March 2023: Spain's Mediterranean Coast

Let's play wine trade word association. We say 'Spain' – You say...yep, you guessed it: 'Rioja'.

This behemoth of a winemaking region is world-renowned (and not without good reason), but there is so much more to Spanish wine than Rioja. From Priorat to Penedès, from Valencia to Malaga, these lesser-known regions fight for our attention and the prime slots in our wine racks. They produce an array of amazing quality wines that we all should know more about, all the while they are pitched against this industry heavy-weight, and we love an underdog, so let's give them a helping hand.

This month, we're taking you on an adventure, an exploration, along Spain's Mediterranean (and southern) coast – one of the few places in the world that has the perfect Mediterranean Climate.

Starting at the northern end of the coast, let's begin with Catalunya. This region, home to Barcelona, is fiercely proud of its identity and independent spirit, which is unsurprisingly reflected in its wines. While much of Spain is famed for its reds, in Catalunya the white wines tend to take centre-stage. The big three grape varieties are Parellada, Macabeo and Xarel-Lo, each making great still wines in their own right, but which combine to produce the country's knock-out traditional method sparkling wine, Cava. That is not to say that the reds are not important; the region's most notable reds are award-winners and hail from Priorat and Penedès. The region's climate is heavily influenced by it's proximity to the Mediterranean Sea – the temperatures, while still warm, aren't quite as high as those experienced within Spain's interior. The region also experiences higher than average rainfall compared with the rest of the country. These conditions favour the production of crisp and fresh white wines (both still and sparkling), and full-flavoured reds, which are ripe but not jammy or baked in character.

Next stop — Valencia. This is about as Mediterranean as it gets — plenty of sunshine, hot summers, cool winters and gentle coastal breezes. The region's vineyards are also located at high altitudes (some at almost 1000 metres above sea level!), which increases exposure to sunlight and leads to highly concentrated fruit sugars in the grapes. This can sometimes mean that the wines are a touch on the higher side in terms of alcohol content. But don't let that put you off - it also means these wines are powerful and full of flavour. Known for not only its wines, but also its Paella, Valencia has in recent times undergone something of a quality revival. Up until recently, most of its wines were nothing much to write home about, but now more and more wineries are making a name for themselves by using lesser-known indigenous grape varieties to inspire and intrigue everyone's palates. Rare grapes such as Merseguera are having a resurgence, and we are excited to have one such example in this month's selection.

And last, but certainly not least – Andalucía. This is Spain's southernmost wine-making region and is the most arid. Temperatures are high throughout the year which contributes to the naturally high sugars and concentrated flavours of the grapes; perfect for producing delicious wines! Luckily, the region's proximity to the coast has a cooling influence which allows for the grapes to ripen relatively gently rather than being burned to a crisp on the vines. This rugged region is perhaps better known as the home of Sherry, but there is more to it than meets the eye. Andalucía is the oldest wine producing region in Spain with a rich history dating back to the ancient Romans and beyond, and while fortified wines will always hog the limelight, the region also produces beautiful examples of aromatic white wines using Moscatel (Muscat de Alexandria) – one such example is waiting for you to discover in your case.

So, without further ado, we encourage you to put down your glass of Rioja, and instead invite you to take the road less travelled – and to enjoy a glass or two along the way.

As always, we look forward to hearing what you think about the wines and whether you have discovered a new favourite amongst them. Raise a glass and share your tasting notes with us on Instagram @thevineking, and be sure to tag us in your posts.

2020 Mountain Blanco, Telmo Rodríguez, Malaga - £28.99, 13.5%

First off, you may recognise the name of this producer from last month's case – Telmo Rodríguez also produces wine on the volcanic soils located in Cebreros just outside of Madrid. This month, however, we are showcasing another of his wines which he makes in Malaga.

Telmo and his life-long friend and business partner, Pablo Eguzkiza have been working together for over 30 years. They first met while studying Oenology at the University of Bordeaux. After graduating, Telmo worked for several years at Cos d'Estournel, and not to be outdone, Pablo worked at Petrus. When they both returned to Spain in the 1980s, they started their joint venture, dedicating themselves to producing quality wines in their homeland, and in doing so have led the way in changing the perception of Spanish wines in the post-Franco era.

The Moscatel grapes for this wine are, unsurprisingly given the name 'Mountain Blanco', sourced from high up in the mountains of Malaga. A grape variety usually associated with sweet wines, the impact of altitude is certainly felt in this surprisingly dry white. It's divinely fragrant with aromas of hay, nectarine and honey leaping from the glass with a touch of light spice. Refreshing and floral notes on the palate, with a zippy acidity which keeps any detectable sweetness at bay.

A brilliant match for seafood dishes, such as Arroz con Almejas (rice with clams), or freshly prepared Sushi.



2021 Mestizaje White, Bodega Mustiguillo, Valencia - £19.99, 13%

The Mustiguillo story starts in 1972, when the Sarrión-Martinez family bought the Terrerazo estate and initially established a country retreat. Soon after, the family developed it into an extensive farm and ranch. Winemaker, Tony Sarrión spent his childhood on the estate and in the surrounding countryside, but left to study abroad as a teenager going on to work in many different sectors, from construction to banking. After many years in the corporate world, Tony felt compelled to return to his roots in rural Spain. He began studying Oenology and Viticulture in the mid-90s, visiting many of the world's most renowned wine making regions and took all he learnt back to the family wine estate. He introduced a series of unprecedented and revolutionary viticulture techniques, including soil type mapping, which saw him go against the grain of the staunchly traditional winemakers of the region – this certainly ruffled some feathers!



The estate's vineyards are some 800-900 metres above sea level, and were once the seabed of the Mediterranean. The landscape is covered in pine and oak trees, olive groves and fields of thyme, rosemary and fennel, giving the wines a distinctively Mediterranean character – if this was France, it is what we would describe as 'Garrigue'.

This wine is a unique blend of 3 grapes, the rare Merseguera, with the more well-known Viognier and Malvasia. The estate is certified organic and this wine in particular can be classified as natural – the grapes are hand-harvested to reduce any possible damage and protect the purity of the fruit flavours. Fermentation

takes place in stainless steel which preserves the freshness of the juice and allows the fruit character not to be overpowered by any influence of oak. Highly perfumed on the nose, with notes of peach, lime and white flowers. Full flavours of stone fruit and a touch of spice on the palate, this is a weighty white with bags of character.

Pair with charcuterie boards of smoked meats and cheeses, salads or a Valencian classic: Paella.

2019 Castellroig Reserva Brut Nature, Sabaté í Coca Corpinnati, Penèdes - £21.99, 12.5%

With a history of growing grapes that stretches back to 1855, the Sabaté í Coca family estate is now in the hands of the 4th generation of winegrowers, Marcel and Josep Sabaté. Their vineyards are located in the Bitlles Valley in the Penedès region of Catalunya and it's here that they have focussed on producing high quality organic sparkling wines using the traditional Cava varieties of Xarel-Lo, Macabeo and Parellada.

Marcel (pictured) and Josep are part of a small group of producers from the traditional heartlands of Cava country, Penedès, who left the Cava DO a few years ago as they felt that the DO didn't reward or adequately represent the quality wines they were producing with the native grape varieties. So, they formed Corpinnat – a new certification brand under which they market superior quality sparkling wines from the Catalan region.

The Castellroig Reserva comes from around 40 plots of Xarel-Lo, Macabeo and Parellada grapes that are grown following and adhering to organic principles, vinified separately before blending and then undergoing the processes of the traditional sparkling wine method – the



same as used in Champagne. This Cava has lovely floral aromas of jasmine and white flowers, green apple and citrus, along with slightly richer notes of fresh brioche, with a citrussy palate of lemon, and orchard fruit. Cracking value for the money, enjoy in place of Crémant or Prosecco and serve with canapés, white fish dishes, or even the classic match for a Traditional Method sparkling wine - Fish and Chips.

2021 Natural SIN Tempranillo, Els Vinyerons, Penedès - £21.99, 12.5%

Alex and Amós, the winemakers at Els Vinyerons, founded the winery near to Barcelona with a common dream – to create wines that express the character of the grapes and the richness of their local terroir. Their founding philosophy is to let nature express itself in the wines with as little human intervention in the process as possible and they are therefore committed to producing authentic natural wines. There isn't a consensus about the definition of a natural wine, but what most agree on are two main ideas: no added sulphites and minimal human intervention in the winery. At Els Vinyerons, the winemaking team play more of a supervisory role in the creation of their wines, allowing fermentation to be spontaneously kickstarted by yeasts found in the air around them. They allow the wines to determine their own characters and age most of their wines in stainless steel, neutral barrels or concrete eggs.

The Tempranillo grapes for this wine are hand-harvested from vineyards near Sant Marti Sarroca (just north west of Vilafranca del Penedès), with great care, and fermented in open tanks. After spending just 2 days on the skins, the grapes are gently pressed to extract the juice and the fermentation finishes off skins. This

has resulted in a bright, fresh and juicy red, with soft tannins. The fermentation lasts 28 days and the wine is then allowed to rest for 6 months before being racked by gravity and bottled unfiltered without the addition of sulphites.

This natural red is plush and lively, with lashings of red berry and cherry fruit on the nose and a silky palate of ripe plums with a touch of spice. Perfectly at home with platters of mixed tapas, grilled meats, or how about making your own chilli beef burritos? Follow the link to BBC Good Food for a recipe!

2021 Camins del Priorat, Álvaro Palacios, Priorat - £32.99, 14.5%

Priorat is one Spain's stand-out wine regions, and has experienced an extraordinary leap in quality and reputation over the last decade or so. This small wine appellation has 1,700 hectares of vines and over 60 bodegas, and lies to the west of Tarragona in Catalunya.

Álvaro Palacios, whose family owns the prestigious Palacios Remondo (the Rioja Bodega), is one of a group of winemakers credited with putting Priorat back on the viticultural map. After studying in Bordeaux and spending two years at Chateau Petrus, Álvaro decided not to return to his family winery and instead decided to set up on his own in the rugged, and at the time forgotten, region of Priorat. This was 1989, and from the very beginning, he set out to produce world-class wines, using fruit from extremely low-yielding old vines and applying ultra-modern winemaking techniques (quite the opposite of the team at Els Vinyerons). Nowadays, Álvaro makes some of the most highly regarded and sought-after wines in the region and his work on redefining the Priorat classification has been most important in helping to elevate the individual villages and vineyards of the region.

Álvaro's wines are elegant with layers of minerality, which faithfully expressed the region's rugged terroir and unique Licorella (red slate and Mica quartz) soils. Camins del Priorat is an intriguing blend of Garnacha (40%), Cabernet Sauvignon (21%), Merlot (18%), Cariñena (15%) and Syrah (6%). A gorgeous black plum colour in the glass, with aromas of liquorice, currants and blackberries. Supple and velvety, ripe blueberry, fig and cassis on the palate with notes of dark-roasted coffee beans and spicy dark chocolate. A long liquorice and peppery finish, this would pair wonderfully with roast Beef or Venison.

2021 Cupatge, Herència Altés, Terra Alta - £16.99, 14%

Herència Altés is a family-owned winery in Terra Alta (South-West of Priorat), dedicated to the careful cultivation of vineyards and production of fresh and elegant wines. The family is committed to producing award-winning wines while doing as much as they can to protect the natural environment around them. Since January 2022, they are members of the IWCA (International Wineries for Climate Action association) which is a non-profit organisation bringing together wineries committed to sustainability and promoting the formation of a global wine community whose goal is to create strategies to reduce the impact of the wine industry on the global environment. The family are committed to practicing organic agriculture and a way of working that is sustainable and respectful of the natural environment. They promote biodiversity within their vineyards which helps strengthen the soil and the health of the vines and local wildlife.

The grapes for their wines (and this one in particular) are hand-harvested, undergo gentle crushing to release the fresh juice but none of the bitter oils found in the seeds, and fermentation starts spontaneously with wild yeasts. The wines undergo aging in Austrian oak foudres for 6 months, and are then blended prior to bottling.



This wine is a blend of Garnacha (53%) and Syrah (47%), vinified separately before being blended after spending 6 months in oak. It is brimming with ripe dark fruits such as blackberries and plums, balanced and well-concentrated on a juicy palate – this is an incredibly more-ish wine, you'll wish we had more than one bottle in the case! Serve with Mediterranean vegetable dishes such as grilled aubergine, or with a traditional dish from Terra Alta itself – *Clotxa* is a small round loaf of bread, split open and stuffed with fresh sardines, garlic, onion and roasted tomatoes. A perfect match which sounds delicious!

£142.94 Case Discount: £121.50 Wine Club Price: £110

