

## Priorat

A quarter-century ago, the Priorat, located about 90 miles southwest of Barcelona in Tarragona province, was a collection of dilapidated Roman terraces that had seen centuries of neglect.

In 1989, however, a group of pioneering winemakers that included René Barbier, Alvaro Palacios, Daphne Glorian, Carles Pastrana and Josep Lluís Pérez—all still active in the region—joined to produce a single high-quality wine from grapes harvested near the town of Gratallops.

Today, you can no longer count the region's vineyards and wineries on your fingers, thanks to the 5,000-plus acres of vineyards now spread throughout this rugged, hilly region. To say the Priorat has boomed is an understatement. There's more wine coming from one of Spain's most blessed terroirs than ever before.

What makes the Priorat unique from the rest of Spain and much of the world is that its century-old vineyards, meticulously reclaimed by the aforementioned "Gang of Five" and others, are planted with 360 degrees of exposure.

Some portions of the Priorat are influenced entirely by the nearby Mediterranean Sea, with humidity and warm nights factoring into the overall terroir. Other micro-zones pick up drier continental influences, and thus are cooler in the spring and fall, but warmer during the summer.

The Priorat is one of Spain's hilliest regions, with vineyard elevations ranging from several hundred feet above sea level to over 2,000 feet. Winemakers can opt to make traditionally powerful wines from lower *costers* (hillsides planted with bush vines), or experiment with lighter, potentially more elegant raw materials taken from cooler vineyards at higher elevations.

Regardless of exposure or elevation, there's an overriding character to Priorat wines, which are largely based on old-vines Garnacha, Carignan and small amounts of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah.

These are predominantly big, dark, powerful wines with minerally depth derived from the region's decomposed slate soils, known as *llicorella*. Alcohol levels usually exceed 15% abv, with flavors revolving around ripe black fruits, oak framing and a

potent core of minerality.

In general, Priorat wines are some of Spain's most expensive offerings. This reflects Priorat's rise in reputation and popularity, but also the high cost in farming steep hillsides. Despite increased plantings over

the past couple of decades, the region's miserly old vines produce the best wines, but in equally miserly quantities.

A visit to the Priorat reveals a region caught between rural traditions and the 21st century. For every modern, architecturally

impressive bodega like that of Alvaro Palacios or Ferrer Bobet, there's someone making several hundred cases of wine out of a former grain mill, municipal building or monastery.

Some of these arriviste wines are over-ripe, out of shape and ponderous. However,

when you come across a great Priorat blend, the combination of complexity, depth, power, fine oak, minerality and overall balance can knock you out.

"Priorat wines are powerful, but they can also be elegant and complex," says Ricard

**95 Clos Mogador 2012.** This Garnacha- and Carignan-led blend from the village of Gratallops is highly aromatic and focused in the mouth, with strong tannins. Flavors of buttery oak, schist, blackberry and cassis culminate with mocha, vanilla and a sense of greatness. Best from 2017–2025. Europvin USA. **Editors' Choice.** abv: 15.5% **Price:** \$90

**94 Mas d'en Gil 2009 Clos Fontà.** Cedar, maple, blackberry and schist aromas precede a tannic, firm, but not overpowering palate, with flavors of blackberry, cassis, fig and vanilla. This Garnacha-Carignan blend will be best from 2017–2024. Classical Wines. **Editors' Choice.** abv: 15% **Price:** \$98

**93 Vall Llach 2012 Porrera Vi de Vila.** Mildly raisiny on the nose, this smells of boysenberry and crème de cassis. Chewy, tannic and heavy in its youth, this Carignan-based offering from vineyards near the town of Porrera yields blackberry, cassis and prune flavors, with a toasty, chocolaty, oak-heavy finish. Best from 2016–2021. Folio Fine Wine Partners. abv: 15.5% **Price:** \$65

**92 Genium Celler 2009 Costers Vi de Guarda.** This is a Carignan-led big boy that's layered and heady, with fiery aromas of cinnamon, baking spices, schist and red-berry fruits that include licorice. Deep, dark plum and berry flavors are long on the finish, with notes of leather and wild herbs. Best from 2017–2025. Grapes of Spain. **Cellar Selection.** abv: 15.5% **Price:** \$70

**91 Scala Dei 2010 Cartoixa.** This is ripe and a bit oaky and creamy up front, with schisty berry scents. It's controlled on the palate, with cherry, currant, plum, coconut and marzipan flavors. An oaky, rooty finish comes with a deep berry aftertaste. Drink this Garnacha-led wine through 2021. Aveniù Brands, Inc. abv: 15% **Price:** \$100

**90 Alvaro Palacios 2012 Les Terrasses.** Cherry, cassis and plum aromas are forward and aggressive. In the mouth, this blend of old-vines Garnacha, Carignan and Cabernet Sauvignon shows generous fruit supported by strong tannins. Minerally flavors of plum and berry finish long. Drink through 2017. Rare Wine Co. abv: 14.5% **Price:** \$40





lows the wine a chance to age for a couple of years. Tri-Vin Imports. —R.V.  
abv: 13% Price: \$12

## SPAIN

### RED WINES

#### PRIORAT

**95** **Clos Mogador 2012 Priorat.** With its patented blend of ripe plum and berry aromas matched against notes of wood smoke, herbs and leather, this is ripped and focused in the mouth, with strong but manageable tannins. Flavors of buttery oak, schist, blackberry and cassis culminate with mocha, vanilla and an overall sense of greatness. Drink from 2017 through 2025. Europvin USA. *Editors' Choice.* —M.S.  
abv: 15.5% Price: \$90

**94** **Clos Figueras 2010 Clos Figueras (Priorat).** Reedy cherry and berry aromas are smoky and schisty, with a high level of purity and complexity. This wine is tannic but in great shape, with lockdown structure. Schisty plum, cassis, black cherry and cocoa flavors finish firm and mildly peppery tasting, with oodles of class and aging potential. Drink through 2022. Europvin USA. *Editors' Choice.* —M.S.  
abv: 14.5% Price: \$85

**94** **Mas d'en Gil 2009 Clos Fontà (Priorat).** Gorgeous from head to toe, this opens with cedar, maple, blackberry and the essence of schisty minerality. On the palate, it's tannic and firm but not overpowering. Flavors of blackberry, cassis, fig and vanilla finish with chocolaty notes and more than enough leftover berry fruit. Hold until 2017, then drink through 2024. Classical Wines. *Editors' Choice.* —M.S.  
abv: 15% Price: \$98

**94** **Vall Llach 2012 Mas de la Rosa (Priorat).** Licorice, lemon peel, nutmeg, black cherry, requisite schist and smoke aromas set up a juicy, full-bodied, tannic palate with blackberry, mocha, cassis and mild herbal flavors. Blackened toast, licorice and black-fruit flavors are draped all over a smooth, controlled finish. Best from 2016 through 2023. Folio Fine Wine Partners. *Cellar Selection.* —M.S.  
abv: 15.5% Price: \$165

**94** **Vall Llach 2010 Mas de la Rosa (Priorat).** Lovely licorice, cherry, kirsch and malty aromas grace the bouquet on this single-vineyard Priorat that's full, lush, pure and moderately tannic. Blackberry, black cherry, cassis and chocolate are the key flavors, while a chewy, tannic, lightly toasted finish introduces touches of prune and raisin. Drink through 2022. Folio Fine Wine Partners. *Editors' Choice.* —M.S.  
abv: 15.5% Price: \$165

**93** **Clos Mogador 2011 Priorat.** Plum, blackberry and toasty aromas are pure, heady and classy. Immediately this wine shows itself to be powerful: The tannins are grating and the overall outlook is far from shy. Toasty, dark flavors of black fruits, spice and licorice end spicy and blackened, with hard-ripping tannins. Best from 2016 through 2026. Europvin USA. *Cellar Selection.* —M.S.  
abv: 15.5% Price: \$95

**93** **Genium Celler 2009 Poboleda Vi de la Villa (Priorat).** This village-designated Priorat is dry, spicy and fresh on the nose, with notes of mountain herbs as well as lively raspberry, plum and currant. It feels wide and packed with power and purity. Roasted berry, oak spice, earth notes and rooty sweetness define the flavor profile on this long-finishing wine with hard tannins and strong aging potential. Best from 2017 through 2024; only 100 cases made. Grapes of Spain. *Cellar Selection.* —M.S.  
abv: 15.5% Price: \$46

**93** **Vall Llach 2012 Porrera Vi de Vila (Priorat).** Ripe, lush and a touch raisiny on the nose, this smells like boysenberry pie and crème de cassis liqueur. Chewy, tannic and a bit heavy in this youthful state, this offering from vineyards in the town of Porrera (Vall Llach's home) delivers blackberry, cassis and prune flavors along with a toasty, chocolaty, oak-heavy finish. Best from 2016 through 2021. Folio Fine Wine Partners. —M.S.  
abv: 15.5% Price: \$65

**92** **Francesc Sanchez Bas 2007 Montgarnatx (Priorat).** Cola, rooty notes, creamy oak and a smoke scent grace dry berry aromas. This has a grapy, padded yet tannic mouthfeel and a black-fruit potpourri of flavors that's big on black currant. On the finish, this aged but vital wine is steady like cruise control. Drink through 2022. Winebow. —M.S.  
abv: 14% Price: \$45

**92** **Genium Celler 2009 Costers Vi De Guarda (Priorat).** Smoky, fiery initial aromas of cinnamon, baking spices, schist and red-berry fruits echo with licorice and minerality. This is a big boy with 15.5% abv and a layered, rich, heady palate. Deep, dark, lusty plum and blackberry flavors run long on the finish, with notes of leather and wild herbs. Drink from 2017 through 2025. Grapes of Spain. *Cellar Selection.* —M.S.  
abv: 15.5% Price: \$70

**92** **Mas La Mola 2009 Priorat.** This shows the floral, red-fruit side of Priorato. Violet, berry and plum aromas are schisty and almost delicate. A restrained but tannic palate features cherry compote, cassis and mild toast flavors. On the finish, this mellows out and hums smoothly. Drink through 2020. Parador Selections, LLC. —M.S.  
abv: 14.5% Price: \$44