

Bodegas Vega Sicilia – 2021 Releases

For decades the fame of this bodega, established in 1864, has extended far outside the region and Spain. It produces some of the most coveted and age-worthy wine in the world. While wines from decades past were almost always excellent to otherworldly, things really kicked up when the Alvarez family purchased the estate in 1982. Under the watch of Pablo Alvarez and with massive investment in the vineyards and winery, the quality of the wines being made here now is both consistent and astoundingly high.

In the context of First Growth Bordeaux, Grand Cru Burgundy and even some Napa Valley wines, the legendary Unico, which ages in barrels for ten years before bottling, is actually a great value. It has always garnered the attention of well-heeled collectors, and rightfully so. But it's the increasing quality of the Valbuena that has intrigued me over the years. It's quite a different wine from Unico, with more power and, relatively speaking, forward fruit. On its own it's one of the great wines of Spain, but it seems to still, undeservedly, be standing in the daunting shadow of Unico, at least in the label-buyers' eyes.

These current vintages are the best young wines that I have ever had here, and for those with the means, I cannot recommend them highly enough. The multi-vintage Unico Reserva Especial, which is always composed of wines from three different, complementary years, is another beast entirely. Released when they're believed to be approachable, these complex wines age effortlessly and are quite intriguing, even if they aren't easy to find.

In the context of First Growth Bordeaux, Grand Cru Burgundy and even some Napa Valley wines, the legendary Unico, which ages in barrels for ten years before bottling, is actually a great value.

2011 Único, Vega Sicilia

£711 c/s IB – 12 cases available (3 bts per case)

The Único released in 2021, 10 years after the harvest, is the 2011 Único, selected from 40 of their 210 hectares of vineyards. 2011 is a concentrated and ripe vintage, and they selected 95% Tinto Fino (Tempranillo) and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon that were cooled in a cold room for 24 hours before being sorted; the bunches and grapes macerated at 9 to 10 degrees Celsius for three to four days, and then it was inoculated with a pied de cuve to ferment with pumping overs. Malolactic was in stainless steel, and the wine was put through a long aging, 10 years between oak and bottle, using new and used French and American oak barrels and 20,000-liter oak vats. For Vega Sicilia, 2011 was a fresher year than 2010, not the common idea about those vintages in Ribera del Duero. The wine has a developed nose with some notes of ripe black fruit, meat and underbrush, somewhat herbal and perfumed. There is something about the nose of the Únicos that I cannot quite describe but is quite distinct, and it's in this vintage and also in the Reserva Especial. 88,288 bottles, 3,505 magnums, 318 double magnums, 60 Imperial and 3 Salmanazar were produced. The wine was bottled in June 2017.

96 Points, Luis Gutierrez, The Wine Advocate

Very ripe with plum, spice and dried-flower aromas, as well as chocolate, fresh flowers and sandalwood. Coffee and hints of meat. Sort of decadent. Full-bodied with round, creamy tannins and an intense, juicy feel. Unique cedar and walnut undertones. So delicious now, but one for the future, too.

98 Points, James Suckling

With the 2016 Valbuena 5° Año scoring 96 Points from The Wine Advocate, it's joint highest score ever, and matching the score of the 2011 Único, it makes this a very smart buy!

2016 Valbuena 5° Año, Vega Sicilia

£282 c/s IB – 8 cases available (3 bts per case)

The 2016 Valbuena was produced with a blend of 94% Tinto Fino (Tempranillo) and 6% Merlot from 140 hectares dedicated to this wine. It fermented with indigenous yeasts, and the first year it matured in barrels (75% French, 25% American) and the second year in large oak vats. This is again a floral and elegant vintage of Valbuena, very much in line with what has happened in the best vintages since 2010. 2016 is going to be a wine that the public is going to like; it has an extroverted personality and is perfumed and generous, juicy and tasty and nicely textured, with fine-grained tannins and very focused and clean flavors. 2016 was a year of very good freshness in Ribera del Duero, a year they like even better than 2018. 182,882 bottles, 6,030 magnums and a few larger formats were produced. It was bottled in June 2019.

96 Points, Luis Gutierrez, The Wine Advocate

Gorgeous aromas of blackberries, black chocolate and shitake mushrooms follow through to a full body with round, plush tannins that are corduroy in texture. The flavors are intense, but not overdone. Drink now or hold.

95 Points, James Suckling

Único Reserva Especial NV (2009/2010/2011), Vega Sicilia

£942 c/s IB – 1 case available (3 bts per case)

As has happened in the last few years, the NV Único Reserva Especial 2021 Release is composed of wines of around 10 years of age, in this case 2009, 2010 and 2011, with 2011 being the Único vintage released at the same time as this non-vintage blend. It's a tribute to the tradition and the past times, a blend of mostly Tinto Fino, the local strain of Tempranillo from Ribera del Duero, and a little Cabernet Sauvignon where they look for the balance and house style by blending different vintages of Único. There are many similarities with the 2011, which can represent about one-third of the blend. There's a little more development in the aromas, some of those ripe but herbal aromas and a powerful palate but without the elegance of the 2011 vintage bottling, which has more stuffing in the mid-palate. It finishes dry, with some tannins. It's certainly younger and fresher than the Reserva Especial from yesteryear, and they are now trying to hold onto some wine to again give it some older components like in the recent past. 16,916 bottles and 257 magnums produced. It was bottled in June 2017.

95 Points, Luis Gutierrez, The Wine Advocate

A red with plenty of blackberry, chocolate, toasted-oak, cedar and hazelnut aromas that follow through to a full body with firm, velvety tannins that are driven and deep. Finishes with black fruit and lots of hazelnut, walnut and almond undertones. Glorious now. A blend of the following vintages: 2009, 2010 and 2011.

98 Points, James Suckling

Offered subject to remaining unsold and final written confirmation.

Wines available for delivery spring 2021.

Delivery will be charged at cost.