

Alvaro Palacios

If anyone embodies the promise and spirit of “The New Spain,” it’s Alvaro Palacios. His L’Ermita is widely considered—along with Peter Sisseck’s Dominio de Pingus—to be the most important new Spanish wine of the modern era.

One of nine children born to the owners of Rioja’s respected Palacios Remondo, Alvaro studied enology in Bordeaux, while working under Jean-Pierre Moueix at Ch. Pétrus. He credits his tenure at Pétrus for much of his winemaking philosophy and for showing him “the importance of great wines.”

Alvaro could have returned to the security of his family’s domaine. But instead, he was drawn to the remote and seductive Priorat, 60 miles from Barcelona, which had been one of Spain’s impor-

tant pre-Phylloxera wine regions. With its unique *terroir* of steep hills and terraces, Alvaro believed that here he could make a wine that evoked both Pétrus and Grange.

He acquired his first vineyard, Finca Dofi, in 1990. Then, in 1993, he located what is now regarded as the crown jewel property in Priorat, a precipitous, northeast-facing Garnacha vineyard on well-

drained schist that had been planted between 1900 and 1940. Alvaro named it for a small chapel, or hermitage, that sits atop the hill.

In 1995, the flow of critical praise for Alvaro’s L’Ermita began, and it hasn’t stopped. But while L’Ermita has received most of the attention, Alvaro produces several other wines compelling in their own rights.

“ *L’Ermita ... is arguably the finest individual red wine in Spain.* ”

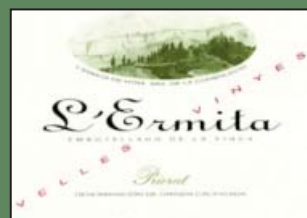
John Radford,
The New Spain

Finca Dofi—from Alvaro’s original vineyard, Finca Dofi is a blend of Garnacha, Cabernet, and Syrah. Like L’Ermita, Dofi combines power and richness with great breed and finesse. In most Priorat tastings that do not include L’Ermita, Dofi is the clear winner.

Gratallops—Alvaro has been instrumental in introducing the Burgundian ideas of *Villages* and *Cru* to Priorat. In 2006, he began to elaborate separately a collection of old vineyards from throughout the township of Gratallops to extend and commercialize this idea.

Les Terrasses “Velles Vignes”—While originally conceived of as a value wine, Les Terrasses “Velles Vignes” has slowly evolved into the essence of what makes Priorat special. Drawing on 15+ years of study, Terrasses is sourced from many of the region’s steepest and oldest vineyards—many of them north-facing to avoid the intense afternoon sun. With the 2007 vintage, Alvaro acknowledged Les Terrasses’ “graduation” by adding the “Velles Vinyes” designation to the label.

The evolving seriousness of Terrasses eventually left room for a new wine, **Camins del Priorat**. Alvaro had never wanted to be known solely for expensive “trophy” wines, and with Camins, he found the opportunity to create something special. Drawing on his wealth of vineyard sources, Alvaro is aiming to produce a wine that is affordably priced, but which also stays true to his vision of Priorat—powerful but elegant, approachable but restrained.



From top: Alvaro Palacios in the L’Ermita vineyard just before harvest; the L’Ermita etiqueta; and the steep slopes of the Baixada vineyard