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PEDRO MÉNDEZ VAL DO SALNÉS, RÍAS BAIXAS

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Who would’ve thought that we once again have to open bottles of top Burgundy to sell them, while two growers in Spain’s Rías Baixas Salnés Valley no longer need their top wines sampled to sell?

Of our three Rías Baixas growers, two bigger ones, Pedro Méndez and Manuel Moldes, work in different zones of Salnés, the region’s “gold-slope” of the appellation’s five subzones. Moldes farms Albariño crus on the region’s rare schist soils between Sanxenxo and Noalla (As Dunas on pure schist-derived sand, Peai on hard schist, and A Capela de Aios on severely eroded soft schist), with ocean views from almost every site. Pedro Méndez, this newsletter’s headliner, works purely on ancient igneous plutonic rock and soils derived from granite and granodiorite just a few kilometers inland from the ocean, some on gravelly soils, called *xabre*, and others on deeper granite silt and

sand. Many of his vineyards sit tucked into Meaño almost like a sheltered Atlantic amphitheater, gathering heat while the surrounding hills soften the ocean's harsher winds near the very center point of Albariño's historical rise.

When we first introduced Pedro's full range of wines to the US market, I recounted in my [April 2024 Newsletter](#) how his rise originated in Michelin-starred restaurants outside of Galicia. In fact, it was at the well-known Madrid restaurant Angelita that our Los Angeles tastemaker, JD Plotnick, first had Pedro's only single-site Albariño "As Abeleiras"—asking the sommelier for something compelling that likely wasn't yet being exported. "He brought out several bottles of different producers. I tried a lot of them and freaked out when I tasted Pedro's wine," he said. First, a text photo of the bottle arrived asking if I'd had this producer before. I hadn't. Then, a flow of texts from JD while still at his table followed: "I would contact him immediately ... No brainer, if available ... Phenomenal ... I'm sure he will be an important producer very soon."



Pedro sent two wines and was transparent about the many suitors who were circling. Only a moment after the wines were open, it was obvious that JD was right. A nice long lunch with Pedro and a few other wines I hadn't tasted yet at Casa Aurora under the care of its owner and strong influencer to the local growers, Miguel Anxo Besada, also the owner of the famous local wine spot in Portonovo, A Curva, the deal was done.

Pedro's family also owns a small restaurant called A Casa Pequena in Meaño, and during the summer tourist season, Pedro is on deck. However, these days, with his relatively rapid expansion, it's hard to imagine that he has much free time outside of the cellar. He admits he won't be able to continue

managing both for much longer, and he'll likely have to step away from the restaurant. Until then, drop in in the summer to meet the man!

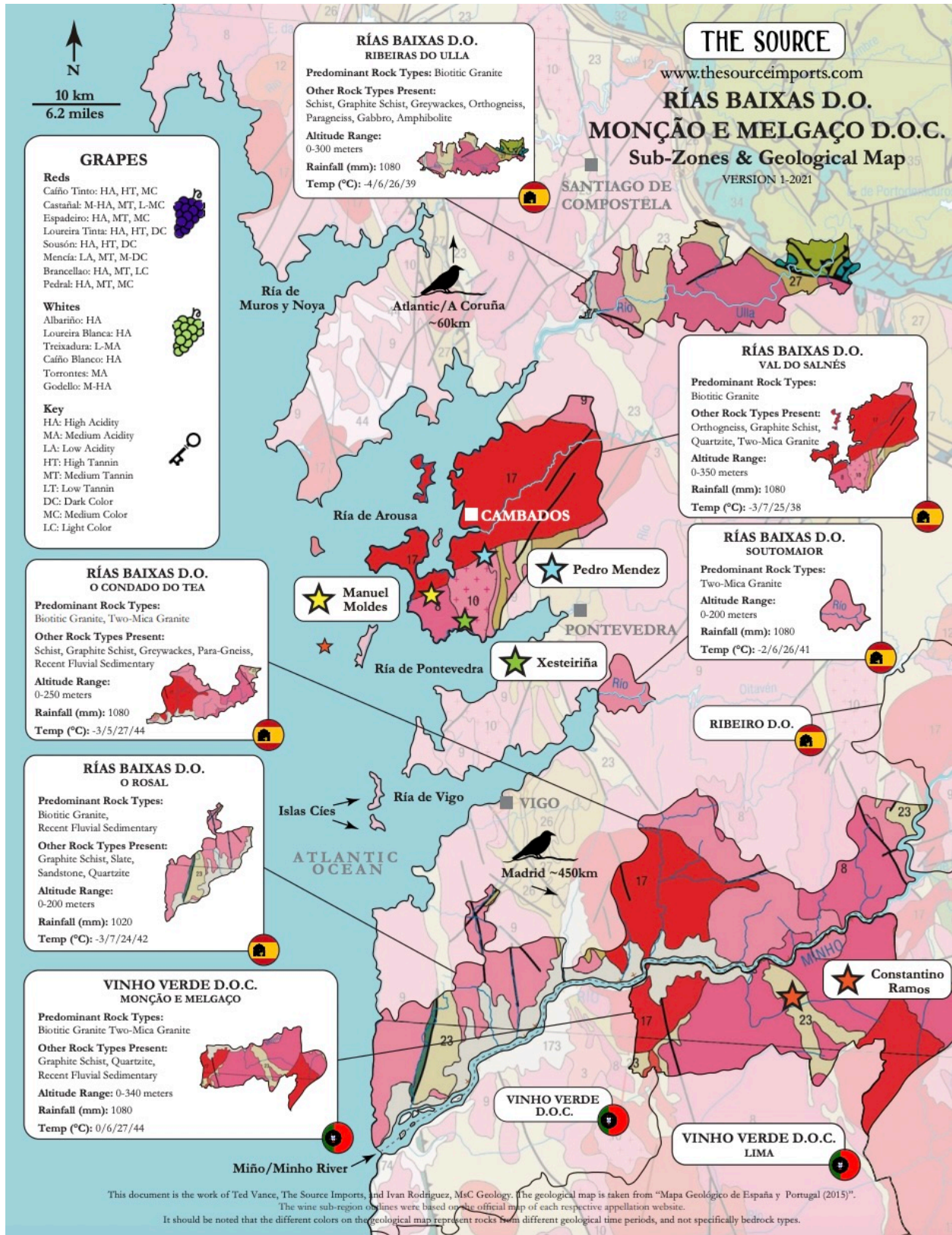
What is sure today is that it's not only Spain's Michelin restaurants that are fired up about his entire range, he's now all over in top spots in New York, Illinois and California, and not surprisingly, poured at many Michelin-starred restaurants and loads of restaurants and retailers that work with equal inspiration.

It's easy to understand why Pedro's wines fit Michelin restaurant menus so naturally. Both the reds and whites perform extraordinarily well with more time open. A microdose of oxygen every ten or fifteen minutes between tables makes them sing after an hour. The reds glide with light textures and unique finesse, balancing mineral, metal, tea notes, soft fruits, and salivating salty oceanic freshness. After a few hours, they become even more gorgeously refined and attractive. On the second day, they feel like they're still in their first hour open.



They're also an adventure for many into a relatively unknown corner of Europe, a place only now beginning to be rediscovered by a world outside Spain and the droves of olive-skinned Madrileños escaping summer heat to mingle with the paler-complected Galicians. It's the edge of a continent, the launching and landing point for boats crossing the Atlantic, a mysterious and often socked-in coast of scattered wave-breaking islands that mirror that of California's Channel Islands and curb the strong ocean currents from Galicia's estuaries whose scale and drama can evoke a softer Atlantic echo of Norway's fjords.

It's no surprise that Pedro's wines (and those of top Galician growers in general) are scattered across Spain's Michelin-starred restaurants: almost all use Galician produce! Inside the vast and docile estuaries, phytoplankton levels are said to be ten to fifty times that of the open ocean and gift the world richly flavored fish and extraordinary seafood, like the crocodile-like, finger-sized percebes (barnacles), briny, sweet berberechos (cockles) that explode in your mouth, and my inexhaustible favorite, the long and fat razor clams called navajas.



Further inland, rugged, worn-down ancient igneous and metamorphic hills that were once Himalayan in size rise from the ocean toward extreme vineyard lands thought to have been first planted by the Romans, which make Côte-Rôtie and Saint-Joseph seem tame. This is also home to celebrated Galician beef, whose fat is said to be as healthy as mackerel and salmon.

Pedro's wines are inexorably tied to all of this.



VIÑOS TINTOS

The aromatically powerful and classic Galician Atlantic red, **VIRUXE**, comes from two plots of Mencía, while the sometimes more refined but edgy Xuntanza is a blend of two parcels of Mencía and Caíño Tinto. In the past, Xuntanza was a multi-vintage blend, but in this new release, it comes from a single season's fruit. Viruxe is harvested from 50-to 75-year-old vines (2026) and Xuntanza from 50 to 80-year-old vines (2026), and both are grown on granite bedrock and sandy, silty topsoil rich in organic matter.

Viruxe, which means “fresh wind,” is aromatically intense but deceptive, as the palate delivers the variety's naturally gentle touch. Equally gulpable as it is intellectually stimulating, it alone presents a compelling argument for Mencía as a reasonable Rías Baixas red grape alternative to some of the more aggressive reds of the commune. It's naturally short on acidity and is usually acidified or blended with other grapes endowed with massive acidity, like Caíño. But here it doesn't need an unnatural boost or the blend, especially when harvested from such old vines grown on granite and a finishing alcohol of 11%. In Rías Baixas, this is perhaps the least ornery and easiest, pleasure-filled, aromatic, and serious red I've had from Salnés. Indeed, others deliver a worthwhile experience and are extremely well-made, like the deeply mineral and charged tintos of Manuel Moldes, but few are as inviting and gentle as Pedro's.

Compared to the 2021's aroma filled with chestnut, austere red fruits, pomegranate, sour cherry, bay leaf, and pungent mineral and metal notes, the 2023 Viruxe tasted in the first week of May initially delivered a smokier wine with a wider aperture of fruit from pink plum skin, a marriage of pink and orange fruits, to almost tropical fruits like papaya, guava and passion fruit. But just like the 2021 version (2022 wasn't bottled alone but blended into last season's Xuntanza), its strong natural snap makes it hard to reconcile that it is indeed pure Mencía. It's surely my favorite pure Mencía in Spain, though it's a difficult wine to relate to others from elsewhere in Galicia.

XUNTANZA meaning “union,” is equal parts Caíño Tinto and Mencía. The bottle tasted in May strikes sharply with a nose of red fruit and salty iodine, like *carefully* sticking your nose into a batch of fresh sea urchin. The palate is sterner and tense (Caíño effect—more intense tannin and acidity), but finishes with salivating mineral strength in the front palate and a suave back palate despite the Caíño-charged acidity. Its seabed-aromatic austerity softens quickly into a bouquet of fresh spring cherry, stonefruit, and citrus. This year resonated much more strongly with me than last season’s version—the vintage blend.



LOS ALBARIÑOS

Pedro’s Albariño collection is from the Salnés Valley hamlet, Meaño. If I were to draw a comparison to Pedro’s wines and our other growers from Rías Baixas, I’d say they’re more powerful than those of Manuel Moldes and perhaps equal core power to Xesteiriña but more contained and classically styled than the latter. Pedro’s Albariños have broad shoulders, a compact core and megathrust. This may be partly due to the older average vine age of his many parcels, and, in some cases, deeper topsoil that brings stronger gears.

It’s important to note that none of Pedro’s wines are labeled as Rías Baixas, so none bear the vintage date or grape name, though they’re both coded at the bottom as a lot name. These two non-conforming label elements are common in Galicia.

Pedro threw down the gauntlet in the first year of his wine labeled **PEDRO MÉNDEZ “VIÑO BRANCO DO VAL”** (Albariño) in 2022. The follow-up year was solid but didn’t stack up fully to such a dynamic wine in 2022. The 2024 tasted in early May 2026 is in the same line as the 2022, but perhaps a touch finer. It was simply stunning—impossible to ignore its pedigree; impossible to ignore its charm; impossible to ignore that he’s jumping ranks quickly toward the region’s top. It has peach, white-flower, and sweet-pear aromatics that shot straight out of the first glass, which was a good surprise for this cooler season.

Last year, I visited with Iago Garrido, the mind and hands behind Ribeiro’s Fazenda Augalevada, who had recently visited Pedro at his cellar, and was convinced that Pedro is already at the top. For those who want to be jostled off their seat by a delicious electric current of citrus, spring stone fruit, mineral, acid, and fabulous resonating chalky, gritty, stinging palate, I can’t disagree. It continues

where the previous two vintages left off: like a perfectly balanced wine margherita—my rare Achilles’ heel of cocktails.

The **AS ABELEIRAS “VIÑO BRANCO DE PARCELA”** (Albariño) is released a year after the entry-level Albariño and comes from a single *parcela* planted in 1996 by a very young Pedro and his father. It sits at 100 meters, on granite soil. While the 2019 was raised in steel, the 2021 was raised in old French oak barrels, the 2023 was raised in 75% in stainless steel and 25% old French oak, then lightly filtered because it was only partially through malolactic. (2020 and 2022 weren’t up to Pedro’s standard, so it was blended in with the entry-level wine.) While the other two Albariños have a broad band of expressions and roundness due to the diversity of parcels, this single vineyard’s uniqueness offers a more vertical than horizontal experience. Sometimes it’s a little closed on the nose at first, but then it blossoms and rewards the patient drinker. What I wrote in that April 2024 Newsletter hasn’t changed a bit: While the other two would be great for a bigger party because they jump into the mosh pit and start knocking people out on the first swing, As Abeleiras is initially snigger and better suited for a two-person tango.

While the others are wonderful in their way, this is the thinker, the wine to observe and admire for its singularity, focused austerity, and tight, chalky and grippy texture. It’s a mineral beam of light. The others are mineral bombs. I tasted this entire range with the sommelier team at the local restaurant, Villa Más, and their sommelier from Argentina, Guillermina, pointed out that it was unusually Riesling-like with its’ reduction leaning into the TDN (1,1,6-trimethyl-1,2-dihydronaphthalene), the petrol-like aroma nearly ubiquitous in older Riesling. This bottle had great austerity, mineral, and a vinyl-like reduction and sweet lemon.



While As Abeleiras is platinum, the color of **TRESVELLAS “VIÑO BRANCO DE VIÑEDOS HISTÓRICOS”** (Albariño) is between straw and gold leaf, and, as always, it tastes expensive. But the first time I ever tasted a vintage of Tresvellas was in Pedro’s arctic-cold cellar above Sanxenxo on a rainy and freezing November day. Everything was almost impossible to warm up—me, the wines, the cheese and charcuterie on the table—and break the ice shell on the wine. Cold Albariño, no matter how good, doesn’t pair well with a runny nose, numb face, and icy fingers and toes. But in the comfort of home or a fabulous restaurant, like Villa Más overlooking Platja Sant Pol, it’s different. And just like every other vintage, the 2023 is a gorgeously gilded beast of an Albariño. And when you see the vines it springs from—if you can call them that—you know the description is apt. They’re small trees! Their average age is well over a hundred years, and the wine feels like it was tapped from the tree like maple syrup from the maple tree. Among the three vintages I’ve tasted, all have deep

concentration and restraint. The warm and well-worked *Tresvellas* (Three Old Ladies) fills the glass and will challenge the great whites of Europe in this more robust style, from Côte d'Or Chardonnay, Arbois Savagnin and Chenin from Brézé. Each vintage shares the same classic high-toned lemony notes that go into full preserves: sweet, salty, acidic, zest oil, and the right amount of bitter pith, and rarely veers off this course.

The three *tree groves* sit at 10, 50 and 190 meters in altitude in the parishes of Simes (the highest) and Villalonga, with southwest orientation, and Padriñán, with south orientation on granite bedrock and granite sand and gravel on wide, relatively flat terraces. (In these intensely rainy areas, extreme slopes are less important than in other viticultural areas because water passes through granite soils quickly.) All three parcels are sheltered from Atlantic winds, which gives that extra body pump in an already naturally pumped wine whose citrus notes are richened by the sun with sweet lemon zest and lemon soufflé, similar to a Corsican Vermentino on granite, or even a hint of Amalfi Coast Biancolella but on a sturdy acidic frame and notable phenolic depth. In the cellar, it's naturally fermented, undergoes a partial malolactic fermentation, and is aged in old French oak until the next season's wine is ready to go into the same barrel. *Tresvellas* is one of the Rías Baixas's most formidable Albariños.