



OLIVIER RIVIÈRE

RIOJA

With about 25 hectares of rented and owned vineyards in Rioja Alta, Rioja Baja, Rioja Alavesa, and in up and coming DO of Arlanza, and splitting his time between his own wines and consulting with other producers, it would be a gross understatement to say that Olivier Rivière is a very busy man. Originally lured to Spain in 2004 by Telmo Rodriguez to convert his vineyards to biodynamics, Olivier came to appreciate the rich history of Rioja and the diversity of its soils and grape varieties. In 2006 he started his own project, and owing to the high cost of land in Rioja, he traded his farming talents for access to grapes from the best sites he could locate.

Olivier was born and raised south of Bordeaux in Cognac. He later studied enology in Montagne St-Emilion, focusing on biodynamic farming, followed by practical experience there, and later in Burgundy. The list of estates where he has worked is impressive by any standards, from the most dedicated fans of natural wines (Elian da Ros & Domaine de Chassorney) to ultra-traditionalists (Domaine Leroy). When his plans to set up a Domaine in Fitou fell through, Olivier decided to spend a few years consulting in Spain, and he's never left.

Coming from France, Olivier has an innate sense of terroir. Unlike many of his peers in Rioja, he bases his cuvées not on political boundaries or the length of barrel aging but on terroir. He believes in a quality hierarchy inspired by Burgundy with generic Appellation and Village wines at the base and Premier and Grand cru wines at the top. This is how to understand best what Olivier is doing in Rioja, rather than the traditional Crianza, Reserva, Gran Reserva model. As Olivier has steadily



and carefully grown his production, he's been hampered by the high prices for land and grapes in Rioja. As a result, he ventured into Arlanza; a relatively new DO located between Rioja and Ribera del Duero. In Arlanza, he found high-elevation vineyards of Tempranillo (some quite ancient) intermixed with a scattering of Garnacha and Albillo. This mountain fruit is potentially sterner stuff than what Olivier had grown accustomed to in Rioja, but it is remarkably vibrant and complex in his hands.

In keeping with his education and advocacy, nearly all of Olivier's vineyard sources – whether owned or leased – are farmed organically with biodynamic practices. The fruit is harvested by hand, and each variety is fermented separately. Depending on the source, it may be partially destemmed or fermented whole cluster. Fermentations are with indigenous yeasts. Macerations are gentle and short. Aging takes place in stainless steel or cement tanks, foudre, and barrel. SO₂ is kept to a minimum, usually added only before bottling. There really is no precise recipe, only the guiding principles of minimal-intervention and taste. These are not your grandparent's Riojas (or Arlanzas, if it had existed 40 years ago), nor are they your parent's. These wines represent a novel approach that relies almost entirely on the specificity of site and the transparency of his winemaking necessary to capture it.

FACTS & FIGURES

FOUNDED

2006

PROPRIETOR

Olivier Rivière

WINEMAKER

Olivier Rivière

SIZE

25 ha

ELEVATION

350-1000 meters above sea level

SOILS

Clay limestone, red clay, gravel, sand, alluvial

VINE AGE

15-90+

VARIETIES

Tempranillo, Graciano, Mazuelo, Garnacha, Viura, Malvasia, Garnacha Blanca

FARMING

Organic with biodynamic practices

HARVEST

Manual

CELLAR

Hand harvested, whole or partially whole cluster fermentations with indigenous yeasts, aged in tank, concrete, foudre or demi-muid

