

EST. MMXI

QUEIRÓN  
***ENSAYOS CAPITALES***

*MONOVARIETAL GRACIANO*  
*SIN SULFITOS*



CHALLENGING THE LIMITS



# CHALLENGING THE LIMITS

A wine is always a challenge. A challenge, a search, and provides a glimpse into the future from a standpoint of tradition and classicism. This is the philosophy of the Ensayos Captales project, the newest venture of the Queirón portfolio, which attempts to make wines on the edge, both in the conception of their viticulture (in this case with the Graciano, which plays a minor but essential roll in the history of Rioja) as well as with work in the cellar, where this first experimentation in making a wine without sulfites has been attempted in an effort to make our wines as natural and organic as possible, while maintaining their integrity and finesse. With Ensayos Captales, Queirón begins a long-term research project, in which the most exquisite viticulture and the most-advanced enology go hand in hand.

## Ensayos Captales nº 1

produced in the traditional gravity flow method (which defines the Queirón winery in itself). The Ensayos wines hail from a vineyard located in the village of Quel, at more than 650 meters of altitude, called 'El Pozo'. This vineyard is composed of poor and sandy soils, with many large boulders scattered throughout. It is at a slope of fifteen degrees, and is an extremely unique terroir, especially for one of the lesser known, yet native grape varieties of Rioja: Graciano. Graciano has forever been considered the 'grace' of Rioja. It represents just under two percent of all the vineyards planted within the Denomination.

# RIOJA ORIGINS

Graciano is a native and lesser known variety in Rioja that is not very widespread or common in other regions. Historically, it has been an essential component of the blends of the great Rioja Reservas. It is typically blended with Tempranillo and Mazuelo and is a low-yielding and late budding grape with the possibility of an extended maturation period. It offers wines of very intense color with low alcohol content. Its nose is exuberant and highly aromatic with notes of fresh cut wood. Its musts are deep red in color and contain high acidity. Juan Marcilla Arrázola (author of the legendary 'Practical treatise on Spanish viticulture and oenology from 1942') considers that its aromas are characteristic of Rioja given that this grape variety provides finesse and quality to a typical blend. Graciano raises and complements the aromatic potential of Tempranillo.

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# NO SULFITES

For decades, sulfur dioxide has been the most widely used preservative in winemaking given that it acts as a powerful antioxidant which helps reduce the effects of dissolved oxygen and inhibits oxidative enzymes. In addition, it has a high antimicrobial capacity against yeast and lactic acid bacteria. However, new trends in agriculture are pointing toward a progressive reduction of the legal limits of this compound in food. Louis Pasteur already explained the relationship be-

tween oxygen and wine in his work *‘Études sur le vin: de l’influence de l’oxygène de l’air dans vinification’*, where he stated that young wines must be protected from too much exposure to air, because it negatively affects their sensory characteristics. The substitution of sulfur is carried out in Queirón with techniques that ensure microbial and oxidative protection, which are otherwise absolutely respectful of the organoleptic properties of the wine.



# THE WINEMAKER

## Rubén Pérez Cuevas

As explained by Rubén Pérez Cuevas, the Queiron winemaker, who sees each vintage as a bit of a mystery: "Everything has its reason for being and we are deciphering the messages that nature offers us. My passion and obsession is to be able to interpret the complexity of the soils, the special features of each meteorological year, the diverse ripening of each variety. It's as if it were a puzzle and we had to fit each piece together". Rubén is a viticulturist. He studied oenology at the University of La Rioja and his passion for wine has led him to travel the world to discover wine-growing regions across the globe: "Learning must be constant, knowing other wines and production styles makes you feel closer to the true heartbeat of Rioja, as well as to the vineyards of Quel". It also helps one to live more fully and see wine as an art: "The deepest heartbeat of our land is of a diverse Rioja that rests on the virtue of passion and that demands that we, as

wine growers strive more every day for a work that gives meaning to our lives. This is a fundamental value that I have learned from my family." In the vineyard you bear witness to the most exact and concrete definition of each wine. This is where everything begins to take shape. After life in the vineyard, you sculpt and assemble, but the vineyard remains the beginning of everything and I always try to be as loyal to what it asks of me," he says.

Rubén Pérez Cuevas, explains that this is a very special wine, a wine in which "we have to challenge our knowledge and our experiences as viticulturists and winemakers to the highest limit. A wine that requires maximum precision in all tasks, from the vineyard to the meticulous work necessary in the winery, all because of the unique characteristics of the Graciano grape and because of everything implied and required in producing a wine without sulfites."

**Why did you choose the Graciano**

## « The aromatic power of Graciano is very suggestive »

### **variety for this first experimentation trial?**

It is a variety that has historically been considered important in Rioja due to its acidity and ability to round out the edges in the blends of bolder Reserva wines. It has however never played a leading role on its own. I have worked with it a lot, and I have enjoyed working with it in the vineyards because of how demanding it is and because of its complex maturity. It is an intimate and very personal desire to give it the prominence it deserves. Despite the number of years it has existed in Rioja, it is still a virtual unknown. Its aromatic power is very suggestive, but it needs to be understood very well. This is my challenge. In our high-altitude vineyards located in the area surrounding Quel, its expression is one of elegance and surprising finesse.

### **Which is the first step?**

The health in the vineyard is crucial. That is why we can only make it in specific vintages that guarantee total

health. Leaf removal is also a fundamental factor in improving maturity rates. We want the morning breezes to dry the night dew from the berries and prevent diseases such as oidium. We are looking for a necessary equation: healthy grapes and optimal harvest time.

### **Why is maturity so decisive?**

The maturity of Graciano is essential. Picking at maturity helps to determine that the wine produced does not lean toward displaying green notes. It is essential to avoiding possible traces of pyrazine, which can otherwise lend itself to characteristics that tend more toward minerality.

### **How do you determine the optimal moment of maturity?**

We have three methods that we implement for determining optimal maturity. The first is the tasting of grapes directly in the vineyard. We taste the skin, the pulp and the seed. We know well how green notes develop with the evolution of maturity. The second me-



## « Each Queirón wine has in itself a test component »

thod is the study of the Phenolic Maturity Index (Dr. Glories Method) and the final method is measuring the amount of anthocyanins within a square millimeter of grape skin (Bacchimeter). Anthocyanins are the main pigments responsible for the color of red wines. During the maturation process these pigments accumulate in the skin and with analysis, we are able to precisely determine their maximum potential.

### **What are the stages of production?**

The first stage of production is guaranteeing that the vineyard is in perfect health. The health of the vineyard is clearly expressed in the wine and it is crucial that there are no microorganisms present in the grapes that could thereafter alter their chemical and organoleptic characteristics.

### **Let's start with the harvest. Is there something special?**

We harvest manually into boxes. We prefer not to harvest in the early hours

of the morning, because we look for moments during the day when the sun has perfectly dried the grapes. Once the grapes are harvested, we refrigerate them in a controlled nitrogen environment to prevent the proliferation of microorganisms (8 to 10 degrees for 24 hours).

### **How do you manage to maintain the reduction in deposits in the environment?**

We use CO<sup>2</sup> from other fermentations to create a sterile atmosphere within the Graciano production tanks and proceed directly to destemming and crushing to help stimulate the tumultuous fermentation of the grapes without stems. Three days later the malolactic fermentation begins. Both fermentations take place in unison, however, the malolactic fermentation finishes 24 hours before the alcoholic fermentation.

### **What do you wish to achieve in ha-**

**ving both fermentations take place in unison?**

We look to achieve an absolute stability in the color of the wine as well as a longer period of time for the skins to be in contact with the must.

**How is the aging done?**

We do everything in new barrels (50% French oak and 50% American, light toasted and 27 mm staves) of extra-fine grain, because despite its strength and structure, Graciano is a very weak variety when exposed to wood. Time spent in barrel must be very well monitored.

**How long does it stay in the barrels?**

Eight months. In order to maintain it's stasis and help in the development of the ageing process, we do not rack the wine. The objective is that the wine does not oxidize, except when in the barrel for a controlled micro-oxygenation process. After ageing, the wine goes through its own stabilization process and thus does not need clarifying products. Filtration proceeds naturally.

**Do you apply these same types of techniques to other wines?**

Without a doubt, this is one of the fun-

damental aspects of the Ensayos Capitaes collection of wines, both in terms of vineyard work as well as with the methodological precision that takes place in the winery. Each wine from the Queirón portfolio has this component of testing and continuous improvement. All of the techniques used, developments and evolution of each project will be reflected in the rest of the winery's production.

**What does this wine represent for Queirón?**

It is the embodiment of one of the objectives of the winery. The Gra-

ciano variety is inherent to Rioja. I believe that it has been presented to us as a challenge, a challenge in taking advantage of its unique qualities and value, including its acidity, its concentration, its colour and the depth of its aromas.

This project has been a first step and I am convinced that we will achieve very interesting things by drawing upon its knowledge as much as possible. In addition, there is the work in the winery in relying more increasingly on natural wines in which the processes are absolutely balanced.



# QUEIRÓN ENSAYOS CAPITALES

MONOVARIETAL GRACIANO  
SIN SULFITOS

## Vintage 2018

This vintage was characterized as one of the longest vintages in the history of Rioja and with not so favorable climatic conditions, which meant that the winemakers had to do their best to select the highest quality grapes. Despite this, the good weather at the end of the growing cycle was conducive to a harvest of good quality, however with a lower alcohol content in general. The abundant accumulated rainfall during the winter and spring of 2018 led to excellent vineyard health during the first months of the growing cycle. The year was complicated in the first fortnight of July with several storm fronts as well as hail, adding to the already abundant rainfall. Fortunately, there was little damage and harvest was not greatly affected or reduced, as high temperatures typical of that time of the year persisted, and in the second fortnight of July, the rains stopped, and a warm and dry patch of weather began, which led to the desiccation of the mycelium and the recovery of the plant canopy as well as the recovery of the grape clusters themselves. The vineyard's overall health improved notably, and the maturation continued naturally in highlighting the larger than average size of

the berries due to good weather conditions. It was a vintage marked by an abundance of excellent quality grapes both in the vineyard and in the winery and without any setbacks in terms of weather.



## It will endure time

Like a child going through puberty, without knowing where to go, this is how Graciano behaves, a variety with overwhelming complexity. As the years go by, it matures and focuses on what it really wants to be, a wine that stands out from the rest, aromatic, full-bodied, as well as silky and elegant. In the old days, this type of grape was used in the blends of the great aged Rioja wines, which allowed the wines to last over time. Today we can taste a bit of 'bottled history'. It has only been in modern times where Graciano has not had a leading role on its own. Made with the technology and precision that our current world affords us, but always keeping in mind how it was

**Ernesto Jesús Cruz**  
Sommelier from Íkaro  
Logroño. La Rioja  
(one Michelin star)

made in the past so that in the future people may be able to drink 'bottled history'. Graciano goes by several names; Cagnovali if we find ourselves in Italy, or Tintilla de Rota, if we travel to my homeland of Andalusia. I think this is where my admiration for this grape comes from, so aromatic, so subtle, so elegant that when it evolves over time it continues to have the liveliness of a young wine, with the wisdom that comes from maturity and keeping in step with the times. This is Ensayos Capitales de Queirón, a young wine made as in the past, with current precision and born with the production of a great Rioja Graciano wine that was born to last over time.



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