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Refreshing Red Rioja: Sangria and Carne Con Chocolate



One of my most dog-eared and used cookbooks is called *The Spanishwoman's Kitchen* by Pepita Aris. Browsing it earlier this week I was drawn to a favorite recipe 'Carne con chocolate', which I love pairing with different Spanish red wines. Interestingly, it is not just me that is interested in Spain. Today, the United States is in love with Spain and all things Spanish, its foods, its chefs and its wines. One only has to look at the proliferation of tapas style bars to see the impact of Spain across the country.

Winemaking in Spain has truly revolutionized over the past 15 years. Gone are the tired, oxidized styles, and in are the vibrant, youthful styles that work so well with so many different cuisines. While, today there is an explosion of wine choice from many different Spanish wine regions, I thought that we'd first focus on Rioja, Spain's oldest and most well known region.

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Rioja is located in the northeastern part of Spain along the river Ebro. It is one of only two Spanish wine regions to have the higher DOC certification instead of just DO (Priorat being the other).

Tempranillo (pronounced tem-prah-NEE-yoh) is the grape of Rioja, and forms the backbone of all its red wines. Because it is not an austere tannic variety (more like softer powdery tannins), its wines are accessible and very expressive even when young. However, it can also produce very age-worthy wines. Tempranillo is usually blended with small amounts of other indigenous varieties like Garnacha, Mazuelo and Graciano in Rioja wines.

Traditionally wine styles in Rioja have been determined by ageing regulations rather than fermentation technique. Red wines labeled Crianza must spend at least two years aging before release, if labeled Reserva the red wines must spend three years aging, and those labeled Gran Reserva must spend at least five years aging before release. American oak has traditionally been the preferred oak for aging wines in Rioja, giving the wines their characteristic spicy, chary, vanilla character. However, today, there is a strong movement toward less time in oak. This enables the true fruit character of Tempranillo to better express itself with aromas and flavors of strawberry, raspberry, mulberry and red cherry with hints of spicy smoke, coffee and chocolate.

For summer drinking we particularly like the Crianza wines, which are juicy, youthful and brimming with bright red fruit. They are also very good value and most can be bought for \$10 to \$15 dollars. They work so well for any gathering of friends or family. They are delicious with anything slathered in barbeque sauce, which picks up the fruity smokiness in the wines. Also try spicy beef kebabs, eggplant caponata, skirt steak with roasted tomato salsa, or serve simply with aged Manchego.

When I first began to enjoy Rioja wines, the choice was limited to the big names like Faustino, Marquès de Riscal or Marquès de Cáceras. These are still excellent wines but thankfully, today there are over 120 wineries from Rioja selling in the United States to choose from. Here are a few, which I heartily recommend, and that are also soft on the wallet.

- Campo Viejo Crianza 2005, DOC Rioja (\$9) – Juicy, refreshing and packed with ripe red fruit and hints of spice. Easy drinking, and certainly excellent value. This wine is



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also great for making Sangria. See recipe from the producer below

- **Ermita D San Felices, Crianza 2005, DOC Rioja** (\$14) – Plummy, cherry and mulberry with some wild strawberry melding with mocha and sweet spice notes.
- **Marques de Riscal, Reserva 2003, DOC Rioja** (\$15) - Cherry, liquorices aromas and flavors. Lots of attractive spice. Long persistent length.
- **Glorioso Reserva (Bodegas Palacio) 2003, DOC Rioja** (\$15) – Fresh and lively with flavors of red plums, cherry and chocolate. Spicy, floral notes add complexity.
- **Martin Códax "Ergo" 2006, DOC Rioja** (\$14) – From well known Rías Baixas producer comes this easy-drinking, perfect for summer wine from Rioja.
- **Conde de Valdemar, Reserva** - 2002 (\$19) - Complexity and elegance for a wine at this price. Medium-bodied, with subtle hints of cherry, cranberry, earth, and spice.

Sangria Sunrise from Campo Viejo

serves 2 pitchers

2 Granny Smith Apples
 3 Large Valencia Oranges or 1 Quart Orange Juice
 2 Peaches
 2 Plums
 1 Small Bunch Seedless Grapes
 1 Tahitian Lime
 1 Lemon
 6 Teaspoons Sugar
 1 Teaspoon ground nutmeg
 3 Kaffir Lime Leaves
 2 bottles Campo Viejo Crianza 2005
 1/4 Cup Triple Sec or Cointreau, added to taste
 Peach schnapps, added to taste

Juice oranges, lime and lemon; add sugar and nutmeg. Cube apples, peaches, plums and slice grapes.

Pour in bottles of Campo Viejo Crianza into a pitcher. Add the juice/spice/fruit mixture and stir. Add triple Sec and peach schnapps to taste. Add the Kaffir lime leaves that have been de-veined and gently crushed.

Chill for at least 24 hours. Serve chilled over ice and garnish with an orange twist.

Carne Con Chocolate (Beef Stewed with Chocolate) – adapted from The Spanish Woman's Kitchen by Pepita Aris

4 servings

2 pounds braising beef, cut into short fingers or cubes
 about 6 tablespoons olive oil
 2 onions chopped
 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
 2-3 tablespoons plain flour
 1 teaspoon Spanish paprika (I usually use more as I love the smoky flavor)
 salt and freshly ground black pepper
 2 big carrots, cut into short sticks
 1 bay leaf
 6 fl oz red wine (preferably Rioja) and some beef stock
 1 ounce dark chocolate (good quality) in pieces (you can add more if you like)
 1-3 teaspoons of vinegar

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a casserole and fry the onions until soft adding the garlic toward the end. Season the flour with the paprika, salt and pepper and lightly coat the beef (putting it in a plastic bag helps and also controls the amount of flour in the sauce). Add oil to another frying pan, add the beef in batches and fry until well colored. Transfer to the casserole with the garlic/onion mixture.

Add the carrots and bay leaf and pour in the wine and enough stock to cover the meat. Put on the lid and simmer for about 40 minutes. By this stage the sauce should just clothe the meat. If the sauce is still too much you can remove some and reduce by boiling. Then add back to the casserole.

Add the chocolate and stir until chocolate has melted. Add the vinegar to taste (Stirring well). Check seasoning. Serve with creamy mashed potatoes.

Wine stores that carry a good selection of Spanish wines from Rioja:

[Sherry-Lehmann](#) (Manhattan, NY)
[Chambers Street Wines](#) (Manhattan, NY)
[Winerz.com](#) (Orange, CA)
[Astor Wines](#) (Manhattan, NY)
[Beltramo's Wines & Spirits](#) (Menlo Park, CA)
[Total Wine & More](#) (various locations, FL, NC, VA)
[The Grape Merchant](#), (Weston, FL)
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[Bev Max](#) (Stamford, CT)
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Mary July 17, 2008 11:00AM

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As a spaniard I can tell you that making Sangria with Rioja from crianza is kind of a sin here. Good wines are not intended to be mixed. Sangria is usually made with cheap wine (1 or 2€, per bottle) or those almost-poisoned packed in Tetra Brick.

Please, try to taste Bordón from "Bodegas Franco Españolas". My favourite Rioja.

Also, there's a typo in the article. It's Marqués de Cáceres, not Cáceras.

posted by [spaniard](#) on 2008-07-18 06:05:03
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Carne con chocolate looks intriguing – thanks for that. However as a non-Spaniard, but seasoned Rioja drinker, I was also a bit shocked at the suggestion of making Sangria with Rioja. It's just too good a flavour to taint with anything else. Rioja is also quite expensive in the UK, so a good bottle is a treat...not a mixer!

My own favourites come from Bodegas Carlos Serres – just wonderful.

posted by [thehighrise](#) on 2008-07-19 13:53:19
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