

THE GRAPE CHOICE
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WINE OF THE MONTH SELECTIONS
October 2011

Spanish Rioja

Rioja is a wine, with *Denominación de Origen Calificada* (D.O.C. Qualified designation of origin) named after La Rioja, in Spain. Rioja is made from grapes grown not only in the Autonomous Community of La Rioja, but also in parts of Navarre and the Basque province of Álava. Rioja is further subdivided into three zones: Rioja Alta, Rioja Baja and Rioja Alavesa. Many wines have traditionally blended fruit from all three regions though there is a slow growth in single zone wines.

Located south of the Cantabrian Mountains along the Ebro River, La Rioja benefits from a continental climate. The mountains help to isolate the region which has a moderating effect on the climate. They also protect the vineyards from the fierce winds that are typical of northern Spain. The region is also home to the Oja river (Rio Oja), believed to have given the region its name. Most of the region is situated on a plateau, a little more than 1,500 feet (460 m) above sea level. The area is subdivided into three regions - Rioja Alavesa, Rioja Alta and Rioja Baja. La Rioja Alavesa and la Rioja Alta, located closer to the mountains, are at slightly higher elevations and have a cooler climate. La Rioja Baja to the southeast is drier and warmer. Annual rainfall in the region ranges from 12 inches (300 mm) in parts of Baja to more than 20 inches (510 mm) in La Rioja Alta and Alavesa. Many of Rioja's vineyards are found along the Ebro valley between the towns of Haro and Alfaro. Rioja wines are normally a blend of various grape varieties, and can be either red (*tinto*), white (*blanco*) or rosé (*rosado*). *La Rioja* has a total of 57,000 hectares cultivated, yielding 250 million litres of wine annually, of which 85% is red. The harvest time for most Rioja vineyards is September–October with the northern Rioja Alta having the latest harvest in late October.^[5] The soil here is clay based with a high concentration of chalk and iron. There is also significant concentration of limestone, sandstone and alluvial silt.

Among the *Tintos*, the best-known and most widely-used variety is Tempranillo. Other grapes used include Garnacha Tinta, Graciano, and Mazuelo. A typical blend will consist of approximately 60% Tempranillo and up to 20% Garnacha, with much smaller proportions of Mazuelo and Graciano. Each grape adds a unique component to the wine with Tempranillo contributing the main flavors and aging potential to the wine; Garnacha adding body and alcohol; Mazuelo adding seasoning flavors and Graciano adding additional aromas.

Rioja red wines are classified into four categories. The first, simply labeled "Rioja," is the youngest, spending less than a year in an oak aging barrel. A "crianza" is wine aged for at least two years, at least one of which was in oak. "Rioja Reserva" is aged for at least three years, of which at least one year is in oak. Finally, "Rioja Gran Reserva" wines have been aged at least two years in oak and three years in bottle. Reserva and Gran Reserva wines are not necessarily produced each year. Also produced are wines in a semi-*crianza* style, those that have had a couple of months oak influence but not enough to be called a full *crianza*. The designation of *crianza*, *Reserva* etc. might not always appear on the front label but may appear on a neck or back label in the form of a stamp designation known as *Consejo*.

2008
Zuazo Gaston
Crianza

Located in the little village of Oyón (Alava), Bodegas Zuazo Gaston is a family winery managed by Prudencio Zuazo Gaston, where artisan quality wines are produced using family-owned vineyards and state-of-the-art facilities.

Their vineyards encompass 50 hectares of calcereous clay soil where they cultivate Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuelo and Graciano grape varieties. The vines are an average age of 30 years, and are located about 450 meters above sea level, taking advantage of a good orientation and long, sunny days. Yields are controlled to about 4,000 kilograms/hectare.

Zuazo Gaston only produces red wines. Their total production is limited to 200,000 bottles per year, thus allowing an optimal quality level for each wine produced.

Produced following traditional methods, using destemmed grapes, temperature-controlled fermentation, and prolonged skin contact to achieve the desired extraction of polyphenols. 14 months ageing in 225 liter American oak barrels, followed by some ageing in bottle.

This wine has a bright appearance, with an intense garnet color with slight bricking on the rim. Vanilla and oak aromas are complemented by notes varietal licorice and fruit preserves. It is complex and elegant on the palate. Perfectly balanced. This is a wine with a full, yet soft body, with a long, intense finish.

90% Tempranillo, 5% Graciano, 5% Mazuelo (Carignan)

Our Price \$15.00

2009
Telmo Rodriguez
LZ

Telmo Rodriguez is one of Spain's pioneer winemakers, advocating native grape varieties tied to the climates and conditions of their sites, and making world-class wines from undiscovered as well as known regions. Perhaps most impressive, while Telmo Rodriguez makes rare and limited wines of astonishing character and quality, his everyday wines have been equally praised, and widely recognized for the tremendous value they offer.

Telmo studied viticulture and oenology at the University of Bordeaux and was the winemaker at his family winery in Rioja, Remelluri, and then set off on his own in the early 1990s to discover new vineyards and regions all around Spain. He now makes a range of wines in diverse viticultural areas of Spain, with an emphasis on the following:

- o Telmo's vineyards are biodynamically farmed
- o All vines are exclusively bush-trained, the traditional Spanish method
- o Sites with exceptional terroir
- o Varietals traditional to their regions
- o Replanting only with massal selections

Telmo was among the first to make significant wines in Toro, Rueda, Valdeorras, Malaga, Alicante and Cigales.

In these areas he uses native varieties, often grapes rediscovered such as Godello, Verdejo, Moscatel and Monastrell which do not have wide recognition. With other classically recognized varieties such as Tempranillo, Garnacha and Carignan, he works with vines that are indigenous and reflect the character of their particular site. As a result, Telmo has been one of the leaders of the quality revolution with these varieties in up and coming areas such as Toro, as well as in the traditional areas of Rioja and Ribera del Duero.

The Rioja vineyards for Telmo Rodriguez' wines are in the eastern part of the region, in Lanciego. It is here, on the clay and calcareous slopes, that some of the most interesting vineyards of Rioja coexist with hundred year old olive groves. Descendants of the same families that pruned these vines over two centuries still work in the bush vine vineyards, using the same methods of cultivation. Telmo's wines come from a combination of estate vineyards (and in the case of Altos de Lanzaga, exclusively estate vineyards), and those of growers in the area who cultivate under Telmo's supervision. With LZ, the quality of the Telmo Rodriguez Rioja vineyards shines through the wine's fresh fruit expression.

LZ is a pure expression of the special area of Lanciego. The vineyards in Lanciego have old Tempranillo, Graciano and Garnacha, and grapes are harvested earlier for LZ than for Lanzaga or Altos de Lanzaga. 2009 was the first vintage of LZ vinified at the newly built cellars in Lanciego. Vinification takes place in cement tank, with natural yeasts carrying out alcoholic fermentation. The winemaking is straightforward, and the pure fruit, mineral and spice characteristics of this authentic wine shine through brilliantly.

The 2009 LZ is a blend of Tempranillo, Garnacha, and Graciano from the Alavesa region of Rioja. It was fermented and aged for 4-6 months in cement and stainless steel. Asian spices, violets, blackberry, and mineral notes inform the expressive bouquet. It opens in the glass to reveal savory, smooth, ripe, layered fruit and a pleasure-bent personality. Drink this outstanding value over the next 6 years.

Our Price \$15.00

SALUTE!