



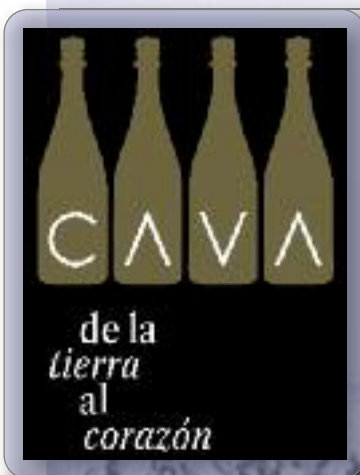
Cava tasting: exceptional quality and a variety of styles

Nowadays, the consumer has an incredible choice of Cavas. Not only can s/he choose from different regions, but also ageing times, sugar levels ranging from Brut Nature to Sweet and various grape varieties, birthing blanc de blancs, blanc de noirs and rosé wines among other styles. Additionally, some wineries use wood as a way of imparting a specific house style.

BY DIEGO BONNEL



Diego Bonnel has long experience in the international wine sector, as well as in strategic management and supply chain management. For more than 25 years, he has put his passion for wine and his expertise in winemaking and exporting to use as a consultant, advising both winemakers and public bodies. He travels extensively in many wine-producing countries, meeting wine experts including winemakers, oenologists and sommeliers. Tasting thousands of wines each year, he is particularly knowledgeable about Iberian wines. He currently lives in Madrid, where he heads the Spanish and Portuguese G&G office.



After tasting the available samples, mostly from Catalunya and some from the Requena area (Dominio de la Vega) and Extremadura, the overall impression is outstanding. By and large, there were no wines with evident flaws and standards were high to extremely high, with an obvious quest to produce a house style, based on the

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proportion of *reserva* wine and liqueur d'expédition used, not to mention time spent on the lees and/or in wood. All were fresh and no wine presented any signs of tiredness or being past its best, even the very well crafted Malvasía Dulce 2001 by Freixenet.

BOTTLE AGEING AND SPECIAL CUVEES

Most quality-conscious producers (in this case, all the participating wineries) leave their wines on the lees longer than they are required by law, irrespective of the category, from the simple Cava to the Gran Reserva.

As mentioned above, all styles can be found. Brut and Brut Nature are the two most common styles regarding sugar content. Brut - up to 12 grams of sugar per liter - shows a slightly sweet touch in the mouth rounding off the acidity in the wines and thus rendering them more subtle. The Brut Nature approach - up to 3 grams of sugar per liter - yields the driest wines with a fresh acidity and a zestiness not found in Brut wines.

The good thing about Cava is that nowadays there are no bad wines. Even the Cavas mass distributed the world over are of a good standard. Carta Nevada Reserva and Cordon Negro Reserva from Freixenet - two wines that can be seen on almost every store shelf in Europe and most of the Americas - show consistent quality and to a certain extent a detectable house style. They are based on traditional grape varieties (Macabeo, Xarel.lo and Parellada) and have undergone more prolonged ageing than strictly required by law. They both offer up a fairly fresh nose with citrus peel, ripe apple and some dry fruit. The palate, off-dry and of medium intensity and body, is fresh and fairly easy-drinking. The overall impression is one of a "friendly" wine that will be there for you whenever you need it.

As far as other lesser-known and/or massive wines are concerned, they are almost always based on the local varieties



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THE PARELLADA GRAPE IS ONE OF THE CLASSIC VARIETIES OFFERING ELEGANT, FRUITY, LIGHT AND AROMATIC WINES

mentioned above though can introduce a little Chardonnay, Pinot Noir or Trepat in some cases. Two characteristics will always be there as the basic aromatic ingredients: ripe apple and crystallized lemon peel.

Special or top estate-produced cuvees are the best wines from each producer and wines that have stayed on the lees for the longest period, thus showing some autolytic character, sometimes rounded off with some clear mineral notes. They also offer the greatest complexity and form the *crème de la crème* of the Cava appellation. Noteworthy cuvees


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IT IS IN THE SILENT CELLARS THAT CAVA ACQUIRES ITS PERSONALITY

include Blanca Cusiné 2008 from Parés Baltà, Brut de Brut 2004 from Recaredo, Torelló by Custo 2008 from Torelló Llopart, Kripta 2007 from Agustí Torelló Mata, Elías Terns Gran Reserva 2005 from Parató, Gran Reserva Seleccio 2006 from Avinyó, Reserva Especial 2009 from Dominio de la Vega, Jaume Codorniu (a blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay) from Codorniu, Reserva Heredad Gran Reserva Brut 2008 from Segura Viudas, Gran Juvé y Camps from the winery of the same name and III Lustros from Gramona. All these Cavas have their own style and can be considered a benchmark for quality in the global world of sparkling wines.

ROSÉ CAVAS

There are basically two styles of rosé Cavas. Among the seven rosés tasted, the Mediterranean style rosé and the Champagne style rosé can both be found.

The Mediterranean style is based on Monastrell, Garnacha and Trepat. The Cavas are very expressive (red fruit) with some spice (white pepper) and medium body and are relatively aromatic. They tend to have a little more alcohol than those based on Pinot Noir. This group includes the rosés

from Agustí Torelló Mata (100% Trepat), Dominio de la Vega (100% Garnacha), Celler Trobat (a blend of Garnacha and Monastrell), and Freixenet, with its Lavit Rosado cuvee (a blend of Trepat, Monastrell and Garnacha).

Champagne style rosés are based on Pinot Noir and they tend to be on the lighter side and a little more subtle. Examples include Avinyó's Rosado Sublim, Rosé Pinot Noir 2009 from Codorniu and the Elyssia cuvee from Freixenet.

All the wines tasted were of good to very good quality.

A TOUCH OF WOOD

Even if traditionally all base wines for Cava were stored in wood (there was no other container available), most producers have moved away from oak, although some have either kept the tradition or are coming back to it.

Recaredo is one of the wineries that works with oak in several ways: either by leaving some reserve wines in wood for a while or leaving a small proportion of the non-reserve wines in barrels for a few months, as is the case for its Recaredo Sutil Gran Reserva 2006 cuvee. Segura Viudas also uses wood for its Torre Galimany 2007 cuvee, but only for fermenting some of the grapes (in this case Xarel.lo). Dominio de la Vega in Requena ages the base wines for some of its cuvees for varying periods in oak (6 months for the Artemayor Brut Nature Cuvee, 3 months for the Brut Nature Reserva 2009) as a way of enhancing power and balance in the wines. The resultant Cavas are an intense bright golden color that is very easily recognizable in a blind tasting.

DISGORGEMENT DATE

In a quest for greater freshness, disgorgement dates can be close to selling dates. This is also a way of being honest and transparent with the end customer: s/he knows when

the process has taken place and can decide whether the wine's maturity is what s/he is looking for. Some of the wineries that took part in our ranking have made this effort: Agustí Torelló Mata, Recaredo and Dominio de la Vega. Among these three, Recaredo is the only one that states the exact time spent on the lees and in the bottle.

It is also a way of showing how each winery approaches ageing: for instance, if a rosé wine has spent a long period on the lees, it will probably have lost its freshness thus revealing a poor understanding of how this kind of cuvee should be handled (obviously, none of the above houses have left a rosé on the lees for too long).

MARKETING

As with Champagne, marketing techniques for Cava are halfway between that of spirits and wine. This is patent in the packaging used by many wineries. Almost all of them have a very personal approach to detail. For instance, the aluminium cap on top of the cork is different for each cuvee, allowing the customer to discover something new with every new bottle and the passionate wine lovers to enjoy a collection that is constantly expanding.

Then there are the more visible parts of the packaging used by each producer to engage with consumers. Freixenet's Christmas TV ads - where a new advert featuring a different pop star or global movie star each year - are examples and participate in the promotion of a particular interpretation



**WINERIES ARE INCREASINGLY OFFERING LUXURIOUS PACKAGING.
HERE, AN EXAMPLE FROM THE TORRELLO LLOPART WINERY**

WINERY	OVERALL QUALITY ASSESSMENT
Recaredo	*****
Agustí Torelló Mata	*****
Dominio de la Vega	*****
Juve y Camps	*****
Freixenet	***
Codorniu	****
Gramona	****
Torelló Llopart	***
Parés Baltà	****
Parató	***
Avinyó	***
Celler Trobat	***
Romale	***

A REMINDER OF CAVA LEGISLATION

Sugar levels. EC regulation n° 607/2009

Brut Nature	Up to 3g/l with no added sugar
Extra Brut	Up to 6 g/l
Brut	Up to 12 g/l
Extra seco (Extra dry)	Between 12 and 17 g/l
Seco (Dry)	Between 17 and 32 g/l
Semi-seco (Semi-dry)	Between 32 and 50 g/l
Dulce (Sweet)	More than 50 g/l

Other noteworthy terms

Cava (with no other statements)	Refers to a sparkling wine that has been aged for least 9 months in the bottle from tirage to disgorging
Cava Gran Reserva	Refers to a Cava Brut Nature, Extra Brut and Brut with at least 30 months' bottle age from tirage to disgorging. In this case, the vintage year must be stated.

THE MEANING OF THE STARS IS AS FOLLOWS:

- ***** *exceptional range, no single cuvee is less than outstanding,*
- **** *the overall quality of the whole range is very good,*
- *** *the overall quality of the range is good, meaning that perhaps one or two wines are less interesting than the average range.*


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of the spirit of Christmas. Others, like Torelló Llopart, house their best Cavas in luxurious individual boxes, with one for each cuvee. Another case in point is the cuvee signed by a famous fashion designer, in this case Custo, displaying a 3D picture that can be viewed through special glasses provided in the box itself. These all create points of difference and ensure that the customer is entering the magical world of Cava.

Enjoyment should be partly aspirational from the outset, beginning even before the bottle is uncorked. Magic and the need to dream attract people to the world of Cava.

WINERY RANKINGS

We have ranked the different wineries based on the overall quality of samples submitted, thus making a general assessment of the quality of their wines.

TASTING CONDITIONS

All samples were tasted in Gilbert & Gaillard's offices in Madrid in November 2012. The following wineries sent samples: Parés Baltà, Recaredo, Torelló Llopart, Agustí Torrelló Mata, Celler Trobat, Codorniu, Freixenet, Seguras Viudas, Parató Vinícola, Avinyó, Juvé & Camps and Dominio de la Vega. Samples of Gramona were bought by us. A total of 52 different wines were tasted.

To enable us to taste a Cava from Extremadura, we bought a bottle of Privilegio de Romale Brut Nature Reserva.