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EDITORIAL

A slosh of extra virgin olive oil from Jaen, a red pepper from La Rioja, or a green one from Galicia (yes, Galicia!), a pinch of salt from Majorca or the Canary Islands... this issue has all the beginnings of a really good salad.

Here comes summer—at least in the northern hemisphere! Time to put a bright cloth on the table and invite friends round. Just the occasion to launch Godello. Thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of certain wineries in—yet again—Galicia, this grape variety has been rescued from the brink of oblivion and is now enjoying quite a renaissance. Your guests will also be impressed by the new-look labels that some made-in-Spain bottles are wearing these days. Exciting things are happening in that department, too.

Our feature on new techniques invented by some of Spain's best chefs should come in handy. Pick up a few tips and really dazzle those guests.

Do you long to get to know Spain better? Ávila and Cáceres are among Spain's lesser-known cities, yet they are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. They are just waiting to be explored, and the cool fall weather is just the time to do it.

I know you always read us from cover to cover! This time, tell us what you think. Any suggestions? Share them with us. I look forward to hearing from you.

Cathy Boirac

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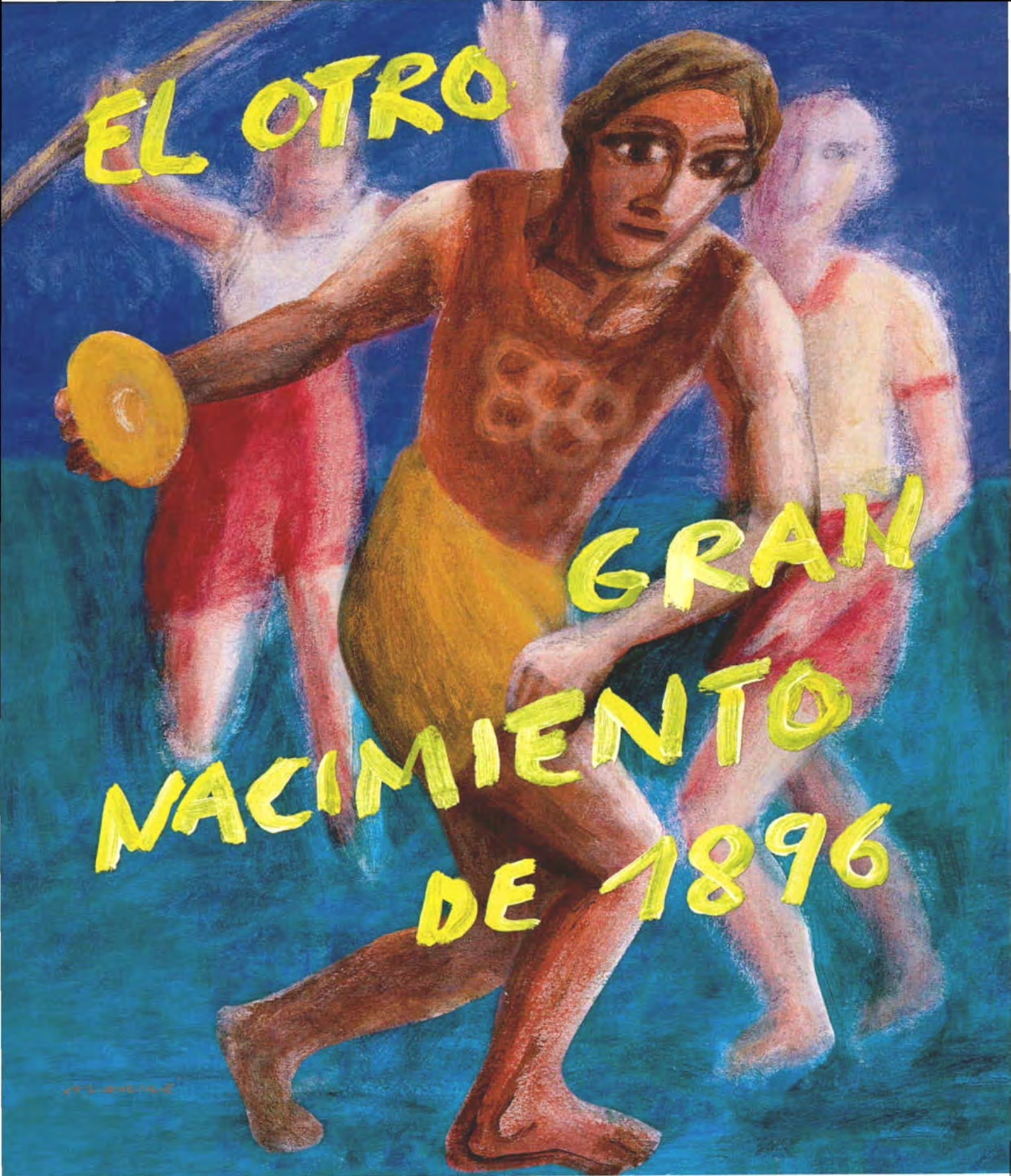
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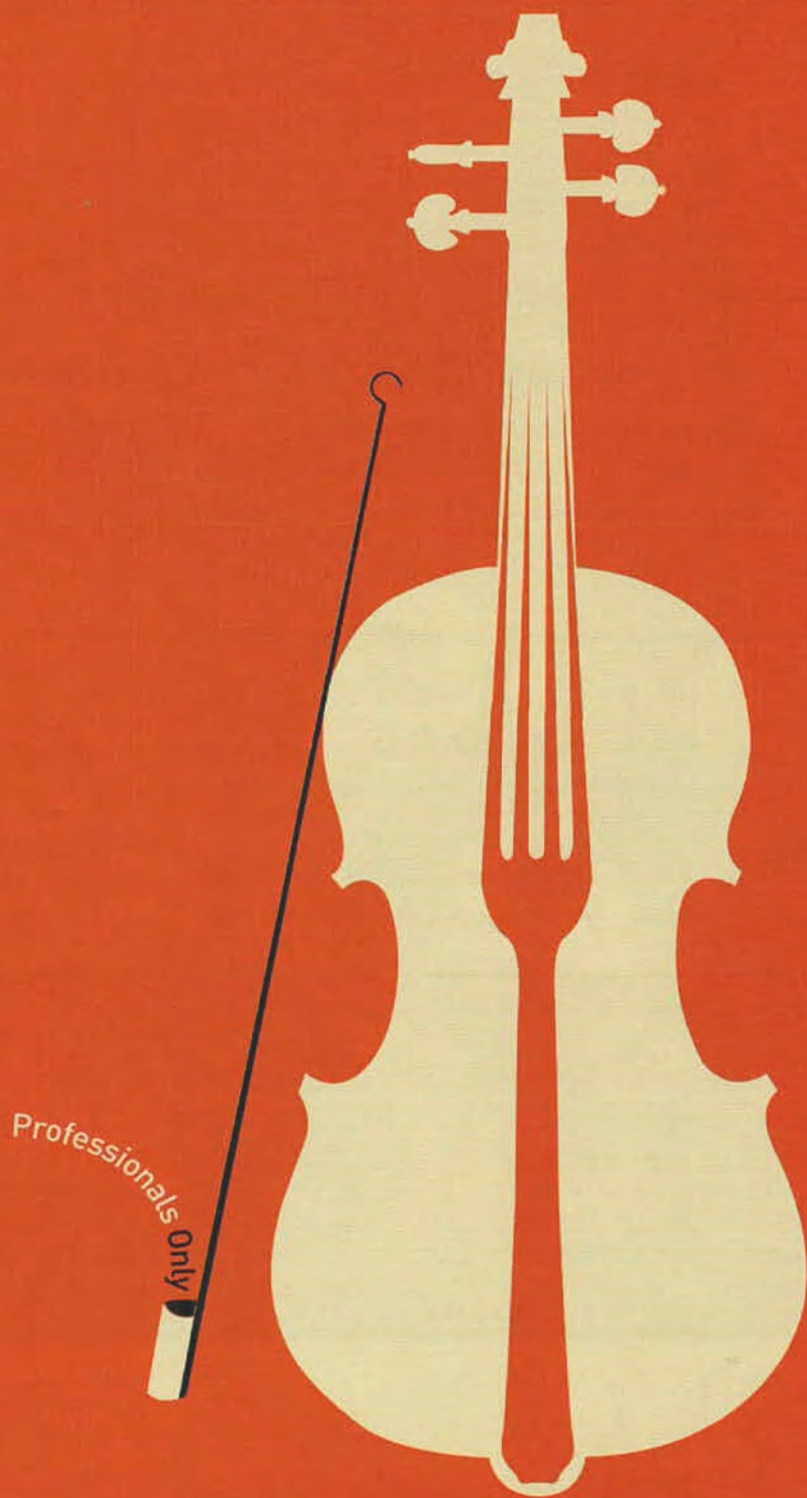
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There's more to salt than there used to be. Over the past decade, this once standard substance has been replaced by a wide—and still expanding—range of products distinguished by their quality, provenance and method of production. Gone are the days when salt was just a basic necessity and no one bothered about where it came from. The gastronomically inclined can now choose between pink salt from the Himalayas, French *fleur de sel* from Camargue and Guérande, Maldon salt from England, Halen Môn from Wales, black salt from Hawaii, Peruvian salt from Maras, etc. The geographical origin of these international favorites is an inseparable part of their identity. Spain's position within this scenario is backed up by impeccable credentials: a tradition that dates back over a thousand years to before the Roman invasion, natural conditions that are ideal for producing the top-quality sea salt known in Spanish as *flor de sal*, and a collection of pace-setting entrepreneurs whose thrust and imagination is the focus of this article.



White Gold

SALT





TEXT

SANTIAGO SÁNCHEZ
SEGURA/©ICEX

TRANSLATION

HAWYS PRITCHARD/©ICEX

Our tour of Spanish salts begins on the Balearic Island of Majorca. We first encounter home-sourced salt at breakfast in our hotel in the center of Palma, the island's capital. A section of the self-service counter flagged as *Rincón mallorquín* (Majorcan corner) displays a selection of the most traditional local foods—*ensaimadas* (coiled pastries), *sobrasada* (pork spread), and, in pride of place, a little heap of salt and its container, a stylishly-designed tub bearing the label Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc. That salt would probably not have been there that morning as a standard-bearer for local gastronomy had Swiss-born Katja Wöhr not landed on the island a few years ago. When she arrived early in 2002, all Katja had with her was an old car, 350 euros and the determination to work with Majorcan salt. Today, the Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc brand can be found in restaurants and delicatessens in the US, Canada, Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the UK, Norway, Belgium and Iceland, and her company, Gusto Mundial Balearides, has an annual turnover of nearly 500,000 euros. The Mediterranean waters that surround the island of Majorca also flow into the Ebro Delta in northeastern Spain, the Iberian Peninsula's deepest river estuary. This is the site of the Salinas de Trinidad

saltworks, which has been supplying this coastal area of Catalonia with salt for centuries and now exports it to over 20 countries. It was not until six years ago that INFOSA, the company that has managed this saltworks since 1946, started to harvest flor de sal and supply various companies that had responded to the market demand for this product. Using Ebro Delta salt as their primary material, brands such as Casanovas Barcelona and Carolingia Sal Preciosa have opened up new culinary avenues with such innovative products as liquid salt and an enormous range of flavored salts. Their success has been such that INFOSA remodeled its premises last year to incorporate 300 small crystallizing pools for the exclusive purpose of producing flor de sal. It has also launched its own brand of gourmet salts, Flor de Delta, a project carried out in conjunction within Catalan chef Joan Roca (of the 2-Michelin-star El Celler de Can Roca restaurant in Girona). Far away, in the Canary Islands, Andrés Hernández and his father run Salinas de Fuencaliente, built by his grandfather over 40 years ago in a spectacular setting on the island of La Palma (declared a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO). This saltworks has always produced flor de sal, which, before its elevation to gourmet

status, used to be kept for use by the plant employees. Since the summer of 2007, it has been a product worth selling. This phenomenon has been decisive in saving artisan-scale *salinas* (saltworks) like the Hernández family's from going under: while they have little hope of competing on price with industrially-produced common salt, they certainly know how to make a top-quality gastronomic product. These three potted histories from the Balearics, Catalonia and the Canary Islands perfectly exemplify the effects of the gourmet salt boom in Spain in the last five years: it has introduced the country to new names and products, triggered changes in the production and marketing approaches of many of its veteran companies, and revived prospects for small artisan saltworks. All thanks to flor de sal.

The choicest of salts

It is actually over 20 years since international haute cuisine first took up flor de sal—or perhaps that should be *fleur de sel*—since it started with salt produced in the Guérande saltworks on France's Atlantic coast. Katja Wöhr, already in the know about its gastronomic qualities, recalls how fascinated she was by the distinctive production process she witnessed





during a visit to Brittany in 2001. For her, it marked the end of a personal quest: she had been looking for a completely natural product of the sea that required only artisan treatment to realize its gastronomic potential. Looking back on that period, Katja describes experiencing an almost mystical conviction that she was "destined to dedicate myself to the sea, to do something that connected me with it." She had worked surrounded by sea in various countries—New Zealand, Australia, Thailand, Jamaica—for nearly 20 years, always in tourism and the restaurant business. Her new project was soon to take her somewhere quite different: southern Majorca's Es Trenc salinas.

In choosing the Balearic Islands, Katja was following in the historical footsteps of the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans and Arabs, all of whom, in their day, extracted salt from the same area as she, as well as from salinas on the neighboring island of Ibiza. Long before Ibiza became a famous international tourist destination, it was known for its salt. Today, its saltworks produce salt of excellent quality that is particularly suitable for industrial fish salting (it has been exported for this purpose for decades to Norway, Denmark and elsewhere), and is also used for products sold under the Sal de Ibiza brand. Like



other places in southern and eastern Spain, the island possesses the conditions needed to produce flor de sal—an exclusive product precisely because it forms only in specific natural conditions, making it scarce and sought after.

Flor de sal's irregular crystals form on the water surface of the pools as a result of three physical influences: sunlight, the relative humidity of the air, and wind. Hot days with many hours of sunshine, low humidity and a light breeze to encourage evaporation without ruffling the surface of the water too much provide just the right conditions for thin crystalline salty layers—flor de sal—to form. In the San Vicente salinas in Cádiz, southern

Spain, this type of salt is known as *sal de hielo*: ice salt.

The distinctive crystallization process that makes it so different from common

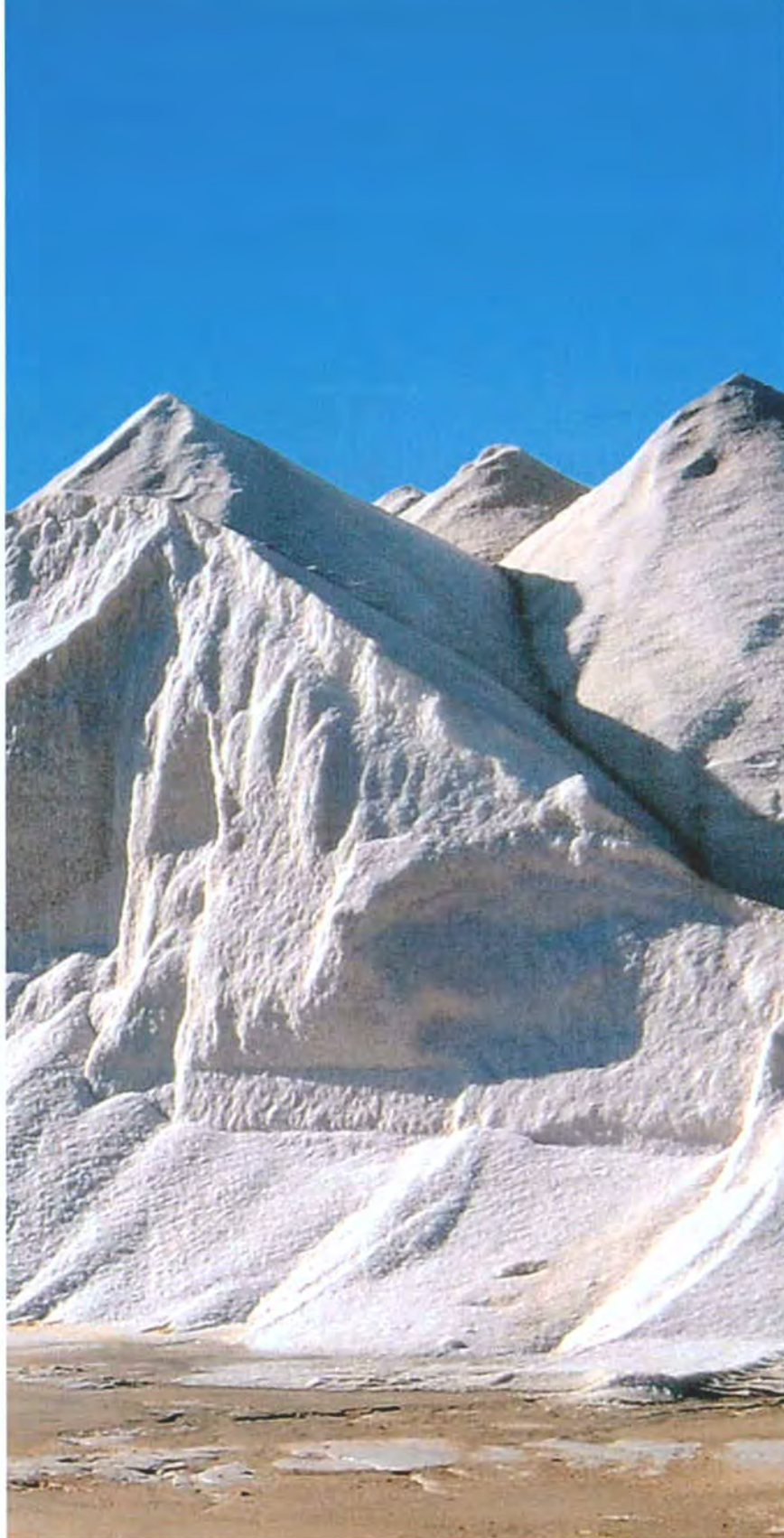
salt—which is precipitated to the bottom of the pan—has implications for its composition. Flor de sal contains less sodium chloride and a higher proportion of oligo-elements such as magnesium, potassium and calcium. The effect of this in cooking is that it salts food more subtly (it is sometimes described a "less salty" salt), while, given that magnesium is a natural flavor enhancer, dishes can be seasoned using less salt. "We try to use salt that's as pure as possible in our cooking," declares Roca. "That's why flor de sal is the salt that fits in best with our approach to seasoning." Flor de sal is the only salt that retains all its organoleptic qualities and its crunchy texture when sprinkled directly onto food before eating (not cooked or dissolved into it). As Marc Fosh, a British chef settled in Majorca and a participant in the Flor de Sal d'Es Trenc project, explains: "That's what makes it so suitable for finishing a dish before serving—it gives it that last dash of flavor."



Artisan appeal

Antoni Torradas, director of INFOSA's Gourmet Division, associates the purity of flor de sal with the traditional way in which it is produced: "...it's been done by practically the same artisan methods for thousands of years, and they're still used today." A visit to a saltworks at harvest time—June to September—is an opportunity to witness this fascinating process, which involves techniques that seem more akin to farming than to mineral extraction (the use of the word "harvest" is significant). On days when a layer of flor de sal forms on the pools, it is skimmed off using a tool known in French saltworks as a *lousse*, which is essentially a pole with a net attached to one end that picks up the crystals as it is drawn across the water surface. The salt is then left on large trays alongside the salt pans to dry out in the sun, then transferred to the packing area where it is packed by hand. Manuel Ruiz, a biologist by training and a partner in the family business that runs the San Vicente saltworks, is keen to highlight the fact that, by its very nature, flor de sal needs no chemical additives: "You can tell by the feel of it that it's very loose-textured; this is the sign of a really good flor de sal, and it means that we don't have to add any anti-caking ingredients before packing, as one would with common salt."

The fact that flor de sal goes from sea to kitchen with so little human intervention in between gives it ecological kudos; indeed, the San Vicente saltworks has been approved by the Slow Food movement. This characteristic also distinguishes it from other salts currently enjoying the boom, such as Himalayan salt which, being fossil-derived, has to be dug out



INLAND SALTWORKS

Spain's salt-making tradition is by no means restricted to its more than 3,500 km (2,174 mi) of coastline. Data collected by the Asociación Cultural Amigos de las Salinas de Interior (Friends of Inland Saltworks Cultural Association) bear witness to the fact that salt has been extracted at over 700 works in the interior of the Iberian Peninsula in the course of its history. However, when industrial methods were adopted generally by marine saltworks in the latter half of the 20th century, the inland salinas could no longer compete with production costs. Furthermore, improved communications made it possible for supplies to be transported from the coast to areas which hitherto had depended on saltworks closer to home. Consequently, most inland salinas fell into disuse and neglect. Recent years have seen rear guard action from groups and public bodies aware of the historical and ethnographic importance of the salt flats landscape of places such as Pozas de la Sal (Burgos, northern Spain), de Imón and Olmeda de Jadraque saltworks (both in Guadalajara, in the center of the

peninsula) and Gerri de la Sal (Lleida, northeastern Spain). Declared a national monument in 1987, Salinas de Añana's Valle Salado (Salt Valley), in the southwest of the Basque Country, is where their efforts have been most successful thus far. On a slope among hills through which their parent salt stream flows, 5,000 salt pans are spread, positioned to capitalize on the lie of the land so that water flows where it is needed. The overall effect is of giant terraces of stone, wood and water—a picturesque setting in which tourists can witness the artisan process of extracting salt (a product on the Slow Food list) and appreciate its historical, natural and cultural significance.

At Gerri de la Sal, the new take on salt has been instrumental in saving its saltworks. Flattened almost entirely when the Noguera Pallaresa River burst its banks in 1982, it languished in disuse for eight years until last year, when a local couple brought back to life one of the 450 saltworks that once drew upon the salt water spring that rises in the middle of town at a potential rate of 15,000 l (3,962 gal) an hour. Enric Canut, one of Spain's top cheese experts, has emotional links with this area, which was his parents and grandparents, and has now committed himself to a project to rescue 30

more saltworks. The plan calls for restoration work to begin in the latter half of this year, and by summer 2010 it is expected to have reclaimed 1 of the 9 ha (22 acres) that the town's saltworks once occupied. The rehabilitated works is expected to extract and market 150,000 kg (165 tons) of salt in that first season, and to be productive all year round from then on; in the winter months, the heat needed to evaporate the salt water so that the salt crystallizes into flakes will be generated by burning woodland biomass.

The emergence of a new back-to-basics approach to gastronomy, and more specifically to salt, means that artisan and organic products have an advantageous edge. Canut explains: "Not everyone can provide salt made on a base of wood, stone and clay in 30 m (98 ft) pools in the heart of the Pyrenees. Inland salt was already in the ground 40 million years ago—the salt now found in the form of mines is from dried up oceans from thousands of years ago, when the water was as pure as could be."



with spades or mechanical diggers from the seams where it occurs, or salt flakes, which are crystallized by evaporating water using metal hotplates similar to giant frying pans (Maldon salt, produced in the UK, is perhaps the best-known example of this type).

Another specific characteristic of flor de sal is that it varies according to where it comes from. "Being a sea product, it differs from one area to another depending on the composition of the water," explains Torradas. These nuances make it possible to tell whether a particular flor de sal is Atlantic or Mediterranean in origin, and even within this latter category, whether it comes from the San Pedro del Pinatar saltworks (located within the biggest salt lake in Europe, the Mar Menor at the southeastern end of Spain's Mediterranean coast) or from La Trinidad in the Ebro Delta at the northeastern end. That said, all the saltworks that appear in this article have one highly significant feature in common: the fact that they are all classified by the Spanish authorities as natural areas which enjoy special protection has important implications regarding the purity of their water and, by extension, the flor de sal harvested there. These areas constitute habitats of great biological interest, and although not all are open to the general public, some are tourist attractions in their own right. The Fuencaliente

saltworks, tucked in among the lower slopes of Teneguía and San Antonio volcanoes on the Canary Island of La Palma, is a prime example.

The Fuencaliente saltworks exemplifies artisan production of both flor de sal and sea salt. Its owner, Andrés Hernández, is also coordinator of the Asociación Española de Salinas Marinas Artesanales (Spanish Association of Artisan Marine Saltworks), to which ten or so traditional saltworks along Spain's Atlantic coast belong. He is confident that the general trend towards good quality food will help these small-scale works, and the natural and cultural heritage that they encapsulate, to survive despite having been pushed to the brink of extinction by industrialized salt production. Like the Janubio works on the neighboring island of Lanzarote, and the San Vicente and Isla Cristina salinas on the Andalusian coast, the Fuencaliente saltworks produces artisan, hand-harvested, additive-free sea salt: "It's a top quality product. The salt is produced entirely by natural forces: it is precipitated as a result of sun-induced evaporation."

The alchemy of salt

Taking a traditional product as their point of departure, imaginative chefs have opened up whole new culinary vistas for salt in the last few years.

In Spain, they have come up with salt-plus-flavor combinations that are firmly rooted in the nation's gastronomic repertoire: salt with Mediterranean herbs, citrus, saffron, tomato, black olives, wild mushrooms, pimentón

(a type of paprika from Spain), and others of more exotic origin, such as caviar, chili, hibiscus and curry. Carlos Pardo, owner of the Carolingia Sal Preciosa brand, declares: "Flavored salts do more than just season a dish, they also contribute extra aroma and flavor which, in combination with flor de sal's intrinsic properties, are a boon to any cook." As such, what Roca likes most about these mixtures is that his cooking benefits from "complex seasoning which, because it's made with the sort of precision that usually applies in confectionery, means that you are able to replicate the results." Flavored salts have been made for some years in the workshop of his restaurant, initially just for the exclusive delectation of its clientele, until they were invited by INFOSA (their supplier of Ebro Delta salt) to work in tandem and market the salts as a product.

Fosh has spent most of his professional career in Spain since training under Martín Berasategui. He first met Wöhr in 2002, a few months before Bacchus (the restaurant at Reads Hotel that he ran until January 2009) won its first Michelin star. As he recalls his first encounter with her, Fosh says with a smile: "If you've met Katja, you'll know that she's someone who emanates a lot of energy—she's an infectious positive person. She hadn't quite worked out what form her scheme would take then, but when she explained the general idea just to see what I thought of it, I was very taken and encouraged her to go forward with it. In hindsight, it now seems incredible that in Spain, a country with plenty of sunshine, and with sunlight being an essential element in obtaining flor de sal, no one had put a Spanish one on the







market before, whereas everyone knew about fleur de sel from France.” It was a few months later, when Katja was considering launching various mixtures alongside her natural flor de sal, that he first became actively involved in the project: “There was very little choice in the Spanish marketplace at that time, except for salt with herbs, and we decided to work with other flavors, capitalizing on my restaurant experience with these kinds of salt.”

Fosh sums up the two-way pull involved in choosing flavors: “You can either go for a crowd-pleaser like Mediterranean herbs, or for something determinedly different, like hibiscus or black olive salt, aimed primarily at chefs.” Rosa Beviá, proprietor of the Sal de Mar La Coccocha gourmet salt range, focuses largely on this latter group; backed by 80 years of family experience in the salt business, she also knows her way round the US market, to which her company has been exporting for the past ten years. As an example of her determination to bring something new to the

marketplace, she invites us to taste her petals of seaweed in flor de sal: browned gently in a little extra virgin olive oil, these turn crunchy, rather like a salt and seaweed puff pastry. Another aspect that gets close attention when creating a flavored salt is choosing quality ingredients that are representative of Spain’s various gastronomic cultures. Describing his product range, Roca focuses on one mixture as being particularly special: “We wanted to make a citrus salt because of the particular importance of citrus fruits in Spanish cuisine in general, and in our own in particular. We tried various things (concentrated rind, juice reductions, exotic combinations) and even used some fruits, such as bergamot, with no previous gastronomic record.” Similarly, Sal de Mar La Coccocha’s product range includes a salt flavored with Marcona almonds—a quintessentially Mediterranean nut that is known all over the world. Sal de San Pedro has opted for including an organic range among its products, for which the seasonings and spices

bear the quality stamp of the Region of Murcia Organic Farming Regulatory Council (southeastern Spain).

Spirit of adventure

Spain is acquiring an impressive and ever-expanding repertoire of gastro-products such as these, and they are being put to new, sophisticated, and sometimes surprising uses. Long-established companies have been swept along by the spirit of adventure: Sal Costa, which pioneered the use of iodized salt in Spain in the 19th century, has had its own line of gourmet salts since 2003 (its smoked salt, made by adding natural liquid smoke to sea salt, is doing particularly well in the US). Another company with over a century of experience behind it is Especies del Sol, which first ventured into the gourmet salt world four years ago with a mixture of flor de sal and La Vera pimentón (PDO Spanish paprika), since which time it has expanded its product range in directions hitherto unexplored in Spain. “We’re starting work on a very



small-scale production of flor de sal flakes extracted from salinas in Huelva,” explains José Manuel Rodríguez, one of the current proprietors of this family business. “We’re experimenting with changing temperatures in the water flow and prolonging the time the flor de sal crystals spend floating on the surface before they sink, with a view to getting flakes of flor de sal that are bigger, and therefore crunchier, similar to Halen Môn from Wales.”

The wine world has also been involved. In La Rioja, young winemaker Gonzalo Gonzalo has been working for the past few months with Toño Alcalá, chef at Caminante restaurant, towards adding salt to the product list of The Wine Republic, their jointly-

owned brand, established, as Gonzalo puts it: “...to create a world in which you can do anything with wine.” Having already come up with products as distinctive as wine jelly and wine chocolate, their latest project, which has yet to hit the marketplace, has been to create a wine salt using as their raw material the sodium and potassium bitartrate that are precipitated after must has fermented in chilled storage tanks. These still-transparent salts are then dissolved and recrystallized, this time by evaporation, during which process wine is added to intensify their color. In another area whose winemaking tradition is among the longest in Europe—Castile-Leon (in the northern half of the Peninsula)—the Abadía Retuerta winery has been equally keen to be involved in reincarnating salt as an haute cuisine product. It is using a technique invented by Bordeaux winemaker Pascal Delbeck that harks back to the 16th century, when the wife of a Libourne innkeeper created the first wine salt in history from the sacks of salt that had arrived in the port

soaked with the wine alongside which they had been stowed in the ships’ hold. Delbeck reinterprets that accidental invention with a secret recipe, macerating grapes with flor de sal and selected spices to produce three different types of salt that match the grape varieties grown in the Abadía Retuerta’s vineyards: Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. Some of the new salts seem to suggest a concept of gastronomy above and beyond the strictly culinary. According to Carlos Pardo, products such as salt flakes with gold and silver, and Carolingia’s range of colored salts “represent the trend towards sophistication and a new aesthetic in cooking. They give added visual appeal to a engagingly modern interpretation of an ingredient as traditional as salt.” Casanovas Barcelona, which also uses Ebro Delta salt as its basic ingredient, takes much the same approach, playing with textures and materials to create two intriguing products: flavored liquid salt and salt gelées. The Casanovas family, a dynastic Catalan clan of



artisan charcutiers since 1924, are constantly experimenting so that they can treat the clientele at their Barcelona restaurant and consumers of their own-brand products to an extra zing of originality. Their salt gelées are made from marine raw materials such as salt and seaweed combined with truffles, citrus fruit, saffron or honey, and their liquid salt, which comes in three flavors (Mediterranean herbs, hot coals and piquant) involves an additional and attention-grabbing new departure: you spray it, rather than sprinkle it, onto your food.

Savory desserts

What could be seen as the last barrier, at least in semantic terms, fell some time ago in the realms of haute cuisine, and the revolutionary results are now starting to filter through to a broader public. Using salt in sweet



dishes is no longer the prerogative of top chefs in Spain, though it is not yet as commonplace there as it is in France, Italy or even the US (where salted candy is already available from the big wholesale chains). Barcelona ice cream manufacturer Sandro Desii, who has invented a flor de sal ice cream that he distributes to restaurants

and ice cream parlors all over Spain and Portugal, is a typical example of the many small-scale businesses that make this sort of thing for their own customers.

Back in Majorca, far away from the tourist traps, Jaume Oliver welcomes me to the cake shop he runs in Algaida, a quiet little town in the

island's interior. I tuck into delicious coffee, pastries and ensaimadas while this young pastry chef tells me how, four years ago, he took the reins of Can Salem, the patisserie founded by his father in 1967. He decided to expand its range of traditional Majorcan products with a few more creative items: these include savory

desserts such as white chocolate *turrón* (nougat) with hibiscus flor de sal; Majorcan *turrón* with almond slivers and dark chocolate, hazelnut and natural flor de sal praline; and bitter chocolate mousse with olive oil and salted chocolate flakes.

In the course of several periods spent in France, Oliver had the good fortune to meet master pâtissier Pierre Hermé, who became a decisive influence on his style as a pastry chef. "He uses flor de sal in nearly all his pastries and chocolates. Seeing that, and knowing that we have top quality salt in Majorca, I realized that this was a terrific opportunity to capitalize on one of the island's natural resources and I started using it in my patisserie." As Oliver himself points out, this touch of local color not only adds appeal for visitors interested in regional food, but it is also something about which native Majorcans can be proud. A few short years ago, salt was very much a minor ingredient, required for certain pastries and doughs; it has now been revealed as a source of exciting new flavors, the counterpoint between sweetness and saltiness generating what Oliver describes as "a taste explosion".

Santiago Sánchez Segura has worked as a trainee journalist at Radiotelevisión del Principado de Asturias and at the Economic and Commercial Office of the Spanish Embassy in Miami. He is currently on a similar placement at Spain Gourmetour.

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WEBSITES

www.institutodelasal.com

Instituto de la Sal

A not-for-profit organization of 18 constituent companies representing the salt sector in Spain and Portugal. (Spanish)

salinas.castillalamancha.es

Asociación Cultural Amigos de las Salinas de Interior

An association (open to individuals, institutions and companies) for those interested in inland saltworks and the natural and cultural heritage associated with them. Its aims are to protect and promote these salinas and disseminate information by means of talks, conferences, publications and excursions. (Spanish)

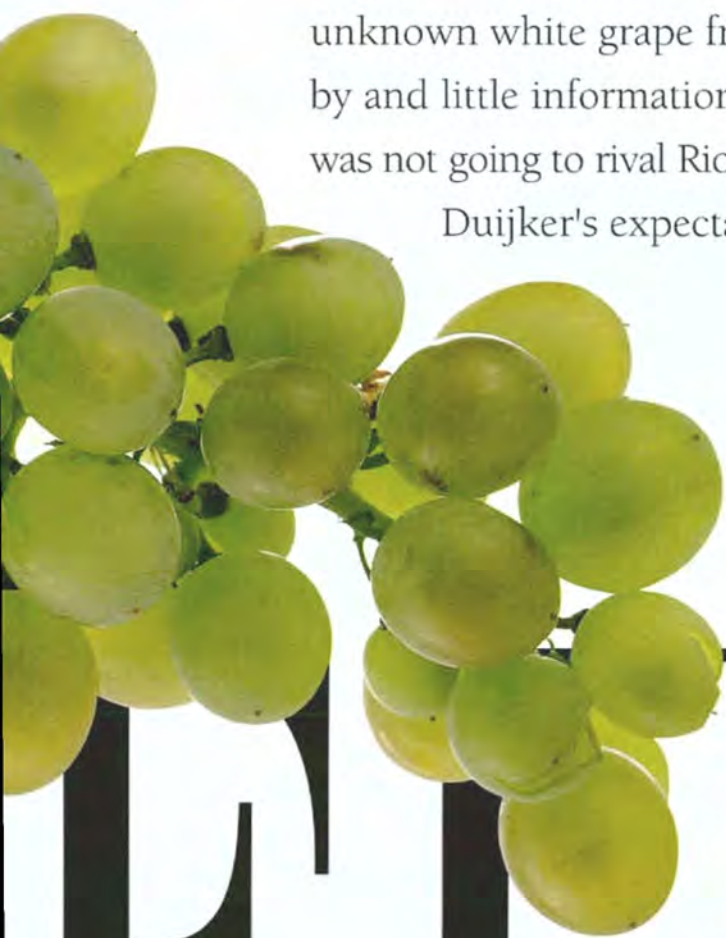
www.sal-atlantic.net

This project, which is co-funded by the European Union, aims to raise awareness about and promote traditional salt from the Atlantic, rehabilitate and revitalize the saltworks and call attention to their environmental, economic and cultural importance (French, Portuguese, Spanish).



GOD

It was in the late 1980s, as the acclaimed Dutch wine writer Hubrecht Duijker signed a copy of his excellent *Wine Atlas of Spain*, that he whispered in my ear: "Keep an eye out for Godello." This well-traveled expert had been touched by something special while researching his book, and of all the wonders in Spain's cornucopia of treasures he singled out an unknown white grape from the northwest. Yet, as the years went by and little information trickled out, it became evident Godello was not going to rival Rioja. Had something gone wrong to dampen Duijker's expectations? It was time to investigate.



Waiting for

ELLO





TEXT

HAROLD HECKLE/©ICEX

PHOTOS

PATRICIA R. SOTO/©ICEX

There had been one exciting sighting, when I came across my first bottle. It was a fine, tightly-structured yet understated *blanco joven* called Guitián that jumped out at me from a wine list in a restaurant in the mountains of Catalonia.

Although it underperformed aromatically, its rounded palate and firm structure did a wonderful job of accompanying a spectacular fresh (not salted) cod dish, which had been served, still cooking, on a sizzling hot slate (*bacalao a la llosa*). Little did I know at the time of the significance of slate in that marriage of ingredients.

Godello had been headed for extinction. Phylloxera infestations in the 1900s wiped out many grape varieties in Spain and bore down hard on the northwest. To restock the area's devastated vineyards, the authorities of the time opted to bring in varieties that could replenish wine supplies rapidly by giving bumper yields. Hence, vast

plantations of heavy-cropping Palomino, which Gallegos called *Jerez*, further squeezed what few Godello vines had survived. While famous in Andalusia for producing sherry, up in Galicia, Palomino tends to make dumb, lifeless wines best suited to quantity rather than quality.

Life in Galicia in the 1950s and '60s was very hard, with many Gallegos forced to emigrate to find work. Those that remained earned what they could from fishing, agriculture and the slate industry. Galicia has some of the finest slate in Europe and among the best quarries, to the point they call it *oro negro* (black gold) locally. Some wise heads in the wine industry realized simple, cheap cooperative wine was not a good way to boost employment. Among them was regional agriculture leader, Salvador Chico.

"Salvador had the idea to send me to Germany to investigate wine. It was enjoying commercial success because

of its ability to give pleasure to consumers," said Horacio Fernández Presa. Horacio had been a teetotaler, but so impressed was he by German producers making Kabinett wines that he underwent a Damascene conversion and took up what became the passion of a lifetime. "They had adopted stainless steel vinification, using totally hygienic technology borrowed from the milk industry," said Horacio. The date was 1972. It was obvious Palomino could not be relied on to trigger a quality wine revolution, so a process to find suitable candidates was instigated.

Back from the brink: Valdeorras

At the headquarters of the DO Valdeorras, in the mountainside village of Villamartín de Valdeorras, director Jorge Luis Mazaira Pérez explained that the 1974 project, called Revival, recovered Godello



from the brink of extinction. Tests were done into what rootstock best suited Godello. Diverse training methods were also tried. "A major concern was its tendency to mature very rapidly," Jorge Luis explained. "In autumn sunshine it can go from 11 to 13 degrees in two days, giving rise to high alcohol." Horacio was among the first to identify Godello's potential. Someone told him of vines on a hillside that had given excellent wines from way back into antiquity, said Jorge Luis.

"There were just a few vines left," said Horacio. "In all there couldn't have been more than 1,000 sq m (1,200 sq yards) of vineyard surviving." The Revival project looked into what soils and locations were best, Horacio said. Bodegas Godeval, the winery he took charge of, was the first to get to grips with Godello and also one of the first in Spain to use the stainless steel he'd spotted in Germany. "Our fermentation hall still looks new today, more than 20 years later," Horacio said with pride. At the early trade fairs where Godello first appeared it was sometimes hit and miss, admitted

Jorge Luis. "You always knew that four or five would fail; now that doesn't happen," he said. Godello is not a terpenic grape, like Albariño or Muscatel, he explained, "it tends to take on the aromas of fermentation." This initial lack of an immediate varietal aroma has slowed its appeal in markets such as Britain, where nose is considered an essential requirement of a wine's attractiveness. Recent careful work in vineyards and total control of rising maturity at harvest time are beginning to allow Godello grapes to have both an appealing nose and a fleshy, rounded palate, said Jorge Luis. "The fantastic thing about Godello is that it allows *terroir* to shine through, but you have to make sure odd smells don't creep in." A selection table at harvest time is essential, he explained. "The surviving Godello vines were around 60 years old, grafted onto a hybrid of *Vitis vinifera* and *rupestris*," said Horacio at Bodegas Godeval. "Ninety percent of the Godello we know today descends from that early genetic material, about 200 original vines," he observed. A clonal selection was made and now, with a

deeper understanding of what winemakers are looking for, "we are approaching a time when a new clonal selection could be made, now that we better understand the wines we are making," he added. However, he is wary of narrowing down the genetic stock too tightly. "Polyclonal vineyards may still contain some very attractive points," he recognized. Bodegas Godeval, built into the ruins of the San Miguel de Xagoaza Monastery, has a 150,000-bottle capacity, harvesting 16 ha (39.5 acres) of vines producing 6.6 lb per plant. Only Godello wines are made.

Godeval 2007 is brilliant yellow with an herbal, lemony nose that is still largely closed. On the palate it is quite full, with good structure. All grapes are de-stalked, cold fermented with inoculated yeasts at 18°C (64.4°F) for around 15 days. The feature Godeval treasures is the mineral quality drawn from slate soils. Godeval Cepas Vellas 2007 is from old vines on slate in the Sil Valley. It is also aromatically closed still, with potential to open and flourish. Herbal and lemony, it has a very fresh palate, albeit with a bit of



a gap mid-palate and as yet a short finish.

A white as serious as the best reds

Rafael Palacios, brother of the famed Álvaro (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 62), began his Valdeorras project in 2004. He has made himself hugely popular by moving his family to the region. His kids go to the local school. "It shows tremendous confidence in our region when someone from Rioja moves to live and work here," a local woman explained. Rafael's winery is temporarily located in a modern suburban house.

A new bodega is to be built next to some ancient stone terraces where Rafael has planted vines. The idea is to use the slope's gravity to go from selection table, through vinification stage, to bottle. "The new winery is very expensive, so we have to work hard," said Rafael. His *Do Bolo* (name of the region) Louro (second wine) 2007 is light yellow with a restrained perfume and a very polished palate. It gives the impression it will mature excellently in bottle despite being made from



the youngest estate-owned vines as well as some bought-in grapes. Rafael has around 12 ha (29.6 acres) planted, from which 26,000 liters were produced in 2008. All the grapes are de-stalked and pressed. Once chilled, they ferment in oak *foudres* (large casks) and barrels, although 20 percent is fermented in stainless steel. When the new winery is built in Valdagua, at an altitude of 750 m (2,460 ft), Rafael hopes to ferment everything in wood. After fermentation the wine is left on its lees undergoing weekly battonage to make for a fuller, more glyceric, rounder palate.

As *Sortes 2007* is his top wine, made from older terrace-grown vines in Val do Bibei. Bright yellow, on the nose it's more accessible, albeit you know it is going to open further with bottle age. Better grapes make a difference. On the palate it is all contained youth. For the moment wood dominates, but you can tell the fruit is going to burst through once bottle age gets going. It is lemony citric and full in the mouth. It spent six months in barrel after fermentation. "This is the most complete wine so far, the best fruit and the most finely worked wine," said Rafael. By now it was clear Godello is a white grape that can be aged. Like the almost eternal Bical in Portugal or Chardonnay in Burgundy, it positively benefits from aging. With its restrained nose, over-chilling stuns Godello's aromas, and those wary of darker yellows, or not prepared to venture into previous vintages, are never going to know the glories they missed. So if you see older vintages for sale, buy them, and go easy with the ice bucket.





Terroir shines through

Bodegas Valdesil in Vilamartín de Valdeorras owns 26 ha (64 acres), including amazing slate vineyards at 510 m (1,673 ft) above sea level. The idea behind Montenovio (2008 tank sample tasted) is to express terroir at affordable prices. Yellow, with green stalky nuances on the nose, it opens up to an impressively balanced palate even at this early point in its evolution. Val de Sil Sobre Lías 2007 is pure yellow. On the nose the influence of the lees adds so much complexity that initially it appears to have been fermented in oak. On the palate it is full, glyceric and rounded.

Pezas da Portela 2006 is fermented in oak and then passed to stainless steel to homogenize. It is rich yellow with a glorious nose echoing wood

mingled with fruit. Old vines from 11 different plots are harvested for this wine. Pedrouzos 2006 (500 magnums) is from vines on broken slate soils in the Pedrouzos vineyard. While still clearly young, it is rich yellow, with a fabulous nose infused with pure terroir mineral hints. It has a huge length and is an impressive wine despite obvious youth.

Roberto Fernández García's family has lovingly restored a former 18th-century winery that had lost its roof. They own 11.5 ha (28.4 acres) that lie astride what in AD 79 was the *Via Nova* which linked northwest Iberia with Rome during the reign of Emperor Vespasian. The winery, called A Coroa ("the crown" in Galician), makes a wine by the same name whose 2007 is yellow with greenish hints. On the nose, fruity greengage mingles with fennel, even if not too generously yet. It has a

balanced palate, firm structure and a shortish finish. A Coroa 2006 is beginning to open up a bit more on the nose. But it is the 2005 that is developing a lovely perfume of tertiary evolution in bottle, with crisp acidity right to the end. Adega O Casal, in Rubiá, was built to make the 2008 harvest. Jose Luis García, one of five partners, said vineyard orientation allows for perfect maturation of Godello. At 550 m (1,804 ft) above sea level it is important that Godello enjoys slower maturation. "One of the problems with Godello is that it matures so rapidly that its acidity drops right down and the alcohol level shoots up," he said. José Luis grew up in England, where his family emigrated to in the 1960s. His Casal Novo 2007 packs peaches and tropical fruit on the nose. "If we hadn't gone through the Revival process we wouldn't be making



wine,” said José Luis. “Palomino, which a lot of the cooperatives still use, can’t make good wine here.” He puts the aromatic impact of his wines down to orientation and age. “Practically all our vineyards are from the first plantation 30 years ago,” he said, adding that his winery has a 60,000-liter capacity, harvesting from 8 ha (19.7 acres).

Bierzo: versatility shows

The Roman naturalist, Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79), mentioned the wines of the northwestern Iberian settlement of Bergidum Flavium, today called El Bierzo. For Rome, Bergidum’s main importance was gold, which was extracted by diverting river water through ore-rich hills. Such wealth contrasts with 20th century poverty in the

wake of Phylloxera. The infestation hit the region particularly hard, and while Garnacha Tintorera and Palomino were brought in, the star grape in the area’s recovery has been the red Mencia. The DO Bierzo (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 72) was founded in 1989 and out of 18,739 tons of grapes crushed a year, Godello represents a mere 441 tons. Despite this small amount, Godello has been attracting increasing attention and loyalty among producers and consumers. Bodegas y Viñedos Bergidenses is a winery with 10 ha (24.7 acres), which supplies its entire Godello requirement. Carlos Fernández, one of five family members involved, says he harvests at two moments, usually three days apart, to get the best Godello blend. His *Viña Garnelo 2008* was fermented in two tanks, harvested three days apart.

The later and riper tank is much more aromatically active, while the palate of the younger wine has fresher acidity. The wines are blended to combine characteristics. “We sell 22,000 liters a year, and our blend contains some Doña Blanca white (known as Valenciana locally) from ancient family vineyards and just a tiny amount of Malvasia.” The blend works well.

A passion for perfection

At the Luna Beberide winery (founded 1987) in Cacabelos, Alejandro Luna, son of founder Bernardo, is enthusiastic about Godello. “My father bought this 70 ha (172.9 acre) property off a man called Mr. Cascallana for 75 million pesetas (about 450,000 euros) who had worked for Gonzalez Byass,



'including as watchman,' said Alejandro, referring to the original deed of sale.

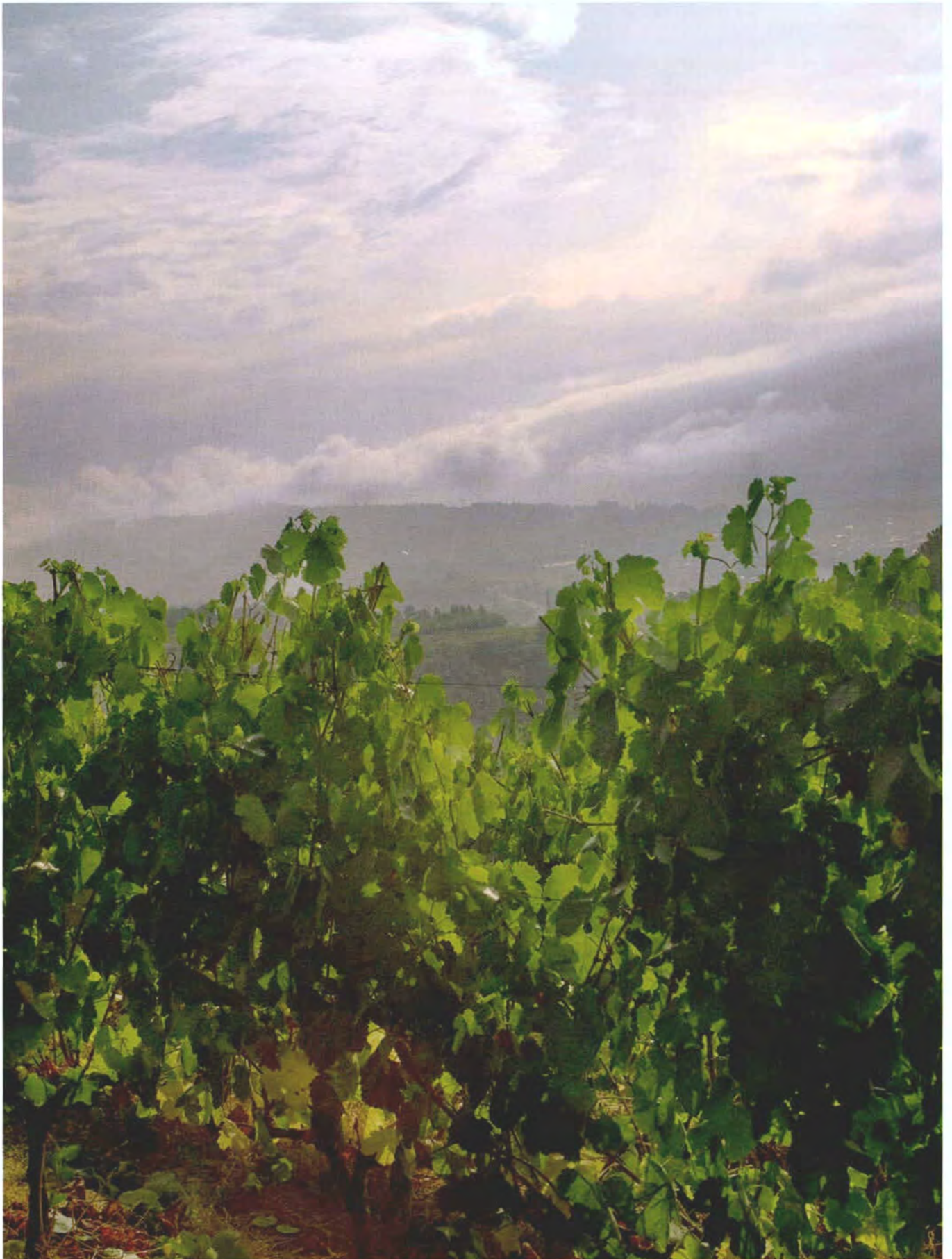
Two years ago they began replanting with cuttings taken from old vines. They have 1.5 ha (3.7 acres) of Godello. "It is selling very well," said Alejandro. Luna Berberide Godello 2008, freshly bottled, is Godello with some Doña Blanca blended in for added aroma. On the nose it is reminiscent of green apples. "Apple is very typical of Godello," said Alejandro. The winery took early winemaking advice from Mariano García (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 75). Two of his sons, Alberto and Eduardo, collaborate in red wine production.

Luna Berberide 2007 has more color but is less aromatically forward, with hints of apple mingled with spices. Its rich palate is a consequence of having rested on its lees, Alejandro

said. "In 1975, Gonzalez Byass commissioned a study into this region and made experimental plantings of the white grapes Gewürztraminer and Sylvaner, probably the first in Spain, even before Somontano," said Alejandro. Prada a Tope, based in the impressively restored Palacio de Canedo (Canedo Palace, circa 1730), has made a big effort to move to more sustainable, organic viticulture. Its incredibly energetic owner, who introduces himself with a firm handshake simply as "Prada", began life as a shoemaker. Today he oversees a nationwide empire that includes restaurants, gastronomic retailing, a hotel, vineyards and a winery. Prada a Tope red pepper are renowned throughout Spain. His 2007 Godello is "very lightly filtered" and delivers a wild, joyous aromatic experience. The palate

backs up the nose, although the finish is a bit short.

Among the most passionate proponents of Godello are Ginés Fernández López and his wife Juani Gancedo Hidalgo. Their Bodegas y Viñedos Gancedo in Quilós was founded in 1998 to cultivate 13 ha (32 acres), with another 10 ha (24.7 acres) supplying fruit. Their Godello is blended with some Doña Blanca, said Ginés, who harvests with infinite care from 63 individual plots. Most of their Godello comes from Val de Paxariñas, Ginés added. Their Capricho 2007 from Val de Paxariñas (19,000 bottles), "smells of broom blossom," he said. It contains 20 percent Doña Blanca "which adds 'wisdom' to the blend." Bottle temperature is vital. "If you let it rise much above 8°C (46.4°F) it becomes too obvious and less enjoyable. At its correct





temperature Godello is truly gorgeous," Ginés said. The wine is fermented very slowly at a low temperature for a long period of time. "This way it roughs up the yeast, giving the impression it was raised on its lees," he explained. A slow, extended fermentation allows for a richer, fuller mouthfeel. Ginés commented that a winemaker's eternal problem with Godello is the need to harvest it green. "Allow full maturity and alcohol takes over and spoils the party. But picking green leaves you with the quandary of how best to deal with a slightly bitter finish," he observed. Their Herencia del Capricho 2006 (1,200 bottles) was vinified Burgundian-style, having been fermented in 225-liter barriques. Vibrant yellow in color, it has plenty of rich oak cocooning citrus fruit and jasmine blossom. The mouthfeel is full, refined, smooth and long, with a very persistent, fresh finish.

Ribeira Sacra: ancient slate terraces

The world woke up to the potential of slate in Spain with the emergence of the Catalan region of DO Priorat

as a producer of world-class wines. Álvaro Palacios discovered that old vines on ancient slate terraces there produced powerful, terroir-driven wines. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find winemakers in Galicia restoring the achingly beautiful, antique and extremely steep-sided slate terraces of Ribeira Sacra.

Although wines have been made here since time immemorial, the region only received the right to sell Vinos de la Tierra in 1993. In 1996 this was upgraded to DO status. There are 3,000 ha (7,413 acres) of vineyard and 2,600 growers, a typical situation in Galicia where the *minifundio* (small parcel) inheritance system divides property like in Burgundy. The average plot is 500 sq m (600 sq yards). A total of 2,755 tons of grapes, mostly red, are harvested annually. Wines can be made of Godello, Albariño, Loureira, Treixadura, Torrontés and Doña Blanca.

Adega Pena das Donas (a *dona* is a mythological figure, a female elf, in Galician culture) is located in the tiny hamlet of Ribas del Sil. The winery owns 1 ha (2.5 acres) and oversees another 2 (5 acres). One tiny patch is in San Cosmede on an incredibly steep-sided V-shaped valley. Farmers use roads where the

inclination is just about manageable, but owner Jesús Vázquez Rodríguez says, "I often leave the doors of my Land Rover open just in case I need to jump out."

Jesús has worked vines here for 50 years and founded the winery three years ago. His wife, Elvira, helps with pruning. In this dramatic landscape each plot measures around 20-30 sq m (24-36 sq yards), he said. The *minifundio* tradition, still observed today, stipulates that one third of an estate be divided equally between all offspring (*la legitima*), another third can be divided equally or given entirely to the eldest son (*la mejora*) and one third (*la libre disposición*) can be disposed of at will, even given to a lover. To make up his hectare (2.5 acres), Jesús had to acquire 30 deeds of ownership, known as *escrituras*. Their Almalarga, 100 percent Godello, vinified on its lees with the help of Antonio Lombardia. The 2008 (tank sample) is a wild ferment (no yeast added) from hand-harvested bunches which were taken up the slopes on mini-rails, Alpine-style. The wine has apple and gooseberry nuances, and is surprisingly full bodied and opulent in the mouth. "Working the lees helps to make the wine voluminous," said Antonio.



Almalarga 2007 has a big nose, redolent of sophisticated perfume. The secret, Jesús said, is very old vines producing tiny bunches.

From Burgundian monks to biodynamic ideals

Three rivers, Miño, Sil and Bupal, drain Ribeira Sacra. The Roman port of Portus Polumbaris on the Sil was used to export prized wines from a local patch called Amandi. Sarcophagus lids in Temes' little chapel made from Italian stone that arrived as ships' ballast are proof of a once thriving trade. From the 6th century, following the departure of the Romans, aesthetes began to arrive to live as hermits in the valleys. Many gorgeous Romanesque churches dot the slopes.

Winemaking underwent a boost with the arrival of monastic orders, including monks from Cluny, in France.

Adega Algueira in the curiously-named town of Sober, makes a blend of 45 percent each of Godello and Albariño and the rest Treixedura. Owner Fernando Algueira González works 10 ha (24.7 acres). "The mineral quality of our soils is always

very present in our wines. We have a lot of slate." Terraces on these exceedingly steep slopes are called *bancales*. Fernando barrique ferments and then leaves his whites one year in 750-liter French casks. He achieves honeyed aromas from the wood and lemony grapefruit. "Godello is great, it always lends citrus fruit character and structure," he said.

"If we could return to the ways of our forefathers in the vineyards it would be great, they spent so much time and backbreaking effort there we just couldn't do it today." Their weak point was poor quality water, which wrecked winemaking, he said. Today, wineries are clean and capable of making great wines, but vineyards cannot really return to old, manual viticulture, said Fernando.

Dominio do Bibei in Langullo, Manzaneda, is at 550 m (1,804 ft) above sea level on hillsides surrounded by vineyards and mountain herbs. Viticulturalist Laura Lorenzo, 26, has worked here five years, using organic composts and pruning during full moons. "In Galicia, the full moon has always been considered propitious for pruning or even cutting hair," she said. She cultivates 30 ha (74 acres),

five of which are very old. The 2008 from Bibeiro at 700 m (2,296 ft) above sea level (tank sample) is spectacular in its aromatic vivacity, full of freshness and pure, ripe fruit. Two clones of Godello are involved. Frequent battonage makes the wine big in the mouth.

Javier Dominguez, who owns the winery, says Godello is, for him, "beyond doubt, Spain's greatest white grape." At harvest, the grapes pass into cooling and drying chambers where they spend up to three days. "When it rains these chambers are vital," said Javier. Winemaking here is gravity driven. Grapes are hand selected on a table and pressed in a small pneumatic press. From there they pass into large wooden barrels, then Austrian foudres and finally Nomblot "eggs." France's Marc Nomblot began specializing in concrete wine tanks in the 1980s. His egg-shaped tanks offer excellent thermal inertia, controlled micro-oxidation and flavor neutrality. They have become very fashionable, particularly among biodynamic producers who believe the shape helps convey the mineral qualities of terroir, greater weight as well as fruit intensity.

A 2008 tank sample from fertile lowlands is still marked by wood





but has a spectacular perfume. "Fertile grounds tend to give less satisfying acidity," Javier said. Still, the wine has appealing herbal qualities, full of thistle. A 2007 tank sample is utterly spectacular, having spent six months in new oak, seven in used and then seven in Austrian foudres before undergoing seven months in a concrete egg. "It'll then spend 14 months in bottle," Javier said.

The 2006 Lapena, to be released in November 2009, is full of sophistication, a unique and quite special perfume. On the palate it's glyceric, with a hint of something savory, almost salty. The acidity is

just about enough to carry the wine into future. It's big and complex. Sara Perez (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 63) and René Barbier are partners in this project. When Javier asked them over, they initially arrived aiming to say no, but when they saw the slate, they soon changed their minds. The 2005 Lapena has been on sale since November 2008. You get the feeling it'll improve. For the moment it's best laid down. Lapena 2004 is just beginning to open up. The wood is still present but perfume is beginning to rise from underneath to gently erupt upwards. It's a wine that commands attention.

Javier and Laura both recognized

that the 2003 Lapena had a problem. While the palate is pretty spectacular, the aroma is sulfur-burdened, "a problem with the yeast," we concluded. The 2002 Lapena was the first wine where total integration of wood, fruit and acidity became evident. The aromatic integration is admirable and intense, with tertiary perfume emerging. It has good acidity and great fruit, as well as a huge finish, a clear indication that Godello is world class. It proves that though Godello drinks well as a *joven*, it can be outstanding if vinified to age, making it certainly worth the wait.



Harold Heckle is a correspondent for the Associated Press. Since he first visited Spain as a student, he has kept himself connected with Spanish gastronomic culture. On this topic, as a journalist he has contributed to the BBC and to magazines such as Decanter, Wine Magazine and Wine & Spirits.

WEBSITES

www.dovaldeorras.com

DO Valdeorras Regulatory Council (Spanish)

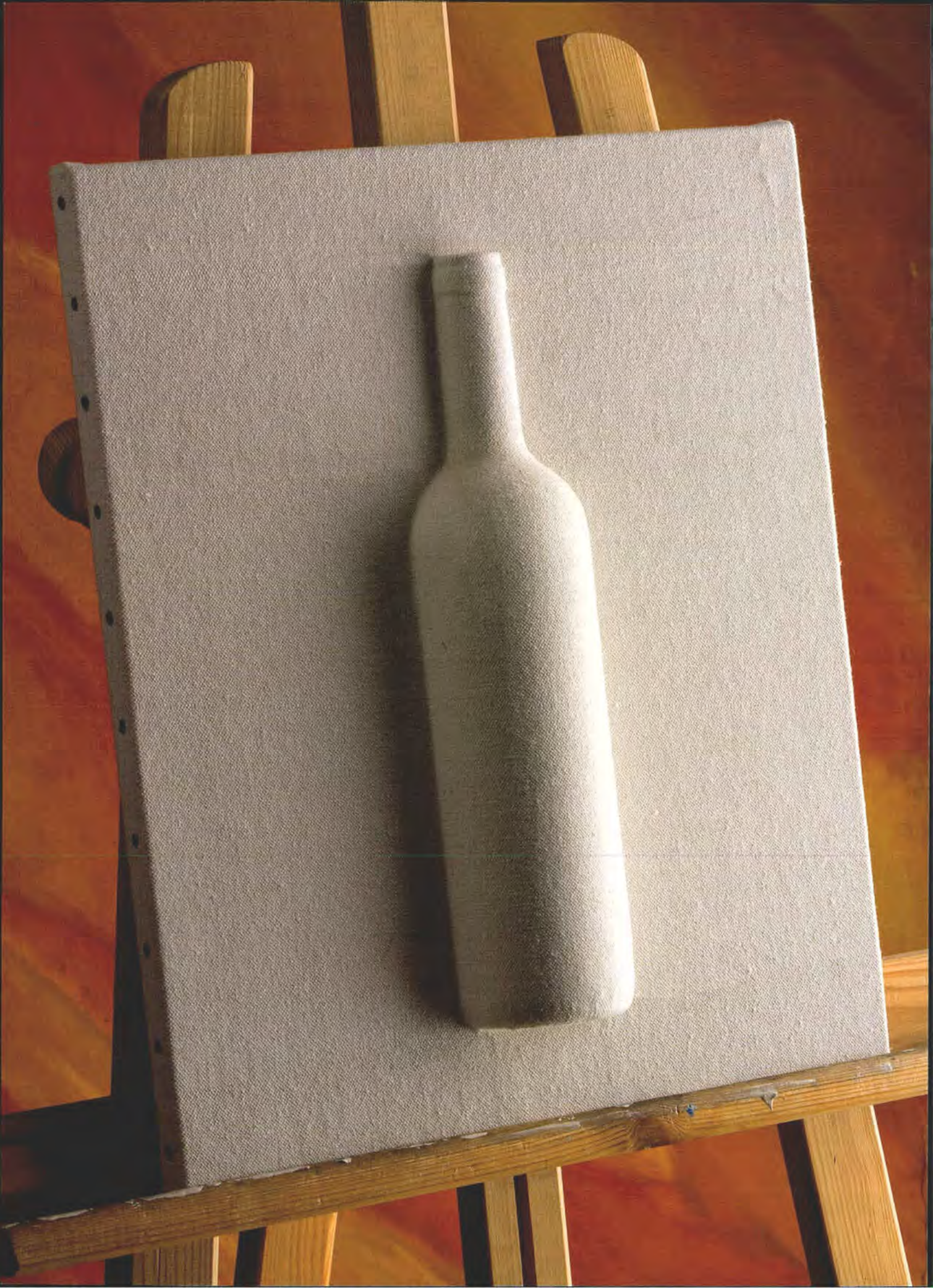
www.ribeirasacra.org

This page contains information about the DO Ribeira Sacra Regulatory Council as well as tourism in Ribeira Sacra (English, Galician, Spanish)

www.crdobierzo.es

DO Bierzo Regulatory Council (Spanish)





WINE

When faced with a shelf displaying dozens of varieties and hundreds of producers to choose from, the wine consumer is left with a bewildering choice. Research has shown that the savvier shopper will choose first by region and then by price; however, in a highly visual market, the label of the product also plays a mammoth role. Whether we admit it or not, most of us do, at least subconsciously, judge a book by its cover.

by Design



Text
Suzanne Wales/©ICEX

Photos
Juan Manuel Sanz/©ICEX

Traditionally, cutting-edge label design and branding has been the domain of New World wines. Experts regularly cite the phenomenally successful Yellow Tail label from Australia, with its aboriginal-inspired kangaroo motif, as the benchmark of contemporary wine branding. Of course, New World wines have the advantage of a "blank slate"; with no history to project, marketers are in the perfect position to endow their product with a fresher, more playful look. Spain, on the other hand, is a country with a millennium-long history of viticulture. But it is also one that, over the past decades, has reinvented itself in a modern renaissance in the arts, politics and all facets of culture. And the image of its wine is starting to reflect this shift.

Consumer choice

I put this premise to the test at La Carte des Vins, a shop in Barcelona's El Born district selling wines from all over the world. With a heavy tourist trade and a high number of foreign local residents, it's a safe bet that a large number of its customers choose their wine by the image it projects. First up, I ask manager Gareth York if Spain is keeping up with trends in modern, engaging wine label design. "Of course, just look at the difference. Here are the French ones," he replies, whilst pointing to a rack of bottles featuring various chateaux, crests and heavy serif typefaces on white backgrounds. "And here are the Spanish ones." A sweeping gaze does indeed reveal miniature reproductions of modern

art, appealing cartoon-like drawings, vibrant colors, wacky symbolism and other strong design and graphic elements. I then ask York which ones have been his latest best sellers. He points to Lautus, a Tempranillo from Guelbenzu bodega in Navarre with an ornate pale pink and gold label reminiscent of an ancient manuscript. "It works really well," continues York. "It's almost Masonic, yet also feminine and mysterious." Another hit has been Dehesa Gago 'G', which has a minimalist label featuring a large white "G" on a black background, a creation of maverick winemaker Telmo Rodriguez. But the one that has walked off the shelves has been Vi de Gel, a Catalan sweet wine presented in a stylish, elongated black glass bottle. York says that customers were buying it by the dozen, then asking what sort of wine it was at the cash register. "A good wine label can make or break a wine," he concludes. "And most customers do in fact admit to buying by label alone."

Contemporary design sense

With Catalonia's strong design and arts heritage and knack for branding, perhaps it's not surprising that some of the most well-conceived niche wine brands hail from its vineyards. Standout examples include L'Origan, a cava with an Art nouveau-style label and bottle shaped like a perfume flask; Pardas, with its playful *jabali* (wild boar) icon; and Petit Grealo, whose differentiating and succinct text-only label (by Barcelona-based graphic designer

Joan Bertrán) was conceived to reflect the "advanced" character of the wine: a blend of Syrah, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon varieties. Even Torres, a leading bodega not normally associated with young-gun winemaking, has started to battle with the upstarts.

"I think that Spanish wine has changed a lot over the past years," says Miguel Torres, head of the company's marketing division, "and its image has changed accordingly." The company currently has two varieties on the market that have broken with Torres' 130-year mold. The first is Celeste. Produced from the company's only vineyard in the DO Ribera del Duero, the label features a seductive portrait of the night sky on the date of the grape harvest. Nerola, an organic wine, is an homage to the swirling (and yes, organic) forms of Barcelona's *modernista* architecture. Mid-vintage, the label was modified and resized so that it actually wraps around the entire girth of the bottle, much in the way a decorative element would swirl around one of the movement's signature candy cane columns. "Sales went up when it was released," continues Torres. "You always sell more when a product stands out. Every 2-3 years we upgrade our labels. If you look at Viña Sol's label today, it's completely different from what it was 40 years ago," he states, referring to Torres' best-selling, mid-priced white. "We do this by making subtle changes to details, such as the size of the typeface and color scheme. Of course, some you can change more than others. The more traditional ones we leave alone."

Pardas, with its playful wild boar icon

Nerola, an organic wine, whose label pays homage to the swirling forms of Barcelona's *modernista* architecture

Celeste, which features a portrait of the night sky on the date of the grape harvest



Espelt, a company from the relatively new wine region of L'Empordà had no such tradition to draw from. So instead they contracted Javier Mariscal, the renowned Catalan imagemaker who first shot to international fame with Cobi, the canine mascot for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. For Espelt, he has created a corporate image that encapsulates the young, lighthearted culture of the company. Wine labels and other promotional material feature a cheeky collection of colorful stick figures ploughing the fields, harvesting the vines and prancing through the vineyards with a glass in hand.

"In the beginning, the most important thing for us was to create a brand for our product. We didn't have any credibility or a concept," says Espelt's general director Xavier Cepero. "Historically, L'Empordà has always had a close association with art; every village here has its own artist or writer. So we approached Javier Mariscal to create something modern and full of life. It was a risky thing to do."

Cepero admits that Espelt's fresh, carefree image has probably meant sacrificing a few potential clients, and that more conservative sommeliers tend to leave their wines alone. But the upside is that it has also helped their export market (Espelt exports 50% of its 500,000-bottle annual production) and it has been pivotal in helping them tap into the younger, more design-conscious consumer. The brand, claims Cepero, is particularly popular in Japan, where the cartoon-like imagery of Mariscal resonates well



Espelt's labels, which depict an assortment of happy, colorful stick figures, perfectly reflects the winery's young, upbeat spirit.

with a generation which has grown up on manga.

Avant-garde influences

Across the Mediterranean, on the island of Majorca, two wine companies have played the outsider aesthetic to the max. Ànima Negra's diabolic, cult-like imagery has been inspired by the low-yielding grape principally used for its wines: the indigenous, purple-black callet. Their labels look like they have been tailor-made for a gathering of Goths, with the red 'AN' logo contrasted against a jet-black background and crudely cut in the form of ripped pieces of paper.

On the lighter side of the spectrum is 4Kilos, a boutique bodega created in 2006 by Francesc Grimalt (who previously worked at Ànima Negra and is largely credited with rescuing the callet grape from obscurity) and Sergio Caballero, one of the founders of Barcelona's enormously successful modern music and multimedia festival Sónar. Given their backgrounds, a novel approach to marketing their two varieties (4Kilos and 12Volts) was predictable. The 4Kilos website comes with neat features such as You Tube videos and Google Earth links to the vineyards. "We didn't have the money to hire a star architect for our bodega," laughs Caballero (the name 4Kilos comes from the pair's original investment in their venture in Spanish pesetas, when a *kilo* meant a million pesetas in argot. Today's equivalent of 4 kilos is 24,000 euros). "So we invested money in our web. We decided that we would have fun with the project and do something different. For me, the culture of wine is a little boring, and modern wine labels often look very 'designed'." Instead, they took inspiration from the French Chateau





Mouton Rothschild wines—the first to use works of art on their labels—and asked two established contemporary artists for permission to use their artwork on their bottles. As a result, 4Kilos features the florid, mystical imagery of Canadian artist Marcel Dzama, whilst 12Volts bares the edgy, graffiti-like work of LA-based illustrator Gary Baseman. Both are leading figures in the underground art and design scene. Their visually-arresting labels for 4Kilos have broken ground in Spain by forging a connection between fine wine and pop culture, and at the same time have helped the company tap into a New World market (4Kilos exports approximately 50% of its 10,000-bottle annual production).

The art of wine

The relationship between art and winemaking is as old as the craft itself. The Romans regularly featured Bacchus—their God of wine—on all manner of artifacts, while the Renaissance painters established the connection between the consumption of wine and the creative process (“I feast on wine and bread, and feasts they are,” declared Michelangelo). The modern art

pioneers cemented this relationship, as the image of the rough-living, bohemian artist forged its way into the collective consciousness. In Spain, the Aragonese winery Enate, following the concept used by certain cavamakers at the end of the 19th century and sherrymakers at the beginning of the 20th century, used contemporary art on their DO Somontano label (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73). Their striking and timeless labels feature artwork by some of the art world’s elite, including Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida and Antonio Saura.

Founded in 1992, this family-run business decided from the word go that they wanted to break the mold. “Back then the wine market was very traditional,” explains Ramon Justes, Enate’s art and communications director. “There is such a huge number of bodegas in Spain, so you have to find your place. Our strategy was to break with tradition and communicate in a modern language.”

So Enate set about finding artists interested in their proposal. The process is the same today. Each one tries the wine and then produces about five paintings inspired by the sensations it emits. Enate then chooses one for the label, but it also buys all the originals, which it then displays in the gallery that forms part of its stunning modernist headquarters, a work of Jesús Manzanera, a Madrid-based architect renowned for cutting-edge wineries. Further signs of the company’s strong commitment to contemporary art include a once-yearly grant awarded to an up-and-coming artist and temporary shows of their collection in the country’s top cultural palaces. Admirable patronage aside, Enate’s commitment to contemporary art has carved them a privileged place in

4Kilos’ label displays the florid, mystical imagery of Canadian artist Marcel Dzama, while 12Volts bares the edgy, graffiti-like work of LA-based illustrator Gary Baseman.



SPANISH DESIGN BRINGS IN A GOOD HARVEST

A product's packaging is its skin and carries the basic information the consumer is looking for. And consumers today are increasingly well-informed and live in a society that sets high standards.

But packaging can also practice the art of seduction. The huge range of products on offer makes for tough competition and intense natural selection. Products that are unable to attract attention and create a desire to purchase are quickly replaced by others that will achieve higher rotation at points of sale. You either sell or you die.

The rationale of the market is relentless. Quality is necessary but not enough in itself—it has to be clearly expressed. This is one of the reasons why packaging has traditionally been an important medium for graphic design, and why brand strategies constantly vie with each other in a race that is both cultural and economic.

But the race may have certain collateral effects that we as designers must be careful to avoid. Quantity and noise are threats to quality. If the emphasis is placed on visibility alone, the aesthetic element in messages and its suitability to the content lose ground. Volume and trendiness then take over and become the prime values. Ever since the streamlined, conceptual designs by Raymond Loewy for Lucky Strike, levels of semiotic contamination have been rising constantly.

As with gastronomy and architecture, Spanish design is entering an interesting phase of maturity, in the wake of design in other European countries. This can be explained in part by Spain's political and cultural situation up to the 1970s.

But Spain is fast making up for its late start with intense activity in publishing, institutional graphics and advertising and, of course, packaging and product design. This is especially apparent in the world of wine.

In just a few years, a world that seemed to work behind closed doors and to be stuck in a groove of repetition has been overwhelmed by an inrush of new ideas and creativity, and transformed into an interesting observatory of graphic trends and new concepts.

New is not necessarily good. But the emergence of design in the wine world is showing that there is still plenty to say about labels and bottles, and these things are being said.

The world of wine is growing. More and more people now know the difference between a quality wine and what the British and Australians call "plonk". But there are also more and more wineries, Designations of Origin and winemaking regions and countries.

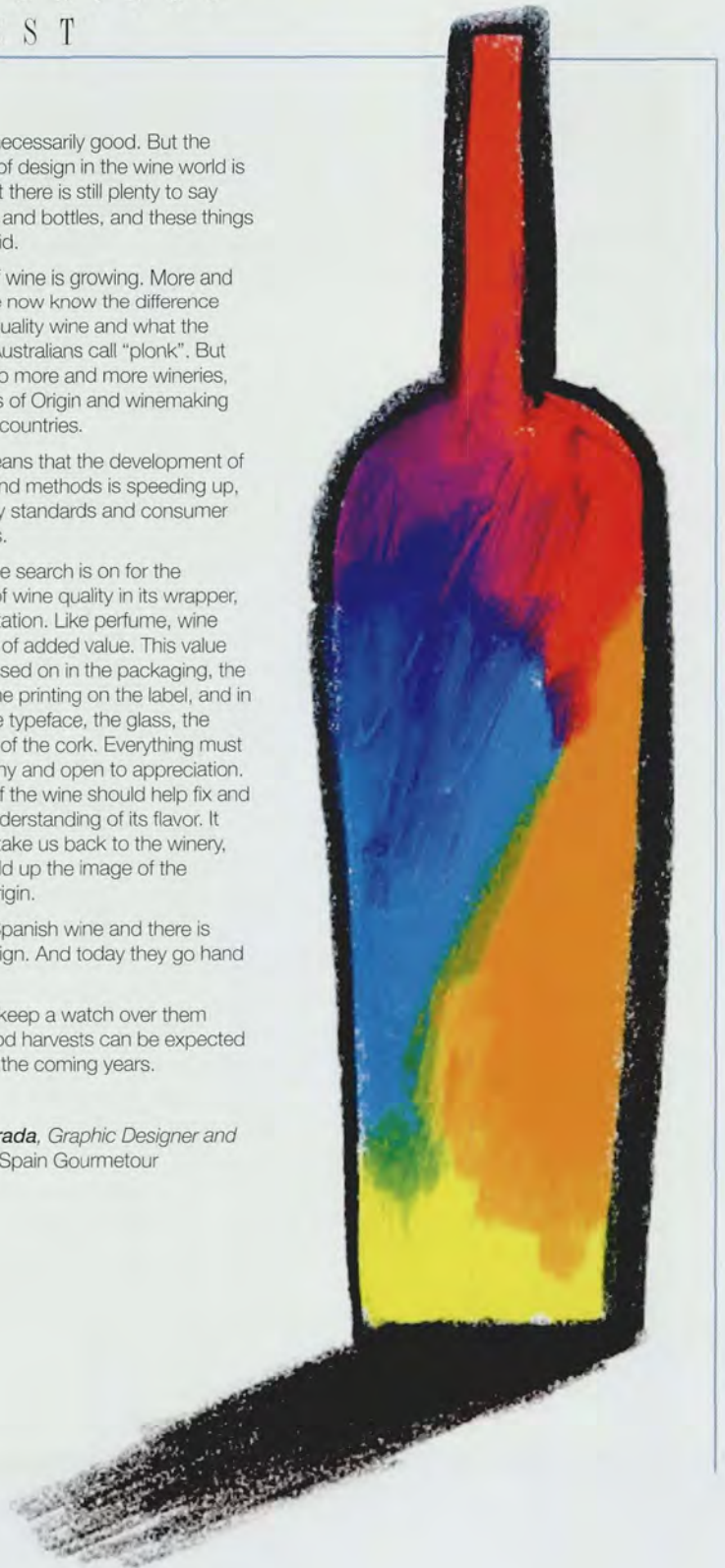
All of this means that the development of processes and methods is speeding up, as are quality standards and consumer expectations.

In parallel, the search is on for the expression of wine quality in its wrapper, in its presentation. Like perfume, wine offers plenty of added value. This value must be passed on in the packaging, the paper and the printing on the label, and in the color, the typeface, the glass, the appearance of the cork. Everything must be noteworthy and open to appreciation. The image of the wine should help fix and create an understanding of its flavor. It should also take us back to the winery, and help build up the image of the country of origin.

So there is Spanish wine and there is Spanish design. And today they go hand in hand.

We need to keep a watch over them because good harvests can be expected from both in the coming years.

Manuel Estrada, Graphic Designer and Art Director, Spain Gourmetour



the market (the company currently produces over 2.5 million bottles a year, 20% of which are exported). "There are various messages we are trying to convey," continues Justes. "The first is that we are a contemporary, high-quality product. The second is that this is a product to share, something that you are proud to put on the table. Another advantage is that contemporary art is not bound by cultures. The same piece of art could have been made by an artist from China or indeed anywhere else."

Exporting an image

Whilst Enate has created an image free of cultural restraints, there are many companies for whom it's still a challenge. Exporting is vital for the majority of Spanish vintners, as they generally produce considerably more than is needed for local consumption. Catavino is a consulting firm that helps Spanish producers break into foreign markets. Ryan Opaz, Catavino's CEO, says that he is constantly shown beautifully-designed bottles by winemakers who claim how much they are going to sell on the strength of them. He then laughs. "Label laws in Spain have loosened up a lot over the years," he says from his office in rural Catalonia. "As a result, there are a lot of OTT and well-designed labels out there. But for a lot of manufacturers I think it's a case of putting the horse before the cart."

Opaz believes that, on an

international level, Spanish wine, which is highly regional by nature, doesn't have a globally coherent, marketable image. He also says that producers need to carefully consider their image before they export, and, on the whole, should conceive a tailor-made label for their different markets.

Madrid-born Javier Romero of the Wine Branding Group agrees with the latter point. He has spent the last 15 years designing Spanish wine labels for the US market.

"If you want to make it here you have to understand the way the consumer thinks," says Romero, from his studio in Connecticut. "In Spain, there is much more of an awareness of wine. Wine was always on the table, so from a very young age we learn who's who and what's what. Now Americans are consuming more wine than beer, so there has been a consumer shift. The growth market here is with the younger consumers—it's a lifestyle thing. They are more open to branding and packaging, or to wine that is presented in a different way." That said, he is wary of the current trend in Spain for conceptual imagery in wine marketing. "I think it's out of control. Everyone seems to be looking for an identity and trying to compete with the New World. They have to find their identity and clean up their act. All this abstract craziness, it's confusing."

One of the Wine Branding Group's more successful, country-specific re-designs has been for Marquès de Gelida, a cava that mixes traditional



Ysios, the Calatrava-designed winery. Its simple, arc-shaped label recalls the undulating forms of Calatrava's poetic architecture.

Aragón's Enate winery boasts contemporary art on its labels, which feature works of some of the art world's elite, including Antoni Tàpies, Eduardo Chillida and Antonio Saura.



and symbolic design elements on its elegant label. “The thing that impressed me with that makeover is how immediate the impact was,” claims Romero. “As soon as the new bottle was launched, sales went up. I was shocked.” Taking this as an example, and with the label being the only form of advertising many producers have, Romero believes that it is essential for producers to invest money in their visual language. “There is no design integrity in a lot of new labels, and people are sensitive to that. Labels need to have a strong personality. The point is not to do something crazy. They need to tell a story.” One company that has uncorked the story formula in a hip, stylish and incredibly direct way—as well as overcoming Spanish wine’s rationality hurdle—is the Galician company Rosalia de Castro. Their Paco & Lola Albariño, which was conceived especially for the export market (a third of its 150,000-bottle yearly production leaves these shores) is a stellar example of lifestyle marketing, which, much like Apple computers does, acknowledges the consumer as much as the product itself and sells an “experience”. The bottle sports a chic black and white polka-dotted label and turquoise blue cap. On the Paco & Lola website, consumers can read about the parties and launches “attended” by the “divine duo” on a blog (including the Los Angeles premiere of Woody Allen’s latest film *Vicky, Christina, Barcelona*) and link to style bibles such as the British magazine *Wallpaper* and the

influential street-fashion webzine *The Satorialist*.

"We are quite a young team, so we decided very early on that the image was very important," says Paco & Lola's marketing director, Elvira Furelos. "The problem we were faced with was that nobody really knows anything about us. Overseas they've heard about Barcelona or Madrid but certainly not Galicia. So we decided to do something very 'Spanish'—and that's where the flamenco-type spots came in." Regarding the name, Furelos explains that whilst Paco & Lola are both quite Spanish names, they also translate well into other languages and don't present any real problems with pronunciation. This helps the wine have global appeal, as it could be as easily enunciated by a Berlin filmmaker as a fashion stylist from Shanghai, both of whom would belong to Paco & Lola's target market.

Architecture and wine

With chateaux, *masías* (farmhouses, typical in the regions of Aragón and Catalonia), monasteries, villas and other traditional winemaking facilities being standard fare on many labels, homage to Spain's newest wine palaces is a logical step in the realms of modern wine marketing. Santiago Calatrava, Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid are just some of the star architects that have lent their vision to the new wave of wineries in La Rioja over the past decade in a trend largely conceived to promote wine tourism in the

region. But it's only relatively recently that bottle semblance has equaled the visual assertiveness of the product's home base. One of the first to do so were the makers of Ysios, the Calatrava-designed winery that forms part of the Domecq Bodegas group. Its uncluttered, arc-shaped label recalls the undulating forms of Calatrava's poetic structure. Navarre's Señorío de Arinzano winery (part of the Chivite group) has gone a step further. Their first *vinos de pago* (single vineyard) label features original architectural sketches by Rafael Moneo, the Pritzker Prize-winning architect responsible for Señorío de Arinzano's elegant, harmonious project that fuses the winery's old 18th-century estate with modern offices and wings. Just released onto the market—and winner of first prize on the Honours Board of the 2009 *Repsol Guide*—is the limited edition (5,000 bottles) Frank Gehry selection for Marques de Riscal. The exuberant packaging features an abstract drawing by the über-architect in the same gold, silver and grape palate employed in his famed City of Wine, a five-star hotel located on the Marques de Riscal estate in El Ciego, La Rioja.

The personalization of wine

Modern, digital technology has made the personalization of wine a powerful, and certainly affordable, marketing device. A bespoke wine label is an attractive and prestigious tool for companies and event organizers and a handful of

Carlos Meña Bayón, the designer behind Mania's label. The bottle features a charming butterfly design, as light and uplifting as the wine that it holds.



Since 2006, Spain's foremost fashion event, Cibeles Madrid Fashion Week, has commemorated the occasion with a tailor-made special edition bottle of wine from the DO Vinos de Madrid.



companies are now specializing in the process of making them. Personalized and rare wine labels can also become cult items; once a year the cutting-edge advertising and communications agency La Fabrica approaches an of-the-moment artist to design a label for their Matador wine, which is then marketed through La Fabrica's website. A handful of bodegas are taking this concept a step further by involving the consumer in the winemaking process. At Ysios, customers who purchase an entire barrel of its namesake Tempranillo can have their name printed on the label when it's ready for bottling. Pago del Vicario, a boutique winery and wine resort near Ciudad Real has a similar scheme. Cal Celdoni, a small bodega in the Catalan DO Conca de Barberà region, part-owned by Ferran Adrià (he of elBulli fame), invites people to invest in the venture by buying their own vines. Takers get a 25-year lease on 20 GPS-tracked vines on Cal Celdoni's up-market estate and 42 personalized bottles per year at the end of the production process. Even more hands-on activity is available at ArtCava, an innovative project run out of a small masia in Penedès. Clients can participate in every facet of the cava-making process, including the design of their own labels and cap. Pairing wine with fashion has also come into vogue. Since 2006, Cibeles Madrid Fashion Week, Spain's main fashion event, has commemorated the occasion with a tailor-made special edition bottle of wine selected through a blind tasting

of the DO Vinos de Madrid. The first bottle featured the names of all 31 designers who participated in the event in a sleek, graphically-direct red and black design by local creative Modest Emperador.

The future

With more and more young oenologists claiming their place in Spain's wine industry, it's a safe bet that the image of its wine will reflect the aesthetic ideals and tastes of this new generation. Carlos Meña Bayón, a designer based in Valladolid, is witnessing this shift, as he creates labels for DO Ribera del Duero's winemakers. "It's when their children take over the business that its image generally changes," he says, "or when the vintner starts producing *vino de autor* (signature wine)." He cites his design for Manía, a verdejo conceived by the second generation of owners from the Felix Lorenzo Cachazo winery. The bottle features a charming butterfly design, as light and uplifting as the wine that it holds. "Manía has sold well on its image," says Meña Bayón. "But the wine is also good and the bottle reflects that."

In the near future, designers such as Meña Bayón will have new challenges to face. With wine sold in aluminium tins, cardboard casks, mini-dose bottles and even tubes all gaining popularity in foreign markets, they will have more formats to work with than the traditional glass bottle. (Freixenet has jumped the gun on small volume cava with the party-friendly Mini Black, which

comes in a cool black and white bottle with a built-in cup). Opaz believes that Dynamic Wine Labels will soon become the norm, meaning that customers will be able to read notes and ratings of wine on their mobile phone via an imbedded QR code (or two-dimensional bar code). Blogs, social networking sites and other digital supports may also, in the future, sway consumers one way or another on their next wine purchase.

In the meantime, the label acts as our window to the wine. From the

labels on the wine jars found in King Tutankhamen's tombs to the first, rectangular-shaped labels of the early 1800s to today's cacophony of creative imagery, wine label design reflects a social and artistic history as rich and nuanced as the taste of wine itself.

Suzanne Wales, born in Australia, is a freelance journalist based in Barcelona. She specializes in travel, design and architecture. Her work has appeared in publications such as Wallpaper, Vogue, Frame and Concierge.

HAVE A LOOK

4Kilos

www.4kilos.com
(Spanish). Vinos de la Tierra de las Islas Baleares

Ànima Negra

www.annegra.com
(Catalan, English, Spanish). Vinos de la Tierra de las Islas Baleares

Enate

www.enate.es
(English, Spanish). DO Somontano

Espelt Viticultors

www.cellerespelt.com
(Catalan, English, Spanish). DO Ampurdán-Costa Brava

Felix Lorenzo Cachazo

www.cachazo.com
(English, German, Spanish). DO Rueda

Guelbenzu

www.guelbenzu.es
(English, French, German, Spanish). Vinos de la Tierra Ribera del Queiles

L'Origan

www.lorigancava.com
(Catalan, English, Spanish). DO Cava

Marqués de Riscal

www.marquesderiscal.com
(Chinese, English, Euskara, French, German, Japanese, Spanish). Frank Gehry Selection DO Ca Rioja

Paco & Lola

www.pacolola.com
(English, Spanish). DO Rias Baixas

Pago del Vicario

www.pagodelvicario.com
(English, Spanish). Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla

Pardas

www.pardas.net
(Catalan, English, Spanish). DO Penedès

Torres

www.torres.es
(Catalan, English, Spanish). Celeste DO Ribera del Duero; Nerola and Viña Sol DO Catalonia

Ysios

www.domeqcbodegas.com/caste/bodegas/index.php?bodega=ysios
(English, Spanish). DO Ca Rioja

The Wine Branding Group

www.winebrandinggroup.com
(English)



Would it be possible to cook differently? Could we prepare the same old ingredients in new, better ways? Could we improve on time-tested recipes?

New Takes on **TECH**



Text
Julia Pérez/©ICEX

Photos
Toya Legido/©ICEX

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

NIQUES

Culinary techniques are little more than a set of actions that we repeat almost mechanically, without stopping to think of new ways to do things, or of changes that might lead to a better result. We rarely bother to question why we cook the way we do. We just follow the set routine, never doubting the know-how that has been passed down from generation to generation, as if it were absolute truth. Until along comes a free spirit, showing curiosity and sparking rebelliousness. Then non-conformism, the driving force behind change, takes over. Such times of breaking with the past, of transgression, have punctuated the history of gastronomy, opening the door to advances in culinary techniques. These revolutions in the kitchen unintentionally raise gastronomy to new heights. Similar processes take place in art or certain scientific disciplines, with every contribution representing a step forward.

To understand how cooking develops, we have to travel in time. In the past, new gastronomic models appeared in parallel with sociological changes. Going back a few centuries, some of the names that come to mind

are La Varenne (17th century), Menon (18th century), Carême (19th century) and Escoffier (19th-20th century). Each of them brought a qualitative change, the birth of a new system with new rules and methods. The fall of the aristocracy in France triggered the birth of public eating houses, when the now redundant chefs of the nobility started to cook for the bourgeois, not in their homes, but in restaurants. But the 20th century saw a different type of change, one affecting the role played by chefs as trendsetters. *Nouvelle cuisine* in France was born out of chefs' personal enthusiasm and their need to establish a different relationship with their customers.

Thirty decisive years

In Spain, the changes began in the Basque Country where, back in 1977, a group of young chefs (Arzak, Subijana, Arguiñano, Irizar, Castillo...) dared to proclaim that *salsa verde*, the emblematic green sauce of Basque cuisine, should be made only from parsley and garlic, and no longer thickened with flour. And they started to lighten other traditional recipes, under the influence of the modern dietary approach of *nouvelle cuisine*. It's true they made some mistakes, offering a surfeit of terrines, puddings and pies, and decorating all their dishes with tomato flowers, herbs and cream, departing from the spirit of Basque cuisine. But, over the years, their wildest initiatives have been forgotten and the essence of what they were doing has remained. Today they are seen as having exerted a great influence. During this initial episode, changes were worked not so much on techniques as on ingredients, cooking

times, serving, etc. Cuisine became lighter and healthier, cooking times were shortened and aesthetics received the importance it deserved. Chapter two of this story takes us to the mid-1990s and features a bright young man from Hospitalet de Llobregat (Barcelona). His natural intuition led him, after a series of successes and failures, to start questioning everything and applying scientific method to the humble art of cooking. Without being chauvinistic, nor revering him as a national hero, there is no doubt that Ferran Adrià marked a turning point, a before and after, in Spanish and global cuisine. His technical contribution to avant-garde cooking is unquestionable, but his intellectual contribution is even greater. He caused a re-think among his colleagues all over the world, encouraging them to show curiosity and to experiment. Jacques Maximin had once told Adrià, "creating is not copying", and Adrià took this advice seriously, creating a new culinary paradigm: the Adrià revolution.

Cuisine, science and technology

Similar challenges were being faced more or less at the same time by scientists such as Hervé This in France, Harold McGee in the United States, and Davide Cassi in Italy. They were all, in their different ways, searching for the answer to the questions being posed by Adrià. What happens inside food when it is cooked? Can certain reactions be avoided to bring out flavor, texture, color, etc.?

At the end of the '90s, cuisine and science met up and started out on a path that opened up new horizons, with encouragement coming from some quarters and rejection from others.







Following the example of elBulli, many chefs began to search for new methods, new techniques that would allow them to achieve results that previously had been unthinkable. But they had to set out across a desert, with practically no landmarks to follow. The path was plagued by doubts and questions, not to mention lack of understanding, but it gradually cleared as their experiments proved successful. And they did to cuisine what restorers do to cathedrals: they cleaned, polished, and restored it to glory. While using the latest technology, they were careful to acknowledge the cultural weight of the taste memory that existed in each location.

All the new techniques developed over these years and the technology that has made them possible have helped expand know-how. We could maybe leave aside the foams—the symbol of so many excesses—but after that whirlwind which looked as if it might put an end to food as we knew it, the fact is that now we know how to fry better, boil better, roast better. And, most importantly, this new expertise is not limited to haute cuisine and restaurants, it has reached all social levels, homes, hospitals, schools, etc.

"It's something of a paradox," says Adrià, "but after all our innovations, creations and inventions, I think our greatest provocation was in the early 1990s when, at elBulli, we served grilled vegetables and fish. It was food that was not typical of gastronomic restaurants, but rather of beach eateries and bars. We converted them into haute cuisine. What we were trying to do was to create a different language to respond to new concepts; to that end, we devised brand new techniques which led to the modernization of preparations."

All the elBulli books have been important, but it was *El sabor del Mediterráneo* (1993) that really planted the seed of the Adrià revolution. "The importance of the sea and its inclusion in haute cuisine was essential," says its author. "We reduced fish and shellfish cooking techniques to absolute simplicity, an approach that was unheard of in haute cuisine."

Cooking: from stews to the Roner

"One of the first things I changed when I started cooking," explains Juan Mari Arzak, "was the way we cooked potages. In my mother's day, everything was cooked together in one large pan—the meat, vegetables, and legumes. But I realized it was better to cook each ingredient separately. That way I could give each product the right consistency, without running the risk of mushy potatoes and tough *chorizo* (a type of red sausage). At Arzak (three Michelin stars, in San Sebastian), since 1965 everything has been cooked that way—separately. It might seem a minor detail, but in fact it's an essential step forward."

Arzak's initiative created a great following, and many chefs began experimenting in their own way with the process of cooking solids in a liquid. Martín Berasategui (Martín Berasategui, three Michelin stars, in San Sebastian) has adopted a similar process for the popular *marmitako* (bonito and potato stew). "People used to cook the bonito with the other ingredients, leaving the fish dry and tasteless. But what I do is make a good fumet full of flavor, and then I use it to cook the potatoes and vegetables. When they're ready, I cut the fish into dice and fry them separately, adding them at the end.



Artichoke broth, vegetable micro-wafers, broad beans and peas
(*Caldo de alcachofa, microláminas de verduras, habitas y gusantes*)

That way the fish is still moist and full of flavor. It's a great dish." Andoni L. Aduriz (Mugaritz, two Michelin stars, in San Sebastian) made his name for the **stocks and broths** he uses to accompany his dishes. These are wholesome, translucent liquids without a drop of fat; they draw admiration. "Preparing a stock is simple but time-consuming. You have to cook it first, then remove the fat, then clarify it. To make things easier, all you have to do is ensure that the liquid does not boil vigorously, because this makes it cloudy. The idea is to control the temperature the whole time so that the stock hardly moves and particles do not come off the solid ingredients. I realized this

just by observing.”

The contribution made by Carlos Cidón (Vivaldi, one Michelin star, in Leon) centers on how to cook **legumes** (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 69), although he is also an expert on mushrooms. Basing his observations on the science of rheology, Cidón has studied legumes under the microscope, and has proven that the porosity of a chickpea's skin (of the Pico Pardal variety grown in Castile) increases if soaked at 60°C (140°F). “This way,” he explains, “you get them to soak from inside because the tip opens up more and the skin does not separate from the seed during cooking.” He has also tested empirically how the percentage of fat in the cooking liquid affects legume texture. If cooked in a medium fat stock, chickpeas end up greasier than if cooked in plain water. The most significant changes in methods for cooking **vegetables** were

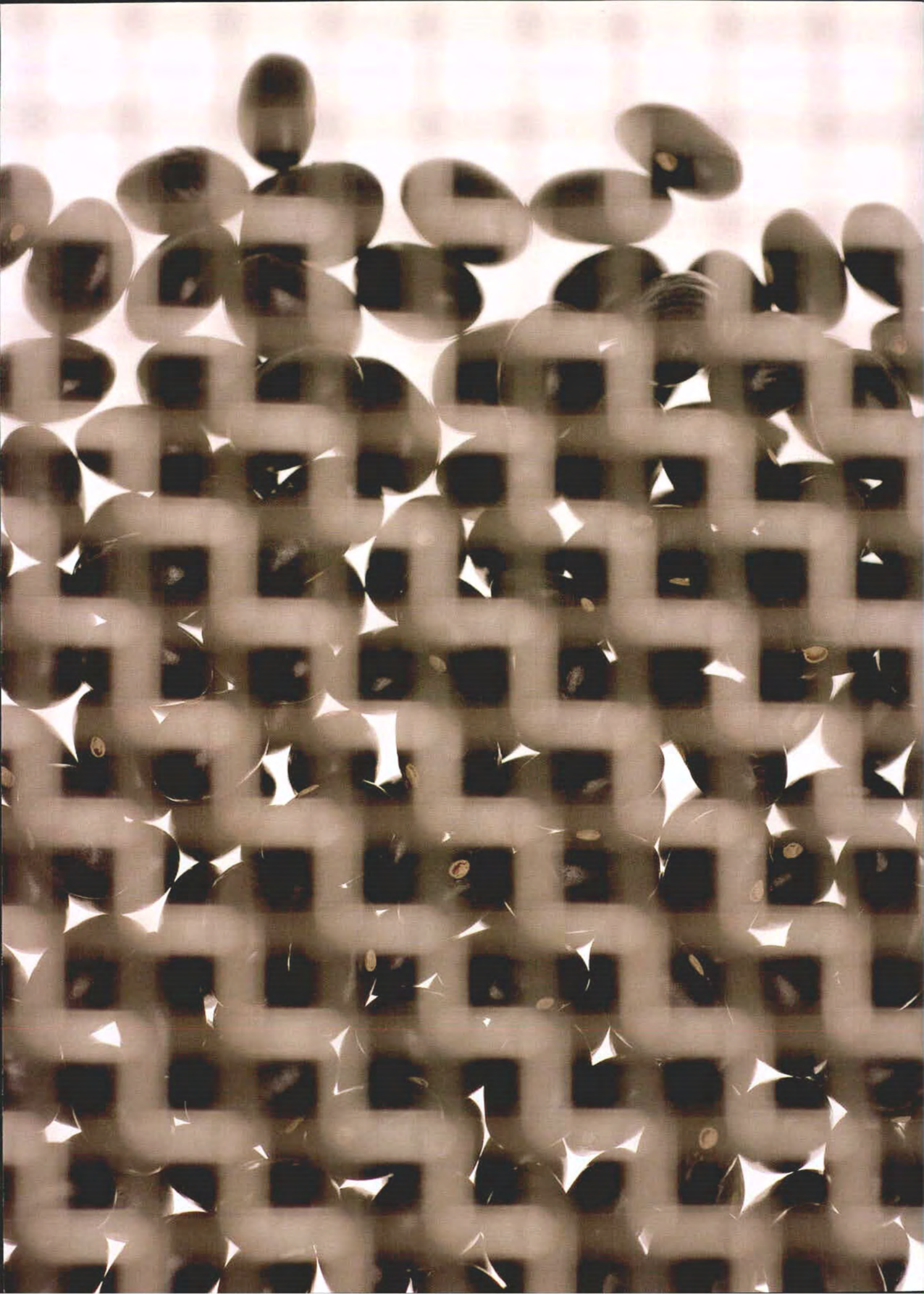
Fried Pico Pardal chickpeas with garlic shrimp and shrimp crisp
(*Garbanzos de pico de pardal fritos con gambas al ajillo y crujiente de gamba*)



introduced by Navarran chefs who daringly moved away from Spanish tradition to offer vegetables al dente, crisp, colorful and full of vitamins. Enrique Martínez (Maher, in Cintruénigo, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 74), Koldo Rodero (Rodero, one Michelin star, in Pamplona) and Ricardo Gil (Restaurante 33, one Michelin star, in Tudela) spearheaded this small “green movement”. Rodero, in collaboration with farmer Floren Domezain—probably the person who knows most about vegetables in Spain, and whose fruit and vegetable company Floren is now the main distributor of quality fresh produce in the country—has analyzed the vegetable universe in Navarre. “Each vegetable is a world in itself,” claims Rodero. “You can’t overgeneralize, but essentially there are three main factors involved: cleanliness, cooking temperature and water quality. Traditionally, in order to preserve the color of the vegetables, other ingredients such as lemon, flour or parsley were added to the cooking water. We’ve found that, when you wash cardoons or borage, provided you keep them constantly under running water, you don’t need to add anything. Nor should you pull off the threads because this process releases an enzyme that encourages oxidation. You should just trim them using a very sharp knife, cutting lengthways.” Rodero also recommends that the cooking temperature never exceed 70°C (158°F), i.e. the liquid should never boil, and the type of water available should be studied so that any necessary adaptations can be made. Recent analyses have shown that magnesium helps fix chlorophyll, so when vegetables are cooked in water with a higher salt content, their colors are retained better. Rodero declares himself a fanatic of sous-vide cooking. “When asparagus is cooked

sous-vide, without adding any liquid at all, the result is sensational because the vegetable keeps its earthy and nitrate flavors but also its characteristic sweetness when it’s in season. I always say that when you cook asparagus in water, you leave its flavor behind in the water. Cooking in a vacuum is the best way to avoid this.”

The work done by Ricardo Gil, in collaboration with Laboratorios Olea, has helped him quantify the advantages of using osmotized water for cooking vegetables, determine to what extent they oxidize and see how oxidation can be avoided by reducing the level of water and using a cover to ensure that the vegetables remain fully submerged at all times. To this end, he has designed a set of baskets, one for each type of vegetable. These are placed in the pan to ensure that the original shape is maintained and no morphological alteration takes place. Enrique Martínez, Koldo Rodero, Ricardo Gil, each of them in their own way and guided by intuition, have traced their own paths, but all with the common aim of improving methods of cooking vegetables. An unusual kitchen gadget is the Gastrovac, designed by Sergio Torres (Dos Cielos, in Barcelona) and Javier Andrés (La Sucursal, in Valencia) in collaboration with Valencia’s Polytechnic University, and sold by the Catalan company ICC (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73). It is a sort of pressure cooker in which food can be cooked sous-vide at a low temperature. An artificial low-pressure atmosphere is created inside, with no oxygen, in which it is even possible to fry at low temperatures. This method retains the texture, color and nutrients in foods. The best results are obtained with vegetables and fish, which end up moist and tasty.



Quique Dacosta (El Poblet, two Michelin stars, in Denia) has written what is practically a thesis on rice in his book *Arroces contemporáneos* (Contemporary Rices). In addition to analyzing rice varieties, recipes, utensils, etc., he explains his two-phase cooking method. This allows restaurants to have rice dishes prepared in advance so that they can just be finished off when ordered, but without affecting the texture. Instead of pre-cooking the rice in water and then mixing it in with the *sofrito* (sautéed garlic, onion and tomato in olive oil), he interrupts the natural cooking process of the rice. "The need to serve perfectly-cooked rice half way through the menu was what led us to experiment," explains Dacosta. "We now stop the boiling after eight minutes then recover it four minutes before taking the dish to the table. We had to find out how long it takes for 98% of the rice grain to gelatinize, depending on the variety." The procedure is simple. The rice is cooked in the traditional way, and after eight minutes, it is drained and the cooking liquid set aside. The grains are placed in an inverted bain-marie, i.e., one containing ice rather than hot water, to cool down. During this process, cooking continues at a rate of 10%. When the dish is ordered, the cooking liquid is heated and the rice added to it until cooking is complete.

Dacosta has also tried cooking rice sous-vide, and Joan Roca (El Celler de Can Roca, two Michelin stars, in Girona) has researched this method. To achieve absolute precision he uses a Roner (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 73), a device used in medicine but which Roca has transferred to the kitchen with huge success. Many large-scale rice restaurants or catering companies now prepare their rice dishes in advance using the sous-vide method,

making the whole process much simpler. Dacosta explains: "What you do is place the rice in a vacuum pack with the exact amount of warm stock. Then you place the pack in the Roner and cook it at 82°C (180°F) for 60 minutes, though the timing may vary depending on the variety. The pack must then be cooled down in ice. Then all you need to do is regenerate the rice by heating it up in a bain-marie just before serving."

Sous-vide cooking for all sorts of ingredients has brought a real technical shift, even substituting and complementing such old-time methods as roasting. Many professionals today, instead of roasting lamb or suckling pig, now cook them in a vacuum and then flash grill it to make the skin as crisp as it would be if it had been roasted in the oven. Even in the heart of Castile in central Spain, where wood-fired roasting is a traditional technique that has been mastered by the experts, today many young chefs such as Jesús Ramiro Jr. (Ramiro's, one Michelin star, in Valladolid) prefer to use the sous-vide method in their restaurants because it simplifies the logistics of preparation.

The main characteristic of sous-vide



cooking is that the ingredients, whatever they are, retain their juices, aromas and nutritional properties. The possibility of prolonging cooking for a long period at a very low temperature is another way of preserving organoleptic characteristics.

As a cooking method, the combination of low temperatures and vacuum cooking shows maximum respect for product quality. At low temperatures, chefs can control the amount of cooking needed by ingredients as delicate as an egg yolk. This technique has been developed with precision by Aduriz, who can achieve tens of different textures for a single ingredient—from the velvety graininess of a completely-cooked yolk to the extreme fluidity of a liquid yolk.

Escabeche, preserve or dressing?

Sous-vide cooking can even be used to prepare an *escabeche*, one of the earliest and most characteristic methods used in Spanish cuisine, stemming from Arab traditions and practically unchanged over the centuries. Recipes for escabeches can be found in the earliest Spanish cook books and in Hispano-Arabic books, such as *La cocina hispano magrebi durante la época almohade* (Hispano-Maghreb Cooking During the Almohad Period), a translation into Spanish by Ambrosio Huici Miranda (Ediciones Trea) of an anonymous manuscript in which they appear as *sikbay*.

Originally, the main purpose of an escabeche was to conserve food, especially in the summer months when it went off quickly. It was therefore necessary to place the food

in an acid medium (vinegar) to which they added spices, herbs and vegetables with antiseptic qualities (garlic, coriander, bay leaf, pepper, and citrus fruit peel, for example). Cooking times were extended to ensure that any bacteria were properly killed off. Today, Iñaki Camba (Arce, in Madrid) explains that escabeches no longer have to preserve food and are produced for immediate consumption. This turns the escabeche into a dressing, and means the food does not have to be cooked for hours nor fried previously, as used to be the case with trout, sardines, etc. The goal is to maintain the flavor that certain foods acquire, because that flavor belongs to our taste memory. "What we've done," says Pepe Rodríguez Rey (El Bohío, one Michelin star, in Toledo), "has been to simplify recipes, making them more delicate, lighter, sublimating escabeches. Now that we sometimes prepare them sous-vide, we have been able to alter the proportions, reducing the strength of the vinegar. Also, the vinegars we use are now of much better quality, usually sherry vinegars."

The revolution in the frying pan

Frying, one of Spain's most widespread culinary techniques, has been the focus of much research by Málaga chef Dani García (Calima, one Michelin star, in Málaga), in collaboration with Raimundo García del Moral, Professor of Pathological Anatomy at Granada University. The result is what they call "21st-century frying", in which fish are fried whole, with their skin and even their scales. This makes them swell up, as if cooked en papillote, so that the flesh cooks inside its natural casing, holding in all the moisture. "When



Warm chive soup, wild garlic and bluefish.
(Sopa tibia de cebollino, ajos silvestres y pescados azules)





talking to García del Moral," says García, "he told me how he had been served an 'inflated' sole at Casa Joaquín (Almería, on Spain's southern coast) in which the skin formed a natural protection, causing a double cooking process. And I realized that in some bars which are especially popular for their fried tapas, the anchovies are served with a swollen skin. So I started to think seriously about frying which, in avant-garde cooking, is generally ruled out." But with frying, it is not easy to get the right results and it is not suitable for all types of fish. The most suitable are sole and turbot, but the kitchen team at Calima has also been successful with red mullet, small red bream, gilthead bream, and even with John Dory. It is essential for the skin and scales of the fish to be intact—any cut or damaged fish cannot be cooked this way. The temperature is also important. The fish should be cooked at no more than 1-2°C (34-36°F) to ensure a marked contrast when it is submerged in oil at 180°C (356°F). This will blow up the skin, separating it from the flesh, which cooks in its own juices. The fat does not penetrate, it just makes the skin crisp. "I realized," explains García, "that in an haute cuisine restaurant we can't serve the fish whole, and customers usually remove the skin before eating the fish anyway. So I had to re-think the recipe. We ended up serving the flesh on its own, paired with an *emblancho* (a typical Málaga stock of fish, salt and water) as a sauce and with the skin served separately as a crisp. First we prepare the fillets in the kitchen, then we re-fry the skin. The dish has been tremendously successful but it's so complicated to serve that we don't always include it on the menu." García finds frying fascinating and is

always experimenting. His latest contribution is a new version of the traditional *tortilla de camarón*, a shrimp crisp from Cádiz. In this case, however, the novelty is not in the technique, but in the ingredients. The flour has been replaced by two transparent starch wafers—discovered by García in Japan—with the shrimp inserted between them in a spiral shape. The result is a crunchy, very delicate filigree, the sublimation of this Cádiz specialty, in which the shrimp are not overwhelmed by either the flour or the oil. Pure poetry. The Riojan chef Francis Paniego (Echaurren, one Michelin star, in Ezcaray in northern Spain) has also made an important contribution to the art of frying. His famous *Hake in batter fried at low temperature* (45 °C / 113 °F) has really made the headlines in Spain, and hundreds of chefs—even people cooking at home—are making it on a daily basis. "The idea came from watching my mother," says Paniego. "When she cooked for the restaurant, she used to fry the hake portions in hot oil, then leave them for a few minutes in the oil but off the heat. I thought we should be able to achieve the same effect by carefully controlling the temperature, first frying the fish in hot oil for a few seconds to form a crisp outside layer, then submerging it in oil at 45°C (113°F). The result is exceptional, as if the fish had been cooked the whole time at a very low temperature, confit-style." He was right. His hake with rice soup and fried peppers is one of the simplest yet most delicate dishes I have ever tasted. Hidden beneath a golden wrapper is a portion of immaculate, white fish that falls into fresh, juicy flakes full of flavor. A celebration for the taste buds.



Marmitako (Albacore tuna and potato stew)

Emulsions, soups and delicate sauces

There is a whole range of preparations that basically consist of an emulsion of a fat or oil with other ingredients. They include the popular *alioli* (made from extra virgin olive oil and garlic) from Spain's east coast, Basque *pilpil* (an emulsion formed from the gelatin in cod skin with olive oil), and the traditional Andalusian cold soups: *gazpacho* (tomato-based), *ajoblanco* (with crushed almonds), *salmorejo* (water, tomato, vinegar, olive oil, salt and pepper) and *porra antequerana* (with bread added).

All these preparations have changed over the years either because of the arrival of new kitchen devices such as the Thermomix, which makes it possible to form emulsions of a smoothness that was previously unimaginable, because of changes in the actual process as with *pilpil*, or because of changes in the way the main ingredient is treated, as with the garlic in modern *aliolis*. And all of them have seen the inclusion of other ingredients.

Creamy rice with artichoke, clam and Manchego cheese
(Arroz cremoso de alcachofa, almeja y Queso Manchego)



"We never imagined," says García, "that a popular, everyday cold soup such as gazpacho could be transformed into haute cuisine. In 1998, when I was just 22, I made my first gazpacho with goose barnacles, following in the footsteps of Ferran Adrià and his lobster gazpacho. It was a provocation, certainly, but the result was an elegant, smooth, very refined soup that could perfectly well bear comparison with the vichyssoises served in French haute cuisine restaurants." In this case, technology and moderate use of certain ingredients such as garlic were decisive for this new-look gazpacho. Mari Carmen Vélez (La Sirena, in Alicante, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 74) has done something similar with alioli, described by Josep Pla (a Spanish writer and journalist, 1897-1981) as a "youthful sauce, one that stimulates the senses and encourages hyperbole". The first dictionary reference to alioli dates from 1600 and, although the formula does not appear in the recipe books of Sent Soví (14th century, author of the first collection of Catalan recipes) or Ruperto de Nola (15th century, author of *Libro de guisados, manjares y potajes*), it was certainly part of popular cuisine even before their time.

Behind its harmless appearance as a delicate, light emulsion is the power of garlic. Binding *Allium sativum* with oil is not easy, and a short cut is often taken by adding other ingredients—water, stock, vinegar, a few drops of lemon juice and egg yolk. This practice has degenerated into the widely-used "false alioli", which is essentially garlic-flavored mayonnaise.

The genuine, traditional method was to crush the peeled garlic cloves with salt in a marble or china mortar, forming a creamy paste. The oil was then added gradually in a process which, to avoid

Y E S T E R D A Y A N D T O D A Y

COOKING IN LIQUID

Legumes

- Traditional method: No control of temperature or timing of soaking and cooking processes. All ingredients cooked together.
- Updated method: Temperature control during soaking and cooking. Each ingredient is cooked separately according to the time it needs.

Rice

- Traditional method: Cooking rice for one period of 18-20 minutes.
- Updated method: Two-stage cooking. This makes it possible to prepare the rice in advance and finish the cooking process just before serving. The traditional method has not changed, but, rather, it is carried out in two stages.

Stews

- Traditional method: Boil all the ingredients together for the same amount of time. Drawback: loss of nutritional and organoleptic qualities.
- Updated method: Cook each ingredient separately for just the time it needs to retain all its nutritional and organoleptic qualities.

Stocks

- Traditional method: Boil all the ingredients together for a relatively short time, then strain and remove the fat. Leave to settle to remove any cloudiness and then filter again.
- Updated method: The ingredients are used raw, without being fried at all so there is much less fat. Everything is cooked together over a very low flame for a very long time at almost exactly boiling point. This means the liquid hardly stirs so it does not become cloudy and does not have to be filtered.

Vegetables

- Traditional method: No special method for cleaning or trimming. Cooked in plenty of water, adding other products to prevent or reduce oxidation.
- Updated method: A specific method is established for each vegetable to prevent oxidation.



EMULSIONS

Alioli

- Traditional method: An emulsion of raw garlic and olive oil made by manually crushing the garlic with salt to obtain a creamy paste, then gradually adding oil.
- Updated method: Use of boiled or roasted garlic to make the flavor milder, and manual or mechanical production of the emulsion. Inclusion of new ingredients.

Cold soups

- Traditional method: The ingredients are crushed and water and olive oil are added to form an emulsion. The texture is thick and may be lumpy.
- Updated method: It is essential to use a food processor to form the emulsion at high speed, thus achieving a very fine, delicate texture.

Pilpil

- Traditional method: The cod is cooked with the skin on in olive oil and the emulsion is formed with the gelatin from its skin.
- Updated method: The sauce is prepared separately using cod skins cooked in olive oil to form an emulsion. Then the sauce is poured over pieces of cod which are finished in a cool oven for approximately 12 minutes.

ESCABECHE

- Traditional method: The foods are cooked at length in an acid medium, usually vinegar, the aim being their long-term preservation.
- Updated method: Reduction of cooking times and use of quality vinegar so that the food acquires added aromas. The aim is no longer to preserve the food, but to give it a special flavor and texture.

FRYING

Confit

- Traditional method: Portions of battered fish are submerged in oil at 170°C (338°F). First a crust forms on the outside, then the oil is removed from the flame and the fish is left in it to continue cooking for a few minutes.
- Updated method: The temperature and timing are calculated exactly. First the pieces of fish are fried in hot oil and then transferred to oil at 40°C (104°F) until cooked. This is similar to making a confit in olive oil.

Traditional – 21st century

- Traditional method: Whole, battered fish is submerged in oil at 170°C (338°F). Only small fish can be used (anchovies, whitebait, red mullet, etc.)
- Updated method: The technique is the same but is used for large fish so that the skin forms a papillote, creating a dual cooking process. First the food cooks on the outside, forming a smooth, crisp exterior layer. It then cooks gently inside, without absorbing any oil.

SOUS-VIDE

- This new method allows foods to be cooked without losing any flavor or nutritional qualities. It replaces both cooking in liquid and traditional roasting (lamb, suckling pig, fish, etc.).



curdling, requires skilled wristwork and plenty of patience. Vélez has become Spain's alioli expert for two reasons: the fine sauces she is capable of producing, and her thorough study of the process. She distinguishes between different types of garlic—purple Pedroñeras and white garlic are not the same—and sometimes prefers to use cooked garlic. If boiled or roasted, the sharpness of the garlic is reduced and the sauce becomes more delicate. This allows her to produce hundreds of different aliolis—with almond milk, orange, foie gras and seaweed, to name a few. What might seem newfangled nonsense is, in fact, just a continuation of long-established tradition in which added ingredients might well have been pear, quince, potato or bread. In her hands, an alioli becomes elegant, with the strength of the garlic in check to prevent it from overwhelming the other ingredients. "The garlic should be treated one way or another depending on what sort of alioli you want," says Vélez. "You remove the germ and sometimes you use it raw, sometimes boiled, sometimes roasted. That way it loses its piquancy but the taste remains." Something similar has been done with Basque pilpil sauce, to which chefs such as Martín Berasategui and Senén González (Sagartoki, in Álava) have added new ingredients, achieving some unusual flavors. "Preparing pilpil in the restaurant is always complicated," says Berasategui. "You have to prepare the sauce in advance and then add the cod just before serving. I couldn't prepare it like my mother and my aunt used to do." Traditionally, pilpil was prepared by heating extra virgin olive oil with

garlic and then placing the pieces of cod in the pan with the skin side down. The pan then had to be gently but constantly shaken for the fish to release its gelatin, slowly forming an emulsion. The problem is that the pieces of cod may fall apart when they bump into each other, spoiling the appearance of the finished dish, and it has to be served as soon as it is prepared, so it must be made portion by portion. "I found a way to prepare the sauce," says Berasategui, "by making an emulsion with garlic oil and the gelatin from cod skins, keeping the oil at a very low temperature. Then, just before serving, I sprinkle carefully-cut pieces of cod with the emulsion and place them in the oven, also at a low temperature. After about 12 minutes, the olive oil has penetrated the fish and the center has reached the right temperature." Berasategui has also experimented with adding citrus fruit skin to the pilpil to give it an unexpected aroma. This brief review must include Víctor Arginzoniz (Etxebarri, near San Sebastian), the real innovator behind the ancestral technique of grilling (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 71). He has shown how such delicate products as caviar or baby eels can gain a lot from charring.

Julia Pérez is a food writer who has worked for over 15 years as the gastronomy editor of several magazines (*Mía Cocina*, *Vogue*, *Gala*, *Biba*, *Elle*). She also writes regularly for the newspaper *El Mundo* and *Esquire*, *Spanorama* and *Vino+Gastronomía* magazines, as well as other media in Spain and elsewhere. She has published several books and restaurant guides. In 2005 she received the Spanish National Gastronomy Award for journalism.



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Thirteen is the total number of UNESCO-declared World Heritage Cities in Spain. Thirteen gems all shining by their own light, but jointly making up quite a piece of jewelry, which, since 1993, have comprised the Spanish Group of World Heritage Cities. Thanks to the savoir-faire and expertise of their custodians, these well-preserved ancient urban spaces, laden

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Past

RICHES

Ávila's Wall





Yerba Tower wall, Cáceres

Today's

ASSETS

with history and impregnated with the legacy of diverse cultures, are shining bright again, not just for a mere few but for all of us. In this second of three articles, we stroll around the august palaces, churches and convents of walled-in Ávila, and penetrate into the sinewy alleys and splendid squares of medieval Cáceres.

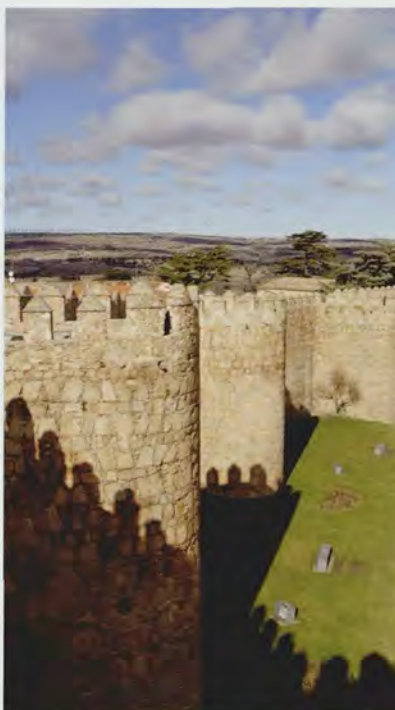
Keenly aware of the relevance of their cities' heritage—not only as invaluable monumental enclaves bearing witness to an otherwise irrecoverable past, but also as a sizeable source of income from tourism, a stimulus for cultural expansion in Spain and abroad, and a source of cohesion for the local population—in 1993, the mayors of six cities (Ávila, Cáceres, Salamanca, Santiago de Compostela, Segovia and Toledo) gathered for the first time to unite forces and exchange experiences. They have been gradually joined by the remaining localities (Alcalá de Henares, Cuenca, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 75; Córdoba, Ibiza, Mérida, San Cristóbal de la Laguna and Tarragona).

Soon the group will take possession of its new permanent seat in the brilliantly-refurbished Palacio de los Verdugo (Los Verdugo Palace), which will also house Ávila's complete historic archives, in addition to the third external UNESCO office (after Venice and Moscow). So why not let this characteristic 16th-century palace be the point of departure for our stroll through monumental Ávila?

From gate to gate

Upon reaching Ávila—at 1,127 m (3,697 ft) it's the highest located city in Spain—and not unlike millions before you, you will be awestruck by the appearance of its over 2.5-km (1.5-mile) long, fully-intact surrounding wall with 87 fortified

towers, 2,500 merlons and 9 imposing gates. Once there, you can do two things: take a guided walking tour or, map in hand, just wander around, meandering in and out of its gates, as the UNESCO protected area also includes some magnificent churches and convents outside the main wall. And, of course, there's no reason why you can't do both! Or, in order to take in the inner city and behold the splendid views on the nearby Sierra de Ávila, you can take a walk high up along the exceptionally well-rehabilitated *adarve* (battlement), perhaps even attending one of the theatrical visits organized regularly in summer.



Ávila's Wall

The Palacio de los Verdugo was built as a markedly defensive mansion with two lateral towers, only a few upper windows on its sparingly but beautifully-decorated façade, a *matacán* (a narrow stone balcony generally located high above the entrance door from which unwanted attackers could be fended off), a large *zaguán* (a remnant of Arab architecture; this typical entrance hall shields off the interior from visitors or intruders) and a gorgeous porticoed patio, allowing the natural light to pour into its surrounding quarters. The building is certainly representative of the civil architecture from that era, of which Ávila, the "City of Noblemen", preserves an impressive number by chance of fate. They, of course, rival the numerous splendid Roman and early Gothic convents and churches.

What cannot go unnoticed in front of this palace is the massive rudimentary stone carving of what appears to be a bull. Over 50 of these life-size zoomorphic sculptures representing bulls and boars can be found spread throughout the city. They are a testament to the presence of Ávila's earliest dwellers, the so-called Vettones, a livestock breeding people settled in an area of western Spain between the Duero and Tajo Rivers. At the Centro de Interpretación de La Vettonia (Vettonia Museum), you can get a comprehensive idea of this pre-Roman culture and the well-



Mercado Grande Square, Ávila

preserved remains of their settlements, or *castros*, throughout the area. The museum is housed, together with the municipal government building, in the majestic Torreón de los Guzmanes (Los Guzmanes Tower), soaring high over a number of neighboring noble mansions. Most of these stone-cast witnesses of past riches have been beautifully renovated and now contain official institutions, banks, museums or hotels. Don't miss out on sipping cocktails to the sound of the piano on the patio of the Renaissance-style Palacio de los Velada (Los Velada Palace), now a hotel, perhaps after a visit to the





peculiar cathedral which lies opposite.

Initiated in the 12th century but not completed until the 16th, it's not only Spain's earliest Gothic cathedral, but it's also one of Europe's most outstanding examples of a fortress-church. Its apse is fortified with a triple row of oversized battlements with interior galleries and firing holes protruding from the city wall. You can actually see it for yourself walking alongside the cathedral and through the *Puerta del Peso de la Harina* (Gate of the Flour Weight) to the other side of the wall.

Extra civitatem nulla securitas

Once you're there, to your left lies what is probably the most interesting part of this sober, imposing granite wall. Fortunately tourists no longer have to comply with the Latin premise above: "no security outside the city". The wall has remained greatly intact most certainly due to extreme poverty here in the 19th century, which prevented the city from expanding and abolishing its older structures. With the help and expertise of Moorish workmen and Jewish handcrafters, the wall was

built in the 12th century to secure a solid stronghold during the painstaking recovery of the Arab-occupied Iberian Peninsula, known as the *Reconquista*. The fact that remains of nearby Roman settlements were often used here is clearly visible. Abutting the outer wall you will also see a series of modest buildings that used to be butcher shops.

Today its stables house *La Bodeguita de San Segundo*, a bustling wine bar (open until 1:30 am) where you can taste any wine by the glass, always accompanied by a *tapa* (a small serving of food). "In Ávila they're



Ávila's Wall

free," says Emilio Rufes, its jovial owner. Patrons can choose between select Ibérico ham, delicious *cecina* (dry-cured beef typical from the area north of Ávila), excellent carpaccios and even the classic T-bone steak, the latter two from the famed PGI Carne de Ávila (beef) (Unique lands produce unique meats, page 83). It comes as no surprise that it was written up in the *New York Times*. Rufes has been in the wine business for almost 40 years and, together with his wife Paqui, also runs the nearby Vinoteca, which boasts over 1,300 different wine references where you can get all the advice you

need on any wine you like. Now, as you resume your walk, head two doors down to Teo Legido's workshop for a chat and a look at his

elegant minimalist pieces of contemporary gold jewelry. And why not surprise somebody with a truly unique gift?



Something mystic in the air

"I was born in Ávila, the old walled-in city, and I think that its almost mystic silence and serenity entered my soul at birth", wrote Miguel Delibes (born 1920), one of Spain's foremost contemporary authors. Indeed, although it certainly is lively, Ávila has a singular quietude to it. It is not only the city of noblemen, but also the city of Saint Teresa (1515-1582), one of Spain's great universal

mystics. Here she was born, here she wrote her famous works, and here she spent most of her life, especially at the Monasterio de la Encarnación (Monastery of the Incarnation) some 3 km (1.8 mi) from the city and well worth a visit. But let's walk to the Convento y Museo de Santa Teresa (Saint Teresa Convent and Museum) via Ávila's central square, known as Mercado Chico because of the traditional farmers' market still held here every Friday. It is a porticoed square presided over by the municipal government building from



LITTLE BITS OF HEAVEN

So what do we do with egg yolks? The question seems fair in an area where sherry was traditionally fined with egg whites. Religious orders were the perfect beneficiaries and it is precisely in the convents of southeastern Spain where the confection of *yemas* (yolks) allegedly originates and from there spread to other convents throughout the country. There are *Yemas de Sevilla*, *de Ecija* and *de Cádiz*, *Yemas de San Pablo*, and certainly the most widely-known are *Yemas de Santa Teresa* from Ávila. However, no nuns are directly involved here. It was Isabelo Sánchez who started making them in 1860, and even though for well over a century it remained a family

operation, Ávila became inseparably linked to its famous yolks and vice-versa, so much so that in order to safeguard quality, the product had to be patented as imitations showed up everywhere. You will find *Yemas de Ávila* in the city's ubiquitous pastry shops; however, only the three gourmet stores called Flor de Castilla sell the original *Yemas de Santa Teresa*, still 100% handmade today with the best ingredients: egg yolks slowly stirred into sugar syrup, left to solidify just enough to be gently hand rolled into small balls and dusted with powdered sugar. The ethereal texture, beautiful deep yellow color and exceptional taste surely make them bits of heaven.

where small streets, full of little shops, run towards all cardinal points of the wall. At the Baroque Carmelite Convent, popularly called The House of the Saint, you can visit the chapel built where Teresa was born in 1515. It features a statue of the saint as well as a beautifully-carved Christ figure. The adjacent museum holds manuscripts, clothes and other relics. October 15th, the day of her passing, is celebrated with a large procession and a solemn mass, which attracts thousands of devotees to the historic site.

Yet popular religious fervor aside, Ávila has also become the seat of the first Centro Internacional de Estudios Místicos (International Centre for Mystical Studies), founded by the municipal government with the support of official and private institutions and UNESCO, which closely collaborates on the frequent events of international scope organized in the city. These include monographic congresses, seminars, musical and other performances and exhibitions like the recent *Art and Mysticism*, which filled the city center with



Mercado Grande Square, Ávila

bronze statues by the cubist artist, Jacques Lipchitz (Lithuania, 1891-1973). The foundation also includes a novel multistory Centro de la Interpretación de la Mística (Centre for Mystical Interpretation) where, armed with a written guide, you are invited to experience your own sense of mysticism.

Minding the body

However, not only the spirit but also the body needs to be nurtured, and you happen to be in the right spot.



Through the Puerta del Rastro (Rastro Gate) just across the street, a waft of wood fire will undoubtedly draw you to Mesón El Rastro, probably the most well-established restaurant in Ávila; Mariluz, one of the friendly waitresses, has worked here for more than 40 years and knows several generations of assiduous clients by name. On weekends people often drive from Madrid just for lunch. "We're like a big family," says Pilar Sánchez, who, together with her brother, is the fourth generation in charge of the family business. This is the place to taste typical *patatas revolconas* (diced potatoes stirred slowly until forming almost a purée in olive oil perfumed with fresh bacon, spicy *pimentón*, garlic and water) or PGI Judías de El Barco de Ávila (beans) (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 69), a wonderfully delicate white bean stew. But these are merely appetizers. As a main course, try the tender roast suckling pig or the famous *chuleta de Ávila*, a veal chop that cuts like butter. Desserts are all homemade and, if you have withstood the temptation until then, order *Yemas de Santa Teresa*, Ávila's quintessential sugared yolks (Little bits of heaven, page 78) with your coffee.

Now, as you leave the city, exit through the Puerta del Puente (Gate of the Bridge) and over the well-preserved Roman bridge crossing the Adaja River towards the Cuatro Postes (Four Posts) monument, which offers a spectacular view of the walled city. But then again, perhaps don't need to walk up that far. Just after crossing the bridge you will find El Almacen, which used to be a grain warehouse; today it is a restaurant run by Isidora Beotas, who reigns in the kitchen, and her husband Julio Delgado, who takes care of the restaurant and its bodega.



Views of Cáceres

The views from their huge bay window are spectacular, especially at night when the wall is lit; enjoy them over a lovely dinner and a great glass of wine.

It will not be easy to say goodbye to Ávila, but there is always a reason to come back. As we mentioned in the first article of the series, this is not meant to be an accurate guidebook, but rather a glimpse of the city; there are many more things to see and experience. Just check Ávila's calendar and organize your visit to coincide with any of the numerous events and medieval reenactments planned throughout the year in this placid and welcoming city.

Sampling views and products

Schedule permitting, we now continue to our next destination, Cáceres, some 200 km (124 mi) away. Our journey leads us between the Sierras of Ávila and Gredos into the lovely Jerte Valley, and from there through the vast Extremaduran *dehesas* (a melange of woodlands and meadows), crowded with livestock, to Cáceres. It is a route that suggests many interesting short detours, like the aforementioned castros and the magnificent Monasterio de Yuste (Yuste Monastery), and luck has it that it also allows us to sample some of Spain's outstanding quality designated products along the way. Our first stop will be in El Barco de Ávila, where some of Spain's special dried beans are produced. Their quality, evidenced in the buttery

texture of the cooked beans that you may remember from Mesón El Rastro, was officially recognized with PGI status in 1984. Although it's accompanied by seven other types, the *judía blanca riñón*, or white kidney bean, and the oversized *judión* account for about 90% of production. A nice place to visit—in addition to the Castillo de El Barco de Ávila (El Barco de Ávila castle) and its magnificent Roman bridge—is the cooperative store on Mayor Street where, in addition to other regional products and wines, you can see how the beans come neatly presented in 1 kg (2.2 lb) sacks all provided with numbered tags. We now drive along gently sloping foothill meadows where the *Negra Avileña*, characteristic black cattle from Ávila, graze (Unique lands produce unique meats, page 83), and then gradually up to the Tornavaca pass. The entire Jerte Valley stretches out below, culminating in an immense silvery reservoir. As pretty as it is, the valley truly shines in all its ephemeral

beauty in spring when, for just a few days, the cherry tree orchards on both of its slopes are in full bloom. This stunning display attracts thousands of viewers from different countries. Sheltered from the prevailing northern winds, it is not surprising that, in this microclimate, the valley has been producing quality cherries since they were first planted here in the 14th century. Although over 40 varieties are grown, only a few produce the famous *Cereza del Jerte*, a PDO certified, red to purple, crunchy cherry, always sold without the stem. It is also unsurprising that, in addition to the many different preserves, the area also produces an all-natural cherry eau-de-vie and liqueur, which go by the name *Valle del Jerte*. Export efforts are well under way, so keep an eye peeled. We continue our route all along the valley towards beautiful Plasencia and, just before entering, we make a short detour to Jaraiz de la Vera, where the Regulatory Council of the famous PDO *Pimentón de la Vera*



San Cristóbal de la Laguna





(paprika) resides. This small area produces the unique smoke-flavored, deep red pepper powder known as *pimentón*. It comes in three different varieties: sweet, sweet and sour, and spicy, according to the type of pepper used: *jaranda*, *jariza* and *jeromín*, respectively, all from selected *Capsicum annum* and *longum* seeds. The pretty Museo del Pimentón (Paprika Museum) in Jaraíz's Plaza Mayor focuses on the history and production process of this wonderful spice, widely-coveted by gourmets and professionals and exported all over the world (albeit in small quantities). And before leaving this village, you should visit a tiny shoe store where, for over 150 years, Teodoro Sanchez's family has handcrafted beautifully-embroidered traditional shoes. "Dorin" and his wife Angela will be delighted to show you their collection, take your order, and forward it to you

wherever that may be. It's a good thing Christian Lacroix hasn't got wind of it... yet. Our next and last stop immediately before reaching Cáceres is the village of Casar, where the creamy, but pleasantly pungent and fragrant *torta* of the same name is produced. This peculiar PDO sheeps' milk cheese is dealt with in detail in *Spain Gourmetour* No. 75. If you haven't tasted it yet, now is your chance, and if you have, you'll surely be eager to savor it again in its place of birth.

Breathing it in

"Cáceres is a city to be breathed in," affirms Amparo Fernández, its director of tourism. So let's take a deep breath and be carried away. Like in Ávila, 19th-century backwardness has meant preservation. Cáceres, well before it became a World Heritage City in 1986, had already been proclaimed

the 3rd monumental complex of Europe as early as 1968 (after Florence, Italy, and Tallin, Estonia). But compared to Ávila's majestic, yet somewhat distant, granite architecture, Cáceres seems more proximate. Its surrounding wall, built by Almohads (occupying Berbers) in the 12th century, is mostly made of adobe but is not always readily noticeable, as over time it was partly sandwiched in by buildings. Here palaces and churches, although no less imposing, are made of the simpler stonework supported by massive cornerstones and beautifully-sculptured arches. While traces of prehistoric and pre-Roman cultures remain (Vettonic boars will cross your path again), Cáceres became a relevant colony on the Roman *Vía de la Plata* (Silver Route). However, the city gained true relevance under Arab occupation and, as it was not



U N I Q U E L A N D S P R O D U C E U N I Q U E M E A T S

Anybody familiar with Spanish gastronomy will rave about its marvelous hams and other dry-cured products, but what is far less widely recognized is the outstanding

reputation of its fresh meat. This is why, under the auspices of the Instituto Innovacarne (Innovacarne Institute) and with financial support from the European Commission, a group of beef, veal and

lamb producers all holding PGI status (12 in total, among them the aforementioned Carne de Ávila, and Ternera de Extremadura (veal), *Spain Gourmetour* No. 67) launched an ambitious three-year nationwide campaign to promote and underscore the officially certified, highly sanitary, health-promoting organoleptic qualities of their meat. The campaign's slogan is *Carnes únicas de tierras únicas* (Unique lands produce unique meats). Miguel Morillo, director of the PGI Ternera de Extremadura, explains that relevant factors include the animals' diet and their environment. As a general rule, adults graze practically all year round in open, often sloping meadows which offers the following advantages: movement allows a fine infiltration of fat and causes the meat to be more savory and tender, and eating grass and herbs aromatizes the meat but also produces substances beneficial both for our health and for a better conservation of the product. So next time you travel through these unique lands, don't hesitate to savor their unique meats.





Parador, Torreorgaz Palace, Cáceres

“reconquered” until 200 years later than Ávila, was far more influenced by Arab and Jewish cultures. Accordingly, more vestiges have been preserved and are still being recovered. Not to be missed is the city’s gorgeous 11th-century multi-arched *aljibe*, or cistern, in the basement of the Casa de las Veletas (House of Las Veletas), also home to the Museo de Cáceres (Cáceres Museum). Just opposite we find the fortified mansion known as Casa de las Cigüeñas (House of Storks). It features a tall tower, the only one not “beheaded” by Queen Isabel I (1451-1504), who, allegedly in an effort to put a halt to regular armed feuds between inner-city noble families, had the upper part of all towers removed (in reality she did it as a favor to its owner, who had taken her side in the dispute over the inheritance of the throne of Castile).

The fact that it’s called House of Storks is no coincidence: storks are as intrinsic to Cáceres as its monuments, and if anything interrupts the reigning silence, it’s their characteristic clapping. There is not one outstanding point without either a stork or a nest. Marcelino Cardalliaguet, the Extremadura representative from SEO/BirdLife in Spain, explains that as many as 178 couples and over 300 non-reproductive storks are registered, making it by far the largest urban population in Europe.

Be their guest

Here, as in any historic Spanish town, convents are not only a deep-rooted part of architectural heritage, but many also tend to be industrious places where delicious traditional homemade pastry is produced. At

the nearby 15th-century Convento de San Pablo (San Pablo Convent), Clarisse nuns continue to make their delicate bits of heaven: the famous *Yemas de San Pablo* (Little bits of heaven, page 78). Now let’s stroll to the old city center, to the Plaza de Santa María, an irregular square surrounded by a number of magnificent medieval buildings. Cáceres owes that era’s great wealth to the riches brought back from the New World by its conquerors—in their majority from impoverished Extremadura—as well as to the lucrative transhumance and wool trade. There is the church of the same name with a bronze statue of San Pedro de Alcántara (patron saint of Extremadura) who, upon touching his feet, grants such disparate favors as passing exams and finding fiancées. The Palacio de los Moraga (Los Moraga Palace), just

across the way, houses the Centro Provincial de Artesanía (Center for Handicrafts), which offers three floors of beautiful samples of the most varied traditional and contemporary handicrafts from all over Extremadura on display and for sale.

Wandering up and down these cobblestone alleys undoubtedly whets one's appetite, so we head



to nearby Torre de Sande. It is a fortified vine-covered mansion that houses a cozy restaurant and beautiful garden where César Ráez delights his guests with what he calls "classic-daring" cuisine. Based on regional and seasonal products, it includes a choice of what is one of the area's gastronomic fortes: game. His *Cocina de Caza* (Game Cuisine) afforded him the 2006 Gourmand World Cookbook Award for the best local cookery book in Spain (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 70).

But hear ye, hear ye! Under the auspices of Relais & Châteaux, right next door, construction is in progress of an exclusive five-star hotel conceived by the phenomenal team of Toño Perez and José Antonio Polo, owners of the famed two-Michelin-star restaurant Atrio (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 68), which attracts food and wine connoisseurs from all

over the world to Cáceres. And keeping with the trend of investing this exceptional historic setting with 21st-century luster, just few a feet away, the magnificent Palacio de Torreorgaz (Torreorgaz Palace), home to the Parador (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 69), will undergo comprehensive refurbishment starting in May.

Beyond the wall

Exiting through its Puerta de la Estrella (Gate of the Star), down below we find the Plaza Mayor watched over by the magnificent Torre de Bujaco (Bujaco Tower) and surrounded by white stucco buildings. Every year in November the square takes on its old guise and for a few days becomes the center of a huge medieval market that spreads throughout the old city and attracts



Plaza Mayor, Cáceres

over 100,000 visitors. After a short walk from here we reach the Gran Teatro where, throughout the year, a wide range of cultural indoor events are organized; however, with its generally mild climate, Cáceres is also the scenario of a number of very successful outdoor festivals such as Womad (World of Music and Dance), Play! Cáceres (contemporary music), Irish Fleadh (celtic music) and Classical Theatre, among others. Just across from the theater, one of Gabriel Mostaza's small stores will provide you with a snapshot of the best traditional products from Extremadura. The store, which is a feast for the eyes, and its aromas will undoubtedly tantalize your appetite. So now is the time to wrap up our visit with what Juan Mari Arzak (one of Spain's foremost Basque chefs) described as a "magic" meal at El Figón de Eustaquio in San Juan Plaza (San Juan Square). Today the restaurant is run by Eustaquio's niece, Pilar Blanco. "As a girl I used to be so happy in the kitchen," she says, smiling. Today she runs the show, and continues to radiate that same happiness. Decoration is simple, but inviting, leaving center stage to the food that is always delicious. "Things that work don't need to change," says Pilar. In addition to their hallmark *perdiz estofada* (braised partridge), other emblematic dishes are *frite* (fried morsels of lamb with potatoes), oven-roasted lamb and suckling pig, venison, or locally-found mushrooms and *criadillas de la tierra*, a truffle-like tuber. For dessert, try their delicious *bisquit de higo* (fig biscuit glacé). Here yet another journey revealing some of Spain's hidden treasures draws to an end. We have been to stately Ávila, but haven't visited

nearby Segovia or Salamanca, and we have strolled through splendid Cáceres, but not through neighboring Trujillo and Mérida. It just goes to show the unparalleled density of Spain's historic and cultural heritage, always cast in splendid landscapes and enlivened by a myriad of events and superb gastronomy. Our next trip will take us to the Mediterranean where we

will visit Roman *Tarraco*, present-day Tarragona, and Phoenician *Ybshim*, today's white-washed Ibiza. It will be an entirely different experience so we hope you will join us again!

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San Juan Square and Church, Cáceres



Text
Paul Richardson/©ICEX

Illustrations
Luis Serrano

A pepper is just a pepper—right? Wrong. There are hundreds of *Capsicum* types the world over, and a good proportion of them are traditionally grown in Spain. Some are hot, some are not. Some are made for drying, others to be ground into *pimentón* (a type of paprika from Spain) and others are grown specially to be eaten fresh. They are omnipresent on European supermarket shelves at almost any time of year: big, fat, brightly-colored peppers from southern Spain, with a mild and inoffensive flavor. But there is a great deal more to the world of Spanish peppers than the intensively-grown products of Murcia and Almería. A host of traditional varieties, as-yet little-known outside their places of origin, offers an unsuspected wealth of curious shapes and aromatic flavors. Paul Richardson reports on the Spanish pepper varieties that are poised to hit the big time.

PEPPERS

Born to be Mild





The pepper and the numerous relatives of its extended family—green, red, orange, yellow, small and spicy, large and sweet—are one of the characteristic ingredients of Hispanic cooking in the widest sense. Their uses in Spanish cooking can be broadly divided into three. They can be dried and ground into powder to produce *pimentón*, a unique Spanish flavoring and an irreplaceable element in any self-respecting spice rack, from Cádiz to La Coruña and from coast to coast in Spain. They can be preserved whole by various methods: in vinegar or brine, or peeled and bottled in their own juices. And last but not least, they can be eaten fresh, in or out of season, as an ingredient in one of countless Spanish recipes. They are so ubiquitous that, like the tomato, they are easy to take for granted; however, without them the world would certainly be a poorer place. In the kitchen, peppers are happy either to take center stage or to blend discreetly into the background. Green pepper is an

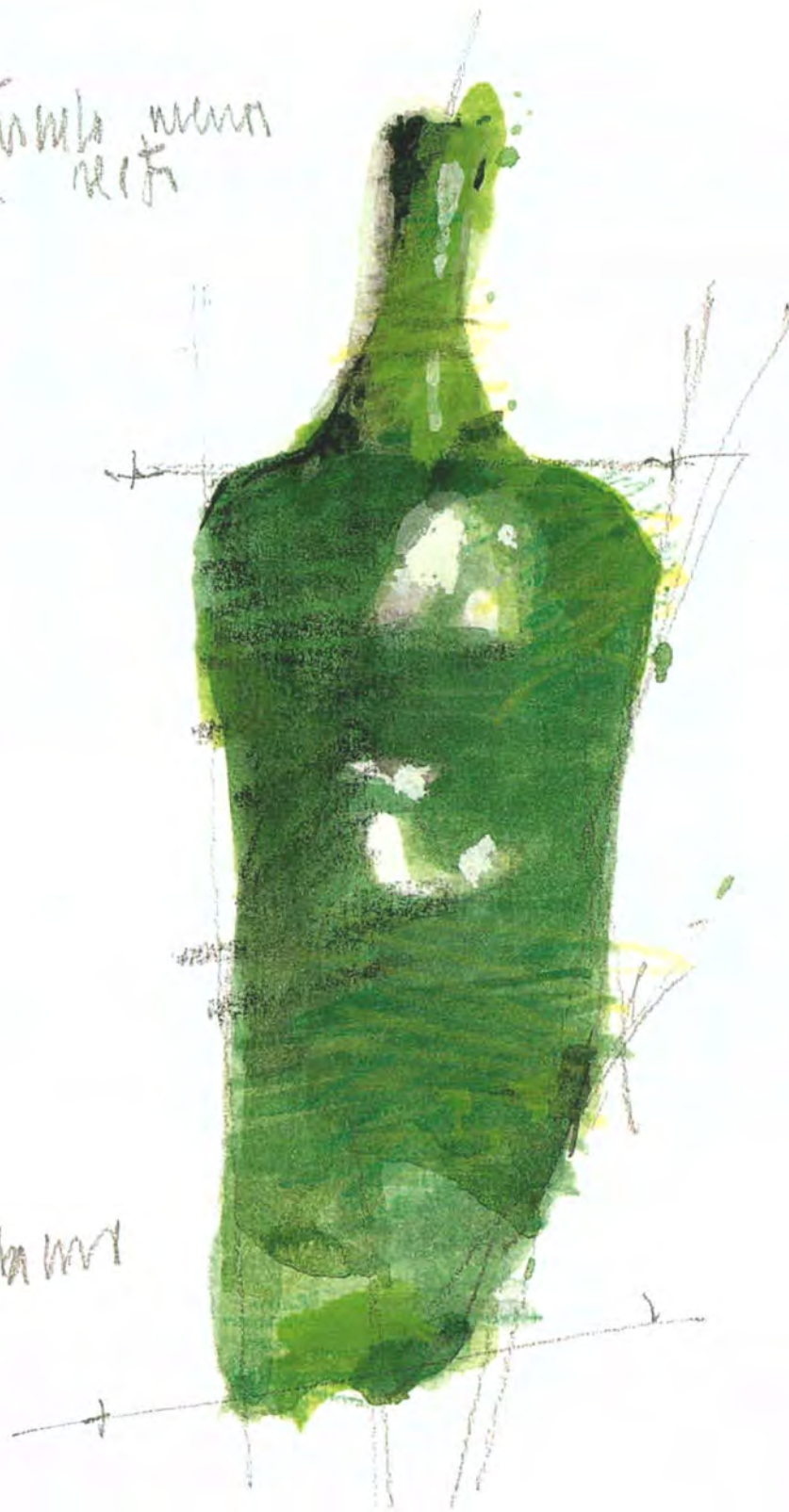
essential element of cold soups like *gazpacho* (cold vegetable soup), as well as Spanish summer recipes like Majorca's *trepó* (tomato, onion and pepper salad). Classic summer vegetable dishes like *pisto* (vegetable stew with eggplant, tomato and onion) and *tumbet* (oven-baked layers of potato, eggplant and pepper) would be literally unthinkable without peppers, green and red. Stuffed peppers, with a filling of ground beef, pork and ham, *morcilla* (blood sausage), salt cod, mixed shellfish and/or rice, are a staple of culinary life in Navarre, La Rioja and the Basque Country. The Basques add green pepper to their potato and salt cod tortilla; the Aragonese use red and green peppers in the sauce known as *chilindrón*. As a culinary resource the pepper is virtually limitless, and few world cuisines offer a richer testament to its versatility. Peppers of one sort or another are never far from the vegetable basket in my own kitchen. Just in the last week, if I cast my mind back, I fried

whole green peppers in olive oil as a garnish for lamb chops grilled over a fire of vine cuttings. I finely chopped and gently sautéed a green pepper in olive oil along with tomato and onion (known in Spain as a *sofrito*) as a base for wild boar stew, and I sliced red peppers into bold chunks, giving a burst of color and flavor to a rice dish with chicken and vegetables.

A rich history

The genus *Capsicum* belongs to the family *Solanaceae*, which also includes the potato, eggplant, tomato and deadly nightshade (belladonna). Of the five cultivated species of *Capsicum*, that which encompasses by far the widest number of varieties is *Capsicum annuum*. Under the umbrella of *annuum* we find most of the peppers cultivated on a worldwide scale, from Mexico to Italy, Peru to Spain. The pepper was first encountered by Spaniards on Columbus' second voyage of discovery (1493-1496),

gr 11 pedunculata nigrum
part. RIF



gr 11

red ham

when the great conquistador observed the natives eating a fruit similar in shape and color to a small cherry. The fruits seemed to be very spicy, which led them to believe that this was a relative of pepper—the spice, not the fruit—thereby laying the ground for a confusion which has continued to puzzle and infuriate both cooks and linguists

to this day. The Spanish word for pepper (the spice, *Piper nigrum* in Latin) is *pimienta*, and it was under this thoroughly misleading name that Columbus brought the first *Capsicum* back to Europe. The learned Fernández de Oviedo (historian of the Indies, 1478-1557) described the plant known as *aji* (the name by which hot peppers are still

known in much of South America), as “the *pimienta* of the Indians, a tall plant with grains or pods as large as a finger in length and width”, which would now coincide with the different varieties of pepper (in Spanish, *pimiento*). The pepper is a rich source of carbohydrates, proteins and minerals such as potassium, calcium and

regular,
alargada



verde claro
con mamita

más pinda
pál. him y brillante

phosphorus. High in vitamin C, it also contains vitamins A, B1, B2, E and P. The popular belief that raw peppers are indigestive turns out to be the culinary version of an urban myth. Exactly the opposite is true: the properties of peppers as a foodstuff include inducing appetite and aiding digestion, while also

acting as a mild disinfectant. As the world's fifth largest producer of peppers, with 4.09% of the total (after China with 53.85%, Mexico with 6.48%, Indonesia with 4.22% and Turkey with 4.18%; FAO, 2007), Spain boasts a magnificent variety of these often overlooked vegetables. The center of pepper

cultivation on an intensive scale is the province of Almeria, where Capsicums account for as much as 40% of all the available surface area (in greenhouses). Production on this scale is largely dependent on the so-called Morrón variety, and especially Lamuyo, the familiar fat, fleshy, mild-flavored pepper typically found

on the supermarket shelves of Northern Europe. Following the Morrón in terms of quantity are the Cristal varieties, which are long and thin, are mostly eaten green, and have a sweetly penetrating aroma. Thereafter come a host of varieties, most of which are unknown outside Spain, or even outside their home territory. To calculate the number of pepper varieties in this country is even beyond the scope of experts in the field, given the extraordinary biodiversity within the Capsicum family. Often cultivated for centuries in private vegetable gardens, Spain's specialist pepper varieties are highly-valued by local chefs and gourmets but are seldom seen outside their home regions. For the vast majority of consumers, peppers are simply peppers, and the awareness of different varieties that exist, for example, with respect to the tomato and the potato, has not yet come into being.

But 2009 looks set to be a year of change for the Spanish pepper. Some of the finest local varieties are finally being recognized for their unique qualities, and recognition in the form of PGI (Protected Geographic Indication) and PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) is on the way for a generous handful of them.

Some like it hot

One of the varieties soon to receive a (long overdue) PDO is a pepper which has enjoyed something of a boom in recent years, its fame spreading throughout Spain and even abroad. The **Pimiento de Herbón**, a pepper from Galicia

(northwest Spain) that has become famously known as *Pimiento de Padrón*, partly owes its success to a curious botanical fact: while most of these peppers are naturally mild in flavor, a few examples on every plant develop a spontaneous piquancy. Around 10% of Herbón peppers are spicy, but this percentage rises the longer they are left on the plant. Here is a vegetable that effectively comes with its own marketing slogan. "Unos pican y otros no" (some are hot, some are not) was a traditional saying in the region of Herbón, and is now known all over Spain, to the point where it has almost become a proverb illustrating the lottery of life, along the lines of "some you win, some you lose". The Pimiento de Herbón is a small pepper, usually measuring 4-6 cm (1.6-2.4 in) in length, and always picked green. As traditionally served in the *tapas* bars (a *tapa* is a small serving of food) and restaurants of Santiago de Compostela, the big city closest to its original place of cultivation, it was simply fried in olive oil and sprinkled with coarse salt, and eventually Pimientos de Herbón—known almost universally, if incorrectly, as Pimientos de Padrón—took their place among the classic dishes of Galician cuisine, alongside *pulpo a feira* (octopus with potatoes, rock salt, sweet pimentón and olive oil) and *lacón con grelos* (pork shoulder with turnip tops). In Galicia, a popular combination was, and is, *sardinillas con Pimiento de Herbón*: small sardines fried with peppers on the side. In the Plaza de Abastos (Abastos Square), the great central market of Santiago de

Compostela, it's still common to see farmers' wives sitting beside big baskets of fresh green Herbón peppers, which they usually sell by the hundred, not by weight. The "Russian roulette" aspect of eating Herbón peppers, not to mention their glorious green color and near-addictive flavor, makes them enormous fun to eat. Though they had been grown in the region for centuries, their "boom" began in the late 1980s with the advent of improved distribution and refrigeration systems. The fashion for Herbón peppers quickly spread through the diaspora of Galician bars in the big Spanish cities, especially in Madrid and Barcelona, where there were large permanent communities of expatriate Galicians. And from there they made the leap into foreign markets. Growing demand led to a Herbón-type pepper being grown in Murcia and Almería, and even in Morocco, for export to Argentina, the US and Great Britain. This has led to the eventual creation of a Protected Designation of Origin for the Pimiento de Herbón. The demarcated area centers on the mouth of the Ulla River, on the borders of Pontevedra and Coruña provinces, and includes the villages of Padrón, Dadro, Rois, Pontecesures and Valga. Two cooperatives are mostly responsible for the production of Pimiento de Herbón within the PDO area: Pimerbón and A Pementeira. One source estimates total production within the PDO at around 1,700 kg (3,748 lb) per year, principally during the main growing season of mid-May to late October. The pepper that's sometimes hot,

O Couto



Riojano



Herbón



Gernika



PIMIENTO DE O COUTO



Zone
Galicia: Coruña province, Ferrol county

Shape
trapezoidal truncated cone

Color
dark green with a slight gloss

Skin
slightly craggy

Length
4 to 8 cm / 1.6 to 3.1 in

Flavor
sweet

PIMIENTO RIOJANO



Zone
La Rioja

Shape
conical with a slightly pointed end

Color
intense scarlet

Skin
slightly uneven

Length
16 to 18 cm / 6.3 to 7.0 in

Flavor
sweet

PIMIENTO DE HERBÓN



Zone
Galicia: La Coruña and Pontevedra

Shape
conical or truncated conical

Color
bright green

Skin
slightly rough

Length
3.5 to 6 cm / 1.4 to 2.4 in

Flavor
90% are sweet, 10% are spicy

PIMIENTO DE GERNIKA



Zone
Basque Country (Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya and part of Álava)

Shape
triangular, long and narrow, with a very pointy tip

Color
very glossy medium to dark green

Skin
delicate and fine

Length
6 to 9 cm / 2.4 to 3.5 in

Flavor
spicy

Arnoia



Oimbra



Fresno-Benavente



PIMIENTO DE ARNOIA



Zone

Galicia: Orense (Arnoia municipality and town of Meréns, Cortegada)

Shape

large, long and bell-shaped, with 3 or 4 lobes and 4 ribs

Color

yellowish-green

Skin

smooth and glossy

Length

11.5 to 13.5 cm / 4.5 to 3.1 in

Flavor

smooth, not spicy

PIMIENTO DE OIMBRA



Zone

Galicia: Orense municipality, Verin county

Shape

regular and elongated

Color

light green with slightly yellowish tones

Skin

smooth and shiny

Length

8 to 17 cm / 3.1 to 6.7 in

Flavor

sweet

PIMIENTO DE FRESNO-BENAVENTE



Zone

northeastern Castile-Leon (Leon, Zamora and Valladolid)

Shape

rectangular

Color

intense red

Skin

smooth with 3 or 4 lobes at one end

Length

8 to 12 cm / 3.1 to 4.7 in

Flavor

medium sweet, slightly bitter and not spicy



sometimes not, has a close relative in the far north of the country whose growers like to boast that it's never, ever hot. The **Pimiento de O Couto** is grown exclusively in the county of Ferrol, in the very furthest northwestern reaches of Galicia and of Spain. According to Antonio Rivera of the Mabegondo Agrarian Research Center (CIAM), which has been working on the PDO project for Herbón and the PGI for O Couto peppers, the similarity between these two varieties may have a historical

explanation. Peppers and monasteries in Spain are intimately connected, given that it was often the friars sent as missionaries to the New World who brought back new species and began growing them at home. Despite the distance between them, the monasteries of Herbón and San Martiño do Couto belong to the same order. It would seem logical, then, that the pepper was originally brought from South America during the 15th century and was planted by the monks in the

gardens of these two monasteries, where over time the Pimiento de O Couto began to develop along slightly different lines from its relative in Herbón. The O Couto pepper is larger, usually around 6-8 cm (2.4-3.1 in) in length, and grows erect on the plant, whereas the Herbón pepper hangs from the stalk. It is grown by only 40 to 60 producers over a surface area of just 3.5 ha (8.6 acres), and, as is common in Galicia, these producers operate on a family-run basis. Some

consumers detect a grassier flavor in the Pimiento de O Couto than in that of Herbón. But the main difference is in the heat, or rather, the lack of it. In a part of the world where spicy foods are not widely enjoyed, the Pimiento de O Couto has made a name for itself locally for its reliably non-piquant flavor. As-yet unknown beyond the borders of Ferrol county, it remains to be seen whether the PGI (whose final bureaucratic hurdles are due to be overcome some time this year) will give this product the boost it deserves.

Sweet and gentle

Galicia is prodigal in traditional pepper varieties. Of the eight or so *Capsicum* types recognized at the local level, at least four are currently looking for their niche in a much wider marketplace. Hailing from the south of the region, the varieties of Arnoia and Oimbra are very different from their small and occasionally spicy northern cousins. These are big, sweet, pale-colored peppers, perfect for use in cooking when still green, or for roasting and preserving when they turn red. The **Pimiento de Oimbra** hails from the county of Verín, where it has been planted for generations by local families and is virtually unknown outside this small area, though an attempt was recently made to begin exporting them to the UK. The **Pimiento de Arnoia** is also large, long and bell-shaped, with a shiny and yellowish-green skin, but at 50-90 g (1.7-3.2 oz), it's smaller

and lighter than its relative, which weighs in at between 70 and 400 g (2.5-14.1 oz).

Jose Manuel García, a professor at the University of Vigo, knows these peppers better than anyone: García produced botanical studies as part of the team working to set up the PGI, soon to be awarded to both of them. He emphasizes the localized nature of these two varieties and their perfect adaptation to the climate of southern Galicia with its hot summers and cool, wet winters. In practice they are organically grown, since chemical fertilizers and pesticides are rarely used by the families who farm them on a tiny scale. Traditionally, these varieties have been served fried as a garnish for roast meats, as part of a summer barbecue menu, and García also describes a wonderful-sounding *empanada* (pie) made in the area around Verín featuring a filling of fried Oimbra peppers with onion and ground meat or shellfish. García sees the culinary future of both Arnoia and Oimbra varieties in the ever-changing world of Spanish tapas, proclaiming their excellence as part of a *pisto* and in the classic peppers stuffed with ground meat. Their sweet and delicately aromatic flavor also makes them ideal, he claims, for more refined treatment in mousses and *pasteles* (a soft "cake" analogous to a terrine).

The excellence of Galicia's contributions to the *Capsicum* family is well-known to Marcelo Tejedor (Casa Marcelo, Santiago de Compostela, *Spain Gourmetour* No. 54), who is rapidly becoming known

as the Autonomous Community's most influential chef. When I mention the Arnoia pepper during a conversation with him, Tejedor goes into raptures about its "softness and perfume. It's wonderful in season, you could eat it raw, it's crunchy and mild, or roasted, or fried, it's absolutely delicious!" Tejedor points out that, apart from the omnipresent Padrón/Herbón, the pepper family plays a relatively modest role in the gastronomic life of Galicia. Its main use is in *guisos* (casseroles and stews), especially those featuring fish and seafood, as part of the initial *sofrito* with onion and tomato. In his own life and cooking, however, they have a much wider use. As the son of fruit and vegetable merchants, he remembers his mother serving them stuffed, roasted and preserved in olive oil. Among the seasonally varying dishes on his daily menu, I have seen roast sardines with Herbón peppers, hake with a sweet and sour red pepper sauce, and sea bass served with a stock made with locally-grown green peppers. He stresses that his dishes very rarely use hot peppers. "We are more fond of gentle flavors," he says, "and when the Herbón peppers are hot, people round here usually put them to one side."

Basque roots

A general dislike of hot and spicy foods is common to Spain's northern territories, where many of the country's classiest pepper varieties are to be found (there are few notable exceptions to this general

rule, one being the piquant *Guindilla vasca*, a long, green and exceptionally hot pepper, preserved in vinegar and a popular Basque delicacy). The famous **Pimiento de Gernika** (*Gernikako piperra* in Euskara) is thought to have been grown first as a hot pepper, but had the heat bred out of it over centuries of adaptation to the mild and humid conditions of the Cantabrian coast. Traditionally left to mature on the plant and subsequently dried in long strings, it was mainly valued as an ingredient in such typical Basque dishes as *bacalao a la vizcatina* (salt cod with peppers, onions and tomatoes) and *angulas al pilpil* (elvers in olive oil emulsified in fish stock). Over time this custom declined, and nowadays the variety is used above all as a green pepper, picked when it is still sweet and tender, and used for frying. Grown mainly in the counties of Txorierri, Murguía and Busturia and harvested during the months of April to November, it normally has a conical, slender shape, a deep glossy green color, and measures between 6-9 cm (2.4-3.5 in) in length. One of its defining characteristics is its fine skin, which when cooked is so delicate that it virtually melts in the mouth.

The variety in question takes its name from Gernika, a small town near Bilbao with a tremendous symbolic importance in Basque politics and culture (the Picasso painting *Guernica* commemorates the bombing of the town by the Germans in 1937). The area around Gernika was both the cradle of the

variety, where it was principally grown, and where it was mainly sold in the town's Monday produce market. The Pimiento de Gernika is now a hugely popular vegetable in the province of Vizcaya, constituting the region's most important agricultural crop after lettuce. Of the province's total crop, 40% is sold to other parts of the Spanish state. The variety has been protected under the quality control scheme for Basque food products with the Kalitatea seal since 1993. Moreover, the Gernika pepper is likely to have its very own PDO by the end of the year. Historic Basque cookbooks such as *El Amparo* (1930) and the Marchioness of Parabere's *Enciclopedia Culinaria* (1940) include the Gernika pepper among their specified ingredients. All the important Basque chefs of our time, from Martín Berasategui (Martín Berasategui Restaurant, Guipúzcoa) to Pedro Subijana (Akelarre restaurant, San Sebastian) to Karlos Arguiñano (famous for his cooking programs on TV), are familiar with this variety and use it regularly. Juan Mari Arzak (Arzak restaurant, San Sebastian) has been known to describe his favorite dish as fried Gernika peppers with egg and french fries. Certainly the tendency is to "keep it simple", and there is nothing like brief exposure to smoking hot olive oil and a sprinkling of sea salt to bring out all the melting sweetness of the pepper. However, Spanish culinary creativity being what it is, we are beginning to see more complex uses of the Gernika

pepper. At last year's Pintxo Contest in Hondarribia (a *pintxo* is equivalent to *tapa*), one of the prizes went to a *txipiron* (baby squid in Euskara) and tempura of Gernika pepper with cold tomato soup and lime perfume, courtesy of Raúl Fernández and Antonio Cristóbal of the restaurant Chelsy in Pamplona (Navarre). The most avant-garde chefs are even using the seeds of this variety, a deliciously nutty idea in more than one sense: assiduous diners at Josean Martinez's restaurant in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao may remember seeing on the menu a dish of lamb with sherry sauce garnished with lemon and toasted Gernika pepper seeds.

A fine Rioja red (pepper)

Pepper varieties in Spain, like other species of fruit and vegetable, are very often linked to their places of origin by bonds of culture and history. In 1896, the great gastronome Angel Muro wrote in his magnum opus *El Practicón*: "La Rioja has a well-deserved reputation for the cultivation of the pepper", and Dionisio Pérez, aka Post-Thebussem, author of the classic *Guía del Buen Comer Español* (1929), mentioned the La Rioja pepper as one of Spain's egregious delicacies. The classic pepper of the La Rioja region is often known as the *Pimiento najerano*, after the town of Nájera, between Logroño and Santo Domingo de la Calzada, where it was first cultivated. This is a longish, conical pepper with a



noticeable *pico* or pointed end, an intense scarlet color when ripe, and a partly uneven surface with two or three distinct “faces”. The **Pimiento Riojano** has its very own PGI. Peppers in one form or another are practically omnipresent in Riojan life. They hang in garlands on the balconies of country houses, deep red and wrinkled from the autumn sun. They are roasted over vine cuttings and preserved in jars or

tins—a delicious resource for the winter months. The Riojano pepper is mostly eaten when thoroughly ripe, and an in-between type, half-green, half-red, called *Entreverado*, is also valued locally for its gentle flavor. But it’s the red, sweetly pungent, fresh, but thoroughly ripe pepper that has the starring role in Riojan cuisine. Moreover, it forms an irreplaceable element of the local gastronomy: the phrase *a la riojana*,

in the style of La Rioja, implies the presence of red peppers in the treatment of the main ingredient. Like its cousin in Gernika, the Pimiento Riojano is dear to the hearts of those who grow and eat it. Stuffed peppers are a cornerstone of the region’s tapas culture. *Patatas a la riojana*, potatoes with red peppers, *chorizo* (a type of red sausage) and bay leaf, is a stalwart dish of the rural working class,

often cooked and eaten on a cold day among the vineyards, while *caracoles a la riojana*, one of Spain's best dishes with snails, gives these humble mollusks a flavor boost with red pepper, onion, garlic and chopped ham. At Echaurren, the region's best-known restaurant, in Ezcaray, chef Francis Paniego (*Spain Gourmetour* No. 54) serves a wonderful salt cod *a la riojana* in the most authentic local style. But he also makes original use of the local pepper in his own cunning creations: in a first course of goats' cheese and bean sprouts on a translucent pool (he calls it a "veil") of red pepper juice, and in a curious marriage of pepper and pineapple, lending its tangy sweetness to a meaty scallop on

what would otherwise be a bland and visually neutral puree of cauliflower.

Castillian classics

As yet, apart from the Pimiento de Herbón, none of these peppers can boast of a commercial presence very far beyond its homeland. Usually there is a good reason for this: Spain's specialty pepper varieties are produced in such small quantities, and are so eagerly appreciated at home, that few of them ever escape from their place of production. In the case of the **Pimiento de Fresno-Benavente**, the farthest the product ever got is Asturias. The Fresno-Benavente pepper is an example of the way that, given time and patience, vegetable species brought

from other continents can eventually adapt to a given set of natural conditions. The Valley of the Tera River (northwest Spain), in whose villages of Aguilar, Micereces and San Pedro de la Viña the local pepper variety is widely grown, has just the humidity and very high summer temperatures the variety needs for ripening. Just 30 growers produce this aromatic, fleshy, bright red morrón-type pepper on a commercial scale, though a legion of small-time farmers also grow it in backyard vegetable patches for home consumption. The farmers of Fresno de la Vega, some 40 km (25 mi) north in the province of Leon, claim that their own local pepper has been grown in their region since 1700. The Pimiento de Fresno-Benavente



has a single demarcated quality zone of 300 ha (741 acres), straddling the borders of the Leon and Zamora provinces and uniting no less than 90 villages. This pepper will be the only Capsicum grown to be eaten fresh, as opposed to dried or preserved, to have its own seal of quality in the region of Castile-Leon. The Fresno-Benavente variety represents just over a quarter of all Castilian peppers, but it's virtually unknown beyond the borders of its Autonomous Community. Anyone who has followed the progress of Spanish food over the last few decades will be familiar with the scenario: a high-quality product, unique to its place of origin and consumed there since time immemorial, of whose existence the outside world has only the vaguest idea. Then comes official recognition, protection and control, and promotion. The product begins to reach foreign markets, and before long people in London and Paris are talking about the peppers of Arnoia, Oimbra, Herbón, O Couto, Gernika, La Rioja, Fresno and Benavente, just as they talk about Raf tomatoes and Ratte potatoes. For too long these excellent vegetables have been no more than local heroes. Armed with its PDOs and PGIs and a renewed sense of confidence, however, the small world of the Spanish pepper may at last be on the verge of something big.

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).



WEBSITES

www.mediatorural.xunta.es/es/areas/alimentacion/produutos_de_calidade/en_tramitacion/

PGI Pimiento de Arnoia, PDO Pimiento de Herbón, PGI Pimiento de Oimbra and PGI Pimiento de O Couto (Galician, Spanish)

www.mapa.es/es/alimentacion/pags/Denominacion/hortalizas/pimiento_fresno_benavente.htm

PGI Pimiento de Fresno-Benavente (Spanish)

www.euskolabel.net/producto/producto.asp?producto=12

PDO Pimiento de Gernika (English, Euskara, French, Spanish)

www.lariojacalidad.org/igp/pimiento_riojano/informacion/index.html

PGI Pimiento Riojano (Spanish)





Restaurante Pepe Vieira

Introduction
Almudena Muyo/©ICEX

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

Photos, recipes
Toya Legido/©ICEX

Photos, introduction
Toya Legido/©ICEX
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Evolving, committed, audacious. These seem to be appropriate adjectives to describe the cuisine offered by Xosé T. Cannas at his restaurant Pepe Vieira “Camino da Serpe”, recently the winner of its first Michelin star. On property owned by the family in the district of Raxó (Pontevedra), he and his brother Xoan Torres Cannas, sommelier and *Nariz de Oro* (Nose of Gold) 2004—who has chosen the wines for this selection of recipes—have raised a spectacular building to house their restaurant. An untiring researcher, Xosé, founder of Grupo Nove (created to update Galician cuisine), focuses on regional products and gastronomy, but casts off some of the old-school customs. Tradition is seen as the starting point, the basis for creating open, discerning cuisine with an identity. Xosé’s extensive experience in kitchens in Canada, Scotland and France has convinced him that the magic of cuisine lies not in tricks nor artifice but, above all, in total respect for product quality.

5 RECIPES



Squid coulant

(Calamar coulant)

This dish takes its name from the famous coulant by Michel Bras. In this case, the surprise comes from the Riojano pepper mayonnaise that pours out as you cut into the squid.

SERVES 4

For the squid: 4 squid; 50 g / 2 oz flour; 2 eggs; 50 g / 2 oz homemade breadcrumbs; salt; extra virgin olive oil.

For the Riojano pepper mayonnaise: 1 egg yolk; olive oil; 1 lime; 2 Riojano peppers; salt.

Breadcrumbs

Take day-old bread and dry in the oven. When cold, place between two Gastronorm grids. Crush with a rolling pin, repeating as necessary until the bread falls through. The crumbs should not be too fine.

Squid

Clean the squid, trim to shape and season with salt. Dip in breadcrumbs, pressing down to coat well, then fry in extra virgin olive oil.

Riojano pepper mayonnaise

Roast the peppers, peel and liquidize. Make the mayonnaise, and add the liquidized peppers.

To serve

Fill the squid with the Riojano pepper mayonnaise and place in the center of the dish.

Preparation time

40 minutes

Cooking time

30 minutes

Recommended wine

Viña de Martín Escolma 04, by Luis Anxo Rodríguez Vázquez (DO Ribeiro), who is a great connoisseur of the local soils and the varieties that grow in the DO Ribeiro. He is a pleasant, affable person who is always ready with a surprise, yet he transmits credibility and a serious attitude, ignoring passing fads and ensuring that things are done properly. And this can also be said to be characteristics of his wines. The freshness of this Viña de Martín Escolma 04 complements the acidity of the pepper and the fried crumb coating on the squid, offering a balanced contrast.





Grouper with roast O Couto pepper stock

(Mero con caldo de Pimiento de O Couto asado)

The O Couto peppers are among our favorites because of the slight sweetness they give to the stock.

SERVES 4

4 groupers, 100 g / 3 1/2 oz each; 2 onions; 2 carrots; 2 leeks; 1/2 clove garlic; 6 O Couto peppers; 5 black peppercorns; 1 1/4 1/4 cup chicken stock; extra virgin olive oil; salt; seasonal flower petals.

Cook the groupers in the steam oven at 65°C / 149°F, just until the inside of the flesh reaches 45°C / 113°F. Then place on a hot grill, skin side down, until the skin is crisp.

Roast the O Couto peppers with salt and extra virgin olive oil. Lightly fry the onion, carrot, leek and garlic with the peppercorns. Add the peppers. Pour over the chicken stock and simmer for 15-20 minutes. Blend, strain and season with salt.

To serve

Pour the stock over the base of the dish and add the grouper. Decorate with seasonal petals.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

20 minutes

Recommended wine

As Sortes 06, by Rafael Palacios (DO Valdeorras). This wine is the result of the search for quality in historical areas such as the DO Valdeorras (Orense) where the star variety is Godello (Waiting for Godello, page 28). This is a grape that produces wines with volume, creaminess and mineral touches, making it ideal to accompany the firm, elegant, gelatinous flesh of the grouper.

Villalba capon with Gernika pepper drops and spicy cream of chickpeas

(Capón de Villalba con pepitas de Pimientos de Gernika y crema especiada de garbanzos)

Capons are mostly consumed in Galicia at Christmastime, and those from Villalba are considered a special treat. Documentary evidence shows that every year, since 1838, the Galician town of Villalba has celebrated its annual Capon Fair, when high prices are fetched for prime birds.

SERVES 4

For the Villalba capon: 4 capon thighs; 1 onion; 1 carrot; 1 leek; 1/2 clove garlic; 10 g / 4 tbsp tomato sauce; 1 dl / 1/2 cup white wine; 2 dl / 3/4 cups chicken stock.

For the cream of chickpeas: 100 g / 3 1/2 oz chickpeas; 1 bay leaf; 5 black peppercorns; curry powder; salt.

For the Gernika peppers: 500 g / 1 lb 2 oz Gernika peppers; 1/2 g / .02 oz agar agar; 1 l / 4 1/4 cup sunflower oil; sugar.

Others: 2 wild asparagus spears; 1 dried peach.

Villalba capon

Chop the vegetables and fry lightly. When brown, add the tomato sauce and white wine. Reduce, then add the chicken stock.

Before placing the thighs into this mixture, cut the top of the bone so that it will be easy to remove the flesh later. Transfer the sofrito with the thighs to vacuum packs and cook in the Roner for about 12 hours at 85°C / 185°F. Bone, without pulling the flesh

apart, then cut each thigh into 4 pieces. Strain and reduce the cooking liquid.

Cream of chickpeas

Cook the chickpeas with the bay leaf, black pepper and salt. Strain, peel and blend, adding a little of the cooking water and some curry powder.

Gernika peppers

Blanch the Gernika peppers and liquidize. Add sugar, if necessary, and the agar agar and boil. Transfer the liquid to a squeezer bottle and squeeze a few drops onto the cold sunflower oil so that they set. Drain and set aside.

Wild asparagus and dried peach

Cut the asparagus spears in half and sear on the grill. Cut the peach into julienne strips.

To serve

Cover the base of the plate with the cream of chickpeas and then add, in the following order, the capon, the seared asparagus spears and the strips of peach. Top with a few Gernika pepper drops and finish the whole dish by glazing with the cooking juices from the capon.

Preparation time

12 hours, 15 minutes

Cooking time

12 hours

Recommended wine

Gorvia 05 (DO Monterrei), by Viñedos Quinta da Muradella. José Luis Mateo is the driving force behind the small Quinta da Muradella winery, a project that started up in 1990 with a view to producing top-quality wines based on respect for the environment, tradition, native varieties and the identity given by the local soils. They use grapes from both very old and new vineyards. In the mouth, this is an Atlantic wine—fresh, light, versatile, elastic and fun. The wood is perfectly integrated, with no tannic edges, just elegant velvet, and the finish is long and pleasant. This is a very personal, different wine, which marries to perfection with the smooth capon flesh and the sandy texture of the chickpeas.





Herbón pepper and vegetables chargrilled over Caíño vine wood

*(Pimiento de Herbón y verduras
asadas al sarmiento de caíño)*

The aroma from the vine wood coals brings out the flavor of the peppers and the vegetables. The adage used to describe these peppers in Galicia is "Some are hot, some are not".

SERVES 4

For the chargrilled vegetables: 16 Herbón peppers; 1 artichoke, quartered; 1 onion; 4 garlic shoots; 1 tomato; 4 wild asparagus spears; 1 eggplant; 1 red pepper; Caíño vine wood; salt; extra virgin olive oil; smoked fleur de sel.

For the smoked oil: 250 ml / 1 1/8 cups sunflower oil; 250 ml / 1 1/8 cups olive oil.

For the cheeses: 20 g / 1 oz San Simón da Costa; 20 g / 1 oz Gamonedo; 20 g / 1 oz Tetilla; 20 g / 1 oz cured Manchego cheese.



Chargrilled vegetables

Prepare the red hot coals with the vine wood. Peel the vegetables and cut into pieces. Cook the artichoke in water and sear on the grill. Grill the vegetables, sprinkling with olive oil and salt.

Smoked oil

Mix the olive and sunflower oil in a pot. Add the trimmings from the roast vegetables and confit at approximately 65°C / 149°F for one day. Strain and set aside. Just before serving, brush the smoked oil over the vegetables to give them a shine.

To serve

Arrange the chargrilled vegetables on a hot slate and sprinkle with the smoked fleur de sel. Add small cheese wedges.

Preparation time

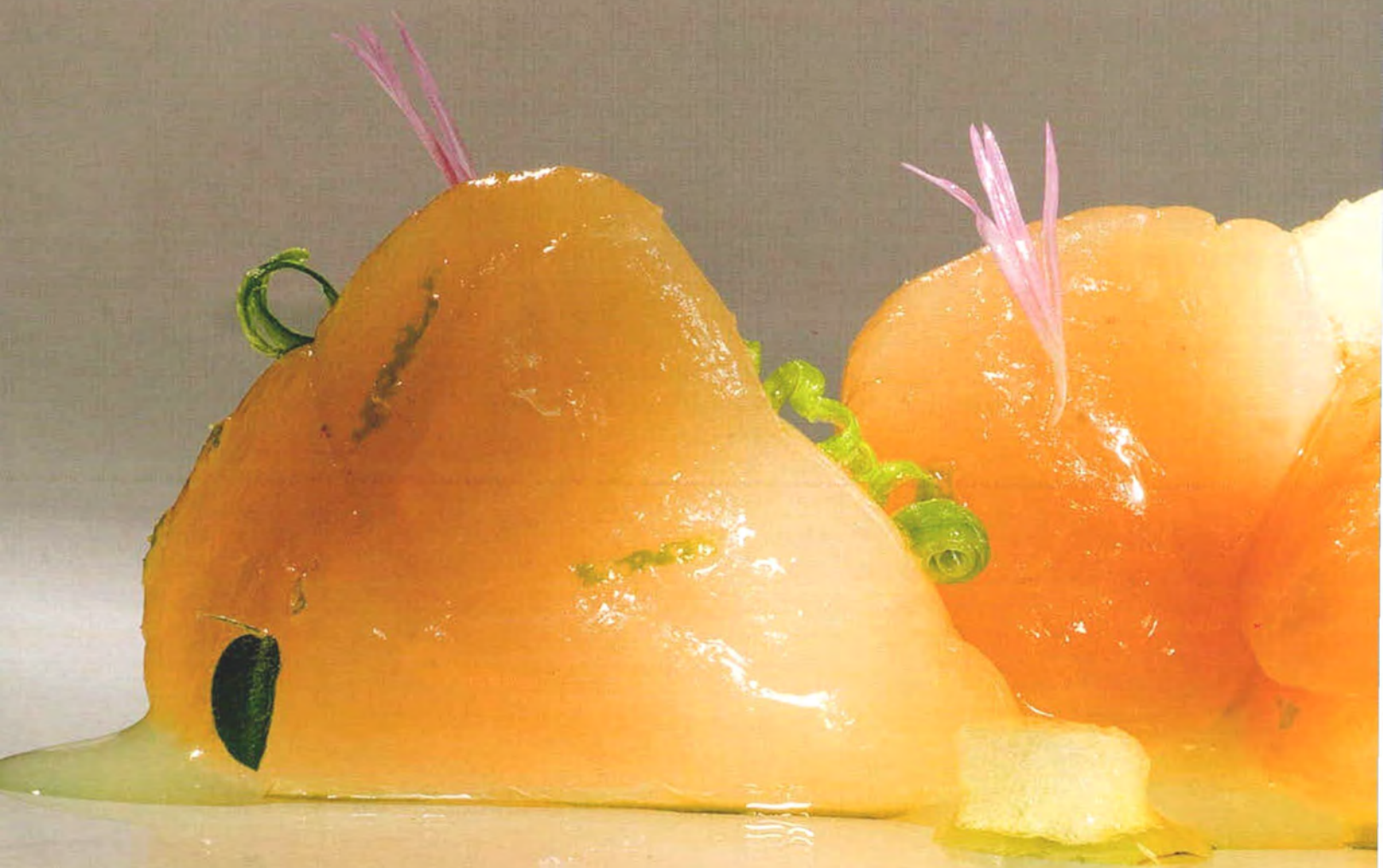
1 hour 40 minutes

Cooking time

45 minutes

Recommended wine

Goliardo Caño 06, by Bodegas Forjas del Salnés (DO Rías Baixas). Raúl Pérez and Rodrigo Méndez have given a new lease of life to Galicia's native Caño variety, helping the DO Rías Baixas reinvent itself with wines like this one. Creativity and originality in a wine that stands in a class of its own, this purebred Atlantic wine links up the contrasting flavors in this dish—smoke and fruit, coals and acidity. The peppers are clearly influenced by the vine wood fragrances.



Girdled scallops with fleur de sel

lime, apple and Arbequina oil
*(Vieira lañada con flor de sal,
lima, manzana y arbequina)*

After numerous experiments with scallops, we have now found an excellent formula in which fleur de sel plays a leading role. And the combination of the acidic Granny Smith apple with the scallops is perfect.

SERVES 4

For the scallop marinade: 4 scallops; 250 g / 9 oz sugar; 1 kg / 2 1/4 lb fleur de sel; 4 limes; 2 grapefruits; 15-20 Jamaica peppercorns; 12 juniper berries; Arbequina extra virgin olive oil; black pepper; cardoon petals.

For the apple jelly: 2 Granny Smith apples; ascorbic acid; xanthan.

Scallop marinade

Carefully trim the scallops, keeping just the muscle flesh. Prepare a marinade with the fleur de sel, sugar, the juice and skins of the limes and grapefruits, juniper and Jamaica pepper. Soak the scallop flesh in this mixture for 20 minutes, remove and wipe off the marinade.

Apple jelly

Liquidize the apples except for one slice, and immediately add the ascorbic acid and xanthan. Cut the remaining slice en brunoise and place in extra virgin Arbequina oil.

To serve

Cut each scallop into four and arrange on the base of a soup dish. Add a few drops of extra virgin Arbequina olive oil and the brunoise of Granny Smith apple, the black pepper, cardoon petals and apple jelly.

Preparation time

30 minutes

Cooking time

20 minutes

Recommended wine

Contraaparede 04 (DO Rías Baixas), by Adegas Dos Eidos. This winery, located on the slopes leading down to the sea in the district of Padriñán, is considered the superior representative of the new Albariño school.

The nose suggests the characteristics of the local soil, with touches of granite, wild herbs and salinity. The iodine notes that come from the nearby sea enhance the citric flavors in the dish. These, together with the apple, give freshness and harmony, bringing out the full flavor of the scallop.



New US factory for Palacios Alimentación

"Setting up this new plant in Miami means that we now have a production facility closer to the growing American market and the countries on the continent, from Canada to Chile, and can therefore be nimbler in our response to their requirements," explains Florencio Lázaro, financial director of Palacios Alimentación, summing up the *raison d'être* of the company's new 5,257,000 euros factory in Florida. It replaces the old factory used by Palacios until October 31st last year (the Spanish company acquired it in 2005 after purchasing the US company, Elore Enterprises). The new 2,500 sq m (26,909 sq ft) premises will produce *chorizo* (a type of red sausage), *morcilla* (blood sausage) and other Spanish charcuterie classics, plus more recent additions to the range such as *rosas* (filled bread rings) sold in the US market as "spanwiches". The group's US-produced range will be rounded out by Palacios brand chorizo and cured pork loin imported directly from Spain.

Text

Santiago Sánchez Segura/©ICEX

Translation

Hawys Pritchard/©ICEX

Illustrations

AVI

On the Move

Date of foundation: 1983

Activity: Producing and marketing refrigerated agri-foods

Workforce: 600 employees

Turnover for 2008: 130 million euros

Export quota: 8%

www.palacios.es

East meets West at Ossiano

Catalan superchef Santi Santamaria has opened a new restaurant—Ossiano—in Dubai, his first international venture. Santamaria is a leading light in Spain's food firmament, where his four restaurants have been awarded seven Michelin stars between them. He is personally involved in running Ossiano, the concept behind which is to bridge the East-West cultural divide: it uses local ingredients—dates, citrus fruits, mint, couscous, sumac—in combination with Mediterranean products brought in weekly from Spain. Pride of place on the wine list goes to the Cuvée Santamaria collection, designed by the chef himself and Joan Carles Ibáñez, sommelier at his flagship restaurant, Can Fabes.

The food at Ossiano is in Santamaria's signature style—what he calls "the real thing"—for which his Spanish restaurants are famous. The entire culinary team has been trained at Can Fabes, and Santamaria will visit the UAE at least four times a year to keep a close eye on quality.

He sees the venture as "a major challenge, given our location within such a huge complex" (his debut restaurant is in the luxurious Atlantis The Palm resort). Ossiano's décor—an evocation of the mythological underwater world of Atlantis—is quite an experience in itself: diners are surrounded by glass panels that look into the Ambassador Lagoon, a vast aquarium containing 250 marine species including sharks, rays, eels, piranhas and other exotica.

Date of foundation (Ossiano): 2008

Workforce: 48 employees

Santi Santamaria's restaurants: Four in Spain (Can Fabes, Santceloni, Evo and Tierra) and one in Dubai (Ossiano)

Annual turnover: 35 million euros

Brands: Cuvée Santamaria (wines and cava) and Gourmand Santamaria (gourmet food)

www.atlantisthepalm.com/diningentertainment.aspx

www.canfabes.com/santisantamaria



Casa Riera Ordeix launches in KaDeWe

Since early this year, distribution company Antonio Viani Importe has been marketing products by Casa Riera Ordeix (a Catalan firm) in Germany. Under the terms of the agreement, the former has added the latter's top-



quality, guaranteed authentic *Legítimo Salchichón de Vic* sausage to its product range, while Casa Riera Ordeix has succeeded in its quest for a local operator whose business approach is in tune with its own.

Via the German distributor, Casa Riera Ordeix's *salchichón* and *fuet* sausages have been launched in upmarket shops such as Berlin's gourmet mecca, KaDeWe, thereby lengthening the list of prestigious European establishments that carry products by these Catalan master charcutiers (Harrods in London, Galeries Lafayette in Paris and El Club del Gourmet in Spain and Portugal have stocked them for some time).

The arrangement also represents a step

forward in the company's designs on central Europe. Despite its traditional predilection for strongly-flavored smoked charcuterie, this is currently a market full of potential for top-of-the-range cured meat products. With an eye to the future, Casa Riera Ordeix is already poised to venture into other priority markets such as the US, Russia and Japan. All this activity is underpinned by the company's guiding principle, which is to make the best products and sell them at the best shops in the world.

Date of foundation: 1852

Activity: Manufacturing and marketing charcuterie

Workforce: 20 employees

Turnover for 2007: 1.8 million euros

Export quota: 20%

www.cro.es

5J ham: At home in Harrods

The Osborne Group has opened its first restaurant outside Spain. Though quintessentially Spanish in both food and atmosphere, The Ibérico Ham House is located in Harrods, one of London's most iconic landmarks and shopping destinations.

The menu is the work of top Spanish restaurateur, Pepe Rodríguez Rey (of one-Michelin-star El Bohío restaurant in Illescas, central Spain). As in the group's 15 restaurants in Spain, star billing is given to *jamón 5J*, a cured ham that many connoisseurs consider to be among the best in the world. 5J (*cinco jotas* in Spanish) is acorn-fed



Ibérico cured ham, obtained from thoroughbred pigs fed exclusively acorns and herbs found naturally in the wooded scrubland where they range freely, and selected by the master *jamoneros* (ham specialists) at Sánchez Romero Carvajal, a member company of the Osborne Group.

The menu at The Ibérico Ham House includes traditional favorites such as *croquetas de jamón* (cured ham croquettes), *salmorejo andaluz* (a denser version of *gazpacho*) and more elaborate dishes such as *menestra de verduras 5J* (a fresh vegetable medley cooked with 5J ham), *costilla de cerdo ibérico* (Ibérico pork rib) and a particularly good *tarta de verduras* (vegetable pie).

Date of foundation: 1772

Activity: Selecting, manufacturing and marketing foodstuffs and beverages

Workforce: 1,000 employees

Turnover for 2007: 280 million euros

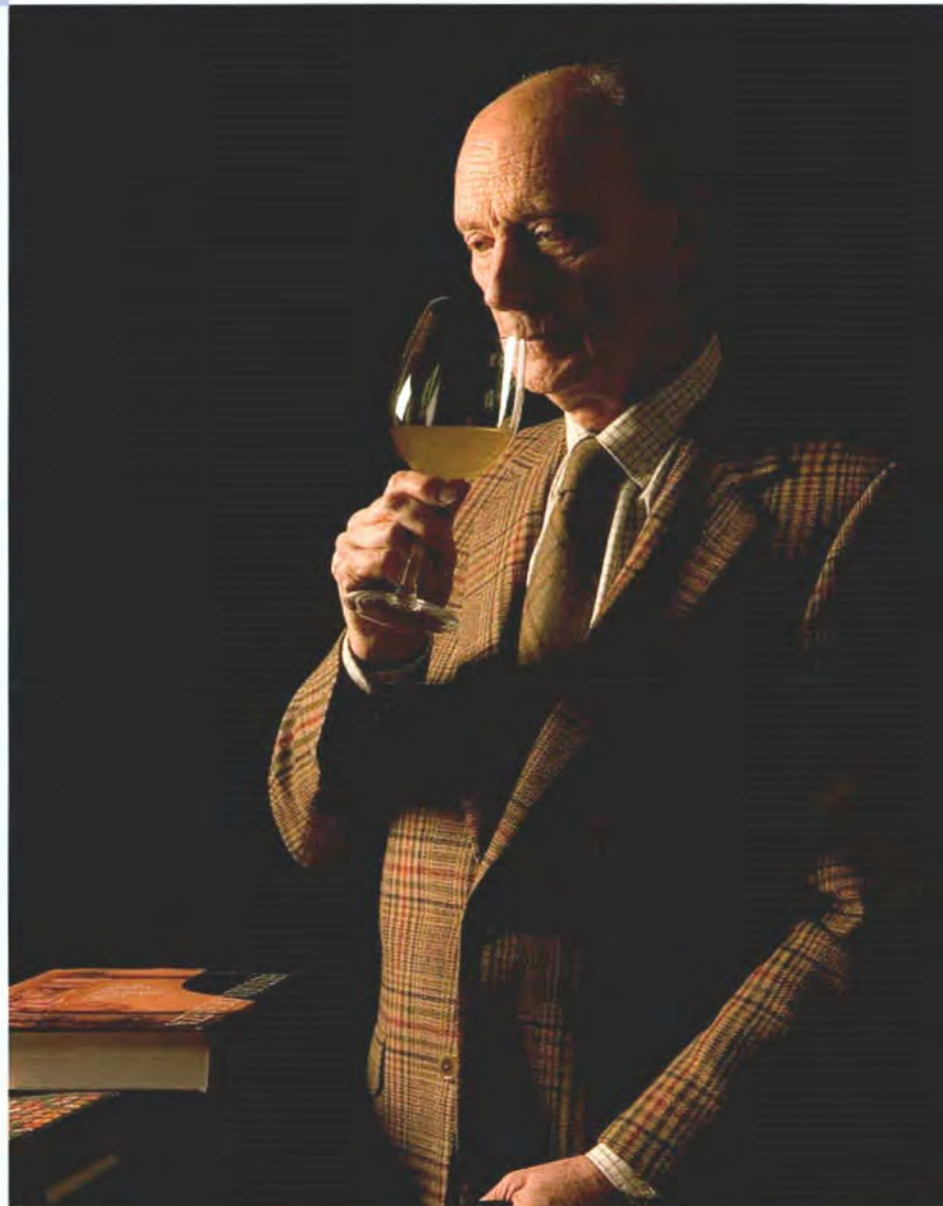
www.osborne.es



Family Jewels

CASTILLO DE CANENA

Olive oil company Castillo de Canena is named after the seat in a little town in Jaén (southern Spain) of a family whose connections with the product stretch back as far as 1780. The company controls the entire production process of its extra virgin olive oils, whose fine quality has taken them to over 35 countries all over the world and won the Coq d'Or prize awarded by the *Guide des Gourmands*. Furthermore, this is an environmentally-friendly company committed to sustainable development: its three photovoltaic plants keep it self-sufficient in electricity, and it is also pioneering a scheme to create a torrefaction plant so that pruning remains can be capitalized on.





TEXT

ALMUDENA MUÑOZ/©ICEX

TRANSLATION

HAWYS PRITCHARD/©ICEX

PHOTOS

CASTILLO DE CANENA

Madrid in the depths of winter. The spacious drawing room with its glowing fireplace is a welcoming sight, and delightfully warm after the bitter cold outside. I'm at Rosa Vañó's house, which serves as Castillo de Canena's HQ in Madrid: from here, she coordinates commercial activities at national and international levels, and organizes the various launches and presentations that the company stages for the extra virgin olive oils it produces in the little town of Canena, in Jaén province (southern Spain). The table has been set for breakfast, and features prominently the trademark cherry red bottles designed by Sara Navarro (a Spanish fashion designer whose work has shared the catwalk with that of John Galiano and Martine Sitbon) for the Primer Día de Cosecha (First Day of Harvest) collection of oils, the third edition of which has just hit the marketplace. Slices of country bread (some toasted, some not) and tomatoes are the next things to catch the eye. Ooh, and there's a homemade sponge cake, completing the still life. I wait to follow Rosa's lead: ignoring the tomato for the moment, we start by tasting just bread and extra virgin Arbequina olive oil. "Note the hints of green apple and artichoke. It starts off elegantly in the mouth and is sweet to the palate, though you'll notice that, gradually, a slight piquancy sets in, and a barely perceptible touch of

bitterness," she says instructively. Meanwhile, she also manages to tell me how her nearly ten years of experience as a marketing manager for The Coca-Cola Company taught her to communicate positive values, identify with the consumer, professional or otherwise, keep a close eye on quality and, above all, made her realize the importance of emotional resonances. Indeed, it was these, fuelled by an existential reassessment triggered by turning 40, that led to her setting up the Castillo de Canena Olive Juice company with her brother, Francisco Vañó. "At 40, you feel mature and resourceful: it's a time to stop and think about what you want to do with the rest of your life. And the idea of going into business together and doing something that revived the old family connection with olives appealed to us. We decided that he would see to the land and the oil mill and I would do the marketing and selling," recalls Rosa. The scheme was not something conjured up out of the blue, but rather

it was underpinned by the notion of honoring the family's olive-growing tradition, which dates back to 1780. "My father, who is an economist and a lawyer, is quite a connoisseur of olives and olive oils, but until five years ago he produced only bulk oil. My brother and I left our respective jobs with multinational companies with the clearly-defined objective of creating a brand that would become a world yardstick for top-of-the-range extra virgin olive oils. It was a tall order, but not an impossible one given that we control the whole quality chain: growing, milling, storing, packing and selling."

Product, innovation and image

We take a break from the company's background story to focus on the next round of toast, over which we drizzle extra virgin Picual olive oil. This time, I have to be on the sensory alert for "...balsamic aromas with hints of peppermint, mint and a touch of citrus, and the nicely balanced bitterness and piquancy making their presence felt in the mouth." As I grapple with the finer points, Rosa explains how excellence in the end product begins with the work carried out in the olive groves: "Our estate, which is right in the heart of the Guadalquivir Valley (which traverses



Andalusia, in southern Spain, from east to west) is irrigated by water from the Guadiana Menor River. Using a drip fertirrigation system sweetens our harvests and keeps things on an even keel, guaranteeing that our product is consistent and its aromas and flavors stable, harvest after harvest. On the basis of an integrated production system, we draw up a template for the harvest in advance, and we monitor the olives constantly and exhaustively so that we can spot when the fruit reaches the optimal degree of ripeness and development. We collect the olives manually or using vibrating equipment and umbrella-like mesh catchers, and we transport them to the mill in under three hours, where they are milled immediately in chilled conditions, thereby guaranteeing that our extra virgin olive oils are fresh, wholesome

and low in acidity." The process continues in the cellar, which is climate-controlled: it is equipped with completely inert stainless steel tanks which ensure that none of the oils' organoleptic properties are lost before bottling. Furthermore, the bottling process includes the addition of a little dose of (completely harmless) nitrogen to each bottle to protect against oxidation.

"At the moment we're looking into using new gases that are less volatile than nitrogen and effective for longer," Rosa informs me. Evidently, the company's commitment to excellence applies to innovative techniques as much as to the product itself. "We export by sea to countries such as Japan, Brazil and Canada, and we're currently doing research into new packaging made out of

materials—unfamiliar to the olive oil sector—that withstand the rigors of sea transport better." Meanwhile, there is a cosmetics project afoot in conjunction with a few laboratories, and an experiment using differentiated growing techniques for different types of olives.

For Rosa Vañós, all roads lead back to marketing: product and innovation must be backed up by image, and that image must be uncluttered and communicate certain messages. The company's extra virgin olive oils certainly illustrate her principles: the Castillo de Canena Reserva Familiar, which comes in Arbequina and Picual varieties, is understated in presentation and features the eponymous family castle on its label. (Built in the 15th century on the site of an old Arab building which itself had stood on the

I N D E T A I L

CASTILLO DE CANENA
RESERVA FAMILIAR

This is the first extra virgin olive oil to have taken the Coq d'Or prize awarded by Paul Bocuse's *Guide des Gourmands*.

- **Picual varietal**

Description: The fruits of this variety are large, elongated and pointed. The trees are open in habit with structurally arranged branches, and are a bright silvery color.

Tasting notes: This oil is a lovely, bright golden yellow color with warm green hues. In the nose, it starts off complex and individual, with a wealth of elegant notes: artichoke, eucalyptus, lettuce and traces of peppermint, basil and rosemary. It is nicely harmonious in the mouth, with delicious suggestions of ripe banana, newly-cut grass, and touches of sweet almond at the finish.

- **Arbequina varietal**

Description: The fruits of this variety are small and round. The tree is medium-sized, leafy and dark green in color.

Tasting notes: Within its notably intense flavor and exceptional fruitiness in the nose and mouth, this full-bodied oil is remarkably delicate, well-rounded and complex. Its luscious vegetal aromas are suggestive of lemon peel, lemon verbena, tomato leaf and olives. The flavor develops in the mouth, progressing from a velvety start through to an explosion of green impressions underpinned by an elegant bitterness and a cheeky, piquant finish.

PRIMER DÍA DE COSECHA

Olive oil meets the art world for the third year in a row at Castillo de Canena with a 20,000-bottle run bearing a label by chic jewelry designer, Joaquín Berao. He follows in the footsteps of bullfighter Enrique Ponce and fashion designer Sara Navarro (creator of the distinctive red bottle).

- **Picual varietal**

Harvest: Early November

Tasting notes: This is a bright green oil of medium intensity, green olive fruitiness. It is highly aromatic and quite complex in the nose—balsamic with a hint of peppermint, mint and a zing of citrus. In the mouth it is well structured and long lasting, with a very nice balance between bitterness and piquancy.

- **Arbequina varietal**

Harvest: Late October

Tasting notes: This oil has the smoothly fruity aromas of fresh olives, with slight hints of green apple and artichoke and the slightly piquant nuance that one expects of Arbequina oils from the Jaén region: they contain a high proportion of oleic acid and polyphenols, which make them exceptionally stable. It starts elegantly in the mouth, fluid and sweet on the palate, though with a hint of piquancy and a barely perceptible bitter note gradually making their presence felt.

ACEITES DEL SIGLO XXI

This collection is intended as a group of oils suitable for different uses, each with its own particular added value: a new take on using and appreciating extra virgin olive oil.

- **Royal Temprano**

This oil is obtained from early Royal olives, a variety native to Jaén province. This variety was grown in ever-decreasing quantities from the late 19th-early 20th century on, to the point of almost becoming extinct: there are barely 1,200 ha (2,965 acres) of Royal olive trees there today. The decline can be attributed to the fact that its fruit is difficult to harvest and yields less oil than other varieties, such as Picual.

Description: Royal olives are large, egg-shaped and pointed, and turn purple to black when ripe. The tree is of medium vigor, open in habit with pendulous branches and a dense canopy. It develops a prolific root system and has thicker, tougher leaves than Picual and is better equipped to survive long periods of drought.

Tasting notes: This green, golden-tinged oil is remarkably elegant in the mouth, just slightly bitter and with the slightest prickle of piquancy. It is highly fragrant, with three complex aromas emerging: artichoke, green banana and fresh grass. The fact that it possesses all three of these extra virgin olive oil characteristics endows it with huge personality which lingers on in a long finish.





site of a former Roman *castro*, the castle was declared a National Monument in 1931 and is considered to be one of the finest examples of Andalusian Renaissance architecture). Primer Día de Cosecha oils, again Arbequina and Picual varieties, are more flamboyant in their appeal, the tone having been set by the cherry red bottle designed for their launch by Sara Navarro; Aceites del Siglo XXI (21st-Century Oils), a collection whose

first oil (a Royal Temprano varietal) has just been released onto the market, comes in a black, rounded bottle with white text.

Worldwide market

As she finishes her description of the Castillo de Canena range, Rosa reaches for the sponge cake that has been waiting in the wings during our typical Andalusian breakfast. She

gives me a piece to taste, explaining that it's made with Reserva Familiar extra virgin Picual olive oil instead of butter, spelt flour and brown sugar "...much better for you, and easier to digest." It is light and really delicious. She goes on to point out that our breakfast exemplifies new uses for olive oil, and replicates a technique that the company uses abroad: "It's what we do with foreign chefs when we're opening up new markets. We work with them to find out how our oils can be used to enhance local dishes. No one can put the qualities of our product across as well as we can." And it pays off: in Japan they use Castillo de Canena Reserva Familiar in marinades, mixed with soy sauce, and in seaweed dishes: "Some are very bland and others are too salty: in both cases, extra virgin Arbequina olive oil redresses the balance." In Russia, they use it in the most basic examples of their cuisine: in vegetable (especially cabbage) dishes, and in purées and thick soups, such as beetroot. In the UK, patisserie and dessert chefs have been replacing saturated and polyunsaturated fats with extra virgin olive oil "...especially Picual oil, because it has an extra piquancy." In the US and Norway it is used for marinades, for barbecue foods in the former, and for herring and salmon in the latter, where it makes "a perfect mixture with dill and sugar."

CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Castillo de Canena's policy of environmental awareness is exemplified by its three operational photovoltaic energy plants, capable of generating 300 KW, which make it electrically self-sufficient for fertirrigation of the olive groves. In addition to this sustainable development initiative, the company has an integrated production farming certificate, to rationalize the use of phytosanitary products; maintains vegetal cover throughout the farm, which obviates the indiscriminate use of herbicides, reduces soil erosion and preserves the native herbaceous vegetation; and also uses pruning remains as biomass to be used as a non-pollutant ecological fuel.

The company has entered into an agreement with the Geopónica firm to make use of pruning remains, entailing the installation of a torrefaction plant for turning them into ecological fuel in the form of charcoal briquettes.





The same idea is given a different slant for what Rosa calls "Open Days": days when journalists, chefs, buyers and opinion leaders in general are invited in for an oil tasting, followed by a drinks and snacks party at which the food (cheeses marinated in oil, chicken wings sautéed in Picual olive oil, Arbequina olive oil soufflés...) showcases the company's extra virgin olive oils. They have staged these in places as far-flung as Hong Kong, Dubai, Japan, the United States, Mexico, France and the United Kingdom. "The most recent one was the event we held in London at the end of last year, at Ibérica (the Spanish food and wine center on Great Portland Street). It got a lot of coverage, including a report in *The Times*."

A room at the company's productive HQ, the actual Castillo de Canena, has been fitted out with public relations events in mind. I was shown around it some months ago by Francisco: a large space located in the lower reaches of the castle, it is almost certainly a former cool room where foodstuffs were stored. The fact that the temperature remains stable all year round makes it perfect for tastings and meetings, added interest and atmosphere being provided by a little collection of olive oils from around the world and the press reports about the company throughout its history that line the walls.

All told, it comes as no surprise to learn that Castillo de Canena extra virgin olive oils have a presence in over 35 countries: upmarket food shops such as Fortnum & Mason (suppliers to the British Royal Family) stock them in the UK, while John Williams, Chairman of the Academy of Culinary Arts and chef at the London Ritz, uses them prominently in his cooking; in the US they are sold at Whole Foods Market, Williams-Sonoma (the leading chain of gourmet food shops) and the New York restaurant Daniel; Joel Robuchon's restaurant L'Atelier in Paris; at the Palacio de Hierro department stores in Mexico; in Russia at the Globos Gourmet chain; and at the 7-star Burj Al Arab hotel in Dubai.

Rosa is also keen to mention: "Our extra virgin olive oil has been selected by Harrods to be sold as 'Made by the Vañó Family for Harrods'." The UK is, in fact, Castillo de Canena's most important market, with sales in 2008 totaling 110,000 euros. Future plans include bringing out a range of "signature" oils and promoting "monovarietals" made from Andalusian varieties Hojiblanca, Arbequina, Manzanilla Sevillana and Pico Limón, which will join Royal in the Aceites del Siglo XXI collection. Rosa, recently voted Businesswoman of the Year for 2008 by Fedepe (the Spanish Federation of Managerial, Executive, Professional and Business

Women) views all these changes philosophically: "The important thing is what we are, not what we aren't. We must stay true to the essentials."

Almudena Muyo spent twelve years as a journalist specializing in international trade before taking up her current position as editorial coordinator of Spain Gourmetour.

C A S T I L L O D E C A N E N A

CASTILLO DE CANENA

Date of foundation: 2003

Activity: growing, milling, storing, packaging and selling extra virgin olive oil

Workforce: 75 employees

Turnover: 900,000 euros

Export quota: 50%

Main export markets: France, Japan, Russia, UK, US

Head office

Remedios, 4

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STILL LIFE

with Watermelons and Apples
in a Landscape

For this issue of *Spain Gourmetour*, circulated during the summer months in the northern hemisphere, we have chosen a refreshing, summery painting. It features the most emblematic of summer fruits: the watermelon. A skilled combination of light and shade makes the fruits stand out against the shadowy landscape in the background. Beside them, with every detail of their texture portrayed, lies a group of apples.

Luis Meléndez (1716 -1780)

Luis Meléndez is considered Spain's most important still life painter of the 18th century, and in 2004 was showcased by the Prado Museum in its exhibition, *Luis Meléndez. Still Lifes*. The son of a painter from Asturias (northern Spain), he was

born in Naples, Italy, where his father was working, and came to Spain at the age of one. In 1748 he traveled back to Naples to complete his training, and then returned to Spain in 1753 during the reign of Ferdinand VI (1713-1759), for whom he worked on commissions.

It was during the reign of Charles III (1716-1788) that Meléndez started to specialize in still lifes, including the series he dedicated to the Prince of Asturias, the king's son.



Photo
© Prado National Museum,
Madrid, Spain

Translation
Jenny McDonald/©ICEX

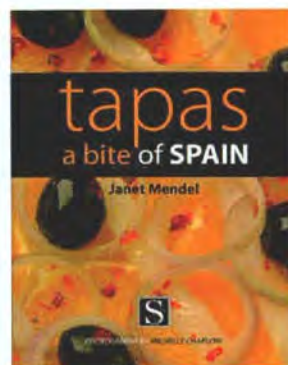
Still Life with Watermelons and Apples in a Landscape / 1771 / Oil on canvas, 63 x 84 cm
© Prado National Museum, Madrid, Spain

LASTING IMPRESSIONS

Text
Samara Kamenecka/
©ICEX



El Celler de Can Roca, una sinfonia fantástica (El Celler de Can Roca, a Fantastic Symphony) by Jaume Coll. Spanish. August 1986. Gerona, Spain. The three Roca brothers, Joan, Josep and Jordi, hatched a brilliant idea: opening a restaurant. And thus, El Celler de Can Roca was born. This book tells its 20+ year history and discusses the culinary knowledge, imagination, and steadfast commitment to avant-garde techniques and concepts that have made it a success. With seasonal recipes to boot (try Adaptation of Calvin Klein's perfume Eternity or Truffle, anchovy, Merlot), El Celler is nothing short of a symphony where three musicians bring every aspect together in perfect harmony. Do your five senses a favor and check out this book. (Edicions Domeny, www.cellercanroca.com, info@cellercanroca.com)



Tapas, a Bite of Spain by Janet Mendel. English. Few would argue that the essence of Spain lies in the tradition of tapas, and what better way to bring this Iberian treasure into your home than with 140 awesome tapas recipes. Mendel offers extensive information on the custom, a guide to Spanish cheeses, helpful kitchen tips, a glossary, tapas party menus, and a wine guide, in addition to delicious suggestions such as broad beans sautéed with ham, and potato tortilla with chorizo and chard. The recipes are all based on traditional Spanish products, none are especially labor intensive, measurements are expressed in metric, British and American systems, and recipes are organized by the way they are prepared and served (on toast, on a stick, in cold salad, hot off the grill, etc.). ¡Buen provecho! (Ediciones Santana, S.L., www.santanabooks.com, info@santanabooks.com)



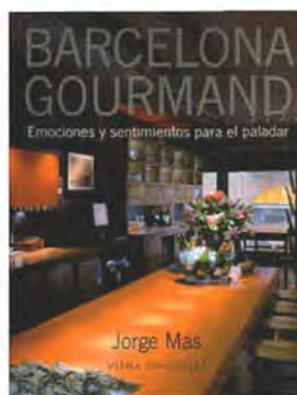
2009 Repsol Guide. English, Spanish. This road atlas for Spain, Portugal, Andorra and Southern France, until now known as *Guía Campsa*, has been around for three decades and comes complete with tourism information. Published for the first time in English (to complement the Spanish version), this text includes the particulars on more than 1,000 tourist hotspots, 2,000 hotels, and 2,000 restaurants selected by the Royal Spanish Academy of Gastronomy. It comes with two more publications: the traditional Guide to the Best Spanish—Wines, and the new Guide to Routes with a Denomination of Origin. Don't give it a second thought: get out there and follow the advice of one of the most well-traveled guidebooks in all of Spain. (Repsol YPF, www.guiarepsol.com)



A fuego negro, pintxos y viñetas (*A Fuego Negro, Pintxos and Cartoons*) by Iñigo Cojo, Amaia Garcia and Edorta Lamo. Spanish. Creativity abounds in this text, where comic book meets cookbook. The authors offer a different perspective of the Basque *pintxos* culture (specifically, Donostiarra), where every recipe is the fruit of a story, and every story comes as a drawing. These gastronomic suggestions—shot glass appetizers, salads, etc.—fuse tradition with modernity in 100 delectable recipes. Try the watermelon, feta cheese and mint; fruit and flower salad with essence of tequila; or roast beef with red pepper marmalade and an herb veil. Smiles will be twofold: one for the food and one for the comic. (Editorial Everest, S.A., www.everest.es)



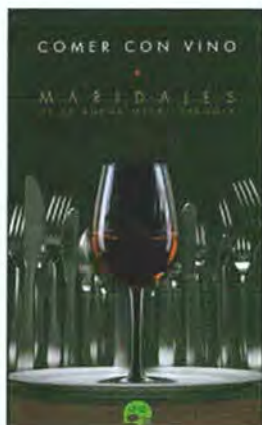
The Perfect Marriage: the Art of Matching Food and Sherry Wines from Jerez. English. The latest trend in eating is the sampler menu, which offers a succession of small, tapas-style dishes together with their best accompaniment—sherry! Behind this book is Britain's top chef, Heston Blumenthal, and here he features more than 50 recipes and detailed insight on sherry pairings from 15 of the best chefs in the UK, including Fergus Hendersen, Peter Gordon and Skye Gyngell. Sherry, with so much complexity and its range of styles, is the perfect partner for tasting. From the coriander chicken tikka with oloroso to the poached cherries and goats' cheese salad with parma ham and manzanilla, this open invitation to experiment with combinations will have your mouth watering in record time. (Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., www.simonsays.co.uk)



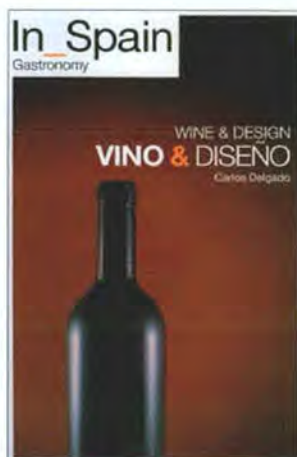
Barcelona gourmand, emociones y sentimientos para el paladar (*Barcelona Gourmand, A Palate's Emotions and Sentiments*) by Jorge Mas. Spanish. This exquisite book offers a beautiful presentation of select places in Barcelona that prioritize quality and strive to transmit their passion for gastronomy to customers. They are Spain's flavor ambassadors. Mas offers an exclusive look at Barcelona's most emblematic restaurants, delicatessens, specialty stores, bakeries, tea shops and bodegas that share three common keys to success: a unique space, the best products and service, and sincere enjoyment from doing what they do well. From Da Giorgio to Küppers & Sson, the vivid photographs make you feel as if you were inside each shop, and you'll feel an urge to walk up the counter and order some Iberian ham/gourmet chocolates/wine. (Viena Ediciones, viena@vienaeditorial.com, www.vienaeditorial.com)



Cocina para cualquier ocasión (*Cuisine for Any Occasion*) by Mario Sandoval. Spanish. Signature cuisine for everyone: that's the proposal of Mario Sandoval, the youngest Michelin-star chef, as he presents his top recipes for any occasion. His more than 60 dishes offer modern combinations and original creations, with step-by-step written and visual explanations of the most complicated techniques, as well as advice and ideas for being the best host and improving your skills in the kitchen. Salmon carpaccio with mango and vanilla vinaigrette, and pasta salad with bacon and yogurt sauce are just two delicious suggestions. Whether its Sunday brunch, lunch with the in-laws or dinner with the boss, his complete menus will save you time, not to mention wow your guests! (Libros Cúpula, www.libroscupula.com; Scyla Editores, S.A., www.scyla.com)



Comer con vino (Dining with Wine) by Pepe Iglesias. Spanish. Remember those old rules, white wine with fish and red wine with meat? Iglesias maintains that we need to move beyond those stereotypes and start matching the right wine with the right dish. In this text he guides readers through the marriage process, highlighting the subtleties of specific Spanish dishes and explaining the reasons behind each pairing with fantastic detail. He offers an overview of the types of wines to drink with everything from salads and soups to cheeses and rice dishes, and even includes a selection of recipes. Did you know that smoked salmon goes hand in hand with a dry sparkling wine, and dark chocolate brownies are scrumptious with a glass of muscatel? If not, read on... (Asturias Gastronómica, s.l., webmaster@pepeiglesias.net, www.encyclopediadegastronomia.es)



In_Spain. Vino & Diseño (In_Spain. Wine & Design) by Carlos Delgado. English, Spanish. *In_Spain* is a series of books that brings together businesses and products that represent the country. This particular book features Spain's most avant-garde wineries, stretching from Cádiz to Cuenca and from La Rioja to Burgos, with breathtaking photographs and information on the winery, its history, the process, the technology, the final product(s) and the people behind it all. Articles include "Adegas Moure: the power of landscape", "Irius: bioclimatic architecture", and "Gonzalez Byass: the temple of sherry wines". Spanish wines are a leading light not only due to their outstanding quality, but also due to the design of the wineries where they are produced, so get ready for some fascinating stories and some mind-blowing infrastructure. (Udyat 2008, www.in-spainonline.com, comunicacion@in-spainonline.com)



In_Spain. Quesos & Paisajes (In_Spain. Cheese & Landscapes) by Enric Canut. English, Spanish. Step into the wonderful world of cheese with this book, which maintains that cheese is the result of a culture of subsistence and behind each and every one there is a story and a landscape that has been constructed over time. From "PDO Queso Alt Urgell y Cerdanya: the humanized Pyrenees" to "Asturian cheeses: the land of 40 cheeses", learn about production processes, regional histories and their resulting cheeses, a variety of different types, brilliant cheese makers, and much more. These tales, anecdotes and photos about the twists and turns of geography aim to bring the tastes and aromas of Spain's many cheeses right into your mouth. (Udyat 2008, www.in-spainonline.com, comunicacion@in-spainonline.com)



Quique Dacosta 2000-2006. English-French, Spanish-Italian. This project, like its subject, is completely cutting edge: it fuses book and website (www.quiquedacosta.com) into a single forum, presenting the singular work of chef Quique Dacosta. The mastermind behind El Poblet (Alicante), here he shares more than 90 recipes, complete with complementary videos online. This text also discusses his background, the culinary ecosystem in which he works, his dedication to research, milestones achieved at his restaurant, and his historic importance in the culinary world. You'll be dazzled by the recipes (cherry gazpacho with prawns; cuttlefish eggs with pepper vodka emulsion), the presentation, and Dacosta himself, who raises the bar on a daily basis. (Montagud Editores, S.A., www.montagud.com)

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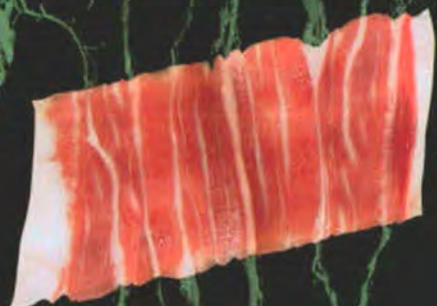
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