

Quinta da Muradella



In the late 1980s, a young José Luis Mateo made a decision that shook his blue-collar parents: He was quitting university in Madrid and returning to his far-flung home in Verín, a tiny Galician town five miles from the Portuguese border, to make wine

His parents' cause for concern was well founded: rural Galicia had been in decline since the 1970s, and they hoped their son would take the academic route. But José Luis had spent much of his youth tending his father's one-hectare vineyard and knew in his heart that Monterrei's vineyards were to be his life's work.

So, José came home, and eventually thrived beyond his wildest imagination. He started Quinta da Muradella in 1990, and originally paid the bills by producing wine for the family *taberna*. But over time, the unassuming *vigneron* saw his reputation soar; first in his native Galicia, then among young Spanish sommeliers who were looking for more freshness and *terroir* in their wines. Finally, the cult became international in scope.



Today, José has become one of the most idolized and respected winemakers in all of Spain, and his tiny production has reached cult status. The wines are soulful and singular, with dazzling personalities. They rank among Spain's very best.

THE HIDDEN EDEN

Spain's verdant Galicia may be better known for Rías Baixas, Ribeiro, and Ribeira Sacra, but its greatest hidden jewel could be tiny Monterrei, hugging the Portuguese border. Monterrei is far and away the smallest Galician appellation by vine plantings, and while it remains unknown to many, its history and pedigree run extraordinarily deep. Grape growing can be traced back to Roman times, and Val de Monterrei wines were prized and sold throughout Spain's American colonies as early as the 1500s.



The region boasts an incredible diversity of soils, exposures, and grape varieties. An ancient north-south fault created a valley in the mountains that was eventually filled by the Tamega River. The geological folding mixed an incredible range of slate, schist and other mineral veins into the hillsides, and the Tamega spread that diversity across the lower elevations.

Vineyards are located anywhere between 300m and 700m of elevation, and expositions are equally varied. Soils can change multiple times across a single site. Likewise, there is a tremendous range of local grape varieties cultivated here. The nearly infinite possible combinations of varieties, soils, exposures, and altitudes offers the opportunity for wines of dizzying complexity.

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In addition, this remarkable grape-growing climate lies at a transition point between coastal and continental influences. The warm summer days are ideal for ripening grapes, while the mountainous surroundings and cooling Atlantic influence help retain freshness.



Clearly, this terroir has enormous potential in the right hands. It was only a matter of time before someone as revolutionary as José Luis Mateo became the de facto ambassador for the appellation.

THE PERFECTIONIST

Pick any hour of any day, and chances are you'll find José Luis roaming his vineyards with well-worn boots, a warm jacket and glasses perched atop his widow's peak. He is a man glued to the vine, with probing eyes that have long been uninterested in artificial light.



If you do find him indoors, it's likely in one of two places: his small cellar where he hand-makes a couple thousand cases of wine, or his even smaller family bar a half-mile's walk away, home to rustic, hearty meals and healthy pours of his own wine.

With time, he has come to appreciate the mix of varieties in his oldest vineyards. He is also slowly converting some of his younger, wire-trained vineyards to traditional bush pruning, believing that it is better adapted to his *terroirs* and helps temper the effects of warmer, drier summers.

He brings that same fastidious nature to bear in his tiny cellar. Aside from spontaneous ferments, minimal sulfur additions, and unfinned/unfiltered bottlings, José Luis is always adapting; he'll never use a standardized formula. He trials various vessels, blends, and aging lengths, and never has a set bottling date. He is always patient, only releasing the wines when they are ready. And even then, he always obsesses with what he could have done better.

Ultimately, José Luis is among the greatest, most refined wine minds of our time, and his growing cult following is wholly deserved.

We're lucky that he was born in an obscure village within an obscure appellation, with obscure grapes to work with. If he were a product of Napa or Bordeaux, his limited-production gems would've been broadcast to every corner of the world decades ago ... and they would sell for far more than these *hors catégorie* gems do today.

