
Salud to Spain: The new conquistadors of wine

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A fleet of new Spanish wines and grapes is making its way to our shores.

THE ROCK STAR WINEMAKER: Telmo Rodriguez & Pablo Eguizkiza

With his dashing good looks and string of hit labels, Telmo Rodriguez is a true rock star of wine. So popular is this Spanish winemaker that before I'd even had a chance to say "hola" at my first attempt to interview him, he was whisked away by his Australian distributor to meet his local fans.

However, unlike in the products of pop, when it comes to Rodriguez's releases, it's certainly not a case of style over substance. And when I did eventually catch up with him, there was no celebrity swagger. Rather, a catchy passion for the wines of his country, which as one of a new guard of winemakers, he's helped elevate to new levels, making make Spain the source of some of the sexiest wines in the world today.

His is a tale of rebellion, passion and discovery. After studying winemaking in Bordeaux, he returned to his family winery in Spain's Rioja in the late 80s to find the country's most famous region at "its lowest moment", while international varieties such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot were being favoured across the country rather than Spain's wealth of local varieties.

"There was very little passion at that time in Spain," remembers Rodriguez. "Rioja was completely dominated by 'managers' rather than wine people who were more concerned with paying less taxes or less for grapes to improve their business results."

What did excite him was the potential he witnessed when driving round his homeland. "I saw there were so many beautiful vineyards that had been abandoned or remained completely unknown," he recalls.

In reaction to these trends he considered so negative, he broke away from the family business to start his own company with fellow winemaker Pablo Eguzkiza through which to champion Spain's own grapes and rejuvenate some of the country's great forgotten vineyards. It now owns vineyards across the country in regions such as Galicia and Malaga, the little known village of Cebreros and also sees Rodriguez back in Rioja, where his aim is to make artisanal wines displaying the region's true personality that he felt had been obscured by the industrialised approach of the big firms.

"You have to have the intuition to know where you are, what you want to do and to do something authentic," says Rodriguez. It's an approach that's resulted in a range of truly distinctive wines, from characterful everyday examples to some of the country's most captivating new classics.

"Everything we've done has been exciting: we're driven by it," enthuses Rodriguez. When quizzed on what's been the most exciting element of all in his winemaking journey to date, it's unlocking the potential in those old vineyards in which Spain is so rich.

"We are bringing to life tastes and references that were always there but had been forgotten," he says. "These special places had been detected 2000 years ago and then abandoned. But now we've got the sensibility and ability to recuperate them and bring back to life some of the most amazing vineyards of Spain and of the world."

By [Jo Burzynska](#)

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