

Wine Spectator

Rediscovering Rioja

Tracking the evolution of Spain's iconic region and its wines



The village of Elciego is home to Marqués de Riscal's original 1860 bodega and Frank Gehry's 2006 City of Wine addition.

Across Spain's many appellations and wine styles, bottlings from the Rioja region are far and away the most familiar to Americans. Rioja arrives to U.S. shores in volumes that ensure its presence on store shelves and restaurant wine lists. It's the only Spanish wine type that ranks among America's most consumed foreign wines, in a group with **New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc** and **Italian Chianti**.

And bottlings of Rioja offer incredible breadth, with versions ranging from easy-drinking to complex and ageable, and price tags from \$10 to \$1,000 per bottle.

Rioja's success in the U.S. is largely based on recognized winery names offering wines of generally consistent quality and at volume—not an easy feat to achieve. That dependability is attractive to consumers, especially for those purchasing outside of their usual comfort zone.

Rioja's stylistic consistency may come at a price. Innovation and experimentation in the vineyards and cellars are present but implementation sometimes takes a back seat to meeting the expectations for consistency. Detractors argue that Rioja has lost its soul, becoming a brand more than a dynamic wine representing a distinctive tapestry of soils, people and places.

In the past 10 to 20 years, the wine world as a whole has increasingly embraced *terroir*-driven examples, with wineries offering more single-vineyard or even single-parcel bottlings. The movement lends weight—or at least additional attention—to the claim that Rioja, known for blending grape sources from throughout the region to achieve scale, is more commodity than artisanal product. But producers in Rioja are far from untouched by the trends of other leading wine areas around the world.



An overhaul of labeling regulations in 2017 now allows wineries to give emphasis to Rioja's subregions, villages and even *cru* vineyards. Producers large and small are looking for abandoned vineyards to resuscitate and ways to prolong the life of Rioja's wealth of **old vines**. Microvinifications of single plots or parcels are widespread in the region's wineries, for edification before blending but also increasingly for bottling as solo wines. And a new wave of boutique producers determined to map Rioja's *terroirs* is bringing dynamic energy to the region as a whole.

The fight for Rioja's soul is less of a pitched battle with a winning and losing side than it is an expansion of Rioja as we've known it in recent decades. Although it's happening slowly and heralds change, this expansion offers greater granularity and definition to the region, giving consumers more to explore and enjoy. It's an evolution, not a revolution, and the moment for wine lovers to rediscover this rich wine realm should start right now.

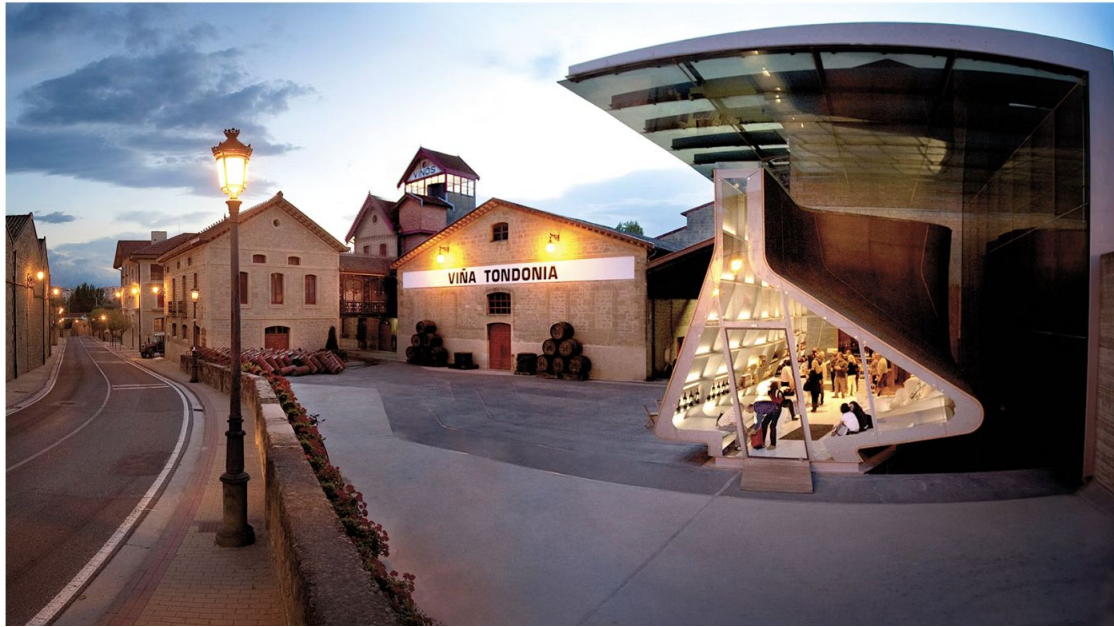
The Beginning and Bordeaux

Alongside some of Rioja's old-vine vineyards, visitors can find **lagares**, stone cisterns for wine production introduced by the invading Romans in the second century BC, a testament to the longevity of wine production in the region.

In more recent history, records indicate a thriving wine industry in the 16th through 18th centuries. Archives show that the 1580 production from what is today Rioja Alta, the region's westernmost subzone, totaled the equivalent of nearly 600,000 cases. Small, underground cellars were common in Rioja's villages, with as many as 250 cellars for 300 growers in the 1600s.

Telmo Rodríguez is one winemaker who has put Rioja's historical infrastructure to use for his modern needs. Rodríguez left Rioja and his family's **La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remelluri** winery in the 1990s to explore winemaking in different parts of the world. He returned to Rioja in 1998 to found his own **Bodega Lanzaga** estate, with aging of some of the winery's labels completed in an underground cellar in the village of Ollauri.

“I came to Ollauri because I wanted to understand what was the origin of Rioja—what was the *terroir*; I wanted to see the old, traditional cellars,” recalls Rodríguez. “I saw this cellar and I realized it was perfect, with many of the components mimicked by modern cellars today,” he says, highlighting the cellar’s natural temperature and humidity control and its gravity-fed workflow, among other features. The cellar, which was abandoned in the 1970s, additionally still supports abundant natural yeast, allowing Rodríguez to eschew inoculating with **cultured yeast** strains during winemaking and potentially capturing more of Rioja’s historic flavors.



Rodríguez is one of the forerunners of Rioja’s movement toward more *terroir*-driven wines, through the lens of connecting the region’s past with one of its potential future paths. He founded Lanzaga to create “a wine from a village” akin to those winemakers of the 1700s.

Taking that expression a step further, in 2011 Rodríguez bottled his first single-site wine from the 4.7-acre Las Beatas vineyard (2021: 95 points, \$375). “What is traditional Rioja? The blend?” poses Rodríguez. “Champagne is a blend,” he says, chuckling, “but we find **Clos du Mesnil** quite interesting,” acknowledging Krug Champagne’s revered single vineyard as a successful exception among a tradition of blending.

Rodríguez seeks to recover what he considers Rioja’s heyday, an interpretation that recalls the region’s wines during the 17th and 18th centuries. But for most students of wine, today’s Rioja—both wine style and industry infrastructure—has its origin in the late 19th century, heavily influenced by **France’s Bordeaux**.

Two of modern Rioja’s founding fathers spent time in Bordeaux to study advances in winemaking during their exile from Spain due to the political turmoil leading up to Queen Isabella’s ascension to the Spanish throne in 1844. Upon returning to Spain, each man began wine production using Bordeaux’s “modern” techniques, including **fermentation** and **aging in oak**.

Luciano de Murrieta García Lemoine, the **Marqués de Murrieta**, produced his first

wine in 1852, then later established a winery estate at Ygay, south of the town of Logroño. From 1850 to 1860, D. Guillermo Hurtado de Amézaga, later the **Marqués de Riscal**, constructed a bodega in the village of Elciego, including chambers for barrel aging à la Bordeaux; the winery's first vintage was 1862.

"In Rioja and at Marqués de Riscal, the 19th century was very tightly tied to Bordeaux," says Hurtado de Amézaga's descendent Luis Hurtado de Amézaga, head winemaker and technical director at the winery today. "The Marqués de Riscal lived in Bordeaux for 40 years; Jean Pineau, from Bordeaux, was the first winemaker at Marqués de Riscal; and we continued the tradition of French winemakers until my grandfather [assumed the position]."

In 1867 the vine louse **phylloxera** swept through France, devastating the country's vineyards and further integrating Bordeaux's relationship with Rioja as the French region's wine merchants turned to Rioja.

"Rioja's historic wineries were created to be substitutes for high-end Bordeaux, when phylloxera meant there was no Bordeaux," says Maria José López de Heredia, who is the fourth generation helming her family winery, **R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia**, with siblings Mercedes and Julio.

Founded in 1877, López de Heredia was one of many new bodegas to ride the incredible boom, especially in the town of Haro in northwestern Rioja, where a railway connecting the seaport of Bilbao, on Spain's northern coastline, facilitated export to France.

Bordeaux's technique of oak fermentation and aging became firmly entrenched in Rioja. A large **cooperage** was built in Rioja, and the American colonies provided a less-expensive alternative to French oak. The use of oak would ultimately spur a classification system that would come to define the region's wines, basing release dates and labeling on the length of time the wine was aged—**crianza**, **reserva** and **gran reserva**.

Creating an Identity

Despite Rioja's historical ties to Bordeaux, today the structure of the region's wine industry shares many similarities with that of **France's Champagne**.

Rioja's 13,500 growers drastically outnumber the 750 wineries producing and selling wine commercially, mirroring Champagne's symbiosis of vine growers and *grandes marques* houses. Blending grape varieties and vineyard sources allows both Champagne's and Rioja's wineries to produce at a large scale, under a few well-recognized labels. A regulated aging regimen is applied to all of Champagne's wines and to many examples from Rioja, resulting in larger wineries in both regions that store millions of bottles at a time in their cellars. And historically, wineries in both regions strived to produce a recognizable house style, although Rioja achieves this without the multi-vintage blending approach of Champagne.

"The big challenge is to make the same style of wines for many years to come. [It

should be] that in 20 years' time, the 2024 will taste the same as the 2004 does today," says Juan José Díaz, head winemaker at family-owned **Bodegas Faustino**. The **2004 Gran Faustino I Gran Reserva** (93, \$100) is an entirely new label released to the market for the first time this year. It's a selection of barrels originally vinified for the winery's **I Gran Reserva bottling** (2016: 92, \$37), elaborated as the separate Gran Faustino label due to the success of the 2004 vintage.

Faustino, established in 1861, is the region's biggest vineyard-holder with over 2,000 acres of vines; they also purchase grapes from growers to meet 20 percent of their production needs. In relative terms to Champagne, they might be considered Rioja's **Moët & Chandon**. The winery is also a staunch traditionalist, upholding Rioja's aging regimens for much of its lineup of wines. They boast roughly 60,000 barrels and 9 million bottles in the cellar at any given time.



The impact of longer aging in oak undoubtedly benefits Faustino's implied goal of equalizing flavor profile and structure from vintage to vintage. Common elements include baked and dried fruit, tobacco and spice flavors, supple tannins and lively acidity. In the hands of a skilled winemaker long oak-aged Riojas can be incredibly nuanced and profound.

Yet Rioja's use of an aging regimen to define and in many ways epitomize its wines has been far from an unqualified success.

The aging terms prevailed as identifiers for the wines during many difficult historical periods: the collapse of Rioja's export market in the late 1890s when the Bordelais returned to the wines of their own vineyards; World War I, the Spanish Civil War and World War II; poor vintages; other economic and political upheavals; and the influence of technologically driven, often industrialized winemaking common in regions around the world during the 1960s and 1970s.

Not all wineries were able to successfully navigate these challenges, and lesser-quality wines from poor vintages or high-yielding vines, for example, didn't benefit from long or over-aging. Such examples served as more of a detriment to the Rioja appellation's name and image.

Following Fashion

Lesser-quality wines aside, in the later part of the 20th century Rioja's traditional style fell out of fashion. **Napa Cabernets**, heralded vintages from Bordeaux and **super Tuscans** were ascendent, popularizing fruit-driven wines of power and richness.

Marqués de Riscal was the first Rioja producer to offer an alternative in a similar camp. "It was tough in the '70s and '80s in Rioja," says Hurtado de Amézaga. "Riscal decided to launch a new wine in 1986, the Baron de Chirel, the first 'special wine' of Rioja." Conceptually it diverged from traditional Rioja: aged only two years and in new French oak, a focus on grape sourcing from select top vineyards and the inclusion of about 15 percent **Cabernet Sauvignon** with the **Tempranillo**. "It was the idea of our American importer at the time, to produce something a little thicker, a little new oak, a little more structure."

A wave of producers came to the fore in the 1990s offering wines in a newer, what was considered "modern" at the time, style, including **Finca Allende**, **Bodegas Roda**, **Abel Mendoza**, **Artadi**, Rodríguez's **Bodega Lanzaga**, **Bodegas Fernando Remírez de Ganuza**, **Viñedos del Contino** and more. The Eguren family, owners of the more traditionally focused **Bodegas Sierra Cantabria**, launched **Señorio de San Vicente**, a single-estate wine produced exclusively from 44 acres of vines in the La Canoca vineyard and aged for two years in primarily French oak. **Bodegas Muga** released the first vintage of their modern-styled Torre Muga bottling in 1991 and Aro bottling in 2000.



Collectively these wineries and their wines were more focused on specific vineyard sources for a bottling, even if they were not yet labeled as such. The winemakers largely adopted techniques common to Napa and Bordeaux at the time: seeking riper fruit at harvest, **extending maceration** and aging in new French oak as opposed to Rioja's traditional use of American oak. And although Baron de Chirel was originally labeled as a *reserva*, many of these versions eschewed Rioja's classification system of aging. They bottled under a generic back label for young wines, *cosecha*, but charged prices that outpaced many of the region's *gran reservas*.

At first Rioja's new wave wines were well-received, living harmoniously for the most part alongside the region's traditional examples. But in the mid-2000s the wine world's palate began to shift again, with critics decrying examples from Rioja and many other regions as over-oaked fruit bombs. Although Rioja's producers didn't abandon the new approach altogether, they softened it: less **canopy management** in the vineyard, limiting **extraction**, cooler macerations, less **toast** on their oak and the use of larger or more neutral oak vessels.

"We see that classic in Rioja is always the same wines, but modern keeps on changing," says Guillermo de Aranzabal, managing director of traditionalist bodega **La Rioja Alta**. In the 1990s La Rioja Alta joined other new wave Rioja producers with the establishment of their **Torre de Oña** estate outside the village of Paganos in the Rioja Alavesa subzone. Since 2005 they have conducted extensive soil studies at the property, leading to the release of the winery's single-vineyard **Finca Martelo** bottling (2019: 91, \$40). "Torre de Oña is a *terroir*-driven philosophy, while La Rioja Alta seeks a consistent style," summarizes de Aranzabal.

Forging Ahead

Rioja's exploration of style in the 1990s and early 2000s paved the way for yet another evolution, across all the region's offerings. For traditional wines, this means a new spin to bring them more in line with today's palates.

"I think we are improving the wine. It's a little softer in color, a little bit more vibrant," says La Rioja Alta winemaker Julio Sáenz, speaking about the winery's introductory Viña Alberdi bottling. "But also we're looking for fruit character. And with all of our wines we're working with wood, but less present, more integrated. [The Viña Alberdi] is aged for only two years, but it still has great aging capacity."

And that same pursuit of brighter wines with more fruit and elegant depth has also found application to a growing number of *terroir*- and site-specific examples. Like Champagne's *récoltant-manipulants*, or grower producers, Rioja's small growers produce wines primarily from family vines that they own and tend themselves. While the wines of Rioja's small growers can't compete with larger-volume offerings widely available in the market, they're rapidly adding depth and dimension to the region as a whole.

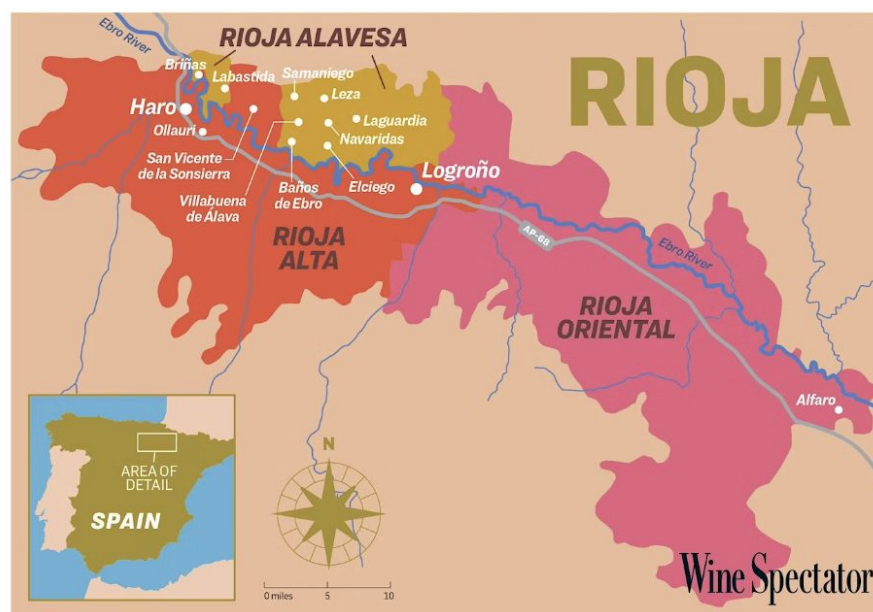
"Nowadays, we want wines that are pure, without any makeup. We prefer a finer style, more acidity, more fruit. We want wines for pleasure," says Arturo de Miguel, who helms his family winery **Artuke** with his brother Kike.

"From 2009 through 2015, my mind was very conditioned by my studies. I used a lot of oak, 20 to 25 days maceration. I had a lot of discussions with my father, who was very traditional," says de Miguel, who finished his enological studies and experience working at other wineries before joining his father in 2009. Beginning with the 2016 vintage he revamped his approach, producing what he calls "a more traditional style," vinifying white and red grapes together and utilizing old barrels, and later including single-parcel bottlings in their lineup. "[During my travels to other wine regions] I saw the possibility of producing other styles of wines, with the inclusion of other grapes, using stems and with other types of barrels."

"Today winemakers travel much more than they did 30 or 40 years ago. And when you see the best, you feel compelled to try and reply," says Eduardo Eguren, son of Marcos Eguren, who owns a number of leading Rioja estates with his brother Miguel Ángel (*Sierra Cantabria*, *Señorio de San Vicente* and *Viñedos de Párganos*). In 2018 Eduardo Eguren established his own winery, *Cuentaviñas*, producing wine from 27 acres of vineyards, a combination of acreage inherited from his maternal grandfather as well as sites he leases from his father and uncle.

"I said to myself, 'What do I want in my life: a new project, or to follow the family path?'" explains Eduardo Eguren. "I decided I wanted to do a project to show how different soils produce different stories in wine." Eguren produces one white and five red Rioja wines (plus one from Ribera del Duero), including four single-vineyard bottlings. The *Rioja Los Yeltones 2021* (94, \$300) from the La Rad vineyard is a top example.

"Now in Rioja, there's something happening, there's going to be a big change, with a change in the generations," enthuses Eguren. "For me, change began in the 1990s with my family and others building up quality. But then it stagnated. From 2015, 2016, change began again with young producers. It's changing the landscape of Rioja."



Jose Gil, whose first vintage was 2016, produces six wines with his wife, Vicky, under their *Vignerons de la Sonsierra* label, including two village wines and three single-vineyards from 42 acres of vines, about a third of which they own. Previously, Gil worked at his family winery, Bodegas Olmaza. "It was incredible learning from my grandfather, my father and uncle. But when I saw some vineyards mixed in the tanks with others—incredible vineyards—it was my dream to be able to bottle these separately. It's a dream I share with Vicky, to show these vineyards, to make wine with humility," says Gil.

Diego Magaña Tejero, who only started his Rioja project in 2021, also used experiences working at his family winery, *Bodegas Viña Magaña* in the neighboring region of Navarra, to inform his future direction. The first stop was northwestern Spain's *Bierzo*, where he produces wine under his *Dominio de Anza* label. But making wine in Rioja was always the dream.

"In Bierzo, I'm more free. But here in Rioja, there's a legacy. You have to do your own vision, but with respect," says Magaña, who produces his six wines from 11 acres of vines, from sources he owns and purchased fruit. "It's not always about buying vineyards," he clarifies. "It's also about buying the grapes and telling the story of this area. Maybe if I don't buy these grapes now, we'll lose the vineyard, we'll lose the patrimony." Magaña touches on the fact of Rioja's aging population of vine growers, many without a new generation to take over the family vineyards, spurring Rioja's small growers and large bodegas alike to take up the work.

And it is not only a younger generation leading the charge from the vineyards.

"I feel like for many years we were pushing against a door, and now, finally, the door is opening a little bit more," says Maite Fernández, who owns **Bodega Abel Mendoza** with her husband, Abel Mendoza.

Mendoza decided to redirect his family's bulk wine business in 1988. Even at the young age of 17 he had been considering a different path for several years. "More isn't better. Less is always better. Every year is a blank page, and to make the picture, you take the different components and you paint your own interpretation," says Mendoza. Although production volume at the winery hasn't increased over the years, the number of bottlings has, as Mendoza makes wines that he feels express Rioja in its many facets—both its soils and its styles.

"From 40 different plots spread over three different villages and 57 acres of vines I can usually make 18 to 19 different bottlings," he adds. "For us this project is a form of life. Now we are an example, with some young people following our behavior."

"More and more, Rioja is focused on vineyards. For us it has always been like this, but now you can find young people very focused [on this aspect] of Rioja. It's a new wave that's diversifying Rioja's panorama," says Carmen Pérez-Garrigues.

Though Pérez-Garrigues' first commercial release of her 2018 and 2019 Villota wines (bottled under **Viñas del Lentisco**) was only in 2021, she and her family have played an important role in Rioja's history. Her father—Ricardo Pérez-Villota—and Mateo José Madrazo Real de Asúa, father of Viñas del Lentisco's current winemaker, Jesús de Madrazo Mateo, formed a partnership with **CVNE** winery in the 1970s that created the **Viñedos del Contino** estate on 400 acres of land owned by the Pérez-Villota family. In 2013, looking to the future, Pérez-Garrigues convinced her father to leave the partnership with CVNE, taking with them about 280 acres of land, including 240 under vine.

"My father thought I was mad at first. But I knew if I was going to continue, I wanted to continue in a different way," explains Pérez-Garrigues. The new path includes production of the single-vineyard **Viña Gena bottling** (2022: 92, \$60). "So we are not the new, young blood, the young people. But I really like their bravery," says Pérez-Garrigues. "Even if we are older than they are," says winemaker de Madrazo Mateo, "We have the same passion."

Telmo Rodríguez, frustrated by Rioja's labeling regulations that would not allow

him to express on the label the wine in the bottle, its source and *terroir*-driven expression, addressed the situation with not quite legal lengths for some of his wines. For Bodega Lanzaga, he highlighted *terroir* by redacting “Lanziago” from the phrase “Viñedos Propios en Lanziago” on the front labels of his Lanzaga and LZ bottlings. (Lanziago is still clearly readable under the black redacting mark.) And since the inception of his Lindes project, produced at his family winery **La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remelluri**, Rodríguez willfully included the village name on the labels. The range of Lindes’ six wines focuses on the distinctive expression of the fruit sourced from vines in and around the named village.

In 2017, Rodríguez and others were able to finally push through new regulations for Rioja’s labels. Producers can still use the classic *crianza*, *reserva* and *gran reserva* terms if they so choose. But they can also highlight Rioja’s subzones, its specific villages and single-vineyard sites.

Rodríguez’s labeling efforts were not about marketing, but about finding a way to identify for consumers the work he had been doing for decades to showcase Rioja’s *terroir*. “We have *grands crus* in Rioja. [In the past] we abandoned the best places for more fertile land at lower, [more accessible] elevations. It all starts here, in the vineyard. To talk about a place, to talk about a taste, to talk about a profile.”

“I think the key now is the new generation,” says Rodríguez. “We have the *terroir*. We have the market—a consumer who is ready for quality wine. We’re going to rebuild a map that understands the beauty of Rioja—in all its diversity and different places.”

Mapping Rioja

The Rioja DOCa (*Denominación de Origen Calificada*, or denomination of qualified origin) spans more than 60 miles from its eastern to western limits, separated into three subzones: Rioja Alta, Rioja Alavesa and Rioja Oriental. As a whole, Rioja’s geography is defined by the Ebro River, with its tributaries forming seven valleys, and the Sierra Cantabria mountain range. The mountain foothills provide elevation for the region’s vineyards and protect against significantly cooler, wetter weather from the Atlantic Ocean just to the north.

Total vineyard acres: 163,612

Red Grapes: Tempranillo (88 percent of plantings), Garnacha, Graciano, Mazuelo and Maturana Tinta

White Grapes: Viura (66 percent), Tempranillo Blanco, Verdejo, Sauvignon Blanc, Garnacha Blanca, Chardonnay, Malvasía, Maturana Blanca and Turruntés

Vineyard altitude range: Primarily 1,000 feet to 1,800 feet, with plantings up to 2,950 feet

Soil: Varied, with a predominance of limestone but incorporating clay, iron, alluvial components

Organization: 571 wineries across 144 villages

Rioja Alta

Acres: 68,841 | **Villages:** 18

Rioja's westernmost subzone encompasses vineyards typically situated at higher altitude than the region's other two subzones. The *terroir* layers clay with iron and limestone, and at lower elevations, closer to the Ebro River, alluvial soils are common. On average, the area's Atlantic climate offers even-keeled temperatures throughout the year and moderate rainfall. These factors combine to promote wines that are generally more elegant in style, with brighter acidity.

Rioja Alavesa

Acres: 32,549 | **Villages:** 77

Rioja Alavesa is made up of two non-contiguous areas, both north of the Ebro River and located northeast above Rioja Alta. Clay-limestone soils dominate the vineyards, which are often terraced and/or divided into small parcels. Conditions are more humid and cooler on average in Alavesa, and the resulting wines offer vivid acidity and more definition.

Rioja Oriental

Acres: 62,222 | **Villages:** 49

Rioja Oriental, or "eastern" in Spanish, was formerly known as the Rioja Baja for its generally lower-elevation vineyards. The area lies east of the city of Logroño, primarily to the south of the Ebro River, and it benefits from a Mediterranean climate that supports the wide plantation of **Garnacha** (versus Tempranillo's dominance in Alta and Alavesa). Oriental's predominantly clay-, iron- and alluvial-based soils, warmer and drier climate and lower-elevation vineyards produces wines with fruit-forward character and more weight and structure.

Aging Rioja

Rioja was established as an official Spanish DOCa (appellation of origin) a century ago. Labeling terms based on aging were common beginning in the 1900s, but an official system wasn't standardized until 1980. It's still the primary system used by most of Rioja's historic bodegas and this strong association has helped to define the region's wines.

To the region's benefit, the classification terms *crianza*, *reserva* and *gran reserva* are relatively easy to understand. Every bottle of Rioja includes a color-coded label strip on the back of the bottle with the term *cosecha* (harvest), and the vintage year next to the DOCa emblem. If applicable, *crianza*, *reserva* or *gran reserva* is listed above *cosecha* and may also appear on the main front and/or back label.

Crianza: Marked by a bright red appellation strip | Aged a minimum of two years, with at least one year in oak barrels for red wines and six months for white and rosé wines.

Reserva: Marked by a dark red appellation strip | Aged a minimum of three years, with at least one year in oak barrels and six months in bottle for red wines. Aging

for white and rosé wines is a minimum of two years with at least six months in oak barrels.

Gran Reserva: Marked by a dark blue appellation strip | Aged a minimum of five years, with at least two years in oak barrels and two years in bottle for red wines. Aging for white and rosé wines is a minimum of four years with at least six months in oak barrels.

Cosecha: Marked by a green appellation strip | All other still table wines from Rioja bear the term cosecha and the vintage date on the appellation strip, without an indication of aging. These wines are collectively known as “generic” wines or “cosechas.” They encompass everything from easy-drinking, early-release bottlings from bodegas otherwise labeling under the aging system to more serious versions from wineries opting to label under an origin-based system.

Defining Rioja

After decades depending primarily on the aging classification system on labels to distinguish a winery’s lineup, the Consejo Regulador, Rioja’s regulatory council, announced an alternative based on a wine’s origin in 2017, with amendments in 2024.

The aging classification system works best for wineries producing wines that source fruit from a broader geographical range of vineyards to create wines in a consistent style, often at larger volume. The new origin-based system closely follows Burgundy’s model, with labeling encompassing everything from wines sourcing fruit from a subregion through to single-vineyard bottlings.

Prior to the new regulations, producers utilizing more specific grape sources for their wines were not legally able to indicate that source on the label. This caused widespread discontent, particularly as the trend toward single vineyard and *terroir*-driven examples has been gaining momentum in the broader world of wine.

Zone Wines: Labels listing one of Rioja’s three subzones—Rioja Alta, Rioja Alavesa and Rioja Oriental—indicate a wine produced entirely from grapes sourced within the given subregion.

Village Wines: Labels listing one of 144 approved municipalities indicate a wine produced entirely from grapes sourced from vineyards in and around the municipality. This category was first identified as *Vino de Municipio* in the regulatory council’s 2017 changes, reflecting the governmental term for the area around a given village. The classified term was updated to *Vino de Pueblo* (“village wine”) in 2024 to highlight a more *terroir*-driven approach to classification. Labels can read both *Vino de Pueblo*, indicating the classification, as well as an indication of the vines’ location via the term *Viñedo en* (“vineyard in”) plus a village name; for example, *Viñedo en Labastida* (“vineyards in the village of Labastida”).

Single Vineyard Wines: Labels listing a delimited vineyard recognized by the regulatory council, along with the term *Viñedo Singular* (“single vineyard”), indicate a wine produced entirely from grapes sourced from the specified vineyard.