



marqués de Valdeueza Olive Oil

Exceptional Estate Bottled Oil from Western Spain



As a history major I have to admit to being moderately biased toward this oil—you'd be hard pressed to find any product that's a whole lot more rooted in family and national history than this. The family—formally known as the

House of Alvarez de Toledo—has been a fixture in Spanish history for something like ten centuries. I can't tell you it's some romantic rags to riches story—at least for the last nine hundred years, the family has been hugely successful and has stayed that way for centuries. Best I can tell quality and care have been a part of most everything they seem to have done for hundreds of years now, and this oil is no exception.

The Valdeueza oil is very well made and it shows. No defects, long finish, good complexity. It's made from a unique blend of four different varieties that grow on the farm. Hojiblanca and Picual are standard varieties from southern Spain and are not uncommon out west either. The former brings a soft, warm, nutty butteriness; the latter offers hints of artichoke, green asparagus, a bit of earthiness and a touch of black pepper in the finish. Arbequina arrived in the region only recently, planted for its good yields and round soft flavor. In Extremadura, at least on the family farm, it tastes a bit different from what I've experienced in Catalonia (where it typically comes from): less apple, more olive. Most interesting to me, though, is the oil from the Morisca olives, which are unique to the area, offering a fair bit of pepper and interesting fruit, almost apricot in a way, with a touch of green grass and green tomato in there too.

For those of you who follow these things (and there are many!), I'd put the flavor profile of the finished oil in about the middle of the range—less green than the Tuscans, less earthy than most southern Spanish Picuals. This past autumn the weather was very dry—not great for yields, but generally, in my experience, very good for the flavor of the oil. As is true of all these high end, well made oils, there's a complexity and an elegance (and a commensurate higher cost) that will likely mean you'll want to use it for finishing—at the table drizzled on great greens from the market, on top of a bit of roasted meat or vegetables. During my visit a few years ago we had lunch at the family hunting house where they served us an entire meal in which the oil was featured in every dish. The highlight for me was the potatoes, tossed with a lot of the oil and a bit of salt, then roasted at high heat 'til they had a bit of a golden brown crust and a whole lot of flavor. The more I eat this oil, the more I like it, and I should add that with its distinctive pale blue label and elegant bottle, the Valdeueza oil makes a pretty marvelous gift too.