**Wine Tasting Sunday, April 14, 2025 - Bayview Yacht Club**

**Aperitif: 4:00 PM Tasting: 4:30 PM**

**Reach for a Rioja**

**Aperitivo: Vins El Cep 2018 Gelida Brut Gran Reserva Cava – Catalonia, Barcelona**

Costco, $15, 12% alcohol (Vintage Cava?), WE 94; Organic wine

Winemaker notes; toasty notes, ripe apples, cream, chalky minerality

Reviewed by Mark DeSimone – diffuse bubbles, nose of apple and jasmine. Bold effervescence (Brian noticed this BEFORE seeing the notes) Flavors of brioche, lemon zest, apple, toasted nut, vanilla

**The main event:**

As stated in the invitation, there was a wine article in a December 2024 issue of the Wall street Journal that indicated that many Riojas in the $20 - $40 range drink like $60 - $120 California cabernets. So in this tasting we’ll explore the region and see if we agree. Why not drink what you love instead of drinking a label?

Spoiler alert: many riojas are released in December, so fewer wines may be available now.

Wine has been grown in this region since the time of the Phoenicians when monks were the main winemakers. Rioja was first given legal recognition by the king in 1102 and is named for the Rio Oja, a tributary of the Rio Elbro that runs through the region.

The Rioja is located in the Basque region of Spain, in the north central area not too far from the border with France. There are more than 16,000 vineyards in this region and around 670 wineries.

The main grape grown here is: tempranillo, Others are: viura, Garnacha, Graciano, and carinena (mazuelo). Most of the wines are red, but there are also white riojas.

The Rioja global brand is :”saber quien eres”, translated as Know who you are.

Wines are **classified: joven (young), Crianza, Reserva, Gran Reserva**

What is a key flavor – OAK; different classifications have to do with Oak and aging.

**Wine #1:**

**Generic Rioja** – Is a vin joven, young wine, without tannins and oak of higher classifications. Normally you can assume these wines are made from tempranillo. The WSJ article mentioned that some riojas taste like a Crianza.

**2020 Lucia Victoria Tempranillo Rioja**

Costco, $7,14% alcohol, James Suckling 91

Winemaker notes: ruby color with violet. Red and black fruit aromas, firm tannins, notes of vanilla and chocolate, long finish

Regional information: There are three regions divided along the axis of the Rio Ebro.

Rioja Alta to the west, including the town of Haro

Rioja Alavesa to the north

Rioja Oriental to the south and east.

Vintage years have been classified

**2015** muy Buena, 2016 muy Buena, **2017** muy Buena, 2018 buena, **2019** excelente, **2020** muy Buena

**Crianza Rioja** – Aged for a minimum of one year in oak casks and a few months in the bottle. (Whites are aged 6 months in casks). Aged in used oak so the oak flavors aren’t as strong,

**Wine #2:**

2020 Leza Garcia Jinto familia Crianza Rioja

Costco, $13, (WE list price at $34), WE 93, 14 % alcohol

Tempranillo, reviewed by Mark DeSimone: red, violet color, aromas of blackberry, mocha, smoke, Tastes of cherry, bittersweet chocolate, caramel, plush tannins

In the WSJ article, the author noted that some wines labelled Crianza may taste like a reserva. WHY you may ask? Jancis Robinson book states that “some producers are spurning the traditional categories and bottling their oak aged wine with a generic Rioja label so they can use different-sized barrel or larger oak vats. (Does that remind anyone of Antinori’s super Tuscan, a Sangiovese blend that was ineligible for DOCG classification of Chianti)

**Wine #3:**

2020 Senorio de Odon Crianza Rioja

Trader Joe $7,14.5% alcohol, Tempranillo, WE 92 (WE price listed at $26)

My neighbor, John, told us about this wine. He bought a couple bottles at Trader Joe and went back the next day to by their entire stock. He talked to the store manager about the next delivery and told me about it. I showed up one day later and bought their remaining stock – all 8 bottles. I owe John.

Bodegas Leza Garcia is a family wine making business. The grandfather, Jaun Leza Arenzana started it in the beginning of the 20th century. It is located in Rioja Alta, the historical area of Rioja.

The wine is 12 months aging in oak casks. Deep ruby red, aromas of cherry, currant and chocolate. Tastes of fig, milk chocolate, plum, butterscotch, lavender, full tannins

Mike DeSimone of WE: ruby garnet colored, bouquet of blackberry, dark chocolate, mint tea. Velvety tannins; flavors black currant, raspberry, milk chocolate, caramel, aniseed. Bright fruit finish

Pair with game, roasts, red meat, cured cheese, sausages

**Surprise Cocktail – the Kalimotxo** cali-mo-cho

Made of equal parts of Rioja and Cola. This drink originated in the Basque Country in the 1970’s. Served at festivals as it is both affordable and delicious. Often is mixed in massive containers for a crowd. Add a slice of citrus fruit – orange or lemon

If you compare wines of other Spanish regions that are made with tempranillo, the wines of the Rioja are less full-bodied and bold, compared to wines of the Ribera del Duero or Toro regions. But that taste comparison will be left to another tasting event.

**FOODS** to pair with Rioja and this cocktail: pork, sausages, lamb, spicy dishes, paella, hard cheeses

**The CHEESES:**

**per Total Wine the Tempranillo grape goes well with Manchego, sheep cheese and havarti:**

**Costco cheese: Manchego, Pecorino Romano, Havarti**

**Reserva Rioja** – Tastes are getting serious. Wines aged for a minimum of 3 years, with at least one year in an oak cask. Many winemakers age their reservas longer and select the best grapes

**Wine #4:**

2019 Burgo Viejo Licenciado Rioja Reserva

Costco, $15, (on line prices $25) 13.5% alcohol, Decanter 95, WE 93, Tim Atkin 89; gold at International wine challenge

Tempranillo

Winemaker notes: deep red, flavors of vanilla and pepper, mature black fruit, well structured, elegant

WE notes from Mike DeSimone: deep garnet, aromas of fig, cocoa butter, dried herbs, opulent tannins, flavors of black cherry, plum, clove, caramel, sage, mint. Long finish. Drink through 2038

**Gran Reserva Rioja** – Only certain vintages are chosen to make gran reservas. They have the most age-worthy potential. Some gran reservas are aged for 10 years before release. Fortunately, we found some at 7 and 9 years, though they have been aging since I bought them in December.

**Wine #5:**

2015 Reciente Bodegas Olarra Rioja Gran Reserva DOCa

www.grupobodegasolarra.com

Costco, $20, (on line prices $50), 13.5 % alcohol, WE 92; Tempranillo AND Mazueolo

Winemaker notes: ripe berry and smoke and spices, complex aromas of leather, coffee, raisins, Firm, elegant and smooth mouthfeel.

Founded in 1973 Bodegas Olarra is recognized as the Great Cathedral of Rioja (wine architecture) Bodega designed by Juan Antonio Ridruegjo and one of the first times that a prestigious architect designed a production facility. It’s an interpretation of a Gothic cathedral with three floors and central transept transept separates two main parts of a building or church, transverse to the main building). There are 111 domes above the barrel cellar so no need for external temperature control.

Started 50 years ago and 3rd generation family has three winemakers (Pedro has sales, Marcial has administration, and Luis with help of another Spanish winemaker, has viticulture and oenology. They make wine under several other labels (Anares, cerro anon, el rayo olarra, and more)

This wine came from old vines, low yields. aged first year in new barrels, second year in old barrels. bottled in July 2019. More winemaker notes: suggest decanting, flavors of balsamic, spice, smoky, red and black fruits, Long finish

WE review Mike DeSimone: dark red violet color, flavors of cassis, cherry, thyme, oregano, milk chocolate, tobacco, Lush tannins, salty finish

**Wine #6:**

2017 Cune Rioja Gran Reserva website: cvne.com but CUNE is pronouncable

Costco, $20, 14 % alcohol; This wine was a favorite in the WSJ article with a purchased price of $35; James Suckling 94, WS 91, Robert Parker 91

Tempranillo, graciano, mazuelo

Winemaker notes: Ripe fruit and spices, tobacco and roasted coffee, fine tannins, fresh finish

Has been in the same family since 1879 when Real de Asua brothers arrived in Haro on a trip for health. Five generation in same family, shipped to 90 countries. The group now has eight wineries, Cvne (Compania Vinicola del Norte de Espana), Imperial, Vina Real, some in duero, valdeorras, rias baixas and has vineyards in rioja, ribera del Duero, valdeorras, and cava

JS: toasted oak, consommé, meat, lemon, crisp and firm tannins

WS: medium bodied, cedar, cigar box, plum, cherry, fine grained tannins

RP (wine advocate): freshness and youth from a tough year. Aged in oak for 224 months, fruit driven