



BODEGAS VEGA SICILIA

RIBERA DEL DUERO

FACT SHEET



OWNER

David Alvarez and family

PRODUCTS

Ribera del Duero, Valbuena 5° Ano

Ribera del Duero, Unico, Cosecha

Ribera del Duero, Unico, Reserva Especial



SIZE OF THE VINEYARDS

There are currently 250 hectares under vine, out of the 1000 hectares that comprise the entire estate.

LOCATION OF THE VINEYARDS

Spain's most famous and important wine estate is located at Valbuena del Duero, 30 km east of the ancient university town of Valladolid. The northern boundary of the estate is marked by the main road that runs along the left bank of the Duero (Douro) river - these rich soils are planted with vegetables rather than vines. The top of the hills are left to sheep, but in between are the vineyards, on north-facing slopes at altitudes of 750-800m above sea level.

The climate here is extreme continental, with very hot summers and cold winters; frost is a risk from October to the end of May. Rainfall is a modest 500mm per year. Most significantly, there is a wide variation in temperature between day and night - as much as 30°C - which allows the vines some respite even in Midsummer, and maximises levels of colour, aroma and flavour in the ripening grapes.

SOIL

The bedrock is schistous: the same rock that underlies the Port vineyards of the Douro further downstream. The topsoil is chalk-based, very pale and quite sandy.

GRAPE VARIETIES

Valbuena: 80% Tinto Fino (Tempranillo)
25% Merlot & Malbec

Unico: 80-90% Tinto Fino (Tempranillo)
10-20% Cabernet Sauvignon, with maybe some Merlot too.

These are averages - the blend varies with each vintage. A dry year will mean more Tinto Fino, a wet year more Cabernet. In years when no Unico is made, the Cabernet will go into the Valbuena.

AVERAGE AGE OF THE VINES

Valbuena: average 25 years old





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Unico: over 40 years old, with some vines aged 80 years or more.

AVERAGE PRODUCTION

Strict selection and very low yields of 15-20 hl/ha mean production is limited. The total varies between 250 000 and 300 000 bottles when both cuvées are produced, much less when only Valbuena is made.

VINIFICATION AND AGEING

Care begins in the vineyards, which contain a mixture of free-standing (bush) and wire-trained vines. Neither chemical fertilisers nor herbicides are used, but organic compost will be added if the vines are suffering unduly. This way, the high average age of the vineyards is maintained. The combination of old vines and severe pruning limits yields, which are further reduced by strict selection at harvest time. The altitude and cold nights delay ripening, and Vega Sicilia only harvest when the grapes are truly ready - late October, or even November on occasion. Picking is by hand, and the crop is transported to the Bodega in small plastic boxes so as to arrive in perfect condition.

The winery is now equipped with stainless steel tanks and pneumatic presses, but vinification remains traditional in inspiration. The musts are fermented in tank or in lined cement vats, with temperatures rarely exceeding 28°C, and cuvaison extended for many weeks. After pressing, the young wines go into large wooden vats for the malolactic conversion, followed by extended ageing in oak and bottle.

The ageing regime is gradually evolving, with the time spent in wood reduced, and some new oak now used; but the owners are conscious of Vega's distinct personality, and Unico continues to see more oak than just about any other fine wine in the world. Valbuena rests in the large oak vats 6 months, before 14 months in new French and American oak barriques, 9 months in older barrels, bottling and further ageing at the bodega before release after 5 years. The most recent vintages of Unico remained in the large oak vats for 12 months, followed by 8 months in 100% new barrels, 24 months in 50% new oak, and 26 months in old oak. Unico is never released before it is ready to drink, which means a minimum of 10 years, often much more - the 1981 has only just been released, and the 1970 was held back 26 years. This monumental wine spent 3 years in wooden vat, 30 months in 576 litre casks, and 11 years in old oak barriques before bottling and a further 9 years at the bodega.

Unico Reserva Especial is a non-vintage super-blend, assembled from the best lots of the very best years. It is a blend of three or four different vintages, and the average age of the wines used is usually at least 30 years old.

MARKETING

Vega Sicilia could sell four times their production without looking for further customers, such is



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the demand for these world-famous wines. Most goes to private clients, and there is a long waiting list to join the select band who are offered 3 or 4 bottles a year. Bottles are also allocated to the best restaurants and hotels in Spain.

About 17% of the stock is made available for export, using exclusive representatives who will ensure quality distribution. Europvin has the privilege of being offered the allocation for a number of markets, including the USA, Canada, Japan and the Far East, Australia & New Zealand. There is, unsurprisingly, not enough to go round !

NOTES ON THE PROPERTY

The history of the estate goes back many centuries, with official documents from 1697 referring to the 'Vegas de Santa Cecilia y Carrascal'. The name is in fact a geographical reference - Vega means water meadow, and one of the streams on the estate was named after Santa Cecilia, who also had the local chapel dedicated to her honour. The chapel still remains, but her name has been corrupted to Sicilia.

Perhaps the most significant date in the history of the property was 1864, when Don Eloy Lecanda, who had inherited the estate from his father, came back from Bordeaux with cuttings of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec. He planted these alongside the local black grape Tinto Fino (which is in fact Tempranillo), and began making wine of vastly superior quality to that of his neighbours. He used the name Bodegas Lecanda, and it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that new owners, the Herreros brothers, started calling the wine Vega Sicilia. The Herreros moved in the highest social circles, and introduced their wine to the discerning palates of the aristocracy and upper-middle classes. Ignoring commercial considerations, they instigated a philosophy of 'quality at any cost', and Vega acquired a fame and prestige far in excess of its lowly 'table wine' status. This has remained the guiding principle of the bodega ever since.

Vega Sicilia has been blessed with a succession of fine winemakers. Don Jesus Anadon worked tirelessly to maintain and build on the reputation of the wine through changes of ownership and an expansion in production. Then came Mariano Garcia, who has now handed over to his able deputy, Javier Ausas. Garcia oversaw the critical transition in the 1980s, when Vega had to respond to advances in winemaking technology and the resulting changes in consumer tastes. Backed by heavy investment from owner David Alvarez, he succeeded in updating the style of the wine - reducing the total time in wood and incorporating some new oak influences, while retaining the unique and wonderful character of Vega. More than ever, Vega Sicilia justifies its reputation as Spain's first growth, one of the very greatest red wines in the world.