

Decanter

PAGO PAGO!

Not the capital of an exotic south-Pacific island, but a new category of 'grand cru' single-vineyard estates in Spain. Many are called but few are chosen, as **JOHN RADFORD** explains



DO Finca Elez (2003)

This was a joint first with Valdepeña in 2003. In the run-up to the millennium, I bumped into José Peñín, one of Spain's leading wine writers. I asked him which areas of Spain were the ones to watch and he said that high-altitude vineyards in the south were full of potential, 'particularly the Sierra de Alcaraz' in the province of Albacete. At that time, Finca Elez had already been established in El Bonillo for seven years, a project by actor, film and theatre director Manuel Manzanque and his sister Sofia. They had planted vineyards at 1,080m in the Sierra de Alcaraz, among the highest in Spain. The project was planned extremely carefully, and Manzanque believes 'wine, much like drama or comedy, represents man's highest cultural aspirations, and is equally capable of giving pleasure.'

Promotion to Pago status was not easy. >

Sofia Manzanque recalls: 'As we were the first, the main difficulty was bureaucracy. The administration knew what it wanted but hadn't defined the document to register it. It was a long job.'

The details: Established 1993 at El Bonillo, Albacete, Castilla-La Mancha, 250km south of Madrid; 38ha of Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah.

Best wine: Manuel Manzanque Escena (£26; Fah).

Above: Manuel Manzanque of Finca Elez, with children Manuel and Sofia.