

## Txomin Etxaniz 2004 Getariako Txakolina

6 Sep 2005 by JR

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Okay, okay, the name of this wine doesn't exactly trip off the tongue, but it does wonderful things to said mouth furniture. As I outlined in [your turn](#) last year, this vibrantly tart white is a great pick-me-up, reviving the most jaded of palates, and getting the appetite in gear for the truly great food that is on offer in its homeland, Spanish Basque country. (Read Nick on [San Sebastian revisited](#).)

Just to make things a little more complicated there are three different tiny regions producing Chacoli, or Txakoli in Basque: Arabako, Bizkaiko and Getariako Txakolina all have their fans but the last, just outside San Sebastian, is the biggest and arguably best zone where the local grape Hondarribi Zuri (yes, a very close friend of mine) is grown on green, Atlantic-washed slopes in mixed farming country. A few years ago there were only 75 ha/180 acres of vines left but that total has recently doubled – perhaps because more and more drinkers are appreciating this revivifying style of slightly prickly white.

This, although Spanish, is essentially a 'green wine', *vinho verde* in Portuguese, in which the grapes are picked when still high in malic acid – and it is not completely different from the local Sidra, or cider. In the many wonderful restaurants and tapas bars of San Sebastian it is poured from a great height, through a funny T-shaped special pouring device which allows this, into large, thin, glass beakers.

You may suspect that there is a touch of 'What I Did on My Holidays' romanticism about this recommendation but, as I described in the your turn alluded to above, this wine has also given me great pleasure even in the cold of a London May.

But it absolutely has to be a good example. If there's a shortage of fruit, the wine is like paint stripper. In my experience the best producer is Txomin Etxaniz (another good friend of mine) who, despite labels which suggest they belong to another decade, manage to squeeze an admirable amount of flavour and even a suggestion of floral aroma into their bottles of wine which are, mercifully, just 10.5 per cent alcohol.

To my surprise, I see that the wine is relatively easy to find – especially in the US, where it costs rather less than at either Thameside Wines in Putney or Hedley Wright in Essex in the UK, although it is cheapest of course in Spain itself where even Lavinia, not the cheapest wine merchant in Barcelona and Madrid, charge less than 9 euros for it. K&L of San Francisco charge \$14.99 while [www.everywine.co.uk](#) charge about £10 a bottle for it, but you have to buy at least six – which is a snag because this wine should be drunk as young as possible. In fact most bottles don't even carry a vintage year on the label – it is assumed that only the most recent harvest will be on offer.

The 2004 vintage seems in general to have suited this unusually bracing style of wine better than the 2003. I do hope you share my enthusiasm for this wine. But you certainly won't if the first requirement of a wine for you is that it is full bodied and red.

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