

Pink Cava

No conversation about sparkling wine can exclude Cava - whether pink or white.

Sitting somewhere between Prosecco and Champagne in pricing, Cava is a Spanish méthode champenoise or méthode traditionnelle sparkling wine that undergoes a secondary fermentation in the bottle. In vinification and price point, it is probably most similar to French Crémants. This article is part of a series about sparkling rosé, read [our report on white super-premium Champagne](#) here or [sign up to our newsletter for the next instalment](#).

Cava, which originally simply means 'underground cellar', was created as a sparkling wine, made using the traditional method of second fermentation in the bottle as recently as 1872, in Sant Sadurni d'Anoia in Penedès. The term Cava itself was not used until 1959, with the DO created in 1972.

The success of Cava guaranteed its position in many markets, to the extent that it grew into a large-scale commercial and international brand, with little of its original quality. Moves have been made over the years to introduce higher quality qualifications. In 1991 the classifications of Reserva (18 months ageing) and Gran Reserva (30 months ageing) were introduced and in 2015 a new category, Cava de Paraje Calificado was introduced to indicate top quality cru vineyards and 36 months ageing. It is not yet used for rosé. In 2020, regional zones were demarcated. [Miquel Hudin's excellent piece on Spanish sparkling wine designations](#) is extremely helpful in understanding the situation and the politics behind these quality levels.

Outside of the DO's quality pyramid are three alternative designations. [Raventos i Blanc](#) left the DO in 2012 to create their own DO, Conca del Riu Anoia (Anoia river basin), that has yet to achieve legal recognition. The [Corpinnat](#) label focuses on indigenous varieties, organic viticulture, and a more restrictive geographical area. [Clàssic Penedès](#) is yet another alternative within the Penedès DO rather than Cava's, and is more permissive of international varieties, albeit maintaining a smaller geographic area. Although not officially belonging to the Cava DO, these wines are usually referred to as Cava by outsiders (including us, as in this article) - but they are more accurately Catalanian, Penedès, or Spanish sparkling wines.

[Corpinnat was created] with the aim of distinguishing great sparkling wines made in the heart of the Penedès from 100% organic grapes harvested by hand and entirely vinified on the premises of the winery.

Cava is made from vineyards covering 38,000ha, more than three quarters of which is planted with either [Macabeo](#), [Xarel-Lo](#) or [Parellada](#) and these three varieties have formed the backbone to traditional Cava since 1888. [Chardonnay](#) is a distant fourth, and [Grenache](#) an even more distant fifth. [Trepât](#) and [Pinot Noir](#) between them make up a paltry 5%, and [Monastrell](#) is planted on an anecdotal 80ha. The three red grape varieties between them make up around 10% - compared to 70% of Champagne and 4% of Prosecco.

Pink?

Long-term, growth in Cava rosé volumes will require shifting increasingly to a rosé-de-blanc style as in Prosecco and parts of Champagne, or changes to the vineyards. With such limited plantings, rosé blending can become a question of finding the grapes rather than choosing the best ones.

The small share of white grapes isn't helped by winemaking decisions: rosé-de-blanc is a fairly unusual style for Cava, with many, if not most top rosés instead opting for 100% red grape blends, perhaps influenced by modern perceptions on, and misconceptions around, blending red and white wine. Pinot Noir and Grenache are by far the most common choices, with Trepát made as a rosé by only one or two producers that we are aware of. The *condiciones* that lay out the rules by which Cava can be made are not quite as flexible as Champagne, mandating that the base wines can be either white or rosé (not red), and that rosés must contain a minimum of 25% red grapes - a marked contrast to Prosecco's *maximum* of 15%!

Los vinos base se elaborarán siempre en virgen, pudiendo ser blancos o rosados. Los vinos base rosados deberán elaborarse al menos con un 25% de uvas de variedades tinta. Pliego de Condiciones Denominación de Origen Protegida Cava

Exceptions do exist, such as Raventós i Blanc's De Nit, a Xarel-Lo, Macabeu, Parellada blend with an additional 5% Monastrell - although the colour is very, very pale and of course it is outwith the Cava DO. There is no standardised 'Cava pink', and as with Champagne, colours range from pale shell to dark ruby, almost light reds. Colour has no indication on quality (there are good and bad pale wines, and good and bad dark wines), seemingly very little on aromatic intensity, but is more telling on structure: expect slightly riper acidity and tannic structure from the darkest wines. Unlike pink Prosecco, sugar is mostly absent - and once again, has no relationship with colour.

Is pink Cava the same as regular Cava, just with colour? Is it more similar to Catalanian rosat or claretes, just with bubbles? Despite the high proportions of red grapes, red fruit and other rosé characteristics were not as pronounced as they are in the fuller bodied still rosés of the region. This could well be due to the earlier harvesting for fresh acidity in the sparkling wines, which from the few technical sheets we had suggested was around 6g/l TA. A number of vineyards also mentioned high altitude vineyards. In comparison we have seen 8-10g/l from cool-climate sparkling wines of similar alcohol - accordingly, malolactic is uncommon. As a rule of thumb, we find that darker pink Cavas have more rosé typicity than the palest, but exceptions exist.

As with many other rosés and sparkling pinks, clear glass is an increasingly present problem. Lightstrike is a problem in as many as a quarter of the Cavas we have tasted, leaving us with at least one simple recommendation: **do not buy rosé Cava unless it is in a dark bottle** - and as with so many other rosés and sparkling wines, don't be afraid of decanting the wine for an afternoon to allow the bubbles to soften and the aromatics to breathe.

THE MARKET

Rosé Cava volumes have been on a slow and steady rise relative to the whites since 2015, progressing from 8% of volumes to just over 10% - keeping up with global rosé averages, but not driving them as in Prosecco or southern France.

Unfortunately, the majority of this growth comes from entry-level wines, which represents over 95% of rosé Cava. White cava is 'only' 85% entry-level, with the rest made up of Reserva and Gran Reserva. In 2021, only 65,000 bottles of rosé Gran Reserva were produced. That is less than half of Château d'Esclans' Garrus alone.

Premium and ultra-premium pink Cavas are still significantly less common than for other sparkling pink regions. Vintage or *collita* rosé Cava exists, but do not seem to be accompanied by a significant jump in quality. Although we have found it increasingly hard to differentiate many more entry-level Champagnes from Cava in blind tastings as climate change transforms Champagne's climate, value-for-money is more relevant to pink Cava than outright quality.

In this regard, Cava seems to have more in common commercially with pink Prosecco or rosé Crémants, both styles firmly rooted in the entry-level category. Premium wines do exist, however, and the Corpinnat label applies to rosés just as much as whites. Reaching to €20-30 retail, these aren't the €100+ bottles found in Champagne - and although the top *Cava de Paraje Calificado* designation is allowed for rosés, as far as we are aware, not a single bottle of it has ever been made.

Price is a challenging point. With rosé Champagne attracting a significant price premium even over comparable whites, we are shocked time and time again at the prices Cava is available at - expect many of the excellent wines we present below to retail at or below €10! If Cava is to escape the good-value-for-money poisoned chalice, could premium rosé be the category to shake things up? The quality is clearly there, the story and the winemaking - what comes next?

It's important to point out that rosé Cava is a relatively small-volume niche product (20-25m bottles) compared to Cotes de Provence rosé (110m bottles) or pink Prosecco (75m bottles and growing), even if it is comparable to Champagne's 35m bottles.

Our conclusions are mixed. Pink Cava has less rosé fruit and charm than might be expected - a similar problem to many other sparkling pink styles. Cava is not (yet) pushing the boundaries of the rosé world or redefining the sparkling rosé category - but euro-for-euro, we have yet to find better quality or value-for-money sparkling rosé anywhere else in the world.

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Raventos i blanc de Nit (Sparkling rosé) 2020

Very pale cream pink. Slightly beeswax, sweet herbal tobacco and pot pourri aromas developing into notes of white waxy flowers, Jasmine, mahonia, exotic flowers, apples and pears then emerge. On the palate the fruit is creamy with rich biscuit leesy character with sweet-perfumed oranges, followed by ripe white fruit and juicy red berries balanced by long clean mineral structure, delicate stony citrus freshness and long, sour cooking apple, citrus and hedgerow berry acidity, and a hint of pithy apple tannins. A serious wine, linear, crisp and elegant which feels like Champagne in its acidity, power and elegance.

91 Agusti Torello Mata Trepat (Sparkling rosé) 2019



Dark ruby coral pink. Sweet, scented aromas, dried hay, pot pourri and soft slightly bruised ripe fruit aromas. On the palate the ripeness continues with honeyed mellow fruit, bruised apples, apple pips, peach kernel, and abundant rich, ripe strawberry and raspberry fruit with characteristic herbal finish. Edgy fresh crisp crunchy acidity, red currant fruit, sour hedgerow berries although struggling a little to balance the full-bodied fruit at first. Very distinctly cava and soft ripeness with a firm inner core. Stop looking for Champagne and appreciate what a wonderfully drinkable wine this is - so much fruit, so much strawberry, it's a real joy, while maintaining serious composure and a velvet, fresh and well-balanced structure. For €11 retail, it's a bargain.

91 Recaredo Intens Rosat (Sparkling rosé) 2019



Dark cherry pink. Rich cherries, herbal, spice aromas, slightly atypical for Spanish sparkling - with so much intense red fruit, but still has some of the typical pithy red apple herbal waxiness. Cherry fruit, austere, more of a red wine with lacy soft structure, cherries, and a subtle hint of tannins. Very much an elegant claret which benefits from decanting when the fruit becomes more opulent, rich and spiced on the nose and beautifully rich and silky on the palate. Despite being brut nature it's still incredibly appealing and soft showing sparkling Penedès typicity.



91 Martinez Sant Sadurni d'Anoia (Sparkling rosé)

Pale blue-tinted pink. Waxy, coconut herby, fennel seed and green apples on the nose. Creamy, ripe soft with a lovely herbal and crunchy apple fruit, dark floral notes with phenolic notes and slightly stony mineral length. Unmistakeably Cava, prettily made with creamy round fruit and long fresh acidity.



90 Eudald Cava (Sparkling rosé)

Copper coral pink. Rich aromas of toasty autolysis and creamy ripeness with some sweet scented apples. Beautiful intensity of fruit that explodes on the palate with full bodied cherry compote with cinnamon and cloves, softly scented ripe fruit, redcurrants, cranberries, perfumed peche de vigne, a touch of exotic fruit and blood oranges. The seriously ripe fruit is balanced by stunning, elegant, citrus acidity and a touch of grippy red wine tannins on the end giving power and weight. A beautiful, youthful wine which will improve with some age.



90 Llopart Corpinnat (Sparkling rosé)

Very pale pink. Creamy, floral aromas with a touch of mint. On the palate, surprisingly fresh and fruity, with crisp and crunchy, red pithy apples, strawberries, pretty, soft red berries, some nice dark intensity and concentration with herbal notes on the finish. The acidity is tart and green with a bone dry edge and a whisper of salinity on the finish. May not be the most vibrant, but the concentration of fruit is lovely with some exciting and intriguing notes and I would very happily finish the bottle with a friend.



89 Llopart Microcosmos (Sparkling rosé) 2019

Pale salmon. The long ageing has given fine toasty, leesy notes on the nose, opening up to waxy, herbal aromas. On the palate there is very ripe, soft red fruit with a dark fruit inner core giving a weighty almost red wine structure, and some tight austerity giving it a gastronomic edge. Crunchy green apples, long fresh acidity and a saline finish with a phenolic edge. This wine really started to shine after time in the glass giving a pithy, fresh, vibrant finish and giving Champagne a run for its money on elegance. If we had not finished the bottle, we can imagine this wine only getting better - so decanting would be a good option.



89 Jané Ventura Reserva de la Musica (Sparkling rosé) 2019

Very pale salmon pink. Pithy apples, apple blossom and fresh herbs on the nose. The wine is rich and fruity with apple and pear compote with a hint of sweet creaminess and cinnamon combined with fresh crunchy red-skinned apples, crab apples and herbal notes. Saline citrus acidity and chalky texture balance the ripe fruit with a dry phenolic finish.



88 Suriol Collita (Sparkling rosé) 2011

Looks like a medium orange / amber-pink. Slightly oxidative notes with beeswax and intense yeasty aromas. Some gentle oxidation continues on the palate, with some intriguing red fruit, a saline and mineral finish and some nice acidity. An exciting natural wine and very much in the natural wine camp - and I would happily finish a glass of this and probably even the bottle.