



**Written by**  
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*1 May 2017*

## Bierzo explained



It's unlikely that with this article I am introducing you to Bierzo. There has been a pronounced increase in interest in this north-west Spanish region over the last 20 years. The potential of the region is beyond doubt, not just because it is the homeland of Mencía, a grape variety that has proved that it does not have to be rustic and can produce intense wines, but also because, according to Carmen Gómez, technical director at the Bierzo Consejo Regulador, it has one of the highest percentages of old vines in Spain. Almost 80% of the 3,000 ha (7,415 acres) are at least 60 years old, with many of the vines being centenarians.

The Consejo has launched a project to preserve all old vines, via a land bank that helps to put elderly vine growers tempted to abandon old vines in touch with energetic younger ones, transferring ownership of 81 ha (200 acres) of old vines so far.

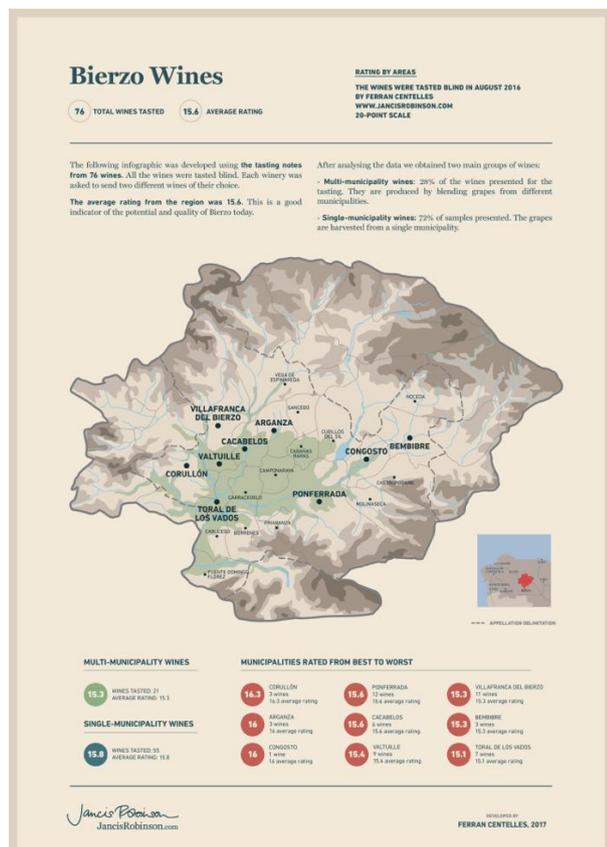
The average yields are a moderate 7,000 kg/ha and there are 2,400 vine-growers, for many of

whom viticulture is a weekend activity.

Like all the regions that are on the pilgrims' route to Santiago de Compostela, such as Rioja, Navarra and Ribeiro, Bierzo's wines were already produced and valued by monks in the Middle Ages.

Bierzo is located within the valley of the River Sil, from which it is Atlantic-influenced. However, the climate remains severely continental. Think of the region as a tectonic pot surrounded by a mountainous chain. The village of Cacabelos, seen in the picture above taken from Prada a Tope winery in Arganza, in the bottom of the valley, is in the centre of the region at 450 m (1,475 ft) elevation. The elevation increases at the periphery towards the mountains that peak at 1,000 m in the villages of Corullón, Vilafranca del Bierzo and Bembibre.

Bierzo borders on Valdeorras to the west and has considerable annual rainfall of 600-700 mm (24-27.5 in). The rain falls mostly in the areas surrounding Valdeorras and is less pronounced in the east of the region, For example, Corullón and Vilafranca del Bierzo are rainier than Bembibre, Ponferrada and Congosto. There are lots of small mountains and small valleys within the region, creating hundreds of slopes and different exposures, as shown on the map below. (You can download a pdf of the map [here](#) in order to zoom in.)



Currently the Consejo is considering an enlargement of the area, possibly including the outer mountainous area where very old vines remain but which was not included in 1989 when the appellation boundaries were set.

The soils are mainly loamy with a percentage of slate and quartzite, while the elevated zones have poorer soils than the ones on the plain and tend to produce better-quality grapes.

Bierzo is well known for its slate quarries in the south west of the region. Mining was an

important part of the gross domestic product at the end of 19th century when the phylloxera louse arrived. Many people therefore chose mining over vine growing, or were forced to emigrate to South Africa, and many vineyards were abandoned. Unfortunately mining is today woefully undervalued and many are losing their jobs.

The region saw a boost in the 1960s due to the co-operative movement. Six co-operatives were created at that time but today just three of them produce a total of 40% of Bierzo's wine production. Disappointingly, the wines presented for my tasting by co-ops were generally disappointing. Those who follow some of my articles have probably noticed how proud I feel when co-operative wines reach the heights as I truly think that when co-ops produce very good wine, the standard quality level of the region must be high.

The region is definitely progressing in terms of winemaking but I was disappointed to find an average of no more than 15.6 when I analysed all my scores from my blind tasting. Dilution and farmyard aromas seem to be increasingly rare, although a few samples showed a premature oxidative character, with the majority of the wines likely to reach their peak within five to six years after bottling.

I think generalising is always unfair but I was quite surprised that so many Mencías showed a very sweet character, rounded texture and velvety sweet tannins. The overall expression was a bit extreme in terms of ripeness. I noticed some overripe flavours too. The wines may be from the dry or dilute clichés of the past, but I am unsure of the likely ageing ability of such wines.

A good 75% of the region is dedicated to red wines, with Mencía accounting for 73% of the plantings co-existing with 2.4% of red-fleshed Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouschet). Of the white wine grapes to which about a quarter of the region is dedicated, Godello is producing delicate wines and showed particularly well in my tasting. However, the dominant white wine grape is Palomino, which accounts for 17% of plantings. It is locally known as Jerez and generally speaking in terms of quality it was a step behind Godello. There is as usual an exception that breaks the rule. Check out the remarkable and particular white produced by Akilia to discover an eye-catching Palomino.

The region is also seeing a slow but steady increase in producers. Almost 30 new wineries have emerged in the last ten years to bring the total to 77. The majority of the newcomers are small growers with the ambition of producing their own wine. As an example, Bodegas Vehemencia, the truly micro winery pictured below and launched in 2014, obtained 15 points for its first vintage but that has climbed to 16.5 for the 2015 vintage. This is clearly a producer to watch.



As usual the tasting was blind, and there are always surprises when tasting that way. As I had requested, the tasting was stimulatingly arranged by municipalities. A municipality is an area with an administrative entity that can be subdivided into villages. I used the results of the

tasting to design the infographic above, which leads to some very marked conclusions.

The two top-rated municipalities were Arganza, averaging 16 for all the wines tasted, outshone only by Corullón, which peaked at an average of 16.3 for the three samples presented. Valtuille also has a few very remarkable wines although its average is 15.4. Toral de los Vados was the weakest flight of the tasting.

The 15.6 average score of all these wines may seem a bit low but I would like to point out that, unfortunately, the really prestigious top wines were unwilling to submit their top cuvées to be tasted blind. Below you will not find the top cuvées from Descendientes de J Palacios, for example. Unfortunately some other significant producers such as Raúl Pérez, Mengoba and Massurias did not submit any wine at all for my tasting, but I will try to report on them separately.

In contrast, you can discover names such as Puerta del Viento, Demencia, **Losada**, Prada a Tope, Dominio de los Cerezos, Aurelio Feo, Casar de Burbia or the already discussed Vehemencia, all producing noteworthy wines. Furthermore, I am happy enough to note the remarkable scores obtained by Dominio de Tares' Cepas Viejas and Palacios' Corullón - two benchmarks within Bierzo.

Bierzo is today producing 9 million bottles but has the potential to produce up to 13 million. I am quite certain they will succeed in increasing the number of those who already follow the region, particularly in the export market, because only 35% of the total crosses the Spanish border.

I have grouped the 80 wines described below (the 76 noted on the infographic are supplemented by four from Demencia that I did not taste blind) first by colour and then by municipality, although they are divided according to whether the grapes are sourced from a single municipality or whether they come from several municipalities. In this case I have used the main municipality to sort the wine.

A personal thank you to all the team from the Consejo Regulador for such a well-arranged tasting and support during the day and a half of tasting.

## RED WINES

### ARGANZA MUNICIPALITY

- *Prada a Tope, Palacio de Canedo Maceración 2015 Bierzo* *Mencía planted in Arganza village at 600 m. Yield of 7,000 kg/ha. Carbonic maceration.*  
Tasted blind. The wine has a simple fruit character and a touch of violet; it is expressive, pleasant and clean. It is not complex but it is well made, with plenty of black fruit concentration and juiciness. Easy drinking, clean and fruit driven. **GV** (FC)13.5% Drink 2017-2022  
16
- *Pittacum, Val de la Loba Mencía 2014 Bierzo* *Old vines planted in 1930 at 700 m elevation, aged for 12 months in used French oak barrels.*  
Tasted blind. Intense ripe black fruit character showing dry herbs, spice and a touch of meatiness. A savoury mid palate, with well-integrated juicy tannins, although it is slightly drying at the back. It is a juicy Mencía with a well-managed sensation of freshness. (FC)14% Drink 2017-2021

15.5

- Prada a Tope, Picantal Mencía 2010 Bierzo *Single-vineyard Mencía grown at 800 m elevation. Native yeasts are used for fermentation. Aged in French oak.*  
Tasted blind. Complex nose displaying tobacco, spiciness and forest floor, with the fruit underneath. It has a mature character overall. On the palate it is pleasant and complex, and I particularly like the fine-grained tannins. It is savoury and fleshy, a very good example of an aged Mencía. It is enjoyable now but I am not sure if it will keep long, as it already has notes of plum liqueur on the aftertaste. An elegant and remarkable wine. (FC)14.5% Drink 2017-2020  
16.5

## BEMBIBRE MUNICIPALITY

- Viñas de Viñales, Miliario 2015 Bierzo *Mencía from Bembibre village planted on red clay soils. Fermentation with ambient yeasts. Unoaked.*  
Tasted blind. Youthful and simple fruit character, pleasant, with modest tannin and a rounded, dairy expression. Not very extracted. An easy-going wine. (FC)14.5% Drink 2016-2018  
15
- Viñas de Viñales, Interamnum 2015 Bierzo *Mencía planted at 700-850 m elevation. It is fermented with non-inoculated yeasts and is unfiltered. The wine remains on its lees post-bottling but does not see any oak.*  
Tasted blind. Quite open and somewhat evolved for a young (joven) wine, it shows sweet black fruit character and spiciness. Well made, although it has a touch of spirit on the aftertaste. Complex and developing, definitely not what one would expect from a joven wine. (FC)14.5% Drink 2016-2017  
15
- Dominio de Tares, Bembibre 2011 Bierzo *Mencía from a 100-year-old vineyard. It yields 2,000 kg/ha. Limited production of 5,000 bottles. 16 months ageing in French oak plus 24 months in bottle.*  
Tasted blind. The nose is already mature and shows coffee, toast, wet leaves and obvious oak character. The palate has mellowed, the tannins are starting to appear polished and it has a creamy sensation on the back palate. A very good glass of wine with evident oak character, drinking well now but I am not sure about its ageing capacity. (FC)14.5% Drink 2016-2019  
16

## CACABELOS MUNICIPALITY

- Puerta del Viento, Sin Sulfitos Mencía 2014 Bierzo *60-year-old Mencía from Cacabelos, made by Jorge Vega García. Its yield is less than 1 kg per vine. Limited production of 1,200 bottles. Fermentation takes place in 500-litre French oak barrels with a subsequent 10 months' ageing. Certified organic. No sulphites added.*  
Tasted blind. An open nose with enough concentration, of fruit rather than oak. The tannins are mellow, and overall the palate is harmonious. Dry but pleasant long finish. A very remarkable and perfectionist natural wine. It won't keep long but it truly is a noteworthy wine. **GV** (FC)13.5% Drink 2017-2018  
€10 RRP in Spain 16.5
- Soto del Vicario, Men de Mencía 2012 Bierzo *Vineyards are situated in Cacabelos at 700 m elevation. Produced from 40- to 100-year-old vines. Cold macerated for 72 hours prior to fermentation.*

Tasted blind. It is a fruit-driven wine emphasised by lots of ripe black fruit flavours. It is not too complex but has enough fruit character combined with a herbaceous lift. Easy drinking although the tannins are still noticeable. It is very appropriate for its €7 retail price. (FC)14.5%  
Drink 2017-2020  
€7 RRP in Spain 15.5

## CACABELOS MULTI-MUNICIPALITY

- Vinos Valtuille, Pago de Valdoneje Mencía 2015 Bierzo *Mencía planted in 1920. Picked quite early to retain freshness. Fermented in stainless steel tanks.*  
Tasted blind. Youthful, simple and vivid with a very refreshing mouthfeel. A pleasant and easy-drinking wine. Uncomplicated and quite a bargain. This is a producer to follow. (FC)14% Drink 2016-2018  
€6.50 RRP in Spain 15.5
- Losada, Altos de Losada 2014 Bierzo *70-year-old Mencía. Limited production of 7,300 bottles. The vineyards are planted on clay soils in Valtuille, Pieros and Villadecanes villages. Only native yeasts are used for fermentation, and it is aged for 15 months in new and nearly-new 500-litre French oak barrels.*  
Tasted blind. Very good aromatics, pure and showing ripe black fruit, plums and herbal lift. Lots of fruit on the front palate, mellow and superbly integrated tannins, a dense fruit character and a savoury aspect at the back. Very good wine, fruit-charged but still silky, with superb management of the oak. (FC)14% Drink 2018-2022  
17
- Martín Códax, Cuatro Pasos Mencía 2014 Bierzo *Gobelet-pruned old vines. Short ageing in oak.*  
Tasted blind. The nose is very smoky and red fruited. Easy drinking and not too complex. It has some earthy and beetroot character that slightly overwhelms the fruit, and a bitter-sweet sensation on the back palate. Slightly austere. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2017  
14.5
- Dominio de Tares, Cepas Viejas 2014 Bierzo *Mencía from Cacabelos, Vilafranca del Bierzo and Toral de los Vados villages. The vines date back to 1930 and 1950. Ambient yeast fermentation. Nine to 10 months' ageing in French and American oak barrels. The wine settles for six months in bottle before entering the market.*  
Tasted blind. The nose combines deep black fruit and obvious oak character; it is complex, toasty and has a minty touch. The sweet fruit aspect lingers pleasurably through the palate, alongside juicy and sweet tannins. Modern winemaking with lots of toasty flavours. A remarkable Mencía, rich and concentrated. (FC)14.5% Drink 2017-2019  
16.5
- Godelia 2012 Bierzo *Mencía aged for 12 months in 400-litre French oak barrels.*  
Tasted blind. The nose is already open and evolved showing forest floor, cedar and black fruit underneath. It is slightly lacking vivacity and freshness. The palate shows an intense black fruit character and rough tannins. Godelia is a notable producer within Bierzo. However, this wine seems to be prematurely evolved. (FC)14.5% Drink 2014-2017  
15
- Gancedo, Xestal Mencía 2009 Bierzo *Mencía on clay soils planted at 620 m elevation. 12 months in French oak barrels.*  
Tasted blind. Very open and mature nose showing black pepper, cloves, forest floor and obvious oak character. The palate is oaky and has polished tannins, not massive, with a touch of meatiness. Gancedo is a significant producer within the region but the wine seems slightly over-oaked and already mature. (FC)14.5% Drink 2013-2017

## CONGOSTO MUNICIPALITY

- *Almaz, Montium Mencía 2012 Bierzo* From vines in Congosto village. Dry ice pre-fermentation maceration. Aged for 12 months in 225-litre and 500-litre oak barrels.  
Tasted blind. Fruit-charged, juicy and very pleasant, with well-defined primary aromas on the nose showing ripe black fruit and touch of liquorice. Surprisingly youthful for a 2012. Really pleasant, mellow and generous in fruit. (FC)14% Drink 2015-2018  
16

## CONGOSTO MULTI-MUNICIPALITY

- *Los Cerezos, Van Gus Vana 2012 Bierzo* Mencía. Old vines planted on limestone and sandy soils. Fermented in cement tanks. 12 months' ageing in French oak barrels.  
Tasted blind. The nose is starting to develop and shows toast, caramel, vanilla and leafy aromas. The palate is broad and juicy, very polished and pleasant with a nice combination of sweet fruit-related flavours and spices. It is ripe but fresh. The 2012 tastes much fresher than the 2009. This is an up-and-coming producer to follow closely. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2019  
16.5
- *Los Cerezos, Van Gus Vana 2009 Bierzo* Mencía planted at 600-700 m elevation. Aged in oak for 12 months. Production limited to 4,000 bottles.  
Tasted blind. Very open and mature nose showing sweet spices, cedar and tobacco. The palate is fine grained and oak flavoured. The development dominates the fruit. It is an adequate wine but I would prefer to drink a fresher vintage. (FC)14.5% Drink 2015-2018  
15

## CORULLÓN MUNICIPALITY

- *Descendientes de J Palacios, Villa de Corullón 2014 Bierzo* Mainly Mencía. Vineyards are planted on slate soils within Corullón village at 600-1,000 m elevation. 60- to 100-year-old vines.  
Tasted blind. The wine has great complexity, very ripe black fruit, sweet toast, plums and lots of extract. Remarkable within the flight, displaying a deep and intense palate. It combines volume and a balancing freshness. A clean and pure style of Mencía. (FC)13.5% Drink 2017-2020  
17
- *Paixar Mencía 2013 Bierzo* Mencía planted on slate soils at 900 m elevation. 22 months' ageing in French oak barrels.  
Tasted blind. The nose is very open and is starting to evolve, showing liquorice, vanilla, oak and a minty lift. It has elevated levels of tannins, and certain developing notes such as dry leaves, which hide the fruit. Slightly warming and bitter on the back palate but still very pleasurable. (FC)14% Drink 2016-2018  
16
- *Descendientes de J Palacios, Petalós 2014 Bierzo* Mencía from Corullón and Vilafranca del Bierzo villages. 60- to 100-year-old vines planted on slate soils.  
Tasted blind. Slightly close and earthy, complex, developing and showing red fruits, floral

touches and spices. Medium bodied with plenty of fine-grained tannins. The palate boasts lots of flavours, particularly pungent spices. It is slightly lacking fruit concentration although it still holds up on the back palate. Not the best bottle of Pétalos I've had, but a must-taste within the region. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2017

16

## PONFERRADA MUNICIPALITY

- **Almázcara Majara, Jarabe Mencía 2014 Bierzo***Vines planted at 600 m elevation that date back to 1940. Eight months' ageing in oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. The nose is slightly closed, showing sweet red cherries, toast and pencil lead. Mineral expression. Lots of juiciness on the palate. It is savoury and has enough fruit. Quite convincing as a youthful, juicy wine. The fruit lingers through the palate. If you take time to aerate it, this might be a beautiful bottle of wine. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2018

16

- **Encima Wines, Para Muestra Un Botón Mencía 2014 Bierzo***Hand-picked Mencía planted on clay and slate soils. Vineyards are at 600 m elevation. 'Para muestra un botón' translates as 'to show a button' - it is a humorous Spanish saying that we use when referring to an example.*

Tasted blind. The nose is slightly spirity showing black fruit, toasted oak and dairy notes. Voluminous but not elongated, very juicy and rich in tannins. The palate is gourmand, easy drinking but not deep. It has lots of fruit and dry herbs at the back. Good and straightforward wine. (FC)14% Drink 2015-2018

15

- **Otero Santín, Valdecampo 2014 Bierzo***Old Mencía planted at 600 m elevation. The winery was created in 1950.*

Tasted blind. Very fragrant, with violets and lots of black fruit. Simple but very pleasant with an intense and palatable fruit character. Juicy tannins and well-integrated alcohol. Well ripened. Not complex nor deep but a very comfortable everyday wine. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2017

15.5

- **Akilia, Villarín 2013 Bierzo***Single-vineyard Mencía from 90-year-old vines. Ambient yeast fermentation with a subsequent eight months' ageing in cement tanks. Very small production of 1,600 bottles. Akilia has to be one of the paramount wineries within the appellation, the project is authentic and totally terroir-minded.*

Tasted blind. The Villarín is polished and delicate, really lingering through the palate. The aromatics are slightly evolved and closed. It is idiosyncratic and not perfectionist, but intriguing and eye-catching. It has its own personality; I particularly like the polished texture but the nose is too mature for me. (FC)12.5% Drink 2015-2017

16

- **Aurelio Feo, Buencomienzo Mencía 2012 Bierzo***Mencía from a spot called Buencomienzo. Vines of over 100 years old. 12 months' ageing in French and American barriques.*

Tasted blind. Very intense and ripe nose showing prunes, dairy notes, cedar, chocolate, cloves and vanilla. Very attractive and intense on the nose. The palate is ripe and deep with extra concentration and power. Not refined but unctuous and intense. Very sweet, juicy and bitter on the finish. It is slightly warming but the overall balance is convincing. Concentrated and meritorious, definitely a wine to follow. (FC)14.5% Drink 2015-2018

16.5

- **Cepas del Bierzo, Don Osmundo Barrica 2011 Bierzo***100-year-old Mencía planted at 500-600 m elevation. Production limited to 3,816 bottles.*

Tasted blind. Mature nose showing sweet fruit, tobacco, cedar, earth and wet leaves. The palate is polished and has balancing acidity. Already mature, but adequate. I reckon I was expecting more from this 100-year-old vineyard. (FC)14.5% Drink 2013-2017

15

#### TORAL DE LOS VADOS MUNICIPALITY

- **Martín Códax, Pizarras de Otero Mencía 2015 Bierzo***60-year-old vines. Produced as a young wine.*

Tasted blind. Lots of fruitiness showing red fruits, floral lift, dairy notes and cream. Very youthful with an intense red-fruit impact. It is juicy and pleasant though not complex. Good, fresh and fruity young wine. (FC)13% Drink 2016-2018

15.5

- **Vehemencia Mencía 2015 Bierzo***Mencía and Garnacha from Villadecanes village. It is fermented in stainless steel. 3,500 bottles produced. This is a rising micro-winery founded in 2014 with a promising future ahead.*

Tasted blind. The nose is extracted and shows an earthy and leafy character. Very intense and creamy; it has an inky texture and it is well packed with fruit. Not refined but superbly concentrated and dense. Sweet fruit and enough depth. Convincing and promising project. (FC)14.5% Drink 2016-2018

16.5

- **Vehemencia Mencía 2014 Bierzo***Mencía and Garnacha from Villadecanes village. It is fermented in stainless steel. 3,500 bottles produced. This is the first vintage of the recently founded micro-winery.*

Tasted blind. The 2014 is not as good as 2015, less refined and slightly closed. It is dense but the texture is austere with a hollow mid palate. I like the intensity but much preferred the 2015. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2018

15

- **Martínez Yebra, Tres Racimos Mencía 2012 Bierzo***Mencía from Villadecanes village, planted on clay soils with pebbly stones. Very old vines dating back to 1906.*

Tasted blind. The wine is two-faced, on one side the palate is well constructed with delicate tannins and depth, yet on the other the nose is slightly dirty and oxidative with a clear developing character. It is a shame, as the palate with its fruit charge is meritorious but the nose does not reinforce this. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2018

15

- **Martínez Yebra, Viñadecanes Mencía Crianza 2012 Bierzo***Old vines planted at 436 m elevation.* Tasted blind. The wine is fully developed, showing a herby character and lack of fruit. The fruit is slightly tired and it has a bitter finish. Oxidative. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2017

14

- **Luzdivina Amigo, Leiros Mencía 2007 Bierzo***Pre-phylloxera vines planted at 600 m elevation on slate soils at a 25% gradient. 24 months in French oak barrels.*

Tasted blind. I really respect and admire the work Luzdivina Amigo is doing; Leiros has always been a wine I particularly like. However, the 2007 vintage does not merit a high rating. The oak is very obvious and the wine seems slightly tired. The palate is drying and the overall sensation fading. I would recommend a younger vintage. Although this time it has not achieved a top score, this is a wine to follow. (FC)14.5% Drink 2013-2017

15

#### TORAL DE LOS VADOS MULTI-MUNICIPALITY

- **Silva Broco, Lagar de Caxán 2015 BierzoMencía.** *Vineyards are within Toral de Vados, Corullón and Vilafranca del Bierzo villages. Produced as a young wine.*  
Tasted blind. Very youthful and straightforward wine showing dark and red fruit and a floral lift. The palate is soft and refreshing with a bitter aftertaste. Simple, easy-drinking and pleasant young wine. (FC)13.9% Drink 2016-2018  
15
- **Silva Broco, Viña Broco Mencía 2014 BierzoMencía** *planted in 1968. The vineyards are located at 300-350 m elevation.*  
Tasted blind. The nose is completely fruit-driven, not complex but appetising. The palate is balanced, juicy and well made. It all makes sense on the palate but is not particularly deep or intense. I do not think it will keep for long, but it is very drinkable now. (FC)14% Drink 2015-2018  
15.5
- **Pittacum Mencía 2010 BierzoMencía** *obtained from lots of different plots and villages. It is aged for eight months in 225-litre French oak barrels.*  
Tasted blind. The wine is developing and it shows dark fruit, oak, chocolate and toast. It is slightly riper and with darker fruit than the average Bierzo. Intense, grainy tannins. It is starting to exhibit tertiary aromas such as forest floor and tobacco. Showing appropriate signs of development. (FC)14.5% Drink 2012-2018  
15.5

#### VALTUILLE MUNICIPALITY

- **Peique Mencía 2015 BierzoVines** *planted on clay-loamy textured and quartz soils. Ambient-yeast fermented.*  
Tasted blind. Very youthful and vivid. Straightforward fruit; it is simple on the aromatics. The overall sensation is refreshing and vibrant. A rounded, easy-drinking wine not to be kept. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2018  
15.5
- **Castro Ventosa, El Castro de Valtuille Mencía Joven 2015 BierzoMencía** *sourced from different plots within Valtuille de Abajo. Mainly old vines planted on clay soils. It spends four to six months in oak foudres.*  
Tasted blind. The wine shows a clean and expressive character, with lots of fruit and floral notes. Very good aromatics but slightly austere on the palate. Vivid and fruit-driven, displaying pencil lead flavours. Youthful wine, very pleasurable but not to be kept. **GV** (FC)13% Drink 2015-2017  
15.5
- **Estévez, Versos de Valtuille Mencía 2015 BierzoMencía** *from Vilafranca del Bierzo village. Vines were planted in 1920. Alcoholic and malolactic fermentation take place in stainless steel tanks.*  
Tasted blind. Very clean and pure youthful wine showing red fruits, black pepper and floral lift. Easy drinking and uncomplicated, quite expressive compared to the average young wine from Bierzo. Well made. I would love to see the this winery betting on top wines as their young wine already has great potential. **GV** (FC)14% Drink 2016-2018  
15.5
- **Javier Coedo García, Lacazán 2015 BierzoMencía.** *Harvested during the night. Old vines planted on clay soils.*  
Tasted blind. The wine needs aeration as it is slightly closed. It is youthful but slightly disjointed and austere. Correct but not much excitement. (FC)12.5% Drink 2016-2018  
14.5

- **Verónica Ortega, Quite 2015 Bierzo** 93% *Mencía* and 7% others (mainly *Garnacha Tintorera*). 90-year-old vines. Yield of 4,000 kg/ha. Aged in 225-litre French oak barrels and 800-litre clay amphorae.  
Tasted blind. The nose is clean and creamy showing red cherries, plums and prunes. Quite clean, with pencil lead aromas. It is more ripe than fresh, the tannins are integrated and it has a youthful overall expression. (FC)12.7% Drink 2017-2020  
15.5
- **Castro Ventosa, El Castro de Valtuille Mencía 2012 Bierzo** *Mencía from two different plots planted at 450-600 m elevation. 12 months in oak.*  
Tasted blind. El Castro de Valtuille is a benchmark wine within Bierzo, however the 2012 is starting to fade. It is showing a herby character, with toasty notes overwhelming the fruit. The palate shows the delicate side of *Mencía* but the overall sensation is evolved. (FC)14% Drink 2015-2017  
15
- **Demencia Mencía 2010 Bierzo** *From Valtuille village. The vineyards were planted in 1920 on sandy clay soils. 48 hours' pre-fermentation maceration and ambient yeasts are used. Aged in oak for 15 months, with just one racking.*  
Tasted blind. Extremely ripe, showing intense black fruit, plums, prunes, toasty oak and sweet spices. Very showy and modern but quite precise winemaking. It has a sweet fruit-bomb character and it reminds me in some way of a New World wine. Very cool for those loving intense and concentrated wines. (FC)14% Drink 2016-2019  
16
- **Demencia Mencía 2012 Bierzo** *From Valtuille village. The vineyards were planted in 1920 on sandy clay soils. 48 hours' pre-fermentation maceration and ambient yeasts are used. Aged in oak for 15 months, with just one racking. Minimal SO2 used.*  
Tasted blind. The 2012 Demencia is a step above all the past vintages, it has great fruit ripeness with an extreme black-fruit concentration on the nose. Very physical but in good shape, with firm tannins still to be mellowed. It has a superlative concentration and great potential. Fruit bomb, deep and extracted. (FC)14% Drink 2016-2019  
17
- **Peique, Selección Familiar Mencía 2008 Bierzo** *Aged in French oak for 18 months with a subsequent 15 months maturing in the bottle. Production limited to 5,000 bottles.*  
Tasted blind. The wine shows premature evolution, it is minty and earthy but it is extremely open. The fruit is fading but the tannins remain dry. It has not aged as expected. I really would prefer a younger vintage as Peique is a remarkable producer within the region, but this may not be a good bottle. (FC)14.5% Drink 2014-2017  
14.5

#### VILAFRANCA DEL BIERZO MUNICIPALITY

- **Verónica Ortega, Roc 2013 Bierzo** 95% *Mencía*, 5% white grapes from old vines. Aged in second- and third-use French oak barrels.  
Tasted blind. The wine shows a premature oxidative character. It has an open expression, with ripe black fruits, cigar box, forest floor and dust. It is very open, and the fruit is starting to decline but the tannins remain. It is slightly dull due to its evolution. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2017  
14.5
- **Casar de Burbia, Casar Mencía 2014 Bierzo** *Mencía vines of over 40 years old planted on clay-ferrous soils. 12 months' ageing with regular racking.*

Tasted blind. The nose is really ripe showing sweet red fruit, toasty oak and warming alcohol. It is very juicy and rounded, with bitter tannins and an intense mouthfeel. The wine is on the fuller side of Mencía, playing with overripeness, but it is harmonious. Very tasty modern wine. (FC)14% Drink 2017-2019

15.5

- Bodega del Abad, Carracedo Mencía 2012 Bierzo100% Mencía from Valtuille de Arriba and Valtuille de Abajo villages. 80-year-old vines yielding 3,000 kg/ha. Whole bunch fermentation, aged in wooden vats.

Tasted blind. The wine is slightly closed but shows toast, oak, sweet spices and dark fruit. It has a generous black fruit character. Superb concentration and texture with drying tannins well supported by fruit charge. Hedonistic and on the ripe side of Mencía. The wine shines after breathing for while. (FC)14% Drink 2015-2018

16

- Merayo Mencía 2015 BierzoMencía from Vilafranca del Bierzo village. Vineyards are located on hillsides. The wine ages on its fine lees for six months.

Tasted blind. Very youthful and fresh showing simple fruit character such as red cherries, plums and prunes. It is totally fruit-driven, very juicy and pleasant but not deep. It is an easy-drinking, youthful and pleasurable Mencía.13.5% Drink 2015-2017

15.5

- Merayo, Les Tres Filas Mencía 2015 BierzoOld gobelet-pruned vines between 60 and 80 years old. Six months' ageing in French and American oak barriques. No fining before bottling.

Tasted blind. The wine is halfway between a youthful and mature wine. It shows red cherries but also toast-like aromas. It is a bit closed; medium in body but with enough fruit character. It is slightly short. Correctly made but not much excitement. (FC)14% Drink 2016-2018

15

- Tenoira Gayoso, Tenoira Mencía 2015 Bierzo100% Mencía planted at 500 m elevation. Indigenous yeast fermentation in stainless steel vats.

Tasted blind. The nose shows obvious warming notes. It displays plums, cherries and hints of overripeness. The palate has a bitter-sweet element. The tannins are mellowed. Balanced and drinkable but without much extract. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2018

14.5

- Luna Beberide, Art 2013 BierzoMencía vines dating back to 1940. Vineyards reach 800 m elevation. Stainless steel fermentation with subsequent ageing for 18 months in oak.

Tasted blind. The nose is very open and spicy, showing very ripe cherries, cedar and cloves. The palate is soft and rounded, pleasurable and very hedonistic with a grainy texture. Rich but not over-extracted. A remarkable old-vine Mencía. (FC)14% Drink 2017-2020

16

- Bodegas Adriá, Vega Montán Adriá 2012 BierzoMencía planted on clay soils. Aged in French oak barrels.

Tasted blind. The wine is evolving; it shows mature aromas of dry herbs, pungent spices, cherry brandy and earthiness. The palate is soft, with a delicate texture and moderate tannins. It is on the delicate side for Mencía but I am not sure if it will keep long. (FC)14% Drink 2015-2018

15

#### VILAFRANCA DEL BIERZO MULTI-MUNICIPALITY

- José Antonio García, Unculín Mencía 2015 Bierzo100-year-old vines located in Valtuille de Abajo and Corullón municipalities. Grapes fermented by plot using ambient yeasts. 'Un culín' is

*a very common Spanish saying to refer the last drops of wine left in a glass.*

Tasted blind. The nose exhibits creamy, dairy notes and red fruits. It has an obvious fruit character and generous sensation of alcohol. Well charged with ripe black fruit on the mid palate. It has enough length but the flavours are rather simplistic. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2018  
15.5

- **Arturo García, Solar de Sael Mencía 2014 Bierzo***Vines planted on clay and slate soils. High planting density. Hand harvested and oak aged.*

Tasted blind. The nose is dominated by oak that overwhelms the fruit. It is evolving and shows prunes, marmalade and cocoa. Well structured and intense, with a satisfactory balance and an already-formed bouquet. Great fruit charge but the oak still dominates the wine. (FC)14% Drink 2016-2018  
15.5

- **Demencia, Pyjama 2014 Bierzo***Mencía planted in 1920 on clay-loamy soils. Fermented with ambient yeasts. Five to seven months' ageing in second- and third-use French oak barriques. Three rackings are done prior to blending. Nacho León, the remarkable producer behind this wine, says, 'We try to elaborate a wine halfway between complexity and easy-drinking comfort'.*

Tasted blind. Very ripe and intense style, showing black fruits, strawberry jelly and toast. The palate is dense and savoury. It displays pencil-lead notes, a superb charge of fruit and a slightly warm alcohol sensation. Extreme in terms of ripeness. Considerable extraction and fruit quality. **GV** (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2019

€12 RRP in Spain 16

- **Cobertizo, Expresión 2012 Bierzo***Mencía planted on clay-limestone soils. Aged in oak.*

Tasted blind. The wine is slightly tired and dominated by a leathery and farmyard sensation that does not let the fruit shine. Very ripe and showing sweet chocolate notes. The fruit is starting to fade but the tannins remain. The texture and the profile are correct but the aftertaste is evolved. I would recommend a younger vintage. (FC)14% Drink 2014-2016  
14.5

- **José Antonio García, Aires de Vendimia Mencía 2012 Bierzo***Century-old Mencía from Valtuille and Corullón villages. Vineyards are planted from 550 to 650 m elevation in Valtuille and 750 to 910 m in Corullón. Both are vinified by plot and use whole bunches. Fermentation took place in French foudres with 11 months' ageing in French oak barrels. Production of 4,500 bottles.*

Tasted blind. The nose is clean and shows superb balance between fruit, oak, toast and vanilla. It is meaty and truly spicy, dense and inky with rough tannins that are mellowing. It is a bit austere but I particularly like it. It is in good shape for a 2012. (FC)14% Drink 2015-2020  
16

- **Arturo García, Solar de Sael Mencía Gran Reserva 2003 Bierzo***Vines planted on clay and slate soils depending on the plot. Hand harvested. Aged in oak.*

Tasted blind. The wine has clear signs of evolution, and a fully developed nose showing earth, wet leaves and nail varnish. The fruit is totally hidden and caramelised. Considerable as an old wine, but not giving much pleasure. (FC)14% Drink 2010-2017  
14.5

- **Viñas del Bierzo, Gran Bierzo 12 Meses Mencía 2012 Bierzo***Mencía planted on clay and loam-textured soils with slate. 12 months' ageing in French oak barrels. Co-operative winery created in 1963.*

Tasted blind. The nose shows a leafy character, sweet caramel and red fruits. Not extremely intense but comfortable, soft and correctly packaged. It is not particularly complex, but it is a commodity wine. (FC)13% Drink 2015-2018

15

- *Viñas del Bierzo, Gran Bierzo Origen Mencía 2014 BierzoMencía planted between 1916 and 1936. Whole bunches fermented in 225-litre open barrels.*  
Tasted blind. The nose gives a clear oak impact, with green notes, red fruits and rather simplistic aromatics. Slightly evolved showing a touch of nail varnish. Bitter and austere on the back palate. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2017  
14.5

## ROSÉ WINES

- *Otero Santín, Rosado 2015 Bierzo80% Mencía, 20% Godello. Vineyards were planted in 1940 at 600 m elevation on clay and slate soils. Hand harvested. The winery was set up in 1950.*  
Tasted blind. Very pale rose colour. It shows citrus, red fruits and sweet caramel on the nose. It is light and watery but still expressive, with a refreshing agile finish. (FC)13% Drink 2015-2018  
15.5
- *Bernardo Álvarez, Viña Migarrón Rosado 2015 BierzoMencía from Villadecanes and Cacabelos villages. Old vines planted between 1915 and 1925 on clay loam soils. 80-year-old winery.*  
Tasted blind. The nose shows lots of candy and sweet aromas. The palate is quite oily with limited acidity. The wine seems to be evolving, it is not an everyday rosé, but I found it to be remarkable and idiosyncratic. (FC)13.5% Drink 2015-2018  
15

## WHITE WINES

### CACABELOS MUNICIPALITY

- *Godelia 2015 Bierzo80% Godello, 20% Doña Blanca. Destemmed before a slight pressing. Alcoholic fermentation in stainless steel tanks with five months' ageing on the lees.*  
Tasted blind. A pure wine showing floral, green fruit and citrus notes. Vivid and medium bodied. Quite delicate and displaying an elegant bitter almond touch on the back palate. Very well-made wine. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2018  
15.5
- *Vinos Valtuille, Pago de Valdoneje Godello 2015 BierzoVines planted on clay sandy soils in Cacabelos village. Cold macerated and five months' ageing on its lees. Production limited to 4,000 bottles.*  
Tasted blind. Really pure and aromatic wine, showing peach, apricot, quince and a touch of grass. It has a delicate nose. The palate is light and very well outlined, refreshing, balanced and showing substantial green fruit on the palate. It is a remarkable Godello. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2018  
16
- *Soto del Vicario, Go de Godello 2015 Bierzo100% Godello planted at 700 m elevation. Cask fermented and aged on its fine lees.*  
Tasted blind. It is quite simple on the aromatics, showing melon and pear aromas. The wine seems to be suffering from premature evolution because it has a slight lack of freshness. It is a light style of wine. (FC)13% Drink 2015-2016  
14.5
- *Gancedo, Capricho Val de Paxariñas 2015 Bierzo85% Godello, 15% Doña Blanca planted on sandy soils. Spontaneous fermentation at low temperatures in stainless steel.*  
Tasted blind. It has a pure and vivid nose showing stone fruit, white pear, citrus and a floral

touch. The palate is slightly off dry, displaying a balancing and refreshing acidity that intersects the oily texture. It has generous alcohol and a touch of bitter almonds on the aftertaste. It is not particularly deep but is an approachable, quality-oriented wine. 13.5% Drink 2016-2018

16

#### CACABELOS MULTI-MUNICIPALITY

- **Bernardo Álvarez, Campo Redondo Godello 2015 Bierzo** 10-year-old vines planted on clay-loamy soils. The winery was created in 1940.  
Tasted blind. The wine has a rich fruity character showing peach, ripe lemon and dairy notes coming probably from the lees. Well balanced in terms of alcohol and acidity, it is well made showing consistency, fruit charge, freshness and expressiveness. Everything in place but not especially concentrated. (FC) 13% Drink 2016-2018  
15.5

#### CONGOSTO MUNICIPALITY

- **Almaz, Naturae Godello 2012 Bierzo** 97% Godello, 3% Doña Blanca from Congosto municipality. Very low yields of 1 kg/vine. Hand harvested and cooled by dry ice. The wine mellows in stainless steel tanks for one year.  
Tasted blind. It is very intense and toasty and has a remarkable nose. Ripe quince, dairy notes and touch of cream. It has a vivid expression and a lingering refreshing finish. It is now at a very good point in its development. (FC) 13.5% Drink 2014-2018  
16

#### PONFERRADA MUNICIPALITY

- **Cepas del Bierzo, Escaril 2015 Bierzo** Mainly Palomino with a little Godello and Doña Blanca. Century-old vines.  
Tasted blind. I am sure the winery has great potential as they own a worthy array of old vines. However, the Escaril is tired and has suffered from premature oxidation, dominated by nail-varnish notes. (FC) 12% Drink 2015-2017  
14
- **Almázcara Majara, Cobija del Pobre 2015 Bierzo** 100% Godello aged in oak for three months. 80-year-old vines at 600 m elevation. Hand harvested in September.  
Tasted blind. The wine is youthful and expressive, uncomplicated, showing ripe peach, apricot and ripe lemon. It has enough length and a creamy lees sensation. Very good winemaking with great oak integration. Remarkable and full of youthfulness. (FC) 13.5% Drink 2016-2018  
16
- **Aurelio Feo, Collage 2015 Bierzo** 80% Godello, 15% Doña Blanca, 5% Palomino. Gobelet-trained vines. Annual production of 3,600 bottles. Cold macerated for 48 hours prior to fermentation.  
Tasted blind. Simple nose showing quince and citrus notes. Refreshing and light, easy to drink with a slightly watery aftertaste. (FC) 13% Drink 2015-2018  
15
- **Losada Godello 2015 Bierzo** 20% is aged in second-use barrels, 80% is aged on its fine lees in stainless steel tanks. Vineyards are at 700 m elevation on slate soils. Moderate yields of 4,500

kg/ha. Production limited to 6,000 bottles.

Tasted blind. Very remarkable aromatics showing quince, ripe peach, a touch of oak; a very deep and intense nose. The wine has a great palate, lots of flavour and concentration, it is voluminous and rich. For sure one of the best Godellos in Bierzo, powerful but still refined.

Mouth-watering wine. (FC)14% Drink 2016-2019

17.5

- Akilia, K 2014 Bierzo 75% Palomino, 25% Doña Blanca. Vines dating back to 1912 located at 700 m elevation. Harvested early. Skin contact maceration during fermentation. Aged on its fine lees in stainless steel tanks for five months.  
Tasted blind. The nose is very open, with hints of oxidation but still clean, it has a cold-climate sensation, herby and nervous, quite unique within the region. The wine has noteworthy acidity, severe but still appetising. Non-standard winemaking. It has its own idiosyncrasy. Akilia is making wine on the wild side. It shows a new intention within the region. A producer to follow closely. (FC)11.8% Drink 2016-2018

16

- Encima Wines, Para Muestra Un Botón Godello 2014 Bierzo Vines planted on clay and slate soils. 50% aged in French oak foudres.  
Tasted blind. The nose is very open and slightly evolved. It shows white apple, bitter almonds and a touch of dry nuts. The evolving notes are dominating the palate but the zesty acidity remains. It has a good profile but I would prefer to taste a younger vintage. (FC)13% Drink 2015-2017

15

#### TORAL DE LOS VADOS MUNICIPALITY

- Victor Nuñez, Cuco's Godello 2015 Bierzo Godello from Villadecanes village. Fermented at low temperatures between 14 °C and 18 °C.  
Tasted blind. The nose is starting to develop; it shows quince, very ripe and sweet stone fruit and lees. Soft but slightly limited in terms of concentration. Quite easy to drink but a little watery on the back palate. (FC)13% Drink 2015-2017

15

#### VILAFRANCA DEL BIERZO MUNICIPALITY

- Bodegas Adriá, Vega Montán Godello 2015 Bierzo Vineyards are located in Vilafranca del Bierzo and planted on clay soils. Stainless steel fermentation. 40 days' maturation in foudres.  
Tasted blind. A bit closed initially, and needs time to express itself. It shows quince, citrus, pineapple and white apple. It has an expressive and comfortable nose. It is creamy but not extremely concentrated, perfectly driven by its freshness. It has a green and vivid back palate. (FC)12.5% Drink 2016-2017

15.5

- Luzdivina Amigo, Los Pedregales Godello 2015 Bierzo 100% Godello from Vilafranca del Bierzo village. Young single vineyard planted in 2011 on sandy and clay soils with pebbles. Slow fermentation at 15 °C for 45 days.  
Tasted blind. Very floral and delicate showing acacia, fresh peach and a touch of lemon candy. It is motivating and complex. A voluminous wine, really charged with fruit, and slightly caramelised on the back palate. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2018

16

- Casar de Burbia, Casar Fermentado en Barrica Godello 2014 Bierzo *Vines are planted in Valtuille de Arriba village on clay soils with slate and quartz. Limited production of 2,000 bottles. 12 months' ageing on its lees in French lightly toasted oak barrels of 500 and 700 litres, with a subsequent maturation of seven months in stainless steel tanks.*  
Tasted blind. The nose is quite portentous, with very ripe fruit, showing peach, quince and a touch of toast. The oak is palatable but well placed; a salty character and very rounded expression. It has an elegant bitterness on the back palate. (FC)13.5% Drink 2016-2018  
16
- Bodega del Abad, San Salvador Godello 2013 Bierzo *80-year-old vines. Limited yields of 1,500 kg/ha. Fermentation is finished off in 500-litre oak barrels, with a subsequent period of ageing.*  
Tasted blind. The wine is evolving and seems to have lost its past eloquence. It has a toasty expression and a touch of nail varnish. Voluminous and very creamy on the palate but the evolution does not let the fruit express itself. (FC)13.5% Drink 2014-2016  
14.5

#### VILAFRANCA DEL BIERZO MULTI-MUNICIPALITY

- Cobertizo Godello 2015 Bierzo *Godello planted in 2004 on chalky and clay soils.*  
Tasted blind. It is a very open wine with an evolving character; the fruit is a bit hidden and it has a green grassy touch. (FC)13% Drink 2015-2017  
14