

CRITICAL REVIEWERS TASTING NOTES: Gandara Spanish Rioja vs Ribera Tasting- June 10, 2018

Rioja-----

2011 Bodegas Muga Selección Especial Reserva (\$40)

92 points James Suckling: A complex nose of dried strawberries with slate and white-truffle undertones. Hints of Spanish cedar. Full body, juicy tannins and bright acidity that follows through to a long, clean and earthy finish. A great wine that shows structure and complexity. Drink or hold.

93 points Wine Spectator: This red has a firm backbone and a solid texture, with harmonious flavors of plum, blackberry, licorice, cocoa and espresso. Concentrated yet graceful. Drink now through 2026.

92 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: The 2011 Reserva Selección Especial, from a warmer and drier year compared with the average (as well as the previous harvest), has a similar blend as the regular Muga Reserva; it is 65% Tempranillo with 20% Garnacha, 10% Graciano and 5% Mazuelo, and it was fermented in small vats with indigenous yeasts. The different varieties and grapes are fermented and aged separately, the first year in new oak and the second one in used barrels. 2011 is a powerful vintage for this cuvée, which now shows quite marked by toasty aromas. Warm vintages usually need longer in bottle to integrate the oak, but experience shows that it gets absorbed and in fact the evolution of this wine in bottle is very good. Even if the nose recommends to wait, the palate is very balanced, with remarkably ripe tannins for such warm year, which can sometime produce some harsh tannins. Not the case here, where the wine shows good elegance and balance. This is a very reliable cuvée, quite stable across vintages.

2011 La Rioja Alta "Viña Alberdi" Reserva (\$19)

94 points James Suckling: A classic and tightly knit Rioja with dried berry, spice and cedar character on the nose and palate. Medium body, very fine tannins and flavorful finish. Acidity carries the wine and the tannins. Gorgeous.

91 points Wine & Spirits: This is a velvety, red-fruited wine behind the initial oak blackness, with notes of forest floor as the wine softens up with air. It remains tight in the middle, needing a grilled sirloin to bring out its complexity.

90 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: The 2011 Viña Alberdi is a blend of Tempranillo from different vineyards with a classical fermentation. The grapes are destemmed and crushed in stainless steel followed by malolactic and aging in new and used American oak barrels for two years. There are some toasted aromas of sesame and sunflower seeds, somehow yeasty, with a bit of a reductive profile that I like very much. They have introduced some changes in the vinification, and since 2010 the grapes have been sourced 100% from their own vineyards. With time, more balsamic notes appear. The palate is medium-bodied with tasty flavors, dusty tannins and moderate acidity.

2012 Bodegas Lan, Edición Limitada Rioja (\$40)

92 points Wine Spectator: This bold red is dense yet expressive. A thick texture delivers ripe flavors of blackberry and currant that mingle with cocoa and menthol notes. Well-integrated tannins and lively tangerine acidity keep this focused. A rich, modern style (TM)

K&L Notes: Always the most forward, intensely fruited and richest of their bottlings, the 2012 Limitada picks up where the excellent 2011 left off, though perhaps with a few dashes more acidity and a slightly firmer structure as a result. A very good bottling of Rioja from Bodegas LAN, with loads of dark cherry,

sweet cocoa and cassis aromas leading to a tasty palate of mixed berry fruit confit flavors with perfectly bright, balancing acidity.

2012 Bodegas Roda Reserva Rioja (\$50)

95 points James Suckling: Very fresh, deep black fruit and licorice character. Rich and complex, but also very lively for its age. The refined tannins are beautifully integrated and drive the long, complex finish. Delicious now.

K&L Notes: Located in the famed barrio de estaciones, Roda is the relative newcomer in this historic area of bodegas including Lopez de Heredia, La Rioja Alta and Muga. Their style tends to show more dark fruit flavors, with savory undertones and the grilled, toasty nuances of high quality French oak barrels. This is a wine of deep pitch and heft, but showing a fine balance between fruit flavors, textural weight and wood. This is Rioja for fans of Napa Cab and right bank Bordeaux.

Ribera del Duero-----

2012 Vega Sicilia "Valbuena" Ribera del Duero (\$140)

95 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: The 2012 Valbuena was cropped from a vintage with a very dry and warm summer that resulted in very healthy grapes. The élevage is French and American oak barrels that on average lasts 18 months followed by another 18 months in 20,000-liter oak vats. It has ripe tannins and a powerful mouthfeel but with a soft texture. Even if it's not widely mentioned, it always has had some French grapes, mainly Merlot, but this 2012 is the first Valbuena ever to be really 100% Tempranillo—because the Merlot didn't behave well in this warm and dry year. It follows the path opened by the 2010, more precise and elegant, rounded by that extra time in larger vats to finish polishing the tannins. I find this 2012 halfway between 2010 and 2011. It has depth and elegance. (LG)

94 points James Suckling: The depth and intensity to this wine is focused and rich with so much chocolate, coffee and hazelnut character. It is full bodied and very polished with juicy tannins. Light, angular edge. Better in 2019 but already beautiful.

94 points Wine Enthusiast: Lightly charred, toasty berry aromas come with a full covering of clove and baking spice scents in this plush wine. The palate is edged with drying tannins, bolstering exotic berry, spice and herbal flavors. Its long, balanced finish features chocolate and unabsorbed oak. Drink through 2022. *Cellar Selection*

93 points Vinous: (aged for five years in new and used French and American oak barriques and vats) Opaque ruby. Primary dark berry and cherry scents are complemented by suggestions of vanilla, coconut, cured tobacco and cedary oak and accented by a suave floral topnote. Sappy, concentrated and expansive in the mouth, offering sweet black raspberry, cherry-vanilla and candied licorice flavors that are supported by a spine of juicy acidity. Unfolds slowly with air, picking up a spicy quality that carries through the very long, gently tannic finish, which echoes the cherry and coconut notes. Hands off this one for at least a few more years. (JR)

2013 Finca Villacreces "Pruno" Ribera del Duero (\$18)

93 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate: I've loved this wine in the past and the 2013, a blend of 90% Tempranillo and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon aged 12 months in French oak, is stunning, simply over-delivering in so many different ways. This wine, which offers up copious quantities, of blueberry, black raspberry and black currant fruit, licorice, graphite and meaty notes, offers fabulous aromatics, medium to full-bodied mouthfeel, beautiful, pure texture and a long, heady finish with subtle oak. What's amazing is the French oak is all two-year-old, super-expensive Darnajou barrels. For \$20 this is another amazing offering from Spain and from importer Eric Solomon. (RP)

92 points James Suckling: A firm and silky red with chewy tannins and pretty fruit. Full body, seamless tannins and a fruity finish. Drink or hold.

2012 Pago de losCapellanes Crianza Ribera del Duero (\$30)

95 points Wine Spectator: This polished red shows power and grace. Black cherry, currant and licorice flavors are fresh and clean, backed by mineral, loamy earth and espresso notes. The firm tannins are well-integrated, and juicy acidity gives way to a floral finish. Not showy, but harmonious and long.

93 points Wine & Spirits: A selection from estate vineyards near Pedrosadel Duero, this tempranillo feels like a Romanesque cathedral, austere, without many frills, but with that sense of solidity and serenity in its structure. In terms of decor, the aromas are spicy, with a focus on ripe red fruit. You can drink it now with roast leg of lamb, but it would be better to wait five years, as it will surely gain in complexity and charm.

93 points Wine & Spirits:

KL: Composed of Tempranillo from Pedrosa de Duero, and then aged in all French oak barrels (1/3 new, 1/3 one year-old, 1/3 two year-old), this Ribera shows dark cherry and red plum fruited aromas. Approachable now, it is also serious enough to age a while in your cellar. Pago de losCapellanes is one of the most consistent producers in all of Ribera del Duero; very good quality, fresh, nicely structured wine, with tasty fruit, bright acidity and well balanced oak.

2013 Bodegas Vizcarra JC Vizcarra (\$35)

92 points Vinous: Bright purple. Explosive, oak-spiced boysenberry and blueberry aromas, with candied lavender and vanilla qualities coming up with air. Lush, weighty and seamless on the palate, showing impressive focus and thrust to its dark berry liqueur, cherry-vanilla and floral pastille flavors. Finishes spicy, round and very long, with smooth tannins and repeating florality. This distinctly suave, approachable wine spent 15 months in French and American oak barrels. The 2009 and 2004 renditions of this wine are both pretty gorgeous right now, with the '09 rich and creamy but built to age and the '04 displaying an array of sexy floral, spicy dark fruit qualities and the freshness to continue aging gracefully.