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Report # 28: The Wines of Priorat

Introduction

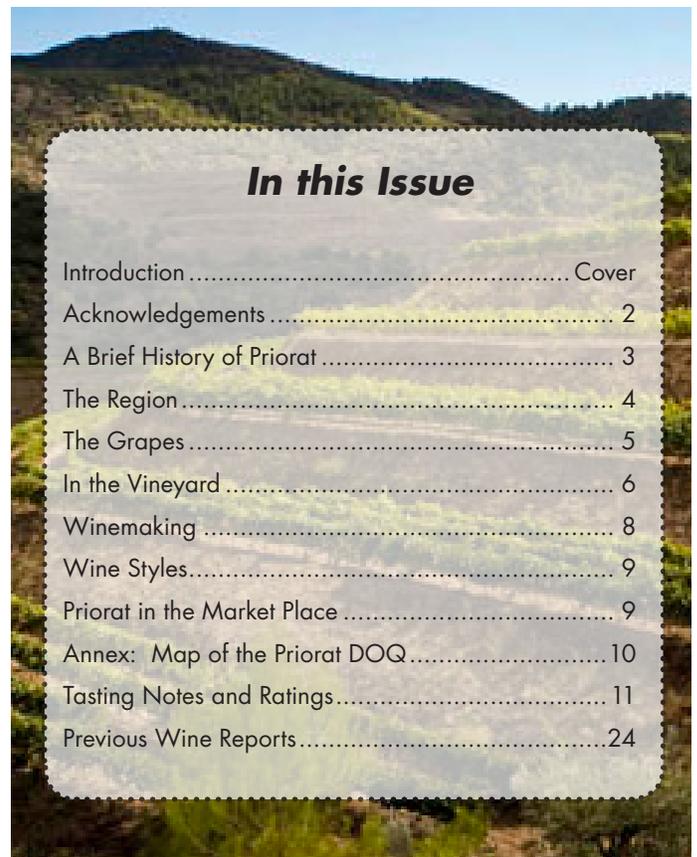
Priorat is one of Spain's most spectacular wine successes of the past quarter century. While the region has an illustrious, long history of winemaking dating back to Roman times and including the founding of Scala Dei in the 12th century, its current international reputation is based on developments since the late 1980s.

Thirty years ago, Priorat was impoverished. Its wines were sold in bulk and unappreciated by the wine trade. Today it is home to 93 wineries and 616 growers who together produce some of the world's most special wines from low yielding, old vine Garnacha (Grenache) and Cariñena (also called Samsó in Catalan and Carignan in English) planted in the unique, infertile licorella (schist) soils of the region. The story behind Priorat's rebirth and meteoric rise to fame is fascinating.

As is often the case, it took the foresight of a few exceptional individuals to realize Priorat's rebirth. Rene Barbier is the region's first and foremost pioneer. He and his fellow pioneers saw the potential of Priorat in its unique terroir and its rich treasure of scraggly old Garnacha and Cariñena bush vines. It is these vines that produced the wines immediately recognized by the world's foremost writers and reviewers as being truly exceptional in character and quality.

While the wines that made Priorat famous are costly to produce and expensive to purchase, the region's growers and its wave of dynamic new winemakers have introduced new plantings of Garnacha, Cariñena, and French varieties that provide the fruit for new lines of less costly wines. Our tastings reveal these medium-priced wines to be of surprisingly high quality with many of the same flavor characteristics of their more pricey and prestigious brethren.

In this report we explore Priorat and its wines. We look at both its ancient and modern wine history, the wine pioneers of the region, the special terroir, the old terraced vineyards, and the blend of traditional and modern winemaking that create these



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magnificent wines. While recent, difficult economic times have adversely influenced the fine wine market, we are confident that Priorat will survive and thrive, especially as its fame spreads beyond its traditional export markets to the growing wine markets of Asia, especially China.

Our reviews of over 150 Priorat wines are presented at the end of this report and are also available on our website.

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Mike Potashnik, Publisher Don Winkler, Editor



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