

La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remelluri



Remelluri

Owned by the family of Telmo Rodriguez, and since the retirement of Jaime Rodriguez in 2010, run on behalf of the family by Telmo and his sister Amaia. This property released the first genuine estate wines of la Rioja: owned, grown, made and bottled on a single property. Organic and never subjected to herbicide, Remelluri is in conversion to biodynamics, and increasingly planted to field blends of its own genetic cultivars.

If la Rioja is one of wine's most beautiful places, equally Remelluri is Rioja at its most beautiful.

The first estate of la Rioja

A Granja is Spanish for 'farm' – usually one given to animal production. In this case, La Granja Nuestra Señora de Remelluri (or simply Remelluri for short) is a very special estate nestled under the Sierra de Toloña range in the Cantabrian mountains. Remelluri is 150 hectares of property planted to 90 hectares of vines across 200 plots, grown above 600m altitude. High above all of Rioja, the estate has a pure, rugged wild-country beauty. Remelluri offers a spectacular panoramic view down to the vast Ebro basin and all the way south to Sierra de la Demanda.

Remelluri is 15 minutes' drive east of Haro on the back road to Logroño, under Sierra de Toloña, between Labastida and San Vicente. In the centre of the property stands a giant green oak, which marks the political convergence of Basque Rioja Alavesa and Spanish Rioja Alta (neither of these terms have anything productive to say about Rioja wine quality, they are strictly historical, cultural-political referents).

Remelluri is in the records since the 10th century as a discrete village, complete with necropolis, church and so on. High up on the margin of Rioja under the mountains, here one could see potential attackers approaching from the valley and have time to react and hide in the mountains. The First Republic sold the property off from church control in the 19th century. Run down, the property was purchased by Jaime

Rodriguez Salis, father of Telmo Rodriguez, in 1966. You can still observe 10th century stone lagares in the vineyards where wine was made traditionally for a thousand years.

Remelluri became the first Rioja bodega to grow, make and bottle from and on a single estate. The first vintage under Jaime's ownership was 1971. Since then, renovation of the vineyards and a degree of modernisation of approach (compared to traditional Rioja) has seen Remelluri become a very famous reference in Rioja. Remelluri really came to prominence in the late 1980s when Telmo took over winemaking. Under the guidance of the young Telmo, Remelluri moved to the forefront of quality Rioja properties in the late 1980s/early 90s. Telmo first started working with his now long-term business partner, Pablo Eguzkiza at Remelluri. Telmo and Pablo left Remelluri in the mid-1990s to concentrate on their emerging 'Compania'. 15 years later, they are back! Telmo and his sister Amaia (with Pablo also involved) have taken over the property, running it on behalf of the family since Jaime's retirement in 2010.

Several key changes ensue.

There were some innovations and corrections that Telmo was not allowed to implement when running Remelluri on his father's watch. Now, an exacting viticultural quality regime is in place, stipulating that the dry-grown fruit be entirely organic and biodynamic. There have been revisions of planting locations and subtle handling adjustments. As part of Telmo and Amaia's viticultural commitments, a significant change will be a reversion to field blend planting. In front of the chapel (next to the chateau-bodega complex in the heart of the property) is a 30 year old vineyard grafted to all 25 local varieties, and Telmo is using this genetic mix for future planting and re-grafting in the estate's vineyards, seeking deeper variety (including in degrees of ripeness) and 'movement' in the wines.

As well as deep work on the estate's viticultural quality, Telmo has also culled purchased fruit from nearby growers, which had crept into production during Telmo's absence, watering down the purity of the estate concept. True to Telmo's cultural-historicist custodial bent, he did not simply cut contracts to the external growers. Instead, he created a new label under which Remelluri continues to guarantee growers' incomes. "Lindes (the boundaries or limits) de Remelluri" is a new brand with two wines representing the growers in the small villages either side of Remelluri Estate: 'Viñedos de Labastida' is a village wine representing grower-families on the western boundary of Remelluri, and 'Viñedos de San Vicente' is from families in the village on the estate's eastern margin.



Remelluri's fruit is taken from three distinct valley formations within the estate, in which are terraces housing bush vines grown in very cold and poor soils of limestone, sandstone and loam.

Remelluri Blanco



A 9-varietal Atlantic Mountain wine, reflecting the thrillingly cold and herb-laden soils of Remelluri's highest parts. This wine is the result of Telmo planting a mixed-variety vineyard in the late 1980's. Viognier, Moscatel, Roussanne, Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Marsanne, Garnacha blanca and others are planted in a 'linear' vineyard: small plots are strung along a little path which winds from 650 up to 800 metres at the peak above Remelluri, all beyond the limits at which red wine varieties can be successfully ripened in these ultra-cold soils.

Telmo's aspiration here was to show the countryside ... the multi-varietal composition, accompanied by multiple fermentations in different technologies simply allows grapes and winemaking to be cancelled out in favour of the telling of the land. Various sizes and ages of oak, as well as stainless steel and concrete reflect a theory of 'disappearing winemaking' which Telmo has deployed to astonishing results in Rueda and Valdeorras whites (and increasingly in his reds), but the idea began with Remelluri Blanco. The whites are gently pressed, fermented with natural yeast and aged about 12 months, firstly in wood then rested in concrete before assemblage.

REMELLURI Blanco

A twitch of herbs in a field of golden cereal, with barley water's savoury richness and fine earthiness. Smooth, super-characterful. With good weight and affecting texture, it's a wine of tremendous nerve and run.

Remelluri Estate (aka reserva)

Today's Remelluri Reservas are consistent with those of the past: refined, elegant, and not much marked by racking - all oak influence is clean and meaningful. However, since Telmo's return it's a noticeably brighter, marginally richer, fabulously brambly red berry wine with wonderful florals. Tempranillo predominantly, with a little Graciano and Garnacha, plus field blend Viura and 'Malvasia'. Fermentation is in large conical oak vats, with pigeage. Malo is mainly in vats, with a portion in barrique. New oak ageing is reserved for the most structured fruit; most gains secondary character from 'oxidative' ageing in older wood. After about 17 months ageing, it's bottled unfiltered.

REMELLURI Estate



This is a ground-breaker – a quantum shift in Remelluri. Lovely framing tannin is filled with purple mountain herbs and carries hints of pepper, toasted lavender, sage, thyme. Fluidity inheres in and around a camshaft of tannin which quite literally gears the wine. Compelling!

Bright briary-herbal fruits and cedary balsam are impregnably knit, sandwiched on the nose with mountain air above and chocolate-earth below. In the mouth, it shows wonderful poise – fresh mountain-blue-florals lead to a fruit-spice-oak build by mid-palate, fading to a long, gentle, slightly earthen release. Never big and always graceful, with years of positive development ahead.

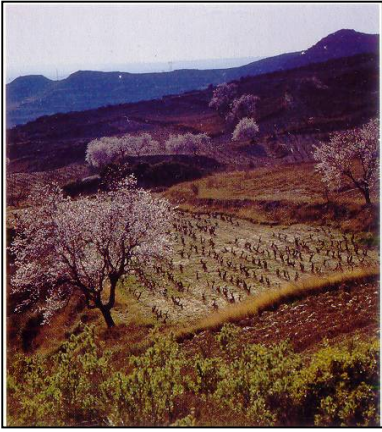
Remelluri la Granja (aka gran reserva)



Tempranillo 85% or so with Garnacha, Graciano and traces of Moscatel, Viura and 'Malvasia'. Spontaneous wild yeast fermentation in large oak vats precedes 27 months in oak, with 7 years of total bodega maturation before release into the market. As with the Reserva, nowadays the Remelluri reds are made in a mix of materials – larger foudre as well as barrique, but also cement and even demijohns.

REMELLURI 'la Granja'

An incredible, wafting nose: a potpourri of wild mountain herbs, spiced florals and a gnurl of wizened tobacco dissolve into a delightful purple liquor. The mouth is a glacier of wonderful tannin, a tongue along my tongue, the wine mortised within, easily fit. The tannin radiates its wine, a slow and discreet movement, a reveal. At the end, the taste of a land.



I DRANK A POEM IN RIOJA

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potpourri of wild mountain herbs,
spiced florals,
a gnurl of wizened tobacco dissolved in purple liquor.
The mouth a glacier of tannin,
wonderful, flavourful - a tongue along my tongue,
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At the end, the taste of a land.
(Remelluri 'la Granja')



above, Scott with Amaia Rodriguez
below, collection of old 'Alavesa Medoc' bottles from the 1870s

LINDES de REMELLURI: 'Viñedos de Labastida' (Atlantic), 'Viñedos de San Vicente' (Mediterranean)

When Telmo took over Remelluri in 2009 he found that his father had increasingly been buying wines from the villages either side of Remelluri Estate (Labastida on the western 'linde' or limit of Remelluri, on the track to Haro, and San Vicente on the eastern boundary towards Logroño). Telmo immediately culled the grower fruit. However, instead of simply cancelling their contracts, leaving the villagers without income, he decided to make a grower's wine from each village. Not only did he honour the contracts in 2009, but being such a committed historian and cultural conservator, Telmo decided the little village project was a worthwhile interpretation and expression of Rioja, and he has continued to make the Lindes de Remelluri grower-village wines since. 9 Labastida families and another 8 in San Vicente are all the better for it! Not to mention we, who get these extremely high quality viticultural proceeds (a mix of Tempranillo with Garnacha, Graciano and Viura) at great prices. Both wines are made similarly and simply, with fermentation in 5,000 litre old French oak vats, then 12 months' maturation in old French barriques.

Labastida and San Vicente offer quite different terroir expressions, with no winemaking to influence the differences. It's a very cool project. The two villages are just 5km apart on a small country road, the A-124 from Haro to Logroño which winds just under the mountains above the north shore of the Ebro. Labastida is nestled beneath the Sierra Cantabria, with cold soils in tight valleys marked by the Atlantic. The Labastida wine is concentrated, sweet and slick with nice lines - a cool-soils wine of inky-blue fruits, glossily sweet-seeded and creamy. The village of San Vicente de Sonsierra has a warmer aspect and richer ferrous red soils, with its vineyards out in the valley and open to the Mediterranean. Lindes de San Vicente is a notably more open and earthy wine, with foursquare tannins, nicely blocky compared to the slink of Labastida.



LINDES de REMELLURI 'Viñedos de Labastida' Tempranillo, DOCa Rioja

The steep, enclosed valley at Labastida nestled under the Cantabrias yields a vibrant, elegant, fluid wine. Labastida is satin-spiced, sweet-pipped, acid-crunchy and lacey-tannined. Floral, with juicy cherry, earth and field herbs, it's a fine wine of concentrated elegance.



LINDES de REMELLURI 'Viñedos de San Vicente' Tempranillo, DOCa Rioja

You can feel how open the valley is below San Vicente, with warmer and redder soils and the influence of the Mediterranean. The sense of sky and space is lower and quieter in register. Open and spicy, dry and earthy, four-square in tannin profile. Cherry fruit has a stony reserve, with herbal aromatics of wispy wild fennel and tobacco in an earthen, granular palate.