

A small wine trip in Rioja.

A few years ago we came travelling down from Bilbao where we visited the Guggenheim Museum. Our idea was to visit the bodegas with excellent wines and beautiful design in the Rioja region and made our first stop in Haro along the Wine Route A-124. Haro is a classic wine town, where wine has been produced since the 1400s. The city's big boost came in the late 1800s when phylloxera ravaged the worst in France. Winemakers from France came to buy wine and stayed to help build the wine culture.



Around the town of Haro lies more than thirty bodegas. On the way into town you pass to the left Lopez de Heredia Viña Tondonia. The entrance to the shop is a giant carafe. It is the famous architect Zaha Hadid, who designed the new part of the bodega. At the back you'll find their Art Nouveau-inspired pavilion of the exhibition in Brussels 1910th. Our wine choice here was Viña Tondonia White Reserva. We were perhaps a little unfortunate and found only a scrubby hotel and sat alone on a bad tourist

restaurant - the advice of the tourist office. On the way back to the hotel we stumble over a little bar that appears has won several first prizes for their cold tapas. What a big hit in the otherwise dreary Haro.

The day after we follow the A-124 to Briones. Why we did not see this city before? What a charming little village with streets that stagger up to the center. Large old stone houses where it hangs the sign "see vende cosecha". Here they sell wine from their own farms. We walk around the square and the church. What a cozy town with nice sculptures here and there.

Just outside the city is one of Spain's most elegant bodegas situated, Ysios, with its undulating roof. The architect Santiago Calatrava, has designed the building.



Production takes place in state of the art facility. You must call before to get a tour, as well as most other popular wine houses. The wines are of high caliber, and why not buy a whole barrel and share with friends? Ysios Reserva, with 100% Tempranillo became our wine-selection. Nearby is the ultra modern bodega Baigorri. Something quite different built of steel, glass and concrete. If you are getting tired try to take in at the hotel Palacio Samaniego in the small sleepy village Samanigo.



A bit outside Laguardia you will find Bodega Marques de Riscal, in the village of Elciego (Alvar). An absolutely stunning building signed architect Frank Gehry. The same man who designed the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. Titanium ceilings are flying like kites in different colors. Wine shop, is located in a modest building near the entrance. In the futuristic building is a first-class restaurant and hotel located. The original bodega was built in 1858, so there is a long wine tradition that is the

basis for the excellent wines they produce. They also have farms in Rueda (white wines) area and in Castilla y Leon (a red wine). Our choice here was the Marques de Riscal Reserva with mainly Tempranillo grapes.

Logrono will be the final stop for this both visual and wine inspired trip. You should now have a car full of good wines. Logroño is a major city. At the entrance is the bodega Franco-Española. Hemingway visited this bodega several times to shop for wine, so why don't you do the same? Buy a bottle and sit down on the Ebro river bank and enjoy the Rioja region that you now have passed, at least a small part of it.



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