

Descendientes de J. Palacios (DJP), DO Bierzo

Ricardo Perez Palacios and Alvaro Palacios

Descendientes de Jose Palacios is one of 3 estates of the family of Alvaro Palacios:

- Alvaro's personally named estate is the leading Garnacha producer in Priorat.
- The family 'home' (literally and viticulturally) is the Rioja estate, Palacios Remondo in Alfaro.
- The Bierzo Mencía wines as discussed here.

The 'Descendientes' are Alvaro Palacios and his nephew, Ricardo Perez Palacios, both of whom grew up in the Palacios family home in Alfaro, Rioja. Both are descendants of Alvaro's father, Jose Palacios, who died in 2000, just as the first Bierzo wines were being prepared and for whom the Bierzo project was then named.

DJP commenced in 1999, when the young Ricardo was studying permaculture in Leon, subsequent to viticultural studies in Bordeaux. Ricardo came across some very old plantings of Mencía high on the mountain slopes above the village of Corullón, and recognised these as heritage material of great potential and importance, just as Alvaro had done a decade earlier with the remnant old autochthonous Garnatxas of Priorat. Alvaro was summonsed to inspect and an immediate decision was made to invest and investigate. Ever since, Ricardo and Alvaro have been purchasing and renovating old vineyards, massale propagating heritage genetic material throughout their holdings, all the while refining how to grow and vinify Mencía.



el Bierzo

Bierzo is in the north-western continental province of Leon (the mid-north is usually referred to as Castile y Leon, with Leon separating the larger province of Castile from Galicia). Bierzo is a basin surrounded by four distinct mountain ranges, from which a number of significant rivers (most notably the Sil) carve their way west, draining central Spain to the Coast via the 'low rivers' (Rias Baixas) of Galicia. Along with the Sil, which flows west from Ponferrada, there is also Rio Cua, emanating from Cacabelos and Rio Burbia from Vilafranca del Bierzo. Rising from the valley floor are clay-dirt hillslopes, and surrounding these at the perimeter of the valley are mountain slopes with mineral soils (in particular, those above Corullón in the north-west). The region is green and mountainous, with chestnut forests facing to the north and south-facing exposures given to viticulture. Bierzo is also historically famous as one of the traditional stops along the 'pilgrimage' route to Santiago de Compostela.

DO Bierzo – honorary Galicians

Although politically a part of continental Spain, in wine logic we align Bierzo with the Galician-Atlantic DOs, on the basis of two inter-related continuities. Firstly, the River Sil (which converges with the Miño just west of Ribeira Sacra) defines the main wine regions of Galicia, and this river originates in Bierzo. Secondly, along the course of the Miño, climatic changes define the natural order of Vitis Vinifera throughout Galicia, beginning with the Godello and Mencía of Bierzo. As one follows the river west, downhill from the continental heights of Bierzo, eventually arriving at sea-level in the Atlantic DO of Rias Baixas, decreasing continentality progressively alters the conditions which determine the best variety of each region. Bierzo, atop the river has the most continental climate (the greatest amount of daytime solar radiation), and a corresponding high diurnal temperature range, with the coolest nights. This daytime warmth is the maximum that Mencía can manage – further east into the extreme continentality of Rioja and Ribera del Duero, for example, and the daytime sun is too much – Mencía becomes sloppy-soft with chocolatey tannins and too little acidity – cool nights cannot save what is lost during the day. As one travels west, lower daytime temperatures eventually mean that the continental varieties, Mencía and Godello do not ripen sufficiently, and coastal, Atlantic varieties (Brancellao, Treixadura and eventually Albariño) take over.

Bierzo has two millennia of history in wine production, dating back to the Roman occupation (1st-4th centuries AD). After all this time, the economy of the area was closely tied to the grape, but the late-19th century advent of phylloxera interrupted all this. After phylloxera, 40% of the population migrated from the area. Re-planting on American rootstocks, at first in locations based on historical memory and lore saw 30% of the area renewed, but further difficulties arose from 1935 after the Civil War. As the region got poorer, plantings shifted down into the valleys on rich soils. Non-local varieties, particularly Palomino, were planted for their high yields, closely followed by the advent of industrial fertilisers. The old varieties and ways were lost, and a 50 year black age persisted until the

late 80s, when a philosophical re-birth slowly emerged. By the 1980s, as with most of Galicia, the high crop white, Palomino dominated, accounting for 50% of the region's plantings.

Nowadays, as the region reverts to its native Mencia and Godello, there are 4500 hectares planted, 90% red, mainly in small plots of 400-800 square metres. Grapes are grown for wine between 300 and 2000 metres' altitude. The main local grape is Mencia. The white Godello is also important, and there's a little Garnacha Tintorera (aka the pink-fleshed Alicante Bouchet) and traces of another 20 local varieties, mostly red. Historically the white varieties were blended in with the reds to make 'Clarete' – fruity, light pink wines made with about a quarter white grapes. These were the typical local wines for a long while – not just here in Bierzo, but in Ribera del Duero and Rioja too.



Soils and sites

In Bierzo, there are three main vineyard locations – the fertile valley floor, intermediate hill-slopes of red clay dirt, and mountain slopes with schist (slate) mineral soils. No good wine comes from Bierzo's valley floor. Both the hillside material and the mountain gear are capable of excellence, depending on orientation (south-facing mountain slopes are a warmer site promoting softer Mencia than a north-facing hillside), and clay is cooler than either granite or schist. Along with the complex terroir, altitude and aspect options, keep in mind that Bierzo is a fundamentally mixed continental- Atlantic climate.

The oldest vines are in the mountain slopes, and these vineyards are where the heritage material of Bierzo is to be found. Although most of Bierzo was wiped out by phylloxera, and most of the rest was debased by the practices of the 20th century, some vineyards in the high parts were re-planted by massale selection from the scattered survivors of phylloxera, and these are a direct link to *Vitis Vinifera's* long history of evolution in situ here. Vineyards such as those of DJP claim a direct historical continuity with this legacy, and are a potential source for the authentic renewal of Bierzo. The intermediate slopes – the clay hills of the valley, however, are mostly younger, planted during the rebirth period of the 1980s and 90s. Some of this is planted to industrial clones from nurseries, some of it to heritage genetics sourced from the remnant old vines in the mountains.

The wines of DJP

DJP Mencias are produced at several levels:

- a regional Bierzo wine – Pétalos, which blends mountain fruit from above Corullón (about 80% of the blend) with that of the clay hill-slopes rising out of the valley floor, mainly around the village of Cacabelos
- a village wine, Corullón, summarising many tiny component parcels of schist-soil-grown Mencia from the mountain slopes above Corullón, and
- site-specific bottlings from three special parcels above Corullón: Moncerbal, Las Lamas and La Faraona. These sites are a combination of Paraje (elsewhere, Partida or Lieu-Dit) wines representing a specific sub-village place, or specific vineyard or Cru wines.

There were two other place wines bottled in earlier years, Fontelas and San Martin, but these have ceased, with Ricardo and Alvaro preferencing quality fruit to the village wine, Corullón. A vineyard such as Moncerbal will see some fruit go into Pétalos, more into Corullón, with a small portion bottled as single site material. The resultant wines are fresh, fragrant and deep – juicy, lively and silky. The wines display elements of gamey-meatiness along with ravishing florals. Round and long fruit tannins are always a feature.

The mountain vineyards for Corullón, including Moncerbal, Las Lamas and La Faraona are very small plots grown at 600-1000 metres altitude. All are based on a minerally slate – some featuring clay and others chalk, with traces of granite and a complex range of metals and minerals. Alvaro and Ricardo have 40 hectares above Corullón made up of 225 parcels (so an average plot would be just about 200 square metres!), and all are the product of organic-biodynamic viticulture, tilled by horse.

In releasing Moncerbal, Las Lamas and La Faraona, Ricardo and Alvaro achieve a masterful summation of Mencia's possibilities in just 3 wines. Each share a relatively similar set of flavour descriptors, but each has a distinct tannin profile; these differences are utterly inherent, and the tryptic exhibit the same similarity-difference each harvest.

They are true terroir wines of the clearest sort. From Moncerbal to Las Lamas is a 5 minute stroll. In a straight line, it's merely 10 minutes to La Faraona.

Moncerbal has a fine, mineral and permissively linear tannin.

The Clay of Las Lamas results in a broader, weightier cocoa-like tannin.

La Faraona's tannins are lacy through the mouth and then fan out like a delta, a horizontal peacock feather effect!

DJP Vintage history

1999-2002, all Atlantic

2003 Continental

2004 Atlantic

2005 Continental

2006 & 7 Atlantic

2008-2011 Continental

2012-2016 Atlantic

2016 Bierzos: like perfumed cotton

An Atlantic harvest yet again, temperate and tranquil after a wet spring (860 litres of rain). Clear, bright, airy wines result. The 2016s have wonderful floral aromatics: violets, heather, rock-rose and camellias. Orchard fruits (cherry & white peach) rolling on soft gliding tannin, expressive of pure soil and northern air. Like perfumed cotton.

Petalos, regional blend Mencia



Petalos is the regional expression of Mencias from Bierzo. It's mainly mountain mineral material from Corullon fruit (including de-classified material from the single vineyards), plus 20% high quality gear from clay hill-slope sites below Corullon. Aged 12 months in large older French oak (1-6 years old), it's a great, accessible encapsulation of the DJP Mencia package. It is drawn from nearly 900 plots in the region - 200 owned by Ricardo and Alvaro, and the rest leased from 175 growers. Gently made in order to preserve acidity (the first and last consideration when

handling Mencia), there are 5 days of gentle pigeage, with little pumping over. Depending on the year, DJP retain as much as 50% of the stems if they are suitably ripe. Maceration takes place for a month or so in a very cool cellar, with malo in tank before ageing in barrel. Egg-white fining takes place only in hot years, and the wine is given a modest 1 micron filter to lighten and brighten.

2016 Petalos leads with lashings of complex florals: field herb, dried sage, red lavender, violet, pepper tree and rose. There's fresh clay dirt, lissom red plum and sour cherry fruits: earthy and bright, it sums Mencia and Bierzo perfectly. The palate has nicely moderated fruit plushness in a choc-blackberry register. Petalos is soft, open, round, pretty and fresh with nice slick-but-earthy tannins and smoky minerals.

Corullón, village Mencia



Corullón is the summation of 210 tiny parcels of fruit grown from the cold metal-mineral soils on the mountain slopes (between 500-1000 metres) above the village of Corullon. Vine age is 50-90 years, and these organic vineyards are un-irrigated and bio-dynamically farmed by hand and horse. Fermentation is in small wooden vats (foudre), and the wine is bottled unfiltered after 14 months' maturation in French oak – the first 7 months in new, then another 6 or so in 2-3 yo

barriques and hogsheads with some foudre and clay vats in the mix. About 50% of stems are retained, with just a little, gentle pigeage; fermentation and maceration go for a little more than two months. No pumping, no filtering or fining. Contains traces of white from field blends including Palomino, Godello and Valenciana.

Corullon 2015: smells of plum flowers in dark purple fruit, the palate is long with satin tannins, sweetly pippy with lovely gentle earthiness. Fleshy but well cut with green herbs a-tingle in freshly tilled.

Moncerbal, Vino de Paraje

From Sufreiro, an 0.86 hectare section of the Moncerbal hillside, facing south above the village of Corullon, at above 750m, with vines around 100 years' age. Rocky slate with silica and quartz, but there's only about 30cm of soil. Fermented in small open wooden vats (old 1200 litre foudre), aged 14 months in new French barriques.



Unfiltered; production total: 8 barrels. (Sufreiro is the Galician name for the cork oak.)

Moncerbal 2015: Vibrant, spicy and purple with lovely herb-floral countryside smells, and a juicy palate marked by gravelly soil and piquantly spiced. Highly perfumed fruit is filled with musky roses and an incredible tangle of herbs and balsams.

Las Lamas, vino de Paraje

From 0.54 hectares of south-west-facing slope, 60, 90 and 100 year old patches of vines. It's perilously steep, seeming to hang from the road's edge (below 750 metres' altitude). Las Lamas has deeper soils than Moncerbal, with quite a bit of clay, granite and quartz in the typical Corullon mountain light brown and pale grey slate mineral soils. There's about 1% of Alicante Bouchet field-blended in the Mencia, which has the longest sun exposure of the three single sites. Unfiltered, 5 barrels.



Las Lamas 2015: Garnet spices, potash, rosehip and lilac florals on the nose. The palate is liquorous - oozing red fruit, but has good grip and lovely run in the mouth thanks to perfectly expressed sweet grape pip tannins.

La Faraona, Cru Mencia

Faraona is single parcel within the Paraje of el Ferro, on a tectonic-volcanic fault and laden with nuclear minerals. With its shallow basalt bedrock, La Faraona is the highest hill in Corullon, ranging from 855 metres at the bottom of the vineyard to 975 metres at the top. Very steep, south-east facing, planted to 65 year old vines which struggle in just 30cm of (volcanic basalt, titanium etc) soil and with just the morning sun for succour. Grey and pale brown slate with quartz. Only worked (tilled by mule) one year in three. It was 50% Palomino when Ricardo and Alvaro purchased it, but this rogue variety is now just a trace along with a little Alicante Bouchet in field blend. Fermented in new 600l French oak, unfiltered, with total production of up to 2 barrels. In 2009, they had to cooper a special ¼ barrel to approximate a second barrel after a full first barrique!



La Faraona 2015:

Wonderful briar in red fruit jelly – it's sweetly pippy with lovely gentle earthiness. The finish is fabulous: a long mouthful of satin, seemingly, as a literal bay of tannin radiates deep out back.

HISTORICAL TASTING NOTES

2015: grace, harmony, purity

2015 is classical, melding the dryness of Continental years with the freshness of Atlantic harvests. A hot and dry summer - the driest since Ricardo and Alvaro arrived in 1999 and in fact the driest for 50 years, then freshened by pre-harvest rain from the end of August. 518 litres in total. '15s were picked in the last 3 weeks of September, compared to the usual 7 week spread into late October.

Truly beautiful wines, delicacy touching the sublime. Fluid and silky tannins filled with squozen fruit aromas – cold, purple, pulpy, cloudy and alive with the perfume of many flowers. Harmony and grace with great purity, muy emocionado!

Petalos 2015: red fruit nose is round, bright, floral and earthy with good energy. The palate is delicate and fresh with soft tannin. Spiced blood plum and wild roses, twitched with herbs, ravishing heady florals. A wine of great depth and spread, it's beautifully set, tannin delivers wine to tongue, which is tidied by lovely nutty spice, then a wander off finish. Really great.

2014

2014 is a third consecutive Atlantic harvest in Bierzo. A cold year, not wet, then a quite wild summer: cold, mild weather perforated by a string of days around 40 degrees Celsius, followed by a week of rain leading into harvest.

Petalos 2014: raspberry leaf and sweet earth set up a lovely tension in an agrodulce (sweet and sour) wine, delicate with good line and terroso most of all.

Corullon 2014: balsamic herbs and violets ring out over red-blue fruits. The wine is elegant, definitively Atlantic with great length. The cold sensations are relieved by sweet spices and deep earthiness. There is a clear sense of cold in the damp mountain soil aromas, from which rise a 'spring-like' awakening, with blossom smells, mint and verbena and an electric mineral tingle emerging. Tannins are beautiful and run the show in the mouth, full and deep, softly, earthily coating, then coaxing, engendering a slow, low outward release promising a long developmental future.

Moncerbal 2014: beautiful sweet, rounded and floral nose with beets, plums and a carpet of tiny purple-blue flowers. The palate has lovely juice rising from a slate bed, and dances with fennel, marjoram, geranium. Very fine, very long and with lovely delicate minerality. Ricardo says 2014 is Moncerbal's year.

Las Lamas 2014: darker and earthier than Moncerbal, wild roses and a lash of mountain herbs, electrically mineral. Very well fit to the mouth without being 4-square and not overly drying either, lovely juice covering granular tannins in a wine of profoundly earthy overall cast.

La Faraona 2014: vegetal as always, spicy and very mineral. There is a dominant sense of 'Terroso' – all-around earthiness radish, beets, pomegranate affect a bright, rich, fruity, earthy wine with gentle tannin flow lit up with spice and minerals.

The 2013 vintage

2012/13 was a warm winter but spring 2013 turned cold with frost burn, a cool summer saw late and uneven flowering but autumn was warm and fine, perfectly setting up a slow, very late ripening, where (as always with Mencia) very careful timing of picking and selection was required. The 2013s are wonderfully defined, quiet wines of great focus; they're cool, a touch abstract and require some patience ahead of a long, harmonious future.

DJP 'Corullón' Mencia 2013

Lots of fresh-tilled earth and green herbs, the earth fills with soy, the herbs turn to bracken and moss, red fruits in the back, slowly going electric. The palate has loads of fresh mineral slate carving a clean line from tongue-tip all the way back and out. Acid grip at the rim accentuates its horizontal plane discus-in-the-mouth affect. It's a cold rock sandwich, with lovely sweet, herbal, fleshy-vegetal spicy perfume release out back. The palate fills and builds roundness to reach to the back in a plush, complex masterpiece.

DJP 'Moncerbal' Mencia 2013

Quiet and cool, this is a mountain air wine, mingling sour cherry, medicinal herb and savoury dark fruits. It's very calm, reserved, precise. With wonderful spicy-acid lines and subtle tannin linear and alongside, it has outstanding direction and release, tannins build towards back then release in a sweet-sour squeak.

DJP 'Las Lamas' Mencia 2013

Lactic with creamy cherries, bracken, smoked blackberry canes, ferrous earth, potash, red flowers and rose thorns. Almost beef stock full, it's round with iron surf-crashing on a metal-mineral fresh shore and fanning out, energetic and electric. Despite the early sense of body, it's not overly concentrated, not particularly glyceric.

DJP 'La Faraona' Mencia 2013

Lots of complex and sour green herbs and grasses, and equally complex fine aromatic metal-minerals, vibrant sour cherry and clear country air. Faraona has outstanding grip from long tannins twining along a rail of steely acid. There's a thread of volatile wildness relieved by some lovely earth perfumes at finish; complex, packed, but not heavy or dense, just requiring time to blossom.

The 2012 vintage

2012 was started by a remarkably mild, warm-and-dry winter, which led to a very early commencement to the vegetation cycle. Frosts and spring rains played havoc with the young shoots, but a mild and humid summer stabilised matters. Nevertheless, going into the harvest, the maturation variances from plot to plot were nightmarish. Harvest ranged over six weeks from mid-September, a relatively late start. Wild boars feasted on Moncerbal and Las Lamas just before harvest on October 19, further testing Ricardo's patience. Nevertheless, vivid and elegant 2012s resulted from the great pains taken to harvest at just the right time.

DJP 'Petalos' Mencia 2012

Lashings of field herb, red lavender, violet, fresh clay dirt and nicely moderated fruit in a choc-blackberry register. Round, pretty and fresh with nice earthy tannins.

DJP 'Corullón' Mencia 2012

Meat, blood, flowers, violet and dark rocky earth – the whole Bierzo Mencia package is right there on the nose, backed up by scrubby herbs. Throughout, the everlasting presence of cold dark slate, nuanced with hung meat and choc-edged, with touches of kelp, anise, plum and rose flowers. The palate has gorgeous ripe tannin and a lovely juicy lift with snappy field herb cut. There is a lovely sense of controlled volume, and the finish is satisfying and elegant.

DJP 'Moncerbal' Mencia 2012

Ricardo reckons they might have picked this a day later than optimal. Cranberry and Regaliz (licorice) pastille fruit leads a nose filled out sweet purple flowers, velvet curtains and ash. It's a very fine and settled wine to smell. The palate is round but not overly glyceric, featuring lingering pastille fruits set in a crystalline structure and mouthfeel with very elegant tannin. Cranberry, ash and violet yield to licorice at back.

DJP 'Las Lamas' Mencia 2012

RPP: "This is the year for Las Lamas". Well, it's a magical wine, so deft that it's light. Deep and earthy, the nose is meaty and dark-set, leavened by a touch of bitter green herb and a granite-fresh back note. Cranberry fruit and mineral tannin, spice and fine acidity give dance to a carnal, purply fruit palate, nicely plush over silty earth.

DJP 'La Faraona' Mencia 2012

This year there is a 450 litre barrel and a 75 litre pup, totalling 525 litres production. Very herbal, with purple florals, pimiento and the smell of old wood in the tannin, and savoury with meaty red fruit. The palate has great tannin weight, but with lots of dance, as it's slashed through with glinting minerals.

DJP 'Si Qui' 2012 'natural'

Sweet, grapey, primary with some pith and pippy structure and a raspberry acid line.

The 2011 vintage

2011 is the last in a string of 4 consecutive Continental harvests since 2008.

2011 is similar in overall feel, quality and flavour to the 2010s, but easier wines thanks to forward phenolic development - softer, more open and expressive already. The harvest gave nice crops, perfect climatology, clean, all natural with no problems. Ricardo reckons with Bierzo that picking time is everything, and that they nailed the timing in 2011. Fermentations were cool, just 25 degrees under the cap and less further down in the wine, and ran over 18 days. The wines were then macerated for a couple of months.

DJP 'Petalos' Mencia 2011

Plush, elegant and floral with trademark roses and pepper tree perfume, bright and earthy at once, red fruits with roast meat juice, smoky minerals. It's soft, open, savoury, elegant, satiny, dry, long and supple with sour cherries and dried sage.

DJP 'Corullón' Mencia 2011

Pure, with red cherry, wild spice and a complex perfume - wild strawberry, mulberry, wildflowers, pickled cherry, violets and lilac over fennel, smokey meat, moss, forest floor and cold charcoal. The dark, meaty-mineral palate is deep, silky and sumptuous, driven by fine tannin. It has good flesh and concentration, but line and focus equally, with good acid balance to finish.

DJP 'Moncerbal' Mencia 2011

Forest berries run around in a wonderfully complex and pretty nose with rosehip, blackberry cane, oriental rose and cold dark rock. The palate just makes you go 'wow'! Fluid with lots of gorgeous tannin, it is focused but not intense. A delicious and easy drink, its varietal cast is classical and perfect with lovely after-palate perfume.

DJP 'Las Lamas' Mencia 2011

Liquorous deep cherry and bramble rose nose with big soft red fruit-floral set, husky dark spice and pruny concentrated depth. More dense and savoury than the delicacy of Moncerbal, the gently liquorous fruit works slowly through the mouth thanks to the typical solid tannin of Lamas, which engenders a great sense of the earth all through the wine. Voluminous without heft.

DJP 'La Faraona' Mencia 2011

Forest strawberry, smoky red fruits and slate on a nose that's dark, deep-set, run through with dried field herbs and lifted by mineral freshness. There's the smell of velvet, brambles and stone, and more brambles and stone. The palate is marked by the most fabulous liquid tannins, and despite a great deal of impact, the wine flows up and out in the mouth, effortless already.

2010s

2010 Pétalos

Plush, elegant and floral with trademark roses and pepper tree perfume, bright and earthy at once, red fruits with roast meat juice, smokey minerals. It's savoury, elegant, satiny, dry, long, supple with sour cherries and dried sage.

2010 Corullon

Soot, beet, red dirt, violet, tobacco, smoke (earth mineral expression) with sweet, spicy tannin. Fleshy, with dark baking spices, purple-black fruits with tobacco and wild herb flecks, deftly structured with great tannin fineness.

2010 Moncerbal

Ultra-fine nose, canned red and white cherries, fennel and mountain herbs and lovely, very subtle soft dark spice. The mouth is likewise fine and subtle; highly mineral (more so than glyceric), just mid-weight with everything in perfect harmony. It's hard not to think of premier cru Chambolle-Musigny. Remarkable juicy-tingly acidity driving the finish given the tendency towards softness in mortal Mencia. Typically for Moncerbal, the tannin is permissive, giving, inviting, and of a deftness belying its volume.

2010 Las Lamas

Brightly purple, glaze cherry and violet fruit aromas rimmed with wildflowers, earthiness yields gunsmoke, grey and clay dirt, with plug tobacco and a lash of wild fennel. Rich, succulent, dense, great balance in the mouth. There's a tight core of spice wound into the tannin/oak/acid through-line; the cherry-tobacco-earthly fruit rolls out from this line and puckers back at the finish. By far the most resolved Las Lamas yet in its youth. Serious, striking and sexy enough to forgive any alliterative folly.

2010 La Faraona

Mulberry and wild cherry liquor, bitter herbs, beetroot, rhubarb, red heathery florals, with hints of nectarine and white florals in the aromatic mix. Marked by moss and forest floor, the palate is seriously concentrated yet structurally ethereal with typical radiating tannins hitting front and back simultaneously, it's everywhere and nowhere all at once.

2009s

Corullon

Pure, with red cherry, wild spice and a complex perfume - wild strawberry, mulberry, wildflowers, pickled cherry, violets and lilac over fennel, smokey meat, moss, forest floor and cold charcoal. The dark, livery meat palate is deep, silky and sumptuous driven by fine tannin. It has good flesh and concentration, but line and focus equally, terrific acidity gives a salivating finish (generous vintage and a low-acid variety to boot, but who could tell?!).

Moncerbal

Purple florals over red-black spicy fruits, it's expressive with boysenberry and rosehip fruits, dark crushed rock minerality, black tea, and velvet aromatics and a palate both pretty and liquorous. Fruit is dark cherry flecked with wild herb and fennel, and harmonious sweet chocolatey textured fruit tannins. Fine, permissive tannins are the trademark of the Moncerbal parcels, thanks to which the palate has outstanding line, with crunching mineral, steely thread.

Las Lamas

There's always a certain (controlled) wildness all about this wine - wild raspberry, tiny cherries and forest floor on nose are very attractive with wood-spice, balsamic herbs, tobacco and kelp. The palate is purple-fruited, densely floral and spicy with mountain herbs, wild rose and brambles in the mix, angelica and ink at the back. With full, dry tannins, Lamas is more 'centrally' structured than the groove of Moncerbal, and will unfurl relentlessly through time.

La Faraona

Liquorous wild cherry and wild herb nose with deepset minerals, La Faraona is a wine of great dynamism. There's energy on nose, in mouth, in the fruit, acid and tannin. It's not noisy, however - calm, composed and radiant is more the picture. Red heather'n'leather mingle with boysenberry/satsuma fruits, forest floor, moss and mild spice. Delta fan ethereal fruit tannin is the marker of this vineyard, unmistakable every vintage. Expensive? It's profound in the global sense and worth every penny.

2008s

Corullon is the summation of 210 distinct, bio-dynamically farmed parcels of fruit from the cold metal-mineral soils in the mountains above the village of Corullon. It is a pure Mencia, and like all the 08s has a very cold black rock austerity reflecting a relatively low-glycerol year, and presenting wines of quiet power, great length and harmony, all with very fine lines. From bright-to-dark, aromatically there's rose-pomegranate-berry, clean air, truffle-'shroom earthiness, blueberry, tobacco and heather all lifting of the smoky, blue steel dark cold slate base. The palate is mossy choc-cherry fruit with little violets and cool black slate. It's dry, velvety, mineral, restrained and linear with good volume and a lovely sense of release.

Moncerbal has cherry blossom and rosy little red berries lifting out of darker tobacco/sensimilla, irish moss and black tea aromatics, underpinning by that defining sense of cold dark rocks. To the extent it gets juicy, it's in a blueberry way, with fine tannins promoting run and release on the palate. Lean, cool and quiet, it's very long, super elegant, totally savoury, deeply and quietly concentrated.

Las Lamas is inky and more spicy than Moncerbal, Lamas has smoked cranberries and crushed violet over cold roast beef, anise/tobacco, spice pods and leather. Dark, dry, with spice-studded leather-tannins, it's open and long, with a very delicate overall affect. Minerally and pure, full with great movement.

La Faraona is heartbreakingly beautiful now and for a very long time in the future! Has the bright-over-dark aromatic energy of the other 2008s in spades, with bright cherry-pomegranate and rose-red florals over granite, tobacco and crushed violets. A fine and detailed palate features the evanescent beauty of fanning delta tannins unique to this vineyard. There's a lovely silty character to the tannin and overall the wine's pure, long, dark and restrained; a beguiling, complete, understated beauty.

OLDER

2007 Continental-Atlantic

2005-6 Continental

2004 Atlantic

2003 Super-Mediterranean version of Continental

2001-2 Atlantic

2000 Continental-Atlantic

1999 Atlantic

CORULLON 2000: Leather and anise, fenugreek, blackstrap and old spices, dry dark and earthy.

SAN MARTIN 2001: very intense fennel-marjoram interplay, sweet, earthy, gravel-tannined.

MONCERBAL 2003: plush fruit over a clean, beautifully cut line, marked by raspberry and fennel. Ripe sweet nose of violets and leather. Full, sweet palate without jam is studded by anisey minerals.