

Going Grape: Saying sorry to Spain



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Columnist

Spain, I owe you an apology. I always seem to forget that you offer a wealth of delicious and affordable wines.

When I'm staring blankly at a boring selection of reds wondering what to get, I have a hard time remembering that you're more than just cheap Rioja. Gazing across the landscape of under \$20 wines, there's no country with more to offer at that price point than you, Spain.

Your mencia grape from Bierzo is better than any mid-tier red from California. Your garnacha from Priorat and monastrell from Jumilla rival the seas of mediocrity I stumble through trying to get to the Spanish section whenever I do remember check it out.

Alas, when I get there the selection is usually uninspired with the same mass produced tempranillo and albariño I've been seeing for years; and let's not forget the supercheap cava's I wouldn't make a mimosa out of.

But it's not your fault, Spain. Buyers seem to think that's all that will sell, so that's what they put on the shelves, and the public's perception of Spanish wines continues to be shaped by the lowest common denominator of plonk. And here I am begging forgiveness because I have been a lazy consumer who hasn't put forth the effort to actively seek out your incredible wines and demand that they populate store shelves and wine lists.

Consider the following list a mea culpa. These are Spanish wines worth finding or

special ordering.

- Bodegas Fillaboa Albariño 2014, Rias Baixas (\$20-23) This most refreshing white wine is dry, lightly acidic, and has a tropical nose of pineapple and citrus fruits. Initially tart on the palate, once this wine hits the mid-palate area on the outside edge of the back of your tongue, it explodes with deep mango fruit and some apple flavors. Perfect with ceviche or a chilled seafood salad, this wine is a perfect summer sip.
- Hacienda de Arínzano, Rosé 2015, Pago de Arínzano (\$18-21) Made from 100% tempranillo from a vineyard dedicated to producing only rosé, this beautiful bluish-pink wine is bursting with fresh strawberry flavors and a bit of white pepper, making it a wonderful summer alternative for red-wine drinkers.
- El Posadero 2012, Vinos de Madrid (\$13-15) Unbelievably inexpensive, this 85 percent tempranillo and 15 percent syrah is actually a single vineyard wine that begs to be your house wine. Easy drinking and lighter than one might expect from tempranillo, I suspect the syrah rounds out some of the dusty characteristics making it an easy-to-love little red.
- Pinyolet Garnacha 2012, Monstant (\$14-17) Coming from just north of Priorat (where the worlds most pricey garnachas come from) this contender for your personal house wine is that much more of a bargain. Not overly acidic or tannic, the fruit flavors of red plum and blackberries are lean and focused.
- ***Losada Mencia 2011, Bierzo (\$16-18) More on the dark fruit side of the red spectrum, Mencia is one of my all-time favorite grapes because it is so big on flavor. Chocolate and tobacco can often be found in descriptors of mencia, and this one adds an earthiness and some herbal notes making it one of the more complex wines you'll find for under \$20.***
- Vivanco Reserva 2010, Rioja (\$20-23) Remember how I mentioned earlier the oceans of inexpensive Rioja that flood store shelves from giant producers who could care less quality? Well, this isn't one of those producers. Vivanco is 100% estate grown, harvested by hand, and they only use the top 20-30% of the harvest for their wines. The winery is also home to a museum of wine and their bottles are modeled after the last handblown wine bottle known to exist dating from 1880s France. And the wine? It's great. It has an old-world mouth feel with the gritty earthiness, but the flavors of black fruit and baking spices integrate beautifully with the soft tannins. The two years in barrel and the extra two years in bottle make this reserva as approachable as a cashmere blanket.

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