



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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To all who have helped and supported us with this educational initiative, our heartfelt thanks.

To you, Spanish Wine Essentials candidate, good luck and good reading.



Welcome to Spanish Wine Essentials!

“Any reasonable, sentient person who looks at Spain, comes to Spain, eats in Spain, drinks in Spain, they’re going to fall in love. Otherwise, there’s something deeply wrong with you. This is the dream of all the world.”

—Anthony Bourdain

Wine Scholar Guild is thrilled that you have chosen to begin your Spanish wine education journey with us!

This course has been designed to provide students with a fundamental understanding of the Spanish wines most often seen on a retail shelf and restaurant wine list. This is not an exhaustive compilation. Instead, wine styles and regions have been carefully chosen from Northwestern, Northeastern, and Southern Spain to reflect their commercial and historical significance.

Information has been judiciously curated. Icons help to signpost your learning. Information on “the place,” “grape varieties,” “wine profiles,” and “production notes” has been included for each wine. We have also included a “notable producers” section and let us just say that creating this list was no easy task! Each of the appellations has dozens, if not hundreds, of excellent producers that could merit a mention. Instead, we have chosen a cross-section of producers that represent the diversity of their particular appellation. We have included large producers (whose wines will be widely available), boutique producers, historically significant wineries, and up-and-coming entities. Peppered with information on cultural attractions, regional cuisines, and points of interest, the program allows students to learn about wine within a cultural framework.

We see Spanish Wine Essentials as a springboard toward a comprehensive understanding of the wines of Spain. The modules are designed to support and enhance your learning, be it classroom-based or online study.

Upon completion, you will be ideally positioned to further your studies with the internationally acclaimed Spanish Wine Scholar® (SWS) Program. (Learn more on the last page.)

We trust you will enjoy your fascinating journey through Spain, glass by glass!

¡Salud!

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Phoenicians found Gadir (modern-day Cadiz) and introduce viticulture

1100 BCE



Romans conquer peninsula, rename it "Hispania," and unite it under one language (Latin)

3rd - 1st c. BCE



Moors invade southern Spain

711 CE



Religious pilgrimages begin to Santiago de Compostela

9th c. CE



Henry I of England begins trading wool for "sherish" wine from Jerez

12th c. CE



Reconquista ends in Granada & Christopher Columbus leaves for the Americas

1492



Miguel de Cervantes publishes *Don Quixote* in two parts

1605 & 1615



7th c. BCE
Greeks arrive on the peninsula and name it "Iberia"



1st c. CE
Romans construct the Via Augusta to link Hispania to Rome



722
Reconquista begins in Asturias



9th c. CE
Benedictine monks spearhead winemaking efforts in northern Spain



1469
Marriage of Ferdinand II of Aragón and Isabella I of Castile unites Spain



1560
Safeguards created to protect quality and reputation of Rioja wines



INTRODUCTION TO SPAIN

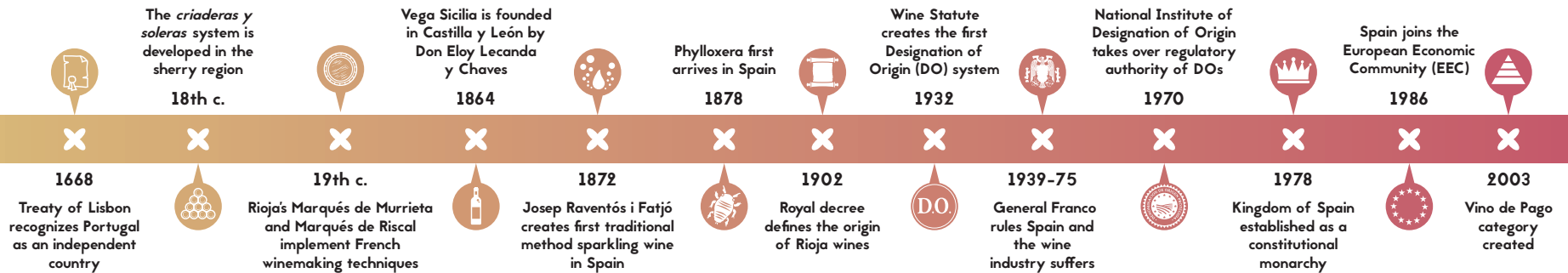
Spain is a deeply traditional country yet one of the world's most dynamic. Vine roots run deep, but winemaking is cutting edge.

Wine has been made in this country for nearly 3,000 years! The Phoenicians established ports in the south, opening Spain to commerce throughout the Mediterranean. Greeks, arriving next, named the land "Iberia" and expanded trade routes focusing on the export of the peninsula's wine and olive oil. The Romans set up colonies in the 3rd century BCE and brought more advanced winemaking know-how along with yet another name change—Hispania. The nearly 800 years of Moorish rule introduced technologies (like distillation) and exotic foods such as eggplant, rice, and citrus, which are still part of the fabric of Spanish culture today. During this Islamic period, monasteries quietly continued to cultivate grapevines for sacramental purposes and local consumption.

The unification of Spain through the marriage of Ferdinand II and Isabella I in the 15th century paved the way for a period of cultural and economic growth unequaled in centuries prior. Sherry and other wines from around the peninsula sailed westward along with explorers and conquistadors while new foodstuffs from newly discovered continents made their way back to the Spanish mainland. During the following centuries, Spain became one of the most powerful empires in the world, militarily, financially, and culturally. Literature and the arts took center stage and Spanish wines made their way to England, Ireland, Scotland, and Holland. At the same time, notable aristocrats from Rioja travelled to France to study different winemaking techniques. These methods, once applied at home, would create a signature style for Rioja and distinguish this growing area as one of Spain's most prominent.

Spanish wine became a major French import when phylloxera and mildews, newly introduced from the New World, decimated French vineyards. Then Spanish vineyards, too, fell victim to the plagues. Fortunately, recovery was rapid and the wine industry again grew and expanded. After the Spanish Civil War—and throughout the ensuing decades of oppression during General Franco's dictatorial reign (1939-1975)—the Spanish continued to focus on their vineyards and wineries.

Today, Spain is the second most visited country in the world (after France) and offers visitors a plethora of cultural experiences—from amazing wine and food to breathtaking architecture to some of the world's most outlandish and enviable festivals and celebrations. In the days of sailing ships, Spain explored the world, but then as now, it is a world worth exploring.

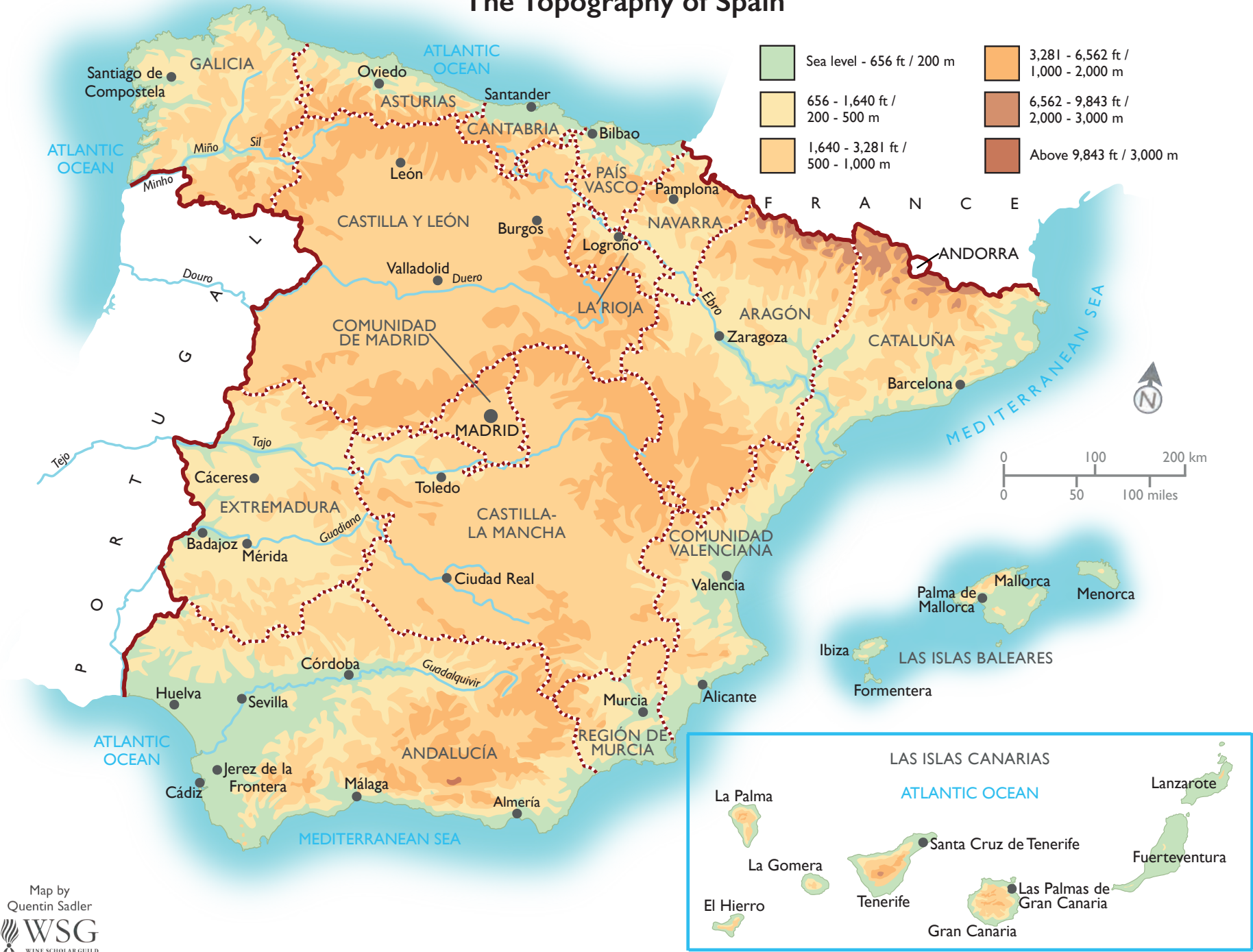


The Essential Appellations of Spain



Map by
Quentin Sadler
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WINE SCHOLAR GUILD

The Topography of Spain



Map by
 Quentin Sadler
 WSG
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TOPOGRAPHY, CLIMATE & SOILS

Spain is located on the Iberian Peninsula and is the southernmost country in Europe. It is bordered by France and Andorra to the northeast and Portugal to the west. The country has an astounding 3,084 mi/4,963 km of coastline accounting for 72% of its borders. The Atlantic Ocean is situated to the northwest; the Bay of Biscay (part of the Atlantic Ocean) lies to the north. The Mediterranean Sea flanks the eastern and southern borders.

The country also lays claim to two sets of islands: The Balearic Islands are located off the coast of Valencia in the Balearic Sea (part of the larger Mediterranean Sea), while the Canary Islands sit off the coast of southern Morocco in the Atlantic Ocean.

TOPOGRAPHY

Spain is the second most mountainous country in Europe (after Switzerland). The Pyrenees Mountains create a natural border between Spain, France, and Andorra, while numerous ranges such as the Cantabrian Range in the north, the Central and Iberian Systems in the center, and the Sierra Morena in the south separate Spain's autonomous regions. Spain's highest peak (Mount Teide) is located on the island of Tenerife in the Canary Islands.

One of the country's most notable and most influential topographic features is the Meseta, a high-elevation, central plateau which covers nearly 45% of mainland Spain. The Meseta sits at between roughly 1,312-3,281 ft/400-1,000 m and is a prime agricultural growing area. Madrid, Spain's capital city, is located at 2,119 ft/646 m, making it the second-highest capital in Europe (after Andorra la Vella).

Plains occupy the smallest area in Spain but are significant, nonetheless. The Ebro Basin occupies approximately one-fifth of the Spanish landscape and is home to many of Spain's most acclaimed wine regions. In the south, the fertile Andalusian Plain is also agriculturally important with a focus on wheat, cotton, and sunflowers. While considerably smaller than the Ebro Basin, it is no less noteworthy considering it is the home to one of the world's greatest fortified wines.

Five primary rivers flow through Spain, even though the country is home to more than 1,800! Four of these rivers flow westward and empty into the Atlantic Ocean: Tajo (the longest river on the Iberian Peninsula), Duero, Guadiana, and Guadalquivir. Only the Ebro River flows eastward and empties into the Mediterranean Sea. These rivers are extremely important as numerous vineyards lie along their banks. As such, the rivers act as moderating forces in regions where extreme heat and/or cold are common.

CLIMATE

Mainland Spain has one of the most diverse climatic landscapes in Europe. Because of its size and location, three climate types converge within its borders: maritime (Atlantic), continental, and Mediterranean. Much of the northwestern part of the country is influenced by a maritime climate, while the central part of Spain experiences a continental climate with extreme diurnal and seasonal shifts. The eastern and southern coastal areas of Spain are primarily Mediterranean, but elevation and proximity to mountain ranges create continental influences within this zone.

Offshore, the Balearic Islands have a Mediterranean climate, while the Canary Islands are largely subtropical in nature.

SOILS

Spain's soils, and the parent materials from which they are derived, are the result of millions of years of geological activity, erosion, and weathering. Those parent materials (rocks) are generally classified by their origin and composition.

Sedimentary – Most of Spain's vineyards are sedimentary (limestone, sand, clay, and alluvial deposits). They are of both fluvial and marine origin and are generally located along the coastline and on the central plateau. The famed *albariza* soil of Spain's Sherry region is sedimentary.

Metamorphic – Parent rock, subjected to heat and pressure below the earth's surface, is transformed into shale, slate, schist, and gneiss. Such rocks are found in northern Spain near the Cantabrian Mountains as well as in Cataluña. The well-known *llicorella* soil (slate/schist) of Priorat is metamorphic.

Volcanic – Volcanic activity has shaped much of Spain's landscape, but none more strikingly than that of the Canary Islands. These soils are generally poor in organic matter but water-retentive, enabling the vines to survive heat and drought.

UNDERSTANDING SPANISH WINE LAW

The European Union (EU) regulates the wine industry in all its member nations. In 2009, new regulations were implemented in order to standardize the nomenclature of wine quality levels and labeling terms. The EU divided wine into two major groups and created new categories that roughly corresponded to the quality pyramids already in place in member countries:

WINES WITH GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION

- Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)/ Denominación de Origen Protegida (DOP)
- Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)/Vino de Indicación Geográfica Protegida (IGP)

Many countries, including Spain, chose to continue to use their traditional designations for each of these categories, as they generally fit neatly within the new EU structure. Most Spanish wines are labeled using the traditional terms (DOCa/DOQ, DO, VC, VP, and VT), which continue to be the most common quality designations found on labels today.

DOCa/DOQ – Denominación de Origen Calificada [Spanish]/Denominació d’Origen Qualificada [Catalan] (Qualified Designation of Origin)

- Spain’s highest PDO/DOP level
- Awarded to DOs that have attained the highest quality levels for an extended period
- Requirements for this category include DO status for a minimum of 10 years and wines must be produced and bottled within the region

DO – Denominación de Origen (Designation of Origin)

- Largest portion of Spain’s PDO/DOP quality ladder
- The wines must meet several quality standards, including the use of authorized grape varieties, production levels, winemaking methods, and aging times

VC – Vino de Calidad con Indicación Geográfica (Quality Wine with Geographic Indication)

- Represents wines whose distinctive qualities are derived from its *terroir*
- A region must spend a minimum of five years as a VC prior to applying for promotion to DO status

VP – Vino de Pago (Estate Wine)

- Single-estate wines with unique characteristics crafted by highly esteemed producers
- Wines must be made with respect to the distinctive conditions representative of the area and must be produced and bottled wholly within the estate
- Each Pago may set its own rules, including authorized grapes, viticultural and vinification practices, and aging methods

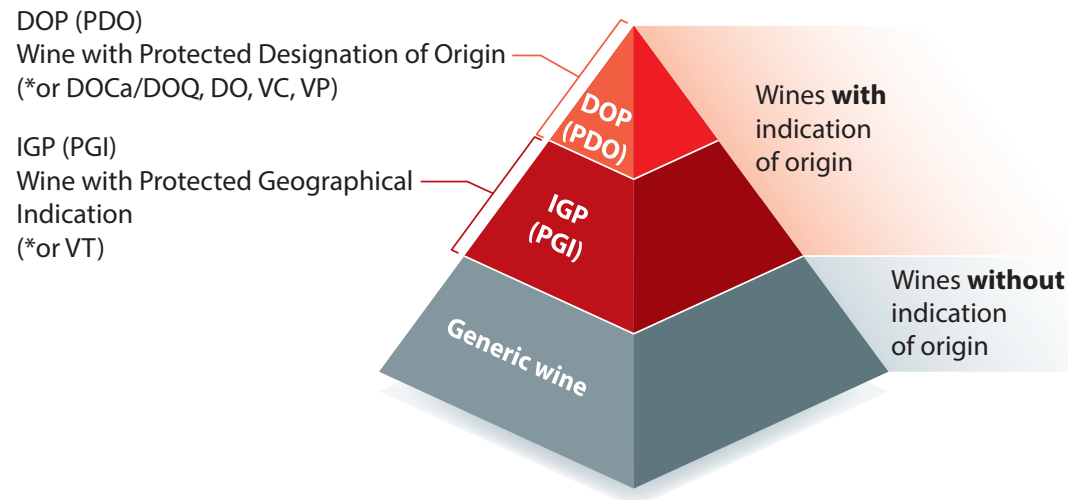
VT – Vino de la Tierra (Wine of the Land)

- Represents wines which must come from a particular geographic area and possess identifiable local characteristics
- Growing areas are generally quite large and may cover an entire autonomous region
- The wines must meet a minimum alcohol content and exhibit varietal typicity

WINES WITHOUT GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION

Vino – Generic Wine

- Wines that do not have an indication of origin other than the country in which they are made
- Generally produced from:
 - Grapes grown outside appellation boundaries
 - A blend of grapes from multiple appellations
 - Grapes not authorized by other growing areas
 - Grapes from unclassified vineyards



SOME TERMS TO KNOW

Bodega	Winery
Cosecha	Harvest or vintage; also, a wine with no aging requirement
Crianza	An aging category; this category has the least strict (shortest) barrel-aging requirements
Gran Reserva	An aging category; this category has the strictest (longest) barrel-aging requirements
Joven	Young; a term referring to a young wine which has spent zero-to-little time in barrel
Reserva	An aging category; this category has moderate (between Crianza and Gran Reserva) barrel-aging requirements
Roble	Oak; this term refers to a young (joven) wine which has spent a short amount of time in barrel
Vino blanco	A white wine
Vino dulce	A sweet wine
Vino espumoso	A fully sparkling wine
Vino generoso	A dry, fortified wine
Vino rosado	A rosé wine
Vino tinto	A red wine

UNDERSTANDING LABELS

Wine labels provide a wealth of information—provided that you know what to look for and where. The label below shows the nine items which normally show up on a Spanish wine label. Note that numbers one through six are mandatory, while numbers seven, eight, and nine are all optional.



- 1: Quality designation e.g., DOCa/DOQ, DO, VC, VP (DOP), or VT (IGP)
- 2: Appellation (name of the winegrowing zone)
- 3: Alcoholic strength
- 4: Country of origin
- 5: Name of producer
- 6: Volume of wine (in the bottle)
- 7: Wine name
- 8: Vintage
- 9: Aging classification (if applicable)

NATIVE GRAPE VARIETIES

The vine has found a home in every one of Spain's 17 autonomous regions. Native varieties dominate this viticultural landscape. In fact, the top six grape varieties (Tempranillo, Airén, Bobal, Macabeo, Garnacha Tinta, and Monastrell) are native and account for more than 65% of all plantings.

Compared to other wine-producing nations, Spain has more land under vine than any other, and its viticultural heritage is so rich that several of its native grapes (Garnacha, Mazuelo, Monastrell) have travelled beyond the country's borders to become international in scope.

To date, there are more than 250 grapes authorized in Spain's Register of Commercial Vine Varieties and "new" ones are added regularly. Continued efforts to recuperate indigenous varieties is helping Spain navigate the impending climate crisis and offer new and exciting varieties to the world. Below are Spain's most important and commercially significant grape varieties.

WHITE GRAPES

Airén is Spain's most widely planted white grape variety, but it is rarely made into quality still wines. The majority of Airén is used in the production of brandy as well as in the production of grape spirit to fortify sherry. Wines generally are neutral and moderately acidic.

Albariño is the primary grape of DO Rías Baixas in Galicia. It is a thick-skinned grape which produces wines with zesty acidity and floral notes accompanied by flavors of citrus fruit, peach, apricot, and grapefruit. Its wines are typically accented by both minerality and salinity.

Godello is often compared to Chardonnay because of its versatility. It produces highly aromatic wines which are medium-bodied with moderate acidity and characterized by yellow apple fruit, thyme, and stony minerality. Godello wines are capable of extended aging.

Hondarribi Zuri is the primary grape of the Basque Country. Wines produced from this grape are light and easy-drinking with mouthwatering acidity. They exhibit notes of white flowers, tangy citrus, and green apple and are usually slightly prickly (due to being bottled with small amounts of residual CO₂).

Macabeo (also known as Viura in Rioja) is one of the three primary cava grapes and Spain's second most planted white grape. The grape produces wines which are low to moderate in acidity with citrus fruit, stone fruit, and waxy floral notes. In cava, it adds softness and elegance to the blend.



Palomino Fino is the primary grape of sherry. This thin-skinned grape produces neutral, low-acid, low-alcohol wines. This profile makes it ideal as the base for fortified wines.

Parellada is one of the three traditional cava grapes. This very late-ripening grape shows notes of white flowers, citrus fruit, and quince. It adds finesse, body, and lemony freshness to the cava blend.

Pedro Ximénez (also known as “PX”) is native to Andalucía where it is used to create still and fortified wines in both DO Montilla-Moriles and the sherry DOs. Wines made from PX are generally low acid and high alcohol with a grapey, raisiny character.

Treixadura is the primary grape of DO Ribeiro. Wines made from this grape are aromatic and fuller-bodied than coastal Galician white wines. They have fresh acidity and floral, lime, herbal, and cucumber notes. The grape is usually incorporated into blends and has excellent aging capacity.

Verdejo is the dominant grape in DO Rueda in Castilla y León. Wines made from Verdejo are moderately high in acid and alcohol with notes of lemon, lime, peach, and laurel (bay leaf). Due to their similar characteristics, the grape is often blended with small amounts of Sauvignon Blanc.

Xarel-lo is the star grape for still wines in DO Penedès as well as being one of the three primary cava grapes. It produces full-bodied wines with high acid, moderate alcohol, and notes of citrus, apple, and herb. In cava, it adds acid and freshness to the blend.

RED GRAPES

Bobal is the primary grape in the Utiel-Requena region of Valencia and is Spain’s second most planted red grape. It produces wines with deep color, moderate alcohol, crisp acidity, and supple tannins all while showing notes of red berry fruit and fresh herbs. The grape also responds well to carbonic maceration.

Garnacha Tinta is indigenous to Aragón in northeastern Spain and is well-adapted to the heat of the region. Wines made from Garnacha are generally full-bodied with high alcohol and moderate, fresh acidity. Red wines are typically concentrated and mineral-driven with floral notes, intense red fruit, and spice.

Listán Negro is the primary red variety of the Canary Islands. It crafts easy-drinking, lightly colored wines with crisp acidity and low tannins while boasting notes of raspberries, blackberries, licorice, and black pepper. The grape responds incredibly well to carbonic maceration.



Mazuelo, as the grape is called in Rioja, is more commonly known as Cariñena throughout Spain, except in Cataluña where it is often called Samsó. It is in Cataluña where the grape finds its greatest popularity. The grape yields deeply pigmented, high-acid, tannic wines with notes of dark fruit, pepper, and licorice. It has tremendous aging potential; it is often blended with Garnacha.

Mencía is a thin-skinned grape grown predominantly in the high-elevation *terroirs* of eastern Galicia and northwestern Castilla y León. It produces light- to medium-bodied wines with high alcohol and bright acidity, moderate tannins, and notes of raspberries, red plums, rosemary, and thyme. Aged examples show additional notes of tobacco and smoke.

Monastrell is the most planted grape in Murcia and southern Valencia where it thrives in the extreme temperatures and drought, so characteristic of the region. This thick-skinned grape produces highly aromatic, dark, tannic wines which exhibit black fruit and savory notes.

Tempranillo is considered Spain's noble grape and is the county's most planted variety. It is known around Spain by more than 25 local synonyms! Tempranillo takes its name from the Spanish *temprano* (meaning "early") as the variety is both early-budding and early-ripening. Wines produced from the grape generally show moderate alcohol, acid, and tannin with notes of red fruits, leather, and spice. The grape ages gracefully displaying forest floor, cigar box, and dried fruit characteristics, all while maintaining fresh acidity.

INTERNATIONAL GRAPE VARIETIES

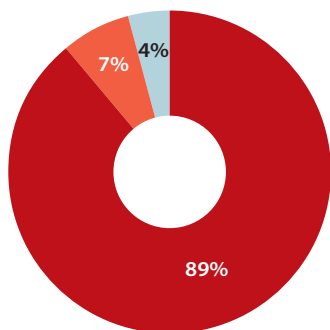
Bordeaux's proximity to Spain and its reputation for producing high-quality wines made it a mecca for producers from regions like Rioja and Castilla y León as far back as the mid-18th century. As a result, numerous French varieties eventually made their way back to Spain. Additionally, Spain's importance to France during the phylloxera epidemic introduced grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and Merlot to the Spanish landscape. Today, international grape varieties (as they are now known), like Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Chardonnay, are found throughout much of Spain with the notable exception of northwest Spain where native grapes dominate plantings. These international grapes are used to craft both blends and varietal wines.



WINE STYLES

Both nature and nurture contribute to wine style. Nature plays its part via grape variety, soil, weather, and climate; nurture through human hands. It is the grape grower and winemaker who decide what to plant, how to train each vine, when to pick the fruit, how to ferment it, how long to age the wine, and what to age it in. All of these factors, and many more, will have an impact on what the consumer tastes in the glass. While a grape variety may be harvested with an innate set of unique properties, grape growers and winemakers can vastly alter those characteristics, should they choose to do so. Grapes with naturally high acid levels can create wines that are soft and mellow if the vines are forced to grow in hotter-than-ideal conditions and/or grapes are left on the vine long after acid levels have begun to decline. Varieties that are best known for crafting deep, dark, and powerful reds can be bottled as pale, juicy thirst quenchers by minimizing the maceration period (the amount of time the juice and skin are in contact with each other).

SPANISH WINE PRODUCTION BY CATEGORY



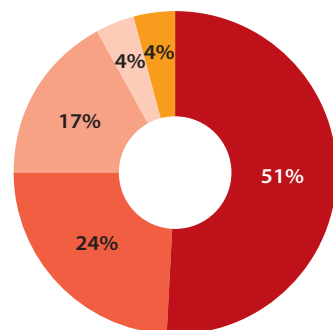
■ DOP ■ IGP
■ Wine without Indication of Origin

Data Source: Eurostat, 2022

Spain is the third-largest producer of wine in the world (behind Italy and France) but is first in terms of wine volume exported.

- Spain boasts a wide diversity of wine styles; however, this is mainly a red wine country, with more than half of its total production falling into this category. White and rosé wines are produced in most wine regions, with specific appellations giving more focus to these styles.
- Sparkling wine is an important part of Spain's overall production. In fact, Spain is the fourth-largest sparkling wine producer in the world (behind Italy, France, and Germany).
- Fortified and sweet wines have a long and distinguished history throughout Spain; most of the quality production is in the south.

SPANISH WINE PRODUCTION BY STYLE (PDO)



■ Red ■ White ■ Sparkling
■ Rosé ■ Fortified and sweet

Data Source: Spanish Ministry of Agriculture, 2023

TRADITIONAL VS. MODERN

Better winery hygiene and modern innovations such as stainless steel fermentation tanks and temperature control have led to improvements in wine quality. While new machines, technologies, and previously avant-garde philosophies are now commonplace, many wineries are still described in terms of “traditional” and “modern.”

These descriptors reference the overall style of wine being produced and focus on a winemaker's approach to maceration, aging, and oak. Compared to one another, “modern-style” wines are often considered fruitier and less tannic, with obvious notes of oak, while “traditional” examples are described as earthy, savory and more tannic, with little oak flavor.

What we refer to as the “modern” wine style began to emerge in the early 1980s. A new generation of Spanish winemakers traveled abroad and discovered winemaking practices that embraced scientific advances, focused on riper fruit, extracted less tannin, and incorporated French oak *barriques*. These young winemakers returned home determined to incorporate what they had learned into traditional winemaking practices.

Most facets of “modern” winemaking were adopted with little resistance, while others, such as the use of non-traditional vessels, were met with more opposition, especially from older generations.

Today, both the “traditionalist” and “modernist” coexist without conflict. Many Spanish wines on the market are a product of a blended approach. However, there are winemakers that do plant their flag firmly in one camp vs. the other. For this reason, the terms “traditional” and “modern” remain useful indicators of style.



THE CUISINE OF SPAIN

The origins of Spanish cuisine date back thousands of years to when the Phoenicians and Greeks occupied the peninsula and introduced the olive tree. Today, Spain is the largest producer of olive oil worldwide, accounting for just over one-third of global production. During the Roman era, the so-called “Mediterranean Triad” crops (wheat, grapes, and olives) were cultivated throughout much of the country.

The Moors introduced rice production and the irrigation techniques needed to successfully grow this crop. As a result, rice became an important staple on the mainland. The Moors also introduced spinach, eggplant, peaches, apricots, saffron, and almonds and taught the Spanish how to preserve food with vinegar (a technique referred to as *escabeche*). Many of today’s signature Spanish dishes are legacies of the Moorish occupation.

Spanish cooking has been documented as far back as the mid-14th century. Catalan chef, Ruberto de Nola, the chef to King Ferrante of Naples, compiled a collection of recipes in his *Llibre de Sent Soví*. This book was the definitive guide to traditional Aragonese cooking prior to the food revolution brought about by Columbus’ voyages to the Americas.

The face of Spanish cuisine changed dramatically with the return of ships from the Americas in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. New World foodstuffs such as tomatoes, potatoes, corn, bell peppers, paprika, and cocoa eventually entered Spanish kitchens—most were fully incorporated into Spanish cookery by the 18th century. In the meantime, Spanish staples such as olives, grapes, and rice made their way to the new colonies.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Spanish focused on defining a “national cuisine.” Today, many of Spain’s iconic dishes—*paella*, *gazpacho*, *tortilla española*, and *pan con tomate*—grace menus worldwide. Regional food traditions, such as small plates (*tapas*), have also found their way into the overall national food framework and jumped borders. *Tapas* are now a worldwide phenomenon.

Lastly, although possessing a wildly traditional “kitchen,” Spain currently boasts one of the most modern and dynamic food scenes in the world. Much of this is credited to Catalan chef, Ferran Adrià, who began working with scientists in the 1980s to deconstruct and understand the physical and chemical transformation of food during cooking. The so-called “Molecular Gastronomy” movement found a home in Adrià’s famed Michelin 3-star El Bulli, five times named the world’s best restaurant (2002, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009). His historic gastronomic prowess continues to influence chefs both in Spain and around the world.