



# The Cavalier Daily

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LIFE

## The return of Spain

Jeff Katra, Cavalier Daily Columnist

Faustino VII Bodegas 2005 Price: 10.99

Grade: B

Spain boasts some of the world's oldest wine regions. The Rioja and the Ribera Del Duero have been making wine for more than 1,000 years. Yet, despite its long history, Spain is relatively new to the modern wine market. During the totalitarian regime of Francisco Franco, Spain's vineyards were torn up to make way for state-controlled grain production. Franco advocated agricultural policies that stymied the wine industry. He disallowed experimentation and local ownership of vineyards and supported a low-density planting scheme for the vines that led to fewer yields and poor quality grapes. Franco's policies led to poor grapes, poor knowledge and a wine industry behind the times.

In the last 30 years, Spain has rebuilt its wine reputation and prowess from the ground up. It now offers some of the world's finest value wines. With each passing year, Spain continues to offer new developments and to move ever closer to rivaling France and Italy for Europe's finest vino.

The Rioja region lies in northeast Spain along the River Ebro. Traditionally, Rioja uses four grapes to make red wine: Tempranillo (Spain's workhorse grape), Garnacha (same as Grenache in France), Mazuelo and Graciano. Similar to Italy, Spain has age-labeling classifications that communicate the quality of the grapes and the amount of time the wine has spent in oak barrels. "Vino Joven" is a very young wine that probably spent little or no time in oak barrels. "Crianza" means the wine was aged for two years, six months of which had to be spent in an oak barrel. "Reserva" means a wine was made from a superior collection of grapes and was aged for three years, one of which had to be spent in an oak barrel. Finally, "Gran Reserva" means the wine was made from exceptional grapes, aged in oak barrels for at least two years and in the bottle for three.

Faustino VII has a wide array of quality offerings. The Gran Reserva, which can be identified by its gray bottle, retails from \$18 to \$25 and is fantastic. It is the best Spain has to offer at an affordable price. Faustino also makes a Reserva for approximately \$14 that has distinct oak flavors. I chose to rate the most inexpensive Faustino variety, which has no aging designation. Frankly, I was a little disappointed because I have come to expect great things from the Faustino brand. The nose displayed muffled aromas of roasted blackberry, oak, prune and hints of strawberry and raspberry. The wine had a yeast character that overpowered the other elements. Yeast aromas usually frequent cheaper wines. The palate displayed slightly better attributes with traces of vanilla, prune and roasted blackberry. The wine finished with a strong black cherry aftertaste.

Although the bottle was not terrible, it was not excellent either. I have had other Faustino bottles that were sumptuous. Any two bottles in the world of wine, even from the same brand and year, can differ greatly. It is possible that I purchased a less than stellar bottle by mere chance. That said, I still recommend Faustino. Even more, I highly recommend your continued interest in the wines of Spain.

Jeff's column runs biweekly Wednesdays. He can be reached at [jkatra@cavalierdaily.com](mailto:jkatra@cavalierdaily.com).

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