



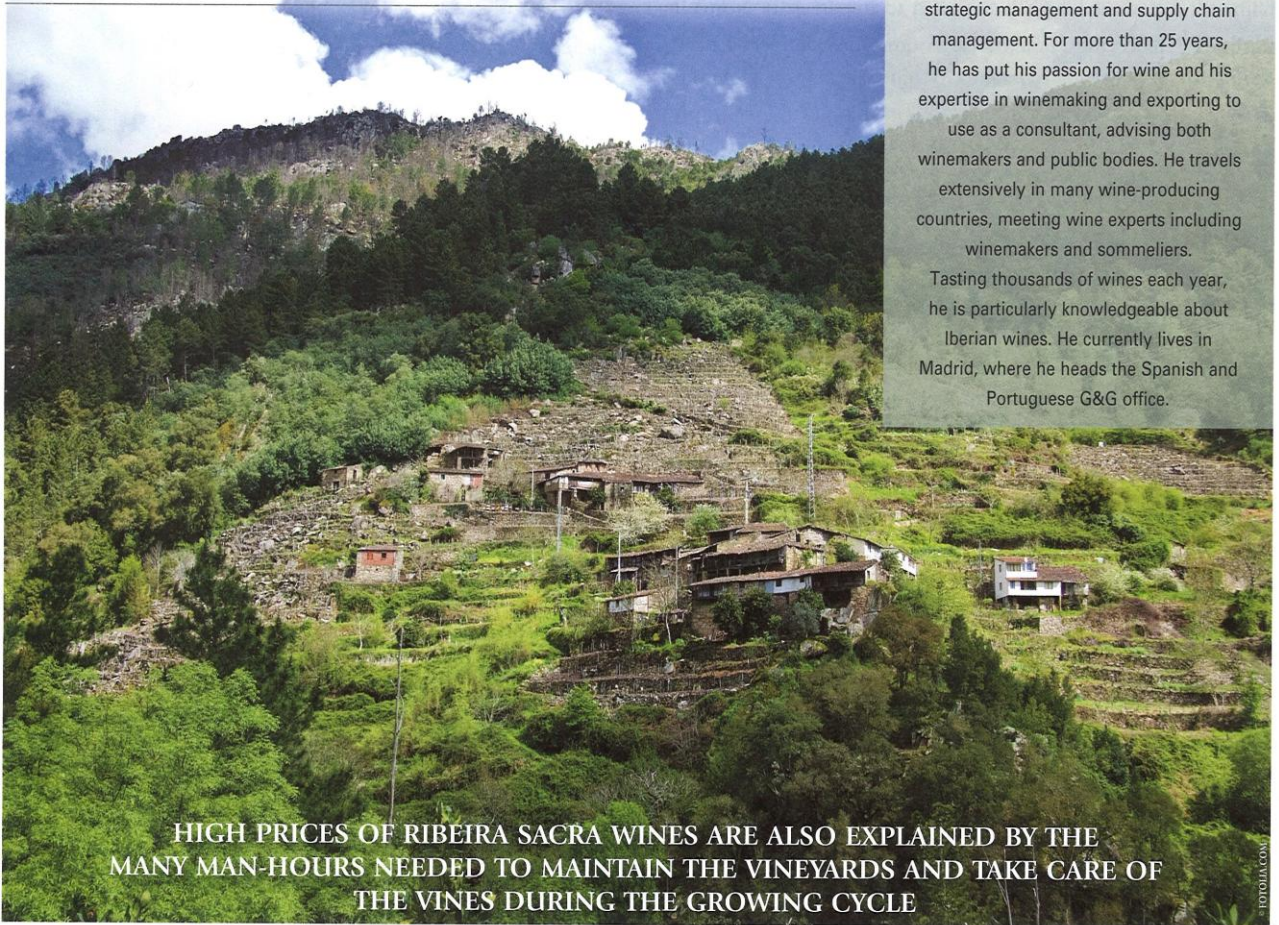
RIBEIRA SACRA: Galicia's secret gem

When people talk about Galician wines, the first thing that springs to mind is Albariño and its fresh white wines. No one would associate the region with well-balanced reds and surprising whites that aim to offer consumers something different, more complex and pairing perfectly with a wide array of foods. At a time when marginal wine drinkers are looking for less alcoholic wines with history and a story to tell, Ribeira Sacra is the perfect answer.

BY DIEGO BONNEL



Diego Bonnel has long a experience in the international wine sector, as well as in strategic management and supply chain management. For more than 25 years, he has put his passion for wine and his expertise in winemaking and exporting to use as a consultant, advising both winemakers and public bodies. He travels extensively in many wine-producing countries, meeting wine experts including winemakers and sommeliers. Tasting thousands of wines each year, he is particularly knowledgeable about Iberian wines. He currently lives in Madrid, where he heads the Spanish and Portuguese G&G office.



HIGH PRICES OF RIBEIRA SACRA WINES ARE ALSO EXPLAINED BY THE MANY MAN-HOURS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN THE VINEYARDS AND TAKE CARE OF THE VINES DURING THE GROWING CYCLE

The appellation currently extends over 1,250 ha, an area that has remained unchanged for the past twenty years and accounts for 5.2% of the total area under vine in Galicia, embracing 20 different localities. Ninety wineries and two thousand eight hundred growers produce Ribeira Sacra wines. Since 1997, the number of wineries has increased by 62% whilst grower numbers have doubled, revealing how dynamic the region is. The increases are partly due to the fact that the wines sell well and their price tags ensure sufficient profitability to attract newcomers to the appellation.

A LANDSCAPE SHAPED BY THE RIVERS MIÑO AND SIL

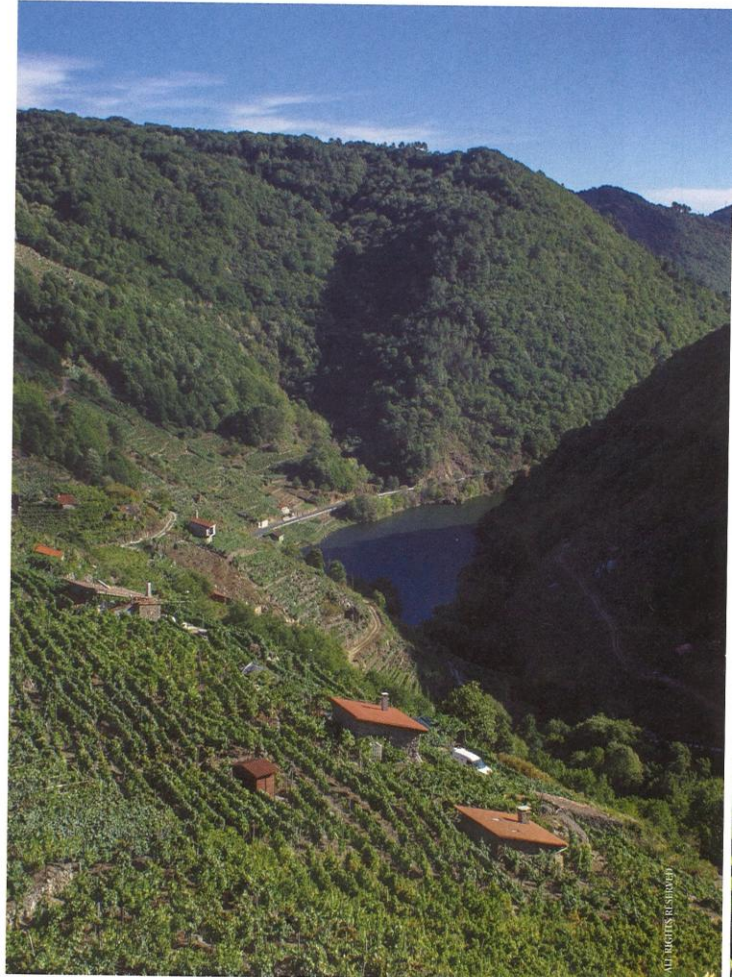
Ribeira Sacra is located in the south-eastern corner of Galicia. Bordered by Portomarín in the North West, Ourense to the South West, Manzaneda to the South East and Quiroga in its most easterly part, two rivers combine to shape its very distinctive landscape of steep terraces: the Miño river to the West and the Sil river to the South.

The appellation is divided into five sub-areas: Amandi, North of the river Sil, Chantada, West of the river Miño, Quiroga Bibei, in the easternmost part of the appellation, Ribeiras do Miño, East of the river Miño and Ribeiras do Sil, South of the river Sil.

Even though the appellation has a long history, it was only officially recognized in 1996. Winemaking in Ribeira Sacra dates back though to the Roman conquest. History has it that once the gold deposits in the region of Las Médulas had been depleted, prompting the need for new economic returns from the conquered provinces, the Romans moved to the banks of the River Sil to start grape growing and making wine to send to Rome. Closely linked to the Caminos de Santiago (the routes to Santiago de Compostela), the area has a long spiritual history. Indeed, the name Ribeira Sacra means 'Sacred Riverbank'. Vineyards were farmed by monks and their work shaped the area as we know it today, with many terraces along the Miño and Sil river banks.

QUALITY FACTORS

The quality of the wines from Ribeira Sacra can be ascribed to a number of different factors, one of which is undoubtedly the appellation's consistently low yields for the past twenty years. The



THE SPECTACULAR CANYONS OF THE RIBEIRA SACRA REGION

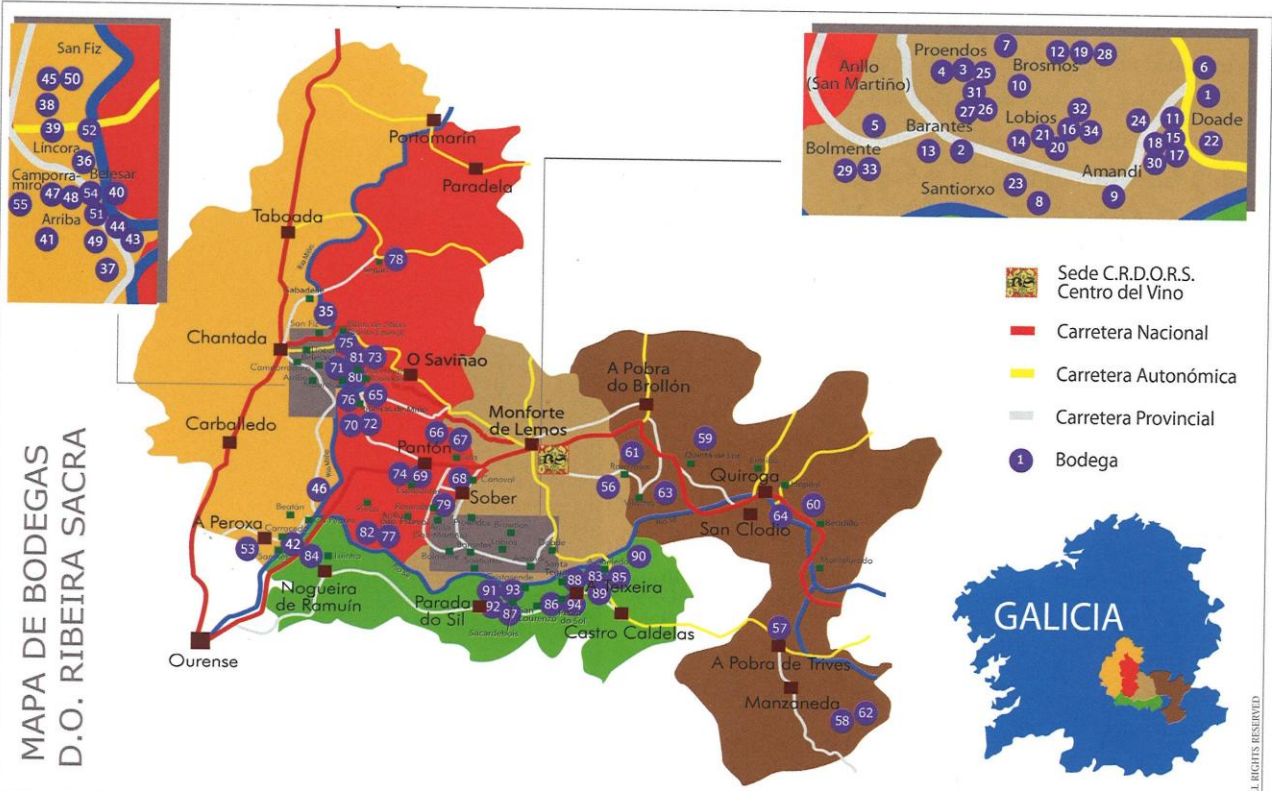
average yield is around 20 hl/ha, dropping in the most challenging years - like 2002 - to an average 13 hl/ha and potentially rising in more plentiful years - like 2009 - to 28 hl/ha. Hence production can vary from 15,000 hl in 2002 to 35,000 hl in 2009, making supply and demand management somewhat of a headache.

Another factor to consider is the climate, which tends to be more continental than Atlantic, with yearly rainfall of 900 mm and an average annual temperature of 14°C in the Miño valley, and rainfall of 700 mm/year and an annual mean temperature of 13°C in the Sil Valley. Winds can be very strong as they are funnelled by the shape of the valleys. All these factors combine



SPAIN

DISCOVERY



SUBZONA AMANDI

1. ADEGA ALGUEIRA S.L.
2. ADEGA LOBEIRAS C.B.
3. ÁLVAREZ GONZÁLEZ, MARCELINO
4. ARIAS FERNÁNDEZ, TOMÁS
5. ARIAS GARCÍA, M^a Otilia
6. BODEGA PETRÓN S.L.
7. BODEGA SOUTELO S.L.
8. BODEGAS DE RECTORAL DE AMANDI S.A.U.
9. CARNERO FIUZA, JORGE ENRIQUE
10. CONDE RODRÍGUEZ, JESÚS
11. D'FRAN S.C.
12. DON BERNARDINO S.L.
13. FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, ILDEFONSO
14. FERNÁNDEZ RODRÍGUEZ, MANUEL
15. LÓPEZ FERNÁNDEZ, DOMINGO
16. LÓPEZ LÓPEZ LAURA
17. MARCOS FERNÁNDEZ, RAMÓN
18. MARTÍNEZ FERNÁNDEZ, ELADIO
19. PÉREZ LÓPEZ, JOSÉ
20. PÉREZ RODRÍGUEZ, MANUEL
21. PRADO FERREIRO, M^a CARMEN NIEVES
22. REGINA VIARUM S.L.
23. RÉGOA C.B.
24. RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, JOSÉ MANUEL
25. RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, TOMÁS
26. RODRÍGUEZ PÉREZ, ERNESTO
27. RODRÍGUEZ PÉREZ, JOSÉ IGNACIO
28. RODRÍGUEZ PÉREZ, PEDRO MANUEL
29. RODRÍGUEZ PORTELA, ODILO
30. RODRÍGUEZ RODRÍGUEZ, M^a CARMEN
31. VALDÉS PÉREZ, MANUELA
32. VÁZQUEZ GONZÁLEZ, CRISTINA
33. VERAO PÉREZ, JOSÉ RAMÓN
34. VIDAL LÓPEZ, JOSÉ MANUEL

SUBZONA CHANTADA

35. ADEGAS E VIÑEDOS LAREU S.L.
36. ADEGAS E VIÑEDOS VÍA ROMANA S.L.
37. ADEGAS VIÑA GAROÑA S.L.
38. AMEDO S.L.
39. AS OUBENZAS C.B.
40. BLANCO LÓPEZ, JOSÉ
41. BLANCO PÉREZ, FELIZ
42. BODEGA ALAXIÑA S.L.
43. BODEGAS SANTA MARÍA DE NOGUEIRA S.L.
44. CABO DO MUNDO S.L.
45. CALVO MÉNDEZ, MANUEL
46. DOMÍNGUEZ GONZÁLEZ, EDELMIRO
47. GRUPO PEAGO S.L.
48. LEMOS NOVOA, ANTONIO
49. MOREIRAS MÉNDEZ, M^a ISOLINA
50. OTEREO CASTRO, JOSÉ MANUEL
51. PINCELO S.L.
52. RABELAS S.L.
53. SEOANE NOVELLE JAVIER
54. TEIJEIRO LEMOS, M^a ESTHER
55. TERRAS DE LÍNCORA S.C.

SUBZONA QUIROGA-BIBE

56. ADEGA DON RAMÓN S.L.
57. CHAO DO COUSO S.L.
58. DOMINIO DO BIBEI S.L.
59. ED V 2015 SLU
60. MONDELO RODRÍGUEZ, MANUEL
61. PUMAR RODRÍGUEZ, ROSA M^a
62. S.A.T. ALFER
63. S.A.T. OS ERMITAÑOS
64. VAL DE QUIROGA S.L.

SUBZONA RIBEIRAS DO MIÑO

65. ADEGAS MOURE S.A.
66. BODEGAS LOSADA FERNÁNDEZ S.L.
67. CASA MOREIRAS, S.L.
68. CASTRO SESSE, JOSÉ MARÍA
69. FERNÁNDEZ GONZÁLEZ, JAVIER
70. FINCA MILLARA BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS S.R.L.
71. FORTES LÓPEZ, JOSÉ ANTONIO
72. GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ, LOURDES
73. LÓPEZ LÓPEZ, MANUEL
74. LÓPEZ VAZQUEZ, MAXIMINO
75. NOVA TOURAL S.L.
76. PARADELA RODRÍGUEZ, MANUEL
77. PENA DAS DONAS S.L.
78. PÉREZ PÉREZ, JOSÉ LUIS
79. PÉREZ RODRÍGUEZ, ÓSCAR
80. REGAL LÓPEZ, ROBERTO
81. S.A.T. VIRXEN DOS REMEDIOS
82. VÁZQUEZ PEREIRA, JESÚS MANUEL

SUBZONA RIBEIRAS DO SIL

83. ADEGA CACHÍN S.C.
84. ADEGA DO MOLLÓN S.L.
85. ADEGA PONTE DA BOGA S.L.
86. ADEGAS PEDRA DO SOL S.C.
87. ADEGAS VALCAR S.L.
88. ÁLVAREZ RODRÍGUEZ, VICTORINO
89. BODEGAS COSTOYA S.L.
90. FEIJOO GONZÁLEZ, JORGE
91. LEIRABELLA S.L.
92. RONSEL DO SIL S.L.
93. VÁZQUEZ ÁLVAREZ, JOSÉ
94. VÁZQUEZ RODRÍGUEZ, JOSÉ



THE VINEYARDS IN RIBEIRA SACRA GROW ON VERY STEEP INCLINES

to restrict alcohol levels to around 12.5% -13.5%; this can rise on odd occasions but not as a rule.

Soils also factor into the quality equation. Those in the Miño valley are of granitic origin, with areas of sandy loess, providing freshness and good drainage for the vines. In the Sil valley, clay content is higher. Both of these main soil types bring complexity and diversity to the area's wines.

Generally speaking, Ribeira Sacra produces wines for pleasure, generally designed to be drunk young and partnering well with a range of delicate, subtly-flavoured foods like sushi and Japanese

cuisine for the whites and poultry and mild cheeses for the reds. These distinct features, along with the area's unique and impressive landscapes, may well make Ribeira Sacra the wine world's next big discovery over the coming decade.

UNIQUE VARIETIES AND IDIOSYNCRATIC WINES

The Ribeira Sacra appellation offers a variety of unique grapes, both red and white. The main white grapes are Albariño, Loureira, Treixadura, Godello, Dona Branca and Torrontés whilst the reds



GREAT WINES ARE ALWAYS THE RESULT OF EXTREME CONDITIONS,
LIKE HERE IN RIBEIRA SACRA

are Mencía, Brancellao, Merenzao, Tempranillo, Sousón and Caiño Tinto, rounded off by Garnacha Tintorera and Mouratón. The appellation is mainly geared to producing red wines. The Mencía grape is the most widespread and it produces mostly wines designed to be drunk whilst still young, fruity and aromatic. Bright purple in colour, they display plenty of fruit (wild berries) on the nose and medium-plus intensity. They are mainly on the light side and hence dissimilar in style from more Mediterranean wines like those of Jumilla, Yecla or even Valencia and Alicante. The tannins are soft and well-integrated and the wines are nicely balanced by impeccable acidity and alcohol levels. They are savoury and some may be slightly astringent. On the palate, they are elegant and exhibit ripe red berries, with a medium-to-long finish, depending on the appellation sub-area and individual producer styles.

White wines, produced in limited quantities, bear the hallmark features of the grape variety. Godello yields fresh, fruity wines with a palate that can sometimes be exuberant. Albariño produces fresh, enjoyable wines that are easily recognisable and bear the specific characteristics imparted by their location on the banks of the Miño and Sil rivers. However, production of blended white grapes is on the rise and increasingly complex wines can be found.

RIBEIRA SACRA'S MOST SURPRISING GRAPES

The Merenzao grape is a small-cluster variety with small, compact berries, high sugar content and medium acidity. It is also known as Trousseau in the Jura region of France. It is likely that the

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Interview with José Manuel Rodríguez, head of the Ribeira Sacra CRDO

José Manuel is a very dynamic and above all pragmatic man who has an in-depth understanding of the challenges facing the Ribeira Sacra appellation. Despite his busy schedule, he agreed to answer our questions.

What is so unusual about Ribeira Sacra?

Europe's most ancient soils were found in Ribeira Sacra. Despite this, previous administrations did not take our region into consideration as a quality wine producer and we were only granted official recognition as an appellation in 1996, which is when the public started to take notice of us. One of our greatest advantages is that because of our location and climate, we are not influenced by

trends. You won't find any over-extracted, excessively oaked or overripe wines here. Most growers are concerned about revealing the 'terroir's' specific personality and our efforts have been rewarded by attention from the media.

What are its other main features?

The vineyards are all on steep slopes and thus all the work has to be carried out by hand. Our region can be compared to that of the Valais in Switzerland or Cinquetera in Italy. The vines are planted on pebbly terraces - where 90% of all the wines come from - giving the wines their unique personality. Similarly, we also have many different soil types, ranging from granitic soils to schist. Another advantage of the lay-out of our vineyards is that the plots are tiny and therefore speculators are not interested in our region. We thereby avoid attracting businessmen who are only interested in high volumes and medium-to-low quality wines.



Broadly speaking, our appellation's greatest achievement is its archetypal personality and styles that are well-known and recognized the world over. The wines are fresh and extremely food-friendly.

What are the main challenges that lie ahead for the Ribeira Sacra appellation?

We need to continue to build upon the work that has already been accomplished. Also, there are many old growers and we need to attract young growers to the appellation. This requires a sound economy: if running a winery is profitable, then we will attract young people and the rest will follow.

We have to maintain our prices and continue to ensure the profitability of our wineries. Viticulture must be our region's 'modus vivendi'. Even though we have not yet been recognised as a World Heritage site by Unesco, we are aiming towards it and hope to be accepted by 2017.

Our quality starts in the vineyard by limiting yields to a maximum of 8,550 kg/ha. This has been reduced by 10% which is unheard-of in Spain, especially at a time when many other regions are increasing yields rather than decreasing them. Our grapes sell for over a euro per kilo and our wines are priced in excess of five euros a bottle, which is more than 'crianza' and reserve wines from Rioja and other areas. These are standards we need to maintain. Another issue we face is expanding our Wine Route which is already a work-in-progress. Some wineries welcome more than 20,000 visitors a year.



TERRACES AND COMPLEX SOILS UNDOUBTEDLY FACTOR INTO THE QUALITY

variety travelled from Jura to the Iberian Peninsula with one of the monastic orders that settled there in the second half of the 20th century. Algueira makes an interesting 100% Merenzao wine. The grapes are pressed by foot, a technique which ensures delicate extraction and highlights the wine's aromatics and flavours, tannin and acidity. The wine offers finely detailed fruit characters that recall wild cherry tinged with blood orange and wild herb. On the palate it is luscious and soft and ends with a long finish, leaving a hint of tannin and red liquorice perfumes.

Brancellao is a red variety producing light, aromatic wines. Although a good quality and disease-resistant variety, its productivity is very low. It is used for blending with other varieties but can also be made as a single varietal. Dominio do Bibeí makes an interesting single varietal Brancellao. During the wine making process, the Brancellao grapes are destemmed and macerated at cold temperatures for four days. The grape juice is then fermented in 500 l barrels with punching of the cap and manual stirring of the lees. It stays in the same barrels for three weeks. The wine is aged on the lees for 19 months in first, second and third-use 300-litre oak barrels. Then it spends 18 months in the bottle before being released.

Sousón is a dark-skinned grape variety yielding relatively light though deeply-coloured red wines - the deep purple-red hue is

due to the strong pigmentation in its skin and the ease with which this is passed on to the wines.

Caiño Tinto is a dark, thick-skinned grape variety which imparts a deep colour and robust tannins to the wines. It usually yields fragrant red wines and is used predominantly in red wine blends that range from delicate and perfumed to medium-bodied and very sour. Caiño Tinto is a challenging grape variety in the vineyard because it is prone to many diseases including powdery mildew, sunburn and grey rot. Its yield can also be highly irregular.

Mouratón, another variety found in the Ribeira Sacra appellation, is far from being the most used. The grape is known for its deep, dark colour. It buds and ripens early to produce wines often with alcohol levels around 12%. The vines are prone to diseases like anthracnose and downy mildew. Once again, Dominio do Bideí offers an excellent - and expensive - version of this varietal. The fruit is hand-harvested from 60 to 100-year-old vines from steep, terraced vineyards (in Quiroga-Bibeí) with sandy clay and gravel soils at elevations ranging from 360 to 600 metres. Fermented with native yeasts in 500 L barrels and then aged for 20 months in four year-old French oak barrels, the wine is bottled unfiltered and unfiltered. ■