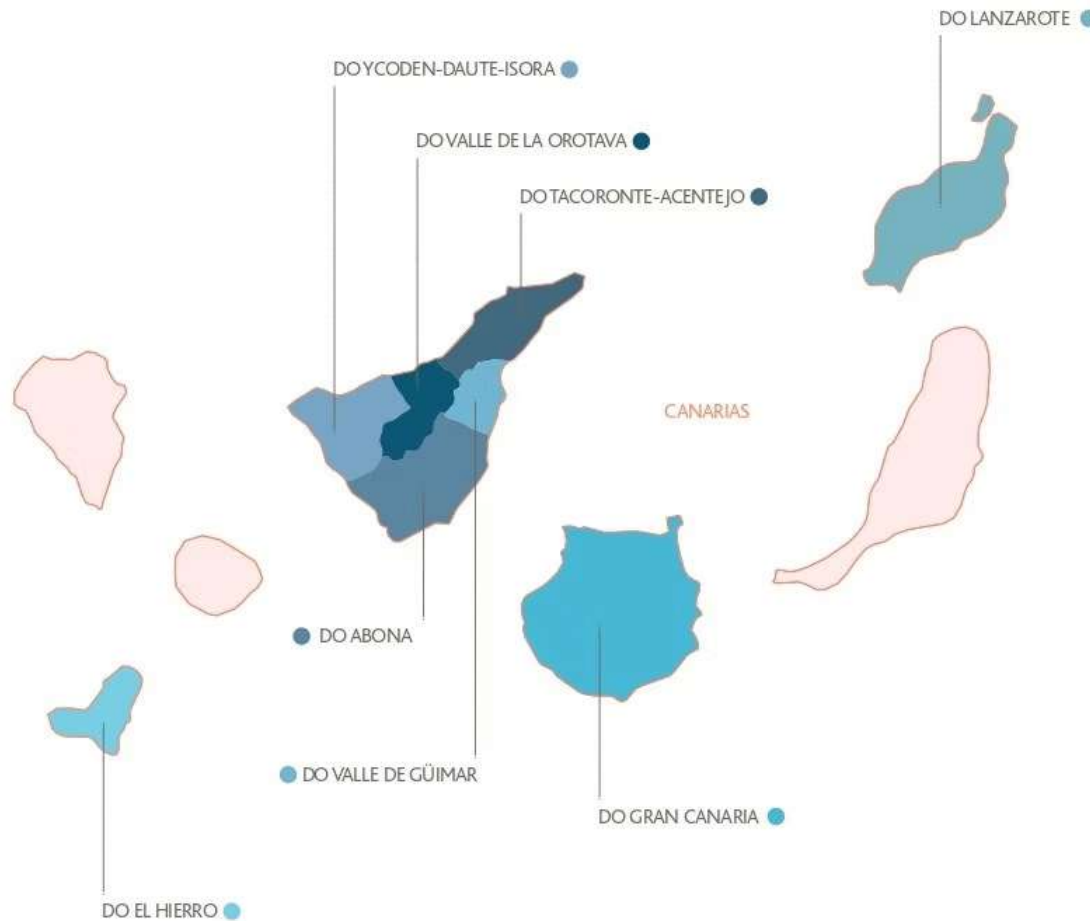


Canary Islands - Mastering Terroir with Chiara Sieni DipWSET

Geographic Foundations



The Canaries consist of eight principal islands—Tenerife, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, La Palma, La Gomera, El Hierro, and La Graciosa—spread over 450 km and lying at 27–29°N latitude, 1,000 km from southern mainland Spain and 100 km from Africa's Saharan coast.



Historical Perspective

History

Viticulture began in the 15th century with settlers introducing grapevines from Iberia

1

1703 Methuen Treaty between England and Portugal strengthened the bonds between England and Portugal

3

21st century the Islands wines experienced a revival, and a renewed recognition for safeguarding rare grape varieties

5

2

Between 16th and 17th century, The Canary Islands became a major wine trade centre, especially for Malvasia wines shipped internationally

4

At the end of the 19th century, Phylloxera plague gave these islands another chance to flourish

Climate Nuance and Adaptation

Climatically, the Canaries lie in a subtropical zone but exhibit enormous intra- and interisland variation due to altitude, exposure, and maritime influences.



The Atlantic

A key cooling and humidifying influence, especially on windward (northern) slopes.



Trade Winds (Alisios)

Northern slopes experience "sea of clouds" mists, reducing heat and increasing humidity.



Saharan Influence

Eastern islands, particularly Lanzarote, suffer periodic dry, hot, and dust-laden winds.



Rainfall

Annual precipitation ranges from as little as 100mm in Lanzarote up to 700mm on windward slopes in Tenerife.



Microclimates

Altitude and aspect generate myriad local climates, from fog shrouded terraces to arid, desert-like plains.

The Volcanic Soil Mosaic



Volcanic Ash (Lapilli)

On Lanzarote, black lapilli forms a porous surface that collects dew and cools roots, and vines are planted in pits ("hoyos") protected by walls for moisture and wind protection.



Basalt, Pumice, and Decomposed Lava

These soils provide essential drainage, mineral richness, and heat retention but require deep rooting to locate scarce moisture.



Sand, Clay, and Iron-rich Soils

Particularly on El Hierro, these provide a distinctive mineral and sometimes saline character, contributing to the unique personality of Canarian wines.

Phylloxera Alert

Phylloxera, previously absent in the Canary Islands allowing ancient ungrafted vines to thrive, was first detected on July 30, 2025, in Valle de Guerra, Tenerife. Since then, 5,289 surveys found 84 infected vines mostly in Tacoronte-Acentejo DO, with cases also confirmed in Valle de La Orotava DO and, recently, Valle de Güímar DO in southern Tenerife. This marks an end to the islands' phylloxera immunity.



Viticulture: Traditions and Evolution

Canarian viticulture remains highly manual due to the challenging and varied terrain.



Cordon Trenzado (Braided Vines)

Unique to Valle de la Orotava DO, Tenerife, where ancient vines are woven horizontally along the ground to enable air flow, maximize sunlight, and cope with mountain slopes.



Hoyos and Zanjas (Pits and Trenches)

On Lanzarote, vines are planted in craters (up to 4m deep) and ringed with stone walls, vital for capturing moisture and shielding from wind and sand.



Terracing

Essential on La Palma, El Hierro, and northern Tenerife, broad terraces ("bancales") enable viticulture on steep, erosion-prone, humid slopes.



Ungrafted Vines

Most vines remain on original rootstock due to historic phylloxera immunity, many over a century old, providing deep genetic diversity and complex old-vine wines.



Low Density and Low Yields

Both techniques and environment limit yields, further concentrating flavours.

The Treasure of Indigenous Grapes

The Canaries' centuries-old isolation has led to the preservation of a remarkable array of grapes, many found nowhere else.

Key Grape Varieties



Listán Blanco (Palomino)

The principal white grape comprises around 30% of all vineyard plantings, expressing crispness, minerality, citrus, and sometimes a gentle salinity.



Listán Negro

Most widely planted red represents about 25% of all plantings, yielding light-to-medium-bodied wines, often floral, with red berry fruit and a notable volcanic spice; it is used in carbonic maceration for youthful, fresh styles.



Malvasía (Volcánica and Aromática)

Accounting for about 20% of vineyard area. Celebrated for both dry and sweet wines. Malvasía Volcánica, especially in Lanzarote, gives luscious, aromatic whites, often with honeyed notes, while Malvasía Aromática produces powerful sweet wines in La Palma and El Hierro.



Negramoll

Representing around 10% of vineyard plantings. A red grape producing light, elegant, Pinot Noir-like wines with soft tannins and delicate aromatics.

Other Unique Varieties: Vijariego Blanco, Marmajuelo, Gual (Bual), Baboso Negro, Verdello, Bermejuela—each with distinct character, and often field-blended in traditional plots. Together provide about 15% of the planted area



A Spectrum of Wine Styles

Whites

Noted for purity, acidity, pronounced minerality, and often subtle aromatics reminiscent of Atlantic brine, volcanic stone, and mountain herbs. Malvasía and Listán Blanco dominate, appearing in both mono-varietal and blended forms.

Reds

Typically light in body, with bright red fruit and floral notes, fine-grained tannins, and a characteristic volcanic edge. Many of these are aged with minimal oak to preserve varietal typicity and terroir transparency.

Sweet Wines

An ancient tradition using late harvested or sun-dried Malvasía, sometimes fortified. These wines, like the celebrated Malvasía Dulce, can rival those from Madeira or Sauternes for depth and longevity.

Natural, Low-Intervention and "Garage" Wines

The new generation of Canarian winemakers is increasingly trendsetting, fusing ancient vines and techniques with minimal intervention, native yeasts, and innovative vessel use (clay amphorae, concrete eggs, and old barrels), yielding highly specialty, terroir-driven limited releases.

Carbonic Maceration

Commonly employed for Listán Negro and Negramoll, producing vivid, pure, aromatic early-drinking reds.



Protected Designation of Origin

Canary Wine Classification

The wines of the Canary Islands PDO – Canary Wine have the following classification, which is included on their label:



Parcel Wine (VP)

Wine from grapes grown in a plot with distinct soil and microclimate that set it apart from its surroundings

Municipal Wine (VM)

Wine from grapes grown, produced, and bottled within the same municipality

Island Wine (VI)

Wine from vineyards on one of the Canary Islands' recognized units, such as Tenerife or Fuerteventura

Regional Wine

Wine obtained from grapes from different plots in the geographical region of the Canary Islands.

TENERIFE

A microclimate for each vineyard

As the largest island in the Canary Islands, Tenerife boasts five distinct Denominaciones de Origen (DOs). Its complex terroirs and diverse microclimates allow for unique indigenous grape varieties to flourish.

Viticulture began here in the 15th century. Tenerife's vineyards were spared from the 19th-century phylloxera plague, preserving ancient ungrafted vines that continue to produce exceptional wines today.



Geography, Climate and Terroir

Tenerife is dominated by Mount Teide, an active volcano rising to 3,718 meters, the highest peak in Spain. Vineyard elevations range from sea level to about 1,500 meters. The island's topography is rugged, with terraced vineyards climbing steep volcanic slopes.

The climate is subtropical but moderated by several factors:



Atlantic Ocean influence

Provides cooling maritime breezes.



Trade winds (Alisios)

Northeasterly winds bring humidity and mist, cooling vines especially on exposed slopes.



Altitude

Leads to significant diurnal temperature shifts, with cool nights preserving acidity and aromatic freshness.



Sea of Clouds (Mar de Nubes)

A near-permanent fog layer on northern slopes traps moisture, reduces sun intensity during the growing season.



Low rainfall

Annual precipitation ranges from 300mm to 700mm.



Soils

Predominantly volcanic, ranging from porous volcanic ash to mineral-rich lava soils.

Grape Varieties

Tenerife, the main producer and exporter of Canarian wines. Its famous white grape is Malvasia Aromatica, used in dry to sweet wines, while Listán Negro is the most common red. The island has many unique native and Iberian grape varieties:

- **Listan Negro:** Commonly confused with Listán Prieto, studies show that Listán Negro is actually a natural crossing of Mollar Cano and Palomino Fino. The most planted red variety in the Canary Islands, Listán Negro has a natural affinity with the soils and micro-climates of Tenerife, where it produces strong yields of ripe grapes on its volcanic soils. It produces light to medium bodied reds with medium tannins, fruity aromas of raspberry and plum. It's often used in carbonic maceration for fresh, early-drinking styles but can also produce structured wines with oak ageing.
- **Malvasia (Malvasía Volcánica and Aromática):** Flagship white varieties yielding aromatic, elegant wines ranging from dry to sweet.
- **Listan Blanco (Palomino Fino):** Versatile white grape used in both dry and fortified styles.
- **Negramoll:** Black grape contributing softness and aromatic complexity.
- **Baboso Negro:** A red grape variety that originally came to the Canary Islands via Alentejo, Portugal, where it's known as Alfrocheiro. With small, compact bunches, Baboso Negro has a thin skin that breaks easily.



The 5 Denominaciones de Origen (DOs) of Tenerife

DO Tacoronte-Acentejo



- **Location & Climate:** Northern and northeastern slopes of Mount Teide, the largest DO in the Canary Islands. It enjoys a humid, temperate climate.
- **Soils:** Volcanic ash and lava rocks, terraced vineyards.
- **Grape Varieties:** White grapes such as Gual, Malvasia Aromática, Listan Blanco (Palomino), Marmajuelo; black grapes dominated by Listan Negro and Negramoll.

- **Wine Styles:** Whites are aromatic, fresh, and textured; reds range from fragrant and fruity young wines to more structured, oak-aged bottlings.
- **Viticulture:** Traditional cordón trenzado vine training (twisting several vine stems into ropes trained on wires).

DO Valle de la Orotava

Location & Climate

Northern terraces of Mount Teide; wetter and cooler.

Soils

Volcanic with high mineral content.

Grape Varieties

Predominantly white grapes—Gual, Malvasia (both Aromática and Volcánica), Verdello, Vijariego, Listan Blanco; reds include Listan Negro, Malvasia Rosada, and Negramoll.

Wine Styles

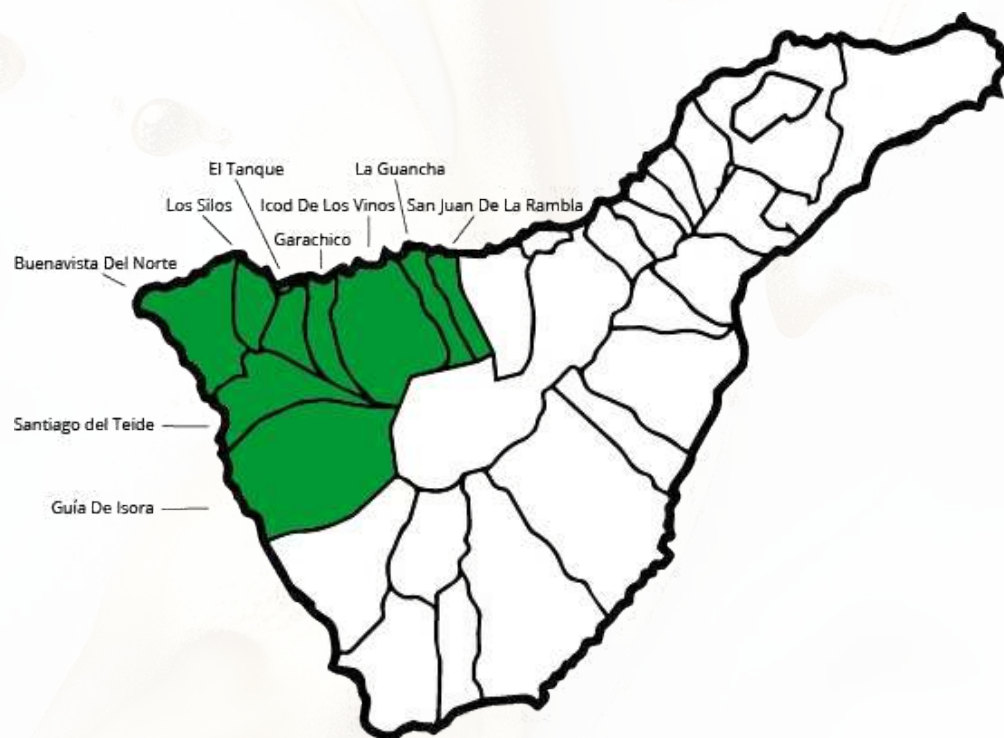
Elegant, fresh whites with richness and minerality; fragrant reds gaining popularity.

Viticulture

Traditional low-wiring trellis with rope-trained vines; renewed interest from quality-focused producers.



DO Ycoden-Daute-Isora



Location & Climate: Northwest of Tenerife, the wettest DO with around 550mm rainfall.

Grape Varieties: Traditionally whites including Malvasia, plus emerging fresh reds from Listan Negro and Baboso Negro.

Wine Styles: Crisp whites with aromatics and minerality; reds are low-intervention with lively fruit.

Viticulture: Micro-vineyards, low yields, and organic practices.

DO Abona

Location & Climate

Southeast slopes of Mount Teide; semi-desert climate moderated by high altitudes (up to 1,500 meters).

Wine Styles

Vivid, aromatic whites and vibrant, medium-bodied reds.

Grape Varieties

Whites include Verdello, Gual, Bermejuela, Moscatel; reds include Listan Negro, Negramoll, Moscatel Negro.

Viticulture

Vineyards scattered across altitude gradient, leading to several microclimates.

DO Valle de Guimar

- **Location & Climate:** Eastern slopes, small and dispersed vineyards with less than 1 hectare average size.
- **Grape Varieties:** Field blends of native varieties.
- **Wine Styles:** Traditional, small-batch wines reflecting individual terroirs.



Viticultural Techniques and Styles

Many Tenerife producers utilize traditional vineyard practices alongside modern winemaking:



Traditional Cordon Trenzado

Twisting vine stems into long ropes (cordón trenzado) for sun exposure and wind resistance.



Dry Farming and Terracing

Low-yield farming to concentrate flavours, terracing to protect vines on steep slopes.



Carbonic Maceration

Popular for Listan Negro to produce bright, fruity, early drinking reds.



Oak Aging

Used selectively for fuller-bodied red wines for complexity and longevity.



Sustainable Practices

Increasing use of organic farming due to naturally low fungal pressure.

Notable Producers of Tenerife

Bodegas Reverón

This winery is applauded for its commitment to volcanic terroirs and indigenous varieties, producing full-flavored reds and refined whites with a focus on balance and purity.

Viña Norte

Celebrated for boutique-sized productions highlighting natural viticulture and terroir-driven wines from Tacoronte-Acentejo, emphasizing low intervention and site expression.

GRAN CANARIA

The Miniature Continent

Gran Canaria is the third largest Canary Island, known for its volcanic geology and diverse microclimates. Its rugged terrain and Atlantic influences create unique conditions for grape growing. Pico de las Nieves, the island's highest point at 2,000 meters, causes significant climatic variation that shapes grape ripening and wine styles. The Denominación de Origen (DO Gran Canaria) governs the quality and characteristics of its wines, traditionally focused on whites but increasingly including notable red varieties.



Geography and Climate

Gran Canaria's central mountainous terrain is dominated by Pico de las Nieves, which acts as a climatic divide:

Northern slopes

The mountain traps moist trade winds (Alisios), generating a consistent "sea of clouds" (mar de nubes) that reduces solar radiation and preserves humidity. This cooler, humid environment favours slower grape ripening and retention of acidity.

Southern slopes

Shade and moisture are limited, and the climate is warmer and more arid due to the rain shadow effect.

The climate of Gran Canaria is sub-tropical, influenced by the trade winds and breezes from the Atlantic Ocean, depending on the height of the vineyard. The south of the island is widely regarded as having the best weather in the world, due to consistent sunshine and moderate temperatures.

Terroir and Viticulture

Gran Canaria's mineral-rich volcanic soils, with porous pumice and ash, retain moisture for dry-farmed vines. Steep slopes require terraced vineyards, limiting mechanization and demanding skilled, labor-intensive work. This varied terrain creates microclimates ideal for cultivating diverse grape varieties.

Traditional viticulture, including methods like El Parral and Vaso Irregular, remains well preserved and respected on the island.

Grape Varieties



White Grape Varieties

Listán Blanco: The principal white grape, producing fresh, aromatic wines with crisp acidity.

Breval: A white grape variety known Beba on mainland Spain, where it was cultivated in Andalusia before the phylloxera plague. It ripens early and thrives on Gran Canaria, where it's blended for aromatic, balanced wines.



Red Grape Varieties

Listán Negro: The most prominent red variety, producing medium-bodied wines with red fruit and moderate tannins.

Additional minor black varieties may be included in blends.

Wine Styles

White Wines

Often mineral-driven and aromatic with balanced acidity, reflecting the cooler northern altitudes' freshness and the volcanic soil's influence.

Red Wines

Increasingly significant, these include fresh, light to medium-bodied wines with bright red fruit flavours and moderate tannins, reflecting low-yielding vineyards and cooler mesoclimates.

Rosé Wines

Made predominantly from Listán Negro, offering lively red fruit and refreshing acidity.

Winemaking techniques are evolving with a blend of traditional and modern approaches, including stainless steel fermentation for freshness and occasional oak aging for added complexity.

Denominación de Origen Gran Canaria

The DO Gran Canaria encompasses vineyards scattered on the island's northern and central areas, especially those benefiting from the altitude and trade wind influence. It maintains standards ensuring that grape varieties, yields, and production methods uphold the region's standards of authenticity and quality.



Notable Producers



Bodegas Sepa

A traditional winery known for crafting refined, terroir-expressive wines emphasizing native grape varieties. Their portfolio includes fresh whites and elegant reds emblematic of Gran Canaria's volcanic terroir.



Bodega San Juan

A winery blending traditional practices with newer techniques, recognized for wines that combine vitality with structural balance. They produce noteworthy examples of both white and red wines that reflect the island's climatic diversity.



La Montana

Bodega La Montaña, a 40-year-old family winery, offers an authentic gastronomic experience with eco-friendly wines, including a sweet white. Their bochinche, a pop-up vineyard restaurant open post-harvest, serves homemade wines with classic Canarian dishes like

LANZAROTE

A lunar-like terroir



Lanzarote, the easternmost of the Canary Islands, is renowned for its breath-taking volcanic landscapes and a viticultural environment unlike any other in Europe. The island's signature black lava fields, combined with a harsh subtropical climate dominated by strong north-eastern trade winds and proximity to the Sahara Desert, create unique challenges and opportunities for wine production. Lanzarote's wine culture is centred around its Denominación de Origen (DO Lanzarote), where traditional vineyard cultivation techniques and indigenous grape varieties, adapted to extreme conditions, yield distinctive wines celebrated for their minerality and aromatic intensity

Geography and Climate

Lanzarote's terrain is characterized by:

- Vast expanses of solidified black lava fields that cover much of the island's interior due to the last volcanic eruption in 1824.
- The island is relatively flat compared to its neighbours, which allows the Alisios trade winds to blow unhindered from the northeast to the southwest.
- Lanzarote is also the closest Canary Island to Africa, meaning it receives hot, dusty winds from the Sahara Desert.

The climate is subtropical with minimal rainfall, making it the driest island in the archipelago.

Terroir and Vineyard Practices

Lanzarote's iconic terroir is defined by its volcanic ash, locally known as **lapilli** or **picón**. This porous volcanic ash covers the soil and plays a vital role in moisture retention.

The unique challenge of viticulture in Lanzarote is due to the thickness of the Lapilli layer on the vineyard soils. Semi-circular walls are then built around these trenches to protect the vines from the strong winds.

Vineyards are planted in **hoyos** or **zanjas**, small hollows or trenches dug into the lapilli to shelter vines from the Saharan winds. Surrounding each vineyard or vine are **abrigo** or protective stone walls—low, semi-circular dry stone constructions:

- Shield the vines against intense winds.
- Capture condensation from morning mist and dew.
- Reduce evaporation and help retain moisture in the soil.

Grape Varieties

Malvasía Volcánica

The dominant grape of Lanzarote, a natural cross between Malvasía Aromática and Marmajuelo, mostly cultivated on the volcanic slopes of Lanzarote. Malvasía Volcánica is a notably fruity wine, with touches of minerality on the palate and accounts for over 75% of the vineyard plantings.

Other varieties

Listán Blanco: Used in blends and some varietal wines.

Moscatel: Adds aromatic intensity to blends.

Red varieties such as **Listán Negro** and **Negramoll** are scarce but increasingly experimented with.

DO Lanzarote Specifications

DO Lanzarote covers the whole island's vineyard area, enforcing regulations to maintain the quality and heritage of its wines:



Traditional Planting

Vineyards must maintain traditional planting styles in hoyos or zanjias sheltered by abrigos.



Indigenous Varieties

Grape varieties restricted primarily to indigenous Canarian varieties, with Malvasía Volcánica as the flagship.



Low Yields

Maximum yields kept low due to the harsh environment naturally limiting production.



Hand Harvesting

Harvesting must be by hand due to difficult terrain and low vine density.

Wine Styles

Lanzarote wines are prized for:

- Their **mineral character** prominently reflecting volcanic soils.
- Whites from Malvasía produce a range of styles including dry, medium-dry, and sweet wine styles, often showing floral and tropical aromas balanced by natural acidity.
- Reds using Listán Negro and Negramoll tend to be light-bodied but aromatic and fresh.

Notable Producers

Bodegas El Grifo

The oldest winery in the Canary Islands and Spain's oldest active one, El Grifo crafts a diverse range of Malvasía-based wines, including dry whites and distinctive sweet wines that highlight Lanzarote's volcanic terroir.

Bodegas Rubicón

Known for adhering to traditional viticulture in hoyos and producing authentic, terroir-driven wines that express Lanzarote's unique growing conditions.

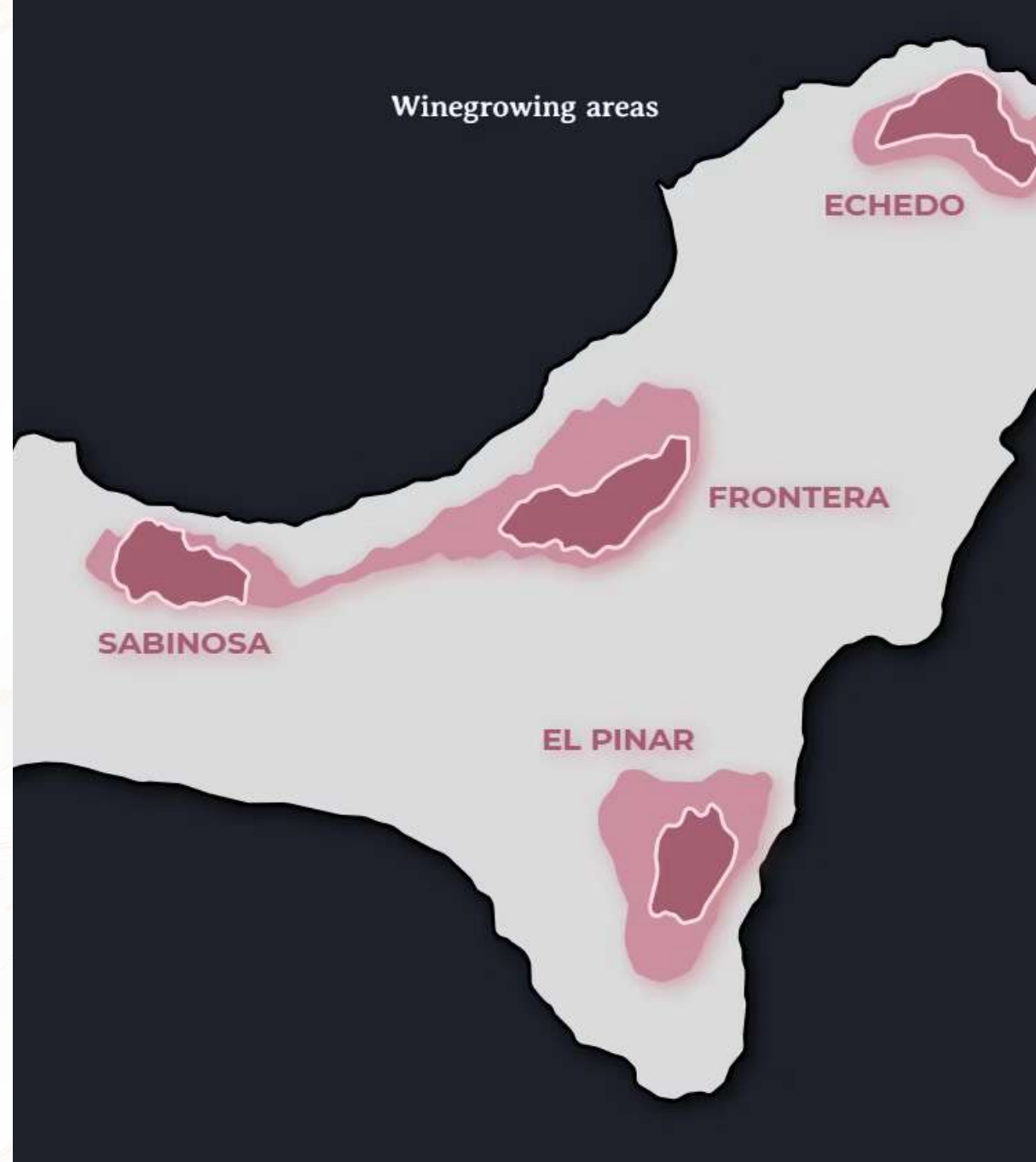
Bodegas La Geria

Large cooperative emphasizing the conservation of traditional vineyard methods, producing a variety of Malvasía wines that are widely recognized.

EL HIERRO

The youngest soils in the archipelago

El Hierro, the smallest and youngest Canary Island, lies furthest southwest. Its volcanic soils, steep terrain, and tough climate preserve ancient native grapes. Though vineyard area is small, the island is gaining recognition for distinctive wines shaped by iron-rich soils and Atlantic influence. The DO El Hierro protects traditional varieties and low-yielding, minimally handled vines that express the terroir.



Geography and Climate

El Hierro's young geology shows in its iron-rich volcanic soils and ash layers. Its steep, rugged slopes require manual work for vineyard care and harvest

Climatic conditions are among the harshest in the archipelago:

- Very low annual rainfall, reaching as little as 125 mm, making it the driest island.
- Subtropical maritime climate with mild temperatures moderated by the Atlantic Ocean.
- Constant winds and limited humidity place stress on the vines, but reduced disease pressure allows organic and sustainable farming.
- Mist and dew are critical moisture sources for vine hydration.

Terroir and Viticulture

The island's **TERRA FIRMA** is dominated by volcanic ash and lapilli, together with iron-rich mineral deposits which impart a distinctive profile to the wines.

Soils drain well yet retain enough moisture for vines, whose deep roots tap subsoil nutrients. Steep volcanic slopes create demanding but rewarding sites that foster rich biodiversity.

El Hierro's vines are grown low to the ground to withstand strong winds, a system that demands continual care to maintain shape and rooting.

Grape Varieties

El Hierro's vineyards, totalling some 200 hectares, are distinguished by the preservation of some of the Canary Islands' oldest and rarest native grape varieties:

White Grapes

Vijariego Blanco: it is the most acidic grape variety in the Canary Islands. This grape variety is entirely unique to the islands and has yet to be found anywhere else in the world.

Listán Blanco: Originating from Jerez de la Frontera, this widely planted Canary Islands grape adapts to varied altitudes and microclimates, maintaining steady yields thanks to its natural disease resistance

Red Grapes

Vijariego Negro: A rare native red once tied to El Hierro, Vijariego Negro is also known as Sumoll in Catalonia. While adaptable and found across the Canaries, it shows a preference for cooler vineyard sites.

Listán Negro: The most planted red variety in the Canary Island, commonly confused with Listán Prieto, studies show that Listán Negro is actually a natural crossing of Mollar Cano and Palomino Fino.

Baboso Negro: Contributes aromatic complexity. A red grape variety that originally came to the Canary Islands via Alentejo, Portugal, where it's known as Alfrocheiro. With small, compact bunches, Baboso Negro has a thin skin that breaks easily, leading to lower yields and a higher risk of rot in the vineyards. It's grown predominantly in El Hierro and Tenerife.

Wine Styles

Historically, El Hierro was known for sweet wines produced from grapes dried naturally or late-harvested. Today, the focus is predominantly on dry wines expressing the island's terroir with:

Whites

Crisp, fresh, mineral-driven wines from Vijariego Blanco, Baboso Blanco, and Gual with vibrant acidity and floral aromas.

Reds

Light to medium-bodied reds with moderate tannins, fruity and sometimes slightly earthy, made from Listán Negro and Vijariego Negro.

Field Blends

Reflect the traditional interplanting of native varieties.

Winemaking often favours minimal intervention to enhance natural expression, with some producers experimenting with lees aging and gentle oak influence.

Notable Producers

Currently, the DO of Wines of El Hierro brings together 13 wineries and over 200 winegrowers.

Vinos de El Hierro

Small-scale winery committed to crafting wines that highlight the island's volcanic soils and rare grape varieties, including both whites and reds.

Bodegas Sabinosa

Historic producer focused on revitalizing ancient varieties and traditional methods with modern winemaking finesse

Thank You for Joining Us!

We appreciate your time and interest in Canary Island, an archipelago with a mosaic of terroir and ungrafted grape varieties.

We look forward to welcoming you again soon!

For any request or information

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Cheers,

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