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GREAT VALUE WINES: 7 GREAT RIOJA UNDER \$45 (95 POINTS AND UP)

Wednesday, April 29, 2020



Like Barolo and Amarone, Rioja wines often come with talk of “tradition” versus “modernity”. But it can be reckless to pigeonhole certain wines or producers under these labels, as these concepts make little sense when most producers will often have a foot in each camp.

In Rioja, one “tradition” that dates back to the 18th Century involves whole-bunch fermentation. But this is not common in Rioja today, not even by the books of some deemed “traditionalists”.

Nevertheless, though not entirely correct, I must acknowledge that these labels are useful to hint certain styles that are well understood among the trade and knowledgeable consumers.

In the 1970s, the Spanish wine control board Consejo Regulador first connected wine quality (and commercial value) with the length of aging and the use of oak barrels. Rioja has ever since officially embraced a more oxidative and oak-coated style to emphasize its “tradition”, with some exemplary Reserva/Gran Reserva bottles almost taking an orange hue after lengthy cellaring, featuring keynotes of mature and savory fruit, often with tobacco leaves and earthiness on top of sweet, spicy oak scent, whose palate is energized by bright acidity that lingers through to the lengthy finish. Appetising for old wine lovers!

In a sense, modern Rioja wine is to Spain what Super Tuscany is to Italy, which proves a truism — where there are rules there are rule breakers. New-era producers soon started to revolutionize their style. They invested more and some ignored the classifications stipulated by the board. Fueled by a transformation of contemporary aesthetics and market demand, they have redefined quality under their own standards, some following the icons from Bordeaux and Napa. Excellent renditions without being dependable on American oak or long-time aging aim for fresher, riper fruit with more focus and depth, giving more fleshiness, opulence and concentration to the final wine.

Today, we see more producers fine-tuning their wines not by taking sides. Instead, they try to combine the best of both worlds and simply pay more attention to the vineyards and the source of grapes. For example, Ramirez de Guazuza, a rather modern player, bows to tradition by involving carbonic maceration in their young wine “Erre Punto”. Marques de Murrieta, often deemed a “traditionalist” with a long history, now also applies a modern touch to their wines and makes a very dense, full-bodied red under the label “Dalmau”.

The variations of Rioja wines today have expanded. Rioja is also a great choice for people who enjoy both structure and elegance. The major blending partners of tempranillo and garnacha can deliver a wine that combines the class and density of a Bordeaux with a splash of Burgundian finesse and tenderness.

Good Rioja also tends to be a stellar wine for your cellar and represents jaw-dropping value. Under \$45, we have selected 7 sensational bottles of Rioja, all 95 points or above! Be patient if you want to lay them down or go slow to sip now with some fine Jamon Iberico and aged Manchego cheese. Salud!

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7 GREAT VALUE RIOJA WINES

La Rioja Alta Rioja Viña Ardanza Reserva 2010 – JS96
Available at Wine.com (\$32.99)

Bodega Lanzaga Rioja Lanzaga 2014 – JS96
Available at K&LWine (\$34.99)

Muga Rioja Reserva 2016 – JS95
Available at K&LWines (\$24.99)

Granja de Nuestra Señora de Remelluri Rioja Lindes de Remelluri Viñedos de Labastida 2014 – JS96
US Average Price: \$28

López de Heredia Rioja Reserva Viña Bosconia 2007 – JS95
Available at JJBukley.com (\$35.94)

López de Heredia Rioja Reserva Viña Tondonia 2007 – JS95
Available at K&LWines (\$43.99)

CVNE Imperial Reserva 2015 – JS95
US Average Price: \$42

– Zekun Shuai, associate editor in Beijing

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