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Smell. Taste. Scribble. Repeat -- The Chronicle's wine editor on what to drink. [Read bio](#)

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The new cutting edge of Spanish wines

Thursday, June 24, 2010 at 5:44 PM in [Tastings](#), [Wine](#), [Wine Lists](#)

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I'll be in Telluride, Colo., for the next few days at the Telluride Wine Festival, hopefully with something new and interesting to report. So before the brief radio silence, I'll leave you with a post to enjoy through the weekend. Consider this a scouting report for summer drinking.

Just when you thought you knew Spanish wine ... think again.

Importer Jose Pastor, based in Richmond under the Vinos and Gourmet and Jose Pastor Selections labels, has been responsible for bringing some of Spain's most avant-garde wines to these shores, including some of my favorite values like the Guimaro wines from Ribeira Sacra. If you've seen wines from that particular part of Galicia, or from the Canary Islands, chances are good Pastor had a hand in it. His producers typically use traditional winemaking — indigenous yeasts, little sulfur and so on — and to farm old indigenous Spanish varietals, bringing a modern eye to some very old and obscure traditions.

Pastor keeps expanding his selections into the ever more avant-garde, with a whole load of new additions to his book that are being debuted later this month. He recently gave me a preview. Given their popularity with Bay Area wine directors, expect to start seeing some of these wines on restaurant lists and store shelves this summer.

To start: Aside from one weekend in Puerto Rico when it was essential, I've always found Albarino kinda meh. The usual comparison is to Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling, but poorly managed vineyards and industrial winemaking often make it seem like meager versions of either. I'd been told that Pastor had game-changing Albarinos, and indeed he does.

The wines of **Benito Santos** are from individual organically-farmed parcels, typically bottled without sulfur as a preservative. These notions are radical in the cool, damp, mildew-friendly region of Rias Baixas, and these are radical wines. The **2009 Igrexario de Saia Albarino** (\$15), from granite soils, is left up to a year in tank. It's pure, lovely Albarino that actually tastes like Albarino, full of Riesling-y peach and stone, with a grassy bite to finish. The **2007 Xoan** (\$30), from less than half a hectare of vines up to 100 years old in sandy soils, is intense and stark, with iodine, chervil and apple skin. After nearly three years in steel tanks, it's still pure and steely as hell. I swore never again to cast away Albarino without cause.

The Albarinos from **Pedralonga** are equally dramatic, if showing more mineral and saline depth. Pastor drew comparisons to Loire whites, and that's really apt — indeed, he said, "Galicia is the next Loire." Not sure whether that's a blessing for success but if you love the mineral-charged whites and reds of the Loire, we'll be covering some happy ground here.

The biodynamically farmed Pedralonga is a father and son operation, and the straight **2009 Rias Baixas Albarino** (\$30) does, indeed, channel the soul of the Loire in Rias Baixas. All flint and peach skin, it manages to be both opulent and totally precise; it could kick the living crud out of a Sancerre. The **2008 Rias Baixas Albarino** (\$30), made in tank on its lees, goes somewhere different, as though it summoned the ghost of Chassagne-Montrachet to the room. Intense mineral crunch, tarragon and fierce acidity, with grass and apple. A **2007 Barrica** (\$52), done in used barrels, adds the expected rich texture and brings a leesy richness to iodine and steely, sharp lime flavors. And Pedrolongo also has a red, the **2006 do Umia** (\$20), from Mencia, Caino and Espadeiro, with heady scents of fennel seed, white pepper, copper and umeboshi plum. Like a stark Bourgueil that collided with a spice rack. (And now you can play stump the sommelier.)

Oh, there's Godello, too. After once dismissing this white grape as a wannabe next big thing, I'm willing to concede its extraordinary aromatic potential. The **2009 Galqueira Valdeorras Godello** (\$35) is Godello on overdrive, almost musky to the smell, with cassia, bark lemon peel and bergamot. The **2007 Mengoba Bierzo White** (\$16), a mix of Godello and Dona Blanca aged in large casks by young winemaker Gregory Perez, is surprisingly big and weighty, with fine paraffin richness, plus apple, apricot, chervil and a huge whack of acidity. And there's now a white counterpart to the gorgeous red Guimaro wines from Ribeira Sacra. The **2008 Guimaro BGB Ribeira Sacra** (\$20), from barrel-fermented Godello, shows an unbelievable mineral bite reminiscent of long-aged, intensely farmed Muscadet like the Luneau-Papin Excelsior. It's ripe and full, and yet a full truckload of rocks on the palate.

Other fun items, soon hitting a wine list near you:

2008 Laureano Serres L'Abeurador Macabeu (\$25): From Tarragona. Made entirely on its skins in tank and unfiltered, it's full of pine pitch, peanut and apricot, and surprisingly subtle on the finish. Think a good Chenin Blanc gone even wilder.

2006 Vinatigo Ycoden Daute Isora Vijariego (\$30): An easy sub for fino sherry, full of iodine, almond and peach pit. In this case, though, it's another Canary Islands entry, from indigenous white Vijariego grown on its own roots.

2008 Bermejo Lanzarote Rosado (\$22.50): The Bermejo wines from the Canary Islands already have a loyal following, and this rosé from 80-year-old Listan Negro (Black Palomino) vines grown on volcanic soils is a tribute to lovers of green, pyrazine-y flavors. All Cab Franc on the nose, with a chewy profile and tomato-leaf accents.

2006 Monasterio de Corias Guifla Vino de la Tierra de Cangas (\$58): If Rias Baixas seems too warm, there's always Asturias, where the usual tippie is cider because its grape potential is, shall we say, marginal. From Verdejo Negro, Mencia and Carrasquin, grown on mountainside slate, this again channels Cab Franc, with tons of paprika, flowers and crushed cranberry. Gorgeous in its mineral precision. There's also a young 2009 Joven (\$16).

Asturias: the new Ribeira Sacra. That's cutting-edge enough for summer 2010.



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