Today's Rioja has become a divided land. With an ever-growing number of wineries making young, “modern”, fruit-driven wines laden in new French oak, López de Heredia remains a bastion of the old ways, continuing to make wine in the same style and spirit as 135 years ago.

The ghosts of López de Heredia’s generations of winemakers seem to permeate the layers of fungi draped throughout the tunnels of its historic cellars. However, in one of the wine world’s greatest paradoxes, this ultra-traditional bodega is also one of the most forward thinking.

Deep in the atmospheric cellars, winemaker Mercedes López de Heredia, one of the two enthusiastic daughters to have taken over the day-to-day running of the winery, took the time to chat with me about the extraordinary bodega she’s been fortunate enough to inherit.

Tell me how López de Heredia began

My great-grandfather, Don Rafael, while working as an importer of goods, saw an opportunity to sell wine to the French while they were being hit by phylloxera and started the Bodega in 1877. We were the first winery in Haro and are the third oldest in Rioja.

In 1890 phylloxera spread into Spain but by then the technique of grafting American rootstock onto vines was already well known. From 1901 to 1907 we had to uproot and graft all our vines which was quite a task, but we were already a strong enough brand to survive.

My great-grandmother helped my great grandfather with the blending of the wines. She was diabetic but she loved to cook – she was huge!

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