

# Ribera del Duero

In recent years quality has improved, styles have aligned more to British tastes and prices have fallen. It's time to revisit these wines, urges Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW

RIBERA DEL DUERO is the 'other' classic red wine region in Spain. Much smaller than Rioja in terms of production, it includes a few top names of almost mythical dimension, such as Vega Sicilia and Pingus, plus many producers that deliver top quality in consistent fashion.

The region's wines are very successful in Spain and in the US, but not so well appreciated in the UK. The macho style of the wines in the 1990s – high alcohol, explosive, extracted fruit and lots of oak – no doubt put Ribera at a disadvantage in the educated British market. Indeed, Ribera is still a very local wine; exports account for only about 25% of production.

Modern Ribera wines are thankfully quite different to those of the last century, and *Decanter* has monitored their progress. In 2011, experts in a *Decanter* panel tasting of the 2007s criticised the overall quality of wines in the market. Subsequent vintages have become much more refined, more balanced and with less dominant (but still evident) oak.

The never-ending economic crisis, which resulted in the collapse of the Spanish domestic wine market, was also a good reason to redress the situation, since the only way to survive was by increasing exports. In a rare convergence, quality improved while average prices fell. Ribera wines are now more in line with British tastes.

## Regional and age categories

Like most Spanish appellations, Ribera del Duero is huge in size and diverse in climates and soils. It consists of three distinctive regions. The core towns of each region are Peñafiel, Roa and San Esteban de Gormaz. Around Peñafiel, where the oldest wineries are, wines tend to be fruitier and rounder in youth, and then age gracefully; at Roa wines are characterised by their elegant structure and firm backbone; while in the much smaller sub-region of San Esteban de Gormaz the wines, coming from pre-phylloxera vines, offer unique purity and depth of fruit expression.

Tempranillo (aka Tinta Fina or Tinta del País) is the main variety of Ribera. It can be blended with Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot and the white Albillo, but the blend must be at least 75% Tempranillo.

There are several Ribera categories. Some 70% of wines are young, often aromatised and with a short stay in oak – the so-called roble category. These should be appreciated for their fruitiness and drinkability. Most other wines are crianza style, aged in oak barriques for at least one year, intended to be drunk between five and 10 years. Balance and roundness are their best features. The top tier of reserva and gran reserva represents between 5% and 10% of production; it includes, not always at lofty prices, the essence of Ribera del Duero.

Good Ribera is hearty and intense, but also velvety, suave, long and joyful. Do not be afraid of keeping the best wines, as they improve well over time.



Map: Maggie Nelson

## Ribera del Duero: know your vintages

**2015** Theoretically a great vintage, but many top wines not yet released.

**2014** Variable in the sub-zones, but quality is in general quite good.

**2013** Average. The season started wet and cool, followed by a long, dry summer then rain and botrytis at harvest. Several top producers did not release wines. A few worthy exceptions.

**2012** Another vintage marked by water stress, but more balanced than 2011.

**2011** Rated 'Excellent' by the DOP. Very hot year, with heat and water stress. The best wines are superb, but many are too alcoholic.

**2010** A dream vintage, when phenolic maturity was in balance with alcoholic maturity. The best wines have great ageing capacity.

**2009** Much hyped by producers and media on release, it's a warmer vintage than 2010, with lower acidity and many wines out of balance. The best are great, but many will fade soon.

## Ribera del Duero: the facts

**Area under vine (2015)**  
22,040ha – 21,066ha being Tempranillo, the rest Cabernet Sauvignon, Garnacha, Merlot, Malbec and Albillo; 27% of vines are over 50 years old

**Number of producers**  
8,344 vine growers and 287 wineries

**Annual production**  
91.6 million bottles, of which 63.3m roble, 21.7m crianza, 4.9m reserva and gran reserva, 1.7m rosé

**Exported** 25%

*Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW is a DWVA Regional co-Chair for Spain and Sherry* ➤

# The results

Heavy tannins and the lack of acidity, plus ever-present issues over oak, marred what was otherwise a solid tasting of 'good-quality' wines. Christelle Guibert reports

THE EXPECTATION WAS, in this tasting across many vintages of Spain's second most famous wine, that there should have been some real stars. There weren't, but the positive news for consumers is that 74% of wines were Recommended or more.

Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW said: 'I'm not disappointed by the result at all, as Ribera does not have the potential of producing a high quantity of high-quality wines. There is, however, as we have seen here, a lot of potential for some good-quality wines.'

This is a bold statement, but one shared by his fellow judges. 'In 10 or 15 years' time there will be more diversification and recognition,' said Sarah Jane Evans MW. 'Growers and producers have all come piling in in recent times, changing the vines and planting on flat land used for sugar beet farming. Only now is Ribera starting to investigate its best sites, soils and aspects, so I feel more optimistic now than I've felt for quite a bit.'

Ballesteros continued: 'A lot of Ribera is produced in places that will never produce anything decent. Great things come from great terroirs and unfortunately these are not differentiated in Ribera.'

After 108 wines tasted over two days, the panel considered this the most tiring tasting they'd ever done, citing a lack of acidity and heavy tannins as the issue rather than the high alcohol or the oak. Ballesteros' view was that producers should harvest earlier: 'You may get greener wines as a result, and when young they may not show at their best, but they will age better and you will have wines that are far more balanced. But producers are not doing this; they go for phenolic maturity, which results in opulent and cloying wines.'

While winemaking was deemed to be very good in general, with very few faults, Pierre Mansour noted: 'There was still too much oak – expensive oak – used rather than winemakers actually considering what the

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Sarah Jane Evans MW

fruit can take. If you like wines that showcase winemaking more than a sense of place, then Ribera has many examples.' Evans was a bit kinder, believing the oak treatment had improved. 'Yes, a lot of oak is used but it is good oak, and well-handled oak with the fruit underneath to match it. It is quite different from how we used to feel five years ago.'

Mansour described the top-scoring wines as 'bold, opulent and intense but at the same time elegant – very different to Rioja's expression of Tempranillo'. Evans agreed. 'If you want a modern Tempranillo that isn't Rioja, then there are some winning recommendations here. Some are classic Ribera – foursquare oak and bold, black liquorice and tapenade flavours; others are lyrical and delicate with charming floral aromas.'

Mansour felt the choice of producer was more important than the crianza and reserva categories when deciding between wines. 'There wasn't a big quality difference,' he said. 'And that's not to say that crianza is great compared to reserva, just that there's not much stylistic difference in terms of how much oak was used.'

Vintage also plays a important role, especially with the complicated harvests of recent years. Our tasters felt 2012 showed best, though some wines were going through a dumb phase. Mansour was 'baffled' by the 2013s: 'There were wines that had really ripe fruit flavours, but also some grassy, unripe ones.' The panel found the 2015s promising but as only the basic wines were submitted it is too early to make a full judgement.

## The scores

108 wines tasted

**Exceptional**

0

**Outstanding**

0

**Highly Recommended**

20

**Recommended**

60

**Commended**

25

**Fair**

1

**Poor**

0

**Faulty**

2

**Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release Ribera del Duero wines. One wine per producer was permitted.**

## Highly Recommended 90–94pts



**Arzuaga, Gran Reserva 2004**  
Decanter average score: 94/100pts  
Individual judges' scores: Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW 93 Sarah Jane Evans MW 93 Pierre Mansour 95

£89.99 OW Loeb, Selfridges  
Sophisticated leather and tobacco nose. Silky, sweet, deliciously integrated and mature yet it retains its vigour and life. Distinctive on the palate with great class. Everything a gran reserva should be. It's a traditional, retro style. **Drink 2017-2022 Alcohol 14%**



**Alberto y Benito, Briego Fiel 2009** 91 PBT 92 SJE 90 PM 90

N/A UK [www.bodegasbriego.com](http://www.bodegasbriego.com)  
Lifted, toasty oak nose which carries onto the mid-palate, joined by rich fruits, raspberries and cherries coming through. The light rasp of tannin and savoury, spicy finish make this an excellent food wine. **Drink 2017-2025 Alc 14%**



**Dominio Basconillos, Viña Magna, Crianza 2012** 91 PBT 91 SJE 90 PM 91

N/A UK [www.dominiobasconillos.com](http://www.dominiobasconillos.com)  
Fine tarry notes on the nose with ripe red fruits peeking through. This is powerful and tightly grained, but is approachable now as there is real depth and a long, lush cassis finish. **Drink 2017-2026 Alc 14%**



**Valdaya, Mirum 2014** 91 PBT 89 SJE 92 PM 91

N/A UK [www.valdaya.com](http://www.valdaya.com)  
Enticing nose of cedar, smoke and herbs, this is a crowd-pleasing style with plump stone fruits and a prickle of acidity. It is youthful but perfect for current drinking as the tannins are nicely absorbed, leading to a classy finish. **Drink 2017-2019 Alc 14.5%**



**Negón 2012** 93 PBT 93 SJE 93 PM 92

N/A UK [www.bodeganegon.com](http://www.bodeganegon.com)  
Dense and leathery – there is plenty of oak in this classically styled wine – but there is generous fruit underneath too, with a focused structure that is tight and impressively built. Eucalyptus and ripe, velvety tannins on the bold finish. **Drink 2019-2031 Alc 14.5%**

*'Only now is Ribera starting to investigate its best sites, soils and aspects, so I feel more optimistic now than I've felt for quite a bit'*

Sarah Jane Evans MW



**Linaje Garsea, Archangelus Gabrihel French, Crianza 2011** 91 PBT 91 SJE 91 PM 90

N/A UK [www.linajegarsea.com](http://www.linajegarsea.com)  
This is discreetly developed but also rich in sweet cherry fruit. There is just enough tangy acidity before the rasp of tannins kick in and leads to remarkable persistence on the finish. **Drink 2017-2021 Alc 14.5%**



**Antonino Izquierdo 2012** 90 PBT 91 SJE 89 PM 89

N/A UK [www.bodegasizquierdo.com](http://www.bodegasizquierdo.com)  
A slightly different, brooding style that is restrained and elegant, and surprisingly fresh for its age. Notes of black olives and leather come through with alluring concentration and drive, finishing with power and spice. **Drink 2017-2022 Alc 14%**



**Asenjo & Manso, Silvanus 2010** 92 PBT 94 SJE 93 PM 90

N/A UK [www.asenjo-manso.com](http://www.asenjo-manso.com)  
From 2010, the dream vintage, and a real joy to drink. Living up to its year with generous fruit plus delicious complex tobacco, spice and earth tones. With a ripe open palate, it displays friendliness, balance and a prickle of acidity. **Drink 2017-2027 Alc 15%**



**Diodoro, Autor 2009** 91 PBT 90 SJE 90 PM 92

N/A UK [www.bodegaspascual.com](http://www.bodegaspascual.com)  
Wonderful mature characters still with a red berry strain running through it. There is a light punch of citrus acidity – could do with more – and it is fine and round in the mouth. Perfect for the short term. **Drink 2017-2021 Alc 14%**



**Protos, Finca el Grajo Viejo 2014** 91 PBT 92 SJE 91 PM 91

POA Walker & Wodehouse  
Stylish, smoky new vanilla oak swirls around the glass, with charming dark fruits and a note of cedar. The palate is bursting with damsons and blackberries – a modern Ribera of great intensity. **Drink 2017-2026 Alc 15%**



**Finca Villacreces 2014** 90 PBT 90 SJE 90 PM 90

POA Carruthers & Kent, Liberty Wines  
This wine is quite young now, with plenty of creamy new oak and layered blackberry fruit and a few stewed plums thrown in. But it shows charming complexity, punchy tannins and therefore a real capacity to age. **Drink 2017-2026 Alc 14% >**

## The judges

### Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW



Ballesteros Torres is a DWWA Regional co-Chair for Spain and Sherry with Evans (right). He has studied in Jerez, Burgundy, Napa and Bordeaux, and has a masters in

oenology. A columnist at *Vino y Gastronomía* and *Planeta Vino* magazines, he's on the council of the Institute of Masters of Wine and the governing board of the Spanish Tasters' Union.

### Sarah Jane Evans MW



Evans is a DWWA Regional co-Chair for Spain and Sherry with Ballesteros Torres (left). An award-winning journalist and writer since the 1980s, she became a Master of Wine in 2006. In

2010 Evans was knighted into the Gran Orden de Caballeros del Vino for services to Spanish wine, becoming chair of the Institute of Masters of Wine in 2014.

### Pierre Mansour



Mansour spent four years with UK merchant Berry Bros & Rudd after an introduction to the wine trade in 1995 with the Antique Wine Company. He did the WSET Diploma in 1998

before joining wine visitor centre Vinopolis as tastings manager. In 2000 he moved to The Wine Society and since 2004 has been responsible for its Spanish wine, among others.

## Highly Recommended (continued) 90–94pts



**Garmón 2014** 90 PBT 90 SJE 92 PM 88  
 £35 City Wine Collection  
 Elegantly cedary on the nose, this is an archetypal Ribera showing red and black berry fruits, menthol and liquorice complexity. It is still youthful and muscular, with a creaminess to the texture and a bold finish. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 14.5%



**Ismael Arroyo, Valsotillo, Reserva 2011** 90 PBT 92 SJE 87 PM 90  
 £16 D Byrne & Co  
 A lot of richness here, with almost cloyingly rich fruit characters. It is stylish in its own toasty, sensuous way with an enticing mouthfeel. Bold and satisfying in its length and presence. **Drink** 2017-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



**La Loba 2014** 90 PBT 91 SJE 90 PM 90  
 POA Desoutter & Jame  
 Earthy aromatics with hints of meat and savoury notes. Full of character, this is suave and juicy on the palate in quite a delicate style. Herbaceous and bright – a lovely example of Ribera. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 14.5%



**La Viña del Loco, Toga, Reserva 2011** 90 PBT 90 SJE 90 PM 91  
 N/A UK [www.miravinos.es](http://www.miravinos.es)  
 Intense blueberry fruit aromatics intermingle with the smoky, chewy palate. It displays hints of green herbs and red cherries with limpid freshness and generous tannins. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 14%



**Neo, Crianza 2011** 90 PBT 90 SJE 91 PM 90  
 POA Bancroft  
 A supple ripe and plummy Tempranillo with a streak of liquorice and tobacco. It is polished and modern in its style, with soft acidity and grainy tannins on the open, sweet berry finish. **Drink** 2017-2023 **Alc** 14.5%



**O Fournier, Spiga 2012** 90 PBT 91 SJE 91 PM 89  
 £25.99 Carruthers & Kent, D Byrne, Fairyhill Wines, Frontier Fine Wines, Martinez, The Drinkshop, Village Vine  
 An absolute powerhouse of a wine and a crowd-pleasing style. Fine ripe Victoria plums open up in the mouth with a dusty, smoky richness backed up by vanilla and cedar. **Drink** 2017-2027 **Alc** 15%



**Pago de los Capellanes, Parcela el Nogal 2011** 90 PBT 92 SJE 89 PM 90  
 £50 Great Western Wine, Le Vignoble  
 A veritable fruit bowl of pure damsons, dark plums and spicy blueberries. This boasts a silky texture and a long, flavourful finish, if a little balsamic and cloying right at the end. **Drink** 2017-2030 **Alc** 14.5%



**Rodero, Carmelo Rodero, Crianza 2014** 90 PBT 91 SJE 90 PM 89  
 £20 De Vinos  
 This is a bold, structured wine with a plummy nose and a slight baked quality. It is full of rhubarb freshness, with a firm undertow of well-managed oak and acidity in support, leading to a peppery finish. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 14%



**Señorío de los Baldios, Crianza 2013** 90 PBT 90 SJE 90 PM 91  
 N/A UK [www.bodegasgarcia.com](http://www.bodegasgarcia.com)  
 Dominating oaky notes on the nose giving way to secondary aromas and then some leather and spice. This is concentrated, textured and massive but has developed gracefully with silky sweet fruit. A wonderful old-fashioned style. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%

## Recommended 86–89pts

Wine	Score	PBT	SJE	PM	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Abadía de Acon, Crianza 2012	89	86	88	92	Pepper and exotic spice on the nose but the palate is a little restrained with cooked red fruits and a warm finish.	14.5%	2017-2026	£14.95	Vin Cognito
Alilian, Buenagente 2013	89	87	89	91	Mocha oak and green herb aromas – this is an ambitious wine. Oak dominates the layers of dark fruit, so decant to let it open and breathe.	14.5%	2017-2018	N/A UK	<a href="http://www.bodegasalilian.com">www.bodegasalilian.com</a>
Balbás, Ritus 2013	89	90	91	86	A finely perfumed, floral nose leads to an elegant red fruit palate juxtaposed with slightly balsamic, chunky tones and finishing with soft, abundant tannins.	14%	2017-2021	N/A UK	<a href="http://www.balbas.es">www.balbas.es</a>
Bodegas La Horra, Corimbo 2012	89	91	88	88	Pepper spice and savoury aromas stand out, whereas a mineral and focused edge cuts through the palate, speaking clearly of its region.	14.5%	2017-2031	£47.99	Amathus, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Drinkmonger, Fortnum & Mason, Hedonism, Le Vignoble
Bodegas Valpincia, Pagos de Valcerracín, Crianza 2013	89	88	86	92	Generous and developed with lively red fruit that is fleshy and succulent, with real Tempranillo quality and a slight green edge.	14.5%	2017-2019	N/A UK	<a href="http://www.bodegasvalpincia.com">www.bodegasvalpincia.com</a>
Cepa 21, Malabrigo 2011	89	92	89	86	Chocolate and smoky notes dominate this powerful wine. The thick palate is a little baked but very dense with fruit.	15%	2017-2030	POA	C&D Wines
Cruz de Alba, Crianza 2013	89	87	89	90	A full-bodied, crowd-pleasing style of Ribera. Red fruits mingle with fine cedar and earth, leading to a punchy, fruity finish.	14%	2017-2020	£15-£17	Ellis Wines, Sommelier's Choice

## Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	PBT	SJE	PM	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
<b>Fincas Valdemar, Crianza 2012</b>	89	88	90	89	In its particular rustic style, this wine is meaty and mature with cherry fruit at its heart. Enjoyable brambly acidity and gentle tannins complete it.	14%	2017-2025	£19.99-£21.99	Berkmann Wine Cellars, Grape & Grain
<b>Gallego Zapatero, Yotuel? Finca de Valdepalacios 2008</b>	89	91	88	89	Extremely oaky nose giving some exotic lift. There is plenty of sweet fruit and volume on the palate to make it charming and enjoyable.	13.5%	2017-2025	N/A UK	www.bodegasgallegozapatero.com
<b>Mirat, Reserva 2005</b>	89	94	88	86	Leathery, vegetal notes mingle with florals and ripe fruits to give a rich, inky multi-layered Ribera with enveloping tannins, if a touch pinched on the finish.	14.5%	2017-2031	£30	Ellis Wharton
<b>Rento, Reserva 2011</b>	89	89	89	88	A very ripe, modern example with quince fruit and elegant oak that is sound and firmly built, with gentle spice coming through on the finish.	15%	2017-2021	N/A UK	www.bodegarento.es
<b>Tamaral, Reserva 2011</b>	89	87	89	91	The palate is all about black fruit with an underlay of tarry oak. It is rich but slightly conflicted and needs time to integrate. Very accomplished.	14.5%	2017-2022	£24	Barton Brownsdon & Sadler
<b>Valduero, Unacepa, Reserva 2012</b>	89	90	90	86	Subtle interplay between ripe dark fruit and cedar oak that is restrained for Ribera. Edgy and firm but a touch excessive.	14%	2017-2027	£40	Robb Bros
<b>Arrocal, Angel, Reserva 2012</b>	88	89	89	86	A chalky palate that is both spiced with leather and bursting with bright cherries, but there is noticeable alcohol and a slightly bitter finish.	14%	2017-2024	N/A UK	www.arrocal.com
<b>Bodegas Altos de Ontañón, Roble 2014</b>	88	87	91	87	A richer style here, with plump red fruit aromas and a herbaceous note. The palate is dry, with fine-grained expressive oak, not too overbearing.	14%	2017-2018	£10	Boutinot
<b>Bodegas Santa Eulalia, Riberal, Crianza 2011</b>	88	89	86	88	A juicy style of Ribera that is full-bodied and velvety with a muscular palate. Lacks some intensity but it is still harmonious and long.	14.5%	2017-2028	£16.99	Berkmann Wine Cellars
<b>Ciillar de Silos, Crianza 2012</b>	88	85	90	88	This is all about dense cherries, with some earthy development and enough freshness to ease the ripe fruit. An overlay of tarry oak and a savoury finish.	14.5%	2017-2018	£20.95	Carruthers & Kent, Fields Morris & Verdun
<b>Cueva Jimenez, Ferratus Ao 2014</b>	88	88	86	90	Blueberry and floral aromas with some balsamic hints. Juicy bright fruit palate with spicy but drying oak. A bit short on acidity but clean and typical.	14%	2017-2021	£15	Bistrovin, RS Wines, Spirited Wines
<b>Dehesa de los Canonigos 2013</b>	88	87	90	87	A traditional style, with that classic American oak influence and sweet berry fruits too. There are green notes on the palate but it is ready to drink now.	14%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.dehesadeloscanonigos.com
<b>Juan Manuel Burgos, Avan 2014</b>	88	89	88	88	The nose is a little stewed but the palate shows tobacco, forest floor and appealing truffle notes. It is thick and generous in a brooding style.	14%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.avanvinos.com
<b>Legaris, Calmo 2011</b>	88	92	86	85	Smoky and very rich with lots of fruit and extract: a monster with powerful structure. The tannins are well-managed, but the overall effect is very dark.	15%	2017-2030	POA	Codorniu UK
<b>Peñafiel, Miros, Roble 2014</b>	88	87	88	89	Baskets of alluring red flowers and plums on the nose. Despite the evident oak, the style is soft and engaging.	14%	2017-2020	POA	Mountain Valley Wines
<b>Prado de Olmedo, Monasterio de San Miguel, Crianza 2014</b>	88	87	89	89	Marked new oak and tannic muscle dominate here, bringing spice and seasoning to the rich and generous fruit. There's a savoury tapenade finish.	14%	2017-2021	N/A UK	www.pradodeolmedo.com
<b>Raiz de Guzman, Crianza 2012</b>	88	90	86	89	A textbook crianza; liquorice and savoury notes with richness from American oak. It is expressive but still youthful in its power.	14%	2017-2025	N/A UK	www.raizdeguzman.es
<b>Ribon, Tinto Ribon 2014</b>	88	88	89	88	A fine wine in an unusual style that is perhaps playing with oxidation giving spicy and vegetal notes. A savoury grain of tannin adds structure.	14.5%	2017-2021	£19.95	Albion Wine Shippers
<b>San Mames, Doble R, Crianza 2012</b>	88	89	85	89	A punchy crianza where savoury and leathery notes are overlaid with black fruits and roasted notes, expressing the Tempranillo grape well.	14%	2017-2024	N/A UK	www.bodegasanmames.com
<b>Sei Solo 2014</b>	88	89	86	89	A young, straightforward, honest wine with minty new oak. It is muscly and ambitious with decent mid-term ageing potential.	14.5%	2017-2021	£30-£36	City Wine Collection, Justerini & Brooks
<b>Valdubón, Roble 2015</b>	88	89	86	89	Bursting with ripe damsons and dark fruit on the nose but this generosity doesn't follow on the palate, although it does have great length and clarity.	13.5%	2017-2021	£10-£11	Marks & Spencer, Molson Coors, Soho Wine Supply
<b>Veronica Salgado Capricho, Crianza 2012</b>	88	87	86	90	Ripe, meaty and fleshy at first but the promise doesn't quite hold up through the domineering new oak, although there is an agreeable succulence here.	13.5%	2017-2023	N/A UK	www.veronicasalgado.es
<b>Viña Sastre, Crianza 2011</b>	88	89	89	87	Delightful vanilla and plum aromas with a herbaceous quality. Obvious high alcohol but it does not stand apart too much as the palate is silky and long.	15%	2017-2027	£19	City Wine Collection, Handford, Hedonism, Good Wine Shop
<b>Viñas del Jaro, Chafandin 2014</b>	88	87	89	89	Layered cassis on a sensuous palate – this will appeal to many. Not entirely integrated at present, but shows promise.	14.5%	2017-2020	£30	Dulwich Vintners, Eton Vintners, In Vino Veritas, Moreno Wines, Oxford Wines, Salut Wines
<b>Adaro de Pradorey, Crianza 2012</b>	87	88	86	86	Tobacco mingles with ripe fruit on the nose. It starts well and has a classic feel to it, but finishes a little short.	14%	2017-2025	N/A UK	www.pradorey.com
<b>Altogrande, Crianza 2013</b>	87	86	85	90	Exotic and savoury, this has a sweetly fruited palate with a hint of green underneath. It is long, but not especially complex.	14.5%	2017-2019	£25	Frederick Robinson
<b>Aster, Finca El Otero 2012</b>	87	86	87	87	Some discreet development which is enticing. This is strong and lively with spice and plums. Lacks elegance but shows power.	14.5%	2017-2026	£29.95	Armit, The Wine Merchant
<b>Carrequemada, Roble 2014</b>	87	90	88	84	A fine combination of cedar, fleshy red cherries and notes of vanilla. It is opulent and heavy with a Port-like quality.	14%	2017-2023	N/A UK	www.viñamatey.es
<b>Catania, Crianza 2013</b>	87	86	89	86	An honest wine for drinking now because it is herby and tarry, with chunky, balancing tannins but noticeable heat on the finish.	14%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.hispanobodegas.com
<b>Comenge, Reserva 2011</b>	87	87	88	86	Glossy baked black fruit and plenty of alcohol. There is lots to like here: it is energetic and young, but perhaps a little simple.	15%	2017-2024	£27.99	Eurowines

Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	PBT	SJE	PM	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Conde de San Cristobal 2013	87	88	89	83	Approachable style, with toasty and green pepper notes – very international. A little austere and not for the long haul, but very enjoyable now.	14%	2017-2022	£16	Majestic
Ebano, Crianza 2013	87	86	86	89	A fleshy wine with a rustic edge: a simple, poised style. This will benefit from decanting to show its stylish structure.	14%	2017-2019	£22.99	Carruthers & Kent
El Inicio, Admiracion 2012	87	89	86	86	Just a little oxidised with roasted fruits blended with spicy oak in a commercial style. Easy and chewy, just a touch pinched on the finish.	14%	2017-2021	N/A UK	www.bodegaselinicio.com
Epifanio Rivera, Erial 2013	87	87	86	87	Some oxidative development on the herby, woody nose. It is easygoing with soft tannins, but could be a bit fresher.	14.5%	2017-2019	POA	Laytons
Mantrus, Roble 2014	87	84	89	87	Peppery and distinctive, this is chewy and textured in the mouth with fine tannic muscle.	13.5%	2017-2018	£9	Boutinot
Milénico, Valdepila 2012	87	86	88	87	Aniseed and leather aromatics – a peppery, foursquare style of Ribera. The alcohol is evident but the tannins are delicately integrated.	14.5%	2017	£16	Vinissimus
Pinna Fidelis, Roble 2015	87	86	86	89	The fruit is cooked and jammy on the nose, leading to a creamy, blueberry palate that is youthful with promising potential.	14%	2017-2020	£9-£10	D Byrne & Co, Field & Fawcett, Prohibition Wines
Rios Prieto, Prios Maximus, Roble 2015	87	87	87	87	High-toned raspberry fruit runs through the pleasant palate. Notes of mocha richness in an easy-drinking, simple style.	13.5%	2017-2018	£11	Adnams, D Murray, Gordon MacPhail, Gusto, L Smith, Mumbles, Portland Wines, Spirited Wines, Staintons, The Wine Co, Weavers
Roberik, Abés 2014	87	85	89	86	Bold oak initially, with a fine edge of grassiness and grainy tannins. Almost salty on the finish.	14%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.roberik.com
Torres, Celeste, Crianza 2013	87	87	89	85	Restrained, well-integrated toasty notes coming through the palate with tapenade underneath. Graceful, but could be just a bit more complex.	14%	2017-2021	£11.99-£13.99	Waitrose, Campbells of Leyburn, Rodney Densem Wines
Uvaguilera, Palomero, Roble 2009	87	88	85	87	Old-style classic crianza: toasty oak, smoky tobacco leaf and developed fruit. Just lacks some fresh fruit concentration.	14%	2017-2024	£13.99	Cambridge Wine Merchants
Vega Clara, Diez Almendros, Roble 2014	87	83	89	89	Tarry oak on the nose with plump, confected fruit on the palate. A fine lift of acidity makes this an honest wine.	14%	2017-2018	POA	Bodega Soul
Vizcarra 2013	87	87	86	87	Discreet nose of faint damson fruit, followed by a silky palate with gentle maturity and quite a leathery finish.	14.5%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.vizcarra.es
Alnardo, Psi 2013	86	91	85	82	Delicate and somehow rustic all at once. Enticing cherry fruit but a touch hollow; it could improve with food.	13.5%	2017-2021	£22.50	Corney & Barrow
Arnaiz, Roble 2015	86	84	85	89	Aromas of garrigue and aniseed lead onto an oak palate in a modern style, but with some tight, jarring acidity.	14%	2017-2017	N/A UK	www.garciacarrion.com
Convento San Francisco, Roble 2014	86	87	85	87	A pepper and cassis-driven palate in a creamy style that starts fleshy but finishes tight with firm tannins.	14.5%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.bodegaconvento.com
Dominio de Atauta 2012	86	87	84	88	Floral and bright fruit that is fresh and fragrant. It is supported by oak but the tannins are drying. Ready to drink.	14.5%	2017-2021	£24-£28	D Byrne & Co, Kwoff, Prohibition Wines, Tiny's Tipple
Emina, Reserva 2011	86	86	85	88	Vanilla dominates in a blackberry custard kind of way. Its spice and lactic character shows noticeable winemaking, not terroir, with a soft finish.	14.5%	2017-2022	N/A UK	www.emina.es
Marques de Velilla, Crianza 2012	86	86	85	88	Finely leathery and floral with mellow developed tones, but the palate moves onto green notes. Lacks a bit of acidity.	14%	2017-2021	N/A UK	www.marquesdevelilla.com
Martin Berdugo, Joven, Roble 2015	86	87	86	85	Zippy black fruit characters with tangy citrus acidity and a hint of banana and liquorice spice.	14.5%	2017-2018	£10.50	Morgenrot, The Vineyard Ramsbottom, Whalley Wines
Matarromera, Prestigio 2012	86	88	87	84	The nose has the heartiness of Ribera and promising intensity, but the mid-palate is drying and it finishes a touch short.	14.5%	2017-2021	POA	The Drink Shop
Pico Cuadro 2013	86	87	86	85	Meaty aromas twinned with blackberries and baked fruit on a smooth palate, although the finish is a bit uneven.	14%	2017-2021	£15.50	Humble Grape
Portia, Prima, Roble 2013	86	85	86	86	Wood smoke and plums translate from nose to palate in a well-made fashion, but it remains a touch modest.	14%	2017-2019	£18-£20	Drinks Direct, The Drink Shop

Commended 83-85pts

■ Aalto 2014 85, 15%, 2017-2018, £18-£25 City Wine Collection, Justerini & Brooks ■ Abadia de San Quirce, Crianza 2014 85, 14%, 2017-2020, N/A UK www.bodegasimperiales.com ■ Bertrand Sourdais, Antidoto 2014 85, 14.5%, 2017-2020, £16.50 H2Vin ■ Bodegas Los Maticos, Velvet, Roble 2014 85, 14%, 2017-2018, £30-£40 Raymond Reynolds ■ El Mosaico de Baco, Roble 2014 85, 14%, 2017-2019, N/A UK www.elmosaicodebaco.com ■ Malacuera, Crianza 2013 85, 14%, 2017-2021, N/A UK www.bodegasmalacuera.com ■ Mathilde Chapoutier 2014 85, 15.5%, 2017-2021, N/A UK www.chapoutier.com ■ Pagos del Rey, Condado de Oriza, Reserva 2012 85, 14%, 2017-2021, POA Felix Solis Avantis UK ■ Pingón, Carramimbre, Reserva 2012 85, 15%, 2017-2024, £22 Amathus ■ Sarmentero, Roble 2015 85, 14.5%, 2017-2020, N/A UK www.bodegasarmentero.com ■ Trus, Roble

2015 85, 14%, 2017-2019, £9.50 Morgenrot, The Vineyard Ramsbottom ■ Viña Pedrosa, Reserva 2012 85, 14%, 2017-2024, £36.95 Bancroft ■ Abascal Vineyard, Hacienda Zorita, Crianza 2012 84, 13.5%, 2017-2019, £15 Adnams, Aimees Wine House, Amazon, Hampton Cellar, Harrods, Last Try Wines, Nailsworth Wines & Spirits, Oval Fine Wines & Beers, Shenfield Wine Co, The Grape Store, The New Wine Shop, Vinotopia ■ Alvides, Crianza, Crianza 2014 84, 14%, 2017, £29 Grape Passions ■ Dominio Romano 2014 84, 14%, 2017-2019, POA Top Selection ■ El Secreto 2014 84, 14%, 2017, N/A UK www.vina-mayor.es ■ Monteabellon, Finca Matambres 2012 84, 14%, 2017-2021, £30-£35 Fields Morrin & Verdin ■ Senda de los Olivos, Crianza 2014 84, 14.5%, 2017-2018, N/A UK www.zifar.com ■ Tresmano 2014 84, 14%, 2017, N/A UK www.tresmano.com ■ Traslascuestas, Roble 2015 84, 14%, 2017, N/A UK www.bodegastraslascuestas.com ■ Valtravieso,

Crianza 2014 84, 14%, 2017, N/A UK www.valtravieso.com ■ Arroyo, Crianza 2013 83, 14%, 2017-2018, N/A UK www.tintoarroyo.com ■ Buenos Dias, Roble, Roble 2014 83, 13.5%, 2017, £12.40 Cheers Wine Merchants, R Campbell & Sons, The Bottleneck, The Vineyard ■ Diez Llorente, Crianza 2013 83, 13.5%, 2017-2018, POA Albion Wine Shippers ■ Emilio Moro, Malleolus de Sanchomartin 2011 83, 14.5%, 2017-2021, POA C&D Wines

Fair 76-82pts  
■ Laveguilla, Crianza 2012 79

Faulty  
■ Rolland Galarreta 2012 (oxidised)  
■ Cuarenta y Uno Norte, Roble 2013 (oxidised)

For full UK stockist details, see p94

My top three

Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW

■ **Asenjo & Manso, Silvanus 2010**  
Sheer pleasure – a joy to drink – and a showcase of the best that Ribera can offer. Balanced in its abundance; long and enticing. Great! **94 Drink** 2017-2027

■ **Mirat, Reserva 2005** Wine from a small area in the province of Soria, from very old vines, with a unique character. Finely textured with a delicate finish. Lovely personality. **94 Drink** 2017-2031

■ **Protos, Finca el Grajo Viejo 2014**  
This marks the return of Protos to the hallowed halls of the best Riberas. A single-vineyard wine built upon brilliant fruit for the long run. Very promising. **92 Drink** 2017-2026

My top three

Sarah Jane Evans MW

■ **Arzuaga, Gran Reserva 2004** A traditional treat. If there was one wine in this tasting made for the lover of classical Spanish gran reservas, then this was it. Ripe cherry fruits overlaid with very fine oak and a lively prickle of freshness running through. **93 Drink** 2017-2022

■ **Negón 2012** A discovery! A winery new to me, and one that is working biodynamically. This is a serious wine, and could simply have had all the density of Ribera del Duero. But it blossoms impressively, revealing juicy ripe fruit and finely textured tannins. Long, memorable finish. **93 Drink** 2019-2031

■ **Garmón 2014** Young, and full of power. Not in the least discreet, still showing plenty of oak, but already with complex notes of menthol, liquorice and cedar. Very well-handled, from fruit selection to cellar. **92 Drink** 2017-2021

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary: Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW

A positive tasting, with 74% Recommended or more, but no ‘wow factor’. And while oak use is less ‘clumsy’ than in the past, overly wooded wines are still an issue



Pedro Ballesteros Torres MW is a DWWA Regional co-Chair for Spain and Sherry

AT FIRST SIGHT, these results don't seem brilliant, since there are no Outstanding wines, but there are positives.

Firstly, there are 20 Highly Recommended and 60 Recommended wines – remarkable numbers. Secondly, with the exception of the top-rated wine, Arzuaga's Gran Reserva, practically all the other wineries have a superior wine in their range that was not submitted. Lastly, the vintages tasted were, in the main, not the best recent vintages in quality terms. *Decanter's* last Ribera tasting focused on 2010, the dream vintage, so it's hard to better that. Despite the hype, 2011 is not up to 2010 – wines were noted as heavy, very ripe and fleshy – and the top wines from 2015, the next great vintage, won't be released until 2018. The other vintages tasted are clearly inferior, though it is indicative that two of the three top wines are from 2004 and 2010, while the few 2009s and '05s submitted were also well rated.

Examining wine categories, the roble style (young wines that spend a few months in oak to gain in aroma and some tannins) was of limited interest. The only gran reserva to be tasted got the top mark, while the scores for crianza and reserva were more related to the winery and the vintage than their categories. It is clear that Ribera wines need ageing to be successful.

Some top wines got very low marks, such as Aalto and Viña Pedrosa (both 85 points) and Emilio Moro (83), probably because of their high tannins and heavy oak. These are likely to score more highly in a few years' time.

In some cases, tasters preferred a blend with Cabernet Sauvignon. Cabernet's tight fruit tannins are far more interesting than those from wood. The use of oak is still a major feature in Ribera: most wines smelled of toast, vanilla and the like. They are not as clumsily oaked as in the past, but still it's still a mystery as to why so many producers want to hide the lovely Tinta Fina (Tempranillo) fruit behind vulgar wood aromas, common to any oaked wine. A bit less oak would surely result in slightly higher marks and, very probably, in better understanding by British consumers.

In conclusion, this was a very interesting tasting, with many lights and few shadows. But sadly it was not a memorable tasting; the wow factor was not there. **D**

*It's still a mystery as to why so many producers want to hide the lovely Tinta Fina fruit behind vulgar oak'*