

Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España

C.V.N.E, aka 'Cune', Haro

VIÑEDOS del CONTINO, Laserna

VIÑA REAL, Logroño



The 4 Bodegas of Eusebio Asua

C.V.N.E (hereafter, Cune, pronounced Coo-neh) was founded in 1879 by the Real de Asua brothers (Raimondo and Eusebio) of Bilbao. The company is still run by a descendant of the brothers.

CVNE have three wineries based in distinct locations (one of which is a double bodega). As well as Cune in Haro, there are Contino and Viña Real from near Logroño to the east. Contino is a single-site project from a warm south-facing vineyard. While Contino is an expression of place, the Cune and Viña Real wines are expressions of 20th century Rioja process – racking and oak influence, all that stuff. However, there is a 'placeness' which separates Cune and Viña Real, and one which is quite traditional in Rioja. The Haro-environs wines of Cune are sold in 'Claret' bottles, while the Logroño-area fruit for Viña Real is in 'Burgundy' bottles. Logroño in the east is a slightly warmer, more open part of the valley, nearer to and more influenced by the Mediterranean, whereas Haro in the west is more influenced by the Atlantic chill coming in over the Sierra Cantabria, and here the valley is tighter, hillier. Haro wines tend to be lighter, less tannic and more linear, ie very roughly 'Claret' in style, whereas Logroño wines are fuller, rounder, earthier and more tannic, a little like a relaxed version of Barbaresco or such. Many producers have historically released wines both in 'Claret' and 'Burgundy' bottlings, expressing Rioja in two valid (westy or easty) structural styles.

Get me to the Estación on time

The business was established in Haro, near Barrio de la Estación. The train station at Haro was a direct link to Bordeaux in France, stricken at the time by phylloxera and oidium, and many of Rioja's most famous names gathered in the "train station suburb" on Haro's north-eastern corner. From here, the new wave of Bordeaux-style Rioja producers which sprang up in the second half of the 19th century could easily ship Rioja wine to cover the vacant markets for 'Claret'.

Thus, Cune first made an income as a *negociant* house supplying bulk wine to France. A similar short term 'boom' occurred in other parts of Spain, such as Mallorca, whose plantings increased four-fold in the second half of the 19th century, before the collapse when phylloxera eventually devastated most of Spain's vineyards too. By the time this happened, however, Cune had matured into a genuine wine producer in its own right. The brothers soon moved away from bulk wine shipping and began purchasing and planting vineyards around Rioja Alta and employed cellar masters from Bordeaux. The colloquial brand name, "Cune" is the result of a slight mistake in their first order of packaging: the direction to stamp wooden wine cases as 1886 'C.V.N.E' were simply mis-read by the package company, and by a happy typo slip, the homonym 'Cune' was born.

Cune have four distinct bodegas:

- The Cune bodega in Haro since 1879, servicing vineyards from Haro and nearby Villalba.
- There is a technically distinct bodega within the Haro mainframe, within which the high end wines under the 'Real de Asua' brand are made as a subset of Cune.
- CVNE are partners with Jesús Madrazo in a single vineyard property, Viñedos del Contino, located in the tiny village of Laserna just north of Logroño.
- Finally, nearby to Contino, also just out of Logroño, is a distinct wine business, Viña Real – a space-age bodega built into a hilltop. VR has occupied its own bodega here since 2000, previously being housed in nearby Elciego.

C.V.N.E (Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España), aka 'Cune', La Rioja Alta

Haro is home to Cune, where the company began in 1879 and still resides on its original site, Barrio de la Estación, directly next to the train station in Rioja Alta. This "suburb of the railway station" is a tiny cluster of some of the big names of old school Rioja – Cune, Lopez de Heredia, Muga, La Rioja Alta and more. While some of these may be regarded as anachronistic dinosaurs peddling low-brow industrial Rioja, they constitute an enormous chunk of the visible and known story of La Rioja.

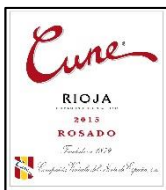
Cune, in our mind is the most delicious and relevant of these big houses making 'trad Rioja'. They produce the full Riojan catalogue of blanco, rosado, crianza, reserva and gran reserva wines (but no jovens). Grapes are sourced from roughly 500 acres of vineyards controlled by Cune, about half of which they own. These vineyards are in Haro and other nearby villages - Briñas, Briones, Zarratón and Villalba, with the oldest vines coming from Torremontalbo. The winemaker is María Larrea.

A typical Cune wine is balanced by some Mazuelo, Graciano and sometimes Viura to give a wine of good acidity at around 13% alcohol with a slightly austere tannin profile. Additionally, Cune produces a sub-label called *Imperial* (named for the original half-litre "Imperial Pint" bottling) which releases Reserva and Gran Reserva bottlings in exceptional years. The fruit for *Imperial* is from their oldest vines. The 'Imperial' tag is in-house language, not an official classification.

The Cune bodega in Barrio de la Estación boasts an impressive collection of 19th century structures which surround a central patio. Among the architectural works is the Nave Eiffel, designed by Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel (yep, as in the Eiffel tower). The room, begun in 1890 and completed in 1909, is a textbook example of the marriage of aesthetics and functionality. The roof is supported by metal trusses which crisscross the room at regular intervals, eliminating the need for columns and making for a more efficient use of space. The *Imperial* label wines are aged in this bodega.

The true treasures of the Cune bodega are to be found in a dimly-lit cellar below the winery which trace the history of the bodega, vintage by vintage, era by era, with each vintage produced represented in a colossal 'cemetery' housing 400 bottles of every Cune wine made to date. Commenced in 1888, it's roughly 60% full at present!

CUNE Tempranillo Rosado (screwcap)

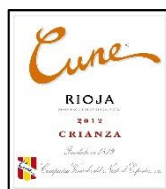


Hand-picked fruit is handled in stainless steel, soaked at 12 degrees for 24 hours after crush, then bled off. The wine is fresh, bright and clear, fruity but dry.

Cune Tempranillo Rosado

Bright strawberry fruit with apple flowers and nicely spiced acidity, it's crisp with just a bit of phenolic body, and bone dry. Served stunningly cold, it's dry, lean, sprightly, flavourful and refreshing.

CUNE Tempranillo Crianza



Cune, along with Lopez de Heredia were the first producers of Rioja to make a Crianza style wine. Hand-picked grapes for Crianza from Cune are de-stemmed and fermented temperature-controlled at around 28 degrees in stainless steel, then aged a year in older US oak. Crianza is aged in 4-5 year old American oak, and like all Cune tintos is 85-90% Tempranillo, with a bit of Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuelo.

Cune Crianza

Harmonious dark-fruit-tea aroma with glacé cherry, and well balanced hybrid of fruit and oak maturity. The palate is nicely formed with oak at the right weight for the fruit, is crisp and savoury with no oxidation evident. All is mature, elegant, fine and integrated.

CUNE Reserva

From the same vineyards as Crianza fruit, a better selection of grapes plus additional fruit down-graded from Imperial vineyards. The wine is aged 18 months in oak (70% US, 30% French), equal thirds new, one and two years old. Mature aromas of tobacco and red fruits mingling in moderate levels of harmonious oak. There's a pleasant savoury fruit balance, the wood is clean and gently intrinsic, and the wine finishes with fine acidity and delicate residual fruit tannins.

These wines can live until 50 years' age, given good cellaring.

Cune Reserva Tempranillo



Sweetly earthy and balsamic woody aromas wander by one another and mingle with subtle cherry stone, plum and rose. There are touches of briar, tobacco leaf and blackberry. The palate is perfectly resolved and graceful, with fruit, oak and earth all playing together in harmony. Just mid-weight, it's nicely wound, glidy and relaxed, with deeply spicy tannin taken down and away by acidity in a low arcing finish.

CUNE Imperial Gran Reserva

Not made each year, IGR is harvested from Cune's best patch of goblet-pruned dry-grown bush-vines in Villalba and Haro. 24 days maceration and 30 months' ageing in US and French oak.

Cune Imperial Gran Reserva



Blackcurrant, cassis and wild cherry fruits meet violet, peony, leather and old ink. Chinchona bark melds with soft silty tannin and resolve as a poem of ease and space. Imagine taking two sheets of fine parchment with dried inkblots on them, and between them pressing and drying peonies ... now, slowly rehydrate them with your mind, follow the ethereal dance, the subtle wafting of ink, earth, paper and flower ... sweetness becomes spice, oak becomes space ... utterly fabulous.

CONTINO



Contino is a single-estate bodega of 150 acres based in a 200 year old farmhouse in Laserna, between Logroño and Laguardia. The name comes from the royal guard of 100 soldiers who guarded the monarch, and the label features the bust of San Gregorio, the patron saint and protector of vineyards. Created in 1974 by C.V.N.E and Jose Madrazo Real de Asua (father of Contino's current winemaker, Jesus Madrazo), the family owner of the estate.

Jesus, an engineer as well as enologist, took over in 1994 and is constantly revising the growing and making of the 7 distinct plots on the estate, each of which is vinified as a separate wine prior to selection and blending the house range. Genetic material for planting comes from massale selection.

Contino was set up to be a counter to the Rioja trend of buying/blending to build brands (including of course, by Cune themselves!), with crisp acidic fruit from the cold soils in the North blended with more colourful ripe and alcoholic fruit from Southern Rioja. Prior to the establishment of Contino, the vineyards regularly provided the fruit for the legendary Gran Reservas of Viña Real.

The idea was to create one of the first 'chateau' style or single estate wineries in Rioja. The farmhouse has cellars underground which date back to the 16th century. The vineyard immediately in front of the house and bodega features a 1,000 year old olive tree for which the premium release 'Vino del Olivo' is named. Contino's average age of vines is 35 years old but some are more than 70. The vineyards sit on the valley floor behind the Viña Real winery atop the nearest hilltop towards Logroño. Primarily planted with Tempranillo (85%), Madrazo is a champion of the Graciano grape which comprises the bulk of the remaining plantings along with some Garnacha, Mazuelo and Viura. The estate sits tucked inside one of the bends of the Ebro River (which sometimes floods in winter

and spills into the vineyards). There are alluvial stone and sand plots which drain freely and the underlying heavy clay and marl soils take care of water retention during the hot summers. All fruit is dry grown. The south-facing pebbly and very warm site is particularly well suited to ripening Graciano, ordinarily tending to greenness and very high acidity.

Jesus's grandfather was responsible for the invention and commercialisation of "IFOs" – Identified Flying Objects – the large-scale mobile grape buckets which are used (nowhere more spectacularly than at Viña Real – see below) by many Riojan producers to handle must and wine by gravity and thus avoid pumping, even in 'pumpovers', the correct, if clunky term for which is 'dropovers'.

CONTINO Garnacha

From 70 years-old vines planted by the river – as well as typically contributing 2% of the Reserva wine's fruit and 15% of the Gran Reserva of Contino, Jesus has cautiously begun attempting a varietal wine. Aged in second year 500 litre barrels previously used for Contino Blanco, it spends two years un-racked in wood. Although a varietal, this wine has the shape and feel of Rioja first and utterly, with Garnacha as flavour fill.

Contino Garnacha 2012



Red peppers, sour herbs and some nice meat and spice on the nose. The silky primal red berry fruit is nicely opened with oxidative handling. Both nose and palate have terrific harmony - fruit and tannin are earthy and together, oak gives support without marking the palate. Long as well as round, seamless and really delicious, a very well structured and complex Garnacha.

CONTINO Reserva

Hand-picked and de-stemmed, fermented in 12,000 litre stainless at 30 degrees, macerated 15-20 days. Aged 2 years in old oak, 60% French, 5 rackings. 85% Tempranillo, 10% Graciano, 5% mixed Mazuela and Garnacha. Deep and complex, the wine is a very high quality amalgam of oak, earth, fruit - the savoury, the meaty and the mystic. The red fruit confiture over hung meat and fine oak is subsidiary to a fabulous sense of 'wineness', it's all sweet and leathery with old wood aromatics, pimiento, allspice, black pepper. The palate glides from glyceric cherry through leather to sourberry. It's deep, smooth and meaty with subtle leather, sweet cedar, vanilla and wood spice depth brightened by pip-squeaky fruit and acid levity. Long and profound.

CONTINO Reserva 2009



In a red fruit register, with floral lift and purply-mineral crushed spices, the open savoury nose has earthen depths of river silt and sweet old clay pipes. The palate has beautiful textural maturity, working in a rich-but-dry vein. The wonderfully adapted amalgam of fruit-tannin-oak-air-acid affects a hugely pleasing dusty-nutty-spicy freshness in a lingering finish of great gentleness.

Viña Real

While the Cune bodega in Haro represents CVNE's commitment to tradition, Viña Real exemplifies their embrace of modern technology. Viña Real wines are in a rounder, more fruit forward style, yet have the structure and ability to age for half a century. Viña Real started in the 1920s and old VR Gran Reservas are among Rioja's legendary wines.



Since 2004, Viña Real has been housed in a modern purpose-built winery designed by Bordelaise architect Philippe Mazières. The foyer entrance sits atop the hill known as Cerro de la Mesa and commands sweeping views of both the Alavesa vineyards (looking directly down on Contino just to the North) and South to Logroño, Rioja's commercial centre. The heart of the facility is a cavernous circular chamber which, when viewed from the outside, resembles the upper portion of a giant wine barrel. Inside, technology and modernity reigns. The above-ground portion houses the winemaking facility, designed with the goal of complete reliance on gravity-flow, made possible in large part by a rotating central crane, delivering giant IFOs to each fermenter. Anytime grapes or juice need to be moved, for example to 'pump-over', it is done by gravity thanks to the IFOs. The bodega features twin 3km tunnels dug into the hill where bottle and barrel ageing takes place (these drives took 6 years to dig!). The grapes are grown on sunny south-facing slopes above the Ebro River in Elciego and nearby villages. As with Cune, Viña Real wines are produced from about 50% estate owned vines, and the rest is purchased.

VIÑA REAL barrel fermented Viura, screwcap

Grapes from the valley floor in Elciego are picked at optimum ripeness and cold macerated for 6-8 hours, fermented with neutral yeast in new US oak barrels for 15-20 days, then aged 4 months on lees in barrel, without malolactic or *batonnage*. The wine has soft peachy fruit with hay, warm apples and golden sandy aromas. Textured and mature, the palate is clean with good balance between creaminess and bitterness, and a pleasing pebbly raciness to finish.

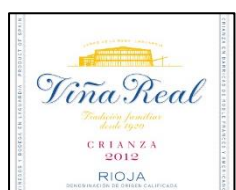
VIÑA REAL Blanco 2014, barrel fermented Viura



Mid-straw in colour, underlining the restraint in winemaking intervention. The nose is grainy (toasted and ripe field barley) with subtle, constrained lees richness (columbine, meal and all that). Starting out full and lush, the palate quickly gains line and natural texture and has good overall harmony. The fruit is a complex of cut white nectarine, green apple and old yellow flowers, built on a layer of subtle oak, with a cleansing ping of subtle acid to finish.

VIÑA REAL Crianza Tempranillo

Fruit is sourced from Laguardia and Elciego, mainly Tempranillo with some Garnacha and Mazuelo. Destemmed grapes are fermented in stainless steel for 10-12 days at 26-28 degrees. Malo takes place in oak and the wine is matured in new oak (70% French, 30% American) for 13-14 months, raked every 5-6 months. Vina Real has a house style I liken to 'decompressed Barolo'. Cherry, fruit of the forest, balsamic, mature wood and tea aromatics, with tars, tobacco and red dirt. A ripe, open and round style, mature fruit edged by oak.



VIÑA REAL Tempranillo Crianza 2012

Delicate floral red fruits, gently of the countryside, soft mature oak aromas and a hint of fruit tea. Soft, slightly creamy palate which lands on mature oak. Surprisingly deft. Not oxidised, and not overly extracted. Gentle and easy.

VIÑA REAL Reserva Tempranillo

15 days maceration, fermentation in stainless with IFO-dropovers by gravity.

Held in concrete for malo, then racked by gravity to new barrels (60% French).

After cask ageing for 2 years, the wine is clarified with white of egg white to achieve silkiness and shiny final colour. Ageing in bottle 36 months. 40yo vines.



Vina Real Reserva 2010

Vanilla, spice and mint overlay red fruit with a waxy clay soil aromatic thread, soft deep florals later. The palate is a nice soft, round mid-weight number ending with gentle spice. Vanilla, soft oak, a touch of acidity and gently mature (light and spicy) tannin mingle at the end.

Cune, Contino and Viña Real back vintage notes, and wines not imported by TSA

2011 Cune Crianza

Red fruits, balsalm, chocolate and heather in an open and gentle nose, nicely woody. The palate likewise is spacious and gentle, with a good long slow red cherry fruit core, a bit of cola, nut and a hit of scrubby heathery herb. Savoury, long and low in the mouth, the balsamic old wood and fine volatile acidity add a sourness which caresses and elongates the gentle earthy red cherry fruit. A gentle and amiable old school Crianza that has been protected and developed rather than clobbered.

2010 Cune Crianza

Smells very floral over strawberry fruit steeped in balsamic wood with tea-like lift and some carob and earth depth. The palate is harmonious, open and neat, with red fruits, earth and balsalmic wood all mixing nicely. Light, clean and clear mouthfeel.

2009 Cune Crianza

A medium ruby hue, with a simple red cherry fruit bouquet of plums, red tobacco and ochre dusted heather, a lick of sweet coconut American oak gives aromatic lift. The palate mirrors the nose with lashings young red cherry fruit and creamy vanillin-coconut milk sweetness derived from the American oak. The palate is balanced by some sour cherry fruit on the finish, with fresh thyme herbs and drying sweet grainy oak tannins on the finish.

CUNE Reserva 2010

Sweetly earthy and balsamic woody aromas wander by one another and mingle with subtle cherry, plum and rose. There are touches of briar, tobacco leaf and a hint of choc. The palate is perfectly resolved and graceful, with fruit, oak and earth all playing together in harmony. A mint-acid snip gives definition. Just mid-weight, gloriously glidey and relaxed, it is the big easy. And it will live until 50 years' age, no sweat, given good cellaring. Not bad for a \$40-50 retail wine ...

CUNE Rioja Reserva 2009

This is a gorgeous release. Aromatically, it leads with the hallmarks of old Rioja – cedary wood, truffle-tobacco, and the typical hessian-nut aroma of Tempranillo's tannins hybridised in oak. There's red berry fruit in jar-preserve form with a cola back note - the wine is only moderately dusty and in a lovely earthen register. The natural generosity of 2009 is shown to full advantage here, with this reserva just a touch plusher and juicier than typical, and with great dance-off acid coming into play at the finish. Delicious, charming wine, impeccable drinking now, and with room to manoeuvre in a cellar. Great value.

2008 Cune Reserva 2008

Smelling like, and delightful to sup with, a charcuterie board (no garnish, no varnish thanks, just the meat and the wood). Tobacco in clay, dark cherry, jerky meat, some 'shroom and fine old wood aromas. CUNE style is like looking down and along a road winding through a plain - the palate's open and beautifully laid out. The dry, elegant, briary blackberry fruit is complexed with typical heathery florals, and a judicious titch of aldehyde in the gently chocolatey tannin-oak heart.

Cune Imperial Gran Reserva 2007

More handing in oak for a longer time equals even more abstract volatile secondaries! Not especially volatile, even although the fruit and earth has been entirely subsumed by "process", however it's sweetly oaky-vegetal, and smooth as all get out with incredibly rounded, long swishy tannin-oak polymer as its core value, gently spiced and earthy.

Cune Imperial Gran Reserva 2005

Perfumed and carrying a huge sense of the countryside, it's a deep whiff of la Rioja. Blackcurrant, cassis and wild cherry fruits meet tobacco, violet, peony, leather, undergrowth and old ink. Cold metal mineral gives real dance and composure to the palate. Full but not succulent, with lean tannins leaving space in the mouth allowing the fruit-oak-spice hybrid to expand and roll without crowding the mouth, and leaving a sweet licorice-mineral aftertaste. The best metaphor I can think of is to imagine taking two sheets of fine parchment with dried inkblots on them, and between them pressing and drying peonies ... now, slowly rehydrate them with your mind, follow the dance, the subtle wafting of ink, earth, paper and flower ... sweetness becomes spice, oak becomes space ... it is exceptionally hard to describe wine this good. It's fabulous.

Cune Imperial Gran Reserva 2004

A deep garnet hue, with ruby notes and a dusty nose of oak, and I'm shopping in an antique store I can't afford to be in, smells like a grand old cedar antique wardrobe that's had gowns from the orient hanging in it. An exotic cinnamon and baking spice nose, shrouds ripe dark cherry fruits, very perfumed. A creamy vanilla and black cherry palate with sweet custard powder notes from American oak. The wine has medium + freshening acidity and medium grainy sinewy tannins with drying oak tannins on the finish. More sweet fruit of black cherry and plum on the palate with integrated alcohol freshness on back palate combined with a note of raisin fruit and xmas cake on the back palate. A lot fresher and less contrived than the Real Asua below. Long palate length, red apple peel tightening on the finish to leave a refreshed palate.

Cune 'Monopole' Viura Blanco (screwcap)

This was the first commercial white brand released in Rioja, hence the 'monopole' tag. Nowadays, of course, they have nothing like a monopoly on Riojan Viura releases, but have a stylistic distinction that's deliberate, and delightful, seeking to avoid the oxidative dullness of traditionally wooded white Rioja. Monopole is fermented in stainless steel, and bottled with neither malolactic or lees work. While cultivated yeasts are used, they are, thankfully, entirely neutral and acidity is natural. Fermented at 16-18 after dropping to 10 degrees for 24hrs, typically the wine will see 8 hours of maceration and the better years a little longer. Fruit is grown at 700m altitude on very poor soils and grapes are harvested with good acidity.

2015 Monopole Rioja Blanco Viura 100% (screwcap)

White cut pear flesh, zingy; delicate but with nice phenolic texturing stopping the wine from weakness or thinness; nice green thrill in the fruit gives good line. Simple, clean and unaffected.

2012 Monopole Rioja Blanco Viura 100% (cork)

Lemon peel fresh, a little custard apple fruit plushness, over chalky freshness. Nice fruit release with white florals

2012 Monopole Rioja Blanco Viura 100%

2012 very hot and dry season, very uneven ripening of grapes in vineyards. Grown at 700m altitude, next to the limestone blocks on very poor soils. Grapes are harvested slightly underripe with good acidity. Viura is endowed with thick skins protecting it from the heat, made in an Alsace style. Monopole Blanco was the first unoaked white wine made in Rioja, in 1915. Only a minuscule amount was made in 2012 the extreme heat and water deprivation made it a tough vintage for whites. A clear pale lemon hue, with perfumed lemon balm, citrus and verbena, green apple peel aromas, fermented at 16-18 after dropping to 10 degrees for 24hrs, typically the wine will see 8 hours of maceration and the better years a little longer. Perfumed vinous weighty phenolics cover the palate and a touch of alcoholic heat on the back provides spice, 13%alc.

Cune 'Monopole' Viura Blanco 2011

Floral with peach and almond kernel (sorta nuts and patisserie over cold steel), with cool green herbal and subtle phenolics at back. Mouth leads with powerful and phenolic fruit of high quality and good harmony and balance, and the rich, ripe peachy aspect is edged and constrained by bitter herb and soft nutty tannin. Mild and a bit over medium-bodied, it's a very harmonious entry level wine, with fair length and a very high quality wine at the \$. 13% a/v.

Cune Imperial Reserva

As a stylistic variant, the Imperial wines are handled solely in French wood, with fermentation in large foudre and ageing in French barrique. The Imperial vineyards generally give a high extract fruit and so can handle ageing in new oak for 6-12 months. The blend is Tempranillo 85%, with freshness and acid structure being supplied by Mazuelo & Graciano.

Cune Imperial Reserva 2007

Tobacco and delicate anise-fennel play over rich oak aromas, with touches of pickled cherry, mustard fruits and 'shroom. The palate works along the mouth nicely, maintaining a sense of space and ease of movement as it deftly touches all parts. Dark-fruited but deft, not too serious and not too oaky. Roasted meat, faded flowers, gentle herb and spice, soft acidity and a nice mature balsalm finish.

Cune Gran Reserva

60% French, 50% new oak.

Cune Gran Reserva 2009

Creamed dark berries, blackberry and cherry, spice, vanilla and tobacco, briary cob tobacco, coal gas dark, nicely soft fruit elaborated pretty sucessfully with the austere dry oak regime, fairly long and elegant finish. Quite classy, the oak and air regime is the story, but it's not abstract and has pretty good fruit harmony with nutty linear tannins threading together.

Cune Real de Asua

Modern winemaking: a long, about 40 days, maceration more than a month, and then 18mths in new french oak, same vineyard as Imperial Gran Reserva.

Cune Real de Asua 2004

A deep garnet colour with purple, liquored cassis fruits and fig/fruit mince spiced nose. Oak aromatics of a slightly dusty cedar wardrobe, seems to be a defining house/vineyard oak style expression. Perfumed, sweet plum and prune fruit on palate and slightly oxidised bbq sauce palate, slightly warming alcohol on the finish. The Asua is not as drying and oak tannin based as imperial, a more modern style.

Cune Real de Asua 2011

Big, oaky, briary, sweet simple fruit. Not bad, but really boring.

Contino Blanco

Blend is 70% Viura, 20% white Garnacha, 10% Malvasia. 5,000 btls produced. Cold soaked and fermented in stainless steel to 7 or 8% a/v, then racked into 350 and 500l French oak barrels to finish alcoholic fermentation. Aged on lees and racked every two weeks, total maturation in barrel is 6-7 months with malolactic suppressed. Aim is to have a wine that can be bottle aged for 5 years.

Contino Blanco 2014

Malvasia, Garnacha, Viura; barrel fermented then batonnage in French oak.
Woody, rich, relatively simple and short, fairly full and round.

CONTINO Blanco 2011 (14%)

Smells of nuts and patisserie over cold steel, with a hint of the earth over limestone of the Contino vineyard. In a 'Puligny' style, it's long and even, very savoury, with tons of subtle power, concentrated but classy and probably two years shy of really saying what's on its mind.

Contino Blanco 2010

Deep lemon in colour, aromas of barrica, tropical pineapple fruits, lemon sherbert, creamy nose, white flowers, white peach, dusty oak, warm alcohol, creamy vanilla custard powder notes. Mostly barrica flavours with a beeswax palate texture and moderate acidity.

Contino Reserva 2007

Leads with pippy sweet blackberry, and the touch of creaminess is relieved by leafy-spicy herb cane aromas and a bit of gamey cowhide. The palate starts out round with cream and spice, then a leather thread of sweet, fine tannin controls the glycerol and delivers the mouth to a really nice metal-mineral and cedar finish. Moderate acid freshness gives good structure and line and the fresh ripe dark fruits with anise spice, fennel and red licorice evolve and complex with time in the glass.

Contino Reserva 2006

2006 is a particularly warm vintage and Contino perhaps Rioja Superior's warmest high quality site. The "whole-of-an-orchard" metaphor is apt here, the fruit of the trees, and their leaves and bark and twigs and the soil taken together spell a wine of marked earthen-leather or remarkable candied juiciness, depending upon how you look at it. There's a boozy developed aspect to the tannins giving a touch of kirsch and some nicely developed oak smells, but the 'countryness' wins out on balance for me, and finishes with the clean, fine smells of an old well-looked-after tobacco pipe and long vegetal tannins.

Contino Reserva 1995

Citric and earthen high-low notes, brick-dusty old red fruits, cherry-adobe nose. Nicely ageing fruit is stretched along a fine tannin-acid thread with a lovely volatile touch. Good fruit flesh still, and great fine 'tannin' inside, a oneness of oak and fruit tannin through time. Delightful.

Contino 2005 Gran Reserva

Only bottled in magnums, 3L and 6L. GR is made from oldest vines of Contino: 70% Tempranillo from La Sanchez (plot close to the river), 15% Garnacha and 15% Graciano. Fermented in concrete vats with no epoxy, after 3 years in oak barrel and 3 in bottle, it is released in its 7th year. Aged first in newish French and then in older US oak, with racking every 6 months.

Red heather and leather, blackberry fruit and caney spice, sweet incense river silt nose. Palate has some juicy sweet red fruit, but on balance is very dry with lots of wood extract and sweet-sour spice, freshening acidity from Graciano is evident – needs a lot of time.

Contino 'Vino de Olivo' 2011

Cabernet in style, and not interesting

Contino 'Vino de Olivo' 2007

Tempranillo 88% and 12% Graciano, grown on clay limestone over 3 metre deep river stone bed.

Spends 18 months in new oak 60% French, 20% American with some Hungarian and Russian.

Unfiltered. 2001 & 2007 won best Tempranillo in the world (universe, even!) award.

Deep garnet colour with dark fruits, vanilla and fennel, baking spices, damsons, slightly closed nose.

Palate is expressive and floral with sweet baking spice, red fruit, very tempranillo looking on the palate with red liquorice and sweet spiced strawberry, nice soft fine grained tannins. Warm alcohol notes lead into a baked fennel character. Complete, with fresh acid and juicy red fruit in balance.

Contino 'Vino de Olivo' 2008

Tobacco, briar and beefstock with violets for relief and some angelica along with sweet oak on the nose. Palate likewise is really spice, leathery with thick skinsy texture; there's some juiciness from forest fruits, the oak kicks in towards the back along with silty earth expression. Nicely complete palate, slightly warm. A very small production in this very cold year

Contino 2009 Graciano

100% Graciano, late harvest, difficult to ripen, high acid, low alcohol low ph and low yields, so good ageing, and also nearly disappeared by the beginning of the 70s, Contino has alot of pebbles in the soils and reflects the heat during the night. Most plantings are along the river bank. Harvested on 15 Sep in 2009 and in 2008 24 Oct. 90% French and 10% Hungarian all new oak. A deep purple with ruby hues, quite vibrant and inky. A sweet vanilla sugar nose and bourbon like aromas, dark plums, tarry with blackcurrant leaf, aniseed and fennel, choc-mint notes with menthol highlights. Savoury aromatics of black sundried kalamata olives, cassis liquored fruit , a very fresh juicy acid lift on the palate and fading to granite, graphite minerally tannins - a true mediterranean variety style wine. Speaks of scorched earth and wild Mediterranean shrubs and herbs, sings of its homeland and environment, a true wine of terroir.

Contino Graciano 2009

Acidic, with high colour, low alcohol and a very herbaceous/vegetal profile, Graciano is a useful blender in Rioja wines, adding acidity in warm years to balance the tendency to softness in Tempranillo. First planted at Contino by Jesus's father in 1989 and since augmented by Jesus. The 11 hectares of Graciano is 15% of Jesus's plantings, but only yields 10% of his fruit (this high cost per kilo had pretty much killed it off by the 80s in a Rioja dominated by high crop/low cost fruit). Of the 64,000 hectares currently planted in la Rioja, currently just 1,000 are Graciano. As well as yielding an unusually high proportion of the Contino red blends, since 1994 there's also a rare straight varietal. 2009 is aged 16 months in 90% French and 10% Hungarian new oak. Deep purple, vibrant and inky. Savoury aromatics of black sun-dried kalamata olives, cassis liquor fruit, a very fresh juicy acid lift on the palate and fading to granite-graphite minerally tannins - a true mediterranean variety style wine. Speaks of scorched earth and wild Mediterranean shrubs and herbs, sings of its homeland and environment, a true wine of terroir. It's also grippy, stemmy, vegetal, green and a bit hot!

Viña Real 100% Viura 2012

Sulphur is added at reception, after alcoholic fermentation to stop malolactic, and at bottling; total 25-30 ppm free SO₂. Sometimes acidified at must stage. Very herbal, yellow-floral nose; palate has columbine-lolly richness, some obvious oak touches, an easy earthiness in the yellow fruit. Nice dryness and less fat than '11, possibly unbalanced bitterness.

Viña Real 100% Viura 2011

Medium straw in colour, obvious notes of oak and vanillin, orchard fruits in the ripe peach spectrum and crushed tinned pineapple, incredibly tropical. Palate is dry with medium acidity, creamy coconut-vanillin body lotion oak and tropical tinned pineapple fruit and light creaminess on finish. Dolly Parton songs are on shuffle in my head when this wine is in my mouth, not unattractive wine but just too showy and yelling at me in a chirpy Texan accent that makes my head want to explode...

Vina Real Rosado 2014 screwcap (Viura with 15% Crianza Temp)

Peachy, crunchy apple aromas, relatively rich white wine style palate, fresh and crunchy. Lively floral. Dry. Like eating an apple in the orchard with bonus alcohol.

Viña Real Crianza 2010

13.5% alc. 90% Tempranillo and 10% Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuela. Slightly heavier style with Graciano and Mazuelo to give acidity and lift to the Tempranillo.

Acid added at arrival. PH adjustment to 3.6 or less.

A bright ruby colour with sweet oak spice and youthful raspberry, red cherry on the nose. The palate has dark cherry fruit and baking spice with vanilla and coconut husk, raspberries, and fresh acidity. Moderate tannins give a supple structure and a moderate length to the palate. There is red plum skin grip, with terracotta and limestone chalky drive giving structure to the finish.

Viña Real Crianza 2009

Creamy, slightly gamey nose with cranberry-chocolate, spicy pimiento, a touch of leather and caney herb. Fruity palate is pleasantly full, and savoury with a touch of creamy oak and a nice fan of ripe tannins and fresh acidity at end structuring along with dry grape tannin.

Vina Real Reserva 2011

Vanilla, spice and mint overlays and the red fruit is less floral with a waxy clay soil aromatic thread, then soft deep florals later. The palate is a nice soft, round mid-weight number ending with gentle spice. Vanilla, soft oak, a touch of acidity and gently mature (light and spicy) tannin mingle at the end. Oak stands apart in mouth-flow.

15 days maceration, 30-40 year old vines, after stainless fermentation, held in concrete for malo, then racked by gravity to new barrels (60% french).

Viña Real Reserva 2006

Garnet-ruby. Lifted perfume with spice, red fruits, raspberry, rose, new leather, some menthol and well ... Brettanomyces. Palate is stripped of fruit and overly developed with pronounced alcohol. Definitely rustic! 60/40 French/American oak, 90% Tempranillo with a bit of Graciano and Mazuelo.

Viña Real Reserva 2007

Dark register on nose with barbecue meat and touches of 'shroom and beefstock, glace-cherry/choc, river delta silty earthiness and typical Riojan red lavender. The palate is round, leathery and tannic, with cold steely mineral relief and lots of skinsy tannin.

Vina Real 1988 Gran Reserva

Classical old cold tea, meat, leather, and deeply floral, nutty like an old cork board, really mineral, chalky, great tension ... It wants to open and stretch in the mouth; no ox; lovely mineral-volatile ... Floral cowpat tannin mineral with chalky crunch from under and out.

Vina Real Gran Reserva 09

Red fruit tea aromas are floral with some dark spice and deep and lovely gamey-earthly oxidative development. Very round in style, acid perhaps standing apart at end. Nothing too aggressive, balance is good except for integration issue.

Viña Real Gran Reserva 2006

70% French oak, 28 months. Fruit from old Elciego vineyards near the original Viña Real bodega. Florals over dirt, meat, briar, arrowroot and licorice along with baking spice and juniper. The mouth is built on soft, fleshy, broad tannins well matched to oak and the structural frame works well with a tangy, steely acidity. Perhaps lacks depth of fruit flavour to match.

Pagos de Vina Real 2010

Deep, polished, but with very prominent new oak, earthy. Obvious.

Pagos de Viña Real 2005

18 mths French oak, 40 days maceration.

Deep garnet with ruby hues, warmer more matured fruits, dark chocolate and black plums, black cherry, cinnamon and baking spice. More grainy heavy mahogany tannins, quite a delicious drink, more modern and notes of alcohol sweetness and sweet fruit and sweet roadside herbs. Give me lamb/goat on a spit, pronto!