

SPAIN

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changed everything: the economy, construction in the area, even immigration, as new people came to work the vines. Even tourism is growing now."

The Hostal Sport in Falset is proof of that. Though basic, it offers a level of modern comfort that's new to the region. Its restaurant is a gathering place for Priorat's winemakers, and in February I lunched there with Baste, René Barbier Jr. and Sara Pérez, daughter of José Luis Pérez, another of the pioneers. Along with friends, the three winemakers are engaged in a multitude of overlapping projects, exploring Priorat's possibilities. They are enjoying its success; now they want to find its soul.

"My father brought the family here from Barcelona when I was 9," Pérez recounts. "I was dying of boredom. I hated wine and I vowed to leave. But one day my tastes changed. I looked around and realized this was not only my home, it was the most exciting place I could imagine to work."

Pérez makes wine at Clos Martinet, which her father founded in 1992, at Cims de Porrera, in conjunction with a local cooperative, and with Los Ocho, a group of eight young friends. She also produces Venus and Eneas, muscular red blends from the

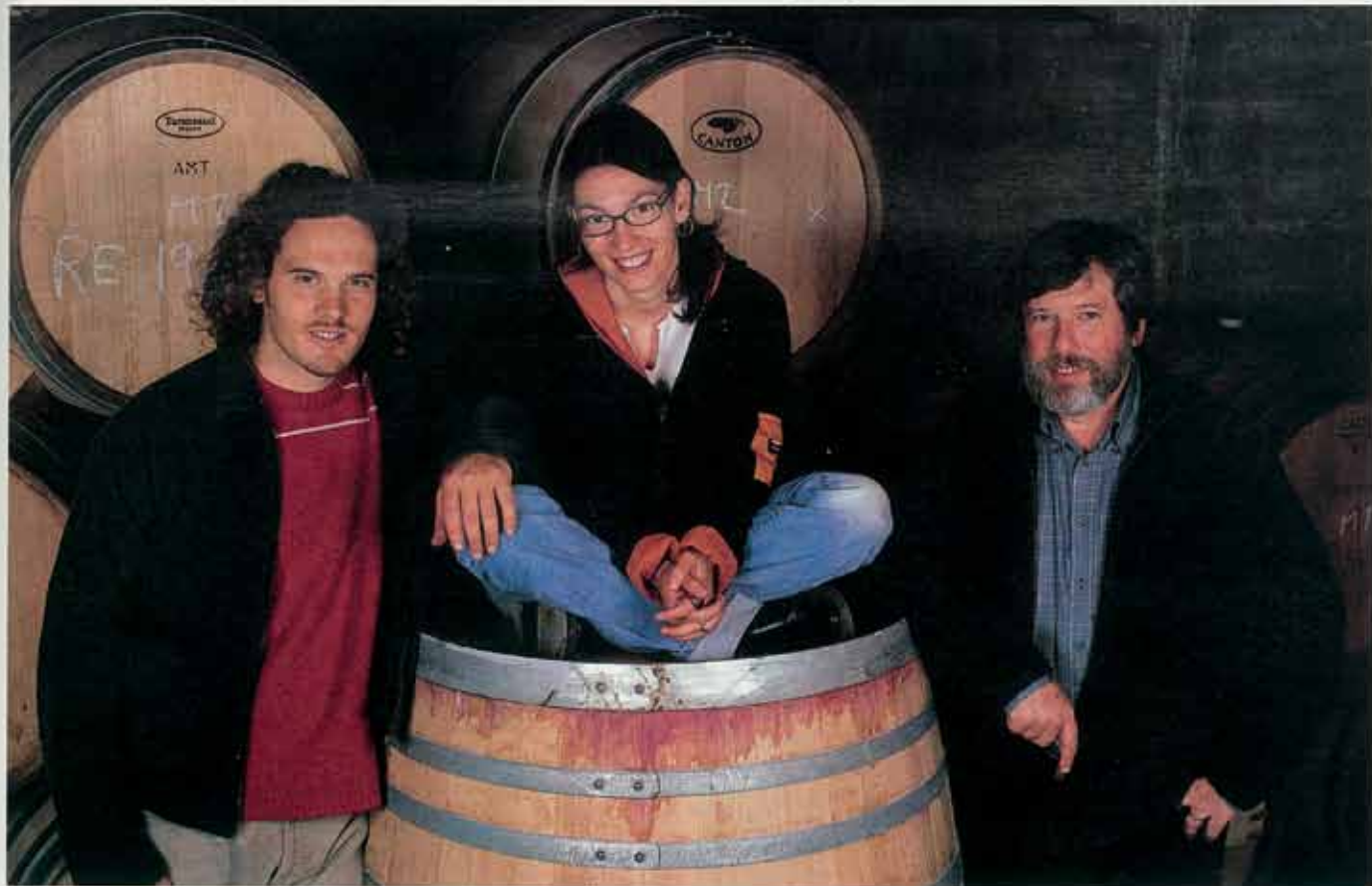
Montsant region where Laurona is based. She's keenly attuned to the history embedded in the abandoned vineyard terraces that mark Priorat's steep hills, and in the character of the old men whose ancient vineyards supply the grapes for Cims de Porrera.

Pérez is jubilant about Priorat's progress, noting that while there may have been as many as 15,000 acres of vineyards planted pre-*phylloxera*, in 1990 there were fewer than 2,000 acres, along with only 10 bodegas. Now there are 42 bodegas working nearly 5,000 acres of vines. But at the same time she fears for the region's character.

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Pérez is working primarily with old-vine *Cariñena*, especially at Cims de Porrera. The grape was widely planted in Priorat after *phylloxera*, because it was easy to cultivate and highly productive. Though it has a reputation for making simple, rustic reds, she finds that in this *terroir*, with yields limited by the advanced age of the vines, *Cariñena* can make structured, richly fruity wines. But while her dedication to this traditional variety is sin-

René Barbier (far right) pioneered Priorat. Now his son, René Jr., and Sara Pérez are pushing the region even farther forward.



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