

THAT LITTLE WINE BAR

James The Sommelier – Spanish Wine

'Wine honors the soul, so honor it with yours.'

Spain: A chameleon's tale



Newly imported, affordable and terribly trendy new Spanish wines at That Little Wine Bar now!

It may be unexpected, perhaps, but Spanish wine culture is as varied as a chameleon walking through a kaleidoscope, and it is the third biggest producer of wine in the world. After an influx of French wines and practices, Spain enjoyed booming trade in the mid-1800s and was exported all over the world to account for the lack of French wine, devastated by phylloxera. Spain itself was ravaged by phylloxera in the early 20th century and after two world wars, its wine production was left in apparent disrepair. However, Spain's skin toughened and began adapting to its new environment. Then, during the 1970s, decisions were made to renovate insolvent vineyards and replant grapes where wheat was being grown to feed the hungry. Spain's skin is now distinctly red in colour as one of the most exciting wine countries in the world.

Like any exciting wine producing country, Spanish regions are all making wines to call their own and taking pride in their own unique blends and tastes. Sure, everybody has heard of Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Navarra but what about Castilla y Leon. With poor soil and a harsh climate, it does not immediately strike one as the best area for wine production but appearances can be deceiving. These conditions actually work in the wines favour as the vines dig deeper in the soil to find water concentrating the grape juice and making them even tastier. Of more interest, however, is the municipality of Rueda, which is now laying claim to some of the best whites in the whole country and even in Europe. Having grown wine for thousands of years previously, it was awarded its own appellation in 1980 and since then the white wines produced here have gained a considerable reputation.

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The grapes on offer are also as great as the areas. Tempranillo, the core to most Spanish red wines, adapts itself to certain conditions so rigorously that it has lost its own idiosyncratic flavour profile. It becomes so different that it now has over 10 different names. The Tempranillo grape in Rioja is usually more Pinot Noir-like whereas the Tinto Fino of the Ribera, takes on an almost Cab-like quality, with heavier tannins and more cherry flavors. Also, the fashionable Verdejo grape has made a name for itself as the new white to drink in Spain. From Barcelona to Madrid trendy wine bars are filling to the brim with Verdejo from Rueda and customers are praising its aromatic and refreshing character. And then there is Cava, Spain's answer to Champagne, which compares very favourably to the best of them.

A chameleon, indeed. It seems that most of Spanish wine culture is instinctively morphing and shifting its way into the future at its own pace. The exciting thing about a chameleon is... you never know *where* it's going.