

Ribera del Duero 2007

In less than 30 years this region has shot to stardom – all the more impressive, says John Radford, given the challenges of frost, hail and storms at such high altitudes

RIBERA DEL DUERO wines took 91 gongs in the 2011 Decanter World Wine Awards and, elsewhere in the world, gold medals at the Concours Mondiale de Bruxelles in Luxembourg, Sélections Mondiales des Vins in Canada, and Monde Selección in Belgium, consolidating the region's position as a producer of world-class quality reds.

A combination of high-altitude vineyards, active chalk in the soils and massive inward investment have propelled Ribera del Duero to stardom. But the one thing that winemakers can't control is the weather. Frost is always a risk, with a maximum of only 138 frost-free days a year. There is little margin for error during the ripening season, and the high altitude which gives that purity of expression to the Tempranillo grape can turn vicious towards October.

The DO was awarded in 1982, when the region had just nine bodegas – including Vega Sicilia – but its first worldwide prominence came in the mid 1980s when Robert Parker wrote in *The Wine Advocate* that Pesquera 1982 was 'Spain's Chateau Pétrus'. The description is, perhaps, a bit over the top, but it galvanised interest in the region and, by 1990, everybody wanted to know about it. Investment came in from established producers elsewhere in Spain, particularly Rioja. Today, there are 245 bodegas.

Ribera del Duero extends for about 100km east to west on both banks of the river Duero, with vineyards at up to 900m in the east around San Estebán de Gormaz in the province of Soria, and down to about 750m in the west, around Quintanilla de Onésimo in Valladolid, with Aranda de Duero in the centre, in Burgos.

Expressive Tempranillo

The main grape is Tempranillo, known locally as Tinto Fino or Tinta del País, with some Garnacha and the white Albillo originally used in rosados (there are no DO whites here). In addition, villages that had historically grown Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec can continue to do so.

But it is Tempranillo that gives the wines their regional character. Grown at high altitudes, it ripens early in the intense heat of the season and, in the best years, offers an unmatched richness of fruit with fresh acidity, thanks to cold nights at altitude: the contrast between night and day temperatures can be more than 20°C. Young wines tend to have a very deep, purple colour, with aromas of strawberry and raspberry fruit and sometimes a hint of damson. The wines are well-suited to ageing, and the modern trend is for French oak, particularly Alliers, which adds toasty flavours, spice and warmth. The finished wines tend to be quite high in alcohol at 13.5% to 14.5% but, with sufficient extraction and judicious use of oak, this is not excessive.

The 2007 vintage was patchy, characterised by rain, thunderstorms and hail. Winter had been warm and wet, spring cool, hail fell in May over 17% of the area (vineyards in the village of La Horra were almost wiped out) followed by a cool summer but a hot September with late rains and, finally, frost in late September. A very difficult harvest.

The best current vintage for drinking is probably 2005, which is nearing its drinking peak. The 2007s should come in over the next year or so (see box, right).



Ribera del Duero: know your vintages

Consejo ratings: 3 - Buena; 4 - Muy Buena; 5 - Excelente

2010 (Rating: 5) Excellent ripening conditions and pure, healthy fruit. Yet another 'best ever'? 2015-2030

2009 (5) Hot summer but September rains saved the day. Another 'best ever'? 2015-2025

2008 (4) Looked good but frost hit during the harvest, reducing quality. 2015-2020

2007 (4) Wet, with storms, hail and frost, leading to much lower yields. 2012-2020

2006 (3) Biggest-ever vintage. Some dilute wines. 2011-2015

2005 (4) Another very hot summer, perhaps too hot for long life. 2011-2015

2004 (5) Very hot summer. Classic, top-quality wines. 2011-2015

2003 (4) The scorching heatwave year, with October rains. High-altitude vineyards fared best. Drink up.

2002 (4) A difficult year with a large harvest, rather dilute. Drink up.

2001 (5) An outstanding year – arguably the best in the DO to date. 2011-2020

Ribera: the facts

Hectares under vine 20,173

Bodegas 245

Wines contain a minimum of 75% Tempranillo

Yield maximum 7,000kg/ha (about 49hl/ha)

Production 2007 79,952,902kg (which equals 3,963kg/ha or 27.7hl/ha)

The results

The best wines showed concentration, elegance and balance, but too many were overoaked to make up for a lack of ripeness. Still, canny buyers could find some gems for short-term drinking, says Guy Woodward

So what did you make of the 2007 vintage?

Juan-Carlos Rincón was adamant: 'I can't agree that this is a *muy bueno* (very good) year, as the Consejo claims. 2007 was difficult in Ribera. They had storms and hail, and a lot of producers picked before this, meaning the grapes didn't properly mature. There were a lot of green tannins.'

Was this manifested in the wines?

Annette Scarfe summed it up: 'Producers who picked early to avoid the hail ended up with wines showing a lack of ripeness. But others, who probably discarded a lot of fruit, achieved wonderful concentration, elegance and delightful fruit.' This variability of quality and style was referred to by most tasters. Radford said: 'Bearing in mind it wasn't such a good year, I thought many wines showed well. I suspect that's because it's a year which is maturing earlier.' But, he added, 'we also saw a few that were trying too hard, with too much new French oak, and that's all the wines smelled of - a green, leafy, woody flavour'. For Sarah Jane Evans MW, the worst wines yielded a 'curious contrast between syrupy fruit and stalkiness, which wasn't very appealing'.

Hmm... sounds like a real mixed bag.

And that, for many, was the problem - inconsistency. Evans confided, 'I always expect confusion every time I go to a Ribera del Duero tasting. I wonder if I'll really know that it's Ribera; can I tell where these come from? There's a lot of work going on - money being spent, flashy wineries - so it's hard to get your head around. You assume it's arrived, but it's such a young DO, you forget it's still arriving.'

So was there no hallmark style here?

'Often you get all the flavours under the sun in Spain with Tempranillo,' said Evans, 'but there were actually some very clear definitions here of red cherries, black cherries and strawberries which were very distinctively what I might think of as the definition of that grape - especially when it isn't dominated by vanilla oak.'

That sounds more like it. Any other positives?

For Christine Parkinson, 'the rich black fruit was the strongest point: blackberry, black plum, damsons, sloes and occasionally cassis.' She 'particularly liked the autumnal aromas too: savoury, earthy and woody' and was among the tasters whose glass was half full. 'Many wines

The scores

106 wines tasted

2



Decanter Award

21



Highly recommended

60



Recommended

21



Fair

2



Poor

0

Faulty

9

€ Good value (under €15)

also had pronounced minerality,' she enthused. 'In fact I hardly wrote 'simple' as a tasting note at all, and even my lowest-scoring wines generally had some character.'

I'm sensing a 'but' coming...

I'm afraid so. While Rincón 'found a lot of elegance in the reserva wines,' he was 'expecting a better level with the crianzas'. The problem was that 'because they have less wood, it's tough to mask the faults of the vintage. But that's no excuse - the wines were mainly terrible.' Pierre Mansour agreed: 'For a region that bills itself at the same level as Rioja, I didn't expect to see so many poor wines. And the reason it's frustrating is because the problems were in the winemaking: why are they selecting such green fruit [with] such a strong, high acid that makes for very awkward wines?' He also questioned where 'the pleasure factor' was. 'Some of them looked very luxurious, they were good-tasting wines with a lot of power and intensity, but how much pleasure would you get out of drinking them?'

Let me guess - too much oak?

Correct. Radford bemoaned winemakers who felt new French oak was the panacea for everything. 'If they're not happy with their wine they say: "let's give it 12 months in new French oak and that'll sort it out". It doesn't.' Mansour said that there were times when he 'questioned whether I was at an oak tasting not a wine tasting. I came up with more adjectives than I've ever done to describe different flavours of toastiness and a lot of my notes asked "where's the fruit?" There was some very glamorous, expensive winemaking, but the wines were overmade and, in a vintage like 2007 you don't want to do that - you need to respect the quality of the fruit, though it's inferior.' Others were more tolerant, with Evans claiming that '75% of the wines handled the oak pretty well, and the best had a fine balance of oak and fruit.' Nonetheless, 'what distinguishes the good ones is lovely fruit, not lovely oak.' Parkinson felt that 'another year or two was needed to allow the oak to integrate,' but that 'it shouldn't be a long-term problem'.

So are these wines to age?

Evans wrote 'drink now' for nearly all the wines, but felt 'they'd be even nicer three years from now'. And she said even the best 'wouldn't last beyond seven years, which surprised me, because as a consumer you might think

The tasters

Sarah Jane Evans MW is, along with John Radford, co-Regional Chair for Spain at the Decanter World Wine Awards

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Pierre Mansour has been with The Wine Society since 2000, and buys the Society's Spanish wines, among others



Also tasting: Mel Jones MW is a wine writer, broadcaster and educator who runs the website Quaffersoffers.co.uk

Christine Parkinson is group buyer for Michelin-starred restaurants Hakkasan and Yauatcha, with operations in Miami, London and Abu Dhabi

Annette Scarfe consults for restaurants in London, Hong Kong and Singapore, and is a WSET-certified educator

Juan Carlos Rincón is a broadcast journalist, presenter and international wine judge

you're making an investment in a classy wine, but in fact my advice is to start drinking it now, or next year.' Rincón felt the reservas would benefit from some age: 'Right now you feel the wood, but in a few years they could integrate into very elegant wines, with tobacco, liquorice and leathery, peppery notes to go with the black fruit.'

Let's cut to the chase. Would you recommend the wines?

Not for blind purchase. As Scarfe said, 'It's not a meaty vintage but careful selection will reward via elegance, fresh red fruit and balanced oak.' Mansour agreed: 'Be careful, be selective. There are some super wines but if you don't know the producer, it's high risk. At the very top end the high prices are probably justified - they are world-class wines - but on the whole, you're much safer with Rioja.'



“I always expect confusion every time I go to a Ribera del Duero tasting”

Sarah Jane Evans MW



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John Radford

5 star wines Decanter Award 18.5-20pts



Pago de Los Capellanes, Reserva 19pts/20

£37-£37.99 Blanco & Gomez, Great Western Wine, Harper Wells, Secret Cellar, Swig, Wooden Wine Box, WoodWinters

Perfumed violet, red and black berry, toffee, butter, chocolate, liquorice, vanilla and balsamic nose. Enormous fruit and tannins but the fruit is winning. It's rich, hot, spicy and long. A full, layered and attractive wine with a rich fruit length. **Drink:** 2011. **Alcohol:** 14.5%



Monteabellón, 24 Meses 18.83

£25 Berry Bros & Rudd

Rich, locked-in black forest fruit and dark chocolate on the nose. A bold, gamey and savoury palate with dark, ripe fruit, excellent structure and big, firm yet supple tannins. Memorable, spicy and delicious.

Drink: 2015-2025. **Alc:** N/A

4 star wines Highly recommended 16.5-18.49pts



Bodegas Gallego Zapatero, Yotuel, Finca de Valdepalacios 18

N/A UK www.bodegasgallegozapatero.com

Chocolate, oak and raw black fruit aromas. Fragrant and floral palate with an earthy minerality and fresh, smooth and supple tannins. Long and elegant, it lasts and lasts - excellent. **Drink:** 2014-2020. **Alc:** 14%



El Lagar de Isilla, Reserva 17.63

POA Stone Vine & Sun

Aromas of wood, liquorice, blackcurrant, violet, prune, cherry and spice. Full, compact palate with excellent fruit intensity. Delicious grainy tannins give a firm structure. High quality, classic Ribera del Duero. **Drink:** 2012. **Alc:** 15%

ENTRY CRITERIA: the wines entered are **crianza- or reserva-level wines (whether or not these styles are included in the wine name)**. **Crianzas** are aged for two years before release with at least one year in oak barrels; **reservas** must be three years old with at least one year spent in oak.

4 star wines
Highly recommended (continued) 16.5–18.49pts



Anta Banderas, a10 17.5
N/A UK www.antabodegas.com
Delicious bouquet of dark chocolate, black fruit, earth and floral perfume. Rich, fruit-led style with big tannins and fruit. Beautifully balanced, vibrant and youthful with black fruit, charred wood ash and mineral flavours in abundance. **Drink:** 2015–2025. **Alc:** 13.5%



Bodegas Arzuaga Navarro, Amaya Arzuaga 17.38
N/A UK www.arzuaganavarro.com
Aromas of fruit compote, cherry, smoke, toasty new oak and balsamic – classy perfume. Full, dense and chunky with harmonious, well-judged tannins, a lift of acidity and a long, tarry finish. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 14%



Matanegra, Crianza 17.33
£17.69 Vinissimus
Very inviting, restrained autumnal aromas of rich dark fruit. Very fragrant, floral palate offering notes of jasmine, concentrated blackberry fruit and some chocolatey oak with distinctly powdery tannins. Very long, ripe and fine. **Drink:** 2012–2015. **Alc:** 14%



Tábula, Gran Tábula 17.33
N/A UK www.bodegastabula.es
Very dark, subtle, deep black cherry, leaf, coffee, chocolate and floral bouquet. Rich, dark, oaky and long, it has supple, chewy tannins and fresh acidity. A big showy wine with great potential. **Drink:** 2015–2025. **Alc:** 14.5%

“Even my lowest-scoring wines generally had some character”

Christine Parkinson



Viña Solorca, Barón del Valle, Crianza 17.33
N/A UK www.bodegassolorca.com
Candles, smoke, rich, dark and redcurrant fruit and savoury aromas. A biggie with fabulous fruit, ripe, creamy tannins and a long length. Has power, warmth and ripeness – a vibrant and charming wine. **Drink:** 2014–2025. **Alc:** 14%



Bodegas Viyuela, Crianza 17.17
N/A UK www.bodegasviyuela.com
Smoke, oak, rich and savoury black fruit, compost and black tea on the nose. Has good flavour and feel with savoury cocoa, cassis and mineral notes framed by juicy acidity, grainy tannins and well-judged oak. Long. **Drink:** 2012–2020. **Alc:** 13.5%



Arrocal, Angel 17.13
N/A UK www.arrocal.com
Bright, lifted nose of pepper, orange peel, strawberry, cedar, black fruit, spice and flowers. Fresh and spicy palate which is almost fleshy. Has a velvety backbone and great length. Quality here. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 14%



Anta Banderas, a16 16.88
N/A UK www.antabodegas.com
Appealing vanilla, red berry, mineral, oak, plum and floral aromas. Powerful and full of fruit with oak giving an overlay of tar. Good integration. Elegant, with a classy poise. An honest, stylish wine. **Drink:** 2011–2013. **Alc:** 14%



Felix Callejo, Reserva 16.88
£25 Wimbledon Wine Cellars, The Vineking, The Wine Library, New Generation Wines
Perfumed aroma of violets, black and red fruit, spice, vanilla and cinnamon oak. Generous, sweet fruit with extracted tannic muscle. Has a brisk and firm attack. **Drink:** 2012. **Alc:** 14%



Matanegra, Vendimia Seleccionada 16.88
N/A UK www.pagosdematanegra.es
Red and black fruit, smoke, toffee, meat, savoury and high-quality oak on the nose. Rounded, generous palate with enormous flavours and length. Fresh acidity and velvety tannins. **Drink:** 2011–2013. **Alc:** 14%



Viña Pedrosa, La Navilla 16.88
£22.40 Bancroft
Aromas of red berry, cherry, leather, smoky, toasty oak and floral perfume. Dense, rich syrupy palate with a spicy, leathery finish. Excellent balance, fine velvety tannins and fresh acidity. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 13.5%

4 star wines
Highly recommended (continued) 16.5–18.49pts



Santa Eulalia, Riberal, Crianza 16.83
£14.99 Berkman Wine Cellars
Aromatic and promising aroma of black fruit, vanilla and chewy toffee. Very fresh and bright with well-judged oak, ripe tannins and intense plum, cherry and berry fruit that is beginning to harmonise. Will improve. **Drink:** 2013–2020. **Alc:** 14.5%



Señorío de Nava, Crianza 16.83
N/A UK www.senoriodenava.es
Aromas of fruit compote, black cherry, baked clay and compost – in a good way. Ripe, juicy and oaky with a vegetal, savoury truffle and ripe black fruit flavour. Has firm but fine tannins and is balanced and long. Very good. **Drink:** 2011–2015. **Alc:** 13.5%



Valdubón, Reserva 16.75
N/A UK www.valdubon.com
Charred oak, dark damson fruit and coffee aromas. It has a big structure, power, weight and ripeness with controlled tannins. Youthful, modern style that's full of character, offering supple juicy raspberry fruit, leathery notes and a good long finish. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** N/A



Asenjo & Manso, Silvanus, Crianza 16.67
N/A UK www.asenjo-manso.com
Perfumed bouquet of talcum powder, toasty oak, black and tropical fruit and wood spice. Good, rich damson, cassis and chocolate palate with chewy tannins and a piquant, oaky finish. Needs some time. **Drink:** 2012–2020. **Alc:** 14.5%

“Right now you feel the wood, but in a few years they could integrate into very elegant wines”

Juan-Carlos Rincón



Bodegas Astrales, Astrales 16.67
£25 Fortnum & Mason, Hangingditch, Martinez, Moreno, The Sampler, The Wine Society
Perfumed, intense black fruit compote and vanilla custard aroma. Concentrated black fruit, mineral, savoury and vanilla character with juicy acidity and supple tannins. Polished, delicious, vibrant, appealing. **Drink:** 2011–2015. **Alc:** 14.5%



Valtravieso 16.63
N/A UK www.valtravieso.com
Attractive pepper, tobacco, red cherry, vanilla, cedar, liquorice and violet bouquet. Good rich fruit showing some muscle. Beautifully balanced with excellent intensity and length. Power and elegance here. **Drink:** 2012–2025. **Alc:** 14.5%



Aalto 16.5
£25.17–£41 Harvey Nichols, Justerini & Brooks
Haunting nose of chocolate, earth, baked fruit, brambles, smoke, minerals, berry and flowers. Bright and juicy with a citrus freshness, stewed fruit compote and a dense, chunky, layered palate. Beautifully made. **Drink:** 2012. **Alc:** 14.5%



O Fournier, Spiga 16.5
£22.25–£27 Coe Vintners, Seckford, Slurp, Tesco Wine by the Case
High-toned blueberry, spice, baked fruit, mint, tar, herbs and vanilla ice-cream aroma. Lively cherry fruit palate which is bright and crunchy. Has an opulent quality with attractive vanilla oak. Long length. **Drink:** 2011. **Alc:** 14.5%

3-STAR WINES Recommended 14.5–16.49pts

WINE	SCORE	TASTING NOTE	ALC	DRINK	PRICE	STOCKISTS
El Lagar de Isilla, Vendimia Seleccionada	16.38	Ripe quince, jam, flowers, violets, dates, figs and wood smoke on the nose. Big, ripe, modern mouthful with a pleasing mineral finish. Lovely purity and precision.	14.5%	2011	£25.95	Stone Vine & Sun
Tábula	16.38	High-quality new oak, smoke, tar and black fruit nose. Full, complex and cedary with grippy tannins and a bold, persistent expression. Long length.	14%	2011	£22.25	Bibendum, Slurp
Bodega Diaz Bayo, Nuestro 20	16.33	Zesty, black fruit, chocolate and rubber on the nose. Lifted currant flavour with juicy, refreshing acidity, rich, crisp tannins and well-judged oak. Lovely balance.	14%	2013–2025	£27.99	Secret Cellar
O Fournier, Alfa Spiga	16.33	Vivid blackberry, lifted violet, spice and a tier of tropical fruit on the nose. Lovely, sweet, ripe flavour with just the right amount of oak, and supple, sandy tannins.	14.5%	2015–2025	£30.50–£33.99	Seckford, Slurp, Tesco Wine by the Case
Protos, Crianza	16.33	Fresh blackberry, sloe, woodsmoke and oak aroma. Good, rich, dark plummy fruit with firm tannins which are under control. Fresh, long and elegant. Needs time.	13.5%	2013–2020	£17.16	Exel Wines
Pico Cuadro, Vendimia Seleccionada	16.25	Spicy nose of blackberry, toasty new oak, currants, brioche and vanilla. Lovely rich fruit with integrated tannins and spice. Full, lively palate showing generosity.	14%	2011–2020	N/A UK	www.picocuadro.com
Vega Real, Crianza	16.13	Minerals, farmyards cassis and chocolatey oak aroma. Delicious palate with big flavours, yet is still refreshing. Lovely rich fruit and chewy tannins – will be great.	14%	2014–2025	£11.35–£15	Averys, Gerard Seel, Telegraph Wines
O Fournier, Urban Ribera	16	Lovely savoury fruit, earth, toasty oak and juicy cranberry aroma. Easy-drinking style with big fruit and tannins, but the balance is right. Rich, savoury and fruity.	14.5%	2011	£11.50–£13	Butlers Wine Cellar, D Byrne & Co, Martinez Wines, Slurp
Torrederos, Selección	16	Lovely soft Tempranillo nose of blackcurrants. Supple, silky tannins frame savoury, ripe damson fruit with juicy acidity. Long and refreshing with oak in balance.	14%	2014–2025	N/A UK	www.torrederos.com

3-STAR WINES Recommended (continued)

WINE	SCORE	TASTING NOTE	ALC	DRINK	PRICE	STOCKISTS
Vizcarra, 15 Months	16	Rich, complex and perfumed cassis bouquet. Deep rich flavours of lovely fruit, plain chocolate and oak. A big modern style which is developing well.	14%	2015-2020	POA	Premier Vintners
Torres de Anguix, d'Anguix	15.88	Black and red berry fruit, herb, grass, tar and intense oak aroma. Dense, youthful, punchy style which is in harmony. Needs time but should be a blockbuster.	14.5%	2012-2025	N/A UK	www.torresdeanguix.com
Bodegas López Cristóbal, Crianza	15.83	Subtle, fragrant aroma of vanilla, buttered toast and chocolate – full of promise. Popcorn oak balanced against ripe fruit with firm tannins and a long length.	13.5%	2013-2020	£13.49	Raeburn £
Emina, Crianza	15.75	Bold, classic nose of red cherry, minerals, tar, leather and red berry jam. Abundant bright fruit palate with vanilla oak. Silky and succulent with good persistence.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.emina.es
Hacienda Monasterio,	15.75	Complex black fruit, cassis, violet and smoke bouquet. Powerful, juicy and fruity palate with an elegant, peppery, liquorice character. Nice minerality.	14.5%	2011	£29.99-£42	Corney & Barrow, Daniel Lambert, Harvey Nichols, Hennings, Last Drop, Majestic, Mumbles Fine Wines, Old Chapel Cellars, South Downs Cellars, Tanners
Bodegas Epifanio Rivera, Erial Tradicion Familia 'TF'	15.67	Exotic nose of graphite, oak, ripe berry fruit, sandalwood and black tea. Grippy tannins under control. Long, balanced and supple with a toasted coconut length.	14.5%	2013-2020	£19.95	Jeroboams, Laytons
Matarronera, Crianza	15.67	Ripe, raw, bramble fruit, plum, damson, herbs, oak and autumnal aromas. Intensely minerally with prominent tannins. Fruit under a good structure.	14.5%	2013-2015	£24	Harvey Nichols
Bodegas Pascual, Buró, Depeñalosa Crianza	15.63	Aromas of red berry, plum, redcurrant, oil, smoke, tar and creamy vanilla oak. Round, sweet fruit with a classy balance. Has a peppery bite at the back.	13.5%	2011	N/A UK	www.bodegaspascual.com
Bodegas Rodero, Carmelo Rodero Reserva	15.63	Pot-pourri, wood, herb and stewed fruit nose. Sweet upfront cherry fruit with a punch of acidity – much like a baked fruit pudding. Good balance and structure.	14%	2011	£23.55 (2005)	Vinissimus
Bohorquez, Reserva	15.63	Redcurrant, liquorice, leather, cherry, red fruit and cassis aroma. Simple and bright, juicy, jammy style. Modern palate with good length, spice and complexity.	14%	2011	£24.95	Majestic, The Wine Society
Valduero, Unacepa I	15.63	Spicy, cassis, bramble fruit, currant and violet bouquet. Big and dense, boldly peppery with oak. Showily made with succulent fruit and good drinkability.	14%	2012-2020	N/A UK	www.bodegasvalduero.com
Viña Arnaiz, Reserva	15.63	Aromas of undergrowth, red berry, liquorice, plum, violet, vanilla and cherry cola. It has lively, grainy, young and punchy fruit. Finely textured with a classy structure.	13.5%	2012	N/A UK	www.garciacarrion.es
Bodegas Viyuela, 10	15.5	Soft, musky damson, clove, bramble and spicy oak bouquet. Refreshing palate with crisp fruit and proportioned supple tannins. Good balance and structure.	13.5%	2012-2015	N/A UK	www.bodegasviyuela.com
Cillar de Silos, Torresilo	15.5	Oak, smoke, pot-pourri and violet perfume. Dominated by oak and tannins now, the fruit is overwhelmed. Good but needs time.	14%	2014-2020	£34	AG Wines, Uncorked
Emilio Moro	15.5	Ripe, compote-like fruit with aromas of redcurrant and oak. Lip-smacking acidity and crisp tannins. Juicy and refreshing with plenty of popcorn oak.	14%	2013-2020	£15-£21	Nickolls & Perks, Wine Source
Hesvera, Crianza	15.5	Intense ripe black cherry, blackberry, warm spice and caramel on the nose. It has pronounced savoury notes with crisp acidity and firm, ripe tannins. Lovely now.	N/A	2011	N/A UK	www.hesvera.es
Bodega Diaz Bayo, FDB	15.38	Ripe, jammy black fruit, smoke, liquorice and Port aromas. Extracted black cherry, liquorice and wood on the palate. International and opulent, bold style.	15%	2012	£49.99	Secret Cellar
Finca Villacreces	15.38	Redcurrant, spice, cherry, mineral, cassis and floral perfume. Supple, fresh and lively with a lovely intensity of flavour. Bold yet balanced and long. Promising.	13.5%	2011-2018	£25	Secret Cellar
Neo	15.38	Vanilla, redcurrant, bramble fruit, pepper, minerals, oak and floral perfume. Dense, layered and velvety palate which is bold and satisfying.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.bodegasneo.com
Neo, Punta Esencia	15.38	Intense, baked cherry, smoke, cream and spicy vanilla oak aroma. Round, sweet redcurrant fruit, crisp acidity and dry tannins. Tannic, stylish and long.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.bodegasneo.com
Bodega Castillo de Peñaranda, Atico Crianza	15.33	Restrained and inviting oak, ripe blackcurrant and savoury bouquet. Definitely oaky in the mouth with grainy, ripe tannins, fresh acidity and a long length.	14.5%	2012-2015	N/A UK	www.bodegasantaana.es
Condado de Haza, Crianza	15.33	Intense blackberry, tobacco and medicinal aroma. Lovely palate – just the right fruit and oak balance with solid, dense tannins. Firm and chewy, traditional style.	N/A	2013	£16-£18.95	Berry Bros & Rudd, Tanners
Emilio Moro, Malleolus de Sanchomartin	15.33	Subtle, smoke, leather, baked fruit, savoury oak and medicinal aromas. Rich, spicy and medicinal with a big structure. Juicy but very savoury style. Will be excellent.	14.5%	2015-2025	£95-£115	Les Vignerons de St Georges, Nickolls & Perks, Wine Source
Paramo de Guzman, Raiz de Guzman	15.33	Soft, almost fragrant, milky fruit, sweet vanilla and floral perfume. Nicely balanced with spicy, pepper fruit with a tannin-led finish. Well put together.	14%	2013-2020	£12.70	Boxford Wine £
Fuentespina, Selección	15.25	Polished new oak, flowers, blackcurrant, cherry, tar and liquorice bouquet. Thick, intense and very oaky, glamorous style with chewy tannins. This will be great.	14%	2012-2030	POA	PLB Group
Mayor de Castilla, Reserva	15.25	Herbal red berry, smoke, cherry and strong vanilla oak on the nose. Fresh, round and easy-drinking palate with a long length. Has a dry, grippy finish.	13.5%	2011	N/A UK	www.garciacarrion.es
Balbas, Crianza	15.17	Bright, simple, perfumed black fruit and redcurrant aroma. Dark and damsony with crisp acidity and firm, chewy tannins. Good balance and structure.	14%	2012-2015	POA	The Wine Shed
Bodega San Roque de la Encina, Monte Pinadillo, Crianza	15.17	Fresh, lightweight black fruit aroma. Attractive black fruit and oak palate with bright juicy acidity and dominant tannins. Pleasant but austere.	N/A	2013-2020	N/A UK	www.bodegasanroquedelaeacina.com
Cruz de Alba, Crianza	15	Coffee, black cherry, blackcurrant, tar, oak and smoke on the nose – flamboyant. Oak dominates yet it has succulent fruit, high acidity and some elegance.	14.5%	2011	£15.40	Sommelier's Choice
Hacienda Vitulia, Vendimia Seleccionada	15	Brioche, oatmeal, stewed fruit and a raisined, sweet Sherry nose. Concentrated and long but lacks focus. Has stewed plum, tea leaf and sweet oak flavours.	N/A	2011-2015	N/A UK	www.bodegasvitulia.com
Montecastro	15	Exotically oaky nose with liquorice, cedar, coffee and black fruit notes. Fresh, lively and zesty palate with a modern fruit style. Full and youthful, tight and firm.	14%	2011	£22.95	Lea & Sandeman
Pesquera, Reserva	15	Cedar, red berry and floral aroma. With its bright, young jammy fruit, it is plump, balanced and chunky with an appealing quality and a tight structure. Decent.	14.5%	2011	£29.95	Berry Bros & Rudd
Valduero, Crianza	15	Intensely perfumed, pepper, black cherry, Ribena and oak bouquet. Lovely palate of ripe cassis and black cherry well matched to subtle clove and vanilla oak.	14%	2015-2020	£17.99	Inverarity Vaults
Alonso del Yerro,	14.88	Aromas of black fruit, earth, mint and red fruit. Rich, dense and spicy fruit with chewy tannins. It is complex with lots of spice and heat – a blockbuster.	14.5%	2011-2030	N/A UK	www.alonsodelyerros.es
Comenge	14.88	Minerals, blackberry, toast, vanilla, baked red plum and creamy oak bouquet. Flavours of stewed red fruit meld with herbs, fresh acidity and good persistence.	14.5%	2011	N/A UK	www.comenge.com
Gormaz, 12 Linajes, Crianza	14.88	Spice, pepper, red berry, cedar, vanilla ice-cream and a herbaceous nose. A sappy, lively palate with sweet fruit compote flavours, fresh acidity and a powerful finish.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.hispanobodegas.com
Bodegas Mambrilla, Alidís, Expresión	14.83	Red and black berry, violet, herb, cassis, oak and stewed fruit nose. Dense blackberry fruit with dry, grainy tannins and peppery oak spice.	N/A	2011	N/A UK	www.mambrilla.com
Tábula, Damana Crianza	14.83	Soft, gentle, perfumed Tempranillo nose. Simple, juicy and oaky style with good, crisp tannins wrapping the fruit. Pleasant and refreshing yet austere on the finish.	14%	2013-2020	£10.50	Bibendum £

3-STAR WINES Recommended (continued)

WINE	SCORE	TASTING NOTE	ALC	DRINK	PRICE	STOCKISTS
Altos de Tamarón, Crianza	14.75	Spice, herbs, peppermint, red berry, jam, minerals and delicate floral perfume. Full and generously fruity with well judged oak and a muscular quality.	13.5%	2011	£7.99	Asda, Free Run Wines
Bodegas Frutos Villar, Conde de Siruela, Crianza	14.75	Raspberry, tar, nail varnish, toast, oak and floral bouquet. Elegant and fresh with a full, sweet mid-palate and noticeable oak. Has some grainy, drying tannins.	14%	2012	N/A UK	www.bodegasfrutosvillar.com
Cillar de Silos, La Viña de Amalio	14.75	Simple berry fruit, fig, liquorice, red berry, marmalade and vanilla nose. Attractive fruity style with soft, velvety tannins and a light body. Simple but effective.	N/A	2011	N/A UK	www.cillardesilos.es
Lambuena, Crianza	14.75	Smoke, oak, red berry, spice and tar on the nose. Oak dominates this chunky, crisp, structured palate. Dense and chalky – relieved by some dark cherry fruit.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.bodegaslambuena.com
Portia, Prima	14.75	Red berry, spice, earth and floral bouquet. It has a dark, savoury, leathery character with a job of acidity and chewy, extracted tannins. Youthful style.	14%	2012	£20	Cellar Trends
Valdrinal, Crianza	14.75	Red berry, vanilla and creamy, smoky aroma. Round and smooth with integrated oak and textured, firm tannins. Refreshing crisp acidity. Fresh and linear style.	13.5%	2011	N/A UK	www.valdrinal.com
Pago de Carraovejas, Crianza	14.67	Minerals, leather, red fruit, herbaceous and woody bouquet. Layered, almost opulent fruit, high acidity and rounded tannins. Complex, rustic and persistent.	14.5%	2011	£25	Handford, Hangingditch, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Markinch Wine Gallery, Moreno, Waitrose
Cillar de Silos, Crianza	14.63	Elegant, creamy vanilla oak, redcurrant compote, prune and citrus aroma. Round, integrated and freshly fruity with firm acidity. Tannins are slightly rasping.	14.5%	2011	£17.48-£18.50	AG Wines, Christopher Keller, Majestic, The Drink Shop, Theatre of Wine, Uncorked, Vagabond
Gormaz, Catania, Crianza	14.63	Coffee, tobacco, cherry, tar, cedar and herbal bouquet. Concentrated fruit with fresh herbal, minty note, high acidity and grainy tannins. Bold, bright and spicy.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.hispanobodegas.com
Torres, Celeste	14.63	Mineral, vanilla, strawberry, wood smoke and floral aromas. Fresh and spicy with lots of fruit. Very commercial with a leafy, tarry finish. Balanced and long.	13.5%	2011	£11.30-£14.20	Corking Wines, Donard Wines, Fareham Wine Cellar, Nidderdale Fine Wines, Noel Young, Paul Adams, Vintage Marque
Asenjo & Manso, Ceres, Cultivo Ecológico Tempranillo	14.5	Smoky, upfront nose. Broad attack on the palate with round, juicy plums; marked acidity. A little lacking on mid-palate with noticeable alcohol and a dry finish.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.asenjo-manso.com
Gormaz, Crianza	14.5	Complex nose of red berry, smoky oak, plums and stewed fruit. Full palate with spicy, leathery, stewed fruit and a rustic, tannic style. Has a firm finish.	14%	2011	N/A UK	www.hispanobodegas.com
Viña Mayor, Crianza	14.5	Attractive, freshly picked red berry and redcurrant fruit, cream and high-quality oak aroma. Fresh, spicy, herbal palate with grainy tannins and an oaky finish.	13.5%	2011	£8.29	Everywine £

2-STAR WINES Poor 12.5-14.49pts
■ Bodegas Tionio, Austum (14.38) ■ Dominio Basconillos, Dominio Basconillos Roble (14.38) ■ Legaris, Crianza (14.38) ■ Montebaco (14.38) ■ Pagos de Mogar, Vendimia Seleccionada (14.33) ■ Bodega Diaz Bayo, Nuestro, Crianza (14.25) ■ Bodegas Imperiales, Abadia de San Quirce (14.25) ■ Dominio Romano (14.25) ■ Viña Mayor, Secreto (14.25) ■ Viña Pedrosa, Reserva (14.25) ■ Asenjo & Manso, Ceres (14) ■ Viyuela, Selección (14) ■ Gormaz, Catania, Roble

(13.88) ■ Abadia de Acón, Crianza (13.75) ■ Alidís, VS (13.5) ■ Viñas del Jaro, Finca el Quiñón, Jaros (13.38) ■ Pagos del Rey, Condado de Oriza (13.33) ■ Antonio Moral (13.17) ■ Dominio Romano, RDR (13.13) ■ Bodegas Ismael Arroyo, ValSotillo Reserva (13) ■ Valdubón, Honoris de Valdubón (13)

1-STAR WINES Poor 10.5-12.49pts
Bodegas Garcia de Aransa, Señorío de los Baldíos (12.25) ■ Pesquera, Crianza (12.13)

For full UK stockist details, see p108

Next month's panel tastings:
 Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2009
 & Grower Champagne Brut NV

Expert summary: John Radford

In a tricky vintage, four stars is a good result. But the lack of Awards, especially from the big names, was a shock, as was the practice – still – of using oak to ‘hide’ your sins



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SADLY, IT STILL seems to be the case in too many bodegas that if wines don't live up to expectations, more oak is the solution. Those whose vineyards suffered storm and hail damage could be forgiven for trying to rectify what had promised to be a much better vintage before the rains and frost of late September, but it just doesn't work.

The most disappointing thing for me was to see so many well-known names with reputations for quality at the bottom of the list. If Pesquera's Crianza can garner only one star, what's happened to the 'Pétrus of Spain' (see p97)? Other names to conjure with also languish at the bottom of the table: Ismael Arroyo, Codorniu's Legaris, Viña Pedrosa and Viyuela (all bodegas I have visited and whose wines I have admired) scraped only two stars, although Pedrosa and Viyuela won four stars for other wines.

Despite the weather, the north-west seems to have done best, but only Anta Banderas in Villalba (part-owned by actor Antonio Banderas), has more than one wine in the four-star bracket. Other than that there's no real pattern. A difficult vintage like 2007 will always be a test of the winemaker's skill, and it looks as if the top bodegas simply discarded grapes that weren't good enough and made the best wine they could with the best grapes available.

Fortunately there were some stars: Award-winner Pago de los Capellanes has always been a consistent performer,

while the relatively new (2000) Monteabellon was a surprise, but a very welcome one. Among the four-stars were Aalto (Mariano García), O Fournier (Laura Terrazas/José Spisso) and Astrales (Eduardo García), all of which have made headlines in previous vintages. I would have expected, perhaps, to see at least one of them at five-star level given their experience and track record although, in an iffy vintage, four stars is a pretty good result. Another pleasant surprise was to see two wines from La Horra – worst hit by the hail – with four stars: Asenjo & Manso Silvanus Crianza and Santa Eulalia Riberal Crianza.

The Consejo's 'Muy Buena' (four stars) classification for the vintage seems a little generous, perhaps motivated by the dilute, disappointing 2006, which was classified 'Buena' (***), but our two Award-winners prove that, even in the most challenging times, great winemakers can still make great wine, albeit in smaller quantities.

“The most disappointing thing was to see so many names with a reputation for quality at the bottom of the list”