

Dominio de Atauta

“Proprietor Miguel Sanchez ... is fashioning fabulous wines at this extraordinary estate in Ribera del Duero.” Robert Parker

On the far eastern edge of Ribera del Duero, the town of Atauta overlooks a hidden canyon, its floor covered with ancient Tempranillo vines. From this canyon, an important new estate has emerged: Dominio de Atauta.



Atauta's ancient vines.

Vines were first planted in Atauta over a thousand years ago. The people who tended those vines also built dozens of limestone wincellars which surreally dot the landscape. In modern times, these cellars—and the vines that supplied them—were abandoned.

Rediscovering Atauta's Past

A prominent Madrid wine merchant, Miguel Sanchez, grew up near Atauta. When he left, he had little idea that Atauta was anything but a sleepy, aging town. The few remaining local growers, however, noted his success. In 1995, they asked him for help in marketing their wines. Miguel quickly found a market for them but, in the process, he discovered what a viticultural treasure the zone was. Everywhere he looked, he saw small neglected plots of ancient Tempranillo vines.

He also realized that the Phylloxera plague that devastated most European vineyards 140 years ago had largely bypassed Atauta. Today, Atauta is a priceless rarity: a sea of ungrafted vines, many exceeding 100 years of age.

Bringing Atauta Back

Miguel understood the area's potential and began acquiring vineyards—a slow, painstaking process given their parcelized (and often forgotten) ownership. He also went in search of a winemaker to bring his project to fruition. After consulting colleagues in several countries, he chose a talented young Frenchman, Bertrand Sourdis, who had interned at Mouton Rothschild and Leoville Las Cases, and with Alvaro Palacios.

Bertrand had plenty to do when he joined Miguel during the summer of 1999. His primary challenge was to rehabilitate the neglected vineyards—a project that continues today. He also helped design a gravity-fed winery and a program of biodynamic viticulture, allowing no chemicals or fertilizers to be used at Atauta.

The Wines

Atauta lies an hour east, and a quarter mile higher, than most Ribera del Duero vineyards. Nighttime temperatures are considerably cooler here, leading to a “freshness” that other Riberas cannot match.

Fermented with indigenous yeast, and aged primarily in used barriques, Atauta created a new paradigm for Ribera del Duero. The wines have incredible concentration, yet also demonstrate balance, refinement, and a delicacy that belies their typical 13.5% alcohol.

In addition to the regular bottling, the team has identified parcels that reveal extraordinary character. In each vintage, they will release one, two, or all three.

Valdegatiles—Made from 100+-year-old vines grown on sand, this wine is explosively aromatic, with an array of red and black fruits.

La Mala—The “Bad” is named for tiny yields provided by the massive, 150-year-old vines in the site. Bertrand believes this is a unique mutation of Tinto Fino, and the resulting wines display black fruits and incredible textures.

Llanos del Almendro—Bertrand believes this is the best site in Atauta. In the right vintages, it combines the depth of La Mala with the exuberance of Valdegatiles.

The wines of Dominio de Atauta are a must for anyone who wants not only pleasure from a wine, but with every sip to explore its origins.

DOMINIO DE ATAUTA

Ribera del Duero, Spain

OVERVIEW

Established: 1999

First Vintage: 2000

Proprietor: Miguel Sanchez

Winemaker: Bertrand Sourdais

Dominio de Atauta is located an hour upriver from the major Ribera del Duero estates, and at much higher elevation. Miguel discovered that many of the ancient Tempranillo vineyards in this side valley were ungrafted. He began buying vineyards in late-1999 and hired a young French winemaker, Bertrand Sourdais, to capture the potential of this unique viticultural heritage.

VINEYARD INFORMATION

Soils: Calcareous rock, clay, and sand.

Vines: 100% Tinto Fino. The estate farms 600 parcels of 90% ungrafted vines, with most parcels exceeding 60 years old.

Elevation: 950 m

Appellation: Ribera del Duero

Harvest: by hand

VINTAGE NOTES

2005 – Yet another drought year, but relatively cool. Small crop provided wines with serious intensity and structure.

2004 – A drought year, though not as hot as 2003. The wines have great concentration and pure aromatics.

2003 – Very warm season for this relatively cool zone. The wines are atypically ripe, but have great potential.

2002 – Strong vintage at Atauta, with long hang time and complete aromatics.

ADDITIONAL WINEMAKING NOTES

No filtration or fining.

All harvesting by hand.

25-35 day maceration.

Elevage in barrique.

“Non-dogmatic” Biodynamic viticulture.

The Wines

Ribera del Duero

Fruit Source: Estate vineyards, 90% ungrafted vines, with most parcels exceeding 60 years old.

Yields: ~20 hl/hA

Oak Aging: 100% in French barrique. 20-30% new.

Production: 8,000 cases (2005)

Ribera del Duero “Valdegatiles”

Fruit Source: A single site on the estate, with ungrafted vines over 100 years old. The soils are very sandy, and it is the windiest portion of Atauta, yielding the most aromatic wines.

Yields: <20 hl/hA

Oak Aging: 2nd passage French barrique for 18 months.

Production: 130 cases (2005).

Ribera del Duero “La Mala”

Fruit Source: A single site on the estate, with ungrafted vines approximately 160 years old. Only 70cm of sand and clay soil top the limestone rock here, and the Tinto Fino clone here appears to be a unique mutation.

Yields: <20 hl/hA

Oak Aging: French barriques (50% new) for 18 months.

Production: 66 cases (2005).

Ribera del Duero “Llanos del Almendro”

Fruit Source: A single site on the estate, with 65+ year old vines. A unique combination of 40cm of sand top a dense clay sub-soil.

Yields: <20 hl/hA

Oak Aging: French barriques (50% new) for 18 months.

Production: 130 cases (2005).