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Algunas Repercusiones: MICHAEL FRANZ



Verdejo from Rueda: Spain's Best White?

By Michael Franz

A key aspect of the amazing renaissance in Spanish wine during the past 15 years has been the emergence of world-class white table wines made from indigenous grapes. Not long ago, white Spanish table wines were quite rare in export markets, often limited to whites from Rioja that were boringly bland or lamentably oaky. For all but the geekiest of consumers, Spanish wine was either red or it was sherry--which many didn't regard as wine at all.

This situation has changed dramatically during the past decade, and today Spain exports hundreds of thousands of cases of white table wine to a single country like the United States. An impressively large proportion of this is premium wine, as much more of it is priced above \$12 than below. Now that Spanish whites are available in significant numbers, attention has inevitably turned to evaluating them comparatively. Similarly, particular regions exporting whites from Spain have turned from selling themselves as curiosities and started seeking stature by claiming to be the best that the country can offer.

I heard such claims being made for renditions of Rueda's Verdejo grape while tasting extensively in the region last week, and I also tasted enough impressive wines to take the claim seriously. I found plenty of evidence to indicate that Verdejo from Rueda is indeed Spain's most consistent white. It is also probably the most versatile of the leading whites as a partner for different foods. Moreover, it offers the strongest value of the top contenders, with almost all of the wines priced in the teens, and many of the best clustered around \$15. But is it--all things considered--Spain's best?

Rueda is a legally delimited winegrowing region (or "D.O." in Spanish wine lingo) located northwest of Madrid in the province of Castilla y Leon. Wine grapes were grown there by the Romans, and it seems clear that the Verdejo grape was brought to the area by the Moors about ten centuries ago. Rueda is situated cheek-by-jowl with Toro, which is famed for robust reds, but almost everything vinous in Rueda is white. Although other grapes like Viura and Sauvignon Blanc are grown there (along with a few very rare red varieties), Verdejo has emerged as the undisputed star of the region. And when I say "undisputed," I mean it: I never heard anyone offer a single syllable in favor of anything else, whereas everyone working in Rueda seems to believe that Verdejo is their ticket to the top.



Days during the summer are hot and dry in Rueda, but that isn't the whole story in terms of climate. Summer arrives relatively late, and if you ever think about trying to catch some rays in this part of sunny Spain in May, you should think twice. Temperatures were still dipping to the freezing point at night last week, and I was hit by hailstorms on two occasions. Even during the summer, swings in temperature can be very dramatic--to the tune of 40 degrees Fahrenheit from day to night.

These wide swings are principally a function of altitude, and those who are unaware that Spain is essentially a giant plateau might be surprised to have a look at their airplane's altimeter after landing in Madrid. The Rueda D.O. ranges from about 2,200 feet near Valladolid to over 2,500 feet above sea level closer to Segovia, where one can find very old vines struggling to find warmth, water and nutrients at the margin of survivability.



Diurnal temperature swings are crucial for slowing the ripening process and helping the grapes retain their natural acidity. Climate aside, the Verdejo grape variety starts with a tendency to hold an abundance of acidity, which helps to explain how nervy whites can be made in such close proximity to the ripe reds of Toro.

Another piece of this puzzle is that nearly 90% of the appellation's grapes are machine harvested--rapidly--during the cool of the night.



This is the point in the daily cycle when the grapes are highest in acidity and in aromatic compounds. Only trellis-trained vines can be harvested in this way, whereas older, head-pruned vines must be picked by hand. However, virtually everyone agrees that old vines produce the most concentrated and flavorful fruit, and some plots of very old Verdejo vines are now being used for special high-end bottlings that are among the D.O.'s best.

The region is marked by modest internal diversity in terms of soils and microclimates. My sense is that there's more differentiation among the different sub-regions within Rias Baixas, which is home in Galicia to Albariño, Verdejo's best known rival. Similarly, there is more variation in growing conditions separating other Galician D.O.s such as Valdeorras and Ribeira Sacra, which is home to Godello, the third of Spain's leading trio of whites, as well as the less well-known Loureiro and Treixadura.



Nevertheless, differences in altitude make for notably warmer conditions near Valladolid than in the areas closer to Segovia, where harvesting can start as long as two weeks later. The three basic soil types are alluvial (i.e., rounded riverbed stones), sandy and calcareous (limestone). Stony soils with some sand content are considered the best, and zones with this profile are planted almost exclusively to Verdejo--which is a commentary on the primacy accorded to this variety.

If Verdejo from Rueda will be new to you, seek out a fresh rendition, which means 2009 vintage at the moment, with the new vintage becoming available each spring in export markets (though some producers actually bottle wines from the autumn harvest before the end of the calendar year for their Spanish customers).

Once you find one or two of these to try, which should you expect them to taste like? You'll usually see pale straw color, and find the wine light-bodied but leaning toward medium-bodied. The lead aroma is usually akin to dried herbs, with more subtle suggestions of flowers (especially lavender) and occasionally a suggestion of wild fennel or anise. The fruit flavors are usually suggestive of stone fruits, especially peaches or nectarines but sometimes fresh apricots, and you'll usually find citrus notes in the finish along with lots of zesty acidity. Some wines will show a hint of bitterness in the finish, and at low levels this can be interesting rather than off-putting, though many winemakers will leave just a little residual sugar in the wine to counter any bitterness.



Recommended 2009 Vintage Rueda Verdejo Wines

Outstanding (91 – 92 Points)

Azumbre "Viñedos Centenarios"
Blanco Nieva "Pie Franco"
Jose Pariente
"Mania" by Felix Lorenzo Cachazo
Villa Narcissa, by Javier Sanz

Excellent (89 – 90 Points)

Cantosá
Carrasviñas
Cimbron
Clavador
Emina
Ermita Veracruz
Esperanza
Felix Lorenzo Cachazo
Garcí Grande
Mantel Blanco
Martina Prieto



Martinsancho
"Mocén" by Bodegas Antano
Montespina
Naia
Oro de Castilla
Prado Rey
Protos
Quatro Rayas
Quatro Rayas "Viñedos Centenarios"
Shaya
Zapadorado

Very Good (87 – 88 Points)

Con Class
Marques de Irun
Marques de Riscal
Martivilli
Monte Alina
Palacio de Bornos
Reina de Castilla
Trascanpanas
Tres Olmos
Vicaral, by Vicente Sanz

Verdejo Fermentado en Barrica:

As in Rias Baixas or other white-dominated parts of Galicia, some winemakers in Rueda can't resist the temptation to barrel ferment some of their Verdejo and/or age it in French oak barrels. In my experience, this is almost invariably a bad idea with Albariño, which loses its subtle floral aromas and much of its linear drive when treated this way, and I've found no reason to believe that Godello is any better suited to barrel fermentation. I expected the same result with Verdejo, but actually found some oaked renditions that were very successful. Most are based on very concentrated fruit from old head-pruned vines, and when winemakers go easy on the oak, the resulting wines can show more substance on the palate and some interestingly spicy accents. This style poses no threat to the tank-fermented style in terms of prominence, and what little risk it poses for clarity of consumer expectations of Rueda Verdejo is certainly justified by how tasty and interesting the wines can be. Here are the best wines that I encountered in this style, with point scores in parentheses:



Marques de Riscal "Limousin" 2008 (88)
"Naiades" by Bodegas Naia 2005 (92)
"Naiades" by Bodegas Naia 2006 (91)
"Naiades" by Bodegas Naia 2007 (90)
"Naiades" by Bodegas Naia 2008 (90)
Jose Pariente 2008 (91)
"V3" Verdejo Vieilles Vignes by Sitios de Bodegas 2006 (88)

Returning to my initial question, my conclusion is that Rueda Verdejo really does merit serious consideration for the title of Spain's best white wine. In fairness, it must be said that the best renditions are no better than the best bottlings of Godello (e.g., "As Sortes" by Rafael Palacios) or Albariño (such as Pazo de Señorans or Fillaboa). However, Godello remains so rare that it can't compare favorably to Verdejo from Rueda, which is now being turned out by more than 50 wineries with an extremely high average of quality. Rias Baixas turns out lots of different Albariños, and the best of them are superb, but a distressingly high percentage of them are watery and lacking in aromatic impact and depth of flavor. Since Verdejo from Rueda is more consistent, more affordable, and at least as versatile with food, its claim to be Spain's best white is a strong one.



Algunas Repercusiones: MICHAEL CERVIN

RADIO

Hello All: Attached is the link to the radio show I did during our trip- May 6th Track 2.

The Tasting Panel article will be out next month and I will forward that as soon as I get it. The radio show reaches about 35,000 primarily in California and throughout Australia.

<http://www.aroundtheworldradio.com/aarchives.jsp?start=25>

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www.CervinItStraight.com

Author of the forthcoming Moon Travel Book-

"Santa Barbara & The Central Coast" (nationwide Nov/2010)

and "Blunted by Lunacy"---a short story collection (Nov/2010)



ARTÍCLOS ESCRITOS: INTERNET

Hello All: Here is one of the articles for Food & Beverage World from the Rueda trip.

<http://fbworld.com/2010/07/13/a-trip-through-spanish-wine-country-the-rueda-verdejo/>

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A Trip through Spanish Wine Country: the Rueda & Verdejo

in PLACES WINE EDUCATION by FBWorld Team — July 13, 2010 at 10:28 am | 0 comments





Spain is best known for their red wines of Rioja and Ribera del Duero; however the Rueda, located north east of Madrid, is home to Spain's best white wine, Verdejo. Similar in style and characteristics to Pinot Gris, Verdejo expresses itself with lemon and citrus, minerality and above all, a sharp, enticing acidity. Verdejo has been growing in Rueda for over a thousand years and it's believed it was brought to Spain by the Moors. Some vines, still producing are 130 years old. But the last few decades have seen Verdejo finally come into its own. "Verdejo is ideally suited to the poor soils and harsh environment in Rueda," says winemaker Pablo del Villar of Bodegas Hermanos del Villar. He refers to the stress on the vines caused by wide diurnal swings (daytime temperatures tumble more than 25 degrees at night) all of which helps to create the fundamental acidity that Verdejo is known for.

I visited Rueda in April, 2010 which gave me the opportunity to visit producers, winemakers and growers, and sample more than 100 Verdejos. Geographically, Rueda is unremarkable; mainly tedious flatlands, though 2,300 feet above sea level, and some areas even get snowfall. The majority of vineyards are bush types; low to the ground, vines and leaves strewn along the sandy, rocky soils in an attempt to absorb the sun. Palomino, Sauvignon Blanc and Viura are also planted here, but by comparison, they don't identify themselves as being from Rueda. There are 54 wineries operating, and only a handful of those allow public tastings. But things are changing. The grape is catching on everywhere, so much so that acreage has doubled since 2005.

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The barren rocky landscape of Rueda produces some exceptional wines



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At its best, Verdejo is sharp and clean with lemon and lime notes, a backbone of minerality and a potent acidity. That may sound simple, but crafting excellent wines is never a simple process. "Verdejo is our personality," says Juan de Benito Ozores, the director general of Bodegas Alvarez y Diez whose Montel Blanco wine is a great example of what Verdejo is capable of: simple, clean and pure. Yet many producers are trying barrel fermented versions and the results are less than spectacular; the oak simply overpowers the essence of the Verdejo grape. The vast majority of Verdejo is meant to be drunk young where the bright acids work best and the lively freshness of the wine is at its peak. Additionally, the local tapas in the area, most notably in the nearby city of Valladolid, such as white asparagus, chorizo, bacalau (deep fried cod) and torreznos (pan fried pork) are enhanced by this invigorating, firm young wine.



The mother and daughter winemaking team of Victoria (R) and Christina (L) Bodegas Jose Pariente

Some of the best producers of Verdejo include Bodegas Nain, Bodegas Nieva, the mother/daughter winemaking team at Jose Pariente, Bodegas Lorenzo Cachazo, and Bodegas Yllera. This isn't Napa; there are no picturesque tasting rooms dotting the landscape. There are, however, dedicated producers who are striving to perfect their grape. Victoria Pariente, winemaker at Jose Pariente, arguably one of the best Verdejo producers underscores why the wines from Rueda are gaining notoriety; simply put, the winemakers are paying strict attention to their signature grape, making certain the world knows when they reach for Verdejo – it's classic Verdejo they will get, not some funky blend or well-intentioned winery "project." Pariente sums up the nature of Verdejo poetically. "Wine is like a bear. When it is cold, the bear wants to hibernate. When it is warmer out, the bear is more active." The wines from Rueda are indeed active with wonderfully crafted juice that truly reflects a sense of place.

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A Trip through Spanish Wine Countr...

Article and Pictures by Michael Cervin



This massive vine is still producing grapes, 120 years after it was first planted

Michael Cervin has been writing about wine for over a decade. Notable publications include Decanter, Wine Enthusiast, Wine & Spirits, The Tasting Panel, and over 60 others. He is the restaurant critic and travel writer for the Santa Barbara News Press. He is a frequent judge at wine and food festivals including the Best of Vinho Verde Awards in Portugal, The Monterey Wine Competition, The Central Coast Wine Competition, and the Berkeley Springs International Water Tasting, among others. His forthcoming wine travel book, "Moon California Wine Country" will be published nationwide in April 2011. www.MichaelCervin.com

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Hello Everyone: Here's the latest long form article on our Rueda trip.

<http://www.intowine.com/verdejo-spain%E2%80%99s-signature-white-grape>

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Verdejo - Spain's Signature White Gr...



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Verdejo - Spain's Signature White Grape

by [Michael Cervin \(User/michael-cervin\)](#)

Though Spain is better known for the red wines of Rioja and Ribera del Duero, the Rueda, located north east of Madrid, is home to arguably Spain's best white wine, Verdejo. Similar in style and characteristics to Pinot Gris, Verdejo fully expresses itself in the high altitude of Rueda where it showcases lemon and citrus, minerality and above all, a sharp acidity which makes it compelling with the tapas so that are so ubiquitous around the region. It's also inexpensive, with bottles exported to the U.S. usually less than \$15. Verdejo has been planted in this area for over a thousand years, and it's believed it was brought to Spain by the Moors. Some producing vines date as far back 130 years. However it has been only in the last few decades that Verdejo has proved to be the best fit for the cooler Rueda region.

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Winemaker Pablo del Villar of Bodegas Hermanos del Villar says, "Verdejo is ideally suited to the poor soils and harsh environment in Rueda." The stress on the vines and wide diurnal swings, where daytime temperatures can tumble as much as 25 degrees at night, help to create the fundamental acidity that Verdejo is known for. Rueda itself is geographically unremarkable; mainly flatlands, though high in altitude, about 2,300 feet

above sea level for most of the region and some areas even get snowfall. The majority of vineyards are bush types, low to the ground which spread out their leaves along the sandy, rocky soils to absorb the sun. The area is also dotted with pine nuts trees; thin trunked trees with a round canopy which makes them look like lollipops. Palomino, Sauvignon Blanc and Viura are also planted here, but they pale by comparison.

There are fewer than 60 wineries in Rueda, and only a handful of those allow public tastings. But things are changing. The grape is catching on everywhere, so much so that acreage has doubled since 2005 and other regions in Spain are beginning to plant it. But like any signature grape, to understand its true identity you need to go to the source.

I visited Rueda in April, 2010 which allowed me the luxury to visit with producers, winemakers and growers, and sample more than 100 Verdejos in and around Rueda. The end result has been a newfound affinity for this white grape. At its best Verdejo is sharp and clean with lemon and lime notes, a backbone of minerality and a potent acidity. That may sound simple, but crafting excellent wine is not a simple process. It was also clear that many producers are trying their hand at a barrel fermented version and the results are less than spectacular. Verdejo is best when left alone and the inherent qualities are not interfered with.

"Verdejo is our personality," says Juan de Benito Ozores, the director general of Bodegas Alvarez y Diez whose Montel Blanco wine is ubiquitous in the States. It's understandable that any winery portfolio needs diversity and that has driven winemakers to experiment with oak. But thus far, with a few exceptions, Verdejo is best unadulterated. Though the vast majority of Verdejo should be drunk young, on several occasions, I was able to taste verdejos 10 to 12 years old, and while they are still drinkable and enjoyable, they are not compelling. The bright acids work best within recent vintages and the lively freshness of the wine is at its peak. Additionally, the local tapas in the area, most notably in the city of Valladolid, such as white asparagus, chorizo, bacalau (deep fried cod) and torreznos (a pan fried pork) are enhanced by this invigorating, firm young wine.

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Verdejo - Spain's Signature White Gr...

Some of the consistent producers of Verdejo include the mother/daughter winemaking team at Jose Pariente, Bodegas Lorenzo Cachazo, Bodegas Naia, Bodegas Yllera and Bodegas Nieva, all names to look out for. While visiting Naia I had the fortunate opportunity to taste through all of the 2003-2009 vintages which showed the differences in growing over the years as some of the Verdejos vary in acidity. This isn't Napa, there are no picturesque tasting rooms dotting the landscape. There are however, dedicated producers who are striving to perfect the grape that is their own. It's easy to assume that low yields or "proper" spacing of the vines have some impact on the quality of the fruit.

"Mathematics has nothing to do with it. You just have to pay attention to your vines," says Victoria Pariente, winemaker at Jose Pariente, arguably one of the best Verdejo producers. And she underscores why the wines from Rueda are gaining notoriety; simply put, the winemakers are paying strict attention to their signature grape, making certain the world knows when they reach for Verdejo, it's classic Verdejo they will get, not some funky blend or well-intentioned winery "project." Pariente sums up the nature of Verdejo poetically: "Wine is like a bear. When it is cold, the bear wants to hibernate. When it is warmer out, the bear is more active." Currently the wines from Rueda are indeed active with wonderfully crafted juice that truly reflects a sense of place.

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