

Beronia

RIOJA D.O.Ca

History and Origins

In 1902 a Royal decree was enacted defining the 'origin' applicable to Rioja wines. In 1926 the creation of the Consejo Regulador (Control Board) was decreed. Its mission was to define the boundaries of the designated region of origin of Rioja wines, supervise the issue of the 'seal of approval', and to recommend the legal measures to be taken against usurpers and forgers of the 'Rioja' name. However, it was not until 1945 that the body attained its legal structure. The control board finally became officially established in 1953, and from that time began to set out the foundations for a modern and efficient operation. On 3 April 1991 a Ministerial Order granted the category of 'Calificada' to the Designation of Origin, the first and only wine designation of origin in Spain to attain this ranking.

Production Area

The wine producing region of Rioja is situated in the Ebro Valley. It has the Sierra de Cantabria mountain range to the north and to the south Sierra de la Demanda, resulting in conditions that provide a very privileged environment for vineyards.



The 57,000 hectares of vines which currently make up the region of the Denominación de Origen Calificada Rioja are located in three autonomous communities, La Rioja, the Basque Country and Navarra. Their average annual yield is 250 million litres, 85% of which is red wine, with the rest whites or rosé wine.



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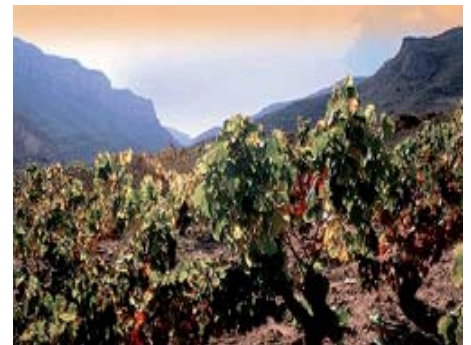
Although Rioja covers a relatively small area, it has a number of different soil types and climate conditions. This affects the development of the vines, resulting in distinctive characteristics which are ingrained in the special nature of the vines. The Rioja has climate influences from both the Atlantic and Mediterranean. As the land of the Rioja slopes down from west to east, the climate becomes increasingly drier and hotter due to the Mediterranean influence. There are three types of soil suitable for growing vines in Rioja: chalky clay, ferrous clay and alluvial. This variety of soil types does not cause any difference in respect to quality of the wines produced since Rioja wine is made from grapes carefully selected from the various areas.

The diversity in soil and climate has led to the classification of their wine region into three sub-areas: Rioja Alta, Rioja Alavesa and Rioja Baja. Rioja Alta is made up of 24.457 hectares and is influenced by the Atlantic, Rioja Alavesa 12.050 hectares and climatic influences from both the Atlantic and Mediterranean and Rioja Baja has 20.907 hectares and Mediterranean influence.

Viticulture

There are seven varieties of grape permitted by the regulations of the Denominacion de Origen Calificada Rioja. Red grape varieties include Tempranillo, Garnacha, Mazuelo, and Graciano. White grape varieties include Viura, Malvasía and White Garnacha.

The harvest in the Rioja region takes place during the months of September and October. The results from the harvest of 2006 show an official vintage of Very Good with a production of 416.32 million kg grapes, 90.78% of which were red grapes.



All aspects relating to the viticulture are regulated by the Control Board such as planting density which must meet a compulsory minimum of 2850 vines per hectare and a maximum of 4000 vines per hectare. Pruning systems are also regulated as they affect grape productivity and quality. Where the traditional goblet system and its varieties are used, a maximum load of only 12 buds per vine over a maximum of six spurs is allowed. Under no circumstances may the maximum limit of 36.000 buds per hectare be exceeded, except for the Garnacha variety, for which 42.000 buds per hectare will be allowed. The Control Board also establishes maximum authorised production limits per hectare, which are below the average for the more prestigious European designations of Origin. For red varieties this limit is 6000 kg per hectare and for white varieties it is 9000 kg per hectare.

Vinification

Once the grapes have been taken to the bodega, different processes are used to produce the wine, depending on whether it is white, red or rosé.

White wines - the whole grape is passed to a draining tank. The stems are then removed and it is pressed to obtain the must which is transferred to the fermentation tanks.

Rosé wines – the grape is destemmed and lightly crushed and sent to draining tanks. Here it is left to macerate for a short period. It is then pressed and left for a day for the suspended particles to settle. It is then decanted and the almost crystalline must is transferred to the fermentation tanks.



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Red wines – there are two ways of making red wine in Rioja. The most widely used today involves the removal of the stalks in a destemmer before fermentation. This is more appropriate for wines which are to be aged in wood. In the traditional system, the whole grape bunches are fermented in large pools. This is known as ‘carbonic maceration’. The resulting wines are smoother, with good body, intense colour and ideally suited for drinking during their first year. In both cases the must is overpumped during fermentation, to ensure good colour extraction and maintain a constant temperature throughout the tank. Both systems aim to achieve uniform fermentation and to ensure the aromas from the must are not lost.

After fermentation the wine is decanted and transferred to storage tanks for quality controls. At this point the Control Board carries out sensorial and laboratory tests to determine whether the wine meets the standards required to be a Rioja.

Ageing Process

Rioja wines are aged in 225 litre oak casks, with periodic rackings, followed by a further period of bottle ageing. There are over 270 ageing bodegas in Rioja which have a total of over 900.000 casks. The different Rioja wine categories are based on minimum ageing periods. Crianza – wine in its third year, matured for at least one year in oak cask. Reserva – carefully selected wines, aged for at least three years, of which one is in oak cask. Gran Reserva – belongs to great vintage wines which have been aged at least two years in oak casks and three years in bottle.

Market Surveillance

Rioja is probably one of the Designations of Origin in the world which provides the highest guarantee to consumers with respect to provenance, vintage, ageing category and quality. To achieve its goal of maximum quality assurance and in tune with its standing as the only Designation of Origin to have the calificada surname, Rioja goes beyond the strict enforcement of regulations on grape growing and wine making by carrying out extensive market surveillance actions.



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