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May 2012 £4.20

# Decanter



**Brilliant  
Bordeaux**  
**St-Emilion & Pomerol 2009 rated,  
plus the best of the New World  
Rhône 2010**  
**Top picks from the south  
in a stellar vintage**

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# Spain's new-generation whites

John Radford looks at how winemakers have reinvented their white wines, both in the vineyard and winery, via innovations in varieties, blends and styles



TEN YEARS AGO, one of the stock questions in the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) Diploma exam was 'which is the classic white wine of Spain?'. Just a decade ago, Spain was hardly known for its white wines at all, and only Rías Baixas and Rueda made anything of an impact beyond its borders.

A great deal has changed since then. Other regions have come to the fore, particularly Ribeiro with the Godello grape, which promises great things in the future. A good deal of new work has been done in Rioja: Alvaro Palacios famously sacked all but two of his contract growers when he took over Palacios Remondo as winemaker; Telmo Rodríguez (see our interview, p44) has perfected Remelluri Blanco in his own inimitable style, and Contino has at last produced a white wine.

Also interesting are emergent regions such as Terra Alta with Garnacha Blanca, the region-wide Catalunya DO with Viognier, and Vinos de Madrid and Castilla y León with the once-despised Albillo.

In the meantime, Rías Baixas has upped its game in quality terms while keeping prices reasonable, and Rueda

*“Almost every region is rediscovering a time when most of Spain's wine was white”*

*The wines below are the best of those tasted, non-blind, at the Boutique Spain tasting in London (November 2011), in Rioja (October 2011), and from samples received and tasted in January 2012.*

*For full details of UK stockists, see p99*

has enthusiastically introduced overnight harvesting, grape chilling and inert-gas blanketing to prevent Verdejo oxidising. Except, that is, for a new project that has returned to 'traditional' Rueda winemaking. Ossian has a Burgundian consultant winemaker, Pierre Millemann, who is making wine the old-fashioned way: picking during the day, no gas-blanketing, foot-treading before going to the press, and a lot of stirring of the lees to encourage complexity, including a little deliberate oxidation. The results are spectacular, especially Capitel which comes from a vineyard on 8m-deep sand. Phylloxera never visited here, and the 160-year-old vines are still on European roots.

Elsewhere in Spain, almost every region is experimenting with new ways with native as well as international varieties, and rediscovering a time when most of Spain's wine was white, before the advent of Bordeaux-style winemaking in the 1850s.

For my choice below, I've had to be brutal: the selection of just 20 was a challenge, but all the wines scored no less than 17pts/20, and I was delighted to taste five attaining 19pts, including one of my all-time favourites: López de Heredia's Viña Tondonia Gran Reserva 1991. Tradition – albeit an enlightened version of tradition – would seem to be making something of a comeback.

*John Radford is Regional co-Chair of Spain at the Decanter World Wine Awards*

## Radford's 5- and 4-star wines



**Coto de Gomariz, Blanco, Ribeiro 2009** ★★★★★ 19pts/20

£14.72 Bottle Apostle, Caviste, Duncan Murray  
Treixadura, Godello, Loureira, Albariño. Nuts and wood-oil aromas; lovely, rich, lipsmacking fruit on the palate with fresh acidity and hazelnuts on the finish. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 13.5%



**Lopez de Heredia, Viña Tondonia Blanco, Gran Reserva, Rioja 1991** ★★★★★ 19

£55 Swig, The Wine Society, WoodWinters  
Viura. Mature, mellow, smoky-oaky nose; rich entry, soft, mellow fruit on the mid-palate, still vibrantly alive – no trace of oxidation. Wonderful, long, dry finish. Drink: 2012–2020. Alc: 12%



**Ossian, Capitel, Rueda 2010** ★★★★★ 19

£36.17 Justerini & Brooks  
Verdejo. Rich nose with citrus, gameyness and some reduction. Big, warm, ripe fruit palate, with crisp acidity, fresh fruit on the mid-palate and a long, dry finish. Tremendous complexity and structure. Drink: 2015–2025 Alc: 13.5%



**Palacios Remondo, Placet, Rioja 2008** ★★★★★ 19

£19–£21 Hailsham Cellars, Winedirect, Woodwinters  
Viura. Deep, complex nose of herbs and a hint of citrus; lovely, rich, round, mouthfilling, spicy, greengage palate. Dry finish with a hint of almond. Drink: 2012–2015. Alc: 13.5%



**Remelluri, Blanco, Rioja 2006** ★★★★★ 19

£44.99 Ann et Vin, Planet of the Grapes  
Viognier, Chardonnay, Roussanne, Marsanne, Sauvignon, Garnacha Blanca, Moscatel. Smoky, herby nose; mouthfilling pear fruit, musky oak, rich but dry. Superb. Drink: 2012–2015. Alc: 14.5%



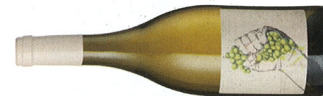
**Casal de Armán, Ribeiro 2010** ★★★★★ 17

£15.49 Cellar Door, Delivino, Selfridges  
Treixadura, Godello, Albariño. Soft, citrusy nose, light and delicate, a hint of fruit sweetness on the palate which builds to a big, spicy finish which ends dry. Drink: 2012–2013. Alc: 13%



**Contino, Blanco, Rioja 2010** ★★★★★ 18  
£21.50 Slurp

Malvasía, Garnacha Blanca, Viura. Some Malvasía richness on the warm, ripe nose. Nicely balanced palate with some richness and the barest hint of citrus and gooseberry fruit. Bone dry. A new classic. Drink: 2013–2015. Alc: 14%



**El Escocés Volante, El Puño, Catalunya 2009** ★★★★★ 18

£19.49 Delivino, Imbibros, Planet of the Grapes, The Vineking  
Viognier. Soft, rich, smoky and herby notes on the nose. Great complexity and richness on the palate and a warm, endless length. Drink: 2012–2013. Alc: 14%



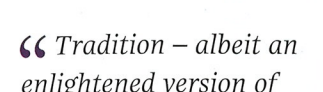
**La Báscula, Catalan Eagle, Terra Alta 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£9.50 D Byrne, Noble Green, Noel Young, Woodwinters  
Garnacha Blanca, Viognier, Roussanne. Warm, honeyed aromas followed by a rich and complex mid-palate with lovely herby fruit and a long finish. Dry. Drink: 2012–2013. Alc: 14%

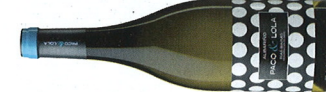


**Naia, Rueda 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£11 D Byrne, Highbury Vintners, Oxford Wine Co, Slurp, WoodWinters  
Verdejo. A little closed on the nose but clean and fresh. Big, spicy, warm fruit on the palate with herbs and more spices plus a hint of citrus. Delicious. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 13%



*“Tradition – albeit an enlightened version of tradition – would seem to be making something of a comeback”*



**Paco & Lola, Rías Baixas 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£14.95 Marquet Square, South Downs Cellars  
Albariño. Lovely, ripe old-vine aromas, and a rich mid-palate with a hint of gooseberry fruit. The finish is very long and savoury. Lovely. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 13.5%



**Palacio de Fefinañes, Rías Baixas 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£15.99–£18.99 Handford Wine, Haselmere Cellars, Moreno Wines, Oxford Wine Co, Waitrose  
Albariño. Very fresh, greengage fruit on the nose with a rich palate that is warm, ripe and complex. Delicious. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 13%



**Valdamor Albariño, Rías Baixas 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£13.50 Spanish Wines Online, Swig  
Very fresh savoury nose, with lovely peachy fruit and lipsmacking acidity on the palate. Classic, crisp, fresh Albariño. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 13%



**Bodega Marañones Picarana, Vinos de Madrid 2010** ★★★★★ 17

£16.50 Bottle Apostle, Butlers, Harvey Nichols, No2 Pound St, Noel Young, Sampler, Vagabond, Woodwinters  
Albillo. Woody nose but good, rich, spicy fruit on the palate and a hint of honey although dry on the finish. Drink: 2012–2013. Alc: 14.5%



**Bodegas Coto Redondo, Señorío de Rubio, Rías Baixas 2009** ★★★★★ 17

£11.99 Cheers Wine Merchants  
Albariño. Rich wood-oil aromas and tight fruit on the palate. There's some weight, which is rare in Albariño, but this gives it endless length. A keeper. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 12.5%



**Finca La Colina, Verdejo Cien x Cien, Rueda 2010** ★★★★★ 17

£11.99 H2Vin, Spanish Wines Online  
Classic Verdejo nose. A touch of gooseberry fruit on the palate, rich but dry, crisp and very long – the gooseberries turn to greengages on the finish. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 13%



**García Viadero, Albillo, Castilla y León 2008** ★★★ 17

£6.99 Goedhuis  
Lovely aromatics – an almost floral perfume – with delicious, herby fruit on the palate, crisp, fresh acidity and completely dry on the finish. Drink: 2012. Alc: 12%



**Legaris, Verdejo, Rueda 2010** ★★★★★ 17

£7.49 Marquet Square, Noel Young, Wildflower Wines  
Unusual leather and wax aromas, but good, crisp fruit palate with hidden richness and a long, bitter almond finish. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 13%



**Mas Macià, Suprem Blanc, Catalunya 2010** ★★★★★ 17

£10 Highbury Vintners  
Garnacha Blanca, Xarel-lo. Smoky, savoury fruit on the nose, and a lovely fresh palate with gentle fruit and a hint of pepper from the Xarel-lo. Lipsmacking acidity. Drink: 2012–2014. Alc: 12%



**Txómín Etxaniz, Txakoli, Getariako Txakolina 2010** ★★★★★ 17

£14–£16 Bowland Forest, Cornelius, Good Wine, Markinch, Moreno, Oxford Wine Co, Slurp, South Downs  
Hondarrabi Zuri, Hondarrabi Beltza. Spiky, spicy nose and fresh prickle of CO<sub>2</sub> on the palate with crisp gooseberry. Lovely. Drink: 2012. Alc: 10.5%