

Email not displaying correctly? View it in your browser.



## **Vintages Preview**

**April 3rd release**

### **¡España! Spain's rise to prominence**



Dear Vintages Preview Readers,

Anyone following developments in the wine world can't have failed to notice the incredible rise to prominence that Spain has experienced in the last decade. I'd say that the US and the UK markets are way ahead of Ontario in their acceptance of Spanish wines, but this feature release at Vintages is a clear sign that España is being taken more seriously here, too. I lived and studied in Spain from 1994-1995 and spent a wee bit of time exploring the local wines (albeit with a different focus than my approach today), and recall remarking on the stunning value on offer. \$3-\$5 would buy you a very respectable Rioja or Ribera del Duero; the most I ever spent on a wine was \$18

for a bottle of Tinta Valbuena from Vega Sicilia, these days closer to \$150. I drank the wine with a friend, over a picnic, straight from the bottle. It was one of my first great wine drinking experiences.

15 years and 5000 kms away, the entry price point has more than tripled, but Spain is still a great source of good value, characterful reds, and increasingly whites, too. Out of 23 wines from Spain in this release including two sherries, only one is more than \$20, and that's for a 2001 Gran Reserva Rioja (Lealtanza), so more than justifiable. Rioja still dominates the list of regions on offer, certainly Spain's best known internationally, but we are finally starting to see more wines from less well-known areas like Montsant, Rias Baixas, Bierzo and Jumilla to name but a handful. The list of varieties used is not as long as say, what Portugal or Greece can offer the world, but there's the commercial advantage of familiarity. Many drinkers already know about grenache and mourvedre, both originally Spanish grapes, and it doesn't take too long to learn their Spanish names (garnacha and monastrell). Add cariñena (carignan), tempranillo and mencia, and you've got most of the native reds in this release covered. Albariño grown in the northwest in Galicia, in denominations of origin like Rias Baixas, and verdejo from Rueda are considered Spain's best whites.

Clearly there are many regional differences to consider, but the reality is that at in this price category, producer technique is a more significant style factor. Many of the

wines in this release share a resemblance of abundantly ripe and/or raisined fruit, and soft, plush tannins, making for wines with broad commercial appeal. Indeed if there's anything to complain about, it's the similarity of styles available. This can be explained partly because the same LCBO tasters are responsible for selecting all of the wines (a major defect in our monopoly system), and partly because that's what Spain is producing in commercial abundance.

I've said it before, but in my view, Spain is still well behind many old world, and even quite a few new world wine producing countries on the maturity curve. Remember that "fine wine" is a relatively recent phenomenon in most regions outside of Rioja and Jerez, and producers are still grappling with the establishment of distinct regional styles, not to mention containing the enthusiasm of discovering that there are markets for their wines beyond regional and national frontiers. In this sense, Spain is where California or Australia was in the early 1990s, when the general over-exuberance resulted in exaggerated styles of overly oaky fruit concoctions. The least interesting wines in the release were those that taste like they could have come from anywhere: simple, jammy fruit, soft texture and an impression of sweetness on the palate – basic supermarket wines. Everybody needs to pay the bills. The best were well made to be sure, but have more individuality and personality, a fundamental difference between commodity wine and an authentic expression of a place.

The pendulum will continue its inexorable oscillation back to the middle, as it already has in many other countries. I am sure that the soul searching already underway in Spain will steer the country toward a place of prominence on store shelves, restaurant lists and in private cellars the world over. While not widely recognized or even represented in Ontario, Spain's top wines are up there with the best. Ultimately these representative icons need to find their way here in order to cast a spell of quality on the rest of Spain's offering, just as Chile, Australia and South Africa, among others, are working to get out of the 'good value ghetto', or at least build another more chic and exclusive neighborhood around the ghetto to bring up the average real estate prices.

My top ten wines from Spain are [listed below](#) for your convenience. The wines that topped the list for me were universally appealing, with neither excess of oak nor exaggeratedly ripe or raisined fruit. Some favour fruity flavours, while others are more traditionally savoury and earthy, but all are representative of the New Spain. As though to hammer the value point home, four Spanish wines can also be found in the [top ten smart buys](#).

Outside of the Iberian Peninsula, southern France continues to impress with a second straight number one top buy, this time the excellent St. Chinian from the Cooperative of Roquebrun in the Languedoc. Spring is in the air with a pair of vibrant whites from Austria and Germany, New Zealand delivers a delicious pinot noir for under \$20, and one of the

top scoring wines in the entire release was grown in the Okanagan Valley.

### Top Ten Smart Buys:

1. [2007 CAVE DE ROQUEBRUN LA GRANGE DES COMBES ST. CHINIAN-ROQUEBRUN AC](#) \$16.95 90pts \*\*\*
2. [2006 TOWNSHIP 7 MERLOT VQA](#) Okanagan Valley \$26.95 91pts \*\*\*
3. [2008 CVNE MONOPOLE DOCa](#) Rioja \$13.95 87pts \*\*\*
4. [2007 CHÂTEAU DONA BAISSAS VIEILLES VIGNES CÔTES DU ROUSSILLON VILLAGES](#) \$17.95 90pts \*\*\*
5. [2006 LARIA VINO TINTO](#) DOC Montsant \$18.95 90pts \*\*\*
6. [2008 ARTAZURI GARNACHA](#) DO Navarra \$13.95 87pts \*\*\*
7. [2008 REICHSRAT VON BUHL ARMAND RIESLING KABINETT](#) QmP \$19.95 90pts \*\*\*
8. [2005 LOS 800](#) DOCa Priorat \$19.95 90pts \*\*\*
9. [2008 SEIFRIED ESTATE PINOT NOIR](#) Nelson, South Island \$19.95 90pts \*\*\*
10. [2008 LAURENZ UND SOPHIE SINGING GRÜNER VELTLINER](#) Niederösterreich \$14.95 88pts \*\*\*

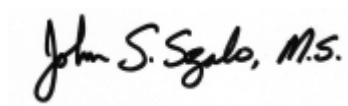
### Top Ten Feature Wines at a Glance: Spain:

1. [2006 LARIA VINO TINTO](#) DOC Montsant \$18.95 90pts \*\*\*
2. [2005 LOS 800](#) DOCa Priorat \$19.95 90pts \*\*\*
3. [2001 LEALTANZA GRAN RESERVA](#) DOCa Rioja \$27.95 90pts \*\*1/2
4. [2004 BODEGAS LAN RESERVA](#) DOCa Rioja \$19.95 89pts \*\*1/2

5. [2006 VIÑA ZACO TEMPRANILLO](#) DOCa Rioja \$14.95 88pts  
\*\*1/2
6. [2008 GABA DO XIL MENCÍA](#) DO Valdeorras \$15.95 88pts \*\*1/2
7. [2006 LA COVA DELS VINS OMBRA](#) DO Montsant \$16.95 88pts  
\*\*1/2
8. [2008 LEIRA ALBARIÑO](#) DO Rias Baixas \$16.95 88pts \*\*1/2
9. [2008 CVNE MONOPOLE](#) DOCa Rioja \$13.95 87pts \*\*\*
10. [2008 ARTAZURI GARNACHA](#) DO Navarra \$13.95 87pts \*\*\*

To see all of my reviews click [here](#).

Cheers,



John Szabo, MS

---

**Invite a friend, get a free month of premium service**

Please remember to [invite your friends to WineAlign](#). For every friend you invite who registers with our service you will receive a FREE month of our premium service.

---

**FREE**

# **RESTAURANT GUIDE**

*Inside Toronto Life's April Issue*



---

If there are any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to send an email to [feedback@WineAlign.com](mailto:feedback@WineAlign.com) .

You provided your email information to Wine Access First in Line eReport or you are a paid subscriber to WineAlign.