



Vivanco
LA ISLA
VIÑEDO SINGULAR
2019

RIOJA
DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN CALIFICADA



INFORME RIOJA
TIM ATKIN
93 POINTS

History of a place

It was in 2000 when I first went to see those plots of land. The grape harvest was about to begin. We had received a call from a famous French grape grower and winemaker who wanted to sell two plots of land that he had been growing till then in an area of Briones unknown to me. It was called La Isla (The Island), we were told. It was so named because it was isolated, almost hidden, in a location north-east of the town. My father and I went down a steep slope on a winding road and crossed the railway track without losing sight of the landscape that was opening up in front of us: to the north, the silhouette of San Vicente and Sierra de Cantabria; to the west, the tower of the church of Briones and, to the east, the castle of Davalillo dominating from San Asensio.



We got out of the car and the sound changed completely. There was almost absolute silence. Just the quiet flow of the river Ebro hidden by the trees on its banks. There were two plots, one opposite the other, both planted in 1973, with a road separating them. One, arranged north-south, consists of mostly bush-trained, ungrafted Viura grapevines, planted with vinifera rootstock, surviving phylloxera thanks to the particular composition of the soil. The other is arranged perpendicularly to the first, running east-west. It is mostly Tempranillo, trained on a trellis system which was among the first to arrive in Rioja in order to improve leaf surface exposure and achieve better cluster aeration. The grapes were smooth and crisp, with a freshness and ripeness that was very difficult to achieve at the time. The Viura had a special flavour, with exceptional complexity evincing the direct connection between the soil and the vinifera.

We immediately fell in love with the vineyards, overwhelmed by the twilight landscape of a late September evening. I closed the car door, looked at my father and said, "This place deserves its own wine." Since then, I haven't stopped thinking about it.

Twenty years later, after many harvests of knowledge and learning about these two areas, my dream (and that of my father) has finally come true. Two wines that tell the story of my first visit to this magical place so called LA ISLA.


Rafael Vivanco

WHAT IS A VIÑEDO SINGULAR?

The Viñedo Singular (“exceptional vineyard”) category was approved in 2017 by the Regulatory Board of Rioja with the aim of giving visibility to wines from a *single vineyard* within a qualitative spot. It occupies the first position in the traceability pyramid applied to catalogue the origin and worth of the wines produced within the Designation, equivalent to the single vineyard wines or the *grand cru* from other wine regions.

The “Viñedo Singular” category includes the most demanding and qualitative set of regulations, which are summarised below.

Requirements

1. Grapes exclusively sourced from plots that constitute the "exceptional vineyard".
2. Old Vineyard: 35 years old at least.
3. Maximum production: 5,000 kg/ha in the case of red varieties and 6,922 kg/ha in white varieties.
4. Maximum yield: 65 liters of wine every 100 kg. of grape.
5. The “exceptional vineyard” must be balanced and have limited vigour. During ripening of the grape, the growth of vegetation must be totally stopped.

6. A single shoot trimming is authorized.

7. Hand harvest.

8. Double qualification of the wine through blind tasting. First, to get the wine qualified as Viñedo Singular once produced. In the second tasting, before launch onto the market, the average score will be excellent otherwise the wine will not be able to be released onto the market as Viñedo Singular. The tasting panel is formed by winemakers, sommeliers and independent technical resources from the Rioja council board.

Generic
These are first or second-year wines that retain their primary characteristics of being fresh and fruity. This category may also include other wines which, even if they have undergone an ageing process, are not certified by the Control Boards.

Crianza
These wines are ones that have reached at least their third year and remained in oak barrels for at least one year. For white and rosé wines the minimum ageing period in barrels is 6 months, with a minimum period in the cellar of 18 months.

Reserva
These are wines that have aged in oak barrels and bottles for a total period of 36 months, with a minimum of 12 months ageing in oak barrels followed and complemented by a minimum of 6 months ageing in the bottle. In white wines and rosé the ageing period is 2 years, of which at least 6 months must be in the barrel.

Gran Reserva
These are wines that have aged in oak barrels and bottles for at least 60 months, with a minimum duration of ageing in oak barrels of 2 years followed and complemented by a minimum of 2 years in the bottle. For white wines and rosé, the ageing period is 4 years, of which at least 6 months must be in the barrel.

Viñedo Singular
The vineyard must be at least 35 years old and the maximum production allowed is 5,000 kilos per hectare for red grapes and 6,922 kilos per hectare for white grapes and with a 65% grape to wine ratio. It must come from a balanced vineyard with a limited vigour. The harvesting must be carried out manually and in an environmentally friendly manner and its uniqueness must be recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. They use a specific guarantee document. The wines made will undergo a double qualitative evaluation, and the second one has to be classed as "Excellent".

Vino de Municipio
Grapes coming from the said "municipality" and which have been produced, grown and bottled within its geographical area. An exception is allowed of including up to 15% of the volume of grapes from neighbouring municipalities, in which case they have to prove a long-standing link with the said vineyard of at least 10 years. The label must bear the words "Vino de Municipio" together with the name of the municipality. The name of the municipality is displayed on the label with characters which are equivalent to or smaller than those used to represent the name of the Rioja Designation. Their documents contain a specific coding. The Board will check the geographical traceability of the product.

Vino de Zona
Grapes from the "area", with the exception of the possibility of incorporating up to 15% of the volume of grapes from neighbouring areas under the same conditions as those described for wines of municipio. The name of the area is displayed on the label with characters which are equivalent to or smaller than those used to display the name of the Rioja Designation. Their documents contain a specific coding. The Board will check the geographical traceability of the product, as it does with the *Vino de Municipio*.

Quality Sparkling Wines
The production of quality sparkling wines using the "Traditional Method" is allowed for all the grape varieties authorised by the Designation, including obtaining rosé and white wines. The label must include "Traditional Method" and the type of dry sparkling wine: Brut, Extra Brut or Extra Nature. They bear a specific guarantee document.

Generic
The minimum period required in one place for the second fermentation is 15 months.

Reserva
24 months in the Reserva category.

Gran Añada
36 months in the Gran Añada category.



LA ISLA, THE SPOT

La Isla is a small spot within a unique landscape, located on the border between Briones, San Asensio y San Vicente de la Sonsierra, within the heart of Rioja Alta. It is situated in a small depression, with the river Ebro as its northern boundary and the railway line closing the southern edge. It is made up of a diverse blend of small plots of land historically used to grow grapes, with some of the oldest vines in the Briones area.

All the vineyards share a similar type of soil, alluvial, with some sandy deposits and limestone cobbles, laid out in terraces descending to the Ebro. The closer we get to the river, the greater the percentage of cobbles, which thin out as we move southwards and get closer to the border area, which is more clay-based soil and less stony. Its wines show a subtle salinity, coming from this calcareous environment of alluvial origin.



Climatically, on top of a marked Atlantic influence characteristic of this high part of Rioja Alta, the area is strongly influenced by the River Ebro, affecting harvest dates, which are usually among the earliest in the area, ensuring full ripening and medium-high acidity with wines that are very and with high potential for laying down.

LA ISLA, PLOTS OF OUR “VIÑEDO SINGULAR”

Within this spot and since 2000, Bodegas Vivanco owns two different but very close plots: one, on ungrafted vines, from an old massal selection mostly of the Viura variety and, the other, from a similar old massal selection of mainly Tempranillo. Both were planted in 1973 and are grown under organic certification, representing the ultimate expression of this unique and singular location. These are vineyards that we are recovering, otherwise they would have been pulled up due to its low yields. For all these reasons, in 2019, they were qualified as “Viñedo Singular” by the Rioja Council Board and the Spanish Minister of Agriculture.

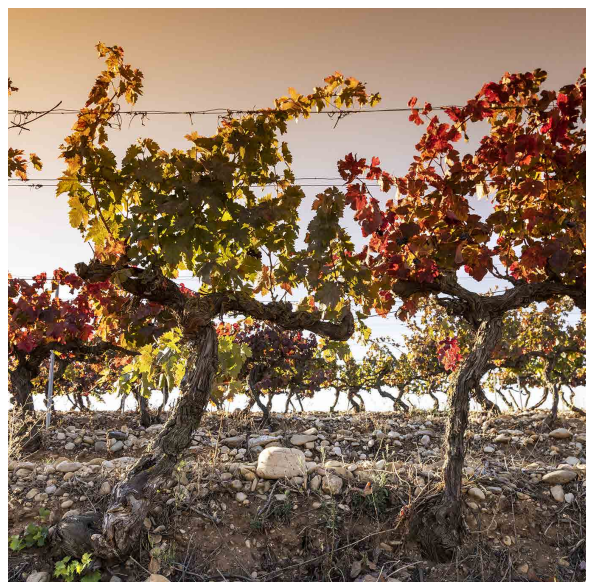


LA ISLA, RESCUING AN HISTORIC RIOJA VINEYARD

The definition of an old vineyard is not only based on its age. Behind the history of each of its grape varieties lies a common element: diversity. Normally, different varieties coexist in this type of vineyard as a result of an ancestral planting process: first, an American vine was planted to prevent the attack of the phylloxera and, a year later, once the trunk already formed, each vine was then grafted, one by one, with plant material (vine shoots) previously selected by the grape grower.

In this process, some vine shoots of other varieties were mixed in, accidentally or on purpose, with the desired one and grafted onto rootstock. When the plants budded, the vines appeared interspersed across the vineyard, providing a diversity that would be almost impossible today with modern techniques. In our plot in La Isla, besides the Tempranillo other varieties appear, such as Garnacha, Moristel, Viura and another white variety called Calagraño. And all this in 1973, a time when the beginnings of the modernization of viticulture and its methods could already be glimpsed.

With La Isla in its red version we recover this historic personality of Rioja vineyards, represented, in this case, in a plot that has two distinct zones. The upper part on descending terraces, has less vigor and most quality with the most uniform ripening. The flatter part requires, in most years, a later and more selective harvesting process.





VINEYARD DATA SHEET

Spot: LA ISLA (Briones).

96% Tempranillo of great genetic variability as a result of an old massal selection from Briones, 2% Moristel and Garnacha Tinta and another 2% of white varieties, mainly Viura and a small part of Calagraño. Planted in 1973.

3.1 ha

Viticulture certified as Organic since 2013 and including green corridors of natural vegetation surrounding the vineyard in order to preserve the biodiversity and indigenous fauna.

Soil: alluvial terrace over the Ebro river. Deposits of sand and limestone round stones with low capacity holding water and nutrients, very appropriate for a low yielding and high quality viticulture.

Wire-trained from the very beginning (one of the first vineyards in Rioja under this technique) with double-cordon and east-west facing and presenting two distinct zones. The southern area, furthest from the Ebro river, is a slope with an average gradient of 10.4%, while the northern part has a gentler gradient averaging 3%. It is located at an altitude of 438-447 metres a.s.l.

Planting density: 3,700 vines per hectare.

LA ISLA, THE 2019 VINTAGE

After a 2018 vintage with a markedly Atlantic character and substantial rainfall, 2019 was more normal year, with fewer unforeseen events. An autumn and winter with more moderate rainfall gave way to a warmer spring that enabled an early budding of the vines. The summer was drier with a heat summation of almost one degree more than the previous year, offering a wine with more fruit energy and structure.

LA ISLA 2019

GRAPE VARIETIES: 96% Tempranillo of great genetic diversity as a result of an old massal selection, 2% Moristel and Garnacha Tinta and another 2% of white varieties, mainly Viura and a small part of Calagraño. Planted in 1973.

HARVEST: In three different days; the hillside part was picked on 25 September and the central part, on 30 September and 1 October. All the grapes are hand picked in small boxes.

VINIFICATION: All our grapes are first refrigerated in our cooling chambers. Afterwards, the grapes go onto a cluster sorting table and then, a berry sorting table. After mild crushing, the grapes are fed by gravity into small French oak vats where they ferment and are left to macerate for around 20 days in contact with the skins at a controlled temperature of 28 °C with light pumpovers and gentle punching down (pigeage).

AGEING: A good portion of the wine remains on the lees for 12 months in one- and two-year-old, 225- and 500-litre, extra-fine-grain French oak barrels. The remaining part ages on the lees in small tanks for the same period of time. The wine was bottled in November 2020 and remained in our underground cellar at least for 30 months before release onto the market.



TECHNICAL DATA

ALCOHOL DEGREE: 14% vol.

PH: 3.70

TOTAL ACIDITY: 5.6 g/l in tartaric acid

RESIDUAL SUGAR: 1.1 g/l