

PRE-TASTE WINES: Critical Reviews

2009 Bodegas Muga "Prado Enea" Gran Reserva Rioja (\$60)

96 points James Suckling: This shows the ripeness and intensity of the vintage with truffles and hints of tea. Full body, layered and beautiful. Flavorful finish.

96 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: The most classic cuvée was not produced in 2007 or 2008, so we jumped to **the phenomenal 2009 Prado Enea**. It was produced with grapes from cooler vineyards that enjoyed 20 extra days of slow ripening compared with warmer zones, which provided them with perfect ripeness and deep flavors. This blend of 70% Tempranillo, 20% Garnacha and the remaining 10% between Mazuelo and Graciano had an extended élevage, in this case no less than three years (alternating newer and older barrels). This is still a baby and I know Winemaker Jorge Muga would like to keep it in bottle for longer before selling it. The wine has 14.1% alcohol and a surprising 3.34 pH, especially considering 2009 was generally a warm and ripe year. But somehow this cuvée seems to work very well in ripe vintages. The wine feels even younger on the palate, and it still needs to develop some further complexity and the silky texture for which this wine is famous. There is good balance here and all the elements are in place for a nice development in bottle. In fact, it feels like one of the great recent vintages of Prado Enea. There will be no Prado Enea in 2012 and 2013 either, but it's produced in 2010, 2014 (small quantities) and 2015. At this quality level, the price seems like a real bargain. 90,000 bottles produced in 2009.

95 points Vinous: Brilliant ruby-red. Heady aromas of smoke-accented red berries, potpourri, incense and vanilla show superb clarity and pick up cedar and pipe tobacco nuances in the glass. Sweet, seamless and broad in the mouth, offering concentrated yet vibrant red currant, cherry liqueur and floral pastille flavors that fan out steadily on the back half. A spice-cake quality emerges on the impressively persistent, red-fruit- and floral-driven finish, which is given shape by smooth, harmonious tannins.

95 points Wine Enthusiast: Alluring, complex and powerful aromas of grilled meat, berries, tea, smoke, vanilla and spice cover every base. An intense palate is concentrated but still elegant. Blackberry, molasses and mocha flavors finish with chocolaty oak notes, fine tannins and overall cohesion. Drink this special Rioja from 2020 through 2035. *Editors' Choice*

93 points Wine Spectator: Plump and lively; delivers plum, tobacco, licorice and candied orange flavors, with firm tannins and balsamic acidity supplying structure in traditional style.

2010 La Rioja Alta "Viña Alberdi" Reserva Rioja (\$20)

95 points James Suckling: Ripe and intense aromas of strawberries and blackberries with hints of black ink. Savory notes, too. Full-bodied, chewy and focused with linear fruit and character. Very finely crafted. Drink or hold.

91 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: The 2010 Viña Alberdi is a Tempranillo blend from different vineyards from what they consider an extraordinary vintage. This wine is matured in American oak barrels built by their own coopers, the first year in new barrels and the second in third-year barrels. This is the younger of their wines, with red berry aromas and spicy oak, quite harmonious. The palate is lively, balanced and polished, with tasty flavors and bright acidity. Delicious. (LG)

Wine & Spirits: A rich vintage of Viña Alberdi, this packs a lot of blackberry and black cherry flavor into its long, juicy finish. The wine is warm and gamey, and a little hard edged with bitter oak, but it should stand well with food, especially lamb sausages.

2011 Cune Grand Reserva Rioja (\$31)

JS-94. James Suckling: A very powerful CUNE with so much blackberry, fresh mushroom and floral character. Big and tannic yet so polished at the same time. Even structure. It shows wonderful potential for ageing. Better in 2020.

WS90 Wine Spectator: This red has a pleasant woody, spicy character, with black cherry, licorice, dried herb and loamy earth flavors in a smooth, dense texture, supported by well-integrated tannins and orange peel acidity. Drink now through 2023.

2013 Hacienda Solano Vinas Viejas Ribera del Duero (\$30)

92 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: The 2013 Selección Viñas Viejas is a mixture of Tempranillo grapes from multiple small plots of old vines in the village of La Aguilera, where the family has the vineyards and the winery. There is low alcohol and very good freshness here, despite the fact that it was harvested in mid-October. It matured in oak barrels for one year. 2013 was a challenging vintage, a cool year, but with problems of botrytis during the harvest, so it was necessary to sort and select thoroughly. The old vines are harvested earlier, and these were the grapes for this wine, which has an herbal freshness and some spicy and earthy notes with some oak in the background. The palate is medium to full-bodied, but with very good freshness that makes it feel lighter and easier to drink, quite accessible with fruit at the forefront. It developed a note of orange peel with time in the glass (LG)

2012 Lambuena Crianza Ribera del Duero (\$20): Located in the town of Roa, which is part of the Burgos district, Lambuena is a producer of D.O. Ribera del Duero wines and is one of our newest Spanish direct imports. Ideally situated in the central growing region of the Ribera del Duero, in an area known for the very high quality of its chalky clay soils and its extreme continental climate, Lambuena makes big, generously fruited, yet structured and ultimately classic Ribera del Duero wines (these days, this is very difficult to find in this D.O.) Though the wines consist primarily of Tempranillo ("tintofino" in the local parlance), there is a small amount of Merlot grown as well, a grape that has been growing in the region since at least the late 19th century (and is still part of Vega Sicilia's plantings). A careful hand harvest, native yeast fermentation, fermentation in tank followed by aging in French and American oak barrels (with a four year barrel rotation) all add up to very good, traditional Ribera del Duero wine. The crianza shows black cherry fruit, hints of licorice, subtly smoky/sweet spices, and an overall balance and structure that I love to taste, but all too seldom sense in modern day Ribera del Duero wines. This should continue to improve in bottle for at least another 7 years.