

'There's been massive investment in the steep mountain valleys, and some impressive new bodegas are in production'

(a magnificent new palace on precipitous vineyards), F Schatz (a real eccentric who has planted German varieties), Bentomiz (for new-generation sweet wines) and Descalzos Viejos (a wonderful single-estate in an old monastic vineyard) as well as many more. This is a region with enormous potential.

Try: Conrad, Soleón 2003 ★★★★★ (18)

Made from Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc grapes which are aged for 14 months, the wine has real structure, complexity and an elegant use of oak. Drink now–2012. £15.95; Alb



Since the DO of **Tierra de León** was awarded in 2005, around 30 bodegas have sprung up, making wine mainly from the red Prieto Picudo grape. One of the first on to the UK market was Bodegas Gordonzello in Gordoncillo and the wines won a modest following at value-for money prices. My most recent visit was to Margon: it has ancient vineyards and grows Albarín Blanco for whites and Prieto Picudo for reds. The brand-name is the Roman name for this part of León – Pricum. A female fellow-traveller remarked to the winemaker, Raúl Pérez, that he might have to find a new name if he wanted to market the wine in the UK. He asked why and she suggested he ask one of her male colleagues. The wines were, however, excellent.

Try: Bodegas Gordonzello, Peregrino Tinto 2001 ★★★★★ (17)

Prieto Picudo means 'dark pointed' and somehow this sums up the style of the wine: 'dark' in the sense of bitter chocolate and 'pointed' for its fresh, crisp acidity. It's a wine of real personality, unusual and individual, and fantastic value for money. Drink now. £6.21; Ark

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Continued on p37

... AND SPAIN'S TEN MOST EXCITING NEW-WAVE PRODUCERS By Sarah Jane Evans MW



RAUL PEREZ: Bierzo, Monterrei, Ribeira Sacra and Rías Baixas

Raúl Pérez (above) is definitely at the top of this top 10, although he is attached to many wineries, rather than just one. Ferrán Centelles, sommelier at El Bulli, is a big fan: 'I like all his projects. His wines are currently the cult wines in Spain.' Pérez is one of the young stars of Spain's most exciting region today, the north-west. He works as a winemaker and consultant across Bierzo, Monterrei, Ribeira Sacra and Rías Baixas, and has a reputation for recovering old vineyards and reviving local grapes. In Monterrei, he is restoring the reputation of the white variety Doña Blanca at Quinta de Muradella; in Bierzo, at Castro de Valtuille, he works with Mencía, the crunchy, vibrant red.

Try: Ultreia, Saint Jacques, Bierzo 2008 ★★★★★ (17.5/20)

Sumptuously perfumed with the keynote Mencía red, blue and black berries. Lively fresh acidity, mid weight, lightly spicy, long intense finish. £10.50–£11.50; Han, Ind, L&W, Smp

BODEGAS PITTACUM: Bierzo

Pittacum is another of the new-wave wineries, founded less than a decade ago. It is owned by Terras Gauda, an Albariño producer in Rías Baixas, which had been looking to branch out into red winemaking. Working with the Mencía grape in nearby Bierzo was the obvious choice, and it was able to acquire a good selection of old vineyards on slate soils. The winemaking is meticulous, with no short cuts: careful selection, manual

Left: Raúl Pérez spreads his talent across many bodegas in four different regions

cap-plunging, long macerations, vertical press, cask ageing, egg-white fining. The result is a distinctive, fresh expression of Mencía. It also produces an intense rosado, Tres Obispos, quite unlike the usual pale versions of northern Spain.



Try: Bodegas Pittacum, Aurea Reserva, Bierzo 2006 ★★★★★ (17)

A single-vineyard wine, a step up from the *joven* style, aged in new oak for 14 months. Bright, lifted aromatics of baked fruits, coffee and mocha; full-bodied with roasted fruits, and bold echoes of oak ageing. Long, powerful finish. £29.25; CPY, Slr

BODEGAS JIMENEZ-LANDI: Méntrida

Méntrida is a nondescript, small DO south of Madrid, dominated by co-ops, with a mere handful of contrastingly good producers. One of these is Jiménez-Landi, run by Daniel and José Jiménez-Landi. They are indicative of the approach of the new generation, working old vines (Garnacha) biodynamically and the new vines (Syrah) organically. In the winery they ferment in either stainless steel or open-top oak vats. The wines (below) are neither filtered nor stabilised. Also highly rated in Méntrida is boutique producer Canopy, with its Tres Pata and Malpaso reds.

Try: Bodegas Jiménez-Landi, Pielage Méntrida 2007 ★★★★★ (17) 2006

Full-bodied, Merlot-Syrah blend aged in 300- and 500-litre new French oak. Bold, brooding fruit and new oak aromas of smoke and toast, with equally rich and concentrated palate. Supple, savoury, long. £22; Han, Ind, PIG, Smp, WBe

