

VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

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Number Sixty-One

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A few years ago, the new Rioja producer who blew me away with the classical styling and impeccable quality of their wines was Señorío de P. Peciña (Pedro Peciña was the long-time managing viticulturist for Bodegas La Rioja Alta, so the traditional basis of his winemaking is very understandable), and last year, the new revelation for me in the world of old school Rioja was Bodegas Lecea, who I had the pleasure to visit during my October 2014 trip to Spain. **This year, another new estate to me has popped up from the ultra-traditional camp in Rioja- Bodegas Akutain**, who like these other two producers, is based in the La Rioja Alta sub-region. **This is a small, family-owned bodega that farms a bit more than six hectares of vines making truly outstanding wines in the classic mold.** With the lineup of relatively new estates popping up to swell the ranks of old school traditionalists like López de Heredia, Cuné, La Rioja Alta, Marqués de Murrieta and Bodegas Riojanas, **it is hard not to get hopeful that the long dark night of over- extracted, French oaky and dense Rioja is starting to come to an end and a new dawn may be on the horizon in the finest of all Spanish wine regions!**

2012 Rioja Crianza- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

Bodegas Akutain is a new producer to me. The family farms just over six hectares of vineyards in the Rioja Alta region, with their cellars based just outside of Haro. The estate is old school in the best sense, picking by hand, fermenting everything with wild yeasts and raising the wine exclusively in old, American oak casks and bottled unfiltered in the great traditions of the region. Their 2012 Crianza is outstanding, wafting from the glass in a complex blend of red and black cherries, toasted coconut, woodsmoke, a touch of sweet nuttiness and a topnote Rioja spice tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and wide open, with a velvety attack, a sappy core, lovely soil signature and a long, refined and meltingly tannic finish. Utterly classic and flat out delicious. 2016-2030+. **90**

2006 Rioja Reserva- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

The 2006 Rioja Reserva from Bodegas Akutain includes a bit of garnacha in the blend and was aged three years in old American oak barrels prior to bottling. The wine offers up an outstanding bouquet of red and black cherries, cigar ash, excellent soil tones, a bit of bay leaf and a discreet base of coconutty American oak. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and beautifully balanced with a fine core, still a bit of backend tannin and excellent grip and focus on the very long and classy finish. This is bottled unfiltered and unlike most ten year-old bottles of Rioja, this is best decanted off of its sediment. An excellent bottle from this very exciting classical Rioja estate! 2016-2030+. **92+**

2004 Rioja Gran Reserva- Bodegas Akutain (Rioja Alta)

The 2004 Rioja Gran Reserva from Bodegas Akutain is a lovely the elegant side of Rioja Alta fruit, as it offers up a complex and utterly classic bouquet of plums, raspberries, cigar smoke, an impressively complex base of soil tones, cloves and toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, pure and vibrant, with a great core of fruit, impeccable balance, lovely complexity and a very long, bright and classy finish. Just a great bottle of old school Rioja! 2016-2035+. **94**