

Meet Pedro Guimaro.

He's the best producer in Ribeira Sacra, a radically steep river valley appellation in central Galicia. His wines are alive. Wild and free, pure expressions of the countryside in which they are grown.



Adegas Guimaro

Steep? As Pedro says, "this isn't a Valley: it's a Canyon!"

Owning 9 hectares, and controlling 14 more from nearly 30 old subsistence growers, Pedro Perez has run the family business since 2000 (her retired from legal practice to take over the family business). Their holdings are south-facing (50-70 degree) slopes above the Rio Sil, between the towns of Amandi and Doade in the Amandi sub-zone. Between these towns, the bodega itself is in the hamlet of Brosmos. Pedro's holdings are planted at around 4500 vines/hectare and yield about half a litre of wine per vine. The plots are tiny, planted between 200 metres to 550 metres altitude. New plots planted into the dense stone (there's no soil until they create it) average about 4-5 vines per day per worker. All viticulture is organic, but Pedro shies away from (as he sees it) the religiosity of B-D.

The four single vineyards (including Ladredo which Pedro co-makes with Dirk Niepoort) range from west to east in this order:

Ladredo (east facing or nacimiento - to the rising sun and also the ripping easterly winds that tear down the river from the continental hinterland)

Cappelinos (95 years old vineyard faces south-east towards Pombeiras across a small valley)

Pombeiras (70 year old granite and quartz over pizarra, south-west or poniente – to the setting sun)

Finca Meixeman (has a both a slate facing nacimiento and a granite-iron poniente face)

Guimaro is Gallego for 'non-conformist'. Well, quel surprise, eh? Originally, this tag came from their refusal to pay tithes to the count.

Guimaro Joven Godello 2012

From 20 parcels of old vines, inter-planted with the Mencia, Pedro gets just 5 tonnes of Godello (includes about 20% Treixadura). This yields just 3000 bottles of Joven Blanco and another 900 litres which become 1200 bottles of Barrica (below). The four barrels for Barrica are filled and whatever is left becomes the stainless steel made Joven. Godello in Ribeira Sacra is finer and more minerally than wines from warmer climes up the river in Valdeorras and el Bierzo.

Lovely green grassy herbs over lemon drop and verbena, citrusy with grapefruit and lime. Palate has nice persistence with apple-pear fruit drawn out on long ripe acidity. Not too round, a nice style with very good line. A delicious crisp and easy drinking medium bodied wine.



Guimaro Godello Barrica 2012

(barrel tasting May 2013) After 6 months resting unstirred on lees in 6 year old barricas, no malo. *A rich and powerful wine, with golden fruit well balanced by earth and a rippling herb snap finish. Has a savoury nose of mealy lees and soft vanilla with peach skin and almond blossom. The palate is textural with savoury almond meal and viscous orchard fruit. There is an underlying cool minerality giving line and length and moderate acid. Old oak, musk, anise and fennel add to the sweet-savoury interplay.*

Guimaro Mencia Joven 2012

Fermented separately by soil type then blended. The Tinto Joven is raised half in foudre and half in tank; a small part of the cuvée is whole-cluster fermented. No oak ageing, native yeast fermentation and little filtering giving freshness and purity.

(on arrival, Melbourne July 2013) a blend of granite, slate and sand soils from many parcels (some yielding as little as 200kg). All stainless steel handling after 6 day cold maceration. 20-30 day spontaneous fermentation, 6 months in tank on lees, un-filtered, cold stabilised, egg white fined. *Fresh and wild smelling with forest strawberry, lightly smoked blackberry canes and gently pressed wild cherry juice in mountain air. The palate has just enough glycerol to get the thing going, and is in a spare, foresty, scrubby register. Sere and beautiful with a light skin-grip frame, it's a pure country wine – light, earthy and clear. It's proud but not showy, and very real.*

(just bottled, Brosmos May 2013)

Bottled 3 weeks and showing more of its vegetal side, with red fruit tea, pomegranate, a shower of roses and a snip of caney tannins.

(awaiting bottle, Brosmos May 2013)

Strikingly pure wild cherry, the smell of rock, beets, little blue flowers and a hint of blood.

(Bree tasting pre-bottling at winery in February 2013)

Aromatic raspberry rose petal, pomegranate fruit with an incredibly slaty & minerally palate length. Fresh acid and firm granite minerality gives a structure akin to Morgon cru Beaujolais on the palate. Black cherry pip and rhubarb, a powerful core of fruit gives roundness and the mid palate shows quartz to the finish. The Joven blend incorporates equally all aspects & gives round raspberry fruit with sap & spice notes almost of white pepper.

Guimaro Mencia Joven 2011

Fruit of the forest (barberry, wild strawberry and glace cherry) meet violets over a graphitic earthiness. The palate has the heady wandering like the smell of a warm day under a peppertree (pepper more as perfume than spice). The bright juicy palate has nice spice through earthy, gamey fruit with a subtle savoury texture. Fresh, softening acidity giving a really elegant and gentle line from entry to a long, sappy all-spice and mineral finish.

Guimaro-Niepoort 'Ladredo' Mencia 2012

(barrel tasting May 2013) 80% whole bunch fermented in small foudre for 60 days; malo and lees ageing in foudre, then 12 months ageing in old French barrique.

Floral with lots of 'cowpat' gaminess. Contains about 15% Garnacha Tintorera.

Guimaro-Niepoort 'Ladredo' Mencia 2011

(Tasted from tank May 2013 - assembled, ready for bottling in a week)

Cherry, wild rose, rosehips and bitter herb nose. Palate has a lovely fresh cast, ashy tannins clearly reflect the slate, florals, nice sense of chew with outstanding mouthfeel and balance.



Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2012

(barrel tasting May 2013) Fermented in large 20yo 'Cuba' French oak. 10% stems, aged 10 months 500l French to date. 2010 was the first vintage of Pombeiras.

Mineral fresh lift on nose, with ink, game, blood, rose petal and field florals. Palate has great volume, savoury with black pepper-spiced tannins.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2011

(10 weeks in bottle; just 600 bottles made)

Smells like an old heavy red velvet curtain at your grandmother's and piquillo pepper caponata with lots of exotic spice – cardamom, anise, peppercorn, pimiento. Liqueurous fruit is beautifully textured with fabulous herbaceous tannins working slowly along the boysenberry and spice palate.

It's vibrant, energetic, vivid, alive.

Guimaro 'Pombeiras' Single Vineyard Mencia 2010

Pombeiras is the coolest climate single vineyard plot on both slate and granite. Whole bunchy aromatics of sap, pepper and incense rise from the glass. The palate has a purity of red cherry and cranberry fruit with violets and a silky powerful mid-palate core. There are aromas of mineral earth, truffle and forest floor. The wine keeps evolving every time you look into the glass. Amazingly ethereal and incredibly sexy.

Guimaro 'Cappelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2012

(barrel tasting May 2013) Aged in 225 and 500 litre old wood. First vintage was 2002.

It's very well composed already with cool blue fruits over cold rock, a lovely touch of bloodiness and nice ferrous earthy undertone.

Guimaro 'Cappelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2011

This vineyard is a field blend with a little Caiño and Mouratón Negrada. Just 4 barriques made.

Blueberry skinsy fruit, with floral lift, barnyard and pimiento over cold dark rock and the lovely smell of soft ripe fruit tannin from old vines, gently extracted. Wonderfully composed, it's bloody and dense with glorious dark fruit and inherent 'cut' from full, long vegetal tannins yielding to a mouthfeel of stones, stones and more stones as the palate wanders off, long and fine.

Guimaro 'Cappelinos' Single Vineyard Mencia 2010

Fleshy, gamey meat cut with vegetal blackberry canes, glyceric cherry sliced through with minerality. Long, caponata-fleshy slick, slinky and supple tannin palate is soft and leads to a very graceful exit. The vegetality of 2010 compares nicely with the ripeness of 2011. It's a smoky, coolly mineral reflection of place.

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2012

(barrel tasting May 2013, tank 1 of 3 prior to assemblage)

Spicy red fruits, pretty strawberry flowers wild raspberries and lots of cold rock. Lighter and fresher than Cappelinos and Pombeiras, with pomegranate juice nicely gripped in a delicate tannin frame.

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2011

Very dark nose & powerful with sweet fruit & vanilla, spicy hung meat, tight fine-grained tannins, perfumed with dark & powerful broody fruit.

Guimaro 'Finca Meixeman' Single Vineyard Mencia 2010

Spicy black lozenge fruit with a lift of shiso, field herb and autumn vine leaves. Palate mingles licorice, leathery black cherry and sweet raspberry with slatey-mineral rock, the meaty and the vegetal in a long, fine structure. Holding its cards close to the chest at this stage.





D.O. RIBEIRA SACRA

Heroic viticulture, heedless winemaking).

North-west of Ourense in central Galicia, Ribeira Sacra centres around the ancient mountain fortress town of Monforte de Lemos. Defined by two significant rivers, the Miño and the Sil, Ribeira Sacra pretty much marks the beginning of red wine country in Spain. Here the granite soils of coastal Galicia starts to merge with the continental schist found more in Valdeorras and Bierzo. While there is some red west and south in Ribeiro, Monterrei and Rias Baixas, Ribeira Sacra is where continental climatic factors allow red to take over from white.

Breath-takenly beautiful, featuring crazy-steep deep slopes with grades up to 85 degrees. Endless steps traverse the steep terraces from ridge-top to valley floor – a differential of hundreds of metres. It is no joke to call viticulture here ‘heroic’.

Sadly, Ribeira Sacra is currently a little too pleased with being able to bang on about ‘heroic viticulture’ and too little critical attention is going into whether they make delicious wine or not. On the back of some puff from Parker, Ribeira Sacra is pretty hot right now in the US - for no good reason. There’s a host of bad, bad wood in this hood. Short dunk ‘robles’ wines abound. Shitty compound glue corks are in everything. If your Joven ain’t wooded to all sorts of clunkiness, your Barrica is surely clobbered. And don’t even think about ordering it if it’s hubristically dressed up as ‘Vino del Autor’! Right now, there is very little Ribeira Sacra wine worthy of recommendation.

But, then, there is Pedro Guimaro ...

That’s not even his real name. Pedro Perez, owner-maker at Guimaro in Amandi is responsible for deft, heart-breakingly beautiful wines that justify this D.O. all by themselves. Usually, people just call him Pedro Guimaro.

Geography, D.O rules and all that ...

D.O. Ribeira Sacra was commenced in 1996, after the rupture of phylloxera, followed by the long bad years of bulk wine production ... and is now just coming back to itself and attempting to discover its quality potential. In that, these are very early days, it must be said, but the new D.O. now covers 1200 hectares with 3,000 growers and nearly a hundred bodegas in production. The Ribeira Sacra ‘Region’ is listed at 2500 hectares, but only half of this is actually controlled by the CRDO. Production is 85% Mencia and Tinto overall accounts for about 95% of the crop.



Soils are acidic granite and slate with traces of iron, mica and quartz. There's a little clay in some vineyards down near river level. Almost all vineyards are steep terraces, and impossible to mechanise, save for winches to haul baskets of grapes up the forbiddingly steep slopes. See the photo of Pedro with the Cesto (35kg grape basket) on his shoulder at the top of this document? Until recently, this is how they would get the grapes up from the river to the bodega – in Guimaro's case, a 10km hike ... workers would make one trip in the morning and another in the afternoon.

The climate varies from quite Atlantic in the west (Chantadi) to relatively Continental in the east (Ribeiras do Sil). Depending on the sub-region, rainfall is from as little as 600mm near the Rio Sil, up to 850mm by the Miño. Autumn is cool, after a long and relatively warm Galician summer.

There are 5 subregions:

- Amandi, just south of Monforte de Lemos, above the Sil and home to Guimaro, a mix of granitic and schist soils on steep south-facing terraces
- Quiroga-Bebei, with north-facing slopes across the Sil from Amandi is the D.O.'s southern boundary
- Ribeiras do Sil in the east abuts Valdeorras (across the river from Telmo's Gaba vineyards), and thus have more schist in the mix with granite soils
- Chantada, is the western boundary of the D.O. on the left bank of the Miño as it runs south towards Ribeiro and ultimately becomes the Spanish-Portuguese border
- Ribeiras de Miño, is on the right bank opposite Chantada, north-west of Monforte de Lemos

There are two levels of appellation in Ribeira Sacra.

Wines labelled Ribeira Sacra Summum are required to be a minimum of 85% preferred varieties and 60% minimum Mencia. To be labelled varietally, eg as a Mencia, it must be at least 85% Mencia.

The lesser category of Ribeira Sacra need only be 70% preferred varieties.

Yields are limited to 9.5 tonnes/hectare for red and 12 t/ha for whites.

Preferred varieties are:

Red: Mencia, Brancellao, Merenzao, Sousón, Caiño Tinto and Tempranillo.

Whites: Godello, Albariño, Treixadura, Torrontés, Dona Branca and Loureira.

There are also 'authorised' (but not preferred) red varieties: Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouchet) and Mouratón.

There is only one qualitative appellation: 'Barrica' indicates ageing in 500 litre oak or smaller for at least 6 months in case of reds and 3 months for whites. It's an entirely meaningless appellation.

