

Alvaro Palacios

If anyone embodies the promise and spirit of “The New Spain,” it’s Alvaro Palacios. His L’Ermita is widely considered—along with Peter Sisseck’s Dominio de Pingus—to be the most important new Spanish wine of the modern era.

One of nine children born to the owners of Rioja’s respected Palacios Remondo, Alvaro studied enology in Bordeaux, while working under Jean-Pierre Moueix at Ch. Pétrus. He credits his tenure at Pétrus for much of his winemaking philosophy and for showing him “the importance of great wines.”

Alvaro could have returned to the security of his family’s domaine. But instead, he was drawn to the remote and seductive Priorat, 60 miles from Barcelona, which had been one of Spain’s important pre-Phylloxera wine regions. With

Finca Dofi—from Alvaro’s original vineyard, Finca Dofi is a blend of Garnacha, Cabernet, and Syrah. Like L’Ermita, Dofi combines power and richness with great breed and finesse. In most Priorat tastings that do not include L’Ermita, Dofi is the clear winner.

Gratallops—Alvaro has been instrumental in introducing the Burgundian ideas of *Villages* and *Cru* to Priorat. In 2006, he began to elaborate separately a collection of old vineyards from throughout the township of Gratallops to extend and commercialize this idea.

Les Terrasses “Velles Vignes”—While originally conceived of as a value wine, Les Terrasses “Velles Vignes” has slowly evolved into the essence of what makes Priorat special. Drawing on 15+ years of study, Terrasses is sourced from many of the region’s steepest and oldest vineyards—many of them north-facing to avoid the intense afternoon sun. With the 2007 vintage, Alvaro acknowledged Les Terrasses’ “graduation” by adding the “Velles Vinyes” designation to the label.

The evolving seriousness of Terrasses eventually left room for a new wine, **Camins del Priorat**. Alvaro had never wanted to be known solely for expensive “trophy” wines, and with Camins, he found the opportunity to create something special. Drawing on his wealth of vineyard sources, Alvaro is aiming to produce a wine that is affordably priced, but which also stays true to his vision of Priorat—powerful but elegant, approachable but restrained.

its unique *terroir* of steep hills and terraces, Alvaro believed that here he could make a wine that evoked both Pétrus and Grange.

He acquired his first vineyard, Finca Dofi, in 1990. Then, in 1993, he located what is now regarded as the crown jewel property in Priorat, a precipitous, northeast-facing Garnacha vineyard on well-drained schist that had been

planted between 1900 and 1940. Alvaro named it for a small chapel, or hermitage, that sits atop the hill.

In 1995, the flow of critical praise for Alvaro’s L’Ermita began, and it hasn’t stopped. But while L’Ermita has received most of the attention, Alvaro produces several other wines compelling in their own rights.

“*L’Ermita ... is arguably the finest individual red wine in Spain.*”

John Radford, The New Spain



From top: Alvaro Palacios in the L’Ermita vineyard just before harvest; the L’Ermita etiqueta; and the steep slopes of the Baixada vineyard

ALVARO PALACIOS

Priorato, Spain

OVERVIEW

Established: 1989
Les Terrasses debut: 1990
Finca Dofí debut: 1989 (no 1991)
L'Ermita debut: 1993
Proprietor & Winemaker: Alvaro Palacios

VINEYARD INFORMATION

Soils: Friable Schist on steep, terraced slopes
Appellation: Priorat
Elevation: 250 to 600 meters above sea level
Harvest: by hand

VINTAGE NOTES

2009 – A monumental vintage here, with the ripeness of 2003 and the balance of 2008.
2008 – Alvaro was the last grower to harvest in Priorat, and waited out rains that diluted other growers' offerings. Small quantities, but outstanding wines.
2007 – Early indications are for a very fresh vintage of tightly-wound, pure wines.
2006 – Another dry year, but well-timed rain before harvest appears to have allowed complete ripening and beautiful freshness.
2005 – A drought year, coupled with a poor flowering, produced some of the lowest yields ever. The top wines have unparalleled levels of concentration and pHs as low as 3.3.

ADDITIONAL WINEMAKING NOTES

No filtration, fining with egg whites (all wines)
L'Ermita destemmed by hand, others by machine.
Maceration: 25 days (L'Ermita and Finca Dofí); 15 days (Les Terrasses)
Fermentation in oak vats with punching down (L'Ermita and Dofí); fermentation in stainless steel with pumpover (Les Terrasses)
Malolactic fermentation in barrel for L'Ermita and Finca Dofí.
Biodynamic viticulture for Dofí & L'Ermita.

The Wines

L'Ermita

Fruit Source: A dramatically steep 2-hectare north-facing vineyard of 70-year-old, head-pruned vines.
Avg. Yields: < 12 hL/hA (2007)
Blend: 100% old-vine Garnacha (a little Cabernet was added prior to 2006).
Harvesting is by hand, with multiple passes to pick optimal fruit.
Oak Aging: 100% new French *barrique*.
Avg. Production: 250 cases.

Finca Dofí

Fruit Source: A single vineyard, with an average vine age of ~20 years.
Avg. Yields: Less than 20 hL/hA
Blend: 60% Garnacha and 40% Cabernet, Syrah and Merlot.
Oak Aging: 100% new French *barrique*.
Avg. Production: 1250 cases.

Les Terrasses “Velles Vinyes”

Fruit Source: Estate grapes, with the addition of selected lots of purchased old vine Garnacha and Cariñena grapes.
Avg. Yields: ~25 hL/hA
Blend: 30% Garnacha, 60% Cariñena, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah
Oak Aging: 12 months in French *barriques* (20% new).
Avg. Production: 12,000 cases.

Camins del Priorat

Fruit Source: Estate and purchased grapes.
Avg. Yields: ~30 hL/hA
Blend: 30% Garnacha, 60% Cariñena, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah
Oak Aging: 3-4 months in *barrique*, followed by tank and cask aging.
Avg. Production: 50,000 cases.