

## ARTOMAÑA TXAKOLINA

### DO Arabako Txakolina

Situated in the quaint Basque *herrirka* (village) of Artomaña on the banks of its eponymous river are the family vineyards and winery of Artomaña Txakolina. The estate is a forty-minute drive south of Bilbao in the Arabako Txakolina DO, which is the warmest and furthest inland of the three Txakoli regions. Like much of this green and damp part of Spain, the vineyards and valleys are flanked by imposing mountain ranges. The limestone-rich *Sierra Salvada* casts an intimidating figure across the landscape giving protection from the harsh Atlantic winds while providing irrigation via the local rivers that are born at its peaks.



The first wines of the region were produced in 1988 when Eugenio Alava Ugarte set out to recover the tradition of wine production in the region. He gathered twelve local growers to produce a small local co-op. Said co-op's wine led to the region receiving *Vino de la Tierra* (VdIT) status in that year, eventually becoming an authorised DO (Arabako Txakolina) in 2002. Eugenio's sons have now taken the reins of the family vineyards, and in 2005 they started 'Artomaña Txakolina' as a family-owned estate. They built a new winery and focused on expanding their land under vine by continuing to plant local varieties. They now farm a total of 20ha, which makes them the largest producer in the region.

Hondarrabi Zuri dominates the plantings, though Izkiriota Ttipia (Petit Manseng), Hondarrabi Zuri Zerratia (Petit Courbu) and Izkiriota (Gros Manseng) also play their parts in the vineyards and in the final wines. The region's distance from the coast and the protection of the mountains allows for a long, moderate growing season. Meaning, the native varieties ripen fully and avoid the sapid-astringent characters which can occur closer to the coast. The (still relatively young) vines are planted on mainly limestone soils with some clay content at between 270m-350m. Total production here is around 350,000kg producing 260,000 bottles.

The Alava brothers focus on making wines that respect the traditions of the region while reflecting the unique terroir that surrounds them. Capping yields, natural yeasts, native varietal blends, and stainless steel vinification are some of the practices they follow to make sure it is the soil and the fruit that do the talking. They are not interested in clouding their wines with oak or muddying their identity with the addition of non-Basque varieties.



### 2018 ARTOMAÑA TXAKOLINA 'Xarmant' Txakoli

This estate wine is a blend of varieties dominated by Hondarrabi Zuri (70%) with equal parts of Izkiriota, Izkiriota Ttipia and Hondarrabi Zuri Zerratia. The parcels are hand-picked separately and left to cold soak for 24 hours at 10 C°. This increases both volume and aromatic complexity in the final wine. The wines ferment spontaneously with vineyard yeasts and spend four months on lees in stainless steel before bottling.



*Instant Txacoli on the nose! Grapefruit, green apple, lovage, celery leaf, a waft of hay, white petals and chalk. The palate is fresh with pear, golden delicious, and herb fleck. Starting soft, with good depth thanks to excellent, controlled phenolic development, the palate freshens on a petillant tickle and a grassy tweak. The twinning of natural acidity and the chalky-limestone soils give the wine a moreish crisp saline-sourness.*

## Txakoli (chak-oh-lee)

Txakoli is the wine of the Basques, and, like the Basques, it is a survivor.

This rugged, rocky coast along the Bay of Biscay is hardly the ideal place to grow grapes; there is not a week of the year without rain, cloud cover is constant, and harsh northern winds continually harass the grapes. Viticulture in the region dates back over 1000 years. The first mention of 'vino chacolín' to designate local wines was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the etymology of the word coming from 'etxakoá' (home-made) or 'etxeko ain' (enough for home)<sup>1</sup>.

### THE THREE TXACOLIS

There are 3 (geographically, and stylistically) distinct Txakolis, each with its own appellation. The first two are pretty much coastal, at Getaria and Bilbao respectively, the third is inland towards Vitoria-Gasteiz. The three linguistic renderings of each are, in order of presentation below, the correct Basque (*euskera*), the common lazy international 'translation' of *euskera* for common use (equates to substituting Rome for Roma), and the Spanish version (*euskera* translated into *castellano*, similar to ingles as the Spanish name for the English) :

- Getariako Txakolina - Txakoli de Getaria - Chacolí de Guetaria
- Bizkaiko Txakolina - Txakoli de Bizkaika - Chacolí de Vizcaya
- Arabako Txakolina - Txakoli de Álava - Chacolí de Álava

After a series of plagues in the 19th century (oidium, mildium, and, of course, phylloxera), Txakoli encountered one of its greatest moments at the start of the 20th with the emergence of 'chacolines' (bars that served exclusively Txakoli wines alongside salt cod, squid, and elvers). As knowledge of the region's culinary heights grew, so did the recognition and appreciation of its wines. This high, however, was not to last, and by the 1980s, disease, industrialisation, and competition from exogenous wine regions saw the area under vine reduce from the 2,874ha that were recorded in the census of 1891, to just 50ha. The future of the Basque wine looked bleak. A striving for quality driven wines (spearheaded by the Txueka family of Txomin Etxaniz) led to the establishment of Txakoli's first DO, Getariako Txakolina (chak-oh-lee-nyah), centered around Getaria in 1989. This was the first major step in revitalising the Basque wine industry. In time, two more DOs would be created; Bizkaiko Txakolina in 1994 (Bilbao, rather than Getaria coastal hinterland) and Arabako Txakolina (thanks to the hard work of Eugenio Alava Ugarte) inland from Bilbao towards Vitoria-Gasteiz in 2002. Today, these three regions represent 90% production of Txakoli wine.

Hondarabbi zuri (zuri meaning white in Basque) and hondarrabi zuri zerratia (petit courbu) are the two prominent white grape varieties, while hondarrabi beltza (beltza = black) is used for reds and rosé. Hondarrabi zuri is traditionally grown closest to the coast, trained on high pergolas, and produces highly aromatic wines. Hondarrabi zuri zerratia, grown in the west and further inland, has more compact clusters, with flowery, vegetal aromas, and a slight astringency. Other authorised varieties include; mune mahatsa (folle blanche), izkiriota (manseng noir), izkiriota ttipia (petit manseng), sauvignon blanc, riesling, and chardonnay.

### The Wines of Txakoli

White Txakoli shares flavour spectrums with its neighbours, Albariño from Rías Baixas to the west and Cava (Penedès) to the south-east. It often presents with a light effervescence, akin to the Vinhos Verdes of northern Portugal and is best drunk young and fresh. It is pale-straw in colour and can have green highlights, refreshing acidity and aromas of fresh fruit, flowers, and grass. The light effervescence is most typical to the



<sup>1</sup> The Basques are fiercely protective people in terms of their traditions and religions. As early as the 14th century local wines became controlled and protected - entry of wine from outside the region was forbidden until all the local wine had been consumed and the uprooting of any of the region's vines resulted in a death sentence.

coastal wines of Geteriako Txakolina; Bizkaiko and Arabako Txakolis are more often bottled without petillance. Barrel fermented whites are increasingly popular. White Txakoli represents about 95% of the region's production.

Rosé Txakoli, or 'ojo de gallo' (eye of the rooster) is made with at least 50% hondarrabi beltza and is often made in a clarete style (using both red and white grapes), rather than the more traditional saignee (red grapes only). The wines traditionally have aromas of wild strawberries, violets, and raspberries, with hints of green pepper.

Red Txakoli is a young wine which can have a deep cherry colour, medium tannins, and a fruit/vegetable register not dissimilar to its relative, cabernet franc. While red Txakoli has previously been rare and almost unseen outside Pais Vasco, it has more recently been popping up in international markets seeking cool climate, maritime-influenced reds.

Two wine styles have been developed within the region that fall under the protection of the DO, but cannot be labelled as Txakoli/Chacoli/Txakolina. Late-harvest wines produced from overripe grapes with a natural abv of 15% or more, aged in oak for a minimum time stipulated by the DO dependant on the vintage conditions; and sparkling wines made in the traditional method.

#### **Getariako Txakolina - Txakoli de Getaria - Chacolí de Guetaria**

This was the first and remains the largest of the Txakoli DOs. Created in 1989, its 84ha are located on the rocky Biscay coast, west of San Sebastian, in the municipalities of Aia, Getaria and Zarautz. In 2007, a change to the appellation laws allowed expansion of the DO to cover all of Gipuzkoa. The soils here are predominantly clay covered by a layer of sandy soil. Hondarrabi zuri accounts for 95% of plantings; the other 5% is hondarrabi beltza. The summers here are cool (which allows for a longer ripening period) due to its proximity to the Atlantic. Rain is fierce and frequent. The majority of vines are planted on a high trellis system (called '*parra*' in Basque) to allow circulation of air through the canopy to prohibit rot and mould in the wet, humid climate. DO regulations permit a maximum of 13,000 vines per ha, residual sugar of 9 grams or less, and, a minimum abv of 9.5%.

#### **Bizkaiko Txakolina - Txakoli de Bizkaia - Chacolí de Vizcaya**

The 60ha of Bizkaiko Txakolina, surrounding Bilbao, achieved DO status in 1998; in 2006 the DO boundaries were broadened to cover all the districts of Bizaia. The soils here are shallow and slightly acidic with clay-loam on limestone rock and marls. Rainfall is between 1,000mm-1,300mm and the climate is very much Atlantic. Vineyards here are positioned halfway up hillsides protected from the northern winds and mostly south-facing at between 50 to 400m to maximise exposure to sunshine in this cloud-covered region. The Hondarrabi zuri zerratia grape here adds a more acidic and herbaceous note to the wines.

#### **Arabako Txakolina - Txakoli de Álava - Chacolí de Álava**

Made up of 50ha in the Ayala valley, near Vizcaya, it is the youngest and smallest of Txakoli DOs. It achieved Vinos de la Tierra (VdIT) status in 1998 and was accepted as a DO in 2002. It is the most inland of the three regions, with protection from the harsh Atlantic winds thanks to the *Sierra Salvada* mountain system. Arabako Txakolina vineyards receive considerably less rainfall and have a higher average temperature than Bizkaiko and Getariako, meaning that the grapes are able to achieve higher abv (the average is 12-12.5% as opposed to the 11.5% of the coastal regions). Barrel-fermented whites are common. The soils are based on limestone. Although hondarrabi zuri is the most planted variety here, zerratia, beltza, and other native Basque varieties play their part in the wines.