

# Bullish On Spain

*Spanish winemakers' export push benefits the American market with diverse, high-quality wines*

BY ANGEL ANTIN

When the Table 301 restaurant group opened The Lazy Goat five years ago in Greenville, South Carolina, patrons eyeballed the Spanish, French and Italian wine list with suspicion. "Customers felt comfortable with Italian wine, perceived French wine to be expensive and figured the Spanish selections must taste terrible because they were so well-priced," says general manager and wine buyer Aimee Maher. Today, Spanish wine accounts for two-thirds of the wine volume at The Lazy Goat, and the restaurant's top-selling label is the 2009 Ramón Bilbao Crianza from Rioja (\$10 a 10-ounce carafe; \$20 a 20-ounce carafe; \$30 a 750-ml. bottle).

Spain is under pressure to export its wine to the United States as Spanish consumption decreases. This has led to a strong push by trade organizations like Wines From Spain, Vibrant Rioja and Drink Ribera—and an abundance of new brands in a category that's already extremely diverse. "Every Spanish wine-making region is affected by the country's economic crisis, and Spanish wine producers are flooding the U.S. market with wine," says Jorge Ordoñez, owner

of Fine Estates From Spain and the driving force behind 130 wines from 40 wineries brought to the United States by various importers.

Spain is turning out an increasing number of joven- and crianza-style reds from Rioja, as well as other wines with relatively little age—particularly wines from outside the traditional denominations of origin. These fruit-forward wines resonate with Americans and reach the market faster than Rioja's traditional aged wines. Varietal labeling, eye-catching packaging, screwcap closures and promotions targeting Millennial consumers reflect Spain's concerted effort to increase exports to the U.S. market.

Shipments of Spanish table wine advanced 52.5 percent to 5.94 million nine-liter cases in 2011, on top of a 15.6-percent increase the year prior, according to Impact Databank. Of 2011's total, bulk wine accounted for 1.9 million nine-liter cases, from just 108,000 cases in 2010—a noteworthy jump from 2009, when the United States imported no bulk wine from Spain. Rioja stands out as the region shipping the greatest volume, totaling 952,000 nine-liter cases in 2011—an 11-percent increase over 2010.



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