



Arizcuren is unique on many fronts, but immediately notable is that it's the most urban winery there is in the entire region of Rioja, based in the center of Logroño, a city of 150,000 people.

There are others wineries located within the core of various villages and there's the enormous Franco Españoles which sits just on the other side of the Ebro River from Logroño's center, churning out four million bottles a year. But there is nothing like Arizcuren, narrowly wedged into Calle Santa Isabel just around the corner from a Lidl supermarket. The location has not discouraged owner, Javier Arizcuren as he manages to coax around 30,000 bottles a year out of the space. That may seem like a lot of wine, but in Riojan terms, it is admittedly a micro operation.

Every visit I've had to the winery makes me think that it will be the last as I'm convinced there's no way they can continue in such a small space. But instead of throwing in the towel and moving out to place with more breathing room, Javier seems to be acquiring other locales along the street such as an extra parking space and another building to store bottles. The upshot of this is that he has a nice tasting space at the back now, which wasn't there the last time I visited.

An architect by training and trade, Javier also has his architecture office in the same building as the winery. He says it gives him the advantage of "Being able to control everything in one spot." It wasn't always like this however as he's not from Logroño and found himself based there as it was his wife's hometown.

Javier's family is originally from the village of Quel in the far east of Rioja and looks like a filming location for someone in need of an alien planet given how starkly different it is from the rest of Rioja. But in the hills just to the south of the village is where all of their grapes come from. While currently known as "Rioja Oriental", Javier, as well as myself still prefer the original "Rioja Baja". The irony in being 'lower' Rioja of course is that best vineyards in the region are

actually some of the highest that exist. This location is also a definitive point wherein Rioja has stopped being Atlantic and is most-definitely Mediterranean.

There is a great deal of Grenache in Rioja Oriental which is noteworthy in an of itself. In fact, it used to be the dominant grape prior to Tempranillo taking over due to the latter providing more consistent levels of production.

While switching to Tempranillo solved production levels, it made for an overall error that's just been getting worse due to Climate Change and it's one that producers such as Arizcuren and Palacios Remondo have been working to rectify for the last few years.

You see, there's this view that as Tempranillo is from Spain, this means it's a "hot weather" grape. While it does considerably better in warmer climates than say, Pinot Noir, it's much happier when doused by a touch of the Atlanticas seen in Rioja Alta and Alavesa. As soon as you start heading east from Logroño, Tempranillo gets steadily less interesting. Once you reach the Mediterranean shores of Catalunya and Valencia, it's downright awful as the heat and lack of water do it no favors. I can only assume that everyone planting Tempranillo in Texas Hill Country will realize this at some point as well.

So beyond the urban winery and the far-east vineyards aspect to Arizcuren, what really sets the wines apart is just how Grenache and Carignan are such key components of the wines. The wine, Barranco del Prado is almost all Grenache and is definitely the better for it. Finca el Foro is 90% Grenache and Carignan. These are both excellent wines that showcase the single vineyards which Javier has from his family or has bought during the years.

Even his blended, Monte Gatún Tinto is an excellent wine, but again, the blend is led by Grenache and Carignan. Tempranillo is merely a backup singer in this ensemble and honestly, I feel it's overshadowed by Graciano, which is another variety that's showing well in Rioja when allowed to go solo.

Thus, for anyone who is 100% sure that they, 'know' Rioja, I highly recommend having a look the growing group of wines that proudly showcase what's coming out of the eastern reaches of Rioja. They represent a very different side of Spain's famous wine region which is a mix of Riojan classiness and Mediterranean wildness.

2023 Arizcuren • Barranco del Prado

97_{/100}

Spiced red cherry with a very zesty note of orange peel and lively pomegranate, softly chocolate-y with a light note of apple blossom. Rich, powdery and lengthy on the palate with fine, peppery notes into the finish with excellent freshness.

2024 Arizcuren • Finca el Foro

95_{/100}

Finely spiced red cherry with a touch of dried orange peel and lighter apple blossom notes, and underlying bitter chocolate. Delicate and finely structure on the palate with very nice length.

2024 Arizcuren • Sologarnacha

94_{/100}

Finely red fruited with softer cherry and lighter wild strawberry notes, touches of bitter chocolate and light toasted sweetness at the base. Rich and rounded on the palate with fine, lifted structure into the finish.

2024 Arizcuren • Solomazuelo

93_{/100}

Very soft powdery cocoa and lighter black cherry as well as light floral lavender notes, black pepper spice at the base. Structured, linear and very fine on the palate with crunchy touches in the finish.

2025 Arizcuren • Monte Gatún Blanco

92_{/100}

Fine, pulpy citric peel with a good deal of white tea and sweet saline notes. Right and pulpy on the palate with fine roundness into the finish.

2024 Arizcuren • Monte Gatún

92_{/100}

Lovely spiced mix of red and dark fruits, softer forest berries with a light touch of dark cherry at the base. Fine wealth of fruit on the palate with a delicate freshness and leafy touches into the finish.

2015 Arizcuren • Solomazuelo

91_{/100}

Mix of red and dark cherry fruits along with lighter orange peel notes and a kick of peppery spice at the base. Light and flexible on palate with softer red cherry fruit in the finish and softer confectioned notes.