

Behold the Season of the Red

Written by Jacqueline Coleman, BT Contributor
September 2018

Red, white, and you: Agreeable wine for \$15 or less

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It's hard to believe we're almost into red wine season, but September's here, and I'm ready to start raiding the wine fridge of all the bolder bottles I've been holding on to all summer.

We've had a lot of fun tasting picnic wines from France and Italy, and refreshing whites from California and New Zealand, but I'm ready to get right into some of the heavier food-pairing wines.

Spanish red wines are some of the best economical picks, combining quality with an affordable price point. It's hard to go wrong with a Tempranillo, especially if it's designated "reserva," and even harder if it's from the acclaimed Ribera del Duero region. I do love a fruity Garnacha, and it can be fun to explore bottles of Spanish wines that contain Monastrell or Mencía.

When shopping for Spanish wines, it's tempting to just seek out wines from Rioja, but I will

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challenge you to be a little more adventurous with your picks. In this month's lineup, I'm presenting wines from not only Rioja and Ribera del Duero, but also from the Jumilla region, in southeastern Spain, and the Calatayud region, which sits in northern Spain in the southwest corner of Zaragoza Province in the autonomous community (an administrative designation) of Aragon.

What could be better in the early fall than sitting outside sipping a wine from Spain and enjoying some *pan con tomate* and Manchego cheese? Let's explore some of these labels as we dive into the wines of fall with these expressive Spanish reds.

If you want to wow your friends with a Spanish red that isn't Tempranillo, check out the **2013 Alvarez de Toledo Mencía Roble**

. Made from 100 percent Mencía grapes, this darker red wine starts out with black cherries and a bit of chocolate on the nose, just a little more fruit-forward than some of the other Spanish reds. A fuller-bodied wine, the Alvarez de Toledo Mencía softens as it opens, showing complexity and elegance on the palate.

The **2016 Garnacha de Fuego** could be a crowd pleaser at your next Spanish tapas night. A lovely expression of Garnacha, this wine will show beautifully with any grilled steak-and-mushrooms dish. Ripe raspberries and cherries on the nose blend into a slightly earthier wine on the palate. Mild tannins and a nice balance round out the finish on this 100-percent Garnacha from the Calatayud region of Spain.

One of the more interesting reds with a funny label that is sure to start a conversation is the **2016 Wrongo Dongo**

. A dark and inky wine from the Jumilla region, this 100 percent Monastrell has a hint of licorice and dark chocolate along with the ripe red fruit on the palate. Smooth with strong tannins, Wrongo Dongo will pair perfectly with a heavier Spanish chorizo.

Back to a more traditional Rioja, I really enjoyed the **2014 Lan Crianza**, a Tempranillo aged for 12 months in mixed oak. A bit of spicy raspberries on the nose, with hints of that oaky-vanilla that blends into a well-balanced wine in both body and fruit-to-earth match. This is an excellent choice for an economical Rioja wine. I would choose this wine for any Spanish tapas night.

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The **2016 Chopo** Monastrell was a little lighter than the Wrongo Dongo but still held its own. A super ruby-red wine with big raspberries on the nose, Chopo has a bit of a shorter finish and a fruitier palate than some of the others. This is a lighter expression of Monastrell, but still an elegant drinking wine.

As I said before, it's hard to beat a Tempranillo from Ribera del Duero in Spain, and that was exactly the case in this group of bottles. The **2013 Píxide** was definitely a wine to revisit for a meaty Spanish dinner. A bit earthier with a punch of red fruit jam on the nose, Píxide is very well balanced on the tongue. Full bodied and smooth, this is an outstanding value wine for the price at under \$12.

Finally, we have another lovely Garnacha, or Grenache, from Calatayud with the **2015 Fabla Old Vines Grenache**

. I found the nose on this wine to be simply beautiful, with robust cherries and vanilla spice -- another very smooth, medium-bodied wine that provides a terrific value for the price.

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