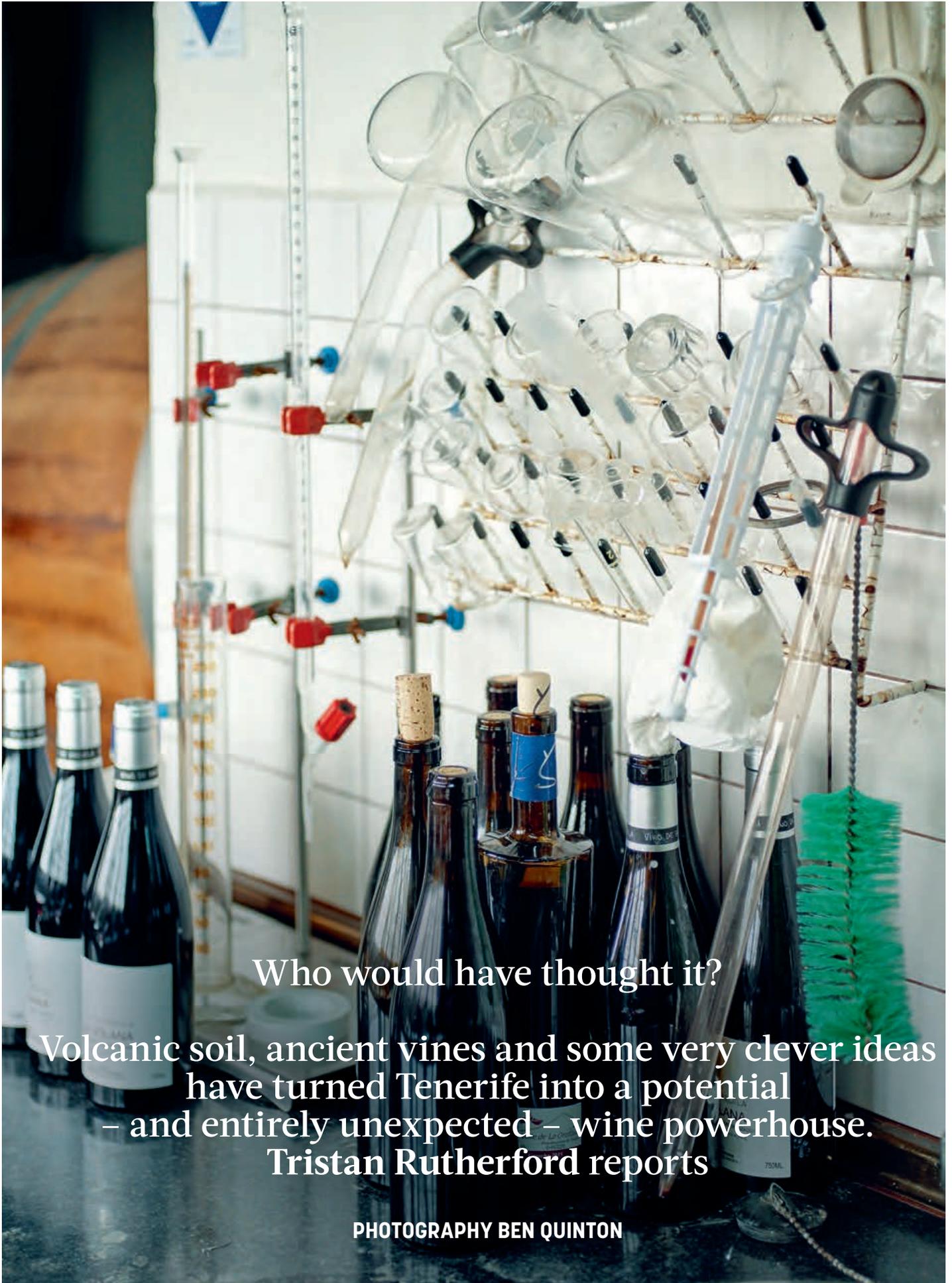
A photograph of a vineyard in a dry, hilly region. The vines are green and arranged in rows on a slope. In the background, there are two prominent, rounded mountains under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font.

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There is no set recipe
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Who would have thought it?

Volcanic soil, ancient vines and some very clever ideas
have turned Tenerife into a potential
– and entirely unexpected – wine powerhouse.
Tristan Rutherford reports

PHOTOGRAPHY BEN QUINTON

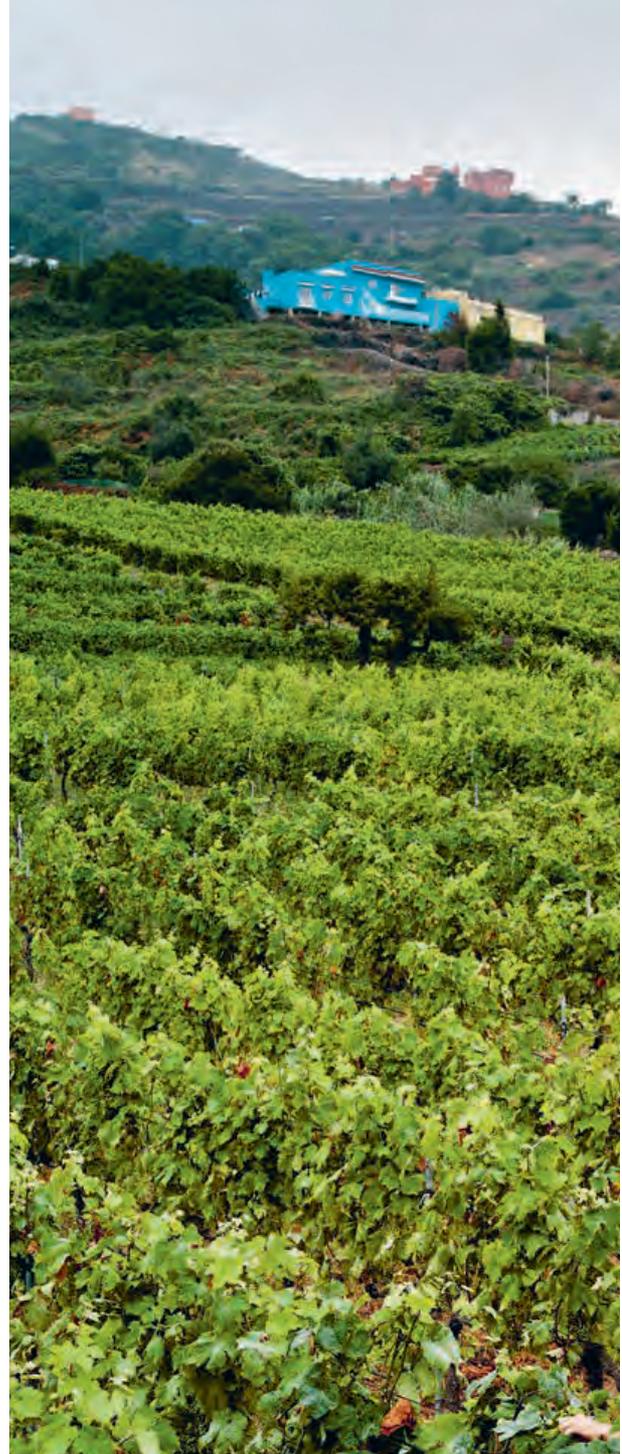


It's an unlikely sight. In the foothills of Mount Teide – at 3,718m Spain's highest peak – lime-green grapevines spring from the volcanic red dust. This fiery no-man's-land is probably the island's most famous landmark. Its dramatic moonscape scenery is a long-time favourite of Hollywood directors, most recently forming the backdrop for *Clash of the Titans* and *Fast & Furious 6*, but grapes have been growing in these parts – nourished by the volcanic soil – for far longer than the film crews have been arriving.

With the hire car, I barrel seaward from these 1,600m-high vines, part of Europe's loftiest vineyards. It's early morning as I slide past Tenerife's alpine forest, then gun through the cloud cover on its moonscape plateaux. The Atlantic sears blue at each switchback. Playa de las Americas, the beach that formed the conquistadors' stepping stone to the New World, twinkles below. Sail west from Los Gigantes, the shattering cliffs visible in my wing mirror, and it's next stop is the USA.

My next port of call, however, is Suertes del Marqués. A sea mist sweeps like candyfloss above the Atlantic, 400m below, as I approach the vineyard. Other incongruous sights abound as I ramp the car up the steep driveway. Lemon trees, papayas and bananas sway in the breeze. Bougainvillea chokes the terraces that tumble seaward. A 30-strong team wearing Panama hats tend the parcels of land in a manner far removed from the 21st century.

Clockwise from top left the blending room at Bodega Suertes del Marqués; checking and pruning the vines at the Suertes del Marqués vineyard; a bottle of its Vibonia; empty wine bottles waiting to be filled; Loles Perez Martin, the new chief blender at the bodega





From first impressions here – and judging by what most people probably think about the kind of wine they’d expect to find in Tenerife’s wine – it would be easy to assume that this is a simple island winery, producing something palatable for local drinkers and nothing more. But the truth couldn’t be more far removed.

“We’re not making Coca-Cola here,” says the bodega’s chief blender, Roberto Santana, as we stand in the blending room, surrounded on all sides by sleek machinery. “We are blending 16th-century grape varieties using 21st-century biodynamic techniques. There is no set recipe for what we do. We don’t add any vanilla chips or oak flavouring, like so many modern vineyards. That would be an insult to the workers you see outside.” Many of Santana’s creations end up on his blending-room floor, but the best can be found on the continent’s top tables, including London’s Restaurant Gordon Ramsay and Fera at Claridge’s. In fact, Suertes del Marqués is leading the charge for a new generation of world-beating Tenerife winemakers.

Rock stars

James Dawson, from top London bar/boutique Humble Grape, reveals his favourite volcanic wines

WEINGUT VON WINNING PECHSTEIN RIESLING 2013, Pfalz, Germany



Tasting notes Apricot, lime, fresh herbs, Maldon sea salt.

Background This Forst region vineyard was named after the nearby dormant Pechsteinkopf volcano. The basalt soil lends a salty minerality, highlighted by tropical fruits and a rich texture. The wine represents the truest impression of the delicious grapes.

GALFANO GIUVA CARLOTTA 2011, Sicilia, Italy



Tasting notes Red cherry, raspberry, sun-dried tomato.

Background This delicious sweet wine is made from Moscato di Alessandria grapes dried naturally on the vine and is produced on land owned by the Galfano family for two centuries. The 40-year-old vines benefit from the fertile, water-retaining volcanic soil.

HATZIDAKIS SANTORINI 2015, Santorini, Greece



Tasting notes Fragrant, full and dry with ripe acidity.

Background Haridimos Hatzidakis used to make wine for a major merchant, but in 1996 he went it alone, producing his vintages. His vines are cultivated without herbicides or pesticides and Santorini's volcanic soil lends a distinctive acidity.

This month, Humble Grape is hosting special wine tastings at its two London boutiques.

humblegrape.co.uk



This page, clockwise from top left old bottles of wine in the cellars at Bodegas Monje; the event space at the bodega; Felipe Monje; the bottling machine

Of course the proof is in the pudding. Set before me are seven of Suertes del Marqués's wines. First up is Vidonia, an intoxicating white as sweet as lemonade with hints of lemon and grapefruit. Then El Ciruelo, which has a yearly production of just 2,665 bottles and picked up the *El Mundo* Award for Best Red in 2013. A final brew is Blanco Dulce, a dessert wine so unctuous it's like biting into a pastry. "We can only make 100 bottles of this a year," says vineyard director Jonatan García Lima. "Twelve are sent to Claridge's, 12 to Ramsey." It all begs the question: why is no one else on Tenerife producing such high-quality, innovative wines? And the answer is that, finally, they are. "It's recent news," says Lima. "I have shown four local vintners our production methods. If we can produce fine wine together it's better for our global brand."

That hope is achievable because Canarian wine was once a globalised marquee. The Veuve



“These traditional techniques are not just for show. Our vineyard is just 11 hectares, yet it shoots up 400m”



Clicquot of the 16th-century drinks industry was eulogised by Shakespeare in several plays. In *Twelfth Night*, for instance, Sir Toby Belch says to his friend, “O knight, thou lackest a cup of Canary.” The writer’s annual payment was said to have included a barrel of island wine.

Today, that reputation is slowly being regained. Tenerife accounts for five of Spain’s Denominación de Origen Protegidas (DOP) regions, meaning five of its local appellations are protected and highly regarded in terms of Spanish wine production. Much of this has to do with Teide’s presence. Not only does its soil lend a mineral tang, but its height also helps regulate rainfall and wind. Not that it’s all good.

“These traditional techniques are not just for show,” says Lima, gesturing at his workers tending to the land by hand. “Our vineyard is just 11 hectares yet it shoots up from 300m to 700m. A tractor is worthless in these conditions.”

Indeed, so steep is the Orotava Valley, one of Tenerife’s five Denominación de Origen (DO) appellations, that it took the Spaniards 94 years to pacify this part of the island from the Guanches, Tenerife’s Stone Age indigenous people. The Spanish overran pancake-flat Fuerteventura in just three. Such varied topography dictates that Lima must grow 10 grape varieties on his tiny plot to take advantage of a dozen climatic conditions. In a nod to the island’s pioneer history, these vines include a Malvasia once found in Greece and Negramoll, a Madeiran grape imported by



“It took Lima’s family 25 years to accumulate this patchwork of vines”



Portuguese sailors centuries ago.

Assembling the vineyard was equally difficult – it took Lima’s family 25 years to accumulate this patchwork of vines, “because one terrace was owned by four brothers and so on”. But so sought-after have Tenerife wines become, that just one sun-kissed hectare

around here costs €200,000. By comparison, “You could buy a 20-hectare vineyard for that in mainland Spain.”

The American Declaration of Independence in 1776 was toasted with a Canarian vintage. Imports of liqueur barrels and island bananas were what turned London’s East End into Canary Wharf. Even the gangsters controlling America’s prohibition trade enjoyed the marketability – and easy island exportation – of Tenerife wine. But how to rekindle a romance ruined by Europe’s homogenised mega-vineyards that crank out Cabernet Sauvignon from €1 a bottle?

The answer may lie north, along Tenerife’s coastal highway. I turn the car towards the DO Tacoronte-Acentejo region, a land of rippling vineyards anchored by Mount Teide. At first glance, Bodegas Monje seems an unlikely standard bearer for innovation. Felipe Monje is the fifth-generation owner-vintner of this venerable winery, who says, “Tradition is our gift for the future.” While some 90% of European vines were destroyed by the



Clockwise from top left the red volcanic soil; tanks used for wine production at Bodegas Reverón; Diego Miguel Reverón, bodega owner





Clockwise from top left Enrique Alfonso Garcia, owner of Bodega Altos de Trevejo; one of the new sparkling rosés being produced in the same manner as Champagne at Altos de Trevejo; traditional vines being grown high up in among the pine forests, referred to as mountain wine

“Now, wine enthusiasts look for something different, which shines a spotlight on us”



19th-century phylloxera virus (continental vineyards now use clippings grafted onto American roots), Tenerife’s Listán negro, the island’s principal grape, survived. “Now, wine enthusiasts look for something different to Merlot, which shines a spotlight on us.”

Even the vines themselves are interesting. Instead of trailing along a terrace, each thick branch is braided sideways, with stems shooting out from the 10m trunk. “That’s because they are 200 years old,” says Monje. Tiny Canarian potatoes are planted at the end of each vine. An ancient method of pest control? “No, Tenerife people just like eating potatoes and drinking wine.”

Vintages from these ancient vines are then aged in 200-year-old oak barrels. “So you drink what your Lord Nelson and Napoleon would have drunk.” Like Suertes del Marqués, Bodegas Monje produces different varieties – 14 in total – on a 500m radius slope that would challenge Chris Froome. Otherworldly vintages, like Tradicional, smack of salt breeze and earth.

We step inside Monje’s ultramodern winery. In a pioneering move, guests can drop in for tastings, walks and even theatre productions held among casks of maturing Crianza. Across the island, other vineyards are following suit. These include Cándido Hernández Pío, which won gold medals at the San Francisco International Wine Competition, the most respected in the USA. New outfits, like Enotenerife, offer several Rutas Del Vino (wine routes), which take in tastings in the remote DO

Abona region, the highest categorised vines in Europe.

A final secret weapon is a brand-new plaque outside Bodegas Monje. It shows the logo of the new DOP status for Canary Wine. “All our island wines, not just places like DO Orotava and DO Abona, will now bear this marque,” says Monje. “Then the world will know what sunshine and volcanoes really taste like.”

DESTINATION TENERIFE



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