



Vinous Media - Spain's Northern Regions Keep It Cool March 31, 2019

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Vinous Media's Spanish editor Josh Reynolds has just published reviews of wines grown across Northern Spain, including wines from Rias Baixas, Ribeira Sacra, Bierzo, Tierra de Leon and Navarra. His introduction to the article follows along with reviews of Grapes of Spain wines.

“Spain's northern, Atlantic Ocean-influenced winegrowing zones were virtually unknown to most wine lovers only a decade ago, but things have changed dramatically. Some of Spain's most sought-after, high-quality and highly allocated red wines come from Bierzo and Ribeira Sacra, and the popularity of the area's racy whites, especially those of Rias Baixas, which are usually exclusively made with the local Albariño variety, continues a steep upward trajectory.

This was hardly the case just a decade ago, when these wines were seldom encountered outside the region, except in forward-thinking restaurants scattered across Spain. Today, collectors are chasing down small-production, Mencia-based Bierzos and Ribeira Sacras with the zeal of Burgundy aficionados, and Galician white wines have established a strong and growing foothold in stores and, especially, restaurants around the world that feature seafood- and vegetable-based menus. There has also been an uptick of interest for the less commonly encountered white and red wines of Ribeiro, Monterrei and Valdeorras, many of which are proving to be outstanding and, for the time being at least, mostly terrific values as well.

Most of the wines here, red as well as white, tend to be made with a light hand, meaning that they are not too extracted and on the low-alcohol side, displaying bright acidity and, usually, minimal oak influence. The vast majority of white wines are raised entirely in stainless steel and/or concrete tanks, and, when oak comes into play, it's usually in the form of large, neutral vats or barrels, for reds as well as whites. Given the cool conditions that dominate the area, acidity levels tend to be on the high side and pHs are, as a rule, low, meaning that the general style of all the wines is lively and mineral-driven, the white wines showcasing citrus fruit and floral qualities and the red wines showing red rather than dark fruit character coupled with spiciness and florality. Fans of Pinot Noir, Gamay, Dolcetto and Loire Valley Cabernet Franc will find a lot to like from the red wines here, as will white wine aficionados who favor Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling and cool-climate Chardonnays such as Chablis. Restraint, elegance and precision, far more often than not, are the bywords.

Adegas Gran Vinum (Rias Baixas)

Albariño Nessa 2017 – 89 points



Vivid straw color. Citrus pith, white flowers and a zesty mineral topnote on the tightly focused nose and in the mouth. Dry and mineral in character showing good delineation and a refreshingly bitter quinine flourish on the nicely persistent finish.

2019-2021

Albariño Mar de Viñas 2017 - 90 points



Bright yellow. Mineral-tinged citrus and orchard fruits on the vibrant, spice-tinged nose. Silky and open-knit, offering juicy Meyer lemon and pear flavors that deepen slowly on the back half. Shows very good energy and a hint of fennel on a long, spicy finish that leaves a succulent pear nectar note behind.

2019 - 2022



Esencia Diviña 2017 - 92 points



Light, bright gold. Fresh and incisive on the nose, displaying intense orchard and pit fruit scents and a tangy suggestion of lemon zest. Chewy and taut in the mouth, offering bitter lemon and pear skin flavors and a bracing mineral flourish. Finishes long and precise, with recurring citrus fruit character and lingering mineral and floral notes.

2019 - 2023

Gran Vinum Selección Especial 2017 – 93 points



Limpid, green-hued yellow. Powerful, deeply pitched melon, white peach and tangerine scents show excellent clarity and pick up a smoky mineral quality with aeration. Offers deeply concentrated, spice-tinged citrus fruit and honeydew flavors that tighten up steadily on the back half. Closes very long and smooth, with resonating peach and mineral qualities and a sexy floral nuance.

2019 - 2024

Isaac Fernandez Selección (Ribeira Sacra)

Adrás Mencía 2017 – 90 points



Lurid ruby-red. Assertive, mineral-accented red berry and cherry aromas and strong spiciness and mineral lift. In a seamless, lithe, somewhat Pinot Noir style, showing fresh raspberry and bitter cherry flavors that put on weight and become sweeter with aeration. Silky tannins frame the lively, persistent finish, which leaves a sexy floral note behind.

(Aged for seven months in used French and American oak barrels of varying size.) 2021 - 2027

Bodegas y Viñedos Luna Beberide (Bierzo)



Godello 2017 – 90 points

Pale gold. Fresh pit fruit and honeydew aromas show good clarity and are sharpened by suggestions of fennel and dusty minerals. Sappy and energetic on the palate, offering juicy Meyer lemon, peach and melon flavors and a hint of succulent herbs. Finishes chewy and long, showing a hint of chalky minerality and very good persistence. (Raised on its lees for six months in stainless steel tanks.) 2019 – 2022

Godello 2018 – 91 points

Vivid straw-yellow. Aromas of fresh pear, melon and tangerine are energized by a suggestion of chalky minerals. Sappy and concentrated, yet nervy as well, offering bitter citrus pith, pear skin and honeysuckle flavors that become spicier on the back half. Shows very good depth and clarity finishing long and taut, with persistent mineral and floral qualities. (All stainless steel.) 2019 – 2024

Mencía 2017 – 90 points



Brilliant violet color. Mineral- and spice-accented dark berry, cherry pit and floral aromas show good clarity, with a suggestion of licorice building in the glass. Displays blackberry and bitter cherry flavors that are braced by a spine of tangy acidity and a hint of cracked pepper. Expands and becomes sweeter on the finish, which features subtle floral and spicecake qualities and dusty tannins. (All stainless steel.) 2019 – 2022



Mencia 2018 – 91 points



Deep ruby. Spice- and mineral-accented cherry and dark berries show very good energy and focus. Blackberry, bitter cherry and licorice on the palate, along with suggestions of dark chocolate and violet. Opens up slowly with air and finishes very long and floral with smooth, even tannins and lingering florality.

2020 – 2025

Finca la Cuesta 2015 – 91 points

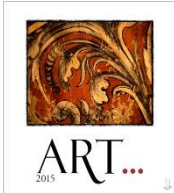


Lurid violet color. Mineral-accented dark berries and candied flowers on the highly perfumed nose. Bright and energetic on the palate, offering bitter cherry and blackberry flavors that deepen and turn sweeter with air. Gently sweet and seamless in texture, with dusty tannins adding grip to a long, floral- and mineral-tinged finish. (Raised in a 50/50 combination of new and used French oak barrels.) 2021 – 2026

Finca la Cuesta 2017 – 91 points

Deep ruby. Intense blackberry, cherry pit and licorice aromas are enlivened by a suggestion of smoky minerals. Juicy and focused on the palate, offering chewy dark berry and bitter cherry flavors that open up and become sweeter with air. Shows very good depth as well as energy and finishes sappy and long, with building florality and fine-grained tannins that sneak in late. (Aged for a year in 50% new and 50% used French oak barrels.) 2019 – 2024

Art 2016 – 92 points



Opaque ruby. Powerful, mineral-laced dark berry, incense and floral pastille scents show excellent clarity and are complemented by a hint of succulent herbs. Concentrated yet lithe, offering palate-staining boysenberry, bitter cherry and allspice flavors and a spicy jolt of white pepper. The mineral quality repeats emphatically on a very long, penetrating finish that leaves sweet dark fruit liqueur and spicecake flavors behind. (Raised in new French oak

barrels for a year.) 2019 – 2025

Art 2017 – 93 points

Vivid ruby-red. Mineral- and smoke-accented red fruit liqueur and pot-pourri aromas are complemented by suggestions of cola, vanilla and candied licorice. Sweet, seamless and focused on the palate, offering intense black raspberry, cherry compote and spicecake flavors that become livelier with air. Shows impressive detail, depth and finishes on a repeating red fruit note, with smooth tannins and lingering florality. (Aged for a year in new French oak barrels.) 2023 - 2032

Paixar 2015 (under Bodegas y Viñedos Paixar) – 93 points



Lurid ruby. Highly perfumed and vibrant on the nose, displaying heady dark berry, pot-pourri scents and a smoky mineral overtone. In a rich but elegant style, offering appealingly sweet black raspberry, cherry-cola and spicecake flavors given spine and lift by a core juicy acidity. Shows outstanding depth as well as delicacy, and finishes with strong, floral-, mineral-driven persistence and silky tannins that come on late. (Aged for 22 months in new French oak barrels.) 2019 - 2026



Paixar 2016 – 94 points

Bright, violet color. Sexy, deeply perfumed blackberry, cola, floral oil and incense aromas pick up a smoky mineral quality as the wine opens up. Supple, seamless and alluringly sweet, offering palate-staining black/blue fruit liqueur flavors that are complemented by suggestions of vanilla, mocha and five-spice powder. Densely packed yet lively as well, finishing with outstanding clarity and smooth, harmonious tannins. (Aged for 16 months in new French oak barrels.)

2022 – 2030

Bodegas Margon (Tierra de León)



Pricum Prieto Pricudo 2010 – 92 points

Inky ruby. Pungent dark berries, candied violet and a hint of licorice on the highly perfumed, mineral-accented nose. Sweet and penetrating, offering intense black raspberry and cherry liqueur flavors that unfold and pick up a smoky element with air. Powerful yet graceful and precise, showing closing thrust and silky, even tannins that build slowly and lend shape and gentle grip. (Made with 30% whole clusters and fermented in open-top oak vats, with malolactic fermentation and 14 months of aging in new and used French oak barrels.)

2019 – 2023

Bodegas Caudalía (Navarra)



Paal Syrah 01 2015 – 90 points

Bright purple. Smoky, spice-tinged black/blue fruit aromas open up slowly to show hints of violet and cured meat. Gently sweet and focused on the palate, offering bitter cherry and cassis flavors sharpened by a strong jolt of cracked pepper, which adds back-end bite. Supple tannins build slowly on the clinging finish, echoing the smoke and spice notes. This one would make a good ringer in a blind flight of Crozes-Hermitages. (Fermented and aged for 27 months in concrete tanks.)

2019 – 2024

Xi'ipal Syrah La Celada 2014 – 91 points



Lurid violet color. Blackberry, boysenberry, violet and a hint of licorice on the perfumed nose. Provides very good palate coverage and offers appealingly sweet dark berry and spicecake flavors and a peppery nuance that builds steadily as the wine opens up. Supple tannins lend shape to a spicy, clinging finish that leaves

behind sweet dark berry liqueur and allspice notes. (Fermented in concrete tanks and aged in used, 400-liter French oak barrels for a year.)

2020 - 2028

Xi'ipal Syrah La Celada 2015 – 92 points

Vivid purple. Powerful black/blue fruit, licorice, smoked meat and floral pastille aromas are complemented by sneaky vanilla and olive nuances. Sappy and nicely concentrated, offering bitter cherry, blueberry and fruitcake flavors that are sweetened by suggestions of vanilla and cola. Shows strong, spicy lift on a very long, gently tannic finish that echoes the olive and blue fruit notes. (Fermented in concrete tanks and aged for a year in used, 400-liter French oak barrels.)

2021 – 2029



Xi'ipal Graciano Gracia Vid 2015 – 91 points



Inky ruby. An exotically perfumed bouquet evokes ripe, dark berries, pot-pourri and vanilla, along with a building oak spice note. Rich, palate-coating blackberry, bitter cherry and violet pastille flavors are complicated by spice and mineral notes that expand with air. Closes on a youthful, tannic note, showing very good clarity and leaving a sweet dark berry note behind. (Fermented in concrete tanks and

raised in a used 400-liter French oak barrel for 14 months.)

2020 – 2027

Xi'ipal Tempranillo La Abejera 2015 – 92 points



Deep, bright-rimmed ruby. Mineral-accented black raspberry and cherry-vanilla aromas are complemented by mocha, pot-pourri and star anise notes. Gently sweet and seamless in texture, offering red and dark berry, rose pastille and spicecake flavors that deepen slowly as the wine opens up. Sappy and energetic in

style, showing strong thrust and harmonious tannins on the long, floral-dominated finish. (Fermented in concrete tanks and aged for a year in used, 400-liter French oak barrels.)

2020 – 2026

Xi'ipal Garnacha Las Bajadas 2015 – 92 points



Deep, lurid ruby-red. High-pitched, mineral-accented red/dark berry and pot-pourri aromas are complemented by suggestions of succulent herbs and Asian spices. Smooth and open-knit, offering appealingly sweet raspberry and lavender pastille flavors that tighten up slowly with air and pick up mocha and white

pepper nuances. Shows impressive clarity and spicy lift on the persistent finish, which is given shape by silky, even tannins. (Fermented in concrete tanks and aged for a year in used, 500-liter French oak barrels.)

2020 - 2026

