Bodegas Vega Sicilia – A Culture of Patience, Dedication, and Excellence

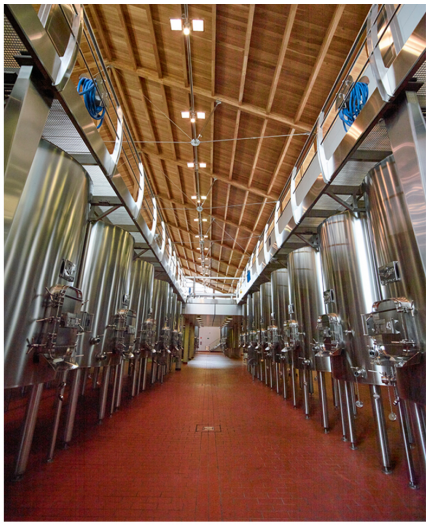
Bodegas Vega Sicilia is a 152-year-old winery located in Ribera del Duero, Spain which is a two-hour drive north of Madrid. The name Vega Sicilia has appeared in Spanish documents that existed several centuries before the winery was founded though the exact origin of the name is currently unknown. The word Vega refers to the green vegetation that grows along the riverbank of the Duero while Sicilia refers to Saint Cecilia, the patron saints of musicians, after whom several villages in Castile and León are named after.

In 1848, it was founded by a Basque land owner, Don Toribio Lecanda who had an idea of planting French grape varieties mainly for Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot but the plan didn't work so well.

In 1890, the land was bought by Antonio Herrero Vasquez and the first Vega Sicilia was produced by Domingo Guarranicha, nicknamed "Txomin," who recognised the quality of terroir he was working with. Although it didn't take long before the wines were considered as one of the best in Spain, it sure did garnered awards at various events in Barcelona in 1929.

In 1982, the same year that the Ribera del Duero was granted Denominación de Origen (DO) status, the estate has been owned by the Alvarez family who are members of the Primum Familiae Vini and also brought with them modern business acumen and vast resources but also a great respect for Vega Sicilia's winemaking traditions. And indeed much of Vega Sicilia's global reputation was forged in the 1980s and early 1990s, a time of abundance for lovers of the estate's wines. Classics like the 1962, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970 and 1975 Unicos were all readily available. Rarities like 1942 and 1948 were there for the asking, and the estate's other wine, Reserva Especial—made from a blend of vintages—included wines up to 35 years old.

Bodegas Vega Sicilia winery is as unusual as the wine itself. In an era of winery owners who strut like peacocks bragging about their wine, the head of Vega Sicilia, Pablo Alvarez explained that only few wines have history as distinguished as that of Vega Sicilia.

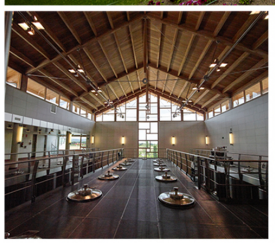


Land bathed by the River Duero,
an extreme climate, expert hands,
a pact with time.

The winery produces three different types of wine. Of its two top labels, called Unico and Unico Reserva Especial, then the Valbuena 5º.

The **Unico** was Spain's first great wine and until recent decades the only Spanish wine collected and coveted throughout the world. It is the signature wine that is usually released ten years after vintage. Rather than trying to duplicate the Caber- net-Sauvignon or Merlot-based wines of Bordeaux, as some Spanish wineries do, Vega Sicilia focuses its efforts on trying to take advantage of the unique properties of Tempranillo, the pre- dominant grape variety of the winery. The Unicos are at least 80% Tempranillo, which Vega Sicilia's winemaker, Gonzalo Iturriaga calls "the best variety in the world," even though it has practically no presence outside of Spain. And if Vega Sicilia's winemaker is dissatisfied with the quality of the harvest in any year, the winery will refuse to produce a single bottle of Unico. This has happened six times in the last 36 years: 1984, 1988, 1992, 1993, 1997 and 2001.

The **Unico Reserva Especial** is a non-vintage blend of diffe- rent Unicos, aged at least for 10 years. This wine can include grapes from vintages harvested more than 30 years apart and usually only available to private customers under strict allocation. It is a blend of grapes harvested in three different years, a rarity in the world of red wine, so the bottle doesn't have a vintage date on it.



Dedication, soul, passion...

The **Valbuena 5º** is a blend of 95% Tinto Fino and 5% Merlot and this wine takes its name from the village where it is produced. It is aged for less time than the Unico or the Unico Reserva Especial with the 5° (5 años) designating the years it has been aged before release. The wine is made from younger vines (average vine age of 25 – 20 years), although their aggregate age would compete with most other leading wines.

Vega Sicilia also has one more winery in el Duero, the **Alion**, and another one in Toro, the **Pintia**. Even though they don't carry the Vega Sicilia name, the winemaker and the grape variety being used are the same. Both get less aging–four years for Alion and three years for Pintia.

In 1993, when the Alvarez family arrived in Hungary, they found **Tokaj Oremus**. The wine is studied in great detail and with great respect, together with its significance, its laborious wine-making process, and historical practices. From the moment the vineyards were founded to present day, the Álvarez family, respecting the Tokaj traditions, has made considerable investment in Tokaj Oremus with a view to increasing the technical level of the treatment of the grape and the winemaking installations, so as to make the best wines possible.

Benjamin de Rothschild (the grandson of James de Rothschild and owner of Chateau Lafite), driven by his quest to find the best soils and local varieties, he aspired to produce a great wine in Spain. In 2003, he met with Pablo Alvarez. The **Macan** and **Macan** Clasico are the result of a fortuitous alliance between the Rothschild and the Alvarez families, who share a long- standing passion of making great wines from unique terroirs. Composed exclusively of tempranillo grapes harvested from 40 year-old vines, Bodegas Benjamin de Rothschild & Vega Sicilia has been very limited in production since its first vintage in 2009. A great Spanish wine crafted in the French style, the Macan wines leverage the full potential of the Rioja terrain for an elegant, distinguished wine that is powerful and persistent.

Vega Sicilia wines are widely renowned as one of the finest and most valued red wines on the market. They cater to a very few and select clientele in 85 countries, and Txanton is one of them. Its growing fame and desirability is testament not only to the estate's enduring legacy but to the world's craving for wines of history and noble bearing. Txanton, together with Bodegas Vega Sicilia aims to showcase the cellar's great vintages through wine dinners and events. It is simply that arguably few can match the historical prestige of Vega Sicilia.

A mystery that is impossible to explain.

Credits: Christine Faith L. Lopez | © 2016 Txanton Torre Wine & Olive Oil Co., Inc.

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