

Palacios Remondo

Sierras de Yerga near Alfaro, 'la Rioja Oriental'

The Palacios family, nowadays headed by Alvaro's sister, Conseulo, runs the Hotel Palacios in downtown Alfaro, adjacent to which is the family bodega – the winery responsible for the Palacios Remondo wines. Both Alvaro and his nephew, Ricardo (Conseulo's son) were born and educated in Alfaro before they commenced their agricultural wanderings. Having formally departed Alfaro in 1989 in order to set up shop in Priorat, Alvaro 'returned' in 2000 following the death of his father, Jose, who set up the family business in 1945 and ran it from then on. On behalf of his eight siblings, Alvaro now runs all aspects of the family's bodega, which has been much transformed in the intervening years under Alvaro's care.



ALFARO

Alfaro is in the far south-eastern corner of la Rioja, and is the largest production village in Rioja, with 3750 hectares of vines (Laguardia is second). Here, on the southern shores of Rio Ebro, the soils tend to be fertile alluvium – too productive for growing quality grapes. However, some of the world's finest vegetables come from the rich red soils around Alfaro ... piquillo peppers, artichokes, asparagus and much more.

The fruit for Palacios Remondo wines is no run-of-the-mill product of rich dirt, though. The Palacios family holdings are 15 kilometres west of Alfaro, high up in the pale clay hillslopes under Mount Yerga. Above 550m altitude, this is one of the highest parts of the entire Rioja appellation, and produces fine, very late-ripening fruit in cold soils. Yerga is in the Sierra Yllera, part of the Sistema Iberico which divides this last vestige of Rioja from Soria, the wild eastern-most part of Ribera del Duero an hour to the south. In the rain-shadow of the mountain, rainfall is a very low 360mm (compared to 550 in Haro).

Under Mount Yerga, the Palacios family have 110 hectares of their own vineyards. A further 60 hectares are rented from two families with whom they have a long association. With the Yerga Mountain looming behind at 1100 metres, the main vineyard, 'La Montesa' is at 550-650 metres altitude. The vineyards of the families from which they rent from are just below in front. The oldest vineyards, above La Montesa, are at the limit of Garnacha's ability to ripen. The soil is a coarse chalky quarternary clay riddled with 'pebbles' - quite big rocks of various mineral origins (metamorphic volcanic lava, limestone, quartz and basalt). In profile, most vineyards have a topsoil of ferrous clay and limestone mixed over a deep chalk layer, then another layer of red soil and a very deep layer of lime.

PALACIOS REMONDO NOW

While growing up in Alfaro, Alvaro witnessed the dumbing down of Rioja after the Civil War ended, where Tempranillo became all that was validated, and Rioja itself became a simple, price-oriented brand. Alvaro allows that the bad decision-making of the 80s and 90s was the result of a lack of confidence, and calls the focus on varietal Tempranillo 'viral - an invasion', particularly so on the soils below the river. 80% of the 23,000ha of Rioja Baja is planted to irrigated industrial Tempranillo: as Alvaro terms it, 'artificial wine'.

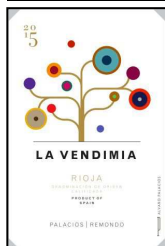
Under Jose Palacios, Palacios Remondo was a conventional Rioja of industrially-farmed Tempranillo expressed within the Crianza-Reserva-etctera model of production. In the years under Alvaro's guidance, the vineyards and wines have undergone extraordinary change. Nowadays the vineyards are bio-dynamically grown low-crop organic plantings of local Garnacha genetics, with a scattering of Viura. Any Tempranillo in Palacios Remondo wines is purchased from good growers near Haro on the Ebro's north shore.

Avoiding industrial clones from the nurseries, all plantings are massale cuttings of ancient genetics evolved in situ, planted on Rupestres de lot rootstocks. While all ancient and recent plantings are 'en vaso' (goblet-pruned bush vines), the 20-some year old plantings of la Montesa itself are on trellises. Alvaro plans to spend the next 10 years re-grafting this main vineyard to bush vines. This would not seem necessary to most, given the outstanding quality already reached. It is simply the best thing to do, though, according to Alvaro, and therefore mandated.

PALACIOS REMONDO 'La Vendimia' Garnacha-Tempranillo

An unfiltered, organic, 'generic' Rioja, blending the south and north shores of Rio Ebro: Garnacha from Monte Yerga and Tempranillo from Haro. Alvaro's precise-yet-barely-tutored wines gently but unfailingly reflect the earth in which they grow, and this hallmark is seen in spades here. 4 months in barrique.

PALACIOS REMONDO 'La Vendimia' Garnacha-Tempranillo



Smelling for all the world like an apple orchard in blossom (flowers, leaves and tree boughs), the Garnacha in this is really pretty, and marries beautifully to the grey-clay smell of the damp soils up under Mount Yerga out back of Alfaro. Crisper in tannin-line than unwooded Tempranillos such as LZ, and with a more pronounced, broader natural acidity, it's a very lively and linear Garnacha-based blend. Kee-runch! Both bright and earthily-fruited, this juicy little wine balances neat, modest tannins and soft red dirt acidity. Mid-weight at most, round and complete, gently spiced and perfumed, it's classy and delicious.

PALACIOS REMONDO 'La Montesa' Garnacha

La Montesa is the Palacios' name for the shovel-nosed hill-slope above the town of Alfaro from which their main wines are selected. Three passes yield the Viura blanco, the joven tinto 'La Vendimia' and its big sister 'La Montesa' which is aged in older French oak. It's just a little 'more' than La Vendimia ... more savoury, more mineral, more structured, yet still extremely gentle and open-weave. It's all things to all people – affordable to quaff, stylish enough for a dinner party. Most exciting, by 2015 La Montesa will be a pure mountain Garnacha with no Tempranillo in the blend any longer, and sporting an utterly appropriate burgundy bottle. The wine is aged a year in new to 4 year-old barriques. These are extremely clean, with all wood in Palacios Remondo's bodega washed in hot water, rinsed in cold, then re-washed with jets of ozone. *Expect: Fresh red fruit with a herbal thread, lovely and open nose, cold tea and rose hip, fine and savoury, touches of exotic perfume. Vibrant and free. Palate is lipstick savoury, cherry and herb, lovely and intelligent.*

PALACIOS REMONDO 'La Montesa' Garnacha 2015



98% Garnacha, finally, with a touch of field blend white! A very big and high quality harvest from the warmest year on record - wet winter then warm and dry summer and dry harvest.

The wine has great phenolic maturity and a salty herb-sour edge to intense almost tarry dark Garnacha. The palate has a fantastic acid-tannin reach which drags clay spice and floral red berry along and along and along ... It's long, complex, fresh, vital and complete.

PALACIOS REMONDO 'Propiedad' Viñas Tradicionales Garnacha de Alfaro

95% Garnacha with a bit of Monastrell and field blend Viura, this is a blend of five old vineyards at 600+ metres altitude under Mt Yerga. Las Mulgas is the oldest of these, at 90 years old and 650m. the others are Corral de Serrano, Valviejo, Valfrio and Valmira (from the 2014 harvest onward, Valmira is a stand-alone Cru bottling). These vineyards represent "the limit" for Garnacha – any higher than this and you get unripe, thin-skinned Garnachas. Fermented in Bocoï (Foudre), aged in 650 litre French oak and bottled unfiltered. From



2010, Propiedad is the reward of a decade's intense labour by Alvaro in returning the Alfaro vineyards to their 'natural' viticultural direction: organically-grown bush-vines of Yerga's heritage Garnacha genetics.

Palacios Remondo 'Propiedad' 2015 Garnacha

More earth, woody heart vine perfume overlays over lipstick savoury red fruit with radish and herbal tang. Deep vine wood with spice, earth, herb, spice and space. Full of light and air, vibrant with soft fresh acidity.

Quiñón de Valmira, Sierra de Yerga

Having ended the cycle of recuperating Palacios Remondo's viticultural heritage, the next step for Alvaro is vineyard-specific releases. Valmira is the first such, and a small selection is bottled as a Cru wine, while the rest still goes into Propiedad. Valmira is a cold, high altitude 3 hectares of south-east facing Garnacha with 5% Tinta Velasco (Bobal). The quarternary soils are very shallow (20cm) calcareous and ferrous clay over a

deep and nutrient poor pale clay petrocalcic base. Valmira is fermented in foudre, and aged 15 months in Demi-muid, with very low sulphur.

“The spirituality of the place, chiseled by centuries of dry, cold Cierzo winds and the Mediterranean sun leaves a faint presence: the silent nerve of Garnacha, the allure of solitude.” (AP, of course)

Altos de Yerga by Alvaro Palacios ‘Quiñon de Valmira’ Garnacha 2015

Harvested September 28, after a very warm summer and dry lead-in to harvest. The heritage vineyard Valmiras are wild wines showing their mountain origin with cold-tinged vigour: citrus-edged red fruit in a wide, open, savoury register.



Poached quince clear and bright to swirl. Despite its discrete colour, the peach, quince, orange, cherry fruit quietly gathers richness. Smells of sweet-herb-spice, and feels vegetal-fleshy. Very much of the countryside, the mouth is perfumed with musk, earthen spice and soft beautiful faded rose petal. Excellent mature skins and seeds mark all. Open and gentle with a touch of grip gathering to woody-tannin-spice at end.

Vintages in brief

08 too cold

09 'vulgar', Alvaro says (but not really)

10 super charming

11 richer but very calm, concentrated and open

12 very dry

13 small crop after drought ended and very mild summer

14 difficult wet vintage

15 hot, prolific harvest of very good quality

16 beautifully balanced

