

GREAT VALUE WINES: 8 TOP MENCIA WINES UNDER \$30



Mencia is the epitome of Spanish freshness. Genetically identical to Portugal's jaen grape, mencia has had huge success in Spain thanks to acute winemaking know-how, conjuring freshness, authenticity and drinkability in red wines from Galicia. Bierzo, Ribeira Sacra and Valdeorras are prominent DO appellations to be sought out.

Like many neglected grapes, mencia was once considered a little simple and rustic. Young vines planted on plain, fertile land often translate into wines of significant volume, even though mencia is not known for its yields.

But this promising variety has undergone a revival since the discovery of some old vines rooted in the poor but slate-rich soils on steep hillsides, a terroir that conjures up the landscape of Priorat, and this has had a big impact on mencia's quality. These old vines produce grapes concentrated in tangy flavors but rarely get too jammy or candied fruit-like, producing wines with focused, fresh fruit often featuring strawberries, dark cherries and plums, along with fine herbs and floral perfume. The bright, lively acidity of mencia can rinse the palate, making it extremely food-friendly, and the dense flavors are framed in a taut, grippy medium body, sometimes lightly peppery with a sense of minerality in the finish.

The styles of mencia also reflect well of the land and the vintage. Depending on where it is grown, it drifts from a fruity and lightly rustic gamay to a cool, spicy syrah, or from an ethereal, elegant pinot noir to a fresh, concentrated Loire cabernet franc, sometimes with a rich and spicy edge of grenache in a warmer year. The vibrant mencia makes wines that deserve to be appreciated in their own right.

That said, winemaking also gives mencia versatility, and what I find it tantalizing about this grape is that more thoughtful, avant-garde winemakers like Raul Perez and the Palacios have successfully conjured "naturalness" without deliberately making "natural wine".

With minimal intervention to bring transparency and the uniqueness of the terroir into the glass, I sense that for mencia, "naturalness" is not a creed, but more like a concept. It sets no boundaries and does not bind the hands of winemakers, but creates honest and heartfelt wines that are closer to the vineyards than to the winery, more agricultural than they are industrial.

Today, mencia wines make up many of the hidden gems waiting to be discovered, especially by wine lovers who look for natural purity of fruit and drinkability. But don't expect to be guided by labels and categories. "Naturalness" and "authenticity" come hand in hand with mencia wines, a byproduct perhaps of the free spirit of the people who make them.

Check out the following eight bottles we selected under \$30 for mencia. These wines are a starting point for the exceptional values of mencia. With their fresh fruit and vibrant acidity, they go great with tacos or enchiladas!

8 great value Spanish mencia wines

Losada Vinos de Finca Mencia Bierzo 2016 – JS96

US Average Price: \$19

Envínate Ribeira Sacra Lousas Viñas de aldea Vinos Atlánticos 2017 – JS96

International Average Price: \$24

Bodegas y Viñedos Merayo Mencía Bierzo Las Tres Filas 2016 – JS95

US Average Price: \$17

Pedro M. Rodríguez Pérez Ribeira Sacra Guimaro Camiño Real 2016 – JS95

US Average Price: \$26

Luna Beberide Mencía Bierzo Finca la Cuesta 2016 – JS94

US Average Price: \$19

Godelia Mencía Bierzo 2015 – JS93

US Average Price: \$18

Descendientes de J. Palacios Bierzo Pétalos 2017 – JS93

Available at [Zachys DC](#): \$19.90

Alberto Orte Valdeorras A Portela 2015 – JS93

Available at [Wine.com](#): \$26.99

– *Zekun Shuai, associate editor in Beijing*

TASTING NOTES

ENVÍNATE RIBEIRA SACRA LOUSAS VIÑAS DE ALDEA VINOS ATLÁNTICOS 2017

| | | |
|-----------------------|-------|--|
| Country Spain | Score | This has a tarry, reductive mode on the nose with a dark-plum and black-cherry edge. Very flinty, it opens up nicely with air to offer deeply spicy, graphite-like notes that really appeal. The palate has a very plush and concentrated feel with such succulent and finely detailed tannins, carving a long, sturdy run to the finish. Drink or hold. |
| Region Galicia | 96 | |
| Vintage 2017 | | |

LOSADA VINOS DE FINCA MENCÍA BIERZO 2016

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| Country Spain | Score | Sexy, stylish and complex Bierzo with a wealth of dark graphite and stony aromas, pepper, baking spices and dark berries. Succulent palate with a deep and juicy core of pitch-perfect, ripe and spicy black cherries and blackberries. The tannins are immaculate. Long and regal. Drink or hold. |
| Region Castilla y León | 96 | |
| Vintage 2016 | | |

BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS MERAYO MENCÍA BIERZO LAS TRES FILAS 2016

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| Country Spain | Score | Impressive fresh, peppery and spicy aromas with dark berries and graphite. The palate has glossy, ripe tannins and an attractive, long, shimmery finish. Full of interest and detail. Saturated with flavor. Drink or hold. |
| Region Castilla y León | 95 | |
| Vintage 2016 | | |

PEDRO M. RODRÍGUEZ PÉREZ RIBEIRA SACRA GUIMARO CAMIÑO REAL 2016

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| Country Spain | Score | Superb, peppery dark berries, plenty of spices and a wrap of glossy, ripe tannins on the palate that perfectly suits the dark-berry and spicy-fruit core. Lots to like here. Drink or hold. |
| Region Galicia | 95 | |
| Vintage 2016 | | |

LUNA BEBERIDE MENCÍA BIERZO FINCA LA CUESTA 2016

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| Country Spain | Score | Crushed roses and violets with pepper and wild berries. |
| Region Castilla y León | 94 | The palate has a fleshy and succulent core of rich black-cherry flavor. Long and smooth with regal tannins. Classy stuff. Drink or hold. |
| Vintage 2016 | | |

ALBERTO ORTE VALDEORRAS A PORTELA 2015

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| Country Spain | Score | Fragrant crushed-rose and lighter cherry aromas here with a very fluid, even and plush palate. Fine, yet powerful tannins. Dark stones and spices. Plenty of detail. Drink or hold. |
| Region Galicia | 93 | |
| Vintage 2015 | | |

DESCENDIENTES DE J. PALACIOS BIERZO PÉTALOS 2017

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| Country Spain | Score | Crushed-blackberry, asphalt and blueberry aromas and flavors. Full body. Lots of cracked black pepper and spice. Chewy finish. Slightly dry now. Needs time to soften. Try after 2021. |
| Region Castilla y León | 93 | |
| Vintage 2017 | | |

GODELIA MENCÍA BIERZO 2015

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| Country Spain | Score | This is rich and flavorful with lots of ripe-berry, spice and walnut character. Full body. Layered and intense with lots going on. Extremely long and flavorful. Drink or hold. |
| Region Castilla y León | 93 | |
| Vintage 2015 | | |
