

The *Epic* Wines *of the* Canary Islands

by **Santo Bains**

including

100 Canarian Wine and Food Pairings

by sommelier **Rodrigo González Carballo**

and

**An Introduction to the Unique Grapes
of the Canary Islands**

by **Dr Maria Francesca Fort Marsal**



For Victoria and George

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This work has been undertaken in the spirit of scholarship and knowledge sharing, and the time and resources required for the creation of *The Epic Wines of the Canary Islands* were provided (by the authors and publisher) on a purely not-for-profit basis.

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LOCATION OF THE CANARY ISLANDS



CANARY ISLANDS WINE STATISTICS

Total wine production

8,753,000 litres/yr
*of which 52% is red (incl. rosé)
 and 48% is white*

3 biggest red wine-producing appellations

DO Tacoronte-Acentejo	1,781,000 litres/yr
DO Valle de la Orotava	640,000 litres/yr
DO La Palma	410,000 litres/yr

3 most abundant red grapes by weight of fruit grown

Listán Negro	3,096,000 kg/yr
Negramoll	454,000 kg/yr
Vijariego Negro	171,000 kg/yr

3 biggest wine-producing islands

Tenerife	5,263,000 litres/yr
Lanzarote	1,950,000 litres/yr
La Palma	794,000 litres/yr

3 biggest white wine-producing appellations

DO Lanzarote	1,557,000 litres/yr
DO Abona	595,000 litres/yr
DO Valle de La Orotava	431,000 litres/yr

3 most abundant white grapes by weight of fruit grown

Listán Blanco	3,152,000 kg/yr
Malvasía Volcánica	2,592,000 kg/yr
Moscatel	351,000 kg/yr

Statistics for the Canary Islands wine appellations, here and throughout the book, are from the Gobierno de Canarias. NB Wine production data is the 5-year mean (2013–2017), while grape variety abundance data is from the 2018 harvest.

WINE APPELLATIONS OF THE CANARY ISLANDS



DOP ISLAS CANARIAS
 (Includes all of the Canary Islands)

INTRODUCTION

The first time I travelled to the Canary Islands was simply in search of a few happy, sun-drenched weeks away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. But the Fortunate Islands have touched my soul. I am now familiar with all seven of the major islands – Tenerife, La Palma, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria, El Hierro, La Gomera and Fuerteventura – and I make four or five trips to the archipelago every year. The visits are divided between family holidays and wine research, but every year the line becomes a little more blurred. During our most recent Canarian getaway, Vicki, my partner, allowed me to stuff eight bottles of wine into her suitcase for the flight back home (and I had a baker's dozen in mine). Vicki and our young son, George, know that the wines of the Canary Islands have become my passion. You will soon realise it too, because what you are about to read is the product of three years of my life during which I have applied myself as I did to my doctorate in the late 1990s. It's been exhilarating, particularly because of the wonderful people I have met on the journey. Since I left my career as a geologist to write this book, if anyone asks me: 'What gets you out of bed in the morning?', I reply: 'I'm writing about one of the most interesting wine regions of the world. And I don't *get* out of bed in the morning – I *leap*!' If they find my enthusiasm intriguing, I am happy to tell them the story of the path that brought me to this place.

Inspiration

Early on in my professional career, I was asked by my employer to represent the company at an international geological convention in Paris. I was pleased to be nominated, but I had a lot of work to complete in the office, and shoehorning in a day trip from London was not on my wish list. But it was my job, so I went – and I’m delighted I did, because it changed my life. The meeting included a generous lunch that fabulously demonstrated the excellence of French cuisine. As I made a start on the main course, I paused to sip the accompanying glass of Saint-Émilion Grand Cru Classé. It was better than any wine I had ever tasted before, and delivered the transformative insight that wine could be sublime. As I flew out of Charles de Gaulle late that night, I was bursting with energy.

Over the years that followed, I used my spare time to nourish my new-found interest, including courses at the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) school in London. While it was fascinating and exceedingly enjoyable to learn the art of wine tasting and familiarise myself with the various wine styles of the world, I needed a specific focus. I sought a *muse*.

She came to me during a holiday with Vicki in Puerto de la Cruz, on the north coast of Tenerife. Sitting with her on a warm October evening under the swaying palms of the town’s historic central square – the Plaza del Charco – out of curiosity I ordered a bottle of local wine, Monje Tradicional. Many wine enthusiasts can tell you of their ‘wine epiphany’ – like the one I’d had in Paris – but few can tell you that they have had two. My second occurred with that first sip of Tenerifan tinto. I had never before tried wine with such powerful and compelling character. If the best wines are those that transmit a clear sense of place, then this wine was off the scale.

The very next day, the beach forgotten, I went to the Casa del Vino, Tenerife’s primary wine museum, and there I learnt some fantastic things. It turns out that the Canary Islands are blessed by possessing an unusually broad range of high-quality wine grapes, many of which are unique in the world and highly charismatic; the volcanic soils on which they grow, and their proximity to the Atlantic, impart further layers of authentic Canarian personality. To my surprise, I also learnt that wine has been made in the islands since the 15th century, when the Europeans invaded, ousting the native Guanches. While the wines of the archipelago

are mostly unknown in the wider world today, in the past their export was the islands' primary source of wealth. For centuries, vast numbers of ships – none more so than those of British merchants and the Royal Navy – carried Canary wines across the high seas to mainland Europe, the Americas, Asia, and even Australia. My maternal (English) family tree being full of sea dogs, this maritime history drew me in at a personal level. During the 16th and 17th centuries, England's desire for Canary wine was practically insatiable; according to one museum display, William Shakespeare received a barrel a year as part of his salary. And would you believe it, Horatio Nelson, whom one of my ancestors served under at the Battle of Trafalgar, received a barrel of wine from the Canarian commander during the peace that followed the Royal Navy's failed invasion of Tenerife in 1797 (this was when Nelson lost his arm; he was trying to secure a beachhead at Santa Cruz).

Eager to learn more, after several hours of drinking in the information (and several wine samples) at the Casa del Vino, I went into the museum shop hoping to buy a book all about the wines of the Canary Islands. I didn't find anything on the shelves so asked a member of staff, '*¿Tienes un libro sobre los vinos de las Islas Canarias, preferiblemente en inglés?*' (Do you have a book about the wines of the Canary Islands, preferably in English?) The answer: '*No hay uno, ni siquiera en español.*' (There isn't one, not even in Spanish.) That was when I knew what I had to do. If the day before I had been stunned by finding a wine of exceptional *sense of place*, that moment at the Casa del Vino was when I discovered my own *sense of purpose*.

The Fortunate Islands

Prior to being a corporate geologist turned wine enthusiast, I had been a university academic. For nearly a decade, I composed research papers for publication in scientific journals and magazines, during which time I learnt to follow a formula comprising three key elements. I thus had a pre-existing framework with which to approach the task of writing a comprehensive book about the wines of the Canary Islands:

1. The topic of the work must be inherently interesting and relevant to a broad audience; after my Casa del Vino visit, I was sure that I had unearthed a gem.
2. Any new investigation must be underpinned by a thorough

consideration of previous work: this would demand serious library time.

3. First-hand observations being essential, this was going to require:
 - a) bodega (winery) visits, and
 - b) conversations with the leading figures of the Canary Islands wine community.

Regarding that last element I had a problem: I had no existing contacts and was not fluent in Spanish. While I was agonising about how to overcome this barrier, I went on a short holiday with Vicki and George to Tenerife. We chose to stay at The Ritz-Carlton, Abama, intending to spend most of our time enjoying the hotel's beautiful pools and beach, and on the outbound flight I decided to park my book-writing anxieties for a week and focus on family fun and relaxation. Providence had other plans for me.

The Ritz-Carlton, Abama, houses several restaurants, including the Canary Islands' only Michelin two-star establishment – Martín Berasategui's M.B. As six-year-old George was with us we didn't plan to dine there on this trip. But while we were sitting down to eat one evening at our hotel's family-friendly steakhouse, I enquired if it would be possible to have a bottle of premium Canary wine brought in from M.B.'s extensive cellar. My request went to Rodrigo González Carballo, the first native Tenerifan to hold the role of head sommelier at M.B. Curious to meet the visitor who had such a keen interest in his islands' wines, Rodrigo came over to the steakhouse to introduce himself, and we struck up an animated conversation about our shared passion. Rodrigo, fluent in English, explained that the wines of the Canary Islands are now resurgent on the world stage, attracting the attention of the leading wine critics not just in Spain, but in the UK and US as well. Half an hour later, when Rodrigo had left us to enjoy his wine (Artífice Tinto) with our food, I was elated: he had invited me to come back to the Canary Islands to accompany him on a comprehensive bodega tour. I had accepted, of course. One road trip turned into four, and Rodrigo and I have become firm friends. Our chance meeting at The Ritz-Carlton, Abama, was transformational, and while this book represents my own interpretations of the historical and modern Canary Islands wine story, Rodrigo's connections, expert knowledge and opinions have been fundamental.

In June 2018, further reinforcing my sense that fortune was playing a hand, on the last day of our final research leg Rodrigo and I participated in an event to mark the release of the 2017 wine vintage of La Gomera. That brought us into contact with another extraordinarily good-natured, generous and talented person who has contributed significantly to this work. While Rodrigo led a group tasting of Gomeran wines, Dr Maria Francesca Fort Marsal of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona, Spain, presented her latest research on the grape diversity of the Canary Islands, involving state-of-the-art genetic analysis. What I heard cleared up a few lingering uncertainties I'd had about the provenance of certain Canarian grape varieties; and Francesca, now a friend as well, has further helped me by ensuring that all of the grape descriptions in this book are consistent with the latest scientific insights.

How to approach this book

First and foremost, this book has been written for you, the reader. You may be among the millions of visitors who travel to the Canaries every year, or a wine enthusiast, or perhaps even a member of the professional wine community. Or this book's title may have intrigued you even though you have no personal connection – yet – with the islands. I hope, too, that this book will prove an entertaining read for all those of you who have helped me along the way.

This book embodies the compendium I was seeking those many years ago at the Casa del Vino. *The Epic Wines of the Canary Islands* is thus principally a guidebook, but one in which the contemporary wines of the Canary Islands are framed by tales of famous protagonists (Columbus, Nelson, Cook, Drake and many more) and descriptions of extreme natural beauty that have together created what I believe to be one of the most exciting and profoundly interesting wine regions on Earth. No less than 500 years in the making – and resilient despite the shocks of war, market collapses and catastrophic natural disasters – Canary wine is undeniably heroic and grand, and here is its story. If I can at least make you more aware and interested in this topic than you were before, or help you to enjoy your glass of Canary just that little bit more, I will be delighted.

The book contains 11 regional chapters – one for each of the major wine zones of the Canary Islands. By all means read the entire book, but each

chapter tells its own unique story, so you can dive straight into whichever region or island you wish to explore. Tenerife has always been the most important island of the archipelago as measured by annual wine production, and it has five independent wine zones. So it occupies the first five chapters of the book (starting with the north-west, where exports of Canary first commenced 500 years ago). La Palma comes next because during the 16th and 17th centuries at least, it was the only significant economic rival to Tenerife, and because it retains a notably rich wine culture to this day. Lanzarote, the second biggest producer today, is then followed by Gran Canaria, El Hierro, La Gomera and finally Fuerteventura, which have been ordered by (descending) volume of wine output per year.

The 18 most important grape varieties of the Canary Islands are described in detail, each one of them within the chapter where I deem it to be emblematic or highly relevant to the local story. It is important to note, however, that the majority of the varieties are grown throughout the archipelago and may hold prestige for several regions. So, although the grape variety Malvasía Aromática, for example, can be found throughout Tenerife and is of great importance to its winemaking tradition, I have placed its full description within the chapter on La Palma, because on that island today that grape is being used to produce some of the greatest wines in all of Spain, if not the world. This means that to find full information on the grapes that are representative of any given wine zone, you may need to refer to the table of contents.

Each of the chapters 1 through 10 ends with descriptions of meritorious bodegas and wines. All 24 profiled bodegas were visited, and all 100 wines tasted – in many cases across multiple vintages (note: tasting notes given relate to the vintage year highlighted in bold). They have been selected for inclusion because they were good to excellent in quality *and* because their stories had relevance to the themes of this book. There are many bodegas and hundreds of wines of the Canary Islands that have not found their way into this book – and a still larger number with which I am not yet even familiar. Everyone I have interviewed thus far has been so generous and amiable that I rejoice that there is so much more for me to learn and to write.

Near the end of the book is a wine finder section, where the wines profiled in this book are tabulated by type, price, constituent grapes and nature,

my intention being to make it easy to find the styles of wine that appeal to *you*. For each of the wines listed there, I have included the tasting notes that Rodrigo and I made as we experienced them, in which their aromas are attributed to ‘primary’, ‘secondary’ or ‘tertiary’ factors (the glossary that follows this introduction deciphers technical terms). For each wine, I have also tried to explain how it informs (or fits within) the Canary Islands’ epic wine story, or how it showcases a specific grape variety, elaboration process or *terroir*.

With this book I hope above all else to convey how the superlative modern wines of the archipelago have been brought into existence by the accumulated hard work and dedication of countless generations of passionate and talented Canarian grape growers and winemakers. It has been a privilege and honour to meet those responsible for taking up the baton through our era; an experience that has left me confident that the future of Canary wine is in good hands, and that its next 500 years may be even more spectacular than its first.

Santo Bains, St Pancras, June 2019



GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

abv – alcohol by volume

afrutado – a particular type of semi-sweet wine that has intensely fruity aromas

aguardiente – alcoholic spirits (usually brandy)

alisios – Canarian term for the Atlantic trade winds that blow from the north-east

appellation – any defined and protected wine zone

ARPICI – approximate retail/shop price in the Canary Islands (at the time of writing): € denotes 1–10 euros, €€ is 11–20 euros, and so on up to €€€€€+ for 50+ euros

barranco – a ravine

barrica – an oak cask, also sometimes used to denote a wine that was fermented in barrel

bâtonnage – the action of stirring settled *lees* back into a wine

blanco – a term used to indicate white wine or white grapes

bodega – a winery or wine cellar

calima – Canarian term for Saharan heatwaves

Canary – historical term for the Malvasía-based sweet wines that England (and many other countries) imported from the Canary Islands in centuries past

carbonic maceration – fermentation of uncrushed grapes under a blanket of carbon dioxide (*maceración carbónica* in Spanish)

cask – a word used interchangeably in this book for wine barrel

cooperative – in this book, a term used to denote a *bodega* that is jointly owned by grape growers who pool their resources to produce wine under one or more labels (*cooperativa* in Spanish)

coronal forest – the pine forest that sits, like a crown, atop Tenerife

coupage – the enhancement of a base wine by the addition of small amounts of wines made from other grape varieties

crianza – a red wine aged for a minimum of 2 years (including at least 6 months in oak barrels) prior to release; a white wine aged for a minimum of 1 year (including at least 6 months in oak barrels) prior to release

cumbres – uplands/highlands

cuvée – wine produced from mixing multiple grape varieties before or after fermentation

Denominación de Origen (DO) – an *appellation* regulated by Spanish law

Denominación de Origen Protegida (DOP) – an *appellation* regulated by European Union law

disgorgement – the manual process of removing sediment from *méthode traditionnelle* sparkling wine bottles

dulce – a sweet wine

elaboration process – see *vinification*

espaldera – the most common modern system of vine training (*trellis* in English)

espumoso – a sparkling wine

finca – a country estate

fortified – wine to which alcohol (usually brandy) has been added, to halt further fermentation

foudre – a huge wooden vat, many times larger than a standard wine barrel

frizzante – Italian term for a semi-sparkling wine

gran reserva – a red wine aged for a minimum of 5 years (including at least 18 months in oak barrels) prior to release; a white wine aged for a minimum of 4 years (including at least 6 months in oak barrels) prior to release

grand cru – a term applied as a legal designation or informal description for a vineyard that routinely produces wines of the highest class

Guanches – the people who lived in the Canary Islands before the Spanish conquest

ha – hectares

indigenous yeasts – yeasts that occur naturally in the vineyard or winery (as opposed to lab-cultured strains)

jable – coarse-grained volcanic soils, formed from a mix of pumice and volcanic ash

joven – a young wine that has seen little or no ageing before release (plural: *jóvenes*)

lagar – a large open container in which grapes are crushed to make wine (plural: *lagares*)

laurisilva rainforest – a type of ancient subtropical forest still found today in some areas of the Canary Islands that experience year-round high humidity and warmth

lees – the deposits of dead yeast and other particulates that precipitate during alcoholic fermentation and ageing of wines (*lías* in Spanish)

loam – soil comprised of approximately equal parts of clay and sand

maceration – the period in the winemaking process when there is contact between grape juice and skins (*maceración* in Spanish)

malolactic fermentation (MLF) – the second fermentation of wine that (sometimes) follows alcoholic fermentation

masl – metres above sea level

medianías – midlands

mejorantes – a term sometimes used in the Canaries to denote the major international grape varieties of the world (e.g. Syrah, Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon)

méthode traditionnelle – the method of sparkling wine production that originated in Champagne, in which there are two stages of fermentation: the first in tank, the second in bottle

mildiu – Spanish term for a fungal disease (downy mildew) that attacks grapevines

mirador – viewpoint (plural: *miradores*)

noble rot – a fungus (*Botrytis cinerea*) that can attack grapes causing them to dehydrate and shrivel, and in so doing, provide the opportunity to produce superb sweet wines

oenology – the study of wine and winemaking

oidio – Spanish term for a fungal disease (powdery mildew) that attacks grapevines

parra alto – a tall arbour made of vine leaves to protect grapes from the sun

parra bajo – a short arbour made of vine leaves to protect grapes from the sun

passerillage – when ripe grape bunches are left on the vine late into the summer to dry and concentrate sugar and flavour

petrichor – the distinctive pleasant odour that fills the air when rain falls after a heatwave

phylloxera – a North American insect that devastated the grape harvests of Europe in the late 19th century – but *never reached the vineyards of the Canary Islands*

picón – small stones that fall out of the air during a volcanic eruption to form high-permeability soils (*lapilli* in English)

primary aromas (1°) – the aromas in wine derived directly from the grapes and *terroir*

reserva – a red wine aged for a minimum of 3 years (including at least 12 months in oak barrels) prior to release; a white wine aged for a minimum of 2 years (including at least 6 months in oak barrels) prior to release

residual sugar – the grape sugar left over in a wine after fermentation

rosado – a rosé wine

seco – a dry wine

secondary aromas (2°) – the aromas in wine that are introduced during the winemaking process

semidulce – a medium-sweet wine

semiseco – a medium-dry wine

solera – a system of fractional blending where new wine is added to top up barrels containing wines of previous *vintages*

terroir – the unique combination of factors (esp. geography and climate) that gives each vineyard area its character

tertiary aromas (3°) – the aromas in wine that develop over many years

tinto – Spanish term for a red wine

trellis – see *espaldera*

varietal wines – wines made from a single grape variety (*varietales* in Spanish)

vidueño – traditional Canarian term for a dry (usually white) wine made from a broad mixture of grape varieties

vinification – the process of making wine from grapes

vintage – a single specified year in which grapes were grown and harvested to make wine (*cosecha* or *vendimia* in Spanish)

yield – the weight of grapes or the volume of wine produced per unit area





The *unique* grapes
of the Canary Islands

by Dr Maria Francesca Fort Marsal

The wines of the Canary Islands are exceptional in many respects, not least because they are made from a broad portfolio of genetically unique grape varieties that, taken together, represent one of the best-preserved vestiges of the early domestication of the Eurasian grapevine – *Vitis vinifera* L. – which began almost 10,000 years ago in the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia.¹ Mainland Europe's vines once possessed such a legacy too, but much diversity was lost due to phylloxera, an American aphid that decimated the majority of the world's wine vineyards in the late 19th century. Thanks to the Canary Islands' volcanic soils, where phylloxera is unable to breed, the islands' *Vitis vinifera* L. were spared, leaving the archipelago a veritable Noah's Ark for what is today by far the most important wine grape species in the world.²

Although there is some debate regarding the exact timing of the arrival of grapevines in the Canary Islands, most researchers agree that *Vitis vinifera* L. was introduced during the process of European colonisation that began in the 15th century. In the first instance, vines were planted to make wine for religious celebrations, but shortly thereafter for domestic consumption, and then lastly as a cash crop to make wine for export. Historical records indicate that each

1 Bacilieri R, Lacombe T, Le Cunff L, Di Vecchi-Staraz M, Laucou V, Genna B, Péros JP, This P and Boursiquot JM (2013) Genetic structure in cultivated grapevines is linked to geography and human selection. BMC Plant Biol. 13 (1), 25

2 Hidalgo Togores J (2010) *Origen Vitis: la bodega. Tratado de enología*. Ed. Mundi-Prensa, Madrid. ISBN: 8484765318

island (except for Lanzarote) was planted with vines very close to the date of its conquest, using cultivars brought by settlers who had arrived from all over Europe, particularly southern and western Spain, and Portugal.^{3,4}

As well as preserving an uncommonly rich genetic ancestry, the viticulture of the Canary Islands represents a crucible where *Vitis vinifera* L. has developed in new directions. With the exception of Syrah and a handful of other French grapes that have arrived in recent decades, for 500 years the Canary Islands' originally planted varieties were left to adapt and evolve in isolation. And change they did: new morphological characters emerged, driven by natural mutations, environmental pressures and human selection, and entirely new varieties have come into existence too, thanks to natural crossings.⁵

For three years I led a research programme at the Enological Technology Research Group of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona to profile the genetic singularity of the grapes of the Canary Islands. The work is published in Marsal et al. (2019),⁶ where, amongst other findings, our comprehensive DNA analysis demonstrates that the *Vitis vinifera* L. population of the Canary Islands is *substantially* different from that of all the major wine-producing regions of the world. Canarian grapes, as you might expect, do share some genetic features with those of the Iberian Peninsula and other areas of Europe from where settlers arrived (confirming the historical information) – but most fascinating, perhaps, is that they also share genomic characteristics with several varieties from the eastern Mediterranean. This new information is both exciting and important because it supports the notion that the Canary Islands' wine grape population contains a genetic record of the *Vitis vinifera* L. migration that once took place, starting in the east of the Mediterranean Basin and moving to the west and finally out into the Atlantic.

What this means for you, the reader, is that by drinking the modern wines of the Canary Islands you can experience grapes that are not just unique, but that embody a profoundly pure expression of *Vitis vinifera* L.'s epic 10,000-year history.

3 Cabello F, Ortiz J, Muñoz-Organero G, Rodríguez-Torres I, Barba A, Rubio de Miguel C, García S and Sáiz R (2011) *Variedades de vid en España*. Agrícola Española, Madrid. ISBN: 9788492928132

4 Macías Hernandez AM (2002) *Colonización y viticultura. El caso de las Canarias, 1350–1550*. Douro. VII, 13, pp 285–296

5 López M, Armas R and Criado M (1993) *Vinos de Canarias*. Consejería de Agricultura y Pesca, Santa Cruz de Tenerife

6 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404



Listán Blanco



Gual



Marmajuelo



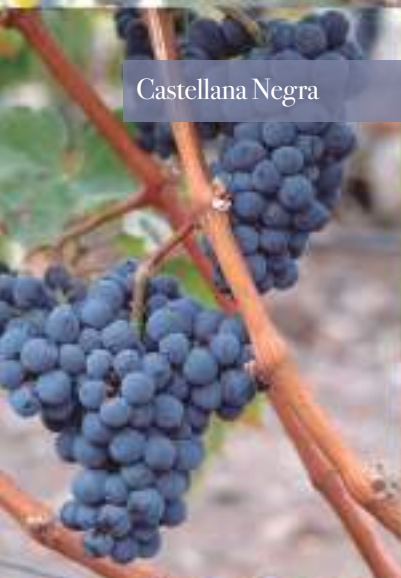
Listán Prieto



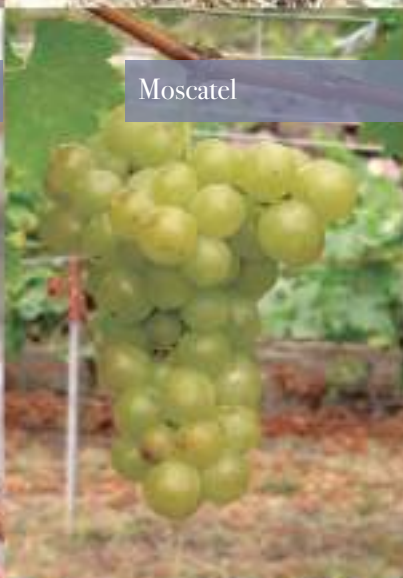
Listán Negro



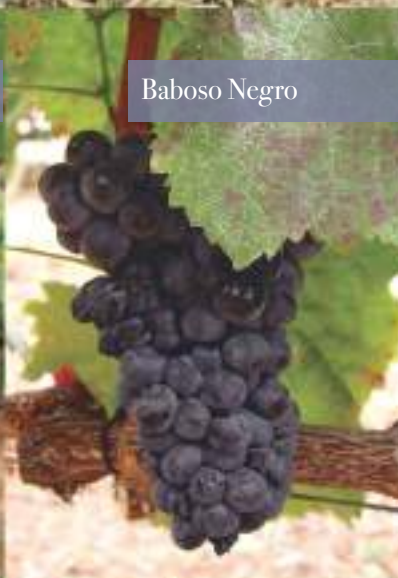
Negramoll



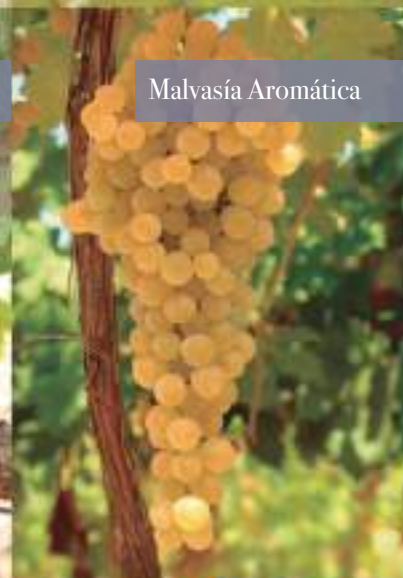
Castellana Negra



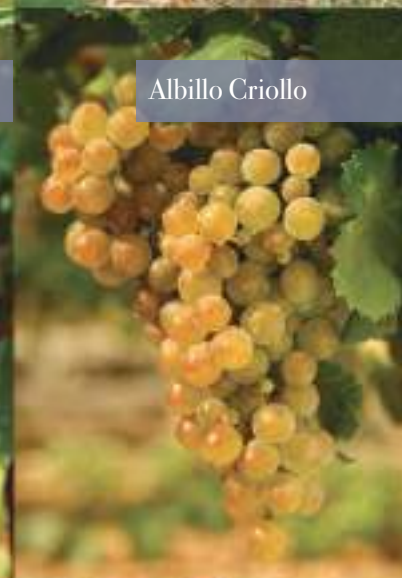
Moscatel



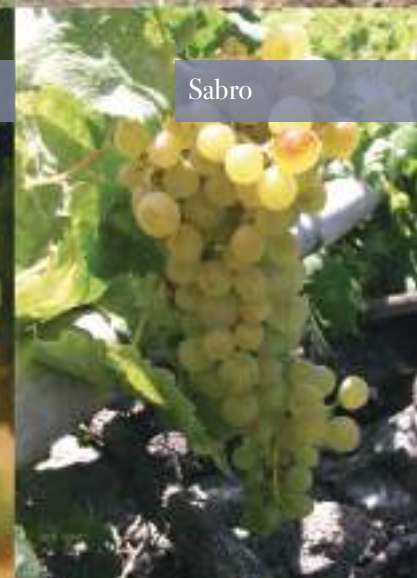
Baboso Negro



Malvasía Aromática



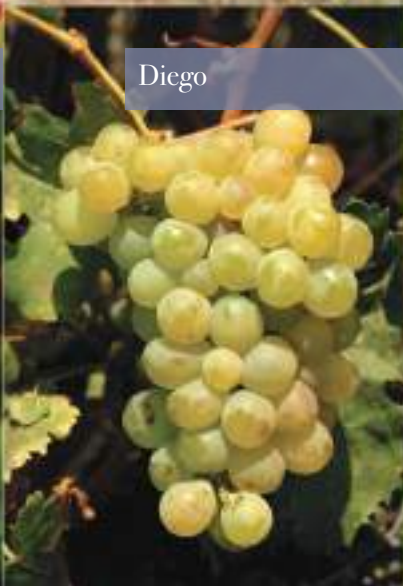
Albillo Criollo



Sabro



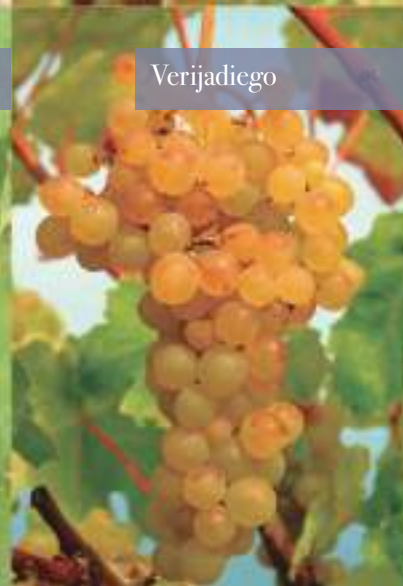
Malvasía Volcánica



Diego



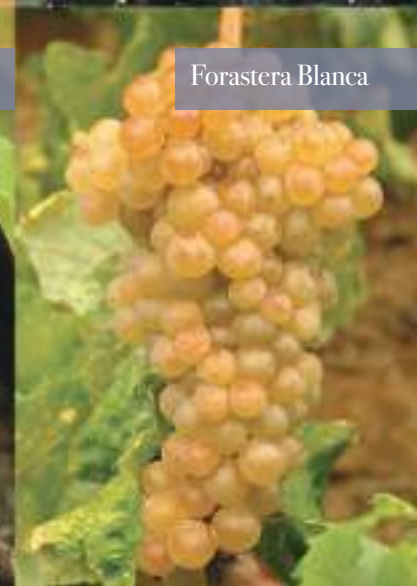
Tintilla



Verijadiego



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1
Tenerife North-West
(Ycoden-Daute-Isora)

HISTORY

North-western Tenerife is home to the wine region known as Ycoden-Daute-Isora, which takes its name from the two *menceyatos* (kingdoms) of the Guanches, Icod and Daute, and the lands of Princess Isora, whose home this was before Spain appropriated Tenerife by the cross and the sword at the end of the 15th century.

The merchant capitalists who had financed the conquest were keen to see a return on their investment. On Tenerife's fertile northern slopes, the lands awarded them were planted with imported cash crops in the hope of generating vast wealth. However, with a local consumer population of only a few thousand, to realise their dream they required a port through which they could access international markets.

This windward side of Tenerife suffers from rough seas during winter months, but one deep rocky bay offered a harbour in which large ships could load produce from the new estates. Just offshore, an islet provides a windbreak from the alisios, allowing vessels to anchor in relative safety year-round. Here, in 1497, Cristóbal de Ponte, a Genoese financier who had become one of the largest regional landowners, founded a small port town, Garachico, its name coined by joining the Guanche noun for 'islet' with the Spanish adjective for 'small'.

Sugarcane and grapevines were the order of the day, but when Spain's new

territories in America proved more suitable for the former, Tenerife became an island of wine. Within only a few decades of European settlement, vineyards were extending the full length of the northern coast. The lands in the vicinity of what had become the island's primary port, Garachico, were particularly heavily planted, leading to the establishment of agricultural satellite towns such as Icod de los Vinos and La Guancha to the east, and Los Silos and Buenavista to the west.

Distinguished historian George Steckley's research paper, *The Wine Economy of Tenerife in the Seventeenth Century: Anglo-Spanish Partnership in a Luxury Trade*, explains that the first wines sold out of Garachico had a relatively diverse customer base. Some went onto ships that were riding the trade winds to Spain's new colonies in America, while a good volume was loaded onto vessels that 'returned north, battling the prevailing north-east winds, withstanding the dark and dirty weather of winter seas, to carry the rich produce of Tenerife back to the old and established European markets'. As the 17th century progressed, however, one nation developed a seemingly unquenchable thirst for the wines of the Canary Islands and would monopolise trade. That country was England.

Steckley explains that in London, Canary, the luxurious sweet wine made from the Malvasía Aromática grapes of the Canary Islands, became so highly appreciated that the city's leading vintners regarded it as the prized item of their cellars. Furthermore, at its zenith, such was its popularity and esteem that English consumers were willing to pay twice as much as for the best wines of France. Consequentially, ships hurried to carry the new vintages of Tenerife to London, and in 1691 the 'Canary Fleet' was so large that alarmed residents of Weymouth mistook it for an armada of warships sailing up the Channel!

For two centuries the European settlers of north-western Tenerife had grown rich off the land they had gained at the expense of an entire race of people. Although by now the native culture and religion had been all but forgotten, it seems that one of their old gods had a terrible retribution to deal that would bring the golden age of wealth creation to a violent and fiery end. Warning signs began to appear as far back as 1559 when a surging sea caused huge damage to burgeoning Garachico. Next, the festering boils of pestilence (almost certainly bubonic plague from London) broke out in 1603 – and then in 1645 a giant landslide with accompanying tsunami destroyed a large part of the port and town, drowning scores of people and sinking 82 ships. If the populace were not already in fear of impending doom, then they were left feeling even more anxious when a plague of locusts arrived in 1659 and devoured the year's crop.

Before that apocalypse had finally arrived, Garachico also witnessed one of the most unusual man-made calamities in the history of wine. At the peak of England

and Tenerife's tightly joined trade in Canary wine, tensions spilt over in an event known as the Riot del Vino. In 1666, England and the Canary Islands were at loggerheads about rising wine prices, and for a short while, all trade between the two nations was strictly prohibited. When some local winemakers attempted to conduct secret business with English merchants, an angry mob broke into the offending bodegas and smashed the casks that were being prepared for export, 'causing one of the strangest floods you could ever read about in the annals of the world' according to Canarian Enlightenment historian José de Viera y Clavijo.

The Guanches of Tenerife believed that their sacred volcano, Teide, imprisoned the forces of evil including the devil Guayota who had been locked inside it by their supreme god, Achamán. Following the invasion of his island, the subjugation of his people, and thus two centuries without worship, on 5 May 1706 Achamán unlocked the gates of hell. Let loose, Guayota rushed down the north-western slope of Tenerife towards the island's new European heart. For nine long days, Garachico and the surrounding countryside witnessed scenes of fire and brimstone that can be more vividly imagined than described. Vineyards and most of the town were set ablaze or buried, but worst of all, vast streams of red lava poured into the harbour, causing the sea to hiss in retreat. When it was all over, and the molten rock solidified, the most violent volcanic eruption the island has suffered in recorded history left Tenerife's greatest wine port in total ruin; the tiny, shallow cove that remained being unsuitable for anchoring even small boats, no shipping was ever again possible. With the source of Garachico's power forever lost, the newly constructed port of the Orotava valley – 20 miles to the east – assumed the role of primary axis of trade of the Canary Islands.

Moving to modern times, we find that the vineyards of the north-west of Tenerife and its old port community have not just survived; they have flourished anew. Garachico is considered today to be one of the most beautiful, charming and historically interesting towns of the entire archipelago. It has again become a centre of foreign trade – this time, though, tourism – and its motto, 'Glorious in Adversity', speaks of the local people's great dignity and resilience.

Over the past three centuries, the region's wines have been reinvented too. When, during the 18th century, the English eventually fell out of love with sweet Malvasía Aromática-based Canary, the predominant grape variety was changed to one better suited for the elaboration of dry wines, **Listán Blanco**, the quintessential grape of the modern regional appellation. Though **DO Ycoden-Deute-Isora** commemorates the indigenous people in a way they could never have imagined, Listán Blanco has proved unrivalled in its capacity to transmit the eternal spirit of a terroir that was once theirs. By making and drinking these wines, the Guanches (and their god, Achamán) are thus fittingly honoured and remembered.



A PORTRAIT OF THE NORTH-WEST OF TENERIFE

No written portrait of the wine culture of north-western Tenerife would be complete without a description of the jewel that is Garachico. Though the volcanic eruption of 1706 destroyed half the town and most of the port, the lava flows at least created a small peninsula upon which the townspeople could rebuild. Garachico thus preserves a splendid mixture of pre- and post-eruption Spanish colonial architecture through which a long wandering stroll, preferably after a light lunch of freshly landed fish and chilled white wine, is highly recommended.

Where once Tenerife's first harbour had existed, there is now just petrified lava. In one area, imaginative open-air swimming pools have been cut so that bathers can enjoy a fresh swim in Atlantic seawater while feeling safe in the knowledge that there is a thick barrier of igneous rock between them and the crashing rollers. Legend has it that during an excavation in 1926, the buried wreck of an old Spanish galleon was found, complete with a cargo of South American silver and Canary Islands wine. Who knows what other fabulous fortunes remain entombed in the volcanic debris?

Before you get out your pneumatic drill, take time to explore the historical treasures more readily accessible at street level. Overlooking the now peaceful rock pools, the Castillo de San Miguel's purpose was to protect the original harbour from

seaborne attack; but when disaster struck from the slopes of Teide, it could do nothing but suffer a humiliating defeat to the lava which flowed right past its walls and ruined the port. The small 16th-century castle has been beautifully preserved, and today houses an exhibition that summarises the town's history.

Further back from the shore, in the old town that was spared Guayota's frenzy, a maze of narrow cobbled streets contains myriad 16th- and 17th-century Canarian houses, immaculately restored. Many are multi-storeyed mansions, with large central courtyards and polished pinewood doors, windows and galleries of the most exquisite craftsmanship. The grandest residences are invariably those built by the wealthy merchant families, identifiable by their high lookout towers from which they once watched for the arrival and departure of wine ships.

The plazas, churches and old convents of Garachico are no less enchanting. The main church, the Iglesia de Santa Ana, immediately recognisable by its gorgeous white bell tower, was built in 1520 on land owned by Cristóbal de Ponte and is named after his wife, Ana de Vergara. Directly behind Santa Ana, Plaza de la Libertad, Garachico's most beautiful square, is a wonderful place in which to spend time admiring the magnificent buildings that surround it, and viewing monuments that commemorate the revolutionary Simón Bolívar, whose ancestors came from here. Alternatively, you could just sit among the well-tended trees and gardens, relax, have a drink, read a book, and enjoy observing the daily life of the Garachiquense.

Across the plaza from Santa Ana is the Antiguo Convento de San Francisco, also founded in the 1520s by de Ponte. The tranquil old convent possesses beautiful cloisters and balconies around a lovely central courtyard, and is today home to the public library and municipal archives, where those seeking to develop a deeper understanding of the epic wine history of Garachico are warmly welcomed and generously assisted.

When Garachico lost its harbour in 1706, the focal point of regional wine production shifted east (towards the port at Orotava) to an agricultural community situated near the base of a long, smooth fertile slope which stretches from the pine forests of Teide's midriff right down to the sea. Icod de los Vinos, or 'the Kingdom of the Wines', is likeably unpretentious. Best known to tourists as the place where the Canary Islands' largest Dragon Tree (*Dracaena draco*) grows, the real Icod is highly attractive, with a noticeably fresh, healthy and hardworking atmosphere, thanks largely to its being surrounded by some of the most productive farmland of Tenerife. At one time, every last plot was planted with Malvasía Aromática to make Canary for England, but today other food crops take up much of the space, and the vineyards that remain are more diverse in terms of variety of wine grape grown.

When the trade in sweet Canary ultimately failed, the regional epicentre of viticulture and winemaking shifted east once again. The lands surrounding La

Guancha, with their higher-altitude ash-rich volcanic soils, proved superior for growing Listán Blanco, which has gone on to become the signature grape of the north-west of Tenerife. La Guancha’s inhabitants still cherish their traditional rural existence, but they are also amongst the most forward-looking and ambitious people of the Canary Islands. Some of the archipelago’s most innovative wineries are here, and La Guancha has the distinction of being the only town of the archipelago to house the headquarters of two separate appellations, including the Canary Islands’ most recent wine organisation – **DOP Islas Canarias**.



GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Ycoden-Daute-Isora is unique in that it is the only viticultural area that spans the two dominant climatic zones of Tenerife: the wetter and milder north, and the hotter and sunnier south.

The vast majority of the region's 1600 ha of vines grow in the green and fertile La Guancha–Icod de los Vinos agricultural area. Here, terraced vineyards can be found at altitudes of between 50 and 1000 metres on a wide slope that climbs steeply from the north coast of Tenerife towards its highest point, Pico del Teide, the greatest mountain of Spain and the third tallest volcano on Earth. The humid oceanic trade winds that bump up against the side of the mountain result in the vineyards receiving ample water from precipitation and condensation throughout the year. Soils are all volcanic, but near the coast they tend to be sandy, while upcountry they are predominantly ash and clay over fractured bedrock with higher organic matter and lower pH. This subtropical terroir has proved well suited to the production of white grapes, notably Listán Blanco at higher elevations, and aromatic **Gual**, **Marmajuelo** and Malvasía Aromática nearer the sea. However, the extensive range in altitudes and subtle variations of soil and vineyard orientation also allows a broad range of grape varieties, reds included, to mature to a state of high quality.

West along the coast from Garachico, and directly inland from Buenavista del Norte, is Valle del Palmar. This arable valley was created by the partial collapse and infilling of the Teno Massif – one of Tenerife's oldest volcanic formations. It's a hard-to-reach place, being far from everywhere and only accessible via a couple of small and terrifying switchback roads that seem to be in constant need of repair. The small farming community that lives here has for many generations occupied its time with making the traditional Canarian foodstuff, *gofio*, by roasting and milling the grain of cereal crops that grow abundantly on the rich old, degraded volcanic soils of the valley floor. More recently, the western flank of Valle del Palmar has been planted with vines, where the composition and drainage of the soils, orientation towards the sun, mid-altitude and sheltered northern microclimate produce a unique terroir conducive to red grape varieties that have long growth cycles.

The northern section of the Teno Massif may have failed long ago, producing the Valle del Palmar, but the rest of it stands firm today as a rugged, mountainous landscape that provides a barrier over which the humid alisios cannot pass. In the hot, sunny and arid rain shadow to the south, work is under way to regenerate the viticultural tradition of Santiago del Teide. Situated at about 1000 masl and facing west towards the island of La Gomera, here several of the classic grape varieties of the Canary Islands are producing white and red wines from a semi-desert terroir that is entirely different from those of the verdant north.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE YCODEN-DAUTE-ISORA

www.ycoden.com



With a mandate to govern the grape growing and winemaking within Tenerife's north-western municipalities of San Juan de la Rambla, La Guancha, Icod de los Vinos, Los Silos, El Tanque, Garachico, Buenavista del Norte, Santiago del Teide and Guía de Isora, **DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora** oversees the production of approximately 500,000 litres of wine each year, of which about two-thirds is white.

Since its establishment in 1994, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora has risen to become one of the most influential and exciting appellations of the Canary Islands. Over the past 25 years, its 13 registered bodegas have successfully revived the latent winemaking potential of this corner of Tenerife by fastidiously combining modern techniques with traditional practices to produce excellent wines from some of the archipelago's most interesting grape varieties. In the last five years alone, international exports have risen from just 2% of the total to 15%.

Much effort has been directed towards working with the hundreds of local grape growers who own vineyards that are too small, rugged or inaccessible for mechanisation. In particular, the DO has endeavoured to introduce the *espaldera* (trellis) system of vine training to improve overall crop quality, quantity and profitability.

Modern *espaldera* vineyards are created by inserting lines of metal posts joined by four to six horizontal wires. To this frame, vines are tied in an upright manner to provide support, but also to hold the majority of the green foliage above and away from the fruiting zone to improve bunch aeration. The whole structure is no more than 2 metres tall, with the fruit wire typically about halfway off the ground, at a height that allows for easy handling during the growing season. The leaves of the green canopy above are also easily trimmed and positioned to provide an optimal level of shade for the maturing grapes.

Furthermore, when introduced, the alignment and density of *espaldera* rows can be set according to factors such as grape variety, soil fertility, orientation to the sun, and nature of the prevailing winds. The advantages and flexibility of this training method have made it omnipresent throughout most of the major winemaking regions of the world. Here in the vineyards of DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora, the improvements to vine ventilation and light exposure have proved particularly beneficial to Listán Blanco, especially in the wet and cloudy terroirs facing the north coast.

Emparrado de Icod (the Icod arbour) is a rather peculiar form of vine training found only in the north-west of Tenerife. It is a sort of large and tilted espaldera, where the vines are held by a 4-metre-wide leaning framework along the boundaries of agricultural fields, to leave their centres for growing other fruits and vegetables. While similar structures can be seen in other areas of Tenerife during the grape-growing season, this is the only part of the island where the superstructure remains in place throughout the year. Although its presence is an interesting relic of local viticulture, it is now in decline.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN PROTEGIDA VINO DE CALIDAD DE LAS ISLAS CANARIAS

www.canarywine.com



Established in 2011, with operations based in La Guancha in the north-west of Tenerife, **DOP Islas Canarias** is the youngest wine appellation of the archipelago. It is fundamentally different from the ten regional appellations in that it permits wines to be made from grapes grown anywhere in the Canary Islands. Bodegas that choose to make wine under DOP Islas Canarias are free to continue using their regional DO for other wines within their portfolio.

The new appellation is outward facing, with its primary objective to create an overarching high-quality brand that will be easily recognisable on the international market. It is indeed possible to imagine the average foreign consumer more easily identifying a bottle of Canarian wine if it is labelled DOP Islas Canarias rather than, say, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora or DO Valle de Güímar.

The initiative has raised some concerns, however. Some feel that by allowing the mixing of grapes from multiple regions and islands, the resulting wine will not reflect any specific terroir. Furthermore, some worry that large bodegas will use their financial clout to take advantage of the new freedoms to buy up an ever-increasing fraction of the annual grape production of the Canary Islands. This, they argue, will drive up crop prices and force a consolidation (and homogenisation) of a market currently characterised by its rich diversity of independent wineries. On the other hand, proponents of DOP Islas Canarias contend that more competition for grapes, in part driven by higher international demand for the wines of the Canary Islands, will lead to a brighter future for everyone. The logic that if the thousands of small grape growers of the archipelago experience greater economic stability, a virtuous cycle will be established whereby increased investment will be made to raise crop quality and quantity, enabling the wines of the Canary Islands to make further inroads into the lucrative export markets of the world.

It is important to note that at present most wines elaborated under the DOP Islas Canarias brand do not blend grapes imported from multiple regions. Moreover, the project has thrown up some exciting single-source wine possibilities that did not previously exist. For example, the island of Fuerteventura, which does not have a regional DO, now has an organisation under which it can create and market wines made from grapes grown entirely on its soil.

As at 2018, 30 bodegas are utilising the new appellation. Overall production is relatively small – DOP Islas Canarias labels appear on about 500,000 bottles of wine each year or about 4 in every 100 bottles of wine made in the Canary Islands – but because almost all go for export, DOP Islas Canarias already sends more wine abroad than does any other appellation of the archipelago.

Another way in which DOP Islas Canarias is trying to raise the profile of the wines of the Canary Islands is through its Canary Wine School, founded in 2016. Its campus is located at appellation headquarters, and its mission is to leverage the power of information technology in order to expand and enhance Canary Islands' wine sector training opportunities by creating new connections with the outside world.



GRAPE VARIETIES

For more than 300 years, the flagship grape variety of the north-west of Tenerife has been **Listán Blanco**, which became established during the late 17th century when the growing of Malvasía Aromática fell into (near) terminal decline. Listán Blanco thrives across all terroirs here, but most winemakers agree that the vineyards of the highlands routinely provide the best base material with which to create high-quality wine.

Through the pioneering work of **Juan Jesús Méndez Siverio**, director of Bodegas Viñátigo (see below), and the encouragement of DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora, in the past 20 years there has been significant planting of some of the more aromatically potent Canarian grape varieties. Usefully, white **Gual** and **Marmajuelo** have been found to do well in the lowland terroirs that do not particularly favour Listán Blanco. For reds, some new vineyards of Vijariego Negro, Baboso Negro and Castellana Negra (often called Tintilla in Tenerife) have appeared alongside the Listán Negro and Negramoll that have always had a modest presence in these parts.

In the sunny, high-altitude, semi-desert environs of Santiago del Teide, **Listán Prieto** ('the Mission Grape') is making an exciting comeback. During the 16th century, vines of this grape were taken by Franciscan missionaries from Garachico and other Canarian ports across the Atlantic to the similarly dry regions of New Spain. Remarkably, therefore, the first European grapevines to be planted in the New World came from the Canary Islands.



LISTÁN BLANCO

Listán Blanco was introduced to the Canary Islands in the late 15th century¹ and has been the most economically important grape here since the end of the golden age of Malvasía Aromática, when it took over as the backbone variety of dry vidueño wine production. More recently, it has fulfilled the role of producing the huge volumes of easy-drinking white wines necessary to meet the demands of the tourism trade and local restaurants. It performs well in this role, being very productive and, in defiance of its thin yellow-white skin, disease-resistant across virtually all microclimates and soils of the archipelago. It is also unusually tolerant of intense sun and heat, and will maintain good health while neighbouring vines of different varieties are suffering heatstroke during the warmest years. With over 3 million kilogrammes grown annually,² it is today the most cultivated grape of the archipelago and permitted by all Canarian wine appellations.

Listán Blanco is genetically identical to the Palomino Fino grape of Andalucía,^{3,4,5} best known for being the principal grape used to create sherry. The grape's continental stronghold is around Sanlúcar de Barrameda in the Jerez region (north of Cádiz, the port whence it probably set sail for the Canary Islands) where it thrives on the famous sun-drenched white, chalky, lime-rich albariza terroir. In these soils, the grape is ideal for creating the base material to elaborate the various distinctive styles of sherry. As well as being exceptionally reliable even in these very hot and arid conditions, its key strength is that it perfectly transmits the clean and relatively neutral character of the soils without imparting any overpowering flavours of its own – perhaps just a touch of fennel and cut grass.

In the Canary Islands too, Listán Blanco produces aromatically subtle wines – at least compared to many of the other available varieties. To meet market demands for more intense fruit and floral flavours, the juice from more aromatic grapes is

1 García de Luján A (1996) *La viticultura del Jerez*. Mundi-Prensa, Madrid. ISBN: 9788471146786

2 2018 data provided by the Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria (ICCA). Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca. Gobierno de Canarias.

3 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

4 Zerolo J, Cabello F, Espino A, Borrego J, Ibáñez J, Rodríguez-Torres I, Muñoz-Organero G, Rubio C and Hernández M (2006) *Variedades de Vid de Cultivo Tradicional en Canarias*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria, Santa Cruz de Tenerife. ISBN: 9788460639770

5 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

often added, and to create the modern holiday wines that are intended to be drunk young, Listán Blanco is usually harvested early, to augment its gentle primary character with a degree of green freshness.

Transforming this reputation for producing relatively neutral wines, winemakers and connoisseurs alike have now realised that what many have perceived to be Listán Blanco's weakness is in fact its greatest strength. Yes, it lacks 'organic' aromatic power – but this very fact contributes to it being astonishingly good at transmitting the 'inorganic' nature of its terroir, and unlike the purity of the albariza of Jerez, the volcanic soils and Atlantic salinity of the Canary Islands can be hugely expressive. So if you want a pure and vivid taste of Canarian terroir, then a well-made 100% Listán Blanco is what you should seek.

Although great Canary Islands Listán Blanco varietal wines can have subtle aromas of a range of herbs and citrus fruits, they will almost always provide a striking and unmistakable volcanic mineral expression. In addition, the oldest vines with the deepest roots in the best sites can combine to produce wines that with a little ageing can evolve into something that's nothing short of profound.

note 1: As well as being the Canary Islands' most abundant grape, Listán Blanco is of great importance to their viticulture in being the direct progenitor of three of the other local varieties: Listán Negro, Albillo Criollo and Forastera Blanca.^{3,5}

note 2: As explained above, and throughout this book, Listán Blanco is a grape variety that exceeds at conveying the vibrancy of the Canary Islands' youthful geology. For those seeking to develop a better understanding of how volcanic soils (including those found in the Canaries) can influence the personality of wines, be sure to read Master Sommelier John Szabo's superb book *Volcanic Wines: Salt Grit and Power*.⁶

note 3: The grape name Palomino is said to have come from Fernán Palomino¹ – a famous Christian military officer who fought to take Andalucía back from the Moors. I do not know why the grape was then called Listán Blanco in the Canary Islands, but it is possible that over time because of its ubiquity and reliability it began to be considered as the white counterpart of the equally ubiquitous and reliable red grape, Listán Negro. Furthermore, Listán Blanco and Listán Negro are arguably the winners in terms of the white and red grapes best able to transmit the salty minerality of Canarian soils, a feature we now know was inherited by the latter from the former.

note 4: Many grape growers and winemakers of the Canary Islands are concerned about the recent trend towards markedly hotter and drier growing seasons. If this is interpreted as a consequence of ongoing climate change, then you might predict the continued dominance of Listán Blanco in the Canary Islands throughout the 21st century, given its high resistance to heat and drought.

6 Szabo J (2016) *Volcanic Wines: Salt Grit and Power*. Jacqui Small LLP, London. ISBN: 9781910254004

GUAL

Gual is grown predominantly in the western province of the Canarian archipelago, notably on Tenerife, La Palma and El Hierro (where it is sometimes called Uval). Its heritage, however, is not Spanish but Portuguese. It is genetically identical to Malvasía Fina,^{7,8} an old variety thought to have originated from either the Douro or the Dão regions of mainland Portugal,⁹ areas where it is still widely grown today.

On the Portuguese island of Madeira, this same grape is called Boal, and it is famous. It is the primary component of a version of fortified wine marketed around the world as Bual Madeira (Bual being the English spelling of Boal), which is the second sweetest style of Madeira available. Rumour has it that, among a cellar of over 25,000 bottles, a Bual from 1815 is Buckingham Palace's oldest wine – that is unless it has been drunk in the last year or so. Unlike the Canary Islands, which lie 350 miles to the south, Madeira was walloped by phylloxera, and most vines had to be replaced and grafted onto (non-*Vitis vinifera*) American rootstock. Because Boal vines – being susceptible to problems generated by oidio, incomplete pollination and water stress – do not ripen or yield as reliably as the other principal Madeira grape varieties, there were few replantings, and today there is not much Boal left.

A quirk of history has thus left the Canary Islands the one location where this expressive variety still grows on 100% European vines, and there is now a golden opportunity for this high-quality grape to find new fame via its use in a range of unfortified styles of wine. Early experimentation with monovarietal examples suggests that Gual might only mature routinely at good yields at these more southerly latitudes; this makes the Canaries an ideal place for winemakers to use it to elaborate high-potential dry white wines. In recent years, several Canarian bodegas have independently managed to create rich, dry wines that are characterised by their lustrous appearance and highly distinctive notes of charred wood, toast, coconut and vanilla, achieved, very unusually, without any application of oak.

Good examples of Canarian Gual can display more exciting aromas and flavours, including white flowers and blossom, melon and pineapple (depending on the level of ripeness) – all nicely integrated with good acidity and an unctuous, almost buttery texture. Unlike many whites, when good Guals age they seem to be able to

7 Maul E and Röckel F (2015) *Vitis International Variety Catalogue*. www.vivc.de

8 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

9 Robinson J, Harding J and Vouillamoz J (2012) *Wine grapes. A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, including their origins and flavours*. Allen Lane (Penguin Books), London. ISBN: 9781846144462; ECCO (HarperCollins), New York. ISBN: 9780062206367

resist oxidation and keep much of their primary aromatic character, allowing them to develop deep complexity over many years.

note: It seems Gual (Malvasía Fina) comes from good stock, being the result of a crossing of an old Iberian variety called Hebén and Baboso Negro (Alfrocheiro),^{10,11,12} the latter considered today to be one of the most promising red grapes of the Canary Islands.

MARMAJUELO

The origins of Marmajuelo, a rare white grape variety grown exclusively on the Canary Islands, remain something of a mystery, but there are a few clues (on *vitis canarias*¹³) that have enabled the formation of a tentative hypothesis. It's a bit complicated, so please bear with me.

On El Hierro, Marmajuelo is called Bermejuela. Also on El Hierro, there is an even rarer grape called Bermejuela Rosada, or sometimes Vermejuela, which is bright pinkish-red when ripe and has been shown by recent molecular study as the ancestral form of modern Marmajuelo. The historical literature on the grapes of the Canary Islands mentions a rubella-coloured (from the Latin *rubellus*, meaning 'flushy, reddish or rufescent') grape species, accordingly named Vermilion, which is thought to have come to the islands from the area around Almuñécar in southern Spain. We can theorise that Vermilion later became known as Vermejuela. Then, because V and B sound similar in Spanish, Vermejuela may have corrupted to Bermejuela, and when a genetic mutation of Bermejuela gave rise to a version of the variety that lacks pigmentation, we get two grapes – the original Bermejuela Rosada, and the new Bermejuela Blanca (now shortened to just 'Bermejuela') ... still following? Why the 'Berme' has changed to 'Marma' in Tenerife – to create the name 'Marmajuelo' – is also a mystery, but it could be to do with the fact that this grape grows best down near the sea (*mar* in Spanish). Admittedly, quite a lot of uncertainty, but what is assuredly known is that Marmajuelo is a firework of a grape, making wines that burst with bright acidity, alcoholic potency and colourful aromas.

10 Zinelabidine L, Cunha J, Eiras-Dias J, Cabello F, Martínez-Zapater J and Ibáñez J (2015) *Pedigree analysis of the Spanish grapevine cultivar 'Hebén'*. *Vitis* -Geilweilerhof-. 54: 81–86

11 Lacombe T, Boursiquot JM, Laucou V, Di Vecchi-Staraz M, Péros JP and This P (2012) *Large-scale parentage analysis in an extended set of grapevine cultivars* (*Vitis vinifera* L.). *Theor Appl Genet*. doi:10.1007/s00122-012-1988-2

12 Laucou V, Launay A, Bacilieri R, Lacombe T, Adam-Blondon A, Berard A et al. (2018) *Extended diversity analysis of cultivated grapevine* *Vitis vinifera* with 10K genome-wide SNPs. *PLoS One*. 13 (2)

13 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Bermejuela/Marmajuelo (and references therein)

Although Marmajuelo is permitted in most Canary Islands DOs, only about 100,000 kilogrammes are grown per year,¹⁴ most of which come from the lush microclimates of northern Tenerife and El Hierro where pockets of high-permeability sandy volcanic soils exist at altitudes below 300 metres. Outside of these ‘sweet spots’, its vines, which have relatively weak roots, have a short lifespan and tend to encounter pollination problems when the grapes fail to develop fully after flowering, rendering Marmajuelo uneconomic to grow in most areas of the archipelago.

So, due to its oenological value but very limited supply, Marmajuelo juice is often used as liquid gold and alloyed into blends to bring vivid tropical notes of passion fruit, pineapple and plantain, and an opulent, almost malleable, mouthfeel. The aromas of young 100% Marmajuelo wines are warming and exotic, like your first deep breath in the Palm House at Kew Gardens when you have just walked in out of a crisp winter’s morning. With your expectations set high, they then follow through with a gratifying taste and texture of delicious tropical nectar.

Some winemakers are experimenting with harvesting Marmajuelo a little earlier than usual and giving it more exposure to secondary vinification processes such as ageing on lees (sometimes with bâtonnage) in oak. These wines can be sumptuously complex – still characteristically full-bodied, but now creamier and with subtler fruit aromas wrapped by a greater depth of salinity and minerality (from the volcanic-Atlantic terroir) and enhanced by brioche and toffee notes. The wines are also beautifully balanced by a surprisingly zesty acidity, given that the grapes grow where daytime temperatures are high and diurnal ranges are low, and that the wines have undergone malolactic fermentation. They appear to be quite serious wines and may have potential for long ageing. It will be fascinating to see how this new style of Marmajuelo evolves in bottle over the coming years.

LISTÁN PRIETO

Though extremely rare today in Europe, Listán Prieto, a red variety (originally brought) from Castilla-La Mancha in Spain,^{15,16} is one of the most historically important grapes of the Canary Islands. It has the significance of probably being the first *Vitis vinifera* cultivar to be successfully exported from the Old World to the New.^{15,16}

14 2018 data provided by the Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria (ICCA). Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca. Gobierno de Canarias

15 Robinson J, Harding J and Vouillamoz J (2012) *Wine grapes. A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, including their origins and flavours*. Allen Lane (Penguin Books), London. ISBN: 9781846144462; ECCO (HarperCollins), New York. ISBN: 9780062206367

16 www.wine-searcher.com/grape-924-mission

From around 1540, it was taken across the Atlantic by Spanish Franciscan priests¹⁵ for use as sacramental wine.¹⁶ It was particularly well suited to the task, being hardy, highly adaptable and drought-resistant. As the Franciscans founded their missions, Listán Prieto became more commonly known as the Mission Grape. By the end of the 16th century, it was relatively common in both North and South America, where it was used at table and to make sweet wines. It remained the most important grape of Chile, Argentina and California until as recently as the second half of the 19th century, when it was overtaken by the now ubiquitous French-international varieties¹⁵ that swept across the world when fashion shifted away from sweet red wine.

Today, Listán Prieto continues to be in decline in the Americas, but it is still, after Cabernet Sauvignon, the second most planted variety of Chile (where it is known by the synonym ‘País’), where it is mostly used for the production of bulk rosé for domestic consumption.^{15,16} There is still a small amount grown in Argentina as well (called Criolla Chica there), where it is also used for rosé.¹⁵ But Listán Prieto’s monumental contribution to the modern Argentinian wine industry is achieved through its prestigious offspring – Torrontés, Argentina’s flagship white grape variety – which has been established by recent DNA analysis as being the direct progeny of Listán Prieto and another important Canary Islands grape, Moscatel.¹⁷

In California, little Listán Prieto remains, but small accumulations are grown here and there, where Mission is commonly used to make a style of wine that is a relic of an earlier time. Angelica is a historic sweet dessert wine, made either by fortification with Mission brandy or by partial fermentation to retain grape sugar. Angelica dates to the original Mission period in California, and its name is thought to have been given it to celebrate the founding of the city of Los Angeles (in 1781).¹⁸

The only place in Europe where you can still find this grape is in the Canary Islands. It probably first arrived here in the early 16th century from Castilla-La Mancha, its home in mainland Spain until it was eradicated by phylloxera. There were only 29 ha planted here in 2008,¹⁵ and its future looked in jeopardy until the establishment of the modern Canary Island DOs and some individual efforts to revive this variety – particularly in higher-altitude sites of Tenerife and La Palma. As a result, the Canary Islands now produce some of the best dry Listán Prieto red wines in the world.

Listán Prieto’s vines, subtle flowers and dark-skinned grapes are exceptionally beautiful, but when yields are allowed to go too high the grape produces juice that has weak colour and low acidity. Sugar is, however, always abundant, and so at high

17 Aliquó G, Torres R, Lacombe T, Boursiquot JM, Laucou V, Gualpa J, Fanzone M, Sari S, Perez Peña J and Prieto J (2017) *Identity and parentage of some South American grapevine cultivars present in Argentina*. Aust J Grape Wine Res. doi: 10.1111/ajgw.12282

18 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angelica_wine (and references therein)

yields Listán Prieto is best suited as a source of succulent table grapes. However, when controlled viticulture is applied and combined with suitable terroirs to allow the winemakers to produce Listán Prieto red wine with higher levels of colour and acidity, these wines can be very good indeed. Expect a bright cherry-red colour, and clean and bright varietal aromas of nicely balanced red fruits. Tannins can start off being intense and grippy; so either leave them for a few years to mellow, or enjoy them slightly chilled if drunk while still young.

STYLES OF WINE

Being excused from the terrible 19th-century plague phylloxera, which decimated and forever changed the major wine regions of the world, all of the vineyards of the Canarian archipelago remain ungrafted, full-blooded *Vitis vinifera*. In other words, the Canary Islands are blessed by being one of only a tiny number of locations in the world where individual grapevines can still use their own European roots, rather than surviving by being spliced onto a phylloxera-resistant American or American-hybrid species. Perhaps this natural plumbing explains, at least in part, how Canarian wines can so strongly transmit the sensations of ‘minerality’ and ‘salinity’ from their volcanic-Atlantic soils. However, it is also true that at the varietal level *Vitis vinifera* vines are unequal in terms of their capacity to communicate terroir.

In the north-west of Tenerife, no grape variety is better at achieving a pure expression of the local soils than Listán Blanco. The best blancos secos of this variety almost burst with volcanic-Atlantic character, which combines beautifully with the subtle herbal aromas and citrusy acidity of Listán Blanco to produce clean and refreshing wines ideal for pairing with fresh seafood. Life doesn’t get much better than the gastronomic ecstasy of washing down a grilled *vieja* (local parrotfish) with a chilled, well-made Listán Blanco on a hot sunny day.

This region also provides a great starting point for exploring some of the white grapes of the Canary Islands that are inherently ‘bigger’ and ‘fruitier’. With their bouquets of tropical fruits and full-bodied mouthfeel, blancos secos made from Marmajuelo and Gual can be luxurious and exotic. When fermented in concrete or aged in oak barrels, the structure of the palate can be raised to magnificent.

In recent years, the north-west’s tintos have made steady progress towards excellence, too. Although they still constitute just one-third of total production, much more focus has been placed on them, as it has become clear that astute plot selection can create red wines of character and class. Those incorporating Vijariego Negro, Baboso Negro and Castellana Negra tend to start life vigorous and voluptuous, where your faculties gorge on rich aromas and flavours of sweet

(red and blue) berries and flowers. The best of these are usually matured in oak barrels, which polishes tannins and adds a delicious layer of sweet spice.

Red wines of Listán Negro and Listán Prieto provide a greater sensation of terroir and are more like the traditional tintos jóvenes produced in this region during most of the 20th century. Characterised by a vivid cherry-red colour and clean and bright nuances reminiscent of tart red fruits and berries (e.g. sour cherries, redcurrants and raspberries) grown on volcanic soils, on the palate the best have good structure and balance, and a pleasantly persistent, slightly tannic finish.

Although some good examples of rosados and dulces can be found now, in the early 21st century, these styles of wine are not a speciality of this region. Notably, however, in homage to history several bodegas have recently made efforts to recreate the classic sweet Malvasía Aromáticas of yesteryear.

BODEGAS

VIÑÁTIGO

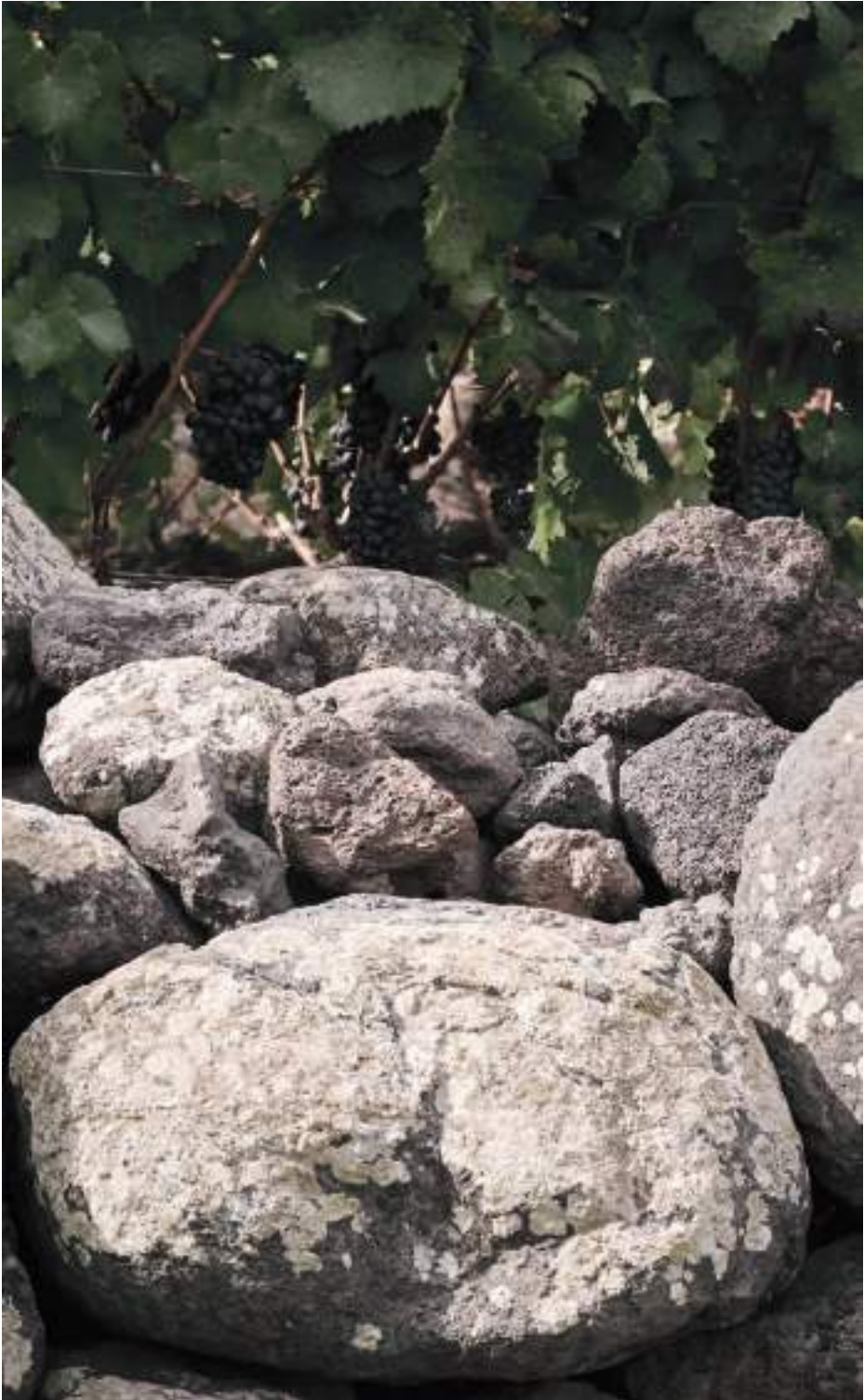
The reference winery of the Canary Islands

www.vinatigo.com

Juan Jesús Méndez Siverio, founder and director of Bodegas Viñátigo, is a hero of contemporary Canarian viticulture. His life's calling has been to rediscover, grow, analyse and promote the heritage grape varieties of the Canary Islands. The wealth of knowledge that his work has created has helped underpin the significant expansion of wine styles that are now available throughout the archipelago, and his wines have achieved a calibre of class that many doubted the Canaries would ever again produce.

As told in Viñátigo's 25th-anniversary e-book, *Naturalmente Únicos*, for four generations Méndez's family made simple homemade wines from the centuries-old Listán Blanco, Listán Negro and Negramoll vines of their 1.7 ha Cabo Verde estate near the small town of La Guancha in north-western Tenerife. He thus grew up pruning, harvesting and stomping grapes, and even when he had left home to study chemistry at the University of La Laguna, he would still return at the weekend to tend the vineyards, his commute fuelled by a sense of ancestral duty and a great love for the activity itself.

With an inquisitive mind, commitment to analytical rigour, tremendous work ethic and panache for teaching, Méndez was making rapid progress as an academic



when his father announced that the time had come to pass the family winemaking tradition to the next generation. In what has proved a transformational moment for the wines of the Canary Islands, Méndez resolved to merge his two great passions of viticulture and science by launching a project that he had always dreamed of: Viñátigo. His grandparents' old rural house was converted into a small winery, where it became possible to apply modern techniques to improve upon the traditional elaborations of the past, and Viñátigo's first vintage of 1990 sold well into the domestic market and established its economic viability.

By 1996, Méndez had become a renowned regional winemaker, and Viñátigo, having acquired and developed several new vineyards, was becoming constrained by the size of its bodega: in just 200 square metres almost 100,000 bottles of wine were being elaborated per year! Moreover, as well as requiring more room to cope with burgeoning production, Méndez desired more space for his ambitious research and development activities.

Méndez had long suspected that the Canary Islands might contain a wealth of high-quality pre-*phylloxera* grape varieties with which to make interesting new wines, and so he made several trips of exploration around the archipelago. The island of El Hierro proved a treasure trove. Near-forgotten varieties such as Gual, Marmajuelo, Baboso Negro and Vijariego Negro were discovered, and shoots were brought to Tenerife for planting at Cabo Verde in a new Jardín de Variedades Canarias – an area Méndez had set aside with the express purpose of applying the Lazarus effect.

Adjacent to this plot, in 1997 Viñátigo opened a large, technologically sophisticated winery to expand capacity to 250,000 bottles per year. It was also to serve as an oenological research centre complete with expensive analytical equipment and a suite of microvinification vessels with which to study the potential of the new grapes and to determine their ancestry – work that has involved collaborations with many of Spain's leading universities. Furthermore, Viñátigo's state-of-the-art facilities offer the ability to apply top-tier quality control practices during the elaboration of its portfolio of wines.

The architecture of the new bodega is both aesthetically pleasing and environmentally sound. Its design blends volcanic rock (excavated from the site) with modern materials to maximise energy efficiency: the trade winds provide the ventilation and the sun the illumination; and gravity delivers the driving force for the processing of grapes over the three levels of the superstructure. The Teide-inspired cone-shaped entrance, where you descend a wide spiral wooden staircase through subtropical foliage, leads to an atmospheric tasting room where you can sample Viñátigo's wines with the ambience of being, both figuratively and literally, under a volcano.

As at 2018, 17 different wines are made. Naturally, the hallmark of the portfolio is

provided by the 12 varietales wines, which form an unrivalled encyclopedia of the heritage grapes of the Canary Islands. Of the dry whites from this range, both the Gual and Marmajuelo stand out for their richness and aromatic potency. Of the dry reds, Negramoll (the ‘Atlantic Pinot Noir’ according to Méndez) is silky and mellow, with a good body, medium acidity, soft tannins and appealing notes of sweet red fruits and toffee-caramel. On the other end of the spectrum, the Tintilla (Castellana Negra) is much more robust, with high acidity and flavours of fresh blackcurrants, and dark chocolate, vanilla, tobacco, cedar and smoke from partial fermentation in oak.

Sommelier Rodrigo González Carballo and I happened to visit Viñátigo in late October, on a day when Méndez was seeing in some grapes brought by truck from their 2 ha of terraced vineyards in Valle del Palmar, hidden away in the geologically ancient Teno Massif of the far north-west. Holding up a small bunch of the grapes, Méndez explained: ‘Tintilla (Castellana Negra) is a grape of power; its ample colour and tannins can create wines that are structured and elegant, but it is hard to grow and only a few locations in Tenerife are suitable for it. One of the reasons I like it is that it can produce truly ageworthy red wines, either on its own or in blends. It destroys any false belief that the Canary Islands can only produce jóvenes ... We have been bequeathed great grapes, and if we learn to use them well, we have what we need to make great wines.’

In 2006, Viñátigo began a line of coupage wines, in which various varieties are brought together based on a matchless scientific understanding of their strengths, with the intention of producing ageworthy wines of the richest character and class. Ensamblaje Tinto and Ensamblaje Blanco are designed each vintage anew, with the individual grape varieties vinified separately (and in a specific way deemed appropriate for their condition that year) before blending. Ensamblaje Tinto, usually comprising Baboso Negro, Tintilla (Castellana Negra), Vijariego Negro and Negramoll, is generally well structured and balanced, with complex primary aromas of forest fruits and secondary aromas from French oak. Ensamblaje Blanco is a tour de force. In it, Gual, Marmajuelo, Verijadiego, Malvasía Aromática and Verdello combine to produce a full-bodied white wine possessing a symphony of sweet fragrances, crisp acidity and dimensions of volcanic minerality and subtle herbs. Since 2014, Viñátigo has added two more wines – Elaboraciones Ancestrales (Blanco and Tinto) – where contemporary varietal knowledge is combined with old-fashioned methods of winemaking (such as using indigenous yeasts, foudres and concrete vats) with the intention of recreating wines of history.

Viñátigo’s Malvasía Clásico may be Méndez’s greatest feat of resurrection. The Malvasía Aromática grape, upon which the famous trade in sweet wines with England was based during the 16th and 17th centuries, had more or less disappeared from its ancestral home here in the north-west of Tenerife until Méndez rediscovered a few strains of it near the historical port town of Garachico. Following a multi-year

programme of replantings and scientific analysis (to understand the likely nature of the venerated export wines of old), Viñátigo now makes its flagship dulce only in the years when Méndez feels that the grapes are of the right condition to create bottles of wine that will justly encapsulate the legendary Canary. Moreover, Malvasía Clásico is the wine that he selects when I ask him, given the opportunity, what he would gift to Queen Elizabeth II: ‘Although it’s true that sometimes there has been a little turbulence, our 500-year relationship with England has been very close and very strong, and this wine represents our maximum expression of love.’

ENVÍNATE

Wines that provide pure expressions of some of Spain’s most exciting terroirs

www.envinate.es

Tenerife native **Roberto Santana** is one of four friends that own and operate one of Spain’s most exciting 21st-century wine ventures: Project Envínate. ‘Teamwork is key. We may have different points of view, but we are united in our philosophy and the four of us make all decisions equally,’ says Santana, who met **Laura Ramos, José Ángel Martínez** and **Alfonso Torrente** in 2005 during a course on oenology at the Universidad Miguel Hernández de Elche in south-eastern Spain. Their brand is wines that emphatically manifest terroir, accomplished by artisanal handling of grapes from a selection of genuinely spectacular old-vine plots. While Envínate also makes wines on the mainland, it is Tenerife that has become the most significant part of the portfolio by volume: ‘Here we prioritise acidity and freshness. We want to respect the strong influence that the ocean has on the character of our vineyards by creating bona fide *Vinos Atlánticos*.’

As explained in Luis Gutiérrez’s book, *The New Vignerons: A New Generation of Spanish Wine Growers*, from 2008 to early 2016 Santana consulted for Suertes del Marqués, where he played a lead role in pioneering and commercialising an approach focusing on plot-specific wines that reflect the soils, grape varieties, and trade wind-dominated climate of northern Tenerife. Furthermore, during these years, Santana and his Envínate partners identified and gained access to a pair of extraordinary coastal vineyards near Taganana, an unfrequented hamlet in the Anaga Peninsula of north-eastern Tenerife. The two parcels of land they found contain a mix of untrained centenary vines of mixed red and white varieties, many of which have yet to be formally identified. Táganan Parcela Margalagua and Táganan Parcela Amogoje, Envínate’s debut wines from Tenerife, have achieved world renown. The former is a majestic tinto of transcendent red fruits and wildflowers, whilst the latter is a glittering aromatic blanco seco of regal poise.

Envínate now manages 4.5 ha (3 owned, 1.5 rented) of vineyards in this dramatically

rocky sub-appellation, with some plots being so difficult to access and hair-raising to work that the harvest must be carried out by sure-footed horses. To more than counterbalance this inconvenience, these sites provide the team with some incredible 300-year-old vines and enough acreage to add two ‘village’ wines to their Táganan range (village wines use grapes from different vineyards within the same area; in this case, Taganana). Táganan Tinto and Táganan Blanco are much more salty and earthy than their single-plot sovereigns, and as such they are glorious in their natural complexity and hotness of emotion.

In 2016, Envínate’s Canarian base of operations moved from rented space in Suertes del Marqués to the old cooperative bodega of Santiago del Teide: a town situated at 1000 masl, directly inland from the famous Los Gigantes cliffs on Tenerife’s western coast. This part of the island experiences something akin to a continental climate, with the adjacent Teno Massif providing an effective shield from the trade winds, thus giving clear skies year-round, while its high altitude results in a clime of large diurnal temperatures. These are conditions ideal for employing a low-intervention agricultural approach, where grapes can be left to ripen slowly with minimal risk of fungal attack. Many of the nearby plots have soils of volcanic ash derived from a peak that was the last (to date) to erupt in Tenerife: Chinyero, known to the Guanches as Benje, which blew its top in 1909. The plots contain gnarly bush vines of Listán Prieto, Listán Blanco and Tintilla (Castellana Negra), 70 to 100 years of age; these have been recovered to make Benje Tinto and Benje Blanco, the only wines of Envínate’s range that carry a designation of origin – in this case, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora. The wines do a remarkable job of illustrating the arid volcanic mountain environment from which they come. Benje Tinto is apple-skin red, with vibrant tannins, fresh acidity and expressive aromas of desert shrubs like flixweed. Light straw yellow Benje Blanco also possesses excellent freshness, with a nose of cactus blossom and a palate of lemons, limes and dried herbs. Like the village wines of the Táganan range, these wines are exceptional value for money.

Since 2016, Envínate has also worked with select grape growers in the Orotava Valley, the malachite-green heart of northern Tenerife, to elaborate exquisite expressions of the lush terroir using the Canary Islands’ dominant grapes, Listán Negro and Listán Blanco. Migan incorporates the former, grown in three separate plots: one of these, at 350 masl, extracts red-fruit character, while the other two, at 500 and 600 masl, bring out intense minerality and pepper. Palo Blanco incorporates the latter from another vineyard, at the same elevation but further west in the cooler and cloudier area of the valley near the town of its namesake. Santana feels the terroir may be ‘Tenerife’s Montrachet for Listán Blanco’ in which the grape can achieve wines of great character and exceptional complexity and balance.

‘Our philosophy is to do everything we can to respect the terroir. So much of the personality of a wine can be derived from it. Here in Tenerife we want to show the great variation that exists between these regions, vineyards and vintages. We can achieve this goal by having a shared vision, not just in Envínate, but also with the many grape growers with whom we have formed a harmonious relationship,’ says Santana (indeed, vineyard owners’ names appear on the front label of some of the plot-specific wines). Envínate’s portfolio is sensational, rendering an almost graspable portrait of some of northern Tenerife’s most profoundly interesting vineyards. With exports to nearly 30 countries, people around the world now have the opportunity to sample this diverse and beautiful landscape, but for the ultimate experience, it really is worth coming to see the very extraordinary places where these exceptional wines come from.

BORJA PÉREZ VITICULTOR

Tenerife wine’s new blood

www.borjaperezviticulor.com

Young, brilliant and bold, viticulturist and vintner **Borja Pérez González** has become something of a rock star of the Canary Islands’ 21st-century terroir-focused wine revolution. ‘I am driven by my pride for Tenerife’s traditions and environment to create quality wines packed with local character,’ says the former emergency services worker and motorsport engineer when we meet at his small but well-appointed winery in La Guancha. Here, Pérez uses indigenous yeasts to conduct plot- and grape-specific fermentations and ageing of wine in a mix of concrete, stainless steel and oak. When oak is used, to avoid overpowering flavours being imparted he only ever uses old 500-litre barrels or very expensive new handcrafted foudres imported directly from France – one of which he was excited to see delivered to the winery during our visit. ‘I choose winemaking paths that I think will give the purest expressions of the land, in a style that is unpretentious and enjoyable.’ He spares no expense to obtain the instruments he requires to realise his vision.

In the field, Pérez tends towards sustainable agriculture, with everything done by hand, and treatments and irrigation applied only when necessary. His vineyards range between 200 and 700 masl, and are spread across the north-western face of Tenerife; 5.5 ha have been in his family for generations, with a further 2 ha having been added in recent years by renting plots from local landowners. The collection of vines, which are of different ages and trained using a variety of methods, provide a broad range of material with which to exercise his art. Pérez takes great care to ensure that the individual nature of each plot and each grape variety are respected, and is always on the lookout for opportunities to obtain harvests that will achieve

the highest quality wines. For example, he plans to change his espaldera pruning method (from spur to cane), because he believes it will optimise the flow of water and nutrients within the vines.

His wine portfolio to date has comprised two lines – Ignios Orígenes and Artífice. The former was his first major project, which he began in 2011 after spending several years studying the science of agriculture and learning how to make wine under the tutelage of his family elders. The inaugural vintage produced two age-worthy wines, Ignios Orígenes Baboso Negro and Ignios Orígenes Marmajuelo; wines that have good structure, fresh acidity, and strong volcanic minerality. In Portugal and the Canary Islands, Baboso Negro can produce wines that are full-bodied and dominated by aromas and flavours of cooked fruit. But Pérez's wine is different: 'Baboso grapes have thin skin. After two or three days of ripeness, they begin to dry out and will make jammy wines. I harvest before this happens,' he says, thereby explaining how his wine, although still rich with red and black berries, achieves a degree of lightness and freshness that allows other features of the terroir to shine through.

The following year, Ignios Orígenes Listán Negro was added, and in 2013 the Ignios Orígenes range was made complete with the addition of Ignios Orígenes Viliariego Negro, which uses grapes from a vineyard planted in 2006 with shoots brought over from El Hierro. The 700-metre-altitude plot, bordered by Tenerife's coronal forest and offering dramatic views up towards Teide, is Pérez's highest, and seems to suit the very long growth cycle of this variety, again giving fresher and more mineral wines than many others made with this grape in the Canary Islands and the Iberian Peninsula.

While the contemporary, confidently minimalist, volcanic art of the Ignios Orígenes bottle labels do an excellent job of reflecting the outward personality of these wines and their maker, the labels of Artífice, which show a close-up black and white photograph of Pérez's 82-year-old grandfather's clasped hands, reveal a deeply sentimental soul. Acknowledging the economic imperative to create a more affordable range of wines, I learn that the Artífice project was also launched (in 2014) with the intention of preserving old vineyards in the region that were at risk of abandonment. Grapes are purchased from local farmers that follow traditional methods of viticulture and are combined with estate-grown fruit to produce three gloriously emotive wines that everyone intrigued to know about the terroir and heritage of north-western Tenerife should try: Artífice Listán Blanco de Canarias, Artífice Vidueños Blanco and Artífice Tinto.

AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



VIÑÁTICO GUAL

Bodega: Viñático, La Guancha, Tenerife
Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias, previously DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora
Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)
Vintage(s) tried: 2014, **2016**
Grape(s): 100% Gual
ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, half fermented in stainless steel vats, half in egg-shaped concrete tanks under temperature-controlled conditions; aged on lees and blended before bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* bright canary yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) opulent aromas of tropical fruits (pineapple, and hints of banana), flower of acacia, jasmine and orange blossom, intriguing scents of sweet spice and toasted coconut / *palate:* unctuous mouthfeel, well balanced by tangy (citrusy) acidity.

Comments: As well as being fabulously tropical, this white wine tastes, smells and even feels as though it has spent some time in toasted oak barrels – but it has not. ‘Whisky lactones, a compound usually imparted by oak, is in this wine coming solely from the grape,’ explains vintner and distinguished Canarian grape scholar Juan Jesús Méndez Siverio. A wine of paradise with its very own USP!

Sommelier's recommendation: Works well with fatty dishes with smoky overtones, like grilled smoked goat's cheese with *mojo de cilantro* (a green sauce made of coriander, vinegar, garlic and oil).



VIÑÁTICO MARMAJUELO

Bodega: Viñático, La Guancha, Tenerife
Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias, previously DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora
Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)
Vintage(s) tried: 2013, **2016**, 2018
Grape(s): 100% Marmajuelo
ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, 85% fermented in stainless steel vats, 15% in egg-shaped concrete tanks under temperature-controlled conditions; aged on lees and blended before bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep yellow, verging on gold / *smell & taste:* (1°) sumptuous aromas of tropical fruits (esp. pineapple and dragon fruit) and sweet mist of the rainforest / *palate:* full and enduring, well balanced by sharpness of acidity reminiscent of the juice of a freshly squeezed passion fruit.

Comments: Designed to show off the primary characteristics of this rare grape variety, it represents the archetypal (and indeed, it was the first) varietal Marmajuelo wine of the Canary Islands. So desperate was I to try it that I once tasked a friend with bringing me back a bottle from their holiday in Tenerife. That kind and loving person experienced all sorts of bother getting the bottle through airport security, but arrive with me it did. My enjoyment of trying that first Marmajuelo wine was well worth their effort (in my opinion, anyway).

Sommelier's recommendation: Try this wine with fruit-based dishes with a marked seafaring character, such as avocados stuffed with prawns, and pineapple from El Hierro.



VIÑÁTICO ENSAMBLAJE BLANCO

Bodega: Viñático, La Guancha, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016

Grape(s): Gual, Marmajuelo, Verijadiego, Malvasía Aromática and Verdello

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, each grape variety is vinified separately using either stainless steel, egg-shaped concrete tanks, or, in the case of Verijadiego, in French oak barrels with ageing over its lees (with bâtonnage) for four to six months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* bright straw yellow with greenish reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) luxuriously fragrant and flavourful, apricots and nectarines, red apples, fresh herbs, jasmine and mimosa; (2°) underlying bready notes / *palate:* plentiful yet fresh, with a zesty mouthfeel that, as a bonus, has an expression of Canarian minerality that enhances the wine's sense of place and adds further complexity to the long 'sweet' tropical finish.

Comments: Perhaps the most kaleidoscopic countenance of any blanco seco wine of the archipelago, masterfully composed by the winery that has devoted decades to understanding the fundamental nature of the grapes of the Canary Islands.

Sommelier's recommendation: Goes well with hearty vegetable dishes, like *potaje de berros canario* (a traditional watercress stew from La Gomera).



VIÑÁTICO NEGRAMOLL

Bodega: Viñático, La Guancha, Tenerife
Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias, previously DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora
Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)
Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017
Grape(s): 100% Negramoll
ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, aged for 6 months in used French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* medium ruby red / *smell & taste:* (1°) primary aromas and flavours dominated by sweet red fruits (strawberries, cherries, red plums); (2°) underpinning layer of moreish butterscotch introduced by passing through used oak / *palate:* surprisingly full-bodied (for a grape likened to Pinot Noir), with lovely soft tannins and lingering finish.

Comments: A mesmerising varietal Negramoll that focuses one's attention on both the red-fruit character of this grape and its inherent potential to produce wines that are pleasant, gentle and introspective.

Sommelier's recommendation: Great with smoked or spiced meats, such as a traditional *pata de cerdo asada* (roast leg of pork) flavoured with paprika.



VIÑÁTICO MALVASÍA CLÁSICO

Bodega: Viñático, La Guancha, Tenerife
Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora
Type: *blanco dulce* · (50 cl)
Vintage(s) tried: 2008
Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Aromática
ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 15% abv, naturally sweet from late-harvested grapes, with fermentation in stainless steel halted by cold with residual sugar @ 65g/l, then aged for 18 months in old French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* translucent gold / *smell & taste:* (3°) dried fruits, sultanas, dates, aromas of ground nuts, hints of (aged Riesling-like) kerosene and smoke / *palate:* mouth-coating honeyed sweetness, balanced by the resolute freshness of noble Malvasía Aromática.

Comments: A delightful tribute to the fabled Canary wines of the north-west of Tenerife.

Sommelier's recommendation: Pairs to perfection with cured cheeses (such as *manchego curado*).

BENJE BLANCO



Bodega: Envínate, Santiago del Teide, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, up to 40 days of maceration with skins, with fermentation (using indigenous yeasts) tailored to each vineyard plot, followed by 8 months of ageing – 60% in concrete vats, 40% in old Burgundian oak barrels – prior to final blending and bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* clear straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1 °) charismatic perfume of lemons, limes, white flowers and cactus blossom, delicately seasoned with dried herbs / *palate:* a slender body possessing bright acidity (notably tangy, like grapefruit), fine structure and innate longevity.

Comments: Sourced from vineyards between 1000 and 1200 masl in the rain shadow of the Teno Massif, this wine has introduced an exciting new continental style to the already illustrious white wine portfolio of the north-west of Tenerife. Benje Blanco 2016 is remarkably complex and sophisticated for a young, varietal Listán Blanco. NB Though slightly lower in alcohol (12% abv), the 2017 vintage is buttery and fuller-bodied, and seems to have been more influenced by MLF and time on lees.

Sommelier's recommendation: Goes well with mild-flavoured fish dishes like a grilled *mero* (grouper) with *papas arrugadas* and *mojo verde* (small potatoes boiled in salt water, served with a green garlic sauce).

BENJE TINTO



Bodega: Envínate, Santiago del Teide, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017

Grape(s): 90% Listán Prieto, 8% Tintilla (Castellana Negra), 2% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12% abv, up to 20 days of maceration with skins and daily punch-downs, with fermentation (using indigenous yeasts) tailored to suit each vineyard

plot; the wine is transferred into old Burgundian oak barrels for MLF and 8 months of maturation prior to bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* apple-skin red / *smell & taste:* (1°) aromas of fresh fruits (red apples, cherries and raspberries) along with a subtle herbal component like the scent of flowering flaxweed / *palate:* refreshing light body of high acidity and medium tannins that are fine yet alive.

Comments: The old vines and expert hands of the winemakers have created a wine that vividly represents the arid volcanic mountain environment from whence it came: gracefully austere, undeniably beautiful. Beyond the successful transmission of terroir, Benje Tinto is highly interesting to drink because it leaves one keen to explore the (historical and modern) pathfinding grape, Listán Prieto. If, however, you're in no mood for deep contemplation and just want a good red wine to lighten your spirits, this will do nicely.

Sommelier's recommendation: Combine this wine with small game such as *conejo en salmorejo canario* (rabbit cooked in a traditional Canarian sauce).



ARTÍFICE LISTÁN BLANCO DE CANARIAS

Bodega: Borja Pérez Viticultor, La Guancha, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora

Type: *blanco seco (fermentado en barrica)* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017 (barrel sample)

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, fermented with indigenous yeasts, and aged in 500-litre old Burgundian oak barrels for 8 months; a significant fraction of the grapes stay with their skins long into the winemaking process (to extract additional aromatics) before blending into the rest prior to bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) lemon zest and pith, delicate notes of dried wildflowers, a strikingly earthy elementality (mineral and smoky); (2°) a touch of cream cheese / *palate:* medium acidity; bitter, sour, salty and buttery – all in balance; medium body, with a lovely textured mouthfeel; easy-drinking yet with subtle complexity and a long finish that is gently bitter.

Comments: A Listán Blanco made in a classical style from its traditional heartland near Icod de los Vinos in the north-west of Tenerife. Grapes are from old vines grown on ash-laden volcanic soils at approximately 500 masl. This wine illustrates how mid-altitude Listán Blanco can compensate for its modest acidity and neutrality of primary fruit by transmitting an expression of local heritage and terroir that is of unmatched lucidity.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal for seafood dishes such as grilled *lapas* (limpets) with mojo verde.



ARTÍFICE VIDUEÑOS BLANCO

Bodega: Borja Pérez Viticultor, La Guancha, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016

Grape(s): Marmajuelo, Gual, Albillo Criollo and Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, from grapes hand-harvested at different times in a schedule governed by the varieties' differing rates of maturation; fermented separately in old French oak barrels before ultimate assembly in 2000-litre foudres where the wine undergoes MLF and ageing on fine lees for 10 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* bright lemon / *smell & taste:* (1°) lemon juice and peel, sea herbs, dried white flower nuances, markedly saline; (2°) a touch of fresh yeasty bread / *palate:* good acidity and structure, quite dense and creamy but still with a mouthfeel that is fresh, and a long and elegant terroir-driven finish that is full of flavour and character.

Comments: One can't help but think that this wine must represent a classic vidueño, but in all likelihood made in a finer style than those that were once mass-consumed and exported by the local people of northern Tenerife. Highly textured, complex and alive – a graceful homage to history.

Sommelier's recommendation: Combines perfectly with vegetable-based dishes, such as *puchero canario* (a classic Canarian stew).



ARTÍFICE TINTO

Bodega: Borja Pérez Viticultor, La Guancha, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2016

Grape(s): 90% Listán Negro, 10% mix of Vijariego Negro and Baboso Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, fermented (using indigenous yeasts) in stainless steel vats, then aged for 7 months in used Burgundian oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* medium to pale ruby / *smell & taste:* (1°) pronounced

redcurrants, cranberries and sour cherries; (2°) discreet cigar smoke; (3°) notes of forest floor and leather, and an agreeable hint of farmyard / *palate*: high acidity, deliciously tart and fruity, mild tannins, with a long savoury finish.

Comments: Borja's 'entry-level' tinto is anything but boring. Full of authentic personality, delicious, and a rare example of a Listán Negro wine from the north face of Tenerife where the characteristic white and black pepper of the grape variety do not reign supreme. A very food-friendly wine, of a style similar to several Sangiovese and Barbera-based wines that I've enjoyed with a wide range of traditional Italian cuisine.

Sommelier's recommendation: Try pairing this wine with spiced vegetables, particularly *arvejas arregladas* (peas in a spicy tomato sauce, often served with hard-boiled eggs).

IGNIOS ORÍGENES MARMAJUELO



Bodega: Borja Pérez Viticultor, La Guancha, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2017 (barrel sample)

Grape(s): 100% Marmajuelo

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 13% abv, alcoholic fermentation in stainless steel before racking to 500-litre old French oak, MLF allowed; the wine remains on lees for 11 months in barrel.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: medium lemon / *smell & taste*: (1°) soft tropical fruits and nectar, charred chicory, salty volcanic-Atlantic minerality; (2°) yeasty brioche; notes of rich toffee-caramel, hint of wood smoke / *palate*: silky mouthfeel, voluminous creamy texture, good acidity, great integration of component parts, extremely long savoury finish.

Comments: An interesting case study in vintner approach to winemaking. This wine shows what Marmajuelo can do at high-ish fermentation temperatures. The variety's normally powerful primary tropical aromas are more subdued but are joined by strong volcanic and maritime notes from the terroir. In addition, malolactic fermentation and barrel ageing have enhanced texture, and although some freshness has undoubtedly been sacrificed, the grape's naturally high acidity still leaves a vibrant wine that may develop further in bottle.

Sommelier's recommendation: Pairs nicely with light dishes such as a green salad with fresh cheese and a *miel de palma* (palm honey) dressing.

IGNIOS ORÍGENES BABOSO NEGRO



Bodega: Borja Pérez Viticultor, La Guancha, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016

Grape(s): 100% Baboso Negro

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 14.5% abv, fermentation in stainless steel tanks, then gentle pressing and transfer to used French oak barrels for MLF and ageing for 12 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* intense cherry red / *smell & taste:* (1°) sour cherry, cherry syrup, black fruits (esp. blackcurrant), quickening spice mélange, attuning notes of volcanic minerality / *palate:* notably creamy mouthfeel of fresh acidity, great structure and velvety fine-grained tannins.

Comments: Another very interesting case study in approach to winemaking. This wine represents a partial checking of mighty Baboso's propensity to produce fruit bombs. Attentive growing, precise harvesting and thoughtful vinification have successfully preserved enough acidity to create a fresher style. To be honest, it's still wildly fruit-focused, but has finesse by being steered through a path that has imparted elements of volcanic-Atlantic personality. Alexander tames Bucephalus!

Sommelier's recommendation: Works well with spicy dishes like roasted *cabrito* (kid), Canary-style.



2

Tenerife North
(Valle de La Orotava)

HISTORY

You may be surprised to learn that the age of mass tourism in the Canary Islands began long before the advent of the jet engine – in fact, it arose as far back as Victorian times when a wealthy scientist from London (aka the Big Smoke) partnered with a medical doctor from the Orotava Valley to launch Spain's first 'Health and Pleasure Resort'. The resultant luxurious and imposing Grand Hotel Taoro, built in Puerto de la Cruz in 1890, was designed to accommodate the growing number of well-heeled travellers escaping the grey skies and soot of booming industrial England to revitalise themselves in the sun, sea and clean air of Tenerife ... just a week away, by steamer! Today, although the majority of tourists head to the sprawling purpose-built resorts of the southern part of the island, Puerto de la Cruz remains Tenerife's northern hub of tourism, where you are just as likely to hear an English voice as a Spanish one. Perhaps more surprising still is that the English have been regular visitors – and indeed residents – here since the 16th century.

Well before the age of international tourism, Puerto de la Cruz was one of the most important wine ports of the Atlantic. The first vineyards of Tenerife were planted here in 1497, just along the coast at Finca Burgado in what is now the protected landscape of Rambla de Castro. Soon the entire valley was carpeted with vines, encircling Puerto whose streets were then paved to facilitate the rolling of

wine casks towards a large open space, Plaza del Charco ('Puddle Square'). It was located just in front of the embarkation cove, where the casks were washed before being loaded on board. Plaza del Charco has been the heart of Puerto de la Cruz ever since.

At its height, the town exported 30,000 pipes (half-tun wine casks) of Malvasía wine every year, and at vintage release 100 or more ships, almost all of them English, could be anchored in front of the pier waiting to load. By the middle of the 17th century, the wine trade with London became so vigorous that an English consulate was established to serve the large expatriate community that had formed on Tenerife.

With surging demand came surging inflation. When the bodegas doubled their prices, the English merchants asked the Crown to intercede. Charles II of England, who had created a union with Portugal by his marriage to Catherine of Braganza, agreed to help, and in 1665 he issued a royal warrant for the formation of the quasi-monopolistic Canary Company,¹ with the aim of strengthening the English negotiating position. Enraged, the Canarians expelled participating merchants and banned English ships from landing. The dispute escalated further in 1666 when the English monarchy issued a retaliatory proclamation 'prohibiting the importation of all wines of the growth of the Canary Islands: and all further trade and commerce with the said islands and the inhabitants thereof, until His Majesty's pleasure shall be further known'.

While the Orotava Valley endured economic hardship during these years, London suffered an unprecedented series of catastrophes. The Great Plague of London struck during 1665, followed by the Great Fire of London in September 1666. Then in June 1667, while the English were still reeling from the death and destruction of the previous two years, a Dutch fleet attacked and destroyed the Royal Navy vessels anchored in the Thames. The merchants and the king, dealing with terrible losses and seeking every possible opportunity to repair the health of the economy, finally blinked and dissolved the Canary Company in September of that year so that trade with the islands could resume. But although wine exports from Puerto de la Cruz to London were re-established, and continued until the end of the 17th century, the seeds of mistrust and ill will had been sown, and England gradually put tariffs in place that favoured the import of wine from Portugal. By the time the War of the Spanish Succession broke out in 1701, in which England and Portugal ultimately fought as allies in a full-blown war with Spain, almost all the English merchants in Tenerife had either returned home or moved their trade to Madeira or Oporto.

1 For further particulars on the rise and fall of the trade in Canary between England and Tenerife, read Caroline A J Skeel's excellent historical review: *The Canary Company*, Aaron Nix-Gomez's illuminating summary article entitled *A Brief History of Wine from the Canary Islands*, and George Steckley's essential research paper: *The Wine Economy of Tenerife in the Seventeenth Century: Anglo-Spanish Partnership in a Luxury Trade*.

During the decades when the trade in sweet Malvasía with England was declining, the people of the Orotava Valley began to retask their vineyards towards producing *vidueño* – a style of dry wine that suited the rapidly growing populations of New Spain in the Americas. Advantageously, *vidueño* could be made from a blend of higher-yielding grape varieties, and when a catastrophic volcanic eruption destroyed the nearby coastal town of Garachico in 1706, Puerto de la Cruz became Tenerife's linchpin of trade with the New World. However, *vidueño* never achieved the international renown of the Malvasía-based Canary, and by the 1820s most wine merchants had moved to Tenerife's flourishing leeward seaport at Santa Cruz, to export mixed goods. Puerto de la Cruz was left teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

During the second half of the 19th century, old grievances were forgotten, and a new era of prosperity was ushered in. The burgeoning British Empire needed fuelling ports for its new breed of steam-powered ships, and Tenerife, strategically placed in the Atlantic, agreed to become a coaling station for the British. The ships that brought Northumbrian coal to the island did not, of course, return home empty; they were laden with Canarian fruit (bananas, in particular) and vegetables that could now arrive in Great Britain still fresh. The trade grew to such proportions that one of London's prime docks became known as Canary Wharf.

It did not go unnoticed by the shipping companies that as well as being bountiful, the Orotava Valley is uncommonly beautiful and is blessed with an equable climate. Thus, to enhance further the economics of a well-established supply route, the vessels began to bring wealthy Victorian excursionists on banana boat cruises – which takes us back to the beginnings of mass tourism in the Canary Islands.

To this day, the economy of the Orotava Valley remains reliant on the historic trio of tourism, bananas and wine. Much has changed, of course, but local people still remember the glories of the past. In Puerto de la Cruz, the golden age of the wine trade is celebrated on the *Vispera de San Andrés* (St Andrew's Eve) on 29 November each year; children run through the streets towards the Plaza del Charco pulling pots and pans on lengths of string, creating as much noise as possible to recall the clattering of the great numbers of metal-hooped wine casks rolling towards the seafront to export the new vintage; and in the plaza is 'the opening of the wineries', when members of the community are invited to sample the year's new wines.²

2 *Vispera de San Andrés* is also celebrated in Icod de los Vinos and La Guancha, which both exist on a steeply sloping stretch of Tenerife's north-western face (as discussed in the preceding chapter). In these old wine towns, the tradition is for people of all ages to slide down the streets on waxed wooden tables; the young adults take it at a tremendous speed and end with a violent crash into a heap of car tyres. Had you stumbled upon this activity before reading this book, you might have fled in terror thinking that the locals had lost their minds to a poisonous fog. But fear not, the alisios mists are pure, and this adrenaline-charged activity is to remember an exciting time when wine casks had to be slid (rather than rolled) between the wineries and the coast to manage the extreme gradient.

The majority of the wines produced in the valley over the past half-century have been of an easy-drinking sort consumed domestically, with much quaffed by the vast number of tourists that continue to come to enjoy the exceptional beauty of the north coast of Tenerife. With good, cheap wine in plentiful supply, the joy of being on holiday in such an idyllic setting can sometimes tip one into a sense of elation when it becomes hard to resist the urge to sing at the top of one's voice.

Even better, wine quality has been on an upward trend from the late 1980s, and since 1995 the region has been operating under full DO status. Most excitingly, in 2008 an enterprising new bodega, **Suertes del Marqués**, determined the time was right to raise anchor and return to the serious business of international export of quality wines. It has been a remarkable success story. Many other bodegas of the archipelago have followed suit, and for the first time in several centuries, the wines of the Orotava Valley are available in England. The passionate (and occasionally turbulent) British love affair with Canarian wine has just begun a new chapter.



A PORTRAIT OF THE OROTAVA VALLEY

The Orotava Valley sits at the heart of the verdant north of Tenerife, where its elemental fertility once supported the most populated kingdom of the Guanches – Taoro. Since the Spanish conquest, many visitors have been struck by the luxuriant beauty of the landscape, among them Alexander von Humboldt, who spent time in Tenerife in 1799. Whilst on an excursion to climb Teide, this illustrious Prussian naturalist came to a spot overlooking the valley where he is said to have fallen to his knees in awe at the scene before his eyes:

having traversed the banks of the Orinoco, the Cordilleras of Peru, and the most beautiful valleys of Mexico, I own that I have never beheld a prospect more varied, more attractive, more harmonious in the distribution of the masses of verdure and rocks, than the northern coast of Teneriffe.

Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America During the Years 1799–1804, Alexander von Humboldt

Though now incorporating the manifestations of a greatly enlarged human populace, the vista from the Humboldt Mirador is still utterly breathtaking. If anything, the white and ochre patchwork of the towns and villages far below provides a pleasing contrast to the intense green of its sweeping vineyards, vast stretches of banana plantations, and numerous palm trees with their feathery heads waving in the wind. The feeling of gazing upon a paradise on Earth is further enhanced by the peak of Teide, which looms over the valley like a mythical realm of gods.

Furthest to the west, the town of Los Realejos has great historical importance, being where the conquest of Tenerife was officially completed in 1496 with the signing of the Peace of Los Realejos between the remaining Guanches and the Spaniards. The first vineyards of Tenerife were planted nearby shortly thereafter, to make sacramental wine for the inaugural church of Tenerife – Iglesia de Santiago Apóstol – constructed on the spot where the surrender was made.

The picture-perfect town of La Orotava, situated in the *medianías* (midlands) of the valley, exists adjacent to the most important vineyard area of modern times. It retains a strong Spanish character and preserves a Renaissance-era core of grand squares overlooked by magnificent churches, administrative buildings, and aristocratic residences with tiered pinewood balconies.

Puerto de la Cruz, which sits in the middle of the northern coastal stretch, has been tastefully converted from a busy Atlantic wine and banana port to a lively tourist centre. The buzzing bars, cafés, shopfronts and high-rise hotels somehow manage to exist agreeably alongside historic plazas and two- and three-storeyed mansions that once belonged to the merchant families whose commerce brought great wealth to the town in centuries past. Adorned with stunning carved-wood galleries that



have been polished to an effulgent glow, the houses evoke the romance of the Orotava Valley's golden era, when its Canary wines set sail to destinations all around the globe.³ Down near the Plaza del Charco and the old embarkation cove, many of the buildings and warehouses that once facilitated the trade still stand, including the beautiful Casa de la Real Aduana (the Old Customs House). Built in 1620, it presided over all outgoing and incoming marine cargo, as well as housing the English Consulate during the roaring decades of Malvasía. The Cabildo (Island Council) de Tenerife acquired the building in 1997 and now, fully restored, it serves as Puerto's socio-cultural exhibition centre. The western façade of Casa de la Real Aduana carries an old cross called La Carola, which for centuries faithfully guarded the souls of the voyagers who travelled to and from the 'Port of the Cross'.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Positioned on the northern slope of the island, the Orotava Valley opens from its narrowest point at about 2000 masl to widen to a coastline of just over 10 km. The valley, having originated in a giant landslide that occurred approximately 600,000 years ago, is delimited on both its western and eastern sides by two steep escarpments – Ladera de Santa Ursula and Ladera de Tigaiga. Though its floor tilts significantly towards the sea, its lower reaches have been partly infilled with late Quaternary volcanic sand, clay and ash deposits that have decreased the original angle of inclination and increased geological complexity.

At the height of the wine trade, the lower half of the valley was blanketed entirely with vines, which extended from about 5 km inland (and approximately 800 masl) all the way down to the coast. Today, the vast majority of vineyards exist between 300 and 800 masl in the medianías, with the stretch of land from the TF-5 motorway to the sea mostly having been handed over to bananas and tourism. Still, total vineyard area is about 1000 ha, and the region is second only to Tacoronte-Acentejo in terms of annual production of wine in Tenerife.

The climate is warm maritime, with summer highs that can reach a balmy 30 °C, but stability of temperature is provided year-round by the moderating influence of the trade winds and proximity to the ocean. In La Orotava, and the grape-growing lands that surround it, temperatures rarely fall below 15 °C in winter or exceed 25 °C in summer.

A defining feature of Orotava Valley viticulture is the impact of the *panza burro*

3 For an engaging and highly informative portrait of the glory days of Tenerife's northern wine ports, it is worth tracking down distinguished historian Agustín Guimerá Ravina's 2007 essay entitled *Los puertos del vino*; the copy I found was in the library of Tenerife's Casa del Vino.

(donkey's belly) or *mar de nubes* (sea of clouds). These terms describe the meteorological phenomenon in which a blanket of clouds regularly forms over the valley at an altitude of about 1200 metres as the moisture-laden north-east trade winds, having come in from the sea, are pushed upwards by the slope of the land, and cool. Though this process is common in several north-facing stretches of the Canaries, Orotava's propensity for an extensive *panza burro* is particularly acute, because its rectilinear escarpments do a wonderful job of trapping the thick clouds that form there. They act as a screen, protecting the grapes from overexposure to the sun and lengthening the growing season. Furthermore, the Ladera de Tigaiga escarpment is usually the first to begin to catch the clouds during the day, providing an interesting microclimatic variation that sees the valley's western vineyards receiving slightly less sun, lower temperatures and more rain than the eastern ones.

After many happy holidays in the area, I've found that the climate and weather are still exactly as described in the guidebook *The Vale of Orotava*, written by Osbert Ward. In 1903, after several winter visits to the Grand Hotel Taoro, Ward took up permanent residence in Puerto de la Cruz and wrote his enchanting time capsule, a small part of it paraphrased here:

Most precipitation occurs from October to March, leaving the rest of the year largely rain-free. Humidity is actually at its peak during the late summer – i.e. the period of grape ripening and harvest – when the central valley commonly sits within clouds and mists, but such a thing as a damp or stagnant feeling in the air is rare; most days a breeze comes in from the sea only to be replaced at dusk with a cool wind that sets in from the mountains and keeps the night fresh.

With plenty of moisture and young volcanic soils rich in nutrients, the Orotava Valley exists in a state of perpetual lushness. Since overexuberant vines generally lead to big, watery grapes with less flavour, the viticulturists long ago began to employ a novel training method – *cordón trenzado* (braided cord) – that can produce high-quality grapes at high yields by inducing stress, as explained below.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DEL VALLE DE LA OROTAVA

www.dovalleorotava.com



Legal protection for the wines of the Orotava Valley was granted in 1995, with the DO covering wine production from grapes grown in the valley's three municipalities. There are presently 16 registered bodegas: 10 in La Orotava, 5 in

Los Realejos and 1 in Puerto de la Cruz. **DO Valle de La Orotava** is bordered to the west by DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora, and by DO Tacoronte-Acentejo to the east, and extends from the foot of Teide down to the sea.

On average, about 1 million litres of wine are produced each year, making DO Valle de La Orotava the second most productive wine region of Tenerife and third overall in the Canary Islands. Considering its relatively small area – only 10 × 11 km – this is a surprising statistic that speaks of the valley's exceptional fertility. In fact, vineyard yields here, being fully double the Canary Islands average, are amongst the highest in Europe.



The vineyard training method that enables high-quality grapes to be grown at such unusually high yields is the *cordón trenzado*; it was an ingenious invention during the golden era of wine export when there was a focus on maximising production from the available land. This type of cultivation is also perfect for growing grapes of concentrated flavour from land that might otherwise supply an overabundance of water and nutrients for standard grape production; the method, by tasking each vine with producing a vast weight of fruit, means that each bunch of grapes receives just what it needs to achieve an optimal state of ripeness for making wine.

The *cordón trenzado* technique involves allowing each vine to grow approximately seven branches that are braided together and over time grown into a woody cord 8–15 metres long; it is held horizontally above the ground by short *pergolas* (originally wooden forks, now metal posts). The process can be repeated so that ultimately each plant can support four cords arranged in parallel rows, usually in a north–south orientation to allow the sea and mountain breezes to funnel between them, providing adequate ventilation. Vineyards comprised entirely of *cordón trenzado* appear very dense. Indeed they are – but perhaps counterintuitively, the number of individual vines is quite small because each plant is so huge. Some of the biggest and most productive examples may even grow enough fruit to enable bottling of ‘single vine wine’. Wouldn’t that be something?

Mechanisation of *cordón trenzado* is impossible, and all stages of growing, braiding, pruning and harvesting involve a great deal of manual labour, which makes this training method expensive. Of great concern also is that the vineyard workers require specialist knowledge, and the generation that possesses it is rapidly approaching retirement age, with very few young people being drawn to a life on the land to continue the tradition. In addition, *cordón trenzado* carries the unusual risk that if a single vine dies a significant fraction of the crop is lost. It is not surprising, therefore, that over the past 20 years many vineyards of this type have been abandoned or replaced by less laborious training methods such as *espaldera*. Where once the *cordón trenzado* accounted for over 95% of area under vine in the Orotava Valley, today that figure stands at about 80%.

In the early years of the 21st century, however, there has been a growing recognition that the *cordón trenzado*, unique in world viticulture, is a hallmark for the wines of the valley, which should be preserved. A government-backed study has been launched to determine the most appropriate formula to protect this part of Orotava’s agricultural heritage. Perhaps the single most powerful motivation to continue to employ the *cordón trenzado*, though, is its capacity to produce premium wines that can sell on the international market at prices that achieve sustainable economic viability. Since 2010, this commercial model has been increasingly vindicated: at the time of writing a full third of the bottled wines of the Orotava Valley are exported – by far the highest fraction of any region of the Canary Islands.

GRAPE VARIETIES

In general, the cooler and cloudier western flank of the valley grows a majority proportion of white grapes, whereas the central and eastern areas are where red grapes predominate. In fact, the white/red dominance zones for the whole of the north coast of Tenerife have a border that runs north–south through the municipality of Los Realejos.

By far the most abundant varieties are **Listán Negro** and Listán Blanco, grown in the cordón trenzado vineyards of Orotava's medianías. Being high-yielding, hardy grapes, they complement the intentions of the training method – to grow a very large weight of fruit from each vine – and they resist the fungal diseases and pests that can often affect crops raised under such humid and fertile conditions. Since the turn of the 20th/21st century, however, the pursuit of different styles of wine has led to an increased prevalence of other grapes.

For reds, new plantings of Baboso Negro and Vijariego Negro have been significant. These grapes being much more troublesome to grow than Listán Negro, most have been trained upright in espaldera to increase ventilation and to provide easier access to bunches so they can be carefully monitored and managed during the growing season.

For whites, several traditional aromatic varieties have returned to favour. Malvasía Aromática and Marmajuelo do particularly well in the highly porous, light-coloured pumice-rich soils that are intermittently present in the valley's lower reaches. Higher up, Albillo Criollo has been thriving in the acidic clay-rich soils of the western valley's midlands and is often used to boost the freshness of Orotava wines that contain a dominant component of Listán Blanco.

LISTÁN NEGRO

Although there is sometimes confusion about the difference between Listán Negro and Listán Prieto, recent study has established that Listán Negro has a unique genetic profile and is exclusive to the Canary Islands.^{4,5,6} With approximately 3

4 Zero J, Cabello F, Espino A, Borrego J, Ibáñez J, Rodríguez-Torres I, Muñoz-Organero G, Rubio C and Hernández M (2006) *Variedades de Vid de Cultivo Tradicional en Canarias*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria, Santa Cruz de Tenerife. ISBN: 9788460639770

5 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

6 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

million kilogrammes grown annually,⁷ it is the most widely grown black-skinned ('red') grape variety on all the islands except for La Palma, where Negramoll is more abundant. It is now known that Listán Negro is a crossing between Listán Blanco and Negramoll,⁵ and we can reason that it may have originated hundreds of years ago on the north face of Tenerife in vineyards where these varieties are commonly co-planted.

When Listán Negro berries are ripe, they are visually unremarkable: medium-sized, almost perfectly spherical, with skins of medium thickness and pigmentation that is an even purple-black. The bunches, however, are head-turningly huge. At up to a kilo each, they are the biggest and heaviest grape bunches of all the Canarian varieties at harvest time. Better still, Listán Negro is notably disease- and pest-resistant. Putting its ability to create delicious wines to one side, surely one of the main reasons that Listán Negro is so extensively cultivated in the Canaries is because it has proved to be so very reliable at producing big yields. In addition, it exhibits excellent adaptability to different soils and climatic conditions, and is today found planted at a broad range of altitudes across the archipelago.

It is in its (possible) birthplace of northern Tenerife where this variety is most representative, and where it is best known for its capacity to produce exceptional wines. Here, Listán Negro is used to fashion a range of lovely varietal wines, both red and rosé, most of them meant to be enjoyed while young. The best of these are cherry-red coloured, characterised by lively and refreshing aromas and flavours of sour cherries, cranberries, strawberries and raspberries over an intense peppery-mineral volcanic core. A trademark of the variety is its ability to transmit the strong character of the local terroir. In the mouth, tannins tend to be soft, with a light and dry body that ends with an agreeable and moderately persistent finish. This personality is instantly recognisable as the quintessential authentic young red wine style of the Canary Islands, and its ongoing elaboration must be considered of great cultural value regardless of any contemporary trends and market demands.

More recently, various bodegas have demonstrated that of all the grape varieties of the Canary Islands, it is Listán Negro that responds most appealingly to carbonic maceration – a fermentation process that adds a sort of steroidal boost to the primary fruit aromas of red grapes. Carbonic maceration is most famously used to vinify Gamay in Beaujolais Nouveau, and, in fact, many of the qualities of the resulting wine are similar – a light to medium body with soft tannins and highly potent aromas of red fruits. Sometimes the method can even lead to hints of more artificial notes like bubblegum and banana milkshake, which are not always displeasing. In the specific case of Listán Negro, the process can create a unique

7 2018 data provided by the Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria (ICCA). Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca. Gobierno de Canarias

and agreeable harmony between the sweet fruits and tannins, and the memory of volcanic black pepper. If the label doesn't tell you, you can usually spot that the carbonic maceration technique has been used because it creates wines with a markedly youthful violet rim to the appearance.

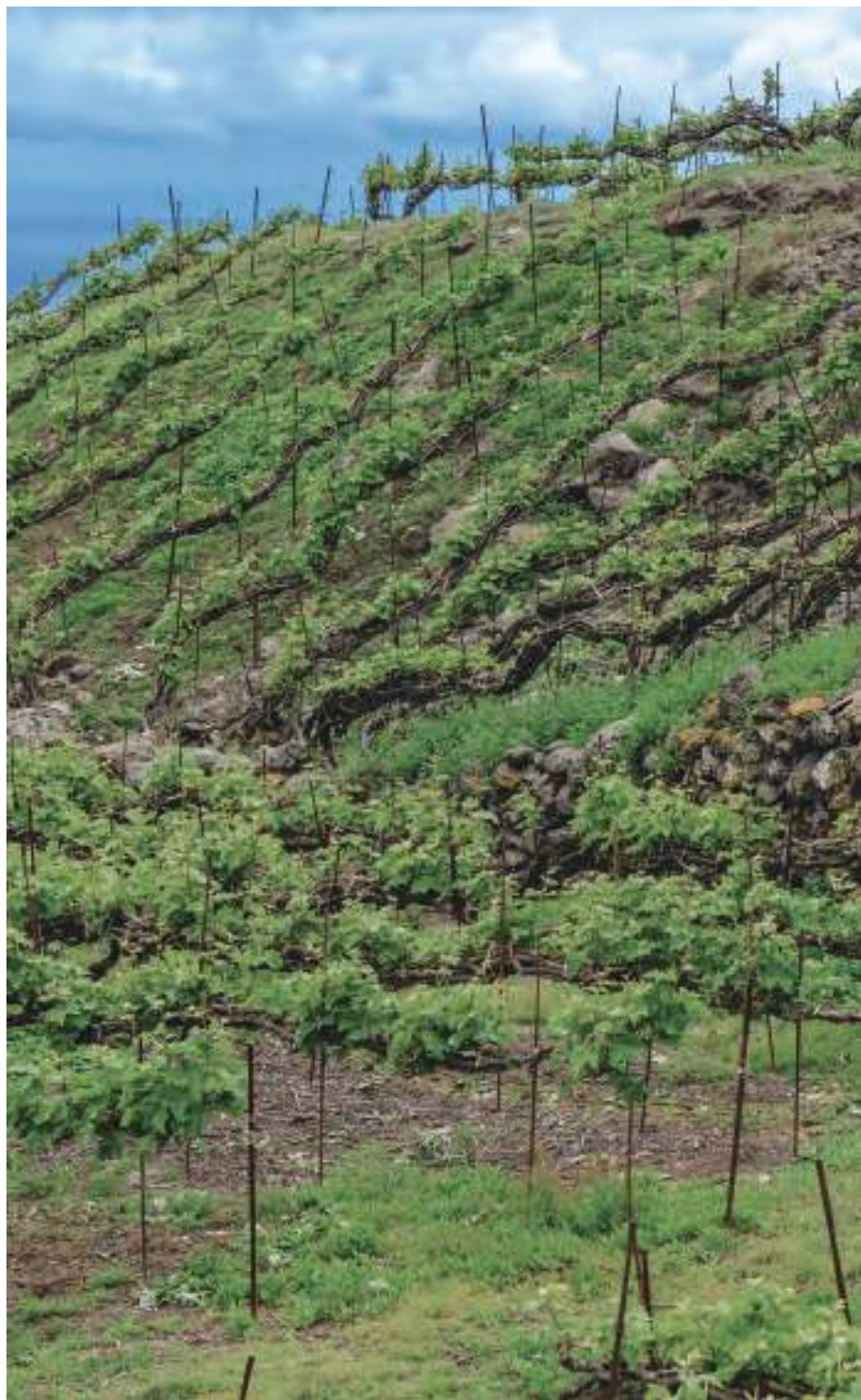
At the other end of the scale, with more intense (normal) maceration Listán Negro actually has a very good capacity for maturation, provided that it has been a good vintage and that careful pruning has been applied to avoid excess production. The juices with the most potential for long life then require ageing to polymerise the tannins, and contact with oak can wrap the fruit with flavours of spice, vanilla and liquorice depending on barrel age, type, and length of maturation. The best examples have polished tannins and a creamy feel in the mouth, and deliver a long, elegant finish of perfectly integrated red fruit and spice – which must build, of course, on an essential foundation of peppery volcanic minerality.

A criticism sometimes applied to Listán Negro is that it can be overly rustic and can lack body. One way around this is to blend it with such varieties as 'elegant' Negramoll and 'forceful' Castellana Negra; the former mellows and rounds a Listán Negro wine's flavour and mouthfeel, while the latter stiffens its palate.

Listán Negro, with its potential to create attractive rosés and red wines in both young and aged styles, is highly versatile with all manner of cuisine. It is perhaps at its most delicious when enjoyed with the traditional foods of the Canary Islands (or vice versa). Young wines can be sublime with small game such as rabbit, and barrel-aged crianzas match very well with the stronger flavours of, for example, goat stew. Listán Negro can also be paired exceptionally well with desserts, cheese and chocolate, with some producers using it to elaborate luscious sweet red wines derived from grapes that have been dried in the sun.

STYLES OF WINE

The modern blanco seco and blanco afrutado wines of the Orotava Valley are usually made in a light style that is pleasant and refreshing, with the intention that they should be drunk chilled, and as soon as possible after vintage release. Most of these are 100% Listán Blanco (or blends in which it is dominant); they are pale straw yellow, with clean aromas of green fruits, fresh herbs and lemony acidity. The youthful freshness of these easy-drinking wines makes them ideal paired with grilled Canarian seafood. For the blancos secos, it is becoming more common to see a component of Albillo Criollo and fractional fermentation and maturation in oak to enhance acidity and complexity. If you want to try an example of an Orotava dry white wine with a strong sense of place, seek out those made from Listán Blanco grown on centenary cordón trenzado vines from the western flank of the



valley, which tend to transmit the salty minerality of the volcanic soils and Atlantic maritime climate of northern Tenerife.

White grapes from old-vine cordón trenzado are used by some vintners to elaborate truly excellent full-bodied dry wines. In these, Listán Blanco and other local varieties – notably Marmajuelo, Gual and Malvasía Aromática – may have undergone extended maceration, then alcoholic and malolactic fermentation in old oak with time on lees, and been bottled unfiltered, with the overall intention of reproducing something akin to the vidueño style of the late 17th and 18th centuries. The rich lemon-gold wines that result can be complex and very interesting, with aromas of ripe fruits, flowers, dried herbs and roasted nuts, and a long, savoury finish.

Red wines, which account for about 55% of the valley's annual output, are again mostly designed to be simple and easy-drinking, but in the second decade of the 21st century there has been a marked increase in the elaboration of red wines of premium quality.

Tintos jóvenes are virtually all 100% Listán Negro, and are generally clean and bright, with light aromas of red fruits and black pepper over a mineral volcanic background. When they are well made, they can be very refreshing on a hot sunny day, especially when served chilled, which keeps a lid on the intensity of the pepper and blunts any rough edges of youth. Orotava's locals and its visitors have been drinking great volumes of this happy and inexpensive style of wine for over 100 years, and will no doubt do so for at least another century to come.

Thanks to the enduring popularity of Orotava's tintos jóvenes, there are now 'Old Faithful' cordón trenzado vines of Listán Negro that, far from being exhausted from centuries of service, are today giving fruit of the very highest calibre that can be elaborated to achieve a genuinely vivid and unforgettable expression of the local terroir. With a little longer maceration and respectful use of oak, these Listán Negro wines are easily among the best of the premium modern reds of the archipelago. Both barricas and crianzas are made, the best of which have aromas of cranberries, cherries, strawberries and raspberries, sometimes given warmth by a wrapping of toast and spice from oak. Some can have a palate that is notably creamy and persistent, with polished tannins and a long, elegant finish. The foundation, however, is always the intense black and white pepper of quality Listán Negro from the Orotava Valley. The expression is striking in its purity, and no other wines in the world have this particular personality.

The Orotava Valley's much younger plantings of Baboso Negro and Vijariego Negro are producing fruit that can be blended with Listán Negro to add colour, body and enhance the overall richness – or, increasingly, to produce fruit-forward styles of varietal wine that are more immediately recognisable to the modern international palate. Here, on the north face of Tenerife, some prominent winemakers are taking

the approach of harvesting these two grapes early to preserve acidity and create a lighter style, although the inherent power of the varieties still tends to deliver above-average body and flavour concentration compared to Listán Negro.

Rosados are not a particular speciality of the valley and are few and far between. When, however, they are made, they are invariably 100% Listán Negro.

There are some sweet wines, often made to recall and celebrate the great days when the wines of the Orotava Valley were appreciated throughout the world. These can be elaborated using late-harvested grapes, or they may be fortified, and occasionally soleras are employed to achieve an oxidative style. Malvasía Aromática is the usual target, with the intention of simulating the classic Canary export wines that the English were so very much in love with during the 17th century: golden or amber, highly scented with aromas of white flowers, honey and raisined fruit, and with a deep, spicy sweetness and alcoholic warmth balanced by bright acidity:

with the heat of the Sun and the Soil, is grown now to that height of perfection, that the Wine which they afford is accounted the richest, the most firm, the best bodied and lastingest Wine ... Of this Wine, if of any other, may be verified that merry induction, That good Wine makes good Blood, good Blood causeth good Humours, good Humours cause good Thoughts, good Thoughts bring forth good Works, good Works carry a Man to Heaven; *ergo* good Wine carrieth a Man to Heaven. If this be true, surely more English go to Heaven this way than any other, for I think there's more Canary brought into England than to all the World besides.

James Howell, 1647, Historiographer Royal to Charles II of England

BODEGAS

SUERTES DEL MARQUÉS

Where the wines of the Canary Islands have begun their new international age
www.suertesdelmarques.com

Local entrepreneur **Francisco Javier García Núñez** has been buying parcels of land in the central midlands of the Orotava Valley since 1985. An elongated estate of about 10 ha now exists, in which vines grow in adjoining plots from 350 to 700 masl up a slope that provides epic vistas of the north coast of Tenerife at Puerto de la Cruz. It is a stunningly attractive place (Humboldt was right!), tranquil and green, where the scenery is dominated by ancient cordón trenzado vines that are up to 200 years old.

For nearly 20 years Javier sold his grapes, but when his son, **Jonatan García Lima**, finished his degree in business administration and quality management in 2006, the family decided to found and operate an estate winery. The success of Suertes del Marqués has been nothing short of phenomenal. Not only is it already considered one of the archipelago's flagship producers, but also in its short life it has arguably done more than any other bodega to put the Canary Islands back into the global market for premium wines. Today, international fine wine retailers buy 90% of the bodega's annual production of 120,000 bottles.

From 2008 to early 2016, the bodega employed oenologist **Roberto Santana** (now of Envínate), and with youthful energy, talent and passion, García Lima and Santana grew Suertes del Marqués into a respected international brand. One of their greatest brainwaves was to introduce a Burgundian winemaking concept where each vineyard of the estate is given the opportunity to express its characteristics. With limited intervention during the growing season, separate harvests and tailored vinifications, the differing soils, orientations towards the sun, and elevations combine to create plot wines of different personalities, the most vivid of which are bottled separately as 'vinos de parcela', while the rest are expertly blended into 'estate' or 'village' wines that are designed to showcase the volcanic-Atlantic nature of the region.

Seven of the premium international wines are from single plots, a quintet of which are old-vine Listán Negro-dominated wines – La Solana, Candio, El Ciruelo, El Chibirique and El Esquilón – which sing an exquisite chorale about the nature of this grape on the north face of Tenerife. The other two vinos de parcela reds, a Baboso Negro called Los Pasitos, and a Vijariego Negro called Cruz Santa, are both vinified into a style that is generally lighter, fresher and lower alcohol than most other examples of varietal wines made from these grapes.

Suertes del Marqués makes one premium estate white wine, Vidonia, the English name for the dry vidueño export wines of 17th- and 18th-century Tenerife. Although its exact blend varies depending on vintage, the dominant component is always old-vine Listán Blanco in cordón trenzado, and it is always beautifully crafted. In fact, Vidonia may be the nearest thing the Canary Islands has to a premium old-world Chardonnay, with good acidity, complex palate, considered use of MLF and French oak, and significant potential for ageing. What differentiates it is its dimension of salinity, acquired from the Atlantic and Tenerife's volcanic soils, a feature also possessed by the bodega's other dry white, Trenzado, one of the four village blends that include a fraction of locally purchased grapes from vineyards located in the western part of the valley. Trenzado is also mostly Listán Blanco, but tends to have a higher amount of aromatic varieties such as Gual and Marmajuelo.

The other village blends are red. El Lance and Medianías include significant Vijariego Negro and Baboso Negro, varieties that give them a core of ripe berries

and fragrant flowers whereas in 7 Fuentes, which is 90% Listán Negro, pepper and spice tones prevail. 7 Fuentes accounts for over half of Suertes' production, and so must be made with great care. Moreover, this wine currently holds the role of introducing the world to the red wines of the Canary Islands. As such, the wine is designed to be easy-drinking yet sophisticated, with an emphasis on fresh upfront fruit to balance the more flamboyant aspects of Listán Negro, which the drinker may not be accustomed to.

The portfolio is rounded out by two sweet wines, one white, one red, both using soleras that took their first input in 2010. The blanco dulce is a blend of Listán Blanco and Malvasía Aromática; the tinto dulce is Listán Negro and Baboso Negro. I am told they are excellent, but they are also hard to obtain: only about 100 half-litre bottles of each are released per year.

Over the four vintages since the departure of Roberto Santana, García Lima has taken full control of production. Changes have included earlier harvesting to create more freshness ('less alcohol, more acidity'), and fermenting with whole clusters to provide greater structure and depth. 'Over the last couple of years, I feel like we are producing wines with greater ageing potential and in a style that I love to drink,' says García Lima. He adds, 'We are still working hard to learn about our land and our grapes and the best processes of vinification to match different plot and vintage conditions. For example, invaluable insights were gained from our recent geological study, which showed us surprising soil and bedrock variation around the estate.'

It will be interesting to see how the existing portfolio of Suertes del Marqués continues to evolve, and fascinating to try the new wines that emerge. There is currently excitement surrounding the imminent launch of a new Malvasía Rosada, unique in that it will be the only one of its sort in the Canary Islands, and because the grape (reportedly) produces a pink wine with potent aromas of stone fruits. Although these unusual features introduce an element of risk, judging by the bodega's past vision and success this new Malvasía may well be a winner.

TAJINASTE

A family winemaking ethos that embraces the power of collaboration

www.tajinaste.eu

Named after Tenerife's iconic high-altitude flower, Tajinaste is a family-owned bodega with a history going back to 1939 when Domingo Farráis returned to the Orotava Valley and acquired the El Ratiño estate using money made in Cuba. Today, his enterprising grandson, **Agustín García Farráis**, runs one of the most

well-respected wineries of Tenerife. García perfected his trade in Bordeaux, and, as well as being a highly skilled vintner, has poured tremendous energy into raising the standards and profile of the wine sector of the Canary Islands. Among his many activities, he has recently brought the world's pre-eminent WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust) training programme to the islands, and has become a champion of DOP Islas Canarias as a platform for raising the profile of the wines of the archipelago with the wider world. His ambition and drive for modernity follow in the footsteps of his parents, **Cecilia** and **Agustín Snr**, who were among the first in Tenerife to make wine using stainless steel, as far back as 1977.

El Ratiño, near the town of La Perdoma, contains wonderful centenary vines of Listán Negro and Listán Blanco trained in cordón trenzado planted a quarter-century before the estate was acquired. In 2003, as part of a general expansion programme, the García Farráis family purchased another nearby estate, La Haza, and planted vines of Vijariego Negro, Listán Negro, Marmajuelo and Albillo Criollo (this time trained in espaldera) to provide a diverse range of grapes to work with. Beyond this, the bodega leases 8 ha and buys harvested grapes from select regional viticulturists and, as at 2018, Tajinaste produces about 200,000 bottles of wine per year in various styles.

García vinifies on a plot-by-plot basis, allowing him the opportunity to study the character of each vineyard prior to blending, which he does with the finesse of an experienced craftsman. 'The aromas of the grapes change a lot within just a few hundred metres in our valley. Furthermore, some vineyards make wines with more structure, others with more acidity. If we listen to and respect these individual characteristics, we can find ways of bringing them together into wines of heightened complexity.' A great example of this is Tajinaste's powerful oak-aged red, named Can – a blend of old-vine cordón trenzado Listán Negro from El Ratiño and Vijariego Negro from La Haza. The wine has delicious notes of ripe red and black fruits, sweet tannins and spice, and speaks of García's time in France.

In addition to managing his family's wine business, García has been centrally involved in an exciting collaborative project using the territorial freedoms of DOP Islas Canarias to create, for the first time, a portfolio of wines to showcase the diversity of the archipelago under a single, unifying brand – Paisaje de las Islas (Landscape of the Islands). At first glance, the bottle labels of the range look identical, but upon closer inspection each wine carries a unique illustration reproduced from the book *Histoire Naturelle des Îles Canaries* (published in nine volumes between 1836 and 1850) that speaks of its origin. Since 2013, four wines have come into existence and are now being made each year. Three of them are vinified at Bodegas Tajinaste: a dry Malvasía Aromática / Marmajuelo blend that highlights the coastal terroir of the Orotava Valley and the capacity for these two grapes to make a wine of intense aromas and mouthfeel; a remarkable

100% Forastera Blanca made in a fresh style from grapes grown in Vallehermoso on La Gomera; and a naturally sweet Malvasía Aromática that represents the historic Canary of the 16th and 17th centuries. The fourth wine of the series is created in Bodegas Comarca de Güímar, a unique sparkling white Reserva Brut Nature that cleverly illustrates the versatility and potential of the Canary Islands' most important red grape, Listán Negro. The Paisaje de las Islas brand is already doing an excellent job of raising the profile of Canary Islands wine abroad, including, for example, appearing on Michelin-starred restaurant wine lists in both mainland Europe and North America, and the next additions to the range are eagerly anticipated. I'm informed the project pipeline could include a dry white Malvasía Volcánica from Lanzarote, a barrel-fermented Negramoll from La Palma, and two other reds that will represent the island landscape and the grapes of Gran Canaria and El Hierro.

It is clear that a defining characteristic of García's ethos is his unwavering belief in the power of teamwork: 'Through DOP Islas Canarias and Paisaje de las Islas I hope we are demonstrating that when we find opportunities for collaboration and friendship, we can achieve great things.' And he adds: 'None of the other winemakers here in the islands are my competitors. Our successes help each other, and our collective hard work and dedication will help to inform the world that our islands represent a progressive wine region, steeped in tradition, with a lot to explore and enjoy.' Hear, hear!

ATLANTE

Pastoral wines that are a reflection of the winemaker's soul

www.vinosatlante.com

In 2003, after 11 years working abroad, **Jesús González de Chávez Trujillo** returned to his native Tenerife and gradually began to involve himself in the business of managing his family's vineyards in the Orotava Valley. 'My banking jobs in Madrid and time in London provided me with great experiences and invaluable skills and knowledge, but I always harboured a deep desire to reconnect with my land,' he explains. 'Some of my strongest childhood memories are of stomping the grapes with my siblings, cousins and friends. The smells, the sounds, the images from the harvests – so vivid, so happy.' A major milestone in his phased transition from the financial services sector to making wine occurred when he completed a master's degree in oenology and viticulture at the University of La Laguna: 'I had such a wonderful time and met so many nice people that I left with no doubts about what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.'

Bodegas Atlante has been bottling its own wine since 2013, following six years in which González de Chávez used the family grape harvests to elaborate wines for bulk

sale to intermediaries: ‘I needed time to understand the character of our vineyards, to see how the grapes would respond to different vinification techniques, and to think carefully about what sort of wines I wanted to make.’ The vineyards that he studied are on two beautiful parcels of land that exist in distinctly different terroirs of the valley. Near the village of San Antonio, just outside La Orotava, González de Chávez’s father has 2 ha of land at 450 masl that can grow high-quality Listán Negro from old cordón trenzado vines that are up to 10 metres long. This site also has small plots of younger Vijariego Negro and Castellana Negra in espaldera, which provides useful blending options. The bodega is situated here too; it’s a charming early 20th-century building formerly used to dry tobacco and converted to winemaking in the 1940s. About 4 km west from here and at 700 masl is González de Chávez’s uncle’s 2 ha plot, well suited to producing quality white grapes, in this case Listán Blanco and Albillo Criollo.

Now in full independent production, Bodegas Atlante is building a reputation for making artisanal wines that speak of a passion to preserve, respect and cherish the gorgeous natural landscape and rich heritage of the Orotava Valley. Pesticides were abandoned in 2011, and far from problems arising, a Gaian floor of indigenous grasses and flowers has emerged that traps the morning mists away from the vines and moderates the vineyard temperatures during summer heatwaves. In the bodega, the original concrete lagares have been preserved because they have proved ideal for fermentation using indigenous yeasts and because they allow a new generation of children to stomp away and thus fall in love with a way of rural living that’s at risk of disappearing. ‘Everything we do is by hand,’ says González de Chávez. ‘Our philosophy is that if we focus on simply enjoying the harvest and every aspect of processing the grapes, it will lead to wines filled with authentic personality.’ Then he adds with a wry smile: ‘The truth, though, is that every year you make a wine you suffer a lot because you want to make a perfect wine.’

Not surprisingly, production is tiny – only 7000 bottles per year – and the portfolio includes just two wines, both of which are enchanting. Atlante Blanco is a roughly 50:50 blend of Listán Blanco and Albillo Criollo that typically presents aromas of fennel, dried fruits and nuts, and a lovely creamy mouthfeel balanced by Atlantic salinity. The rich style is achieved by maturation on lees and bottling without filtration or clarification. Atlante Tinto, depending on vintage, is either 100% Listán Negro or a blend of Listán Negro with the other reds of the family estate. The wine spends 12 to 18 months in mixed-age French and American oak before bottling, again without filtration or clarification. It is flowery with delicate red fruit and a hint of spice, smooth and pleasant on the palate, with sweet tannins and a lingering finish. Complexity is enhanced by subtle coffee and toffee notes from oak. The characteristic black and white pepper signature of Listán Negro from the north face of Tenerife is notably gentle, and the overall structure is organic, reminiscent of the aromas of fallen autumn leaves.

At present, 100% of production is sold in the Canary Islands, at a price that is modest but at the top of what the local market will support. González de Chávez wants to sell his wines internationally (at a price that better reflects the effort of making them) and increase production to a level that would enable him to ‘offer salaries to local vineyard and bodega workers that would give them an option to enjoy a rural existence in our beautiful valley for their whole lives’. Considering the craftsmanship and love that goes into every bottle, and the unique character and high quality of Bodegas Atlante’s wines, this inspiring ambition may well be within his grasp.



AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



EL CIRUELO

Bodega: Suertes del Marqués, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de La Orotava

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, **2016**

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 13% abv, single-plot centenary vines in cordón trenzado, whole bunches used, 30 days maceration, fermentation in concrete, 11 months ageing in old 500-litre French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* radiant cherry red / *smell & taste:* (1 °) sour cherry and tart raspberries balanced by sweet red *ciruelo* (plum), zealous cracked peppercorn aromas from the grape variety, and saline volcanic-Atlantic minerality from the terroir / *palate:* svelte and smart, with refreshing acidity, engaging structure and a long finish full of complex character.

Comments: The 2016 El Ciruelo has deliberately been made ‘fresher’ than the 2015. Both are outstanding, but the tartness of the latter has given it elite sophistication. This is a premium wine with great potential for long ageing in bottle. Surely one of the finest examples (ever?) of Listán Negro from the north face of Tenerife.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Try this wine with charcoal-grilled *cochino negro canario* (Canarian black pig) with spicy apple sauce.



EL ESQUILÓN

Bodega: Suertes del Marqués, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de La Orotava

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, **2016**

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, single-plot, ca. 85-year-old vines in cordón trenzado, whole bunches used, 15 days maceration, fermentation in concrete, 11 months ageing in old 500-litre French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* radiant cherry red / *smell & taste:* (1 °) red berry medley, pink peppercorns, crushed white pepper, Asian spice (cloves), smoky inorganic minerality / *palate:* ample tannins and high acidity, incredible texture and elegant finish.

Comments: After the (easy) selection of El Ciruelo, it was hard to decide between Suertes' other distinguished single-plot Listán Negro wines for inclusion in this book. Gravity pulled towards Candio 2015 for its riper fruit and fuller body; it's delicious but also nicely illustrates the impact of plot orientation (Candio faces west, and so collects more sun than north-facing El Esquilón and El Ciruelo). On reflection, however, El Esquilón 2016 won out for its sublime mouthfeel ('like Pinot Noir,' suggested the winemaker, Jonatan García Lima) and, most importantly, its more earnest representation of the essential personality of Listán Negro from north-sloping (relatively cool-climate) Valle de La Orotava. As a bonus, the ample tannin and high acidity of this vintage give it great capacity for development in bottle.

Sommelier's recommendation: Achieve perfect harmony by pairing this wine with dishes such as *carne de cabra* (goat meat), Canary-style.



7 FUENTES

Bodega: Suertes del Marqués, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de La Orotava

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013, 2014, 2015, **2016**

Grape(s): 90% Listán Negro, 10% Castellana Negra

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, grapes from more than two dozen vineyards in the vicinity of La Orotava, all vinified separately using a mix of concrete, old oak barrels and large foudres, aged for 8 months then blended and bottled.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* translucent cardinal red / *smell & taste:* (1 °) pronounced tart red fruits (esp. redcurrants, sour cherries and cranberries) seasoned with cracked white and black peppercorns / *palate:* good acidity and peppery tannins bring a sense of firmness and vibrancy to a mouthfeel that is otherwise light-hearted and cordial.

Comments: Representing approximately 60% of output, Suertes' economic viability hangs on 7 Fuentes. It's a village wine, so designed to be easy-drinking yet complex. Compared to the estate's single-plot Listáns, the varietal-terroir expression is ever so slightly toned down and rebalanced. The tilt is towards primary fruit (to suit consumers not already familiar with the grape and the region), while the wine's structure is cleverly honed by addition of Castellana.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with strong-flavoured, hearty fare, particularly the time-honoured Canarian favourite, *ropa vieja* (shredded meat – beef, pork or chicken, and sometimes all three – stewed with onion, chickpeas, tomatoes, beans, potato etc.; its name means ‘old clothes’!).



TRENZADO

Bodega: Suertes del Marqués, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de La Orotava

Type: *blanco seco (vidueño)* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013, **2015**, 2016

Grape(s): 95% Listán Blanco, 5% vidueño

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, multiple vineyards with the majority of grapes grown from 100+year-old vines in cordón trenzado (hence the name of the wine), fermentation and 9 months ageing in a mix of stainless steel, concrete, old oak barrels and one larger foudre.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* an intense lemon that glows with a rim of gold / *smell & taste:* (1 °) powerful citrus (esp. grapefruit and lemon) with suggestions of papaya, passion fruit and inorganic minerality (incl. traces of moondust); intriguingly nutty / *palate:* handsomely composed yet pleasingly piquant, with a flavourful finish that ends with savoury notes of terroir.

Comments: Since its launch, the blanco seco village wine of Suertes del Marqués has been variously described as like a Burgundian Chardonnay ... but from volcanic soils. It's a good characterisation, and one that is further divisible by vintage. Over time, the direction of travel seems to be north; from full and bold towards lean and articulate.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with steamed or stewed fish dishes, such as *bacalao encebollado* (cod with onion).



VIDONIA

Bodega: Suertes del Marqués, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de La Orotava

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, **2016**, 2017

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPCI: €€€

Vinification: 13% abv, grapes from 100+year-old estate vines in cordón trenzado, fermented and aged for 12 months in 500-litre used French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* shimmering lemon / *smell & taste:* (1 °) Meyer lemons, fresh stone fruits, lick of halite; (2 °) delectable pâtisserie (brioche and toasted almonds) and hints of sweet oak / *palate:* outstanding texture, creamy, dense yet bright and fresh, well structured and complex, persistent and highly expressive.

Comments: The winemaking team of Suertes del Marqués blind-taste the entire Listán Blanco vintage, then select only the best barrels for elaborating Vidonia. In pursuit of elegance and complexity, quality of mouthfeel is prioritised. Grand and gracious like the galleried mansions of the Orotava Valley, this wine is an aristocratic blanco seco that has been polished to an effulgent glow.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with dishes such as *costillas de cerdo* (pork ribs) served with *papas* and *mojo verde* (potatoes with a green garlic sauce).



MIGAN

Bodega: Envínate, Santiago del Teide, Tenerife

Appellation: Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos)

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016 (Parcela La Habanera), **2017**

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPCI: €€€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, grapes from centenary vines in cordón trenzado, three vineyards (La Habanera, San Antonio, Tío Luis) vinified separately in concrete tanks then MLF and 12 months of ageing in neutral oak barrels before blending and bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale ruby / *smell & taste:* (1 °) perfectly ripe cherries, strawberries and red plums, drops of sharp raspberry coulis, light seasoning of white and black pepper, faint whiff of dried flowers, volcanic smoke and notions of vernal agriculture / *palate:* dry, refreshing and easy-drinking, light tannins, fruity and flavourful, brilliant balance of sweet and savoury, with a finish that highlights the appetising red-fruit character of the grape variety.

Comments: Migan 2017 may be the most approachable (premium) 100% Listán Negro of Tenerife. It is exceptionally well constructed, subtly multidimensional and, most importantly, scrumptious. It is composed of three wines from different plots in the central Orotava Valley. Parcela La Habanera and Parcela Tío Luis are sandy-soiled vineyards that sit between 550 and 600 masl and bring out elegant (but somewhat hard) expressions of Listán pepper and volcanic terroir. Down-slope, clay-soiled Parcela

San Antonio concentrates Listán's delectable red fruits. Together, vinous harmony is achieved. Migan will satisfy wine connoisseurs and thirsty holidaymakers alike.

Sommelier's recommendation: Enjoy a perfect marriage of this wine with fried spiced meats such as a Canarian favourite: *carne de fiesta* with *papas bonitas* (local new potatoes).



PALO BLANCO

Bodega: Envínate, Santiago del Teide, Tenerife

Appellation: Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos)

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 11.5% abv, grapes from centenary vines in cordón trenzado, fermented in concrete, aged in oak foudres for 10 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale yellow / *smell & taste:* citrus (esp. lemons), crab apples, sea spray, smoky igneous minerality, petrichor; sourdough notes from fine lees / *palate:* tart, dry and fresh, medium-bodied, lovely texture in the mouth, long finish that is intensely saline.

Comments: Vine dresser and vintner Roberto Santana suggests the 1.5 ha black volcanic soil vineyards of Palo Blanco in the western Orotava Valley may be 'the Montrachet for Listán Blanco'. (Montrachet is a grand cru vineyard in Burgundy that is considered by many to be the world winner for its propensity to make wines that showcase the most sublime qualities of Chardonnay.) If the superpower of Listán Blanco, the most planted grape of the Canary Islands, is its ability to transmit terroir into the bottle, then Palo Blanco certainly puts forward a strong argument that Envínate has found a vineyard of championship potential.

Sommelier's recommendation: Great with aniseed-flavoured dishes like grilled or boiled *vieja* (local parrotfish) with *gofio* dumplings (using roasted Canarian grains) and mojo verde.



TAJINASTE BLANCO SECO

Bodega: Tajinaste, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017, 2018

Grape(s): 90% Listán Blanco, 10% Albillo Criollo

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 12.5% abv, grapes from old vines in cordón trenzado, fermented in stainless steel (80%) and French and American oak barrels (20%) where the wine remains for 2 months prior to bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) fresh lemons, limes, Cox apples and Conference pears, with hints of fennel and cut grass / *palate:* biting grapefruit-like acidity on entry, yielding to a notably smooth mid-palate and a finish that leaves with a cinder-cone puff of smoke.

Comments: This wine has been designed to be ‘young and fresh, with some complexity’. Mission accomplished. It also delivers a good varietal showcasing of Listán Blanco even though grown in low-altitude volcanic soils, with freshness amplified by addition of a little Albillo Criollo and structurally enhanced by a deft touch of oak.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Fantastic with intense and characterful dishes, such as those made using the Canarian delicacy *tollos* (strips of dogfish, salted and dried in the sun).



CAN

Bodega: Tajinaste, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de La Orotava

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, **2015**, 2017

Grape(s): 90% Listán Negro, 10% Vijariego Negro

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, hand-selected grapes, Listán from centenary vines in cordón trenzado, fermented in stainless steel tanks, racked to new and second-use French oak for MLF and 10 months ageing.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep ruby / *smell & taste:* (1°) plentiful ripe red and black cherries; (2°) sweet spices from oak (esp. vanilla, nutmeg and cinnamon), shavings of dark chocolate, hints of charred wood, delicate minerality; (3°) evolved fruit (blackberry jelly) balanced by savoury notes of black olives / *palate:* good acidity, plush tannins, lovely finish that is savoury and sweet, very moreish.

Comments: It is interesting to note that this wine is made from vineyards just a stone’s throw from others that are creating super-expressive Listán Negro varietal wines that are very light and marvellously peppery. Can is a very different animal: Bordeaux-trained vintner Agustín García Farráis has used riper grapes, precise blending and young oak to create something that is densely-structured and splendidly juicy.

Sommelier's recommendation: Goes nicely with game dishes such as *conejo al ajillo* (rabbit cooked with garlic).



PAISAJE DE LAS ISLAS MALVASÍA Y MARMAJUELO

Bodega: Tajinaste, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013, 2014, **2015**, 2016

Grape(s): 50% Malvasía Aromática, 50% Marmajuelo

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, Malvasía Aromática fermented and raised in stainless steel, Marmajuelo fermented and aged for 5 months in French oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* intense straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) plentiful tropical fruits and floral notes, lemon and bergamot, *mucho* saline minerality; (2°) smoke and spice from oak, wisp of brioche; (3°) toffee-caramel and honey-glazed grilled pineapple steaks / *palate:* refreshing citrusy acidity, nice full mouthfeel, long flavourful finish that is harmoniously sweet, salty and (ever so slightly) bitter.

Comments: Paisaje de las Islas is a project to elaborate wines that represent the landscape they come from. This, the first of the line, highlights the volcanic minerality of the Orotava Valley and the capacity of Malvasía Aromática and Marmajuelo to make wine with intense flavour and a balanced glyceric palate. What really sold me, however, was its bottle-ageing profile. I tasted four consecutive vintages side by side from youngest to oldest, which showed a lovely evolution of fruit – starting from fresh, ending at caramelised. Very importantly, all had good acidity, great structure and plenty of volcanic personality. Above I describe the 2015 vintage because at the time of tasting (December 2017) it was, at just over 2 years old, the one that had the most balance between primary and tertiary aromas.

Sommelier's recommendation: This wine works very well with fresh tomato and *albahaca* (basil) salads.



ATLANTE TINTO

Bodega: Atlante, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de La Orotava

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, **2016**, 2017 (barrel sample)

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 13% abv, 300-year-old vineyard in cordón trenzado, whole bunches used, fermentation in traditional open concrete lagares, 12 months ageing in old 600-litre French and American oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* radiant cherry red with a weathered rim of garnet / *smell & taste:* (1°) sweet and crunchy red fruits, crushed black, white and pink peppercorns, subtly floral, background minerality and Atlantic salinity; (2°) creamy notes from MLF, subtle toffee-caramel and coffee-bean notes from barrel, pleasing trace of freshly rolled cigars / *palate:* good acidity and body, medium-intensity tannins with rounded edges, (overall) warming and smooth with a long flavourful finish that fades to haunting notes of forest floor.

Comments: A very authentic wine of personality and nature-inspired complexity. Wonderfully evocative of the traditional 19th- and 20th-century viticulture of the Orotava Valley. Atlante Tinto is from the heart.

Sommelier's recommendation: Choose this wine to match the intense and spicy dishes of Tenerife such as *steak tartar de cochino negro canario* ('steak' tartare made from herb-smoked Canarian black pig shoulder and flavoured with soya, hoisin and chilli sauces).



3

Tenerife North-East
(Tacoronte-Acentejo
and Taganana)

HISTORY

Vines were introduced to this region shortly after the completion of the conquest of Tenerife – the last of the Canary Islands to fall to Spain. In fact, it was here on the very land where vineyards are located today that the Conquistadores and the Guanches clashed in the three major battles that decided the fate of the island.

The first occurred on 31 May 1494, at a place near the modern town of La Matanza de Acentejo (The Slaughter of Acentejo), when 3000 Guanche warriors met and attacked 1000 Conquistadores as they entered a narrow ravine whilst marching across the north face of Tenerife from their beachhead at Santa Cruz. The natives, under the command of Bencomo, Mencey de Taoro (King of the Orotava Valley), were more mobile and they understood better how to fight in such terrain, so they executed a faultless battle plan, resulting in 90% of the Spaniards being killed – the single greatest defeat suffered during their entire Atlantic-American colonial expansion.

The second encounter occurred on 14 November 1494, near present-day La Laguna. But it did not go well for the Guanches, even though they now outnumbered the invaders 6:1. This time, the Spaniards avoided being ambushed, and faced their enemy on flatter ground that enabled them to wage modern warfare. With cavalry and crossbows unleashed against them, the Guanches were mown down, and noble Bencomo was killed.

Finally, on Christmas Day 1494, at a site not far from that of the first battle of Acentejo, a Spanish army reinforced by Christianised natives from the Menceyato de Güímar launched an all-out assault on the remaining free men of Tenerife. After half a day of unimaginable violence it was all over. With shouts of '*¡Victoria! ¡Victoria!*', the Spanish forces celebrated their resounding triumph. Supreme Commander Alonso Fernández de Lugo – who would become the first governor of the islands – gave orders to create a church on the site of the battle, and the modern town that now surrounds it is called La Victoria de Acentejo (The Victory of Acentejo).

The soils and best wines of this area of Tenerife are usually the intense red of oxidised iron; although this is not from the blood spilt in 1494, you can still immerse yourself in the rich history of this region by drinking its modern produce. The grapevine is the only crop that has taken permanent root in the soils here since the conquest, and although viticulture and winemaking have encountered some major setbacks, just like the Conquistadores, perseverance and the application of modern technology has succeeded in ushering in a new era of internationalisation and prosperity.

It was right here, near the historic battlefields of Acentejo, that the first significant attempts at regenerating the Canary Islands wine sector emerged in the 1980s.¹ For over 100 years, viticulture had survived solely to satisfy the demands of the local population, and a near-monopoly provided very little impetus for change. Though this continuity did at least allow valuable knowledge and tradition to be passed down through the generations, the techniques for winemaking and the methods of vine cultivation had become very outdated in relation to the progress and innovation that was transforming the sector in other parts of the world.

Troubled by the new commercial wines of peninsular Spain that began to flood the Canarian market during the second half of the 20th century, several influential producers from within the local community began to voice an opinion that the traditional winemaking practices of north-eastern Tenerife needed significant updating. Importantly, they argued, a programme of modernisation should not attempt to compete with the mainland head-on (at least not to start with), but should instead focus on achieving high-quality wines that would encapsulate and protect the unique personality of their land and grapes. Support for this line of thinking grew, a strategy was developed, and in 1985 a request for a Denominación de Origen (DO) was formally submitted. The Spanish government agreed and finally, in 1992, the first fully-fledged appellation of the Canary Islands came into existence. Confident **DO Tacoronte-Acentejo** anchors the north of Tenerife in its position at the heart of the contemporary Canarian wine scene. Surely worthy of another '*¡Victoria! ¡Victoria!*'.

1 For a full description of the rejuvenation of north-eastern Tenerife's wine sector, read Santiago J Suárez Sosa and María Paz Gil Díaz's 2007 essay entitled *Los últimos 20 años vitivinícolas en la comarca Tacoronte-Acentejo*; the copy I found was in the library of Tenerife's Casa del Vino.

But there is more. During the last few years, this region has been the site of one of the most exciting new evolutions of the Canarian wine sector. A group of visionary young winemakers have breathed new life into the ancient and wild vineyards of the remote Anaga Peninsula to produce wines of such uncommon character and freshness that they have caught the attention and imagination of the world's leading wine critics. Interestingly, this project sits independent of any DO and chooses to employ a Burgundian classification system, with both single-vineyard and village wines (the village wines use grapes from different vineyards within the same area; in this case, Taganana). At the other end of the spectrum, many of north-eastern Tenerife's bodegas are putting their weight behind the DOP Islas Canarias venture, believing that consolidation and a unifying Canarian brand is the best path to foreign market penetration. Regardless of camp, all the people of this part of Tenerife possess a deep-rooted, burning ambition to see the character-packed wines of the Canary Islands go on to be consistently recognised as amongst the very best in the world. The passion is tremendous, and the existence of competing approaches has created a dynamism that is accelerating improvements across the board and bringing exciting variety to the consumer.

A PORTRAIT OF THE NORTH-EAST OF TENERIFE

With one of the best climates in the world, gorgeous scenery and long sandy beaches, Tenerife is a year-round destination for European holidaymakers. An incredible 5 million foreign visitors come each year, half of that number from the UK. Upon arrival at the main international airport, TFS, most make their way either to the sunny resorts of the south or to easy-going Puerto de la Cruz on the island's beautiful central north coast.

The north-east of Tenerife, in contrast, is rarely visited by tourists. This part of Tenerife, however, is anything but uninteresting or unremarkable. In fact, it is the location of its biggest city and most important port, Santa Cruz. Inland and uphill, Santa Cruz sprawls into the island's second biggest city, historic San Cristóbal de La Laguna. La Laguna was the original capital of the island (Santa Cruz took over in 1833), is the Canary Islands' main university town, and possesses an attractive old colonial core that achieved UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 1999. Here, in the Santa Iglesia Catedral de San Cristóbal de La Laguna, rest the remains of Alonso Fernández de Lugo, vanquisher of the Guanches.

Today, nearly half of Tenerife's population live in or around the Santa Cruz–La Laguna urbanisation, and the place hums with the energy of being the undisputed commercial, academic and governmental epicentre of the western Canary Islands. Before the rise of Canarian mass tourism, this part of Tenerife was even more critical to the prosperity and order of the island than it is today. As



exquisitely elucidated and illustrated in Carlos Cologán Soriano's masterpiece of historical research, *Tenerife Wine*, during the 18th century international trade through Santa Cruz was the lifeblood of the island, with much of the wealth creation achieved by supplying the Royal Navy with wine as its ships stopped en route to Britain's new colonies in America, Asia and Australia. When war broke out between England and Spain in 1796, such had become the importance of Tenerife to the British Empire that an attempt was made to seize Santa Cruz by none other than Rear-Admiral Horatio Nelson. He lost the battle and his right arm, but was nevertheless graciously invited by the victorious General Antonio Gutiérrez to share the wines of Tenerife before going home.

Nelson's attempt on Tenerife²

Spain, with France, commenced war against Great Britain in October 1796. The following February, off the south-western tip of Portugal, the main Spanish fleet was ravaged by the Royal Navy during the Battle of Cape St Vincent. A 38-year-old English commodore named Horatio Nelson was instrumental in the British victory. In the days that followed he was knighted, promoted to Rear Admiral, and given the task of leading the blockade of Cádiz, mainland Spain's most important Atlantic port, where the battered Spanish fleet had fled to take refuge.

By April, Nelson had become restless and anxious. The enemy would not come out to give battle, and he observed that, like himself, his crew were growing tired of being so long at sea without action. For many of the men, without battle there was no opportunity for glory and no chance of personal wealth creation via the seizure and sale of enemy vessels and cargo. Nelson, however, desired above all else to do his duty for England.

Meanwhile, 1250 km to the south-west of Nelson's fleet, two heavily laden vessels from the Royal Company of the Philippines had docked for safety in Santa Cruz de Tenerife after learning that Cádiz, which had been their destination, had been blockaded by the British, with the bulk of the Spanish fleet trapped inside. Shortly thereafter, Nelson learnt of the docking of the ships in Tenerife and, supposing that they might be carrying significant treasure, began penning letters to the Admiralty, proposing to obtain the strategically important Santa Cruz (along with any docked ships) for Britain whilst her situation of naval supremacy prevailed in the north-eastern Atlantic.

On 14 July, Nelson received permission 'for taking possession of the Town of Santa Cruz by a sudden and vigorous assault', and to achieve this end was granted a formidable task force of four battleships, three frigates, a cutter and a mortar boat. He set sail immediately.

2 An adaptation of events described more thoroughly and by experts in i) *Nelson and Tenerife 1797* by Agustín Guimerá Ravina, ii) *1797: Nelson's Year of Destiny* by Colin White, and iii) *Nelson: A Dream of Glory* by John Sugden.

Upon nearing Tenerife on Friday, 21 July, Nelson split his force into two attacking groups. The frigates were given orders to land troops and artillery, unseen during that night, to the north-east of Santa Cruz to occupy the high ground over the city, whilst the rest of the ships, including his flagship, HMS *Theseus*, would position themselves about a mile out to sea with the port and its main defences within bombardment range. Once in their menacing position, a pre-prepared ultimatum would be issued by Nelson to the commanding officer of Santa Cruz at dawn on Saturday, 22 July, demanding the surrender of Tenerife ‘which if refused, the horrors of war ... will fall on the Inhabitants of Teneriffe ... for I shall destroy Santa Cruz, and the other Towns in the Island, by a bombardment’. However, events did not unfold at all as Nelson had threatened.

The peculiarities of the interaction of the alisios with the irregular topography of Tenerife, of which all island grape growers possess an exact knowledge, were unknown to Nelson. On the stretch of coast where he intended to land his men, a microclimatic phenomenon occurs each May to September whereby the winds are funnelled at night from the Anaga ridges and down the valleys with such force as to create unpredictable gusts and unseasonably rough seas. The small boats launched from the frigates to land the assault force were thus greatly delayed, and at dawn were observed by the Spaniards before they managed to reach shore. With the advantage of surprise lost, the frigates attempted to recover the situation by moving closer in to lend supporting cannon fire – but these too were unable to manoeuvre effectively in the unexpectedly choppy waters.

With the alarm raised, General Antonio Gutiérrez, military Commander-in-Chief of the Canary Islands, hurried to muster as many fighting men as possible. With 1300 to hand, 68-year-old Gutiérrez, who possessed a distinguished military record (earned mostly against the British in other parts of the world), had just enough time to direct a series of highly effective repelling moves that ultimately forced the invaders to retreat back to sea by the end of the day.

For the two days that followed, the British could not mount another attack because their ships were forced to keep tacking to and fro to maintain a safe position, since the troublesome alisios had strengthened to a steady, whistling breeze. No doubt humiliated, and knowing the Spaniards would be using every available hour to fortify their position, Nelson became immensely frustrated and decided that once the winds died back he would wait for nightfall to personally lead a direct frontal invasion of Santa Cruz. His gamble was that if he could land his 1000 well-trained troops all at once, he would simply be able to overwhelm the town’s main defences.

At 11 p.m. on 24 July, the troops took silently to their small boats and began to pull gently to shore. At 2 a.m., they were just 300 metres from the town’s mole when they were seen. Hearing the alarm go up, they let rip a ‘hurrah!’ and rowed hell-for-leather to attack. Flashes of light were followed by the terrifying clapping and whizzing of

cannon and musket fire. Once they were within the primary kill zone of Santa Cruz's guns, the carnage was terrible. When Nelson's boat made landfall, he stood, drew his sword and began his charge. He had taken but one or two steps when a bullet smashed through his right arm. He was at once evacuated back to his ship, where the arm was amputated – without anaesthetic, of course – and thrown overboard.

Incredibly, the British did manage to land enough men to wage a street battle in the darkened precincts of Santa Cruz for the next four hours. But being without their leader and in unfamiliar territory, they were defeated by Gutiérrez's tactical superiority, and by 7 a.m. the invaders had no option but to raise a flag of truce and seek terms for surrender. In the end, a quarter of Nelson's assault force had been killed, with about half that number again wounded – 346 casualties in total, including Nelson and several of his commanding officers. One of his ships went down too: the cutter HMS *Fox*, when it tried to get close enough to disembark reinforcements. In contrast, the Spaniards suffered just 25 dead and 35 wounded.

Despite the ferocity of the fighting, the captured and wounded soldiers were extremely well treated on both sides, and Gutiérrez generously agreed that the British could leave with their remaining troops and ships on the condition that there would be 'no further molestation of the Town in any manner by the Ships of the British Squadron now before it, and that prisoners shall be given up on both sides'.



In appreciation, Nelson – just hours after his amputation! – sent the following letter to Gutiérrez, which was the first document he ever signed with his left hand:³

His Majesty's Ship *Theseus*, opposite Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 25th
July 1797

Sir,

I cannot take my departure from this Island, without returning your Excellency my sincerest thanks for your attention towards me, by your humanity in favour of our wounded men in your power, or under your care, and for your generosity towards all our people who were disembarked, which I shall not fail to represent to my Sovereign, hoping also, at a proper time, to assure your Excellency in person how truly I am, Sir, your most obedient, humble servant.

Horatio Nelson

P.S. I trust your Excellency will do me the honour to accept of a Cask of English beer and a cheese.

In return, Gutiérrez wrote:

My most esteemed Sir: I express my gratitude for the attention that your good self has transmitted, a proof of your benevolence and good manner; for my part, I do not believe that praise is due when a man's actions are dictated by basic humanitarian laws, these were all I followed with respect to the wounded and those troops that had landed, those that I must consider as brothers from the moment that our conflict is over. If I, or anyone else on this island can be of assistance to your good self after those unfortunate uncertainties of war, it would be an honour for me; moreover, it would be a pleasure for me if we could share a couple of flasks of wine which I trust would not be of the worst that is produced here. When circumstances permit, it would be of utmost pleasure to me to meet personally with such a worthy and honourable person as your Excellency. Meanwhile, may God give you a long life and many years of joy.

Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 25th July 1797

I kiss the hand of your Excellency, your most obedient servant.

Antonio Gutiérrez

P.S. I received and much appreciated the beer and cheese you so kindly sent ...

3 Reproduced from *The Dispatches and Letters of Vice Admiral Lord Viscount Nelson*.

Gutiérrez even treated the British officers to lunch on 26 July, in which the best wines of Tenerife were served.

To the people of Tenerife, the defeat of Nelson is a moment in their history they are enormously proud of. In Santa Cruz today, you can find a street named Calle de Horacio Nelson, and in the Museo Histórico Militar de Canarias you can review the history of the battle and look upon ‘El Tigre’ (‘The Tiger’) – the cannon that allegedly fired the blast that took off Nelson’s arm. If you happen to be in the vicinity of this part of Tenerife on 25 July, you may even hear a gun salute rippling through the Anaga mountains to commemorate the victory.

As for Nelson, though his letters suggest he suffered a crisis of confidence following the defeat at Tenerife, he would later rise to become one of the most celebrated seamen of all time. While his aggressive approach at Santa Cruz had failed, his penchant for audacious frontal attack proved more effective at sea, bringing him decisive victories in such pivotal confrontations as the Battle of the Nile and of course Trafalgar, just south of Cádiz, where the outnumbered ships of the Royal Navy decimated the combined fleets of both France and Spain. Victory at Trafalgar confirmed the naval supremacy of Britain through the remainder of the Napoleonic wars and for the rest of the 19th century, but it cost Nelson his life. He was shot by a French musketeer and died shortly before the battle ended. Nelson’s final words were ‘Thank God I have done my duty’.

The wine gifted to Nelson and his men would almost certainly have been made from grapes grown in the Tacoronte-Acentejo agricultural area directly to the west of the Santa Cruz–La Laguna corridor, or possibly the (much smaller) Taganana zone on the north face of the Anaga Peninsula: two distinct viticultural terroirs that have existed since the Spanish conquest. If your interest in Tenerife’s epic history has been piqued, it is possible for you to deepen your knowledge and explore the character of those historic wines by drinking a selection of the region’s modern vintages: the soils and even some of the vines have not changed. Moreover, several of today’s leading winemakers can trace their family involvement in the wine trade here back to times before Nelson, and they take pride in incorporating the traditional processes that have been handed down through the generations.

Most of the region’s principal bodegas are set amongst the productive agricultural lands that surround Tacoronte, La Victoria de Acentejo and El Sauzal. These wine towns are rich in tradition and culture, their historic centres containing countless old houses with lovely flower-filled balconies and intricately carved pinewood doors. The archipelago’s chief wine museum is here too, in El Sauzal. The Casa del Vino, set in a beautiful old Spanish colonial manor house, is without doubt the best place to begin any wine tour of Tenerife. Here it is possible to spend an entire day learning all about the history of the Canarian wine trade, trying the different

styles produced in the island today in the atmospheric tasting room, and enjoying traditional food in the exceptionally good restaurant.

To dig even deeper into the authentic wine culture of Tenerife, it is worth braving the hairpin bends through the razor-sharp peaks, plunging ravines and eerie mists of the emerald-green Anaga Peninsula (a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve) for a drive or bike ride to Taganana, an isolated hamlet that sits amongst vineyards that have existed for some 500 years. Ethereal Taganana, one of Tenerife's first post-conquest European settlements, feels suspended in the early 16th century. As well as the ancient vines, open-air stone lagares can be found, once used to create wine exported directly to England from the coast at Roque de las Bodegas; a place where, in the moonlight, you can sometimes catch a shadow on the water that looks like a wine ship arriving from across the oceans of time.

As the crow flies, Taganana is just 10 km from Santa Cruz, but it seems further from the hustle and bustle of the capital than any other part of the island. Its disengagement from the world has endured through the centuries thanks to the encircling Anaga mountains, and it is thus fitting that the name of the place derives from the Guanche word for 'surrounded by mountains' – Táganan.



GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The large strip of sloping land that runs along the north-east coast of Tenerife, where the vast majority of this region's vineyards are located, is strongly influenced by the Atlantic trade winds and is characterised by spring-like mildness and moderate-to-high humidity throughout the year. This part of the island is all fertile and green, but the saturation of colour reaches its peak on the north face of the Anaga Peninsula, where still exists one of the archipelago's most important reserves of laurisilva rainforest.

At the macro level, the landscape and climate are governed by Tenerife's backbone, which delineates the principal grape-growing area into a zone that rises from the coast to a serrated ridge that runs diagonally from the south-west to the north-eastern extremity of the island. Here, the land climbs steeply from the sea, topping out at just over 1600 masl along the crest of the volcanic spine. The majority of vineyards are located between 200 and 800 masl, mostly on terraced slopes that face north and north-west towards the lapis lazuli expanse of the North Atlantic. Occasionally, the pattern is interrupted by deep, narrow barrancos – including the one where the Guanches violently ambushed the Spanish in 1494 – where water from winter storms quickly runs back to the sea.

Geologically, this is one of the oldest parts of the island, and the millions of years of physical, chemical and biological reworking of the surface materials has brought into existence luxuriant red loam topsoils rich in organic matter, iron, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and various other nutrients. Although derived originally from the alkaline igneous rocks over which they now lie, most of the soils here are acidic (due to having been covered by pine forests for most of their existence) and occasionally require treatment with lime to balance pH. The thickest and most fertile soils exist at altitudes below about 500 metres. Above this, they tend to become thin and less productive, creating a variety of different vineyard characteristics with which bodegas can develop their portfolio of styles.

The principal viticultural area of the region is centred around Tacoronte and neighbouring El Sauzal, where there is a large wedge of (relatively) gently sloping land of altitude between about 300 and 800 metres which enjoys a microclimate giving a little more sun and a little less rain than the rest of north-eastern Tenerife. In late summer, cooling winds and occasional sea frets help to slow ripening and lengthen the growing season, extending the time in which the aromatic intensity of grapes can form. With the conditions of the terroir being just right for high-quality red wine production at volumes that are generally impossible in other parts of the Canaries, this viticultural zone has proved a pole star for guiding Tenerife's wines back onto the international market.

Surprisingly, in recent years the wines from north-eastern Tenerife that have attracted

the most attention and praise from the world's leading critics are those made from the tiny amount of grapes that are grown 25 miles up the coast from Tacoronte, under the very different conditions that prevail near the Anaga village of Taganana. Here, amongst a rocky landscape that drops precipitously from sharp mountain peaks to the sea, a bewildering diversity of ancient vines grow as wild bushes, barely clinging on to the extremely steep land where only the most sure-footed of viticulturists dare tread. The mixed red and white grapevines grow on soils that are generally permeable and thin, and all the vineyard work here must be accomplished by hand under climatic conditions that are as wild and windswept as you can get on Tenerife. But it has proved to be worth the additional effort and risk. The exposure of the vineyards to strong breezes, salt-laden ocean sprays and mists, and a cooler climate allow grapes to ripen slowly over an extended growing season, enabling them to capture an exceptionally pure expression of the terroir. The Anaga viticultural subzone may be one of the most extraordinary and profoundly interesting grape-growing settings anywhere on Earth, and we can rejoice that visionary winemakers have begun to deliver wines that succeed in bottling this character.



DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE TACORONTE-ACENTEJO

www.tacovin.com



As mentioned earlier, **DO Tacoronte-Acentejo** became the first wine region of the Canary Islands to be granted full appellation status when it was signed into law in 1992. Today, as measured by annual volumes of wine produced, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo is the largest in Tenerife (and, in the Canary Islands, second only to DO Lanzarote). Over the last five vintages for which there is data, the DO's 50 participating bodegas produced just over 1.8 million litres of wine per year – about 40% of Tenerife's total, with nine-tenths of that being red. As well as leading by volume, the appellation remains at the forefront of the multifaceted drive to put meaningful quantities of quality oak-aged Canarian red wines onto the international market.

Lourdes Fernández López, first president of DO Tacoronte-Acentejo and founder of Bodegas Cráter, today continues to champion the philosophy of continued modernisation to achieve ever-better quality. You can be sure that every bottle of wine that carries the appellation's logo has had production standards meticulously applied and has passed a rigorous assessment of character achieved via comprehensive chemical analysis (Fernández is a scientist) and expert panel tastings. Fernández's leadership also pushed the DO into new areas of strategic marketing, and the organisation now offers some of Tenerife's best outreach and wine education activities for professionals and the public alike.

DO Tacoronte-Acentejo appellation status is available to wines from grapes grown in any of north-eastern Tenerife's nine municipalities. From east to west these are: Santa Cruz, La Laguna, El Rosario (borders DO Valle de Güímar to the south), Tegueste, Tacoronte, El Sauzal, La Matanza de Acentejo, La Victoria de Acentejo and Santa Ursula (borders DO Valle de La Orotava to the west). Thanks in part to the richness of the soils, the area between Tegueste and Santa Ursula has the highest density of planted vineyards in the entire archipelago.

GRAPE VARIETIES

Like all the other regions of the archipelago, the north-east of Tenerife enjoys ungrafted plantations of a broad set of original European varieties that have had centuries to adapt to the various volcanic terroirs that exist. DO Tacoronte-Acentejo already permits a long list of grape varieties, but the law may soon need to be adjusted to include even more. In recent years it has been discovered that

the wild micro-plots of the Anaga Peninsula preserve a priceless treasure trove of unusual archaic varieties (e.g. Listán Bago, Listán Gacho and many others that are yet to be formally identified). These vines have already been used to produce world-class wines which, at least for the time being, are being elaborated, bottled and sold independently of the appellation.

Though red and white grape varieties are specified by the DO in equal number, make no mistake – this part of Tenerife is red wine country: 95% of the vineyards grow red grapes.

The vast majority of vines are the Canary Islands' steadfast reds, Listán Negro and **Negramoll**. Though Listán Negro is the more abundant, Negramoll is (arguably) the variety that most defines the region. Both grapes can make excellent varietal wines, but the flagship wines of north-eastern Tenerife are produced when the varieties are blended into a cuvée in which an exceptional expression of Negramoll imparts deep sophistication and elegance.

Though quite rare, **Castellana Negra** has its home in this corner of the island. The variety is small-berried, thick-skinned and difficult to grow, and it matures uniformly only in the hottest years. When ripe, even small additions can 'stiffen' blends, fulfilling a role not dissimilar to that of Petit Verdot in Bordeaux. Occasionally, Castellana Negra is made into single-variety wines that require many years in bottle to soften.

With the region having such a strong focus on exports, it comes as no surprise that there has been a fair bit of experimentation with the major international grape varieties, referred to locally as the *mejorantes*. On the whole, results have been unremarkable, with the notable exception of Syrah.

NEGRAMOLL

Negramoll is sometimes described by its growers as the Pinot Noir of the Canary Islands, since its delicate berries require careful handling and because it produces wines that are light, soft, fruity and deliciously juicy when drunk young, but more complex, savoury, smooth and stylish when left to age in the bottle.

The variety is grown abundantly in the Canary Islands – about half a million kilogrammes per year,⁴ and second only to Listán Negro in terms of total red grape area under vine. It is most prolific in La Palma, where it is often used to make excellent red and rosé varietal wines that are usually best consumed while young and

4 2018 data provided by the Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria (ICCA). Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca. Gobierno de Canarias

vibrant. In Tenerife, on the other hand, the red soils and microclimates of the north-east give rise to a sublime expression of Negramoll that, when blended with firmer varieties, achieves some of the Canaries' most memorable and ageworthy wines.

Though predominantly purple when ripe, a curiosity of Negramoll is that the colour saturation of its berries can vary significantly from year to year,⁵ and a mutation of Negramoll (named Negramoll Rosada) can be found which bears black, purple, red, pink and white berries on the same vine to produce multicoloured bunches. Furthermore, on Tenerife, an entirely pink-berried version has been observed;⁶ what to call this variant, with 'Negramoll Rosada' already taken, is a head-scratcher. Perhaps this diversity and intermingling of skin colour is the reason that Negramoll is sometimes called Mulata (mixed race) on the islands.

Recent DNA research has shown that Negramoll is identical to Mollar Cano,⁷ a variety that exists in Andalucía (in south-western Spain) and Peru. When the grape came to the Canary Islands is currently unknown, but written records show that it was present in South America as early as 1614.⁸ Since it was usual for the Spanish transatlantic ships of the day to stop in the Canaries on their way to the New World, we can suppose that it was likely that this variety was introduced to the islands during or before the 17th century. Here it became known locally as Negramoll, presumably as a local corruption of Mollar Negro.

Probably at around the same time, this variety was also introduced to Madeira under the name Tinta Negra Mole.⁸ It is today Madeira's most steadfast grape, being by far the most widely planted variety and producing about 75% of its fortified wines. This dominance was established after the island had been hit by phylloxera in the 1860s; growers replanted the dark-skinned Tinta Negra Mole rather than the traditional white-skinned varieties⁸ which they viewed as being less productive and reliable. They also did this because the grape is quite well suited to fortified sweet wine production, as it produces high yields and high sugar.

Although there are also some excellent fortified Negramoll wines produced in the sunnier Canaries, it is in dry reds that Negramoll shines in the Fortunate Islands. Here, traditionally Negramoll has been used in blends, where it brings aromatic

5 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Negramoll (and references therein)

6 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. *OENO One* 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

7 Martín J et al. (2006) *Determination of relationships among autochthonous grapevine varieties (Vitis vinifera L.) in the north-west of the Iberian Peninsula by using microsatellite markers*. *Genetic Resources and Crop Evolution*. 53 (6) pp 1255–61

8 Robinson J, Harding J and Vouillamoz J (2012) *Wine grapes. A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, including their origins and flavours*. Allen Lane (Penguin Books), London. ISBN: 9781846144462; ECCO (HarperCollins), New York. ISBN: 9780062206367 (and references therein)

complexity and structural elegance (with the partnering grapes bringing greater colour intensity, acidity and tannin). The flagship wines of some of DO Tacoronte-Acentejo's most prestigious bodegas are usually Negramoll blends, and they can be some of the best red wines of the archipelago.

A personal story: entirely through luck rather than judgement, and before I had a decent understanding of wine, I once speculatively purchased a bottle of Monje de Autor Reserva 2000 Óscar Domínguez just before the flight back to London – mostly because it had an attractive label. I lost this Negramoll blend under my stairs for ten years. When I found it, I drank it – and it was marvellous! As I sipped, I was blissfully unaware that it was a collector's item and one of the most prestigious and valuable red wines ever produced in the Canary Islands. I recall complex flavours of spice and the most delicate evolved fruit. The tannins were soft and silky with age and the finish long and moreish – a beautiful wine. If I still had the bottle now, would I sell it or would I drink it? I would most definitely drink it.

It is now nearly impossible to find a Monje de Autor Reserva 2000 Óscar Domínguez – there were only about 5000 bottles made – but the next vintage of this series (2012) has just been released and is worth buying a case for your cellar before it sells out. If you want to try another example of a premium DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Negramoll blend, you might seek out Magma (de Cráter). Though Listán Negro is the most common blending partner of Negramoll, Magma is a Negramoll-based wine enhanced with locally grown Syrah. While the winery's decision to add a little of the illustrious but alien Syrah may be contentious, it's easy to admit that the resulting wine is delicious, and to admire the bravery required to experiment with a new way of framing Negramoll at the expense of losing some of its Canarian identity. Or you might even argue that if it's okay to Frenchify local wines with oak barrels from Burgundy, why should it not be okay to add a little juice from French grapes too? Wherever you sit regarding this issue, Magma is a wine that demonstrates that Negramoll can be blended with other varieties to create something deluxe and powerful yet remain the star of the show.

Varietal Negramoll wines are lighter and more delicate than the blends mentioned above. When young, their colour is quite attractive, being a light cherry or raspberry red, sometimes even salmon. The nose is usually dominated by aromas of red berries with occasional hints of blueberries, and on the palate soft and sweet tannins combine with moderate alcohol to provide a gentle mouthfeel. With oak and bottle ageing of 5 years or more, a fading to orange and browning of the wine's colour is more than made up for by complexity; secondary and tertiary notes of ground coffee, toffee-caramel and an evolution of the primary fruit to include savoury nuances of leather and forest floor. With the tannins having become less sweet but fully integrated, these aged Negramoll wines come across as elegantly subtle and polished – distinguished.

CASTELLANA NEGRA

Although still a minority grape variety, Castellana Negra is currently in fashion and is being replanted in the Canary Islands now that the value of the fine wines it can produce has begun to outweigh its high growing costs. It is today grown in several of the Canary Island DOs, but its traditional heartland remains between Tacoronte and Tegueste in DO Tacoronte-Acentejo, where it is usually found growing alongside Negramoll and Listán Negro.

When the fruit is fully ripe, delicious concentrated juice can be obtained that is deeply coloured and infused with luxurious primary aromas of hedgerow fruits such as sloe, bramble and elderberry. With high acidity, good alcohol and intense tannin, oak maturation and bottle ageing lead to meaty wines which have a very distinctive and elegant profile dominated by liquorice, chocolate, and eucalyptus notes reminiscent of a top-quality New World Cabernet Sauvignon.

Although notably resistant to diseases and pests, Castellana Negra is a difficult grape to grow profitably because it matures uniformly only in the hottest years. Generally, ripening is patchy, requiring considerable effort by pickers to sort the useable grapes. Furthermore, the liquid yield from the small, thick-skinned, blackish-blue berries is low due to the unusually high percentage of grape volume occupied by seeds.⁹

It is genetically identical to the Tinta Cão of Portugal,^{10,11,12} where hot summers give rise to grapes that make long-lived and deeply coloured, rich, full-bodied wines. In the Canary Islands, Castellana Negra is particularly well suited to blending, where it lends dark pigment and structure, while the other varieties blended with it help to soften the sharp tannins it can possess in its youth. Varietal Castellana Negra wines are as scarce as hen's teeth, but sometimes, when the growing season has been exceptionally well suited to the grape (i.e. very hot), they are made. Canarian winemakers know the value of a good Castellana Negra harvest; thus you can be sure that any 100% Castellana Negra wine will be from an excellent vintage and has undergone careful vinification. These are premium wines and well worth tracking down, but be aware that they may not soften until they have been left to age for 5 years or more.

note: Castellana Negra is commonly called Tintilla in Tenerife, but it is not the same as the Tintilla grape of Gran Canaria.

9 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Castellana Negra (and references therein)

10 Maul E and Röckel F (2015) *Vitis International Variety Catalogue*. www.vivc.de

11 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Varietades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

12 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

STYLES OF WINE

This region is the beating heart of the Canarian red wine trade – an incredible 40% of the archipelago's vino tinto is produced here. While good quality and easy-drinking table wine is still the backbone of trade, many of the leading bodegas now elaborate premium oak-aged red wines, including crianzas and reservas. The best examples of both young and aged styles are almost always Listán Negro / Negramoll blends.

Despite its growing reputation for excellent ageworthy reds, the north-east of Tenerife's most traditional wines are its tintos jóvenes. These have been made here for hundreds of years, and thus today incorporate the immeasurably valuable knowledge and experience of generations of viticulturists and winemakers. Good examples are bright cherry red and taste alive: intense red fruits with pepper, dry with good structure, balanced and slightly tannic, and with a pleasant and persistent volcanic finish. Perhaps the most versatile reds of the entire archipelago.

Even the crianzas and reservas are still cherry red and packed with primary fruit if drunk straight after release, but with further age in bottle the colour begins to fade to garnet, and savoury notes of leather and forest floor emerge. Together with the vanilla, toast, cocoa and tobacco of oak and the minerality imparted by the volcanic terroir, the wines become highly complex and expressive, and occasionally achieve a standard that can match the finest aged reds of mainland Spain, but with the bonus of having a personality all of their own.

In the early 1990s, several bodegas in this region pioneered the application of carbonic maceration in the Canary Islands, creating an altogether different animal from their traditional tintos jóvenes. The process involves whole bunches being tossed into a tank which is then filled with CO₂ and sealed so that fermentation can take place in a total absence of air, usually for about 6 to 8 days. Fermentation begins within the berries themselves, which eventually begin to break down to release their juice. Gentle pressing then helps to liberate a deep cherry-red wine with a vivid purple rim. The process is designed to release colour and flavour but not tannins, resulting in juvenescent wines that display ample clean and bright red fruit (raspberry and plum, in particular) with a soft and refreshing mouthfeel. Sometimes red-fruit intensity can run to candy, and hints of bubblegum and banana can emerge. Listán Negro is the usual target where carbonic maceration can create likeable wines of sweet fruits, good acidity and mild tannins whilst retaining an agreeable seasoning of black pepper. Bodegas Insulares Tenerife, the large regional cooperative based in Tacoronte, produces a wine named Viña Norte Maceración Carbónica, which is the most readily available wine of this class in the Canary Islands.

The relatively few rosados that are made in the north-east of Tenerife are derived mostly from de-stemmed Listán Negro berries that are crushed and left to cold-

macerate for up to 12 hours before skins are removed and fermentation commences. Pink, clean and bright, good examples have intense aromas of red fruits and a mouthfeel that is lively and fresh, especially if well chilled.

Like Bordeaux and Rioja, where the excellent dry white wines of these appellations are somewhat hidden by the immense shadow cast by their great reds, the white wines of north-eastern Tenerife should not be overlooked. Here they are varietal or cuvées of Listán Blanco, Malvasía Aromática, Moscatel, Gual, Marmajuelo and Verdello. When made in a youthful style, aromas tend to be typical of the grape varieties used, underpinned by a terroir-derived minerality and given substance by a pleasant palate of moderate acidity. The best vintages, however, respond very well to lees and barrel ageing to create full-bodied wines of surprising complexity and class.

Though representing just a tiny fraction of overall production, a handful of the region's red and white fortified dessert wines have reached legendary status in the Canary Islands; perhaps none more so than Bodegas Insulares Tenerife's Humboldt Blanco Dulce 1997, which is one of the best wines produced in the Canary Islands in the modern era. If you are lucky enough to see a bottle for sale (I found one at the Casa del Vino in June 2018), buy it and try it!

BODEGAS

MONJE

Artistic wines that incorporate the tradition and passion of six generations

www.bodegasmonje.com

Situated just above the pleasant wine town of El Sauzal, Bodegas Monje is a medium-sized family-owned winery set amongst an incredibly picturesque landscape of vineyards overlooking the sea. The bodega that exists today was originally built in 1956 but was redeveloped in 1983 to incorporate new winemaking technology and to increase capacity to 160,000 litres per year. In 2009, a stunning and highly imaginative multilevel complex was added below ground. On the second subfloor, The Monje Cultural Space – an impressive high-ceilinged exhibition area – is used to promote the intersection of wine with the arts. When I visited, it was being used to showcase 'vinotinte', a project that uses dyes associated with the wine elaboration process to create unique clothing. The space is also used for theatre, music and Monje's quarterly 'Wine & Sex' evenings, when guests enjoy a daring artistic-cinematic experience emphasising the role of wine in eroticism. Descend further, and on the third subfloor there is a softly lit lounge where guests can drink in a more intimate atmosphere whilst expressing their wildest fantasies (by penning an anonymous note for placement in a wishing barrel).

Directly above this sensual wonderland, the working parts of the bodega are equally fascinating. An atmospheric barrel cellar houses rows of magnificent American (Virginian) oak and chestnut barrels originally used for transporting rum and molasses across oceans. After some 200 years of usage, their thick deposits now impart a unique personality to Monje's flagship red, Tradicional, a blend of Listán Negro, Listán Blanco and Negramoll. **Felipe Monje**, the current director, explains: 'I learnt to make this wine from my father, as he learnt it from his forefathers, and I am proud to uphold a family tradition that stretches all the way back to 1750.' And he adds: 'Since the beginning of the winery, one of our old barrels has always been used to make our fortified Vino Padre [Father's Wine], and today this too is made just as our ancestors did.' The profile on the bottle of this sweet red dessert wine is of Felipe Monje's father, Miguel Monje (1916–1999), and the wine inside comes across as a loving tribute, possessing a rich character that speaks of warmth and dignity. The 6th-generation **Alberto Monje**, Felipe Monje's nephew, is now involved in every aspect of the business, and thus the future of the Monje dynasty's role at the heart of Canary Islands winemaking is secure.

Although anchored by long history and family tradition, Bodegas Monje is also characterised by innovation and has been at the vanguard of combining age-old Canarian winemaking practices with modern methods. For example, in 1991, the bodega was the first to apply carbonic maceration in the Canary Islands, and in 1993, it elaborated the archipelago's first aged red wines under full DO status. The aged series, called Monje de Autor, has the same grape composition as the Tradicional, but the wine spends 12 or 18 months in smaller young French-American oak barrels followed by 3 or 5 years in bottle before release (depending on whether they are released as crianza or reserva). They are produced only from the best harvests (crianzas – 1993, 1994, reservas – 1995, 1998, 2000, 2012), are not cheap, but are (by all accounts) always first-rate. Each vintage label is a work by, or dedicated to, a legend of Canary Islands art, and the complete series has become highly sought after by collectors (the Monje de Autor Reserva 1995 César Manrique is currently available for €525 per bottle). I have had the pleasure of trying two of these wines (2000 and 2012), and if it were within my means I would try to collect them all too, but I am content with having access to the many other Monje wines that are more modestly priced. Today, the bodega makes a wide range of wines on an annual basis – 9 red, 3 white and 1 rosado – and it is clear that their entrepreneurial spirit is still very much alive, with the Canary Island's first-ever sparkling Negramoll rosado put on the market in 2019.

Almost all of the grapes that are used come from the 17 ha of vines on the family estate, some of which are hundreds of years old. The plots have a moderate slope towards the north and are comprised of stony red volcanic soils that are so naturally rich in nutrients that they do not require fertilisers. The finca is also blessed with a few plots where rare grape varieties have been able to cling on in the Canary

Islands. Just last year, the bodega released its first-ever 100% Bastardo Negro red wine, which is entirely unique in the archipelago. The grapes have just undergone comprehensive DNA analysis and have been shown to be identical to the Trousseau of mainland Europe – a grape of French pedigree and undeniable class.

Monje welcomes more than 20,000 visitors per year, who come to explore the many points of oenological and cultural interest but also to enjoy a Canarian gastronomic experience. The bodega has an excellent restaurant where each of the dishes is crafted (mostly using local ingredients) to match one of the in-house wines. Many of the tables are located on a large terrace that offers sensational views over the ocean to the north and across Tenerife to Teide in the west. Bodegas Monje is certainly a highlight of any wine tour of the Canary Islands (why not combine it with a trip to the Casa del Vino, which is just down the road?), but if you can't make it, you can still buy the wine online from the bodega's attractive and easy-to-use website, and have it shipped to you at home.

CRÁTER

Visionary leadership that has given rise to bold wines of international quality

www.craterbodegas.com

When I arrived at Bodegas Cráter in El Sauzal, I was excited to be met by owner **Lourdes Fernández López** and oenologist **Omar Alonso**. Fernández, the first president of DO Tacoronte-Acentejo, was instrumental in establishing the Canary Islands' first Denominación de Origen for wine, and has been at the forefront of modernising the sector ever since. She was also one of the seven friends that launched the Cráter winemaking project in 1998, with the ambition of pushing the boundaries of regional viticulture and winemaking in order to improve the red wines of Tenerife to such a level that they could match the best of mainland Spain. 'Our philosophy from the start was to believe that we could reach the level of quality that is achieved in Ribera and Rioja,' she says. 'It was also of equal importance to us to retain the strong character imparted by our volcanic soils, our native varieties (e.g. Listán Negro and Negramoll) and our Atlantic climate.'

With this singular focus on achieving international quality, only 12,000 to 15,000 bottles of wine are produced per year, all made from homegrown or purchased grapes from select vineyards perched about half a kilometre above sea level on the narrow strip of land that sits atop the dramatic coastal cliffs of this part of Tenerife. The area is a haven for all manner of seabirds and native plants, and great care is taken to conduct and promote sustainable viticulture to ensure the preservation of a healthy ecosystem. 'We believe this special local environment comes through in the personality of our wines, which we try to make in a style that reflects the multifaceted natural beauty of our land and the freshness of the ocean,' says winemaker Omar Alonso.

The principal wine, which was the bodega's first, is Cráter – a (roughly) 2/3 Listán Negro, 1/3 Negramoll cuvée whose component parts are aged for 6 months in new and used French oak and spend 1 year in bottle after blending before release. It is today considered to be one of the finest mid-priced red wines of the Canaries, thanks largely to a record of dependable high quality that now spans 20 years. The bodega's second wine is Magma, first elaborated in 2004 and subsequently only when harvests permit it (2008, 2013, 2016, 2017). Magma, a premium wine (in both quality and price) is both subtle and bold. Being 80% Negramoll, it is naturally soft and complex, but with 20% Syrah, its definitive structure is provided by what some view as an unwelcome immigrant grape. Politics aside, Magma is an excellent choice if you are looking for a sophisticated, aged (7 months in barrel, 30 months in bottle) red wine in a style that sits somewhere between Canarian and French.

More recently, Bodegas Cráter has begun to diversify into white wines. Blanco D Cráter is a cuvée of 80% Listán Blanco and 20% Verdello (sometimes Malvasía Aromática is used), where the wine is fermented by indigenous yeasts in closed stainless steel tanks to emphasise primary floral aromas, but matured on lees for 3 months to deliver texture and savoury complexity. I was also treated to a preview of (soon to be released) Magma Blanco, a reserva white wine of Verdello and Malvasía Aromática that is deliberately intense – dark yellow, aromas of ripe tropical fruit and orange peel, buttery texture and a long saline finish. The quality of these dry white wines surprised me, and, by challenging the notion that Tacoronte-Acentejo is 'red wine country', provided me with yet another example of how the people behind this bodega work tirelessly to move beyond illusory constraints inherited from the past.



AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



MONJE TRADICIONAL

Bodega: Monje, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias, previously DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2008, 2014, 2015, **2017**

Grape(s): 85% Listán Negro, 10% Listán Blanco, 5% Negramoll

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, fermentation in stainless steel followed by 4 months in antique (200+year-old) American oak and chestnut barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* cherry red with an attractive orange rim / *smell & taste:* (1°) tart fruits – red cherries, cranberries, redcurrants, blackberries – heavily seasoned with white pepper / *palate:* light-bodied and bone dry, excellent acidity, fine tannins, crisp and articulate, and possessing a smooth finish that ends with sensations of fruity sweetness and charismatic hints of black treacle.

Comments: An extraordinary expression of the Listán-based, mixed-grape, young red wines that were ubiquitous throughout the north-east of Tenerife during the 20th century. In my opinion, absolutely unmissable; especially so if you want to experience the great tradition and history of Tacoronte-Acentejo. Moreover, it's a supremely drinkable wine. Even when I'm supposed to be tasting, I always seem to find myself guzzling it with avidity.

Sommelier's recommendation: A splendid match for dishes that combine vegetables and spicy meat, such as *bubangos* (a locally grown spherical courgette) stuffed with veal.



HOLLERA

Bodega: Monje, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias, previously DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto maceración carbónica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, **2018**

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, whole-bunch fermentation in stainless steel under CO₂.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* vibrant cherry / *smell & taste:* (1°) juicy redcurrants, cherry drops, subtle scent of flowers (esp. roses), underlying pepper and minerality / *palate:* svelte body with good upfront and mid-palate fruitiness, great balance, sweet and soft tannins, with a lovely finish that reveals the primary character of the grape and volcanic terroir.

Comments: I love this application of carbonic maceration, which is delightfully enhancing. It's like a young natural beauty made-up for a fun night out.

Sommelier's recommendation: Works well with fatty fish like *átun* (tuna) cooked in *mojo rojo* (a red sauce made of peppers and paprika).



AUTOR RESERVA

Bodega: Monje, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto reserva* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2000, 2012

Grape(s): 80% Listán Negro, 15% Negramoll, 5% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, 18 months in oak barrels, 5 years in bottle prior to release.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* ruby developing to garnet / *smell & taste:* (1°) black and red berries, tamed black and white pepper, saline inorganic notes; (2°) baked sweet spices; (3°) developing fruit (esp. dried blackberries) and cinnamon / *palate:* perfectly formed body (medium+ tannin, acidity and alcohol), excellent entry and mid-palate, with a finish of immense complexity and satisfaction.

Comments: Nineteen years on from the vintage (2000) that produced the epic Autor Reserva Óscar Domínguez, Bodegas Monje has released the next edition of these wines that pay homage to the great masters of Canary Islands art. This time Néstor Martín-Fernández de la Torre (1887–1938) is honoured: a painter and theatrical designer who employed symbolism in his works. The label on the 2012 vintage is a reproduction of his painting *Sátiro*. Satyrs were mythical creatures of ancient Greece characterised by their enthusiasm for wine and sex. Typology aside, Autor Reserva Néstor Martín-Fernández de la Torre maintains the personality and class of the previous Monje de Autor wines, and from its evolution thus far, seems destined to be another masterpiece of the Canary Islands.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with powerful dishes such as *garbanzas arregladas* (a meaty chickpea stew).



BASTARDO NEGRO

Bodega: Monje, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias

Type: *tinto reserva* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013

Grape(s): 100% Bastardo Negro

ARPICI: €€€€€+

Vinification: 14% abv, single-parcel grapes, fermented and aged for 8 months in new 300-litre French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* bright ruby red with a thin garnet rim / *smell & taste:* (1°) clean and fresh red and black fruits, crushed black peppercorns, clear sense of volcanic minerality; (2°) strong aromas of oak (esp. smoke, toast, vanilla and other sweet spices) / *palate:* tart acidity and firm tannins, streamlined mouthfeel, with a finish that balances flavours of oak with graceful notions of terroir.

Comments: This is the only Bastardo Negro varietal wine of the Canary Islands, and to date, only one vintage has been made. Science has recently shown this grape to be genetically identical to the renowned French grape Trousseau (a dark-skinned offspring of Sauvignon Blanc), which my Tenerifan sommelier friend Rodrigo González Carballo and I were pleased to see was consistent with our sensory analysis of this wine (done before we knew) in that we determined it to be of high quality with significant potential for ageing. How this variety came to be in the Canary Islands is completely unknown, and perhaps fittingly, in this example wood and terroir somewhat overshadow Bastardo's own primary aromatic personality, thus leaving the grape an exquisite enigma. While already terrific, further time in bottle could round this wine to excellence.

Sommelier's recommendation: To fully appreciate the elegance and spicy character of this wine, pair it with lightly seasoned grilled meats.



VINO PADRE

Bodega: Monje, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias, previously DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto dulce* · (37.5 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2008, 2015, 2017

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 16% abv, late-harvest grapes, fermented and aged in an antique (200+year-old) American oak barrel, fermentation stopped (@ 87 grams of residual sugar per litre) by the addition of aguardiente.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* garnet red / *smell & taste:* (1°) sappy strawberries and raspberries, ripe blackcurrants, intriguing notes of Asian spices (like garam masala); (3°) sweet figs and cherry liqueur / *palate:* sweet yet surprisingly light, fine tannins, sufficient acidity to keep this wine refreshing and moreish, while the finish is what you hope for: warming, deliciously fruity and long.

Comments: Felipe Monje's memorial to 'the man who bequeathed me the opportunity and honour to continue our family tradition'. Vino Padre is a wine that has been made by five generations of Monjes, using an elaboration method and equipment lovingly handed down over hundreds of years. Being similar to some Portuguese sweet red wines, Vino Padre is also an interesting vestige of the diverse patriarchy that has given rise to the glorious range of wine styles that are now available in the Canary Islands.

Sommelier's recommendation: This wine combines perfectly with dark chocolate and cured cheeses made of sheep's milk, such as *manchego curado*.



NEGRAMOLL ROSÉ

Bodega: Monje, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: Vino de España

Type: *rosado espumoso* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015

Grape(s): 100% Negramoll

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 12% abv, méthode traditionnelle sparkling wine with secondary bottle fermentation and disgorgement performed in March 2018, brut nature.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* salmon pink / *smell & taste:* (1°) vivid tart raspberry and pomegranate, hints of strawberry and guava, faded flowers (esp. chrysanthemum); (2°) pronounced bakery notes (brioche, biscuit and sweet pastry) / *palate:* gentle bubble and relatively low alcohol, but with spritely acidity and a creamy body that coats the mouth; the finish is very long and characterised by a delicious balance of fresh raspberry, savoury yeasty notes and intense maritime salinity.

Comments: A unique single-plot Negramoll espumoso that has brilliantly combined the delicate fruity/floral perfume of this elegant variety with the sophistication of a well-made méthode traditionnelle sparkling wine.

Sommelier's recommendation: You'll enjoy it best with *peto a la plancha* (grilled Atlantic wahoo).



CRÁTER

Bodega: Cráter, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2008, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, **2015**

Grape(s): 70% Listán Negro, 30% Negramoll

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, aged for 6 months in new French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* light ruby with a copper rim / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe red and black fruits (esp. red cherries and blackberries), crushed peppercorns, potent minerality; (2°) layers of smoke and toasted oak, sweet spices, chocolate, coffee / *palate:* fresh and of middling body, with fine-grained tannins, good structure, and a satisfying finish that emphasises varietal fruit and volcanic minerality.

Comments: From the outset, Bodegas Cráter has pursued the creation of contemporary wines that could match the quality and style of oak-aged Riojas and Ribera del Dueros. The flagbearer for the winery, Cráter, has over the first two decades of the 21st century become a darling of DO Tacoronte-Acentejo. Pre-2015, the wine was known for its glossy mouthfeel and assertive oak, but 2015 marks a rebalancing that puts equal weight on primary fruit, wood and terroir. Cráter has always been made to a high standard – but the 2015 has unassailable poise.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with *carne de ternera* (veal) in sauce and in *carne ahumada* (smoked beef) dishes.



MAGMA

Bodega: Cráter, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: **2013**, 2016, 2017

Grape(s): 80% Negramoll, 20% Syrah

ARPICI: €€€€€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, aged in French oak barrels for 7 months, followed by a further 30 months in bottle before release.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep ruby with a garnet rim / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe dark fruits (black plums, blackberries, blackcurrants and black cherries), hints of pepper, volcanic minerality and Atlantic sea smoke; (2°) multifaceted notes of oak (cocoa bean, chocolate, coffee, butterscotch, toffee, vanilla, smoke, charred wood, cloves, tobacco); (3°) captivating tertiary aromas of lilac, preserved fruits and flame-grilled steak / *palate:* sweet tannins, medium body, silky smooth mouthfeel with bright edges and stable frame; long and delicious finish that is both fruity and meaty (as in savoury).

Comments: I have tried this wine several times over the years, and I see that my tasting notes use one adjective more than any other: ‘delicious’. Magma has actualised the dream of Bodega Cráter. Although only one-fifth of the blend, you could easily mistake it for a high-quality, oak- and bottle-aged varietal Syrah from France. If you were to taste these side by side, however, you would soon see that Magma is gentler, and of volcanic-Atlantic genesis.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Be sure to try it with succulent grilled ribs of *cochino negro canario* (Canarian black pig).



BLANCO D CRÁTER

Bodega: Cráter, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017, 2018

Grape(s): 80% Listán Blanco, 20% Verdello

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, fermented in stainless steel, aged on lees for 3 months with bâtonnage.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* clear straw yellow with green reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) notably floral (honeysuckle and sweet blossom) with a saline, terroir-driven core / *palate:* decadent mouthfeel, with a long finish where the potent bouquet is honed by a subtle bittersweet dimension reminiscent of squeezed pomelo.

Comments: A wine that leaves me joyfully perplexed. According to the winemaker, the minority component of Verdello is bringing freshness, while the dominant Listán Blanco delivers terroir and, to my surprise, the heavenly bouquet. Here I was believing that (i) Listán Blanco is aromatically subdued (especially when grown at lowish altitudes – in this case, 400 metres), and (ii) this part of Tenerife does not produce high-quality dry white wines. For a second, I considered *not* including Blanco D Cráter because it doesn’t fit the prevailing narrative – but omitting it would have been a travesty. The wine is expressive, elegant and truly exceptional.

Sommelier's recommendation: A superb choice with a salad of *brote de guisantes* (pea shoots), fresh tropical fruits and local *queso de cabra* (goat's cheese).



MAGMA BLANCO

Bodega: Cráter, El Sauzal, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *blanco seco reserva* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015

Grape(s): 50% Verdello, 50% Malvasía Aromática

ARPICI: €€€€€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, fermented in stainless steel, matured on lees for 4 months with weekly stirring.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* brilliant lemon yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe stone fruits and tropical fruits, very saline; (2°) notes of pâtisserie (esp. butter pastry); (3°) hints of candied orange peel, dried bananas and honey / *palate:* citric acidity, creamy body, notably voluminous mouthfeel, long finish that balances ripe and developing fruit against aromas of MLF and sensations of Atlantic sea spray.

Comments: Magma Blanco 2015 is Bodegas Cráter's first effort at producing a premium white wine. Compared to Blanco D Cráter, it certainly has a broader and more intense palate, and greater salinity from terroir; the nose, however, is not nearly as fragrant. Part of this wine's attraction will be its exclusivity – only 300 bottles per vintage, and it will not be produced every year.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with richly flavoured fried fish like *pescado de roca* (rockfish) or *salmonete* (mullet) served with *mojo verde* (a local green sauce infused with garlic).



TÁCANAN PARCELA MARGALAGUA

Bodega: Envínate, Santiago del Teide, Tenerife

Appellation: Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos)

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017

Grape(s): Listán Negro, Negramoll, Vijariego Negro et al.

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 12% abv, mixed grapes (including up to 10% blancos) from a single plot of ancient untrained vines, whole-cluster fermented, and aged in neutral French oak casks for 11 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* light cherry red / *smell & taste:* (1°) juicy red berries (esp. cherries and strawberries), fragrant wildflowers, drop of rosewater and discreet measure of sea breeze (cranberry juice with a squeeze of grapefruit), articulate inorganic minerality, subtle dried herbs, atmospheric petrichor / *palate:* dynamic and graceful, spectacularly pure and exact, perfect acidity, light and silky mouthfeel, outstanding balance, with a mesmeric finish of ample length, depth of expression and composure.

Comments: From untrained mixed grapes (some unidentified) grown on a small outcropping of iron-rich *tosca roja* (coarse red) volcanic soil just 100 metres over the raging Atlantic on the wild coast of the Anaga Peninsula, Táganan Parcela Margalagua dumbfounds by achieving a level of refinement to compete with the major league wines from the manicured vineyards of Burgundy. Understandably, many members of the local and international wine community view this wine as the Canary Islands' modern paragon.

Sommelier's recommendation: Thanks to the good structure and floral profile of this wine, it pairs extremely well with spicy red meats such as *cabra* (goat).



TÁGANAN TINTO

Bodega: Envínate, Santiago del Teide, Tenerife

Appellation: Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos)

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013, 2016, **2017**

Grape(s): Listán Negro, Negramoll, Vijariego Negro et al.

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 12% abv, mixed red grapes from vineyards near the remote hamlet of Táganana, plots fermented separately in concrete or plastic vats before blending and maturation in neutral oak barrels for 11 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale ruby / *smell & taste:* (1°) red fruits (esp. sour cherries and glossy ripe cranberries), drop of blackcurrant syrup, wildflowers, potpourri, touch of pungent spice (esp. liquorice and pepper), saltwater-wet volcanic minerality, fleeting suggestions of petrichor and fumarole smoke / *palate:* vigorous upfront acidity and salinity, richly flavoured, fragrant, good tannins (firm, not grippy), sour and savoury sensations, a certain earthy bitterness, restrained sweetness of fruit; long tangy finish with an abundance of charisma.

Comments: When tasted next to its impeccable (and more expensive) single-plot sibling, Margalagua, multi-vineyard Táganan Tinto has the feeling of being somewhat primordial. Does this make it less good in some way? Well, ultimately

that's up to you. But, what I can say is that when Rodrigo and I tasted the 2013 vintage together he told me that he was 'proud to have a red wine with these *skills* from the Canary Islands', and as I have become more familiar with both wines it is actually Táganan Tinto that I would select if someone told me I *had* to pick one to guzzle all day long. Furthermore, and perhaps courting controversy, for me Táganan Tinto is the hands-down winner if measured by sense of place, providing an unrivalled impression of Vinos Atlánticos.

Sommelier's recommendation: Not only pairs well with dishes made from fatty fish such as *rodaballo* (turbot) or *panza de áton* (tuna belly), but also is an excellent choice with North African dishes like tagine.



DOMÍNGUEZ COLECCIÓN CASTELLANA NEGRA

Bodega: Domínguez Cuarta Generación, Tacoronte, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013

Grape(s): 100% Castellana Negra

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 14% abv, single-vineyard, fermentation in stainless steel vats followed by 12 months maturation in Central European and American oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* ruby red fading to copper orange / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe brambles, elderberries and blackcurrants, cigar box; (2°) pronounced smoky notes, lovely aromas of mint chocolate and cedar wood / *palate:* upfront black fruits, plentiful mellowing tannins, good acidity, svelte mid-palate, finish that fades away to whispers of charred oak and snuff.

Comments: This wine was designed to embody the essence of Castellana Negra when grown in the heartlands of DO Tacoronte-Acentejo. The mission has been executed to perfection. Though the grape varieties are not related genetically, some people view Castellana Negra as the Canaries' answer to Cabernet Sauvignon. Indeed, the front-end loading of black fruits, pleasing mint chocolate, lingering tobacco, good acidity, and texture and intensity of tannins are all quite similar. Furthermore, it can present leafy aromas in slightly cooler regions and vintages, just like its illustrious lookalike. Here in Tacoronte, however, the grapes have been fully baked and elaborated into an elegant wine that is ageing very well.

Sommelier's recommendation: Marvellous with red meat either served in a sauce or grilled, like our beloved *carajacas* (calves' liver, marinated and grilled).



HÍBORO SYRAH

Bodega: La Hijuela, El Rosario, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, 2015, **2017**

Grape(s): 100% Syrah

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14% abv, aged for 3 months in French oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep magenta / *smell & taste:* (1°) enticing notes of sweet blackcurrants, black cherries, blackberries and sloe, underlying pepper and spice, and just a smidgen of eucalyptus; (2°) creamy vanilla, cocoa, charred oak and smoke / *palate:* juicy and silky, with a round and full mouthfeel, and a long finish reminiscent of crème de cassis.

Comments: La Hijuela is a young bodega specialising in Tenerifan Syrah. Their meyorante vineyard was planted in 2008 and is now growing grapes that are being elaborated into wines of a ‘hot climate’ style – full, fruity and soft. If you were wondering how Canarian Syrahs stack up against the global heavyweights, Híboro Syrah won a silver medal at Syrah du Monde 2015, the prestigious international competition that grades the best varietal Syrah wines from around the world.

Sommelier’s recommendation: This wine goes well with strong-flavoured meat dishes such as *cabrito en adobo* (kid in a marinade sauce).



VIÑA NORTE TINTO MACERACIÓN CARBÓNICA

Bodega: Insulares Tenerife, Tacoronte, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto maceración carbónica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017, **2018**

Grape(s): 95% Listán Negro, 5% Negramoll

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 13.5% abv, whole-bunch fermentation in stainless steel under CO₂.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* cherry red with a violet rim / *smell & taste:* (1°) sweet cherries and raspberries; (1°/2°) pronounced banana liqueur and candied sweet red fruits, playful hints of bubblegum / *palate:* bursting with tart fruitiness, pleasant mouthfeel, with a good finish in which sensations of red berries are at the fore.

Comments: If you want to know what liberal application of carbonic maceration achieves, try this wine. This style may divide opinion, but in my view this wine (i) provides greater choice to the consumer, and (ii) leaves one in no doubt that Listán Negro is very well suited to this process. I like it.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with *chuletitas de cordero lechal* (suckling lamb chops).



MARBA ROSADO

Bodega: Marba, Taguste, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *rosado seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, **2017**, 2018

Grape(s): 80% Listán Negro, 20% vidueño

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 13% abv, fermented in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* transparent French pink / *smell & taste:* (1°) high-intensity notes of strawberries, raspberries and cherries, crushed pink peppercorns, subtle inorganic minerality, enigmatic nuances such as candied apricots and citrus blossom / *palate:* very clean and refreshing mouthfeel, tartness of fresh raspberries, light and lively, with an overtly fruity finish that nicely balances sensations of 'sweet & sour'.

Comments: This wine is one of the most awarded rosados of the Canary Islands. It easily achieves the requisite easy-going disposition, but with great depth of character. While it is true that Listán Negro has what it takes for elaborating excellent wines, there is something special about Marba Rosado when compared to the many other Tenerifan rosés made from this grape. Perhaps it is the cryptic vidueño (allsorts) component that sets it apart.

Sommelier's recommendation: A great choice to complement a light lunch of *vieja a la espalda* (fried parrotfish).



GRANALYSIUS DULCE

Bodega: Presas Ocampo, Tacoronte, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *tinto dulce barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: **2013**

Grape(s): Castellana Negra, Listán Negro and Negramoll

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 15% abv, late-harvested and sun-dried on mats, de-stemmed then fermented in stainless steel, further 10 months of ageing in American oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* ruby with a violet rim / *smell & taste:* potent and profoundly complex, (1°) ripe blackcurrants, redcurrants, cherries, black plum, dried herbs, traces of salty volcanic minerality; (2°) chocolate, butterscotch, vanilla, charred wood; (3°) walnuts, prunes, figs, fruit preserve, marzipan / *palate:* silky smooth tannins, warming and enveloping, intensely flavourful, excellent balancing acidity, with a fine sweet finish that seems to go on forever.

Comments: The grapes that make this wine are so sweet that alcoholic fermentation completes naturally while still leaving abundant residual sugar. This process concentrates flavour too, which Gran Alysius Dulce owns in abundance. The application of American oak and a few years in bottle have introduced other dimensions of luxury, but what makes this wine special is that somehow there is enough acidity to keep the voluptuousness clean and virtuous. Castellana Negra, always the largest component (at least 40%), is probably to thank. There are very few bottles of this wine left in the world, and it is rarely produced, but Presas Ocampo tell me they hope to make a 2019 vintage. I hope so too.

Sommelier's recommendation: Simply superb with chocolate mousse.



HUMBOLDT BLANCO DULCE

Bodega: Insulares Tenerife, Tacoronte, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Tacoronte-Acentejo

Type: *blanco dulce gran reserva* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 1997

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 19.5% abv, fortified with grape spirits, 10 years (!) in used American oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* lustrous gold with an amber rim / *smell & taste:* (2°) tasteful oak and lees frame of toasted vanilla pods and wheatgerm digestives; (3°) powerful notes of oxidation and fruit development – dark chocolate, toffee, honey-roasted nuts, quince cheese, dried apricots, raisins and lemon curd / *palate:* good acidic tang, extraordinary depth of flavour within an unctuous body of great structure and sweetness; the finish is silky and long.

Comments: Named in honour of Alexander von Humboldt, this towering wine from Bodegas Insulares Tenerife reminds me of a high-quality sherry, and would

probably sit just outside Cream (on the Medium side). After more than two decades of ageing (half in wood, half in bottle) it has developed polymathic complexity. Of course, this is what Listán Blanco (Palomino) was born to do. Amazingly, some bottles of this Titan of Tenerife are still available.

Sommelier's recommendation: Don't miss any opportunity to try this wine with *truchas de batat*, a deep-fried Canarian Christmas treat made of sweet potato, almonds, cinnamon, a little star anise and plenty of sugar.





4

Tenerife East
(Valle de Güímar)

HISTORY

Valle de Güímar is on the eastern coast of Tenerife and takes its name from the Guanche *menceyato* (kingdom) that existed in this part of the island before and during the early days of the European conquest. Añaterve was the last Mencey of Güímar, and was the first of the island's nine rulers to make peace with the invaders. Not only did he capitulate, but he actively collaborated with the conquerors, providing fighting men and supplies throughout the ensuing campaign to crush those who resisted the invasion. It is almost certain that the willingness of the Guanches of Güímar to cooperate with and support the Europeans was not through cowardice (or prudence) in the face of overwhelming military might, but because they had come to believe that it was God's will.

About a century earlier, in 1392, on a small beach near where the valley's largest town, Candelaria, now stands, two Guanche goatherds found a medieval sculpture of the Virgin Mary holding a child and a green candle (hence 'Candelaria') which had, presumably, fallen off a passing ship and been washed ashore.¹ Never having seen anything like it, in an act to determine if it was inanimate one of the Guanches

¹ For the complete story, be sure to read *The Guanches of Tenerife, The Holy Image of Our Lady of Candelaria, and the Spanish Conquest and Settlement*, written by The Friar Alonso de Espinosa in 1594 (but very helpfully translated into English and edited by Sir Clements Markham in 1907).

tried to throw a rock in its direction, but his arm became paralysed. The other approached it with a stone knife and tried to slice at the Virgin Mary's fingers, but only succeeded in opening a wound on his own hand. They fled in terror, but when they returned later that day with Mencey Acaymo, they touched the statue and their injuries were miraculously healed. Convinced it was supernatural, Acaymo had the statue taken to his royal cave, where it was worshipped as a divine embodiment of the sun goddess Chaxiraxi, the mother of all the Guanche gods.

Later, as the Spanish expansion through the archipelago unfolded, a Guanche who had been converted to Christianity travelled to Tenerife – as yet unoccupied – and on seeing the statue there recognised it as that of the Virgin Mary. Hearing of this, the Spanish dispatched missionaries to Güímar to enforce and spread the idea that what the Guanches had always thought of as Chaxiraxi was in fact the Virgin Mary, and that Christianity was the true faith.

When the Spanish eventually completed their conquest of Tenerife, they attributed a good part of their success to the 'Miracle of Our Lady of Candelaria'. Up until this opportunity to convert the Guanches of Güímar to Christianity, Tenerife had been hostile and impenetrable. The first celebratory mass was held on 2 February 1497, at a site close to where the statue was discovered, and Alonso Fernández de Lugo ordered the construction of a church and the plantation of vines in the surrounding valley to provide sacramental wine for future services.

The first Basilica of Our Lady of Candelaria was completed in 1526, and the Virgin Mary was declared the Patron Saint of the Canary Islands by Pope Clement VIII in 1599. The statue itself disappeared as mysteriously as it had appeared, being reclaimed by the ocean when a freak tsunami hit the coast in 1826. Nowadays, Candelaria is the principal Catholic centre of pilgrimage of the Canaries, and on 15 August every year tens of thousands of pilgrims come from far and wide to pay homage to the Virgin Mary in Candelaria, where a replica of the famous icon is solemnly carried out to sea by a procession of local fisherman. The public holiday also involves quite a bit of fun, including a re-enactment of the discovery of the statue, complete with locals dressing up as Guanche natives, and a huge fiesta when devout Catholics and inquisitive tourists alike can enjoy a rich offering of Canarian culture and cuisine. Needless to say, it's an excellent opportunity to try the modern wines of Valle de Güímar.

In the early centuries of European settlement, the impact of the international wine trade was not as intense in this area compared to the north of Tenerife because it is more arid and the soils are not nearly as fertile. The grapes grown in Valle de Güímar were used instead to produce wines for local consumption, including communion wine, which was its original purpose. In the late 20th century, however, a handful of bodegas realised that their relatively low-yielding vineyards might actually be well suited to growing grape bunches of concentrated flavour, and they began

experimenting to make products of higher quality. Valle de Güímar eventually won independent appellation status in 1996 and, although it remains small, has made impressive progress with its wines – especially its afrutados and sparklers, which are now adored throughout the islands. Looking ahead, if the grape growers and winemakers can further master how to use their dry and relatively infertile terroir – particularly the higher-altitude sites – to tease out wines of maximum expression, then there is real potential here to produce truly fine wines. Valle de Güímar is an appellation to watch.

A PORTRAIT OF THE GÜÍMAR VALLEY

As John Radford explained in his wine book, *The New Spain*, if before 1996 you had driven up the eastern coast of Tenerife from the beaches of Playa de las Américas all the way to the outskirts of its capital city, Santa Cruz, you would not have left the very large viticultural area known as Vinos de la Tierra Abona-Valle de Güímar. Today, for good reason, this side of the island is split into two fully fledged appellations – the (still) large southern area now being DO Abona, and a much smaller northern area called **DO Valle de Güímar**. You will be informed when you have crossed from one to the other by the brown billboards placed along the sides of the TF-1 autopista, but you will also observe a marked change in the terrain – to the south the scenery is dominated by barren and dusty cream-coloured volcanic badlands, while to the north the landscape is, although still very arid, notably more hospitable, with the intermittent greens of natural vegetation and agriculture.

The 10 km-wide Valle de Güímar is also more densely populated than the badlands to the south, with towns and villages of various sizes from the coast right up to the foot of its mountainous highlands, where the tilt changes and the land shoots upwards towards the main ridge of the island. Over the centuries, countless narrow but elongated rectangular agricultural terraces have been cut into the terrain from the shore, to which they run parallel, all the way up amongst the pine trees of Tenerife's coronal forest – their ubiquity seemingly implying that the region has been brought under ownership and control.

However, a petrified lava field which tongues down towards the sea from a volcanic cone at 1500 masl, deep in Güímar's hinterland, serves as a reminder that humanity's mastery of the Earth is illusory, and in the end everything we do and build will be wiped away by elemental powers far beyond our control. The eruption, which occurred in 1705, spewed rivers of basaltic lava that destroyed everything in their path and left a scar of black land that today acts as a natural border between the second and third biggest towns of the valley: Güímar and Arafo. Though the lava field is desolate and barren, a day spent hiking there can provide peaceful solitude and the most stunning views of the valley. You might also come across a truly defiant sight: vines planted in the lava field's nooks and crevices with their



long shoots held aloft by specially designed wooden frames. The grape-growing endeavour silently roars: *'We may one day be gone, but while we are here we will make heroic wine!'*

If you find yourself in a spiritual frame of mind, it's worth considering a visit to the Pirámides de Güímar, a grouping of six large stepped pyramidal structures built from stacked stones. For a fee, you can enter a tourist park that invites you to examine the pyramids and contemplate the intriguing possibility of an ethnographic link between the celestially enlightened ancient Egyptians, the Guanches of the Canary Islands and the Mayans of Central America.

The structures are oriented to the solstices, and the park welcomes visitors to stand on the grand pyramid's main platform on the day of the summer solstice to experience an awe-inspiring double sunset, when the sun sets behind a mountain top, then re-emerges again only to disappear for good (well, at least until the next morning) behind a neighbouring peak. Although it is entertaining to let your imagination compose colourful moving images of the Guanches worshipping Chaxiraxi on this very spot, there now exists compelling archaeological research that suggests the structures were probably created no further back than the early 19th century.

The pyramids should still appeal to wine enthusiasts, however, since an alternative theory for their construction is that they came into existence as a by-product of agriculture, as the rural population cleared cultivable land of large stones to create space for vines and other crops. As to the reason for the pyramids' shape and solstitial orientation, perhaps no one will ever really know. Whatever the truth may be, it is surely the case that while watching an exhilarating sunset or sunrise from there we should pop open a chilled bottle of Valle de Güímar sparkling wine to enhance the enjoyment of the celestial show and to honour all those who worked to create such a life-affirming opportunity.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Like the Valle de La Orotava, the Valle de Güímar was created by an ancient landslide of unstable volcanic rock, when a section of proto-Teide slid off into the sea under its own weight some 800,000 years ago. What remains is a large, almost square, valley about 10 km long by 10 km wide, contained by pronounced ridges on three sides and by the coast on the other. In the areas furthest inland and away from the sea, vineyards can be found growing right up to 1400 masl, making them amongst the highest in Europe.

Unlike the lush Valle de La Orotava that faces the humid trade winds, the wine-producing region of the Valle de Güímar is situated in a rain shadow. The climate is

therefore hot and dry, with little rain and almost 3000 hours of sunshine per year – no wonder the valley’s Guanches so devoutly worshipped Chaxiraxi. Altitude is the greatest ally to those focused on quality wine production; vineyards planted above 600 metres experience pronounced intra-day temperature ranges and an overall cooler climate, which between them can extend the growing season by several months compared to those down by the coast.

Another significant factor that creates variation across the Valle de Güímar’s terroir is the diversity of soil types, which can range from clay-rich to sandy jable topsoil over the relatively old bedrock from Tenerife’s first phase of volcanic creation. In all cases, fertility is very low compared to most of the other parts of the island, and in some instances, agriculturalists have gone to the extreme of importing alien topsoils to add nutrients and trap moisture.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DEL VALLE DE GÜÍMAR

www.vinosvalleguimar.com



Valle de Güímar, which encompasses the municipalities of Arafo, Candelaria and Güímar, achieved full DO status in 1996. Since this time there has been a marked increase in total wine production, and there are now more than 600 ha of registered vineyards that supply 20 bodegas with the grapes they need for making wine. Despite this recent growth, this is still the smallest appellation of Tenerife, making on average just 350,000 litres of wine per year over the last five vintages for which there is data – less than 10% of Tenerife’s total.

DO Valle de Güímar has been able to punch above its weight by being forward-looking and nimble. For example, in 1999 regulations were modified to permit sparkling wines, and a year later there was another change to the winemaking law to allow international grapes such as Syrah and Tempranillo. Most notably, perhaps, has been the invention, regulation and promotion of afrutado wines. This ultra-young, easy-drinking, semi-sweet style has become so popular with Canarian consumers that several other appellations of the archipelago have begun making their own version of this wine. DO Valle de Güímar is, however, the only appellation that stipulates that afrutado must always incorporate a significant fraction of **Moscatel**.

This regulation invariably imparts a recognisable character to the local afrutado wines, but also promotes sustainable usage of the valley’s scarce water reserves. Due to the intense aridity and the low fertility of prevailing soils, DO Valle de Güímar has had to devote much thought and work to improve irrigation techniques

for its vineyards – particularly those at low and mid altitudes. Drip irrigation using water from the regional galleries offers by far the most efficient use of the limited fresh water supply, but it is extremely expensive – the cost being up to 50 cents per cubic metre of water delivered. The potently aromatic Moscatel grape grown for afrutado wines has provided a workable economic solution. These grapes give big yields packed with sugar that can be used to make large volumes of flavourful semi-sweet wines which go to market in a highly compressed time frame, thus enabling growers and winemakers to manage this particular input cost challenge. Modern vineyard training methods can further optimise water usage, and the DO has spent much time coordinating subsidies to convert traditional vineyards (often involving co-cultivation with vegetables) to espaldera. Despite these advances, in recent years there has been so little rain falling on the highlands of the Valle de Güímar that the galleries are depleting and becoming increasingly saline. So far this has not significantly affected the crops, but everyone is worried.

A peculiarity of viticulture in the Valle de Güímar is the presence of a handful of plots where attempts have been made to enhance grape-growing potential by importing huge amounts of topsoil from other parts of Tenerife. Jable has been brought from the south to increase the moisture-capturing qualities of some especially dry vineyards, while some infertile parcels have had red clays from the north of the island ploughed in, to improve the overall availability of nutrients.



GRAPE VARIETIES

Though a wide range of varieties are permitted (and an even wider range grown) by DO Valle de Güímar law, Listán Blanco is by far the dominant white grape and Listán Negro by far the dominant red.

Valle de Güímar's production is very much white wine focused, and most of the region's oenologists and grape growers will agree that for the elaboration of quality wines the local climate is much better suited to white grapes. Listán Blanco is present across all altitudes, with the vineyards in the highlands routinely providing the best base material with which to create wines of a higher class. Diego does well at these higher altitudes too, where it can retain sharp acidity even during the hottest years.

Some of the Canary Islands' more aromatic grapes are slowly increasing their presence, notably Albillo Criollo in the midlands and uplands, and Malvasía Aromática, Marmajuelo and Verdello in the lowlands. In recent years they have been used to produce some very good varietal wines as well as intriguingly complex blends.

The most aromatic grape of them all – **Moscatel** – has established itself as an economic linchpin of Valle de Güímar's viticulture. It is always used in the region's hugely successful semi-sweet afrutado wines, but can also be found in dry examples, where it adds potent perfume.

For the reds, although plantations of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Tempranillo are still under experimentation, the bulk of what is produced is still derived from Listán Negro and best enjoyed young.

MOSCATEL

The succulently sweet and highly perfumed white grape Moscatel, or Moscatel de Alejandría, to give it its full name, is a venerable variety from antiquity. From its roots in the eastern Mediterranean, it has become broadly dispersed and now thrives in hot and arid climates all over the world.

The variety is thought to have remained largely unchanged since it first appeared during the Hellenistic period.^{2,3} Though many believe it to have originated near the great

2 Negrul A (1938) *Evolution of cultivated forms of grapes*. Comptes Rendus (Doklady) de l'Academie des Sciences de l'URSS. 18 (8) pp 585-588

3 Negrul A (1946) *Origin and classification of cultured grape*. In *The Ampelography of the USSR*, Vol. 1 Ed. Baranov A et al. Pischepromizdat, Moscow. pp 159-216

Egyptian city of Alexandria at the western edge of the Nile Delta,^{4,5} some researchers contend that it was more likely to have come from the southern Italian peninsula, Sardinia, Sicily or Greece.⁶ It is rumoured that one of Cleopatra's favourite drinks was Moscatel wine from Samos in the north-eastern Aegean, so perhaps the grape was not native to Alexandria, but the wines made from it were first elevated to fame there.

Moscatel has tremendous aromatic power and high sugar content, and has been used over the millennia for table grapes, raisins and wine. Its wines are today arguably most well known and appreciated thanks to the illustrious range of sweet and fortified wines of Setúbal in Portugal and Málaga on Spain's southern coast. Also in the south of Spain, in Jerez, Moscatel is used, like the Pedro Ximénez grape, to produce a minority style of sherry that is dark brown and intensely sweet. However, as the popularity of sweet wines around the world has declined, this has led to the appearance of much drier Moscatel wines, and a handful of producers have been able to demonstrate that sophisticated contemporary styles are achievable with this variety.

In the Canary Islands, Moscatel is grown in all the islands and is used to make all manner of wines. On its own, most commonly it is made into afrutado, naturally sweet dulces, and both young fortified and aged fortified styles. When blended, it can be found in drier elaborations that can be quite enchanting. For example, Moon Luna de Yariza Blanco, by Bodegas Tempus in DO Valle de Güímar, is manufactured by cold maceration of 50% Moscatel and 50% Malvasía Aromática, and fermented in new American oak for three months with bâtonnage to produce a highly perfumed and textured wine that is complex and balanced.

Whenever it is present, Moscatel will impart its unashamed and unmistakable potent aromas of rosewater, orange blossom, grape and lychee. In particularly complex examples, these aromas can be complemented by subtler notes of elderflower and honeysuckle. In naturally sweet dulce and fortified styles, the orange aromas tend to present more as candied orange, orange peel or even marmalade. With age, figs, currants, coffee, plum, molasses, nuts and chocolate notes can emerge.

STYLES OF WINE

Apart from the large cooperative Viticultores Comarca de Güímar, most of the wine producers in the Valle de Güímar are very small, and when the appellation was first

4 Galet P (2000) *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des cépages*. Hachette Pratique, Paris. ISBN: 9782012363311

5 Nikolau N and Michos V (2004) *Grecia*. In *La vite e l'uomo dal rompicapa delle origini al salvataggio delle relique*. 2nd edn Ed. Del Zan et al., ERSA – Agenzia Regionale per lo Sviluppo Rurale, Gorizia. pp 562–634

6 Robinson J, Harding J and Vouillamoz J (2012) *Wine grapes. A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, including their origins and flavours*. Allen Lane (Penguin Books), London. ISBN: 9781846144462; ECCO (HarperCollins), New York. ISBN: 9780062206367 (and references therein)

split off from Abona, most observers did not anticipate the rise of the high-class whites that have in recent years begun to put the region on the international wine map. It seems the architects of DO Valle de Güímar's independence knew what they were doing!

To be sure, the tradition of accessible dry and semi-sweet easy-drinking whites continues, with the trade in these wines having received a powerful boost thanks to the introduction of the innovative afrutado style. But nowadays, highland white grapes are receiving special handling in the vineyards and the bodegas to achieve a quality that has been recognised by numerous international awards.

Listán Blanco's evolution has been particularly fascinating. The grapes that ripen in the region's highest vineyards are now producing articulate wines that possess distinctive herbal and citrus flavours, while nearer the coast vineyards are harvested early to create a relatively neutral base for DO Valle de Güímar sparkling wines made using the *méthode traditionnelle*. While these sparklers are not about to take on the best of France or England, the second fermentation in bottle still imparts the requisite 'bready' character that makes this style of bubbly so alluring and versatile.

Although comprising only a small percentage of total production, the still, dry wines of DO Valle de Güímar that have generated most excitement are those that contain the valley's best crops of Albillo Criollo, Verdello, Malvasía Aromática and



Marmajuelo. These wines tend to be densely flavoured and richly textured with a deliciously full mouthfeel, and a long finish that has been enhanced, more often than not, by ageing in oak barrels on fine lees for a period of several months or more.

For reds and rosés, Listán Negro is the prominent grape, usually made into wines that are intended for immediate consumption. Some of the valley's reds do see enough time in oak to be crianzas, with an increasing fraction of these incorporating French varieties.

Recently, experimentation with Listán Negro has produced a frizzante style of wine reminiscent of Italian Brachetto d'Acqui. Though potentially unpopular with connoisseurs, these wines ingeniously utilise otherwise indifferent crops to produce a refreshingly sweet, fruity alcoholic beverage that might just be the ultimate wine to enhance a holiday fling.

BODEGAS

JUAN FRANCISCO FARIÑA PÉREZ

Wines that have put Valle de Güímar on the global map

Camino Boruga, 38550 Arafo, Tenerife

Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez, grape grower, winemaker and owner of the bodega that carries his name, is clear about his 21st-century strategy: 'to conduct careful cultivation and vinification of grapes grown from the best available plots to produce first-rate wines that respect the regional terroir.' So far, so good – in recent years his wines have significantly raised the profile of the Valle de Güímar by attracting the attention and praise of the world's leading wine critics.

Fariña Pérez learnt his trade from his father and grandfather, who between them grew grapes and made wine throughout most of the 20th century for home consumption and to sell in the family's restaurant in Arafo. In 1999, the baton was handed on to Juan Francisco, who spearheaded a new project to bottle high quality wines to sell into the commercial market. Though volumes remain small, his successful venture has led to a doubling of the bodega's production over the first two decades of the 21st century.

About half of the grapes that are processed still come from the original family-owned parcels that border the winery and cellar. Here, at 800 masl, vines of Albillo Criollo, Listán Blanco, Gual and Listán Negro are grown in stony clay soils on the eastern-facing slopes of Tenerife with beautiful views out over the ocean towards

Gran Canaria. Further down, nearer the sea, where soils are typically a mix of volcanic picón and jable, the winery buys Moscatel and Marmajuelo from select, carefully managed vineyards. Fariña Pérez took me to meet **Ángel Fariña**, owner of Finca La Hidalga, where I saw an impressive 0.7 ha of 8-year-old drip-irrigated espaldera vineyards – very unusually, completely enclosed under translucent canvas, like those that cover the many banana plantations of the Canary Islands. ‘We invested in the cover primarily to protect from pests – birds, mainly, but also lizards, which a year ago wiped out the entire crop!’ explains Ángel Fariña. ‘The cover also keeps the vines cool in the summer and protects the grapes from sunburn, allowing us to perfectly ripen a high-quality crop.’ 2017 is the first harvest that Bodega Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez has used, with the Moscatel grape providing the key ingredient to the ever-popular El Borujo Blanco Afrutado, its largest product by volume.

Afrutado wines go on sale the same year the grapes are grown, and thus provide a dependable annual cash flow that can often underpin winemaking economics in the Canary Islands, especially for smaller bodegas. ‘While it’s true that afrutado wines generally use grapes from lower-altitude sites and require heavy technical intervention to shorten the vinification process, that doesn’t mean these wines necessarily lack character,’ states Fariña Pérez. His assertion was then verified by a tasting of his 2017 vintage, which was fresh, fruity and floral, but not overpoweringly so, and with a sweet and sour finish that did indeed impart a distinct personality.

Fariña Pérez also sources grapes from Valle de Güímar’s highest plots – Las Dehesas (1400 masl) and Los Pelados (1300 masl) – where dry-farmed bush vines of Listán Blanco, some over 100 years old, and Diego grow from June to as late as October under pronounced diurnal temperatures to produce high-quality bunches of concentrated flavour and bright acidity. This high-altitude raw material is used in the production of two of the excellent ‘Los Loros’ branded wines that were launched in 2012 as an outlet to elaborate wines of personality and passion – a winemakers’ choice line, if you will. Both Listán Blanco and Diego go into the bright and highly textured Los Loros Blanco Sobre Lías, while a mix of Diego, Gual and Marmajuelo go into the well-balanced and notably creamy Los Loros Blanco Fermentado en Barrica. Since 2015, a third Los Loros wine has been added; varietal Los Loros Albillo Criollo is made from grapes grown on the family-owned parcels right next to the bodega. This wine has become one of Fariña Pérez’s favourites, and he is clearly proud to be able to make an aromatic wine of power and elegance from his own vines.

At present the winery continues to produce a refreshing young red-fruited Tinto using their Listán Negro crop, but Fariña Pérez tells me ‘we must accept that the terroir we have is fundamentally better for white grapes’. For red grapes, it seems that (under the prevailing microclimate) the seeds usually remain green which,

in the case of Listán Negro, can lead to its characteristically peppery tannins becoming somewhat grippy and astringent. ‘The direction of my work is white wines,’ he says, and I was left with the impression that the Listán Negro will be replaced by new vines of Albillo Criollo in the not too distant future.

Because of limited production and a growing reputation for high quality, the bodega’s wines sell quickly and are becoming increasingly difficult to find. Furthermore, following some excellent reviews by leading wine publications over the past few years, sales to the United States alone have rocketed to 15% of the total and it seems that international exports will only increase in the years to come. You may need to go to the effort to contact Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez directly to find out where to obtain his wines, but it will be worth it.

VITICULTORES COMARCA DE GÜÍMAR⁷

Masters of innovation

www.bodegavalledeguimar.com

The cooperative Bodegas Comarca Valle de Güímar was created in 1989 and produced 15,000 bottles of wine in its inaugural vintage. Today it is by far the biggest winery in the appellation, with production averaging 300,000 bottles per year, all made from the mixed-grape intake of over 150 partners who cultivate a patchwork of plots from the highlands of the coronal forest all the way down to the sun-soaked coast. To deal with such a wide variety of source material, the bodega has created an ingenious portfolio of wines (marketed under two brands – Brumas de Ayosa and Pico Cho Marcial) that efficiently and effectively maximises the value of each harvest.

Based in a large and well-equipped modern facility in the municipality of Arafo, the innovative winemaking team, now led by respected oenologist **Domingo Donato Delgado**, has pioneered many commercial products that have become mainstays of the Canary Islands’ wine scene. For example, in the 1990s the bodega scored a major breakthrough by introducing a completely new style of semi-sweet white wine – the blanco afrutado – designed to make use of the relatively low-acidity but high-sugar white grapes of Valle de Güímar’s lower-altitude sites. The new offering was made available in a distinctive blue bottle and has been nothing short of a resounding success, especially with local consumers. Today, dozens of wineries across the archipelago market afrutado wines that can be instantly identified on the supermarket shelves by their blue bottles.

⁷ Although I have visited Viticultores Comarca de Güímar, it was some time ago and I have not met the technical team. This bodega description is thus informed by a combination of my extensive tasting of their wines, the bodega’s website (given above), and the terrific articles written by local wine and gastronomy journalist Yuri Millares and published on www.pellagofio.es

Further demonstrating the commercial potential of previously unappreciated coastal crops, in 2000 the bodega helped pioneer Tenerife's *méthode traditionnelle* sparkling wines by harvesting Listán Blanco early enough to preserve the required grape acidity. Although the wines cannot match the pizzazz and elegance of great French champagne, the new product was also very well received by the local market, being highly drinkable and competitively priced. As well as continuing to produce the original Brut Nature, Viticultores Comarca de Güímar now markets another two sparklers – a Brut Nature Reserva, and a semi-sweet Espumoso Afrutado, which, perhaps unsurprisingly given the locals' liking of residual sugar, has become the most popular of the three.

More recently, the bodega has really challenged the established order with Frizzante 5. Having proven the commercial viability of low-altitude Listán Blanco in the noughties, attention turned to Valle de Güímar's unloved Listán Negro crop. Noticing the rising popularity in mainland Spain of Italy's frizzante style of light and sugary fizzy wines, Delgado took early harvested Listán Negro and performed partial fermentation to end in a lightly sparkling rosado containing 60% of the original grape sugar and an abv of just 5%. Firewater it is not, but inebriation is still possible by way of an excess of bliss. It turns out that Listán Negro makes heavenly frizzante, where flavours of luscious red fruits are elevated to ambrosial by traces of the grape's characteristic freshly ground pepper.

Mirroring the afrutado approach, the new product went to market in a spunky new bottle – this time with white branding printed directly onto a 75 cl frosted glass bottle sealed with a toothed metal 'crown cork' (think bottle cap) to, at first glance, perhaps give the impression of a beverage that sits somewhere between wine and soft drink. Look closer, however, and you will see the design depicts a misty pine forest: Brumas de Ayosa (Mists of Ayosa – the mists that form on the pine-clad peak behind the bodega). In many respects, this is a very interesting, innovative wine and an inspired addition to the archipelago's spectrum of styles.

AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



EL BORUJO BLANCO AFRUTADO

Bodega: Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez, Arafo, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de Güímar

Type: *blanco afrutado* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, **2017**

Grape(s): 50% Moscatel, 50% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 11% abv, the two grape varieties undergo temperature-controlled fermentation in separate stainless steel vats which is stopped early (by chilling) to reach the desired balance of acidity and residual sugar.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* brilliant pale lemon / *smell & taste:* (1 °) very fruity (esp. stone fruits, tropical fruits and aromatic grapes), flowers (esp. honeysuckle), hint of fennel / *palate:* gentle citrusy acidity, refreshingly light texture, very flavourful (Moscatel) mid-palate, followed by a finish that combines the sweetness of table grapes and fresh flowers with a balancing tang reminiscent of sour passion fruit.

Comments: The pleasant length and symmetry makes this the highest quality Moscatel afrutado that Rodrigo and I have tried, and those who crave residual sweetness in their young white wines will adore it.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal for combining with Asian food, or a salad with *manzanas* (apples) and *queso tierno* (fresh cheese) from El Hierro.



LOS LOROS ALBILLO CRIOLLO

Bodega: Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez, Arafo, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de Güímar

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: **2015**, 2017 (tank sample)

Grape(s): 100% Albillo Criollo

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12% abv, Albillo Criollo grown from a plot adjacent to the winery at 800 masl, fermented (using indigenous yeasts) in stainless steel tanks with subsequent ageing over lees.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1 °) pronounced juicy

stone fruits (esp. nectarines), hints of tropical fruits and cut grass; (2°) delicate notes of pâtisserie / *palate*: scintillating upfront ‘spicy’ acidity, richly textured mouthfeel with copious primary flavours layered into a silky body and slick finish to create a hypnotic stage presence.

Comments: Albillo Criollo seems to have found a new home in the stony clay soils of upland Valle de Güímar. The grape’s potent primary characteristics are very recognisable, but compared to the classic fresh and light Albillo Criollos of the north of La Palma, this wine, by Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez, has a much weightier palate. The sunnier climate of eastern Tenerife might be a factor, but the lees ageing, executed with finesse, has been instrumental in rendering a new style of wine from this high-potential grape.

Sommelier’s recommendation: A great accompaniment to a bowl of fish soup with *gofio* dumplings (made from roasted Canarian grains).



LOS LOROS BLANCO SOBRE LÍAS

Bodega: Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez, Arafo, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de Güímar

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, **2017**, 2018

Grape(s): 60% Listán Blanco, 40% Diego

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12% abv, fermented (using indigenous yeasts) in stainless steel vats and old *botas* (sherry casks), where it remains on gross and fine lees for 8 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: deep straw to lemon yellow / *smell & taste*: (1°) clean notes of lemon, bergamot and star anise, hints of dried white flowers and lemongrass; (2°) mild cheesy aromas from lees / *palate*: notably gentle and pleasant mouthfeel (almost caramel-like), medium acidity, highly refreshing aftertaste that starts citrusy and dry before fading to bittersweet and lightly floral.

Comments: Knowing that this wine contains Valle de Güímar’s highest-altitude Listán Blanco and Diego grapes, I braced myself for piercing acidity but was instead charmed by its sweet-tempered disposition: ‘2017 was an exceptionally hot year,’ explained vintner Juan Francisco Fariña. This wine is still fresh and clean, but the power of the sun and the hand of the winemaker have combined to make it truly *suave*.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Combines beautifully with *arroz de marisco* (Canarian seafood risotto).



BRUMAS DE AYOSA ESPUMOSO

Bodega: Viticultores Comarca de Güímar, Arafo, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de Güímar

Type: *blanco espumoso* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, early harvest grapes, méthode traditionnelle sparkling wine with second fermentation and 12 months ageing in bottle prior to manual disgorgement (September 2018), brut nature.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* light straw / *smell & taste:* (1°) fresh lemon, lime, grapefruit, with hints of gooseberry and passion fruit; (2°) lightly autolytic / *palate:* explosive bubble, zesty acidity, light and delicately textured body with persistent effervescence; the abundant upfront fruit fades into a subtle finish of savoury brioche and freshly baked bread.

Comments: This wine is exceedingly refreshing and eminently quaffable. The blast of bubbles, which goes off with the energy of a coiled spring, immediately froth the wine on the tongue to provide surprising vitality and clarity of definition to the (normally subdued) primary varietal aromas of Listán Blanco when grown from low-altitude vineyards. At just over €10 per bottle, this has to be one of the best value-for-money aperitifs around.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect as an aperitif to accompany some *camarones* (prawns).



BRUMAS DE AYOSA FRIZZANTE 5

Bodega: Viticultores Comarca de Güímar, Arafo, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de Güímar

Type: *rosado dulce frizzante* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, 2015, 2017

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 5% abv, following maceration the pressed juice undergoes temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel that is stopped well early by chilling to retain much of the natural acidity and sugar.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* watermelon red / *smell & taste:* (1°) strawberries, with further layers of candied raspberries, glazed cherries, a wink of passion fruit and a titillating whiff of cracked peppercorns / *palate:* delightfully fizzy, with a luscious creamy mouthfeel and a finish that takes you on a fling of sweet indulgence.

Comments: Frizzante 5 is very similar in style to Brachetto d'Acqui – a wine produced in the Piemonte region of Italy for thousands of years. According to legend, both Julius Caesar and Marc Antony gave it as a gift to Cleopatra. To her delight (and strategic advantage), she discovered that the wine had the power to unleash the passions of those she targeted for seduction.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with desserts where red fruits take centre stage.



MOON LUNA DE YARIZA BLANCO

Bodega: Tempus, Güímar, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de Güímar

Type: *blanco seco barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016

Grape(s): 50% Moscatel, 50% Malvasía Aromática

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, fermentation in American oak barrels, where it remains for 3 months on lees with bâtonnage.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* lemon with golden reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) very fruity (esp. greengage, pineapple and lychee), intensely floral (esp. orange blossom, fresh chamomile, honeysuckle); (2°) brioche, vanilla and toasted coconut / *palate:* voluminous, lovely texture, good structure, with a finish that confirms the traditional aromas of Moscatel.

Comments: The Moscatel wines of the Canary Islands are almost all made in a semiseco, afrutado or dulce style. This wine is the exception. If you like aromatic dry white wines, try this. With a helping hand from Malvasía Aromática, it is a delightful blanco seco that owns an incredibly potent bouquet. As a bonus, the vintner has applied just the right amount of barrel and lees ageing to provide a creamy mouthfeel and sweet notes of American oak.

Sommelier's recommendation: Splendid with Thai food.



CALIUS VERDELLO

Bodega: Candido Hernández Pio, Candelaria, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Valle de Güímar

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016

Grape(s): 100% Verdello

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, fermented in stainless steel.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* yellow with golden iridescence / *smell & taste:* (1°) strong aromas of ripe tropical fruits (esp. pineapple and mango), hint of banana, touch of spice / *palate:* medium acidity and body, with an appealing glycerine-like mouthfeel, it ends with a lingering fruit cocktail.

Comments: As well as being satisfying to drink, this wine is remarkable for several other reasons. As far as Rodrigo and I know, it is the only 100% Verdello blanco seco that has been made in the archipelago in modern times (note: I am told by the winemaker that the 2019 harvest should allow for a new vintage). The powerfully fruity Verdello grape is an adaptation of the Verdelho of Portugal, but is also the parent of local varieties Albillo Criollo and Forastera Blanca. While its second-generation offspring are clearly well suited to life in the Canaries, Verdello is more problematic to grow and suffers poor yields, and its importance has thus diminished to the point that it is now used almost entirely for blending. Speaking of blending, the grapes that made this wine came from one of the most unusual vineyards of Tenerife, where the nutrient-rich blood-red loam of Tacoronte-Acentejo has been trucked across the island and ploughed into the native soils of La Reconda, near Candelaria, to enhance fertility.

Sommelier's recommendation: A sound choice with *calamares a la plancha con mahonesa de ajo* (grilled squid with garlic mayonnaise).





5

Tenerife South
(Abona)

HISTORY

Abona is a large winemaking area on the southern slopes of Tenerife, where grapes are grown on ultra-high-altitude land, not far from the border of El Teide National Park, all the way down to the TF-1 autopista. With a pronounced inclination towards the sun, a southerly position within the archipelago, and relatively infrequent cloud cover, the land here receives the most solar radiation of any of the Canary Islands' wine zones.

Wine production in Abona dates back many centuries, and relics of this past activity can still be seen. The old infrastructure is now primarily a historical curiosity and tourist attraction, but some bodegas have incorporated their antiquated technology into the modern production process to reintroduce a degree of tradition to their wines. Although this region experienced the same market collapse as the rest of the archipelago's wine industry during the 18th and 19th centuries, some of Abona's original vines continued to be cultivated over the years for local consumption – and so miraculously still exist today. Like the historical bodega hardware, these ungrafted ancestral bush vines are now being actively exploited to make excellent wines in a modern style.

According to the regional appellation's website, to understand the 20th-century rebirth of the Abona wine industry requires looking back to the 1950s when the Cooperativa de Fasnía invested in a wine cellar and began to bottle its wine

production on a commercial scale. Then in 1988, eyeing the burgeoning tourism industry on its doorstep, the Cooperativa de San Miguel also built a bodega complete with all the latest technology. A year later, a yet bigger co-op, the Cooperativa Cumbres de Abona, was created, and has since become the most important bodega in the region (and one of the most important of the island) as measured by volume of wine sold per annum. In short, large cooperative initiatives designed to serve the booming resorts of the south have been the engine of the wine industry here over many decades, and to this day Abona's production is dominated by high-volume wines that are fresh, clean, economically priced and very well suited to the holiday market.

Abona finally achieved DO status in 1996, and under the new banner the wine producers have succeeded in improving quality further. Recently, smaller independent bodegas have sprung up with a laser-like focus on premium wines from grapes specifically selected to maximise what the unique ultra-high-altitude terroir here has to offer. Although the commercial backbone of the industry remains the production of wines to quench the thirst of Tenerife's millions of tourists, it is clear that the energy and ambition of most winemakers currently is to create great wines that can be served in Tenerife's growing portfolio of fine-dining restaurants or that can compete on the international high-quality wine market. Exciting times indeed!

A PORTRAIT OF ABONA

This arid region of Tenerife has two visually distinctive macro-environments. From the coast to about 1000 masl, the lowlands and midlands exist as a continuous gentle incline, being generally light brown and dusty, and punctuated here and there by more colourful small volcanic vent cones. At 1000 masl, there is a change to a much steeper gradient, where the rugged pine-clad uplands become increasingly greener with altitude. Slicing from mountains to coast are countless deep barrancos that have weathered into the landscape over the millennia as storm rains have rushed down the slopes of Teide and cut deep gorges down to the sea.

The lowlands of Abona are 'a beach lovers' bonanza', as Ann and Larry Walker put it in their delightful 1992 travelogue, *Pleasures of the Canary Islands*. With a series of major holiday resorts reaching from El Médano, just north of the TFS international airport, right around the tip of the island to Costa Adeje, this stretch of coast is where Canarian mass tourism really took off in the 1970s. Today, two-thirds of Tenerife's 5 million-plus annual visitors still choose to come to its south coast to soak up the sun. New hotels are still being built, but mirroring the wine sector's shift in focus from quantity to quality, most of those that have been constructed in the last decade or so are at the luxury end of the spectrum and boast numerous 5-star restaurants and other extravagant facilities.

Higher up, with steep slopes and numerous breathtaking miradores, Abona's mountainous uplands are a highly satisfying destination for walkers, climbers and explorers. Several forward-looking wineries, realising the value of their natural surroundings and their convenient proximity to the big holiday resorts, have engaged in strategies to lure the tourists up Tenerife's southern face to enjoy a bodega tour with a meal and a bottle of wine, all the while providing memorable vistas down towards the shimmering Atlantic, empty and blue to its farthest edge where it transitions to a cloudless sky.

If this sort of excursion sounds tempting, be sure to spend some time in the environs of beautiful Vilaflor de Chasna, which, teetering at 1500 masl, is Spain's highest town and the heart of Abona's highland wine country (as evidenced by the bunch of grapes on the town's coat of arms). The community owes its name to a Spanish conquistador who, upon seeing a beautiful native woman, exclaimed '*¡Vi la flor de Chasna!*' – 'I have seen the flower of Chasna!' (Chasna being the place's original Guanche name). Romantically, the region's most recognisable contemporary wine brand is Cooperativa Cumbres de Abona's Flor de Chasna.

Attractively located at the edge of the coronal pine forest that clothes Teide's midsection in a skirt of green, Vilaflor de Chasna has fewer than 2000 inhabitants and always carries a feeling of sublime tranquillity. During Victorian times, the town was a kind of health retreat, where well-off Canarians and foreigners (many of them British) would come for the cleansing pine-impregnated freshness of the upland air and taste of the local spring waters rich in volcanic minerals. Illustrious travellers to Vilaflor de Chasna include the intrepid English explorer and travel writer Olivia M Stone (1883), and botanist Philip Barker-Webb and French naturalist Sabine Berthelot, who wrote *Histoire Naturelle des Îles Canaries* between 1836 and 1850 – an important reference for Charles Darwin's revolutionary work, *On the Origin of the Species*.

Today, efforts are being made to again promote Vilaflor de Chasna as Tenerife's premier centre for nature and spiritual revitalisation. For example, trails have been upgraded to allow hikers and mountain bikers to take advantage of the unspoilt landscape; and for those who want to drink their way to better health, many of the area's bodegas are now marketing organic and biodynamic wines – the clean and dry ultra-high-altitude climate allowing grape growers to farm healthy crops with almost no use of fungicides, pesticides or other artificial chemicals.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The wine industry of Abona is in expansion mode and vineyards now cover an area of more than 1200 ha. The most significant grape-growing area is the *medianías* (midlands), at altitudes between 300 and 1000 metres, but vineyards continue all



the way up to 1700 metres, allowing the *cumbres* (uplands) of Abona to claim the prestigious distinction of having the highest vineyards in Europe. At these extreme altitudes, vineyards produce a fairly meagre yield per square metre and can be incredibly challenging to work, but are today producing grapes of magnificent quality.

As you might guess, changing altitude is the most important factor governing the nature of Abona's terroir, as constant warmth near the sea transitions to extreme weather fluctuations at higher levels. The vineyards of the *cumbres* experience a very large diurnal temperature range, which works with the abundant sunshine to allow grapes to fully ripen with surprisingly high levels of acidity, given the southerly latitude of the Canary Islands.

Thanks to the ample sunshine – 3000 hours per year – the coastal stretch of Abona is always the first wine region of Tenerife to make vintage, often as early as late July. In the lowest-altitude sites, the sunshine and heat can be so intense as to become problematic, with sun damage being a constant risk to grape health. During the growing season, the viticulturists must apply laborious canopy management techniques to ensure the grapes can grow under adequate shade – this is usually provided by the leaves of the vines being positioned by hand. To make the process easier, many grape growers have opted for the *parral bajo* training system – specifically designed so that the vine's foliage is forced to grow into a generous leafy roof-like barrier between the grape bunches below and the relentless sun above. It is effective but employed at the expense of the yield, which can be as low as half of that of *espaldera*.

Overall, the whole of southern Tenerife is exceptionally arid, but Abona's vineyards lie within three main rainfall zones, which can again be delimited by altitude. Between about 200 and 500 metres, rainfall is quite low at around 350 mm per year, while 500 to 1200 metres, where the clouds tend to accumulate, is the wettest zone, relatively, experiencing more frequent showers and up to 600 mm of rain per year. And finally, above 1200 metres rainfall is extremely rare and moisture of any kind is scarce; even in unusually wet years, these 'vineyards above the clouds' seldom receive even 100 mm of rain.

Finally, as with temperature and precipitation, soils also differ significantly depending on altitude. Across the *medianías*, they are typically comprised of thick (10 metres or more) layers of coarse-grained *jable* – a mix of pumice and ash that rained down over this part of the island (thanks to the trade winds) when Tenerife's central volcanoes exploded hot gas and tephra (rock fragments) high into the atmosphere. Unusually, the pyroclastic material ejected during these eruptions was composed of light-coloured minerals and has resulted in the entire area having a characteristic ivory cream colour that contrasts beautifully with the vibrant greens, yellows and magentas of the vineyards as they progress through the

growing season. Jable is extremely low in organic matter and is very porous; it is ideal for growing wine grapes here because it is incredibly effective at absorbing and retaining the scarce moisture. The jable then slowly releases its collected water to the roots of the vines rather than allowing any to be lost to surface weeds which are, consequentially, non-existent.

In the cumbres, soils are generally much thinner, have more clay, and are a much darker colour thanks to their greater richness of organic matter. The highest reaches of Abona are steeply sloping, and plots of old, dry-farmed bush vines can be seen on small terraces cut into the south face of Tenerife amongst the coronal pines. The exception is the Trevejos Plateau just south-west of Vilaflor de Chasna, where an ancient geological rift has stretched part of Tenerife's surface into a large expanse of nearly flat land between about 1300 and 1400 masl. Here it is possible to see large drip-irrigated espaldera plots that are probably the closest thing the Canary Islands have to the standard large estate vineyards of mainland Europe. Although lacking a steep slope, the Trevejos Plateau soils are very well drained, being no more than 1 to 2 metres thick and overlying highly permeable volcanic bedrock that has become densely fractured over the aeons by the immense tensile forces associated with the geological rifting.



Although the viticulturists of the cumbres must contend with an increased chance of climate extremes – sub-zero temperatures are a major threat – growing grapes here has proved to be a risk well worth taking. Although it is true that good wines can be produced from grapes grown across the whole of Abona, the unique conditions of the region’s ultra-high-altitude vineyards are now consistently producing grapes of a superior calibre. Furthermore, the lack of moisture, good drainage, cold nights and cold winters allow cultivation of vines with minimal use of fungicides and pesticides, and several of Abona’s bodegas are now elaborating certified organic wines.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE ABONA

www.vinosdeabona.com



The Canary Islands government awarded protection for the wines of this southernmost region of Tenerife in 1996. **DO Abona** covers wine production from grapes grown in the municipalities of Fasnía, Arico, Granadilla de Abona, San Miguel de Abona, Arona, Adeje and, highest of all, Vilaflor de Chasna. There are presently 18 registered bodegas that have manufactured, on average, 980,000 litres of wine per year over the last five vintages for which there is data. The vast majority of bottling is done by the three main cooperatives, the rest by small to medium-sized private businesses.



Since 1996, the challenge of full modernisation of Abona's vineyards and bodegas has been greatly assisted by DO affiliation, which has opened new lines of financial support and promoted knowledge-sharing amongst regional wine experts. State-of-the-art technology has now been incorporated into a significant fraction of the growing sites and most of the production facilities, from computerised drip irrigation through to the latest hardware for winemaking, maturation and bottling. The consensus amongst the Canary Islands wine community is that DO Abona has been highly successful in facilitating an exciting new phase of southern Tenerife wine production – as evidenced, perhaps, by the dominance of the region's wines at the Canarian government's annual flagship wine contest, Vinos Agrocanarias. In 2017, of the 30 awards handed out, exactly half went to DO Abona, including the overall best wine of the Canary Islands – Cumbres de Abona's Testamento Malvasía Esencia.

At present, almost 100% of DO Abona wines are consumed domestically, but there is rapidly growing international interest in the world-class potential of the wines elaborated from the grapes grown in the region's high-altitude vineyards.

GRAPE VARIETIES

This region grows more white grapes than red (the ratio is about 60:40). As is common in many parts of the Canary Islands, Listán Blanco is the most widely cultivated white variety thanks to its disease resistance and its ability to produce large volumes of good quality wine across the full gamut of terroirs. Its prevalence in the medianías, however, is in steep decline. Here, for the better part of two decades, there has been a concerted effort to switch back from 'easy Listán' into the rarer but more aromatic grapes of Marmajuelo, Albillo Criollo and Verdello – varieties that were once much more prevalent in southern Tenerife. These original varieties are certainly lower-yielding and harder to work than Listán Blanco, but in the mid-altitude jable sites they can, with careful handling, produce high-quality flavour-packed wine grapes. The Malvasía Aromática and Moscatel grapes were never lost from this region and are still grown in significant quantities today, as treasured centennial vines in some vineyards.

Though Listán Blanco is disappearing from the medianías, its future in Abona is secure. Growing where it does, far up in the highest vineyards of Europe, no other white grape can compete with it. Here, on the small dusty terraces cut into the sides of mountains, only Listán Blanco is robust enough to survive the extreme conditions of ultra-high-altitude Atlantic viticulture. And it doesn't just survive; it soars. With virtually no intervention, ancient head-pruned bush vines produce grapes that can be elaborated into exquisitely clean wines full of youthful primary flavours enhanced by ripping freshness.

The thin clayey soils of the arid Trevejos Plateau are where red grape production has established a new stronghold in the south of Tenerife. From having virtually

no presence in around 2010 (apart from a smattering of hardy Listán Prieto and Listán Negro), red grapes now represent about half the area under vine. Among the Canarian specialities that have been the focus of new plantings, **Baboso Negro** and Vijariego Negro appear, with the help of drip irrigation, to have adapted extremely well to the high-altitude climatic conditions and are now being used to produce some very high-quality red wines.

More recently, international varieties have been tried, too: Cabernet Sauvignon, Tempranillo, Merlot and Syrah. Of these, Syrah has been the one real success; when it is blended with native grapes (particularly Baboso Negro and Listán Negro) to make red wine, the resultant ‘Super Canarians’ of the Trevejos Plateau can be amongst the best of the entire archipelago.

BABOSO NEGRO

Baboso Negro is one of the most promising red wine grapes of the Canary Islands. In earlier times, when there was a focus on quantity over quality, this variety fell out of favour because it was found unreliable and difficult to work. Its thin skin is highly susceptible to fungal attack, and viticulturists must remain vigilant to the threat of disease throughout the growing season. If successfully grown, Baboso Negro (which means ‘slimy black’) still demands an all-consuming level of attention, because healthy grapes can in the space of a few days go from underripe to overripe, when they begin to rot and ooze. If this weren’t enough, bunches – and even individual grapes on the same bunch – can ripen at slightly different times, necessitating hand-harvesting over several passes followed by manual sorting in the bodega.

Despite the many headaches of growing it, today Baboso Negro is a shining star of the archipelago, cited by many as being the Canarian grape with the greatest potential for truly world-class fine wine production. When handled correctly, this grape does indeed produce outstanding wines, and many of the bodegas in the vanguard of Canary Islands wine production have made up their minds that this disease-prone and demanding variety is well worth the additional effort and economic risk.

Much credit must go to the pioneering work of Project Tanajara for recognising the potential of Baboso Negro and elevating it from obscurity to celebrity.¹ In 2000, expert chemist and oenologist Juan Jesús Méndez Siverio (director of Bodegas Viñátigo) was invited by grape grower Gonzalo Padrón to visit his family’s vineyards in El Pinar, El Hierro, where his attention was drawn to an unusual slimy red grape variety that appeared to possess an exceptional concentration of flavour. Over the next three years, samples were sent to Viñátigo’s research facilities in La Guancha,

1 Millares Y, Reyes M and Gonçalves T (2014) *100 Vinos Imprescindibles de Canarias / 100 Essential Wines from the Canary Islands*. Pellagofio Ediciones, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. ISBN: 9788493699864

Tenerife, for compositional analysis and experimental vinification. Convinced of the grape's as yet unrealised potential, the Tanajara partnership was born, and nine full-scale vintages of 100% Baboso Negro were released from 2003 to 2011.

Tanajara Baboso Negro introduced an overtly voluptuous modern dry red wine style to the Canarian range, being highly perfumed and full-bodied with well-defined curvaceous edges. These wines are intense and can present with flavours of blackberry, blackcurrant, blueberry, sweet plum, ripe black cherry, strawberry compote, kirsch, jasmine and violet. The mouthfeel is richly textured thanks to high alcohol and plentiful sweet, velvety, fine-grained tannins. Additional structure is provided by delicate minerality and spice thanks to volcanic soils and fermentation in oak, and the finish of all vintages is invariably long and exquisite. Intriguingly, the taste experience is highly reminiscent of Amarone della Valpolicella.

Baboso Negro grows well in locations where the trade winds do not directly impact the vineyards, where humidity is low, and where high altitudes provide large diurnal temperature ranges. El Pinar has these attributes, being on the south side of El Hierro and at an elevation of 650 metres.

Having observed the Tanajara success, a second wave of Baboso Negro winemakers has emerged using new vineyards planted in the most promising microclimates of Tenerife. Of particular note is the work taking place in the highlands of Abona. Here, protected from the trade winds by Teide, Baboso Negro has been planted at altitudes twice that of El Pinar. The subsequent significantly higher diurnal temperature range of this location teases out an additional month to Baboso's usually short growth cycle, thereby concentrating more flavours whilst still preserving significant acidity. Furthermore, the extreme aridity of the south of Tenerife is making it easier to keep Baboso disease free and minimising the need for fungicides.

Baboso Negro is also being grown on the north face of Tenerife, but here some prominent winemakers are taking an approach of harvesting Baboso at the earliest possible opportunity to preserve acidity and create a lighter style. However, even when Baboso Negro is intentionally made into wines of a more cherry-rich and fresher style than those of Tanajara, the power of the grape still delivers above-average body and flavour concentration.

Recent DNA analysis has shown that Baboso Negro is identical to Alfrocheiro^{2,3} – a red grape that is producing very high-quality varietal wines in the warm and dry

2 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

3 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

conditions offered by some inland areas of Portugal, particularly Dão. In Portugal as a whole, Alfrocheiro has also developed a reputation for blending extremely well with Aragonez (Tempranillo in Spain) and Touriga Nacional.⁴ Similarly, in the Canary Islands Baboso Negro has already been shown to blend well with other local varieties; but for now the focus remains on bringing the best out of this grape and showcasing it in varietal wines.

STYLES OF WINE

White, rosé and red wines are all made in Abona, in a ratio of about 60:20:20. Before the turn of the millennium, wines tended to be mostly simple, young and often rustic with somewhat generic flavours, but now purity of aromas is paramount, even for the high-volume wines of the large cooperatives. Today, a host of excellent wines can be found which present complexity on the nose and palate, where the individual components are well defined. Almost all possible styles of wine are produced in Abona: seco, semiseco, afrutado, fortified and dulce. In many cases, barrel ageing has been used to add additional depth and structure.

It is quite difficult to define any particular white wine style here, with most examples possessing their own unique personality. That said, perhaps the one unifying theme of the best whites is their plentiful but harmonious aromas. Furthermore, it is possible to differentiate the wines produced from grapes grown in the medianías, which tend to be more potent and fuller-bodied, with the high-altitude grapes that give wines that are more delicate and of greater freshness.

If you seek out white wines made from one or more of the more aromatic varieties of Abona – Verdello, Albillo Criollo, Malvasía Aromática, Moscatel – expect to discover a pleasing bouquet of white flowers and tropical fruits. Judging by the best examples, these grapes have adapted very well to the jable terroir of the sunny midlands, where they can produce relatively alcoholic and full-bodied wines with intense depth of flavour. Verdello, Albillo Criollo and Malvasía Aromática have also adapted very well to the higher-altitude Trevejos Plateau, and are now being used to create magnificent examples in which the aromatics have been tamed and made cleaner by presentation in wines of lighter body and higher natural acidity.

The still and sparkling whites of Abona's upland Listán Blanco vineyards are characterised by vivid notes of fresh citrus and grassy herbs, with their lightness of body and intense acidity giving them great finesse and making them an ideal accompaniment to either locally caught seafood or almost any of the international

4 Robinson J, Harding J and Vouillamoz J (2012) *Wine grapes. A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, including their origins and flavours*. Allen Lane (Penguin Books), London. ISBN: 9781846144462; ECCO (HarperCollins), New York. ISBN: 9780062206367 (and references therein)

cuisines that are available in the tourist resorts of the south. One of the most enjoyable holiday meals I've had in Tenerife was a juicy barbecued cheeseburger washed down with a chilled Abona Listán Blanco seco espumoso.

The rosés are of mixed quality, but can in some instances be very good, especially those made from Listán Negro, where you should expect shades of redcurrants, raspberries and cherries, and the tell-tale trace of volcanic salt and pepper. A very recent development in Abona is the production of sparkling rosés using some of the more unusual Canarian red grapes. From Trevejos, an example using 100% old-vine Listán Prieto and the *méthode traditionnelle* has raised the bar for Canarian sparkling rosé production and will surely prove to be popular amongst Tenerife's quality-conscious sun worshippers.

As already discussed, the high-altitude terroir of the Trevejos Plateau has been the setting for a compelling adaptation of some of the most promising red Canarian grape varieties including Baboso Negro and Vijariego Negro, as well as some of the global champions including, notably, Syrah. Varietal wines from these grapes can be excellent, but also exciting are the blends. The best of these are beautifully layered, intense, and full of black and red fruits. With a solid body, high tannins and acidity, medium-high alcohol content and glorious depth via oak, these muscular reds have tremendous potential to mellow into complex wines of quality and elegance if left in the cellar for 5 to 10 years. Add that there are already certified ecological wines in this class, and it is easy to imagine these unique low-intervention heavyweights achieving success on the international wine market.



BODEGAS

FRONTOS

Award-winning ecological wines from Europe's highest vineyards

www.frontos.es

Bodegas Frontos, Abona's biggest family-operated enterprise, owns two main vineyard areas, Los Frontones and Los Blanquitos. At 1700 masl, just 3 km east-north-east of Vilaflor de Chasna (as the crow flies) and on the border of El Teide National Park, Los Frontones has the major significance of being the highest vineyard in Europe. On the mainland, conditions at such ultra-high altitudes would simply be too cold, but here in the low-latitude Canaries, they are perfect for low-intervention grape-growing.

The vineyard at Los Frontones does come with some serious inconveniences – it is almost inaccessible, and until very recently it was only possible to transport the grape harvests on the backs of mules and horses down the mountain to the bodega. Although small trucks and tractors can now manage the commute, all the viticulture is still done entirely by hand. The vineyard is 100% Listán Blanco, growing as lovely old bush vines that exist on ancient handmade terraces. With its position so high above the cloud layer, the fresh and dry conditions permit sustainable cultivation of grapes that are used to produce the bodega's prized, certified, ecological white wine. In fact, the only real concern these days is that these dry-farmed grapes actually receive enough moisture over the year to fully ripen. In recent years, the winter rains and snows that are so critical have scarcely been enough, and there is great concern that a changing climate could soon preclude the viability of the crop.

Further down, and right in front of the bodega at 600 masl, the Los Blanquitos grape-growing area presents as an attractive jable vineyard landscape. Here Verdello, Marmajuelo, Malvasía Aromática and Albillo Criollo grow as neat rows of vines in parral bajo, a training system specifically chosen because vine foliage can be used to provide ample shade to the grapes in this markedly high insolation environment. **Carlos Luengo** – the youngest of the ten brothers who own and run Frontos – enthusiastically explains that the bodega is now replacing parral bajo with espaldera: 'Through experimentation, we have learnt that espaldera will provide enough shade to the grapes whilst tripling production from these vineyards. Furthermore, the enhanced competition between the vines for the available nutrients and water should provide just the right amount of stress to produce grapes of the highest possible quality.'

This change has also resulted in the opportunity to adjust the mix of grapes grown

in Los Blanquitos. Of most excitement is the addition of red Baboso Negro: ‘At present, our Baboso Negro varietal wine is elaborated from purchased grapes brought over in refrigerated crates from vineyards in El Pinar, El Hierro; but once the harvests start in the vineyards around the bodega, everything will be in-house, our oenologist will have full control, and we have high hopes that this will lead to the production of truly great red wines.’

Originally, like many bodegas in the south of Tenerife, Frontos produced just white wines. This has begun to change. As well as the work with Baboso, Frontos has been searching for truly ageworthy red wines by experimentation with the *mejorantes*. Their current Tinto Tierra is an atypical Canarian blend of 50% Listán Negro and 50% Ruby Cabernet, purchased from grape growers in the Trevejos Plateau at the south-western foot of Vilaflor. Perhaps more exciting still is the recent release of the 2017 Tinto Tierra Ecológico – Frontos’ first-ever ecological red wine. The mix this time is 70% Listán Negro, 20% Syrah and 10% Merlot, again purchased from Trevejos vineyards, which experienced a particularly dry growing season.

The eco-friendly philosophy of the Luengo brothers extends to the bodega facility, which has itself been built to be respectful to nature. Traditional materials have been used, and the architecture takes advantage of the natural ventilation, temperatures and humidity offered by the volcanic pumice bedrock to minimise energy consumption. Solar energy and natural convection systems are used throughout the rest of this ‘bioclimatic’ building, which houses the bodegas’ sizeable winemaking facilities as well as a tasting room and large restaurant that provide sumptuous views over the vineyards and down to the sea. The restaurant promotes the best of Canarian gastronomy paired with Frontos’ award-winning wines and is regularly hired out for weddings.

Aside from those consumed on site, 95% of Frontos wines are sold into high-end restaurants in the Canaries and mainland Spain.

CUMBRES DE ABONA

A broad range of wines which should appeal to all consumers

www.cumbresdeabona.es

Founded in 1989, Bodegas Cumbres de Abona is by some margin the biggest producer of Abona, manufacturing over half the region’s bottled wine each year. Over 400 members bring in grapes from just under 900 ha of vines spread across the various dry and sunny terroirs of southern Tenerife. With these, the cooperative elaborates and bottles 70% white wines and 30% red wines, 98% of which are sold in the Canaries. Remarkably, 50% of the wine is sold by direct purchase, either

from the bodega shop or online, and the speed at which stock moves suggests that Cumbres de Abona is creating products that consumers desire. When I visited in January 2018, only 10% of the 2017 vintage was still available.

Oenologist **Pedro Rodríguez** oversees the production of Cumbres' huge range – 16 different wines at last count – created in a diversity of styles to satisfy the tastes of tourists, locals and wine enthusiasts alike. As well as striving for uniform and repeatable high quality, the bodega applies consistency across the portfolio by moulding its name into the glass of all its 75 cl bottles to create a distinctive and easily recognisable design.

The three 100% Listán Blanco wines labelled under the Flor de Chasna brand are the most produced and most important, economically, to the bodega. The fresh and dry Blanco (a wine made every year since Cumbres' first-ever vintage) and semiseco Sensación are favoured by the holidaymakers, whereas the semi-sweet Afrutado is the wine most popular with Canarians. Unquestionably, however, the most prestigious wines are the four elaborations of Malvasía Aromática bottled under the Testamento brand. Rodríguez clearly puts his heart into the two Malvasías that are made in a dry style, one markedly richer thanks to fermentation and ageing (on lees) in new French and American oak barrels. As well as producing excellent wines, the bodega asserts that they were the first to elaborate dry Malvasía Aromática in the Canary Islands in the modern era.

Great passion is also applied to the two sweet Malvasías: one is made in a fresher, primary fruit/flower-forward style achieved by stopping fermentation early, while the other, the late-harvest Esencia, achieves something more lucent and complex, with a candied sweetness beautifully balanced by moreish savoury notes, good acidity, and an indefatigable finish. All four Malvasías have won numerous awards and are regularly exported to connoisseurs across mainland Europe. The duty-free and gourmet shops in the TFS departures area are usually well stocked with these wines, giving you the opportunity to take one or more of them home; something I have chosen to do many times, despite the price being notably higher in the airport than anywhere else in Tenerife.

ALTOS DE TREVEJOS

When you taste its wines, the dynamism of Altos de Trevejos is as clear as day
www.altosdetrevejos.com

The Trevejos estate is a family-owned agricultural finca situated at 1300 masl on the eponymous plateau just to the south of Vilaflor de Chasna. Here, the cloudless days are sun-drenched and warm, and the nights are starlit and cold. With an

average intra-day temperature differential of nearly 15°C, the vineyards enjoy the largest diurnal range of all the regions of the Canary Islands.

The Alfonso family's 24 ha of vines are of markedly different ages. Some plots contain lovely thick and gnarled bush vines of Listán Blanco and Listán Prieto, 70 to 200 years old, in a roughly repeating five-spot configuration (i.e. four vines of one varietal in a square around the other). In contrast, neighbouring plots contain row upon row of young vines in espaldera, a system which came into existence this century as large fields were cleared of their mixed crops and the land retasked for wine production. Some of these modern plots are amongst the largest in Tenerife and, being almost completely flat, the closest thing I have seen in the Canary Islands to vineyards that might permit a fully mechanised harvest. Intriguingly, however, much of what has been planted is Baboso Negro and Vijariego Negro – notoriously temperamental grapes that demand hand selection during gathering. The opportunity for mass production has thus been knowingly sacrificed. **Enrique Alfonso García**, a professional pharmacist and the family member who has spearheaded the enterprise, explains: 'Our philosophy is to use the special Trevejos terroir to allow some of the Canary Islands' best grapes to shine like never before.' He adds: 'We didn't need to start the winemaking work to make a living, but winemaking has become our life's work.'

In the early years of the project, the new grape harvests were sold on to third parties, but since 2012 – the year Altos de Trevejos was incorporated – the grapes have been transported for processing to a beautiful old Canarian casa in the town of San Miguel de Abona. This family-owned house, originally built in 1800, has been ingeniously renovated to incorporate a small but very well-equipped modern bodega alongside areas that lovingly preserve and showcase items of great historical viticultural interest, such as an old Canarian Pine lagar, a 100-year-old solera, and some time-worn camel saddles that were once used to transport produce up and down the south face of Tenerife.

Following a few years of experimentation in the new facility, the first full-scale commercial Altos de Trevejos vintage was elaborated in 2014. At present, a portfolio of eight wines are made – five dry, one sweet, and two sparkling. All have been made with great care and attention and are clean and articulate. While the dry whites have been well-praised by leading critics, the dry red wines stand out to me as being particularly noteworthy. The Baboso Negro and Vijariego Negro vines, brought from El Hierro, have clearly adapted very well to the Trevejos terroir. Here the grapes ripen slowly and retain their acidity, and can complete their growth cycle with next to no treatment with chemicals. Following hand-picking of the best bunches in the vineyard, the grapes are further hand-selected in the bodega and then each is used to produce a varietal wine under the Mountain Wines brand. A third red wine, Tinto, is made from a 70:30 blend of Baboso Negro with locally grown Syrah. All three wines present a pleasant primary expression and

refreshing acidity, and the 12-month ageing in used French oak barrels has helped to round the edges of these naturally tannic varietals and enhance complexity via the introduction of subtle toasted notes. It will be interesting to observe how these wines evolve with bottle age. For example, the 2014 Tinto, after only three years, is already beginning to transform from fresh black fruit and spice to attractive sweet cassis.

Most exciting of all, however, are the bodega's sparkling wines. **Josep María Pujol-Busquets**, a Cava specialist from Barcelona, who was a partner of the bodega at its inception (and today continues as an external collaborator), has helped Altos de Trevejos move onto a steep upward trajectory to become a leading producer of Tenerife sparkling wines using the *méthode traditionnelle* (originally called the *méthode champenoise*).⁵ The flagship, Listán Blanco Brut Nature, is already holding its own at international competitions, and has been incorporated into the cellars of some of the best restaurants in the Canarian archipelago. Next, unique in the world, Altos de Trevejos' second sparkler is a delightfully refreshing Rosé Brut Nature made from 100% Listán Prieto.

The Trevejos Plateau has not been immune to the extreme climatic fluctuations seen across the Canarian archipelago in recent years: 2017 was especially atypical, with rainfall half of normal, and sun and heat well above average. For the first time in living memory, it was necessary to commence the grape harvest at the beginning of August. But the rare clouds did carry a silver lining. For sparkling wine production, the hardy Listán Blanco bush vines provided an exceptional crop, and the wine is, at the time of writing, being elaborated into the first-ever 'Extra Brut' vintage. The Listán Prieto vines did well too, and the 2017 sparkler is projected to be more intense and aromatically complex compared to what has come before. The espaldera vineyards needed a helping hand, but thankfully they are all equipped with drip-irrigation technology that can deliver fresh mineral water from Vilaflor's legendary volcanic springs.

5 As an interesting aside, the word 'champagne' is derived from the Latin *campania*, used to describe areas of open, level countryside, the Trevejos Plateau being a perfect example.



AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



TIERRA DE FRONTOS BLANCO SECO ECOLÓGICO

Bodega: Frontos, Granadilla de Abona, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017, 2018

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, single-plot at 1700 masl, temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel followed by a short period of maturation on fine lees.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* very pale straw yellow that glints green in the midday sun / *smell & taste:* (1°) lemon, grapefruit, aniseed, hints of white currants, fresh stone fruits, dusting of volcanics / *palate:* bright citrusy acidity, clean and refreshing palate, gentle feathered mouthfeel with a finish that lucidly reveals the primary aromas of Listán Blanco.

Comments: Listán Blanco is considered by some to be ‘aromatically neutral’, but here, in Europe’s highest vineyard, it abandons its modesty and bares all of its fair and youthful natural beauty.

Sommelier’s recommendation: While you are in the islands, make sure you try this wine with *sancocho canario*, a typical Canarian dish made from salt fish and local vegetables.



TIERRA DE FRONTOS TINTO ECOLÓGICO

Bodega: Frontos, Granadilla de Abona, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 70% Listán Negro, 20% Syrah, 10% Merlot

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, fermented in stainless steel, racked to French oak for MLF and 3 months of ageing prior to bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* crimson with violet reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) engaging balance of sweet and sour red berries against earthier notes of truffle and dried wild herbs, delicate leafy nuance / *palate:* charming rusticity – ample grippy tannins within an otherwise refreshingly light body, and with a savoury finish that is mineral-driven and spicy.

Comments: This first ecological red wine of Frontos has loads of authentic local personality and shows real potential. Its style reminds me of the congenial Dolcetto wines of rural Piemonte (north-western Italy). Future vintages, if they are made, could be great – one to watch.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with just about any kind of filled potato!



TESTAMENTO MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA SECO

Bodega: Cumbres de Abona, Arico, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Aromática

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* straw yellow with gold and green iridescence / *smell & taste:* (1°) pronounced nose of ripe stone fruits (esp. nectarines and mangoes), tropical fruits (esp. pineapple, guava and melon) and scents of white flowers / *palate:* good acidity, clean and smooth mouthfeel, with an end that leaves you with a sense of sweetness nicely balanced by a trace of bitter orange.

Comments: Traditionally, Malvasía Aromática has always been used to make the resonating dulces of Tenerife and La Palma. Purists might argue ‘you can’t play the violin like a guitar’, but they would be wrong (listen to the Pizzicato Polka by Johann and Joseph Strauss): this blanco seco does a wonderful job of highlighting the primary aromas of the Canary Islands’ most famous grape.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with local cured goat cheeses (such as *Arico curado pimentón*) and spicy foods.



TESTAMENTO MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA BARRICA

Bodega: Cumbres de Abona, Arico, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *blanco seco barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Aromática

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 14% abv, temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel followed by racking to French and American oak (50:50) for 3 months ageing on fine lees.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* straw yellow with reflections of golden loveliness / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe stone fruits and tropical fruits, peach blossom; (2°) vanilla and chocolate coconut bars, creamy notes / *palate:* rich buttery mouthfeel with balancing lemony acidity; the finish is long and unctuous with intermingled notes of the grape variety and oak.

Comments: This wine is a typical Malvasía Aromática in that it is luxuriantly perfumed and richly textured, but it is highly unusual in that it is bone dry. A full-bodied delight from the winery that pioneered the seco style from this immortal grape.

Sommelier's recommendation: Try it with desserts such as a *gofio* mousse (*gofio* is flour made from roasted Canarian grains).



TESTAMENTO MALVASÍA ESENCIA

Bodega: Cumbres de Abona, Arico, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *dulce* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2009

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Aromática

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 16% abv, elaborated from low-yield vineyards where grapes were left to undergo passerillage, fermented in stainless steel and matured for twelvemonth in oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* light amber with reflections of gold / *smell & taste:* (1°) floral (esp. jasmine and honeysuckle), delicate five-spice; (2°) toffee, caramel, mocha; (3°) powerful aromas of raisins, dried figs, quince cheese, candied apricots

and wild blossom honey / *palate*: great balance between enveloping sweetness and refreshing acidity, full-bodied and warming, with an extremely persistent finish.

Comments: This, Cumbres de Abona's interpretation of Canary, is the only 100% Malvasía Aromática dulce I have included that has not undergone either noble rot or fortification. The flavour intensity and complexity are fantastic, and the overall style is quite possibly one that the Bard of Avon would have recognised.

Sommelier's recommendation: Because of its unique character, this wine is best enjoyed on its own.



FLOR DE CHASNA BLANCO SECO

Bodega: Cumbres de Abona, Arico, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2008, 2010, 2015, 2016, 2017, **2018**

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 12.5% abv, made from grapes grown at approximately 800 masl, extra-cold maceration and fermentation in closed stainless steel tanks to preserve aromatics.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: very pale straw yellow / *smell & taste*: (1 °) gooseberry, lemon and limes, sweet scent of white flowers, cut grass, fennel seed / *palate*: light-bodied and fresh with remarkably zesty acidity, and a finish that leaves the palate feeling cleansed by persistent notes of tart citrus.

Comments: Flor de Chasna Blanco Seco represents a feather in the cap of both Cumbres de Abona and Listán Blanco. The 2019 vintage will mark the wine's 30th anniversary, a period over which it has proved one of the most economically successful wines of the Canary Islands. It's easy to understand why – it's fiercely refreshing and has a profile that resembles the universally popular Sauvignon Blanc style. Approximately 50,000 bottles are made and consumed each year – half by the locals, half by holidaymakers – and it is widely available throughout the islands. '¡Vi la flor de Chasna!' Chances are you will, too.

Sommelier's recommendation: Goes well with most fish and shellfish, but if you pair it with *mejillones al vapor con mojo verde* (steamed mussels with green Canarian sauce), you'll be onto a winner!



VERA DE LA FUENTE BABOSO NEGRO

Bodega: Vera de la Fuente, Fasnia, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, **2015**, 2016, 2017

Grape(s): 100% Baboso Negro

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14% abv, fermented in stainless steel followed by ageing in mixed French-American oak barrels for 12 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep ruby / *smell & taste:* (1 °) intense ripe blueberry, blackberry, blackcurrant cordial, maraschino cherry, bilberry pie, liquorice; (2 °) chocolate, toffee, caramel, hint of smokiness / *palate:* voluminous and silky, gobs of flavour, with a lip-smackingly juicy finish.

Comments: If you crave a Canary Islands fruit bomb, look no further than Vera de la Fuente Baboso Negro. Oenologist (and owner) **Iván Frias Pérez** originally made this wine as a pairing option for rich foods at his father's restaurant. It was an instant hit and has gone on to develop something of a cult following throughout Tenerife for its delicious berry profusion. From a jable vineyard at just 225 masl in the hot and sunny lowlands of Abona, Baboso's *desire* to produce enveloping wines that teem with fleshy black fruits is fully obliged.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with grilled *chuletas de cordero* (lamb chops).



MOUNTAIN WINES BABOSO NEGRO

Bodega: Altos de Trevejos, San Miguel de Abona, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, **2015**, 2016

Grape(s): 100% Baboso Negro

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14% abv, hand-selected berries fermented in stainless steel followed by MLF and 12 months ageing in French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep ruby / *smell & taste:* (1 °) complex aromas of ripe black fruits (esp. blueberry and black cherry), violet, menthol, mint, background

volcanic spice; (2°) cocoa bean, toasted notes; (3°) cassis and cooked plum / *palate*: good acidity and ample fine-grained tannins, wide mouthfeel, smooth and intensely flavourful, with a long finish that beautifully interlaces ripe fruits and notes of smoky wood.

Comments: At 1300 metres, these are the highest-altitude Baboso Negro grapes grown in the Canary Islands (and probably anywhere on Earth). Here in the arid Trevejos Plateau in the highlands of southern Tenerife, the combination of an exaggerated diurnal temperature range and plentiful daytime sun is allowing this variety to achieve its signature opulence with an unparalleled degree of elucidating acidity. Furthermore, its vinification has been executed with aplomb. A wine of ambassadorial class.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with cured and smoked meats.



MOUNTAIN WINES VIJARIEGO NEGRO

Bodega: Altos de Trevejos, San Miguel de Abona, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, **2015**, 2016

Grape(s): 100% Vijariego Negro

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14% abv, whole-bunch fermentation in stainless steel followed by MLF and 12 months ageing in French oak barrels.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: cherry red / *smell & taste*: (1°) succulent strawberries, maraschino cherries and juicy plums; (2°) sweet spice, hints of charred wood / *palate*: a generous body characterised by a heavy load of ripe red fruits and silky mouthfeel, easy-drinking with decent balancing acidity and a finish that offers a soupçon of savoury volcanics whilst revelling in its plummy aromatic potency.

Comments: Vijariego Negro has adapted well to the ultra-high-altitude Trevejos Plateau since being brought over from El Hierro in the early 2000s. This wine is fruity, meaty and delicious, with just enough oak and acidity to provide a degree of refinement to its natural swagger.

Sommelier's recommendation: This wine provides the perfect counterbalance to marinated and fried meats.



ALTOS DE TREVEJOS BRUT NATURE

Bodega: Altos de Trevejos, San Miguel de Abona, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *blanco espumoso* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013, **2015**, 2017 (tank sample)

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, méthode traditionnelle sparkling wine, second fermentation and ageing in bottle for 12 months prior to disgorgement (May 2017), brut nature.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* a radiant blonde topped by a noble white crown (of bubbles) / *smell & taste:* (1°) well-defined notes of lemons, limes, green apple skins, fennel and dill; (2°) attractive *boulangerie* aromas / *palate:* pearly effervescence, crisp acidity, seductively soft and clean mid-palate, tasty finish of articulate varietal fruit over delicate brioche and flaked almonds.

Comments: This is an ideal holiday sparkler. It is sunny, vivacious and highly expressive. Its purity of primary aromas must be attributable to the grapes having been cultivated in the cleansing environs of Vilafior – but it was a master craftsman who assembled the whole elegant package.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with locally-caught seafood, particularly deep-fried *morena* (moray eel).



ALTOS DE TREVEJOS BRUT NATURE ROSÉ

Bodega: Altos de Trevejos, San Miguel de Abona, Tenerife

Appellation: DO Abona

Type: *rosado espumoso* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: **2015**, 2016

Grape(s): 100% Listán Prieto

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, gentle maceration, méthode traditionnelle sparkling wine, second fermentation and ageing in bottle for 12 months prior to disgorgement (June 2017), brut nature.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* glittering raspberry red / *smell & taste:* (1°) notes of watermelon, strawberries and red gummies, brought into transient focus by a

squeeze of blood orange; (2°) restrained aromas of autolysis / *palate*: the intense fizz creates a starburst of fresh watermelon that quickly evanesces to a bone-dry mid-palate and a finish that teases with hints of volcanic salinity and faded red flowers.

Comments: The only Listán Prieto sparkler of the islands. Though the 2016 vintage is excellent, has greater intensity of aromas and is more complex and long, I can't help but love the original 2015 Altos de Trevejos Brut Nature Rosé. It brings to mind this superb Oscar Wilde quote: it 'is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied. What more can one want?'

Sommelier's recommendation: Derive even more pleasure from this wine by having it with steamed salmon and vegetables.



6

La Palma

HISTORY

Grapevines arrived on La Palma at the turn of the 15th/16th centuries, during the rapid European colonisation that took place once the Spanish conquest was complete and the island incorporated into the Crown of Castile on 3 May 1493.

The Conquest of La Palma ¹

Though some exploratory landings had been repelled in earlier decades, the first serious attempt to conquer La Palma was in 1447, when Guillén Peraza, a 25-year-old Spaniard (who had recently inherited ownership of Lanzarote, Fuerteventura and El Hierro), arrived with three ships and 500 men, and the grandiose notion of bringing the remaining islands of the archipelago under his control.

Though their disembarkation was not resisted by the Guanches of La Palma, it had been carefully observed, and as the Spaniards marched into the rough and mountainous terrain of the island's interior the natives let loose their fury. Utilising their superior agility and knowledge of the land, they slew hundreds including young Peraza, who suffered a brutal blow from a stone that smashed his handsome face. The Spaniards, in shock, ran back to their ships and fled.

¹ This is an adaptation of events recorded in the 1764 work *The History of the Discovery and Conquest of the Canary Islands* by Juan de Abreu Galindo and George Glas.

For several years following the botched invasion, the Spanish, in retaliation for the death of Peraza, intermittently sent small raiding parties to ransack the isolated coastal settlements of La Palma and capture slaves. On one such occasion, a young Guanche woman was killed as she resisted being taken away. Over time, however, the relationship thawed, the violence ended and a tentative truce was established. Some trading of goods began between the free peoples of La Palma and those of the occupied Canary Islands, and for a time it seemed that the Guanches and the Spaniards might even declare a lasting peace. It was not to be so.

During a trading assignment, a Spaniard boasted to Garehagua, a Guanche chief of the north, that he had once killed a local woman when she had become violent at the prospect of being forcibly removed from La Palma. Unbeknownst to the man, the woman had been Garehagua's sister, and hearing the story, he replied, 'Your ill fortune has brought you into my hands, that I should avenge my sister's death!' And with that, he skewered the Spaniard with his horn-tipped *lancia* and the truce was over.

Decades later, the king of Spain granted permission to Alonso Fernández de Lugo, who had been instrumental in the conquest of Gran Canaria, to complete the Canary Islands campaign by overcoming the hostile peoples of La Palma and Tenerife. Having raised the required troops and fleet, Lugo set sail from mainland Spain in 1491, and on 29 September he landed, unopposed, at the port of Tazacorte on the western coast of La Palma. There he built a heavily fortified military garrison and, when ready, marched on the island with over 1000 well-armed and well-trained fighting men. In the space of just over a half a year, nearly the whole island, including Garehagua and his people, surrendered to the sheer force of arms that the Spaniards now possessed.

However, the heart of the island – the territory of Aceró (the Caldera de Taburiente), ruled by Chief Tanausú – was an impenetrable fortress of Guanche resistance. Failing to gain ground by military means, Alonso Fernández de Lugo tried a different tack – he dispatched a relation of Tanausú, a Christian convert (now) named Juan de Palma, to sweet-talk him into surrender. The message he sent was that the Guanches would be well treated and could remain on their lands if they would simply kneel to God (and the Crown of Castile). Though his closest advisors counselled against it, Tanausú sent Juan de Palma back with a message that he would be willing to meet on the condition that Lugo's forces completely withdraw from his territory. An agreement was struck, and the next day, Tanausú and a group of his men descended towards the coast for peace talks with the Spaniards. Lugo, however, had not removed his troops from all of Aceró, and when the two forces met fierce fighting ensued with a heavy loss of men on both sides. Not expecting the confrontation, the Guanches were defeated, Tanausú was captured, and the fall of La Palma was complete.

Alonso Fernández de Lugo put Tanausú on a ship bound for Spain to be a prisoner trophy for the king and queen. Protesting that Lugo had no honour, and defying

him to the bitter end, the last Guanche leader of La Palma refused to eat after losing sight of his beloved land, and died of starvation during the voyage to Europe.

Families arrived from Castile, Cataluña, Mallorca, Portugal, Italy and Flanders (which was under Spanish control at the time), bringing the diversified genetic material from which the modern peoples and viticulture of La Palma were born. Such was the intensity of planting and suitability of the terroir for grapevines that within a few short years the requirements for the new island population were surpassed and La Palma began to export significant quantities of high-quality sweet Malvasía wine to the aristocracy of Europe via Flanders and London.

The island is blessed also with an ample supply of timber (from large pine forests that cover much of it), and Santa Cruz, La Palma's biggest port, became a major centre of Atlantic trade and shipbuilding. Furthermore, La Palma's privileged geographic position at the north-western extremity of the archipelago led to a Royal Charter that stipulated that all Spanish vessels destined for the New World should stop there for repairs and for the restocking of provisions, including water and wine, which were both available in abundance on the island.

Such was the extent of the city's wealth creation that it attracted the attention of the infamous French privateer François le Clerc, who arrived with 10 ships and 700 men on 21 July 1553. He had lost one of his legs at the knee in a skirmish with the English, so was nicknamed Peg Leg. This didn't stop him from looting Santa Cruz and setting it ablaze before sailing off towards the Caribbean where he would continue to cause mayhem and earn his place in pirate folklore.

In response to Peg Leg's plundering of Santa Cruz, the island's government spent large sums of money to construct three well-armed and strategically positioned castles in order to protect the city from future attack from sea. The investment paid off on 3 November 1585, when Sir Francis Drake, at the helm of 29 warships and with over 2000 men, arrived under orders from Queen Elizabeth I to pre-emptively strike Spain's Atlantic colonies in a last-ditch effort to deter Catholic Spain from declaring war on her Protestant England.

It was Drake's intention, by ransacking Santa Cruz, to disrupt the flow of Spanish wealth from the New World, and to bolster supplies of water and wine before making an Atlantic crossing to strike at the heart of Spanish America – the primary target of his Great Expedition.² As his fleet approached, to Drake's great surprise a cannonball ripped through his flagship, *Bonaventure*, narrowly missing him and causing significant damage. As further shots hissed past, Drake realised the defenders possessed more impressive long-range firepower than he had thought

2 For the full story on Drake's Atlantic adventure, read Angus Konstam's 2011 work *The Great Expedition: Sir Francis Drake on the Spanish Main, 1585–86*.



possible and decided to forgo landing in order to preserve his fleet for the more strategically important battles to come in the Caribbean.

Unknown to Drake, the artillery being used against his fleet was The Scorpion, a state-of-the-art iron cannon which had been purchased from England and shipped from the Tower of London to La Palma some years earlier. More ironically still, the Great Expedition, though militarily successful (with the exception of the failed attack on La Palma), had the opposite outcome to the one desired: rather than it giving King Philip II of Spain a cogent reason to reconsider war against the Protestant world, the latter concluded that the only way to settle matters decisively was an all-out invasion of England. Drake and the *Bonaventure* thus sailed back into action again in 1588 against the Spanish Armada.

The people of La Palma are proud of having repelled one of England's most famous naval heroes, but ultimately foreign invasion would be suffered by the island, albeit in a very different form. In the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries the people of La Palma were subject to numerous outbreaks of European smallpox, and their crops suffered various plagues of African locusts and blight. La Palma's wine grapes, which had been a major component of the economy for over 300 years, were not exempt from the destruction, being ravaged by the imported North American fungi of oidio and mildiu from 1852. By the end of the 19th century, the wine export trade of La Palma had vanished.



The vines that survived the fungal diseases were, thankfully, not affected by a third major grape plague that invaded Europe from North America at about the same time: phylloxera – a small insect that devastated the vineyards of mainland Europe and changed them forever. As a consequence, there are now several European grape varieties that survive in their original form *only* in the Canarian archipelago, with some, like **Sabro**, unique to La Palma.

Since the late 19th-century collapse of the wine trade, the agricultural sector of La Palma has been dominated by bananas and, to a lesser extent, tobacco – a fact that remains true to this day (just over one-third of all Canary Islands bananas come from La Palma, and the cigars made here are considered to be surpassed only by those of Cuba, the island that had supplied the tobacco plants to La Palma in the first place). But La Palma's wine-growing sector has seen a major transformation since the 1994 creation of **DO La Palma**. This was designated to conserve the many unique grape varieties and winemaking practices that were on the verge of extinction and to promote once again the world-class potential of the sweet Malvasía wines that can be produced here. Over the last quarter-century, abandoned vineyards have been recovered and new ones planted, and the wines of La Palma have already won a renewed reputation for exceptional quality. It is wonderful to see what was once the pride of Canary Islands' wine production reclaim its place on the international stage.

A PORTRAIT OF LA PALMA

It's easy to understand why La Palma is known as La Isla Bonita (The Beautiful Island). Despite its small area, it has an incredible diversity of luxurious botanical habitats. In a single day one can complete a north-to-south mountain bike ride that begins in subtropical laurisilva, moves through dense pine forests and dry deciduous woodlands, then ends up in arid volcanic shrublands. And I must not forget to mention the profusion of palms (70+ endemic species) that fleck the landscape and give the island its name. Declared a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve in 2002, and described on their website as 'a miniature continent that contains ... all the representative ecosystems of the Macaronesian region', La Palma is probably the Canaries' premier destination for those who want to explore nature.

Even the areas that have been extensively developed by humans are attractive. From the numerous cliff-top miradores and hair-raising bends of mountain roads you can look out over hillsides and valleys carpeted with deep-green banana plantations occasionally punctuated by glistening whitewashed villages of Spanish colonial design.

And then there are the vineyards. Although they represent only a small fraction of the total area of La Palma, when you find them you will be treated to a spectacular illustration of epic viticulture. In the north, the best vineyards are neatly arranged

amongst majestic pine forests on small rock-walled terraces that have been carved into the steep slope high above the deep-blue ocean and, more often than not, a *mar de nubes* (sea of clouds) which obscures the lower levels of the island from view. If this does not deliver your nirvana, then try the southern tip of the island where you can see historic **Malvasía Aromática** vines growing on a blanket of fresh black volcanic sand that stretches down towards the glimmering Atlantic Ocean with ethereal Teide visible on the horizon.

Dominating the middle of La Palma is yet another breathtaking site – its immense gorge, the Caldera de Taburiente, which formed long ago when part of the western flank of the island sheared off into the sea. This towering pine-clad fortress possesses beautiful running streams and waterfalls and a spine-tingling sense of history. This is Aceró, where unyielding Tanausú once reigned.

At 2396 masl, on the rim of the caldera, stands the Observatorio del Roque de los Muchachos, one of the most important observatories in the world for optical and infrared astronomy. Stargazing has always been an important pastime here on La Palma, and one of the best wines ever made on the island makes reference to this – Teneguía's 1996 Malvasía Aromática Estelar ('stellar'). More recently, some entrepreneurial bodegas have even begun to organise events that mix stargazing with wine tasting; the twinkle invariably seems to get brighter as the night goes on.

If you ever get past the tremendous natural beauty and history of La Palma, it's worth seeking out La Palma's excellent cheeses to enjoy with the local wine. Made from the milk of a special breed of goat, the *cabra palmera*, La Palma's cheese, like its wines, proudly enjoys its very own Denominación de Origen – Queso Palmero.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Geologically, at only 2 million years old La Palma is young and wild. The island is essentially a giant compound volcano that rises from the ocean floor to break the surface of the Atlantic as an ultra-steep wedge of land with an area of 706 km² and a maximum height of 2430 masl. La Palma is not quite as tall as the peak of Teide on Tenerife, but in relation to its size it is the steepest island in the world. The rapid transition from the coast up to the mountain peaks is almost alarming – those with vertigo might worry that if they lost their footing they could tumble all the way to the sea.

Under its own weight, about a half a million years ago part of the volcano started slipping away, ripping open what is now the north-central part of the island and forming an impressive 9 km-wide, 1.5 km-deep gorge – the Caldera de Taburiente.

La Palma is still highly volcanically active, but in human history it has been the

southern part of the island that has seen the action. The hot spot underlying the island – its volcanic engine, if you will – has migrated southward over time, elongating the land to the south and creating the Cumbre Vieja, a dorsal ridge formed by numerous volcanic vent cones built of recently spewed lava and pyroclastic ejecta. It stretches north–south from the middle of the island all the way to its southern tip, which is currently the most volcanically active area of the entire archipelago.

The ridge provides truly magnificent views and is one of the most popular hiking trails of the Canary Islands, but it's worth checking that all is calm before making your trip. The last time I visited bodegas in the municipality of Fuencaliente, in October 2017, I managed to time my arrival to coincide with the most significant swarm of low-magnitude earthquakes in decades, sparking fears that Cumbre Vieja was about to pop. It didn't, but 44 tremors in 2 days were an effective reminder that the Earth could let rip at any time here.

The last full-scale eruption occurred in 1971 at the Teneguía vent, located at the southern end of the Cumbre Vieja at Punta de Fuencaliente (the Point of the Hot Spring). It didn't kill anyone, but it did destroy some of the island's best vineyards. But we can't get too upset with Mother Nature, since it was another relatively recent eruption here that created the regional terroir which many consider to be amongst the best for viticulture in all of Spain, if not the entire world – Los Llanos Negros.



In 1677, less than 1 km south of the community of Los Canarios, two small volcanic degassing vents opened up around the old San Antonio cone and for some two months proceeded to cover the surrounding countryside with ejected volcanic ash, sand and gravel – *lapilli* in English and *picón* in Spanish. Despite its close proximity to Fuencaliente’s biggest town, damage was negligible. The prevailing winds pushed much of the ejected material to the south-west, covering older, more fertile soils with a metre or more of fresh black *picón*. The locals named the area Los Llanos Negros – ‘The Black Plains’. Far from being a disaster for agriculture, it was discovered that vines would thrive here even better than before thanks to the new blanket of *picón*; it helped to capture moisture from the air, and allowed the underlying soils to regulate the supply of water to the vine roots more effectively and keep them cool during the many droughts and heatwaves that this part of the island experiences throughout the year. Better still, the *picón* prohibited weed growth. The wines produced from here now seem to express an undeniable and distinctive sensation of uplifting elemental minerality that has elevated them from excellent to world class.



The soils of the north of La Palma are totally different from that of the black vineyards of the south. This part of the island has experienced no volcanic eruption for over a million years and the much wetter conditions have eroded the old rocks to a visually striking, rich red clay. Vines have adapted very well to this terroir too, but the grapes that thrive best here are different from those of the south, meaning that La Palma produces wine in a breadth of styles unmatched by any other of the Canary Islands' major wine zones.

Overall, La Palma is the wettest of the Canaries and is the only one with continuous streams. Being at the north-western edge of the archipelago, it is fully exposed to the alisios. Clouds form as the moisture-laden sea air is pushed up the incredibly steep northern face of the ancient shield volcano to cooler altitudes. The water falls as rain or is captured directly out of the air by the dense foliage in this part of the island. As a result, here in the north the scenery is truly spectacular, with all possible shades of green seeming to exist.

The south of the island is much drier, with sparse vegetation adding only touches of olive and brown to the barren red, orange and yellow craters and mini deserts of black volcanic sand.

This climatic split personality has been cleverly overcome by the populace. The excess water of the north collects in underground aquifers that have been mined by over 150 *galerías* (large water tunnels dug horizontally into the sides of the volcano) and 75 vertical wells. In an even more impressive feat of engineering, a 300 km network of aqueducts, small canals and pipes have been put in place to distribute the precious water all over the island, including a Grand Watercourse (in 1970) that runs all the way from Barlovento in the far north to Fuencaliente at the dry southern tip of the island. Here, as well as satisfying the water needs of the local towns, it is used for top-up irrigation for the vines of Los Llanos Negros during dry years. Fittingly, the measurement unit used on the island for the financial water transactions is the 490-litre *pipe* – the standard volume of the old English wine barrel used throughout history to export La Palma's Malvasía.

Concerningly, the aquifers are beginning to run dry. Since the turn of the century, the weather in La Palma has become noticeably hotter, and 2016 and 2017 were so dry that the rains did not replenish the withdrawals of water. The winemakers of La Palma are unanimous in their opinion that this is not normal climatic variation and there is great concern regarding the availability of water for future growing seasons.

This century's heat and lack of rain has also raised anxiety about wildfires. In 2009, 2700 ha of forests and agricultural lands were lost to fire in the south of the island, and in August 2016 flames engulfed almost 10% of La Palma's surface, with the damage done still visible.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE LA PALMA

www.vinoslapalma.com



DO La Palma was incorporated in 1994. Over the five years from 2013 to 2017, wine production averaged 800,000 litres per year, of which 99% was consumed within Spain. At the time of writing, there are 18 registered bodegas, of which 3 have been profiled at the end of this chapter.

As I have said, La Palma is sometimes referred to as a continent in miniature, and this is reflected by the diversity of its grape-growing areas. The microclimates, rugged terrain and fragmentation of vineyard ownership have led to complex oenography, and the DO has chosen to delimit three distinct winemaking subzones.

Norte de La Palma is a truly fascinating grape-growing area. Encompassing the municipalities of Puntallana, San Andrés y Sauces, Barlovento, Garafía, Puntagorda and Tijarafe, this is an area of extraordinary natural beauty. The vines are grown using all manner of training systems, from unusual low trellises and bush vines in shallow hollows through to modern espaldera. What they all have in common is their highly fertile red clay soils and the fact that most vineyards exist on terraces carved into the steep slopes overlooking the sea. The individual plots are usually very small, the best sites almost all situated between 800 and 1600 masl – putting them above the mar de nubes and amongst the forests of noble Canarian pines.

Some of the best modern dry white wines of the Canary Islands are made here from **Albillo Criollo** – a grape that is exclusive to the archipelago and of huge potential. Some excellent reds are produced here too, and of special interest is that this is the only area of the Canary Islands in which the governing DO has authorised the production of the very rare and historically interesting Vinos de Tea (see below).

Hoyo de Mazo covers the central and eastern part of the island, with the bulk of the vineyards set between 200 and 700 masl. It encompasses the municipalities of Villa de Mazo, Breña Baja, Breña Alta and Santa Cruz de La Palma, and specialises in red wine production for the local market.

A feature of this sloping subzone is the use of an ancient head-pruned bush vine training system where the arms that sag under the weight of their grapes are held aloft by carefully positioned canes and stacked stones.

Fuencaliente, covering the sunnier and drier southern and south-western part of the island, is the principal white grape-growing area of La Palma and provides more than half of the island's total white wine production. The subzone encompasses

the municipalities of Fuencaliente (the quintessential wine region of La Palma), El Paso, Los Llanos de Aridane and Tazacorte, with the vineyards being located between 200 and 1400 masl.

In the far south of this subzone is Los Llanos Negros – the spiritual home of Malvasía Aromática. Many of the plants that produce these illustrious naturally sweet wines are well over one hundred years old and are trained low to the ground as creepers over the volcanic picón that can reach a depth of over 2 metres in some places.

Old vines (some over 200 years old) of other varieties exist in this region too, and in recent years they have been used to produce some dry white wines that have received global recognition for their quality. A particularly fascinating area is Las Machuqueras, which has soils similar to those of neighbouring Los Llanos Negros but is just over the other side of the dorsal ridge in La Palma's south-eastern corner. Here, the winds are stronger, and so stone walls called *cadena*s (chains) have been hand-built over the centuries to shield the vines.

GRAPE VARIETIES

There are a large number of grape varieties authorised under DO La Palma regulations. In reality, among the white grapes, there are three varieties that are undeniably the most important to white wine production on the island: **Malvasía Aromática**, for its ability to produce world-class wines of natural sweetness; **Albillo Criollo**, for its powerful stone-fruit aromas and electric mouthfeel; and Listán Blanco, for its outstanding productivity, ubiquity and capacity to transmit the very soul of the young volcanic soils of La Palma.

Outside of this trio of oenological glory, perhaps the most fascinating white grape is **Sabro**, which is unique in the world to La Palma. It can produce very good wines, and trying them is always thrilling due to the fact that their availability is so vanishingly small. If Canary Islands wine is rare, then Sabro wines are the rarest of the rare.

For La Palma tintos, Negramoll makes the most significant contribution, being the most important of the red varieties in terms of area under cultivation, and also one of the varieties used to create the unique Vinos de Tea (pronounced 'tee-ah'). Listán Negro is also grown and usually referred to by its Palmero name: Almuñeco.

Unlike many of the other Canary Islands DOs, common international varieties such as Syrah are not permitted in La Palma.

MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA

Malvasía Aromática, as its name suggests, is a special white grape of the wider Malvasía family, capable of making particularly exquisite, fragrant wines. These can be excellent when made in a dry style, but Malvasía Aromática wines reach their zenith in their sweet form when bunches are infected by noble rot or left on the vine to dry (passerillage) to concentrate the delicious nectar that has been used over the ages to produce the globally famous beverage usually known as Malvasía in the Latin world, and Canary, Canary Sack and Malmsey in the English-speaking one.

The addition of ‘Aromática’ to the name of this particular grape is relatively recent³ and is applied in the Canary Islands to differentiate it from the Malvasía Volcánica grape that is today mostly grown on Lanzarote. Of the two, Malvasía Aromática is the older – it is, in fact, a parent of Malvasía Volcánica⁴ – and was probably brought to the Canary Islands from Iberia shortly after the Castilian conquest. Western Europe is not where it is originally from, however – Malvasía Aromática cuttings were exported from the eastern Mediterranean over millennia, and it still exists in the region today, where it is known by dozens of different synonyms (e.g. Malvasía Candida and Malvasía di Sardegna).⁵

The variety is believed to be of Greek origin – its genetics show a strong relationship to the ancient Athiri grape⁶ that is today still grown and used for wines in Rhodes, Santorini and Crete. Moreover, the name, Malvasía, is believed (by most) to be an Italianisation of the tiny Greek island of Monemvasia, just 100 metres off of the east coast of the Peloponnese, where, during medieval and early Renaissance Byzantine times, the Venetians controlled a strategically important fortress that was a hub for exporting the sweet *vinum de Malvasias* of the Aegean islands westwards into the Christian Mediterranean.⁶

Whatever the exact origin and route, the grape ultimately made its way out into the Atlantic during the 15th century where it found a new home in the islands of Macaronesia. Here, in the western islands of the Canaries in particular, the cooler oceanic climate and young volcanic soils were found to yield grapes capable of making sweet wines that were better than those that had come before. That, combined with the Canaries’ superior position as an access point for the huge markets of northern Europe – notably the naval powerhouses of England and the

3 Cabello F, Ortiz J, Muñoz-Organero G, Rodríguez-Torres I, Barba A, Rubio de Miguel C, García S and Sáiz R (2011) *Variedades de vid en España*. Agrícola Española, Madrid. ISBN: 9788492928132

4 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

5 Maul E and Röckel F (2015) *Vitis International Variety Catalogue*. www.vivc.de

6 en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malvasia (and references therein)

Low Countries – and the New World, gave rise to a period of majestic splendour for Malvasía that shifted its nucleus of production from the Mediterranean to the North Atlantic.

Thanks to ample maritime traffic, the excellence of Canarian Malvasía was widespread by word of mouth, and its fame and prestige grew steadily through the 16th and first half of the 17th centuries. So Canary became a brand in the same way that Bordeaux or Prosecco are today. Furthermore, the deliciousness of the wines that endured long voyages on rough seas was found to increase – apparently the aerating churn softened the wines and introduced pleasant nutty aromas – and remarkably, the highest prices were fetched by Malvasía that was loaded in the Canaries, sent to the Americas, and then returned for sale in London and Flanders. These ‘Canary return wines’ became the tippie of choice in the palaces of the leading European Courts as evidenced by the most famous writers of the age, including William Shakespeare, who loved it and who wrote in *Henry IV* that it is ‘a marvellous searching wine, and it perfumes the blood’. All this led to a considerable increase in demand of Canary wine and a flourishing trade that became the primary source of wealth for the archipelago for nearly three centuries.



Ultimately, the export trade in sweet Canarian Malvasía would end: nothing to do with a reduction in quality but everything to do with deteriorating international relations and the arrival of alien diseases. In 1662, Charles II of England married Portuguese Catherine of Braganza, which began a process of tilting English trade towards Portugal and away from Spain, including the sweet wines of Madeira, the Azores and Oporto instead of Canary. For 200 years, sweet wine production from Malvasía Aromática went into economic decline, and then the attack of oidio in 1852 and mildiu in 1878 – to which Malvasía Aromática, with its very thin skin, was particularly susceptible – provided a final blow that was very nearly fatal.

Though small plantings of Malvasía Aromática can still be found in El Hierro and La Gomera, it survives today primarily on its original core islands of production – Tenerife and La Palma. Its single greatest stronghold has been, and remains, Fuencaliente at the southern tip of La Palma, where the volcanic eruption of 1677 produced an area of terroir that may be Malvasía Aromática's global grand cru: a thick layer of picón that is exceptionally well drained. Combined with the naturally sunny and dry climate, here Malvasía Aromática can overcome its issues with oidio and mildiu and its tendency towards overly high yields.

When ripe, Malvasía Aromática grape bunches are highly attractive, being the colours of early autumn in Britain – light green, yellow, orange and gold – and give sweet juices that have strong aromas of stone fruits (nectarines, peaches and apricots, in particular), white currants, and a pronounced floral bouquet. In their infancy, wines may have a body feel or soft texture that could be described as round, but they are always nicely framed by refreshing sharp acidity.

When noble rot has occurred, the wines take on a deeper golden hue but retain an excellent balance between the freshness of high acidity and intensity of aroma, which has evolved with overripening to quince jelly, candied apricots and wild blossom honey. There can be a certain bitterness too – like marmalade made from Seville oranges – which provides another highly attractive dimension to balance the sweetness.

When left to age in barrel for one year or more, the wines turn amber and become something akin to the great Canary Sack of yesteryear. Aromas of candied stone fruits and fresh flowers remain but are joined by luxurious notes of coffee, chocolate and fig that fill the mouth, perfume the blood, and warm the spirit to provide an experience immortal.

Malvasía Aromática deserves to be a flagship grape of the Canary Islands, being historically essential and of truly exceptional quality when grown on the best parcels of land. It has hung on to survive several centuries when the demand has waned, but it is now resurgent, and many in the archipelago and the international fine wine community recognise that sweet Malvasía Aromática wines from the Canary Islands are amongst the very best wines of the world.

note 1: As with all works that involve the interpretation of published science and history, the information summarised in this book is subject to challenge and may be revised for future editions. One topic that requires further investigation is the relative role (and importance) of Malvasía Aromática and Malvasía Volcánica on the Canary Islands over the past 500 years. Learned wine scholar Juan José Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourt (El Grifo) has an alternative view to the narrative presented above; he believes that Malvasía Volcánica was actually the original Malvasía grape variety of the Canary Islands.^{7,8}

note 2: A mutation of Malvasía Aromática has resulted in the existence of Malvasía Rosada in the Canary Islands.^{4,9,10} Though it has not yet been used to produce any varietal wines, Suertes del Marqués has recently planted it in the Orotava Valley with this intention.

note 3: The name ‘Malmsey’ was used interchangeably for Malvasía-based wines for centuries. However, in modern oenology Malmsey is now used almost exclusively to refer to the extremely sweet variety of fortified Madeira made from that island’s Malvasía Branca de São Jorge grape, which is not the same as Malvasía Aromática.⁵

ALBILLO CRIOLLO

Recent analysis has shown that Albillo Criollo is exclusive to the Canary Islands and the result of a direct crossing between Listán Blanco and Verdello.^{11,12} It is early budding and ripening, with short compact bunches of small, thin-skinned, whiteish-yellow and freckled berries that are generally resistant to fungal diseases.

Albillo Criollo produces fantastic wines that, in recent years, have received regional and national recognition for quality.¹³ Aromas of ripe stone fruit (peach, in particular) and tropical fruits tend to be accompanied by white flowers and,

7 Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourt JJ (2011) *La Malvasía Atlántica – Malvasía Aromática. Dudas, errores y algunas certezas*. El Grifo, Lanzarote

8 Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourt JJ (2019) *Malvasía Atlántica adiciones 2019*. Personal Communication

9 Zerolo J, Cabello F, Espino A, Borrego J, Ibáñez J, Rodríguez-Torres I, Muñoz-Organero G, Rubio C and Hernández M (2006) *Variedades de Vid de Cultivo Tradicional en Canarias*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria, Santa Cruz de Tenerife. ISBN: 9788460639770

10 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

11 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

12 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

13 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Albillo Criollo (and references therein)

most characteristically, a sort of electric sparkle that is spicy and minerally (i.e. not bubbly). Albillo's acidity is usually citrusy, and more than enough to give balance and precision to the prevailing aromas and add to a very pleasant finish in which savoury notes of Atlantic terroir emerge.

There is no arguing that Albillo Criollo now reigns over northern La Palma, from on high in the vineyard sites that exist above the alisios-derived clouds. Here it has perfectly adapted to the climate, steep slopes and organic soils of this staggeringly beautiful but rarely visited region of the Canary Islands. Though relatively low-yielding, Albillo Criollo is now highly appreciated by the leading winemakers of the area and has become their most planted variety in the 21st century.

SABRO

Of all the Canary Islands' grapes, Sabro is the one that maintains the most enchanting aura of mystery. There is no mention of it in any historical literature,¹⁴ and recently conducted DNA analysis^{15,16,17,18} has only been able to tell us that it is probably a crossing of an archaic Spanish grape named Hebén with some other grape of unknown origin.¹⁶ Perhaps Sabro is a viticultural demigod of the Fortunate Islands.

Despite its intriguing uniqueness and potential for high quality, Sabro is also exceedingly rare, with less than 1% of La Palma's recent harvests being of this variety – just 3000 kilogrammes per year!¹⁹ The grapes that hang on are found mainly in the island's southern Fuencaliente subzone (primarily in Los Llanos Negros), and there are a few scattered plantings in the southern areas of mid-island subzone Hoyo de Mazo.¹⁴

In the past, some bodegas have used Sabro to make elegant, naturally sweet (not fortified) single-variety wines, but in recent years it has been used mostly to

14 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Sabro (and references therein)

15 Zero J, Cabello F, Espino A, Borrego J, Ibáñez J, Rodríguez-Torres I, Muñoz-Organero G, Rubio C and Hernández M (2006) *Variedades de Vid de Cultivo Tradicional en Canarias*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria, Santa Cruz de Tenerife. ISBN: 9788460639770

16 Zinelabidine L, Cunha J, Eiras-Dias J, Cabello F, Martínez-Zapater J and Ibáñez J (2015) *Pedigree analysis of the Spanish grapevine cultivar 'Hebén'*. *Vitis* -Geilweilerhof-. 54 pp 81–86

17 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

18 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. *OENO One* 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

19 2018 data provided by the Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria (ICCA). Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca. Gobierno de Canarias

add body and floral notes to sweet white wine blends whose flavours tend to be dominated by the more aromatically potent Malvasía Aromática and Gual.

Though it is usually associated with sweetness, Sabro is occasionally incorporated into dry wines. For example, Llanovid, a local bodega, has created a wine called La Tablada that is a blend of 62% Sabro and 38% Gual, and marketed under the Llanos Negros brand. La Tablada has finesse, and demonstrates the potential of this variety to produce high-quality wines in a bone-dry style. Excitingly, another local winemaker, **Victoria Torres Pecis**, is actively replanting Sabro, which she likes because of the sophistication of its subtle aromatics and its uniqueness to La Palma; she has expressed a desire to make a dry Sabro varietal wine as one of her main longer-term goals for Bodega Juan Matías Torres.

This little gem of a grape variety is characterised by bunches that are short, loose and small, with berries that are medium-sized, oval and with skins that are of medium thickness and yellow-green. Eaten off of the vine, the grape is juicy and tender and fills the mouth with sweet citrus and floral notes of magnolia and jasmine ('sabro' translates to 'tasty'). These flavours are present in the young wines, and can mature with time in bottle to provide aromas of acacia honey, white peach and carrot cake that are gentle and graceful.



Most Sabro wines are likely to have good alcoholic power and abundant acidity, and are well worth trying if you can find them. As well as experiencing a singular grape and a potentially divine wine, your interest will be for a good cause: Sabro might be saved from Earthly extinction by even the tiniest of increments in demand.

STYLES OF WINE

With a broad mix of ancient and modern grape varieties combined with a diversity of microclimates and volcanic soils, La Palma produces an unparalleled range of wines that are gaining worldwide recognition for their unique personalities and outstanding quality.

Without doubt, it is the naturally sweet wines that are the pride and joy of La Isla Bonita, and quite possibly the whole of the Canary Islands. These wines are an absolute must-try because they are marvellously good, and because of their historical importance. In particular, the 100% Malvasía Aromática dulces from Fuencaliente have achieved the highest international standards of excellence.

Over the last five years, the influential *Guía Peñín de los Vinos España* has awarded 11 prestigious podium places to the sweet Malvasía Aromática wines



of Fuencaliente, making them, according to that publication, by far the most celebrated wines of the Canary Islands. These wines are made from Malvasía Aromática grapes that are left to overripen on the vine – and occasionally, when the grapes have been affected by noble rot, as they were in 2003 and 2008, a further dimension is added to the bouquet. They are ideal for drinking on their own, but they are also excellent with the various flavourful cheeses of La Palma.

The island's dry white wines are usually light-bodied and aromatic, with clean, fruity aromas and zesty acidity – particularly those made from Albillo Criollo. The majority are jovens, made without application of oak, and designed to showcase the natural characteristics of the grape varieties of which they are made. These wines are an ideal pairing with the various kinds of seafood that can be readily pulled in by line from La Palma's coastline (with an appropriate permit, of course).

It is also worth seeking out the dry white wines where emphasis has been put on paying homage to local traditions and terroir. In this category, Listán Blanco is particularly good at transmitting the flavours of fresh volcanic picón into the glass.

The reds and rosés of La Palma are predominantly young and dry. Negramoll is the principal grape for both, but is sometimes blended with other varieties (notably Listán Prieto) to add a little more character and colour. Traditionally, these wines are easy-going; to be enjoyed during meals taken with good company and laughter.

A new style of red wine has just begun to emerge on La Palma. Some of the winemakers here have observed the recent success of the much fuller-bodied wines created from the Baboso Negro and Vijariego Negro grapes grown in the high-altitude sites of El Hierro and Tenerife. So they are beginning to grow these varieties on favourable sites on the north face of La Palma, in the hope that it might be possible for them to produce such wines. Early results are very encouraging (a good example being Viñarda Vijariego Negro).

An oenological curiosity exists high up in the steep mountainous landscape of north-western La Palma. Here, hidden away in the magical pine forests, several bodegas really still do create the legendary Vinos de Tea.

White and red grapes including Albillo Criollo, Negramoll, Listán Prieto and Listán Negro are fermented together into wine using antique casks made from the reddish-brown coloured heartwood of the Canary Islands pine tree, *Pinus canariensis*, known locally as the *pino de tea*. Unlike the central and southern parts of La Palma, which had access to indigenous chestnut trees and to ports where they could source European oak, this once inaccessible backwater had only the wood from the surrounding pine forests, and so the *Pinos Padres* (Father Pines), the largest trees, 150 to 200 years old, were felled to create barrels for the winemakers. The original casks have been handed down through the generations and are still used to this day.

The ancient tea wood imparts some colour and highly distinctive balsamic aromas of resin, menthol and eucalyptus to the wine, which, depending on time in barrel, ranges from ‘scented’ all the way to ‘medicinal’ (said by some to have homoeopathic qualities). At their best, these wines are an exciting accompaniment to a traditional Canarian meal of rabbit in *salmorejo canario* (a spiced sauce) and served with *papas arrugadas* (small potatoes boiled in salt water) – which was how they were originally enjoyed – or, as discovered through personal experimentation, an intriguing match with after-dinner chocolates!

Vinos de Tea recently became eligible for full DO La Palma status, and there is genuine hope that these wines will one day achieve international renown (they may!). If you are interested in trying something unique and more than a bit special, go and taste the wines in the bodegas in which they were made. At the very least, the incredible scenery and the opportunity to meet the talented winemakers who are so proud to make the 21st-century Vinos de Tea will make your voyage of discovery enjoyable and memorable.

BODEGAS

LLANOVID

Where the maximum expression of Malvasía Aromática has been achieved

www.bodegasteneguia.com & www.llanosnegros.com

Based in Fuencaliente, the Llanovid Sociedad Cooperativa Limitada, with 360 members, is the main producer (just under half of the island’s total production) of bottled wine in La Palma and is one of the biggest and most well-respected bodegas in the Canary Islands. Its first vintage dates as far back as 1947, and over the following 72 years it has received numerous awards for the quality of its wines – especially its flagship naturally sweet Malvasía Aromáticas, the best of which have arguably been among the greatest wines of the archipelago in the modern era.

The winery building, which has a tasting room and welcomes visitors for tours (by appointment), is large, architecturally impressive, and full of fascinating history. It was constructed during the early 1940s, and it is somewhat of a minor miracle that it is still standing – if you look carefully, under the countless layers of paint that have been applied over the decades it’s possible to observe big cracks in the walls and ceiling that were formed in 1949, when powerful earthquakes associated with the nearby eruption of the San Juan volcano almost brought the whole business of winemaking here to a premature end. Another feature of interest is the original lighting system, still in use today, which was a gift from Hitler to Franco. The Nazi technology was developed primarily for searchlights, used in Germany to locate

and shoot down Allied bombers during WW2, and the relic preserved here is one of only two that are still in operation worldwide.

The bodega today ferments most of its wines in modern stainless steel tanks and the original suite of huge concrete vats. The concrete once had epoxy linings, but these have been removed and the vats are now kept sealed by the organic skin that has accumulated over time. Oak was introduced in 1993 and is now used for ageing some of the wine, mostly the whites, prior to bottling. The vast majority of the wine that is produced is marketed under the Teneguía brand, which is what you will find on the label of both the large-volume wines and also the premium naturally sweet Malvasía Aromáticas.

Carlos Lozano Pérez, who became winemaker here after completing his studies in oenology in 1989, said ‘we also continue the important tradition of microvinifying a fraction of our harvest for cooperative members, should they desire a particular style of wine (for home consumption) that stands outside the normal range.’ Since the turn of the century, Lozano has also spearheaded the creation of another line of wines – Llanos Negros – born out of passion and an overriding desire to allow the ancient vines (some over 200 years old) and exceptional terroir of Los Llanos Negros achieve ageworthy wines of maximum natural expression. Intervention in the vineyard and in the bodega is minimal, and everything is done in the ancestral way (including using indigenous yeasts for fermentation). These are amazing wines, but can be a little hard to find. Apart from at the bodega itself, they are only available in three restaurants in La Palma and a handful of other fine-dining establishments in the archipelago. Consider it a treasure hunt: a short visit to La Isla Bonita and exploring the islands’ haute cuisine in search of these gems of Canarian viticulture – the right ingredients for an adventure of a lifetime!

JUAN MATÍAS TORRES

Authentic wines that extol the virtues of history and nature

Calle Fuencaliente de Ciudad Real, 38740 Los Canarios, La Palma

Founded in 1885 in Fuencaliente, Bodega Juan Matías Torres has had one of the longest runs of continuous winemaking in all the Canary Islands, and has remained in the hands of the same family throughout. The activity is now run by 5th-generation **Victoria Torres Pecis**, who took over in 2014 and has already achieved significant international recognition for the excellence and depth of personality of her wines.

Torres Pecis has remained true to the philosophy of her father – artisanal winemaking rooted in local tradition – with an uncompromising focus on organic viticulture, minimalist (natural) processes in the bodega (foot-crushing of the grapes, indigenous yeasts for fermentation), and reintroduction of ancestral

technology that was at risk of being lost in time. The bodega uses two *Pinus canariensis* (pine wood) lagares, the older of which is over 150 years of age, and several chestnut foudres, which used to be found more often in the south of La Palma than the foreign oak wine casks.

In just five years at the helm, Torres Pecis has become an inspiration to many other winemakers. Her ethos of achieving honest terroir expression by facilitating the flow of nature and respecting the wine as a living entity ('wine, like life, can change *a lot*, 'she says with a cryptic smile) is widely praised both here in the islands and abroad. As she moves forward with knowledge built through experience, there are sure to be even greater things to come.

The bodega uses grapes from vineyards located in all of the subzones of the island to produce a range of varietal wines (many carrying handmade labels), but a family-owned plot at the south-eastern tip of La Palma produces the most fascinating wine – Las Machuqueras. This vineyard, at 500 masl, stands out for its steep topography and low density/low productivity old vines (up to 100 years). The Listán Blanco grapes that grow here might have low power of primary fruit expression, but are exceptionally good at transmitting the terroir; the wild and windswept terrain, the salty input from ocean spray, the purity of young volcanic soils, all seem to find their way into the glass. The wine has a profound connection with the land whence it came, and thereby encapsulates perfectly the philosophy of Victoria Torres Pecis and her family winery.

EL NÍSPERO

Beautiful wines from the most beautiful part of La Isla Bonita

www.elnispero.es

El Níspero is located at 1200 masl in the north-western municipality of Garafía, amidst the majestic pine forests that exist above the normal level of the mar de nubes, and overlooking the azure Atlantic far below. The cellar is nestled amongst 3.5 ha of family-owned vineyards neatly arranged on small terraces carved into the steep slopes of the north face of La Palma that are well oriented to the sun and sheltered from the wind.

Vineyard soils are red, old-volcanic and very fertile. They are also highly porous, and so the excellent drainage combined with careful pruning keeps productivity in check. In fact, up here sunlight is ample, the diurnal temperature range is pronounced, and moisture is just right to permit both slow ripening of grapes to concentrate flavour and low-intervention viticulture to limit the use and impact of chemicals.

The modern bodega began in 2008 after **Eufrosina Pérez Rodríguez** had inherited a small cellar from her father, who used to make Vinos de Tea. To preserve this legacy, Pérez is proud to continue making Vinos de Tea in the same casks that were originally acquired and used by her grandfather.

As well as her affection for tradition, Pérez has expanded the range and, notably, has been at the vanguard of promoting the intrinsic qualities of Albillo Criollo grown in the north of La Palma. El Níspero was the first to produce a 100% Albillo Criollo wine in the Canary Islands, and such was her success that she now makes two versions: one with oak barrel fermentation (El Níspero Albillo Barrica), and the other without oak (El Níspero Albillo). Both are excellent, but it is telling that it was the version *without* oak she selected to present to King Felipe VI of Spain during an event that took place in 2018. I must agree with this selection, and I'd go so far as to say that El Níspero Albillo may be my favourite young aromatic white wine of the Canary Islands.



AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



LA TIME

Bodega: Llanos Negros, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2000

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, single-plot, 60+year-old vines, macerated and partially fermented with skins in cement, 15 years (!) in cement and stainless steel prior to bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* bright gold to light copper / *smell & taste:* (1°) intense salty inorganic minerality; (3°) pronounced nose of dried white flowers (chamomile), potpourri, aged Riesling-like petroliferous aromas, smoke, and campfire-toasted bread / *palate:* medium to full-bodied, clean mouthfeel and palate (still fresh with acidity), with a long finish that is tremendously complex and full of character.

Comments: Absolutely unique, and from the first sip there was no doubt that it needed to be included in this book. As well as being a wonderful wine, the sublime transmutation of La Time (pronounced ‘teemay’) annihilates any arguments that the Canary Islands’ dominant white grape, Listán Blanco, cannot produce volcanic wines suitable for long ageing.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Perfect with salty hors d’oeuvres such as stewed *garbanzos* (chickpeas) or *jareas* (dehydrated fish, usually corvina).



LA TABLADA

Bodega: Llanos Negros, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco seco barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, 2015

Grape(s): 62% Sabro, 38% Gual

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 14.5% abv, single-plot, 80+year-old vines, maceration with skins, fermentation in stainless steel tanks and then 230-litre French oak barrels, where it remains on its lees for 9 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* brilliant lemon / *smell & taste:* (1°) elegant balance of bitter citrus and potent sweet jasmine and orange blossom, dried flowers, clear volcanic-Atlantic salinity; (2°) toffee, caramel; (3°) dried apricots and touch of candied orange peel and roasted nuts / *palate:* rich and full, good acidity, extended long finish of buttered and salted popcorn along with lingering sweet and bitter notes of marmalade and marked salinity from terroir.

Comments: According to the vintner (who is a true expert of the local grape varieties), apart from the use of oak and lees, we can thank the rare Sabro for the uncommonly plush body and structural finesse of this wine (and some of the floral notes). Gual plays its part too, especially with regard to the aromatic profile, which is hugely expressive. It will be interesting to see how the personality of this wine evolves over the next few years.

Sommelier's recommendation: While you're visiting La Isla Bonita make sure you try this wine with a fresh-caught grilled *bocinegro* (sea bream).



LOS TABAQUEROS

Bodega: Llanos Negros, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: Vino de España

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2006

Grape(s): (vidueño) Sabro, Malvasía Aromática, Diego, Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14.5% abv, fermented in stainless steel, where it remained for 9 months on its lees prior to a further 9 years of airtight ageing before being finally bottled in 2015.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* radiant gold to amber / *smell & taste:* (1°) richly floral notes of Malvasía Aromática, sharp lemongrass, savoury-peppery notes of picón; (2°) subtle charred wood; (3°) dried quince, caramelised nectarine, Riesling-like petroliferous aromas / *palate:* good acidity, creamy and warming mouthfeel, finish that has a balance of 'sweet' candied fruits and salty terroir.

Comments: This 10+-year-old wine still has plenty of primary aromas, but has developed deep complexity of flavour with age. A masterful coupage of the noble white grapes of Los Llanos Negros, which has been bottled during its glorious crescendo.

Sommelier's recommendation: A perfect combination with *sancocho de verduras* (vegetable stew).



LOS GRILLOS

Bodega: Llanos Negros, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, 2015

Grape(s): 100% Negramoll

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, single-plot, 80- to 150-year-old vines, de-stemmed and fermented in stainless steel prior to racking to 230-litre French oak barrels for MLF and 6 months ageing on lees.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* clear cherry with a ruby rim / *smell & taste:* (1°) upfront cherry and raspberry, background bramble and blackcurrant leaf; (2°) smoke and sweet spice (esp. vanilla); (3°) trace of leather and kirsch / *palate:* good acidity and tannins; overall, a light and velvety palate with a long finish of fruit and spice.

Comments: Negramoll, La Palma's most abundant red grape, clearly demonstrates its potential for sophistication in this wine. Fresh red fruit was abundant in both the 2014 and 2015, but the former had benefited from its extra year in bottle in terms of the emergence of a delicate tertiary layer and softening of its tannins. In sum, it had become smooth and exceedingly stylish.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with game – and ideal, too, with *pierna de cabrito asado lenta* (slow-cooked kid's leg).



MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA DULCE RESERVA

Bodega: Teneguía, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco dulce reserva* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2008

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Aromática

ARPICI: €€€€€

Vinification: 14.5% abv, naturally sweet wine from late-harvest botrytised grapes, aged 18 months in French oak barrels with a further 48 months in bottle prior to release.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* amber yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) floral (orange

blossom), ripe stone fruits, bergamot; (2°) chocolate, coffee liqueur, sweet pastry; (3°) vanilla brioche, pronounced raisins, dried figs, honey and caramelised nectarines / *palate*: fresh acidity, full mouthfeel, intensely flavoured, extremely long and pleasant finish of dried orange peel and dried flowers.

Comments: This is one of only two wines profiled in the book that has been made from grapes infected by noble rot. It's a fungus that can very occasionally attack ripe grapes, and, in normally sunny and dry terroirs like southern La Palma, rather than being disastrous can actually enhance water evaporation from the grape to concentrate acid, flavour and sugar. As well as creating lusciously concentrated sweet wines, noble rot can impart distinctive aromas, in this case probably the dried orange peel and honeyed stone fruits. Summing up: a delicious aged Malvasía Aromática made from grapes grown from an exceptional terroir during a special vintage.

Sommelier's recommendation: You've got to try this wine with the La Palma speciality *bienmesabe* – a dessert made of ground almonds, sugar, egg yolks, cinnamon, lemon zest and crushed biscuits.



MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA ESTELAR

Bodega: Teneguía, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco dulce gran reserva* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 1996

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Aromática

ARPICI: €€€€€+

Vinification: 14% abv, naturally sweet wine from late-harvest botrytised grapes, aged 180 months (that's right, 15 years!) in French oak barrels prior to bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: polished chestnut / *smell & taste*: (2°/3°) roasted Arabica coffee, dark chocolate, cinnamon, roasted walnuts, honey, raisins, marmalade / *palate*: bright acidity, rich and uber complex, exceptionally intense and with a luxuriously long finish.

Comments: Great grape variety, great vintage, great terroir, great winemaking. Put another way, what you get when the stars align. Teneguía's own description of this wine describes it as 'practically immortal' and 'almost spiritual'. Indeed – a tasting engraved on the tablets of my memory.

Sommelier's recommendation: Enjoy this very special wine on its own.



SABRO/GUAL DULCE

Bodega: Teneguía, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco dulce* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013

Grape(s): 50% Sabro, 50% Gual

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 16% abv, naturally sweet, late-harvest/sun-dried grapes, fermented in stainless steel.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* light copper / *smell & taste:* (1°) intensely floral (magnolia, jasmine and citrus blossom) and fruity (cooked apples and tropical fruits) / *palate:* moderately viscous mouthfeel with vibrant acidity, sweet finish full of ripe fruits drizzled with honey and then (surprisingly) sprinkled with dried herbs.

Comments: One of the most fascinating sweet wines of the Canary Islands. A nose and mouthfeel that is almost Moscatel-like, but with more acidity and a quickening dimension of spicy herbs. Idiosyncratic and highly original.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with a cheese platter or the traditional Palmero dessert, *frangollo* (millet flour, milk, eggs, sugar, lemon zest, cinnamon, raisins and almonds cooked up together and served drizzled with honey or palm honey).



LAS MACHUQUERAS

Bodega: Juan Matías Torres, Fuencaliente, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016

Grape(s): 100% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 13% abv, single-plot, 50 to 100+year-old vines, biodynamic winemaking, raised in chestnut foudres.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) vivid ocean spray and volcanic minerality, delicate aromas of wilted white flowers, hidden balsamic notes, smoke, whiff of spent gunpowder / *palate:* gentle acidity, but with energy from an emphatic salinity that extends into an extraordinarily haunting finish.

Comments: While this wine might be described as abstemious in terms of its provision of grape varietal aromas, it is positively *resplendent* in delivery of terroir. Opening with a theatrical puff from a smouldering fumarole, the wine then goes on, with greater drama still, to explain that although it may share the same picón soils as the neighbouring vineyards of Los Llanos Negros, the Las Machuqueras plot exists under much more tempestuous conditions. A truly incredible sense of stark, unrefined beauty.

Sommelier's recommendation: Magnificent with *atún encebollado* (tuna cooked in an onion sauce).



EL NÍSPERO ALBILLO

Bodega: El Níspero, Garafía, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016, 2017, 2018

Grape(s): 100% Albillo Criollo

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, fermented in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* brilliant straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) sharply citrus (lemon, bergamot, lime), juicy stone fruits (esp. nectarine), tart tropical fruits (passion fruit and melons), bright green leaves of parsley / *palate:* dazzling acidity, flavourful and smooth mouthfeel, with a lingering finish that presents a balance of varietal fruit and alisios-infused salinity.

Comments: This wine may represent the purest Albillo Criollo varietal expression on Earth. And *oh my!* What a grape it is. Its electrifying acidity and depth of aromatic potential give it, in my opinion, something of an edge over almost any other blanco seco joven when it comes to a refreshing but flavourful light wine to drink with dishes of fresh Canarian fish. Even when well chilled, its fruity aromas are pronounced and its texture mouth-watering.

Sommelier's recommendation: Try it with grilled *abadejo* (haddock).



VINO DE TEA

Bodega: El Níspero, Garafía, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *vino de tea* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2017

Grape(s): 80% Negramoll, 10% Listán Prieto, 10% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, macerated for up to 20 days in barrels of Canarian pine ('tea' wood), fermentation completed in stainless steel.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* intense scarlet / *smell & taste:* (1°) intriguing combination of tart and ripe red and black fruits (esp. red and black cherries); (2°) intensely balsamic (pine resin, menthol, eucalyptus), aromas of cigar box / *palate:* good acidity, good tannins and overall structure, medium body, with a long nostalgic aftertaste.

Comments: As far as Rodrigo and I know, you will not find a wine like this anywhere in the world but from the north of La Palma. While for the winemakers it represents a cherished memory of the past, this *vino de tea* example from El Níspero is also an exceptional red wine for consumers to explore. Its character will divide opinion, but it is surely a sensory experience not to be missed.

Sommelier's recommendation: A very good pairing with spicy chocolates or the chocolate-based Palmero dessert *Príncipe Alberto* (not to be confused with the plum-based Victorian classic, Prince Albert's pudding!).



VIÑARDA ALBILLO CRIOLLO ECOLÓGICO

Bodega: José David Rodríguez Pérez, Puntagorda, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Albillo Criollo

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, certified organic grapes fermented in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* brilliant straw yellow to lemon / *smell & taste:* (1°) highly aromatic, pronounced notes of stone fruits (esp. nectarines and apricots), water of asparagus, hint of freshly cut grass / *palate:* medium body and alcohol, typical charged acidity of the variety, finish that focuses on stone fruits but with a pleasing touch of bitter herbaceousness.

Comments: This wine is complex and incredibly fresh, and another example of the innate high calibre of Albillo Criollo. It was made by gifted young viticulturist and vintner **José David Rodríguez Pérez**, who has begun a new winemaking enterprise, Viñarda, with a laser-like focus on respecting the environment (via application of organic practices in both the vineyard and the winery), underpinned by an intense passion to conserve the winemaking traditions of his home in the north of La Palma. Can't wait to try his first vino de tea (made using grapes from the 2018 harvest).

Sommelier's recommendation: Simply perfect with *arbejas canarias compuestas* (Canarian pea stew).



VIÑARDA VIJARIEGO NEGRO

Bodega: José David Rodríguez Pérez, Puntagorda, La Palma

Appellation: DO La Palma

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2016

Grape(s): 100% Vijariego Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, fermented and aged in stainless steel (80%) and French oak (20%).

Tasting notes: *appearance:* light ruby red with violet reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) sour cherry, black cherry, hedgerow berries, peppery inorganic minerality, wet stones; (2°) smoky notes, hints of nutmeg and cinnamon; (3°) leather, damp weathered soils / *palate:* well-integrated tannins and good acidity, pleasingly restrained mouthfeel, charismatic finish of earthy volcanic minerality.

Comments: In search of a new red wine style for his island, José David Rodríguez Pérez was the first to bring El Hierro's Vijariego Negro to the high-altitude sites of the north of La Palma. It seems to be adapting very well to its new terroir. This wine is notably fresh and elegant, with a deft touch of oak that rounds out the body and adds just a lick of sweet spice. It is delicious and ready to drink now, but probably has the capacity to develop in bottle over the next 4 to 5 years. The only issue is that Vijariego Negro must stay on the vine for a long time to fully ripen, making it very hard to raise without chemical treatments. Rodríguez Pérez is hoping to overcome this within the next few years so that ultimately the entire Viñarda portfolio will be certified ecological.

Sommelier's recommendation: A magical combination with *átun* (tuna) stewed in *mojo rojo* (a red sauce made of peppers and paprika) with *papas hervidas* (boiled potatoes).



7

Lanzarote

HISTORY

The name 'Lanzarote' is thought to come from a Genoese sailor, Lancelotto Malocello, who came to the island in 1312 in search of his brothers who had disappeared without trace after leaving Europe to find a new trading route towards Asia. They were never seen again, but Lancelotto remained on the island, waiting in the care of the sympathetic Guanches for almost 20 years. The Europeans that followed would come for reasons that were not so benign.

First, the island suffered from Castilian slaving raids in 1385 and 1393 that seized hundreds of natives and left the remaining population utterly terrified. In 1402, a Norman knight named Jean de Béthencourt arrived from La Rochelle heading a large expeditionary force, and persuaded the frightened islanders to allow him to build forts to protect the island from further attacks from sea. The Guanches, relieved that the foreigners were not hostile, actually helped in the construction of the strongholds, but all the while Béthencourt was being sponsored by Henry III of Castile with the intention of conquest. Once Béthencourt's true intentions were revealed and he was ready to push beyond his initial beachhead, the Guanches of Lanzarote, realising their naïvety and aghast at their now defenceless position, had no choice but to bow to the Castilian Crown: Lanzarote thus became the first island of the archipelago to undergo full-scale colonisation by Europeans.

The settlers that arrived set to work on the land to produce the foodstuffs of the standard European diet. Though the central plains proved highly conducive to cereal farming and animal grazing, the arid and constantly windy conditions of Lanzarote precluded all attempts at viticulture. Wine, therefore, had to be imported. At first it came from the mainland, but later it flowed from the other Canary Islands when, once conquered, they were found to be more favourable for grape-growing. In return, the Lanzaroteños traded what products they had – wheat, barley, maize, goat meat, cheese, rabbit skins, salt, and even slaves (now captured in nearby Africa).

Everything changed in 1730 when *El Diablo* appeared; a volcanic eruption – Timanfaya – began in the centre of Lanzarote and lasted for six years. To the horror of the populace, the island's central plains – which had become the breadbasket of the Canary Islands – were destroyed, completely covered by lava and picón. But despair turned to hope as the locals realised that their agricultural possibilities had not been destroyed but rather radically altered – the volcanic debris was rich with nutrients, and most importantly, being highly hygroscopic, was far better able to collect and hold the island's scarce moisture. Dig some pits and build some short walls to protect from the wind – and hey presto! vines could thrive. Thus the wine industry of Lanzarote was born, phoenix-style, out of the volcanic ashes. Even before Timanfaya's eruption had died down, vines were being planted in earnest. But the timing of the rise of viticulture on Lanzarote – the last island of the archipelago to grow its own grapes – coincided unfortunately with a period in which the worldwide consumption of sweet Canary was in steep decline.

Meanwhile, in Tenerife, a structural shift was under way to manufacture a different style of beverage that could still be sold into the New World and to the British, both now demanding fortified wines. Tenerife had plenty of base wine in the form of vidueño, but the process of fortification also requires brandy (*aguardiente* in Spanish), and there was simply not enough distilling hardware or grapes in Tenerife to make both. At first, the aguardiente was sourced from outside the Canaries, but as volumes increased, Tenerife's wine traders turned to their island neighbours to provide this essential raw material. Lanzarote responded, and its new grape harvests were sent to the port of Arrecife, where state-of-the-art distilleries were built in quayside warehouses to make aguardiente for onward shipment to Tenerife.

Canarian 'False Madeira' and Captain Cook

In the 18th century, the British began to develop a preference for fortified red wines, which they acquired from Madeira and Oporto in such volumes that prices ballooned. In Tenerife, entrepreneurial wine traders sensed an opportunity. Using aguardiente from Lanzarote and low-cost red wine imported in bulk from mainland Spain, they found it possible to manufacture a cheap facsimile of the Portuguese wines by simply fortifying and staining their white vidueños. It worked, and as the

trade in these False Madeiras grew, red grapes were planted widely throughout the north-east of Tenerife to fully domesticate the supply chain.

The ever-pragmatic British Navy saw False Madeiras as a way to bring down costs, and none other than Captain James Cook championed the economics of this new product, even though he was not exactly enthusiastic about its quality. While taking supplies in Santa Cruz on his third (and final) voyage to the Pacific, he says:

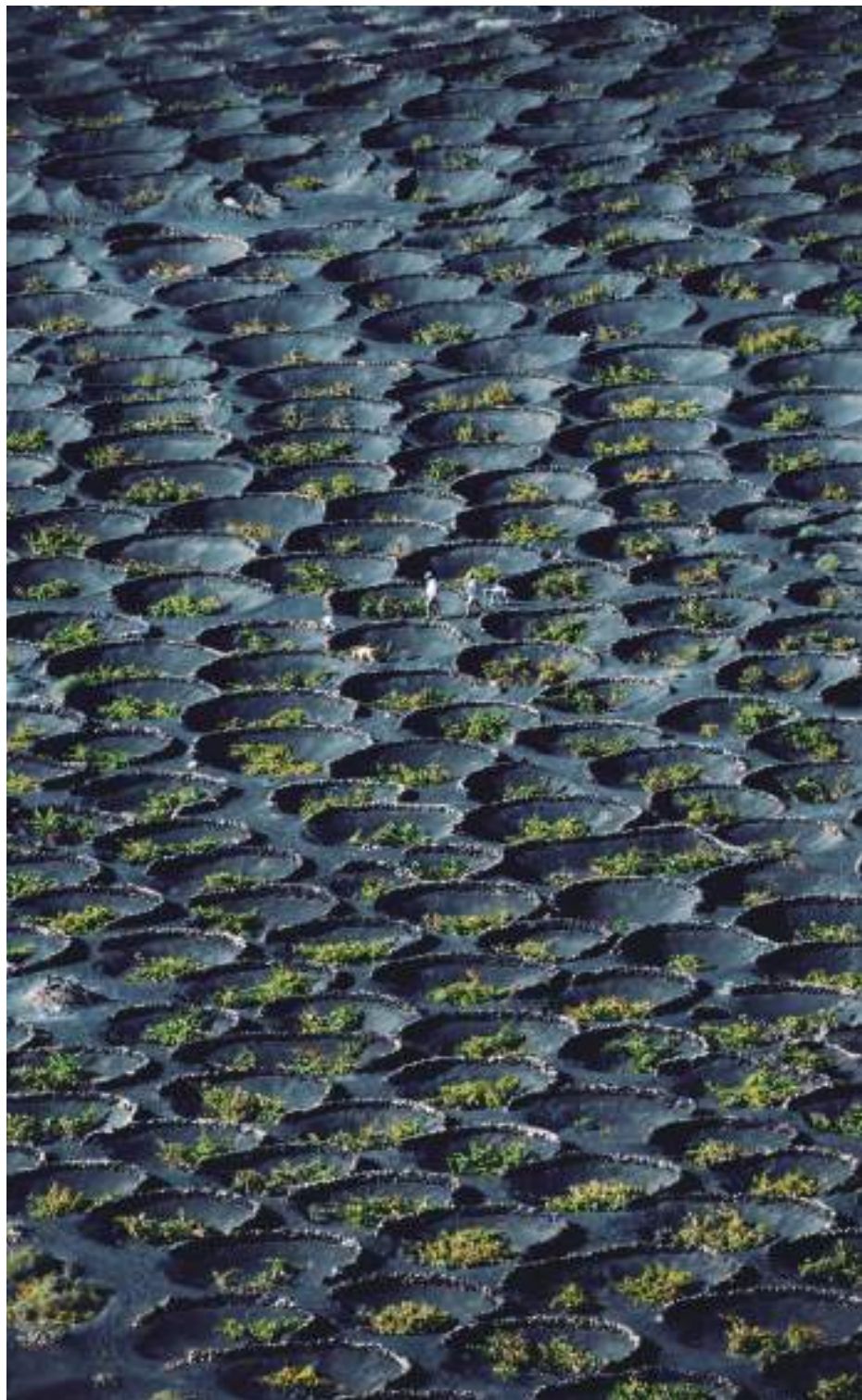
Upon the whole Teneriffe is preferable to Madeira for a Ship to touch at that is bound on a long Voyage, but the Wine of the former according to my taste, is as much inferior to that of the latter as small beer is to strong; its true the difference of prices is considerable the best Teneriffe Wine was sold for £12 a pipe whereas the best Madeira is seldom under £27.

The Journals of Captain James Cook, The Voyage of the *Resolution* and *Discovery*, Thursday 1st August 1776

As documented in the comprehensive study *Historia del Vino de Lanzarote* by Juan José Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourt, for several decades after Timanfaya there was explosive planting of vineyards on Lanzarote that was all used for spirit production. The new volcanic ground which covered most of the centre of the island had no roads, so the transport to Arrecife of all the heavy bunches of grapes over this rough and arid terrain could only be achieved by using camels brought from north Africa (their descendants are the ones that tourists ride today). Moreover, the business of distillation of wine into aguardiente, which requires fire, reached such proportions that the locals started suffering a serious shortage of burnable material for cooking and many of Lanzarote's indigenous trees and shrubs were lost.

In 1769 an unexpected new tax levied on the import of spirits to Tenerife caused the surging aguardiente demand to wobble. The government of Lanzarote, desperate to find a way of protecting its new grape-growing industry, applied new trade freedoms to promote the production and export of wine and spirits from Lanzarote direct to America. In response, the Lanzaroteños built several wineries at their vineyards, including El Grifo, which was founded in 1775 and remains the oldest bodega still in operation in the Canary Islands.

Continued aguardiente supply to Tenerife and exports of Lanzaroteño wine and liquor to the New World bridged commerce to near the end of the 18th century, when a series of exciting new export products replaced wine as the focus of the international traders of Arrecife. The first was barilla, a salt-tolerant plant of Lanzarote which, it was found, could be used to create high-quality soda ash (sodium carbonate) for industrial soap and glass production. Next was orchilla, a lichen which could be collected at great risk to life from the cliffs of Lanzarote and which could produce a natural purple-blue dye. And finally, there was cochineal, a



Mexican insect that could live on imported prickly pear cacti, harvested to produce a bright crimson dye called carmine. By the end of the 19th century all three products had been usurped on the international market by cheaper alternatives, but the wealth that this 100-year economic cycle had generated doubled the population of Lanzarote and created the richest community of the Canaries.

During this century of wealth, the viticultural sector turned inwards and Lanzarote started drinking its own wine. Winemaking methods improved to enable production of the various styles of wines for which the well-heeled populace had developed a taste. Interestingly, this golden era played out at a time when the other islands' wine industries were in trouble, as international demand for Canarian wine (of any kind) had dwindled. Furthermore, when devastating plagues of oidio and mildiu began to strike the other islands' grape harvests from 1852, Lanzarote's arid vineyards were spared, so its bodegas ramped up activity to produce as much wine as possible to sell to its neighbours.

To this day, viticulture on Lanzarote is still prolific. **DO Lanzarote** makes more wine than any of the other Canary Island DOs, and total island production is second only to Tenerife. Domestic demand for drinkable holiday wines is now the backbone of the trade – today several times as much wine is consumed in the hotels, restaurants and bars as the island can make. That said, with the fierce competition brought by globalisation, margins on these simple wines are painfully thin. One way the bodegas manage is by receiving EU subsidies, which primarily come in the form of maintenance grants for the incredibly beautiful and totally unique landscape of Lanzarote's vineyards, which are rightly viewed as a historical treasure requiring careful preservation for future generations to enjoy.

Globalisation has presented a grand opportunity too. The growing international community of wine enthusiasts has begun to seek out new tastes and wines with unique and memorable characteristics. Connoisseurs will pay good money for an *experience*; and to achieve this a wine must be delicious, of course, but must also have an intriguing story tied to extraordinary terroir. The best Lanzarote wines are right on the money, and today's increasing focus towards higher-quality and higher-return products may well mark the beginning of another golden age for La Isla de los Volcanes.

A PORTRAIT OF LANZAROTE

The popularity of Lanzarote as a holiday destination is based on its never-ending sunshine and glorious palm-fringed beaches of soft golden sand – but away from the coastal tourist centres like Playa Blanca and Puerto del Carmen the magnificent desolation of its volcanic backcountry has a stark beauty all its own.

There are dozens of volcanoes on the island and many of them are still semi-active, occasionally smoking and hissing to remind us that here our Earth's crust is thin to the point of barely containing *El Diablo* and his fiery chthonic monsters. The Parque Nacional de Timanfaya covers nearly a third of Lanzarote and was formed by the last really big volcanic breach which took place over six years in the 18th century. Although this large area of erupted lava and ash is now nearly 300 years old, temperatures can still reach 600°C just 10 metres below the surface, and plants have for the most part been unable to regain any significant foothold.

The blacks, reds, yellows, oranges and browns of the petrified volcanic outpourings dominate the scenery, though if you are lucky you might spot an isolated dash of green where a fig tree or fern has managed to spring up. In keeping with the natural minimalism, the park is untouched by humanity apart from one narrow sightseeing road and an architecturally attractive visitor centre. This respectful showcasing of nature is a trademark of Lanzarote, owed in large part to the philosophy of César Manrique (1919–1992), a local artist, architect and environmentalist who, amongst other things, helped to establish careful environmental planning and cleanliness codes for the island. Manrique also designed a symbol for the park – a devil wielding a quindent (a 5-pronged trident) – which has become the instantly recognisable emblem of La Isla de los Volcanes.



The principal wine areas of Lanzarote, which border Timanfaya and were created by the same volcanic event, are fascinating and spectacular in a different way. The region known as La Geria is also covered with relatively fresh volcanic ash and lava, but has been shaped into a uniquely beautiful terroir. Large tracts of the otherwise hostile and barren volcanic desert have been geoengineered back into life by the grape growers of centuries past, who dug tens of thousands of shallow pits, each with a semicircular stone wall 60–70 cm high to act as windbreaks and to allow vines to come into contact with just enough nutrients and water to survive. The scenery is out of this world. If humans ever terraform the moon, this may be what extra-terrestrial viticulture will look like.

The vineyards of Lanzarote are nothing short of ingenious and are integrated with the natural landscape in such a way that the harsh and chaotic expanse of regolith is both respected and made capable of producing an incredible livelihood for a good fraction of the island's populace. Grape-growing here is about as far from easy as you can get, but truly great wines are born when tough terroirs are matched by dedication, hard work and imagination.



GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Lanzarote is the north-easternmost of the major Canary Islands – the coast of Morocco is only 125 km away. Lanzarote's surface is just over 900 km², the fourth largest Canary island, and is somewhat elongated in shape, with its major axis striking north-east to south-west. Although this is overall still the most volcanically active island, it is the oldest of the archipelago, having breached the surface of the Atlantic Ocean about 15 million years ago.

Lanzarote is exceptionally flat compared to the western Canary Islands. The average height of its relief is under 400 masl, and its highest point touches just 670 masl. For comparison, of the other significant wine-producing islands, La Gomera is the next flattest but still reaches 1487 masl. Multiple horseshoe-shaped volcanic cinder cones and craters do provide some features to the landscape, but the general lack of geographic barriers that can impede the force of the alisios and sea breezes mean that a near-constant wind is a distinguishing factor of the island and its agricultural practices.

The oceanic trade wind, laden with moisture, is from the north by north-east, and is most powerful during the summer months. Lanzarote's humidity is typically high, but occasionally a hot, dry wind will blow over from Africa, causing the temperatures to rocket (to 40°C in some instances) and the humidity to crash. This is the *calima*, which, more often than not, will be accompanied by a sandstorm that will make the sky glow an ominous hazy-orange and cause the air to smell of the Sahara. When this happens the grape growers get very nervous, not only because of the risk of drought and heat damage, but also because insects – including the devastating locusts – can accompany the winds. Thankfully, most calimas occur during the winter months, when the vines are dormant and less likely to be harmed.

Although humidity is typically high, there is no geographic relief to push the air up to cool and make clouds, so it rarely rains on Lanzarote. In fact, the island is technically a desert, and is the driest and the warmest of the entire archipelago. Over the course of the year, and apart from the occasional African heatwave, the temperature generally stays within a pleasantly warm range of 18–24°C. The scarce precipitation, however, is not evenly distributed across the year. It almost always comes in the winter, and when it does it can rain cats and dogs. In a few minutes, inches of water can fall to earth only to be entirely lost to the ocean through a web of barrancos.

Almost unbelievably, in spite of the extreme aridity, the island manages to meet the water availability conditions for viticulture thanks to the volcanic debris laid down during the eruption of 1730–36. Helped by some very clever landscaping, the volcanic picón covering the underlying soils retains enough of the moisture

carried over by the Atlantic trade winds for vines to be grown at low densities. The daily thermal contrast – which can reach up to 17°C – helps too, with moisture from morning dew retained and given back to the vines during the heat of the day. The exceptional terroir is completed by the quality of the underlying soils, which are mostly reddish, textured clays of low organic content, optimal macronutrients, and some carbonate that gives slight alkalinity to the pH. These deeper and older horizons where the vines take root maintain a near-constant temperature, which helps the whole plant to manage the variability that it must endure above ground. The protective and life-giving blanket of picón helps in yet another way – it prevents the growth of almost all other vegetation, and is so prized that it has even been spread artificially in areas where the volcano did not rain down its gift to viticulture.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE LANZAROTE

www.dolanzarote.com



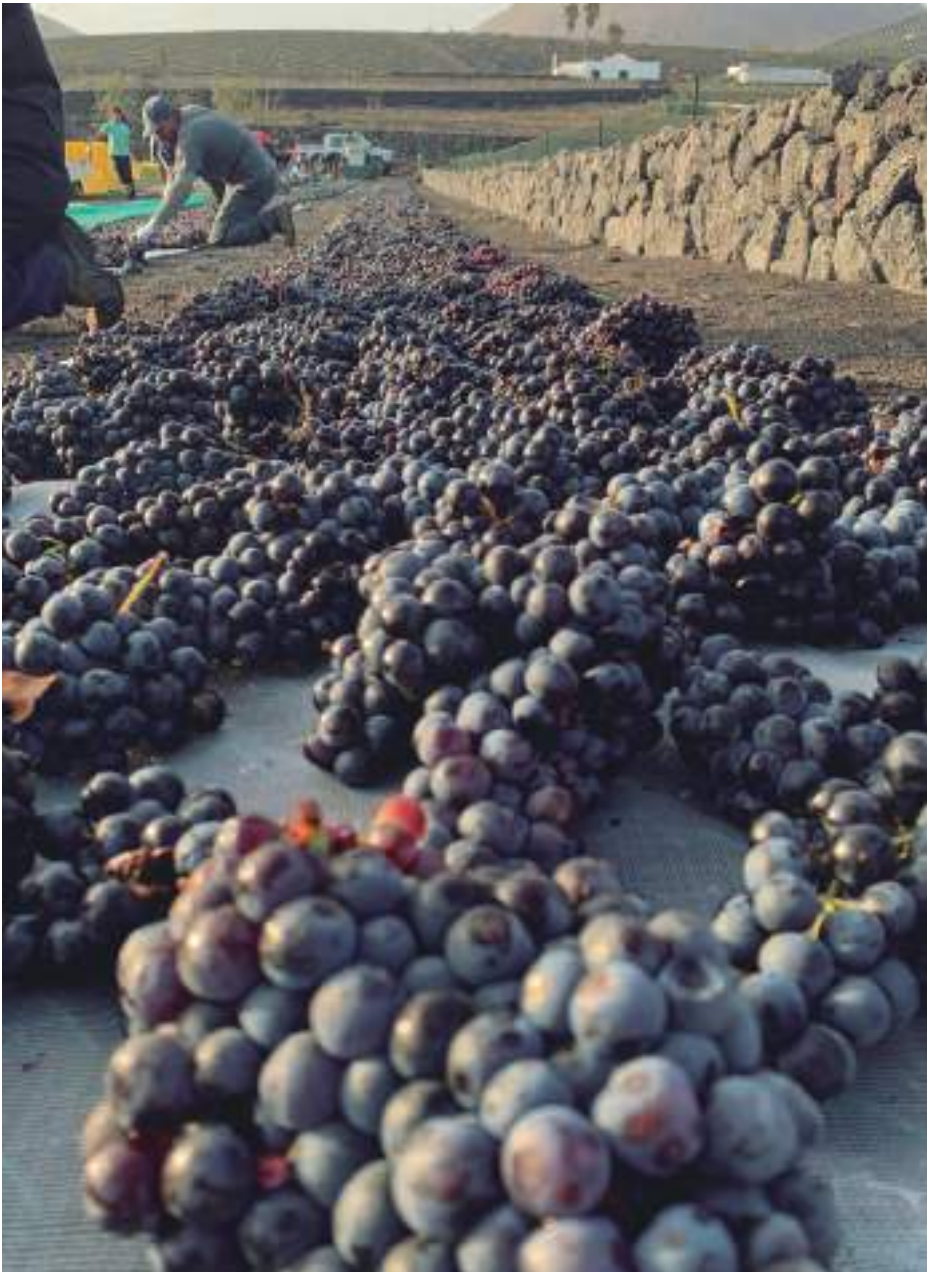
DO Lanzarote was incorporated in 1994. Since that time the control board has worked tirelessly – and successfully – to help to improve the grape harvesting, processing and wine bottling practices in an effort to enhance the overall quality of production. Today, DO Lanzarote is the biggest appellation of the Canary Islands (as measured by annual output) and its brand is one of the most highly regarded of the archipelago, if not all of Spain.

Over the five years from 2013 to 2017, DO Lanzarote wine production averaged about 2 million litres per annum, even though there has been wild climate-induced fluctuation over the past few years: 2016 was the worst year on record, with only half a million litres made; and this, conversely, followed the most productive year ever, 2015, when 3 million litres were bottled. Lanzarote's grape growers and winemakers are very worried about climate change – both its unpredictability and the overall warming trend that has emerged in the 21st century. Unlike the more mountainous western Canary Islands, Lanzarote's low-altitude viticulture has nowhere to retreat to if temperatures rise beyond what the vines can tolerate.

No less than 95% of the wine Lanzarote's 18 bodegas make is consumed within the Canary Islands. The remaining 5% is exported – a fraction that seems set to increase as people around the world become aware of Lanzarote's world-class wines and unique terroir.

The DO, which covers the entire island, is divided into three: La Geria in the

south; Masdache in the centre; and Ye-Lajares near the idyllic town of Haria in the far north. Though all are subject to the hot, dry and windy conditions that characterise Lanzarote, suffer low yields, and conduct methods of viticulture that preclude mechanisation, each subzone has managed to find a strategy for successful winegrowing.



The **La Geria** vineyard area, located between the towns of Yaiza and Tías, is where the extraordinary viticultural landscape of Lanzarote reaches its maximal expression. Here, the vines are planted in the centre of funnel-shaped pits scooped out of the thick blanket of picón that was laid down during the volcanic eruptions of 1730–36. Some of these structures, known locally as *hoyos*, are almost 3 metres deep, where the grape growers have dug deep enough to find the underlying soils. Each hoyo contains one to three vines, many of which are now over 50 years old and possess highly complex root systems. Around the perimeter of each hoyo is a short (60–70 cm high) semicircular lava-stone wall called a *soco*, created to act as a windbreak to defend the ripening grapes from the constant drying breeze. Each vine cluster is separated from the next by a distance of about 3 to 4 metres, making the planting density here the lowest of the entire Canary Islands. As well as the work to care for the vines, the maintenance of the hoyos and socos is carried out manually too, which further raises production costs.

Farther north, in the vineyards of **Masdache** and **Ye-Lajares**, the use of systems of trenches and long stone walls called *zanjas perimenterales* is more common. These areas are farther away from the eruptions of 1730–36 and so the layer of picón is much thinner. In fact, in many instances the layer of picón has been imported and spread by hand. The vines still need to be planted in the soil beneath the volcanic ash, but this can be done without needing to dig deep pits, allowing a planting configuration that permits vines to be planted about 1.5 metres apart in neat rows, thereby increasing yields.

In recent years DO Lanzarote has recognised that the peculiarities of its vineyard landscape are almost as valuable as the outstanding wines it can make. The hoyos, socos and *zanjas perimenterales* require constant maintenance, making these vineyards amongst the hardest to manage in the world. Fortunately, there are now various government-backed programmes to help support the physical preservation of this landscape, and to attract the attention of wine tourism, a booming activity which promises a particularly bright future for Lanzarote.

GRAPE VARIETIES

The dominant grape of Lanzarote by far is **Malvasía Volcánica**, which accounts for some two-thirds of the island's wine production. It is such an important and characteristic variety that each year in early November there is a wine festival on Lanzarote called Malvasía Wine Week, to celebrate the release of the new vintage. The grape has become uniquely well adapted to the terroirs of Lanzarote, and provides wines that as well as possessing a perfect balance of volcanic minerality, salinity and acidity, present a distinctive suite of aromas that differentiates the white wines of the island. The variety is low-yielding, which is not exactly ideal given the

already extremely low planting density of the vineyards, but it is unsurpassable in its ability to showcase the extraordinary terroir.

Moscatel, Diego and Listán Blanco are the next most common white grapes – in that order. The last two are most commonly used to make dry wines, with **Diego**, a late-maturing variety, standing out for its crisp acidity and apple-like freshness. Moscatel, as is common elsewhere throughout the archipelago, is usually grown for the production of floral sweet wines.

Red grape production is only about 20% of the island's total, but when done well can provide fruit of the highest quality. Listán Negro is the dominant variety, and although it is grown commonly throughout the Canary Islands, here the peculiarities of the climate and the terroir have conditioned the vines to produce something different – the grapes produce a notably mellower wine of softer structure and more warmth. In recent times, some wineries have begun to experiment with the growing and inclusion of French grapes, particularly Syrah, which has resulted in a surge in interest as it has become possible to create wines that resemble rich, premium international blends.

MALVASÍA VOLCÁNICA

Long suspected by the locals, confirmation that the dominant grape of Lanzarote is a unique variety of Malvasía has been provided by recent genetic fingerprinting.¹ Since it is grown almost exclusively in the extreme volcanic terroirs of this most easterly Canarian DO, it is now commonly known throughout the archipelago by its differentiating name: Malvasía Volcánica.² DNA mapping¹ indicates that it originated from a crossing of two of the other prestigious varieties grown in the Canaries – Malvasía Aromática and Marmajuelo – although it is unclear if this occurred in the archipelago or mainland Europe.

The grape itself is in many ways like Malvasía Aromática, being small and pale gold, and tasting almost identical to that of its parent when eaten off the vine – deliciously floral and juicy. However, as was noticed over the years, the Malvasía vines of Lanzarote do not suffer nearly as much from viruses and fungi.^{1,3} Though this was initially thought to be due to the nature of Lanzarote's terroir – ultra-dry and well drained – it is now accepted that the Malvasía Volcánica grape is

1 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

2 Cabello F, Ortiz J, Muñoz-Organero G, Rodríguez-Torres I, Barba A, Rubio de Miguel C, García S and Sáiz R (2011) *Variedades de vid en España*. Agrícola Española, Madrid. ISBN: 9788492928132

3 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Malvasía Volcánica (and references therein)

naturally more disease-resistant than Malvasía Aromática, a characteristic that it probably acquired via Marmajuelo (the only white grape of the Canaries that was not impacted by the devastating 19th century outbreaks of oidio).

Wines made from Malvasía Volcánica have good acidity and typically show aromas of white flowers, citrus and stone fruits, white currants and herbal nuances, but the intensity tends to be more subtle than those of Malvasía Aromática, as the latter's name would suggest. A feature of Malvasía Volcánica, which seems to have been inherited directly from Marmajuelo, is its glycerine-like mouthfeel, which provides it with an opulent body no matter what the style of wine made. Though many bodegas on Lanzarote make the historically famous Malvasía dulces, production is today dominated by elaborations of dry or semiseco wines, which seem particularly well suited to Malvasía Volcánica's more subtle flavouring. At their best, the dry wines of the famous La Geria vineyards are wonderfully framed by a striking saltiness and enriching volcanic minerality that vividly translates the spectacular terroir into a beauty it seems you can taste.

DIEGO

Thick-skinned, late-ripening Diego is a white-green grape most notably used in Lanzarote to make excellent dry white wines, and possesses qualities that might one day lead to the elaboration of high-quality sparkling wines here in the Canary Islands.



Today, the archipelago's plantings of this grape are almost all located in just three of its islands. In La Palma and Tenerife, where it can be called Vijariego Blanco or Bujariego, Diego is grown primarily in the higher reaches of southern Fuencaliente and Valle de Güímar in vineyards that border the coronal pine forest.⁴ On these islands, it is most commonly blended as a minority constituent with other varieties grown at lower altitudes, to enhance acidity. In Lanzarote, which produces two-thirds of the Canary Islands' Diego,⁵ it is most commonly used to elaborate varietal wine of markedly different character to those made from the island's dominant Malvasía Volcánica.

Recent analysis has found that Diego is genetically identical to Vigiriega Común de Huelva⁴ – a (now) very rare variety of mainland Spain. Originally, however, Vigiriega Común de Huelva was present across large swathes of southern Spain, and especially in Andalusia (hence 'Huelva', which is a town just up the coast from the port city of Cádiz, from where this grape probably set sail to the Canary Islands in the late 15th or early 16th century).⁶ In the 19th century, phylloxera decimated Vigiriega Común de Huelva in mainland Spain⁷ and so, apart from the Canaries, this grape now exists solely in the upper Sierra de la Contraviesa mountains of La Alpujarra, near Granada.⁸

When not being attacked by phylloxera, Diego is actually quite hardy, being generally resistant to fungi and most other common grape diseases. This is largely to do with the fact that the grapes have unusually thick skins, but also because the pulp in them remains high in acid and sugars as the bunches mature, thereby acting as a natural preservative. Another factor that keeps Diego free from disease is that its characteristic long reddish-coloured vine shoots stand quite erect, allowing air to circulate around the large clusters of grapes that form and keeping the bunches above and away from ground-dwelling pests. Even when pests can get to the grapes, they don't seem to like eating them. Apparently, the many rabbits of Lanzarote (there are so many that the people of the island are affectionately nicknamed *conejeros*, rabbit catchers) leave Diego grapes alone in favour of the more accessible and less tangy/chewy Malvasía Aromática. These features allowed Diego to be the first grape variety of Lanzarote to grow with such minimal usage of fungicides and pesticides as to be certified ecological.

4 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Vijariego Blanco, Diego (and references therein)

5 2018 data provided by the Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria (ICCA). Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca. Gobierno de Canarias

6 Clemente y Rubio S (1807) *Ensayo sobre las variedades de la vid comun que vegetan en Andalucía con un índice etimológico y tres listas de plantas en que se caracterizan varias especies nuevas*. Imprenta de Villalpando, Madrid

7 [es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vigiriega_\(uva\)](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vigiriega_(uva))

8 Robinson J, Harding J and Vouillamoz J (2012) *Wine grapes. A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, including their origins and flavours*. Allen Lane (Penguin Books), London. ISBN: 9781846144462; ECCO (HarperCollins), New York. ISBN: 9780062206367

Diego is usually harvested in September and sometimes even early October, making it the last grape to arrive at the bodegas of Lanzarote each vintage. This late date is quite remarkable, given how far south the Canaries are and how hot and flat Lanzarote is, and says much about Diego's capacity to remain fresh late into the growing season. Unfortunately, this late-ripening cycle exposes Diego to its only real Achilles heel here in the Canary Islands – the risk of late summer heatwaves, which can ruin the entire crop within days.

When grown successfully, because of its high total acidity, Diego can produce young dry wines that are vibrant and fresh. On the nose, aromas are subtle but complex, ranging from zesty green apple and limes to floral notes of sweet alyssum and a certain herbaceousness reminiscent of bitter fennel. In the mouth, Diego has a very distinctive passage. It announces itself with a sharp and steely bite, but behind this follows with sophisticated layers of flavouring and a long, tingly, thirst-quenching finish. Interestingly, when ecological grapes are used, the wines tend to present a more pronounced dimension of soil-derived minerality and salinity. The best vintages age very well, trading some of their radiance for more structure and an even richer suite of sweet, savoury and bitter nuances as the wine evolves in the bottle.

With its juice so rich in sugars and acidity, and with its dry wines already showing attractive results when bottle-aged, Diego may be particularly well suited for the production of Canarian sparkling wine. Indeed, in mainland Spain the remnants of this grape which still survive on the old metamorphosed geologies of the Sierra de la Contraviesa are used for just this purpose. It certainly would be interesting to see how Diego might sparkle when grown from younger, more vibrant, volcanic soils. Besides, an earlier harvest (to enhance acidity for sparkling wine production) might also usefully eliminate the menace of the August and September heatwaves that have become more common in recent years.

STYLES OF WINE

All styles of wine are made on Lanzarote, including some very exciting espumosos. To suit the modern palate and demands of the holiday market, however, the vast majority today are young seco or semiseco still white wines. These are made primarily from Malvasía Volcánica, the variety perfectly adapted to the soil-climatic conditions of the island. This grape can produce wines with harmonious volcanic minerality, acidity and flavours that will help you to form firm and pleasant memories of drinking in the sun. To maximise the expression of the crisp primary aromas, many bodegas target harvests at the exact moment when the grapes are deemed to have achieved ripeness, followed up with cold fermentation

to preserve the freshness. If successful, these young Malvasía Volcánica wines will be highly fragrant with white flowers, dried herbs and ripe stone fruits. Adding to their pleasing freshness, they will have good acidity and a long, dry finish with an intriguing hint of nuttiness. When made in an semiseco or semidulce style, Malvasía Volcánica wines will have all of the aromas mentioned above, but with more intense fruitiness and a hint of honey. In these, the good acidity beautifully balances the sweetness.

Even when young and with low alcohol content, Malvasía Volcánica wines can have a gentle, warming, glyceric mouthfeel, which is considered a desirable varietal expression. If you prefer your white wines with a light body, just make sure your Malvasía Volcánica is drunk well chilled and you should find it most agreeable. Alternatively, you could try a wine from Lanzarote made from a different grape: the



other outstanding young white wines of Lanzarote are made from Diego. Though Diego is later-ripening, its wines are paler and lighter-bodied, and have aromas that are markedly less intense than those of Malvasía Volcánica. But at its best, Diego possesses a certain elegance of flavour, to the point where the fruitiness can seem cleaner and brighter than those of its illustrious rival. In the mouth Diego is fresh and smooth, with zippy acidity and a very tasty, persistent finish – a terrific choice to accompany a light lunch or a starter.

Mature full-bodied dry whites are available too. Malvasía Volcánica, in particular, has proved to be well suited to oak and bottle ageing. Some of the best are created when fermentation takes place in new Bordeaux-style barrels made of French



and American oak. The wines are kept for several months on their lees, then they undergo bâtonnage to enhance their savoury flavours before clarification, and are filtered before bottling. These wines will be intense yellow to golden in appearance, and are well structured with mineral notes and smoky tones against a background of strong and persistent ripe fruit.

Further proving its versatility, Malvasía Volcánica can also be used to produce outstanding sparkling wines following the *méthode traditionnelle*. These wines are dry and refreshing, and possess all the primary fresh fruit and floral aromas typical of the variety in a clean and crisp style, but with the added savoury tones of baked bread which provides an additional dimension to the personality. When done well, bubbles provide a fine, strong initial burst but will present a constant crown to your flute as you sip the experience.

The once-dominant sweet white wines still form a significant part of production and are made either with Malvasía Volcánica or Moscatel, or a combination of the two, and may be naturally sweet (by sun-drying grapes on or off the vine) or fortified. The most classical are the warming, smoky-amber-coloured, naturally sweet Malvasías, which tend to have complex aromas of herbs (e.g. fennel and mint), white flowers, orange peel and ripe tropical fruits such as pineapple, but typically also display rich and persistent nutty aromas that denote an oxidised origin. Many are made by employing the solera system of ageing, best known for its application to make sherry in mainland Spain. The solera process involves fractional blending in such a way that the finished product is a mixture of wines from different vintages that can stretch back a century or more, such as the famous Canari wine of Bodegas El Grifo.

Also very characteristic of Lanzarote, and highly appreciated both inside and outside the island, are the dessert wines made from the Moscatel grape. These can also be assembled via soleras, and when they are, they tend to be amber, generously aromatic and well balanced. The best of these will present sumptuously dense notes of honey and dried apricots against a background of pastry, nuts and figs from their oxidative ageing. Some wineries have obtained a much lighter (and paler) style that focuses on the preservation of the primary aromas of the grape by harvesting earlier and by avoiding contact with oxygen. This fresh face of Moscatel is characterised by glorious notes of lychee, blossom, grape and rosewater, and with the acidity of an early harvest the overall sensation can be one of fresh, sweet nectar.

Lanzarote reds, in general, are wines of excellent quality and structure. They are most commonly made from hand-picked and hand-sorted Listán Negro bunches, but there is an exciting new trend towards the inclusion of Syrah. When made in a young style, wines are usually cherry red, clean and bright, with aromas of red fruits on a mineral background. The mouthfeel of Lanzarote red wines is highly distinctive, being particularly soft and warm. When carbonic maceration

is applied, the colour of the wines becomes more vivid, fruit fragrances become more intense, and the smoothness of the palate is enhanced further to become glossy or even velvety in the best years. Many bodegas now ferment and age some of their best red wine in oak barrels, which infuses mature touches of wood into the already delicious juice. Those wines that contain a component of Syrah will display darker fruit aromas such as blackberry and plum, as well as adding some liquorice, spice and floral nuances (typical of Syrah when grown in a hot climate), and will probably have a firmer palate. Whilst it is true that there is some discomfort amongst the wine community of the Canary Islands regarding the rise of Syrah, it is becoming increasingly difficult to argue against the fact that this French grape seems to be very well suited to several of the archipelago's terroirs, particularly those that prevail on Lanzarote.

Another trend of late has been increased production and consumption of fresh rosé wines, mirroring the rising popularity of this style around the world. Here in Lanzarote, the old workhorse Listán Negro is used and is clearly well suited to the task, producing light and fruity pink wines that at their best make a deliciously cheerful drink of ripe strawberries, raspberries and roses, with just a hint of peppery minerality. A few sparkling versions are made, too, and are perhaps the perfect thirst-quencher when drunk chilled in defiance of a hot calima.

BODEGAS

EL GRIFO

Wines of history made great through research and development

www.elgrifo.com

Located in the municipality of San Bartolomé, and within the Protected Landscape of La Geria, El Grifo has an unbroken history of wine production going back to 1775, making it the oldest bodega in the Canary Islands and one of the oldest wineries of Spain. Many consider it to be the flagship bodega of Lanzarote and perhaps of the whole archipelago. Certainly, it is an extremely large and very well-run commercial enterprise, targeting both wine tourism and international wine connoisseurs, but the eminence of El Grifo has been achieved primarily through being at the forefront of technological innovation. For example, it was the first bodega of Lanzarote to bottle its wines (1935) and use stainless steel tanks (1981), and it was the first bodega of the Canary Islands to manufacture sparkling wine using the *méthode traditionnelle* (1986).

The owners, brothers **Juan José** and **Fermín Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourt**, are the fifth generation of the family that has owned the bodega since 1880. Under their stewardship the old cellar has been converted into a charming wine museum, and an impressive new vinification facility has been hewn out of the volcanic bedrock to permit, amongst other things, temperature-controlled fermentations away from the relentless Lanzaroteño sun. As far as winemaking hardware is concerned, no expense has been spared.

Excellent guided tours (in several languages) are offered that will take you through the new bodega, its fascinating vineyards and the museum. Highlights include tree-like centenary Moscatel vines growing in *chabocos* (8-foot-deep pits created by igniting gunpowder in the fissures of old lava fields), the bodega's epic palm tree (which is almost as old as the Timanfaya eruption and is the tallest and oldest on the island),⁹ and the original 1986 César Manrique artistic work that became the classic label for El Grifo's semidulce – his favourite wine. Manrique, a family friend of the Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourts, also designed the griffin that is the instantly recognisable brand of El Grifo.

The 1986 Manrique hangs in the bodega's extensive wine library, which is a magnet for scholars, being one of the best places to delve into the details about the 500-year history of the wines of the Canary Islands. The existence of the library further speaks to the dedication of the current owners to preserve knowledge and promote research into the archipelago's winemaking tradition. In fact, Juan José Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourt has himself been at the forefront of research and has published various scholarly works on the wine history of Lanzarote, many of which have been invaluable sources of information for this book.

In the last decade, in an effort to further raise the bar the bodega has invested in the establishment of a multidisciplinary viticultural and wine-processing research and development group, and has launched several collaborations with top institutes in France. Current programmes include planting Vijariego Negro, growing in-house fermentation yeasts and eliminating the use of SO₂ in the winemaking process. Led by oenologist **Jorge Rodríguez**, who took up the reins from **Tomás Mesa** in 2018, El Grifo's pursuit of excellence continues to bear much fruit in the form of international recognition at many of the world's important wine competitions.

As you might expect from the foremost bodega in Lanzarote, Malvasía Volcánica is El Grifo's most important grape variety, and is used to produce secos, semidulces, dulces and espumosos. The seco and semidulce Malvasía Collection wines, which use hand-sorted grapes and undergo careful winemaking processes, are excellent and by far the most economically important products of the bodega; but it is the

⁹ Sadly, the palm fell in July 2019, finally succumbing to Lanzarote's relentless winds.

Canari dulce that is the most iconic and easily the most celebrated wine of the bodega, and of Lanzarote. This wine is made using a solera that incorporates only the best vintages, when the Malvasía Volcánica is picked a little early to preserve acidity and dried in the sun for five days prior to vinification. Canari is bottled about once every four years, and by convention, the label carries the most recent vintage to have been added to the solera. At the time of writing, the El Grifo Canari on the market is a coupage of the 1956, 1970 and 1997 vintages. There exists also a Canari that incorporates the 1881 vintage, but it is not for sale.

The bodega produces ten wines from other grapes, and in another example of El Grifo's progressive nature, of note is the bodega's endeavours with Syrah, which it first planted in 2000. Ariana, named after Fermín Otamendi Rodríguez-Béthencourt's daughter, is a blend of Syrah and Listán Negro, and is clearly a wine of love and joy, while the Reserva de Familia is a 100% Syrah specifically designed to compete with the great Syrahs of the world. Production of these wines are vintage dependent, and both use French oak barrels to add complexity of flavour. Overall, the results have been fantastic and are getting better with each new release.

El Grifo and its wines are not to be missed.

LOS BERMEJOS

The naturist wines of Lanzarote

www.losbermejios.com

Near the village of La Florida in the Masdache wine zone, and surrounded by vineyards covered with picón and ordered by the parallel stone walls of the zanjales perimentrales growing system, is one of the most entrepreneurial bodegas of La Isla de los Volcanes – Los Bermejios.

Managing Director **Ana de León Perez**, vintner **Ignacio Valdera**, and business partner **Carmelo González** have run this modern bodega since its establishment in 2001. From the outset, the objective has been crystal clear – to manufacture outstanding varietal wines that delineate the individual characteristics of Lanzarote's traditional grapes.

For whites, Malvasía Volcánica, Diego and Moscatel are used, and for reds, Listán Negro. For all elaborations, everything begins in the vineyard with application of sustainable viticulture (where possible) and careful selection of the grapes when they are deemed to have achieved their perfect level of ripeness. In the bodega, which is housed in a lovely 18th-century manor house, great care is taken to process the grapes in such a way as to preserve and maintain all of the primary

aromas and flavours. For some of the range, oak is applied to enhance, but never obscure, the natural qualities of the varietals.

To give physical form to their new style of wine, Los Bermejos chose a distinctive bottle shape that has an attractive, naturally curved body and a minimalist label that collars the neck. The nakedness, as well as being symbolic of the winemaking philosophy, was a masterstroke of marketing, making the Los Bermejos brand both desirable and instantly recognisable. The bottles were originally imported from a specialist Italian glassblower, but with skyrocketing production (Los Bermejos' output has increased tenfold since 2001), in 2007 it became economically viable to move the manufacturing base to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.



The growth in production volume has been accompanied by an expansion in the bodega's wine range, which now includes two sparkling wines (one white, one pink) and what may prove to be another differentiating masterstroke – Lanzarote's first organically certified wines. The first was the Diego Seco Ecológico, which began in 2003, followed by Listán Rosado Ecológico in 2012, Malvasía Seco Ecológico in 2013 and, most recently, Listán Negro Ecológico in 2017. In all cases, the ecologically grown grapes have been found to provide greater potency of primary aromas, and everything possible is being done to increase the share of ecological production over time – it currently stands at just over 5%. It is a huge challenge, and very risky. When application of chemicals in Lanzarote's warm vineyards is kept to a minimum, the threat of disease – which could wipe out a vintage or, in a worst-case scenario, an entire vineyard – is greatly increased. To complicate matters further, growing conditions have become more unpredictable in recent years. However, Los Bermejos is committed to continuing down the path of sustainable viticulture and has launched several lines of research. The bodega places paramount importance on protecting soils so that generations to come can continue to enjoy Lanzarote's natural bounty. Let's hope solutions can be found to enable delivery of this noble intention.

RUBICÓN¹⁰

Where the world's most dramatic wine terroir rose from the ashes

www.bodegasrubicon.com

Rubicon, named after the first fort built on Lanzarote by Jean de Béthencourt (and the oh-so-trusting Guanches), is located right at the very centre of the La Geria wine zone – arguably the most spectacular viticultural terroir on Earth. Furthermore, Rubicon's vineyards, manor house and nearby chapel are what is left of an historical estate from which the name La Geria is derived. Old records show that the site was called the Cortijo de La Geria (La Geria Farm) from as early as 1570 and was, presumably, dedicated to growing cereals and raising livestock until it was buried during the monster volcanic eruptions that took place between 1730 and 1736.

But the house and chapel were quickly dug out and remain today pretty much as they were before the apocalypse. It was unfeasible to remove the ash from the land, however, but after only a few years of lifelessness and despair, a brilliant innovation

10 While I was in Lanzarote researching this book, it was not possible to meet the owner or winemaker of Bodegas Rubicon. However, I did enjoy a tour, educational chat, and in-depth tasting with its welcoming and knowledgeable wine tourism staff. This winery's description is thus informed by my visit, but also relies on the information published on Rubicon's website and in the excellent book *100 Vinos Imprescindibles de Canarias*.

occurred that allowed the estate to become productive once more. It seems that the cultivation of grapes in hoyos may have started right here too, and this is why, as the technique spread well beyond the limits of the cortijo, the entire grape-growing area became known as La Geria.

The modern Bodegas Rubicón began in 1979, when **Germán López Figueras** purchased the estate and invested in modern winemaking facilities and restoration of the original buildings. Today, Bodegas Rubicón produces a wide range, including some excellent examples of Malvasía Volcánica, but its Moscatels are undeniably its most prestigious wines. The special edition Sweet Gold is made in a delicious style that is at once both fresh and refined, and has earned the winery numerous international awards.

This is a splendid bodega to visit. The old country house has been lovingly restored, and the surrounding scenery is simply breathtaking. Tours are available, and there is a palpable feeling of excitement of sharing with you a piece of Lanzarote's epic wine history. For those who wish to enjoy tasting the wines over a relaxed meal, the bodega has a terrific restaurant that serves delicious Canarian dishes and tapas. The restaurant is positioned in beautiful old rooms where the original wine-processing equipment was located, and has a large terrace where you can sit in the shadows of ancient eucalyptus trees while looking out towards the vineyards with the Parque Nacional de Timanfaya in the distance. This is an extraordinary place to sit, contemplate, and raise a toast to the power of nature and the tenacity of humanity.



AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



MALVASÍA SECO COLECCIÓN

Bodega: El Grifo, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Volcánica

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, the best bunches are hand-selected in the winery after the harvest, de-stemmed and crushed; only the free-run juice is used for temperature-controlled fermentation prior to immediate clarification, filtering and bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* brilliant straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1 °) intensely perfumed, floral (esp. jasmine and honeysuckle), orange blossom honey, peach blossom, with a touch of balancing lemon pith and herbal nuances / *palate:* moderately glyceric, with refreshing acidity, and a lingering finish that leaves one enchanted by the rich bouquet and elegant mouthfeel of Lanzarote's signature grape.

Comments: You will not find a purer expression of the Malvasía Volcánica grapes that grow in the mind-bending terroir that is La Geria.

Sommelier's recommendation: Make sure you have this wine with *caldo de pescado* (fish broth) and *gofio* dumplings (using the flour of roasted Canarian grains).



ARIANA

Bodega: El Grifo, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2016

Grape(s): 70% Listán Negro, 30% Syrah

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, exclusively elaborated from estate grapes, with varieties fermented separately in stainless steel prior to blending in 500-litre French oak barrels, where MLF occurs and the wine ages (on its lees with regular *bâtonnage*) for up to 6 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* intense cherry / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe fruits of the forest, pronounced black and white pepper, liquorice; (2°) pleasing vanilla pod, toasted sweet spices, medium to dark roasted ground Arabica coffee with a sprinkle of dark chocolate / *palate:* lovely feathered texture, silky tannins, good acidity and structure, with a finish that has a nice balance between fruit, spice and oak.

Comments: The ‘sweetest’ coupage of Listán Negro (the Canaries’ dominant red grape) and Syrah (the Canaries’ dominant *mejorante*) that I have yet tried.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Ideal with *pollo de corral al ajillo* (garlic chicken).



RESERVA DE FAMILIA

Bodega: El Grifo, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *tinto reserva* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014

Grape(s): 100% Syrah

ARPICI: €€€€

Vinification: 14% abv, exclusively elaborated from estate grapes, fermented in stainless steel vats with continuous pump-over before racking to new French oak barrels for MLF and resting for 12 months, with a further year in bottle before release.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* ruby to garnet / *smell & taste:* (1°) blackberries, pungent spice (esp. black/white pepper and liquorice); (2°) prominent sweet spices and toast from oak; (3°) hint of leather / *palate:* rich and warming mouthfeel of abundant fine tannins and high alcohol, with a flavourful finish that has become highly nuanced with age.

Comments: With this wine El Grifo have left little reason to doubt that Lanzarote has suitable terroirs to make fine, ageworthy, ‘hot climate’ Syrahs. It is the only Canary Islands wine to have won a coveted gold medal at the international competition Syrah du Monde.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Try this wine with *carne de cabra* (goat meat) or *cordero a la brasa* (barbecued lamb).



CANARI

Bodega: El Grifo, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *blanco dulce* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 1997 (a blend of wines from 1956, 1970 and 1997)

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Volcánica

ARPICI: €€€€€+

Vinification: 17% abv, made from sun-kissed grapes that (once harvested) have spent 5 days on outdoor drying mats, fermentation stopped (with addition of grape spirits) with residual sugar @ 90 g/l, then added to the bodega's glorious Canari solera for long oxidative ageing.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* luminous amber / *smell & taste:* (1°) ample sweet blossom; (2°) touch of brioche; (3°) heady notes of candied orange peel, dried apricots, dates, sultanas, hazelnuts and walnuts / *palate:* extravagantly sweet and flavourful, but still astonishingly fresh and alive, with an impossibly long and complex finish.

Comments: El Grifo's interpretation of the famous sweet Canarian Malvasía wines of history is ... *amazing*. If, as many feel, the crown jewels of Lanzarote wine are its dulces, then this is its Koh-i-Noor.

Sommelier's recommendation: Superb with the award-winning Volcano cheese of Lanzarote (made from sheep, goat and cow's milk, and matured for up to 8 months).



GEORGE GLAS

Bodega: El Grifo, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *tinto dulce* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: TBA (due for bottling and release in late 2019)

Vinification: 16% abv, late-harvest grapes with an additional week on outdoor drying mats, foot-trodden, long maceration, fermentation stopped (@ 100 grams of residual sugar per litre) by the addition of aguardiente, subsequent transfer to French oak barrels for oxidative ageing.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* amber to tawny red / *smell & taste:* (1°) red-fruit compote, cherry brandy, touch of menthol; (2°) pronounced caramel, toffee, butterscotch and cappuccino; (3°) pronounced almonds and hazelnuts, raspberry syrup / *palate:* intense sweetness balanced by precise acidity, soft but full-bodied, richly textured and flavoured, with a finish that is bewitchingly melancholic.

Comments: This is a wine of dignity and heart-wrenching emotion, named after George Glas, a Scottish captain, doctor and man of honour. While developing plans for a British base on the coast of West Africa, Glas stopped in Lanzarote in 1764, where he was promptly arrested by the Spanish military, who did not like his idea. During his imprisonment, Glas composed *The History of the Discovery and Conquest of the Canary Islands*, one of the most important books ever to have been published about the Islands. In 1765 he was released and, with his wife and 12-year-old daughter, boarded the *Earl of Sandwich* bound for England. Nearing the British Isles, four of the six crew members mutinied to appropriate the gold and silver coins they knew were on board. Glas drew his sword and fought, but was overwhelmed and thrown overboard. Tragically, his family joined him in death. A few months later, the villains were caught and hanged in Ireland (and are no doubt suffering an eternity in hell). With this wine, El Grifo salutes Glas' contribution to Canarian culture and his bravery, and mourns the Glas family's harrowing departure from this world.

Sommelier's recommendation: A perfect combination with *huevos mole*, a dessert similar to an egg custard mousse, typical of the eastern Canary Islands.



MALVASÍA SECO

Bodega: Los Bermejos, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2013, **2017** (tank sample)

Grape(s): 100% Malvasía Volcánica

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, fermented and aged on lees over the winter in stainless steel vats before bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale lemon with greenish reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) potent citrus fruits (esp. lemon and grapefruit), stone fruits, white flowers, spring blossom, framed by a striking volcanic minerality / *palate:* mildly viscous, crisp and cleansing, with a finish that is at once fruity, floral and salty.

Comments: Made from Malvasía Volcánica trained mostly in zanjás perimentrales, the vines' deep root network delivers a sure sense of 'terroir in the bottle'. In this wine, savoury inorganic minerality (from the soil) nicely balances the natural aromatic potency of the grape variety. I tasted the tank sample in December 2017, so the wine had not yet fully rested on its lees, but it was already obvious that this was going to be a very good year. I did taste the finished product of an earlier vintage, however, several years ago, while eating razor clams at (my sommelier friend) Rodrigo González Carballo's restaurant in Tenerife, when he had recommended the pairing. As well as possessing a similar balance of primary aromas, the 2013's texture was enriched, and there were some additional savoury notes from the lees (bread, toast, brioche) that enhanced overall structure and complexity. Malvasía Seco is 60% of Los Bermejos' overall production, foundational to its brand, and so demands consistent high quality. My experience suggests success.

Sommelier's recommendation: Try this wine with grilled local fish – *medregal* (a type of bonito) would be an excellent choice – served with *papas arrugadas* (small potatoes boiled, unpeeled, in salt water).



DIEGO SECO ECOLÓGICO

Bodega: Los Bermejos, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Diego

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, fermented and aged on lees for 3 months in stainless steel vats.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* (brilliant) pale straw yellow with metallic green reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) delicate but perfectly delineated notes of freshly cut white flowers, limes, juniper berries and fennel, underlying savoury inorganic minerality / *palate:* vibrant acidity, steely mouthfeel, attractive bitter notes that bring personality and length to the finish.

Comments: If you want to know what thick-skinned, high-acid Diego tastes like, try this excellent wine. Better still, try it alongside one of the 100% Malvasía Volcánica blanco seco wines suggested above. A square next to a circle. If you think all dry white wines taste pretty much the same (as I once did) this exercise will change your mind.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal pairing with a poached *vieja* (parrotfish) and devilled *papas bonitas* (local new potatoes).



LISTÁN NEGRO MACERACIÓN TRADICIONAL

Bodega: Los Bermejós, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2017

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, ripe grapes macerated with their skins for 10 days (to extract as much flavour, colour and tannin as possible), fermented in stainless steel vats before racking to French oak barrels for 4 months ageing prior to bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* medium cherry / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe cranberry, morello cherries and red plum, hints of strawberries and raspberries, gentle seasoning of white and black pepper; (2°) infused with sweet spices (vanilla, nutmeg, clove, cinnamon) / *palate:* medium-bodied, nice acidity, creamy, warming, rounded tannins, with a lovely smooth finish that eventually gives way to the traditional varietal notes of Listán (red fruits and pepper).

Comments: A soft, easy-drinking tinto packed with flavour. If you are just beginning your Canary Islands wine journey, this is a very approachable introduction to the archipelago's dominant red grape. If the best Listán Negros of the north face of Tenerife represent articulate classics played on acoustic guitar, this Lanzaroteño is a mellow rock masterpiece played by electric guitar with distortion.

Sommelier's recommendation: A perfect combination with the popular Lanzaroteño dish *conejo frito* (fried rabbit).



LISTÁN ROSADO

Bodega: Los Bermejós, San Bartolomé, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *rosado seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, made from the free-run juice of pressed, chilled grapes, fermented in stainless steel, short maturation.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale pink / *smell & taste:* (1°) articulate fresh red fruits (esp. sweet strawberries and raspberries) balanced by a squeeze of lime, pinch of white pepper, and salty inorganic minerality / *palate:* crisp, refreshing and well-constructed.

Comments: A box-office success; Los Bermejos Listán Rosado appears on the wine lists of countless good restaurants in Lanzarote and the rest of the archipelago. It has been produced by the winery every year since its establishment in 2001. In some years, when enough certified grapes are available, an ecological version of this wine is also made.

Sommelier's recommendation: While you're visiting La Isla de los Volcanes make sure you try this wine with *rascacio* (scorpionfish) fish cakes – a local delicacy.

SWEET GOLD



Bodega: Rubicón, Yaiza, Lanzarote

Appellation: DO Lanzarote

Type: *blanco dulce* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2009, 2014

Grape(s): 100% Moscatel

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14% abv, the best bunches are hand-selected for temperature-controlled fermentation followed by 4 months ageing in American oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* lucent yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) intoxicatingly floral (jasmine, honeysuckle, blossom); (2°) brioche, toffee-caramel, toasted sweet spice (esp. vanilla pods); (3°) honey butter toast / *palate:* excellent balance between sweetness and acidity, with a long finish replete with flavour.

Comments: A wonderful expression of this most aromatic of grapes. Most years Rubicón makes a dulce called Moscatel, which puts extreme emphasis on the fresh primary varietal characteristics of the grape. It's a multi-award-winning wine (both in the Canaries and abroad), but I have chosen Sweet Gold (only made every 5 years or so) because it commanded my attention from the very first sip. Sweet Gold has terrific complexity of bouquet and balance of palate, which I attribute to skilled use of lees and oak. Appropriately, both wines come in bottles that look as though they might be filled with perfume.

Sommelier's recommendation: An ideal pairing with Canarian *tortillas de calabaza* (pumpkin tortillas), drizzled with honey and sprinkled with cinnamon.





8

Gran Canaria

HISTORY

Vines were introduced to Gran Canaria by European missionaries and settlers in the late 15th century, immediately following the multi-year conquest that culminated with the incorporation of the island into the Crown of Castile in 1487. Within a few decades, Gran Canaria's production of wine exceeded its demand, and international exports commenced. It wasn't until later in the 16th century, however, around the time when an enterprising Dutch merchant named Daniel Van Damme began to cultivate grapes to make wine for export to London and Flanders, that viticulture on the island took off.

The Great Canarii

Have you ever wondered why Gran Canaria is called 'Great' even though it is not the largest island of the archipelago? One theory holds that the Spanish named it in reference to the 'great' defence put up by the native peoples during the conquest. The Guanches of Gran Canaria called themselves the Canarii, and they called their island Tamarán, 'Land of the Brave'. This epithet was substantiated during the European invasion, which took five years and was, by all accounts, fiercely resisted and only achieved by the brilliant cunning of Spanish commander Pedro de Vera. Most of the Canarii warriors were killed in battle or chose to jump to their deaths off the island's high cliffs and monoliths rather than surrender.

By the second half of the 16th century, vineyards thrived throughout most of the north and east of the island, and wine became Gran Canaria's most important export industry, supplying Europe and markets as far afield as Spain's emerging colonies in the New World. But it was England that purchased the lion's share of what was produced, and in 1583 Thomas Nichols, a Gloucester-born merchant who resided in the Canary Islands for seven years, wrote that Gran Canaria, in particular, 'hath singular good wine'. For Nichols to find it within himself to speak highly of the chief product of an island that had treated him so abominably,¹ the wines must have been very good indeed.

When the political relationship with England took a turn for the worse in the 18th century, the wine industry lurched into deep recession. The situation became more perilous still when oidio and mildiu arrived from America in the 19th century. For 100 years, viticulture on Gran Canaria clung precariously to life, but happily since the start of the 21st century the island's wine industry has begun a robust upward swing.

Despite the ups and downs, grapes have continued to thrive on and around the Pico de Bandama (a large volcanic cinder cone) and adjacent Caldera de Bandama (a volcanic crater), where Van Damme first grew his vines; 'Bandama' is in fact a corruption of 'Van Damme'. When Europeans first arrived, this whole area was covered by a forest of pistachio trees – *Pistacia lentiscus* – and Pico de Bandama was initially known as Monte Lentiscal (the Mountain of Lentiscus Trees). Since this area has remained the heart of the island's wine trade over the centuries, it is not surprising that the first appellation of Gran Canaria was granted here in 1999, named **DO Monte Lentiscal**.

The prized vineyards of DO Monte Lentiscal grow on soils of thick picón, specifically the slopes of Pico de Bandama, which was created from the adjacent caldera when this small part of Earth's surface was violently blown asunder some 2000 years ago. These sites are exceptionally well drained, provide a host of flavour-giving minerals from the relatively fresh volcanic ejecta, and are the source of the island's most famous traditional red wines – *tintos del monte* (mountain reds). Although DO Monte Lentiscal enjoyed a separate appellation for several years, in 2006 it was merged into **DO Gran Canaria**, giving the bodegas the flexibility to make wines from grapes grown anywhere on the island. However, many bottles still mention Monte Lentiscal on their labels, to indicate that they are from the most

¹ As captured in the research paper *The English Renaissance and the Canary Islands*; in 1559, during the years of the Spanish Inquisition, the governor of Gran Canaria imprisoned Nichols on the grounds that he was an agent of Queen Elizabeth and therefore an enemy of Spain and the Catholic faith. Nichols' prosecution was preposterous, and four long years passed before he was tried, only to be found guilty of heresy and condemned to a ritual of public penance (during which he was compelled to wear a special shirt called a *sambenito*, hold a lit candle and loudly forswear his sins), before being exiled from the Canary Islands. Later, in London, he published *A description of the fortunate Ilands, otherwise called the Ilands of Canaria, with their strange fruits and commodities*, in which he praised the wines of Gran Canaria.

historic wine region of the island. One could consider this part of Gran Canaria analogous to an Italian *classico* subzone.

Outside the special picón vineyards of Monte Lentiscal, there are many other exciting terroirs to explore. For example, excellent wine grapes are today grown in the high altitudes of Gran Canaria's central Caldera de Tejeda, and there is an exciting revival of viticulture taking place in the island's north-western Vega de Gáldar – an area that long ago earned the nickname 'Las Viñas'. Also in the north-west, the 7 km-long Valle de Agaete is one of the most beautiful, unique and enchanting valleys of the entire archipelago; it possesses a hot and humid subtropical microclimate in which all kinds of sweet fruits can flourish – bananas, papayas, oranges, mandarins, mangoes, guavas and wine grapes – and is currently the site of the world's most northerly coffee plantation.

A PORTRAIT OF GRAN CANARIA

Gran Canaria is one of the most popular holiday destinations in Europe, offering almost guaranteed sunshine all year round. Some even contend that the beach resorts of the south, where the majority of tourists stay, enjoy the most equable climate in the world.

From the blue ocean up to about 200 masl, the coastal belt of Gran Canaria is generally arid, with palm trees, olive trees and salt-tolerant shrubs interspersed with urban developments of various sizes and vintages. Plant life becomes more abundant as the humidity rises inland, with the sharp relief of volcanic cinder cones and tumbling barrancos allowing a myriad of microclimates in which vines and a range of subtropical Macaronesian flora can thrive. Finally, above 1000 masl, in the vicinity of Caldera de Tejeda, the moisture disappears again, and there is a transition to scenery dominated by cacti, heather, pine forests and high-altitude agriculture. On the whole, away from the coast, human activity - including viticulture - blends neatly with the island's natural environment, yielding a landscape mosaic that is agreeably pastoral. Almost half of the island is protected as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, ensuring that generations to come will be able to enjoy the special and varied beauty of Gran Canaria.

If you find yourself on the busy south coast and in need of a relaxing wine escape, it is worth hiring a car to drive due north, along the small, twisting roads that will take you up into Gran Canaria's peaceful mountainous interior. The welcoming bodegas that exist in Caldera de Tejeda grow grapes in what feels like one of the most unspoilt environments on Earth. In the middle of the island, where the population is sparse and the Atlantic air clean and crisp, there prevails a dignified silence (enhanced by the birdsong and the gentle clinking of distant goat bells) and a rare purity of ecosystem.



After a while, head back down towards the coast – but in a north-easterly direction towards the island’s capital, Las Palmas. Choose a route that allows you to stop off in the beautiful old town of Santa Brigida. With its quiet cobblestone streets and charming Spanish architecture, the town could not be more different from the restless bustle of the tourist resorts with their high-rise hotels. Santa Brigida grew prosperous thanks to the wine trade of the 16th and 17th centuries, and is today home to Gran Canaria’s Casa Museo del Vino, a wine museum housed in a renovated colonial mansion that is an ideal place to sample and explore the heritage of the island’s wines. A nice spot for lunch, the museum has a restaurant that specialises in Canarian cuisine. Alternatively, there are dozens of small restaurants nearby that serve local food and wine and possess an authentic atmosphere.

If you want to see the vineyards, talk with the winemakers and experience some of Gran Canaria’s best tintos del monte at source, you’re going to need to set up a bodega visit. Fortunately, Santa Brigida is very close to Pico de Bandama and within the old Monte Lentiscal wine zone, which has the highest density of bodegas on the island. Most will appreciate your interest, but it’s prudent to check in advance that the winery you want to visit will be open when you arrive.



Finally, it's worth carrying on to the illustrious historical centre of Las Palmas, originally constructed using, amongst other things, all the pistachio wood of Monte Lentiscal. It was a principal staging post between the Old and New Worlds, and the layout and architecture of old Las Palmas served as the blueprint for many cities built during the Spanish colonisation of the Americas, such as San Antonio, Texas, which was founded by Canarians. When you've done sufficient sightseeing, Las Palmas, as the Canary Islands' most populous city, has several sophisticated restaurants, where you can finish your day with a superb meal made memorable by a bottle of one of the island's finest wines.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

As outlined in the 2016 scientific textbook *The Geology of the Canary Islands* (Carracedo and Troll), Gran Canaria is geographically at the centre of the Canary Islands and is the third largest island of the archipelago after its neighbour to the west, Tenerife, and Fuerteventura to the north-east. It is the second largest in population after Tenerife, with just under 1 million permanent residents and over 3.5 million visitors coming each year for a holiday. Roughly a circle (with a 45 km diameter), the island's surface ascends from the coast in all directions towards Pico de Nieves (Mountain of Snow), a peak at the centre of Gran Canaria that touches 1950 masl. This topographical architecture has led to the formation of a set of deep radial barrancos which splay out from the island's centre, carved by rainwater draining towards the ocean over the aeons. One of these, Valle de Agaete, has an orientation to the north-west that shelters it from the trade winds, creating one of the warmest and most humid climates of the Canary Islands.

Adding to the morphological complexity, Gran Canaria is scarred by numerous craters caused by volcanoes that have collapsed in on themselves. The formation of two of these craters (technically 'calderas') have given Gran Canaria two distinctive, high-quality grape-growing terroirs that are worth describing in more detail.

Caldera de Bandama, in the north-east of Gran Canaria, is shaped like a sizeable Roman amphitheatre and sits adjacent to a volcanic ash mountain that was blown out from its centre 2000 years ago – Pico de Bandama. On its slopes, vineyards lie at altitudes between about 200 and 400 metres, and experience climatic conditions that are sunny, warm and humid, but tempered by the influence of the trade winds that blow in from the coast, just 4 km away.

Much larger, older and higher up, and covering a good fraction of Gran Canaria's interior, is Caldera de Tejeda, which formed when part of the centre of the island collapsed in on itself some 14 million years ago. Here, vineyards can be found on small terraced plots carved into slopes between 1000 and 1325 masl, where

everything must be worked by hand and carefully managed to avoid damage from winter frosts and (sometimes) snow. The extra effort demanded by this location is balanced by the positives of ultra-clean air, low humidity, a marked temperature differential between day and night, and clear blue skies that allow vines and grapes to receive an average of 11 hours of sunshine a day. Water scarcity is a problem, but this has been ingeniously overcome by computerised drip technology that sources water from La Mina de Tejeda, a nearby well – dug, incredibly, 500 years ago.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE GRAN CANARIA

www.vinosdegrancanaria.es



With the exception of the recently established DOP Islas Canarias, Gran Canaria's regional wine appellation is the youngest of the archipelago. In truth, this island has been slower to bring its industry up to speed with modern grape-growing and winemaking practices than the larger viticultural centres of Tenerife, Lanzarote and La Palma – but now that the rejuvenation of this sector is well under way, Gran Canaria, with its range of idiosyncratic microclimates, is currently producing some of the most exciting wines of the Atlantic.

Although at roughly 325,000 litres per year Gran Canaria makes more wine than El Hierro, La Gomera and Fuerteventura combined, production is still very small compared to its great island rival to the west – Tenerife. However, what Gran Canaria's production lacks in volume it makes up for by degree of heterogeneity: an incredible 70 bodegas operate under DO Gran Canaria's regulations, meaning that average output per winery is less than 5000 litres per year, giving rise to oodles of handcrafted wines of unique personality.

GRAPE VARIETIES

About 70% of Gran Canaria's wines are red, and the two most important grapes, at least as measured by weight of fruit grown per year, are Listán Negro and **Tintilla**. It is usual to see Listán Negro blended with a minority component of Tintilla, though in the past decade it has become more common to see Castellana Negra and Vijariego Negro used to increase a wine's overall colour, depth of flavour and acidity. Premium coupages of this sort are now highly regarded and are starting to be exported as far afield as mainland Europe and North America.

Regarding white grapes, Listán Blanco is abundant and used mostly to create simple, refreshing blancos secos to meet the demands of the tourism trade. Moscatel and Malvasía Aromática are also widely planted, and although frequently tasked with commercial blanco semiseco production, their superlative dulces do a better job of illuminating the sweet and fragrant disposition of both varieties. Gran Canaria's 21st-century wine rejuvenation has witnessed some bodegas seeing success in planting and growing the high-quality grapes Albillo Criollo and Verijadiego. The modern blancos secos from these varieties, whether made in a light or more full-bodied style, can be outstanding and should be sought out.



TINTILLA

It's hard to know the exact provenance of Tintilla because in Spain (including the Canary Islands) the name is applied (as a homonym) to describe many different grapes that can create deep purple, ink-coloured wine.² In Tenerife, most growers and winemakers agree that their Tintilla is genetically identical to Castellana Negra, but the viticulturists of Gran Canaria are adamant that although it may be similar to Castellana Negra in terms of its 'skills', their Tintilla is a distinct variety of wine grape.

What all are agreed on, however, is that any grape variety called Tintilla on the Canary Islands must have clusters that are small, compact, and formed of small, round purple-blue-black berries with thick skins. And when it comes to the wine they produce, opinion is unanimous that Tintilla will present intense aromas of black fruits, chocolate and liquorice, and a body that is full and with sufficient acidity and tannins to permit an extended period of ageing in oak barrels and in bottle. In addition, Tintilla is universally considered an excellent grape with which to make premium red blends.

A grape sometimes suggested to be closely related to Tintilla is Graciano, a Spanish variety found commonly in the Rioja district of mainland Spain. Graciano is highly regarded and can produce powerful and deeply coloured fine wines that age well in bottle and present an assemblage of intense aromas much the same as those of Tintilla. Though it may ultimately be shown through DNA analysis that no relationship between the two actually exists, it is most certainly a compliment for Tintilla to be likened to Graciano, providing a useful indication of Tintilla's calibre.

STYLES OF WINE

The geographical diversity of Gran Canaria results in wines being made in many different styles. Broadly, however, it is possible to distinguish between those made with grapes grown at low altitudes and those produced from high-altitude crops within the island's Alpine-like interior.

Taking the red wines of the lower-altitude vineyards (up to 500 metres), bodegas usually target a style of wine that is richly flavoured, alcoholically potent and deeply coloured. The majority of these are blends of Listán Negro with Tintilla or sometimes Castellana Negra, which can be enjoyed young – but good vintages are well suited to ageing in both oak and bottle, which can significantly enhance

2 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Tintilla (and references therein)

complexity and make overall structure softer and more elegant. When this style of wine is made from vineyards that exist in the former area of DO Monte Lentiscal (i.e. close to Pico de Bandama), it is often referred to as *tinto del monte*.

For whites, the blancos secos and blancos semisecos elaborated from low-altitude vineyards tend to be made predominantly from Listán Blanco, Malvasía Aromática or Moscatel, or a combination of these varieties. These wines are typically night-harvested and fermented in stainless steel, and are designed to be drunk in their youth. Expect them to be bright and light, with medium acidity and relatively simple structure. Those that have a greater fraction of Malvasía Aromática and Moscatel will be more fragrant.

The wines of Gran Canaria's higher vineyards – particularly those above 1000 masl – are quite different. Although the tintos continue to be blends involving Tintilla, it is becoming more common to see Vijariego Negro as the partnering grape rather than Listán Negro. These wines are somewhat lighter in colour and body than the tintos del monte but they can have an equal intensity of primary aromas and acidity. Sometimes the primary aromas can be so well defined in these wines that it is possible to determine the constituents of the blend from a single sniff. Although these wines are splendid to drink upon release, the best of them can take significant application of oak, all the way to crianza level. As for Listán Negro, in the environs of Caldera de Tejeda the grape can struggle to ripen to the degree required for high-quality tinto and is thus now often used to make satisfying rosado, which is enthusiastically quaffed, quite deservedly, all over the island.



The blancos secos made from white grapes grown above 1000 masl can be excitingly fresh and alive. In particular, the wines made from the Albillo Criollo and Verijadiego grapes can have sufficient acidity and depth and complexity of primary fruit to permit the introduction of secondary and tertiary character through such processes as malolactic fermentation and ageing on lees in oak. In the best examples, expect wines of ripe tropical and stone fruits, a creamy palate and lingering savoury finish. These wines are a very welcome addition to the range of homegrown beverages available to pair with Gran Canaria's delicious traditional foods and haute cuisine.

As in all the Canary Islands, dulces are produced as well. In Gran Canaria, these are almost all white and made from Moscatel and Malvasía Aromática, varieties that have been grown on the island at all altitudes for many hundreds of years. Among the local population, the most beloved sweet wines are the blancos dulces naturales, made by passerillage of Moscatel.



BODEGAS

MONDALÓN

Where an Anglo-Canarian family has breathed new life into Tintos del Monte

www.mondalon.com

Although diverse in its attributes, Bodegas Mondalón is perhaps best characterised as a winery at the vanguard of Gran Canaria's mountain red wines revival. Situated on the slope of Pico de Bandama, the bodega produces a portfolio of red wines that do a tremendous job of reinterpreting the traditional wines of Monte Lentiscal.

Mondalón Tinto, a blend of 90% Listán Negro and 10% Tintilla from local plots, has provided the economic foundation of the business since its inception in 1995. An easy-drinking wine best enjoyed young and slightly chilled, it is a vivid cherry-red colour with aromas of fresh blackberries and black cherries, enhanced by modest volcanic minerality and enjoyable hints of banana. Monte Roca, also a Listán Negro / Tintilla blend, has been made since 2010, but from the fruit of the 40-year-old vineyards of trusted family friend and neighbour, **Laureano Roca**. It is an excellent wine, consistently one of the best of Gran Canaria, created by means of precision grape-growing and a vinification process that includes up to 9 months of ageing in high-quality French oak barrels. From ruby to garnet in appearance, Monte Roca has the taste and feel of a good Chianti Classico. Aromas of sour cherry, cranberry, redcurrant, dried flowers and peppery spice are held together by a fresh vanilla-cream palate of medium viscosity. This wine ages well in bottle too, as after three years it is still crisp, but with tannins that have softened and aromas that have evolved a savoury edge to deepen overall complexity. The greatest of their red wines, however, may be Quince Tinto. Made entirely from grapes grown during the excellent 2015 vintage on the steep slope of picón directly behind the bodega, Quince Tinto is a special edition, single-plot 100% Listán Negro. Stylistically similar to Monte Roca, it is more heavily seasoned by the black and white pepper of Listán and underpinned by a gloriously vivid dimension of salty volcanic minerality that represents a genuine transference of terroir. Bodegas Mondalón plans to make this wine again in the future when vintage conditions are right, thank heavens.

The vineyards that surround the winery and family home are all 27 years old, having been planted by **Juan Manuel Cruz Hernández** in 1992 shortly after he purchased the finca with his English wife, Susan. The couple fell in love with each other, with this place, and with their grapes. Nowadays, Mondalón is run by another fruit of their union, their affable and enterprising daughter, **Tamara**. 'I've been working the vineyards since I was ten. When I was a kid, I looked forward to pruning and harvesting. To me, they weren't jobs, but games that I could play with my family. I

still love this way of life just the same,’ she says in perfect English (with a hint of a south London accent), which she learnt to speak from her mum. It is clear that her entire winemaking philosophy is underpinned by close relationships: ‘The bodega is also our house where we live, so we are always connected with the grapes and the wines. I wouldn’t have it any other way.’

Given that it’s literally her backyard, Tamara is well placed and highly motivated to conduct sustainable viticulture. Some plots are now certified ecological, while others have seen five chemical treatments per year slashed to just one as the soil health has improved. Undoubtedly the highly porous and permeable picón has made life easier (by providing a natural impediment to weeds and ground pests whilst retaining just the right amount of moisture), but short-pruned espaldera training and manual weeding every six years has been effective at keeping the vineyards and soils disease- and pest-free. Also, no fertilisers are ever required beyond the compost from spent grapes and pruned vine foliage, reintroduced by opening and closing pits in the picón.

Since the beginning, Bodegas Mondalón has always committed some of its energies into creating white wines. When Juan Manuel Cruz Hernández had no success with growing quality white grapes on his finca, he became a champion for the unification of DO Monte Lentiscal and DO Gran Canaria, a merger which came to pass in 2006. As a result, Tamara can now vinify Albillo Criollo, Malvasía Aromática and Moscatel grown in the south of the island by family friend and ex-winemaker **José Cazorla Quevedo** in terroirs better suited to these grape varieties. Mondalón presently makes about 30,000 bottles of wine a year from 11 ha of vineyards. The ratio is still heavily skewed in favour of red wine (5:1), but the biggest surprise of our visit turned out to be Mondalón’s Albillo-based Quince Blanco. With its high-intensity aromas of cooked tropical fruits (pineapple, mango, papaya, passion fruit), fresh flowers (honeysuckle) and creamy, nutty and spicy palate, my companion in arms Rodrigo and I knew immediately we had come across one of the few truly outstanding dry white wines from Gran Canaria. In addition, we eagerly await the results of the brand-new experimental plot of Forastera Blanca that we were shown – will this be the grape variety that can finally reveal the true potential of the famous terroir of Pico de Bandama in a white wine? If the answer is yes, then we are confident that Tamara is the right person to make the wine to shatter the shibboleth that Monte Lentiscal is good only for tintos.

When they are not busy tending to the grapes or welcoming guests to the winery, Tamara and her family are always hard at work with creative wine projects of one sort or another. For example, in 1999 her father made the first sparkling wines of Gran Canaria: ‘We didn’t have any professional input, and everything was done by hand. We turned the bottles by hand. We built the champagne racks by hand. Everything ... Oh yes, and my father made me wear a helmet and face mask because he was worried that the bottles might explode!’ she says, laughing, before adding,

‘It was really good! But we only made 400 bottles, and my father was worried that it was too expensive to sell into the local market. In the end, we just drank it all. I seem to remember that a lot of it disappeared on the Millennial New Year’s Eve, in case the world was about to end.’ More recently, Tamara has developed a line of anti-ageing creams that contain Bodegas Mondalón’s red wine. Apparently, a polyphenol called resveratrol that is found in red grape skins revitalises human skin when directly applied. But for me, this molecule is very likeable for another reason – resveratrol is what makes a glass a day of red wine good for your heart!

BENTAYGA

Where Gran Canaria’s highest vineyards make wines that reach for the sky

www.bodegasbentayga.com

Bodegas Bentayga is located right in the centre of Gran Canaria, in a high-altitude volcanic crater called Caldera de Tejeda, which Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno is said to have described as a ‘tremendous petrified storm, but a storm of fire and lava rather than wind and water’. As a setting for grape-growing, it doesn’t get much more spectacular.

Over the aeons, erosion of the landscape has given rise to several basalt monoliths that solemnly stand guard over (what is now) the island’s notably silent, peaceful interior. They are the remains of volcanic dykes which pushed up vertically through proto-Canaria some 5 million years ago and solidified into thick columns of igneous rock of unyielding hardness. Every year, when the rains come, their stature grows. Roque Nublo is the highest, biggest and most famous, but Roque Bentayga, from which the bodega takes its name, has a particularly immense presence, especially when beheld from the vineyards just outside the front of the winery. It was a profoundly spiritual place for the Canarii, where they prayed to their gods for guidance and protection, and whose caves at its base provided the last refuge for those unfortunate natives during the final throes of the Spanish conquest. In homage to the strength and courage of the unyielding Canarii, a petroglyph found painted on one of the cave walls has been adopted as the brand image of the winery.

According to the beautifully illustrated book *Los Colores del Vino*, Bodegas Bentayga has roots going back 30 years, when local **Juan Armas** began to purchase plots with the intention of planting vineyards to make quality wine – his lifelong dream. Many onlookers derided the ambition, confident in the prevailing wisdom that it was impossible to grow high-quality grapes outside of the traditional winemaking region of Monte Lentiscal. Armas had his doubts too, but with unwavering patience and faith he spent the next decade experimenting,

observing and learning until finally, in 1998, the potential of the Caldera de Tejada terroir was successfully unlocked. His key was in looking beyond the shores of Gran Canaria for suitable grape varieties.

Today, Bodegas Bentayga makes its wines from 10 ha of 20-year-old vines of Baboso Negro introduced from El Hierro, along with Vijariego Negro, Verijadiego and Castellana Negra imported from Tenerife, and Albillo Criollo from La Palma. Moscatel, used for the bodega's naturally sweet dessert wine, is the only local grape that has been retained; it seems the doubters were at least correct with regard to Listán Negro, one of the stalwarts of Monte Lentiscal, which just doesn't seem to cut the mustard up here (for red wines, at least).

Because high-altitude defines Bentayga's uniqueness, since 2014 the bodega has labelled its wines with the brand name Agala ('high place' in the ancient Canarii tongue), followed by the exact altitude at which the wine's grapes were grown. The innovation was the brainchild of Armas's daughter, **Sandra**, who, having worked the family vineyards her whole life, has recently taken over management of the business, though she is quick to point out that her father's involvement remains fundamental. Ambition and a pioneering spirit have been passed through to the next generation. 'Our wines target a new style. They are international wines with Canarian character,' says Sandra. 'We started out making single-variety wines, but now we understand the grapes enough to be able to focus on high-quality coupages. Eventually, we want to sell 100% of our production abroad.' The modern portfolio is comprised of just five wines, of which all but one are blends – three tintos, one blanco seco and the aforementioned Moscatel dulce natural.



Agala Altitud 1212, Sandra's favourite, is the wine that embodies the philosophy of the bodega. The first tinto crianza of Gran Canaria, it is a coupage of Vijariego Negro and Castellana Negra – grapes that have imparted abundant ripe fruit and high acidity – while the 12 months in new oak have provided ample toasted spice and a lovely creamy palate. It's an excellent example of a powerful Canarian 'claret', perhaps even verging on New World heritage in style. The other outstanding wine is blanco Agala Altitud 1318. Comprised of Albillo Criollo and Verijadiego grown from Gran Canaria's highest vineyard, it vividly conveys the intense beauty, cleanliness and freshness of Caldera de Tejeda's environment.

Aside from the majestic setting of Bodegas Bentayga and its vineyards, the winery building itself is a treat to explore because the concrete and glass façade hides a series of large caves that once served as dwellings for local people and their livestock. The caves, which maintain cool temperatures and steady humidity throughout the year, house a great deal of first-rate, Italian-built winemaking equipment, and provide an extensive ageing space where these aspiring wines spend time building complexity in an impressive range of French, American and Hungarian oak barrels.

LOS BERRAZALES

A cornucopia of tropical treats for the senses

www.bodegalosberrazales.com

'Mm! How sweet the coffee tastes, more delicious than a thousand kisses, mellower than Moscatel wine. Coffee, coffee I must have, and if someone wishes to give me a treat, ah, then pour me out some coffee!' wrote Johann Sebastian Bach in his *Coffee Cantata* of 1735. Surely there is no better place in the world to determine *your* preferred beverage – coffee or wine – than Bodega Los Berrazales.

Located in the hot and humid conditions of the sheltered Valle de Agaete of north-western Gran Canaria, Bodega Los Berrazales is located within a 12 ha flowery subtropical paradise, Finca de la Laja – the only place on Earth where quality Moscatel grapes and Arabica coffee beans grow from the same soil. 'Terroir is a concept that applies to coffee just as much as wine,' says vintner, coffee enthusiast and manager **Víctor Lugo Jorge**. 'Here we make both, and they obtain great character and freshness thanks to our unique volcanic soils and health-giving spring water.' The water he is referring to percolates through the adjacent 14 million-year-old Montaña de Tamadaba, infusing it with a richly mafic (ferromagnesian) minerality. Moreover, the relationship between grape and coffee beans is so close here as to be symbiotic, with compost from both recycled into the soils each winter, and with the coffee plants only existing thanks to the shade provided from the ferocious sun by vines trained in parral alto.

Other fruits are grown too, notably oranges, and the whole place has the feel of a lush equatorial botanical garden. Víctor's family have owned and managed this mixed plantation for 200 years, and today he is keen to share the rich bounty of the estate with the outside world. Los Berrazales is one of the most visited wineries of the Canary Islands: every day, coaches ferry hundreds of tourists from around the island for 'an interactive experience where guests can touch and taste everything'. In 2013 the bodega received a visit from late, great Professor Stephen Hawking. He was given a brief history of wine and told about the volcanic soils that provide a unifying theory regarding the character of the fruits of the finca – but, impressed by its rarity and citrusy freshness, he revealed that his favourite product was the European coffee.

It seems there is always a lot going on at Finca de la Laja. In the spring they harvest coffee, in the summer they harvest grapes, in the autumn they make wine, and in the winter they pick tropical fruits. And of course all year round they tend to their crops as they grow, and they welcome visitors of all backgrounds and interests. Víctor concedes, 'It's a lot of work. Every day I have to drink 8 to 12 coffees!' However, his tireless energy and enthusiasm are fuelled by more than dangerously high caffeine levels. His warm and friendly demeanour makes it clear that for him work is always a pleasure, and something that he has the privilege of carrying out every day with people he loves – his parents, and the friends and co-workers he treats as if part of the family.

Regarding wine, Víctor's father, **Inocencio Lugo García**, is the lead viticulturist. On the day Rodrigo and I visited he was hard at work green-pruning the all-important vineyard canopy. In the bodega, Víctor relies on oenological input from **Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez** (Valle de Güímar, Tenerife), with whom he formed a close friendship in 2006 when they realised that they shared a philosophy of gentle, respectful winemaking and indeed life in general. About 40,000 bottles of wine are made per year, from the four dominant grape varieties that grow here: Moscatel, Malvasía Aromática, Listán Negro and Tintilla. The largest wine by volume is the cryo-fermented Los Berrazales Semiseco, a mix of Moscatel and Malvasía Aromática (60:40) packed with refreshing tropical fruit aromas and highly popular with holidaymakers. Los Berrazales Blanco Seco has more acidity thanks to a higher proportion of Malvasía Aromática (80%), a hint of jasmine and evolved tropical fruit, nuts and spice, and a creamy palate from spending six months in French oak. It also possesses a much surer sense of volcanic minerality than its sweeter sisters. The most seductive wine, however, is the naturally sweet Los Berrazales Blanco Dulce, made from sun-dried Moscatel grapes; each sip is an intoxicating kiss of ripe pineapple, nectarine, peach and blossom. Some of the wine goes into a five-year-old solera that is occasionally syphoned off to give a gentle, sensual nectar that is mellower than even the most smooth and exquisite of coffees. Los Berrazales Tinto Roble is an epicurean wine, too. Made from Listán Negro and

Tintilla, it proudly expresses the sumptuous character these grapes can develop when allowed to ripen fully under the hot and humid conditions of Valle de Agaete. The ripe, almost cooked, sweet red and black fruit aromas that emerge combine with salty volcanic minerality to make a delicious wine. Furthermore, application of French and American oak rounds the tannins and imparts smoothing notes of vanilla, coconut and a playful hint of coffee. If you prefer a more direct infusion, be sure to try the newest treat for the senses: Baristo, a satisfying digestif that uses the roasted Arabica beans of Finca de la Laja to flavour a popular Spanish after-dinner drink, Liqueur 43.

VEGA DE GÁLDAR

Wines of art, love and friendship

www.vegadegaldar.com

Although one of the youngest wineries of Gran Canaria, Vega de Gáldar is reviving a winemaking tradition that is one of the oldest in the archipelago. The area in which the modern bodega and its vineyards are situated was once known as ‘Las Viñas’, where grapes were grown in abundance by Franciscan friars of the old convent of San Antonio de Padua, established in 1520.

With the convent abandoned long ago, the municipality’s connection with wine was almost forgotten until local artist **Cristóbal Guerra Molina** purchased a small farm (on the site of the old convent) with the idea of building a rural retreat to inspire his work.³ He grew bananas and papayas, when one morning a neighbour with an interest in history casually mentioned to him, ‘Did you know there were once vineyards here?’ For Guerra, it was a wine epiphany. Having already begun incorporating the symbolism of Dionysos and Bacchus (the Greek and Roman gods of wine) into his paintings, destiny had provided a palpable means of incorporating this powerful muse fully into his artistic sphere. His vision: *Vinos para el Arte* (Wines for Art), where ‘each bottle of wine could paint a picture of the landscape’.

Guerra reached out to his friend, **Amable Rodríguez del Castillo**, a wine connoisseur with additional land in the vicinity of his own small plot. Rodríguez del Castillo embraced Guerra’s vision, particularly enthused by the idea of playing a role in the recovery of Gáldar’s wine heritage.

To get the project under way, they travelled to Tenerife to investigate which grape

³ This story of the winery’s history is splendidly told (and further detailed) in *Los Colores del Vino*, a book about Gran Canaria’s wines that is beautifully illustrated with Cristóbal Guerra Molina’s artwork, and photographs taken by his friend Tato Gonçalves.

varieties would be the most suitable for their plots. Versatile Listán Negro was an obvious choice, but the pair sought an additional grape with which to strengthen and improve the red blends they had envisaged. With the help and advice of renowned Canarian viticulturist **Jorge Zerolo**, they chose to bring back strains of Castellana Negra from Tenerife, as it presents ‘more intense liquorice, tobacco and chocolate notes than the Tintilla of Gran Canaria, and has higher natural acidity.’ They were warned, however, that Castellana Negra was a particularly tricky grape to work and would require constant attention. Small amounts of Malvasía Aromática and Listán Blanco were also planted, along with experimental vines of Marmajuelo, Vijariego Negro and Baboso Negro.

Vineyards are now well established on three small plots. Two are in the vicinity of the old convent on the outskirts of the modern city of Gáldar, while one is right in the middle of the historic town centre. Altitudes and orientations vary, but all have volcanic loam soils and feel the influence of the trade winds. Though Guerra is quick to admit that they are still in the middle of the learning curve, the bodega’s vineyards are already managed entirely under biodynamic principles and have achieved ecological certification. Wherever possible, simple solutions are employed and everything is done by hand. Nets have been purchased to keep the birds from feasting on the juicy organic grapes (500 kg of fruit was lost to our feathered friends in 2017), and water bowls have been placed here and there to provide lizards with a refreshing drink, so they don’t need to suck moisture from the vines. ‘If you treat the environment with respect, it will reward you. Sometimes there can be setbacks, but you must work on the relationship with a loving and patient heart, like a marriage,’ explains Guerra.

2009 was the first official vintage of their three signature wines: El Convento, Viña Amable, and Nubia. The portfolio is created in a refurbished 300-year-old agricultural house on Rodríguez del Castillo’s land, equipped with a few small stainless steel tanks and American oak casks. They work with indigenous yeasts and fermentation is always with whole clusters in open barrels. Usefully, the bodega is underlain by ancient caves; once used by the Guanches, the caves are now retasked as mystical wine cellars. As total production is tiny, at less than 1000 bottles per year combined, these wines are truly artisanal.

El Convento and Viña Amable are blends of Listán Negro and Castellana Negra. The former had traditionally received more time in oak, up to 12 months, imparting rich notes of chocolate, coffee and tobacco, but without masking primary black and red fruits and refreshing hints of menthol. Viña Amable places more emphasis on upfront fruit. Wild cherries and blackberries stand out. It used to spend just 4 to 6 months in barrel, but as of the 2016 vintage this was increased to 12 months in an effort to soften structure and enhance overall complexity. There is a significant vintage variation for both wines. Notably, in cooler years Castellana Negra tends to introduce mild notes of blackcurrant leaf. The hot conditions of 2016 (and change

of heart regarding length of oak ageing) has produced a vintage of Viña Amable that is a full-bodied delight. Its firm palate of ripe fruits of the hedgerow and ample tannins are balanced by good acidity and perfect application of wood, making it, for both Rodrigo and me, our preferred wine of Bodegas Vega de Gáldar and one of our favourite tintos from all of Gran Canaria.

Nubia is a youthful blanco seco of Malvasía Aromática and Listán Blanco ('Marmajuelo will be added next year, which we hope will give more length to the wine,' says Guerra), but is produced in such vanishingly small quantities (just 209 bottles in 2017) that we could not taste it due to its being sold out. The wine is named after Guerra's daughter **Nubia**, who was born the year he bought the farm where all of this began. She has therefore matured in tandem with the vines and the bodega, and has grown to become the third pillar of Vega de Gáldar, involved with all aspects of the work.

During our visit, the Vega de Gáldar family expressed that 'our reward is when people recognise that these wines are made by people who really care about the environment, the grapes, the wine, and each other!' Nothing could be clearer.



AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



MONTE ROCA

Bodega: Mondalón, Monte Lentiscal, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *tinto* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015

Grape(s): 95% Listán Negro, 5% Tintilla

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 14% abv, temperature-controlled fermentation (whole bunches) followed by 8 months ageing in French oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* ruby with a pale garnet rim / *smell & taste:* (1 °) aromas of tart red berries (cranberry, sour cherry, redcurrant), delicate fragrance of rose petals and dried flowers, fresh black and white pepper; (2 °) notes of sweet spice (vanilla and nutmeg), toasty; (3 °) pomegranate molasses, and an enjoyable savoury dimension of forest floor with a hint of farmyard / *palate:* creamy and moderately viscous, with good acidity and gentle tannins.

Comments: An excellent modern *tinto del monte*, now bottled in a sloping-shoulder (Burgundy-style) bottle to reflect that the wine is of a more fresh and delicate style than the ‘harder’, more intense, regional red wines of yesteryear.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Try it with slices of *chorizo de Teror* (a local spiced pork sausage) on toast.



QUINCE TINTO

Bodega: Mondalón, Monte Lentiscal, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015

Grape(s): 100% Listán Negro

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 14% abv, temperature-controlled fermentation followed by 6 months ageing in French oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* gleaming pale ruby / *smell & taste:* (1 °) intense notes

of crisp red fruits (cranberry and red cherry) and crushed pink peppercorns, redcurrant leaf, violets, rose, inorganic (rock salt) minerality; (2°) subtle tobacco leaf, dried spices and hints of toasted oak / *palate*: low viscosity, but with a subtle creaminess, good acidity and mild tannins, really long salty volcanic finish.

Comments: A special edition, single-plot Listán Negro grown on the slopes of Pico de Bandama during the exceptional 2015 vintage. The use of oak adds complexity but does not obscure the primary notes of the variety and its powerful, memory-forming expression of the fresh black picón that lies at the heart of Gran Canaria's wine heritage.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with intensely-flavoured meat dishes such as *cabra marinada* (marinated goat).



QUINCE BLANCO

Bodega: Mondalón, Monte Lentiscal, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *blanco seco barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015

Grape(s): Albillo Criollo, Malvasía Aromática, Moscatel

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 12.5% abv, temperature-controlled fermentation followed by 6 months ageing in French oak.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: light straw yellow with golden reflections / *smell & taste*: (1°) high-intensity aromas of cooked tropical fruits (pineapple, mango, papaya, passion fruit), flowers (esp. honeysuckle); creamy, bready, hints of toasted sweet spices; nutty notes have developed (from time in bottle) that elegantly complement the primary aromas / *palate*: good acidity, creamy full-bodied mouthfeel, lingering nutty finish.

Comments: We were bowled over by this wine. It has wonderful structure and balance, is very complex, and is quite simply outstanding. It is probably going to be at its peak before 2021, so is worth purchasing and drinking now (if you can find it). I will be keeping an eye on potential future vintages.

Sommelier's recommendation: Make sure you try it with *sancocho canario*, a typical Canarian dish made of local vegetables and salt fish.



VIÑA AMABLE

Bodega: Vega de Gáldar, Las Viñas, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, 2015, **2016**, 2017

Grape(s): 70% Listán Negro, 30% Castellana Negra

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, fermentation and ageing in oak for 12 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* ruby / *smell & taste:* (1°) aromas of ripe black fruits (black cherries, blackberries, blackcurrants) with a refreshing tartness of sour cherry and elderberry; (2°) toasted and creamy notes of oak, with layers of clove, nutmeg, and hints of wood smoke and roasted coffee / *palate:* full-bodied, tannic, high-acid, but with hard edges that have been nicely rounded, persistent finish of juicy black fruit.

Comments: The warm 2016 vintage and long ageing in oak has helped to create a robust, fruity red wine with nuances of oak. It is already delicious and has a lot of potential to develop further complexity with age.

Sommelier's recommendation: An ideal combination with red meat dishes such as grilled chops of *cochino negro canario* (Canarian black pig).



AGALA ALTITUD 1212

Bodega: Bentayga, Tejeda, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: **2014**

Grape(s): Vijariego Negro and Castellana Negra

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 15% abv, grape varieties de-stemmed and fermented separately in stainless steel vats, coupage assembled and aged for 12 months in new oak, plus 12 months in bottle before release.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* ruby with violet reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) gobs of ripe (almost cooked) red and black fruits; (2°) plenty of toasted sweet spice (vanilla, clove and nutmeg), creamy hints / *palate:* great structure, good

acidity, velvety, (alcoholic) warmth, ample rounded tannins, with a long finish that possesses an intriguing balance of sweet berry compote against tangy orange peel and hints of bitter dark chocolate.

Comments: This, the first tinto crianza of Gran Canaria (the inaugural vintage of Agala Altitud 1212 was 2009), is a big wine in an accommodately international style. This far south there is a danger that winemakers will sacrifice too much acidity in pursuit of ripeness of fruit (and wines will become ‘flabby’), but in this case, altitude triumphs. Agala Altitud 1212 is fresh and delicious.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Wonderful with intense and spicy dishes such as *carrileras en salsa* (slow-cooked pig’s cheeks in sauce) served with *puré de batata* (sweet potato mash).



AGALA ALTITUD 1318

Bodega: Bentayga, Tejeda, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 70% Albillo Criollo, 30% Verijadiego

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13.5% abv, pressed juice from both grape varieties is fermented together in new 500-litre French oak barrels (light toast and medium grain) and aged on lees for 4 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* intense straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) high-octane nose of fresh tropical fruits (esp. pineapple), sweet stone fruits, white flowers and orange blossom, bitter orange, ginger; (2°) creamy notes from both MLF and oak / *palate:* creamy and mouth-coating, with a lemon zest and orange peel freshness, long finish that is smooth, floral and fruity, but that also transmits some of the cleansing salinity and mild bitterness of the local volcanic mineral water.

Comments: Traditionally, Moscatel has always been the aromatic grape of choice on Gran Canaria. In Caldera de Tejeda, however, Albillo Criollo has just stolen the show. In this wine, much credit must also be attributed to racy Verijadiego, whose piercing acidity has been expertly harnessed to electrify Albillo’s fresh flavours to create a drinking experience that goes past satisfying to touch exhilarating.

Sommelier’s recommendation: Perfect with dishes such as *garbanzas compuestas* (chickpea casserole Canarian style).



LOS BERRAZALES TINTO ROBLE

Bodega: Los Berrazales, Agaete, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2016

Grape(s): 70% Listán Negro, 30% Tintilla

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 13% abv, grape varieties vinified separately (Tintilla is whole-bunch fermented) in stainless steel vats where a little semi-carbonic maceration occurs, followed by 6 months ageing in French and American oak barrels prior to blending and bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* intense cherry / *smell & taste:* (1°) sweet fruits, ripe blackberries, blackcurrant cordial, bilberry pie, kirsch, a hint of mint; (2°) creamy notes, sweet spices (vanilla, liquorice) hints of toasted coconut and roasted coffee / *palate:* full-bodied with ample fine tannins; the finish is long and flavourful, with the opulence of ripe fruit underpinned by a touch of volcanic minerality.

Comments: Who says Listán Negro can't make powerful wines? Okay, so maybe it's getting some help from young oak and a minority component of ripe Tintilla with a touch of semi-carbonic maceration – but this wine is seriously sweet and juicy. An unusual and memorable expression of the dominant red grape of the Canaries, made possible by the hot microclimate of the Valle de Agaete.

Sommelier's recommendation: Good with heavily-spiced dishes, and particularly so with grilled *chuletitas de cordero* (lamb chops).



LOS BERRAZALES BLANCO DULCE (BARRICA)

Bodega: Los Berrazales, Agaete, Gran Canaria

Appellation: DO Gran Canaria

Type: *blanco dulce* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017 (solera sample)

Grape(s): 100% Moscatel

ARPICI: €€

Vinification: 14% abv, naturally sweet from late-harvest grapes, temperature-controlled fermentation in stainless steel, then added to (a half-depleted) solera of French oak that has been taking consecutive vintages since 2014.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* brilliant yellow to gold / *smell & taste:* (1°) ripe stone fruits (esp. nectarines), cooked tropical fruits (esp. pineapple), peach blossom, cut flowers; (2°) toasty notes from oak; (3°) honey and a touch of chocolate / *palate:* a gentle wine in the mouth that is sensually viscous, perfumed and warm.

Comments: To create this provocative dulce the harvest was done at night (which helps to preserve acidity and flavours under the hot and steamy microclimate of Valle de Agaete). This passion for quality has produced a wine that is without doubt the proprietor's favourite.

Sommelier's recommendation: It is essential to try this wine with *medio Flor de Guía* – a soft Gran Canarian cheese protected by a Denominación de Origen. It's made from a tightly specified mix of sheep's, goat's and cow's milk, and then juice from cardoon and artichoke flowers (hence the 'Flor') is used to coagulate the mixture.



9

El Hierro

HISTORY

The greatest legend of El Hierro is that of the mystical ‘fountain tree’. High up in the island’s misty interior there once stood El Garoé, the tree of life, whose leaves condensed enough moisture to fill a pond. From this single source of fresh water, it is said, the Guanches survived in harmony with their environment for thousands of years.

El Garoé was thus venerated, and the islanders protected it; indeed they guarded it with their lives. When the Conquistadores arrived in 1405, the Guanches resolved to keep the tree hidden so that their enemies would be forced to abandon their efforts due to lack of water. Yet the native peoples of El Hierro were condemned to oblivion when one of their fair damsels, Agarfa, fell in love with a Spanish man-at-arms and naïvely led him to the place where he could relieve his desperate thirst. With the location of the precious fountain tree revealed, the island fell to the Crown of Castile within weeks, and the majority of the islanders were sold as slaves.

There is no mention of wine on El Hierro until the 16th century, when our persecuted friend from Gloucester, Thomas Nichols (see the history of Gran Canaria subchapter), speaks of it, as well as El Garoé, in his seminal description of the Fortunate Islands:

The Iland of Yron, called Hierro ... There is no wine in all that Iland, but onely one vineyard that an English man of Taunton in the West countrey planted among rocks, his name was John Hill. This Iland hath no kind of fresh water, but onely in the middle of the Iland groweth a great tree with leaves like an Olive tree which hath a great cisterne at the foot of the sayd tree. This tree continually is covered with clouds, and by meanes thereof the leaves of the sayd tree continually drop water, very sweet, into the sayd cisterne, which commeth to the sayd tree from the clouds by attraction. And this water sufficeth the Iland for all necessities, as well for the cattell, as for the inhabitants.

John Hill's vineyard is thus thought to have been the first of El Hierro and is said to have existed on the slopes of a small volcanic cinder cone in the north-east of the island that is today called Montaña de la Viña. Who would ever have guessed that the first vines of Europe's south-westernmost outpost would have been planted by an Englishman? John Hill's name continues to be honoured and he is commemorated by the Ensenada de Juanil (Cove of John Hill), whence his Canary wines were sent out across oceans long ago. Coincidentally, the cove is located adjacent to El Hierro's most important modern connection to the outside world; it's just a few metres to the south of the island's airport.

During the 100 years that followed the planting of Hill's inaugural vineyard, wine and aguardiente export to the other Canary Islands (Gran Canaria in particular), Europe and the New World grew to 60,000 litres per annum and became the principal source of El Hierro's wealth. When in the early 17th century a storm blew El Garoé down, the island's vineyards became vital not just to the economy, but also to the continued sustenance of the population.

Another old legend of El Hierro is the tale of a foreign visitor who was surprised that the otherwise warm and welcoming Herreños did not offer any drinking water for refreshment, only wine. He soon realised that on the island wine *is* the water, and even children drank it daily. Unfortunately, in 1852 a most *un*welcome visitor came to El Hierro: oidio, a fungus from the Americas, infected most of the island's vineyards and by 1859 their total wine production had fallen to just 3000 litres per annum. A few years later a second American fungal disease, mildiu, reached El Hierro, and most of the island's remaining vineyards were lost. With the wine export industry destroyed and very little 'water' to survive on, a large fraction of the population emigrated en masse to Cuba and Venezuela (today, 80% of Herreños have relatives in the Americas).

In the 1970s, however, El Hierro underwent significant change. Modern water and electricity systems were installed, paved roads were laid, and the construction of a small airport greatly improved international access. Once these projects were complete, attention turned to the revitalisation of the island's export opportunities, including the establishment of a large agricultural organisation,

Cooperativa del Campo de la Frontera. El Hierro's wine industry was reborn when the co-op's central facility was equipped with a large state-of-the-art bodega, Viña Frontera, which still processes the majority of grapes grown on the island today.

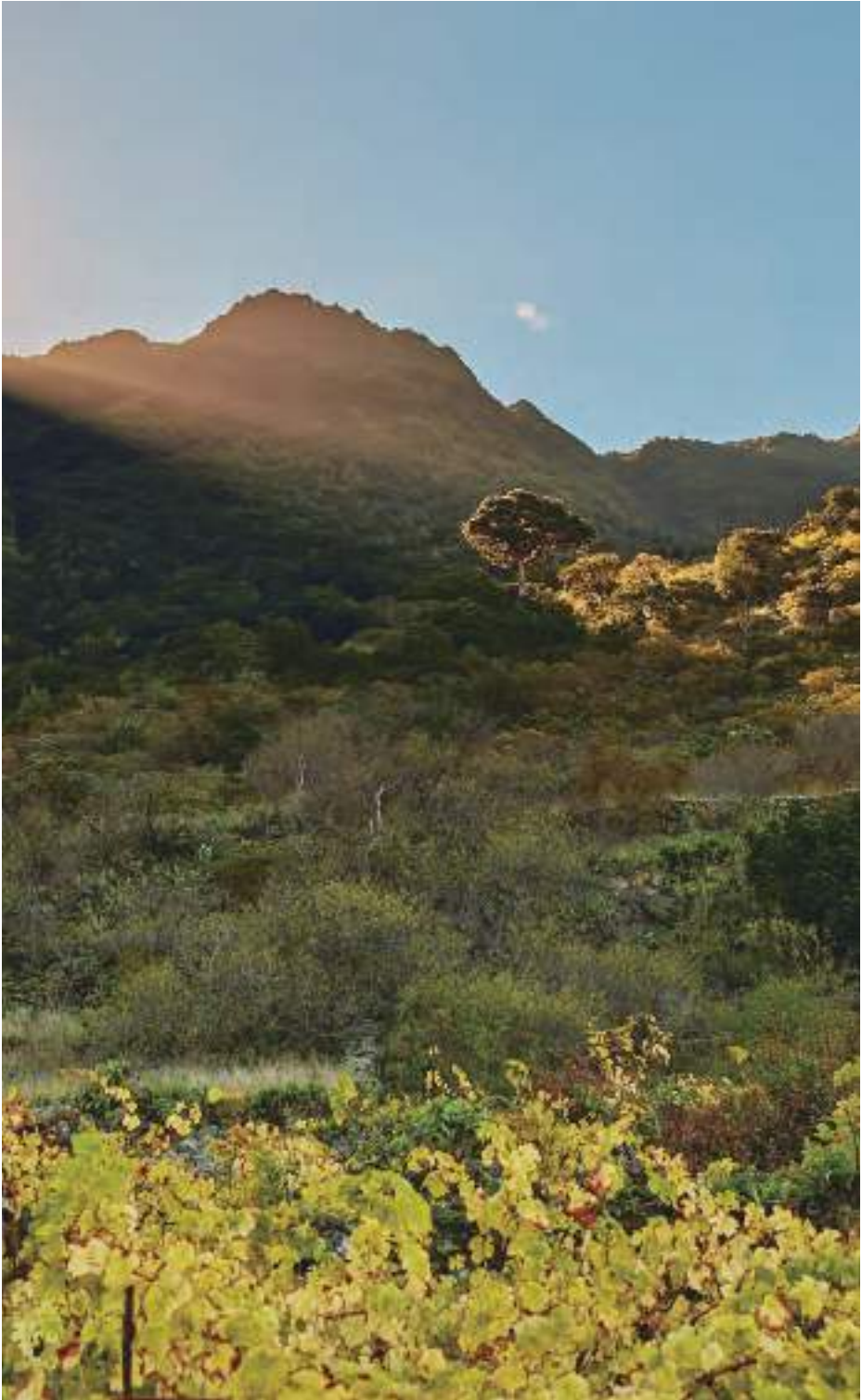
Finally, in 1994 El Hierro was granted its own Denominación de Origen to protect and promote its unique and historically important wines, and to improve their quality. While early successes were underpinned by interest from the large and nostalgic expatriate community in Latin America, El Hierro has gone on to produce some of the most famous wines of the Canarian archipelago of the modern era, such as those of Tanajara, that have graced the menus of some of the world's most prestigious restaurants.

A PORTRAIT OF EL HIERRO

El Hierro, or La Isla del Meridiano (The Meridian Island), is the smallest and the most south-westerly of the Canary Islands. The 2nd-century Alexandrian polymath Ptolemy determined the island to be the edge of the known world. And indeed, El Hierro was the last landmass that Christopher Columbus saw on his voyage of 1492, before making it across the Atlantic to discover the continents of the western hemisphere. In 1634 Louis XIII of France and Cardinal Richelieu decided that the line of longitude running through El Hierro – the Ferro Meridian – should be the prime meridian on the new maps of the Age of Enlightenment. It was only in 1884, during the height of the power and influence of the British Empire, that the prime meridian was repositioned to run through Greenwich.

With only 11,000 inhabitants, El Hierro has both the lowest population and, despite its small size, the lowest population density of the archipelago. Though the other Canary Islanders sometimes take holidays here, to most outsiders El Hierro is still terra incognita, as the Victorian adventurer Olivia M Stone put it in her 1887 travel odyssey *Tenerife and its Six Satellites*. Not much has changed since then. The sparse population still lives mainly off unmechanised agriculture, and the island still carries a feeling of being the most remote and sleepy of all the Canaries. Suffice it to say, if you are looking for a few weeks of sunny tranquillity and peace, away from the constant whine of the infernal combustion engine and the heavy beat of dance music, this is the island for you.

El Hierro is special in another way too: it is by far the youngest of the Canary Islands. Although, according to the textbook *The Geology of the Canary Islands* (Carracedo and Troll), La Gomera, its closest neighbour, is 10 million years old, El Hierro appeared only about 1 million years ago, when three foundational volcanic eruptions emerged from the ocean in the form of a triangular super-cone. Giant gravitational landslides, one as recent as 15,000 years ago, have reduced the size



and height of El Hierro to its present state – a three-sided island just 1500 masl high with an area of 278 km². Two sides – the southern and eastern faces – have steep inclines that end abruptly at the sea. The third face, the north-western, is the great El Golfo – a mighty, sweeping, crescent-shaped bay with a wide cultivated littoral backed by a towering escarpment of sheer volcanic rock where, at least from a distance, it does not seem that even the most sure-footed of animals could find a purchase. A number of miradores offer spellbinding views over this most tranquil of bays; from miles inland you can observe and even listen to the surf breaking on the beaches because the air is clear and there is no other competing sound.

El Golfo's landscape is agricultural – the majority of the islands' fruit is grown here, including its grapes – and in the middle of the coastline, at Las Puntas, an old wharf and small customs house through which the island's produce was once shipped has been converted into the world's smallest hotel. Hotel Puntagrande offers upmarket accommodation in one of the most staggeringly beautiful settings on Earth, and its gorgeous restaurant, decorated with treasures from El Hierro's nautical heritage, specialises in pairing dishes made from fresh local ingredients with the best modern wines of the island.



Changing tack, a peculiarity of El Hierro is its lack of significant barrancos; unlike the other islands, this one hasn't been around long enough for nature to erode deep incisions into its surface. Nonetheless, microclimates abound, and in 2000 the whole island was designated a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve to protect its natural diversity. Semi-arid pine forests and mossy laurisilva greenwood can all be found, but most unusual of all is the central plateau of El Hierro, where foggy green pastureland is divided by dry stone walls into miniature fields, calling to mind John Hill's 16th-century West Country. Another botanical highlight is the famous *sabina* (juniper) trees that sit on the western crest of the island; due to their exposed position, the trunks have been bent to a full right-angle – and their branches wildly contorted – by the relentless alisios. This extraordinary mixture of habitats has also given rise to unique wildlife such as the (now critically endangered) El Hierro giant lizard, known locally as the *gran salmor*, which can grow to almost a metre in length.

The government has the noble ambition of making El Hierro entirely independent with regards to its food and energy. Wind turbines and hydroelectric systems have been installed, and in 2014 El Hierro became a 'hero' by being the first island in the world to be 100% powered by renewable energy. It's worth noting that when vines grow they fix carbon from the atmosphere through photosynthesis, and if their grapes are processed into wine using only renewable energy, the resulting product is technically carbon negative. Ergo, if you want to save the planet, drink some wine from El Hierro!

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

Overall, El Hierro receives less rainfall than the other western islands of the Canarian archipelago – Tenerife, La Palma and La Gomera – but is still green with plant life because of the year-round misty humidity and mild temperatures. There is, however, a broad division that can be made between north and south. The north of the island experiences more cooling and clouds from the trade winds, whereas the south is dried and warmed by more hours of sunshine. Even during the hottest days, however, temperatures seldom exceed 27°C. Furthermore, as El Hierro is the farthest of the Canaries from the African coast, the calima rarely causes grape-damaging heatwaves.

That said, viticulture is anything but easy on El Hierro. At the extreme, grapes can be found growing on steep and uneven plots at altitudes approaching 1000 metres. These vineyards are particularly labour-intensive to work; if they are not carefully managed, the diversity of their orientations will cause uneven ripening of the crop. However, the majority of El Hierro's vineyards are between altitudes of 100 and 900 metres on small natural plateaux or man-made terraces carved into

the volcanic slopes of the island, which at least homogenises the intra-vineyard rates of maturation. The primary terroirs of El Hierro are, therefore, principally governed by the prevailing climate and soil compositions of the island's three major geographic zones.

The oldest wine-growing area, **El Norte**, lies on the north-eastern peninsula of El Hierro. It faces the alisios head-on, and thus has a moderate cloudy climate characterised by persistent winds and relatively high humidity and rainfall. There are about 30 ha of vineyards here, the bulk of which are near the town of Echedo on a gently sloping plateau at about 400 masl, with nutrient-rich loam topsoils that drain well over volcanic bedrock. Not far away is Montaña de la Viña, where John Hill initiated the island's wine economy. Because damp-loving fungi can be an issue in El Norte, hardy, disease-resistant Listán Blanco and Listán Negro dominate the viticultural landscape, with vines commonly trained in espaldera to improve ventilation.

Facing towards the north-west, the lightly compacted sandy/rocky volcanic soils of **El Golfo** provide the most prolific grape-growing conditions of the island. The 120 ha of vineyards receive less moisture than El Norte, which mostly comes in the form of irregular, sometimes heavy, rainfall. A diversity of grapes can be grown thanks to the wide range of vineyard altitudes and training methods employed. In general, the warm, broad, and gently sloping coastal plain is best suited to aromatic varieties, which can often be found interplanted with pineapples, papayas and other tropical fruits whose flavours the grapes seem to mimic. Rising to 700 masl, the stepped vineyards hewn out of the encircling amphitheatre of igneous rock are home to the queen of El Golfo – **Verijadiego**, a high-acidity grape which thrives in the slightly cooler conditions provided by the increased altitude. The highest densities of viticulture in the great bay are found around the towns of centrally located Frontera, and Sabinosa in the far west.

The second most important wine zone of modern El Hierro, with about 50 ha under vine, is **El Pinar**. Located between 600 and 950 metres, the vineyards are at the highest altitude of the island and are found bordering the gloriously silent and still *Pinus canariensis* forest that draws an east–west stripe right across the southern face of El Hierro. Pine trees and grapevines can be centuries old, with large knotted trunks that impart a sense of grace and grandeur to rival the iconic sabinas. Humidity is generally low, and El Pinar enjoys clear skies most days, especially in the summer. Countering the plentiful sunshine and heat of the growing season, a large diurnal temperature range ensures grapes can retain their refreshing acidity right through to harvest time. In addition, the vines tend to exist in wild twisted masses low to the ground, creating an umbrella of green foliage that provides the grape bunches with some protection against the sun. Rainfall occurs primarily as sporadic heavy downpours between November and April, but the soil is sandy and lightly packed with *ceniza horneada*, a type of very fine-grained volcanic ash, which allows just the right drainage for the vines to survive

the capricious winter storms whilst retaining enough moisture to deliver the next vintage. These conditions are well suited to the recently rediscovered full-blooded red varieties **Vijariego Negro** and Baboso Negro that have unexpectedly shot El Hierro's grapes and wines to international fame.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE EL HIERRO

www.doelhierro.es



When El Hierro achieved its Denominación de Origen status in 1994, only two commercial bodegas were in operation. As at 2018, this number had increased to ten, which between them make about 190,000 litres of wine each year. While small in terms of volume – only La Gomera and Fuerteventura have lower production – **DO El Hierro** has established a track record of marked overachievement. Over the past 5 years, the Meridian Island has amassed an enviable portfolio of awards for wines of almost all styles.

El Hierro's success has been due in no small part to the efforts of the DO El Hierro governing council, which has worked closely with the many talented local grape growers and winemakers to introduce modern practices to improve wine quality and consistency of character. With the island blessed by an endowment of world-class grapes and terroirs, El Hierro has undeniable potential to commence commercial-scale export of fine wines to overseas markets. Whether or not this happens may depend on the effectiveness of DO El Hierro's next major project: to facilitate and operate trade discussions and promotional strategies that reach consumers beyond the Canary Islands (where the quality of El Hierro's wines has already become widely known).

GRAPE VARIETIES

El Hierro is a fascinating island with regards to the diversity and inherent quality of its heritage minority grapes, many of which have been planted in the larger wine-producing islands of the archipelago over the last 15 years.

Verijadiego is still largely unique to the Meridian Island, however, and remains its most abundant variety. No better place has been found than the upper reaches of El Golfo to consistently produce Verijadiego crops that make exceptional wines high in natural acidity and infused with subtle notes of green fruits and fresh herbs. To add tropical fruit aromas and body, Verijadiego is commonly blended with the

Marmajuelo and Gual that grow on the coastal plain below. It is from plantings in El Golfo that Marmajuelo and Gual were ‘discovered’ by viticulturists from outside El Hierro before being transplanted to several of the other Canary Islands.

Listán Blanco and a little Malvasía Aromática and Moscatel are also grown, the first being mostly used for table grapes and simple table wines, while the latter two are usually employed similarly to Marmajuelo and Gual – adding character to Verjadiego-based wines, but this time with aromas that are more floral than fruity.

The latest grape from El Hierro to spark interest from the wider wine community is Baboso Blanco. This little known and enigmatic variety is grown in only vanishingly small quantities (mostly in El Golfo), but Viña Frontera has managed to produce a few 100% varietal vintages that are well matched to raising in oak and appear to be amongst the most ageworthy blancos secos of the Canary Islands.

As for the reds, while Listán Negro from all subzones of El Hierro continues to be used for easy-drinking tintos jóvenes and tintos de maceración carbónica, **Vijariego Negro** and Baboso Negro are beginning to take over thanks to their capacity to produce powerful, full-bodied red wines. The intensity of ripe red and black fruits and sultry style pioneered by Tanajara winery of El Pinar from 2003 to 2011 have done much to transform the perception of Canary Islands red wines throughout the archipelago and the wider world.



VERIJADIEGO

Verijadiego is a local Canarian variety that probably first appeared on El Hierro,¹ where it seems well adapted to the prevailing terroirs – notably El Golfo, the steep slopes of the islands’ north face.

The white-green berries and bunches are large and juicy, but intensely sour and with a fresh herbaceous and grassy flavour when eaten off of the vine. It is generally reliable, but the fat grapes more readily suffer sunburn and heatstroke than some of the other varieties of the Canary Islands. To combat this, growers position vine leaves, ferns and sometimes even tree branches over the bunches to protect them from the sun’s rays.

When grown and harvested appropriately, ripe Verijadiego stands out for its retention of high acidity (I’ve heard it is the most acidic grape of the archipelago), which makes it ideal for the production of refreshing still white wines, and provides some sparkling wine potential. Varietal wines typically present mild and refreshing flavours reminiscent of pears, green apples and limes, as well as a green-herb component that in the best examples can be enhanced by undertones of Asian spice, and a pleasing floral finish. As a rule of thumb, wines from Verijadiego grapes grown at higher altitudes are more intense in terms of crispness and expression of flavour, but in almost all examples you should expect the trademark citrusy acidity.

If you want to try some, a good place to start is the archetypal Verijadiego blends of El Hierro’s biggest producer – Viña Frontera. The winery’s Blanco Seco and Blanco Afrutado, which are both made mainly from Verijadiego grapes grown on the highest sites of El Golfo, are excellent. They are, by some margin, El Hierro’s most produced wines and are readily available in supermarkets across the archipelago. In these wines, the aromatic contributions from Listán Blanco, Marmajuelo (sometimes ‘Bermejuela’ on El Hierro), Gual (sometimes ‘Uval’ on El Hierro) and Pedro Ximénez provide a luxurious dimension that beautifully frames and showcases the bright acidity and green fruit aromas of Verijadiego.

note: The white Diego grape of Lanzarote and La Palma (where it is sometimes called Vijariego Blanco) is not the same as the Verijadiego of El Hierro.^{1,2,3}

1 Marsal G, Méndez JJ, Mateo-Sanz JM, Ferrer S, Canals JM, Zamora F and Fort F (2019) *Molecular characterization of Vitis vinifera L. local cultivars from volcanic areas (Canary Islands and Madeira) using SSR markers*. OENO One 53 (4) pp 667–680. www.oeno-one.eu/article/view/2404

2 Zerolo J, Cabello F, Espino A, Borrego J, Ibáñez J, Rodríguez-Torres I, Muñoz-Organero G, Rubio C, Hernández M (2006) *Variedades de Vid de Cultivo Tradicional en Canarias*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Calidad Agroalimentaria, Santa Cruz de Tenerife. ISBN: 9788460639770

3 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

VIJARIEGO NEGRO

Vijariego Negro is an old and prestigious heritage variety of El Hierro. Rediscovered not long ago, it is now being used to make outstanding varietal wines and red blends. Genetically, it is identical to a grape named Sumoll⁴ that is grown widely in Cataluña,⁵ especially in DO Penedès.⁶ The name ‘Sumoll’ is said to derive from the term ‘sumollar’ which means ‘to mature’;⁵ if that’s correct, it’s interesting because Vijariego Negro is notorious for taking a very long time to ripen – usually getting to its optimum condition no less than one month later than its most common blending partner in the Canaries, Listán Negro.

In El Hierro, Vijariego Negro grapes ripen fully and consistently on the sunny south-facing side of the island, El Pinar. When ripe, the variety’s berries are strikingly beautiful – large, plump, ovoid, intense purple-blue – and loosely, but neatly, packed in large regular bunches. The vines themselves are vigorous, productive (high-yielding) and notably hardy. In fact, Vijariego Negro (as Sumoll) has been crossed with Cabernet Sauvignon in parts of Australia to make high-quality grapes (Cienna, Vermilion, Rubienne and Tyrian) that are resistant to severe drought.⁷

Vijariego Negro varietal wines are still fairly rare in the Canary Islands but are highly appreciated – a decade ago the Tanajara winery on El Hierro produced vintages that made their way onto the wine lists of some of the best restaurants in the world. When done well, the wines are both red- and black-fruited with aromas such as morello cherry, cranberries and cassis, and can be enriched by barrel and age to include sweet undertones of vanilla, dark chocolate, figs and soft sweet spice (e.g. cinnamon). In the mouth, they are structured and generous, with the sweet aromas nicely balanced by savoury, meaty notes, all built around polished tannins and fresh acidity. The flavour intensity tends to be persistent, making these wines an ideal accompaniment to salty meat dishes and strong cheese. Vijariego Negro wines can be long-lived too, and it’s worth buying a case of the best vintages for the opportunity to taste the evolution that occurs over ten or more years.

Apart from on its native island, quality Vijariego Negro wine is now also being

4 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Vijariego Negro (and references therein)

5 Favà X (2001) *Diccionari dels noms de ceps i raïms. L'ampelonímia catalana*. Ed. Institut d'Estudis Catalans. ISBN: 8472835596

6 Robinson J, Harding J and Vouillamoz J (2012) *Wine grapes. A complete guide to 1,368 vine varieties, including their origins and flavours*. Allen Lane (Penguin Books), London. ISBN: 9781846144462; ECCO (HarperCollins), New York. ISBN: 9780062206367

7 Carboneau A (2011) *Cienna: une nouvelle variété australienne originale, parmi quelques autres*. Progrès Agricole et Viticole. 128 (11) pp 237-238

made on Gran Canaria, La Palma and in several of Tenerife's DOs, where bodegas have realised the potential of this variety and have invested in new plantings of vines from cuttings brought across from El Hierro.

STYLES OF WINE

About 60% of El Hierro's modern wines are white, the majority of which are designed to be drunk as soon as possible after vintage release. Most are made from a dominant component of Verijadiego or Listán Blanco, but often with additions of other minority grapes to enrich character (as discussed above). Most are seco, semiseco or afrutado, and in all styles it is possible to detect a faint degree of volcanic minerality that is intriguing rather than defining. The best blancos jóvenes have high acidity and possess complex aromas of a wide range of primary fruits, flowers and green herbs, expertly layered into a smooth and refreshing palate of medium body. On the whole, these wines can be enjoyed cold at any time, or with almost any kind of seafood. In recent years it has become possible to find 'bigger' blancos secos that have seen time in new oak; but for now, at least, these are few and far between.



Historically, El Hierro's export wines were potent blancos dulces – dense with sugar and alcohol, but well balanced by the high natural acidity of Verijadiego. The most famous were the Vinos de Las Vetas, made from grapes grown under a dry microclimate in the far west of El Golfo on a small volcanic cinder cone named Montaña de Sabinosa. Here, on a hillside of thick picón that slopes up to a full 45 degrees towards the north-west, sunburn-prone Verijadiego vines are angled sufficiently away from the full force of the powerful southern sun to permit harvesting late in September when the grapes have achieved full, undamaged passerillage.

Unfortunately, even the vines of Las Vetas were not immune from the oidio and mildiu diseases that ravaged El Hierro in the 19th century and forced so many Herreños to abandon their island for pastures new. The emigrants included Ramón Méndez, a famous Canarian wrestler and the last maker of the original Vino de Las Vetas, who left for the New World in 1890 to deal in Cuban rum. In 1930, however, Vino de Las Vetas was reborn when Méndez sold his vineyard and bodega to Juan Pérez, who began to gather the late-harvest grapes of Montaña de Sabinosa to feed into a solera system made of old rum casks of Cuban chestnut wood that Méndez had exported back to his homeland. These 'new' Las Vetas



wines eventually reached such a level of excellence that Pope Pius XII (head of the Catholic Church from 1939 to 1958) allegedly used it for services in the Vatican. Today, only a handful of winemakers maintain the full tradition of *Vino de Las Vetas*; among them, **Herminio Sanchez Pérez**, Juan Pérez's grandson, who still uses the original Cuban barrels to elaborate the exquisite elixir. 'I cannot let these vines and this style of wine die. It is a tradition of El Hierro, and I feel compelled to preserve the heritage of my island and my forefathers,' he says. A further point of interest is that these wines are made from the most westerly vineyards in Europe, and in many ways, *Vino de Las Vetas* may be the most transatlantic wine in the world. Herminio profoundly points out that 'No other grapes of Europe share the sun with America for as long as those of Las Vetas!'

On the whole, El Hierro's tintos fall into two camps. Those made from Listán Negro (grown in all areas of the island) are used for jóvenes of light colour, fresh red-fruit aromas and soft minerality. Notably easy-going, they are usually bottled a few months after the harvest and are made to be consumed slightly chilled, according to Canarian custom. While some Listán Negro wines can see time in used oak barrels, new ones are used almost exclusively for the much more structured and complex tintos barricas and tintos crianzas that can be made from Vijariego Negro and Baboso Negro grapes grown in the dry, sunny, high-altitude vineyards of El Pinar. Of this class, Viña Frontera makes a reliably good Vijariego Negro, but the grapes and wines that have achieved the greatest fame are those of Tanajara. From 2003 to 2011, Tanajara, in association with Viñátigo (of north-western Tenerife), used grapes from their 650-metre altitude vineyards in south-east El Hierro to produce a line of oak-aged 100% Vijariego Negro and 100% Baboso Negro wines of a depth of body, intensity of ripe fruit, and luxuriance of sweet spice that had not previously been achieved in the Canary Islands. Some vintages of these legendary wines can still be found, and though they are relatively expensive, they provide an important reference point for those wanting to understand the inherent potential of Canarian grapes to produce an overtly opulent style of red wine. Though Tanajara has not released its own wines since 2011, the grapes of the estate continue to be used by bodegas in Tenerife (using the freedom provided by DOP Islas Canarias to move refrigerated grapes between the islands) to make award-winning wines (e.g. El Sitio's De Yanes Baboso Negro). Excitingly, however, as this book goes to print, the return of Tanajara is imminent, with Baboso Negro grapes selected from the 2018 harvest having been used to elaborate a new wine, Tanajara Origen, which will hit the market by the end of 2019.

El Hierro produces a relatively small amount of rosados. Though largely unremarkable, they can be pleasantly light, fruity and floral. Most are made from Listán Negro, but it is also possible to find rosados made by blending Vijariego Negro and Listán Blanco, which at best creates wines that are easy-drinking and sweet with flavours of freshly picked red berries.

BODEGAS

VIÑA FRONTERA

El Hierro's modern Garoé tree

www.cooperativafrontera.com

Located in Frontera, a small town in the centre of mighty El Golfo, Viña Frontera is by far the largest bodega on El Hierro. The winery is a sub-organisation of a fruit-focused cooperative (Sdad. Cooperativa del Campo Frontera) that was established in 1977 and has a membership that now represents 5% of the island's population. As well as overseeing the harvesting, packaging, sales and distribution of most of the island's bananas, pineapples, mangoes, papayas, avocados, watermelons, peaches, melons and star fruits, it processes over 75% of all El Hierro's grapes in its winery.

'The legend that wine is more important than water on El Hierro is true. We have it with breakfast and in business meetings; it's more usual to be served wine than water,' says **Gerardo Quintero**, the co-op's commercial director. While a vidueño style of wine sustained the populace during the 20th century, the winery now uses state-of-the-art vinification technology to produce large volumes of light and clean wines that are more in tune with modern tastes. It has proved a sound business decision. 'Since 2010, all new vintages (released in November) have been completely sold out by March,' says Quintero. Quite a feat, considering Frontera elaborates up to 14 different wines (depending on harvest conditions) each year – 7 tintos, 6 blancos and 1 rosado.

Given the cooperative's focus on fruit, it seems fitting that three-quarters of the ca. 150,000 bottles of wine that it produces each year are of a fruity style. Viña Frontera Blanco Afrutado is one of the best value-for-money semi-sweet wines of the Canary Islands. It has notable freshness from a dominant (60%) component of high-acid Verijadiego harvested from El Golfo's forested upper reaches, and a sweet blossomy bouquet from aromatically potent Gual and Marmajuelo, which are grown on the much gentler agricultural landscape that surrounds the bodega.

Unlike the afrutados (the bodega's rosado is an afrutado too), Frontera's secos and dulces do not have fermentation interrupted by chilling and are thus better placed to showcase the full winemaking potential of El Hierro's signature grapes. Verijadiego is framed extremely well in Viña Frontera Varietales Blanco, which uses grapes from 60-year-old vines and is fermented and aged in new French and American oak barrels with regular bâtonnage. It is a wine of sublime complexity, pleasantly floral (it has a small component of Marmajuelo, Gual, Malvasía

Aromática and Moscatel), with a densely glyceric mouthfeel and refreshing lemony acidity.

Gran Salmor is the winery's award-winning, intense blanco dulce. Made from over-ripe Verijadiego, Marmajuelo and Gual, after fermentation it rests in oak barrels for at least two years to give an orange-amber-coloured wine that is aromatic, powerful and complex. It is without a doubt one of the best dessert wines of the Canary Islands and is another illustration of the inherent quality of Verijadiego.

'While we are proud of all our wines, it is undoubtedly true that Verijadiego, being unique to El Hierro, of high quality, and our most important variety by volume, is the most representative of Viña Frontera,' explains **Rubén Hernández Morales**, Viña Frontera's technical director, 'but Baboso Blanco is a super-trendy grape right now. It can make phenomenal wines, and we are encouraging our growers to plant more of it.' By this, he means they have let it be known that they are willing to pay a lot more for it – ten times what they pay for the same weight of Listán Blanco! How is this possible? Retailing at €50 per bottle, Viña Frontera Baboso Blanco is one of only a handful of wines of the Canary Islands that can sell out – pre-release – at a fine wine price point. Some of this is down to its exclusivity: it is not made every year, and when it is made it's only in a tiny amount. In 2007, 300 bottles were made, in 2008 another 300 bottles, then 900 bottles in 2017, and 1200 in 2018. The main reason it is so ardently desired, however, is because it appears to be a great grape capable of making sumptuous ageworthy wines.

'The first time we made 100% Baboso Blanco wines was 2007 and 2008,' says Hernández. 'We used only stainless steel, intending to create a blanco seco to drink while young. But we kept some bottles and didn't open them until December 2016. It turned out to be a spectacular tasting! The 2007 vintage presented roasted nuances (very curious, given we didn't use oak) and honeyed touches, both on the nose and in the mouth. The 2008 still possessed primary tropical and white flower aromas, although now a little honeyed. We were so pleasantly surprised by its evolution in the bottle that we decided to make this wine again, but this time with more complexity by passing through oak.' The excellent 2017 Viña Frontera Baboso Blanco has caused quite a stir, and surely it will not be long before this grape is being replanted across the archipelago. Once again, El Hierro has proved itself the Noah's Ark of Canarian viticulture.

AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



VIÑA FRONTERA BLANCO AFRUTADO

Bodega: Viña Frontera, El Golfo, El Hierro

Appellation: DO El Hierro

Type: *blanco afrutado* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2015, 2016, 2017

Grape(s): 60% Verijadiego, 40% vidueño

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 13% abv, cold-interrupted fermentation in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* radiant sunshine yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) clean notes of white peach, passion fruit, pineapple, mango, lily of the valley, peach blossom and honey / *palate:* good acidity, medium sweetness.

Comments: One of the most reliably good afrutados of the Canary Islands, with top marks for intra-vintage consistency. Widely available throughout the archipelago; look for the attractive blue bottle with the bowed sabina tree logo. Always pleasantly refreshing when served well chilled.

Sommelier's recommendation: Ideal with a fresh salmon salad and all manner of Asian cuisines.



VIÑA FRONTERA BLANCO VARIETALES

Bodega: Viña Frontera, El Golfo, El Hierro

Appellation: DO El Hierro

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 70% Verijadiego, 30% vidueño (incl. Malvasía Aromática & Moscatel)

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14% abv, fermented in new French and American oak, with bâtonnage performed every other day during 3 months of barrel ageing.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale straw yellow / *smell & taste:* (1°) citrus (lemon and lime peel), white flowers; (2°) vanilla, coffee, toasted notes / *palate:* high acidity, medium- to full-bodied, smooth, fresh and well-balanced long finish.

Comments: The highest percentage Verijadiego wine of the current Viña Frontera portfolio. Excellent work with lees by the vintner. Well suited to those who like their dry white wines to be framed by aromas of new oak. Malvasía Aromática and Moscatel make their presence known on the nose.

Sommelier's recommendation: This wine is a fantastic choice with locally caught fish such as *abadejo* (pollack), filleted and grilled.



VIÑA FRONTERA BABOSO BLANCO

Bodega: Viña Frontera, El Golfo, El Hierro

Appellation: DO El Hierro

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Baboso Blanco

ARPICI: €€€€€

Vinification: 14% abv, one half of it fermented in stainless steel and the other in new French and American oak barrels of medium toast, where bâtonnage was performed three times a week for 3 months. The grapes come from small mixed plots in El Golfo and El Pinar at altitudes between 300 and 900 metres, where soils are sand-clay loam with local presence of picón.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale yellow with golden reflections / *smell & taste:* (1°) strong primary fruit aromas of fresh pineapple, mango, passion fruit, salty inorganic minerality, subtle herbaceous notes like freshly cut grass and fennel; (2°) vanilla and moderate toasty notes from oak / *palate:* good acidity, medium- to full-bodied, creamy, extremely long finish.

Comments: This is an elegant, high-quality wine, with significant ageing potential. New oak influence is ample but not overpowering. Baboso Blanco has a shorter growth cycle and a lower yield than El Hierro's other white grapes, is grown only on a very limited scale, and is usually interplanted with other varieties. The age of the vines is up to 30 years.

Sommelier's recommendation: A perfect combination with *pulpo a la brasa* (barbecued octopus) with *papas yema de huevo arrugadas* (small black-skinned potatoes with egg-yolk yellow flesh, boiled in salt water).



GRAN SALMOR

Bodega: Viña Frontera, El Golfo, El Hierro

Appellation: DO El Hierro

Type: *blanco dulce* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2008

Grape(s): 70% Marmajuelo, 20% Verijadiego, 10% Gual

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 15% abv, naturally sweet; made from overripe, late-harvest grapes. After fermentation, the wine spends at least 2 years in oak barrels before bottling.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* an amber-orange that dances with a yellow flame when you hold it to the light / *smell & taste:* (2°/3°) powerful aromas of cooked tropical fruits, flowers, honey, almonds, walnuts, orange peel, cinnamon and ginger, and some oxidative sherry-type ‘flor’ notes (bread, pastry) / *palate:* sweet and unctuous, medium viscosity, good acidity, very persistent nutty finish.

Comments: What can one say? This is an outstanding wine that can be enjoyed now or cellared for years to come. At €9, this wine might just be the best value-for-money dulce of the Canary Islands.

Sommelier’s recommendation: While you’re on La Isla del Meridiano, you must try its most famous dessert wine with its most famous pudding: *quesadillas herreñas*, small puff-pastry tarts filled with sweetened cheese.



TANAJARA BABOSO NEGRO

Bodega: Tanajara, El Pinar, El Hierro

Appellation: DO El Hierro

Type: *tinto crianza* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

Grape(s): 100% Baboso Negro

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14% abv, aged one year in French oak barrels. The grapes come from sunny El Pinar, from a prized vineyard located at 650 masl in a sheltered dell surrounded by Canarian pines.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep ruby red with a brown rim / *smell & taste:* (1°) powerful aromas of ripe blackberry, juicy blackcurrants, black plum, black cherry

and violet; (2°) vanilla and sweet spices from oak; (3°) cooked blackberry, kirsch / *palate*: meaty and full-bodied, warmingly alcoholic; creamy, almost sweet, mouthfeel with silky tannins, extremely long and luxurious finish.

Comments: The one that put the Canary Islands back in the big leagues. The extraordinary intensity of flavours and robust structure of this wine have reset opinions regarding the potential of the Canarian archipelago to produce lusciously juicy, full-bodied oak-aged red wines. The nature of the Baboso Negro grape has allowed for the creation of a style not dissimilar to Italian Amarone della Valpolicella, but without requiring the application of the process of *passito* (where, after picking, the grapes are dried indoors to concentrate sugars and flavours).

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with a paella of *chuletillas de cordero con sarmientos* (lamb cutlets with vine shoots) – a local delicacy.



TANAJARA VIJARIEGO NEGRO

Bodega: Tanajara, El Pinar, El Hierro

Appellation: DO El Hierro

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2009, 2010, 2011

Grape(s): 100% Vijariego Negro

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 14% abv, aged at least 6 months in French oak barrels. The grapes come from sunny El Pinar, from a prized vineyard located at 650 masl in a sheltered dell surrounded by Canarian pines.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: regal crimson / *smell & taste*: (1°) pronounced cherries, redcurrants and damson conserve, intriguing hint of eucalyptus; (2°) oak ageing has imparted vanilla as well as dignifying notes of cedar and tobacco; (3°) tertiary notes of cooked plums provide a sense of sweetness, while a touch of leather gives the wine a savoury dimension / *palate*: silky and creamy mouthfeel, nicely balanced by good acidity and ample soft tannins, long and delicious finish.

Comments: This is a highly complex, high-quality wine that has (for a long while) lived in the shadow of its aforementioned bigger sibling. Ten years on, however, and its graceful ageing allows it to shine independently, as a triumphant example of innovative 21st-century Canarian viticulture.

Sommelier's recommendation: Superb with steak tartare.



DE YANES BABOSO NEGRO

Bodega: El Sitio, Tacoronte, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias

Type: *tinto barrica* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Baboso Negro

ARPICI: €€€

Vinification: 14.8% abv, grapes hand-picked from the Tanajara vineyards of El Pinar (El Hierro), refrigerated and sent to Tenerife for vinification, fermented in stainless steel, racked to 3rd-use French oak barrels for MLF and ageing on fine lees for 10 months.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep magenta / *smell & taste:* (1°) luscious black fruits (esp. blackcurrants, blackberries and black cherries) supported by subtle aromas of bittersweet flowers (esp. wilted geraniums and violets); (2°) delicate sweet spices (esp. vanilla and nutmeg), touch of cedar / *palate:* excellent acidity, plentiful fine tannins, fruity, medium- to full-bodied, notable heat, very long finish that is flavour-packed and satisfying.

Comments: This wine being the most recent rendering of the famous Baboso Negro vineyards of El Hierro – it arrived just in time to be considered for this book – I was excited to try it. De Yanes Baboso Negro 2017 is an outstanding tribute to the heroic viticulturists who have kept alive a grape variety that is of immense importance to winemaking in the Canary Islands. In particular, its freshness and elegant use of oak both impressed me and contributed greatly to my enjoyment of the aromatic power of Baboso Negro, which shines with particular vibrancy in this example. Thank you, Bodegas El Sitio: the research for *The Epic Wines of the Canary Islands* finished on a terrific high, thereby underlining my (already strong) impression that the archipelago's wines are moving from strength to strength.

Sommelier's recommendation: If you get the chance, try this wine with *cabrito embarrado* (literally 'muddy kid'; kid meat covered with a fragrant paste which is – you guessed it! – brown).



HM LAS VETAS

Bodega: Berta Hernández, Sabinosa (El Golfo), El Hierro

Appellation: DO El Hierro

Type: *blanco dulce* · (50 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017, 2018 (solera sample)

Grape(s): 60% Verijadiego, 30% Gual, 10% Listán Blanco

ARPICI: €€€€€+

Vinification: 16% abv, naturally sweet dulce made from grapes that stay on the vines long enough to catch the fading glory of the late summer sun. Fermentation and ageing via a 4-barrel solera system of chestnut casks (Canarian and Cuban) that took its first input in 2008 and is refreshed with an approximate 200-litre input each year. 120 grams of residual sugar per litre.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* deep orange to amber / *smell & taste:* (2°/3°) luxurious aromas of candied orange peel, sultanas, figs, chocolate, coffee, caramel, walnuts, chestnuts, hazelnuts / *palate:* smooth and warming, with an epically long finish that is sweet as a nut.

Comments: Named after his parents (**H**erminio and **M**aruca), Herminio Sanchez Pérez's HM Las Vetas wine is a masterpiece that in 2018 was declared the best wine of El Hierro at its annual island wine competition and received international awards for quality. Undoubtedly, Verijadiego is the key, allowing for a wine of both intense sweetness and freshness, with the use of old chestnut wood imparting another dimension of character.

Sommelier's recommendation: This wine pairs wonderfully with cured Herreño cheeses and nuts.



10

La Gomera

HISTORY

Though documentation is lacking, we may suppose that La Gomera's wine history commenced not long after its partial conquest in 1405 when settlers began to arrive from Europe. Full colonisation of the island was not easy. The Guanches furiously resisted for most of the 15th century, launching several daring counter-offences including one, in 1488, in which the island's Spanish governor was captured and killed.

Shortly thereafter, Beatriz Fernández de Bobadilla, the beautiful (and ruthless) wife of the slain governor, earned the nickname La Cazadora (The Huntress) by locating and terminating her quarry – any male Guanche – with efficiency and extreme prejudice. Her venomous revenge was executed with the help of the conqueror of Gran Canaria, Pedro de Vera, and Alonso Fernández de Lugo (who would go on to conquer La Palma and Tenerife). Lugo became Bobadilla's second husband in 1498, but not before she and La Gomera crossed paths with someone of even greater historical significance.

Legend has it that Bobadilla had a passionate affair with Christopher Columbus, who made San Sebastián de La Gomera his final port of call before his inaugural crossing of the Atlantic in search of the Indies. Having intended to stay just four

days, he kept company with Bobadilla for a full month before setting sail on 6 September 1492 on his voyage of discovery. Columbus anchored his ships at La Gomera again in 1493 and 1498, en route for his second and third voyages to the New World. Aside from his love for Bobadilla, the Canary Islands were of critical importance to Columbus as the last place to replenish supplies, including food, water and wine, before the long voyage to America. Fatefully, Bobadilla also provided Columbus with cuttings of La Gomera's chief economic crop, sugarcane – the first to reach the New World.

Early in the 16th century, when the vast plantations of Columbus's New World started to produce sugar far more cheaply than could be achieved in the Canary Islands, La Gomera's primary industry collapsed. The island scrambled to grow grapes for making wine and aguardiente for export, which succeeded in reviving and sustaining the economy for the next 150 years.

During the late 17th century, the once-reliable income stream from wine production began to fail. While Spain's growing troubles with England and Portugal started to have a severe impact on the wine export trade of the entire archipelago, on La Gomera problems were greatly exacerbated when a plague of locusts arrived to devour the crops of 1685 and 1687, leaving the majority of the island's vineyards in ruin. During the 18th and 19th centuries, wine production continued to decline, and a good fraction of La Gomera's populace was forced to emigrate to Cuba and Venezuela in search of a better life.

Similar to several other islands of the Canarian archipelago, industrial-scale cultivation of bananas and other mixed crops (tomatoes, potatoes and tropical fruits) has underpinned the agricultural sector of La Gomera since the middle of the 19th century. However, as with sugarcane, there has been persistent competition from Latin America and the rest of the emerging world where production and export are accomplished more cheaply. Today, most Canarian agriculture is only viable thanks to generous EU subsidies, motivating the regional government to search for and promote any product that has the chance of long-term economic sustainability. A significant focus of this quest is high-quality grapes for high-quality wine. While the Canary Islands will never be able to compete with the vast plains of La Mancha of mainland Spain or the Central Valley in California with regard to mass-produced commercial wines, the archipelago may be able to elaborate exclusive wines that can sell on the international market at a price point that allows the sector to prosper anew.

In 2003, La Gomera obtained appellation status to protect the uniqueness of its wines. Though **DO La Gomera** is, in terms of annual output, by some margin the smallest DO of the Canary Islands, quality has increased significantly and there is now conspicuous excitement amongst the islanders that their signature grape – **Forastera Blanca** – is of world-class potential. They may be right.

A PORTRAIT OF LA GOMERA

Almost perfectly circular, beguiling La Gomera, the Columbian Island, is the second smallest of the Canaries in both size and population. It is located 28 km from its closest neighbour, Tenerife, whose south-western slope provides a panoramic view of the entire island. From this distance, La Gomera seems to rise and fall from the Atlantic as a relatively smooth and flattened dome, but as you approach San Sebastián by fast ferry from Los Cristianos with (perhaps) a pod of gambolling dolphins accompanying you, your eyes and brain soon decipher the island's true architecture – a sawtooth mountainous interior carved with steep-sided barrancos that descend to the sea to provide narrow gateways through what is otherwise a menacing coastal wall of black basalt cliffs.

In one such opening, San Sebastián, on La Gomera's east coast, is the island's capital and biggest port. It enjoys a particularly rich history. For example, beautiful Parroquia Matriz de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción is the church where Columbus is said to have prayed before setting off to confront the edge of the known world, and the port's delightful old sugar and wine customs house, now a museum, has a well where Columbus took on water for his first voyage. An inscription reads '*Con este agua se bautizó América*' ('With this water, America was baptised').

Away from the capital, there is some foreign tourism, notably at the mouth of Valle Gran Rey, where a low-key collection of hotels and holiday apartments drain most of the island's wine production. Valle Gran Rey ('Valley of the Great King') is named after its 15th-century king, Orone, who led the most ferocious Guanche defence of La Gomera. The modern road through Orone's valley takes you through some of the most breathtakingly beautiful scenery of the entire Canary Islands. In from the coast, the steep road winds through picturesque hamlets whose inhabitants farm all manner of fruits and vegetables from spectacular stacked terraces that have (somehow) been hewn out of the dramatically high 600-metre sheer walls of the mighty gorge.

Visitors seeking to explore La Gomera's vineyard country will need to visit the less dramatic but incredibly pretty valleys of the north. Walking, cycling or merely driving through this heavenly landscape is immensely pleasurable; even more so if you are interested in wine, since the barrancos' densely terraced slopes and fertile agricultural floors support an abundance of vineyards. The compact, brightly coloured and unhurried towns of Vallehermoso ('beautiful valley'), Tamargada, Agulo and Hermigua are all worth stopping in for refreshments. Their charismatic small restaurants and bars serve all manner of Gomeran culinary specialities such as *almogrote*, a piquant red cheese paste to spread on fresh bread, and heady *gomerón*, a mixture of local grape spirits with the island's most famous agricultural product, *miel de palma* (sweet syrup distilled from the sap of palm trees).

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

As detailed in Carracedo and Troll’s recent work *The Geology of the Canary Islands*, the island of La Gomera first emerged from the ocean over 10 million years ago, the result of an ancient stratovolcano that was accumulating rock over multiple eruptive episodes. However, unlike all of the other Canary Islands, it has experienced no recent volcanism and has been subject only to erosional processes for the better part of 4 million years. Its mature geology and worn topography make for an island terroir that is chemically and physically similar to the very oldest parts of Tenerife – Teno and Anaga. Today, La Gomera is 1487 masl at its highest point, 25 km in diameter, and with an overall profile similar to a Titan’s round battle shield lying flat on the ocean (indeed, it represents a textbook example of



an extinct shield volcano). The ratio of height to area is still significant, however, and over the epochs intense water erosion has etched deep barrancos that radiate from the island's centre.

The climate of La Gomera is generally warm and soft, maintaining an average daytime temperature of about 22 °C across the year. Rainfall is a modest 380 mm per year, but most falls on the Parque Nacional de Garajonay, a crown jewel of Canarian natural heritage, situated high up in the middle of the island. This iconic UNESCO World Heritage Site consists of an emerald-green temperate rainforest of laurel, ferns and moss that covers a full third of La Gomera. Its high humidity and dense foliage are due to the trade winds that push up and over the island. At about 900 masl and above, the winds stall and condense to deposit moisture in the form of thick mists and horizontal rain. What the plants do not absorb eventually percolates deep underground to charge the island's abundant groundwater reserves, which supply the local population with plenty of fresh water for drinking and irrigation.

Lower down, the many deep barrancos of La Gomera display a fascinating gamut of microclimates primarily defined by orientation and degree of slope of valley walls. Those opening towards the south tend to be sunny and dry, with temperatures that can oscillate by as much as 10 °C between seasons, and even diurnally during the summer. North-striking barrancos, being more exposed to the trade winds, receive a regular mix of sun and clouds, more moisture, and slightly cooler but more stable temperatures throughout the year. Although some bodegas have sprung up in southern Valle Gran Rey to service the growing tourism trade, the vast majority of La Gomera's vineyards are located in the northern valleys, particularly around the towns of Vallehermoso and Hermigua.

Soils are a special feature of La Gomera viticulture. Because no 'new' volcanic material has been added for many millions of years, the island's topsoils are all heavily broken down, russet-coloured, and decidedly rich in iron and other invigorative base elements.

DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN DE VINOS DE LA GOMERA

www.vinoslagomera.com



For many decades, the viticulturists and vintners of La Gomera campaigned for recognition and protection of the distinctive grape-growing conditions and character of their wines, the two most noteworthy features being the astonishing

steepness and ubiquity of the terraced vineyards, and the uniqueness of the island's dominant grape variety, Forastera Blanca. Finally, in 2003, all the hard work paid off and **DO La Gomera** – one of the smallest appellations of Spain – came into independent existence.

DO La Gomera covers the entire island and, as of 2018, there were 125 ha planted to vines and 16 registered bodegas. Wine production is approximately 115,000 litres per year, of which 75% is blanco seco comprised almost solely of Forastera Blanca. Almost every single bottle of wine made in La Gomera is consumed on the island, but this may soon change; as quality has increased, the secret has leaked out that Forastera Blanca may have international potential.

As well as modernising winemaking practices and raising market awareness, a key focus of DO La Gomera is to encourage the preservation of the island's special viticultural landscape. Because La Gomera has almost no flat terrain, from the earliest days of Spanish occupation terraces have been carved into the slopes of the barrancos to enable agriculture. They come in many sizes, but generally most hug the valley walls as long, narrow ribbons of land whose width decreases (in some instances down to just a few metres) as the slopes get steeper. Besides being visually interesting and attractive, this distinctive landscape helps to prevent erosion – particularly loss of soil – during winter storms. The main disadvantage of vineyards on small terraces is that it makes viticulture particularly labour-intensive.

While the island's vineyards have traditionally been comprised of lines of bush vines or plants trained in parral bajo, modern espaldera has begun to prove itself well suited to the high-fertility soils of La Gomera, and its introduction has improved the economics of production by increasing yields and reducing the manpower required for pruning and harvesting.

GRAPE VARIETIES

Though the usual suspects of Canarian viticulture – Listán Negro and Listán Blanco – are grown on La Gomera, its viticulture is dominated (physically and emotionally) by just one grape: **Forastera Blanca**. Everyone agrees that it has high aromatic and alcoholic potential and good acidity, and that it is the grape that can express all the best qualities of the Columbian Island's terroir.

You may find La Gomera tintos made of something intriguing called Forastera Negra, but this is usually just applied as an island synonym for the Canaries' versatile Old Faithful, Listán Negro.

FORASTERA BLANCA

Although the word ‘Forastera’ translates as ‘stranger’ or ‘outsider’, recent genetic analysis has shown that, like Albillo Criollo, this grape is the progeny of Listán Blanco and Verdello¹ – two grapes that have been present in the archipelago for centuries.

Forastera is grown on at least three of the Canary Islands, but it is the wine emblem of La Gomera, where it accounts for around 85% of area under vine and is present in almost all of the wines of the island – even sometimes the reds.² This dominance and ubiquity of a single variety is unique amongst the islands, and La Gomera’s marriage to it is acknowledged by many people throughout the archipelago who refer to the grape as Forastera Gomera, which does have a nice ring to it.

Forastera Blanca is generally resistant to pests and the common grapevine diseases, but it does have an issue with sour rot³ – its compact clusters of small yellow grapes are sensitive to the formation of acetic acid-producing bacteria, yeasts and fungi. Knowing this, growers are vigilant and take preventative and remedial action to limit the issue, and it now rarely affects production even though harvest has traditionally been later on La Gomera than on most of the other islands.

Over more than four centuries, the grape has adapted itself extremely well to La Gomera’s charming terraced landscape and ancient soils. Here it has high alcohol and flavour potential, and the custom on the island has been to showcase these qualities by letting the grapes go to a level of ripeness that allows for elaboration of unusually powerful wines. These golden-hued wines, which are produced from grapes grown in locations of varying altitudes and microclimates, all tend to demonstrate moderate lemony acidity, a characteristic aromatic flavour profile of tropical flowers and fruits, and a potent salinity that, together with the extremely rich mouthfeel and heat of 15% abv, impart a distinguishing ‘Gomera’ personality that certainly succeeds in delivering an authentic sense of place.

Driven by curiosity, and eyeing an opportunity, enterprising winemakers have recently begun to challenge tradition by harvesting Forastera Blanca earlier in an attempt to uncover the features that might emerge in a fresher style. Though too soon to proclaim the experiment an utter triumph, early results have been very encouraging. For example, when lowering abv to just 13.5%, Forastera Blanca can produce delectable wines dominated by notes of pear, sweet red apple, blossom, stone fruits and nectar. The salinity of the Gomera volcanic-Atlantic terroir

1 Rodríguez-Torres I (2018) *Variedades de vid cultivadas en Canarias. Descriptores Morfológicos. Caracterización morfológica, molecular, agronómica y enológica*. Ed. Instituto Canario de Investigaciones Agrarias. Gobierno de Canarias. ISBN: 9788469754184

2 www.vinoslagomera.com

3 www.vitiscanarias.com; see entry on Forastera Blanca (and references therein)

remains, but is joined in the finish by a lingering sensation of honeyed sweetness and orange blossom that is simply delicious. Forastera Blanca clearly has potential, and seems to be moving closer to finding the right key to play its epic melody.

As the number of wine connoisseurs increases around the world, so there will surely be more interest and value placed on terroir-driven wines that are high-quality, completely unique, and produced in extremely limited quantities. A golden opportunity exists for those convinced of the superlative potential of Forastera Blanca wines to invest in some vineyards now while they are still largely undiscovered and economically priced. If nothing else, you will have acquired your very own vineyard in one of the most beautiful islands on Earth.

STYLES OF WINE

La Gomera's bodegas specialise in producing blancos secos characterised by the varietal flavours of Forastera Blanca superimposed on a salty volcanic foundation.

When grapes are harvested in the traditional way – slightly overripe – wines tend to reach an unusually potent alcohol content of between 14 and 16%, are amber or golden in colour, and have aromas dominated by rich notes of melon, mango, stewed red apple and the perfume of sweet tropical nectar. Surprisingly, even at such high levels of heat, Forastera Blanca can still retain decent acidity, which lends a degree of freshness to a palate that is otherwise powerful and persistent. These wines are idiosyncratic and will not be to everyone's liking, but are irrefutably well matched to La Gomera's artisanal cheeses, almogrote, charcuterie, and miel de palma-based puddings.

When harvested at the first point of ripeness, Forastera Blanca can produce wines that are very good and of a style that has universal appeal. The best examples are clean and brilliant yellow with green reflections, with abundant aromas ranging from apple and pear through to apricot, passion fruit and fresh pineapple. Floral notes are complex and of a temperate climate sort, being reminiscent of both spring orchard blossom and late summer wildflowers. These wines are framed by excellent acidity, and a body that is well balanced, saline and of medium weight. The finish can be long and fruity with a mineral edge. Such wines may have oak- and bottle-ageing potential, but at present they are almost all made to be drunk within one or two years.

Tintos are relatively few, but when made tend to be young, dominated by Listán Negro, and thus cherry in colour, clear and bright, with a peppery nose and a palate that is light and spicy. Drinking them slightly chilled will keep any juvenescent tannins in check and ensure that the aftertaste is fruity and refreshing – perfect for holidays in the sun.

AUTHOR'S SUGGESTIONS



CINCO VARAS

Bodega: Ramón Barrera González, Vallehermoso, La Gomera

Appellation: DO La Gomera

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 100% Forastera Blanca

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 13% abv, controlled fermentation (@ 14 to 16° C) in stainless steel tanks.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* a bright straw yellow that sparkles with traces of green / *smell & taste:* (1°) complex, green apples, stone fruits, tropical fruits, white flowers (chamomile and jasmine) and rock roses / *palate:* good acidity, medium body and long, smooth finish.

Comments: A truly excellent example of an aromatic, young Forastera Blanca. This is certainly a wine to try if you want to test the latent potential of La Gomera's signature grape.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect with vegetable dishes such as *ensalada de berros y cebolla de Guayonje* (a watercress and onion salad from Guayonje, an agricultural area near Tacoronte, in Tenerife).



MONTORO

Bodega: Mario Rodríguez Mendoza, Hermigua, La Gomera

Appellation: DO La Gomera

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2017

Grape(s): 85% Forastera Blanca, 10% Listán Blanco, 5% Marmajuelo

ARPICI: €

Vinification: 13% abv, fermented in stainless steel tanks, 1.5 months on fine lees with weekly bâtonnage.

Tasting notes: *appearance:* pale yellow that shimmers like the sunbeams on the

surface of the Atlantic / *smell & taste*: (1°) stone fruits, tropical fruits, intense salinity, flinty minerality / *palate*: a lovely mouthfeel of high acidity and medium body, with a finish that hints at floral sweetness.

Comments: A Forastera Blanca with a robust volcanic core, made in a refreshing modern style.

Sommelier's recommendation: Perfect combination with light dishes such as *ensalada de brotes verdes y aguacate* (a baby greens and avocado salad).



PAISAJE DE LAS ISLAS FORASTERA BLANCA

Bodega: Tajinaste, La Orotava, Tenerife

Appellation: DOP Islas Canarias

Type: *blanco seco* · (75 cl)

Vintage(s) tried: 2014, 2016, **2017**

Grape(s): 100% Forastera Blanca

ARPCI: €€

Vinification: 14% abv, fermented in stainless and aged for 5 months in 500-litre French oak casks.

Tasting notes: *appearance*: a lemon yellow that glints gold in the Canarian sun / *smell & taste*: (1°) ripe lemon and limes, red apples, paradise pears and hibiscus carried on a warm Atlantic breeze; (2°) background spice, toast and butter; (3°) subtly nutty / *palate*: ample mouthfeel of lovely glyceric texture, bright (citrusy) acidity, lingering flavourful finish that is 'sweetly' fruity (almost nectar-like), salty and very complex.

Comments: 'Paisaje de las Islas' is a project to elaborate wines that represent the landscape from which they come. This, the second of the line, highlights the unique character of the Forastera Blanca grape of the Columbian Island. Applying the new freedoms of DOP Islas Canarias, the grapes are refrigerated immediately after harvest and shipped to Tenerife for vinification using the well-appointed facilities of Bodegas Tajinaste.

Sommelier's recommendation: For a unique and memorable experience, try this wine with grilled *sama* (a great-tasting species of snapper that is native to the Canary Islands).



11

Fuerverventura

Although it is today the most marginal producer of the Canaries, Fuerteventura was in fact the first island of the archipelago to make wine.

Following the Spanish invasion of Lanzarote (1402) and Fuerteventura (1405) – the first islands of the archipelago to come under European rule – settlers began to work the dusty, windswept landscapes of these easternmost islands to produce the bread and wine they would need to survive. While Lanzarote proved suitable for cereals, Fuerteventura could also support viticulture. There is little recorded information regarding the inaugural wines of Fuerteventura, save José de Viera y Clavijo's *Noticias de la historia general de las Islas Canarias* which mentions Viña de Aníbal. The vineyard was probably planted in northern Fuerteventura sometime between its conquest and 1412, when Aníbal de la Salle, of French nobility, was in the area.

By the end of the 15th century, when the more fertile western islands of the Canaries had also been annexed, Fuerteventura's modest wine activity was utterly eclipsed. But in a handful of sheltered ravines its vines clung to existence for half a millennium. Adaptation and evolution have occurred in complete isolation, and today Fuerteventura's ancient *Vitis vinifera* represent one of the least understood (but potentially one of the most fascinating) treasure troves of Canary Islands viticulture.

The government of Fuerteventura has begun to promote the work of recovering

and cataloguing the island's centenary vines, and is sponsoring various wine sector activities in the hope of harnessing this unique legacy to the benefit of the 21st-century populace. Significant milestones have already been reached. In 2016, Bodegas Conatvs became the first winery of Fuerteventura to release wine under an official Denominación de Origen – DOP Islas Canarias. Conatvs' vineyards are located near La Oliva in the north of Fuerteventura, where jable soils hold just enough of the island's scarce moisture to grow grapes of sufficient yield and grade to make appellation-quality wine. Ancient vines of Listán Prieto and a mix of other (similar but distinct) red grape varieties that have yet to be identified are used to make Conatvs (a tinto joven), while new vineyards of Malvasía Volcánica, Diego and Listán Blanco are used in the elaboration of a blanco seco named Airam.

For those who love wine with cheese, it is worth noting that while Fuerteventura may have been the last of the Canary Islands to produce wines of appellation, it was the first to be granted its own protected Denominación de Origen for cheese; Queso Majorero is made exclusively on Fuerteventura from the milk of an endemic breed of goat that has lived on the island since the time of the Guanches. Recognised only since 1996, Queso Majorero has won several international prizes and is amongst the best in the world. While it would be fair to say that Fuerteventura wine is not yet world class, it does have a similar depth of historical heritage, and there is thus reason to feel optimistic regarding its potential for greatness.





Wine Finder

In the main part of the book, each wine is described in the chapter about the place where its grapes grow, which means that the wines are ordered by *region of origin*.

This section of the book is to help you find wines that appeal to you based on other factors, such as:

- i) wine type
- ii) price range
- iii) primary grape

Let's call it the **Epic Wine List**, since it's what you might find in an imaginary restaurant that offers the wines profiled in this book at their 2019 retail/shop price (in the Canary Islands): € denotes 1–10 euros, €€ is 11–20 euros, and so on up to €€€€€+ for 50+ euros.

Following this Wine Finder are three tables based on my own experience as a wine taster:

- **Varietal Expression** will give you the primary aromas and nature of the 16 most widely planted local grape varieties of the archipelago
- **Atlantic-Volcanic Expression** is the case of wine you might choose in order to experience the inorganic, or elemental, sensations of Canarian terroir
- **Voyage Through Time** selects another case of wine for you that showcases the four most significant *international* phases of the 500-year history of winemaking in the Canary Islands

Finally, you may be wondering what my favourite wines of the Canary Islands are. Well, you can see my choices in the **Author's Selection**, my last word on the subject – at least until the next edition of this book ...

I believe that you will find all of the wines in this book interesting, and they are, in my professional opinion, *good* or *excellent* in quality. Bear in mind, though, that many factors have shaped my choices, and are unique to my own experiences, beliefs and preferences.

Several years ago, I realised that the journey involved in creating, consuming and appreciating wine must be one of humanity's longest-lived and most pleasant ways of finding happiness. I hope this book will help you to begin an enjoyable wine odyssey of your own. Who knows where it might lead?

¡Buen Viaje!

Epic Wine List

SPARKLING WHITES

P.

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| €€ | <p><i>ALTOS DE TREVEJOS BRUT NATURE</i>
 Altos de Trevejos
 2015, Listán Blanco, 12.5% abv, DO Abona
 Lemons, green apple skins and attractive aromas of <i>boulangerie</i>. Sunny, vivacious and highly expressive.</p> | 182 |
| €€ | <p><i>BRUMAS DE AYOSA ESPUMOSO</i>
 Viticultores Comarca de Güímar
 2017, Listán Blanco, 12.5% abv, DO Valle de Güímar
 Limes and passion fruit. Exceedingly refreshing and eminently quaffable.</p> | 152 |

SPARKLING ROSÉS

- | | | |
|------|--|-----|
| € | <p><i>BRUMAS DE AYOSA FRIZZANTE 5</i>
 Viticultores Comarca de Güímar
 2015, Listán Negro, 5% abv, DO Valle de Güímar
 Succulent strawberries, glazed cherries and candied raspberries. A fling of sweet indulgence.</p> | 152 |
| €€ | <p><i>ALTOS DE TREVEJOS BRUT NATURE ROSÉ</i>
 Altos de Trevejos
 2015, Listán Prieto, 12.5% abv, DO Abona
 Notions of watermelon and strawberries with a squeeze of blood orange. Perfect pleasure.</p> | 182 |
| €€€€ | <p><i>NEGRAMOLL ROSÉ</i>
 Monje
 2015, Negramoll, 12% abv, Vino de España
 Raspberry, pomegranate, dried flowers and brioche. Creamy, savoury and deeply sophisticated.</p> | 123 |

SEMI-SWEET WHITES

- | | | |
|---|---|-----|
| € | <p><i>VIÑA FRONTERA BLANCO AFRUTADO</i>
 Viña Frontera
 2015, Verijadiego et al., 13% abv, DO El Hierro
 Luscious white peaches, tropical fruits and honey blossom. Pleasingly fragrant and thirst-quenching.</p> | 298 |
|---|---|-----|

€€	<i>EL BORUJO BLANCO AFRUTADO</i> Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez 2017, Moscatel & Listán Blanco, 11% abv, DO Valle de Güímar Juicy grapes and fresh flowers, with a bite of sour passion fruit to ensure it's not all just sweetness and light.	150
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DRY ROSÉS

€	<i>MARBA ROSADO</i> Marba 2017, Listán Negro et al., 13% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Featuring red berries, pink peppercorns, citrus blossom and a lively minerality, it's an enchanting enigma.	130
€€	<i>LISTÁN ROSADO</i> Los Bermejós 2017, Listán Negro, 13% abv, DO Lanzarote Sweet strawberries and raspberries with a squeeze of lime and dash of black lava salt. Crisp and balanced.	249

DRY WHITES

€	<i>FLOR DE CHASNA BLANCO SECO</i> Cumbres de Abona 2018, Listán Blanco, 12.5% abv, DO Abona Gooseberries and tart citrus fruits with nuances of white flowers and cut grass. A zest success.	179
€	<i>TAJINASTE BLANCO SECO</i> Tajinaste 2017, Listán Blanco & Albillo Criollo, 12.5% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Grapefruit, green apples and pears, with hints of fennel and smoke. Fresh by nature, smooth by design.	92
€	<i>CINCO VARAS</i> Ramón Barrera González 2017, Forastera Blanca, 13% abv, DO La Gomera Showcasing the aromatic prowess of Forastera, this wine offers green apples, pineapple and jasmine.	314
€	<i>MONTORO</i> Mario Rodríguez Mendoza 2017, Forastera Blanca et al., 13% abv, DO La Gomera Refreshing and modern, with exotic fruits over Atlantic salinity and a strong volcanic core.	314

€€	<i>TIERRA DE FRONTOS BLANCO SECO ECOLÓGICO</i> Frontos 2018, Listán Blanco, 13.5% abv, DO Abona Citrusy, pure, lovely: a sylphlike wine from Europe's highest vineyard.	176
€€	<i>BENJE BLANCO</i> Envínate 2016, Listán Blanco, 12.5% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Notably charismatic perfume and elegant palate delicately seasoned with herbs from the high desert.	59
€€	<i>ARTÍFICE LISTÁN BLANCO DE CANARIAS</i> Borja Pérez Viticultor 2016, Listán Blanco, 12.5% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Bitter lemon, dried wildflowers and a strikingly earthy elementality. A very classic style of Listán Blanco.	60
€€	<i>LA TIME</i> Llanos Negros 2000, Listán Blanco, 13% abv, DO La Palma Flowery, petroliferous and smoky. A sublime transmutation of Listán Blanco grown on volcanic soils.	210
€€	<i>LOS LOROS BLANCO SOBRE LÍAS</i> Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez 2017, Listán Blanco & Diego, 12% abv, DO Valle de Güímar Sweet-tempered and suave, a gentleman's wine with implied flavours of citrus, star anise, flowers and brie.	151
€€	<i>BLANCO D CRÁTER</i> Cráter 2016, Listán Blanco & Verdello, 12.5% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Notably floral, with honeysuckle and sweet blossom over a terroir- driven core. Expressive and elegant.	125
€€	<i>DIEGO SECO ECOLÓGICO</i> Los Bermejos 2017, Diego, 13.5% abv, DO Lanzarote Steely and on-point, with perfectly delineated aromas of white flowers and bitter notes of limes, juniper berries and fennel.	248
€€	<i>EL NÍSPERO ALBILLO</i> El Níspero 2016, Albillo Criollo, 13% abv, DO La Palma Mouth-watering fresh fruits and green herbs framed by dazzling acidity and Atlantic salinity. Electrifying!	215

€€	VIÑARDA ALBILLO CRIOLLO ECOLÓGICO José David Rodríguez Pérez 2017, Albillo Criollo, 13.5% abv, DO La Palma Charged acidity, with attractive aromas of stone fruits and a touch of bitterness reminiscent of asparagus.	216
€€	LOS LOROS ALBILLO CRIOLLO Juan Francisco Fariña Pérez 2015, Albillo Criollo, 12% abv, DO Valle de Güímar Scintillating acidity, silky mouthfeel, and ample primary fruit complemented by delicate notes of <i>pâtisserie</i> .	150
€€	AGALA ALTITUD 1318 Bentayga 2017, Albillo Criollo & Verijadiego, 13.5% abv, DO Gran Canaria Exhilarating orange peel, ginger, pineapple, blossom and volcanic mineral water. High-altitude class.	277
€€	QUINCE BLANCO Mondalón 2015, Albillo Criollo et al., 12.5% abv, DO Gran Canaria Tropical, spicy and nutty. This wine has wonderful structure and balance, and is outstandingly complex.	275
€€	PAISAJE DE LAS ISLAS FORASTERA BLANCA Tajinaste 2017, Forastera Blanca, 14% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Complex, full-bodied and infused with gorgeous aromas of ripe citrus fruits, paradise pears and hibiscus.	315
€€	PAISAJE DE LAS ISLAS MALVASÍA Y MARMAJUELO Tajinaste 2015, Malvasía Aromática & Marmajuelo, 13.5% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Harmony of fresh and caramelised fruits, saline minerality and nuances of oak. Lovely glyceric mouthfeel.	94
€€	VIÑÁTIGO MARMAJUELO Viñátigo 2016, Marmajuelo, 13.5% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Sumptuous pineapple and dragon fruit lifted by a squeeze of tart passion fruit. Full-bodied and enduring.	56
€€	VIÑÁTIGO GUAL Viñátigo 2016, Gual, 13.5% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Opulent and fabulously tropical (pineapple, banana and toasted coconut). Nectar!	56

€€	<i>TESTAMENTO MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA SECO</i> Cumbres de Abona 2017, Malvasía Aromática, 13% abv, DO Abona Smooth, fruity and potently floral. An excellent encapsulation of the Canary Islands' most famous grape.	177
€€	<i>TESTAMENTO MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA BARRICA</i> Cumbres de Abona 2017, Malvasía Aromática, 14% abv, DO Abona Malvasía Aromática framed by a generous application of oak; luxuriantly perfumed and richly textured.	178
€€	<i>MALVASÍA SECO COLECCIÓN</i> El Grifo 2017, Malvasía Volcánica, 13% abv, DO Lanzarote Prepare to be enchanted by the blossomy bouquet and elegant mouthfeel of Lanzarote's signature grape.	244
€€	<i>MALVASÍA SECO</i> Los Bermejos 2017, Malvasía Volcánica, 13% abv, DO Lanzarote Inorganic minerality and savoury lees in perfect balance with the sweet aromatics of Malvasía Volcánica.	247
€€	<i>MOON LUNA DE YARIZA BLANCO</i> Tempus 2016, Moscatel & Malvasía Aromática, 12.5% abv, DO Valle de Güímar Lychee, orange blossom, sweet vanilla and toasted coconut. This wine is anything but restrained.	153
€€	<i>CALIUS VERDELLO</i> Candido Hernández Pio 2016, Verdello, 13.5% abv, DO Valle de Güímar Satisfyingly tropical, with a full mouthfeel and appealing nuances of spice.	154
€€	<i>TRENZADO</i> Suertes del Marqués 2015, vidueño, 13% abv, DO Valle de La Orotava Powerful citrusy, savoury and nutty dimensions, all neatly balanced within a handsomely textured body.	90
€€	<i>VIÑÁTIGO ENSAMBLAJE BLANCO</i> Viñátigo 2016, Gual et al., 13.5% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Abundantly fragrant and flavourful with a mouthfeel that is equally big and bright. A kaleidoscopic wine.	57

€€	<i>LA TABLADA</i> Llanos Negros 2014, Sabro & Gual, 14.5% abv, DO La Palma Richly flavoured and generously full-bodied. Think buttered, salted <i>and</i> caramel popcorn, with marmalade!	210
€€€	<i>LAS MACHUQUERAS</i> Juan Matías Torres 2016, Listán Blanco, 13% abv, DO La Palma Vivid ocean spray and volcanic minerality with faint aromas of wilted flowers. Incredible sense of place.	214
€€€	<i>VIDONIA</i> Suertes del Marqués 2016, Listán Blanco, 13% abv, DO Valle de La Orotava Meyer lemons, savoury brioche, toasted almonds and oak. Complex, persistent and polished to a glow.	90
€€€	<i>PALO BLANCO</i> Envínate 2016, Listán Blanco, 11.5% abv, Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos) Crab apples, sea spray, smoky igneous minerality and sourdough. An eloquent portrayal of Taoro.	92
€€€	<i>ARTÍFICE VIDUEÑOS BLANCO</i> Borja Pérez Viticultor 2016, Marmajuelo et al., 12.5% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Sea salt, lemons, herbs, dried flowers and yeasty bread. Highly textured, complex and alive – a graceful homage to history.	61
€€€	<i>IGNIOS ORÍGENES MARMAJUELO</i> Borja Pérez Viticultor 2015, Marmajuelo, 13% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Restrained tropical aromas reinforced by potent volcanic and maritime notes and a creamy palate.	62
€€€	<i>LOS TABAQUEROS</i> Llanos Negros 2006, Sabro et al., 14.5% abv, Vino de España This wine still retains some primary freshness but has developed profound complexity of flavour with age.	211
€€€	<i>VIÑA FRONTERA BLANCO VARIETALES</i> Viña Frontera 2017, Verijadiego et al., 14% abv, DO El Hierro Limes, white flowers, vanilla and roasted coffee. A beautiful natural countenance with a fancy oak frame.	298

€€€€€ ***VIÑA FRONTERA BABOSO BLANCO*** 299
Viña Frontera
 2017, Baboso Blanco, 14% abv, DO El Hierro
 Salty minerality, potent pineapple and mango, deluxe vanilla custard. An elegant, high-quality wine.

€€€€€ ***MAGMA BLANCO*** 126
Cráter
 2015, Verdello & Malvasía Aromática., 12.5% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo
 Broad and intense, with features including butter pastry, candied orange peel, dried bananas and honey.

REDS (CARBONIC MACERATION)

€ ***VIÑA NORTE TINTO MACERACIÓN CARBÓNICA*** 129
Insulares Tenerife
 2018, Listán Negro & Negramoll, 13.5% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo
 Bursting with sweet cherries and raspberries, playful banana liqueur and bubblegum-flavoured candy.

€€ ***HOLLERA*** 120
Monje
 2018, Listán Negro, 13% abv, DOP Islas Canarias
 Juicy redcurrants, cherry drops and subtle rose pepper. Young, svelte and seductive.

REDS

€€ ***EL ESQUILÓN*** 88
Suertes del Marqués
 2016, Listán Negro, 12.5% abv, DO Valle de La Orotava
 A sublime, Pinot-like wine from northern Tenerife. Red berry medley, pepper and Asian spice.

€€ ***QUINCE TINTO*** 274
Mondalón
 2015, Listán Negro, 14% abv, DO Gran Canaria
 Volcanic minerality overtop red fruits, currant leaf, violets and nuances of toasted oak. Unforgettable.

€€ ***LISTÁN NEGRO MACERACIÓN TRADICIONAL*** 249
Los Bermejós
 2015, Listán Negro, 13% abv, DO Lanzarote
 A soft, easy-drinking tinto packed with ripe cranberry, morello cherries, plums and warming spices.

€€	<i>MONJE TRADICIONAL</i> Monje 2017, Listán Negro et al., 13% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Berries and cherries topped with treacle and white pepper. Articulate, smooth and supremely drinkable.	120
€€	<i>TIERRA DE FRONTOS TINTO ECOLÓGICO</i> Frontos 2017, Listán Negro et al., 13.5% abv, DO Abona A wine of provincial personality. Red berries, earthy truffle and wild herbs within a refreshingly light body.	176
€€	<i>ARTÍFICE TINTO</i> Borja Pérez Viticultor 2015, Listán Negro et al., 13.5% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Tart red berries with savoury notes of forest floor and leather. A local wine, brimming with charisma.	61
€€	<i>TÁGANAN TINTO</i> Envínate 2017, Listán Negro et al., 12% abv, Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos) A portrait of Vinos Atlánticos: ocean spray, basalt, pungent earth, petrichor, berries and wildflowers.	127
€€	<i>CRÁTER</i> Cráter 2015, Listán Negro & Negramoll, 13.5% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Sweet red and black fruits, crushed peppercorns and notes of volcanic minerality and oak. A regional classic.	124
€€	<i>7 FUENTES</i> Suertes del Marqués 2016, Listán Negro & Castellana Negra, 13% abv, DO Valle de La Orotava Congenial yet complex, with vibrant cranberries, currants and sour cherries, seasoned with white and black pepper.	89
€€	<i>VIÑA AMABLE</i> Vega de Gáldar 2016, Listán Negro & Castellana Negra, 13% abv, DO Gran Canaria A robust, fruity tinto with layers of oak. It is gaining complexity and softening to great beauty with age.	276
€€	<i>LOS BERRAZALES TINTO ROBLE</i> Los Berrazales 2015, Listán Negro & Tintilla, 13% abv, DO Gran Canaria Seriously creamy, sweet and juicy: ripe blackberries, blackcurrant cordial, bilberry pie and toasted coconut.	278

€€	<i>MONTE ROCA</i> Mondalón 2015, Listán Negro & Tintilla, 14% abv, DO Gran Canaria Red berries, rose petals and sweet spices interlaced with savoury dimensions. Complex and very well built.	274
€€	<i>BENJE TINTO</i> Envínate 2016, Listán Prieto et al., 12% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Light, sharp and dry, of delicate fruit and high desert shrubs. Gracefully austere, undeniably beautiful.	59
€€	<i>VIÑÁTICO NEGRAMOLL</i> Vinátig 2016, Negramoll, 13.5% abv, DOP Islas Canarias A mesmerising illustration of the sweet red-fruit character of Negramoll, and how it gifts gentle, moreish wines.	58
€€	<i>LOS GRILLOS</i> Llanos Negros 2014, Negramoll, 13% abv, DO La Palma Upfront cherry and raspberry, with traces of smoky oak, leather and kirsch. Smooth and exceedingly stylish.	212
€€	<i>DOMÍNGUEZ COLECCIÓN CASTELLANA NEGRA</i> Domínguez Cuarta Generación 2013, Castellana Negra, 14% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Upfront black fruits and high acidity followed by a svelte body of mellowing tannins and lingering tobacco.	128
€€	<i>VIÑARDA VIJARIEGO NEGRO</i> José David Rodríguez Pérez 2016, Vijariego Negro, 13.5% abv, DO La Palma Fresh and elegant, with cherries, hedgerow berries, pepper, weathered volcanics and a touch of sweet oak.	217
€€	<i>TANAJARA VIJARIEGO NEGRO</i> Tanajara 2010, Vijariego Negro, 14% abv, DO El Hierro Damson conserve, vanilla cream, eucalyptus, cedar, tobacco and leather. A triumph of ageing!	301
€€€	<i>MIGAN</i> Envínate 2017, Listán Negro, 12.5% abv, Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos) Scrumptious red fruits seasoned with pepper, dried flowers and multidimensional notions of terroir.	91

€€€	ATLANTE TINTO Atlante 2016, Listán Negro, 13% abv, DO Valle de La Orotava A wine of Gaian complexity and balance. Varietal fruit, Atlantic salinity, pastoral terroir and subtle oak.	94
€€€	TÁGANAN PARCELA MARGALAGUA Envínate 2017, Listán Negro et al., 12% abv, Vino de España (Vinos Atlánticos) Spectacularly pure, with transcendent red fruits and wildflowers, rosewater, dried herbs and lucent elementality. Impeccable.	126
€€€	CAN Tajinaste 2015, Listán Negro & Vijariego Negro, 13.5% abv, DO Valle de La Orotava Complex, big-boned and unashamedly rich. Ripe cherries, blackberry jelly, black olives and sweet oak.	93
€€€	ARIANA El Grifo 2015, Listán Negro & Syrah, 13.5% abv, DO Lanzarote Fruits of the forest, pepper, liquorice, vanilla cream and Arabica coffee. Multifaceted and compelling.	244
€€€	MOUNTAIN WINES VIJARIEGO NEGRO Altos de Trevejos 2015, Vijariego Negro, 14% abv, DO Abona Succulent strawberries and plums with sweet spice and charred wood. Potent, fresh, silky: <i>refined swagger</i> .	181
€€€	AGALA ALTITUD 1212 Bentayga 2014, Vijariego Negro & Castellana Negra, 15% abv, DO Gran Canaria Gobs of sweet fruit, roasted cloves, vanilla cream and bitter chocolate orange. Big, bright and invigorating.	276
€€€	MOUNTAIN WINES BABOSO NEGRO Altos de Trevejos 2015, Baboso Negro, 14% abv, DO Abona Opulence with finesse: ripe black fruits, cooked plums, violet, mint, cocoa bean and notes of wood smoke.	180
€€€	VERA DE LA FUENTE BABOSO NEGRO Vera de la Fuente 2015, Baboso Negro, 14% abv, DO Abona An enveloping wine with lip-smacking ripe black fruits, milk chocolate and caramel sauce.	180

€€€	<i>TANAJARA BABOSO NEGRO</i> Tanjara 2010, Baboso Negro, 14% abv, DO El Hierro Luscious blackberries, blackcurrants and cherries gloriously warmed by sweet spices. Pure indulgence.	300
€€€	<i>DE YANES BABOSO NEGRO</i> El Sitio 2017, Baboso Negro, 14.8% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Vibrant black fruits supported by bittersweet flowers, vanilla, nutmeg and cedar. Incredibly satisfying.	302
€€€	<i>HÍBORO SYRAH</i> La Hijuela 2017, Syrah, 14% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo A full-bodied 'hot climate' Syrah: crème de cassis, spice, eucalyptus, vanilla, cocoa and charred oak.	129
€€€€	<i>EL CIRUELO</i> Suertes del Marqués 2016, Listán Negro, 13% abv, DO Valle de La Orotava Sour red berries balanced by sweet plum, cracked peppercorns and saline minerality. Elite sophistication.	88
€€€€	<i>AUTOR RESERVA</i> Monje 2012, Listán Negro et al., 13.5% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo A portrait of dried berries embellished with brushstrokes of salt, pepper and cinnamon. A masterpiece.	121
€€€€	<i>IGNIOS ORÍGENES BABOSO NEGRO</i> Borja Pérez Viticultor 2016, Baboso Negro, 14.5% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Creamy cherry syrup and fresh blackcurrants attuned with fine minerals and spices. Precision craftsmanship.	63
€€€€	<i>RESERVA DE FAMILIA</i> El Grifo 2014, Syrah, 14% abv, DO Lanzarote A warming, gold medal Syrah, with blackberries, liquorice, toasted sweet spices and hints of leather.	245
€€€€€	<i>MAGMA</i> Cráter 2013, Negramoll & Syrah, 13.5% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Dark fruits, lilac, Atlantic sea smoke and peppered flame-grilled steak. Oaky, meaty and delicious.	124

€€€€€+	BASTARDO NEGRO Monje 2013, Bastardo Negro, 14% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Smoke, toast, vanilla and volcanic minerality over teasing impressions of tart varietal fruit. One of a kind.	122
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VINOS DE TEA

€€	VINO DE TEA El Nispero 2015, Negramoll et al., 13% abv, DO La Palma A wine infused with aromas of wild cherries and the nostalgic heart of high-born pines. Unique.	216
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DESSERT WINES, WHITE

€	GRAN SALMOR Viña Frontera 2008, Marmajuelo et al., 15% abv, DO El Hierro Unctuously textured, with persistent tropical fruits, flowers, honey, almonds, orange peel, cinnamon and gingerbread.	300
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€€	HUMBOLDT BLANCO DULCE Insulares Tenerife 1997, Listán Blanco, 19.5% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Cosmos of fruits, vanilla, dark chocolate, caramel and wheatgerm. A remarkable polymath remembered.	131
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€€	LOS BERRAZALES BLANCO DULCE (BARRICA) Los Berrazales 2017, Moscatel, 14% abv, DO Gran Canaria Provocatively viscous, warm and perfumed. Juicy nectarines, tropical fruits, peach blossom and honey.	278
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€€	SABRO/GUAL DULCE Teneguía 2013, Sabro & Gual, 16% abv, DO La Palma An intensely flowery nose and vibrant mouthfeel, with a quickening dimension of spicy herbs. Very original.	214
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€€€	SWEET GOLD Rubicón 2014, Moscatel, 14% abv, DO Lanzarote A wonderful expression of this most aromatic of grapes. Intoxicatingly floral, with layers of honey and spice.	250
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€€€	<i>VINÁTIGO MALVASÍA CLÁSICO</i>	58
	Vinátigo 2008, Malvasía Aromática, 15% abv, DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora Powerfully sweet but resolutely fresh, this wine possesses aromas of dried fruits, ground nuts and – surprisingly pleasant! – kerosene.	
€€€€	<i>TESTAMENTO MALVASÍA ESENCIA</i>	178
	Cumbres de Abona 2009, Malvasía Aromática, 16% abv, DO Abona Jasmine, honeysuckle, dried figs, five-spice, toffee and mocha. The flavour complexity is fantastic.	
€€€€€	<i>MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA DULCE RESERVA</i>	212
	Teneguía 2008, Malvasía Aromática, 14.5% abv, DO La Palma A luscious wine of orange blossom, honeyed stone fruits, coffee liqueur and a balancing squeeze of bergamot.	
€€€€€+	<i>MALVASÍA AROMÁTICA ESTELAR</i>	213
	Teneguía 1996, Malvasía Aromática, 14% abv, DO La Palma Of astral beauty and complexity: coffee, chocolate, cinnamon, nuts, honey, raisins and bitter marmalade.	
€€€€€+	<i>CANARI</i>	246
	El Grifo 1997, Malvasía Volcánica, 17% abv, DO Lanzarote Astonishingly alive, with heady notes of blossom, candied orange peel, dried apricots, dates and hazelnuts.	
€€€€€+	<i>HM LAS VETAS</i>	303
	Berta Hernández 2017, Verijadiego et al., 16% abv, DO El Hierro Luxurious aromas of candied orange peel, sultanas, figs, chocolate, coffee, caramel and Christmastime nuts.	

DESSERT WINES, RED

€€	<i>VINO PADRE</i>	122
	Monje 2017, Listán Negro, 16% abv, DOP Islas Canarias Sappy berries adorned with sweet figs, kirsch and notes of Asian spice. Dignified and delicious.	

TBA	GEORGE GLAS El Grifo 2015, Listán Negro, 16% abv, DO Lanzarote A heart-wrenchingly melancholic wine. Fruit compote, caramel-coated nuts and bitter cappuccino.	246
€€€€	GRAN ALYSIUS DULCE Presas Ocampo 2013, Castellana Negra et al., 15% abv, DO Tacoronte-Acentejo Enveloping aromas of ripe fruits, dried herbs, charred wood, walnuts and chocolate. Deep? No: <i>profound</i> .	130

Varietal Expression

16 wines that showcase the primary aromas of their dominant grape

White Grapes		P.
1	Listán Blanco – <i>Tierra de Frontos Blanco Seco Ecológico</i> , Frontos	176
2	Malvasía Aromática – <i>Malvasía Aromática Dulce Reserva</i> , Teneguía	212
3	Malvasía Volcánica – <i>Malvasía Seco Colección</i> , El Grifo	244
4	Moscatel – <i>Sweet Gold</i> , Rubicón	250
5	Albillo Criollo – <i>El Níspero Albillo</i> , El Níspero	215
6	Diego – <i>Diego Seco Ecológico</i> , Los Bermejos	248
7	Forastera Blanca – <i>Cinco Varas</i> , Ramón Barrera González	314
8	Gual – <i>Viñátigo Gual</i> , Viñátigo	56
9	Marmajuelo – <i>Viñátigo Marmajuelo</i> , Viñátigo	56
10	Verijadiego – <i>Viña Frontera Blanco Varietales</i> , Viña Frontera	298

Red Grapes		
11	Listán Negro – <i>El Ciruelo</i> , Suertes del Marqués	88
12	Negramoll – <i>Viñátigo Negramoll</i> , Viñátigo	62
13	Baboso Negro – <i>Vera de la Fuente Baboso Negro</i> , Vera de la Fuente	180
14	Vijariego Negro – <i>Mountain Wines Vijariego Negro</i> , Altos de Trevejos	181
15	Listán Prieto – <i>Benje Tinto</i> , Envínate	59
16	Castellana Negra – <i>Domínguez Colección Castellana Negra</i> , Domínguez	128

Atlantic-Volcanic Expression

a case of 12 local wines that are notably terroir-driven

White Wines		
1	<i>Artífice Listán Blanco de Canarias</i> , Borja Pérez Viticultor	60
2	<i>Ignios Orígenes Marmajuelo</i> , Borja Pérez Viticultor	62
3	<i>Las Machuqueras</i> , Juan Matías Torres	214
4	<i>Palo Blanco</i> , Envínate	92
5	<i>Trenzado</i> , Suertes del Marqués	90
6	<i>La Tablada</i> , Llanos Negros	210
7	<i>Malvasía Seco</i> , Los Bermejos	247
8	<i>Montoro</i> , Mario Rodríguez Mendoza	314
Red Wines		
9	<i>Táganan Tinto</i> , Envínate	127
10	<i>Benje Tinto</i> , Envínate	59
11	<i>El Esquilón</i> , Suertes del Marqués	88
12	<i>Quince Tinto</i> , Mondalón	274

Voyage Through Time

12 wines that chart the four international ages of the Canary Islands

Europe (interpretations of the sweet Canary export wines of the 16th & 17th centuries)

1	<i>Viñátigo Malvasía Clásico</i> , Viñátigo	58
2	<i>Testamento Malvasía Esencia</i> , Cumbres de Abona	178
3	<i>Malvasía Aromática Dulce Reserva</i> , Teneguía	212
4	<i>Canari</i> , El Grifo	246

America (interpretations of the dry vidueño export wines of the 17th & 18th centuries)

5	<i>Artífice Vidueños Blanco</i> , Borja Pérez Viticultor	61
6	<i>Vidonia</i> , Suertes del Marqués	90

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The English Library in Puerto de la Cruz is a gem. Opened in 1903 to serve the booming British community of northern Tenerife, it is today staffed by volunteers who will be pleased to navigate you through what is probably the most comprehensive collection of English-language books about the Canary Islands anywhere on Earth. In particular, I would like to offer my special thanks to Ken Fisher, historian and library president, for the many insights regarding the vital role of the English in shaping the economy of Tenerife, and for inviting me to deliver a lecture and lead a wine tasting. The event turned out to be one of the most enjoyable things I have done in years, and would not have been possible without the great enthusiasm and help of all the staff and friends of The English Library. I am also deeply grateful to GMR Canarias for supplying a broad range of local wines for the tasting, via their Volcanic Xperience programme.

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