

Love it or hate it – the Marques de Riscal is the hot topic on everyone’s lips.



“Wine Rules Supreme”

In the Hotel Marques de Riscal hightech meets history – and consummate Rioja tradition meets avant-garde architecture with a famous label: Frank O. Gehry

Standing out amidst the quiet rolling vineyards of the Spanish Rioja region, a futuristic landmark has altered the environment irrevocably, dragging the medieval village of El Ciego into the 21st Century. The Marques de Riscal luxury hotel is the renowned Canadian architect’s latest masterpiece and is the hot topic on everyone’s lips. Love it or hate it, Frank O. Gehry’s latest creation is in perfect harmony with his infamous Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, a vision of coloured titanium waves atop an edgy glass and stone structure. The Marques de Riscal winery, home to

the Gehry hotel prides itself on mingling tradition with the contemporary. An ancient winery dating back to 1858, today it produces some of Spain’s best known quality Rioja and has stepped into the future by creating a place where wine is made, cared for and sampled in a five-star setting. With just 43 rooms, there’s a feeling of exclusivity as you walk the hotel’s red carpet to the sleek rooms where pale maple wood, leather touches and dark marble bathrooms ooze luxury. After just 1 month’s opening time, everything is shiny and new: the hotel is still in the early birthing

THE WINE BOTTLE: TITANIUM WAVES STAND FOR THE SHADES OF WINE: MAJENTA FOR THE RIOJA, GOLD FOR THE UNIQUE PATTERN ON THE NECK OF THE BOTTLE, AND SILVER FOR THE FOIL.



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SPECIALTIES WITH A GOOD CIGAR.



WITHIN HAND'S REACH: THE
WALLS OF THE WINEBAR IN THE
VINOTECA ARE CUSTOM MADE
LIBRARY STACKS FOR A COLLEC-
TION OF 1000 WINE BOTTLES.

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FROM ROSÉ TO SCARLET:
AUTUMN HUES ON THE VINES.
RIGHT: THE DESIGNER
RESTAURANT "1860" - A
NEW CULINARY EXPERIENCE



The high tech is so cutting edge that one needs a PHD in electronics to handle the TV and the lighting.

stages. The atmosphere is high tech. Each room is equipped with flat screen televisions by Bang & Olufsen, VOIP telephones and WIFI internet access. In fact, it's so cutting edge, it's hard to work out. One needs a PHD in electronics to switch off the TV and the lighting, like the rest of the funky furnishings chosen by Ghery, is a world of its own. Apparently, Ghery's designer 'cloud' lights were completed before the rooms were finished. The white casing around the bulb, had the builders confused and they mistook the edgy designer accessories for protective layers around the real thing thus showing little regard for the bulbous creations! Little did they know.

Ghery's personal touch is everywhere. As well as designing the curvaceous building he chose its interiors: everything from the B&B leather sofas to the Alvar Aalto inspired furniture and the bright red Ligne Roset 'pop' chairs. In the breakfast room too, Ghery is omnipresent. It's all about aesthetics: orange plastic Verner Panton chairs, high ceilings and on the wall: Ghery's complexe sketches. At the stylish Vinoteca, too, the lines are simple and iconic. The walls are lined with 1,000 bottles, a gigantic 'library' of Riojas, Rosados and white Ruedas. To find out more about the local produce, a visit to the Marques de Riscal's cellars is almost compulsory! Wander around the heart of the winery from the brand new state of the art fermentation tanks and computer control cabin to the thousands of barrels waiting for their time... But the most fascinating place has to be the 'cathedral of wine'. Slightly spooky, the 'crypt' contains around 16,000 bottles from every single year since the winery produced its first bottle in 1862. It's one of the world's most extensive collections of bottles from one particular vineyard.

Bottles lie covered in dust, like forgotten treasures. To age well, the wine must be left in peace, no light, no touching, no moving. We are told in hushed tones: "you understand, it's alive." Only very special guests are granted access and the biggest privilege of all: to sample a bottle of their birth year. Indeed, the story says that's how Ghery was persuaded to take on the project: with a bottle of 1929 Rioja. The



Grape pool.

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Bordeaux & Chocolate.

EX BARTENDER, MARTA SAENZ, THE HOTEL'S LOCAL SOMMELIER, SHARES HER SECRETS WITH US.

"THE 2001 RIOJA WAS A PARTICULARLY GOOD YEAR". SHE REVEALS THAT THERE ARE ONLY 20 ODD BOTTLES LEFT IN THE HOTEL! "FROM NOW ON IT'S 2002 ON THE TABLES OF THE '1860' GOURMET RESTAURANT. I OPENED THE FIRST ONE YESTERDAY. BUT THE 2002 IS VERY GOOD TOO" SHE SMILES.

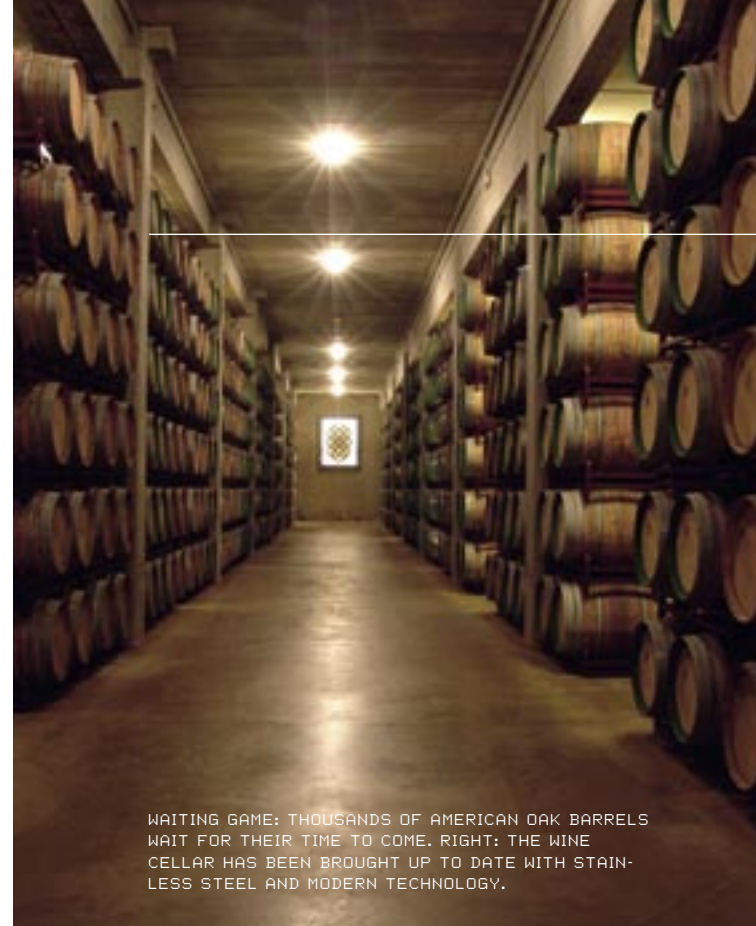
IT'S HARD TO SAY WHICH IS HER ABSOLUTE FAVOURITE BUT SHE ADMITS: "I DO HAVE A SOFT SPOT FOR SAUVIGNON BLANC, AND FOR THE BARÓN DE CHIREL BECAUSE IT CHANGES DURING THE COURSE OF YOUR MEAL."

WHAT'S BEST, FRENCH OR SPANISH WINE? SHE PREFERS BORDEAUX WINES "IT'S VERY SIMILAR TO RIOJA, OR RATHER RIOJA IS SIMILAR TO BORDEAUX!" BUT SHE ADDS: "YOU SIMPLY CAN'T COMPARE THEM... THE FRENCH MAY WELL HAVE THE BEST WINES, BUT IT'S LIKE SAYING YOU WANT TO COMPARE BLACK CHOCOLATE WITH WHITE CHOCOLATE. IT'S STILL CHOCOLATE BUT IT ISN'T COMPARABLE".

king too, on his recent visit was given his, as well as a reserve which is still in American oak barrels ageing alongside another 25,000.

A further privilege, Ghery even has his very own 2001 limited edition vintage, about 5000 bottles produced with his signature. Here, too, old meets new, as ancient wine making traditions have been modernised to enhance the experience: an introductory film in the brand new cinema, efficient staff in sleek uniforms bearing the Marques de Riscal's signature golden logos and a cosy shop where you can pick up a souvenir. To sample the wine with a view of El Ciego's medieval cathedral, head to the hotel's spectacular rooftop lounge library. The perfect spot for a glass or two in the evening sun. Below, the gourmet restaurant awaits with its impeccable white linens and oversized flower arrangements. It's simple, sleek and classic.

The staff are cheerful, relaxed even. Perhaps it's a result of their youth? In the kitchens, 26-year-old Jose Ramon Pieniero runs the show. Despite his young age, he has trained with big names like Ferran Adrià at the famous El Bulli restaurant and with the only Michelin starred chef in the area: Francis Paniego, who is the hotel's executive chef and has been training him for almost ten years. Cool and collected, Jose takes everything in his stride. Cooking for the king of Spain who came to the opening was no problem: 'no stress' he says smiling and adds that the king was a regular at his previous restaurant. Along with his mentor's obvious influence, Jose says he looked to his grandmother for inspiration. She once put a hot tomato soup in the freezer to cool it down for him, leading the young chef to create his much revered red pepper ice cream. He admits his Basque Riojan menu is an evolving project. It's a mix of 'avant garde and traditional cuisine: a fusion of both'. And, although it's early, Jose plans to alter the menu to introduce 'more local seasonal products and more wine' while still keeping classics like their award winning croquets and the 'meatballs with truffle' which is the dish he recommends after serious consideration. He grins: 'everything we do is simple yet sophisticated'. Sounds like a perfect motto.



WAITING GAME: THOUSANDS OF AMERICAN OAK BARRELS WAIT FOR THEIR TIME TO COME. RIGHT: THE WINE CELLAR HAS BEEN BROUGHT UP TO DATE WITH STAINLESS STEEL AND MODERN TECHNOLOGY.



HIGH GLASS: THE GLASS COVERED PASSAGEWAY THAT CONNECTS THE HOTEL WITH THE INDIVIDUAL ROOMS RIGHT: THE SECRET "CRYPT" WHERE THOUSANDS OF WINE BOTTLES ARE STORED.

