

ANTOINE GRAILLOT & RAÚL PÉREZ

BIERZO · SPAIN



GRAILLOT & PÉREZ

The cement vat arrived by crane. Antoine Graillot had shipped it from France to Valtuille de Abajo, a village in northwest Spain's Bierzo region where Raúl Pérez's family has tended vines since at least 1752. The vat was enormous – mammoth, really – and to get it into the winery, they had to remove a section of the roof and lower it through the gap.

Raúl, who has been called "The Wizard of Bierzo," apparently found this reasonable.

The collaboration pairs two winemaking traditions that share almost nothing except a conviction that the grape should be left largely alone. Graillot brings the methodical restraint of the Northern Rhône, filtered through his father Alain's legacy. Pérez brings three hundred years of family knowledge in Bierzo, plus a reputation that includes being named Best Winemaker in the World by Bettane+Desseauve in 2015 and Winemaker of the Year by Der Feinschmecker the year before. His core principle is blunt: exert the minimum influence on the grape.

The wines are Mencía-dominant, drawn from old-vine sites including the Rapolao vineyard. Whole clusters go into that French cement vat for fermentation, then spend ten months in neutral 2,500-liter French-oak foudres. The process sounds simple. Achieving simplicity with two strong-willed winemakers from different countries working in a single cellar is not.

Their Encinas Tinto – named for the *Quercus ilex*, the holm oak that shades the Bierzo hillsides – landed on Wine Spectator's Top 100 in 2019. It was number ninety-nine, which somehow fits: a wine that slipped in at the edge, from a collaboration that exists at the margins of both men's primary work.

In the vineyard, the holm oaks still grow between the vine rows. Pérez's family planted around them for centuries, not through them. Some things you leave where they stand.

"Exert the minimum influence on the grape."

WINES AVAILABLE

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Mencia by Raul Perez / Antoine Graillot 2021

Bierzo
Mencia

Mencia from old-vine Bierzo sites. Whole clusters fermented in French cement, then ten months in neutral 2,500-litre French oak foudre. Minimum influence on the grape.