

# A Vintage to Cherish

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Across Spain, 2016 produced stellar wines in a range of styles and prices.

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Spain's 2016 vintage is one of its all-time greats. It's one of the best harvests of this generation and a benchmark against which future stellar vintages will be measured.

From coast to coast and at points in between, favorable conditions from spring through fall allowed Spain's winemakers to produce splendidly balanced and expressive wines.

Best of all, the high quality is apparent in white, red and sparkling wines, and it isn't limited to the country's most rare and expensive collectibles. It's a year in which the majority of the country's wines, regardless of price or pedigree, are at their finest.

"[It] was an outstanding vintage throughout Spain," says Miguel Torres Maczassek, director general of Familia Torres, which is based in Catalonia, but also makes wine in Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Rueda and Rías Baixas. "There is no doubt that it is the best vintage of the (2000s) so far. As growers and winemakers, we tend to complain about something every vintage...except for 2016.

"The quality of the harvest was outstanding," he says. "Temperatures were, in general, moderate. So ripening was slow and perfect. Some late rains helped the vineyards achieve optimum conditions, and in the end, it was a perfect harvest. Like always, time will tell. But I am quite sure it is a classic vintage."



## WHAT TO BUY

**95** Finca Allende 2016 Gamine Single Vineyard Estate Bottled (Rioja). Early reduction on the nose transitions to cool berry fruit and fine oak. The palate is fully built, with palpable tannins. Lightly toasted black-fruit melds with mint, while oak cuddles a long finish. Drink through 2030. Trinchero Family Estates. **Editors' Choice.** **abv:** 15% **Price:** \$95



## Rioja: A Special Year

With praise for 2001 and kudos to 2010, the 2016 vintage is Rioja's best in at least two decades. *Wine Enthusiast's* blind tastings back that up: More than 50 Rioja wines scored 90 points or higher, which includes 35 wines at \$30 or less.

This blows away other lauded vintages, even before the release of the 2016 gran reservas, which require at least five years of aging in barrel and bottle. That class of wines will be outstanding.

"Spring was rainy, with the highest temperatures of the season coming in June," says Victor Urrutia, CEO of CVNE in Haro, which owns Viña Real and Contino. "However, July was unusually cool. The hottest days did not exceed 75°F. This slowed the growing cycle for our Tempranillo and other grapes, and as we have learned, the best vintages in Rioja...are those with long growing seasons.

"August was hot and dry, while September brought spells of rain, which made us nervous... We finished in Haro on October 31. At Viña Real, we started October 5 and finished on the 25th. Contino [had] similar dates."

He says the 2016 vintage wines have an ideal balance of acidity, body weight, aromatics and persistence, as well as lower alcohol levels than in hotter years. The result was fresher, more profound wines.



**95** **Marqués de Murrieta 2016 Dalmau (Rioja).** A fully ripe nose runs deep with balsamic black fruit aromas as well as complex notes of graphite and fine oak. A plush palate offers that elusive depth of character that great wines display, while this modern-style Rioja tastes of black fruits as well as chocolate. A silky smooth finish shows barely any grit or bite. Drink now through 2028. *Maisons Marques & Domaines USA. Editors' Choice.*  
**abv:** 14.5% **Price:** \$90

**93** **Contino 2016 Reserva (Rioja).** Fully ripe blackberry, cassis and prune aromas are a touch brandid and heady, indicating that this reserva from a high-quality year needs a bit more time. A plump palate is both fleshy and flashy, with good depth. Plum, raspberry, currant and chocolaty oak flavors finish full and a touch creamy. Drink through 2028. *Arano LLC. Cellar Selection.*  
**abv:** 14.5% **Price:** \$46

**91** **Marqués de Riscal 2016 Reserva (Rioja).** Textbook Rioja aromas of spiced plum, vanilla, tobacco and oak grain open this well-balanced reserva. Cherry, red plum, currant and integrated oak spice flavors remain composed on a finish that benefits from a latent shot of acidity. Drink through 2025. *Shaw-Ross International Importers.*  
**abv:** 14% **Price:** \$19

**92** **Bodegas Roda 2016 Sela (Rioja).** Full berry and plum aromas are ripe, lightly spiced and inviting. A fleshy, full-bodied palate features bold tannins, while this delivers sizable black-plum, blackberry and savory oak flavors. Rubbing tannins create texture on a deep finish. Drink through 2022. *Valkyrie Selections.*  
**abv:** 14% **Price:** \$32



## Cava and Sparkling Wines: Low Yields, Delicious Effect

One of the most heard criticisms leveled at Cava and other Spanish sparkling wines is that the grapes most wineries rely on—Xarello, Parellada and Macabeo—don't offer enough character or concentration to produce world-class bubbly.

Not so in 2016. Drier than normal conditions in Spain's northeast, where about 95% of the country's *espumosos* are made, resulted in more concentrated, flavorful and rewarding wines.

Pepe Raventós, winemaker at Raventós I Blanc, a historic Penedès-based winery with a multigenerational track record for some of Spain's best sparkling wines, called 2016 a "surprising harvest in terms of quality, with very good balance of sugars, acidity and structure due to concentrated grapes caused by a lack of water. Yields were very low, the lowest in the history of our estate."

Commercially speaking, low yields are not ideal. But when it comes to quality wines with concentration, nothing is more helpful.

"Despite the dry weather in 2016, the wines are amazing, concentrated and voluminous, with what I call 'long acidity,'" he says.

Raventós says 2016 bears little resemblance to other recent good vintages for Spanish sparkling wines and Cava, like 2013 and 2010. He says those were cooler and more rainy, yielding racier wines with high acidity that bordered on sharp.

"The 2016 vintage gave us volume and acidity; they are great wines," he says. "Nevertheless, I'd prefer not to repeat this year too often. The plants suffered a bit too much because our Mediterranean ecosystem needs a little bit more rainfall."







## WHAT TO BUY

**93** Alta Alella 2016 Mirgin Opus Paratge Qualificat Vallcirera Brut Nature (Cava). An alluring mix of briny apple and nectarine aromas is lightly yeasty, stony and comes with a whiff of scrambled egg. This stately brut nature feels plump and solid, with fine bubbles and healthy acidity. Flavors of cidery apple and white pepper are savory and complex, while a touch of breadly richness elevates the finish. Drink through 2024. Avant Garde Wine & Spirits. **Editors' Choice.**  
**abv:** 12% **Price:** \$66

**91** Raventós i Blanc 2016 De la Finca Conca del Riu Anoia Brut (Penedès). Dry elegance defines the nose, with aromas of white mushroom, apple, pear and spent yeast blending well. A lightly citric and minerally palate plays up freshness, while this tastes of just-ripe nectarine and tangerine. A steady citric finish is tangy and edgy. Drink through 2023. Skurnik Wines, Inc.  
**abv:** 12% **Price:** \$35

**90** Muga 2016 Conde de Haro Brut Reserva (Cava). A breadly, yeasty nose is rich and moderately complex, while this Rioja Cava is bright on the palate, with firm malic acidity. Apple, white-bread toast and spice flavors breeze onto an in-shape finish that's crisp and tight at first, then more expansive and complex. Enjoy through 2023. Jorge Ordóñez Selections.  
**abv:** 12% **Price:** \$30

**90** Vins El Cep 2016 Gelida Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature Reserva (Cava). Saline and lean white-fruit aromas comprise a minimalist nose, while this brut nature is pulpy and properly citric on the palate. Salty flavors of orange and nectarine finish up on a smooth finish, with no bite or fight. Enjoy now. Jorge Ordóñez Selections.  
**abv:** 12% **Price:** \$20

**89** Parxet 2016 Brut Reserva (Cava). Chalky aromas of pear and clover lead to a moderately pulpy palate. Orange flavors are good, but monotone. On the finish, this is dry in feel, with flavor notes of papaya and stone fruits. Overall, this captures the essence of brut Cava. Enjoy now. Biagio Cru Wines and Spirits.  
**abv:** 11.5% **Price:** \$22



## Spain at Large: Coast-to-Coast Greatness

What made 2016 a standout year throughout Spain was that it blessed all wine regions equally and generously, from Rías Baixas to Catalonia.

“The personality of the 2016 vintage was dictated entirely by weather conditions,” says Alberto Medina Moro, U.S. sales manager for Bodegas Emilio Moro in Ribera del Duero.

He says the most important factors were copious spring rainfall, followed by slightly above-average temperatures in June, July and August that offered additional precipitation.

“In July, there was some abundant rainfall,” he says. “This kind of rain, right at the moment when temperatures are highest, favors even ripening. Temperatures were about [2–4°F] above average over the season, which was actually a benefit in a [colder, higher-elevation] appellation, such as Ribera del Duero.”

The end result was a bumper crop of harmonious wines made from Tempranillo grapes harvested in what Medina calls “perfect health and balance.”

“Opposite of warm years like 2015 and 2011, the 2016 vintage didn’t give overly concentrated or excessively alcoholic wines,” says Medina. “Instead, despite being a vintage that we could define as warm, the grapes maintained freshness and produced aromatic, balanced, complex and elegant wines.”

Meanwhile, in the Catalan regions of Penedès, Priorat, Montsant, Conca de Barberà, Terra Alta and Costers del Segre, Torres recalls a dry yet temperate growing season with about 60% less rainfall than normal. This brought about a significant decrease in yields, but the wines are of excellent quality, he says.







## WHAT TO BUY

**96 Torres 2016 Reserva Real (Penedès).** Ripe, smooth berry and currant aromas come with a note of graphite on a convincing nose that promises great things to come. The palate on this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cab Franc is smooth and pure, with modest but notable acidic kick. Blackberry, cassis and black pepper flavors are on the money, while this registers as composed, balanced and holding more in store; drink from 2024–2045. Wilson Daniels Ltd. **Cellar Selection.**  
abv: 14.5% Price: 146

**94 Perinet 2016 Pendants (Priorat).** Potent aromas of dark-berry fruits and schist come with enough prune, raisin and licorice to rank this as a bruiser in need of more time. That initial impression is confirmed on a deeply layered palate with ruggedness and chop. Blackberry and cassis flavors are backed by barrel-driven chocolate and vanilla, while this remains chocolaty on a powerful but smooth finish; best from 2022–2030. Tolosa Winery. **Cellar Selection.**  
abv: 14.5% Price: \$120

**93 Palacio de Fefiñanes 2016 III Año Albariño (Rías Baixas).** Tropical fruit aromas are smooth and elegant, as a high-end Albariño with three years (hence the name) of lees aging should display. A layered palate has minerality at its core, while a tropical fruit basket of melon, papaya, lemon and banana flavors finishes clean and classy. This is in a mature state of grace. Enjoy through 2021. Kysela Père et Fils. **Editors' Choice.**  
abv: 13.5% Price: \$62

**92 Emilio Moro 2016 Malleolus (Ribera del Duero).** Charred oak speaks loudest on a nose that fluctuates between clean and fruity and pointed and staunch. A choppy palate relaxes with airing, while this tastes of oaky berry fruits. On the finish, this reverts to woody, hard and tannic. Revisit this between 2022 and 2024 and it should be calmer and nicer to drink. Skurnik Wines, Inc. **Cellar Selection.**  
abv: 14% Price: \$46

**92 Godelia 2016 Mencía (Bierzo).** This attractive Mencía from a terrific vintage opens with wiry black-fruit aromas offset by grainy oak. A linear palate feel is focused and balanced, with better than average depth. Dark plum, blackberry and mild oak flavors are integrated and finish smooth, with length and complexity. Drink through 2023. Europvin USA.  
abv: 14.5% Price: \$22