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MAY 7, 2007
 EXECUTIVE LIFE -- PARKER ON WINE
 By Robert Parker

Rioja Legends In The Making



Robert Parker

In the medieval Spanish town of Laguardia, Juan Carlos López de la Calle, the visionary owner and winemaker of Bodegas Artadi, is defining the future of Rioja. Traditionally the wines of the Rioja appellation in northern Spain are aged so long in wood they are often overly dry. López instead looks to the great wines of Bordeaux for inspiration, harvesting his tempranillo grapes by hand and keeping quality high by limiting yields. Here is a look at some of the estate's current releases.

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2005 Viñas de Gain

94 points. This entry-level wine from the superstar winery is an awesome value as well as mind-boggling in quality.

Purple/black in color, it offers up a killer perfume that is supersexy. Among its elements are truffles, pencil lead, vanilla, cherry, and black raspberry jam. Full-bodied, the wine is opulent yet elegant, concentrated, and superbly balanced. There is enough structure to ensure six to eight years of positive evolution, and it should drink well through 2032. \$27

2004 Pagos Viejos

97 points. The wine is inky purple with a sublime nose of pain grillé, spice box, cherries, raspberries, and wild blue fruits. All told, it's a dense, plush, full-flavored wine with perfect balance and elegance. Although it can be enjoyed now, it deserves a minimum of a decade of cellaring, after which it should drink well through 2047. \$86-\$100

2005 Pagos Viejos

95 points. It is just slightly more muted than the 2004, but lovely nonetheless. Already complex both aromatically and on the palate, it has superb materials. Purchasers will need to be a bit more patient with this 2005 Pagos Viejos than with the 2004. This wine will need to spend more than a decade in the cellar. \$70

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2004 Viña El Pison

100 points. The 2004 Viña El Pison is purple/black in color with an ethereal bouquet found only in the greatest wines. Vanilla, spice box, truffle, wild blueberry, black raspberry, and blackberry liqueur are descriptors that come to mind but don't really convey the otherworldly nature of this perfume. On the palate the wine is opulent, beautifully delineated, elegant, and powerful all at the same time. Impeccably balanced and amazingly long, the 2004 is a pleasure to drink now but will still be providing pleasure 40 to 50 years from now—with good storage, of course. \$309

2005 Viña El Pison

98 points. Like the 2005 Pagos Viejos, the 2005 Viña El Pison is just a bit more muted than its 2004 counterpart, not quite as explosive on the nose and palate. It'll take more time to fully strut its stuff, but make no mistake: It, too, is a tour de force. \$220

Wines rated from 96-100 are extraordinary; 90-95, excellent; 80-89, above average to very good.

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