



# Old Vines and Amphorae

## THE WINES AND WINEMAKING TECHNIQUES OF THE IBERIAN PENINSULA TREAD A PATH CARVED BY HISTORY

**IN THIS ERA** of closed borders and social distancing, travel to far-flung wine regions remains sadly out of reach. But catching a flight isn't the only option for embarking on an enological journey: We can still open a bottle and taste the world. Now more than ever, I appreciate wine's ability to transport me to places I've yet to visit and beloved destinations alike. Among the latter is the Iberian Peninsula, which is home to Portugal and Spain and encompasses some of the world's most famous wine-producing areas, including the Douro and Rioja as well as lesser-known appellations with their own rich histories and impressive wines—two of my favorites being Alentejo and Somontano.

The large clay vessels known as amphorae are popping up in cellars around the globe as the must-have blast-from-the-past winemaking tool, but they never left Alentejo. According to Pedro Ribeiro, General Manager and winemaker for Herdade do Rocim, *talha* wine—aka wine made in amphorae—“is the epitome of [the region's] millenary wine culture.” He continues, “Here, the techniques developed by the

Romans . . . have been safeguarded [and] handed down from generation to generation throughout history, almost without change. Nevertheless, there is more than one way to make wine in talhas, with certain [regional] variations according to local tradition. . . . With vinho de talha, we are able to express our terroir [through the] amazing purity [of] our fruit [without it being masked by] barrel aging.” Herdade do Rocim produces red and white amphora wines, including its 2019 Amphora Branco and 2019 Amphora Tinto; for those looking to explore additional producers, I also recommend the Herdade do Esporão 2017 Moreto Amphora and the José Maria da Fonseca 2017 José de Sousa Red.

Meanwhile, Somontano in northeastern Spain produces some of the country's most intriguing wines. The climate and terroir nurture a diverse selection of grape varieties from Chardonnay to Gewürztraminer; but the ancient Garnacha vines in Viñas del Vero's high-altitude Secastilla Vineyard are one of the region's true treasures. “The Secastilla wine [is born] in a

100-year-old vineyard in the valley with the same name at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains,” says manager and winemaker Jose Ferrer. “We cultivate old bush-vine Garnacha amongst the ancient olive and almond trees, which have always [grown] there.” Crafted to be a true expression of terroir, the wine has been nominated as the Best Spanish Red Wine and Best International Garnacha by the International Wine Challenge competition. For a taste of Somontano, the limited-production Viñas del Vero 2014 Secastilla Garnacha is a great pick. As for recommendations of other Somontano producers, try the unoaked Enate 2019 Chardonnay 234 and the Bodega Pirineos 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon Selección Crianza. *sj*

*Wanda Mann is a Certified Specialist of Wine and the founder of winewithwanda.com. Follow her on Instagram @winedinewanda.*



PHOTO COURTESY OF VIÑAS DEL VERO



PHOTO COURTESY OF HERDADE DO ROCIM

▲ *Herdade do Rocim's General Manager and winemaker, Pedro Ribeiro, poses with amphorae.*

◀ *Jose Ferrer of Viñas del Vero in the Spanish producer's high-altitude Secastilla Vineyard.*