

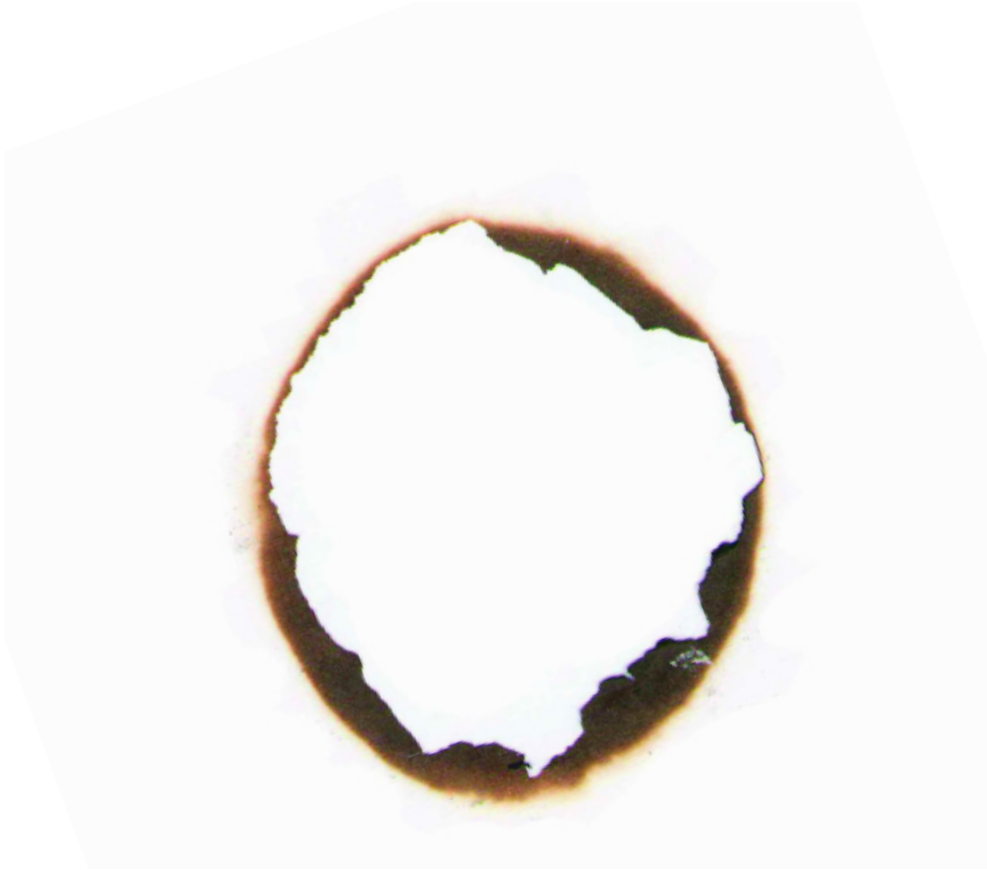
# T O N G

— ABOUT WINE —

Nº 3 / Autumn 2009

## ¿EL FUTURO?

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A SHOT

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IN

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THE

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FOOT

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– BY FRANK SMULDERS MW, THE NETHERLANDS –

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**AFTER YEARS OF UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH, SPAIN HAS BEEN HIT PARTICULARLY HARD BY THE WORLDWIDE RECESSION. UNEMPLOYMENT HAS REACHED A STAGGERING 18% AND IS STILL GROWING, AND THE COUNTRY, UNTIL RECENTLY IN SUCH A POSITIVE AND ENERGETIC MOOD, APPEARS TO HAVE SHUDDERED TO A HALT. MOTORWAYS, RESTAURANTS AND HOTELS ARE DESERTED. THE FACT IS THAT SPAIN'S TERRIBLE RECESSION IS FIRST AND FOREMOST THE RESULT OF A VERY LOCAL PROBLEM - THE COLLAPSE OF THE REAL ESTATE MARKET.**

FRANK SMULDERS IS THE ONLY MASTER OF WINE IN THE NETHERLANDS. AFTER A CAREER IN THE WINE TRADE, HE TAUGHT COURSES ON WINE AND IS CURRENTLY SETTING UP WINE SCHOOLS ACROSS EUROPE, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON SCANDINAVIA. HE IS ONE OF THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND THE EUROPEAN ACADEMY FOR WINE EDUCATION (EAW). FRANK HAS ALSO WORKED AS A CONSULTANT FOR SPANISH WINERIES AND COOPERATIVES. HE OWNS A WINE BROKER AGENCY SPECIALISED IN SPANISH AND ITALIAN WINES.

For 20 years, the Spanish experienced a building frenzy, with hundreds of thousands of houses and apartments going up along the Mediterranean coast and in the main cities, from Madrid to Barcelona to Valencia. The problem that everyone seemed to ignore is that there was no market for all this new property. The odd foreigner from north-west Europe might buy a second home in warm and sunny Spain, but most of the buyers were Spaniards looking to make a bonanza through subsequent resale at much higher prices to fellow Spaniards. Inevitably, the bubble burst, and since then a deafening silence has been hanging over the country, any solution apparently as unlikely as discovering a quality barrel in the average La Mancha cellar. This sorry state of affairs has obviously affected the wine trade. The total collapse of

expenditure in the on-trade, until recently responsible for over 50% of the domestic market, has had a deep impact on sales. Another contributing factor is that over the past 10 years, many of those who made their wealth in the construction and real estate business developed a passion for wine. In areas like Ribera del Duero and Toro, and to a lesser extent in Rioja, Priorat and other wine-growing regions, they invested heavily in state-of-the-art vineyards and bodegas, confidently positioning their wines at premium price levels. With their primary business suffering, many of these newcomers tried to dispose cheaply of their wines, if not their entire bodegas. It's a situation that threatens to throw many regions back in time. One fundamental problem behind all this has to do with the Spanish way of thinking,



THE —  
STORY —  
OF —  
TEMPRA —  
NILLO —

— BY PEDRO BALLESTEROS, SPAIN —

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WINE CONNOISSEURS LOVE IT, BUT IT IS ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT IS SOMETHING OF A MYSTERY. TEMPRANILLO MEANS “EARLY RIPENER”, BUT IN FACT THE GRAPE VARIETY IS A LATE-COMER TO THE INTERNATIONAL WINE INDUSTRY. AT ONE END OF THE SCALE IT YIELDS WONDERFUL WINES, AT THE OTHER IT IS USED AS A HUMBLE BUT HIGHLY EFFECTIVE BLENDER. THAT IS WHY IT IS THOUGHT OF AS A CHAMELEON GRAPE THAT ADAPTS TO CIRCUMSTANCES AND NEEDS.

PEDRO BALLESTEROS STUDIED AGRONOMICAL ENGINEERING IN SPAIN, LATER OBTAINING A MASTERS IN VITICULTURE AND OENOLOGY FROM THE UNIVERSIDAD POLITÉCNICA IN MADRID. HE CONTINUED HIS WINE STUDIES ON RIOJA AND BURGUNDY. HE NOW WORKS FOR THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN BRUSSELS, BUT HIS INVOLVEMENT IN THE WINE WORLD GOES UNABATED. IN 2006, HE OBTAINED THE WINE AND SPIRIT EDUCATION TRUST DIPLOMA AND HE IS HARD AT WORK ON HIS MASTER OF WINE, HAVING RECENTLY PASSED THE THEORY AND TASTING EXAMINATIONS IN JUST ONE ROUND.

Its top wines require cool weather and dry farming conditions but whatever the circumstances, Tempranillo always yields and blends singularly well. It has long surpassed Garnacha as Spain's most extensively planted grape variety. With Spain the world's third wine producer and a major exporter to all key markets, Tempranillo has a significant international presence. Wikipedia lists it as a recent addition to “international grape varieties.” Also in Wikipedia, wine expert Karen McNeil defines “international variety” as a “classic variety” with a long-established and world-wide reputation for making premium quality wines. Is this a good description of Tempranillo? Is it in the same category as a Syrah or a Cabernet Sauvignon? Or is it something more unusual, like Nebbiolo? Or does it stand in a class of its own? Tempranillo is described as a principal variety in all but a few Spanish continental appellations (DOs and DOCAs), as well as in many of the famous Portuguese appellations. It comes

under a number of guises: Ull de Llebre in Catalonia, Tinto Fino in Ribera del Duero, Tinto de Toro in Toro, Tinto de Madrid in Madrid, Cencibel in La Mancha, Aragonez in Alentejo, Tinta Roriz in Douro and Dão. Jancis Robinson calls it “Spain's answer to Cabernet Sauvignon.” Australians have been speaking for decades of Tempranillo's potential; it is planted in Argentina and southern France where it produces some very decent wines. Californians invented the highly successful Tempranillo Advocates Producers and Amigos Society (TAPAS), which has partners in Texas and Canada. Tempranillo has undeniable prestige. One might expect the grape variety to be as present in consumers' minds as Cabernet, Merlot, Shiraz and all the great international varieties. One might think that Spanish producers would use the name as a sales pitch, as New Zealanders with Sauvignon Blanc. But that isn't the case. The market for Tempranillo



RIBEIRA /  
SACRA /  
TERROIR  
FOR THE  
TAKING

– BY DIRK VAN DER NIEPOORT, PORTUGAL –

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**“RIBEIRA SACRA”; THE NAME ALONE LETS ONE SUSPECT SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THE REGION. IT WAS THE NAME THAT INITIALLY DREW ME THERE.**

DIRK VAN DER NIEPOORT IS NOT ONLY ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING PORT PRODUCERS, HE IS ALSO A HIGHLY TALENTED WINEMAKER. AMONG THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF "THE DOURO BOYS", AN ICONIC ASSOCIATION OF PRODUCERS OF STILL RED WINES IN THE DOURO VALLEY, HE HAS WINE-MAKING PROJECTS ALL OVER EUROPE. VINHO VERDE IN PORTUGAL AND RIBEIRA SACRA IN SPAIN ARE JUST TWO EXAMPLES.

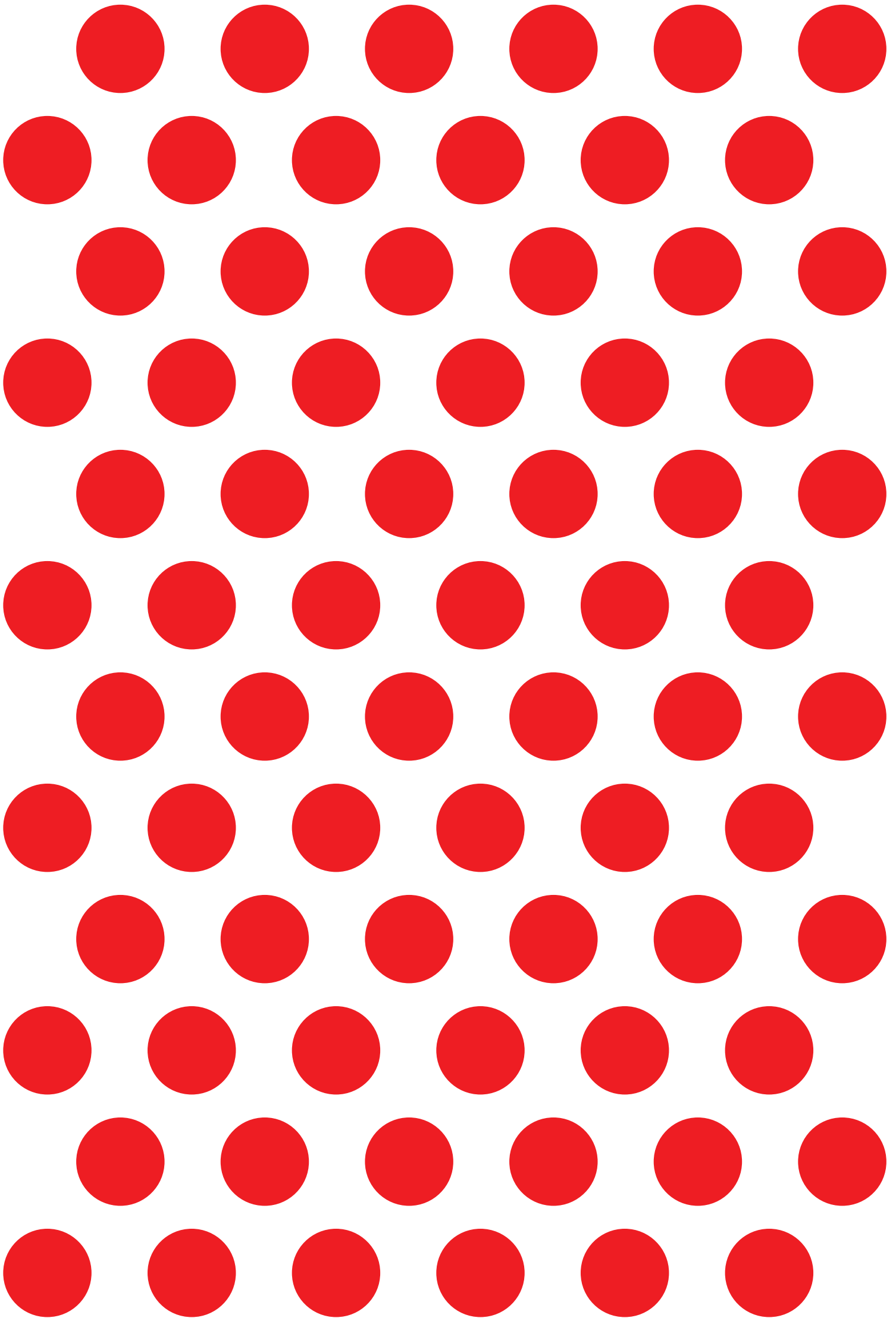
Over the years, my friends Eben Saddle and Raúl Pérez talked to me about many areas, but they seemed to have a special fondness for Ribeira Sacra. I was visiting Raúl one day and things were going as they usually do. We talked, drank and ate and were late for all our appointments. But we also happened to be at about an hour's drive from Ribeira Sacra. I had to be in the Douro Valley that afternoon, but I decided to drop everything because of that mysterious name...

A dear friend, Luis Seabra, my winemaker at Niepoort Vinhos, was with me and Dave Matthews was blasting out of the car radio. Suddenly, after a sharp left-hand turn, we were faced with a staggering view. I stopped the car and turned off the radio. We sat in silence in complete awe.

Ribeira Sacra is among the most beautiful wine regions I have ever seen. It somehow manages to evoke a little of the Douro in Portugal, the Mosel in Germany, the Wachau in Austria and the Hermitage hill in the Rhône Valley. The rivers Sil, Miño and Bibei have cut narrow,

steep canyons into the mountain and I've never seen anything like it anywhere else. Ribeira Sacra is a strange place, a hidden treasure. The small terraced vineyards are owned by local growers who are clearly very attached to them. They are well tended, and the low walls in the steep hills are in impeccable shape. I don't know where they vinify their grapes and I haven't yet tasted many great wines from the area. But the steep terraced vineyards all have different orientations towards the sun and the quality potential is enormous. There must be a huge range of microclimates that could produce a vast variety of wines. Raúl Pérez is already helping a few growers in the region to make distinctive wines.

The DO Ribeira Sacra was established in 1996, although they have been making wines from these terraced vineyards since Roman times. The name, which means "holy river banks", refers to the many monasteries that were built here during the Middle Ages. Working with the locals, the monks carved out most of the terraces and built the low stone walls with



HOW  

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TO  

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MAKE  

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SPANISH  

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RED  

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WINE

– BY RAÚL PÉREZ, SPAIN –

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MY APPROACH IS SIMPLE: I'D RATHER MAKE BAD WINE FROM TRADITIONAL LOCAL GRAPE VARIETIES THAN SOME SOULLESS PRODUCT FROM TEMPRANILLO OR THE OTHER SO-CALLED "INTERNATIONAL" VARIETIES YOU FIND ALL OVER IN SPAIN.

RAÚL PÉREZ IS ONE OF SPAIN'S NEW GENERATION OF TOP WINEMAKERS. LAST YEAR, ROBERT PARKER NAMED HIM "SPAIN'S MOST ORIGINAL WINEMAKER." RAÚL IS A CONSULTING WINEMAKER FOR MANY SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED WINERIES IN THE NORTHWEST OF SPAIN. HIS FAMILY ESTATE CASTRO VENTOSA IN BIERZO HAS BEEN PRODUCING WINE FROM THE RED MENCÍA GRAPE SINCE THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY. RAÚL IS MAKING RED AND WHITE WINE IN ASTURIAS, SIERRA DE GREDOS, BIERZO, RIBEIRA SACRA, LÉON AND MONTERREI.

I was raised in Bierzo on the family estate Castro Ventosa that belonged to my parents and my grandparents before them. Our family can be traced back to 1752, the year mentioned in the oldest document we have about the acquisition of a vineyard. Until recently, we sold most of our grapes to cooperatives. It was mainly because of my restless personality that we started to make and bottle our own wines.

But there came a point when I felt it was time to move on. Over the past two years, I have no longer been directly involved in our estate's production and have started my own consultancy business as an oenologist. I want to make wine that is delicate in style and based on indigenous grape varieties, preferably from old vines. Spain and particularly the northwest is full of traditional varieties, but until now

most of the resulting wines are sold in bulk to cooperatives and large bodegas who then sell them on very cheaply. So, apart from the need to contribute to the revival of local traditions, I also believe that we have a social responsibility to ensure the independence of local wine growers and help them earn their own money as they did in the past.

There are a great many traditional varieties, both red and white, with the reds probably the most interesting. The great advantage of many of the northwest regions of Spain, especially Galicia, is that they have remained covered for so long, when people in warmer parts of the country were investing huge amounts of money in varieties like Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. What was once neglected is now the region's commercial trump card. People these days are fed