

July 18, 2022

WINE News

*A Bounty of Aged and Ageable
Wines from Spain and Portugal*



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Great Wine + Time = Rioja

By Kirk Walker, Spain and Portugal Buyer



There is nothing like old wine. In fact, it is because of two older wines that I work in the wine industry. There are two regions in the world that allow us to regularly drink older red wines—Bordeaux and Rioja. The modern wine industry is built around Bordeaux—heck K&L is built around Bordeaux. The two are definitely connected: the birth of modern

Rioja goes back to when the Bordelais were looking for a region to make wine when their vineyards were ravaged by phylloxera. But that is a history lesson for another day!

Many of the best deals to be had in older wines right now are from Rioja. What makes these wines special? 1. The blend of varietals: Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuelo, and Graciano. They are all very different and bring unique elements to the glass. 2. The terroir—some very special bottles are from single vineyards but most are blends from plots all over the region, with different dirt and aspect, each bringing distinctive

characteristics. 3. The oak: Rioja embraces it. They use oak from all over the world, especially American. There is a French-centric winemaking prejudice against American oak; but that's cool, chefs don't have to use all of the ingredients available to prepare food. Same goes for wine.

That brings me to a different way of thinking about old wines: as they relate to cooking. I like to think of old Bordeaux like a good beef bourguignon. There are as many variations as there are people in France, but they are all relatively simple, do not use a lot of ingredients, and rely on layering and building flavors to make it deep and great. Old Rioja is more like mole sauce. Again there are a million-and-one recipes, but what they all have in common is complexity. Both mole and Rioja use more ingredients than their French counterpart (it always takes at least two stops to get everything you need!). It, too, takes a lot of time to come together, but when it does... wow! Rioja is like that, with a varied array of flavors and depth. I like both dishes, but I love mole. I like old Bordeaux (and love some of it too—but I usually cannot afford those), and I love old Rioja (plus, with the exception of a few, I can afford it all!).

2001 Lopez de Heredia “Viña Bosconia” Gran Reserva Rioja \$244.99 96RP, 96JS, 96TA

2007 Remelluri Reserva Rioja \$44.99 94RP

2010 Hermanos Peciña “Finca Iscorta” Gran Reserva Rioja \$49.99 94RP

2011 Remelluri “Granja Remelluri” Gran Reserva Rioja \$79.99 97JS, 94 RP

2012 Remelluri “Granja Remelluri” Gran Reserva Rioja \$79.99 93VN, 94RP, 94JS

2009 López de Heredia “Viña Tondonia” Reserva Rioja \$47.99 93RP, 97JS

2009 López de Heredia “Viña Bosconia” Reserva Rioja \$44.99 96JS, 95TA

2012 Cune “Imperial” Gran Reserva Rioja \$79.99 94VN, 95RP, 94JS, 97TA

2011 Los Autores “El Brujo” Gran Reserva Rioja \$34.99

2010 Bodegas Casa Juan “Señor de Lesmos” Gran Reserva Rioja \$29.99

2008 Bodegas Puelles Gran Reserva Rioja \$29.99

2011 Pedro Martinez Alesanco Gran Reserva Rioja \$29.99

The Legend of Lesmos: K&L's Longtime Rioja Love

Señor de Lesmos is back! Nobody wants to hear anymore about supply chain issues, so we will not complain but rather celebrate that our longtime K&L favorite Riojas are back—and that they have not gone up in price too much! We have had the pleasure of selling these wines for over 13 years. Rioja is the best value in the world of wine, and these wines are case in point.



Bodegas Casa Juan is a small, organically farmed estate in Laguardia run by the Escudero family (Carmen, Santiago, Julian, and Ángel—together they form the anagram of CASA JUAN). Ángel and his wife, Araceli, are the driving force of the winery. In fact,

Ángel is *the* Señor de Lesmos—or he was: Señor de Lesmos was what his father called him when he got into trouble when he was a child. I like these wines a little bit more knowing that.

The bulk of the family's vineyards are located around the Ebro river in the subregions of Rioja Alta and Rioja Alavesa where they only grow Tempranillo, most of the vines well over 40 years old. But the secret to the house style comes from their vineyard in the Rioja Oriental that is entirely planted to Mazuelo (Carignane); it gives their wines that extra little something! The winemaking is simple: native-yeast fermentation in large concrete tanks; malolactic fermentation in those same tanks; then the wine is racked into the old oak barrels for aging (mostly American with a little French and Bosnian).

2018 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos Crianza Rioja \$12.99 This is the Little Wine That Can. I know that just about every bottle of this Crianza will likely be consumed within a short time of purchase (it's hard to wait!), but I want to assure you that this value wine has tons of aging potential. During the COVID lock down I discovered a 2009 lost in my collection. The wine was awesome! It still had great fruit, spice, and liveliness. I am not necessarily going to tell you to buy a case and hold onto it for 11 years, but I would not talk you out of it either. The 2018 is delicious. It is a classic Lesmos from a classic vintage. The blend is always the same: 85% Tempranillo, 15% Mazuelo. It was aged for 14

months in oak, then blended and bottled. This has that great mix of dark and red fruits, spice, and a subtle but distinctive earthiness. There is enough tannin and acid to give it poise but not enough to require time or very rich food (not that either would be a bad call).

2014 Bodegas Casa Juan Señor de Lesmos

Reserva Rioja \$19.99 I love how good this wine is. It overperforms in the biggest way. I hate to describe wine this way, but it is how I feel about it: it is stupid how good this wine is, and how affordable it is. This wine has everything that I want from a Rioja—and wine in general: complexity, plus a mix of dark fruits and bright berries. It has spice, hints of leather, earth, and an almost iron-like minerality to it. It is persistent; the flavors go and go. It has plenty of structure, which does not intrude but more than subtly drives the wine. You can share this with anyone for any occasion, or with no one at all (plus it is awesome the next day!).

2010 Bodegas Casa Juan "Señor de Lesmos" Gran Reserva Rioja

\$29.99 This is a special occasion wine that needs no special occasion! Gran Reservas are not made every year because not every vintage is up to the task of spending the extended time in oak without being completely overwhelmed by it. This wine, at 12 years old, has come out the other side like it was nothing! There is a crazy amount of still-fresh dark-berry fruit. It takes a second to find it, as you have to look past the ridiculous complexity of the spice, fresh and dried herbs, leather, and exotic woods to find it, but it is there. Once you do, the spice aroma just grows and grows. What a nose!

There are only a handful of wines from around the world that can offer such an aromatically complex nose, and none at this price point! It is on the palate that you get a sense of its age—softer tannins and the round, mellow settled-in thing that happens with older Rioja. It has an ease to it. You can tell that it is not trying to impress you. You get it or you don't. There is still a freshness to the dark berry fruit. It is medium weight, mellow, and complex. A wine for hanging out and nibbling on some cheese or a really great, simply prepared cut of meat.



These wines are longtime staff as well as fan favorites. Also in magnum!

Bet on Birth Year Port

A fun part of wine collecting is finding birth year wines. I, for one, have several cases from my son's birth year. Alas: not every wine is capable of lasting 21-plus years to drink with your children when they come of age. Fortunately, there are a couple of reliable exceptions, and Port could be the biggest. The sugar, the brandy, and the tannins—it is made for long-term aging. Yes, some vintages are better than others, but there are also political reasons for declaring a vintage—and not enough space to get into that here. What's important to know is that a good producer can make very good, age-worthy Port every year.

Quinta do Noval is such a producer. They have made a vintage Port every year since 2011. Quinta do Noval is the only major Port house

that is named after their vineyard. They are in the Pinhão River Valley, one of the most prized regions in the Douro. The first adjective that comes to mind when describing the wines is purity. The fruit aromas tend toward dark berries backed by wild herbs and a touch of flowers. The wines are sweet, of course, but not confectioned. The richness but only begins to flirt with decadence. I know some people do not like sweet wines; but we all kind of do, no matter what we say.

You can crack these at their 21st or 25th birthday celebrations easily, but they'll be delicious at their 5th, 10th, or 15th. Happy birthday.

2018 Quinta do Noval Vintage Port \$94.99 97WS, 96 DC, 96WE, 95VN, 95RP

2019 Quinta do Noval Vintage Port \$69.99 97RP, 97DC, 96VN, 96WS, 96JD

Welcome Back, Bodegas Puelles

After too long an absence, the wines of Bodegas Puelles, another long-time direct import producer, have just returned to K&L. The Puelles family has deep roots in Rioja, owning property on and near their current estate since the mid-19th century, before modern Rioja existed. Located in the village of Ábalos, which is one of the northernmost in the La Rioja Alta subregion and among the most esteemed terroirs. The cool climate and the limestone-rich clay soils produce highly sought-after fruit. At the base of the Sierra Cantabria mountains, Ábalos benefits not only from the cooling proximity of the mountains, but its more westernly position gives it access to the moderating influence of the Atlantic Ocean. Their location contributes to the vibrancy of the fruit and a subtle background minerality.

They make an array of wines: the classic age statements, "antique" age statements (long-time K&L customers will remember the "Secundo Año" wine), and modern stainless-steel wines. I think of them as a "modern traditional" Rioja producer, akin to Muga. They use traditional methods to make a traditional style of wine but with a modern sensibility, i.e., ripe fruit and clean oak (no old funky barrels here).



2016 Bodegas Puelles Crianza Rioja \$17.99 2016 was a very good vintage in Rioja, and a particularly excellent year for farmers in the foothills of the Sierra Cantabria. The additional altitude and the limestone in the soil gave freshness and balance to the ripe fruit of the year. The 2016 is almost all Tempranillo with a sprinkling of Garnacha, Mazuelo, and Graciano. Puelles uses equal parts French and American oak, most of which is used. It has a great nose: dark red and spicy with accents of black berries and earth. It is lifted and bright—there

is a lot going on (one of the great things about Rioja), but it is not heavy or overwhelming. The wine is medium bodied with moderate tannins and acidity and great balance. What is not moderate with



Jesús Puelles is one of the most talented vignerons in Rioja. His estate lies in the cool, limestone-rich region of La Rioja Alta.



this wine is the fruit. The palate exudes dark berries on top of the core of red fruits. That classic Rioja spice is here, laced throughout, but not overwhelming. There is just a hint of earth which adds a touch of intrigue without approaching rusticity. The wine dances; there is just enough weight to give it substance but it has a graceful ease. A great accompaniment to almost any meal—rich and hearty or light and fresh. This could be their best crianza ever.



2008 Bodegas Puelles Gran Reserva Rioja \$29.99

This wine does everything that you want a Gran Reserva to do, and because it is from our friends at Puelles, it is a fantastic bargain. The nose tells it all: a deep, rich, perfect combination of berry, oak, earth, leather, and spice. It achieves that sense of balance you get from maturing wines where there is still some freshness to the fruit, but it is moving toward mulled tones; the tannin and acid are still very present but not intrusive—in a guiding mode verses a driving mode. And most importantly for Rioja,

those leather, spice, and earth tones start to meld and broaden. On the finish, the real pedigree of their fruit shines. The heart of the wine is a lingering dark cherry fruit that has a brightness to it that speaks of the clay limestone soils of the Puelles vineyards around the town of Ábalos. This is a wine that will shine for many years to come.

2020 Bodegas Puelles White Rioja \$15.99

Puelles Blanco is for drinking by the pool. I love that expression. But what does that mean when we are talking about a white Rioja? It means that this is an unoaked wine—a refreshing rarity in a region nearly synonymous with oak. The heart of this wine is Viura, bringing a lot of apples and pears to the party. It has just a splash of Malvasia, which heightens the aromatics and brings a little citrus. This is medium-light bodied, persistent, refreshing, clean, and very easy to drink.



The Soul of the Douro Valley

There is no region whose wines speak so clearly of their place than those of the Douro River Valley. The region and its river are large, with many twists, turns, and tributaries. One of the largest, most important tributaries is the Pinhão River, where you find the Quinta da Manoella, home to Wine and Soul. Wine & Soul is a passion project. It has to be: viticulture here is challenging, some call it heroic. The entire Douro River Valley is stunning, no picture does justice to how amazing this place is. And the Pinhão River Valley even more so. The landscape is mountains; rocks (lots and lots of rocks: schist with some granite and quartz); terraces (a couple of rows here, a stone staircase to the next couple of rows, and so on for hundreds of meters, no exaggeration); and then forests. Yes, forests. They are interspersed among the vineyards, growing where people do not want to cultivate anything. They are a wild mix of trees, bushes, shrubs, and woodland animals. They are the magic here, they maintain biodiversity and it regulate the environment, cooling and maintaining moisture.

Wine & Soul started with one wine, Pintas, named after the owner/winemaker's dog. The **2018 Wine & Soul "Pintas" Douro \$99.99 95WA 94WE 94WS** is a field blend of about 40 varietals from a small site. The wine is a balanced expression of power, concentration, and depth with a delicate complexity to it as well. A classic expression of the region.

The **2018 Wine & Soul "Manoella" Douro \$19.99 91WE 91WS** comes from the vines that surround the Quinta. This is the wine that the forests have particularly helped to shape. There is a coolness to it and an

unexpected elegance. There are only four varietals here: Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, and Tinta Francisca. Its aromas are a mix of berries and spice with soft but present tannins; a subtle aromatic lift; and a long mineral-tinged finish (very Douro).



The **2018 Wine & Soul "Manoella Vinhas Velhas" Douro \$99.99 95WS** is a little piece of history. These old vines were the first regrafted vines in the vineyard, they are over 100 years old. This wine is incredible. There is the power of the Pintas but more subtlety. Power, intensity, elegance, depth, and length—my heart skips a beat when I think about tasting this wine.

The **2020 Wine & Soul "Guru" White Douro \$39.99 93WA** is the surprising treasure of this lineup, using varietals that normally make white Port (which are even more obscure than the red ones!). Grown on granite and aged in old oak, this is a wine of texture, weight, and acidity. It is aromatic, complex, and mineral driven. Very few wines in the world can dance the line between those components, and do it so effortlessly. This is one of the great whites of the world.

One of the best parts of our job here at K&L is to share wines like these with our customers. They are amazing wines, from incredible people, from an out of this world place.



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