



Basic Juice Article **White Ships of Spain**

by: *Beau Jarvis*

The modern day Spanish wine armada is overwhelmingly red. Let's leave these red ships of Spain for a minute and focus on a much smaller fleet: The white ships of Spain. In fact, for this expedition, we are going to exclude the Cava (Spanish bubbly) and Sherry contingents of our white flotilla, and focus on three white wine producing regions: Rioja, Rueda, and Rias Baixas. Wine from these regions is commonly available in most wine shops. To find it, just sail past all the red.

Yo Ho Ho and a Bottle of Rioja

White Rioja is the perfect wine with which to replace the, "rum," lyric in the classic pirate/sailor drinking song, "Yo ho ho and a bottle..." Why? Much of it is eminently drinkable and value-priced. So much so that just about any rapsallion wine-drinker can swashbuckle his (or her) way out of the wine shop with a few fine bottles. Most white Rioja is made from Viura, a widely planted, native white grape variety. Winemakers produce two very different styles of wine from this subtly flavored grape. Some pirates may prefer their Rioja "pure." Pure white Rioja is fermented in stainless steel tanks or concrete vats. The result is a smooth, easy-drinking white wine with subtle scents of pear and minerals. Others may prefer their wine muddied by the barrel (*barrica*) treatment. Barrel-fermented white Rioja is *a-vast-ly* different from the pure stuff. Caramelized oak barrels beef up the wine; making it fuller in both nose and body. On the nose, this muddied wine is full of baked fruit, custard, and cinnamon scents. Wooded white Rioja is weighty, and slightly sticky in the mouth. You wouldn't know these two styles are from the same humble grape. Before you buy an entire case of the stuff and serve it to your *mateys*, sample each style. For the pure version, try *Marqués de Cáceres Blanco Rioja, '03 (\$7)*. Sip it with delicately flavored fish dishes, poultry, or pork tenderloin. A fine example of the wooded stuff is *Conde de Valdemar Fermendatdo en Barrica Blanco Rioja, '01/'02 (\$13)*. This wine works best as an aperitif or happy hour sipper.

Beware the Rueda Triangle

In the gently rolling hills of Spain's northern *meseta* lies the white wine region called Rueda. Another V-grape reigns supreme here - Verdejo. This tangy native is often blended with the international traveler, Sauvignon Blanc. White Rueda wine will tickle your nose silly. It offers up a zesty blend of citrus and herb scents. This zesty character continues into the mouth with some added pear and almond flavors along with surprising heft. Our seafaring ship analogy is apropos here as Rueda whites are perfect with almost any food originating in the ocean. It's flexible enough to handle lobster swimming in butter, grilled shrimp, or even oysters on the half shell. I like to refer to Rueda whites as, "Bermuda Triangle" wine: Once you start sipping, you may very well not return to any other white wine. Ever. Before you walk the Rueda plank, try *Viña Sil Las Brisas, '03 (\$10)*. It's 50% Verdejo, 25% Sauvignon Blanc, and 25% Viura (of white Rioja fame). And if you're prepared to disappear, at least for an evening, open a bottle of *Martinsancho Verdejo, '03 (\$14)*, which is 100% Verdejo. You won't even bother with an *S.O.S.*

Avoid Scurvy. Drink Albariño

It's a shame the naval powers, Britain and Spain were frequently battling. Had the Celtic Brits and Galicians embraced their many similarities, the poor British sailors may not have been referred to as, "Limeys." You see, to avoid scurvy, the Limeys were forced to gnaw on citrus during long sea voyages. However, if they had been mates with the Galicians of Spain, perhaps they could have simply sipped Albariño; the wine star of Galicia's Rias Baixas region. The Albariño grape produces wonderful wine with such strong citrus character, you're bound to believe there's at least some Vitamin C in it (sadly, there is not). However, these wines are much more complex than a simple lime squirt. Imagine a lime *Rickey*, blended with peach and garnished with honeysuckle blossoms. Such an exotic scent combination just begins to describe a chilled glass of Albariño. After it hits your tongue, you'll be able to fully appreciate the treasure of Rias Baixas. This wine performs an amazing balancing act of bracing crispness and simultaneous smooth, viscous indulgence. Take a deep breath, wiggle your tongue and open either or both of these bottles: *Serra Estrela, '03 (\$13)* or *Condes Albarei Albarino, '04 (\$15)*. Not only are these wines delectable alone; but they are also mighty flexible. Both will pair beautifully with seafood, veggie skewers, or pasta. But please, try to avoid the temptation to garnish your glass with a lime wedge.

Whatever flag you fly, you're bound to raise a white flag after sampling Spain's under-the-radar white wine armada. Ahoy and cheers to the white ships of Spain.

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