

# TERROIR TRANSLATORS: 10 GREAT WINEMAKERS

With a focus on site specificity and wines that are made in the vineyard, a new wave of wine-growers is demonstrating the potential of Spain's varied and distinctive terroirs.

**Darren Smith** profiles the names you need to know and recommends bottles to buy

**A**uthentic wines, hard work and a dedication to their land and its traditions – these are characteristics common to all the emerging winemaking talents featured here. In every case, the wines they produce are made without artifice. In every case, they are a demonstration of the truth that, now more than ever before, quality-oriented producers across Spain are seeking to make wines that express geographic specificity.

The shift towards vineyard and site focus and towards more traditional (ie, non-industrial) winemaking practices is not news. But its near-ubiquity here may be. Every producer featured considers their wines to be made in the vineyard, not the cellar. Every one eschews agrochemicals, working organically and, more often than not, incorporating elements of biodynamics in the field. Forget the nomenclature of 'winemaker', think more in terms of 'wine-grower'.

While some are at the very start of their projects, others are more established, though perhaps yet to attract the attention they deserve. Most share a tendency towards making wine in fresher styles, working with old vines at higher altitudes, working in a less extractive way in the cellar, and keeping interventions and additives to a minimum. In every case, it feels like winemaking as it should be: letting top-quality grapes tell the story of their terroir, unfettered and not messed around with.

Since 2019, I have spent several months in Spain, making wine in the bodega of Victoria Torres in La Palma, Canary Islands (one of *Decanter's* up-and-coming Spanish

**'It feels like winemaking as it should be: letting quality grapes tell the story of their terroir'**



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winemaking talents of last year). During that time, as well as witnessing the terroir-wine revolution happening on this volcanic archipelago, I came to appreciate the hard work and dedication that defines the lives of these emerging talents.

It isn't romantic, it's a struggle – against the capricious elements; to secure land and grapes in communities where growers do not value the important work these producers are doing; to recuperate vineyards when there is little support or momentum for change. But it is thanks to the industrious work of the winemakers highlighted below, and the many others we do not have the space to include here, that we are able to drink from the thriving and diverse wellspring of terroir wines that Spain is today – and, of course, to savour the wines themselves.

## Orly Lumbreras

### SIERRA DE GREDOS, CASTILLA Y LEON

At 52, Orly Lumbreras is proof that it's never too late to pursue the winemaking dream. Still working as a radio sound engineer, this late-blooming natural winemaker has followed the path of Alfredo Maestro and Comando G into the Gredos region, to the Alto Alberche valley, to make fine, granite-based Garnacha.

Thanks to his friendship with Maestro, Lumbreras acquired a 70-year-old vineyard, located at 1,100m altitude in the town of Navarredondilla, Avila. In 2012, he made his first 600 bottles of Punto G, which is an uncompromising, whole-bunch-macerated mountain Garnacha. From 2013 to 2016 he was also busy honing his skills with whites, embarking on a white wine project with Rubén Díaz in nearby Cebreros (see *'Regional profile'*, p38).

All this time, a passion for low-intervention winemaking and the terroir of northern Gredos was simmering away and in 2016 he struck out on his own. Still making whites (and orange wines) from Albillo and Chasselas



Photograph: Sarah Jane Evans MW

Doré in Cebreros, as well as collaborating on a small Mencía project at Adega Sernande in the wild Vilachá de Salvador area of Ribeira Sacra, Lumbreras has spent four years recovering old-vine Garnacha plots at 1,000m-1,130m altitude in Navalmoral de la Sierra (where he has his winery) and neighbouring villages such as Navatalgordo, Navarredondilla and San Juan de la Nava. These are natural terroir wines of great individuality, showing the personality of old-vine Garnacha and Albillo from this re-energised and increasingly celebrated mountain region.

### **Orly Lumbreras Viñador, Punto G Garnacha, Gredos, Castilla y León 2018 90**

POA Pure Wines  
Made with fruit from a remote, 70- to 75-year-old Garnacha plot at 1,100m in Avila. Biodynamically farmed. Ripe red and black fruits with baked earth and saline minerality. Concentrated in flavour and punchy at 15% alcohol, but still with a sense of freshness and polish. Really granitic, with savoury tannins that are still quite firm, which says to me that this wine could do with a year or so more in bottle. **Drink 2020-2026**

**Alcohol 15%** ➤

**Above: the former radio sound engineer turned winemaker Orly Lumbreras**

## Alvar de Dios

**TORO/ARRIBES, CASTILLA Y LEON**

Although 35-year-old Alvar de Dios is harnessed to the red wine tradition of his family's native Toro, he confesses to not being overly inspired by Tinta de Toro (the region's name for Tempranillo). Since 2015 his pursuit of the highest-quality terroir wines has led him an hour's drive west, to Arribes – a DO region only since 2007. Here, in Villadepera, he is tuned into something very exciting.

Just 2km from the Portuguese border, Villadepera is a rugged area of pure volcanic schist, whereas most of Arribes is granite and sand. Benefitting from the cooling influence of the Duero river, it is greener, hillier and fresher than further south. There's a strong Galician/Bierzo influence too: natives of these regions who migrated to work in Villadepera's silver mines co-planted varieties such as Mencía, Merenzao and Verdejo Negro in small family plots. De Dios works with 36 of these plots covering just 5ha.

De Dios is close friends with Comando G's Fernando García and Daniel Landi and was the cellarmaster at Bodega Maraños from 2010 to 2015. His feel for white wines is clear through his work with the Albillo grape at Maraños, and it's fascinating to taste his contrasting expressions of Doña Blanca side by side: Vagüera, from a plot of iron-rich clay and limestone in Toro, is bold and opulent; Las Vidres, from poor schistous soil in Arribes, is all delicacy and petrichor minerality. Look out, too, for his Yavallo red from Villadepera. An old-vine Merenzao-dominant field blend, it is several worlds apart from the bull-necked reds



Above: Alvar de Dios

of Toro, showing an earthy, floral delicacy that has more in common with the Jura.



**Alvar de Dios, Las Vidres, Arribes, Castilla y León 2018 94**

£40 (2016) Iberian Drinks

This is Alvar de Dios' 'Pouilly-Fumé'. From an isolated hill of mica-inflected white schist in Villadepera, where the botrytis-prone Doña Blanca prospers. Luminous. Crushed oyster shells, petrichor and lime water, with white flowers, pear flesh and sea spray. Faint anise too. Low-ish acid, but there's

plenty of fruit tannin and a tingle of salty minerality. Precise and transparent. The grape lets the terroir do the talking. Organic. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 12.5%**



César Márquez

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**BIERZO, CASTILLA Y LEON**

Let's face it, César Márquez had an advantageous start in wine: his uncle is Raúl Pérez, and through his family's deep roots in Bierzo (Castro Ventosa was founded by the Pérez family in 1752) he has access to some of that region's best vineyard plots. But it's what you do with your advantage that counts. Márquez's introduction to winemaking came via his uncle in 2011, the year Pérez founded La Vizcaína and began to explore the cru vineyards of Valtuille.

After working in Argentina with the Michelin brothers, Márquez

began shaping his own project, just as Bierzo was formalising its own Burgundy-style vineyard classification system. In 2017, still only 29 years old, he was also made head winemaker at Castro Ventosa, becoming the 10th generation of the Pérez family winemaking saga.

Márquez makes a fantastic white, La Salvación, from centenarian Godello, but the lifeblood of his project is Mencía. Benefitting from his family's 80ha of Valtuille vineyards, he works with 3ha from different terroirs, plus 1.5ha outside Valtuille and 2ha of plots owned by growers: all vines between 80 and 130 years old.

From his outstanding-value Parajes to his single-vineyard El Rapolao

## Verónica Ortega

**BIERZO, CASTILLA Y LEON**

Though hardly new on the scene, Cádiz-born Verónica Ortega is yet to achieve the recognition in the UK that her wines deserve. Since the early 2000s, Ortega has amassed some enviable winemaking credentials. Before moving to Bierzo in 2012, she worked for Clos Erasmus in Priorat, spent two years in Burgundy (at Comte Armand in Pommard and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti) and two years in the northern Rhône as winemaker at Domaine Combié, interspersed with harvests in the Douro and New Zealand.

It was while working at Clos Erasmus that Ortega met Bierzo lynchpins Ricardo Palacios and Raúl Pérez, and began visiting the region, quickly realising that here she had everything she needed to make the great wines she had always been shaping up to make.

With the help of Palacios and Pérez, Ortega gradually pieced together holdings of 5ha of old vines, which she farms biodynamically. She also rents plots from growers who work well in the vineyard. The Mencías of Valtuille de Abajo are the foundation of her work, though she also works with Mencía at higher elevation in Cobrana, and Godello planted on a chalk quarry in San Juan de la Mata.

It's not in their high quality alone that these wines identify Ortega as a special winemaker, it is that each has a distinct personality. From her deep and concentrated yet beautifully defined Roc cuvée from Valtuille to the latest addition to her range, Kinki, which is a high-toned and perfumed early-picked Mencía (blended with some

white varieties) from Cobrana, her exceptional talent is plain to see.



**Verónica Ortega, Cal Godello, Bierzo, Castilla y León 2017 96**

£36 Vine Trail, Vino Vero

While Ortega's Mencías are magnificent, this Godello from organically farmed vines planted on an old chalk quarry – Godello is uncommon in Bierzo, limestone even more so – is so special that it takes precedence. Fermented in French oak and amphorae, it's linear, fine-textured and super-complex.

Crystalline white fruit and citrus with a fine flinty reduction and a haunting spice note of hazelnut, cinnamon, toast and dried apple. An electrifying malic acidity provides incredible verve. **Drink 2020-2030 Alc 12.5%** ➤

Below: Verónica Ortega makes wines with 'distinct personality'

(arguably the most prized plot in Bierzo), the project eloquently reflects the Burgundian system, differentiating between regional wine, village wine (grapes from Valtuille only) and three single-parcel wines. These are profound, nuanced expressions of Mencía and mark out Márquez as a terroir-wine star of the future.



**César Márquez, Pico Ferreira, Bierzo, Castilla y León 2018 95**

£34.70 Indigo Wines

Spicy, whole-bunch depth on the nose: clove, sandalwood, cola cubes with a note of violets. Ferrous red and black fruit, with firm acid, hints of toasty oak and a core of stony minerality. Some chewy tannin, but the concentration, definition and balance suggest a long life ahead. **Drink 2020-2030 Alc 13.5%**



# Julia Casado, La del Terreno

**BULLAS, MURCIA**

Having switched from an intended career as a cellist to that of a winemaker, Julia Casado took a modest bank loan in 2015 and constructed a ‘prefab’ modular winery in the middle of a nature reserve in Bullas, Murcia. Despite having no connections to the region, she managed to forge links with local growers and establish a thriving natural wine label.

Many readers will be familiar with Jumilla, even Yecla; fewer will know of Bullas. Yet Casado believes this is the best region in southeast Spain in which to make pure, expressive Monastrell. In contrast to the hot, semi-arid Jumilla, Bullas is a relatively cool, verdant region in which old dry-farmed bush vines grow at high elevation (about 800m). Casado’s La del Terreno (the local name for Monastrell) exemplifies her lightness of touch. Avoiding oak, her focus is on the fruit and aromatic expression of this variety, which she



Julia Casado

describes as ‘tough... but with a really tender heart, like wood enveloping a flower’.

In summer 2020, Casado moved her winery 50km east from its original site in Venta del Pino to Caravaca in Comarca del Noroeste. Already working with 3ha of rented vines, in Caravaca she has planted a further 6ha as part of a collective working to preserve the area’s agricultural tradition and promote regenerative agriculture. This move feels like the next phase of an inspiring solo project from this resourceful young winemaker.



**La del Terreno, Bullas, Murcia 2018** 91

£32 Dynamic Vines

From a single vineyard at 800m in the village of Cehégín. Far from the oak-monster Monastrells of Jumilla. No oak; the addition of 5% white grapes gives a bright, floral-scented expression, with red and black fruit, a subtle animal note and herbs. Juicy and supple mid-palate with fine, chalky tannins and a refreshing acidity. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13%

# Sabino Quirós & Isabel García: Orulisa

**LIEBANA, CANTABRIA**

Situated at the foot of the Picos de Europa National Park, one of Spain’s most imposing mountain ranges, Liébana is an extraordinary place in which to make wine. Although there is a long wine tradition here (the first evidence is from 826), the area is best known for distilling. Sabino Quirós and Isabel García are a husband-and-wife team – García is in fact a third-generation distiller, and makes artisan pomace brandy under the Orulisa brand that’s served in Spain’s Michelin-starred restaurants.

Since 2015, Quirós has managed a natural wine project alongside the distillery operation. The project is committed to the uphill task (literally – at 500m, some of the vineyards have a 30% gradient) of recuperating vineyards – many over a century old and typically mixed plantings of Bierzo Alto varieties (Merenzao, Albillo, Mencía, Garnacha Tintorera, Godello, Palomino, Albarín) on poor, slate (pizarra) soils. This is vital work in a region where mechanisation is not possible (they use mules and horses) and viticulture is in steep decline: in 1889, there were 676ha of vineyards here, today just 50ha remain.

The pair deserve plaudits simply for the dedication they show in preserving the wine-growing tradition of this spectacular region, but the wines Quirós makes are becoming equally worthy of praise.



**Orulisa, Pum de Pumareña, Cantabria, Northern Spain 2018** 91

N/A UK [www.orulisa.com](http://www.orulisa.com)

Purely centenarian vines, mainly Mencía, Garnacha Tintorera, Merenzao and Albarín Tinto. Mercurial wild-berry nose with intense herbal-balsamic aromatics, juicy cherry and blackberry. Faint eucalyptus. On the palate, lithe and light with chalky tannins, a slightly saline minerality and refreshing acidity suggestive of Liébana’s mountain vineyards. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 12% ➤

**Below: Isabel García and Sabino Quirós**



Photograph: [www.murciamola.com](http://www.murciamola.com)

## Alejandro Narváez & Rocío Aspera: Bodega de Forlong

JEREZ, ANDALUCIA

It's Sherry, Jim, but not as we know it. Based in El Puerto de Santa María, young couple Alejandro (Alex) Narváez and Rocío Aspera plough their own idiosyncratic furrow through the albariza soils of Jerez. Working outside the regulatory framework of the Sherry DO, they produce a fascinatingly diverse wine range – single-site unfortified Palominos, amphora-aged reds, orange wines, ancestral-method sparkling.

Although the duo made their first wine back in 2012, it's only since 2014 that Narváez and Aspera have worked from their own cellar. Narváez previously spent two years working at Château Smith Haut Lafitte in Graves, from where they take some barriques. They have a strong focus on organic farming – indeed Bodega de Forlong is the only winery in the Sherry triangle whose entire range is organically certified – and natural methods of stabilising and preserving their wines.

Initially focusing on Tintilla reds, in 2015 they started the Sherry side of their project. They make it without fortification – instead grapes are partially dried to concentrate

sugars and reach 15 degrees potential alcohol, in order for flor to develop. Their major passion, however, is reviving vino de pasto – essentially high-quality table wines using local grapes (mainly Palomino Fino). Made without fortification, oxidative or biological ageing, soleras or criaderas, they serve to highlight the region's prime vineyard sites and under-appreciated albariza-based terroir.



**Forlong, La Fleur, Jerez, Andalucia 2016 92**

£29.73-£35/50cl (2015) Alliance Wine, Noble Green, The Drink Shop, The Fine Wine Co  
This is made how fino used to be made, which is to say, unfortified. The grapes are sun-dried for up to 36 hours to concentrate sugars and make a wine at about 15% alcohol. Fermented in botas and aged for two years under flor. This gives an intense, spicy flor character – curry leaf, walnut skin – but the wine is fruity too. Saline, glycerine-textured, with hints of camomile, apple skin and baked orchard fruits on the palate. Organic. **Drink 2020-2030 Alc 15%** >

**Below: Rocío Aspera and Alejandro Narváez produce a 'fascinatingly diverse wine range'**



## Carmelo Peña Santana: Bien de Altura

GRAN CANARIA, CANARY ISLANDS

Having worked for Dirk Niepoort in Portugal's Douro Valley for two years, and helped on vintages in Itata, Chile with Pedro Parra and in in Bierzo on the Spanish mainland with Raúl Pérez, 33-year-old Peña returned to his homeland of Gran Canaria in 2017. Once back, he wasted no time establishing projects that will help to define the terroir focus of Canary Islands wines for years to come.

Peña's main project is Bien de Altura, which focuses on organic farming, local varieties and high-altitude sites (1,100-1,500m) in the hills above San Mateo. The first label is Ikewen, which aims 'to express Gran Canaria in a bottle'. From the 2019 vintage it's joined by Tidao, from a centenarian parcel of Listán Negro, Listán Blanco and Listán Prieto.

A further strand to Bien de Altura, named El3mento, is a pan-Gran Canaria-Douro collaboration with his friend Luís Pedro Cândido (table winemaker for Niepoort). Peña is also busy in Lanzarote: the Puro Rofe project sees him make wine with Rayco Fernández.

Whether it's his peppery, volcanic reds or taut, crystalline whites, there's a striking freshness and finesse to Peña's wines, which are a faithful application of the Niepoort principle of 'infusion, not extraction' to the Canaries' Atlantic-influenced volcanic terroir.



**Bien de Altura, Ikewen, Gran Canaria, Canary Islands 2018 93**

£25 Wanderlust Wine  
Mostly Listán Negro from old vines planted at up to 1,400m. Floral, crunchy red fruit and spicy, peppery, volcanic complexity. Taut acidity and mineral freshness. Those high-altitude vines defy one's concept of what a wine made just 100km from the Saharan coast should taste like. **Drink 2020-2026 Alc 11.5%**

**Above: Gran Canaria winemaker Carmelo Peña Santana**

## Pablo Matallana: La Bardona, Bimbache, Taro

CANARY ISLANDS

Born of a 0.5ha rented parcel of Listán Negro in Tegueste, northern Tenerife, La Bardona is the wine with which Pablo Matallana, then aged 26, started his winemaking career in 2015. Following a spell in Chile in 2016, he resumed work on La Bardona in 2017, also setting to work on two projects that form the nucleus of his current endeavours: Taro in Lanzarote and Bimbache in El Hierro, the latter a co-venture with Rayco Fernández of Puro Rofe (see above).

Using indigenous grape varieties, natural ferments and minimal sulphur, the aim is to express the personality of each island. El Hierro enjoys much greater variance of altitude, the most important grape is the high-acid Verjadiego Blanco del Hierro; in Lanzarote's mainly volcanic

gravel-based vineyards, Malvasía Volcánica, Listán Blanco and Tinto, and Diego predominate.

Because El Hierro – the smallest and least-populated Canary islands – is relatively uncharted territory, Bimbache is perhaps the most intriguing of Matallana's ventures. While he and Fernández are pioneering terroir wines for the



**Bimbache Grand Cruz del Calvario 2018**

modern palate here, they are also attempting to revive tradition with El Hierro vino de pata – a Madeira-style wine with amazing ageing potential.

**Valientes Vinos, Bimbache Grand Cruz del Calvario, El Hierro, Canary Islands 2019 94**

N/A UK @matallana.pablo  
The tiny island of El Hierro positively swaggers into the world of fine wine here. From a field blend of five local white grapes: mainly Vijariego Blanco and Listán Blanco with Gual, Baboso Blanco and Forastera Blanca. Briny with amazing (and balanced) lemony acidity and mineral freshness. Flinty, volcanic and pithy, with lovely fine oak character. So exciting to drink. Confidently joins the ranks of top Canarian whites of Envínate and Suertes del Marqués. **Drink 2020-2026 Alc 13%** >

Photograph: @bimbachehierro/Twitter



## Tatjana Peceric: Coreografía

### MONTSANT, CATALONIA

Tatjana Peceric was a professional folk dancer in her native Serbia until the age of 24; it was then, inspired by the gastronomic culture she witnessed while touring France as part of her dance group, that the wine bug bit. A diverse wine apprenticeship took her to Switzerland, New Zealand, Bordeaux and Canada before Priorat captured her imagination.

Peceric first travelled to the region in 2016 after meeting Terroir al Límit's Dominik Huber while working in Switzerland. Although she only intended to stay briefly, her sensibility for Garnacha quickly resulted in her becoming Huber's head winemaker, not just for Terroir al Límit, but also Terroir Sense Fronteres, his spin-off project in neighbouring Montsant.

Her personal project, Coreografía (first vintage 2018), takes her further into Montsant to explore the region's cooler, higher-altitude vineyard sites. Her one wine so far, Pas de Deux, is a Garnacha-Cariñena blend named in homage to her previous life as a dancer. Winemaking is much the same as for Terroir Sense Fronteres – gentle extraction, whole-bunch fermentations, eschewing oak, aiming for low alcohol. What's different is the terroir: for Pas de Deux, Peceric sources grapes from two biodynamically farmed vineyards in

Cornudella de Montsant, the coolest area of the region. These elevated plots of iron-rich clay with gypsum provide a fine, floral expression of Garnacha and an expressive, energetic Cariñena. Peceric makes them dance together gracefully.

For so long in the shadow of Priorat, Montsant is undoubtedly now entering the wine world spotlight. Expect to hear more of both Peceric and her wines as the region's ascent continues. **D**



#### Coreografía, Pas de Deux, Montsant, Catalonia 2018 94

£24.13-£26 Armit Wines, Christopher Keiller, R&H Fine Wines, Vinatis

Grapes are sourced from biodynamically farmed vineyards located high above the village of Cornudella de Montsant, at the foot of Montsant mountain. The wine is whole-bunch fermented, then aged in steel tank and amphorae. Shows a beautifully perfumed nose of wild red berries and dried flowers with a savoury note of dried thyme. There's a lovely sense of transparency on the palate. Very light on its feet, positively silky in texture, with very fine structure and a fresh, mineral finish. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13%

Above: former dancer Tatjana Peceric