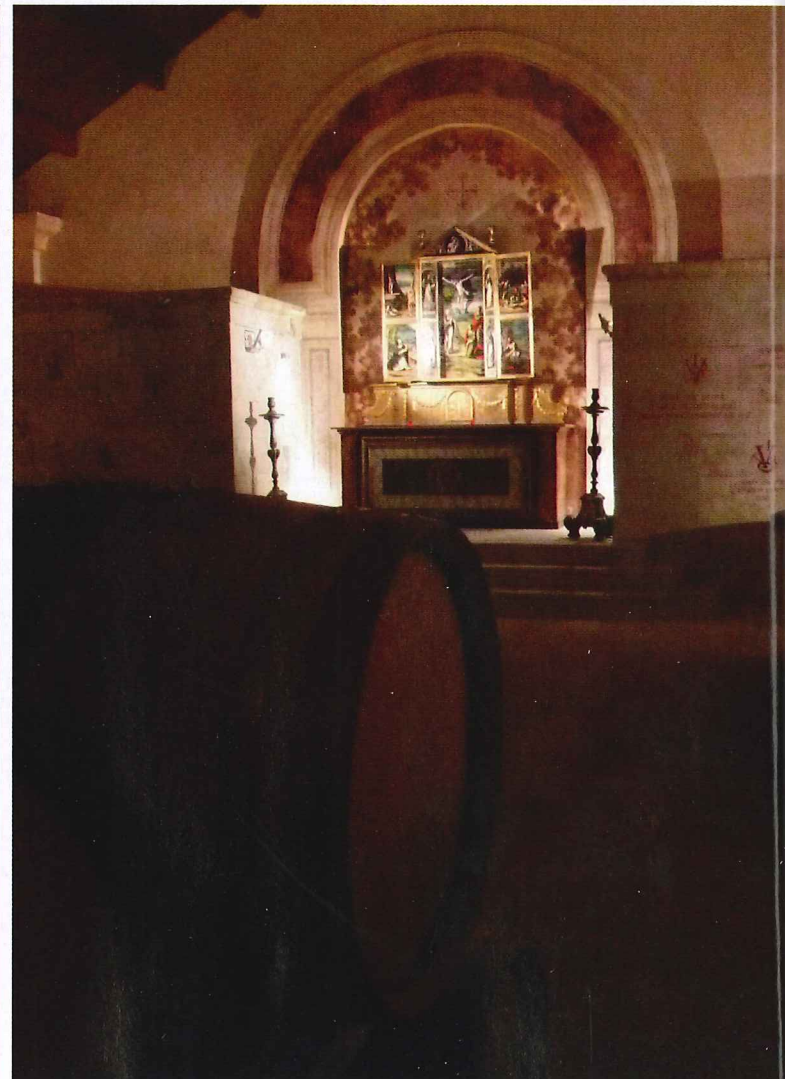


HACIENDA ZORITA
TYPICALS THE NEW
SPAIN: MODERN WINES
BUT WITH OLD-WORLD
CHARACTER



Educating Zorita

With its ambitious cuisine, stellar estate hams and cheeses, and, of course, its excellent wine, Hacienda Zorita is putting the remote western edge of Spain on the gastronomic map

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus may, indeed, have sailed the ocean blue. But before setting off, he needed money, and went on what amounts to a lengthy begging tour of Spain in search of funds. One of the places he stopped was an old Dominican monastery in Valverdón, just outside Salamanca.

A brass astrolabe stands on the bell tower in memory of his visit, but it's safe to say Señor Cristóbal Colón would have had a rather more comfortable stay now than when it was run by the monks. Hacienda Zorita is a lovely country hotel, 10 minutes from one of Europe's oldest university towns and right on the ambling River Tormes.

The monks might recognise the gardens, stone floors and wooden beams, but I doubt they'd be familiar with the menu by Michelin-starred chef Sergi Arola or the range of spa treatments available, including an exfoliating shiatsu facial massage with red grape extract.

Red grape extract? Yes... As well as a hotel, Hacienda Zorita is a winery. In the cellar located behind the hotel's reception, some 1,800 oak barrels of the local grape variety Tempranillo age gracefully to create the Hacienda Zorita wine.

The grapes aren't grown near the barrel cellar/hotel combo, though. While this is a superlative area for keeping the famous *pata negra* pigs that provide Zorita with what must be one of the best charcuterie plates anywhere in Spain, you need to move further west.

Head from Salamanca towards the Portuguese border and you are in the Spanish equivalent of La France Profonde. Dry, dusty and agricultural, you're three hours' drive from Madrid's bustling modernity. All baked earth and shimmering heat. But then suddenly, you crest a small hill, and there before you is the Zorita winery – a beautiful pink/ochre creation, surrounded by lush vineyards. An oasis of green and modernity in a sea of tradition, it looks like it's landed from space.

Winemaking has a long tradition here – as it has all along the mighty Duero Valley – but it's unlikely that it's ever been carried out with the panache and professionalism shown by the team at Hacienda Zorita. The 70 hectares of vineyard make it about the same size as a decent French chateau, the modern temperature-controlled winery is as up to date as anything from the New World, and the grape varieties are an interesting mix of local (Tempranillo) and international.

The Arribes DO is a new one (established in 2007) in recognition of the fact that, after centuries of mostly unremarkable wine, there are now some genuinely good bottles coming out of this remote corner of Spain. Since only wines made with traditional Spanish grapes qualify for DO status,

two of the Hacienda Zorita wines – a terrific Syrah (likely to be in Majestic by the autumn) and the big, beefy Magister (which includes Cabernet, Merlot, Malbec, and Tempranillo) – are *Viños de la Tierra*. But what is evident from tasting all of these wines, however, is the sense of place. The relentless sun of the Arribes is tempered by its high altitude. At 700m above sea level, the temperature drops quickly at night here, which gives the grapes a freshness to go with their ripeness.

On this evidence, spearheaded by go-ahead producers like Hacienda Zorita, it's possible this region could become Spain's 'next Priorat'. We're unlikely to see new countries taking the world by storm like Australia did 20 years ago, but what is likely is regions like Arribes reinventing themselves or rediscovering what made them successful in the first place. And as Hacienda Zorita proves, you don't always need to sail the ocean blue to find them...

WHAT IT TASTES LIKE

Soft red fruits with a lick of liquorice and spice, and a comforting tang of warm red leather. Supple and juicy with round tannins, it's well integrated with a cheerful, cherry-chocolate finish.



WHERE TO TRY 2007 HACIENDA ZORITA

High Street: £8.99; Bacchanalia TWS

Restaurants: River Café by Sergi Arola, Scalini

STAYING AT A WINERY

Hacienda Zorita

- 23 rooms
- beautiful gardens and two pools
- two-star Michelin chef Sergi Arola menu
- 10 minutes from Salamanca
- tour of barrel cellar available
- wine spa, massages and chill-out
- visits to natural park available

Hacienda Zorita Natural Reserve

- 10 rooms surrounded by vineyards
 - pool and silence
 - good stop-off on the way to Portugal
 - in the Arribes del Duero Natural Park
- haciendas-espana.com/en/hacienda-zorita



FROM THE EXPERT

DAVE GREEN
Business development manager,
River Café by Sergi Arola

The Hacienda Zorita represents everything I love about Spain – great-value wine that overdelivers on quality with reliable flavour and, most importantly, Tempranillo showing at its best. Think Rioja but at half the price, with juicy cherry fruit, balanced tannins, and a hint of toast and vanilla from 12 months' oak ageing.

At River Café by Sergi Arola, the classic dish that we recommend this wine with is *Tabla Campera* – a mixed plate of Iberian meats – chorizo, caña de lomo and salchichón, along with an award-winning ewe's-milk queso curado. These foods are produced at Hacienda Zorita's organic farm and work really well with the wine. At home, it's the perfect wine to serve at a dinner party. We had this wine with Sunday roast lamb last week and it worked perfectly.