

# VIEW FROM THE CELLAR

By John Gilman

---

*January-February 2009*

*Number Nineteen*

---

- ❖ *Bodega López de Heredia- Rioja's Timeless Crown Jewel. (pages 1-21)*
- ❖ *The 2007 Burgundy Vintage Report- A Very, Very Fine Vintage of Forward and Sophisticated Reds and Quite Simply the Very Finest Young White Burgundies I Have Ever Tasted. (pages 22-197)*

## Coming Attractions

- ❖ *Domaine Trapet Père et Fils- Gevrey-Chambertin's Other Historic Titan.*
- ❖ *2004 Red and White Burgundies- Idiosyncratic Reds and Youthful Whites.*
- ❖ *1998 Piemonte Wines- An Overlooked and Highly Pleasing Vintage.*
- ❖ *1985 Claret- Keeping Pace Nicely with the More Highly Regarded 1982s.*
- ❖ *The 2008 Vintage in Germany.*
- ❖ *Recently Tasted Austrian Wines.*
- ❖ *Vieux Château Certan- Charting a Unique Course Through Pomerol.*
- ❖ *The Golden Age of California Cabernet Sauvignon Part Three.*
- ❖ *The Produttori del Barbaresco- The World's Greatest Fine Wine Cooperative Celebrates Fifty Years of Excellence.*
- ❖ *The Annual Loire Valley Report.*
- ❖ *Plus Italian White Wines, Noël Verset- Cornas At Its Very Finest, Weingut Willi Schaefer, Château Beychevelle, Recently Tasted Champagne and Sparkling Wines, The Return of Roadkill, , Domaine Comtes Lafon, Taylor Fladgate's Quinta de Vargellas, Domaine Henri Gouges, and Treasure Hunting in Bordeaux's Cru Bourgeois.*

View From the Cellar is published bi-monthly by John Gilman, who is solely responsible for its content. Electronic subscriptions are available for \$120 per year (\$220 for two years), available at [www.viewfromthecellar.com](http://www.viewfromthecellar.com). Inquiries may also be emailed to [jbgilman@ix.netcom.com](mailto:jbgilman@ix.netcom.com). Copyright 2008 by John B. Gilman, all rights reserved. Content may be utilized by members of the wine trade and/or media as long as either View From the Cellar or John Gilman are fully credited.

## LÓPEZ DE HEREDIA RIOJA'S GREAT BASTION OF TRADITION



*López de Heredia is today Rioja's greatest estate, and stands overlooking a Rioja landscape that has changed so dramatically in the last twenty years as to be virtually unrecognizable to connoisseurs of the region a generation ago. The family estate was founded in 1877 by Don Rafael López de Heredia y Landeta in the town of Haro, right in the heart of the Rioja Alta region. The López de Heredia Bodega is the oldest in Haro (now the commercial center of Rioja), and the third oldest in the entire region, with only Marques de Murrieta and Marques de Riscal founded before López de Heredia. This great wine-producing corner of Spain really only got its start in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when French wine producers (particularly from Bordeaux) came south to Rioja looking for a region remote from the phylloxera louse that was ravaging the traditional vineyard areas of France at the time. Don Rafael had done his wine training in France prior to opening his eponymous bodega, and López de Heredia was quickly one of the most important estates in Rioja. Over the ensuing one hundred and thirty-two years, it has remained one of the most important wine-producing domains in all of Spain, with now its fourth generation of López de Heredia family members running the winery. In terms of historical importance and tradition, the only Spanish wine estate that can show the same distinguished past and present day commitment to excellence found in the wines of López de Heredia is Vega Sicilia in the Ribera del Duero.*

*Given Rioja's brilliant historical legacy of great estates, it is sad to think that in terms of producing truly classic and traditionally styled Rioja wines, López de Heredia remains virtually the last bodega to have withstood the tides of modernization and changing fashions in taste that have transformed so many other traditionally important estates in Rioja into caricatures of their former selves. But as Maria José López de Heredia (who along with her sister Mercedes and brother Julio César now run the family estate) comments, "we do not want to have to defend ourselves for the way we make our wines, for this style was what made the region of Rioja famous in the first place, and which has been the foundation for our family winery since my great-grandfather founded the bodega in 1877- why would we want to change anything." Through all of the profound changes that have swept through this region in the last twenty years or so- few for the better I might add- López de Heredia has remained true to the great traditions of Rioja and the legacy started by Rafael López de Heredia y Landeta all those years ago. With the Rioja region just having received this past year permission to officially cultivate grape varieties such as chardonnay, sauvignon blanc and albariño for white Rioja, it seems only a matter of time before the forces of internationalization will also secure a beachhead in Rioja for red varieties such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot as well, and true Rioja will become and even rarer bird. But as long as the family of López de Heredia continues to fashion wines in the region, one can rest assured that classic Rioja reds, whites and rosés will never face extinction.*

*López de Heredia was run for many years by its founder, Don Rafael, who tirelessly built up his beloved estate, with architectural flourish, deep and multi-layered cellars and a myriad of plans for intricate projects in the future. He was head of the estate from its founding in 1877 until 1924, when two of his sons took over the newly incorporated bodega. Don Rafael had originally chosen his first son-in-law, Oscar Zulueta, to take over the as the head of the business many years before, and had begun grooming him early in the twentieth century on the intricacies of the family business while his two sons were still in their childhood. However, tragically, his son-in-law was killed in an automobile accident in 1909, forcing Don Rafael to continue on at the helm of the bodega until his sons were old enough to assume control of the business. Don Rafael remained quite active from 1924 onwards as well, and was always a very interested party in the affairs of the winery up until his passing in 1938. For most of these years he maintained a spacious apartment in the same building as the family's business offices in Madrid, with the comfortable commute of down a few flights of stairs to his daily business. He was a man of great vision, not only for his own winery, but for the region of Rioja as a whole, and is clearly one of the seminal figures in the history of the growth of truly world class wine in Spain.*

*His two sons, Rafael López de Heredia Aransaez and Julio César López de Heredia Aransaez, succeeded to the helm of López de Heredia at the outset of one of the nadirs of the wine trade in the twentieth century, as the destruction and dislocations brought about by the first world war were only just passing when the world stumbled off the financial precipice. In Spain, this was followed up by the further chaos during the era of the Second Republic, which began with the adoption of the constitution of 1931 and*

*which eventually tumbled into the conflagration of the Spanish civil war in 1936. World War II was hard on the heels of the end of the Spanish civil war in 1939, and recovery from the devastation wrought throughout Europe during the war took well into the 1950s to take firm root. These were the subsistence years for López de Heredia, and things did not really begin to rebound until Pedro López de Heredia Ugalde succeeded to the head of the family winery in 1955. He was joined in the family business by his three children, Maria José in 1992, Julio César in 1994 and Mercedes in 1996. However, Don Pedro remains very actively involved in the winery to this day, and is not yet content simply to check on the progress of the older vintages in the cellar.*

*The estate is officially known as R. López de Heredia Viña Tondonia SA, as it incorporates the name of its oldest vineyard into the title of the company when it was formed as a corporation in 1924. Rafael López de Heredia y Landeta realized soon after establishing his winery, that the best guarantee of excellence would be to control his own grapes, rather than having to buy production from grape farmers in the region. Once the winery, cellars and family home in Haro were built up to the point where they could serve the current needs of the company, Signor López de Heredia y Landeta set about to purchase vineyard land in the Rioja Alta region, with the first vineyard purchase being one hundred hectares of Viña Tondonia situated on the outskirts of Haro, which was first purchased around 1890. For much of the historical information that appears in this article, I am deeply indebted to the López de Heredia family, who has kindly shared many of their private family records to make this account as accurate as possible. But, Maria José López de Heredia is quick to point out that the information that is included here is as accurate as the family currently knows it to be, but that it is entirely possible that as they continue to comb through the additional family archives that have been located in the last several years, they may continue to discover more accurate information concerning the foundation of the winery and its early years.*

*Getting back to Viña Tondonia, at the time that Don Rafael first began purchasing parcels in what was to become Viña Tondonia, it was already considered one of the finest vineyard sites in the Rioja Alta region, and much of it had been planted in grapes for many generations. However, like wine-producing areas such as Burgundy, Rioja at this time was a region of small farmers with tiny plots, and Don Rafael had to make a great many individual purchases to eventually amount to the one hundred hectares of vines that today comprises the López de Heredia family's share of Viña Tondonia. This is one of the challenges for the family to truly chart the early years of the winery and its vineyards through a myriad of records, as Tondonia is not in reality one vineyard, but a number of different parcels that were pieced together by Don Rafael at the end of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century. As adjacent land became available, it was continually added on to the core vineyards purchased in the late 1800s. Today, Viña Tondonia is in total a large vineyard of 170 hectares of vines and cereals, set in a bowl alongside a sharp bend in the Ebro River that nearly surrounds the vineyard, giving Viña Tondonia the shape of a giant shell when seen from the air. (There is a superb aerial photo of Viña Tondonia on the company's website that dramatically shows the Ebro River encircling the vineyard). López de Heredia owns one hundred of these one hundred and seventy hectares, with most of their vineyard parcels lying on the*

*higher ground up from the river itself that surrounds the vineyard. As Maria José points out, “my great-grandfather wanted to mostly buy the parcels away from the river, as these low-lying sites are quite prone to botrytis in some vintages” and which is emphatically not desirable in classic Rioja.*

*Viña Tondonia is the backbone of López de Heredia, as each year the lion’s share of production of the top wines at the bodega emerge from this beautiful vineyard. There remains still some farmland within the “bowl” of Viña Tondonia that is still planted with grains rather than vines, as the family will replenish parcels to be replanted with a ten year cycle of grain cultivation as part of their program of crop rotation prior to replanting in vines. The vineyard takes its name from the ancient Latin name for the land, “Tondonié”, which was first cited in 1182 in a historical work done by a monk in the region. Based on this, the locals have called the vineyard “Tondon” (with a few variations in spelling) for hundreds of years, and this is how the current name of Viña Tondonia came about, which literally translates as “the wine from Tondon.” The López de Heredia one hundred hectare section is planted primarily with Tempranillo, which comprises fully seventy percent of the area under vines. The other classic grape varieties of red Rioja are also planted in Tondonia, with about fifteen percent of the family’s parcels planted to Garnacha, and five percent each planted to Graciano and Mazuelo. In addition to Reserva and Gran Reserva red wines made from this vineyard, there are also a terrific dry rosé and Viña Tondonia Blanco, which can be bottled as either a Reserva or a Gran Reserva, depending on the quality of the vintage. The white Tondonia is a fairly rare bottling, as of the one hundred hectares owned by López de Heredia, somewhere between five and six hectares of vines are planted with Viura, the superb white grape variety that is the most important element in white Rioja, and a much smaller amount of Malvasia.*

*Not surprisingly, given all of the travel back and forth between Bordeaux and Rioja from 1870 onwards, phylloxera also began to find its way south over the Pyrenees to Rioja by the end of the nineteenth century. The López de Heredia family records indicate that phylloxera was thought to have been first spotted in Tondonia around 1901, and the vineyards were fully infected by 1907, forcing Don Rafael to begin wholesale replanting of his fairly recently acquired vineyards by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. And then of course came the disruptions brought about by the First World War, adding to the difficulties in the region. With the struggles with phylloxera in Rioja and the dislocations of the war, most of the French vignerons who had arrived in Rioja around 1870 soon departed and returned to France, many of whom are likely to have soon met their demise in the trenches. During the war Rioja was left to the Spanish, who continued to make a wines of international prominence, so that it was not rare to find top flight Rioja as far afield as the United States at this time.*

*Viña Tondonia is a terrific vineyard, with soils comprised of limestone and alluvial deposits from the encircling Ebro River. The vineyards after phylloxera were planted in one of the classic French styles, with the vines pruned “Goblet” style, as is still practiced in the best vineyards of Beaujolais for instance, with each vine cut into five or six short canes, which eventually come to resemble old and withered black hands*

*reaching up to the sky out of the chalky, sandy soils. More recent plantings are done in a more modern, trellised system, but there are a great many parcels of old vines in Tondonia that are trained “Goblet”. Today the average age of the vines in this vineyard are fifty years of age, with still a significant percentage of older vines that date back decades earlier. As noted above, Viña Tondonia is used to produce a red Rioja Reserva and Gran Reserva (in great years), as well as a Viña Tondonia Blanco Reserva and Gran Reserva (again in the very finest vintages), as well as a Tondonia Rosado that is among the greatest and most ageworthy dry rosés made in the world. The Viña Tondonia Rosado is made of a blend of Tempranillo, Garnacha and Viura.*

*The bodega first began to market its wine from this vineyard as Viña Tondonia in 1914. Previous the first release of Viña Tondonia, Don Rafael sold the López de Heredia bottlings from this vineyard under the label of “La Casita” named after his beautiful house perched amongst the vineyards. Don Rafael was a great admirer of the Bordelais and their refined lifestyle amongst the vines, and he was one of the few producers in Rioja to build his home in the midst of his vineyards in the style that is now so familiar to those that visit Bordeaux or California wine country. Since 1886, all of the López de Heredia labels have born an image of the family house amongst the vines. As in so many other aspects of his life, Don Rafael was a visionary ahead of his time, which is rather ironic that his beloved bodega is now one of the last holdouts in Rioja that has not succumbed to the pressures to change the style of their wines- though perhaps this again could be visionary, and it may well be that the López de Heredia family’s tight grasp on their historical legacy will one day soon be the same road that other important producers in Rioja return to.*

*While Tondonia is the largest vineyard that Don Rafael purchased in the 1890s, it is not the only outstanding vineyard that was bought in this era. The second most famous bottling from López de Heredia is their Viña Bosconia, which hails from a vineyard called El Bosque. This vineyard also lies along the Ebro, at another torturous twist of the river, about one kilometer to the north of the winery in Haro. El Bosque is a much smaller vineyard than Tondonia, as in total it is only fifteen hectares, with fully eleven hectares of the parcels planted to Tempranillo. The balance of this red variety-only vineyard is made up of two hectares of Garnacha and one hectare each of Mazuelo and Graciano. From the vineyard the winery makes both a Viña Bosconia Reserva red and in great years a Viña Bosconia Gran Reserva. El Bosque is located on a series of south-facing hillsides in the foothills of the Sierra Cantabria mountains that lie just to the north of the Rioja Alta. Both bottlings are sold in Burgundy shaped bottles, reflecting both the original French inspirations of the bodega (and the entire region) in the 1870s, and the style of the wine that has been fashioned since the earliest days by Don Rafael from this vineyard. Originally, prior to the winery creating the Viña Bosconia brand name for this wine, the wine was known as “Rioja Cepa Borgoña”, reflecting its stylistic orientation to Burgundy. In contrast, all the other López de Heredia wines are sold in Bordeaux shaped bottles. The wine continued to be known as Rioja Cepa Borgoña until 1954, when the wine laws in Spain forbid the use of French names, and the wine was christened as Viña Bosconia.*



*Don Rafael López de Heredia y Landeta in the cellars in the early twentieth century.*

*The López de Heredia family also owns two other fine vineyards in the immediate vicinity of the winery in Haro. One is the twenty-four hectare vineyard of Viña Cubillas, which lies the furthest from the Ebro River of all the López de Heredia vineyards, about four kilometers away from the winery. From the vineyard the bodega produces a wine known as Viña Cubillo, which is used every year to make the estate's Crianza bottling. The plantation is all in red grapes, with sixteen hectares planted to Tempranillo, hectares to Garnacha, two hectares each of Graciano and Mazuelo. This is a fine vineyard, with an elevation of 410 meters above sea level and soils of clay and decaying limestone. The vines average forty years of age, with many well past the age of forty. The other plot of vines that the winery owns lie close to the winery, again overlooking the Ebro, and from which the bodega produces a white wine called Viña Gravonia. The vineyard's name is Viña Zaconia, and it has as very stony soil that forces the Viura vines planted here to dig deep in search of nutrients. Viña Zaconia comprises twenty hectares of vines. Viña Gravonia today is a Crianza every year, but in the early years of the winery, it was often made into a sweet wine if the grapes were attacked by botrytis, in which case it was sold as Viña Sauternia to reflect its stylistic inspiration in the wines of Sauternes.*

*While the López de Heredia winery and cellars have always been based in Haro, for much of the bodega's history, the family has also kept offices and large warehouses and cellars in other locations throughout Spain, and for much of the winery's history, it can be said that its real central location was in Madrid. One of the main reasons for the multiple offices in Spain in the early years of the company's existence had to do with Spanish tax policies at the time, for when a firm wanted to move bottles of wine from one section of the country to another, it had to pay taxes on the transfer of the wine between different states. However, if the wine remained in cask, then the taxes did not have to be paid until the time of bottling or the sale of the wine. Given that traditional Rioja is a wine that has always been aged for a significantly long time prior to making it available*

*for purchase, it would have made no commercial sense to ship bottled wine in those days, accelerating the payment of taxes for wines that would not be sold for several more years. So López de Heredia had need of facilities where they could store the wines in barrel for an extended period, and then to bottle them within the market that they were to be sold when the wines were ready or the firm had orders in hand. It is quite likely that the Spanish tax structure of the day played a significant role in the evolution of the style of Rioja as we know it today (in its recognizable, traditional form- many modern-style Rioja bottlings are not recognizable to my palate as Rioja), adding to the long barrel-aging that rounds and mellows the wines and adds the multi-layered elements of spice, dried fruit and floral tones that makes them unmistakably Rioja.*

*In any event, the family having its main offices and some sizeable cellars in Madrid for much of its history made for a rather precarious situation during the Spanish Civil War, as there was a distinct period of time when it seemed quite likely that the Madrid operations might be nationalized. Fortunately, Haro was quite removed from the fighting during the civil war, so that the harvests and the vinification of the new vintages went on pretty much as normal during these war years. However, López de Heredia has always been a firm that relied quite heavily on the domestic wine market for its clientele (only fairly recently having been embraced in markets beyond the Spanish frontier), and so the combination of the economic woes worldwide during the 1930s and the destruction in Spain caused by the civil war both contributed to a rather subsistence level of sales for the bodega for many years. In fact, as Maria José López de Heredia recalls, “when my father took over the winery in 1955, there had really been no money to invest in the bodega for many, many years, beyond what was needed to keep it open and running and keeping the family fed.” She continues, “many of the projects that my great-grandfather had conceived of for the property had still not been carried out, as the wars had just made it impossible to fund these- we hope to complete some of these in the next few years, for many are closing in on their hundredth anniversary since the original plans were drawn up.”*

*The central commercial location for López de Heredia remained in Madrid up through 1939, when the end of the civil war made it more practical to remove the cellars and bottling facilities from the city and center them once again in Haro. However, the firm continued to bottle some wine in Madrid up into the decade of the 1970s, and retained business offices in Madrid up until 1986, when these too were closed and every aspect of the bodega’s operations returned in full to the winery in Haro. The placing of cellars, bottling facilities and offices in central markets was not unique to López de Heredia in this era, and several other important Rioja bodegas acted likewise during this period in history. During the first half of the twentieth century, López de Heredia also continued to have cellars and bottling facilities in Asturias and Sevilla as well. In the 1970s it became forbidden to move wines in bulk in the Spanish market, and all of López de Heredia’s bottling returned to the home winery in Haro.*

*The vinification and elevage techniques at López de Heredia remain very true to the original practices in Rioja, without any bow to modern winemaking fetishes or the point-driven consultants marring the vinous landscape throughout the world. These*



*include long aging in mostly old, American oak barrels, and then further bottle age prior to release. As Maria José López de Heredia is quick to point out about the winery's use of American oak, "many people think that the winemakers of Rioja started using American oak for their wines because it was more cost-effective than French oak, but in fact this was not the case at all, and American oak was actually more expensive than French in the late nineteenth century when my great-grandfather settled on this wood to make our barrels and fermenting tanks." She continues, "our family made a great many experiments in the early years with different kinds of wood before settling on American oak, as we used chestnut, cherry, elm and even pine- that one did not work out so well- from America, as well as oak from France and even Slovenia." But over time, American oak became the wood of choice for aging vessels throughout Rioja, with an emphasis at most domains of using properly seasoned, older oak barrels and fermenting tanks to raise the wine in, which did not impart a particularly heavy character to the wines. Maria José is quick to point out that "if we did not season the barrels first for several years, then the wines would indeed be aggressively oaky and loaded with oak tannins, but once American oak is properly mellowed, it really does produce a very nice, gentle framing to the wines of Rioja."*

*Signora López de Heredia is also quick to observe that the aromatics and flavors of American oak are, after nearly a century and a half, really part of the cultural heritage of the Rioja region, and she remarks that the winemakers of Rioja cannot change their oak to new and French without completely altering the character of their wines and straying far afield from the rich historical legacy of Rioja: "We could not change the oak without changing the wines, and then they would no longer be López de Heredia Rioja, and what would be the point of that, as we do not need to apologize for the wines that our family has produced for the last hundred years." This is such an obvious fact that I wish that other long-time bodegas of importance in the Rioja region would have take note, as wines from the likes of great estates of the past like C.V.N.E. and Bodegas Riojanas have very recently given into the pressures of the modern market makers and switched over to French oak in the hopes of garnering more critical praise and attendant higher prices, but at the cost of their wines' souls. Now I have little doubt that some executive or financial officer somewhere in the offices of these two bodegas will sit and sneer at the very concept of wines with soul, as wine for him or her is simply another industrial commodity that is to be produced in the most cost-effective manner and "dialed in stylistically" to emulate the most highly rated (and therefore most expensive) wines from around the globe, for wine is a business after all, and who really cares about the actual quality of the wine, as long as the scores are as elevated as the percentage of new wood.*

*As Maria José López de Heredia notes, one of the biggest challenges facing her family's winery these days is to find people who can reconstitute older barrels, as it is a dying art that is much more difficult than fashioning new barrels. She notes that the bodega must actually train coopers in the skills needed to repair older barrels, replacing the stave or two that gives way over time, so that the older wood is not lost. One of the striking things about the respectful treatment of the barrels at López de Heredia is that they are never scrubbed out after a wine is bottled, for the build up of tartrate crystals on the interiors of the barrels is of great importance in maintaining freshness in the wines as*

*they sit for very extended periods in cask. And this is no understatement, as the Crianzas at López de Heredia spend fully three years in barrel prior to bottling, Reservas five to six years in cask, red Gran Reservas for at least nine years in barrel and the Viña Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva for ten years in cask before it is bottled! With such extended periods of cask maturation, one can understand why the López de Heredia family is fanatical about the maintenance of their barrels. The American oak that is destined to one day age these precious wines is purchased as complete trees in the US (mostly from forests in the Appalachian Mountains), and shipped to lumberyards in Spain (typically in either Cantabria or Galicia) where it is cut into boards and eventually staves, and then aged for one year outside, exposed to the elements, and an additional six months inside before it is fashioned into barrels.*

*López de Heredia is unique in the Rioja region today in maintaining their own cooperage, which has been part of their business since their foundation in 1877. For much of Rioja's past, all of the top bodegas had their own barrel-making operations, but over the years, this aspect of the business has been farmed out for financial reasons. But López de Heredia continues to have their own cooperage, seasoning their oak themselves before their own coopers fashion it into barrels. The wines are raised in a variety of aged barrels these days at the bodega, with ten percent of the barrels used being new, fifty percent of the barrels around ten years of age, and the remaining forty percent significantly older. This regimen is designed to take advantage of the greater oxygen exchange of the relatively younger barrels during the wines' early days, with the wines eventually racked off into the oldest and most neutral barrels for their extended maturation process. The wines at López de Heredia are typically racked twice a year over the course of their elevage prior to bottling, with the wines eventually falling clear and bright. At the end of their maturation in barrel, they are fined with egg whites and bottled unfiltered.*

*Of course, this being the epicenter of traditional Rioja, the wines at López de Heredia are not whisked out onto the marketplace immediately after bottling, but receive additional aging in bottle in the cellars as well before they are released. Every bottle of López de Heredia wine spends at least an additional six months in the cellars after bottling to allow the wine to harmonize with its new, more petit environment, and many of the Reservas and Gran Reservas will spend substantially longer aging in bottle in the bodega's vast cellars prior to release. All of the Gran Reservas here are also sealed with wax, instead of a foil capsule, to further protect the cork from harm and to help mitigate the flow of minute amounts of oxygen through the cork membrane during the course of the wine's life. As the folks at López de Heredia like to say, once a top quality cork has been sealed under a wax capsule, the potential longevity of the cork should at least match that of the Gran Reserva wine underneath it, and in many cases it will guarantee that the cork's life cycle will extend beyond that of the wine. But this commitment to long aging in both barrel and bottle is only the end of what is a very traditional vinification and elevage tradition at López de Heredia.*

*The devotion to both quality and tradition at the bodega begins in the vineyards, and is followed through during every step of the evolution of the grape to finished wine.*

*All the López de Heredia vineyards are harvested by hand, with the bodega taking great care to ensure that no bunches are crushed during the collection in the vineyards or on their tractor ride back to the winery. Therefore, they continue to use round, wooden baskets for the collection of the grapes (rather than large hoppers), with a maximum capacity of two hundred kilos, which ensures that the grapes at the bottom are not crushed by the weight of those on top and start their fermentation prematurely. All of the wines at López de Heredia are initially fermented in large, very old oak tanks, many of which date back to the original founding of the bodega in 1877. The coopers at López de Heredia work ceaselessly to maintain these venerable fermentation tanks. The winery uses two different sizes of fermentation tanks- one for red wines and one for whites. The white wines are fermented in 60 hectoliter tanks, all made from American oak and all very old and neutral. The reds are fermented in 240 hectoliter tanks of a comparable age. The family at López de Heredia is quick to point out that the fermentation tanks are never scrubbed down, and over the more than a hundred years that so many of them have been employed, they have built up a dense coating of tartrate crystals on the interior of the tanks, which greatly aids the ability of the indigenous yeasts to perform their duties.*

*After the alcoholic fermentation is completed, the wines are racked off into barrels and begin their period of extended barrel aging. The red wines undergo malolactic fermentation in barrel. All of the barrels used at López de Heredia are 225 liters in capacity, which is the same size of the classic Bordelais barrels which arrived with the French vigneron fleeing phylloxera in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In fact, today, the winemaking regulations of Rioja stipulate that any wines destined for Reserva or Gran Reserva status must be raised exclusively in 225 liter barrels. Now if the officials would only specify which country of origin the wood must come from for these barrels, it might move several bodegas back on the road to classic Rioja! The wines then proceed along their slow maturation process in barrels over many years, before they are bottled without filtration and made ready for the market. The release cycle at López de Heredia is very relaxed and timed to the needs of the wines, rather than the dictates of the market. For example, the sublime 1991 Tondonia and Bosconia Gran Reservas are just being released at age eighteen, while the newest release of the Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva is the twenty-two year-old 1987!*

*For much of the more than one hundred and thirty-two year history of Bodega López de Heredia, the vast, vast majority of the wines have been made exclusively from the estate's own vineyards. In the early days, outside fruit would sometimes be bought in if demand at the bodega exceeded what could be supplied from the domaine's own vines, but it is many, many decades since anything but estate-grown fruit has been used for the López de Heredia wines. As Marie José López de Heredia observes, "the practice in our House has always been to produce wines from our own vineyards." She continues, "in certain years (and these were very rare), my great grandfather and grandfather used to buy some grapes- but only in years where our own harvest might have been devastated by mildew, oidium or other such diseases, but for most of our history we have only made wines from our own vineyards." As the notes below will attest, these vineyards have done a pretty good job of producing magical wines. It is interesting to note that for a great many years, the López de Heredia wines were most popular within Spain itself, but in the*

*last few years, they have become much more popular to a much broader world-wide audience. Perhaps this is a reflection of the dissatisfaction that many wine lovers feel with the modern style of Rioja in particular, and also the disappointments that many modern styled wines have generated with their rather modest track records in the cellars. But as Maria José laughingly observed, “things have definitely changed for us, and now, if you can believe it, one of our very best export markets these days is Italy!” She laughed again, commenting “that if you had told my great grandfather or my grandfather that one day our wines would be selling very well in Italy, he would have thought that you were crazy.”*



*1964 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia looking for a good home.*

### ***Blanco***

#### **1990 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Reserva- López de Heredia**

Being a bit spoiled, I generally drink a lot more Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva than I do the straight Reserva, but based on this really lovely 1990 Reserva, I am going to start looking for this wine with much more regularity. This is the new release of the Blanco Reserva and it is a terrific bottle of wine, as it offers up a fresh and pure nose of honeysuckle, toasted coconut, white cherries, orange rind, *fleur de sel* and a lovely base of chalky soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, very long and quite complex, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids, and lovely length and grip on the focused and *à point* finish. A lovely bottle and a great value. 2009-2020+. **90.**

### **1989 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1989 Viña Tondonia Blanco is still rather a young wine, and it really needs another four or five years of bottle age to begin to fully integrate and come into its own. I have now had the wine on three occasions in the last year, and it fully underscores how important decanting of this wine is prior to drinking it when it is still this young. The bouquet is deep and begins to snap nicely into focus with about thirty minutes of aeration, offering up notes of orange rind, white cherries, sea salts, a touch of lanolin, white soil tones and a bit of marzipan in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and complex, with a brisk and youthful girdle of acidity, a lovely core of fruit, and good length and grip on the focused and complex finish. This is still very early days for the '89 Tondonia Blanco, and I would keep it tucked away in the cellar for several more years if possible, as it will only get better with further bottle age. 2010-2030+. **93.**

### **1987 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1987 Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva is the new release of this fine wine (one has to love it when the new release of the estate's top white wine is twenty-two years of age!), and while it is still a tad on the young side, it looks definitively to be one of the great vintages for this wine. The bouquet is deep and simply gorgeous, as it jumps from the glass in a mélange of white cherries, fresh oranges, a touch of almond paste, delicate floral tones, salty soil and a blossoming note of beeswax. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and very complex, with beautiful acidity, impeccable focus and balance, a lovely core of fruit and a very, very long, very elegant and tangy finish. The 1987 is a great vintage of Tondonia Blanco Gran Reserva, but I would actually give it a few more years of bottle age, as it is still a tad on the young side! 2012-2035+. **94+.**

### **1981 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

Whereas the 1989 Viña Tondonia Blanco could still do with a couple of years in the cellar to fully blossom, the 1981 is drinking brilliantly at age twenty-seven. This is another Tondonia Blanco that I have had the pleasure of drinking quite a few times this past year, and it is a truly magical bottle of wine. The bouquet is wide open now and delivers a superb mélange of orange zest, lemon, sea salts, fresh almonds, a hint of green olive, grapefruit and white soil tones. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, deep and racy, with great precision and focus, bright acids, a rock solid core and a very long, classy and bouncy finish. The palate is not quite as open for inspection as the nose at this point in the wine's evolution, and I would not hesitate to keep this tucked away in the cellar for a few more years before drinking it with really wild abandon. Of the younger vintages of Tondonia Blanco, the 1981 is the finest that I have tasted, and it clearly is my candidate to be the next legendary bottle of this wine after the surreal 1964 and 1957. 2008-2035. **94+.**

### **1976 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1976 Tondonia Gran Reserva Blanco is a lovely bottle of wine that is now fully into its apogee, but still possesses plenty of life in it and is best decanted for a good hour before drinking. The nose is a classic and beautiful mélange of white cherries, orange rind, a touch of lanolin, salty soil tones and a gentle touch of Rioja nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long crisp and beautifully complex, with lovely length and focus, a solid core of fruit, sound acids and good length and grip on the complex and beautifully balanced finish. A lovely bottle. 2009-2020+. **91.**

### **1973 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

While I have had the pleasure of tasting the 1981 and 1964 Tondonia Blanco with some frequency in the last few years, this was the first time that I can recall crossing paths with the lovely 1973. The bouquet is very pretty and stylish, though quite a bit higher-toned than the '81, as it offers up a complex and citric blend of lime, lemon, beeswax, an exotic touch of fava bean, delicate notes of custard and a lovely base of salty soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, clean and crisp, with lovely focus and bounce, fine mid-palate depth and excellent length and grip on the fresh and pure finish. A lovely, lovely wine, that may yet improve a bit with more bottle age. 2008-2030+. **92+**.

### **1970 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1970 Tondonia Blanco is cut from a very similar cloth to the superb 1964, and really is quite similar aromatically and flavor-wise to a great, old vintage of white Graves. The nose jumps from the glass in a beautiful mélange of lemon, a touch of petrol, beeswax, lemon grass, sea salts, a lovely base of white soil tones and a nice touch of pastry cream as it opens up with aeration. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, crisp and focused, with bright acids, excellent balance and outstanding length and grip on the complex and *à point* finish. Just a superb bottle of wine, and one of my favorite vintages of Tondonia Blanco. 2008-2040. **94**.

### **1964 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

I have had the remarkable good fortune to taste the brilliant 1964 Viña Tondonia Blanco on several occasions over the last few years, and has to remain as the single greatest white Rioja that I have ever had the pleasure to taste. Most recently it held its own in a tasting with 1983 Clos Ste. Hune and 1983 Château Haut Brion Blanc, to give some idea of the caliber of this great wine. At age forty-four the wine remains young and, remarkably, emphatically still in need of some extended decanting time before serving, as the very impressive acids that have kept this wine so fresh and vibrant have the upper hand for at least the first hour after the wine is opened. But once decanted, the wine is magical, as it soars from the glass in a blend of toasted coconut, orange rind, lanolin, allspice, chalky soil tones, beeswax and butter cookies. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, complex and still very racy, with great depth at the core, stunning cut and grip for a dry white wine at its age, brilliant focus and balance and a nearly endless, complex and profound finish. Just one of the most magical wines to have ever been created in Spain, of any color. 2008-2030+. **96**.

### **1957 Viña Tondonia Rioja Blanco Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

I would have loved to taste the 1957 Tondonia alongside the 1964, just to get some idea of where they stand in regards to each other. Clearly the 1957 is one of the great, legendary vintages of Tondonia Blanco, and at age fifty-one is right in its magical prime of life. The hauntingly beautiful nose offers up a complex mélange of white cherries, orange peel, hazelnuts, a complex base of soil, hints of new leather and plenty of *fleur de sel*. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure, crisp and laser-like in its focus, with great complexity, a fine core of fruit, glorious freshness for a white wine of its age, and superb length and grip on the perfectly balanced and beautifully long finish. The 1957 Tondonia Blanco is one of the greatest white wines I have ever had the pleasure to taste from Rioja, and so adamantly underscores just how brilliant traditional white Rioja can be that it makes it borderline criminal to even think about playing around with the style of this category of wine. Why other bodegas in Rioja cannot try to emulate this

wine, rather than looking to the new world for their inspiration, is simply a mystery to me! 2008-2025+? **95.**

### ***Rosado***

#### **1998 Viña Tondonia Rioja Rosado Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

I was not sure if my bottle of the 1998 Tondonia Rosado was pristine, as the wine was just a tad soft on the backend, which is emphatically not the norm with this lovely wine. The nose was quite lovely, as it offers up classic notes of orange zest, melon, citrus rind and salty soil tones. However, on the palate the wine is medium-full, long and surprisingly round and gentle, with lovely complexity, but not the usual bounce of freshness and tanginess that I have found in virtually every vintage of this long-lived and very classy Rosado. I have to simply assume this bottle was slightly off. ???

#### **1997 Viña Tondonia Rioja Rosado Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1997 Tondonia Rosado from López de Heredia is a lovely wine that is just blossoming and coming into its peak of drinkability at age eleven. The bouquet is deep, fresh and vibrant, as it offers up a fine mélange of musk melon, delicate notes of wild strawberries, oranges, dusty soil tones and a lovely topnote of dried rose petals. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and round, with lovely freshness and succulence to the fruit, a fine base of soil, bright acids and lovely length and grip on the complex finish. Classy juice. 2008-2020. **91.**

### ***Roja***

#### **2002 Viña Cubillo Rioja Crianza- López de Heredia**

I have been drinking the wines of López de Heredia since my very earliest days in the wine trade (many years ago), and yet I had never tasted their Cubillo Crianza bottling until I crossed paths with it at a recent tasting here in New York. The bottling is a lovely wine and clearly one I should have been on the look for before this, as it offers up a lovely combination of López de Heredia's refined and classic style of Rioja and the more exuberant fruit of youth. The bouquet is deep and complex, as it offers up notes of raspberries, cherries, coffee, Rioja spices, soil and a bit of woodsmoke in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, tangy and complex, with a juicy core of fruit, modest tannins, tangy acids and lovely bounce on the long finish. Quite fine. 2008-2018+. **89+.**

#### **2001 Viña Bosconia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 2001 Viña Bosconia Reserva was just released prior to my recent trip to Burgundy, and I was very happy to have an opportunity to taste it on the eve of my departure, as stylistically, it was a perfect preparation for two weeks in the Côte d'Or. Clearly the Bosconia Reserva is one of the greatest wine values out there, as in most places in the states it can still be found in the \$30 range, and no doubt is decidedly less expensive outside of the friendly confines of the continental US. The 2001 is a fine follow-up to the 2000, with perhaps a tad less intensity at the core, but the same inimitable purity and complexity on both the nose and palate. The bouquet offers up a lovely mélange of cherries, blood orange, clove-like spices, a touch of gamebirds, Rioja nutskins and dusty soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, forward and silky, with lovely focus and delineation, melting tannins, fine, framing acids and lovely length

on the complex finish. A flat out delicious wine that will continue to improve with further bottle age. 2009-2030. **89+**.

**2000 Viña Bosconia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 2000 Bosconia Reserva is a lovely wine in the making, as it offers up outstanding depth and complexity on both the nose and palate. The classic bouquet offers up a mélange of cherries, raspberries, woodsmoke, fresh herbs, Rioja soil tones and a bit of Chambolle-Musigny-like mustard seed in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and focused, with lovely delineation and mid-palate core, tangy acids, modest tannins and excellent length and grip on the bouncy finish. This will be a lovely wine, and is already drinking very well indeed. I would still try to give it a couple more years to add another layer of complexity, but it is no crime to be drinking it now. 2010-2030. **90+**.

**1999 Viña Tondonia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia**

It is still very early days for the lovely 1999 Tondonia Reserva, but this is a wine of excellent potential. The bouquet is deep and quite a classic expression of Tondonia, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of cherries, dried orange, spice tones redolent of allspice and cloves, Rioja soil tones, woodsmoke and a bit of new leather in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, young and tangy, with a lovely core of fruit, excellent focus and balance, and a very long, complex and classy finish that closes with excellent grip and intensity of flavor. A most impressive Tondonia in the making. 2012-2030+. **92+**.

**1991 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The soon to be released 1991 Bosconia and Tondonia Gran Reservas are the finest vintages of these wines that I have tasted since the great 1981 were released, and lovers of classic Rioja would be well-served to lock up some of these superb wines in the cellar as soon as they are released. The '91 Bosconia Gran Reserva is stunning, as it offers up a gorgeous nose of red cherries, orange zest, a touch of red plum, Rioja nuttiness, lovely spice tones, and a simply beautiful base of complex soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and as hauntingly transparent as the best bottle of Chambolle-Musigny, with lovely intensity of flavor, great focus and a very long, youthful and beautifully balanced finish. This is a great Bosconia, that will need a few years to fully apogee, and should be very long-lived. 2-13-2040+. **95**.

**1991 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1991 Tondonia Gran Reserva is also a terrific bottle in the making, as it delivers the same great purity and focus as the Bosconia, in a slightly more fruit-driven and flamboyant personality. The stunning nose offers up scents of cherries, red plums, a touch of blood orange, toasted coconut, leather, beautiful soil tones, and spices and Rioja nuttiness in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, pure and very elegant, with a plush core of fruit, lovely focus and balance, melting tannins, tangy acids and excellent complexity on the long and poised finish. The Bosconia is the more transparent of these two wines in 1991, but the Tondonia's seductive personality will be hard to resist over the next couple of decades. A lovely, lovely vintage for this consistently excellent wine. 2013-2040+. **94+**.



### **1987 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The domaine was very excited to send a bottle of the 1987 Bosconia Gran Reserva for me to taste, as they feel it is one of the best Bosconias in recent memory, Sadly, my bottle was corked, though one could see a great wine underneath the TCA.

### **1987 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

*The 1987 Tondonia Gran Reserva is an excellent wine that has now reached its apogee of maturity and is drinking splendidly. The deep and classy bouquet delivers a fine mix of raspberries, hickory smoke, fresh nutmeg, herb tones, and the classic blend of Rioja spice and soil. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, long and complex, with fine mid-palate depth, lovely, tangy acids, and excellent length and grip on the complex and dancing finish. While the 1987 Tondonia Gran Reserva is a superb glass of wine today, I might be tempted to give it even a few more years in the cellar to see if an additional layer of complexity will emerge with more bottle age. An excellent vintage for this consistently excellent bottling. 2010-2035. 93.*

### **1985 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1985 Viña Tondonia is drinking very well today, and while it may not possess quite the inner core necessary for a very long life (by López de Heredia's lofty standards), it will make a fine dining partner for at least the next fifteen years. The refined bouquet is a mélange of baked raspberries, woodsmoke, a touch of gamebird, cloves and spicy soil tones. On the palate the wine is fullish, complex, poised and elegant, with moderate depth, but nice intensity of flavor, and exhibits plenty of breed on the complex and tangy finish. 2004-2020. 91.



*Viña Bosconia with a storm on the way.*

### **1981 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The '81 Bosconia Gran Reserva is a suitably beautiful bottle that fully captures all the promise of this great vintage in Rioja. This is another wine that I have had at a couple of tastings in the last few months, and it seems to get better and better as it gains in bottle age. The is a lovely mélange of cherries, orange rind, woodsmoke, cloves and cinnamon, orange zest, coffee and a great base of soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, long and vibrant, with impeccable balance, excellent focus and lovely length and grip on the

softly tannic, tangy and very complex finish. I love the combination of intensity of flavor and the bouncy palate impression of the '81 Bosconia Gran Reserva, which texturally bears more than a passing resemblance to Chambolle-Musigny. A lovely wine. 2008-2025. **94+**.

#### **1981 Viña Tondonia Rioja Reserva- López de Heredia**

To my mind the 1981 vintage in Rioja is analogous to the 1982 vintage in Bordeaux, and will be one of the great classic years of our lifetimes. I wish I had had the good sense to lay in more 1981 Rioja bottlings to go alongside my '82 Bordeaux, as I am woefully under-stocked on this great year. The 1981 Viña Tondonia Reserva is an utterly refined and youthful wine that is beginning to be drinkable at age twenty-six, but is still emphatically on its way up. The superb bouquet offers up a mélange of strawberries, blood orange, citrus zest, lovely soil tones, nutskins and coffee. On the palate the wine is fullish, bright, tangy and beautifully complex, with a lovely core of fruit, bright acids, and a very long, classy and intensely flavored finish. Delicious now, I would still give this wine several more years to allow it to really reach its zenith. 2011-2040+. **94**.

#### **1978 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1978 Tondonia Gran Reserva is a very pretty, delicate and fully mature bottle of Rioja that offers up good complexity and perfume, albeit in a slightly fluid style. The bouquet is a lovely, understated mélange of raspberries, coffee, orange rind, cloves and soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, round and silky, with lovely spice, good length, and just a touch lacking in both grip and mid-palate depth to push it up into the outstanding category. But this is still a lovely bottle of Rioja with at least another decade's worth of life ahead of it. I find it infinitely more satisfying to drink than the inky and woody monsters that are coming out of Rioja today to loud and utterly incomprehensible critical acclaim. 2005-2015+? **88**.

#### **1976 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1976 Bosconia Gran Reserva had also just arrived in New York at the time I crossed paths with it, and I have to wonder if there is not even more brilliance here that is currently shadowed by its recent trans-Atlantic voyage. In any case, the wine showed very well indeed at the time of my tasting, as it offers up a superb nose of dried cherries, *sous bois*, orange zest, woodsmoke, herbs, soil tones and a lovely topnote of Rioja spiciness. On the palate the wine is medium-bodied, long, complex and quite ethereal, with lovely intensity of flavor, tangy acids and great length on the refined and very elegant finish. Lovely juice with years of life still in it. 2008-2020+. **92**.

#### **1973 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1973 Bosconia Gran Reserva is now fully into its apogee of maturity and is drinking with great complexity and charm. On the nose the wine offers up a perfumed and classy mélange of cherries, strawberries, nutmeg, nutskins, a delicate touch of fresh herbs and a complex base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and light on its feet, with lovely intensity of flavor, tangy acids, faded tannins and lovely length and grip on the bouncy and beautifully balanced finish. A lovely wine. 2008-2025. **92**.

#### **1973 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

After a pretty, but less the perfect bottle of the 1973 Tondonia Gran Reserva, I was happy to cross paths with a perfect bottle in the last few months. The bouquet is deep, pure and vibrant on the '73 Tondonia Gran Reserva, as it jumps from the glass in a

blaze of cinnamon, singed wood, coffee, strawberry, orange zest, a touch of white pepper and a lovely base of soil tones. On the palate the wine is medium-full, complex and tangy, with lovely elegance and focus, sound mid-palate depth, and excellent length and grip on the silky and complex finish. Just an excellent bottle in its prime of life. I clearly underrated this wine a touch the last time I tasted it. 2008-2020. **93.**

**1970 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

In most vintages I will often have a very slight preference for the Bosconia bottling over the Tondonia, but based on the recent bottles I have tasted of these two top 1970 López de Heredia reds, I have to give a slight nod to the Tondonia in this vintage. The 1970 Bosconia Gran Reserva is a very pretty, stylish and classic bottle of Bosconia that for whatever reason does not seem to have quite the same brilliant transparency to the soil of the Tondonia 1970 Gran Reserva. The Bosconia Gran Reserva is now fully mature, as it offers up a complex and very pure bouquet of cherries, blood orange, Rioja spice, a lovely base of soil tones, delicate autumnal notes and a touch of nutskin in the upper register. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and delicate, with lovely structure and focus, solid mid-palate depth and sneaky length on the complex and velvety finish. The '70 Tondonia has just a bit more grip and mid-palate mojo than this very lovely vintage of Bosconia. 2009-2020+? **92.**

**1970 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

*The 1970 Tondonia Gran Reserva is a brilliant bottle of wine in full bloom. The very transparent bouquet is deep, refined and stunning, as it offers up notes of cherries, raspberries, toasted chestnuts, woodsmoke, coffee, orange zest, spice and a distinct note of sea salt. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and tangy, with outstanding intensity of flavor, lovely smoky flavors, great acids, outstanding soil inflection and a very long, complex and bouncy finish. There remains just a touch of beautifully-integrated tannin on the backend here, which clearly indicates that this wine has many, many years still ahead of it. This is a beautiful bottle of classic, traditional Rioja, and with wines such as this, I find it utterly mystifying why so many bodega owners in the region would turn away from their traditions and begin to make such clumsy and dull modern wines. 2009-2030+. **94.***

**1968 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

1968 is a really lovely vintage for Rioja, without perhaps the added depth and dimension found in a vintage such as 1958, but with all of the aromatic and flavor complexity that Rioja is renowned for coupled to medium-full, silky and elegant structures. The most recent bottle I have tasted of the '68 Bosconia Gran Reserva is the finest I have tasted it to date, as it couples the suave profile of the '68 Rioja vintage today with the bounce, grip and tangy intensity of flavor of Bosconia at its best. The bouquet is a superb mélange of cherries, red plums, fresh nutmeg, soil tones, a nice touch of woodsmoke, nutskins and gentle autumnal overtones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and impressively sappy at the core, with melting tannins, bright acids and excellent length and grip on the peacock's tail of a finish. Superb juice. 2008-2025. **94+.**

**1968 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

*I cannot recall having crossed paths previously with the '68 Tondonia Gran Reserva, and given how beautifully this bottle showed, I do not intend to wait a long time until having the next bottle of this brilliant wine. The bouquet is deep, pure and perfumed, as it soars from the glass in a beautiful mélange of cherries, orange zest, cinnamon*

sticks, lovely soil tones, a touch of nutskin and a distinct topnote of rose petals. On the palate the wine is deep, full-bodied, complex and spicy, with a fine core, great length and grip and still a bit of tannin to resolve on the long and palate-staining finish. A great, great bottle of Rioja. 2008-2030+. 95.



**1964 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1964 Bosconia Gran Reserva does not possess quite the same haunting transparency as the magical 1968, which makes me think this was probably a slightly warmer vintage. The wine is still excellent by any stretch of the imagination, as it offers up a complex bouquet of red and black cherries, a bit of charred wood, cigar smoke, walnuts, plenty of soil and a delicate touch of herb tones in the upper register. On the palate the wine is fullish, round and complex, with a good core, impressive complexity and nice length and grip on the still slightly chewy finish. A bit more old-fashioned in profile than the surreal '68 Bosconia, but the '64 is certainly a terrific bottle as well. 2008-2020+. 93.

**1964 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1964 Tondonia is drinking beautifully, and though it has no doubt been fully mature for decades, it clearly still has a long way to go before it will show any signs of decline. The nose is deep, complex and beautifully perfumed, offering up notes of red plums, coconut, woodsmoke, a bit of pigeon, nutmeg and earth. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round and focused, with good depth in the mid-palate, melted tannins, and

*lovely acids on the long, suave finish. This is just a lovely bottle of mature Rioja. 2005-2025. 92.*

**1962 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

This is simply the regular bottling of Tondonia (neither Reserva or Gran Reserva), and yet the wine is drinking beautifully at thirty-three years of age. The color is a very deep and impressively ruby for its age, and the nose is a wonderfully pungent and mature blend of black cherries, woodsmoke, toasted nuts, licorice, dark chocolate, orange zest, cloves, damp forest floor. On the palate the wine is medium-full and just beginning to show imminent signs of decline, but with a well-rounded mid-palate, lovely layers, and a long, complex and bouncy finish that just betrays a hint of incipient oxidation as it closes. This wine drank beautifully over the forty-five minutes or so that we followed it, and though it lost just a tad of vigor over that time, it still has a fair bit of life ahead of it. Lovely old juice. 2005-2010+. 90.

**1954 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

The 1954 Bosconia Gran Reserva is at its absolute apogee and is drinking beautifully well. The bouquet is deep, complex and very refined in its mélange of raspberries, red currants, orange rind, nutskins, lovely spice tones and a fine base of Rioja soil. On the palate the wine is medium-full, round, focused and quite spicy in its personality, with lovely mid-palate depth, bright acids to keep the wine bouncy from attack to finish, and excellent length and grip on the complex backend. 1954 is a great vintage in Rioja, and the Bosconia Gran Reserva is a fittingly fine homage to the quality of the vintage. 2008-2025. 94.

**1947 Viña Tondonia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

After having had a bottle of the '47 Tondonia Gran Reserva that was undone by a bad cork, I was thrilled to taste a bottle in pristine condition sent directly from the estate by Maria José Lopez de Heredia, when she and Monica Nogues noticed that I did not have a tasting note on a representative bottle. The wine is brilliant and clearly one of the great vintages of Tondonia, as it offers up a complex and very pure nose raspberries, cherries, fresh almonds, nutmeg, spicy soil tones, dried coconut and a lovely topnote of orange zest. On the palate the wine is medium-full, deep and supremely elegant, with great intensity of flavor, magical elegance and complexity, no remaining tannins, but lovely acids and perfect focus and balance that will continue to carry this hauntingly complex and perfumed middleweight far into the future. Just a magical bottle of wine. 2009-2025. 96.

**1947 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

In contrast to the fading bottle of 1947 Tondonia, the 1947 Bosconia remains bright, lively and well-integrated at age sixty. The nose is deep and gloriously pure and vibrant, as it jumps from the glass in a blend of black cherries, vinesmoke, licorice, a touch of mint, tarry tones and dried, dark berries. On the palate the wine is full-bodied, pure and just a tad angular in an old-fashioned sense, with impressive mid-palate depth, lovely focus and still very good length and grip on the complex and almost chewy finish. I have not had the pleasure to taste the 1947 Bosconia with any frequency, so I have little basis to compare this bottle's showing with other examples, but I would guess that this particular bottle was in very good shape, and the slightly intrusive showing of some of the structural elements of the wine is simply the style of the wine in 1947. But make no

mistake, this is a wine with which I wish I had a great wealth of tasting experience, as it is outstanding. In fact, I may be underrating it a tad. 2007-2025+. **92+?**

### **1942 Viña Bosconia Rioja Gran Reserva- López de Heredia**

1942 is a great Rioja vintage, and I am sure that there are brilliant bottles of the '42 Bosconia out there, but alas, our bottle was a bit disappointing. The cork was seemingly sound, but it had not done its job perfectly, and the wine was just a touch oxidative. Underneath, one can easily see that this is a great wine, as it offers up notes of woodsmoke, damp earth, coffee, woodsmoke, Rioja spices and complex, almost salty soil tones. Add a dollop of old, fresh Bosconia fruit and this would be great. On the palate the wine is really deep, long and shapely for its sixty-seven years of age, with good length and sound structure. Catch a good cork with the '42 Bosconia and one will no doubt be in heaven.

### **1920 Rioja- López de Heredia**

The 1920 predates the Bosconia and Tondonia cuvées at López de Heredia, and I am unaware of whether or not there were Reserva and Gran Reserva bottlings at this time at the bodega. One has to assume that this was the precursor of the Bosconia cuvée, as it was in a Burgundian shaped bottle, and was probably sold at this time as a “Rioja Cepa Borgogna” bottling. I find it amazing that I have tasted this beautiful wine on two occasions in the last five years, given how few bottles of 1920 must still be extant. The first bottle of this wine that I tasted was in 2001, and I have to believe that the wine had been shipped recently before tasting, as the second bottle tasted in late 2004 was significantly brighter and more vigorous. The bouquet on the most recent bottle is magnificent, as it soars from the glass in a mélange of black cherries, singed tobacco, summer truffles, cocoa powder, walnuts, nutmeg, plenty of Rioja spice and an exotic topnote of toasted coconut. On the palate the wine is fullish, deep and amazing vigorous for an eighty-four year old wine, with excellent mid-palate depth, and simply superb length and grip on the complex finish. This wine started out as a great, old black fruity wine and then blossomed with all of the exotic spice of a much younger and profound Rioja. Amazingly, the 1920 López de Heredia has years of life still ahead of it. Okay tell me again, what exactly was broken than needed fixing? 2004-2020+? **98.**