

FINE WINE
EDITIONS



THE FINEST WINES OF
RIOJA
AND NORTHWEST SPAIN

A Regional Guide to the Best Producers and Their Wines

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Compañía Bodeguera de Valenciso

It is seldom a good idea to play acronyms with producers' names in order to christen a business, because the results—convenient though they may seem—are more often than not unpleasant to the ear. But there are exceptions—like Valenciso, a winemaking company with a euphonic and resounding name deriving from the surnames of its founding partners, Luis Valentín and Carmen Enciso. Both partners had worked together for 25 years when, in 1998, they finally decided to embark on a joint venture of their own, leaving behind brilliant careers at Bodegas Palacio, in Laguardia, just months after its owner, Jean Gervais, sold it to a large Spanish business. Carmen and Luis speak marvels of Gervais. “He taught us a great deal of what we know, in every field,” they say.

“We seek wines with aromatic volume, wines that shine not out of weight but perfume. Many call this a ‘feminine’ wine. Whatever!”—Luis Valentín

At the beginning it was just the two of them on their own, 100 oak barrels in a rented warehouse, and enough grapes (all bought) for the 24,000 bottles of the inaugural 1998 vintage. Of that Valenciso Reserva 1998 and the following '99, we were able to sample a few bottles labelled Crianza, which were exceptionally released a few months before the legal aging period required to deserve the reserva label. Understandably, a venture starting in 1998 may have lacked the financial resources to wait until 2002 before releasing its reserva and taking the revenue resulting from the first sale. But ever since the 2000 vintage the wine has always been bottled as Reserva.

Thanks to the reasonable success enjoyed by the house today, six people are working there full time, plus several others hired for specific seasonal

work (pruning, harvesting, and so on). It is indeed a small company but also certainly one of those that contribute to the weaving of a solid business tissue in any country.

The most ambitious step in the meantime has been the building of their own cellar facilities in Ollauri. This was carried out one step at a time, avoiding excessive debt. In 2002, the grounds were purchased, and the works started one year later, not to be finished until 2008—though the facilities were ready for the 2007 vintage. The building has been designed for a production of 150,000 bottles per year, allowing for future growth.

Valenciso-controlled vines are almost 100 per cent Tempranillo, averaging 27 years of age, some head-pruned and some on trellises with double cordon, all hand-harvested. The one exception is a small vineyard planted to white grapes (two thirds Viura and one third Garnacha Blanca). Valenciso grapes come from Briones, Ollauri, Rodezno, Haro, and Villalba (all of them in Rioja Alta), divided in 11 plots ruled by a strict work protocol that follows the French guidelines for *viticulture raisonnée*, with yield limits of 5,000kg/ha.

Valenciso Reserva is the only red produced yearly. The concept roughly corresponds with what the wine confirms in the glass. In the words of Luis Valentín: “We are not classicists; we prize fruit above oak, and we use French, not American, oak barrels. We are not radically modern, either: we are not after deeply coloured or extracted wines. We seek wines with aromatic volume, wines that shine not out of weight but perfume. Many call this a ‘feminine’ wine. Whatever!”

The different plots are vinified separately, after destemming and no pressing. Extraction is by traditional pumping, without breaking or submerging the cap. Maceration periods depend on volume and vintage characteristics and range from under 20 days to well over 30. After wild malo, the wine goes into barrels—generally in May/June.



Above: The talented team of Luis Valentin and Carmen Enciso, successfully realizing their ideal of wines neither classic nor modern

The Valenciso team has broad experience in French oak aging, dating back to 1986, and it certainly shows in the fine structure of their wines. Every third is renewed yearly, so each barrel ages three vintages, for an average of 14 months. Again, the French influence shows in the subsequent transfer of wines to cement vats for blending and settling for about a year prior to bottling unfined.

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Valenciso [V]

With quality and consistency in mind, vintage variation notwithstanding, the only vintage not released under the brand name Valenciso since 1998 has been 2003. From our perspective, the goal is being satisfactorily

achieved, though we can wholeheartedly recommend the excellent **Valenciso Reserva 2004★**, a wine with a marked red-berry character, good typicity and length, pleasant balance between freshness and concentration, and an overall impression of depth. **Valenciso Blanco** is an austere, nicely focused wine of small production (roughly 1,000 bottles). Fermented and briefly aged in Caucasian oak barrels, it welcomes prolonged aeration during its first years of life.

Compañía Bodeguera de Valenciso

Area under vine: 17ha (42 acres)
Average production: 100,000 bottles
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Ten Best Values in Rioja

Aldonia

Allende Tinto ★

Artadi Viñas de Gain Tinto

Luberri Maceración Carbónica

Muga Crianza

Sierra Cantabria Crianza

Valenciso

Viña Alberdi

Viña Real Reserva

Viña Tondonia Reserva Blanco