



FREE GIFT

Smithsonian.com

ARCHIVE SHOP MEMBER SERVICES EMAIL UPDATES ABOUT SMITHSONIAN

Air & Space magazine | goSmithsonian | Smithsonian Channel | Smithsonian Institution

Home History & Archaeology People & Places Science & Nature Arts & Culture Travel Photos Videos Games & Puzzles **Subscribe**

Food & Think

A Heaping Helping of Food News, Science and Culture

February 18, 2010

Meeting José Andrés, and the Wines of Spain's Ribeiro Region

Chef José Andrés comes across as bright and lively; approachable, yet a bit dazzling—in short, the life of any party—and the same could be said for the Spanish wines he introduced me to last week.

“Spain is so funny, because historically, or at least when I grew up, people consider the best white to be a good red,” joked Andrés, who was born in the northern region of Asturias and [was named today as a semifinalist](#) for the prestigious James Beard Foundation Award for Outstanding Chef. “But I’m a big fan of whites. As a chef, I look for wines that tend to enlighten you; wake you up, almost like a sunny day.”

When I met Andrés at Jaleo, one of [seven restaurants he owns](#) in and around Washington, D.C., he was hosting a mid-day wine tasting to celebrate the launch of several Ribeiro wines in the U.S. market.

Never heard of Ribeiro, the “[denomination of origin](#)” (DO) wine region in Spain’s northwest corner? Don’t feel bad; neither had I. There’s scarce mention of it on most of my favorite wine blogs, although I spotted a few references to its neighbor, [Ribeira Sacra](#). On a map I was shown, Ribeiro appears as a mere drop of red spilling across some 12 square miles at the base of [Galicia](#), just north of Portugal.

But it’s a drop worth drinking.



Chef José Andrés. Photo by Pablo De Loy, courtesy ThinkFoodGroup.



Ribeiro wines at Jaleo, courtesy Deussen.

Whites are Ribeiro’s signature, representing over 80 percent of the region’s [average annual production](#), which totals 16 million kilograms from 119 wineries or bodegas. Seven of those were represented at the Jaleo tasting, including [Casal de Arman](#), [Viña Mein](#), [Sanclodio](#), [Nairoa](#), [Coto de Gomariz](#), [Docampo](#) and [Viña Costeira](#). (I only sampled the first three, since it was the middle of a work day and I’m not very skilled at spitting.) Most retail for less than \$20 a bottle—a bargain, if you can find them over here. A few U.S. importers of Ribeiro include [P.R. Grisley](#), [Eric Solomon](#) and [De Maison Selections](#), though that’s certainly not a

comprehensive list.

I enjoyed everything I sampled, but my personal favorite was Sanclodio, [owned by acclaimed Spanish filmmaker José Luis Cuerda](#). His [2008 Ribeiro Blanco](#), a blend of five native grapes (treixadura, godello, loureira, torrontés and albariño) is lovely. Its soft, peachy flavors flirt with sharper citrus and mineral

notes, wrapped in a whiff of honeysuckle—exactly what my imagination expected from the man behind a film titled “[Butterfly’s Tongue](#).”

Andrés said he especially admires Cuerda and other Ribeiro winemakers who have helped revive the cultivation of some of the region’s lesser-known native varietals, like godello.

“When it’s a grape that has been in the area for centuries, maybe it’s the one that’s able to interpret the story of the earth better than any other one,” he mused. “And I think protecting the integrity of our history is the only way to preserve who we are. A grape might not change humanity all of a sudden—but it means something.”

Posted By: Amanda Bensen — [Around the World, Drinks, Wine](#) | [Link](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)