tasting with the expert

Mónica Ordóñez | A Family Legacy in Spanish Wine
$40 per wine flight + $25 cheese pairing [*see last page*]

Spain's wine story stretches back more than 2,000 years, shaped by Roman vineyards, centuries of regional traditions, and a remarkable diversity of landscapes and indigenous grape varieties. Yet for much of the twentieth century, Spanish wine was known internationally primarily for Rioja, Sherry, and inexpensive everyday bottles. The country's extraordinary range of wines remained largely undiscovered by American drinkers. That began to change in the 1980s and 1990s, when a new generation of importers and winemakers started introducing the world to Spain's overlooked regions, historic vineyards, and distinctive grapes.

Among the most influential figures in that movement was Jorge Ordóñez. Arriving in the United States from Málaga, Spain, Jorge recognized an opportunity to showcase Spanish wines that deserved a much wider audience. He championed varieties such as Albariño, Godello, Verdejo, Garnacha, and Moscatel, working with growers and producers whose vineyards often held generations of history. His efforts helped transform perceptions of Spanish wine in America, demonstrating that Spain offered far more than the familiar classics.

Wine has remained a family affair. Jorge's children, including Mónica and Nick, have carried that passion forward, bringing their own perspectives to the family's work and continuing to connect American wine lovers with the people and places behind the bottles. Tonight, we're delighted to welcome Mónica Ordóñez to Vin Rouge to share her family's story, her knowledge of Spanish wine, and the experiences that have shaped her journey in the industry.

Our tasting travels across five distinctive expressions of Spain, from the traditional sparkling wines of Catalonia and the Atlantic-influenced vineyards of Galicia to the old-vine Garnacha of Aragón, the celebrated reds of Rioja, and the richly concentrated Pedro Ximénez wines of Andalucía. Together, these wines offer a glimpse into the diversity that Jorge and his family have spent decades championing, and the remarkable wine culture that continues to evolve across Spain.

featured flight of the month

2021 Blanc de Blancs Brut Gran Reserva Cava [*traditional method*]
Vins El Cep '*Gélida*' • Penedès, Spain
~~$15~~~~$54~~ $11|$38 [*30% off tonight only*]



green apple • toasted brioche • almond

Cava's story begins in Catalonia, where sparkling wine production developed during the nineteenth century using the traditional method associated with Champagne. The town of Sant Sadurní d'Anoia became the heart of the industry, surrounded by the vineyards of Penedès. Here, Mediterranean sunshine and varied elevations support the indigenous white varieties that give Cava its distinctive identity. Macabeo, Xarel·lo, and Parellada each contribute something different to the region's sparkling wines, creating a tradition that is distinctly Spanish rather than simply an imitation of French Champagne.

Vins El Cep brings together the winemaking heritage of four families whose vineyards surround the village of Espiells. The Gélida Blanc de Blancs Brut Reserva reflects the estate's commitment to traditional-method sparkling wine, combining freshness with the complexity developed through extended contact with yeast. Green apple, lemon zest, and white peach lead into toasted bread and almond, with fine bubbles and crisp acidity carrying the wine through a clean, dry finish.

The traditional method involves a second fermentation inside the bottle, followed by aging on the lees before disgorgement. This is the same fundamental process used in Champagne, although Cava's indigenous grape varieties and Catalan growing conditions give it a different expression. Its Reserva designation also signifies a longer period of bottle aging than basic Cava, allowing the wine to develop additional complexity before release.

featured flight of the month

2024 Albariño [*French oak*]

Bodegas La Caña '*Navia*' • Galicia, Rías Baixas, Spain

~~$24~~|~~$76~~ $15|$53 [*30% off tonight only*]

ripe pear • lemon curd • sea spray



Galicia occupies Spain's northwestern corner, where the Atlantic Ocean shapes a landscape dramatically different from the country's sunbaked interior. Rainfall is plentiful, temperatures are relatively moderate, and the coastline is carved into deep estuaries known as rías. In Rías Baixas, Albariño has become the defining white grape, prized for its aromatic intensity, naturally lively acidity, and ability to express the region's maritime character. Many vineyards are trained on overhead pergolas, a traditional approach suited to Galicia's humid climate.

La Caña is part of Jorge Ordóñez's effort to demonstrate the potential of Spain's indigenous grapes and historic vineyards. 'Navia' offers a more concentrated expression of Albariño than the winery's introductory bottling, bringing greater depth without losing the freshness that makes the variety so compelling. Ripe pear and orchard fruit mingle with lemon curd, citrus zest, and subtle floral notes. The palate is rounded and substantial, with bright acidity and a lingering saline character that recalls its Atlantic origins.

Albariño is often associated with youthful, stainless-steel-aged wines, but more ambitious examples demonstrate the grape's ability to develop complexity through careful cellar work and extended aging. 'Navia' belongs to this richer tradition, balancing fruit concentration and texture with the variety's characteristic freshness. Its combination of substance and acidity makes it a particularly interesting expression of modern Rías Baixas.

featured flight of the month

2021 Garnacha [*20 months Fr. Oak, 50% new*]
Bodegas Breca '*Brega*' • Calatayud, Aragón
~~$30~~$~~108~~ $21|$76 [*30% off tonight only*]



black cherry • licorice • baking spice

Calatayud's vineyards climb the rugged slopes of Aragón's Sierra de Santa Cruz, where hot summers, cold winters, and dramatic temperature shifts create demanding conditions for Garnacha. Among these hillsides are ancient, dry-farmed vineyards planted between 1900 and 1918. Once overlooked as a source of bulk wine, these century-old vines now demonstrate Calatayud's remarkable potential for producing concentrated, structured reds.

Bodegas Breca was established by Jorge Ordóñez to showcase these historic vineyards, with 'Brega' representing the winery's flagship red cuvée. Produced entirely from Garnacha de Aragón, the 2021 offers black cherry, ripe raspberry, licorice, and warm baking spices. Full-bodied and concentrated, its generous fruit is supported by firm tannins and a long, savory finish.

The 2021 Brega spent 20 months in French oak puncheons and demi-muids [50% new, 50% used], undergoing spontaneous malolactic fermentation in barrel. Sourced from some of the region's oldest dry-farmed vines, it offers a more powerful and structured expression of Garnacha than Breca's 'El Nacido', which we featured last year.

featured flight of the month

2017 Tempranillo Gran Reserva [*24 months Am. oak*]
Sierra Cantabria • Rioja
~~$34~~$~~42~~2 $24|$86 [*30% off tonight only*]



dried cherry • cedar • tobacco

Rioja's reputation for age-worthy reds is rooted in centuries of winemaking tradition, particularly around San Vicente de la Sonsierra. Sheltered by the Sierra de Cantabria mountains, the region's vineyards benefit from a distinctive climate and varied soils that allow Tempranillo to develop richness while retaining freshness and structure.

The Eguren family has cultivated vineyards in Rioja for six generations. Their 2017 Gran Reserva combines 98% Tempranillo with 2% Graciano, offering dried cherry, ripe plum, cedar, tobacco, and subtle earthy notes. Refined tannins and balanced acidity complement the mature fruit, leading to a long, savory finish.

The challenging 2017 vintage saw severe spring frost significantly reduce yields across Rioja. Gran Reserva wines require at least five years of maturation, including a minimum of two years in oak and two years in bottle. This extended aging develops the complex interplay of fruit, oak, and tertiary aromas that defines traditional Rioja.

featured flight of the month

NV Pedro Ximénez [*6+ years Am. oak solera*]
Alvear PX Solera 1927 • Montilla-Moriles, Andalucía
~~$50~~|$35 [*30% off tonight only*]



dried fig • toasted walnut • caramelized raisin

Montilla-Moriles lies south of Córdoba in Andalucía, where intensely hot summers and abundant sunshine have shaped centuries of winemaking tradition. The region is particularly celebrated for Pedro Ximénez, a white grape that produces some of Spain's richest dessert wines. After harvest, the grapes are laid out in the sun to partially dehydrate, concentrating their natural sugars before pressing.

Founded in 1729, Bodegas Alvear is one of Andalucía's oldest family-owned wineries. Its Solera 1927 takes its name from the historic solera established that year. Deep mahogany in color, the wine offers concentrated aromas of dried figs, raisins, espresso, and dark chocolate. Exceptionally rich and velvety, its sweetness is complemented by toasted nuts, cocoa, and a remarkably persistent finish.

Made entirely from sun-dried Pedro Ximénez grapes, the wine ages for more than six years in American oak barrels through the traditional criaderas y solera system. Small portions of mature wine are periodically withdrawn and replenished with younger wine, creating continuity and complexity across generations. The 1927 designation refers to the establishment of the solera rather than a single vintage.

cheese pairing

Cheese

Brie Fermier • *Cow's Milk* • France

Brie Fermier is a traditional farmhouse-style soft cheese with a delicate bloomy rind and a rich, buttery interior. As it ripens, its mild creaminess develops earthy mushroom notes and a subtle nuttiness. Its soft texture and gentle flavors complement the Gélida Cava's bright acidity and fine bubbles, while the wine's extended lees aging echoes the cheese's creamy, savory character.

Bra Tenero • *Cow's Milk* • Piedmont, Italy

Produced in the foothills of the Italian Alps, Bra Tenero is a young, semi-soft cheese with a supple texture and delicate flavors of fresh cream, butter and toasted nuts. Unlike its firmer, longer-aged counterpart, Bra Duro, Tenero retains a gentle sweetness and milky richness. Its buttery character softens the powerful tannins of the Brega Garnacha, while its subtle nuttiness complements the wine's ripe fruit and warm spice.

Wild Rosemary Rodeo • *Goat's Milk* • Pennsylvania, USA

Wild Rosemary Rodeo is an American goat cheese distinguished by its aromatic rosemary-coated rind. Beneath the herbaceous exterior, the cheese offers a creamy texture and bright, tangy flavors balanced by savory herbal notes. The rosemary brings out the subtle herbal character of the La Caña 'Navia' Albariño, while the wine's vibrant acidity cuts through the cheese's richness and its oak aging complements the creamy texture.

Manchego Curado • *Sheep's Milk* • La Mancha, Spain

Made from Manchega sheep's milk in the heart of Spain, Manchego Curado develops its distinctive character through extended aging. Its firm yet slightly buttery texture carries flavors of toasted almonds, sweet cream and a gentle savory sharpness. The cheese's concentrated nuttiness complements the cedar and mature fruit of the 2017 Sierra Cantabria Gran Reserva, while its richness balances the wine's structured tannins.

Mama Marissa Bleu • *Cow's Milk* • Astorias, Spain

Mama Marissa Bleu is a rich, creamy blue cheese with distinctive blue veining and a savory, gently pungent character. Its buttery texture carries earthy, salty flavors that become more pronounced as the cheese matures. Paired with Alvear's Pedro Ximénez Solera 1927, the cheese's saltiness provides a striking contrast to the wine's concentrated sweetness, while its savory depth complements the PX's dried fig, toasted walnut and caramelized raisin notes.