

Spain Spain has a long history of wine production but its wines have only relatively recently come to prominence on international markets. Styles vary from traditional barrel-aged reds to modern, fruity whites; and although international varieties have been planted in many of Spain's wine regions, it is the country's indigenous grape varieties that are increasingly celebrated.

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CLIMATE AND GRAPE GROWING

Spain has three broad climatic zones:

The north and north-west coast of Spain has a moderate maritime climate dominated by Atlantic weather systems. Rainfall, with its associated risks, is high.

The east coast from Catalunya in the north to the Levante further south has a warm Mediterranean climate. Many of the vineyards are moderated by the influence of the sea or altitude, depending on their location. The climate becomes increasingly hot further south.

The Meseta Central, a large plateau in the centre of Spain, is mostly cut off from the influence of the sea by encircling mountains and has a hot continental climate. In winter, temperatures fall below freezing and in the summer temperatures are very high and rainfall is very limited. However, the summer temperatures can be moderated by the cool nights of high altitude sites.

With the notable exception of north-west Spain, heat and the lack of water are the biggest challenges to grape

growing in Spain. Although this does mean that the incidence of fungal disease is low, it places a heavy stress on the vine. Low density, bush-trained vineyards remain the best way of managing this situation by maximising the amount of water available to each vine and shading the fruit from excessive heat. Where it is practical and affordable wire training is slowly being introduced to facilitate machine harvesting.

GRAPE VARIETIES AND WINE STYLES

Key Black Varieties and Styles

Spain's red wines come in a wide range of styles. Inexpensive wines may be made without oak and semi-carbonic maceration is often used to enhance the fruity nature of these wines. The best wines almost always see oak maturation, usually with at least a proportion of new oak. Traditionally, American oak was mostly used, but now French oak is also common.

Tempranillo – Tempranillo is Spain's premier black grape variety. It is grown widely throughout the vineyards of



Vineyards in Rioja Alta. The Cantabrian Mountains protect the region from the worst of the Atlantic weather systems.

northern and central Spain, although it is often referred to by one of its many synonyms. It is a thick-skinned grape, with medium levels of acidity, and so while it needs sufficient warmth to develop its flavours, hot climates without a high diurnal temperature range could cause the wine to lack the necessary acidity for an ideal balance. Consequently it is at its best in areas where summer temperatures are moderated by the sea and/or altitude. Fermented on its own, often using semi-carbonic maceration, it can produce a fresh strawberry scented *Joven* wine, an increasingly popular early drinking style. It also plays a key role in more concentrated ageworthy oaked blends either with the traditional varieties Garnacha, Graciano and Cariñena/ Mazuelo or international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon.

Garnacha Tinta – Garnacha is the Spanish name for Grenache. This grape is discussed in more detail in Chapter 9 *Red and Rosé Winemaking*. It gives a wine high in alcohol, with a tendency to mature early but there are notable exceptions. It is widely used for *rosados*. It is also important in Priorat, where low-yielding old vines enable the production of intense, complex, full-bodied reds.

Monastrell – Monastrell (Mourvèdre) is a thick-skinned grape variety that is drought tolerant, but needs hot,

sunny conditions to ripen. It is grown in south-eastern DOs such as Yecla and Jumilla, where it can easily reach full ripeness and produces very deeply coloured, full-bodied wines with high levels of tannin and alcohol, low to medium acidity and flavours of ripe blackberry fruit.

Other Black Spanish Grape Varieties

Graciano is a highly valued grape but challenging to grow. It is cultivated mainly in Rioja, where it is used as part of the blend in many of the finest wines. Small quantities are used to add concentrated black fruit aromas, acidity and tannins to the structure of a wine to help it age. **Cariñena** is the Spanish name for Carignan, although it is called **Mazuelo** in Rioja. Cariñena gives wines that are high in acidity, tannin and colour. A small proportion of this makes an ideal blend with Tempranillo. It is also grown in Priorat, where it is blended with Garnacha to enhance the tannic structure of the wines. The other local variety that is increasingly coming to prominence is **Mencía**. This suits moderate climates, giving wines with fresh fruit, medium to high acidity, and sometimes a hint of herbaceousness.

Key White Varieties and Styles

Most of Spain's white wines are fresh and fruity. Harvesting at night or early morning and fermenting in temperature controlled stainless steel vessels help retain

SPANISH WINE LAWS

The wine laws of Spain not only offer a hierarchy of PDO and PGI wines but also define specific ageing criteria for red and white wines. Wines that fall outside of these categories are simply labelled *Vino*.

PDO Wines

The Spanish for PDO is **Denominación de Origen Protegida (DOP)** but a number of traditional terms are commonly used:

Denominación de Origen (DO) – In common with all wines of this type, these should be wines of a certain minimum quality, satisfying specifications covering grape varieties, viticulture and location.

Denominación de Origen Calificada (DOCa) – DOs of at least ten years standing may apply for this more prestigious category. At present there are only two DOCa: Rioja and Priorat. Priorat wines use the Catalan terminology of **Denominació d'Origen Qualificada (DOQ)**.

Vinos de Pago (VP) – This category applies to a small number of single estates with high reputations. Approved estates may only use their own grapes, which must be vinified and matured on their estate.

PGI Wines

The traditional term **Vino de la Tierra (VdIT)** is commonly used.

Ageing

The Spanish law defines the following age categories for its wines:

Joven, Crianza, Reserva and Gran Reserva. Many producers exceed the minimum ageing requirements outlined below. *Gran Reserva* wines are only produced in exceptional vintages and white and rosé wines are rarely made in this style.

Designation	Red Wines		White and Rosé Wines	
	Minimum total ageing (months)	Minimum time spent in barrel (months)	Minimum total ageing (months)	Minimum time spent in barrel (months)
<i>Joven</i>	0	0	0	0
<i>Crianza</i>	24	6	18	6
<i>Reserva</i>	36	12	24	6
<i>Gran Reserva</i>	60	18	48	6

Note: Some regions, such as Rioja, require that the wines made there are aged for longer both in total and in barrel.

delicate fruit aromas. However, some producers use oak fermentation and maturation, as well as techniques such as lees stirring, to add texture and different flavours to their wines.

Verdejo – Verdejo is a white grape variety that is highly susceptible to oxidation and was used to make Sherry-like wines. With protective winemaking it can be made in a light-bodied, high-acid, melon and peach flavoured style similar in style to **Sauvignon Blanc**, with which it is often blended. It can also be made in a richer fuller-bodied style when it has undergone skin contact and barrel fermentation.

Albariño – Albariño is grown in the north-west of Spain and has become a particularly fashionable grape

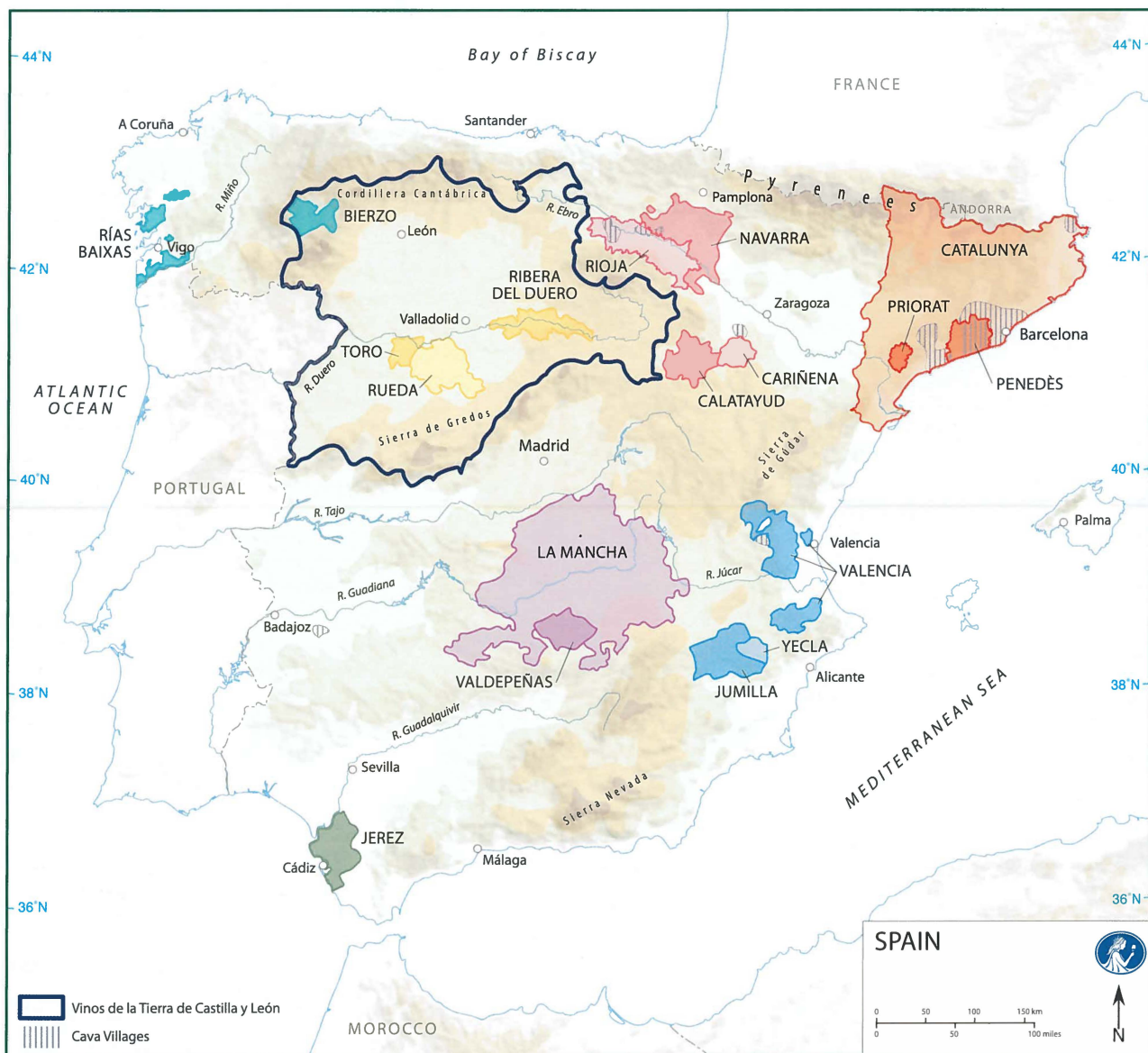
variety. It is thick-skinned and thus able to resist fungal disease, which is useful in the damp climate in which it is grown. Albariño is naturally high in acidity and can produce refreshing wines with citrus and stone fruit flavours. It too can be made in a richer, fuller-bodied style.

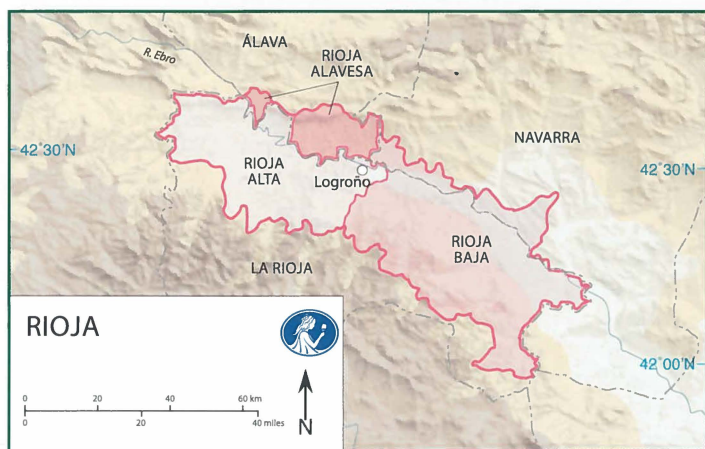
Other White Spanish Grape Varieties

Airén is the most widely planted grape variety in Spain and the vast majority of this is planted in La Mancha in central Spain, as it is one of the few varieties that is able to cope with the extreme heat and drought conditions of the Meseta Central. Although Airén can now be made into acceptable dry white wine, much of the output continues to be used in the production of Brandy de Jerez. Parellada, Xarel-lo and Macabeo are widely

KEY

	2000 m+
	1000–2000 m
	500–1000 m
	200–500 m
	0–200 m





KEY

2000 m+
1000–2000 m
500–1000 m
200–500 m
100–200 m
0–100 m

planted in Catalunya and are the main varieties used in Cava production (for more details see Chapter 42 *Sparkling Wines of the World*). Of these, Macabeo, which is also known as **Viura** in Rioja, is also often used for still wine production. It can be made in an unoaked style with subtle herb and spice aromas. Traditionally it was the mainstay of heavily oaked white Riojas.

International Varieties

In some parts of Spain the traditional local varieties have shown limited potential for quality wines, and better wines can be made more easily from varieties such as **Cabernet Sauvignon**, **Merlot**, **Sauvignon Blanc** and **Chardonnay**. These and other international varieties are now established and widespread, especially in the north-east. They sometimes appear as blends with local varieties.

REGIONS AND WINES

The principal DO regions of Spain may be grouped together into six geographical regions, based on climate and grape varieties: the Upper Ebro, Catalunya, the Duero Valley, the North West, the Levante and Castilla-La Mancha. There are also a number of regions designated for the production of *Vino de la Tierra*: **Castilla y León**, towards the north of the Meseta Central, is the most extensive.

THE UPPER EBRO

Rioja

Rioja is split into three distinct sub-regions, centred around the region's principal city, Logroño. Rioja Alavesa is situated to the west of Logroño, on the north bank of the Ebro in the foothills of the Cantabrian Mountains. The wines are perhaps the lightest of Rioja, and often have the most finesse. The larger Rioja Alta area is also to the west of Logroño, but lies mainly to the south of the Ebro. The vineyards of both sub-regions are planted at a range of altitudes from 500 to 800 metres and their climates are moderated by the Atlantic Ocean, although

the Cantabrian Mountains shield Rioja from the worst of the Atlantic weather. Rioja Baja is situated to the east of Logroño, mainly on the south bank. Here the climate is less maritime, with hotter summers and more severe winters. Annual rainfall can be low, making drought an issue for growers.

Plantings are dominated by black grapes. Tempranillo is the most widely planted variety and does best in the cooler western sub-regions. It is the main component of most blends giving red fruit flavours and a medium level of tannins. Tempranillo benefits from the body and alcohol that comes from the addition of Garnacha, which grows best in the Rioja Baja. Mazuelo and Graciano are both less widely planted and provide a supporting role in blends.

Rioja may be made in a range of different ways depending on the style the winemaker wishes to achieve. Red wines designed for early drinking may undergo semi-carbonic maceration to produce wines that have vibrant red fruit flavours and low levels of smooth tannin. Wines designed for long-term maturation are usually destemmed and crushed and undergo a traditional fermentation. Some producers use vigorous cap management techniques and extended maceration to produce heavily extracted wines, deep in colour and full of fruit flavours, but many are making more subtle, elegant styles. Oak maturation has a defining role in Rioja. Traditionally, the wines were aged in American oak, and often had pronounced aromas of vanilla. Many producers now use oak from France or other European countries for at least some of their wine, giving more subtle spicy aromas.

Eight white varieties are currently approved for use in white Rioja. The most widely planted variety is Viura. Traditionally, the white wines were aged for extended periods in American oak and developed a deep golden colour and nutty flavours. These deliberately oxidised wines have fallen out of favour with modern consumers. Modern white Riojas are often made with minimal contact with oxygen in order to preserve the maximum amount of fruit. Some bodegas are now also producing barrel-fermented white wines, but in a less oxidative style than traditional white Riojas.

Navarra

The vineyards of Navarra DO stretch from the northern and eastern borders of Rioja into the foothills of the Pyrenees. The climate is similar to that of Rioja, but it becomes cooler and wetter nearer the mountains.

Tempranillo is the most widely planted variety and production is focused on red wine. It is either blended with the other Rioja varieties to make a wine in a similar style or increasingly with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Wine styles range from good value *Joven* wines to top quality premium *Gran Reservas*.

Garnacha grapes used for rosé production are picked earlier when acid levels are higher and sugar levels lower. They are then handled protectively to