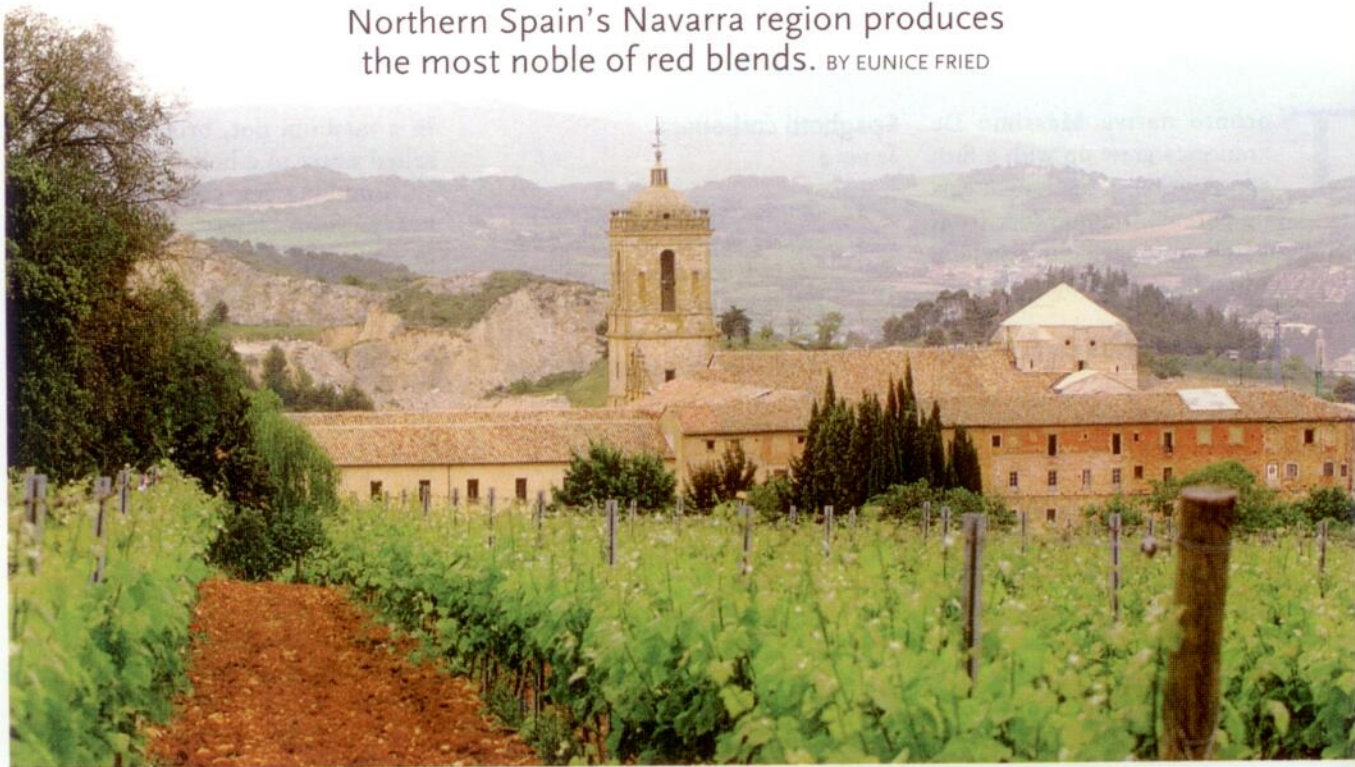


# Regal Reds

Northern Spain's Navarra region produces the most noble of red blends. BY EUNICE FRIED



**I**t hasn't had a king for centuries, but it still calls itself the Kingdom of Navarra. It has had a wine culture for millennia, but unlike its royalty, its wines are alive and well, exciting and revitalized.

Until recently, the northern Spanish region of Navarra was known mostly as the home of Pamplona, the running of the bulls, and Rosé, or Rosado, wines which were Hemingway's favorite. It still produces some of the world's loveliest Rosados, made from the Grenache grape, but now it is also known for outstanding reds. Based primarily on the Tempranillo grape, as are the wines of Rioja, its neighbor to the west, these reds are often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot or both.

One of the newest and most fascinating red wines of Navarra is Pago de Larrainzar (\$55). The only wine produced by a small family winery, it is a blend of the three grapes in which Tempranillo surprisingly plays a minor role. Its intriguing multilayered aroma recalls plums and pepper; it is beautifully structured, with a deep, complex taste and lingering finish. An elegant, fascinating wine.

Bodegas Chivite, in contrast, has been making wine for more than 300 years and is now headed by the 11th generation of the Chivite family. Its Tempranillo-dominated Gran Feudo Viñas Viejas Reserva is rich, smooth and balanced and is a genuine value at \$20. Chivite Colección 125 Reserva is still richer and deeper — a brilliant wine that retails for \$35.

The Ochoa family can trace its winemaking history back even further, to the 14th century; and today, as Bodegas Ochoa, it is an innovative winery that produces a range of interesting wines. Among them are some of Navarra's best buys. Ochoa Garnacha Tempranillo is just what the name implies: a blend of both grapes in which Tempranillo is dominant. Tasty with fresh fruit flavors and a vivid aroma, it is priced at only \$11. Ochoa Tempranillo Crianza, 100 percent of that grape, is well structured and smooth with balanced tannins and finesse — a great value at \$18.

Navarra may no longer have a king, but its wines are rulers in their own right. ■

**VINEYARD VISTA:** Pago de Larrainzar Vineyard

PHOTOS: PAGO DE LARRAINZAR

