

**C.V.N.E (Compania Vinicola del Norte de Espana), aka 'Cune', la Rioja Alta
VIÑEDOS del CONTINO, la Rioja Alavesa
VIÑA REAL, la Rioja Alavesa**



C.V.N.E (Compania Vinicola del Norte de Espana), aka 'Cune', La Rioja Alta

Founded 1879 by the Real de Asua brothers (Raimondo and Eusebio) of Bilbao, C.V.N.E (hereafter, Cune, pronounced coo-nay) has been an integral part of the Rioja region's ascendance in the fine wine world. Early success came as a negociant house supplying bulk wine to a France devastated by phylloxera and oidium. Committing to a fine wine vision of Rioja, the brothers soon moved away from bulk wine shipping and began purchasing and planting vineyards around Rioja Alta and employed cellar masters from Bordeaux. The company is still run by a descendant of the Real de Asua brothers, the fifth generation current CEO Victor Urrutia Ybarra. Innovation combined with tradition has seen Cune become a consistently reliable sources for high quality Rioja wine.

Four bodegas in one?

Cune have four distinct bodegas:

The Cune bodega itself is in Haro, servicing vineyards from nearby Villalba and surrounds in La Rioja Alta.

There is a technically distinct bodega within the Haro mainframe, within which the high end 'Real de Asua' brand's wines are made as a subset of CVNE.

CVNE are partners with Jesus Madrazo in a single vineyard property, Viñedos del Contino, located in the tiny Alava village of Laserna.

Finally, nearby to Contino, also in Rioja Alavesa, is a distinct wine business, Viña Real – a space-age bodega on a hilltop neary Assa, just out of Logroño. For now, TSA imports a selection of Cune and Contino wines, with plans for Viña Real in future.

Haro is home to Cune, where the company began in 1879 and still resides on its original site, Barrio de la Estacion, directly next to the train station in Rioja Alta. This 'railway station suburb' is a tiny cluster of some of the big names of old school Rioja – Cune, Lopez de Herredia, Muga, La Rioja Alta and more. Whether or not we consider these to be anachronistic dinosaurs peddling low-brow industrial Rioja, they constitute an enormous chunk of the visible and known story of La Rioja.

Cune, in our mind is the most delicious and relevant of these big houses making 'trad Rioja'. Cune produce a typical Riojan catalogue of white, rosado, crianza, reserve and gran reserva wines, but not jovens. The family produces wine from 600 acres of vineyards mostly from Villalba and has long-standing contracts with growers from Haro, Brinas, Briones and Zarraton, with the oldest vines



coming from Torremontalbo. The red wines are balanced by some Mazuelo, Graciano and sometimes Viura to give a wine of good acidity at around 13% alcohol, typically with a slightly austere tannin profile. Additionally, Cune produces a sub-label called Imperial (named for the original half-litre “Imperial Pint” bottling) which releases Reserva and Grand Reserva bottlings in exceptional years. Just like the basic Cune wines, the fruit for Imperial is sourced 60% from Cune’s own vineyards and the rest from long term contract growers.

The Cune bodega in Barrio de la Estacion boasts an impressive collection of 19th century structures which surround a central patio. Among the architectural works is the Nave Eiffel, designed by Alexandre-Gustave Eiffel (yep, he of the tower). The room, begun in 1890 and completed in 1909, is a textbook example of the marriage of aesthetics and functionality. The roof is supported by metal trusses which crisscross the room at regular intervals, and thus eliminates the need for columns and makes for a more efficient use of space. The Imperial label is aged in barrel in this fabulous bodega.

The true treasures of the Cune bodega are to be found in the dimly-lit cellars below the winery which trace the history of the bodega, vintage by vintage, era by era with each vintage produced represented in a colossal ‘cemetery’ housing 400 bottles of every Cune wine made to date. Commenced in 1888, it’s roughly 60% full at present!

What is ‘traditional Rioja’

20th Century Rioja is best known through the lense of what has come to be called ‘traditional’ Rioja. More or less typical handling regimes are along these lines: fruit is largely purchased from growers (typically paid on a qualitative criteria), and tends to be light-bodied and somewhat early picked. The fermented wine is aged in older American oak, often for extended periods, and usually with a considerable number of rackings. The effect of this is to *affect* a claret-like palate shape, dropping much of the fleshy tannin of Tempranillo out of the equation and hammering the jubey round richness of the grape into a spare, dry, elegant and wood-struck register. Unlike some others in Barrio de Estacion, Cune’s bodegas are wonderfully clean and fresh-smelling. Unsurprisingly, this follows through into clean, fresh, uncluttered aromatic profiles in their wines ...

Cune 'Monopole' Viura Blanco 2011 (screwcap)

This was the first commercial white brand released in Rioja, hence the 'monopole' tag. Nowadays, of course, they have nothing like a monopoly on Riojan Viura releases, but have a stylistic distinction that's deliberate, and delightful, seeking to avoid the oxidative dullness of traditionally wooded white Rioja. Monopole is fermented in stainless steel, and bottled with neither malolactic or lees work. While cultivated yeasts are used, they are, thankfully, entirely neutral and acidity is natural. Fermented at 16-18 after dropping to 10 degrees for 24hrs, typically the wine will see 8 hours of maceration and the better years a little longer. Fruit is grown at 700m altitude on very poor soils and grapes are harvested with good acidity.

Floral with peach and almond kernel (sorta nuts and patisserie over cold steel), with cool green herbal and subtle phenolics at back. Mouth leads with powerful and phenolic fruit of high quality and good harmony and balance, and the rich, ripe peachy aspect is edged and constrained by bitter herb and soft nutty tannin. Mild and a bit over medium-bodied, it's a very harmonious entry level wine, with fair length and a very high quality wine at the \$. 13% a/v.

Cune Crianza 2009

Hand-picked grapes for Crianza from Cune are de-stemmed and fermented temperature-controlled at around 28 degrees in stainless steel, then aged a year in older US oak. Crianza is bottled under natural cork and screwcap, and we will ship according to which format displays the wine best on a year-by-year basis. With the 2009 vintage, we have shipped it closed by natural cork.

Red fruits, balsam, chocolate and heather in an open and gentle nose, nicely woody. The palate likewise is spacious and gentle, with a good long slow red cherry fruit core, a bit of cola, nut and a hit of scrubby heathery herb. Savoury, long and low in the mouth, the balsamic old wood and fine volatile acidity add a sourness which caresses and elongates the gentle earthy red cherry fruit. A gentle and amiable old school Crianza that has been protected and developed rather than clobbered.

2008 Cune Reserva 2008

From the same vineyards as Crianza fruit but a better selection of grapes with additional down-graded fruit from Imperial vineyards, aged 18 months in new to 2 year old oak, mainly US with a little French. Racked after malo and then another 3 rackings six-monthly.

Smelling like, and delightful to sup with, a charcuterie board (no garnish, no varnish thanks, just the meat and the wood). Tobacco in clay, dark cherry, jerky meat, some 'shroom and fine old wood aromas. CUNE style is like looking down and along a road winding through a plain - the palate's open and beautifully laid out. The dry, elegant, briary blackberry fruit is complexed with typical heathery florals, and a judicious titch of aldehyde in the gently chocolatey tannin-oak heart.

Cune Imperial Gran Reserva 2004

Superb (warm) vintage, this was harvested from Cune's best patch of goblet-pruned dry-grown bush-vines in Villalba and Haro. 24 days maceration and 30 months' ageing in US and French oak. Perfumed and carrying a huge sense of the countryside, it's a deep whiff of la Rioja. Blackcurrant, cassis and wild cherry fruits meet tobacco, violet, peony, leather, undergrowth and old ink. Cold metal mineral gives real dance and composure to the palate. Full but not succulent, with lean tannins leaving space in the mouth allowing the fruit-oak-spice hybrid to expand and roll without crowding the mouth, and leaving a sweet licorice-mineral aftertaste. The best metaphor I can think of is to imagine taking two sheets of fine parchment with dried inkblots on them, and between them pressing and drying peonies ... now, slowly rehydrate them with your mind, follow the dance, the subtle wafting of ink, earth, paper and flower ... sweetness becomes spice, oak becomes space ... it is exceptionally hard to describe wine this good. It's fabulous.

CONTINO



Contino is a single-estate bodega of 62 hectares under vine, based in a 200 year old farmhouse in Laserna, just outside Laguardia in the Alavesa sub-region. The name comes from the royal guard of old and the label features the bust of San Gregorio - for the superstitious, the patron saint and protector of vineyards. Created in 1974 by C.V.N.E and Jose Madrazo Real de Asua (father of Contino's current winemaker, Jesus Madrazo), the family owner of the estate. Jesus, an engineer as well as enologist, took over in 1994 and is constantly revising the growing and making of the 7 distinct plots on the estate, each of which is vinified as a separate wine prior to selection and blending the house range. Genetic material for planting comes from massale selection.

Contino was set up to be a counter to the Rioja trend of buying/blending to build brands (including of course, by Cune themselves!), with crisp acidity fruit from the cold soils in the North blended with more colourful ripe and alcoholic fruit from Southern Rioja. Prior to the establishment of Contino, the vineyards regularly provided the fruit for the legendary Gran Reservas of Viña Real.

The farmhouse has cellars underground which date back to the 16th century, and houses a very snazzy silver suit of armour among its collection of arcana. The vineyard immediately in front of the house and bodega features a 1,000 year old olive tree for which the premium release 'Vino del Olivo' is named. Interesting to note, Jesus's grandfather was responsible for the invention and commercialisation of "IFOs" – identified flying objects – the large-scale mobile grape/wine buckets which are used (nowhere more spectacularly than at Viña Real) by many Riojan producers to handle must and wine by gravity and thus avoid pumping, even in 'pumpovers'.

Contino's average age of vines is 35 years but some are more than 80. The vineyards are immediately above the Rio Ebro's banks on a gentle slope down from the farmhouse at around 400 metres' altitude. (Directly above, across the river on a hilltop sits Cune's other property - the bodega of Viña Real.) Contino is primarily planted with Tempranillo (85%), but Madrazo is a champion of the Graciano grape which comprises the bulk of the remaining plantings along with some Garnacha, Mazuelo and Viura. There are alluvial stone and sand plots which drain freely and the underlying heavy clay and marl soils take care of water retention during the hot summers. All fruit is dry grown. The south-facing pebbly and very warm site is particularly well suited to ripening Graciano, ordinarily tending to greenness and very high acidity.

CONTINO RESERVA 2006

A very hot year with September rains. 85% Tempranillo, 10% Graciano, balance Garnacha and Mazuelo. Hand-picked, de-stemmed, fermented in 12,000 litre stainless around 30 degrees, macerated 15-20 days. Aged 2 years in old oak, 60% French, 5 rackings.

Deep, complex and very high quality amalgam of oak, earth, fruit - the savoury, the meaty and the mystic. The red fruit confiture over hung meat and fine oak is subsidiary to a fabulous sense of 'wininess', it's all sweet and leathery with old wood aromatics, pimienta, allspice, black pepper. The palate is a similar glide from glyceric cherry through leather to sourberry. It's deep and smooth, meaty with subtle leather, sweet cedar and vanilla wood spices and brighter pip-squeak fruit and acid levity. Long, possibly profound.

FORTHCOMING VINTAGES

CUNE – la RIOJA ALTA

Cune ‘Monopole’ Rioja Blanco Viura 2012

2012 was a third consecutive drought year in Spain and saw a very hot and dry season, with very uneven ripening of grapes in vineyards. Viura is endowed with thick skins protecting it from the heat, but even so only a minuscule amount was made due to extreme heat and water deprivation.

The forthcoming vintage of ‘Monopole’ is in a new Alsace-styled bottle, and for good reason. It has a wonderfully handled, spicy and textural phenolic profile. Steely-smelling with apple and perfumed lemon balm fruit freshness, and a touch of tropicality. The palate is dry with lovely texture and a nice sour cut from driving phenolics, giving a long grind to the palate, with soft nutty acidity to finish.

Cune Crianza 2010

Tempranillo with 20% Garnacha and Mazuelo, fermented in stainless then aged 12 months in US oak around 3 years old. Smells very floral over strawberry fruit steeped in balsamic wood with tea-like lift and some carob and earth depth. The palate is harmonious, open and neat, with red fruits, earth and balsamic wood all mixing nicely. Light, clean and clear mouthfeel.

Cune Reserva 2009

Mature aromatics, with red tobacco and fruits mingled through moderate oak. The fine acidity merges in the mouth with very well harmonised oak, and delicate residual fruit tannins. There’s a very pleasant savoury fruit balance and the wood is pleasantly clean and gently intrinsic.

Cune Imperial Reserva 2007

As a stylistic variant, the Imperial wines are handled solely in French wood, with fermentation in large foudre and ageing in French barrique. The Imperial vineyards generally give a high extract fruit and so can handle ageing in new oak for 6-12 months. The blend is Tempranillo 85%, with freshness and acid structure being supplied by Mazuelo & Graciano.

Tobacco and delicate anise-fennel play over rich oak aromas, with touches of pickled cherry, mustard fruits and ‘shroom. The palate works along the mouth nicely, maintaining a sense of space and ease of movement as it deftly touches all parts. Dark-fruited but deft, not too serious and not too oaky. Roasted meat, faded flowers, gentle herb and spice, soft acidity and a nice mature balsamic finish.

Cune Real de Asua 2004

Modern winemaking long, about 40 days, maceration more than a month, and then 18mths in new french oak, same vineyard as Imperial Gran Reserva.

A deep garnet colour with purple, liquored cassis fruits and fig/fruit mince spiced nose. Oak aromatics of a slightly dusty cedar wardrobe, seems to be a defining house/vineyard oak style expression. Perfumed, sweet plum and prune fruit on palate and slightly oxidised bbq sauce palate, slightly warming alcohol on the finish. The Asua is not as drying and oak tannin based as imperial.

CONTINO– la RIOJA ALAVESA

Contino Blanco 2010

Blend is 70% Viura from four 1950s-planted rows in the centre of the estate, 20% Garnacha Blanca planted in the 80s at the hilltop, 10% Malvasia dating to 1930s down by the river. As well as blending three varieties, it also blends the three soils of the estate on which each is grown – alluvial pebbly, limestone-clay and sand. 5,000 bottles produced. Cold soaked and fermented in stainless steel to 7 or 8% a/v, then racked into 350 and 500l French oak barrels to finish alcoholic fermentation. Aged 3 months on lees and racked every two weeks, total maturation in large barrels is 6-7 months with malolactic suppressed. The aim is to have a wine that can be bottle aged for 5 years.

Deep lemon in colour, creamy golden sunny aromas of barrica, tropical pineapple-peach pith fruits, lemon sherbet. Mostly barrica flavours with a beeswax palate texture and moderate acidity.

Contino Blanco 2011

Lemon and citrus fresh on the nose, with the smell of golden summer sands. This vintage is not so oaky, with nutty complexity and biscuity lees giving a soft round palate, textural, lemon pith and chalky fresh grip and moderate acidity.

Contino Garnacha 2009

From 70 years-old vines planted by the river – as well as typically contributing 2% of the Reserva wine's fruit and 15% of the Gran Reserva of Contino, Jesus has cautiously begun attempting a varietal wine. Aged in second year 500 litre barrels previously used for Contino Blanco, it spends two years un-racked in wood.

Garnet hues, with a slightly cheesy reductive note to begin with but blows off into sweet and slightly jammy raspberry and mulberry fruit with rose, red-musk lipstick and a milk chocolate dusting. Bright red candy notes with a spicy-savoury-meaty element and fresh acidity. Oak gives support and doesn't overwhelm the palate or the seriously silky primal red berry fruit with some nice meat and spice notes adding interest. Long as well as round, seamless and really delicious, a very well structured and complex Garnacha. Spankingly good stuff!

Contino Reserva 2007

85% Tempranillo, 10% Graciano, 5% Mazuela and Garnacha. Leads with pippy sweet blackberry, and the touch of creaminess is relieved by leafy-spicy herb cane aromas and a bit of gamey cowhide. The palate starts out round with cream and spice, then a leather thread of sweet, fine tannin controls the glycerol and delivers the mouth to a really nice metal-mineral and cedar finish. Moderate acid freshness gives good structure and line and the fresh ripe dark fruits with anise spice, fennel and red licorice evolve and complex with time in the glass.

Contino Gran Reserva 2005

Only bottled in magnums, 3L and 6L. GR is made from oldest vines of Contino: 70% Tempranillo from La Sanchez (plot close to the river), 15% Garnacha and 15% Graciano. Fermented in concrete vats with no epoxy, after 3 years in oak barrel and 3 in bottle, it is released in its 7th year. Aged first in newish French and then in older US oak, with racking every 6 months.

Red heather and leather, blackberry fruit and caney spice, sweet incense river silt nose. Palate has some juicy sweet red fruit, but on balance is very dry with lots of wood extract and sweet-sour spice, freshening acidity from Graciano is evident – needs a lot of time.

Contino 'Vino de Olivo' 2007

Tempranillo 88% and 12% Graciano, grown on clay limestone over 3 metre deep river stone bed. Spends 18 months in new oak 60% French, 20% American with some Hungarian and Russian. Unfiltered. 2001 & 2007 won best Tempranillo in the world (universe, even!) award.

Deep garnet colour with dark fruits, vanilla and fennel, baking spices, damsons, slightly closed nose. Palate is expressive and floral with sweet baking spice, red fruit, very tempranillo looking on the palate with red liquorice and sweet spiced strawberry, nice soft fine grained tannins. Warm alcohol notes lead into a baked fennel character. Complete, with fresh acid and juicy red fruit in balance.

Contino 'Vino de Olivo' 2008

Tobacco, briar and beefstock with violets for relief and some angelica along with sweet oak on the nose. Palate likewise is really spice, leathery with thick skiny texture; there's some juiciness from forest fruits, the oak kicks in towards the back along with silty earth expression. Nicely complete palate, slightly warm. A very small production in this very cold year.

Contino Graciano 2009

Acidic, with high colour, low alcohol and a very herbaceous/vegetal profile, Graciano is a useful blender in Rioja wines, adding acidity in warm years to balance the tendency to softness in Tempranillo. First planted at Contino by Jesus's father in 1989 and since augmented by Jesus. The 11 hectares of Graciano is 15% of Jesus's plantings, but only yields 10% of his fruit (this high cost per kilo had pretty much killed it off by the 80s in a Rioja dominated by high crop/low cost fruit). Of the 64,000 hectares currently planted in la Rioja, currently just 1,000 are Graciano. As well as yielding an unusually high proportion of the Contino red blends, since 1994 there's also a rare straight varietal. *2009 is aged 16 months in 90% French and 10% Hungarian new oak. Deep purple, vibrant and inky. Savoury aromatics of black sun-dried kalamata olives, cassis liquor fruit, a very fresh juicy acid lift on the palate and fading to granite-graphite minerally tannins - a true mediterranean variety style wine. Speaks of scorched earth and wild Mediterranean shrubs and herbs, sings of its homeland and environment, a true wine of terroir. It's also grippy, stemmy, vegetal, green and a bit hot!*

VIÑA REAL – la RIOJA ALAVESA



If the Cune bodega in Haro respects and represents CVNE's commitment to tradition, the Viña Real bodega exemplifies their forward-thinking philosophy and embrace of modern technology. Viña Real wines offer a more fruit forward style all the while possessing the structure and ability to age for a half a century and more. The grapes are grown on sunny south-facing slopes which run from the Sierra de Cantabria mountain range down to the Ebro River in Elciego and nearby villages. As with the Cune wine, the grapes for Viña Real are produced from about 50% estate owned vines, and the rest is purchased. The brand commenced in the 1920s.

As of 2004, Viña Real has been housed in a modern purpose-built winery designed by Bordelaise architect Philippe Mazieres. The foyer entrance sits atop the hill known as Cerro de la Mesa and commands sweeping views of both the Alavesa vineyards (looking directly down on Contino just to the North) and South to Logroño, Rioja's commercial centre. The heart of the facility is a cavernous circular chamber which, when viewed from the outside, resembles the upper portion of a giant wine barrel. Inside, technology and modernity reigns. The above-ground portion houses the winemaking facility, designed with the goal of complete reliance on gravity-flow, made possible in large part by a rotating central crane, delivering IFOs to each fermenter anytime grapes or juice need to be moved. Below this the facility features twin 3km tunnels dug into the hill where bottle and barrel ageing takes place (these drives took 6 years to dig!). With hygiene a first imperative, they have invested in a mechanical racking/barrel cleaning machine that can empty, steam clean and refill a barrel in 20 minutes, truly amazing to watch.

Viña Real 100% Viura 2011

Barrel fermented fruit from the valley floor in Elciego. Grapes are picked at optimum ripeness and cold macerated for 6-8 hours and fermented in US oak barrels for 15-20 days, then spends 4 months on lees in barrel, no malo/batonnage undertaken.

Medium straw in colour, obvious notes of oak and vanillin, orchard fruits in the ripe peach spectrum and crushed tinned pineapple, incredibly tropical. Palate is dry with medium acidity, creamy coconut-vanillin body lotion oak and tropical tinned pineapple fruit and light creaminess on finish. Dolly Parton songs are on shuffle in my head when this wine is in my mouth, not unattractive wine but just too showy and yelling at me in a chirpy Texan accent that makes my head want to explode...

Viña Real 100% Viura 2012

Very herbal, yellow-floral nose; palate has columbine-lolly richness, some obvious oak touches, an easy earthiness in the yellow fruit. Nice dryness and less fat than '11, possibly unbalanced bitterness.

Viña Real Crianza 2009

13.5% alc. 90% Tempranillo and 10% Garnacha, Graciano and Mazuela. Slightly heavier style with Graciano and Mazuelo to give acidity and lift to the Tempranillo. Destemmed grapes fermented in stainless steel tanks for 10-12 days with temperature control of 26-28 degrees. Malo in French and American oak and matured in barrel for 13-14 months. The wine is raked every 5-6 months. *A bright ruby colour with sweet oak spice and youthful raspberry, red cherry on the nose. The palate has dark cherry fruit and baking spice with vanilla and coconut husk, raspberries, and fresh acidity. Moderate tannins give a supple structure and a moderate length to the palate. There is red plum skin grip, with terracotta and limestone chalky drive giving structure to the finish.*

Viña Real Crianza 2009 (note from winery, pre-bottling tasting of final blend)

Creamy, slightly gamey nose with cranberry-chocolate, spicy pimiento, a touch of leather and caney herb. Fruity palate is pleasantly full, and savoury with a touch of creamy oak and a nice fan of ripe tannins and fresh acidity at end structuring along with dry grape tannin.

Viña Real Reserva 2006

Garnet-ruby. Lifted perfume with spice, red fruits, raspberry, rose, new leather, some menthol and, well ... Brettanomyces. Palate is stripped of fruit and overly developed with pronounced alcohol. Definitely rustic! 60/40 French/American oak, 90% Tempranillo with a bit of Graciano and Mazuelo.

Viña Real Reserva 2007

Dark register on nose with barbecue meat and touches of 'shroom and beefstock, glace-cherry/choc, river delta silty earthiness and typical Riojan red lavender. The palate is round, leathery and tannic, with cold steely mineral relief and lots of skinsy tannin.

Viña Real Gran Reserva 2006

70\$ French oak, 28 months. Fruit from old Elciego vineyards near the original Viña Real bodega. *Florals over dirt, meat, briar, arrowroot and licorice along with baking spice and juniper. The mouth is built on soft, fleshy, broad tannins well matched to oak and the structural frame works well with a tangy, steely acidity. Perhaps lacks depth of fruit flavour to match.*

Pagos de Viña Real 2005

18 mths French oak, 40 days maceration. Deep garnet with ruby hues, warmer more matured fruits, dark chocolate and black plums, black cherry, cinnamon and baking spice. More grainy heavy mahogany tannins, quite a delicious drink, more modern and notes of alcohol sweetness and sweet fruit and sweet roadside herbs. Give me lamb/goat on a spit, pronto!

Notes by Scott Wasley and Bree Boskov.