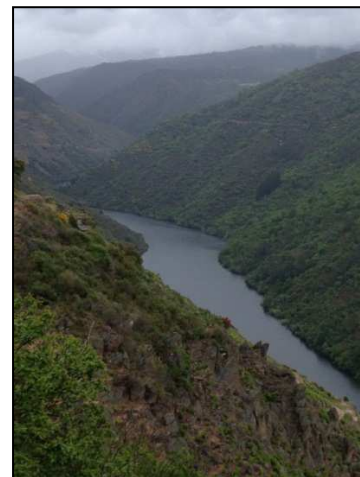


D.O. RIBEIRA SACRA

Heroic viticulture, heedless winemaking).

North-west of Ourense in central Galicia, Ribeira Sacra centres around the ancient mountain fortress town of Monforte de Lemos. Defined by two significant rivers, the Miño and the Sil, Ribeira Sacra pretty much marks the beginning of red wine country in Spain. Here the granite soils of coastal Galicia starts to merge with the continental schist found more in Valdeorras and Bierzo. While there is some red west and south in Ribeiro, Monterrei and Rias Baixas, Ribeira Sacra is where continental climatic factors allow red to take over from white.



Breath-takenly beautiful, featuring crazy-steep deep slopes with grades up to 85 degrees. Endless steps traverse the steep terraces from ridge-top to valley floor – a differential of hundreds of metres. It is no joke to call viticulture here ‘heroic’.

Sadly, Ribeira Sacra is currently a little too pleased with being able to bang on about ‘heroic viticulture’ and too little critical attention is going into whether they make delicious wine or not. On the back of some puff from Parker, Ribeira Sacra is pretty hot right now in the US - for no good reason. There’s a host of bad, bad wood in this hood. Short dunk ‘robles’ wines abound. Shitty compound glue corks are in everything. If your Joven ain’t wooded to all sorts of clunkiness, your Barrica is surely clobbered. And don’t even think about ordering it if it’s hubristically dressed up as ‘Vino del Autor’! Right now, there is very little Ribeira Sacra wine worthy of recommendation.

But, then, there is Pedro Guimaro ...

That’s not even his real name. Pedro Perez, owner-maker at Guimaro in Amandi is responsible for deft, heart-breakingly beautiful wines that justify this D.O. all by themselves. Usually, people just call him Pedro Guimaro.

Geography, D.O rules and all that ...

D.O. Ribeira Sacra was commenced in 1996, after the rupture of phylloxera, followed by the long bad years of bulk wine production ... and is now just coming back to itself and attempting to discover its quality potential. In that, these are very early days, it must be said, but the new D.O. now covers 1200 hectares with 3,000 growers and nearly a hundred bodegas in production. The Ribeira Sacra ‘Region’ is listed at 2500 hectares, but only half of this is actually controlled by the CRDO. Production is 85% Mencia and Tinto overall accounts for about 95% of the crop.



Soils are acidic granite and slate with traces of iron, mica and quartz. There’s a little clay in some vineyards down near river level. Almost all vineyards are steep terraces, and impossible to mechanise, save for winches to haul baskets of grapes up the forbiddingly steep slopes. See the photo of Pedro with the Cesto (35kg grape basket) on his shoulder (next page) ... until recently, this is how they would get the grapes up from the river to the bodega – in Guimaro’s case, a 10km hike ... workers would make one trip in the morning and another in the afternoon.

The climate varies from quite Atlantic in the west (Chantadi) to relatively Continental in the east (Ribeiras do Sil). Depending on the sub-region, rainfall is from as little as 600mm near the Rio Sil, up to 850mm by the Miño. Autumn is cool, after a long and relatively warm Galician summer.

There are 5 subregions (hand-drawn by Pedro Guimaro at right):

- Amandi, south of Monforte de Lemos, above Rio Sil, granitic and schist soils on steep south-facing terraces (home to Guimaro)
- Quiroga-Bebei, with north-facing slopes across the Sil from Amandi is the D.O.'s southern boundary
- Ribeiras do Sil in the east abuts Valdeorras, and have more granite in the mix with schist soils
- Chantada, is the western boundary of the D.O. on the left bank of the Miño as it runs south towards Ribeiro and ultimately becomes the Spanish-Portuguese border
- Ribeiras de Miño, is on the right bank opposite Chantada, north-west of Monforte de Lemos



There are two levels of appellation in Ribeira Sacra.

- Wines labelled Ribeira Sacra Summum are required to be a minimum of 85% preferred varieties and 60% minimum Mencia. To be labelled varietally, eg as a Mencia, it must be at least 85% Mencia.
- The lesser category of Ribeira Sacra need only be 70% preferred varieties.

Yields are limited to 9.5 tonnes/hectare for red and 12 t/ha for whites.

Preferred varieties are:

Red: Mencia, Brancellao, Merenzao, Sousón, Caiño Tinto and Tempranillo.

Whites: Godello, Albariño, Treixadura, Torrontés, Dona Branca and Loureira.

There are also 'authorised' (but not preferred) red varieties: Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouchet) and Mouratón.

There is only one qualitative appellation: 'Barrica' indicates ageing in 500 litre oak or smaller for at least 6 months in case of reds and 3 months for whites. It's an entirely meaningless appellative.

Meet Pedro Guimaro

His name is Pedro Perez, but everyone calls him Pedro Guimaro, and he's the best producer in Ribeira Sacra, a radically steep river valley appellation in central Galicia.

Steep? As Pedro says, "this isn't a Valley: it's a Canyon!"

His wines are alive, wild and free, pure expressions of the countryside in which they are grown.

Adegas Guimaro

The Perez family own 9 and control another 16 hectares leased from nearly 30 old subsistence growers, across a range of slate soils nuanced with sand and granite. Around 50 parcels in total are farmed from the steepest south-facing (50-70 degree) slopes above Rio Sil in between the towns of Amandi and Doade in the Amandi sub-zone. The soils are hard-packed dark slate with quartz, iron and mica. The bodega itself is in the hamlet of Brosmos. Pedro's holdings are planted at around 4500 vines/hectare and yield about half a litre of wine per vine. The plots are tiny, planted between 300 metres to 550 metres altitude. New plots planted into the dense stone (there's no soil until they create it) average about 4-5 vines per day per worker.



Pedro has run the family business since 2000 (he retired from legal practice to take over the family business). His ascension saw a reduction in yield, the banishment of chemicals and an increased focus on distinguishing handling (and in particular, picking times) of the various key plots, thus enhancing the acidity and structure of the wines.

Guimaro's handling is deliberately and meaningfully 'old-fashioned': organic viticulture, wild yeast fermentations, foot treading, inclusion of stems, low sulphur regime, ageing in old wood. While the varieties listed on bottle say Mencia and Godello, most plantings are field blends, with some Albariño and Treixadura in the whites, and other local reds such as Caiño tinto, Merenzao, Souson and Mouratón in the mix.

The slate soils are interpreted via an estate blend Joven style and 4 site-specific Cru wines.

The four single vineyards (including Ladredo which Pedro co-makes with Dirk Niepoort) range from west to east in this order:

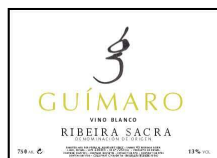
- Ladredo (east facing or naciemento - to the rising sun and also the ripping easterly winds that tear down the river from the continental hinterland)
- Capelinos (95 years old vineyard faces south-west towards Pombeiras across a small valley)
- Pombeiras (70 year old granite and quartz over pizzara, south-east facing)
- Finca Meixeman (has a both a slate part facing naciemento and a granite-iron poniente face)

Guimaro is Gallego for 'non-conformist'. Well, quel surprise, eh? Originally, this tag came from their refusal to pay tithes to the count.

NB: Adegas is the Galego (the Galician dialect) equivalent to Bodega.

Ribeira Sacra, or sacred banks, is likewise the Galego name for the river valley system.

Guimaro Godellos – Joven and Barrica



Godello here is finer and more minerally than wines from warmer climes up the river in Valdeorras and el Bierzo – crisp, clean lines are informed by local minerality with typical fresh orchard fruits.

Pedro gets Godello from 20 parcels of old vines, at different altitudes and orientations, mostly inter-planted with the Mencia. Some Godello remains in the Mencia field blends, while about 4 tonnes of white are picked separately as Godello (in fact about 70% Godello with a lot of Treixadura and a little each of Doña Blanca, Albariño, Loureiro and Torrontés). This yields 3000 litres of Godello, making 3000 bottles of Joven Blanco and 1500 bottles of Barrica. 4x225 litre barrels for Barrica are filled first and whatever is left becomes the stainless steel Joven. The Joven is given a cold maceration with skins for a day, then has spontaneous fermentation in stainless steel for 15 days, and is aged on lees in stainless unstirred and without malo for 4 months. Cold stabilised, very lightly filtered and bottled with 15 parts free SO₂. The portion fermented in Barrica rests unstirred on lees in 6 year old barricas, no malo, no racking, no battonage, and bottled unfiltered after 6 months.

Guimaro Joven Godello 2015

Smells of orange essence, hay, green grassy herbs and has a touch of lovely bitterness edging lemon drop. Apple-pear fruit is open, low, waxy and spicy, with long ripe acidity. There's plenty of richness and power below the mineral-edged slate-smoke line. A wine of good volume and great style, easy and elegant.

Guimaro Godello Barrica 2015

A nose of barley water flavoured with orange rind and persimmon skin bitters, there's lovely richness and weight in a golden orchard fruits register. The palate is super graceful, with fruit richness fading to traces and picking up phenolic bitters as a coda lingering over quartz-clay minerality.

A Guimaro Mencia has:

red fruit tea, a shower of roses and a snip of caney tannins

Strikingly pure wild cherry, the smell of rock, beets, little blue flowers

a hint of blood

Liquorous cherry, meat and minerals

Rock rose, carpasso, cherry wood and pomelo

Tobacco, bosky balsamics, and lovely cold dark rocks

aromatic raspberry and rose petal

pomegranate fruit with slatey mineral-fresh palate length

lightly smoked blackberry canes and gently pressed wild cherry juice in mountain air

recent vintages:

2015, hot

2014, a good year but rain at harvest made it difficult to finish

2013, very cold

2012, normal and very good

Guimaro Mencia Joven

A blend of granite, slate and sand soils from many parcels (some yielding as little as 200kg), which are fermented separately by soil type then blended. It's a summary of Guimaro's soils, and with an average vine age of about 40 years. The Tinto Joven is made half in foudre and half in tank; de-stemmed, with a small proportion (20% usually) as whole-cluster, fermented after 6 day cold maceration. 20-30 day spontaneous indigenous yeast fermentation, 6 months in tank on lees, un-filtered, cold stabilised, egg white fined. No oak ageing and little filtering giving freshness and purity.

Guimaro Mencia Joven 2015



Berry-bright (sour cherry, barberry) smoky-spiced red floral tea, freshened with blossom and carpasso. The palate is easy, light and savoury with great balance. The tannin is just ripe and light, almost a line or thread through the gentle fruit jelly glycerol up front, yielding to soil-fattened acidity.

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia

At 400-450 metres' altitude, Miexeman is a 1.2 hectare plot of 70+ year old organically grown vines from a 'two-faced' vineyard: the larger part is relatively coolly oriented slate facing south-east, or *naciamente* (to the rising sun); the other is iron-rich granitic soil in a *poniente* (setting sun) south-west facing. Both sections are streaked with quartz, iron and mica. The grapes are foot-trodden, 40% whole bunch, 16 days maceration on skins and stems after wild yeast fermentation in open foudre. Very gently pressed, then aged 6 months in foudre and another 12 months in old French barricas. Meixeman was first bottled as a single vineyard in 2006. "Pedro, what does the name Meixeman mean?" "No idea, Scott."

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2013



Deep, dark violet florals, with pollen above and blood below and scrubby tree branch balsamics everywhere in the mix. Savoury, carnal, yet gentle, Meixeman's gamey-pastille fruit opens to wild spice and blossom prettiness out back, everywhere riddled with brushy botanicals.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia

Pombeiras is the coolest climate single site - 70 year old vines planted on granite and quartz over pizzara, south-east or 'nacimiento', facing to the rising sun. Fermented in large 20yo 'Cuba' French oak with 10% stems, all whole bunches, for 60 days, then aged 10 months in 5 year old 500l French barrels. 2010 was the first vintage. Pombeiras means "Pigeon".

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2014



Black raspberry on a black metal minerals, the fruit is soft with floral lift and carries touches of lavender and thyme. The palate is delicately oily, expressing just a touch of pithy weight over a delicate schist soil ashiness. The mid-palate is round and the wine has gentle fleshy-spicy reach, with a touch of fresh apple crunch.

Guimaro 'Capelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia

Just 4 barriques are made from this south-west-facing 0.6 hectare plot, which is a field blend of Mencia with a little Caiño and Mouratón Negrada. Capelinos sits below Meixeman at 350-400 metres and is vinified similarly. 45% stems, long fermentation in open foudre, 12 months or so ageing in 225 & 500 litre old wood. First vintage was 2002. The name means "little church".

Capelinos is more strict and structured than the relatively ethereal Pombeiras.

A wine of bright, full cherry fruit, great spice, the voice of the soil and well structured.

Guimaro 'Capelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2014



Leads with root vegetables and a big hit of dried mixed herbs. The palate is mid-weight (which is plush for here), with fleshy vegetal tannins giving plenty of structure (compared to the satiny waft of Pombeiras). Closes out with fascinating spicy sourness winding out of the earthy tannins.

Guimaro-Niepoort 'Ladredo' Mencia

Technically, this is a Niepoort wine, as that's the company ID on the label. It's a Guimaro-owned vineyard, which Pedro makes in conjunction with Dirk Niepoort. It's marketed by the Niepoort machine as part of Dirk's swag of co-production 'projects'. Contains about 30% Garnacha Tintorera. 80% whole bunch fermented in small foudre for 60 days; malo and lees ageing in foudre, then 12 months in old French barrique. All the whole bunch makes for serious wine needing time to evolve. 4-6 barrels are made annually.

Guimaro-Niepoort 'Ladredo' Mencia 2014

Sweet and sour 'agrodulce' beet-rich fruit, tightly wound and spicy, very long working deep and complete into the back palate.

GUIMARO HISTORICAL TASTING NOTES

Guimaro Godello Barrica 2012

A rich and powerful wine, with golden fruit well balanced by earth and a rippling herb snap finish. Has a savoury nose of mealy lees and soft vanilla with peach skin and almond blossom. The palate is textural with savoury almond meal and viscous orchard fruit; fat lemons cut by grinding skin bitterness. There is an underlying cool minerality giving line and length and moderate acid. Old oak, musk, anise and fennel add to the sweet-savoury interplay.

Guimaro Mencia Joven 2012

Fresh and wild smelling with forest strawberry,. The palate has just enough glycerol to get the thing going, and is in a spare, foresty, scrubby register. Sere and beautiful with a light skin-grip frame, it's a pure country wine – light, earthy and clear. It's proud but not showy, and very real.

Guimaro Mencia Joven 2011

Fruit of the forest (barberry, wild strawberry and glaze cherry) meet violets over a graphitic earthiness. The palate has the heady wandering like the smell of a warm day under a peppertree (pepper more as perfume than spice). The bright juicy palate has nice spice through earthy, gamey fruit with a subtle savoury texture. Fresh, softening acidity giving a really elegant and gentle line from entry to a long, sappy all-spice and mineral finish.

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2014

Liquorous cherry and some game, with wild heather and medicinal herbs. The palate lingers beautifully after releasing from a mid-palate granitic grip.

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2012

Spicy red fruits, pretty strawberry flowers wild raspberries and lots of cold rock. Lighter and fresher than Capelinos and Pombeiras, with pomegranate juice nicely gripped in a delicate tannin frame.

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2011

Bluebells, country air, electric dirt, wild cherry and wildflower hedges – marjoram, lavender and more... Terrific composure and subtle complexity rule nose and palate. Silky fruit is run through with serious crunch – there's a nervous rip of textural acidity from end to end, gaining layered ultra-fine tannin and perfectly tucked in delicate oak. A small masterpiece? No doubt ...!

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2010

Spicy black lozenge fruit with a lift of shiso, field herb and autumn vine leaves. Palate mingles licorice, leathery black cherry and sweet raspberry with slatey-mineral rock, the meaty and the vegetal in a long, fine structure. Holding its cards close to the chest at this stage.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2015

Only 3x500 litre puncheons made.

Satin perfumed, with good richness, great structure and spice.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2013

Rock, rock and rock – the mineral aspect finds its greatest expression in Pombeiras. Sweet, vegetal spicy tannin in a mineral palate. Structured but with good perfume release and nice easy run on the palate. Delicate glycerol, fine with very good integration of spicy oak and delicate lingering sweet fruit finish. Integration? Check that graphite character in the mouth – bet you can't decide if it comes from rock or oak ...!

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2013

Pickled rhubarb and konbu, scrubby herbs moss and forest floor, and those 'exotic spice aromatics' (Asiatic/Moorish), pomegranate ... solid and for-square, deep and wide, fantastic fan back half draws back in thanks to wonderfully twinned tannin-acid train of mid-impact, perfectly judged, deftly effective without shutting anything out.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2012

Mineral fresh lift on nose, with ink, game, blood, rose petal and field florals. Palate has great volume, savoury with black pepper-spiced tannins.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2011

Smells like an old heavy red velvet curtain at your grandmother's with lots of exotic spice – cardamom, anise, peppercorn, pimiento. Liqueur fruit is beautifully textured with fabulous herbaceous tannins working slowly along the boysenberry and spice palate. Layered with tobacco and elderflower, it's vibrant, energetic, vivid, alive.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2011

The spirit of the wild bear in a forest ...

Wild strawberry and violets, subtle chocolate, deeply textured and embedded in lovely damp earth aromas. Perfectly integrated oak with tiny sweet plums, leather, heathery herbs and delightful spice.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2010

Whole bunchy aromatics of sap, pepper and incense rise from the glass. The palate has a purity of red cherry and cranberry fruit with violets and a silky powerful mid-palate core. There are aromas of mineral earth, truffle and forest floor. The wine keeps evolving every time you look into the glass. Amazingly ethereal and incredibly sexy.

Guimaro 'Capelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2013

Fine cherry fruit, bramble tea, strawberry flowers and old roses – delicate wine with crushed rock, a squeak of spice and a nice tannin fuzz touch. All delicate, all about balance and harmony with fruit, earth, tannin and acid all interwoven, an integral, quiet conversation.

Guimaro 'Capelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2013

Soy, dark rose, cold dark rock, a touch of moss and humussy soil warm depth below. Nicely edgy, but only at the edge, the mid-palate is delicately juicy-succulent, perfectly ripe and utterly pared back, great nutty tannin textured like a squozen rose thorn. With Capelinos, the tannin-acid helps the back third open out, whereas with Pombeiras it provides equally what that wine needs, not expansion but definition, restraint and closure ... here the wine squeaks out and back to affect great length and persistence of flavour despite a relatively meagre (albeit perfect) fruit frame earlier on in the journey.

Guimaro 'Capelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2012

It's very well composed with cool blue fruits over cold rock, a lovely touch of bloodiness and nice ferrous earthy undertone.

Guimaro 'Capelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2011

Blueberry skinsy fruit, with floral lift, barnyard and pimiento over cold dark rock and the lovely smell of soft ripe fruit tannin from old vines, gently extracted. Wonderfully composed, it's bloody and dense with glorious dark fruit and inherent 'cut' from full, long vegetal tannins yielding to a mouthfeel of stones, stones and more stones as the palate wanders off, long and fine.

Guimaro 'Capelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2010

Fleshy, purple-gamey nose with decadent rose florals cut with vegetal blackberry canes, glyceric cherry sliced through with minerality. There's a beautiful velvet smell of mature tannin, like an old tapestry curtain. Long, caponata-fleshy slick, slinky and supple tannin palate is soft and leads to a very graceful exit, textural tannin flow given balsamic grip and finishing with gentle spice-acid crunch. The vegetality of 2010 compares nicely with the ripeness of 2011. It's a smoky, coolly mineral reflection of place. Intense, stylish, harmonious with satiny exotic perfume everywhere.

Guimaro-Niepoort 'Ladredo' Mencia 2011

Floral with lots of 'cowpat' gaminess, wild rose, rosehips and bitter herb nose. Palate has a lovely fresh cast, ashy tannins clearly reflect the slate, florals, nice sense of chew with outstanding mouthfeel and balance.

Guimaro-Niepoort 'Ladredo' Mencia 2010

Beaune-like Burgundian – boozed, brambly fruit of the forest with a deep, cool graphitic sense (slate or oak, or both in harmony). Fantastically integrated, harmonious winemaking. Lots of spice with the slug of graphitic slate in a long, cool gliding finish.

Guimaro-Niepoort 'Ladredo' Mencia 2009

Serious, with chewy oak and tannin heart still to soften into cherry liquor fruit. Dense, earthy wine which loves the chance to breathe and round out. Opens to floral rosehip, medicinal cherry juice, black rock aromatics and chewy oak and tannin working together nicely.