



Vivanco
LA ISLA
VIÑEDO SINGULAR
PIE FRANCO
2020
RIOJA
DENOMINACIÓN DE ORIGEN CALIFICADA

INFORME RIOJA
TIM ATKIN
94 PUNTOS

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 we call LA ISLA.


Rafael Vivanco

WHAT IS A VIÑEDO SINGULAR?

The Viñedo Singular (“exceptional vineyard”) category was approved in 2017 by the Regulatory Board of DOCa 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.

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 (95 points or more) 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% grapes 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 bear 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 municipalities. 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 calcareous 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, Bodegas Vivanco owns two different but very close plots since 2000: one, on ungrafted vines, mostly of the Viura variety and, the other, of an 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.

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, THE UNGRAFTED CONNECTION

In the month of June 1899, alarm bells went off in a small village in Rioja Alta, Sajazarra. Despite the efforts and restrictive measures taken by all government agencies since its arrival to Europe, a small insect known as phylloxera had arrived in Rioja. Gradually, the pest spread and devastated practically all Rioja vineyards. It would take almost 20 years for recovery to begin, once the remedy had been discovered. The process required uprooting all the vines and replanting with American vines, which are resistant to the pest. On the following year, vine shoots of the aerial variety sought (Tempranillo, Graciano, etc.) were grafted onto the American rootstock. This way, the root part of the plant was resistant to phylloxera whilst the quality of the vinifera variety grafted was preserved and the aerial part produced the desired grapes.

The pest destroyed almost all the vineyards in Rioja. In 1898, there were 52,592 hectares registered in the province, according to a report at the time (aka Servicio Vitícola), whereas, in 1997, almost 100 years later, there were 36,969 hectares in La Rioja. However, there was a small part that resisted the onslaught. Sandy soil is phylloxera's greatest enemy, where the insect is unable to grow and reproduce. Some of the vineyards planted on such soils survived the pest. These are the so-called UNGRAFTED VINEYARDS. They are vineyards with the original rootstock, ungrafted, with less vigour but they have a much more powerful root system, capable of exploring the soil better and transferring its characteristics (the minerality, as we call it in the world of wine).

Our plot in La Isla is an ungrafted vineyard because it was planted in the traditional way. The curious thing is that it is a vineyard planted in 1973, many years after the arrival of the phylloxera. The grape grower who planted it must have previously uprooted ungrafted vines which led him to continue with this method, banned in Spain since 2003 to prevent the spread of the pest. It is a low-vigour vineyard, with a soil full of pebbles and a sandy profile. The wine obtained is saline, fruit-forward and complex showing that extreme connection between the grape and its place of reference. A unique vineyard, heir to the most ancestral viticulture.



VINEYARD DATA SHEET

Spot: LA ISLA (Briones).

Ungrafted Viura planted in 1973.

2.1 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.

N-S facing.

Altitude 433-440 metres above sea level.

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.

The amount of round stones in the soil is much higher in this plot compared to the plot used for the red wine (La Isla. Tempranillo)

Bush-trained, with very low vigour and great diversity, north-south facing, and with an average constant slope of 5% and an altitude of 440 to 433 metres a.s.l. It is a gentle slope with a slight incline towards the Ebro river (north).The soil is so poor that, traditionally, only white varieties were planted in this plot, in order to ensure a minimum yield.

Planting density: 3,400 vines per hectare.

LA ISLA, THE 2020 VINTAGE

We will always remember 2020 for the COVID pandemic and its consequences. It paralyzed the world and gave way to one of the most difficult harvests in history. A cold and rainy winter led towards an extremely humid and cold spring; consequently, the pressure of fungus was higher than anyone could remember. The struggle was constant, even more so when viewed from the perspective of organic farming, as is the case with Vivanco La Isla. We lived in the vineyard; from May to October, day by day, until the harvest. The result: wines that are less opulent but incredibly honest. Refined, ancestral, delicate, and fruity. True representatives of extreme viticulture and the tireless work of humankind against adversity.

LA ISLA 2020

GRAPE VARIETIES: 98% Viura and 2% other varieties, such as Malvasía, Garnacha Blanca and Calagraño. Planted in 1973.

HARVEST: The grapes were picked by hand in small boxes on September 14, 2020.

VINIFICATION: All our grapes first go onto a cluster sorting table and then, a berry sorting table. Cold maceration for 8 hours and pressing. The resulting free-run must is racked into 500-litre French oak barrels where it ferments.

AGEING: A part of the wine remains on the lees for 12 months in one- and two-year-old, 500-litre, extra-fine-grain French oak barrels. The wine was bottled in November 2021 and remained in our underground cellar at least for 24 months before being released onto the market.

Number of bottles: 1,074 of 750ml.

TECHNICAL DATA

ALCOHOL DEGREE: 14% vol.

TOTAL ACIDITY: 5.6 g/l tartaric

PH: 3.29

RESIDUAL SUGAR: 1.3 g/l

