

High atop the Mediterranean scrublands, row upon row of bull-headed grapes sprawl beneath the Spanish sun. Wedged between a rising plateau and the Mediterranean Sea just 43 miles away, the vineyards of Utiel-Requena roll into the distance. A full 100 wineries call this ancient Iberian winemaking region home, and it's here too that Spain's native Bobal grape flourishes.

The third most planted grape in Spain (after Airén and Tempranillo, respectively), Bobal takes its name from its irregular

Utiel-Requena's reds exceptionally well: The wines grow powerful, yet retain magnificent acidity; robust fruit and complex tannins are kept in balance.

Deep purple in color, Bobal wines feature intense floral aromas and notes of tropical red cherry and raspberry when young. With age, the red fruit aromas give way to black fruits such as blackberry, sometimes with fig leaf and balsamic scents. These fruit and wild aromas carry through on the palate, which also may express hints of chocolate or even cocoa.

farmed. More than 50 percent of Utiel-Requena's Bobal plantings are at least 40 years old, and several date as far back as the beginning of the 20th century.

But grapegrowing—and winemaking—is far from new in Utiel-Requena. While the Romans landed here in 1 B.C. and improved winemaking, the early Iberians had been making wine for centuries prior. In Utiel-Requena, they have been producing wine for more than 2,700 years, as is evidenced in local archaeological sites. The remains of Iberia's oldest industrial winery, dating from between the 7th and 5th centuries B.C., can be seen at the nearby archaeological site of La Solana de Las Pilillas Requena. Here, stone troughs once used for trodding grapes are perched above a series of terraces signaling the remains of four wineries and

a series of adjoining structures once used for the production and storage of wine. Within the ancient winery walls,

BOBAL RISING

Discover the power, history and allure of a native Spanish grape

cones that hang in Taurus-shaped clusters. Bobal's predominance in Spain may be in large part thanks to its brawn, its inky dark skin color and its relatively high acidity, all of which, in the past, made it sought-after for blending.

A Denominación de Origen within the Valencian community, Utiel-Requena takes each half of its name from sister towns. The farthest inland of Valencia's D.O.s, the warmest in temperature, and the D.O. with the lowest rainfall, Utiel-Requena's Mediterranean climate with a continental influence could threaten to result in overly ripe wines. Instead, incredible diurnal shifts—hot summer days followed by cold nights—mitigate the scenario. Here, at elevations ranging from 1,960 to 2,950 feet above sea level, daytime temperatures regularly swell to 104° F, then plummet to as low as 59° at night. All of this serves

In addition to the preponderance of Bobal, which accounts for 80 percent of Utiel-Requena's vineyard plantings, red grapes Tempranillo, Macabeo, Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Pinot Noir, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc are also planted in the region. For some winemakers, this has brought the opportunity for both single-variety wines and unique blends. And while reds naturally dominate Utiel-Requena, they are not the only wines made. The regions' rosés—largely from Bobal—are known for intensity and red fruit character, and whites include Tardana, Merseguera, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Parellada, Verdejo and Moscatel de Grano Menudo.

Today, Utiel-Requena is home to 90,000 acres of higher altitude vineyards, set atop soils of alluvial riverbed and clay and limestone deposits, most of which are dry-

archaeologists have uncovered fragments of amphorae—dating to the 7th century—once used in the fermentation and storing of wine. Today, visitors can explore various tufa limestone caves, some of which feature wine cellars and gravity-fed production sites from as long ago as the 14th century, beneath both Utiel and Requena.

While winemaking in the region may be an ancient endeavor, today Bobal and Utiel-Requena are on the rise. Las Pilillas Requena is likely to be one of the next UNESCO Heritage sites, and wine lovers are flocking to the region to discover this history—and the modern versions of Utiel-Requena wines—for themselves. All of which is part of why more Bobals and Bobal blends, and even Bobal-based sparkling wines, are making their own migration to the New World today.

TASTE THE PLACE:

ARANLEÓN

Sólo Red

Organic winery Aranleón's flagship, Sólo Red is 100 percent Bobal. The wine undergoes malolactic fermentation in Hungarian and French oak barrels and then is aged in those barrels for another 11 months before bottling. A medium- to high-intensity wine, with ruby color, on the nose there are ripe berries with balsamic aromas and Mediterranean notes such as lavender. On the palate, the wine is full of red- and black-berries as well as fig notes and hints of oak on a fresh mineral background.



BODEGAS NODUS

Nodus Bobal

Bodegas Nodus's philosophy is based around the goal of showcasing terroir, from vine through vinification. For Bobal, that means barrel-aging the wine for balance while still allowing the grape's character to shine through. The Nodus Bobal's fruity notes are dark red, with hints of strawberry and raspberry, all balanced with smooth toasted notes and touches of smoky, toasted vanilla.



CHOZAS CARRASCAL

las 2 ces Tinto

Set atop a hill of limestone and sandy soils nearly 2,300 feet above sea level, 60-year-old Bobal vines flourish at Chozas Carrascal. Today, the winery hand-harvests those organic grapes, ferments the juice in concrete tanks, then ages it in used oak barrels for six months to express all the power and finesse of old-vine Bobal. Red ruby in color, with violet hues, the wine is opaque and concentrated, with a nose of toasted aromas and balsamic notes and a palate full of cherry, herbs and spices.



COVIÑAS

Aula Bobal

A selection of their best plots of Bobal vines, Aula makes this tinto using traditional winemaking practices hand-in-hand with highly modern winemaking techniques to produce a wine that is youthful and fruit-driven. In the glass, it's a deep violet red. The nose is full of wild strawberries and red currants, while the palate is smooth, with heady hints of red fruit.



DOMINIO DE LA VEGA

Bobal En Calma

This pioneer family-owned winery makes quality, terroir-based, 100 percent Bobal wine. Bobal en Calma is grown in the 70-year-old, low yield "La Muela" Estate vineyards, full of clay and limestone soils 2,378 feet above sea level. This Bobal undergoes malolactic fermentation in 132-gallon barrels, where it spends an additional nine months before bottling. It is then matured in the cellar until it reaches optimum expression. In the glass, the wine is cherry red with violet hints. The nose offers up intense aromas of blackberry and black currant as well as vanilla, toffee and spices, while the palate is fresh, fruity and structured.



PAGO DE THARSYS

Tharsys Único

The Utiel-Requena region is permitted to make sparkling wines thanks to Vicente García, founder of Pago de Tharsys. The only sparkling wine made of Bobal existing in the market, this blanc de noirs spends 28 months in the cellar. Pale, raw yellow in color, the fine delicate bubbles release a bouquet of Mediterranean fruits such as apricot, quince, apple and pear, all mixed with subtle undertones of breadcrumbs, toasted almonds and white flowers.



TORO LOCO

Tinto Superior

Mostly harvested by hand, the vineyards making Toro Loco are cultivated by 3,500 families who stand behind the success of Toro Loco. The blend of Tempranillo and Bobal undergoes a very careful winemaking process to offer a fresh and juicy wine with aromas of strawberries and cherries and a velvety tannin structure.



TORRE ORIA

Viñedo Antiguo Bobal

Founded in 1897, Torre Oria is among the oldest wineries of the region of Valencia. Today, Torre Oria produces a range of still and sparkling wines, all aged in the winery's historic cellars. The Viñedo Antiguo is 100 percent Bobal, comes from very old vines and spent six months on oak. The wine reveals intense flavors of plum and dark berries, with hints of dark chocolate, as well as layers of black cherries, followed by a long finish.



VALSANGIACOMO BODEGA

Bobal de San Juan

100% Bobal. The Valsangiacomo family has been producing wine in Spain since the late 19th century, but it was just 10 years ago that they launched the Bobal de San Juan project. Intent on displaying Bobal's classic fruit-forward features and taming the wine without hiding its rustic nature, the Bobal de San Juan winery ferments, then ages, all of its Bobal in large concrete vats. This wine, made from old vines, is red with a medium-garnet core and displays red fruits and subtle hints of violets and black pepper on the nose. On the palate, the wine is soft, spicy and juicy, with a fascinating crunchy-fruit freshness and ripe-tannin texture.



VERA DE ESTENAS

Estenas Bobal

With their plantings on clay and calcareous soils, family producer Vera de Estenas is on a mission to champion Bobal. This Bobal is full-bodied, with good acidity and a long finish. Purple-ruby in color with a violet edge, it shows complex fruitiness on the nose, offering up blueberries and blackberries and some floral notes, as well as oak nuances.



utiel-requena
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UTIEL REQUENA
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