

Decanter

RIOJA

GUIDE 2023

THE GREAT WINES, PEOPLE AND PLACES
OF SPAIN'S LEGENDARY REGION



THE SWEET SPOT: £20-£40 reds

The hunt was on for red Rioja that offers both quality and value, and the wines in this tasting did not disappoint, with plenty of diversity on offer, too

REPORT SARAH JANE EVANS MW

How low can red Rioja reserva and gran reserva go? A quick web search reveals that in price terms it's down to £5.75 and £10 respectively. Just how can Spain's first DOCa – created in 1991 – sell itself so cheaply?

In fact, Rioja sells itself both cheaply and at high prices. So we wanted to know where to find the best intersection of value and quality in red Rioja. Where can you reliably find wines with typicity and individuality? We decided to look at £20-£40 – and this price band offered rich pickings, resulting in seven Outstanding wines.

Producers were asked to send their own choice of available vintages. The result was a broad selection from crianza through reserva to venerable gran reservas, as well as 'generics'. In this latter case, producers take their own approach to ageing, stepping outside the prescribed months of bottle and barrel age required in the reserva system.

One of the first things to note is the diversity. We tasted reservas from 2006 to 2018, plus a fine, mature outlier from 1998. For the region once famed for its use of American oak in the form of barrels, there is now plenty of French oak in the cellars.

Some of the gran reservas looked remarkably young. Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW was quick to comment on the notably deep colours of the younger gran reservas in the tasting. The textbook image of a gran reserva is of a wine with a garnet core and a gently fading rim. Yet a number of distinctly youthful gran reservas

are appearing in shops after the minimum of ageing (five years between barrel and bottle).

That might explain why only one gran reserva wine scored 95pts: the Hermanos Peciña 2011. Gran reservas are typically made only in the good years, and 2011 is one of those.

In choosing the £20-£40 level, we had clearly located the 'sweet spot', as Pierre Mansour put it. If you're looking for drinking pleasure, there is plenty to enjoy here. We noticed a high proportion of 100% Tempranillo Riojas, as well as some single-variety Garnachas and Gracianos that showed particular promise. Mansour highlighted Rioja Oriental – while we didn't have many wines from the region, and no gran reservas, these wines definitely showed potential. His tip: 'Keep an eye on Rioja Oriental.'

Inevitably there were disappointments, with wines from producers we knew and liked that failed to perform well. This always happens in a blind tasting. So what to buy? As ever with Rioja, it's complicated. Follow the recommendations from our regular tastings, go to wine tastings, and get to know the producers you enjoy.

Rioja is one of the great wines of Spain. Yet growing grapes and making wines to sell at low prices is not sustainable – there is little left for those at the start of the supply chain. We found many of the fine wines in this tasting were underpriced compared to their Italian and French equivalents. Great news for us as consumers; but do spare a thought for the growers as you raise your glass.

THE JUDGES



Sarah Jane Evans MW is a *Decanter* contributing editor and Co-Chair of the *Decanter World Wine Awards*. Her latest book *The Wines of Central and Southern Spain* is set for release in early 2024



Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW is a widely published wine journalist, educator and judge. He holds a degree in agronomical engineering and a Masters in viticulture and oenology, is a national expert for Spain at the OIV organisation and a DWWA joint Regional Chair for Spain



Pierre Mansour is director of wine at *The Wine Society*, where he has worked for 23 years. Starting out with merchant *Berry Bros & Rudd*, he joined *The Wine Society* in 2000, moved into buying after four years and has been buying *The Society's* Spanish wines since 2008

THE SCORES

105 wines tasted
Exceptional 0 **Outstanding** 7 **Highly Recommended** 76 **Recommended** 22
Commended 0 **Fair** 0 **Poor** 0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their current-release red Riojas priced at £20-£40 (or \$20-\$40), with any Rioja classification of gran reserva, reserva, crianza or genérico permitted

Outstanding 95-97pts



Bodegas de la Marquesa, Finca El Ribazo Selección Terruño 2017

Sarah Jane Evans MW 95
Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW 95
Pierre Mansour 94
 £39.99 Davy's
 Part of the Bodegas de la Marquesa Valserrano portfolio, which has roots dating back to the late 19th century. Fruit for this wine is from a specially selected 5ha parcel in the village of Villabuena, planted in 1985 with 95% Tempranillo and 5% Viura. It was aged in 5,000-litre oak vats and French and American oak casks.
Sarah Jane Evans MW A great classic! Discreet on the nose,

and delicate yet firm on the palate. Fresh but powerful, long and deep, showing some elegant ageing and that unmistakable spicy Rioja note.
Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW Impressively dark Tempranillo, with lively acidity to refresh the brooding dark palate. Notes of liquorice, pepper and basil. Very long finish, with savoury notes. Needs time.
Pierre Mansour Pure red fruit nose. Round, succulent and harmonious, a lovely wrap of creamy oak. An excellent wine.
Drink 2023-2037 Alcohol 14.5%



Bodegas Hermanos Peciña, Señorío de P Peciña Gran Reserva 2011

SJE 95 PBT 95 PM 96
 £31.67 *Justerini & Brooks*
 Founded in 1992 in San Vicente de la Sonsierra, the bodega now owns 50ha of vineyards, and this gran reserva is made with grapes from its oldest vines. Part of the company's main range, named after its founder, the wine is 95% Tempranillo with 3% Graciano and 2% Garnacha, aged for 48 months in used American oak.
SJE Round and poised, with graceful advanced age, this is

suave yet serious, typical yet still appealing. Not particularly complex, nor overtly original, but still delicious – a wine for Rioja lovers.
PBT Classic aromas of red fruits, roses and forest floor. On the palate, that classic interplay of red fruits, fine oak, textured tannins and tangerine acidity.
PM Some real class here. Stylish bouquet with complexity and focus. Soft, rich, yet understated, showing wonderfully ripe tannins and a long finish. Wow!
Drink 2023-2041 Alc 13.5%



Bodegas Lan, Viña Lanciano Reserva 2016

SJE 95 PBT 95 PM 95
 £24.50-£28.99 *Alexander Hadleigh, London End Wines, Shelved Wine, The Fine Wine Co, Vinvm*
 The 72ha Viña Lanciano vineyard sits in a privileged location, in a curve in the Ebro river. The vines dig deep to find nutrients on this pebble-strewn former riverbed. Grapes for this estate wine were harvested and sorted by hand, with maximum extraction ensured by fermentation in small, cone-shaped stainless steel tanks and long maceration.

SJE Restrained nose, showing French oak and rich blackberry fruit. A deep and complex palate, with juicy tannins and a long, complex finish.
PBT Full of dark fruit and spice notes, oak well integrated now, apparent but not dominant. Long, characterful finish with fine freshness.
PM Woody, dark fruit and cedar smoke notes, with round, soft, creamy oak. An intense wine that has fine-textured tannins and a long, oaky, fruity finish.
Drink 2023-2046 Alc 13.5%



Murua, Reserva 2015

SJE 95 **PBT** 96 **PM** 95

£28 **Montrachet Fine Wine**
Owned by Masaveu Bodegas since 1974, Murua sits on a small hill just outside Elciego in Rioja Alavesa. The winery works hard to achieve the best possible expression of the different soils found across its vineyards. Malolactic fermentation and ageing for this reserva are carried out in a combination of French and American oak casks.

SJE This has a classic reserva hue of deep garnet. It's delicate and complex on the nose, with dry tea leaf notes. Delicious and balanced – it's light yet rich,

and has a very long finish. A masterpiece.

PBT This is finely maturing with its eight years. It has succulent confit red fruit, with a layer of oak and spice, as well as black pepper. A warming wine.

PM A lovely, evocative nose with mocha notes. It has round, smooth, textured, fine tannins and is so harmonious.

Drink 2023-2055 **Alc** 14%



Torre de Oña, Finca Martelo Reserva 2016

SJE 95 **PBT** 95 **PM** 95

£22.50 (ib)-£29.68 **Armit, Bowes Wines, Crop & Vine, Crump Richmond Shaw, Lay & Wheeler, Seckford Wines**
Part of the La Rioja Alta group since 1995, Torre de Oña in Rioja Alavesa has divided its vineyards into sub-plots, studying and characterising each one and making and ageing wine from each one separately. The grapes for this reserva come from 60-year-old vines and were harvested by hand. The 2016 vintage saw optimal weather conditions during one of the longest harvests in the winery's history.

SJE Rich, enticing and juicy, with lot of sweet spice, ripe fruit and earthy notes. Savoury and appetising in the mouth. A great wine that's bound to live for many years.

PBT Silky and juicy, layered with oak, pomegranate, redcurrant conserve and basil. Complex and long.

PM With hints of leather and spice, and ripe, textured tannins, this is a textbook reserva. Medium length.

Drink 2023-2046 **Alc** 14.5%



Urbina, Reserva Especial 1998

SJE 95 **PBT** 95 **PM** 95

£21.95-£29.99 **Aitken Wines, Drambusters, Handford, JN Wine, Mumbles Fine Wines, Raffles**
Urbina has a rich history going back to 1870, when Salvador Urbina settled in the village of Cuzcurrita del Río Tirón, and the winery is still family-owned. The Reserva Especial is sourced from the family's own vineyards and is composed of 95% Tempranillo with 5% Mazuelo and Graciano. It spent 12 months in new oak followed by 12 months in used oak.

SJE Clean and delicate, with forest and dry berry aromas,

a pungent spicy note and some cedar. Lovely integrator of volatile acidity. A must-try at that price.

PBT What a pleasure to try a 1998! Fine tertiary aromas of mature oak, truffles, fruit and spice. It's supple and smooth and has textured tannin, integrated freshness and a charming piquancy.

PM Tobacco and cedar aromas with an underlying fruity note. This is really fresh still, despite its age, with plump, soft, sweet fruit, and a long finish. **Drink** 2023-2038 **Alc** 14%



Viñedos El Pacto, Valdechuecas Viñedo Singular 2019

SJE 95 **PBT** 96 **PM** 94
vinedoselpacto.com

El Pacto is driven by a non-interventionist approach to its small-scale viticulture and vinification. Grapes for this wine come from a single vineyard in Cárdenas in the Alto Najerilla region, planted between 1912 and 1918, predominantly with Garnacha. Fermentation takes place in one 5,000-litre concrete tank, and just 2,992 bottles and 66 magnums of the 2019 vintage were released.

SJE Refined ripe red fruit

aromas. This is an intriguing, multi-layered wine with a silky texture and a poised finish. Top quality, lots of identity.

PBT This is Garnacha at its full intensity, layered with chocolate, spices and oak. A solid wine, with fine freshness.

PM An intense wine with an open nose of herbs and plums, and fleshy, sweet fruit. Spicy and bold, with fine tannins.

Drink 2023-2030 **Alc** 15%

Highly recommended 90-94pts



Bodegas Hermanos Peciña, Señorío de P Peciña Reserva 2014
 SJE 95 PBT 93 PM 93
 £22.90-£24.50 Theatre of Wine, Wine Direct
 Expressive red fruit and mature oak aromas. The palate is laced with supple fruit and racy acidity. A subtle wine, with a lingering, elegant finish. **Drink 2023-2044 Alc 14%**



Castillo de Cuzcurrita, Señorío de Cuzcurrita 2018
 SJE 94 PBT 95 PM 92
 £24 Christopher Keiller
 Generous black fruit with lashings of intense oak. Peppery notes and firm tannins. Long, with a complex yet balanced finish. **Drink 2023-2037 Alc 14%**



Miguel Merino, Reserva 2016
 SJE 95 PBT 94 PM 93
 £34.50 Davy's
 Refined, complex and elegant with dark fruit aromas. Finely textured with elegant yet prominent tannins and a long, savoury finish. **Drink 2023-2046 Alc 14%**



El Coto, Coto Real Reserva 2017
 SJE 92 PBT 92 PM 93
 £26.67-£31.99 Liberty Wines, The Fine Wine Co, Vinvm
 Dramatic with smoky new oak aromas. Concentrated dark fruit and balsamic notes on the palate. A full-bodied finish. **Drink 2023-2037 Alc 13.5%**



Muga, Selección Especial Reserva 2016
 SJE 94 PBT 92 PM 93
 £26-£34.48 Alexander Hadleigh, Chester Beer & Wine, Crump Richmond & Shaw, Penistone Wine Cellars, Waitrose
 Intense and youthful with warm spice aromas. The oak enhances the dark fruit with cedar wood spice. An enjoyably long finish. **Drink 2023-2041 Alc 14.5%**



Palacios Remondo, La Montesa Crianza 2019
 SJE 94 PBT 93 PM 92
 £20.50-£22.50 Bancroft, NY Wines, Streatham Wine House, The Wine Reserve
 Expressive red cherry and floral aromas. Sweet spice with savoury and herbaceous flavours. Well balanced with delicate tannins. **Drink 2023-2026 Alc 14.5%**



Remírez de Ganuza, Fincas de Ganuza Reserva 2016
 SJE 95 PBT 94 PM 92
 £29.08-£33.35 Brunswick, Ideal Wine Co, Starling Wines
 Succulent dark cherry and blueberry aromas. Licorice and smoky oak flavours. Long and generous. **Drink 2023-2046 Alc 14.5%**



Rioja Vega, House of Townend 20th Anniversary Collaboration 2017
 SJE 95 PBT 93 PM 93
 £29.99 House of Townend
 Lifted aromas of sweet spice, dark fruit and oak. Bright red fruit with polished layers of licorice and vibrant acidity. Juicy and crisp. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 14%**



Vivanco, Brunes Vino de Briones 2019
 SJE 95 PBT 94 PM 93
 vivancoculturadevino.es
 Restrained aromas of blackberry and red fruits. A concentrated wine, with black cherry, licorice and cassis on the palate. **Drink 2023-2030 Alc 14.5%**



Ramón Bilbao, Límite Sur 2018
 SJE 94 PBT 92 PM 92
 bodegasramonbilbao.com
 Sweet vanilla and red fruit aromas. Intense leafy notes with white pepper and mint flavours. Well balanced with smooth tannins on the finish. **Drink 2023-2028 Alc 14%**



Rioja Vega, Anadas Míticas Gran Reserva 2011
 SJE 93 PBT 93 PM 93
 £39.99 House Of Townend
 Lovely roasted plum, pepper and oak spice aromas. A deliciously fluid and joyful wine with a long penetrating finish. **Drink 2023-2031 Alc 14.5%**



Roda, Reserva 2016
 SJE 94 PBT 91 PM 93
 £29.95-£36.50 Amps, Bon Coeur, Fine Wines Direct UK, Master of Malt, Noble Green, Thorne Wines, Vine & Bine, Waud Wines
 Generous red fruit and oak aromas. Elegant and youthful, with lively acidity. Firm tannin on the finish. **Drink 2023-2036 Alc 14.5%**



Bodegas Manzanos, Voché Vino de Autor 2001
 SJE 93 PBT 93 PM 93
 £24.95-£30 Alliance Wine, Baythorne Wines, The Dorset Wine Co, The Fine Wine Co, Uncorked
 Piquant notes of strawberry confiture, spice, pencil and dry, meaty fruit. Smooth, integrated tannins with a pure and long finish. **Drink 2023-2031 Alc 13.5%**



Bodegas Zugober, Belezos Gran Reserva 2013
 SJE 92 PBT 95 PM 92
 £29.50-£30 Corney & Barrow, Hic
 Lifting violet, licorice and cedar aromas. Balanced palate, with dark chocolate and red fruits. Rich and juicy on the finish. **Drink 2023-2041 Alc 14%**



Campillo, Gran Reserva 2014
 SJE 94 PBT 93 PM 92
 £33 Inverarity Morton
 Impressive, with brooding black fruit, cherry and redcurrant. Full-bodied and beautifully balanced, with an attractive finish. **Drink 2023-2039 Alc 14.75%**



Solar Viejo, Orube Selección de Familia 2018
 SJE 95 PBT 93 PM 92
 £24.95 Sturp
 Expressive smoky cedar on the nose. Layers of dark fruit and wild herbs linger on the palate. Complex, round and elegant, with lovely depth. **Drink 2023-2035 Alc 14%**



Abel Mendoza, Jarrarte Oak Aged Tinto 2018
 SJE 94 PBT 92 PM 90
 £23-£27 Alliance Wine, The Drink Shop, The Fine Wine Co, The Twisted Cork Wine Co
 Succulent Tempranillo fruit with restrained notes of blackberry and smoky aromas. Great balance and depth with a delicious meaty finish. **Drink 2023-2033 Alc 14.5%**



Abel Mendoza, Selección Personal 2018
 SJE 90 PBT 93 PM 94
 £37.57-£40 Alliance Wine, The Drink Shop
 Attractive notes of spice, toast, ripe cherry and dark fruits, with well-balanced use of oak. Refined and graceful with a complex finish. **Drink 2023-2033 Alc 14%**



Carlos Serres, Gran Reserva 2014
 SJE 93 PBT 93 PM 92
 £21 Cavavin
 Vibrant aromas of cigar box, warm spice and oak. The palate is meaty with interwoven oak and ripe berry fruit. A fresh saline finish. **Drink 2023-2044 Alc 13.5%**



Casa Primicia, Julián Madrid Reserva 2016
 SJE 92 PBT 95 PM 92
 £24 Songbird Wines
 Concentrated black fruit with layers of wild herbs and cassis. Distinct in style with wonderful structure and firm tannins. **Drink 2023-2046 Alc 14.5%**



deAlto, La Planta Magica Viñas Viejas 2019
 SJE 94 PBT 93 PM 93
 £22.23-£26.50 Alliance Wine, Shelved Wine, The Fine Wine Co
 Powerful with ripe red fruit aromas. Silky tannins and warm spice on the palate. A persistent finish. **Drink 2023-2027 Alc 13.5%**



Altanza, Reserva 2016
 SJE 93 PBT 92 PM 92
 bodegasaltanza.com
 Excellent fruit concentration and ripeness, enhanced by deft ageing in oak barrels. Layers of sweet fruit and crunchy cherry on the palate. **Drink 2023-2036 Alc 14%**



Amaren, El Cristo de Samaniego 2018
 SJE 93 PBT 92 PM 92
 £35.99-£40 Alliance Wine, Baythorne Wines
 Dark plums and a lovely intensity of spice and dark fruit. Velvety with great presence and weight and a long, textured finish. **Drink 2023-2028 Alc 14.5%**



Bodegas Bilbainas, La Vicalanda Reserva 2015
 SJE 93 PBT 90 PM 92
 £22 Codorniu UK
 A dense, powerful reserva with layers of intense red and dry fruits, a spicy undertone and dancing acidity. Lively and complex. **Drink 2023-2035 Alc 14.5%**



Bodegas de la Marquesa, Valserrano Gran Reserva 2015
 SJE 93 PBT 92 PM 90
 £34.95 (2014) Davy's
 Concentrated and suave with well-integrated oak and notes of cassis and dark fruit aromas. Characteristic and distinctive with fine tannins. **Drink 2023-2035 Alc 14%**



Bodegas Muriel, Viña Muriel Gran Reserva 2011
 SJE 90 PBT 94 PM 92
 £21-£22 Moreno Wines, Shekleton Wines
 Lovely decadence, with forest aromas, notes of blueberries, dark fruit and chocolate. Elegant palate with a nice grip and a lingering finish. **Drink 2023-2041 Alc 14%**



Bodegas Riojanas, Monte Real Cuvée 2020
 SJE 91 PBT 93 PM 91
 £25.99 EWGA, Hayward Bros, Harrods, Hedonism, Stewart Wines, Tate Smith
 Macerated fruit notes, with black cherries, tobacco, leather, ripe plum and liquorice on a well structured and fine palate. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 13.78%**



Castillo de Mendoza, Evento Reserva 2010
 SJE 92 PBT 93 PM 90
 £30.50 Amathus Drinks
 Impressively fresh and fruity, with toasty aromatic notes. A bold, modern Tempranillo with a hint of new French oak. **Drink 2023-2055 Alc 14.5%**



Contino, Reserva 2018
 SJE 91 PBT 93 PM 92
 £23-£25.75 NY Wines, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose
 Bright and vibrant with succulent red fruit, sour cherries and some meaty fruit notes. A brisk mid palate with green herbs on the finish. **Drink 2023-2040 Alc 14%**



Cosme Palacio, Reserva 2015
 SJE 92 PBT 93 PM 91
 £22.76-£26.99 Amazon UK, Blas Ar Fwyd, Mr & Mrs Fine Wine, Vinomondo
 Luxurious, abundant aromas of ripe Tempranillo. Rich, fruity style, with lots of elegant blackberry fruit, and a subtle spice note. **Drink 2023-2045 Alc 14.5%**



Faustino, Icon Especial Selección Reserva 2017
 SJE 93 PBT 89 PM 93
 £30 Amber Beverage
 A fine mature nose with a fresh, lively palate. Layered with notes of black fruit, spice, dark fruit and ripe tannins with a rich intensity. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 14.96%**



Finca Allende, Allende 2014
 SJE 92 PBT 95 PM 89
 £22.35-£28.75 Bancroft, Berry Bros & Rudd, ND John, NY Wines, Raffles Fine Wines, Vinvm, Virgin Wines
 Nice combination of intensity and finesse, with blackberry fruit, chocolate and a toasty nose giving way to a silky palate. **Drink 2023-2044 Alc 14%**



Hermanos Hernáiz, Finca La Emperatriz 2017
 SJE 93 PBT 91 PM 92
 £35-£36.50 Champagnes & Châteaux, Millésima
 An aromatic and stylish wine, with notes of oak, spice, pepper and red fruit followed through with a concentrated and long finish. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 14.5%**



Lozano, Selección de Orígenes 2017
 SJE 90 PBT 93 PM 92
 £30 Frederick's Wine Co
 A perfumed wine with ripe berry and spice and dry herb aromas. Dense and finely grained, with balanced acidity that's round and rich. **Drink 2023-2037 Alc 14%**



Mendieta Osaba, Vascomendi 2019
 SJE 91 PBT 95 PM 91
 £26.50 KWM
 Savoury, smoky, black fruit aromas. A powerful and full-bodied style with an impressively long, intense finish. **Drink 2023-2031 Alc 14.5%**



Miguel Merino, Vitola Reserva 2017
 SJE 93 PBT 91 PM 91
 £27.95 (2016) Davy's
 Attractive meaty fruit, spice and toasty vanilla aromas. The palate is youthful, alive with juice, and refreshed by kumquat acidity. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 14.5%**



Urbina, Reserva Especial 2006
 SJE 92 PBT 93 PM 92
 £20.75-£26.10 Widely available via UK agent Burridges of Arlington St
 Developed style, with lots of vanilla, freshness and dried herbs and fruits. Crisp brambly acidity that is still full of energy. **Drink 2023-2036 Alc 14%**



Vallemayor, Gran Reserva 2010
 SJE 93 PBT 93 PM 90
 £21.02-£28.49 Latin Wines Online, The Northern Wine & Beer Co
 Aromatic notes of blackberry and red berry fruit. Medium bodied with layers of spice and plump fruit, which is poised and well balanced. **Drink 2023-2040 Alc 14%**



Vallemayor, Viña Cerradilla 2016
 SJE 92 PBT 93 PM 92
 £20.42 The Northern Wine & Beer Co
 Fresh and well balanced with a vibrant, dark tannic edge. Generous fruit with a dense but smooth complexity. **Drink 2023-2046 Alc 14%**



Vivanco, Reserva 2015
 SJE 93 PBT 91 PM 93
 £21.95 Wine Direct
 Bright floral aromas with an excellent balance of young red fruit and ageing notes. Long, spicy and complex, with great balance. **Drink 2023-2040 Alc 14.5%**

'In choosing the £20-£40 level, we had clearly located the "sweet spot", as Pierre Mansour put it'



Altanza, Gran Reserva 2015
 SJE 91 PBT 91 PM 91
 £28 Georges Barbier of London
 Baskets of cherries and plums in the mouth, with cinnamon and cumin notes on the palate. Hints of leather and enticing spice. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 14%**



Bodegas Bilbainas, Viña Pomal Gran Reserva 2014
 SJE 92 PBT 90 PM 92
 £35 Codorniu UK
 A dark, brooding Rioja, with savoury saline character and firm tannins. Meaty and juicy, with lovely fruit on the finish. **Drink 2023-2025 Alc 14.5%**



Bodegas La Catedral, Tradición H Gran Reserva 2016
 SJE 91 PBT 91 PM 90
 US\$29 Hidalgo Imports
 Promisingly spicy with precise red berry fruit aromas, followed through with spice, plump fruit, cedar and fine tannins. Fresh and smooth. **Drink 2023-2031 Alc 13.5%**



Castillo de Mendoza, Reserva 2017
 SJE 91 PBT 92 PM 90
 £24.50 Amathus Drinks
 Supple strawberry and balsamic notes on the palate, with extremely ripe fruit and lots of spiciness from the oak barrels. Has a lingering finish. **Drink 2023-2037 Alc 14.5%**



Conde de los Andes, Tinto 2016
 SJE 91 PBT 93 PM 89
 £34.95 (2015) Nysa
 Ripe cherry fruit, new oak and cranberries on the nose, with notes of liquorice and cedar on the palate. Restrained and elegant. **Drink 2023-2041 Alc 14.5%**



El Coto, Coto de Imaz Gran Reserva 2016
 SJE 93 PBT 89 PM 92
 £22.25-£28.65 Alexander Hadleigh, KWM, Liberty Wines, Shelved Wine, The Fine Wine Co, The Secret Cellar, Vinvm
 Roasted plums, smoky, leathery and toasty character with an almost minty freshness in the mouth. **Drink 2023-2031 Alc 14%**



Finca Manzanos, Gran Reserva 2013
 SJE 92 PBT 92 PM 90
 £24.95 Alliance Wine, HarperWells, Inn Express
 Fresh and enticing, with ripe Garnacha notes of red berries. Spicy overtones and layers of red fruit in the mouth, and a rich, smooth finish. **Drink 2023-2027 Alc 13.5%**



Finca Valpiedra, Reserva 2015
SJE 90 PBT 92 PM 92
£23.99-£28.99 All About Wine, Berkmann, Hay Wines, The Secret Bottle Shop
Intense colour with notes of coffee, sweet fruit, toast and redcurrant. Lively acidity gives this reserva vigour and balance. **Drink 2023-2035 Alc 13.5%**



Jesús Madrazo, Crianza 2018
SJE 90 PBT 92 PM 91
£29 Waitrose
A juicy and generous wine with fresh fruit, citrus, ripe tannins and chocolate richness. A crianza that outperforms many in its category. **Drink 2023-2033 Alc 15%**



Luis Cañas, Selección de la Familia Reserva 2016
SJE 90 PBT 91 PM 93
£24.99-£29.95 Alliance Wine, Ann et Vin, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Chalgrove Wines, Connolly's, Quay Wines, South Down Cellars, Talking Wines, The Dorset Wine Co
Lovely blackberry fruit, lively oak-derived spiciness, peppery with a nice silky texture in the mouth. Very good ageing potential. **Drink 2023-2041 Alc 14.5%**



Marqués de Cáceres, Excellens Gran Reserva 2014
SJE 92 PBT 90 PM 90
£23.99 Fine Wines Direct UK
Brooding dark Rioja, with liquorice and mocha, and tangerine acidity that develops in the mouth. Has a long and balanced finish. **Drink 2023-2028 Alc 14%**



Marqués de Vitoria, Gran Reserva 2015
SJE 91 PBT 91 PM 91
£25 Soho Wine Supply
A classic gran reserva style, with a nice combination of healthy fruit and spice, plus a freshness and persistence that is Rioja's signature. **Drink 2023-2035 Alc 14.29%**



Marqués de Vitoria, Reserva 2017
SJE 91 PBT 91 PM 90
POA Amber Beverage
A succulent, juicy reserva, balanced between red fruits, creamy roundness and fine oak. Long resounding finish, drinking well now. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 14.53%**



Viña Olabarri, Gran Reserva 2015
SJE 92 PBT 93 PM 89
bodegasolabarri.com
Spicy truffle with soft tannins and developed dark fruit aromas. The spices carry through in the mouth, with piquancy balanced by the juicy Tempranillo. **Drink 2023-2040 Alc 14%**



Bideona, S4MG0 Samaniego 2019
SJE 91 PBT 90 PM 90
£31.50 Hallgarten Wines
Generous silky fruit, spice and fine tannins full of Rioja typicity. A classy style with modest length. **Drink 2023-2028 Alc 14.3%**



Bideona, V1BN4 Villabuena 2019
SJE 90 PBT 89 PM 90
£28.52-£31.50 Corking Wines, Hallgarten Wines
Pure plum and prune fruits on the nose with crisp tangerine acidity and lightly drying tannins. **Drink 2023-2026 Alc 14%**



Mendieta Osaba, El Camino 2020
SJE 90 PBT 92 PM 90
£24.50 KWM
An explosive palate with red fruits, red brambles, cranberries and white pepper. It has a lingering, powerful finish. **Drink 2023-2030 Alc 14.5%**



Ostatu, Reserva 2016
SJE 90 PBT 92 PM 90
£23.50 adVINture
Black fruits, wild herbs, savoury tannin and balsamic notes with a rich fruit feel in the mouth. Long and open on the finish. **Drink 2023-2036 Alc 14.5%**



Pujanza, Finca Valdepoleo 2018
SJE 92 PBT 89 PM 92
£17.33 (ib) Cru World Wine
Intense dark fruits with minerality. Fragrant and mellow, with notes of warm fruit, fine acidity and an integrated, harmonious finish. **Drink 2023-2028 Alc 14.5%**



Bodegas Riojanas, Monte Real Cepas Viejas 2021
SJE 90 PBT 90 PM 90
£25.99 EWGA, Hayward Bros, Harrods, Hedonism, Stewart Wines, Tate Smith
Very nice, typical Tempranillo aromas, with blackberry and vanilla. Clean and precise. Plump and generous, with a crisp, salty sign-off. **Drink 2023-2025 Alc 13.5%**



Campillo, Colección Reserva 2017
SJE 91 PBT 92 PM 88
bodegascampillo.com
Pungent spicy aromas of vanilla, toast and hedgerow fruits, overlaid with mocha. Savoury notes dominate the finish. **Drink 2023-2037 Alc 14%**



CVNE, Imperial Reserva 2017
SJE 90 PBT 92 PM 89
£23-£30 Cellier, De Burgh, Eton Vintners, Just in Cases, Millésima, Mr Wheeler, ND John, Ocado, Waitrose, The Wine Society, York Wines
Impressively dark colour. Full of red fruit aromas with a mild oak overlay. Rich, juicy, deep, complex. **Drink 2023-2037 Alc 14%**



Rioja Vega, Venta Jalón Reserva Especial 2016
SJE 90 PBT 92 PM 92
£39.99 House of Townend
Supple and succulent, full of black fruit aromas. A pristine and concentrated Rioja lifted by mouthwatering acidity. **Drink 2023-2031 Alc 13.5%**



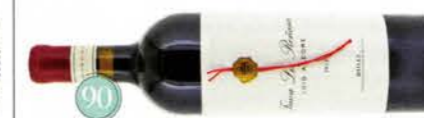
Roda, Sela 2019
SJE 90 PBT 92 PM 92
£22-£23 Bon Coeur, Fine Wines Direct UK, Oddbins, Thorne Wines
Modern style, with ripe fruit, spice and intensity. A blend of tobacco, red fruit and fine tannins with a long, concentrated finish. **Drink 2023-2033 Alc 14%**



Santalba, Ermita de San Felices Reserva 2018
SJE 92 PBT 91 PM 89
£23.50 Castelnau Wine Agencies
Classic reserva style, interwoven with American oak, dark mocha and blueberry. Gently tannic, with bright acidity and a long finish. **Drink 2023-2028 Alc 14.5%**



Gregorio Martínez, Gran Reserva 2014
SJE 92 PBT 89 PM 90
£22-£26 adVINture, Terra Wines
Textbook truffle aromas, developed and in a remarkably oxidative style. Palate more piquant than the aromas suggest. **Drink 2023-2025 Alc 14%**



Luis Alegre, Finca La Reñana 2018
SJE 88 PBT 92 PM 90
£29 Moreno Wines
Sweet oak on the nose with black fruit aromas showing great ripeness. Mellow and oxidative, plump and full bodied. For lovers of abundance. **Drink 2023-2033 Alc 14.5%**



Marqués de Cáceres, Gran Reserva 2014
SJE 91 PBT 90 PM 89
£22.99 Majestic
Meaty and spicy, with berry fruit and vanilla on the nose. Full, muscular tannins, with well-defined fruit intensity and a lingering finish. **Drink 2023-2034 Alc 14%**



Orben 2020
SJE 88 PBT 91 PM 90
£32.99 Liberty Wines
Lovely pure fruit here, fragrant with blackcurrant and cranberry. Rounded and generous, it's well controlled with power on the finish. **Drink 2023-2035 Alc 14.5%**



Ortega Ezquerro, Garnacha 2019
SJE 92 PBT 90 PM 88
£22.95 Jeroboams
A darker style of Garnacha, with black cherry, liquorice and spices. Powerful yet fresh, it's a firm style with chewy tannins. Well made. **Drink 2023-2026 Alc 14.5%**



Ramírez de la Piscina, Gran Reserva 2016
SJE 88 PBT 90 PM 91
ramirezdelapiscina.com
Plummy dark fruits, with cedar and spice. Rich and juicy on the palate, it's balanced and open with lots of fruit. Black pepper on the finish. **Drink 2023-2036 Alc 14.5%**



Ramírez de la Piscina, Selección Reserva 2019
SJE 89 PBT 89 PM 92
ramirezdelapiscina.com
Old-style Rioja with delicate sweet spice aromas and macerated fruit notes. A powerful style but so well controlled with top-quality oak. **Drink 2023-2039 Alc 15%**



Ysios, Selección 2017
SJE 91 PBT 91 PM 88
£30 Amazon UK
Smoky blackberry on the nose. A succulent, juicy and supple Tempranillo, livened by peppery spice. A long, dark finish with mocha notes. **Drink 2023-2032 Alc 15%**

'We found many of the fine wines in this tasting were underpriced compared to their Italian and French equivalents'

Recommended 86-89pts

Wine	Score	SJE	PBT	PM	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Amézola de la Mora, Solar Amézola Gran Reserva 2015	89	90	86	90	Ripe quince and cooked fruit aromas, some attractive volatility. Succulent with a distinctive style.	14%	2023-2025	£37	Berry Bros & Rudd
Cosme Palacio, Glorioso Gran Reserva 2015	89	91	89	88	Herbaceous and plummy, with cracked pepper, smooth tannin and a prickle of freshness. Restrained style.	14%	2023-2030	£23	Ocado
Faustino I, Gran Reserva 2011	89	89	88	89	Creamy aromas, with blueberry and red cherry. Layered with dark oak and a savoury spice. Round and rich.	13.5%	2023-2025	£20-£25.40	Spirits24, The Secret Bottle Shop, T Wright
Luis Cañas, Gran Reserva 2015	89	88	92	88	Modern style, rich and expressive, very young. Full bodied and substantial yet balanced. A long finish.	14.5%	2023-2035	£29.99-£33.99	Alliance Wine, Ann et Vin, Cheers, Shelved Wine, The Fine Wine Co
Nestares Eguizabal, A Veredas Crianza 2016	89	88	88	90	Minty, spicy, quite herbal with a leathery, evolved quality. Palate has pomegranate and citrus freshness.	13.5%	2023-2026	£23.33-£24	Iconic Wines, Pip of Manor Farm, North & South Wines
Ortega Ezquerro, Don Quintin Ortega 2014	89	88	90	89	Bold plum and violets. Classic Rioja blend, with Tempranillo firmness and Garnacha fruit expression.	14%	2023-2034	£28.95	Jeroboams
Palacios Remondo, Propiedad Viñas Viejas 2020	89	90	87	90	Plump, succulent Garnacha with a slightly oxidative bouquet and clean, ripe fruit notes. Gorgeous texture.	14.5%	2023-2027	£29.25-£35.99	Bancroft Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd, NY Wines, Vinvm
Santalba, Viña Hermosa Reserva 2018	89	87	92	89	Restrained, elegant profile with violet and cedar aromas. Quite dense, although smooth, thanks to good acidity.	14.5%	2023-2033	£22.50	Evuna
Tobelos, Tahon Reserva 2015	89	87	89	90	Slightly developed, with dry fruit notes and some woody tones. Built to improve further with a firm grip of tannin.	14.5%	2023-2035	£24-£32 (2013)	Burridges, Frazier's, Gusto Wines, Lanchester Wines, Nicolas, Portland Wine, Weavers
Villota, Viña Gena 2019	89	91	91	86	Fine fruit and mineral aromas. Silky entry with a burst of cranberry and red cherry fruit. Nice acidity.	14%	2023-2030	N/A UK	vinovillota.com
Amaren, Selección de Viñedos 2019	88	86	89	89	Plenty of fruit character with cedary, herbaceous notes and chunky, velvety tannins. Well structured.	14.5%	2023-2030	£20.99	Alliance Wine, Drinkmonger

Wine	Score	SJE	PBT	PM	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Bodegas Manzanos, Siglo Gran Reserva 2015	88	89	87	88	Attractive spicy aromas, a lovely wild character with mushrooms and roasted plums. Very approachable.	13.5%	2023-2025	£24.99	Alliance Wine, Fine Wines Direct
MacRobert & Canals, Laventura Garnacha 2020	88	88	88	88	Pale colour, savoury and rustic quality. Classic Garnacha fruit of red cherries interweaved with oak complexity.	14%	2023-2026	£26 (2019)	Pip of Manor Farm
Ortega Ezquerro, Garnacha 2021	88	89	90	86	Juicy, fruity, expressive. Notes of ripe fruit, pepper, fennel and liquorice. Spicy mid palate with generous red fruit.	14.5%	2023-2027	£22.95	Jeroboams
Valdemar, Conde Valdemar Reserva 2015	88	88	89	88	Dark fruit, roses, marked toasty new oak and dried fruit. Fresh and easygoing, it's unmistakably Rioja.	14%	2023-2035	£20.50-£21.73	Berkmann, Christopher Keiller, GP Brands, Oakham Wines
Villota, Tinto 2020	88	87	89	89	Expressive dark cherry and cassis aromas. Generous palate, finishes with drying tannins and bitter chocolate.	14.5%	2023-2028	N/A UK	vinovillota.com
Viña Herminia, Reserva 2017	88	91	88	86	Discreet aromatic expression but it's all about plums: plums with vanilla, roasted plums and confit plums.	14%	2023-2027	N/A UK	vinaherminia.es
Artuke, Paso Las Manas 2017	87	86	88	87	Curiously scented, with minty notes and a slightly herbal character. Good concentration on the ripe, rich palate.	14%	2023-2027	£26-£28.68	Cépage, Justerini & Brooks
Bodegas Manzanos, Voché Selección Graciano 2017	87	86	88	87	Good structure, with nice acidity. Quince and plums, and a good balance between fruit generosity and acidity.	14%	2023-2027	£24.99-£25.49	Ake & Humphris, Alliance Wine, Ashby Wines, Hay Wines, Shelved Wine, Vine & Bine
La Rioja Alta, Viña Arana Gran Reserva 2015	87	89	87	86	Intense oxidative style, with vanilla, smoke, tar and spicy notes. A burst of juicy flavours and spices on the palate.	14.5%	2023-2030	£34-£41.49	Widely available via UK agent Armit Wines
Luis Alegre, Parcela No5 2018	87	87	89	85	Modern Rioja style, with pure Tempranillo aromas of blackberry fruit and intense spicy notes.	14%	2023-2025	£21	Moreno Wines
MacRobert & Canals, La Nave 2020	87	86	86	88	Well made with a touch of reduction on the nose. A rich palate with citrus and savoury tarry notes.	13.5%	2023-2026	POA	Pip of Manor Farm

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