

Raúl Pérez, Ultreia St Jacques 2008 Bierzo

16 Mar 2010 by Jancis Robinson

From £11.99 and \$25.99

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Bierzo has long been one of my favourite emerging/ emerged Spanish wine regions. I particularly like the grape varieties from which its wines are typically made: Mencía for its fragrant, rather haunting reds and Godello for mineral- rich whites. The mineral element often comes from Bierzo's particularly slaty soils, in some cases on impressively steep ancient terraces - even if not quite as steep as those in Ribeira Sacra over the border in Galicia to the west. And, as you will see if you put Bierzo in to our [Tasting notes search](#), I have consistently been impressed by the wines carrying the name of the most famous winemaking consultant in this north- west corner of Spain, Raúl Pérez, seen here in a photograph taken by American wine writer Gerry Dawes who has written extensively about him [here](#).

Most of Pérez' time is spent being a swashbuckling driving (as opposed to flying) winemaker. He is close to perhaps the most famous Bierzo producer, Ricardo Pérez Palacios of Descendientes de J Palacios, of the same family as Alvaro Palacios of L'Ermita, Priorat fame. Pérez' family winery is Castro Ventosa in Bierzo and they are some of the most important owners of vineyards within this extremely parcelled denomination, which must be a help. He also consults for other Bierzo producers and in Ribeira Sacra and Rias Baixas. His own Albariño has been buried at sea to enhance its marine aspects. He's that kinda crazy guy. When he comes across especially promising lots of grapes he vinifies wines under his own name, as a sideline and sometimes in tiny quantities, in his own winery in Ponferrada in Bierzo.

Ultreia is the name he gives his (very) slightly larger- volume Bierzo wines. **Ultreia de Valtuille**, Valtuille being the local village, is his oaked Mencía, the 2008 being a bit too heavily marked by oak at the moment for my personal comfort. **Ultreia La Claudina** is a white Bierzo based on Godello that I would love to try, but this **Raúl Pérez, Ultreia St Jacques Tinto 2008 Bierzo** is an extremely strong recommendation. Presumably so named as a reference to Bierzo's location on the pilgrim route to Santiago (aka St James or St Jacques) de Compostela, this is a really beautifully pure expression of Mencía's raspberry and graphite fruit. From century- old vines on soils rich in clay, this is beautifully juicy in the way of a young red burgundy and I would expect it to continue to deliver pleasure until 2012 at least. But it's a lovely transparent, racy drink already. It says 14% on the label but I would be very surprised if it were even a smidgeon more than that.

Raúl Pérez has been well and truly lionised in the US, thanks to hard work on the part of importers Olé of New Rochelle, which is perhaps why prices for this wine are considerably higher (£25.99- £49.99 a bottle, the equivalent of £19.80- £33) than the £11.99 charged by the following independent UK wine merchants who have been allocated the wine by clever importer Ben Henshaw of Indigo Wine:

The Sampler of London N1 www.thesampler.co.uk

Handford Wine of London W11 and SW7 www.handford.net

Bottle Apostle of London E9 www.bottleapostle.com

Great Northern Wine of Leeds www.greatnorthernwine.co.uk

Also in the UK Bibendum Wine also have some six- bottle cases they are currently listing at £50 in bond or £70.12 duty paid - so only 34p cheaper per bottle than from the retailers above.

There are many more stockists in the US according to wineseacher.com but the prices are higher.

Best of luck tracking it down!

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