

2010 Aster Crianza

La Rioja Alta Ribera Del Duero, Ribera del Duero, Spain

Product details

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| Vintage: | 2010 | Drinking: | 2017 |
| Producer: | La Rioja Alta Ribera Del Duero | Alcohol: | |
| Region: | Ribera del Duero | Variety: | |
| Country: | Spain | | |

About the producer

LA RIOJA ALTA RIBERA DEL DUERO WINES

Bodegas Áster is a testament to an uncompromising dedication to quality. It took over 10 years from acquisition of the estate till the first wine from it was deemed excellent enough to bottle. But then, Áster's owner has longevity at its core. There was no rush for a company founded in 1895, La Rioja Alta S.A.

Back then, five enterprising families in Rioja Alta came together to form a company which would take local Spanish winemaking to an altogether higher level - filling the gap in supply of complex, well-structured red wines left by the phylloxera crisis in Bordeaux. The Sociedad Vinícola de La Rioja Alta established and maintained the characteristics of what have become classic Riojas. La Rioja Alta evolved without losing its identity, taking control of every aspect of winemaking, acquiring their own cooperage and bottling facility and investing in state-of-the-art equipment, as well as in research and development.

In the 1980s, La Rioja Alta S.A. decided to explore regions beyond its home, and wanted to produce a modern wine from the Ribera del Duero. After intense analysis of terroir, the area of Anguix was selected as the ideal location for cultivating vines. The vineyards were planted with Tinta del País (as Tempranillo is called in Ribera del Duero) in 1991 and monitored for six harvests, with the grapes sold. Even when the first vintage was vinified, the winemakers were not satisfied the quality was high enough (the yield was too high) and the entire stock was sold off in bulk.

Finally, in 2000, the first wine deemed good enough to bear the label of the house and the parent company was produced: Bodegas Áster Reserva 2000. With the quality of the terroir now established, La Rioja Alta S.A. set to building a winery for Bodegas Áster that was not so much state-of-the-art as ahead of its time. Development did not stop there. In 2001, Áster Crianza was introduced, among other Ribera del Duero wines. Then, in 2005, Julio Sáenz - winemaker, pharmaceutical chemist, technical genius - became winemaking director of the entire La Rioja Alta S.A. group, including Bodegas Áster. His analytical rigour was applied to both vineyards and winery.

A year later, the science of Sáenz led to the introduction of malolactic fermentation in barrels and a bold decision to make only two terroir-led wines, with clearly defined and distinct characteristics: Áster Finca El Otero, with grapes from the oldest vineyard, and Áster Crianza Finca San Martin, with the ideal grapes for ageing for at least two years with six months in oak (in which La Rioja Alta has huge experience).

Bodegas Áster's Tinta del País vineyards - trained on espaliers with double cordon



pruning - lie at an altitude of 830m above sea level. From the initial 76 hectares around Anguix, they have now expanded to 95 hectares, in the direction of La Horra. Thanks to Julio Sáenz's detailed plotting of terroir, the grapes are harvested one parcel at a time before being subjected to a manual selection process.

The majority of the estate is clay or silt loam soils located on flat ground or, at the other extreme, in ravines. But one plot stands out: the four-hectare Finca El Otero, on lightly eroded slopes. It's dry and infertile, but there is goodness in that soil for a hard-working vine. The plot is harvested early in the morning so that natural low temperature in the grapes allows an eight-day cold soak without having to artificially cool the berries. There follows a three-month malolactic fermentation period in French oak, with weekly bâtonages. Only a selection of the best barrels are then aged for 16 months in oak with two traditional rackings.

The resulting wine is crammed with character. It tends to glow deep cherry red and hits the nose like a cosy autumnal Sunday evening - coffee, hot chocolate and toasted tea cakes; mulled wine spices and stewed fruit. It has impressively expansive structure, with acidity swirling around mature tannins, before its big finish, with toffee, plums and liquorice. Talking of Sundays, it accompanies roast lamb particularly well.

The Crianza Finca San Martin is a clean and bright pink-tinged red Ribera del Duero wine with aromatic notes of ripe strawberries and redcurrants against a balsamic, aniseed, liquorice and cedar background from painstaking barrel ageing. Well-balanced in the mouth, with a pleasant structure and fine tannins leading to a fresh, agreeable finish.

Armit Wines began to work with La Rioja Alta S.A. in 2010 and, as part of that relationship, is the exclusive importer of Áster Finca El Otero and Crianza Finca San Martin to the UK.

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