

Minius Godello, D.O. Monterrei

Our terrific O Rosal Albariño producer, Valmiñor are also active in Monterrei.

Here, Valmiñor's winemaker Cristina Mantilla is responsible for a ripper Godello called Minius (the Latin name for the longest river in the region, the 'Miño')!

Minius Godello

40 year old vines are grown in Oimbra on a mix of sand, schist and silty-clay soils. The Godello is de-stemmed, cold macerated for a few hours and fermented cool and quiet in stainless steel.



A lively golden yellow and nice and bright in the glass, Minius smells clearly of Monterrei's granitic sand soils and the golden orchard fruits one expects from Godello. There are hints of fennel, citrus and subtle florals too, and the palate is a beautifully balanced rich-round style – typical Godello golden oil is cut with delicate herbal bitterness and there is excellent freshness to finish.

D.O. Monterrei

Comprising just 23 bodegas in the valley of the Rio Tâmega, Monterrei is an emergent source for elegant, savoury whites, mainly Godello – either solo, or blended with Treixadura. It's early days, though: the D.O. was founded in 1992 and the process of re-planting to autochthonous varieties of the region is only 20 years on. As with much else of Galicia (and Spain write large), the post-phylloxera years here saw the region re-planted with 'outsider' varieties selected for ease and volume of yield, not for quality or any intrinsic match to the local conditions. Since the early 90s, Monterrei has been grubbing out 'Jerez' (ie, Palomino) and re-establishing historical local varieties. Of the Galician whites, Godello works best in this continental-verge climate. Although just out the back of Albariño country (Monterrei pretty much joins at the back with the hilly Condado de Tea sub-zone of Rias Baixas), the region straddles Galician and Castilian influences.

Where Galicia meets Spain and Portugal

Monterrei is in Ourense province, about 45 minutes south-east of the city of Ourense and constitutes the boundary of coastal Galicia with Continental Spain and shares characteristics of both. As you drive south into the region from either Rias Baixas or Ribeiro, you will notice the land opening up from the tight hills and valleys of Galicia. The slopes are less steep, the country is drier, less verdant, less berserkly vegetated ... and without noticing, you are also gaining altitude as you climb up out of Galicia into Castile and the high Continental meseta.



The D.O. is named for the seriously grand and impressive Castle of Monterrei which guards the northern entry to Monterrei's main town, Verin (pop. 40,000). The 15th century castle was owned by a Count of the same name. The region is famous for its mineral springs, resulting from the Corga Fracture, in towns such as Sousas, Cabreiroá, Fontenova and Verin itself.

Like much else of Spain, it has a historical mix of cultural influences representing an overlay of invading forces from Roman, German, Arabic, Celtic and others. Wine has been made here for 2000 years, and remnant Roman stone lagars are still to be seen in the fields. (Note: the alternative spelling, Monterrey, is Spanish not Galego).

Climate and Geography

The vines grow on the sides of the valleys around Rio Tâmega, which runs south through Verin and joins the Douro (formerly Duero) in nearby Portugal. There are two sub-zones: Val de Monterrei (Monterrei Valley); and Ladeira de Monterrei (Monterrei slopes, accounting for 40% of production). The soils are a mix throughout both zones, featuring poor sandy soils, schist and limestone-clay soils. The altitude range is 300-850m (Quinta do Buble at 850m is Galicia's highest estate).

The climate is a Continental-Atlantic mix. It's a hot summer-cold winter mix, and summer-time temperatures can hit 40 Celsius, but the continental influence gives a high diurnal temperature range – even such hot days cool to 15 degrees or so at night, de-stressing the fruit. Rainfall is around 600mm.

Monterrei is the warmest and driest area in Galicia, sharing some climatic characteristics with the Spanish central plain. The Sierra de Larouca range produces a rain shadow effect in the area. Besides, summers are long and sometimes dry, sometimes with a daily temperature range sometimes as wide as 30 degrees Celsius. Temperatures can fall below 0 °C in winter. Average annual rainfall is about 700 mm and the influence of the Atlantic produces cold autumns.

Grapes, Vines, regulations

While mainly a white wine region, reds do ripen properly here and there is one significant red wine producer making very fine wine from a patch of pre-phylloxera vines below the castle. For the most part, however, it is whites from Godello and Treixadura which matter. Production is a 70/30 split in favour of white (most of which prefer not to use malolactic fermentations).

It's important to recognise how new Monterrei is. In a story familiar from nearby DOs Ribeiro and Ribera Sacra in particular, the rupture of phylloxera in the late 19th century set up a virtual total loss of authentic/local wine culture in the region. By 1886 phylloxera had wiped out 95% of the vineyards. After the devastation of phylloxera, followed by the rupture of the Civil War, industrial grape growing took over and these regions were almost totally planted to 'Jerez', ie Palomino – easy to grown in heroic volumes of low-grade grape, it entirely displaced autochthonous grapes.

The establishment of the DO in Monterrei co-incided with and was largely responsible for the return of local varieties. Recognised white varieties: Godello 60%, Treixadura 15%, Albariño and Doña Blanca 5% each and traces of Torrontes, Caiño Blanco and Loureiro. Reds are Mencia 70% Arauxa (Tempranillo) 20% Bastardo 5%, and 5% mix of Caiño Tinto and Sousau.

There are around 1500 hectares of vines, but only 1/3 of these are quality-rated and released under the seal of the CRDO – the balance is Vino de Mesa (Palomino and others), showing how much work remains to re-build authentic local character.

Of the 23 bodegas currently producing, roughly 2/3 (Bodegas Cosecheros) grow their own fruit with the rest (Bodegas Industrials) working on purchased grapes. Yields are a legal maximum of 10 tonnes/hectare, but rarely exceed 8. Legal minimum alcohol is 11% a/v for both reds and whites; there's no maximum, but most wines are in the 12-12.5% a/v range and 14% is rarely achieved.

For reds, the ageing criteria for a Crianza is a 6 month minimum, meaning callow, under-matured oak-aged reds are not uncommon. Additions of acid and tannin are legal, however the CRDO does not allow irrigation, dilution, chaptalisation, nor does it allow chemical nitrogen and phosphorous fertilisers.