

Bernabeleva

Extraordinary New Wines Born from a Rich Family Legacy

With a modern highway nearing completion, San Martín de Valdeiglesias lies a mere 75 minutes from Madrid and its three million inhabitants. Yet, the journey feels much longer, both in distance and in time. As one drives west from the capital city, the terrain quickly becomes rugged and mountainous, the air cooler, and one begins to see signs of an earlier era.



At right, Vincente's daughter, Luisa, sitting atop an ancient stone "bear," and above, the modern-day estate symbol.

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Here, on the eastern edge of Spain's Sierra de Gredos mountains, a renowned Madrid doctor named Vincente Alvarez-Villamil purchased land in 1923. The site, which at that time was a full day's travel from Madrid, spoke of its Celtic past, with ancient bears carved from boulders to mark forests dedicated to the hunt goddess.

But the estate, which Vincente named Bernabeleva ("the bear's forest"), held more than just an ancient history—it was, he believed, a special place to plant the noble Garnacha (Grenache)—a place whose wines might exhibit profound character.

But the next decade brought increased political instability to Spain, and the Civil War that erupted in 1936 devastated the country. Though the family held onto the land, Vincente's dream of making wine ended ... for the time being.

The Dream Lives On

But in 2006, two of Vincente's great-grandchildren, Juan Diez Bulnes and Santiago Matallana Bulnes, vowed to fulfill their ancestor's dream. The estate's vineyards were now 80-years-old, and there were Granacha vineyards to purchase from neighboring properties as well. Rejecting current fashions in Spanish wine, the cousins resolved to make wines of purity and expressiveness that were in harmony with the beauty of their ancestral land.

Juan and Santiago's ambitions were well supported by the *terroir*. The vineyards are more than a half mile above sea level, with warm days but cool

nights, and with poor, sandy soils. The resulting wines have ample ripeness, but also astounding bouyancy and freshness.

A Dream Realized

The cousins wanted, above all, to protect the unique personality of their estate, and they hired consultant



Raúl Pérez, a master of cool-climate winemaking, to help them develop the project.

Just as important, they hired as full-time manager a young Catalan named Marc Isart Pinos. Marc's devotion to demanding viticulture and to non-interventionist winemaking have served the cousins' vision well.

Their regime emphasizes long fermentations, and minimal handling. Wines are aged in barrels of different sizes, but very little new wood is used so as not to mask the glorious aromatics.

The Wines

Camino de Navaherreros—Fermented and raised in large neutral wood, it is explosive and fresh.

Navaherreros—This wine is the essence of San Martín Garnacha. A selection of estate Garnacha aged in 2nd & 3rd passage oak barrels.

Carril del Rey—Eighty-year-old south-facing vineyard. Powerful wines, with dark aromas.

Arroyo del Tórtolas—North-facing vineyard at 800m elevation yields bright, intensely aromatic wines.

Viña Bonita—Shallow sand over granite produces meager yields and intense, complete wines.