

Wines from Sierra de la Culebra



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INTRODUCTION

Wines from Sierra de la Culebra is the brand that binds together all the wines produced in Sierra de la Culebra area, in the North-West of Spain, province of Zamora (Castilla y León).

Grape growing and winemaking activities exist in the area since ancient times. Traditionally, every family owns a piece of vineyard that was planted by their ancestors and cared with love by their family members through the years. This is what we inherited and the basis we will build on.

Wines from Sierra de la Culebra is a quality brand created to distinguish the wines we produce in our region and its unique character. In the following pages you will learn who we are, where we come from and what makes us unique.

Wines from Sierra de la Culebra brand is owned by the four wineries currently operating in the area (Bodega Aliste, Bodegas Ramayal, Bodega Castro Mendi and Cepas de la Culebra). We all produce crafted quality wines that reflect the place where the grapes grow while respecting our environment and our inherited winemaking tradition. Furthermore, to guarantee the quality of our wines, every bottle produced in the area that matches the usage of the brand regulations we have set, has a distinctive label in the back of the bottle, with its own unique identification number.

Wines from Sierra de la Culebra brand is just the beginning of our journey as we intend to pursue a quality figure accredited by the European Union for the wines produced in our region. We've got an exciting future ahead and will love to share it with you!

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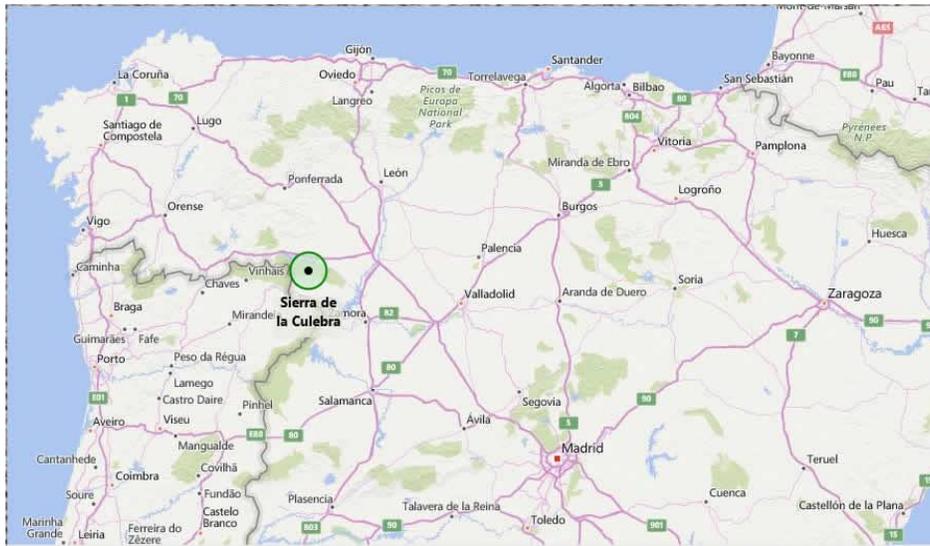
LOCATION

Map

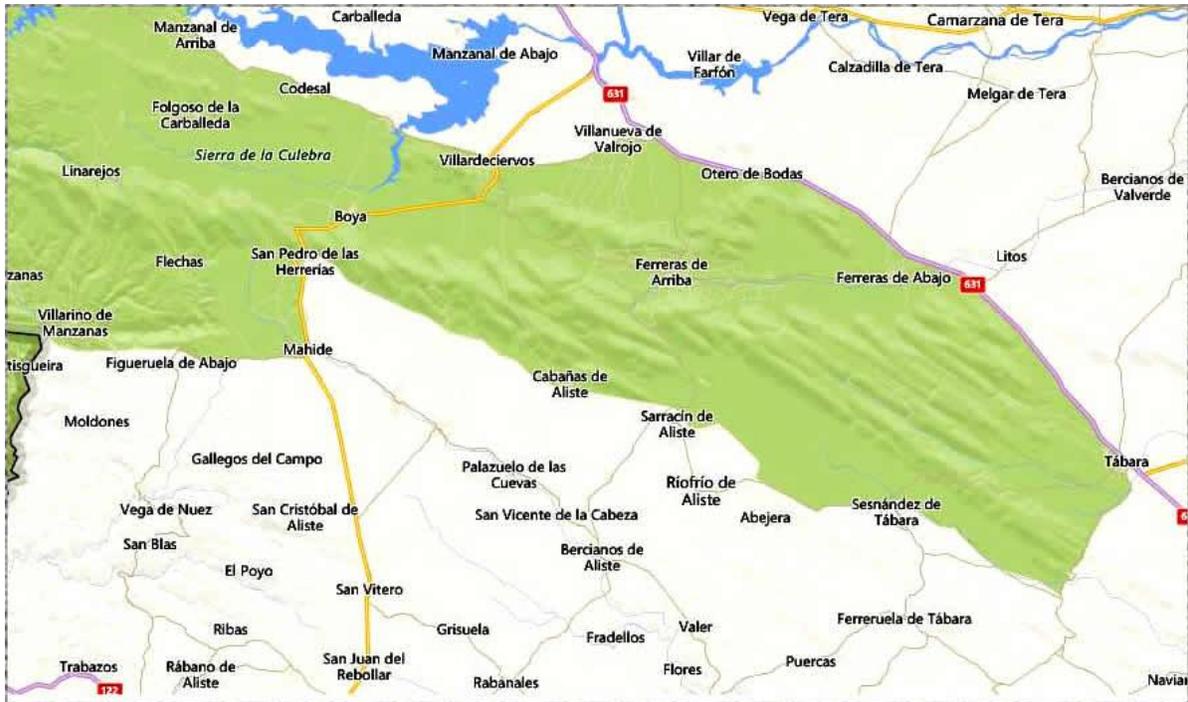
We are located in the North-West of Spain, in the province of Zamora (Castilla y León).



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Unesco's Transboundary Biosphere Reserve 'Meseta Ibérica'

In 2015, our area has been included into the newly created Unesco's Biosphere Reserve 'Meseta Ibérica' because of our commitment to keep our biological and cultural heritage while fostering sustainable development. All the information may be found here: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/biosphere-reserves/europe-north-america/portugalspain/meseta-iberica/>

Soil

The production zone is located right in the foothills of Sierra de la Culebra. Sierra de la Culebra is a mountain range that starts nearby the village of Tábara and continues along 50 km towards Portugal, merging with the Portuguese border. It was created in the Ordovician period (Around 480 million years ago). Common rocks found in our area are slate in depressed areas and quartzite and granite on top of the hills. All of them may be easily found in natural deposits across the region and are the basic materials used in traditional constructions.

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The Sierra's got a soft profile, due to the erosion throughout the years, being the highest peak 'Peña Mira', with 1241 m height. Sierra de la Culebra's production zone ranges between 750 m and 950 m above the sea level, and it is located in the so-called Campo de Aliste, which is a plain surface that fills the area between the Sierra itself and the border with Portugal, where the landscape turns more abrupt because of the erosion caused by the rivers.

The soil that may be found here typically is poor in nutrients, not very deep and with an acid pH. These characteristics limit the agronomic potential of this territory but no doubt can be favourable for growing quality grapes.

Climate

We've got a Mediterranean-Continental climate with some Atlantic influence. Spring and Autumn normally last short time, we can even call them transition seasons between the two main seasons, Winter and Summer. Winter time is not so tough as it used to be (The eldest people still remember harsh winters with lots of snow and frost), recently it can even be described as relatively soft, still having frequent frost in January and February but with higher minimum temperatures than before (Temperatures typically range between -5 and +10 degrees).

Summer time is typically hot during the day and fresh at night, with temperatures ranging between +35 and +15 degrees. This day-night difference significantly addresses the unique character of our grapes.

Regarding pluviosity, our region is relatively dry. Typical rainfall ranges between 500 and 700 mm per year concentrated in Autumn and Spring seasons.

HISTORY

Archaeological discoveries show that the Sierra de la Culebra region has been inhabited for long time: The first archaeological data we have come from the Paleolithic period, (300.000 – 100.000 BC) From this period some hand axes made from stone were found in the village of San Vicente de la Cabeza.

Believed to be from the Bronze age (Somewhere around 2.000 BC), some paintings were found in the village of Trabazos. Those paintings reflect human presence with an economy based in shepherding and some hints of agriculture.

Belonging to the Celtic dominance period (Around 750 BC) some ancient Castros (Typical constructions, huts) can be seen in some mountain peaks and also remain in local place names like

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‘Los Castricos’ . Tin and copper mines found in Sierra de la Culebra start to be exploited during this age.

From the Roman dominance era, a large archaeological legacy can be found in our villages: A roman fountain in Nuez de Aliste, roman roadways (Via Veniata Asturica-Augusta), roman milestones in San Vitero village, the fortress of Petavonium (Near what today is the village of Santibáñez de Vidriales), to name a few. Romans also started iron mines in our area, and still today a few villages are named using the ‘Ferrum’ (iron) suffix like Ferrerueta de Tábara or Ferreras de Arriba. In their quest for gold, Romans also found a local place where to extract the precious metal, which name nowadays is Pino del Oro (Pine of Gold) and, indeed, gold nuggets may be found in this place even today!

It is likely that Romans also introduced the grape growing techniques in our region, as they did in areas nearby.

Regarding the Visigoth dominance (S. V-VIII) not many remains can be found, but one is especially significant: We’re talking about S. Pedro de la Nave temple, main exponent of Visigothic architecture in Spain (Located in El Campillo).

From the Moors dominance it seems that everything has been destroyed but vocabulary: Many words in our region come from their language. To name an important one: apparently Aliste (the largest region in the foothills of Sierra de la Culebra) comes from the Word Al Else, River of Alisos (a typical tree type).

With the next Reconquista (Around S. IX-XII) our area begins a period for resettlement. The monastery of Santa María de Tábara (where Magius painted the famous ‘Beato de Tábara’) dates from this time (s. XI). According to medieval chronicles, the Knights of Templar ruled in the area during S.XI, XII and the beginning of S.XIII. It was at the beginning of S.XIII when the Pope Clemente V dissolved the order of the Knights of Templar, taking over their possessions (castles, properties, etc) handing them over the different Kings of Castille that existed at that time. Enrique II was the king of the region where Sierra de la Culebra is located and paid with the territory he got the services of one of his nobleman: Gómez Pérez de Valderrábano who from now on is to be the new owner of Sierra de la Culebra foothills under what has been named ‘Marquesado de Tábara’

In 1297 the famous ‘Treaty of Alcañices’ was signed in the village of Alcañices between the King of Castile and the King of Portugal, establishing the modern borders between what would be Spain and Portugal. The border between the two countries remain today in the same place it was when the treaty was signed, making this one of the oldest borders in Europe.

Since ‘Marquesado de Tábara’ started, the inhabitants in our area began a dark period in which they were dominated by the church and by the new Marques, to whom they had to pay numerous

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tributes. It wasn't until the beginning of the S.XX when most of the 'rights' awarded to nobility in medieval ages were cancelled and the people in Sierra de la Culebra was free again.

The beginning of the twentieth Century was a rather convulsed period marked by instability that ended with the civil war (1936). It was followed by the dictatorship period of General Franco, which lasted until 1975. Around 1960 emigration began in our area. Many people went away looking for a better life, and they found it in the Basque Country, Asturias, Catalunya, Germany, etc.

Since then the population in our area has decreased, and many vineyards were left away because people didn't have the required time to care about them. Only a fraction of the vineyards that existed 60 years ago exist today and it is our hope that our project helps revitalising the wine culture our region have always had.

Wine mentions in historical publications

Catastro de Ensenada (1751-1754) mentions numerous villages in our area (To name a few: Flechas, Figueruela de Arriba, San Blas, Sejas...) where either 'wine was produced' or 'vines were cultivated'.

In 1850 Pascual Madoz, in his 'Diccionario Geográfico Estadístico de Castilla y León' (Geographical and statistical dictionary of Castille and León), mentions that in our area 'some wine is produced'.

VINEYARDS

Wine has been an important part of the daily life in our area (And the whole Iberian Peninsula) since ancient times.

If we take a walk today into every village of the production area, we will find a number of small vineyards located in strategic parts of each village, typically used to supply wine to the family. The people that have been living here never had large extensions of vineyard, just enough to bring wine to the family unit. This vineyards are the ones that remain today, planted using the traditional 'en vaso' system in sunny areas and flat surfaces, in a location covered from the winds that come from the North (Which are the dangerous ones if there's a late frost in Spring).

Grape varieties

We find mostly Mencía variety in our area, along with Tempranillo and Garnacha grapes. As for the white varieties, we have mainly Palomino, Verdejo and Viura.

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This varieties can be considered traditional in our area, nevertheless, local people typically like to have different grape varieties in their vineyard and so we can find today Shiraz, Cabernet, Merlot, Bruñal, etc which adaptation to the soil has been as good as the one in traditional varieties.

Given the fact that most of the vineyards are quite old and the specific soil and climate characteristics in our area, yields are typically low in the Sierra de la Culebra, ranging from 2 to 3 kg per vine.

WINE AND WINERIES

As explained before, wine has played an important role in the daily life in our area but it wasn't until 2008 when the first winery for commercial purposes was installed: It was Bodega Aliste, followed the year after by Bodega Ramayal (2009), next was Bodega Castro Mendi (2012) and the last one Cepas de la Culebra (2015).

Each one of the producers that currently operate in our area follow the same philosophy, which is to make quality wines that reflect the soil where the grapes grow, maintaining traditional agricultural and vinification techniques, and limiting the usage of synthetic products.

The result of our efforts and the particular climate in Sierra de la Culebra is fresh and serene wines, full of fruit, easy to drink, with a unique character. Our wines mirror the landscape where they grow and mature.

Bodega Aliste

Location: Figueruela de Arriba.

Brands: Marina de Aliste (Red: Tempranillo and Shiraz), Geijo (White: Viura and Verdejo)

Contact: Javier de Jesús

Email: Javier@hacedordevino.com

www.vinosdealiste.com

Bodega Ramayal

Location: Ferreruela de Tábara.

Brands: Soto del Torreón, Ramayal Roble (Red wines with different ageing, made with Mencía 100% from old vineyards) and Padre Serrano using Mencía, Palomino and Garnacha.

Contact: Antonio Ferrero /Jose Palacios

Email: info@ramayal.es

www.ramayal.es

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Bodegas Castro Mendi

Location: San Blas

Brands: Castro Mendi Menester, Castro Mendi Premium and Castro Mendi Roble (Red wine made using Tempranillo grape, 70% grown in Toro area and 30% grown in San Blas de Aliste).

Contact: David Mendieta / Domingo Ramos

Email: Domingo.ramos.castro@gmail.com

www.castromendi.com

Cepas de la Culebra

Location: Riofrío de Aliste.

Brands: Cepas de la Culebra, (Red wine made with old grapes from the family vineyard using the traditional local recipe, which is 90% Mencía, 5% Tempranillo, 5% Palomino).

Contact: Ruben Gago

Email: info@cepasdelaculebra.com

www.cepasdelaculebra.com