



Big Reds from Spain

By Darrin Minehan

Any wine lover with some sense of adventure has certainly ventured into the great value reds of Spain over the past several years. If you believe the wine critics, you'll see more 88–90 point ratings for wines under \$10, and 90–94 point ratings for wines under \$25 from Spain than from just about anywhere else. But many of Spain's great reds retailing from \$25–\$50 remain relatively unknown to Americans. Here's a look at three under appreciated regions to explore.

While Rioja is the best known region using primarily Tempranillo, the grape achieves perhaps even greater heights in Ribera del Duero, where it is also referred to as Tinta del Pais. Some producers occasionally add Cabernet, Merlot, Grenache and other varieties to the blend making deep, structured, velvety-textured wines. Vega Sicila is the most historic producer here, but their wines are priced into the stratosphere. Look for the estates of Alejandro Fernandez (Pesquera, Condado de Haza) and Emilio Moro.

Priorat is the modern star on the Mediterranean Coast, just south of Barcelona. Like Ribera del Duero, it barely registered on the Spanish wine map until the late 20th century. Carignan and Grenache are the primary grapes here and they can produce chewy wines of, at times, stunning concentration. 2006 is a standout among many successful recent vintages. Look for Clos Galena, Marge, Mas Doix, Mas Alta, Terra de Varema or Alvaro Palacios Les Terrasses.

Toro is a region in Western Spain that has been receiving a great deal of attention from prominent winemakers in recent years. They are buying up vineyards in this medieval town to take advantage of the old vine Tinta de Toro (local strain of Tempranillo) planted at high elevations (like Priorat and Ribera del Duero). The value wines of this region can be wonderful if you don't mind some rougher tannins and rustic characteristics. But to experience the grace and power that the new money influx has brought to the region, try something from Almiraz, Numanthia, Lurton or Buil. Vinas del Cenit also produces blockbusters from the surrounding Zamora region.

Salud!