

# Real Tinto-rettos

QRW TASTING PANEL

In the Summer 2010 issue we hit a responsive chord with readers — most of them younger and newer — when we highlighted the Ribera del Duero. Most of them — and 152,000 more who tapped into our website Ribera offering at *QRW.com* — were new to one of Spain's hottest and finest wine regions, and were looking to expand their tastes beyond Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. The Ribera del Duero is located in north central Spain (just above Madrid). As referenced in the Summer article, Vegas Sicilia is the most famous winery of the region; however, their wine is comprised principally of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. For us Ribera del Duero means Tinto Fino — a variety of Tempranillo — Spain's answer to Cabernet Sauvignon, as Master of Wine Jancis Robinson puts it. It's a splendid grape that has firm flavors and firmer structure, and ages wonderfully. To this end, think of such world class wineries as Pesquera, Mauro Vendimia, Pingus, Protos, Comenge, Emilio Moro, and others. The wines are not inexpensive — \$20 to \$50 — but compared to wines in the market place of similar price, the Ribera wines are leagues ahead, offering serious quality, flavor, and value. The world has discovered Ribera del Duero and new wineries continue to emerge. In the late 1980s and early 1990s only about 50 to 60 wineries existed; today, the number has nearly tripled.

Generally, here is what consumers should expect when tasting a Ribera wine:

**Color:** Most of the Ribera wines in the market are young, and, because the wines can be long in aging, they are richly purple, sometimes deeply ruby.

**Aromas:** Spice, dark licorice, oak, berry, vanilla, and a touch of anise make up the composition of most of these wines.

**Flavors:** Expect much the same as what you've found in the aromas, only with more definition and clarity. Blackberry and black cherry are omnipresent — occasionally mulberry tones are found. A well-aired Ribera allows the oak, spice and berries to integrate and become balanced, that is all of a piece. Ribera Reservas are aged for three years in oak, and when the vintage is fine, as in 2001, 2002, 2004 and 2005, the oak, spice, and berry are explosively delicious on the palate.

**Finish:** Otherwise known as aftertaste, finish is vital. It's the best way to judge a wine. Riberas will not disappoint. They can be rustic when young, but, with a bit of aging, the finish is smooth and elegant, long and lingering, what fine finish is all about. Most of the Riberas prompt meditation and respect.

**Drinking/Dining Suggestions:** Decant or open an hour or more in advance. Ribera wines can be initially astringent, decanting alleviates this. Don't be fussy with decanting because the wine is young and without much sediment, thus a good splash will air and age the wine faster. We like the simple approach: pour the wine in a Bordeaux glass, give a few swirls, and let it sit until dinner. As regards dinner, Ribera del Duero needs a firm steak, roast or lamb.

With a cheese course, think aged cheddar cut thinly so the fat in the cheese doesn't disrupt the flavors of the wine, as chunks of cheese often do to red wines.

# DRINK RIBERA. DRINK SPAIN.

MAP



Location: Four of the provinces of Castilla y León come together in the Ribera del Duero: Burgos, Segovia, Soria and Valladolid.  
Area: 93 miles (150 km) long by 22 miles (35 km) wide  
Average Altitude: 837 meters (2750 feet)  
Average Rainfall: 450 mm (17.7 inches) per year  
Weather: Dry summers, with temperatures of up to 40°C (104°F). Long, harsh winters, with temperatures reaching as low as -18°C (-0.4°F).

## THE WINES: LATEST RELEASES

We blind tasted an additional 24 wines for this article (we did 30 for the last issue) and *QRW* has thus offered one of the most extensive tastings of recent Riberas in the United States.

**Here are nine Riberas you should know.** Because of the general description of the Ribera wines above, we limited tasting notes to the essentials. All are DO wines (Denomination of Origin) guaranteeing quality.

**Vintages:** 2001, 2002, 2004 are excellent; 2005 and 2006 for the most part are very fine. Prices may vary from region to region.

- **2006 TINTO PESQUERA, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$40.** Soft and elegant, with red fruit — strawberry and raspberry — and gentle silky texture. Finish is smooth. Needs time.
- **2004 VALDUERO RESERVA, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$38.** Super wine. Excellent vintage. Red berry — strawberry with touch of cherry — soft oak, aura of spice, elegant with long finish. Buy lots!
- **2005 PROTOS RESERVA, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$35.** Blackberry, silky, stylish, vanilla spice, elegant, and delicious. Buy lots.
- **2005 BOHORQUEZ, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$40.** Very fine. Needs time; soft oak, anise, vanilla, spice and mocha finish. Worth the wait.
- **2005 BODEGAS NEO, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$45.** Spicy oak in the aromas and palate, black berry, licorice/anise, and chocolate in the finish. Nicely complex. Worthy of any fine cellar.
- **2004 PRADO REY RESERVA, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$30.** Fine reserve from a fine vintage, with rich oak and spice, cherry, berry, smooth, engaging texture. Fine finish. Buy all you can.
- **2005 COMENGE, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$30.** Our **Best of Show** in the Summer 2010 tasting. Re-tasted again and it didn't disappoint. Red berry oak, spice, hint of figs, textured, and long firm finish. Buy!
- **2006 FINCA TORREMILANOS LOS CANTOS, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$22.** Blackberry and cherry aromas, redolent of figs, good oak, integrated spice and vanilla, nice texture, well made. Nice finish.
- **2003 TINTO FIGUERO 15, RIBERA DEL DUERO, DO, \$55.** From an average vintage, but an above average wine. Bursting with cherry and raspberry, gentle oak-spice, easy hint of oak, smooth from beginning to end. ☞