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## The Bodegas of Rioja



With more than 500 bodegas, or wineries, the relatively small area of Rioja is one of the most intensely concentrated wine regions in the world. Toss a grape and you're bound to hit one or two bodegas. The region has had longstanding traditions, and is the setting for some interesting debates about the future of wine. The tempranillo grape is the backbone of the region, with most wines containing at least 85%. temprano means "early" in Spanish, and this dark grape matures early in the fall.

Having seen a few of the oldest and most traditional bodegas alongside some "international" style bodegas, I find this debate fascinating. From Lopez de Hérédia and Muga, among the oldest and most traditional, to Ysios, with Santiago Calatrava's modern design of undulating waves of polished tin covering the roof, there is space for interpretation.

For Americans quite used to seeing a variety of grapes, it's notable that here in Rioja, grapes like cabernet sauvignon, merlot, and syrah are classified as "experimental", and their growth is regulated by the consejo regulador, or regulating council. Most Riojana bodegas use the traditional tempranillo, graciano, mazuelo and garnacha grapes, which are native to the area, or were cultivated

## About Me



Mark C. Tafoya is a personal chef in New York City. He is also a wine traveler and self-taught gourmet. He is a graduate of Yale University and worked as an actor for 10 years on and off Broadway, and in independent films. His love of wine and food has taken him around the world. He hopes to share his love of world cuisine with you!

Chef Mark Tafoya  
**Executive Chef**  
[The Gilded Fork](#)

here long ago.

This focus on using the traditional grapes of the region has given Rioja a distinctive flavor, both in the wine and in the marketing of itself as a region. The Consejo is very aware that Rioja not become a generic region.



I interviewed several winemakers, including Juan Muga, Maria José Lopez de Hédredia, Christina Forner of Marqués de Cacarès, and Pilar Ramirez of Ramirez de la Piscina, and you will hear their varying philosophies on an upcoming podcast.

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