barlow sets himself a challenge: to eat every bit of a pig over the course of a year. He dedicates 365 days to this culinary exploration, a “porco-graphical tour” of sorts, during which time he eats “everything but the squeal” and shares observations about animal consumption. Along the way Barlow offers the histories and traditions of Galicia, and the text is peppered with entertaining anecdotes. An adventure in eating, indeed. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [www.fsgbooks.com](http://www.fsgbooks.com))



## La cocina de la salud

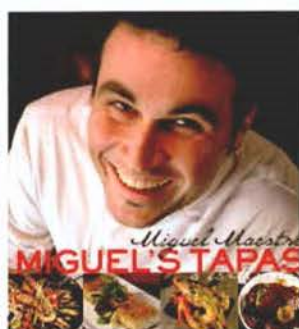
(Healthy cooking) by Ferran Adrià, Josep Corbella and Valentín Fuster. Spanish. This collaborative work between a chef, doctor and journalist really covers all the bases, and is a self-proclaimed manual for a healthy life and healthy eating. All too often we think that for something to taste good, it must be bad for us. Not true. This book shows how to eat healthy and eat well at the same time, how to enjoy eating. The text recreates a day in the life of a family—any family—to illustrate how we can improve breakfast, shopping, food preservation, and cooking. It also takes on issues such as exercise, weight control, blood pressure and cholesterol, and how to educate children on the importance of taking care of their bodies. It is truly comprehensive in its approach and is chock-a-block with ideas, tips and suggestions, all of which are very easy to digest. (Editorial Planeta, S.A. [www.planeta.es](http://www.planeta.es)).



## Reinventing Food. Ferran Adrià: the Man Who Changed the Way We Eat

by Colman Andrews. English. No other chef in history has been obsessed over like Adrià. His professional life has been chronicled, his philosophy shared with the world, reporters/foodies/chefs hanging on his every word. In fact, so much material exists that the author's goal here was to provide the portrait of Ferran Adrià that other texts haven't been able to show, adding unknown facts, telling untold anecdotes. After two years of research and much collaboration with the chef and his people, Andrews dares to tell the story “of how one young chef changed the gastronomic world forever.” This is the first authorized biography, full of fresh insight and information. So if you want the real story, if you want the nitty-gritty details, this is the text that really traces Adrià's rise “from dishwasher to creative genius.” (Phaidon Press Limited, [www.phaidon.es](http://www.phaidon.es)).





### Miguel's Tapas

by Miguel Maestre. English. Miguel Maestre is a well-known TV chef and owner of El Toro Loco in Sydney, Australia, and he has worked in the world's top restaurants. Now Maestre has teamed up with French celebrity chef Manu Feildel to run another Sydney restaurant: Aperitif, in Potts Point. This is Maestre's first cookbook. Organized by time of day, he offers suggestions including Caramelized melon and crispy Iberico ham (breakfast), Vanilla infused with wild boar cheeks (lunch), and Chicken cabbage parcels (dinner). With more than 75 suggestions, mixing traditional recipes with signature tapas dishes, along with a glossary of terms and tips for preparing the basics, this book is ideal for any occasion and pays a deserving homage to the world of tapas. (New Holland Publishers Pty Ltd., [www.newholland.com.au](http://www.newholland.com.au))



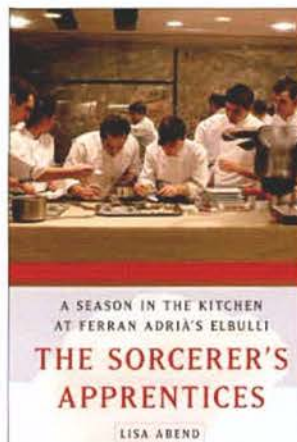
### 43 palabras de la vid y el vino

(43 Words on the Vine and Wine) by Miguel Ibañez Rodríguez. Spanish. This book comes with its counterpart, *The Specialized La Rioja Wine Dictionary*, in a black case, chock-a-block with information on La Rioja's wine sector. Together they offer an exhaustive look at the specific, popular, and specialized language surrounding wine. The author addresses issues such as metaphors used in oenology, the relationship between Spanish and French wine terminology, and La Rioja wine words, among others. Each "chapter" is dedicated to a term, such as ampelography, the field of botany in which grapevines are identified and classified; and *cata*, or wine tasting. This is one of two must-have books for anyone who not only appreciates good wine, but also the language behind it. (La Rioja Government, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Rural Development, [www.larioja.org](http://www.larioja.org))



### Diccionario específico del vino de Rioja

(The Specialized La Rioja Wine Dictionary) by José María Pastor Blanco. Spanish. This book is presented in tandem with *43 Words on the Vine and Wine*, providing a comprehensive overview of La Rioja's wine culture, and includes more than 3,000 entries. The author, a philologist, endeavored to present a linguistic wine repertoire, including everything from common terms to terms in danger of extinction. He researched for four years to compile this dictionary, which included countless interviews in La Riojan villages with longstanding wine traditions. This is the broadest ranging dictionary of its kind published to date, and it reflects a unique language and seeks to preserve it. It is, without a doubt, the new leading reference on the topic. (La Rioja Government, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Rural Development, [www.larioja.org](http://www.larioja.org))



### The Sorcerer's Apprentices. A Season in the Kitchen at Ferran Adrià's elBulli

by Lisa Abend. English. There are many books on elBulli, which has, undeniably, "attained a near-mythic reputation for culinary wizardry." There are texts on Ferran Adrià, his philosophy, his recipes, the story of the restaurant... but what about the other people that make it function like clockwork? This book provides the first-hand stories of the *stagiers*, or interns, that work for free for Adrià in the hopes of learning from the master. The text reflects how the apprentices push themselves to the limits of their culinary skills, how they adjust to the demands for creativity, and how they deal with the pressure of performing nightly, cranking out up to 1,500 dishes per day. They are aspiring chefs from all over the world, submitted to a grueling challenge and pursuing a dream. Some excel, some crack. And here are their stories. (Free Press, [www.simonandschuster.com](http://www.simonandschuster.com))





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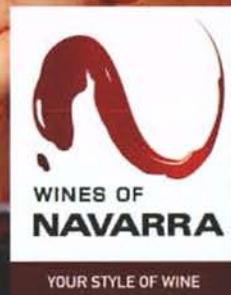
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Source: Ailimpo (Lemon and Grapefruit Interprofessional Association)  
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