Chapter 1

Intriguing Wines from Old Spain

In This Chapter

- Getting to know Spain's top three wine regions
- Scoping out several other Spanish wine regions worth knowing
- Appreciating the greatness (and value) that is Sherry

Spain is a hot, dry, mountainous country with more vineyard land than any other nation on earth. It ranks third in the world in wine production, after France and Italy.

Spanish wine has awakened from a long period of dormancy and underachievement. Spain is now one of the wine world's most vibrant arenas. For decades, only Spain's most famous red wine region, Rioja, and the classic fortified wine region, Sherry, had any international presence for fine wines. Now, many other wine regions in Spain are making seriously good wines. In this chapter, you find out more about these regions and the ins and outs of Sherry.

Spain's wine laws, like Italy's, provide for a bilevel Quality Wines Produced in Specified Regions (QWPSR) category: *Denominaciónes de Origen* (DO) and a higher classification, *Denominaciónes de Origen Calificada* (DOC, also known as DOCa), the latter created in 1991. Wines that don't qualify as DO fall into the table wine category *vino de la tierra* (equivalent to the French category *vin de pays*).

Rioja Rules the Roost

Rioja, in north-central Spain (see Figure 1-1), has historically been the country's major red wine region (even if today Ribera del Duero and Priorato are catching up — fast!). Three-quarters of Rioja's wine is red, 15 percent *rosado* (rosé), and 10 percent white.

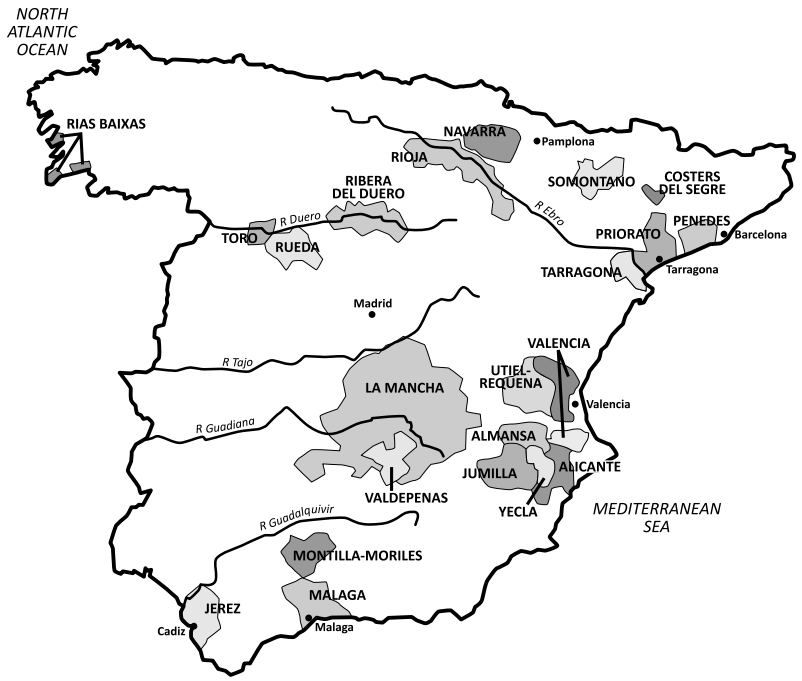

Figure 1-1: The wine regions of Spain.

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The principal grape in Rioja is Tempranillo (tem-prah-*nee*-yoh), Spain's greatest red variety. But regulations permit another three varieties for reds — Garnacha (Grenache), Graciano (Carignan), and Mazuelo. Red Rioja wine is typically a blend of two or more varieties. Regulations aside, some producers now also use Cabernet Sauvignon in their red Rioja.

The Rioja region has three districts: the cooler, Atlantic-influenced Rioja Alavesa and Rioja Alta areas and the warmer Rioja Baja zone. Most of the best Riojas are made from grapes in the two cooler districts, but some Riojas are blended from the grapes of all three districts.

Traditional production for red Rioja wine involved many years of aging in small barrels of American oak before release, which created pale, gentle, sometimes tired (but lovely) wines that lacked fruitiness. The trend has been to replace some of the oak aging with bottle aging, resulting in wines that taste much fresher. Another trend, among more progressive winemakers, is to use barrels made of French oak along with barrels of American oak — which has traditionally given Rioja its characteristic vanilla aroma.

Regardless of style, red Rioja wines have several faces according to how long they age before being released from the winery. Some wines receive no oak aging at all and are released young. Some wines age (in oak and in the bottle)

for two years at the winery and are labeled *crianza;* these wines are still fresh and fruity in style. Other wines age for three years and carry the designation *reserva.* The finest wines age for five years or longer, earning the status of *gran reserva.* These terms appear on the labels (either front or back; see Chapter 3 in Book I for help deciphering which is which) and act as the seal of authenticity for Rioja wines.

Prices start at around $12 for crianza reds and go up to about $45 for some gran reservas. The best recent vintages for red Rioja are 2004, 2001, 1995, and 1994.

The following Rioja producers are particularly consistent in quality for their red wines:

- CVNE (Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España), commonly referred to as CUNE
- Bodegas Muga
- R. Lopez de Heredia
- La Rioja Alta
- Marqués de Murrieta Ygay
- Marqués de Riscal

Most white Riojas these days are merely fresh, neutral, inoffensive wines, but Marqués de Murrieta and R. Lopez de Heredia still make a traditional white Rioja that's golden-colored, oak-aged, and made from a blend of local white grape varieties, predominantly Viura. Both of these traditional white Riojas are fascinating: flavorful, voluptuous, with attractive traces of oxidation, and capable of aging. These wines aren't everybody's cup of tea, true, but they sure have character! They have so much presence that they can accompany foods normally associated with red wine, as well as traditional Spanish food, such as paella or seafood. The Murrieta white sells for about $16, and the Lopez de Heredia is about $20.

Ribera del Duero: Drawing New Eyes and Palates to Spain

Ribera del Duero, two hours north of Madrid by car (refer to Figure 1-1), is one of Spain's most dynamic wine regions. Perhaps nowhere else in the world does the Tempranillo grape variety reach such heights, making wines with body, deep color, and finesse. Now famous for its high-quality red wines, this region has helped to ignite world interest in Spanish wines.

For many years, one producer, the legendary Vega Sicilia, dominated the Ribera del Duero area. In fact, Spain's single most famous great wine is Vega Sicilia's Unico (Tempranillo, with 20 percent Cabernet Sauvignon) — an intense, concentrated, tannic red wine with enormous longevity; it ages for ten years in casks and then sometimes ages further in the bottle before it's released. Unico is available mainly in top Spanish restaurants; if you're lucky enough to find it in a retail shop, it can cost about $300 — a bottle, that is. Even Unico's younger, less intense, and more available sibling, the Vega Sicilia Valbuena, retails for about $100.

Vega Sicilia is no longer the only renowned red wine in Ribera del Duero. Alejandro Fernández's Pesquera, entirely Tempranillo, has earned high praise over the past 15 years. Pesquera is a big, rich, oaky, tannic wine with intense fruit character. The reserva sells for about $28, whereas the younger Pesquera is $20. The reserva of Fernández's other winery in the area, Condado de Haza, sells for about $35. Three other fine producers of Ribera del Duero are Bodegas Mauro, Viña Pedrosa, and Bodegas Téofilo Reyes, who all make red wines that rival Pesquera.

Mountainous Priorato and Its Rich Reds

Back in the 12th century, monks founded a monastery (or *priory*) in the harsh, inaccessible Sierra de Montsant Mountains, about 100 miles southwest of Barcelona in the Catalonia region (refer to Figure 1-1), and planted vines on the steep hillsides. As time passed, the monastery closed, and the vineyards were abandoned because life was simply too difficult in this area (which in time became known as Priorat, or Priorato).

Flash forward to the 20th century, specifically the early 1980s. Enterprising winemakers, among them Alvaro Palacios, rediscovered Priorato and decided that conditions there were ideal for making powerful red wines, especially from old vines planted by locals early in the 20th century.

No Spanish wine region has been in the spotlight lately more than Priorato. And yet Priorato hasn't become a tourist destination, because it's so inaccessible. The region's volcanic soil, composed mainly of slate and *schist* (crystalline rock), is so infertile that not much other than grapes can grow there. The climate is harshly continental: very hot, dry summers and very cold winters. The steep slopes must be terraced; many vineyards can be worked only by hand. And grape yields are very low.

Amazingly rich, powerful red wines — made primarily from Garnacha and Carignan, two of Spain's native varieties — have emerged from this harsh landscape. Many are as rugged as the land, with high tannin and alcohol;

some wines are so high in alcohol that they have an almost Port-like sweetness. Because winemaking in Priorato isn't cost effective (to say the least!) and the quantities of each wine are so small, the wines are necessarily quite expensive; prices begin at about $40.

Priorato reds to look for include Clos Mogador, Clos Erasmus, Alvaro Palacios, Clos Martinet, l'Hermita, Morlanda, Mas d'En Gil, and Pasanau.

Five Other Spanish Regions to Watch

The action in Spanish wines — especially when value is your concern — definitely doesn't end with Rioja, Ribera del Duero, and Priorato (all of which are described earlier in this chapter). Consider exploring wines from the regions described in the following sections.

Penedés

The Penedés wine region is in Catalonia, south of Barcelona (refer to Figure 1-1). It's the home of most Spanish sparkling wines (known as *Cava*); it also produces a large quantity of red and white wines. Cava is made in the traditional method and fermented in the bottle. Most Cavas use local Spanish grapes. As a result, they taste distinctly different (a nice earthy, mushroomy flavor) from California bubblies (see Chapter 3 in Book IV) and from Champagne (see Chapter 6 in Book II). Some of the more expensive blends do contain Chardonnay.

Two gigantic wineries dominate Cava production: Freixenet and Cordorniu. Freixenet's frosted black Cordon Negro bottle has to be one of the most recognizable wine bottles in the world. Other Cava brands to look for are Mont Marçal, Paul Cheneau, Cristalino, Marqués de Monistrol, and Segura Viudas. Juve y Camps, a vintage-dated, upscale Cava, is a worthwhile buy at $16.

Any discussion of Penedés' still wines must begin with Torres, one of the world's great family-owned wineries. Around 1970, Miguel Torres pioneered the making of wines in Spain from French varieties, such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, along with local grapes, such as Tempranillo and Garnacha.

All the Torres wines are clean, well-made, reasonably priced, and widely available. They start in the $10 range for the red Sangre de Toro (Garnacha-Carignan) and Coronas (Tempranillo-Cabernet Sauvignon) and the white Viña Sol. The top-of-the-line Mas La Plana Black Label, a powerful yet elegant Cabernet Sauvignon, costs about $45.

Freixenet, the leading Cava producer, is now also in the still wine business. Its wines include the inexpensive René Barbier–brand varietals and two fascinating wines from Segura Viudas (a Cava brand owned by Freixenet), both $15 to $16. Creu de Lavit is a subtle but complex white that's all Xarel-lo (pronounced sha-*rel*-lo), a native grape used mainly for Cava production. The red Mas d'Aranyo is mainly Tempranillo.

Rías Baixas

Galicia, in northwest Spain next to the Atlantic Ocean and Portugal (refer to Figure 1-1), wasn't a province known for its wine. But from a small area called Rías Baixas, tucked away in the southern part of Galicia, an exciting, white wine has emerged — Albariño (ahl-ba-*ree*-nyo), made from the Albariño grape variety. Rías Baixas is, in fact, one of the world's hottest white wine regions. (Hot as in "in demand," not climate; Rías Baixas is cool and damp a good part of the year, and green year-round.)

This region now boasts about 200 wineries, compared to only 60 in the 1990s. Modern winemaking, the cool climate, and low-yielding vines have combined to make Rías Baixas's Albariño wines a huge success, especially in the United States, its leading market. Albariño is a lively, (mainly) unoaked white with vivid, floral aromas and flavors reminiscent of apricots, white peaches, pears, and green apples. It's a perfect match with seafood and fish. The Albariño grape makes wines that are fairly high in acidity, which makes them fine apéritif wines.

Albariños to look for include Bodega Morgadío, Lusco, Bodegas Martin Codax, Fillaboa, Pazo de Señorans, Pazo San Mauro, Pazo de Barrantes, and Vionta; all are in the $16 to $23 range.

Navarra

Once upon a time, the word *Navarra* conjured up images of inexpensive, easy-drinking dry rosé wines (or, to the more adventurous, memories of running the bulls in Pamplona, Navarra's capital city). Today, Navarra, just northeast of Rioja (see Figure 1-1), is known for its red wines, which are similar to, but somewhat less expensive than, the more famous wines of Rioja.

Many Navarra reds rely on Tempranillo, along with Garnacha, but you can also find Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and various blends of all four varieties in the innovative Navarra region. Look for the wines of the following three Navarra producers: Bodegas Julian Chivite, Bodegas Guelbenzu, and Bodegas Magana.

A brief guide to Spanish wine-label terminology

Expect to see some of the following terms on a Spanish wine label:

- **Blanco:** White.
- **Bodega:** Winery.
- **Cosecha or Vendimia:** The vintage year.
- **Crianza:** For red wines, this means that the wine has aged for two years with at least six months in oak; for white and rosé wines, *crianza* means that the wines aged for a year with at least six months in oak. (Some regions have stricter standards.)
- **Gran reserva:** Wines produced only in exceptional vintages. Red wines must age at least five years, including a minimum of two years in oak; white gran reservas must age at least four years before release, including six months in oak.
- **Joven:** Little or no oak aging.
- **Reserva:** Wines produced in the better vintages. Red reservas must age a minimum of three years, including one year in oak; white reservas must age for two years, including six months in oak.
- **Tinto:** Red.

Toro

The Toro region in northwest Spain, west of Ribera del Duero (see Figure 1-1), made wines in the Middle Ages that were quite famous in Spain. But it's a hot, arid area with poor soil, so winemaking was practically abandoned there for centuries.

In Spain's current wine boom, Toro has been rediscovered. Winemakers have determined that the climate and soil are ideal for making powerful, tannic red wines — mainly from the Tempranillo grape variety — which rival the wines of Toro's neighbors in Ribera del Duero (one of Spain's most dynamic wine regions, as explained earlier in this chapter).

Toro producers to buy include Bodegas Fariña, Vega Sauco, Estancia Piedra, Bodegas y Viñas Dos Victorias, Gil Luna, and Dehesa La Granja (owned by Pesquera's Alejandro Fernandez).

Rueda

The Rueda region, west of Ribera del Duero (see Figure 1-1), produces one of Spain's best white wines from the Verdejo grape. The wine is clean and fresh, has good fruit character, and sells for an affordable $9 to $10. The Rioja producer Marquis de Riscal makes one of the leading and most available examples.

Sherry: A Misunderstood Wine

The late comedian Rodney Dangerfield built a career around the line, "I get no respect!" His wine of choice should've been Sherry, because it shares the same plight. Sherry is a wine of true quality and diversity, but it remains undiscovered by most of the world. The upside of that negligence is that the price of good Sherry is attractively low. The following sections introduce you to all the intricacies of Sherry, an underappreciated, little-known wine.

Entering the Jerez triangle

Sherry comes from the Andalucía region of sun-baked, southwestern Spain. The wine is named after Jerez de la Frontera, an old town of Moorish and Arab origin where many of the Sherry bodegas are located. (*Bodega* can refer to the actual building in which Sherry is matured or to the Sherry firm itself.)

Actually, the town of Jerez is just one corner of a triangle that makes up the Sherry region. Another corner is Puerto de Santa María, a beautiful, old coast town southwest of Jerez that's home to a number of large bodegas. The third point of the triangle, Sanlúcar de Barrameda (also on the coast but northwest of Jerez), is so blessed with sea breezes that the lightest and driest of Sherries, *manzanilla* (mahn-zah-*nee*-yah), can legally be made only there. Aficionados of Sherry swear they can detect the salty tang of the ocean in manzanilla.

Traveling from Sanlúcar to Jerez, you pass vineyards with dazzling white soil. This soil is *albariza,* the region's famous chalky earth, rich in limestone from fossilized shells. Summers are hot and dry, but balmy sea breezes temper the heat.

The Palomino grape — the main variety used in Sherry — thrives only here in the hot Sherry region on albariza soil. Palomino is a complete failure for table wines because it's so neutral in flavor and low in acid, but it's perfect for Sherry production. Two other grape varieties, Pedro Ximénez (pronounced *pay*-dro he-*main*-ehz) and Moscatel (Muscat), are used for dessert types of Sherry.

Exploring the duality of Sherry: Fino and oloroso

Sherry consists of two basic types: *fino* (pronounced *fee*-no; light, very dry) and *oloroso* (pronounced oh-loh-*roh*-soh; rich and full, but also dry). Sweet Sherries are made by sweetening either type.

After fermentation, the winemaker decides which Sherries will become finos or olorosos by judging the appearance, aroma, and flavor of the young, unfortified wines. If a wine is to be a fino, the winemaker fortifies it lightly (until its alcohol level reaches about 15.5 percent). She strengthens future olorosos to 18 percent alcohol.

At this point, when the wines are in casks, the special Sherry magic begins: A yeast called *flor* grows spontaneously on the surface of the wines destined to be finos. The flor eventually covers the whole surface, protecting the wine from oxidation. The flor feeds on oxygen in the air and on alcohol and glycerin in the wine. It changes the wine's character, contributing a distinct aroma and flavor and rendering the wine thinner and more delicate in texture.

Flor doesn't grow on olorosos-to-be, because their higher alcohol content prevents it. Without the protection of the flor (and because the casks are never filled to the brim), these wines are exposed to oxygen as they age. This deliberate oxidation protects olorosos against further oxidation — for example, after you open a bottle.

Aging communally

Both fino and oloroso Sherries age in a special way that's unique to Sherry production: Unlike most other wines, young Sherry isn't left to age on its own. To make room for the young wine, some of the older wine is emptied out of the casks and is added to casks of even older wine. To make room in those casks, some of the wine is transferred to casks of even older wine, and so on. At the end of this chain, four to nine generations away from the young wine, the winemaker takes some of the finished Sherry from the oldest casks and bottles it for sale.

This system of blending wines is called the *solera* system. It takes its name from the word *solera* (floor), the term also used to identify the casks of the oldest wine.

As wines are blended, no more than a third of the wine is emptied from any cask. In theory, then, each solera contains small (and ever-decreasing) amounts of very old wine. As each younger wine mingles with older wine, it takes on characteristics of the older wine; within a few months, the wine of each generation is indistinguishable from what it was before being refreshed with younger wine. Thus, the solera system maintains infinite consistency of quality and style in Sherry.

Because the casks of Sherry age in dry, airy bodegas aboveground (rather than in humid cellars underground, like most other wines), some of the wine's water evaporates, thereby increasing the wine's alcoholic strength. Some olorosos aged for more than ten years can be as much as 24 percent alcohol, compared to their starting point of 18 percent.

Turning two into a dozen (at least)

Sherry begins to get a bit confusing when you realize that the 2 types of it (fino and oloroso) branch into at least 12 types. New styles occur when the natural course of aging changes the character of a Sherry so that its taste no longer conforms to one of the two categories. Deliberate sweetening of the wine also creates different styles.

Among dry Sherries, the main styles are

- **Fino:** This style of Sherry is pale, straw-colored, light-bodied, dry, and delicate. Fino Sherries are always matured under flor, either in Jerez or Puerto de Santa María. They have 15 to 17 percent alcohol. After they lose their protective flor (by bottling), finos become very vulnerable to oxidation spoilage. You must therefore store them in a cool place, drink them young, and refrigerate them after opening. They're best when chilled.
- **Manzanilla:** Pale, straw-colored, delicate, light, tangy, and very dry fino-style Sherry, manzanilla is made only in Sanlucar de Barrameda. (Although various styles of manzanilla are produced, *manzanilla fina,* the fino style, is by far the most common.) The temperate sea climate causes the flor to grow thicker in this town, and manzanilla is thus the driest and most pungent of all the Sherries. Handle it similarly to a fino Sherry.
- **Manzanilla pasada:** A manzanilla that has been aged in a cask about seven years and has lost its flor is referred to as *manzanilla pasada.* It's more amber in color than a manzanilla fina and fuller-bodied. Close to a dry amontillado (see the next item) in style, manzanilla pasada is still crisp and pungent. Serve it cool.
- **Amontillado:** An aged fino that has lost its flor in the process of cask aging, amontillado (ah-moan-tee-*yah*-doh) is deeper amber in color and richer and nuttier than the previous styles. It's dry but retains some of the pungent tang from its lost flor. True amontillado is fairly rare; most of the best examples are in the $25 to $40 price range. Cheaper Sherries labeled *amontillado* are common, so be suspicious if one costs less than $15 a bottle. Serve amontillado slightly cool and, for best flavor, finish the bottle within a week.

- **Oloroso:** Dark gold to deep brown in color (depending on its age), full-bodied with rich, raisiny aroma and flavor, but dry, oloroso lacks the delicacy and pungency of fino Sherries. Olorosos are usually between 18 and 20 percent alcohol and can keep for a few weeks after you open the bottle because they've already been oxidized in their aging. Serve them at room temperature.
- **Palo cortado:** The rarest of all Sherries, palo cortado (*pah*-loe cor-*tah*-doh) starts out as a fino, with flor, and develops as an amontillado, losing its flor. But then, for some unknown reason, it begins to resemble the richer, more fragrant oloroso style, all the while retaining the elegance of an amontillado. In color and alcohol content, palo cortado is similar to an oloroso, but its aroma is quite like an amontillado. Like amontillado Sherry, beware of cheap imitations. Serve palo cortado at room temperature. It keeps as well as olorosos.

Sweet Sherry is dry Sherry that has been sweetened. The sweetening can come in many forms, such as the juice of Pedro Ximénez grapes that have been dried like raisins. All the following sweet styles of Sherry are best served at room temperature:

- **Medium Sherry:** Amontillados and light olorosos that have been slightly sweetened, medium Sherries are light brown in color.
- **Pale cream:** Made by blending fino and light amontillado Sherries and lightly sweetening the blend, pale cream Sherries have a very pale gold color. This is a fairly new style.
- **Cream Sherry:** Cream and the lighter "milk" Sherries are rich *amorosos* (the term for sweetened olorosos). They vary in quality, depending on the oloroso used, and can improve in the bottle with age. Cream Sherries are a popular style.
- **Brown Sherry:** This Sherry style is a very dark, rich, sweet, dessert wine that usually contains a coarser style of oloroso.
- **East India Sherry:** This one's a type of Brown Sherry that has been deeply sweetened and colored.
- **Pedro Ximénez and Moscatel:** Extremely sweet, dark brown, syrupy dessert wines, Pedro Ximénez and Moscatel Sherries are made from raisined grapes of these two varieties. As varietally labeled Sherries, they're quite rare today. Often lower in alcohol, these Sherry styles are delicious over vanilla ice cream (really!).

Some wines from elsewhere in the world, especially the United States, also call themselves "Sherry." Many of these are inexpensive wines in large bottles. Occasionally you can find a decent one, but usually they're sweet and not very good. Authentic Sherry is made only in the Jerez region of

Spain and carries the official name, *Jerez-Xérès-Sherry* (the Spanish, French, and English names for the town) on the front or back label (flip to Chapter 3 in Book I for help distinguishing the front label from the back one).

Storing and serving Sherry

The light, dry Sherries — fino and manzanilla — must be fresh. Buy them from stores with rapid turnover; a fino or manzanilla that has been languishing on the shelf for several months won't give you the authentic experience of these wines.

Although fino or manzanilla can be an excellent apéritif, be careful when ordering a glass in a restaurant or bar. Never accept a glass from an already-open bottle unless the bottle has been refrigerated. Even then, ask how long it has been open — more than two days is too much. After you open a bottle at home, refrigerate it and finish it within a couple days.

Manzanilla and fino Sherry are ideal with almonds, olives, shrimp or prawns, all kinds of seafood, and those wonderful tapas in Spanish bars and restaurants. Amontillado Sherries can accompany tapas before dinner but are also fine at the table with light soups, cheese, ham, or salami (especially the Spanish type, *chorizo*). Dry olorosos and palo cortados are best with nuts, olives, and hard cheeses (such as the excellent Spanish sheep-milk cheese, Manchego). All the sweet Sherries can be served with desserts or enjoyed on their own.

Recommending specific Sherries

Sherries are among the great values in the wine world: You can buy decent, genuine Sherries for $7 or $8. But if you want to try the best wines, you may have to spend $15 or more. Following are some top Sherries, according to type.

Fino

All of these fino Sherries cost about $15 to $18:

- González Byass's Tío Pepe
- Pedro Domecq's La Ina
- Emilio Lustau's Jarana
- Valdespino's Inocente

Manzanilla

Keep your eyes peeled for these two stellar manzanilla Sherries:

- Hidalgo's La Gitana (a great buy at $12, or $9 for a 500-milliliter bottle)
- Hidalgo's Manzanilla Pasada (about $20)

Amontillado

A great number of cheap imitations exist in this category. For a true amontillado, stick to one of the following brands:

- González Byass's Del Duque (the real thing, at $48; half-bottle, $27)
- Emilio Lustau (any of his amontillados labeled *Almacenista,* $35 to $40)
- Hidalgo's Napoleon (about $18)
- Osborne's Solera A.O.S. ($40)

Oloroso

If you're dying to try oloroso Sherry, you won't miss out by tasting any of these wines:

- González Byass's Matusalem ($48; half-bottle, $27)
- Emilio Lustau (any of his olorosos labeled *Almacenista,* $35 to $40)
- Osborne's "Very Old" ($38)

Palo cortado

You find many imitations in this category, too. True palo cortados are quite rare, so stick with the following:

- González Byass's Apostoles ($48; half-bottle, $27)
- Emilio Lustau (any of his palo cortados labeled *Almacenista,* $35 to $40)
- Hidalgo's Jerez Cortado (about $35)

Cream

For an introduction to cream Sherry that's sure to impress, try

- Sandeman's Armada Cream ($12 to $13)
- Emilio Lustau's Rare Cream Solera Reserva ($25 to $27)

East India, Pedro Ximénez, Moscatel

You can't go wrong with either of these sweet Sherries:

- Emilio Lustau (a quality brand for all three Sherries; all about $25)
- González Byass's Pedro Ximénez "Noe" ($48; half-bottle, $27)

Presenting Montilla: A Sherry look-alike

Northeast of Spain's Sherry region is the Montilla-Moriles region (commonly referred to as Montilla; see Figure 1-1), where wines very similar to Sherry are made in fino, amontillado, and oloroso styles. The two big differences between Montilla (moan-*tee*-yah) and Sherry are as follows:

- Pedro Ximénez is the predominant grape variety in Montilla.
- Montillas usually reach their high alcohol levels naturally (without fortification).

Alvear is the leading brand of Montilla. Reasonably priced (about $14), these wines are widely available as finos or amontillados.