

Viña Herminia Crianza 2004 Rioja

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Yesterday in [A sandpaper seven from Spain](#) I highlighted some of the more aggressively textured wines that I came across in my tasting of [New Wave Spanish reds](#). My [article](#) on reds that leave your mouth feeling as though it has just been thoroughly scoured by a scrubbing brush seems to have stirred up considerable interest and has already engendered some very interesting discussion in [this thread](#) on the forum.

I thought it only right therefore to choose a thoroughly flattering Spanish red as this week's wine. In fact, when tasting this young but fully mature rioja I even wrote that **Viña Herminia Crianza 2004 Rioja** felt like putting on an old pair of slippers. This is a rioja that is not trying to win a prize for the most ambitious red to have been made in northern Spain in the (excellent) 2004 vintage. It has no delusions that it is going to spend half a lifetime being stroked in a connoisseur's cellar. It is simply a very appealing, fairly early-maturing expression of ripe Tempranillo, the signature grape of Rioja, with about 15% Garnacha (Grenache – as in Châteauneuf-du-Pape) that has spent just over a year in the American oak barrels traditionally used in Rioja - but the lovely, luscious fruit is by no means dominated by them.

Viña Herminia is the Rioja bodega owned by Luis Caballero of the estimable sherry company [Emilio Lustau](#), which is based in the easternmost, lowest, warmest of Rioja's three subregions, Rioja Baja, in Aldeanueva de Ebro. Their vineyards are on the slopes of Monte Yerga, so the vines benefit from good day-night temperature variation. This vintage was made by flying, or at least driving, winemaker David Morrison, who is probably more at home in the Rhône Valley than in Rioja but seems to have done a fine job with this fruit. His brief, apparently, was to make a wine that was modern, but not too modern. The post of winemaker at Herminia was filled in 2006 by Antonio Palacios, older brother of the famous Alvaro Palacios of L'Ermita etc (the one with the long sideburns between Peter Sisseck and Michel Bettane in [this video](#) of strangely shaped vines in Ronda). The original Palacios family bodega is of course also in Rioja Baja. **Excelsus** is the name of their bottling that receives even less oak and the 2005 is looking admirably delicate at the moment.

The tannins in the 2004 Crianza are already soft so there is no need to serve it with something chewy to make the wine taste softer. In fact I'd serve it with a slow-cooked lamb shanks, or pasta, cheesy polenta or a risotto. Even if an Italian wine might intuitively seem more apt with the last three suggestions, I think the textures will work well. And, needless to say, there is no need to cellar this wine. It is ready to drink this minute, or at any minute during the next two years. The wine is available at Wines of Cornwall at £7.52 and the US and UK importers are, respectively, Michael Skurnik and Michael Hall. Waitrose are selling the 2005 Crianza, which I have not tasted but have absolutely no reason to doubt, at just over £8 a bottle.

But for purists who seek something with a bit more grit and local character than a wine sculpted for the marketplace by an itinerant winemaker, I thoroughly recommend **Macía Batle Crianza 2005 Binissalem-Mallorca**, made from a blend of the Mallorcan varieties Manto Negro and Callet with a bit of Cabernet Sauvignon. This also has an attractively mature nose already. Its particularly rich, robust, natural fruit finishes slightly dry – not in the rasping, sandpapery way, but the way all fruit ripened on dry Mediterranean islands tends to be. This thoroughly wholesome wine is really interesting and is priced very fairly. While the rioja is 14% alcohol, the Mallorcan is 14.5%, and should also be drunk over the next two, possibly three, years.

I am very impressed by how relatively easy it is to find this wine in Europe, especially in Germany, where the price starts at 9.45 euros. (There is a cheaper Anada bottling too.) Noel Young and Hedley Wright sell it in the UK at £10.95 and Boutinot is the UK importer. I have seen American stockists listed by winesearcher.com but not at the time of writing.

Happy hunting.

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