

# The Ribera del Duero Wine Region

*Savoring the Great Wines & Gastronomy of Spain*



*The Abadía Retuerta vineyards on the Milla de Oro, the "Golden Mile"*

## Touring the Ribera del Duero Wine Region

Considered one of the most legendary winemaking regions in Spain, the Ribera del Duero, a short drive northwest of Madrid on Spain's northern plateau, is home to some of the most elegant red wines in the world. The Ribera del Duero appellation, or D.O., straddles four provinces in Castilla y León: Valladolid, Burgos, Soria and Segovia. The fabled Milla de Oro, or the Golden Mile, lies along both sides of the Duero River in the Valladolid province and is often referred to as the heart of the region. Here you'll find the renowned vineyards of Vega Sicilia, Pingus, Hacienda Monasterio, Aalto, Arzuaga Navarro, Abadía Retuerta and Mauro (the latter two sit just west of the appellation's official limits). As fabled as these wineries are, the region is filled with outstanding boutique wineries, including López Cristóbal in Roa, Hermanos Pérez Pascuas in Pedrosa, Ismael Arroyo-Valsotillo in Sotillo de la Ribera, Comenge in Curiel de Duero, and the quite small, but award-winning wineries of Bodegas Vezanzones and Briego in Fompedraza.

The extremes of weather, from scorchingly hot summers with moderate to low rainfall and harsh, cold winters, combined with the unique soil conditions and higher elevation, create the ideal growing conditions for the Tempranillo (early-ripening) grape, known locally as Tinto Fino, or Tinta del País, but it is the great passion for producing great wines that make the Ribera del Duero so notable.

## Ribera del Duero

Ribera's earliest underground cellars, with their distinctive stone chimneys, called *zarceras*, were built in the 13th century in towns across the region and still serve to protect the wines from the extreme climate changes. The limestone caves, dug by hand, provide the perfect conditions for aging these fine wines.

One of the best examples of these cellars is the 400 meter long wine storage cellar of Bodegas Ismael Arroyo-Valsotillo in Sotillo de la Ribera



Although the Denominación de Origen (D.O.) of Ribera del Duero has only been in existence since July 1982, starting with just 8 wineries, winemaking in the region dates back more than 2000 years to the time of the Romans who had a settlement, Clunia, in what is now the small village of Baños de Valdearados in the province of Burgos.

**THE RIBERA DEL DUERO**



*Hand sorting at Bodegas Comenge*



*Removing grape skins at Bodegas Mauro*

As of October 2010, the Ribera del Duero counted 255 commercial wineries with 35,000 hectares in production (about one third the area of their rival, Rioja to the north) scattered along its 115 km length. Major winemaking is centered in and around the towns of Peñafiel (Valladolid), Roa and Aranda de Duero (Burgos) and San Esteban de Gormaz (Soria), all of which sit along the banks of the Duero River.

The “Magic Mile” lies just west of Peñafiel, where most of the vineyards are located in lower elevations. Here the wineries employ special towers to move the heavier, colder air that settles in over the river valley to protect the grapes from the dangers of an early fall frost, common to the area.

On average, the vineyards of the Ribera del Duero are planted between 2,500 and 2,800 feet (760 to 850 meters) above sea level (with some vineyards as high as 3,100 feet or 945 meters), resulting in considerable differences, up to 30 degrees F, between nighttime and daytime temperatures. The predominant grape, the Tinto Fino

or Tempranillo actually benefits from this dramatic change of temperature. It likes to cool off or “sleep”, lie dormant, at night and warm up during the day. These conditions yield smaller berries with loose clusters and tougher skin, resulting in more skin-to-juice contact, promoting full-bodied, powerful wines, but retaining the grape’s renowned elegance, which is a signature of Ribera del Duero wines.

The maximum yields are limited by the D.O. to 7,000 kilos per hectare, but the average yields for the past 22 years have rarely exceeded 3,600 kilos per hectare, as the wineries have reduced the quantity in pursuit of quality.

The rich red wines produced in the Ribera del Duero, including Joven robles, the youngest wines, will benefit from decanting.

## WINES OF THE RIBERA DEL DUERO

The red wines produced in the Ribera del Duero are designated as Joven, Joven Roble, Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva.

**Joven:** "Joven Roble" and "Joven Barrica" are terms that refer to wines aged in oak barrels from three to six



months. These wine tend to be fruity and vibrant and are meant to be consumed when young.

**Crianza:** Aged for 2 years with a minimum of 12 months in oak barrels, these wines are released after the first of October, two years following the harvest. They have well balanced tannins with a full-bodied and velvety feel.

**Reserva:** Aged 3 years, a minimum of twelve months in oak; these wine can only be placed on the market after the first of October of the third year following the harvest. Reserva wines are bottled after 12 months and laid down to sleep until ready to be released. They are typically elegant and intense.

**Gran Reserva:** These are wines of outstanding quality, made in select vintage years only. Aged a minimum of 5 years, a minimum of 24 months in oak barrels, followed by additional bottle aging, and cannot be released until five years after the October harvest. The wines are complex and structured, with great balance and vitality.

The area does also produce a small quantity of rosé, **rosado**, and Bodegas Valduero produces an outstanding white, García Viadero, made from the albillo grape.

## WINE TOURING IN THE RIBERA

We made our first stop during our harvest trip at the beautiful estate of **Abadia Retuerta**, a restored 16th century Abbey near Sardón de Duero (Valladolid), where we enjoyed a deluxe guided tour via 4x4 of the immaculate vineyards, the cutting edge production facility and a lengthy tasting in the winery's new and very stylish Vinoteca. A visit to this stunning winery followed by a gourmet lunch is a "must" for all travelers to the region.

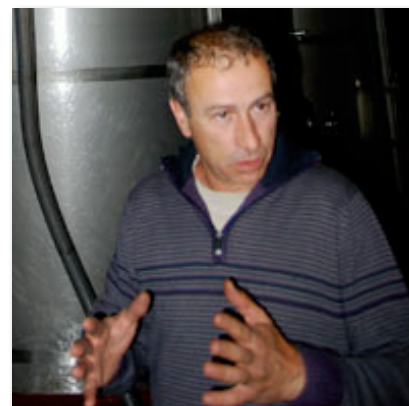
We were equally impressed by the gorgeous estate of the **Hermanos Pérez Pascuas**, located in Pedrosa de Duero on the Burgos side. We were greeted by Adolfo, one of the three brothers, and treated to a private tour with tasting of the full gamut of Viña Pedrosa wines in their soaring Estate Space, surrounded by pine forests and with

the loveliest panoramic views in all of the Ribera del Duero Burgalesa.

In the Burgos province, we were warmly received at two small family-run, boutique wineries. At **Ismael Arroyo-Valsotillo**, we explored their warren of fascinating 16th century subterranean caves, 1,200 square meters of ancient tunnels, hand dug into the rock.

At father and son winery, **López Cristóbal**, the son and oenologist, Galo López, poured us their superb, small production Bagús label, made from old vines and not available in the U.S. Rich, complex and intense!

Other highly welcoming family run wineries that visitors should not miss are the cellars of **Hermanos Sastre** in La Horra, Alejandro Fernández's stunning estate, **Condado de Haza**, outside of Roa and equally beautiful **Valduero** in Gumiel de Mercado.



*Ramon Arroyo Callejo of Val Sotillo*

Contemporary architecture lovers will also want to visit two exciting new projects: the striking Richard Rodgers' designed cellars of **Bodegas Protos**, tucked below the Peñafiel castle and the newly inaugurated Sir Norman Foster project for the Faustino Group, **Bodegas Portia** in Gumiel de Izán.

**LODGING IN THE RIBERA DEL DUERO**

For our harvest exploration of the most prestigious wineries of the Valladolid section of the Ribera del Duero, we based ourselves at the 4-star **Posada Fuente de la Aceña** in Quintanilla de Onésimo , a 300- year old restored water mill. It is the project of architect Roberto del Valle who also designed Peñafiel’s Wine Museum. The inn offers 22 contemporary rooms, all having access to a private terrace facing the Duero, affording utter tranquility and total relaxation. The Posada, a member of the Posadas Reales de Castilla y León, is a only a few minutes walk from the prestigious Dominio de Pingus cellars and a short drive from legendary Vega Sicilia (*but not open to the general public*). It houses a fine gourmet restaurant where the area’s great winemakers, such as Peter Sisseck of Pingus, entertain their guests.

For our base for winery tours in the Burgos province we chose the immaculate and cossetting **La Vida Wine-Spa** in the tiny village of Aldeayuso, a few minutes south of Peñafiel. This warm and welcoming rural hotel offers only 12 spacious double rooms and 5 junior suites along with a complete array of wine therapy treatments, including red wine baths.



Designed and decorated according to Feng-Shui, it makes a quiet and very comfortable base while exploring the eastern half of the Ribera del Duero and the atmospheric town of Peñafiel, its magnificent castle and Museum of Wine. It also boasts a petit but fine gourmet restaurant, Guyot, only open for dinner. Both the Posada and La Vida are family-friendly hotels.

An intriguing option for both history and wine buffs is the **Posada Real de Ventosilla**, a Royal Country Inn, another member of Posadas Reales de Castilla y León. It is adjacent to the estate of Bodegas Prado Rey, Real Sitio de Ventosilla. This 17th century palace, with its coats of arms of the houses of Lerma and Medinaceli still intact, was built in somber Herrerian style for the Duke of Lerma to provide lodging for King Philip III during his hunting trips to the area. This historic inn

provides eighteen rooms with a/c, TV and Internet connection, the grounds offer both a pool and tennis courts, the hotel organizes tours and tastings at its Prado Rey winery, and very reasonably priced dinners are served for hotel guests only.

Two exciting destination hotels are in the works that will provide much needed luxury options for discerning travelers.



Soon to be opened in the center of Peñafiel will be noted winemaker Alejandro Fernández’s first hotel venture, the **Hotel Pesquera AF**. This very attractive 4-star property, a dramatic conversion of a former flour mill, will have 36 wine-themed rooms and five duplex suites, a wine spa (of course!), indoor pool, gourmet restaurant, the Luna Llena, a relaxing outdoor garden and terrace, handy parking garage and will provide deluxe accommodations right in the heart of town.

Also coming soon is the exclusive **Le Domaine** on the spectacular estate of Abadía Retuerta, which will offer 22 luxurious guest quarters in the reconverted abbey, along with a gourmet restaurant (now open), wine spa, gym and pool. The abbey’s chapel will be available for private events, such as weddings.



**DINING IN THE RIBERA DEL DUERO**

Fine dining, gourmet style, in the Ribera del Duero can be a bit of a challenge, as most restaurants limit their menu items to the very traditional Castilian classics: the area's acclaimed (and succulent) baby roast lamb, baby lamb chops grilled over vine shoots, lamb sweetbreads (*mollejas*), steak (*chuletón*) and roast suckling pig (*cochinillo*). But the tiny, 4-fork restaurant **Guyot** at Spa-Hotel La Vida (open for dinner only) is one of our top choices for more creative fare, along with the classics from their adobe roasting oven.

We also enjoy the striking brick and stone restaurant housed in the former flour mill in the **Posada Fuente de la Aceña**, whose kitchen is in the gifted hands of chef Pedro de Rodrigo. Another creative dining spot can be found in Roa, adjacent to the Páramo Guzmán winery, in the contemporary **Hotel Raíz** restaurant, which is a father and daughter affair, father Javier Jimeno at the helm of the kitchen and daughter Myriam, a gifted professional sommelier, manning the dining room.

But it would be a mistake to come to the Ribera del Duero and not sample the region's most popular and beloved dish, the *cordero lechal* or *lechazo*, a quarter of tender, melting off the bone, suckling baby lamb, roasted for 2 to 2-1/2 hours in adobe ovens fired with Holm oak and served in earthenware casseroles. You can enjoy a memorable roast lamb feast at any one of the numerous roasting taverns or *hornos de asar* that line the countryside. In Aranda de Duero, which claims to be the "cradle of roast lamb", there are a dozen *hornos de asar* from which to choose. We sampled this fabled *lechazo* at two highly acclaimed

temples of roast baby lamb, two of the top roasting houses in all of Castilla y León.

**Restaurant Mannix** in Campaspero, just south of Peñafiel, is rated the region's number one *asador* in the reliable Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía guide, and the young, enthusiastic master roaster, Marco Antonio García, served us the most tender lamb we've experienced to date. In addition, we enjoyed Javier Cristóbal's celebrated **Nazareno**, the area's "roast lamb palace" (open for lunch only), sitting next to the medieval walls at the top of Roa, with panoramic views of the countryside from its lively and always packed-to-the-rafters upstairs dining room.

A starter of grilled *chorizo* or *morcilla*, a simple lettuce salad, a clay cazuela of *lechazo* and a local ewe's milk cheese for dessert makes for a truly memorable meal. Don't miss an opportunity to try this simple but immensely satisfying dish during your visit to the Ribera del Duero.



Roast Baby Lamb at Mannix, Campaspero

**Upcoming Events**

**18-28 March 2011**  
Harvard HILR Barcelona to Bilbao Tour

**17-24 April 2011**  
Holy Week - Semana Santa  
Sevilla, Malaga, Madrid, Burgos, etc.

**3-8 May 2011**  
La Feria de Abril - Sevilla's April Fair  
(Starts two weeks after Easter Sunday)

**1-30 May 2011**  
San Isidro, Madrid's top festival

**24 June 2011**  
Jazz Festival Season begins in the Basque Country with the Victoria International Jazzfest, 24 June-3 July

**6-14 July 2011**  
Fiesta de San Fermín and the Feria del Toro, *el encierro*, the running of the bulls, Pamplona

**August 2011**  
Semana Grande festivals-Bilbao and San Sebastián

**September 2011**  
Grape Harvest Festivals in Spain

**September - November 2011**  
Grape Harvest - Ribera del Duero, Rioja and Navarra

**March - November 2011**  
Wine Touring - The Ribera del Duero, Rioja, Navarra, Priorat, País Vasco, Pays Basque, Galicia and the Sherry Triangle.

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Heraclio Veganzones Pesquera  
Bodegas Veganzones