

allowing it to express itself through biodynamic viticulture. The results speak for themselves: Pingus sells in the UK at up to £700 a bottle.

High standards

Not everyone has the resources to go as far as Sisseck, but there's been a shift towards enhancing and maintaining the unique individuality of Tempranillo grown at these altitudes and in these soils, especially as the vineyard matures. In visits to the region, even as long ago as 1988, and even at the most gritty, factory-like co-operatives, I was pleased and surprised to be able to say that I never tasted a bad wine. Some were better than others, of course, but the general standard throughout was amazingly high – except in one respect.

An unusual part of the regulations in Ribera del Duero is that only red and rosado (rosé) wines can be made. There are white wines (mainly from the Albillo) but they have to be sold under the *Viño de la Tierra Castilla y León* classification. Many of them are very good. It's the rosados with which I take issue. From my first visit, 24 years ago, to my most recent, last June, I have struggled with the rosados. In general they lack the identity of the reds and, to be brutally honest, a Navarra Garnacha rosado (at probably half the price) would knock

them for six. In a region where the reds command premium prices, what is the point of making rosado? I suspect that it's a depository for young vines and/or sub-standard grapes that aren't deemed good enough for the reds. There are some good rosados, but they are few and far between.

Looking ahead, however, the most positive aspect for me is the number of new, small, family-owned bodegas who, to quote Sophie Kuhn of Bodegas Gallego Zapatero, 'can't compete on quantity, can't compete on price, so have to compete on quality'. With that attitude, Ribera del Duero looks to be in safe hands for the future.

There are those in the region who would like to change. Ricardo Peñalba of Finca Torremilanos: 'In 1982 there were Tempranillo, Garnacha, and Tempranillo Blanco. Today Garnacha and Tempranillo Blanco have disappeared, and we have planted Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot and Pinot Noir. I think we should reinvent Ribera del Duero.' The Consejo Regulador is, for the moment, unsympathetic, but it is interesting that in the early days, Vega Sicilia planted Pinot Noir and Carmenere in a spirit of experimentation, both of which have disappeared. One thing is certain: this is a region which will continue to surprise us for many years to come. **D**

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Radford's 10 of the best (wines are all 100% Tempranillo unless otherwise stated)



Neo, Punto Esencia 2009
19/20pts (96pts/100)
£39 (2005) **Fine & Rare**
Soft, subtle, dark, deep fruit aromatics. Huge fruit, power, richness and concentration. Ultra-modern, even in Ribera del Duero terms. A new classic.
Drink 2012–2020 **Alcohol** 14%

O Fournier 2005 19 (96)
£12.95 (2009) **Slurp, Swig**
Big, rich, concentrated nose. Powerful, enormous fruit and musky working tannins on the mid-palate, fab balance, fab finish – goes on for ever. **Drink** 2012–2017 **Alc** 14.8%

Valbuena 2007 18.5 (95)
£123 **Berry Bros & Rudd, Direct Wines, Handford, Hangingditch, Harvey Nichols, Imbibros, Moreno** (10% Merlot) Very austere, almost closed nose but rich, ripe fruit gradually developing.



Big, upfront fruit palate and then a rich balance of fruit, oak and tannins, with equilibrium looming, but still needs time.
Drink 2015–2025 **Alc** 14.5%

Abadía de Acón, Reserva 2006
18 (93)
£22.95 (2005) **Halifax Wine Co** (15% Cabernet Sauvignon) Deep, dark raisin and damson fruit, some

quality aromatics. Big, rich, delicious palate, hot spice and tannins underpinning excellent fruit and lovely length. Still has a touch of austerity on the finish – needs another year.
Drink 2013–2016 **Alc** 14.5%



Astrales 2010 18 (93)
£27.95–£33 (2006) **Butlers Wine Cellars, Hedley Wright, Highbury Vintners, Martínez Wines**
Warm, ripe, dark plum nose. Big fruit palate; powerful tannins underpinning great concentration. Hint of liquorice and peppery spice on the finish – very long; needs time. **Drink** 2013–2020 **Alc** 14.5%

Erial, Epifanio Rivera Crianza 2009 18 (93)
£19.95 **Jeroboams**
Good, warm fruit and vanilla on the nose. Big, hot spice, power, weight, tannins underneath on the mid-palate but going places fast. In spite of being a crianza this could be a delicious glugger with minimal food. **Drink** 2013–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Pingus, Psi 2009 18 (93)
£23–£32 **Corney & Barrow, Dickens House Wine, Fine & Rare, Handford, Harvey Nichols, Roberson, Selfridges** (3% Albillo) Some soft spice and fresh fruit aromas. Lovely

integration of fruit and tannin on the palate, and lovely damson fruit with musky overtones. Long finish with austere but delicious fruit. **Drink** 2012–2020 **Alc** 13.5%

Torremilanos, Monte Castrillo 2010 17 (90)
£9.75 **Theatre of Wine**
Soft and ripe dark fruit on the nose. Rich, good fruit on the palate with lovely balance. Nicely made and, indeed, delicious. Excellent value. **Drink** 2012–2015 **Alc** 14%



Villacreces, Pruno 2009 17 (90)
£13.49–£15.95 **AG Wines, Eclectic Tastes, Laithwaite's, The Fine Wine Co, Slurp, Sunday Times Wine Club** (9% Cabernet Sauvignon) Warm, light, summer fruit nose. Rich, musky fruit on the palate to start then tannins kick in on the mid-palate but they are mild and well-integrated. Pleasant length with a soft, musky tannin finish.
Drink 2012–2015 **Alc** 13.5%

Altos de Tamarón 2010 16.5 (88)
£7.99 **Free Run Wine, Tesco Wine by the Case**
Soft and spicy berry fruit on the nose. Lipsmacking freshness on the palate with the barest hint of oak and lovely fresh fruit. Excellent value. **Drink** 2012–2015 **Alc** 13%

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