

CEBREROS

Formally recognised as a DOP just last year, this Spanish region may be little known, but its winning combination of old-vine Garnacha, granitic soils and a mountain climate, together with some dynamic winemaking, are putting it firmly on the map.

Sarah Jane Evans MW finds out more and recommends exciting wines to try

Ever since I visited the region, I've been talking animatedly about Cebberos. But I'm met with blank responses. No one has heard of it. Yet when I say 'Gredos' or 'Sierra de Gredos', then lovers of new-wave Spanish wines are all ears. For Cebberos is the newest denomination

within Gredos, which is itself hallowed territory for fine, old bush-vine Garnacha.

The new DOP lies northwest of Madrid, in the mountains and hills between Philip II's palace of El Escorial and St Teresa's home city of Avila. Telmo Rodríguez is recognised as the first to explore the area, in 1999. He has been

Below: the bush vines that are typical of Cebberos, planted in Avila province

followed by many more, notably Daniel Jiménez-Landi. Still, few wine lovers have heard of Cebberos, so the energetic regulatory body has plenty of work to do. It's hard launching a new DOP (Denominación de Origen Protegida), but the joy of Cebberos is the magnetic attraction of its untamed, isolated countryside.

When it comes to denominations of origin, Spain has been undergoing a major upheaval, with different DOs introducing their own systems of village wines and single vineyards, and not always to local acclaim. Landi – who was working in Cebberos in 2006 before the DO existed – likes the way the fledgling DO has gone about things.

'Their statutes are following the Burgundian model, as has been done in Priorat and Bierzo,' he explains. 'We will be able to

make not just regional wines, but vinos de pueblo "village wines", vinos de paraje "single vineyard wines", and vinos de parcela "single parcel wines". You have to create a quality pyramid. Then over time you can identify the best sites, the best vines. I think this is the right way to do it when you want to make the best of a region.'

Unique combination

What is the best of this region? 'For us, identity is something fundamental in a wine,' says Landi. 'A wine should speak of its origin. The identity in our region is the mountains. In the Sierra de Gredos you have a combination that is unique in the world: old-vine Garnacha on granite, at high altitude and with a mountain climate. That's why we called ourselves "Comando G" – Gredos, Granite, Garnacha.' ➤

CEBREROS AT A GLANCE

Formally recognised as DOP 4 April 2019 – previously the wines were classified Vinos de la Tierra de Castilla y León
Vineyards 455ha (with 56% between 60 and 90 years old)
Municipalities 35
Wineries 13
Growers 330
Varieties planted
85% Garnacha Tinta, 10% Albillo Real, 5% Tempranillo and Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouschet)
Wines White:
100% Albillo Real;
Rosado: minimum 95% Garnacha Tinta with 5% Albillo Real, Garnacha Tintorera or Tempranillo;
Red: minimum 95% Garnacha Tinta

Photograph: Agfotostock/Alamy



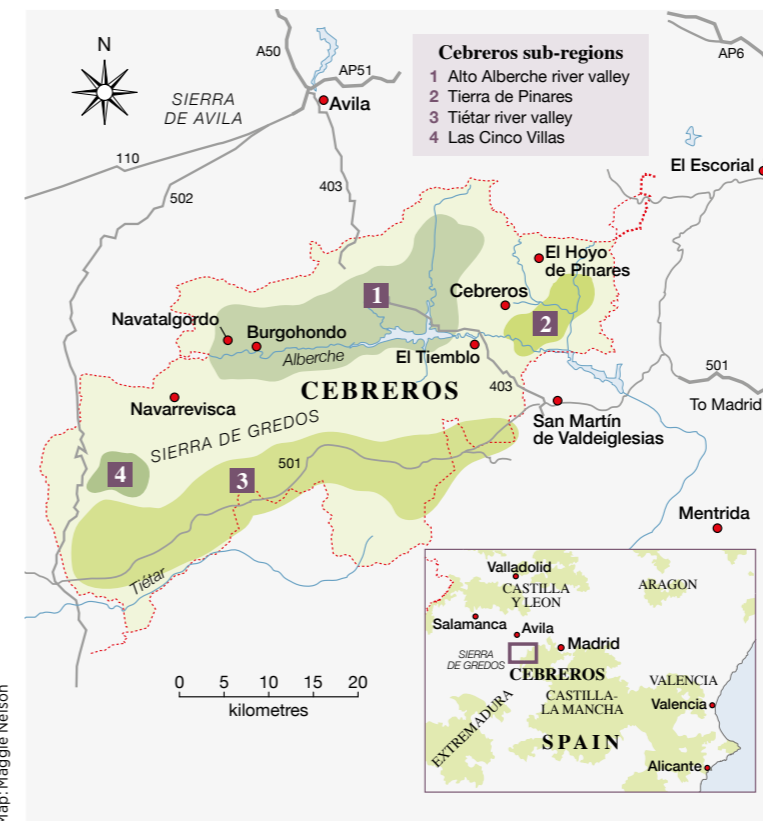
The land is something exceptional: wild and craggy. No wonder St Teresa was a mystic in these parts. Rodríguez explains that ‘Cebreros is a stopover, separating north from south, where the Via Imperial and Cañada Real [the traditional drovers’ route] cross over. We were struck by the stunning view of the landscape graced with Garnacha vines. This extraordinary vineyard was growing wild, without winemaker, oenologist or engineer – it was an orphan.’

It was certainly an area lost to history in modern times, although there’s a 1272 manuscript from the Bishop of Avila concerning leasing vineyards here. Why did no one create a Gredos/Sierra de Gredos DO, taking in Cebreros, Navalcarnero, San Martín and Mentrída, when these mountain Garnachas initially grabbed attention? The point is that if you are looking for a historical pedigree for your new DO or DOP, then what counts is the village name. In wine terms, Gredos is a recent construct. Nonetheless, the urgent work today is recuperation: at Hoyanko, Juan Luis Beltrán remembers there being 1,500ha of vineyards in El Hoyo de Pinares; now, there are just 200ha of those vines remaining. ➤



‘We were struck by the stunning view of the landscape graced with Garnacha vines’

Telmo Rodríguez (above)



CEBREROS: THE LAND, THE CLIMATE AND THE VINES

Climate Mediterranean with continental influences, varying across the DO

Soils Mainly granitic with low pH; El Tiemblo and Cebreros have some distinct vineyards on schist

Zones Cebreros has three distinct zones, created by the rivers Alberche and Tiétar:

Alto Alberche river valley – up to 1,200m; one of Spain’s coolest areas, producing wines with a chilly minerality

Alberche river valley – Tierra de Pinares; dry Mediterranean climate with diverse soils, granitic with slate

Tiétar river valley – Las Cinco Villas; Mediterranean, but quite humid with up to 1,000mm rainfall per year

Vineyards The highest vineyard parcel is in the village of Navatalgordo at 1,200m; to the west the mountains rise up to 2,000m; average vineyard size is 0.43ha, with a typical planting layout of 2.5m x 2.5m

Cebreros: 10 names to know

ARRAYAN

Established in Toledo in 1999, Arrayán is managed by winemaker Maite Sánchez. Its Garnacha de Arrayán is grown at 900m in the Arrebatapas pass. It also produces a Cebreros Albillo Real.

DANIEL JIMENEZ-LANDI, COMANDO G

Working in the region since 2008, and one of the first to make the area known, grabbing headlines with very pure, fine Garnachas. Now that a winery is being built in Avila, its relevant wines are in transition to Cebreros labelling. Rumbo



al Norte is a single-vineyard red wine from Navarrevisca.

DANIEL RAMOS

Described to me as ‘the heart and mind behind DOP Cebreros’ (alongside DOP Cebreros president, Rafael Mancebo). Australian-born Ramos is dynamic and enthusiastic, and his cellar in El Tiemblo (founded in 2010) is an explorer’s delight of different vats and wines, of concrete, old oak and amphorae. He has wonderful isolated, high-altitude vineyards.

ORLY LUMBRERAS VINADOR

Lumbreras is Cebreros’ rock-star producer, literally, known for his former rock ‘n’ roll radio programme. Drawn to Cebreros for the landscape and the vines, he worked with Daniel Landi in 2012 and with Rubén Díaz in 2013 (in that year he also located an abandoned winery). He follows biodynamic practices, and uses traditional tinajas that were made in El Tiemblo. Sade is his orange wine made from Albillo Real. (Also see p4)



RICO NUEVO VITICULTORES

This is another fascinating project, launched in 2018. ‘Juanan’ Martín works with his 12ha of family vineyards – all beautiful sites – and a small cellar in the middle of the village of Burgoondo. Smart viticultural and winemaking advice from Julio Prieto means this is a project that’s moving fast.

RUBEN DIAZ VITICULTOR

Díaz is a Cebreros native who has worked with Garnacha in the region since 1999. A

former partner of Daniel Landi, he makes El Reventón, famed for being a 100-point wine. With his thorough understanding and his subtle winemaking, he’s one to watch. Look out for his rancio Albillo.

SOTO Y MANRIQUE

Launched in 2016 by Jesús Soto (formerly of Belondrade in Rueda and another of the drivers behind the new DOP), working with technical director Bárbara Requejo. The pair are based in the Cebreros cooperative, where they have also been assisting local growers to improve their grapes and revive their traditional brand. The transformation has seen an increase in the growers’ income and reduced uprooting of vines.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ

Best known now for his work with Garnacha in Rioja, Rodríguez has also spent years exploring and regenerating forgotten areas of Spain. He has worked in Cebreros since 1999. The wines will start carrying the appellation from vintage 2018 onwards.

VINEDOS DEL JORCO

This is a joint project between Raúl Pérez and the team from Madrid wine store La

Tintorería, launched in 2009. Pérez is renowned for his delicate Mencías in his home region of Bierzo, but also for his sensitive winemaking in other parts of Spain. Here, there are 2.5ha of old vines planted in 1915.

VINOS Y VINEDOS HOYANKO

A small family project in El Hoyo de

Pinares, founded in 2012. Juan Luis Beltrán has 4ha of Garnacha vineyards between 55 and 95 years old, planted on granitic soil at 810m-1,020m. The work, he says, is ‘ancestral’, making wine as his grandfather did: organic, with no synthetic or chemical treatments. Typically aged in 300-litre French oak for 12 months, with no fining or filtration.



Granitic soil

In the late 19th and 20th centuries this region produced tough, alcoholic wines, used for beefing up lesser blends. Careful viticulture is leading the change. Marc Isart of Bernabeleva, who knows the area well, defines the Cebreros character today: 'It rains less there, and it's higher. A key is the soil, which is a slate of granitic origin. The effect is that the tannins are finer, almost like chalk but more friendly, sweeter. The fruit is a little riper. The wines are darker in colour, with alcohol. They are more complex, less subtle, than the wines of neighbouring San Martín, a little less elegant and more robust.'

Fernando Mora, a Garnacha grower in Aragon, adds: 'It's one of the warmest parts of Gredos. It's got altitude, but it is hot. As a result, the wines are structured, with acidity and persistence.'

Sommelier and wine educator Agustín Trapero was born in Cebreros, and is an ambassador for the new DO. For him, the excitement of Cebreros Garnacha lies in the diversity of sub-zones and the fact that above all the Garnachas show real refinement, 'with layers of fresh red fruit, like raspberry and cherry, and fragrant touches of violets, thyme and high Mediterranean forest, elegant and velvety, with superb minerality on the finish'.

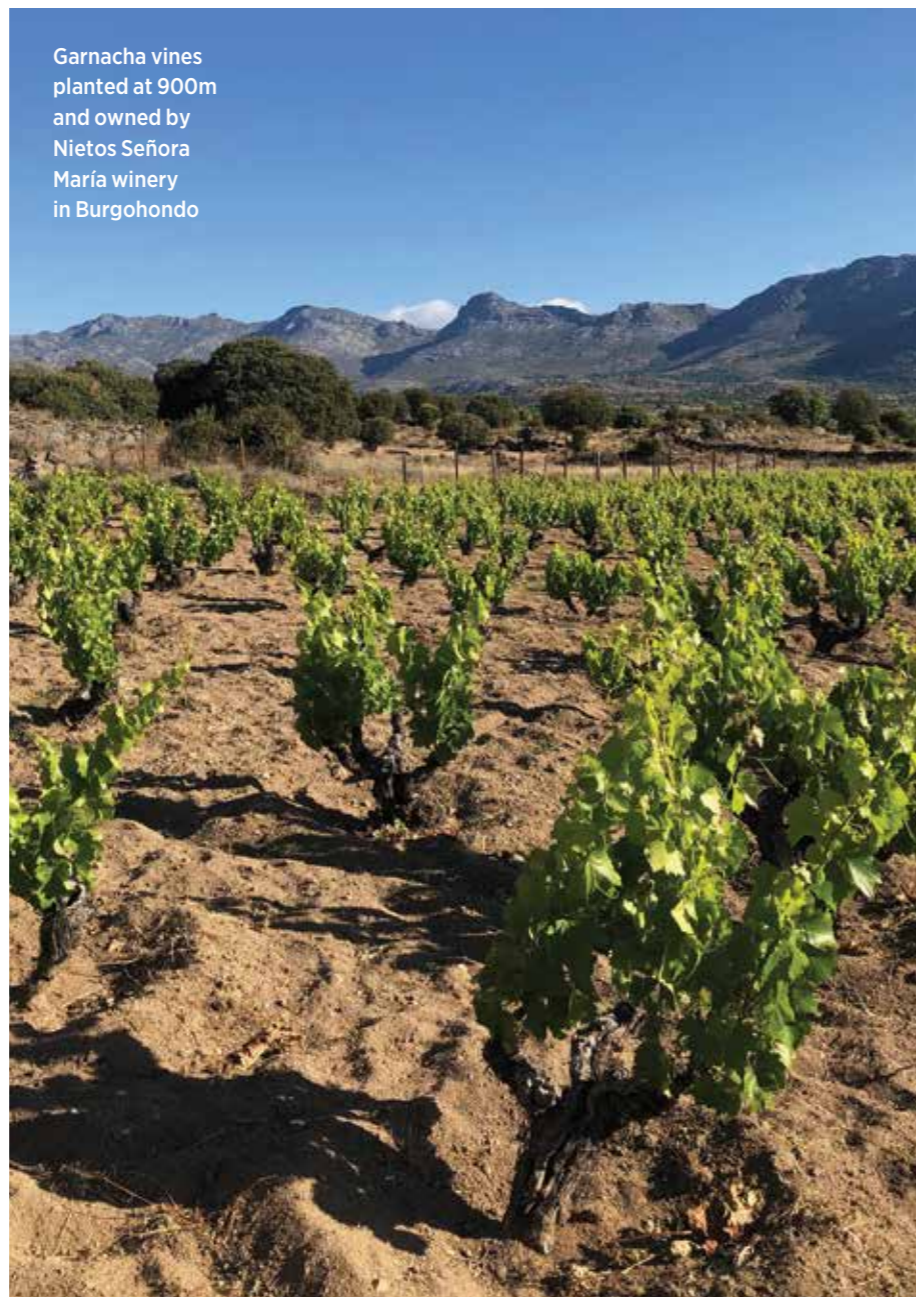
If Garnacha is at the heart of Cebreros, then we mustn't forget the white Albillo Real (not to be confused with Albillo Mayor, recently authorised in Ribera del Duero). There is old bush-vine Albillo Real here. With its low yield, it makes full-bodied, fleshy wines, often quite low in acidity. Trapero describes its stone-fruit character, with white peach and yellow plum, plus touches of honeyed melon, mango and beeswax, with a bitter finish. Frankly, says Isart, 'I have a love/hate relationship with it'. But it does give Cebreros an identity to have its own white wine. Isart speculates that a new approach to Albillo Real with younger vines might make an interesting stylistic difference.

Meanwhile, Landi has been working since 2013 with Albillo Real under biological ageing. 'We believe it could give us a style more in tune with our taste,' he says.

Old and new

What excites me – beyond the beauty of the place and its isolation – is the dynamic feel of Cebreros, with so many new projects among the old vines. There's an open feel, too – an inclusive character. Tiny producers working with amphorae sit alongside cooperatives, biodynamics alongside traditional farming. It doesn't show the entrenched positions that

Garnacha vines planted at 900m and owned by Nietos Señora María winery in Burgothondo



a traditional region within an appellation system can reveal.

There are orange wines, and stainless-steel wines, oak of different ages and sizes. I hope that in the future they will be able to work with 'Garnachistas' across Spain, emphasising Spain's leadership in the variety and celebrating its great diversity. They have so much more to gain in working together rather than separately.

Let's meet again in 2030. Say 'Cebreros' to a wine lover then and I predict there will be smiles of recognition all round.

Sarah Jane Evans MW is a DWWA Co-Chair and the recently appointed chair of Spain's Gran Orden de Caballeros del Vino

Cebreros: Evans selects 10 to try

① Arrayán, Granito Albillo Real, Cebreros 2018 92

£19.75 Kwoff, NY Wines of Cambridge

As Arrayán's Cebreros Garnacha is bold and flooded with flavour, so its Albillo Real is full of character too: rich and golden, with honey and tropical fruits. Grown on granite, aged for seven months in amphora on lees, it has a firm texture – and the memory of the granite soils that the name suggests. **Drink 2020-2023 Alcohol 14%**

Orly Lumbreras Viñador, Sade, Vino de España 2018 91

£27.49 (2017) R&H Fine Wines

Sade shows that Albillo Real has potential as an orange wine. While this isn't aromatic it has plenty of texture, and it emerges as a glinting if slightly cloudy wine, the tannins of 157 days on skins and nine months in used barriques overlain by creaminess, with flavours of fresh almonds and celery leaves, along with a lovely freshness. Biodynamic. **Drink 2020-2023 Alc 13.5%**

② Soto Manrique, Naranjas Azules Garnacha, Cebreros 2019 95

£11.70 Decántalo

Soto Manrique has a fine and growing portfolio of single-vineyard wines, which are well worth exploring. For the time being, the focus is on building distribution, so look out for the growing offer. This is a Provençal-style crunchy rosé, all stainless steel and cool ferment. Very polished. **Drink 2020-2022 Alc 13%**

③ Daniel Landi, El Reventón, Cebreros 2017 96

£99.99-£104 AG Wines, BI Wine & Spirits, Hedonism

What to choose from Comando G's wines that are becoming DO Cebreros, with the team's new winery inside the DO? El Reventón, surely, from vineyards just outside Cebreros village itself. Grown organically at 900m on slate, but with ripeness reflecting the warm year. Intense and persistent, but with the Comando G keynote purity. **Drink 2020-2028 Alc 14.5%**

Rico Nuevo, Jirón de Niebla, Cebreros 2018 95

£30.20 Decántalo

The epitome of the new Cebreros producer: starting from organic family

vineyards in just 2018 and already racing ahead. Hard to choose between the single-vineyard Barrera del Sol and Jirón, but in the end Jirón wins out for its freshness, its generous fruit, wild herbs and elegance. Aged in oak and flextank eggs, it is very refined. Shows the excitement of the new DO of Cebreros. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14%**

④ Península Vinicultores, Cebreros 2018 93

£9.50 The Wine Society

MWs Andreas Kubach and Sam Harrop are behind this multi-regional Spanish project. This may look pale but it's plump, with supple cherries in syrup balanced by stony tannin and lovely freshness, signing off with warm alcohol. Polished, professional winemaking for what the duo view as their village wine. **Drink 2020-2025 Alc 14.5%**

Viñedos del Jorco, Las Enebradas, Navatagordo 2017 92

£43.50 Decántalo

Attractively aromatic organic Garnacha, with equally appealing, expressive fruit in the mouth. Refreshing, persistent, with the texture of the granite soil. My favourite of the Jorco wines; though the entry-level Las Cabañuelas is easier to locate in the UK. **Drink 2020-2024 Alc 13.5%**

Telmo Rodríguez, Pegaso Zeta, Cebreros 2018 91

N/A UK www.telmorodriguez.com

A fine, good-value introduction to

Cebreros from the man who kicked it all off, Telmo Rodríguez, along with partner racing driver Carlos Sainz. This is a light and delicate organic Garnacha, pure in style, with intense freshness and a silky palate. Carries its time in large oak very lightly. A great start. If you can find the top of the range, limited-production Arrebatapas, then snap it up, for its extra gravitas. **Drink 2020-2023 Alc 14.5%**

⑤ Daniel Ramos, Kπ Amphora, Cebreros 2017 89

£19.99-£20.95 Ben's Farm Shop, Butlers Wine Cellar, Reserve Wines, The Stroud Wine Co

An amphora wine from Dani Ramos, from 70-year-old vines and held in 1,000-litre clay tinajas until the summer after vintage. It's very pale in colour but has a burst of energy. Crunchy red fruits and firm citrus stand out on the palate, together with a chalky texture. There's a very long finish. This has benefited from a year in bottle – the 2018 bottling is still a vivid youngster. **Drink 2020-2023 Alc 13.5%**

⑥ Huellas del Tiétar, Relatos, Cebreros 2018 89

N/A UK www.huellasdeltietar.com

Starts bright and fresh with cherries and chewy tannin. Notes of redcurrant jelly and bramble jam appear, followed by fennel and wild herbs. From 70-year-old sand and granite vineyards. The project was launched in 2013 and its winery is in the Tiétar Valley. **Drink 2020-2023 Alc 15%**

