

Godelia

DO Bierzo

Godelia is a young project, at least in its present form. Its wines come from a combination of very old schist-soiled mountain vines and maturing vines from the clay hill-slopes in the centre of the valley. About 30 of the 50 hectares which go into production of Godelia were planted in 1989 by a former owner, who traded under a different brand name. Godelia as such came into being when Vicente Garcia Vasquez, the optometrist of Cacabelos, purchased these holdings in 2009.

Initially, the then 20+ year old vines and some 90 year old bush vines in the mountains were entrusted to a Catalan winemaker brought in from outside specifically to avoid local complacency and to revise inherited bad viticultural habits (endemic in the region at the time). The brief was freshness and elegance. This mantle has since been taken up by a young local female winemaker, Olga Verde Viéitez. The name, Godelia, is Vicente's invention – intended to allude to a fresh and feminine Bierzo, it is a made up contraction of Godello and Lias (lees).



Location and vineyards

Cacabelos is a town smack bang in the middle of the valley floor, midway along the old highway from Ponferrada in the south to Vilafranca del Bierzo in the north. Godelia are just outside of Cacabelos in a 'place' called Pieros. The Castillo Plateau to which these villages belong is a microclimate well-suited to viticulture. The plateau is encircled by mountains providing protection from the cool wet Atlantic weather systems that blow in from the north and west. This sheltered environment provides vineyards with a growing environment free from the pressure of fungal diseases. The soils of the region range from alluvial sands and iron-rich red clay along the valley floors, to exposed hilltops of quartz and slate in the high altitude old vineyards of the surrounding mountains.

On the Castillo Plateau, Pieros is also directly under the Castro Ventosa – literally, 'windy hill'. Rising out of the fertile valley floor, the Castro was once a vital defensive mechanism – from its domed top, at a quick trot, one can quickly look around the entire valley floor in all directions and take warning of invaders. With clay over deep sand at 350-450 metres altitude, the slopes of the Castro are home to much of the best fruit of Bierzo (Pittacum have most of their holdings here). Here are 5 hectares of Godelia material. 5km the other side of Cacabelos, in Legúas on similar rises are 25 hectares of calcareous, granitic, stony clay. The clay of Castro and Legúas also features 'canto rodado' – large pebbles. A further 20 hectares are scattered on the quartz and pizzara (schist-slate) of the mountain slopes at 700-900 metres altitude. These are typically very small plots around 400-800 square metres, largely very old vines which Josep Serra values for their freshening acidity.

History and wine styles

Like much of Galicia, the wine tale of el Bierzo is one of great loss in recent times. This began with the onset of phylloxera in the late 19th century, which eradicated 2000 years of continuous vine culture, accretion of knowledge and the development of autochthonous genetic cultivars. This loss continued during the 20th century due to the twin barbarisms of the post-civil-war dictatorship and twentieth century chemical-industrial agriculture. Agriculture was shifted down into the fertile river valley and only a remnant of hill-slope and mountain holdings were left planted to vine. Planting virtually ceased between 1950 and 1985 as the region's population hollowed out with people moving into mining, industry and the cities. By 1985, high-yield Palomino dominated the valley floor and quality local varieties, principally Mencia and Godello, were ignored almost entirely.

Godelia are keenly aware that good viticulture and lovely resultant wines requires a significant investment in de-coupling from the 20th century and going back before phylloxera ... a deliberate exercise in cultural re-discovery and preservation. Currently, this takes the form of getting the nursery out of the vineyards. Godelia's 20-odd year-old plantings at Castro and Legúas were planted to 'clones' – generic material from the nurseries, and favouring high crop over quality. Josep is grafting these over with quality genetic material selected and transplanted from their best old vines. High up on the slate vineyard of Sobrado and the quartz at 900m of San Pedro de Olleros are authentic local cultivars which give low yields of sweet-tannined fruit from small grapes in open-habit bunches. Thus, the great projects of Galicia (Guimaro in Ribeira Sacra, Luis Anxo in Ribeiro, Telmo and Pablo in Valdeorras and Ladairo in Monterrei) all feature a small amount of old mountain vines in a mix with re-plantings around 25 years or so, which represent the treasury of retained local genetics approaching maturity in this recent period of re-discovery, remembering and re-planting.

About 10% of plantings are white varieties, Godello and Doña Blanca. Historically, these were blended with the reds to make *Clarete* – fruity, light reds with around a quarter white grapes. These were the typical local wines for a long while – not just in Bierzo, but also Ribera del Duero and Rioja.

Godelia 'Viernes' Mencia *Tinto Joven*



Viernes epitomises Bierzo's Mencia, but with atypically great natural acidity to partner the fine, plush tannin. Expect red fruit, blue florals, fine and fleshy tannins with dark cooking spices (clove, nutmeg, pepper-corn) down below the floral lift. There's the gamey hint you expect in Bierzo and the agrodulce (sweet and sour) vibration you hope for in top Mencia, giving excellent mid-palate life before mellowing out to the brilliant finish. Sour cherry, purple fruits, briar, touches of gamey-earthen funk, and that ringing allspice-acid surprise to end.