

ARTICLE ARCHIVE

Spain: Great Vintages, Great Values

Spanish wines continue to be red-hot. As this review will detail, there are hundreds of terrific wines available for under \$20, many of those for less than \$12. Most of these wines come from the marvelous 2004 vintage, widely recognized as the best since 2001, encompassing virtually every significant wine-producing region, and 2005, while not quite at the same level, is by any standard, a very good vintage.

A number of superb 2001s are just reaching the marketplace because many producers, particularly in Rioja and Ribera del Duero, still adhere to the traditional aging regimens specified by the D.O. regulations. This means that Reserva bottlings are just being released. They offer the benefit of extra years in bottle resulting in nuanced aromas and complex flavors. With regard to other vintages, 2002 was a light and dilute year. Relatively few wines were presented, having already passed through the market or not deemed worthy of being shown. 2003 was, as most readers know, a record hot vintage. These wines are a mixed bag but even the best show firm, rustic tannins or a slightly baked character without the aromatic complexity or supple qualities of the 2001s and 2004s. However, by selecting carefully, there are some top-notch wines to be had.

Another positive trend is the ongoing reclamation of indigenous varietals. Prominent among them are Mencia, grown in Bierzo, Graciano in Rioja, Bobal in Vino de la Tierra de Castilla and Utiel Requena, Verdejo in Rueda, Albarino in Rias Baixas, Hondarribi Zuri in Txakoli, and **Godello in Valdeorras**. These can be fascinating and unique expressions at very nice prices.

If I were a budding wine collector with limited discretionary income, I would be laying in cases of 2001s and 2004s from Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Priorat, Toro, and Montsant. The top wines from these regions will reward extended cellaring and, with just a handful of exceptions, cost less than \$50-60 a bottle. Let your wealthy friends stock up on \$500 a bottle Bordeaux and cult California Cabernets and then shock them years later in blind tastings.

Of great significance is the number of new importers who are heading off the beaten track and discovering some wonderful wines that we would otherwise never see. Names worth checking out, all first-timers in the pages of *The Wine Advocate*, include (in no particular order): P.R. Grisley; Elite Wines; Steve Miles Selections, F.L. Navarro, Quality Wines of Spain, New York, NY; Mark Clinard, Well Oiled Wine Co.; Chris Campbell, C & P Wines; Carlos Montalvo, Fine Wine Imports; Axial Wines USA, and Winebow (an old dog can learn new tricks).

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2004 Val de Sil Pezas Da Portela



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RATING: 91 points

PRODUCER: Val de Sil 

FROM: Valdeorras, Spain

VARIETY: Godello
(a dry white table wine)

DRINK: 2007-2009

ESTIMATED COST: \$38

SOURCE: *eRobertParker.com*
(Feb 2007)

The 2004 Pezas da Portela, also 100% Godello, is produced from the oldest vines (90+ years of age) on the estate and is aged for 5 months in French oak. Light gold-colored, it delivers complex aromas of toast, smoke, mineral and melon. This is followed by a full-flavored wine with a supple texture, gobs of ripe fruit, and excellent balance. Drink it over the next 2 years with a variety of seafood courses.

Importer: Eric Solomon, European Cellars, Charlotte, NC;
tel. (704) 358-1565

—Jay Miller