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Rioja wine region celebrates 100 years of excellence with landmark tasting event in Madrid

Centenary gathering highlights tradition, innovation and the enduring legacy of Spain’s most renowned wine designation

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The Rioja wine region marked a significant milestone in Madrid this week, gathering more than 350 professionals at the Four Seasons Hotel to celebrate a century of certified excellence and quality. The event, known as the “Cata del Siglo” or “Tasting of

the Century," is part of a series of commemorations for the 100th anniversary of the Denominación de Origen Calificada (DOCa) Rioja, Spain's first and most recognized wine designation.

The day began with an exclusive tasting session titled "100 Years of Diversity of DOCa Rioja," led by Pablo Franco, technical director of the Rioja Regulatory Council. Seventy high-level experts attended this session, which featured ten exceptional wines representing key moments in Rioja's evolution over the past century. Franco guided participants through a sensory journey, highlighting not only the diversity and quality of Rioja wines but also the people who have shaped its history. He emphasized that the centenary is as much about honoring individuals as it is about celebrating wine.

Following this, Luis Gutiérrez, editor for Wine Advocate and responsible for compiling the Parker list in Spain, conducted a second tasting called "The Excellence of Rioja." This session also hosted 70 professionals and showcased wines that have achieved the coveted 100 Parker points. Gutiérrez shared insights into each wine's production process, offering attendees a deeper understanding of what makes Rioja a benchmark in Spanish winemaking.

After the tastings, a showroom opened its doors to more than 250 additional professionals. Over 100 different Rioja wines were available for sampling, organized into three thematic areas: style, terroir, and color. Attendees explored reds, whites, rosés, sparkling wines, single-vineyard selections, monovarietals, village wines, and regional blends. The event provided a comprehensive look at both traditional and innovative trends shaping Rioja today.

Industry critics and wine experts expressed admiration for the quality and variety on display. Santi Rivas, a well-known wine critic, described the tastings as outstanding and noted that some wines moved participants to tears due to their excellence. Raquel Pardo, a journalist specializing in wine, highlighted Rioja's unique position as a region where tradition meets innovation.

The event also served as a platform to discuss future trends in Rioja winemaking. Franco pointed to three main directions: a renewed focus on origin and unique vineyards; continued appreciation for classic fine wines; and new interpretations from

younger winemakers who are experimenting with white varieties and soil-driven styles.

Rivas commented on how three major currents now converge in Rioja: classic historic wineries with UNESCO-worthy styles; successful producers from the 1990s who continue to evolve; and a new wave of winemakers bringing fresh approaches to Spanish wine. This convergence, he said, cements Rioja’s status as Spain’s leading wine region.

The Regulatory Council announced that the next edition of “La Cata del Siglo” will take place in Bilbao on June 16. This upcoming event will offer another opportunity for professionals to explore the depth and diversity of Rioja wines as the centenary celebrations continue.

Participants left with a sense that this centennial marks not just an end point but a new beginning for Rioja. As Pardo reflected during the event, great wines endure in memory long after they are gone—just as Rioja’s legacy is set to last well beyond its first hundred years.