

TRUE TO ITS *Origins*

FÉLIX SOLÍS AVANTIS
CONTINUES ITS 70-PLUS-YEAR
COMMITMENT TO SHOWCASING
SPANISH TERROIR

by Randy Caparoso

Félix Solís Avantis produces Tempranillo
in several Spanish regions, including
Rioja, Ribera del Duero, and Toro.



Over the past two decades, one family-owned winemaking firm has emerged as Spain's global leader in export markets: Félix Solís Avantis (FSA), founded over 70 years ago in 1952 by Félix Solís Fernández and his wife, Leonor Yáñez, in Valdepeñas, Castilla-La Mancha.

Today, FSA is the only Spanish wine producer ranked among the top ten in the world by sales volume; its wines can currently be found in over 135 countries, and it operates 11 subsidiaries in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. In the U.S. and Canada, it's led by managing director Pedro Garcia.

What matters most to the trade in the U.S., however, is how this company has established such market dominance: through authentically terroir-driven, impeccably crafted wines that are also unfailingly accessible to consumers in terms of both profile and pricing that remains nothing short of incredible. To put it another way, when you produce wines that are every bit as good—in fact, better—as brands priced twice as much, you are bound to come out on top.

The flagship label currently leading FSA's growth is Pagos del Rey. This brand produces wines in five of Spain's major regions: Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Toro, Rueda, and Rías Baixas. According to Félix Solís Yáñez, FSA's CEO and president, "Pagos del Rey symbolizes our commitment to excellence, to the uniqueness of the wines from [these regions], and to a way of understanding enology as a bridge between tradition and modernity."

To retain integrity and quality from place to place, all of Pagos del Rey's wineries are operated independently, ensuring fidelity to the winemaking traditions of each location and, in turn, an unerring sense of place in each bottle. In this way, as Garcia puts it, "The Félix Solís Avantis family has managed to turn their passion, originally applied to a small winery in Valdepeñas, into an international benchmark."

Ribera del Duero: Producing Pure Tempranillo

The first winery in the Pagos del Rey project was established in 2002 in Olmedillo de Roa. It has since become the largest winery in the Ribera del Duero DO, sourcing grapes from more than 450 local winegrowers. Its aging room houses 12,000 French and American oak barrels, where a wide range of wines competing in the premium and ultra-premium segments are meticulously selected and aged.

Take the sleek, contemporary label called 409—which retails in the U.S. for about \$21—and the \$40 Condado de Oriza Gran Reserva, which isn't released until after five years of barrel and bottle aging, as examples of the highly competitive price points of Pagos del Rey's Ribera del Duero wines. And then there's the Condado de Oriza Reserva, a \$19 wine sourced from vineyards averaging 40 years of age that undergoes five days of pre-fermentation maceration and is aged two years in French and American oak and one year in bottle before release. The result is pure and fleshy Ribera del Duero-style Tempranillo that's low-key in terms of oak yet exuberant in all the black cherry, blueberry, plum, kitchen spice, and earth notes associated with the terroir.

Rioja: True to Tradition, With a Twist

In 2006, FSA established its winery in Fuenmayor, Rioja, where it's strategically located for access to a diverse array of vineyards in La Rioja Alta and Rioja Alavesa—some 2,500 hectares farmed by more than 1,000 growers. True to the tradition of Rioja, the heart of this winery is its spectacular aging room, housing 17,000 barrels. It produces a full range of wines: whites, rosés, and reds, from crianza to reserva and gran reserva.

The Pagos del Rey Arnegui Reserva is, in a word, quintessential: Composed of 100% Tempranillo, it's sensuous in its black cherry, smoked meat, and forest floor complexities against the most subtle of vanillin-oak backdrops. Its sleek and absolutely fresh profile is contemporary while retaining the sense of generous maturation true to classic Rioja. Notes Garcia, "This wine has been recognized with multiple gold medals such as Mundus Vini, Berliner Wine Trophy, Bacchus, AWC Vienna, The Global Rioja Masters, and Concours Mondial de Bruxelles."



Toro: Steeped in History

The Pagos del Rey facility in the historic Toro DO—whose history of wine production dates back to the first century B.C.—was established in 2008 at Morales de Toro. The winery now accounts for 30% of Toro's total production, with a capacity of 13 million liters; the cellar houses more than 2,000 barrels as well as a museum created in 2014 to celebrate the region's long history and vibrant culture. Garcia calls it "one of the company's cultural gems, connecting visitors to tradition. [It] offers an interactive tour . . . where they can view the winery's old concrete tanks [and] a barrel room [as well as do] a tasting [of] the latest wines of Toro."

Grapes here are harvested from 150 local winegrowers cultivating a total of 1,100 hectares, many of them planted to bush-trained old vines. Garcia cites the 100% Tempranillo called El Pillo Viñas Rebeldes as a paragon of what FSA is now doing in Toro, describing it as "rich in red and black fruits with spicy and toasted notes. . . . It's powerful and fleshy yet very elegant, with polished tannins."





Rueda: White Wine Central

FSA has been crafting Verdejo-, Viura-, and Sauvignon Blanc–based white wines in Rueda since 2005, maintaining a laser focus on the current taste for light, steely, dry styles driven by zesty acidity and fresh, citrusy and/or floral profiles. With a capacity of 14.2 million liters, its winery is one of the largest and best equipped in the DO. Quality is attained through close collaborative efforts with more than 150 local winegrowers farming some 1,000 hectares of vineyards, where night harvesting assures freshness.

Speaking of white wine, FSA also crafts Albariño in Rías Baixas, though it does not have a facility there.

A Commitment to the Future

According to Garcia, “In the field of innovation, the group’s wineries boast cutting-edge technology, from advanced traceability systems to automated processes that guarantee precision and quality in every bottle. This modernization is not at odds with tradition: the use of American and French oak barrels for aging remains a hallmark.”

“Sustainability is another pillar of the company’s future strategy,” he continues. “Our 2024–2027 plan calls for 100% renewable energy sources, a progressive reduction in [our] carbon footprint, and a promotion of organic and vegan wines. The company has also incorporated lighter packaging and recyclable materials, demonstrating that innovation can go hand in hand with respect for the environment.”

Adds Yañez, “Our commitment is not limited to producing great wines but to doing so responsibly, taking care of the communities and the environment that gives us life.”

Yañez describes his personal mission as one that remains true to his family’s original devotion to quality and authenticity, even after more than seven decades. “In every bottle of Pagos del Rey,” says Yañez, “lies our history, our present, and above all our future.” 



TASTING NOTES



2023 Pulpo Albariño, Rías Baixas, Spain (\$17) Lush yet fresh nose with tropical, peach, and mineral notes; tart and tight yet silky; long and briny/minerally toward the finish.



2017 Arnegui Reserva, Rioja, Spain (\$17) Good color with purplish-ruby highlights. On the nose are nuances of black cherry, smoked meat, forest floor, vanilla, and suede; the palate is silky, even-keeled, linear, and long. This is pure Rioja, yet it’s fresh and buoyant at the same time.

2022 409, Ribera del Duero, Spain (\$21) The name refers to the 409 days that this wine ages in barrel. The price, meanwhile, is incredible for a wine that highlights exactly what makes Ribera del Duero Tempranillo such a wine of the times: Opulent black cherry and blackberry with smidgens of burnt leaf and earthiness are unfettered by excess oak, which instead is manifested in perfectly round, fleshy, svelte tannins.



2018 Condado de Oriza Reserva, Ribera del Duero, Spain (\$19) A classic expression of Tempranillo grown on largely clay/loam slopes. Aromas of chocolate-coated blackberry and blueberry precede a round, fleshy palate that’s youthful in its faintly oaked fruit profile, even after seven years.

2014 Condado de Oriza Gran Reserva, Ribera del Duero, Spain (\$40) Sourced from vineyards averaging 80 years of age, this wine underwent a ten-day cold soak and spent 24 months in French and American oak before aging another 36 months in bottle. It shows an amazingly savory, umeboshi-like complexity, starting with a multifaceted nose of berry, floral, leafy, and gunflint subtleties, yet the palate remains fresh and focused for all its length.

La Única Vino Tinto IV, Spain (\$65) A phenomenal multi-regional blend of 60% Tinto Fino (i.e., Tempranillo from Ribera del Duero); 30% La Rioja Tempranillo; and 10% Tinta de Toro (i.e., Tempranillo from Toro), mostly from the 2018 vintage, at a sensational price. The sheer intensity of the fruit allowed for a larger percentage of new American and French oak, with aging in the 28- to 33-month range. Dark purplish-ruby in hue, the wine offers intensely focused, concentrated notes of black currant, black cherry, and mocha; sumptuously rich and textured, it’s enhanced by slightly grippy tannins and seamlessly integrated flourishes of toasty vanillin oak.