

Spain, Galicia: Valdeorras – More Than Young, Lees and Barrique

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18th Jun 2020 | The Wine Advocate | June 2020 Week 3

Valdeorras is a small appellation, with little more than 1,000 hectares (1,182 to be precise), but it has two different valleys, primarily from the Sil and the Bibei Rivers, although there are also some other tributaries, each with different soils and climates. There is granite, and as usually happens where there's granite, there's also schist, slate and even gneiss. So, there are zones for whites and zones for reds.

It's easy to think about Godello and Mencía, but there's much more to Valdeorras. There are a number of other permitted grapes, some that don't make much sense to me and must be almost nonexistent. I think white Godello is clearly king, but there are others, Dona Blanca and Palomino. But perhaps what's more significant is the number of interesting red grapes that complement Mencía, which can sometimes be a little one-dimensional; there's Merenzao (the same as Trousseau or Bastardo), Brancellao (also known as Albarello) and also Grao Negro, Garnacha Tintorera, Negraeda and Araúxa, the local name for Tempranillo.



Terraced vineyards in Valdeorras; the Regueirón vineyard is in the center (Photo courtesy of Virgen del Galir)

It's a very warm zone with an Atlantic influence; it rains a lot in spring, autumn and winter, while summers are warm and dry. This is an inland appellation in Galicia, neighboring the Bierzo and closer to Castilla than any other wine region in Galicia. While summers are warm and dry. This is an inland appellation in Galicia, neighboring the Bierzo and closer to Castilla than any other wine region in Galicia.

Virgen del Galir

“This first effort is very impressive”

So, place matters, and that’s why I’m so happy to see the approach taken by CVNE (Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España) from Rioja after they bought Virgen del Galir, a small family winery created in 2002 in the O Barco zone of Valdeorras and purchased by CVNE between 2017 and 2018. Since then, CVNE has replanted and recovered some more vineyards and now produces 90,000 bottles divided among a complete range in a pyramid structure following the Burgundian model. They are situated in the village of Éntoma in the Galir Valley, a tributary to the Sil.

The high-level idea for the top ranges of whites is that they all come from the same zone where Guitián is located in the Galir Valley, a zone with lots of slate but not a lot of vineyards, though they are at high altitude. Their reds are sourced from different zones, but at the top of the hierarchy, they are mainly from the Bibei Valley on granite soils.

They already have seven different wines (the red Pagos de Galir that I got was not in good shape), so you have to understand the range, but within their main vineyard Al Malosa, they have a diversity of altitudes and expositions that could deliver a number of different wines... But this first effort is very impressive, and they have a good geographical approach to the wines, escaping the young-lees-barrique structure of too many.



The newly planted Amalosa vineyard from Virgen del Galir has 21 hectares with different altitudes and expositions. (Photo courtesy Virgen del Galir)

2019 Virgen del Galir · Maruxa Godello

Rating
89

Reviewed by
Luis Gutiérrez

Issue Date
18th Jun 2020



Maruxa, or Mary in English, is a Great Galician Name. She was the winery founders' mother.

The wine comes from our vineyards in the village of Éntoma, Valdeorras. We classify it as a village wine.

The 2019 Maruxa Godello was produced with purchased grapes and those from their own vineyards on slate soils in the village of Éntoma close to the Galir River. It fermented in stainless steel and was kept with lees for three months. They look for a fresh, varietal Godello from a warm zone, the Galir Valley, on slate soils. This is very young and very recently bottled; right now, it's a little reductive/flinty, varietal, clean and serious, with good weight and freshness. 2019 seems to be a year with very high potential. This is quite impressive. 40,000 bottles produced. It was bottled in March 2020.

2019 Virgen del Galir · Maruxa Mencía

Rating
89

Reviewed by
Luis Gutiérrez

Issue Date
18th Jun 2020



Maruxa, or Mary in English, is a Great Galician Name. She was the winery founders' mother.

The wine comes from our vineyards in the village of Éntoma, Valdeorras. We classify it as a village wine.

Like the white, the red 2019 Maruxa Mencía is mainly from purchased grapes and a little bit of their own grapes in the village of Éntoma in the Sil Valley of Valdeorras on slate soils, and it fermented and matured in stainless steel. It's fruit driven, varietal and straightforward. Here, they wanted the varietal purity of an everyday red, and it has the typicity and some of that earthy touch of the grape. 26,000 bottles. It was bottled in May 2020.

2019 Virgen del Galir · Pagos del Galir Godello

Rating
91

Reviewed by
Luis Gutiérrez

Issue Date
18th Jun 2020



Pagos del Galir comes From our A Malosa vineyard in the village of Éntoma, Valdeorras. This is a vineyard of premier cru quality and status.

The single-vineyard 2019 Pagos del Galir A Malosa Godello comes from a vineyard of 21 hectares planted over four years after purchasing 10 separate plots. Such a large vineyard has diverse soils—schist, slate, silt and clay—with altitudes ranging between 400 and 600 meters. This 2019 comes from the lower terraces, rich in slate and planted first, four hectares from 2015. It fermented in a 7,000-liter stainless steel vat, a 2,000-liter oak vat and two 600-liter clay amphorae (tinajas) with indigenous yeasts, and it matured with lees for six months, except the part in stainless steel that was transferred to used 500-liter oak barrels. This has a less reductive profile, having been fermented and matured in different containers (not only stainless steel, as is the case of the Maruxa), and it also comes from more schistous soils and has a more herbal and floral touch, even a bit of fennel. It's tastier and more expressive and has a dusty/mineral sensation in the texture. These whites come from a vintage with power and freshness, a year with high potential where the whites are going to age nicely. This is the first vintage for this bottling. 10,000 bottles produced. It was bottled in April 2020.

2018 Virgen del Galir · A Villeira

Rating
93

Reviewed by
Luis Gutiérrez

Issue Date
18th Jun 2020



A Villeira is the name of the vineyard from which this wine comes from. It is in the village of As Ermitas in Valdeorras, and is an exceptional vineyard, of grand cru quality.

The red blend 2018 A Villeira was produced with mostly Mencía and some Garnacha Tintorera, Brancellao, Sousón and Merenzao from a plot on granite soils in the zone of As Ermitas in the more western part of Valdeorras where the soils are granite based. It's 0.4 hectares planted in 1958 on 12 small terraces. There is an old, small winery in the process of being restored, and they plan to ferment this wine there. It fermented in 500-liter oak barrels, where it matured for 12 months. This is a serious red, with the somewhat savage character of the reds from the zone (this is just by the O Diviso vineyard from Telmo Rodríguez), with notes of wild herbs, flowers and berries. It has a medium-bodied palate with the vibrant sensation from 2018, a freshness that comes from the zone and the granite soils too. This should develop nicely in bottle. 1,300 bottles produced. It was bottled in January 2020.

2018 Virgen del Galir · Regueiron

Rating
93

Reviewed by
Luis Gutiérrez

Issue Date
18th Jun 2020



Regueirón is the name of the vineyard from which this wine comes from. It is in the village of Éntoma in Valdeorras, and is an exceptional vineyard, of grand cru quality.

The white 2018 Regueirón was produced with Godello grapes from one 0.6-hectare vineyard planted 25 years ago; the vineyard also contains a little Treixadura and Albariño on a slate-terraced slope. This fermented in four 500-liter oak barrels and a 700-liter concrete vat, where the wine matured for 16 months. This is serious, austere, a little closed but at the same time more relaxed and less reductive, like it's more harmonious. It's a white with energy and finesse, more insinuating, nuanced and subtle. This is already impressive, but it should develop nicely in bottle. This was the first time they vinified this plot, which is impressive. 3,400 bottles and 60 magnums produced. It was bottled in March 2020.

2018 Virgen del Galir · Los Carismáticos

Rating
93

Reviewed by
Luis Gutiérrez

Issue Date
18th Jun 2020



Los Carismáticos is the name of the vineyard from which this wine comes from. It is in the village of As Ermitas in Valdeorras, and is an exceptional vineyard, of grand cru quality.

The 2018 Los Carismáticos is a rare Merenzao (Trousseau) bottling from a small 0.3-hectare plot in the zone of As Ermitas planted 50+ years ago on decomposed granite soils. The grape used is also called Bastardo, María Ordoña or Godello Negro locally, and there are no more than 5,000 kilos produced in the whole appellation. It fermented with full clusters in open-top 500-liter oak barrels, where it matured for 10 months followed by three months in concrete. This is a different zone from Éntoma where they have their main vineyard, this is the Bibe Valley, where the soils are granite. This is a bright ruby color, translucent and with a perfumed, floral and delicate nose, quite varietal, a little ascetic and serious, with a fresh, herbal side to it. The palate is intensely mineral and has fine-grained, chalky tannins. This is a delicate variety with thin skins, so you have to be careful with it. 2018 was a challenging year, but for the reds, it seems to be behaving quite well. As they are fascinated by the variety, they are planting some more... 1,300 bottles produced. It was bottled in April 2020.