

# Ep 164 The wines of Ribera del Duero with Master of Wine Tim Atkin (Part 2)



**Janina Doyle 00:00:07** Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends, and welcome back. So, today, this is part two, with Master of Wine Tim Atkin and we're going to be hearing from Tim what it's like to write his wine reports. What he is looking for when he tastes a wine and then decides how to rank a winery or to put a wine or a specific winemaker in his podium.

As you would have heard last week, this episode is all about the Ribera del Duero region as recently Tim published his last report on this area. However, if you haven't heard last week's episode on Rioja, be sure to go back and listen to that one.

Now this region may, like Rioja, be mostly about Tempranillo. But what about an even older grape variety? One of the parents of Tempranillo. And I'm talking about Albillo Mayor. We will be touching on all of the grapes, the regions, the climate, why is this region so extreme? Why is this the most prestigious? We'll talk about its history. And also some of Tim's most special and spiritually grounding wine spots for him to be in.

Now of course a very special mention to my sponsor of this series, [Wickhams Wine](#). And in fact they do have a bottle of Bodegas Resalte de Penafiel, Ribera del Duero, Lecco Roble, on their site. Sorry, that sounded really long. The winery Resalte de Penafiel is rated as one of Tim's Cru Bourgeois.

Don't forget, if you're on that site, use the code 'EATSLEEP10' for 10% off your first order. You can go to my show notes for the link to their website, along with the transcript that I do for this podcast. If you want to look up any names or regions that Tim mentions, you can. So, pour yourself a glass of wine and let's go.

**Janina Doyle 00:02:37** Right, now, let us move on to Ribera del Duero because I've actually really enjoyed, this is the latest report that I've been reading through and it's been brilliant because I know a lot less about Ribera del Duero than Rioja, which we just spoke about on our previous report.

Now, I love your reports because we mentioned on the episode before, you create the 1855 classification system. So, you put certain wineries into the level so it can really give people an idea of what to try. You give people awards: The Young Winemaker of the Year, The Legend Winemaker, The Best Value White, The Best Value Rosé, The Best Red – there's everything.

And then you give points and information about every wine. There's just so much. You give every report, I love the system, the 10 things that people must know about this region. And there's a lot in those 10 things. What is it like for you writing these reports because you're doing quite a lot of them now as well?

**Tim Atkin 00:03:40** Yeah, I won't pretend they're not hard work. But I mean, there are obviously two phases. And the one phase is the research where I go to the region, I taste all the wines, and I take notes, and then I come back and the first thing I do is I write the tasting notes up. And that can be a bit of a slog, to be honest.

I mean, I think I write reasonably good tasting notes, but writing, you know, I have a system and it looks a bit like, had a grid, it looks a bit like a prison sentence where I do 75 a day and I cross them off. And basically, I do 25 every two hours.

So, I do three blocks of two hours during the day and I break them up by going off for a run or going to gym or something like that. And that's how I do it. And then the last bit, which is the most pleasurable bit, because it's the most journalistic bit, is when I've kind of taken all the stuff out of my notebook, I do the 10 things.

So, the 10 things, some of them are consistent from one year to the next, but others change. And so, I try to shake them up a bit. And some things are re-edits of what I've written before, but I try always to put new stuff in there so that somebody who bought last year's report is not just getting the same 10 things. And those are the bits that interest me as a journalist and as an amateur historian in a sense, and those are the bits that are most journalistic and I hope the most fun to read.

**Janina Doyle 00:04:50** As a Master of Wine, you mentioned before that actually you think you're quite good at the tasting.

**Tim Atkin 00:04:55** I hope so!

**Janina Doyle 00:04:56** What are you looking for when you're rating the wines, when you're tasting every wine and going to visit the wineries?

**Tim Atkin 00:05:04** That's a good question. I have this disagreement with a fellow Master of Wine and she says that you should be able to rate wines objectively, right? In other words, you should be able to say, I don't like the style of wine, but I can see that it's well done.

I half agree with that. So, there might be a solid wine where I think, I really don't like this, I find it a bit over alcoholic, it's got too much oak, but I can see it's well done, right? And I would give it an okay score. But for me, for something to really thrill me and excite me, for me to give it a high score and a rave review, it has to be something that personally, I'd wanna drink and I'd wanna buy.

And I remember doing a show in Australia once and Steve Weber, who was the chairman of the judges said, I don't want you to give a gold medal to any wine you wouldn't personally buy a case of. And I thought, that's good advice. So, I thought, anything from me that gets 98 points and above or even 95 points and above would have to be something that I would not only drink, but put my own money on the table and say, "I'll buy this."

So, I'm cautiously subjective. I think in the end, the reason people read me and not somebody else or they buy my reports is they want my opinion and they want my taste buds. And I think I have a certain set of styles of wine. And it thrilled me recently that somebody in South Africa said to me, "I always

think of this as the Tim wine,” and I said, “Great.” And he said that people have started to say, “Hey, this is the kind of wine that Tim would like.”

I like that! My feeling about wine writers as the people, I don't think I have a monopoly on taste. I don't think I'm the best taster in the world and the only person whose opinion matters. But I think if you're buying a wine that I've recommended, I want somebody to come in a way to say, “Okay, I can understand why that guy recommended that wine. And it makes sense that his palate is consistent.” I mean, I think palate is all over the place where you're trying to second guess the consumer. Doesn't make sense to me.

**Janina Doyle 00:06:50** Yeah, no, okay. That's really, really... And you know what? At the end of the day, it is so true. There are many people out there giving certain points. They are wine professionals or Masters of Wine, and everyone is going to be different. And there are certain, without mentioning any names, there are certain other wine writers and tasters that always are known to score a lot higher than everybody else and things like that.

But the point is, I suppose, actually, that a good advice for anybody is listen to these critics, go and taste the wines and if you agree with them, you'll notice sooner rather than later if you agree with them based on those wines. And then, actually then, you can be like, hey, right, yeah, I actually really do like the wines that Tim recommends. So, actually, every time he says it's a really good wine, I know I'm going to like it. So, yeah, and you could do that with other critics and journalists, can't you? Yeah.

**Tim Atkin 00:07:36** This is my guy or my woman, you know, in a sense that, and I agree with it, and there are people who I think overscore and there are individuals, but they're also companies that do this that give gold medals to wines that don't deserve them, in my opinion. And I think it's cynical, but I can't say that in public. I can't name the people or the businesses involved.

But I think you, as a consumer, can look at it and go and buy a wine, see a gold medal on it or a high score from a certain person or group of people and say, I don't agree with this. And if you don't agree with that, then treat that person's reviews very warily and say, okay, I think this person or group of people or whatever competition is inflating its scores to carry favour with producers and get quoted more.

And people sometimes accuse me of giving scores that are too high, particularly in South Africa, but I genuinely believe in the wines. I think it's important, as you say, to find your critic. And that's true of anything, like, films or music or anything, any strand, I should say, of criticism, it's important that you find a critic or a group of critics who you agree with on the benefit of, given the benefit of doubt they will probably choose something that's worth watching or listening to or drinking.

**Janina Doyle 00:08:47** So, for those people that do agree that their palate matches with your palate, can you give a slight sneak preview to those who have not read the Ribera del Duero report of this year yet, and maybe mention a few winemakers or wines that made the podium this year that people might want to keep an eye out for?

**Tim Atkin 00:09:05** Yeah! The winemaker of the year was somebody they probably won't have heard of, which is a guy called Cesar Mate, M-A-T-E, and he has a bodega with his partner called Marta Mate. And I think Marta Mate, he was my winemaker of the year, and I think that he's well worth looking out for.

The legend of the year was a chap called Felix Callejo. And Felix Callejo is the name of the bodega and is his name. He's now retired, but his kids are running Felix Callejo. And Felix Callejo, I think, is a truly brilliant winery.

The wine of the year was Vega Sicilia. Sorry, folks, it was Unico. Unico is very expensive, but it was a truly wonderful wine. Another winery that I would look out for, and they won the Rosè of the Year, are called Territorio Lutiher, L-U-T-H-I-E-R, like a lute. And those wines, again, small bodega, well worth looking out for.

Another producer, brilliant producer, called Magna Vides, which is V-I-D-E-S. Another small producer called Valdaya. I think they're really good. And the young winemaker of the year, he says, trying to remember who it was, was from a bodega called Sei Solo. And so, Sei Solo is again a really, really good winery. So, there's just a few highlights, but have a look. You know, all the wines of the year are in there. And Ribera is, again, one of those regions that's much, much, much more diverse than people think.

**Janina Doyle 00:10:21** No, and actually what I like you said, oh, sorry, guys, you know, my red wine of the year is one of the most expensive. And quite rightly so, very iconic wine. But what I like as well is you score all the wines, but for everybody right at the back, there's like the reference guide where you've literally listed every wine and then you give an idea of pricing. Or do you actually...? Yeah, I think you actually put, I can't remember, the actual price?

**Tim Atkin 00:10:41** Yeah, I do. I have the prices in euros because some of these people don't export to the UK. And therefore, the prices they get in the Ribera report would be the prices in the Spanish market in a wine shop.

**Janina Doyle 00:10:51** But it gives you an idea again, if people only want to spend a certain amount of money, but they really want to try a wine that you recommended that's within a certain point, level, they can kind of look at it. Actually, it's like a reference guide. So, it's really good how you've broken it all down.

**Tim Atkin 00:11:04** I think you can cross reference. Wine that gets, I don't know, 91 points and it sells under €15 in Spain is pretty good. It's a bit of a bargain. And funny enough, we did a tasting in London recently of the top wines and they were all there, but we also had a value table and it was something like 30 wines that sell under €15 in Spain and some really good wines.

I think Ribera has a reputation for being an expensive region, obviously, partly because of Vega Sicilia, but also because of Pingus, which is even more expensive. But it is a region that produces good value, too. The sweet spot in a way, and this is true of wine in general, in any market, is to find the wine with the highest score.

**Janina Doyle 00:11:42** With the lowest price!

**Tim Atkin 00:11:43** Well, not the lowest price, but a price that you can afford. I mean, I think in England, I mean, it's moved up a bit now because of duty and all sorts of other things. But the sweet spot in England these days is sort of between £8 and £15. You know, you can drink very well in that area as long as you choose your region and your country carefully. You can drink some pretty smart stuff. You don't need to spend £100 a bottle.

**Janina Doyle 00:12:05** Thank goodness! Not always. Talking about Ribera Del Duero, now you have actually put in your report that this is the most prestigious region of Spain. So, why do you believe this is the most prestigious?

**Tim Atkin 00:12:18** Well, partly because it's based on the fame of those two wines. I mean, you know, Vega Sicilia and Pingus are two of the most expensive Spanish wines. I mean, there are others as well like Ermita, maybe from Priorat.

There's nothing really in Rioja. Rioja is a very prestigious region as well in the top end, but there's nothing really that sells at the price of those sorts of wines. I mean, Pingus is €850-something a bottle now.

**Janina Doyle 00:12:41** I was going to say a thousand almost, yeah.

**Tim Atkin 00:12:42** Yeah, probably a €1000 a bottle. That's pretty serious. And so, I think the prestige of that place, and I think you could argue that Vega Sicilia is Spain's most famous winery. So, I think the fact that it's got the most famous winery in Spain, pretty historic winery too, but it's also got what is probably the most expensive wine in Spain too, means that it's prestigious.

It's smaller than Rioja, it's about a third of the size. I'm not saying Rioja is not prestigious, I just think that Ribera is probably more prestigious and just has a better image. I think Rioja has sometimes a bit of a cheap and cheerful image and it's something that's done to itself in a way.

**Janina Doyle 00:13:15** So, now you've talked about Vega Sicilia and Vega Sicilia history actually is quite intense. A lot of people might not know about its history. So, actually, can you – and you touch on that in the report in much more detail, but are you able to just give us a little bit of an idea?

**Tim Atkin 00:13:30** Absolutely! Vega Sicilia was founded in 1864. And it's funny enough, there's a link with Rioja here. A lot of the top Rioja wineries in the mid-19th century were set up in the 1850s and onwards by Spaniards who basically fled Spain during the wars and had actually come back to Spain from France and set up wineries.

So, they brought French ideas with them. And that's true of Marqués de Riscal, for example, which was very, very famous for doing that. Marqués de Murrieta. And it was also true of Vega Sicilia. Vega Sicilia was founded in 1864 by somebody called Don Eloy de Lecanda.

And to start with, the winery was actually called Bodega Winery de Lecanda. So, he named the wine after himself. And this guy was a true revolutionary. He brought Cabernet Sauvignon, Carménère, Malbec, Petit Verdot, obviously they're all Bordeaux, but he also brought Pinot Noir. A lot of these things are still planted at Vega Sicilia.

So, Vega Sicilia was a testing ground really for these great varieties. And Ribera del Duero in those days was not known as Ribera del Duero and didn't have a particularly good name for its wine. And from 1864 to 1927 when Protos, which is the local, what was then a cooperative was founded, Vega Sicilia was the only bodega that was bottling its wines in Ribera del Duero.

So, it was an icon, you know, for all that time. And it's remained an icon now, particularly since the Álvarez family bought it, I think, in 1982. They put a lot of investment into it. It's a pretty special winery. When I spent a morning one day with their viticulturist, nothing escapes their attention. It's like unbelievable attention to detail in the vineyard, in the winery.

And it's one of those wineries that's very special. It's true also for some of Bordeaux's first growths. It kind of deserves its reputation, it deserves its high prices, because it's bloody good. And they put the work in. It's not cynical, it's that they care about the wines.

**Janina Doyle 00:15:12** Well, I said to you that probably the fact that we were talking about Spanish wine, I would mention my dad at some point. Vega Sicilia Unico is always going to be a very special wine for the two of us because basically, one time I gifted him a bottle.

Now, I didn't buy the bottle. I was very lucky. I was a sommelier at the time and I was given a tip by a very affluent customer. And the tip was this bottle of Unico. I think it was 2003. And I gave it to my dad and said, look, I drank a bottle with the customer. I already know how amazing it is. And I want you to have this because he's incredible, he'd been doing all these wonderful things. And he said, "Oh my God, this is amazing!" Like, he looked it up, he saw how expensive it was. And he said, we're gonna drink this on a very special moment together. And I said, "That's fine, whenever you want it. Don't worry. This is your bottle. But yes, of course, I'm happy to drink it with you."

And then one day on a Wednesday or Thursday night, I get this phone call from my dad. He's practically crying down the phone. And I'm thinking that somebody's dead and he can't get his words out. And I am like, oh, my God, my heart is pounding. I feel sick. And he's like, "Your mom! Your mom!" Like, what, oh my God, what about my mom? And he's like, "I asked her to go behind the bar and get a bottle of wine out and she went past all the screw caps."

Basically, anyway, long story short, my mum decided to open up this Wednesday night a bottle of Vega Sicilia and it went with a pizza that had been put in the oven. And he was devastated and he was like, "I drank like a full glass and then I realized it was amazing."

**Tim Atkin 00:16:43** At least he drank it.

**Janina Doyle 00:16:45** I was like, well, dad, first of all, how good is that? You didn't even know what it was, but you realized it was so good that he asks my mom and then my mom shows him the bottle and his heart falls out of his chest. And he says, "Can you come down? Can you get down tomorrow?" And I'm like, "Dad, listen, I've got work to do. I can't come down and see you. You're going to have to drink the rest of this bottle yourself."

Anyway, but you know, we laugh about it now because I was like, look, dad, like there are very little people that would open up a bottle of Unico Vega Sicilia and eat it with frozen, well, defrosted and cooked frozen pizza. Like, you know, good for you.

**Tim Atkin 00:17:20** At least it didn't go into a stew or something like that, right?

**Janina Doyle 00:17:22** It could have been worse. So, oh God, yes. So, it's a very special wine. Now we talk about this incredible region. Many people may not know about its extremes and its climate. Do you think the fact that, I mean, I think you described this that you have to dress like an onion when you go to Ribera del Duero. You have to love lots of layers.

**Tim Atkin 00:17:45** Exactly.

**Janina Doyle 00:17:46** It's the fact that it could be so hot in the day, it's so cold at night, the real diurnal range, the extremes. Do you think that's what makes this region so amazing or are there other factors?

**Tim Atkin 00:17:58** Absolutely. It's like no other region on earth really that I can think of, that it has a very, very short growing season, right? Because it has very long winters and very short but very intense summers.

But even at the height of summer, as you said, you often find, you know, you could be in shorts during the day and you kind of need a sweatshirt at night. So, that diurnal variation, as you said, is kind of a key to the wines and the styles of the wines that are made there. And it's the reason why the short growing season, why they've historically grown Tempranillo – Tempranillo, Temprano in Spanish means early, it means early, obviously, and so it's an early ripening grape variety because the season is so short. I mean, locally, it's often called Tinto Fino. So, just fine red.

But no, exactly. It's part of this high Spanish central plateau, the Meseta. It's in the northern part of the Meseta. Spain in winter gets really cold, that central bit. I flew through Madrid yesterday, two days ago, and I went back from Chile, and I changed planes and it was minus three at 6 o'clock in the morning. So, it gets really cold. And that's what Ribera is about, really. Although, like a lot of places in the world, it's warming up and that's potentially a problem, really.

**Janina Doyle 00:19:07** But I suppose they still, again, it's up to about 800.

**Tim Atkin 00:19:12** No, I mean, it goes up to a thousand really.

**Janina Doyle 00:19:14** Okay! There's still space for them to plant higher. And I think that in your report, even you mentioned that is, I mean, that's one of the ways that perhaps, again, they can try and combat climate change. Yes, exactly.

**Tim Atkin 00:19:28** It's funny. I mean, the high bit is known as the páramo. And the páramo in English is moreland, so it's flat stuff up the top. Historically, that's where the limestone is. Limestone is a very good thing on which to grow Tempranillo. And basically, because the region historically was underwater, and so it's marine-based fossils and limestone.

What happened is that a lot of these areas are 1,000 meters, the páramo, were too cold to grow grapes. In other words, even Tempranillo, early ripening Tempranillo, ripened too late, so people didn't plant up there. People started to plant in the 1990s and when people did it, a lot of people said, "You're insane, this will never ripen." But the pioneers have been proved right because with climate change, it's now possible to ripen Tempranillo at a thousand meters.

In fact, those are probably some of the best sites. So, these high vineyards, flat vineyards rather than on slopes, often on limestone soils in the paramo are slightly the sort of Riberas of the future, I think.

**Janina Doyle 00:20:25** And presumably standing in some of the vineyards that high up you must have some very beautiful views looking out across the region, right?

**Tim Atkin 00:20:25** Yeah! I mean, Ribera Duero is in Castilla y León and Castilla y León is the heart of old Castile, as it was known in Spain. And it's famous for these unbelievable views, vistas, you know. It's just intense. Often with castles on hillsides, it's sort of the image that people have of Spain when they think about Don Quixote, a famous novel by Cervantes where Don Quixote is riding across La Mancha. That's the landscape he would have been riding across, really.

And these unbelievable vistas, you can see for miles and miles and miles and miles because, as you said, you're high up. You get mountains, you just get these unbelievable valleys, and there's not much in terms of centers of population either.

I mean, obviously Valladolid is reasonably a large city and Burgos is quite big but there's a lot of expanse, a lot of space. And you really get this sense of light, incredible light, incredible color, fresher air. And as you said, the intensity that comes with altitude and the diurnal variation, it's a brutal place to grow grapes. It's a slightly scary place to go in a way. It's like, when it's cold, it's really cold. When there's a hail storm, it's really bad. You know, when it rains, it really rains. And particularly with climate change, this stuff is getting more extreme in a way. So, it is an extreme place to grow grapes. And I think that's kind of reflected in the wines.

**Janina Doyle 00:21:51** So now you've touched on Tempranillo or Tinto Fino, which is the same grape variety as in Rioja, but actually as well, the blend of what they put with the Tempranillo is actually very different as well. So, what are your thoughts on the other grapes that can go with Tempranillo in a Ribera del Duero?

**Tim Atkin 00:22:08** They've changed them recently. I mean, the laws are slightly strange in anything that was planted before 1982. And 1982 was the year when the DO, the Appellation, the Denominación de origen was created.

So, Ribera is a very young region. It's just over 40 years old, really. But it's much older than that in a sense, but it wasn't codified until 1982. So, then they decided that Tempranillo had to be a certain percentage, and the percentage was 75% of all reds. And then, you could use 25% of other reds, but some of them were limited to the amount that you could use and some could only be used if they'd been planted before 1982.

**Janina Doyle 00:22:43** Of course, I didn't know that!

**Tim Atkin 00:22:5** Yeah, so it's a bit strange. But the other things you can basically grow are the Bordeaux grapes. So, Cabernet, Merlot, Malbec. You can also use Garnacha, but only up to 5% Garnacha, I think. But you can't use Bobal. And Bobal is a grape that came in from Valencia and is a grape with naturally high acidity, unless it was planted before 1982. So, these vineyards, old vineyards, often have hundreds of different grape varieties but the region was very strict in hanging its hat, if you like, on Tinto Fino, on Tempranillo, and saying, we want our wines to be either only made from Tinto Fino or dominated by Tinto Fino.

I think the percentage for other grapes was 25%. It used to be that you could only use 5% white, but they recently changed that, and you can now use up to 25%. And the white grape varieties are used to add acidity to Tempranillo, because Tempranillo is not particularly high in acidity, and with climate change even in a cold region...

**Janina Doyle 00:23:36** It's not helping.

**Tim Atkin 00:23:36** It's not helping, really. So, I think it was a smart move by them to allow more white grapes, which is what would have happened historically in the region anyway. If you go back into the 50s, white grapes would have been much, much, much more important than they are now. Now they're a tiny percent of what's planted.

**Janina Doyle 00:23:50** Well, this is interesting because you mentioned the white grapes. So again, throughout your report, there's a commentary on Albillo Mayor, the white grape variety, which is hardly planted, but now, one, can be used blended in with Tempranillo, but there are some winemakers that are actually focusing on making a hundred percent, this white grape variety. And you're definitely championing this white grape variety, aren't you?



**Tim Atkin 00:24:15** Yeah. It's a really interesting grape. One of the small little footnotes to its history, if you like, is, and it's one of the reasons that people think that the Tempranillo or Tinto Fino may have originated in Ribera del Duero is that the Albillo Mayor is the father of Tempranillo and the mother is a red grape called Benedicto, which I've also tasted both in Ribera and in Rioja, and you can still find in vineyards.

And so, Albillo is a very historic grape, and it's so historic that it predated Tempranillo, if you like. So, again, it's been around for a long time, but it's only in the last two or three years that they've allowed white Ribera to be made. And most people are making either 100% Albillo Mayor, or they're using white grape varieties that were planted, again, before 1982.

And so, again, a lot of these old vineyards have all sorts of stuff in them. And you can blend other white grape varieties in with Albillo Mayor, but only if the vineyards are historic. I mean, it's a really interesting grape.

**Janina Doyle 00:25:08** Yeah, I think you have come up with a conclusion in your report. You do kind of describe it, but it seems that it depends on if it's an old vine, if it's younger, where it's planted. Like there's not a hundred percent consistency of this is what it should taste like.

**Tim Atkin 00:25:24** I think that's a very perceptive thing to say. There are certain grape varieties, let's say something like Gewurztraminer, right, which pretty much anywhere it's grown in the world, smells and tastes about the same, really. I mean, it's got a very strong personality. Albillo Mayor is a little bit more nuanced in a sense.

And I think what you said is correct, that it needs to be in the right place. And old vines, a bit like Viura really in Rioja, that it's a comparatively neutral grape variety and that to get the best out of it, it needs to be in the right place. And with some old vines. And then when it's got that, it could be really interesting. And there are half a dozen, I think, fantastic white grapes, so white wines made with Albillo Mayor. So, watch the space. I think Ribera Blanco is an exciting new avenue really for the region.

**Janina Doyle 00:26:06** Do you think that they should be focusing even more on whites or do you still think Ribera del Duero needs to be known as the red?

**Tim Atkin 00:26:14** I think it's what it does best as red. What I would allow is, for the moment, it's illegal to make a red wine 100% with Garnacha. Bobal is completely forbidden. And I think a lot of these Mediterranean grape varieties that have higher levels of natural acidity and withstand heat, Ribera is hotting up, and particularly two of the last three vintages have been very hot, and irrigation can be expensive, particularly in old vineyards where it wasn't there. I think that these Mediterranean grape varieties would add a lot.

My next hope is that Ribera will be a bit more flexible and maybe allow people to make a pure Garnacha. People are doing it, but at the moment they can't sell it as Ribera del Duero. It has to be called Vino de la Tierra de Castilla y León, so a table wine or a Vin de Pays equivalent really, country wine from Castilla y León. And I think it's a shame because I think more diversity is a good thing, really.

Tinto Fino at its best is a fantastic grape in Ribera, don't get me wrong, and it's great blended with other things. But I think that allowing people to make single varietal wines with other things would be interesting.

**Janina Doyle 00:27:12** Do you think that is the biggest thing holding it back, their inflexibility to allow in using different grapes?

**Tim Atkin 00:27:20** Funnily enough, I think they're pretty flexible. And I think because it's a young denomination, they're much, much more flexible than Rioja that we spoke about in a previous podcast, where Rioja is a bit stuck in its ways.

I think Ribera, because it's smaller and newer, is a bit lighter on its feet. And I think the fact that they allowed 25% white grapes to be blended in with red, you're never going to get that in Rioja, even though the reality in a lot of old vineyards is that old vineyards are planted with often more than that, with lots of whites, but people have to lie and say there's only 5% white grapes when they're often 25%.

And I think that truth is always a good thing. And recognizing what you've got in your vineyards, why is that a bad thing? I think it's a good thing to say, hey, this is what we did historically, and this is what we're doing today. I personally think that's a positive plus point.

So, I think they're much, much, much more flexible. And I think they will realize that Garnacha, first of all, and maybe these other things like Bobal, why not, you know, why not allow people to sell those as Ribera because you're not going to get hundreds of them. You might get five or 10. The Ribera for the future, for the medium term, at least, is going to be dominated by Tinto Fino/Tempranillo, and that's going to be what it does best and that's what it's best known for and rightly so.

**Janina Doyle 00:28:33** So, if somebody wants to go to this region, where's your recommendation? Perhaps, where they might be able to see quite a lot of the really good wineries condensed in one area?

**Tim Atkin 00:28:44** Good question. I mean, Ribera is divided into four provinces really, and a lot of the most famous wineries are in Valladolid, the province of Valladolid, which is named after the city that's nearby. But most of those wineries, and it includes Pingus and Vega Sicilia and others, Arzuaga, don't actually have vineyards or some of them don't have vineyards there, or Dominio de Pingus doesn't.

The majority of the vineyards and the majority of the best vineyards and the majority of the wineries are in Burgos. And Burgos is the central bit. And that's kind of probably, you know, 75% of what the region produces. It has two other little provinces. One is called Soria. The other is called Segovia. Segovia, absolutely tiny with about three producers. Soria, really good, but way out in the east.

So, I would base myself in the center, which is Burgos, and I'd stay in the town of Aranda de Duero. Now, Aranda de Duero is right in the centre of the DO. You can get to anywhere from there, basically. It's got good restaurants. It's comparatively inexpensive. It's a nice place to stay. There are decent hotels. I would base myself there. And that way you can go, if you want to go out to Soria, which has some of the oldest vineyards in the world, you know, 200-year-old vineyards, pre-Phylloxera vineyards, go out there, way out to the east.

If you want to go to Vega, if you can get in, or you want to go to Pingus or Arzuaga or some of those other places, out in Valladolid, you can go there. If you want to go to Segovia, you can go there. But you're right in the middle of the heart of it. It's really Burgos. And Aranda de Duero is the main town inside Ribera del Duero of Burgos. The main town, obviously, of Burgos is Burgos. But Burgos is actually outside the region of Ribero del Duero.

**Janina Doyle 00:30:19** And when you're there, obviously, we're all going for the vineyards, for the wine tasting. But are there as well any wine museums? We mentioned about the wine museum in Rioja. Do they have any wine museums in Ribera del Duero that you know of?

**Tim Atkin 00:30:31** That's a good question. There's a lot of historic cellars in Aranda which date back to the 16th century and even before, and you can visit some of those cellars, which is worth doing. There are some very historic places. I would go and visit some of the towns really, the villages. Aranda would be a great place to start.

In terms of a wine museum, I'm trying to think actually. There's one place in a place called La Vid, V-I-D, which is the vine. And they have a bit of a wine museum there and you can stay at the hotel there. It's not a full-on wine museum. It's not Vivanco style. We've talked about that previously in Rioja, which is an enormous wine museum. But, you know, that would be a good place to get a sense of what it's like really.

**Janina Doyle 00:31:14** Is there a Tim spot, the place which is the most peaceful, the place that is just your favourite?

**Tim Atkin 00:31:21** Do you mean in the world?

**Janina Doyle 00:31:22** No, no, I was going to say Ribera del Duero, but actually, I can open that up for two. I want one in Ribera del Duero. And now I also want out of, anywhere in the world. Yes, I want both.

**Tim Atkin 00:31:35** Okay, well, I think in Ribera del Duero, my favorite place to visit is probably Soria. And it's very small and it's only about two or 3% of what the region produces, but it has these 200 year old vines. It's just a magical place. There's nobody there.

And if you go to visit them, they have a lot of these old underground bodegas that have been abandoned. And it shows you that in the middle of the 19th century, before phylloxera and mildew and oidium, all those things arrived in a lot of the regions, a lot of wine was produced here. A lot of it was sold in bulk and things like that. But you can see these subterranean bodegas that have now been abandoned, really. So, you see these little houses on the top and then the masses of stuff underground. So, I'd go and have a look at those. That would be my favourite region to visit in Ribera.

My favourite place, in staying with Spain, well, probably one of my favourite places in the world is in Rioja called the Hechicera. And the Hechicera is a dolmen. And dolmens are these sort of, it's a bit spooky, really, but they're like burial mounds.

**Janina Doyle 00:32:31** Okay!

**Tim Atkin 00:32:32** And there's a particularly amazing burial mound in a village called El Villar. And this is called the Dolmen de la Hechicera. It just has this incredible atmosphere. And every time I go to Rioja, I always go there and I just pick an acorn up off the ground. And I bring an acorn home and I usually carry it around me for a year.

It's a little superstition I have that this place just has an amazing energy. And there's something about these prehistoric people. I mean, we're talking kind of Druidic people, they weren't Druids, but that's how old these burial mounds were. But they understood something about whether they're ley lines or whatever you call these points of energy close to the mountains and the way the bodies were laid out,

and there's just something you sense that they understood stuff about the way nature works and the way energy works and the way – I don't know.

I mean, spirituality is a big word, but there's something there that's bigger than us. I'm not a religious person at all. I don't really believe in God, but I do believe in force. And maybe it's a sense of people leaving something behind, that you leave something of your essence behind. And these essences of people collect in certain places and are given, and sometimes they can be bad things. I'm sure you've been to places where you think there's something slightly spooky about this place.

**Janina Doyle 00:33:43** You feel it. Yeah!

**Tim Atkin 00:33:44** You feel it. And there are other places you go where there's a place in Chile, I don't know if you've been to Alcohuz, which is right up in the Andes, 2000 metres. And that's one of my other favourite places. And that's an amazing place.

I mean, they say that they've had sightings of UFOs and lots of people who are witches, inverted commas. And people, mystics, go to this particular place because they think it's one of the kind of central points on earth that concentrates all of this energy. I mean, people are going to start thinking I'm David Icke. I'm not. But I do think there are places where you just feel good. I mean, there's got to be something that's not just the fact you like the fresh air, there's got to be something about that place. And I think it's a kind of accretion, if you like, of historical things that have happened there, good things or of energy that radiates that energy back out to other people.

You know, it's like certain people, you know, I don't know about you but certain people I hang out with, every time I see them, I just want to smile because they're great. There are other people you see and you think, oh, God, they're so miserable. They're such a downer on everything I do. You avoid them because they're negative people.

I think I'm automatically attracted, like you, you're a friend of mine because you're a positive person. I'm attracted to people in a very loose sense. I don't mean physically attracted, I mean mentally and emotionally attracted to people who I think are positive souls. God, that's a bit long, wasn't it, that response, but you know what I mean?

**Janina Doyle 00:35:02** That was the longest response, but so beautiful because when you can connect with nature, when you can feel an energy that lifts you up, because we're all vibrating – everything is vibrating. The earth is vibrating. We are vibrating. So, totally. Everyone else might think you're all woo woo. I'm woo woo anyway. So, you've joined me and I think that is a really nice way to start summing up this episode.

**Tim Atkin 00:35:32** We are the Woo-woos!

**Janina Doyle 00:35:33** Yay! Yay to the Woo-woos! Now, let us finish off again with a bit of a quick fire round because we're here to make wine fun. So, I want to know, right, keeping it Spanish themed, if you had to choose between Manchego paired with Tempranillo or some Jamón Iberico with Sherry, what are you going to go with?

**Tim Atkin 00:35:56** My ideal match with Tempranillo would actually be lamb chops or lamb cutlets, right?

**Janina Doyle 00:36:01** You're ruining it!

**Tim Atkin 00:36:02** So, they're not gonna go down the Manchego. I'm a sucker. I mean, Jamón Iberico is probably one of my three favorite flavors on earth. And Sherry is pretty much up there too. So, I'd go, jamón and sherry.

**Janina Doyle 00:36:16** Okay, now because we don't wanna make this only about Spain, I'm taking us a little bit further away. So now, Oysters and Chablis, or a Pad thai and a Riesling?

**Tim Atkin 00:36:25** Okay. I'm gonna reject Oysters. I don't see the point of Oysters. Somebody once said to me that they are sort of snot in sea water and that's kind of what I think about Oysters. I don't get why Oysters are sexy and I love Chablis. I can go without Oysters for the rest of my life.

Pad Thai and Riesling, love that. I think particularly, Riesling with maybe a little bit of residual sugar, not a bad thing, folks. Nothing wrong with residual sugar if it's balanced in the wine by acidity. I'd go Pad thai, Riesling. Sorry, Oysters. Oyster fans – I know there are lots of people who say they're very sexy. I just find them a bit of a turn off.

**Janina Doyle 00:37:00** Okay. Now, what about Truffle Risotto and Barolo, another classic pairing or Wild Boar Bolognese or Ragu with Chianti?

**Tim Atkin 00:37:12** I'd love both of those, but I'm going to go Truffle Risotto with Barolo, particularly if somebody else is paying for the truffles because, I mean, I don't think we've been to Piedmont and you see them scraping little bits of truffle onto your food, you go, shit, that's 20 quid I've just spent.

**Janina Doyle 00:37:27** Each one. I know!

**Tim Atkin 00:37:29** Each slice.

**Janina Doyle 00:37:30** That's why I'm like, I'll just have the oil.

**Tim Atkin 00:37:33** I'm going Truffle Risotto with Barolo because I think that Barolo is a truffly wine and I think that's the essence of the place. You're getting brilliant wine if you get a good Barolo and you're getting an incredible truffle at the same time, particularly if you go November time.

**Janina Doyle 00:37:47** Now, this is a very, very complex question. This is going to be very, very difficult. Well, I don't know, maybe it's not difficult to answer. So, you've got two options here now. You can have a glass of Barefoot. It could be a Barefoot Shiraz – I'm sorry. Sorry, Barefoot out of a Zalto glass, or glass, well it's not even a glass, you can have some tasting of Chateau Margaux, first growth Bordeaux. It's your shoe, though. It's your shoe though, not someone else's shoe.

**Tim Atkin 00:38:18** I suppose the point with the shoe is how many miles have you walked in the shoes? Are they new shoes or are they going to be like smelly shoes?

**Janina Doyle 00:38:22** No. No, they might be a little bit sweaty.

**Tim Atkin 00:38:26** Okay, well I'm going to go Chateau Margaux out of my shoe. I think I generally try to avoid anything barefoot as it were.

**Janina Doyle 00:30:34** Okay, I know I love that to be. And to be honest, when I was a sommelier in the Beast restaurant, a guy, I don't know why he did it, decided he wanted to drink some wine out of his shoe. He had been drinking throughout the evening. It was a very big turn off. But that is actually what inspired me to create that question.

**Tim Atkin 00:38:55** You meet all these interesting people.

**Janina Doyle 00:38:57** Yeah, in the wine industry, do we not? There's a lot of people you meet. I think we do. We meet a little bit of everyone. Now to finish off, because this one is super serious. Okay, you've got a superpower. You can either turn water into wine, or you can instantly age the wine you have to the perfect drinkability.

**Tim Atkin 00:39:19** I'm gonna go turning water into wine because I think there's a business in that.

**Janina Doyle 00:39:23** All about the profitability.

**Tim Atkin 00:39:25** Not really. No. But I think the thing about perfect drinkability is according to whom? Because, you know, I often find that particularly, like, Champagne is a good example. The French love young champagne and they find our taste for older champagne, mature, nutty, toasty, all those things, a bit weird. So, I think perfect drinkability and maturity is subjective really.

So, I'm going to go turning water into wine because you save some money as well, wouldn't you, if you get turning water into wine? Think. As long as it's good wine, I mean, are we talking Barefoot White Zinfandel?

**Janina Doyle 00:40:00** I mean, we can discuss.

**Tim Atkin 00:40:02** It's getting too complicated. I'm overcomplicating things.

**Janina Doyle 00:40:04** Leave it. Water into wine. Perfect. Jesus, there we have it. Thank you so much, Tim. We could do this for hours.

**Tim Atkin 00:40:11** It's been great fun.

**Janina Doyle 00:40:12** But for now, I think you've given us all some food for thought, or should I say drink for thought. So, a lot for people to work on. Everybody, download the reports. What's your website?

**Tim Atkin 00:40:23** So, my website is [www.timatkin.com](http://www.timatkin.com). And if you want to buy tickets for the Rioja event, and please come on February the 13th, it's under events on my website. So, you'll see a little tab. Click on events and you can buy through a website, basically, another website, third party website.

**Janina Doyle 00:40:37** And you've got plenty of reports to download where people can get into the nitty-gritty and really understand, and suggestions of wines to taste from around the world.

**Tim Atkin 00:40:46** Please buy them and don't share them with your friends because that's how I earn a living. Thank you.

**Janina Doyle 00:40:51** They need to buy them.

**Tim Atkin 00:40:52** You already have. That's why I like you.

**Janina Doyle 00:40:55** Signing off now.

**Tim Atkin 00:40:56** That's why you're my friend.

**Janina Doyle 00:40:57** Yay! Mwah! Thank you so much and we'll speak again soon.

**Tim Atkin 00:41:02** See you soon. Have a good year.

**Janina Doyle 00:41:07** So if you haven't already downloaded the report, go to [TimAtkin.com](http://TimAtkin.com) and there you're also going to find his other reports. So, Rias Baixas, Rioja, South Africa, Chile. What I love also with these reports is there's a list of further readings should you really want to dive further into any of these regions or a list of recommended restaurants for those of you hungry food lovers as well thinking to visit the region. So, it's a great source of information for those of you who want to know the region and its wines so much better that you're not actually going to find on the internet already.

So, next week, I am talking with Dr Norbert Reinisch who is the export sales manager of Braida. Now this is an incredible winery in Piedmont. Braida is the story of Barbera, so the grape variety Barbera. However, we'll be talking about all of their incredible cru wines in the second part.

But next week, as we are fast approaching Valentine's Day, we are going to focus on some of their slightly more fun wines and specifically Brachetto d'Acqui. This is a sweet, frothy, light red wine. Absolutely perfect for Valentine's Day.

So, go and check out that specific wine because maybe you want it in advance for when you listen to this podcast. But for now I will finish off with a wine quote. This one is from Dante, an Italian poet, writer and philosopher, and he said:

“Wine spreads poetry in the hearts.”

I think Tim has been beautifully poetic over the last few episodes, so I hope you've been left inspired and ready to learn more. Thank you as always for listening to the podcast. Do show your support by liking, sharing or leaving a review on the podcast app you are listening to. And I will see you back here next Monday. Until then, wine friends, cheers to you!