

# CAVA CATALAN NOBILITY CATALAN TRAGEDY

After an outstanding tasting, Andrew Jefford makes the case for Cava, wines that can rival Champagne in quality but that deserve to be considered on their own stylistic terms. Jesús Barquín and Andreas Larsson agree

So, now we can say it: Ambitious Cava truly is one of the world's most underestimated, misunderstood, and traduced of the world's fine wines. Jesús Barquín had ten, I had 12, and Andreas Larsson had 14. Of what? Of Cava wines scored between 90 and 96: "outstanding wine of great beauty and articulation." With this tasting, Cava surely makes a plausible case for being the world's second most significant sparkling-wine genre.

Yet how many Champagne lovers among the readers of this magazine will regularly supplement and enrich their diet with the Catalan alternative to the great wines of the Marne hills? I'd be surprised if the percentage reached two figures. How many of those non-Catalans who do regularly drink a bottle of Cava have any idea of the grandeur that this style of sparkling wine can acquire? The percentage may lie to the right of a zero and a decimal place. Most of those who drink export Cava, let's be frank, do so because it is accessible, cheap, and undemanding. How many, finally, of those sparkling-wine craftsmen and women working to produce great sparkling wine outside Europe realize that there might not be one model of inspiration and aspiration, but two? I have yet to meet any. You might call it a Catalan tragedy.

How has the tragedy come about? Cava's origins as an international wine category, like those of Rioja, date back to the 19th century and to France's swift capitulation to phylloxera. Catalans are

astute traders and learn quickly; they mastered sparkling-wine production techniques with great speed and assurance, though the results—from a different set of native grape varieties and a much warmer climate to those of Champagne—were always going to be different to the inspiringly chilly model.

## Poverty trap

Facility, indeed, may be the biggest obstacle faced by ambitious Cava producers. You can grow grapes much more cheaply here than you can in Champagne (the average price for the 2015 harvest was around €0.30 a kilo, whereas Champagne grapes now command €6 a kilo), and the economies of scale enjoyed by the two giant companies that dominate Cava production (Freixenet and Codorníu account for around 70 percent of all Cava) mean that this can indeed be the least expensive sparkling wine produced by the traditional method anywhere in the world. The result is the shipment of 244.1 million bottles of Cava in 2015 (not so far behind Champagne's 312.5 million bottles)—but only 10 percent of those sales have any more than nine months' aging, and only 2 percent fall into the Gran Reserva category (with more than 30 months' aging). There are no reliable figures on the average prices for each category, but the substantial differential between the two must reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, the stark contrast in grape prices. Despite that, yields in the Catalan

vineyards are clearly lower. (Cava is made from roughly the same declared area of vineyards as Champagne: 33,591ha [83,000 acres] for Cava compared to 33,705ha [83,300 acres] in Champagne.)

Cava, in other words, has created a poverty trap for itself—and it now finds it hard to struggle free. A further setback is that, since the mid-1980s, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir have been authorized for Cava. Far from putting the two regions on an equal footing, this possibility has further eroded Catalonia's point of difference, since Champagne's varieties are evidently unsuited to climate conditions south of Barcelona and fail to evoke the Catalan hills and their limestone soils in the same way as the indigenous trio of Macabeo, Xarel·lo, and Parellada do. In Champagne, Chardonnay and Pinot see out an entire season, inching toward maturity; in Catalonia, they need to be hastily harvested in early August in all but the highest vineyards and are thus doomed to failure in terms of developed flavor, articulation, and allusiveness. Happily, Chardonnay occupies only 8.7 percent of the registered surface and Pinot Noir just 2.5 percent, while the local trio continues to occupy 81 percent of plantings.

## Native variety show

It should be remembered, for the sake of completeness, that the Cava rules permit the wine to be made outside Catalonia, from other Spanish varieties. In practice, though, the overwhelming majority of Cava is made in Catalonia from Catalonian varieties. It's also worth noting that one Catalan producer, Raventos y Blanc, has pulled out of the DO in frustration at the tarnished international image associated with the Cava name, though

the Raventos y Blanc wines are made from indigenous Catalan varieties alone, principally from the Raventos family's organic domain in the heart of the region. (They were outstanding performers in our tasting and produced the top-scoring wine on my own sheet.)

Our tasting concentrated on Cava from native varieties, with just four ringers and some blends from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, plus one Rioja interloper. That wine, a Viura/Malvasia blend from Muga, was the only wine made from non-Catalan varieties among my top 12, while the other two tasters had a couple of such wines each in their top selections but only one pure Pinot/Chardonnay, the beautifully packaged and genuinely impressive 2007 Albet i Noya Brut Barrica 21 Reserva 3.

## Cava on its own terms

The marked contrast between Cava and Champagne is vital to understanding and appreciating the former. These are two utterly different sparkling wines, as the notes for the wines that we liked most should make clear. The aromatic spectrum of Cava in general is more floral and less fruity than that of Champagne; moreover, the flowers evoked by this Mediterranean wine are sweeter, wilder, and more herbal than the shy spring flowers of Champagne. Acidity is still present in the Catalan wine, but it is less linear, less incisive, and much less dominant than in Champagne. The flavors of autolysis and secondary fermentation are significant in both regions, but they bear a different relationship to the other elements of the wine; in Champagne, these elements form a primary counterbalance to the structuring acidity, whereas in Cava they almost take on a structuring role of their own,

## AVERAGE AND RANGE OF SCORES

	Average	Range
Tasting	86	77-96
JB	87	81-96
AJ	86	77-96
AL	86	78-96

## ANDREW JEFFORD'S TOP WINES

Raventós i Blanc Manuel Raventós 2008
DO Conca del Riu Anoia 96
Enoteca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 1997
DO Cava 94
Juvé y Camps La Capella Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2005 DO Cava 92
Mestres Clos Nostre Sanyor Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2006 DO Cava 92
Muga Conde De Haro Brut 2012 DO Cava 92
Raventós i Blanc De La Finca 2012
DO Conca del Riu Anoia 92
Recaredo Turó d'en Mota Brut Nature 2003
DO Cava 92
Gramona Celler Battle Gran Reserva Brut 2005
DO Cava 90
Gramona Enoteca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2001
DO Cava 90
Mestres Visol Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010
DO Cava 90
Recaredo Terrers Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2009
DO Cava 90
Titlana Pansa Blanca Brut 2011 DO Cava 90

## THE MARKED CONTRAST BETWEEN CAVA AND CHAMPAGNE IS VITAL TO UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING THE FORMER

in conjunction with the wine's haunting aromatic presences and with the wines' softer, more amply styled acidity.

Many ambitious Cavas are now entirely unsweetened (an ideal easily attainable here), but the most successful used for the aging of reserves in Catalonia than it is in Champagne; the cork oak, after all, is indigenous to the Catalan hills, as it is to the rest of the Mediterranean rim. For my part, I feel that the aromatic presence of healthy cork forms part of the aromatic intricacy of some great Cavas, and that intensifies their Catalan style agreeably. In contrast to other leading international sparkling wines such as Prosecco, finally, it should be stressed that Cava must be made by the traditional method, with secondary fermentation in bottle, and this process is taken very seriously indeed by all ambitious Cava producers. This can clearly be tasted in the finesse, texture, depth, and intricacy of the finest wines in this tasting.

All that remains, in sum, is for lovers and regular drinkers of Champagne to tear off their blinkers and discover what they have been missing: a southern, Mediterranean sparkling-wine genre of equivalent nobility to its northern, Atlantic counterpart but of very different flavor and style.



**Gramona Enoteca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 1997 DO Cava** | 92  
(75% Xarel·lo, 25% Macabeo; 12.5% ABV)

**JB** | Pale yellow, slightly more intense than others. The last wine of the tasting is also the best: delicate and personal in unlikely balance. There is fruit, and there are notes of flower petals, as well as subtle autolysis and elegant undergrowth notes. It exudes finesse, but the final impression is mainly one of racy character. | 96

**AJ** | Still looks bright, fresh, and youthful. Quietly allusive rather than the huge wealth of aroma of some of the older wines, and this has lovely soft seaweedy, oyster, and seashore scents rather than the scents of the forest: remarkable aromatic freshness and subtlety for a 1997. Vivid, searching, deep, dense, pristine, lifted, poised, harmonious, balanced, and subtle: an absolutely remarkable Cava of great, enduring distinction. There are some of the seaweedy notes I caught on the aroma but also lots of dry grass and hay and crushed stone. A wonderful effort, and astonishingly youthful. | 94

**AL** | Another surprisingly young color, just verging on light golden. The nose has some *sous-bois* and development with smoke and windfall but no oxidative notes; fine spices, tobacco, and wood appear as well. The palate is showing more roundness, it probably felt sweet when it was young but has dried out in a positive way, with good freshness and fine vinosity. A rather long finish. A really well-kept example—*chapeau!* | 88

**Gramona Enoteca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2001 DO Cava** | 92  
(75% Xarel·lo, 25% Macabeo; 12.5% ABV)

**JB** | Deep yellow. Delicate nose, dominated by autolysis, and balsamic and wet-earth aromas. The palate is long and elegant, with great finesse. This was wine 43 out of 44—and it definitely confirms that this was a wonderful tasting. | 94

**AJ** | This still looks in fine fettle: bright yellow-gold, though a sparse mousse. Fresh, pure, ewe's wool, lavender, lemon, and pounded stone: smells young and lively. Lots of warm Catalan hay and dry grass, too. Pure, elegant, sweet-edged, pristine, pure, stony, sumptuously ripe yet fresh, too: a magnificent demonstration of how well Catalan raw materials can resist time. | 90

**AL** | Clear and still surprisingly youthful light golden color, with finely melted bubbles. The nose has some evolution and complexity, but it certainly feels more vital than some far younger examples in this crowd, the aromas leaning in the direction of a fine Fino, with roasted almond, dry spices, pear, and autolytic notes. The palate is distinctly dry, with a vital freshness, good flavor intensity, complex rather than fruity in the positive sense, and long and biting finish. A really nice drink and fine effort. | 90

**Mestres Clos Nostre Senyor Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2006 DO Cava** (65% Xarel·lo, 20% Macabeo, 15% Parellada; 12% ABV) | 92

**JB** | Deep yellow. The nose is intense and seductive, with a touch of oxidation and a background of ripe fruit. Balanced mouthfeel. | 88

**AJ** | Full bright gold now. Complex and secondary scents in which cork plays a large part, but healthy cork, mingling with the fruits and the dry grasses and wild flowers and wild herbs to intensify its Catalan forest character. Lovely scents, though now very secondary; there is no fruit apparent at all. Intense, rich, developed, and secondary on the palate: a mouthful of forest and stone. Even though the primary fruit is gone, there is still plenty of rich, ripe acidity to keep it all lively, and that "mineral" stoniness helps carry and support it, too. In sum, this is a richly flavored and commanding Cava at full maturity, at the peak of its expressive powers. | 92

**AL** | Bright and deepening golden color, with an elegant mousse. The nose is rather flamboyant but offers both luscious yellow fruit and a nutty vinosity with spicy layers—once again, I get this flirt with Sherry/Fino. The palate is bold and assertive, yet it has rounded off the edges with time and appears both complex and generous, with good extract, bite, and freshness, and a really long and lingering finish. A fine example of how aged Cava should and could behave. | 96

**Recaredo Turó d'en Mota Brut Nature 2003 DO Cava** | 92  
(100% Xarel·lo; 11.5% ABV)

**JB** | Pale yellow, slightly more intense than others. Very lively and fresh for a 2003, serious and deep, with aromas of bakery and aromatic herbs and a beautiful harmony. Extraordinary. | 94

**AJ** | Mid green-gold. Another wine like [Mestres Clos Nostre Senyor Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2006], in which the notes of the cork closure seem to play a role with the allusions of the grapes and the wines themselves to provide a rounded aromatic whole. Lovely scent of plant and perfume grasses wrapped up the aromas. Very dense, rich, and architectural on the palate, and absolutely no sense of it tiring here since this is a wine with remarkably sinewy, driving acidity (a big surprise for '03). All of that aromatic warmth, intricacy, brocaded, and complexity comes through on the palate in this masterful, complex, pure, and dry Cava. *Chapeau!* | 92

**AL** | Rather pale for its age; appears far younger except for the tiny bubbles. Some nuttiness and development on the nose but less evolved than far younger examples in this crowd; it mixes chopped nuts with some wood, a slight hint of Fino/Sherry, with floral and mineral notes. The palate has medium weight and a nicely firm acidity, good grip and extract, with a long and lingering finish. A well-kept and ascetic example, with more bone and muscle than flesh or fat. | 90

**Freixenet Reserva Real Brut NV DO Cava** (33.3% Parellada, 33.3% Macabeo, 33.3% Xarel·lo; 11.5% ABV) | 90

**JB** | Very pale yellow. A sparkler that shows its origin openly, with all the personality of the local varieties. Dry and intense, deep and full of

character. Although it is a Non-Vintage wine, I find it extraordinary. | 92

**AJ** | Steel-white, with a fine-beaded, sustained mousse. Pure and fresh-scented, with a lot of delicacy and finesse for a pure-Catalan blend. The allusions, nonetheless, are very true to place: fennel, dry grasses, white blossoms in high summer. On the palate, this is sculpted, slender, graceful, and restrained; typical dry-grass and wild-herb flavors but supported by keen but ripe green-apple fruit. Saline, dry, seizing finish; very terror. A classy Cava with lots of finesse. | 89

**AL** | Light golden with rather fine bubbles. The nose is intense and expressive, with finely toasted notes of almond, hazelnut, and some brioche, layered with ripe lemon and some floral hints, rather reminiscent of a blanc de blancs Champagne, with a mineral presence as well. The palate appears quite dry and positively firm, with a good sense of freshness, ripe acidity, and barely ripe fruit on the palate. On the lighter side, but vinous, persistent, and finely refreshing. Appealing to me for its restraint and fine toasty character. | 90

**Gramona Celler Battle Gran Reserva Brut 2005 DO Cava** | 90  
(75% Xarel·lo, 25% Macabeo; 12% ABV)

**JB** | Pale yellow *ma non troppo*. The nose seems a little more tired than other examples, but the mouthfeel is lively, and only the finish is slightly heavy. | 89

**AJ** | Mid green-gold, with little mousse now. Subtle, carefully drawn scents of powdered stone, vetiver, and hay; a quiet but very lovely aromatic profile. On the palate, this does not have the dramatic depth and density and drive of some of its peers but has wonderful aromatic complexity and depth, with billowing lifted aromas. I sometimes feel that it is in fact aromatic finesse and complexity that takes over the structuring role in these sparkling wines, which is played by acidity in Champagne, and this fine Cava would be a perfect example of that. Very seamless, pure, soft fruit beneath that aromatic cloud. Something lovely to sip, with fine "mineral" depths to support both the aromatic weave and the soft fruit. | 90

**AL** | Still a youthful appearance, with a straw color but far tinier bubbles than a young Cava. Quite a tropical nose, with hints of apricot, yellow plum, saffron, almond, and some honeyed notes. It suggests sweetness on the nose; however, the palate is bone-dry and distinct, with good focus and freshness, fine extract, hanging on to the finish, which is long and lingering. Delicate fruit and charm, yet with a good amount of vinosity and complexity. A fine Cava, with fine drinkability and potential. | 92

**Raventós i Blanc De La Finca 2012 DO Conca del Riu Anoia** | 90  
(45% Xarel·lo, 42% Macabeo, 13% Parellada; 12% ABV)

**JB** | Pale yellow. Serious attack, with varietal character (Xarel·lo?) despite a note of ripe grapes that adds complexity and volume to the palate.

**JESÚS BARQUÍN'S VERDICT**

Sometimes one is disappointed to discover that certain wines—even an entire genre—that one used to cherish do not perform well in a blind tasting. This was not at all the case here. On the contrary, it proved a most gratifying experience. The overall level was very high, and some of the best wines approached excellence or easily attained it. This did not surprise me, because I have been fortunate enough to follow the exciting qualitative progress of Spanish (mostly Catalan) sparkling wines, largely through my involvement in Colet-Navazos. (This is why my notes on these two wines have been excluded here, even though they were tasted blind.) In my view, the quality levels have been growing steadily over recent years, and that is why it proved even more satisfying to have this confirmed in a blind tasting of nearly all the great sparkling wines of my country, together with those of other quality-minded producers who follow the lead of the best.

At the very top, Gramona championed the indigenous Xarel·lo and prolonged aging. The recently released 1997 vintage in its Enoteca series is an extraordinary wine of great finesse, balance, and personality. But similarly successful is the batch of great wines put forward by Recaredo, as are some by Can Ràfols dels Caus, Freixenet, Pago de Tharsys, Colet, Albet i Noya... Equally praiseworthy is the trend toward lower dosage in order to present drier and more precise wines. In the light of this tasting, it is evident that the future of quality Spanish sparkling wines does not rest merely with a couple of superb houses, since there is a solid foundation of small, medium, and even large producers (in terms of volume) that know what they are doing from the vineyard to the cellar.

**TOP WINES**

Gramona Enoteca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 1997 DO Cava 96

Can Ràfols dels Caus Parisad Reserva Extra Brut 2003 DO Penedès 94

Gramona Enoteca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2001 DO Cava 92

Recaredo Brut de Brut Finca Serral del Vell Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2006 DO Cava 94

Recaredo Turó d'en Mota Brut Nature 2003 DO Cava 94

Freixenet Reserva Real Brut NV DO Cava 92

Pago de Tharsys Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2008 DO Cava 92

Albet i Noya Barrica 21 Reserva 3 Brut 2007 DO Penedès 90

Castellsgro Sabaté i Coca Reserva Familiar Brut Nature 2008 DO Cava 90

Recaredo Subtil Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2007 DO Cava 90

This plumpness becomes increasingly noticeable towards the end. | 86

**AJ** | Bright mid-gold with a fine mousse. Lovely nose, and very different from its peers: lemon-fresh, with a brioche richness; honeysuckle and balsam. On the palate, too, this is a graceful, fresh, lifted Cava of great charm. The dissolved mousse lasts well, the flavors are pure, refined, lemon, herbal, and long. The balance and finishing dryness are perfect: It has a relaxed, accessible style. Outstanding purity and limpidity here. | 92

**AL** | Light golden nuance with vivid, quite small bubbles. Intense and assertive nose, very vinous style, probably with some oak influence and controlled oxidation, white flower, yellow stone-fruit, hazelnut, and a slight hint of toast emanate from the glass. The palate has good grip, good weight, and good proportions, refreshing and zesty, with abundant fruit, well-integrated and creamy mousse, well-endowed finish with both complexity and persistence, doubtlessly with a potential for aging but darn delicious already. | 94



**Raventós i Blanc Manuel Raventós 2008 DO Conca del Riu Anoia** (70% Xarel·lo, 15% Macabeo, 15% Parellada; 12% ABV) | 90

**JB** | Pale yellow. Good in terms of structure and freshness, but lagging behind the previous two wines (Pago de Tharsys 2008 and Sabaté i Coca 2008) as far as aromas and flavors are concerned, especially due to a background of boiled vegetables on both nose and palate. | 86

**AJ** | Relatively pale for a 2008; steely green-gold. Wow. A very complex, detailed, and engaging aromatic profile here: intricate, nutty, creamy, pounded green hazels, sappy, planty, sweet, and fresh. Hugely attractive: magnificent work here—and can't wait to sip. On the palate, it is deep, long, pure, and pristine, with a wonderful echo chamber of Catalan aromas and flavours: hay, dry grasses and fresh grasses, wild flowers, crushed stones. In wonderful condition for a 2008, still bursting with freshness and expressivity. Beautifully judged ripeness and purity, with round and resonant acidity. A grand Cava of great purity and finesse. | 96

**AL** | Bright and quite pale straw color. The nose offers some evolution, spiciness, and complexity, with ripe citrus, stone fruit, and roasted nuts. Quite broad on the palate, the well-integrated mousse adding a certain creaminess. Still distinctly dry, with a fresh acidity, zesty yellow fruit, and a quite long and biting finish. Starting to show complexity and harmony, so should go on well. | 90

**Albet i Noya Barrica 21 Reserva 3 Brut 2007 DO Penedès** (60% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Noir; 12% ABV) | 89

**JB** | Deep yellow. The nose displays a mixture of fresh and baked apple with some oxidation, very elegantly. Lively palate, with evident acidity to balance a hint of sweetness. Intense and almost out of control, very interesting, and likely to benefit from some bottle age. | 90

**AJ** | Mid-gold with languid mousse. Sweet and brocaded aromas, with plenty of sweet balsam richness. Interesting how these older wines seem to lose a little of their Catalan character... or, rather, acquire a different incarnation of it, less hillside and more liqueur-like. Ah! But now I've noticed that this is in fact non-Catalan grapes, so that explains what I am missing on the nose. Soft, rich, open, and attractive Cava now at its peak maturity. Paradoxically, with the extra time, and on the palate, and despite what I've just said, I do now find a Catalan character—as if the soils were determined to have the last say. But this is still a wine without the dimensions, aromatic intricacy, and command of the middle palate that I feel the Catalan varieties bring. | 87

**AL** | Medium toward deep golden color, with rather finely distributed bubbles. The nose is clearly showing age and evolution, some oxidation, with notes of windfall, nougat, and smoke. The palate is broad and lush, with a fine creaminess, generous fruit, and well-preserved freshness, good bite and grip, and a rather long finish as well. A generous and flavor intensive Cava with maturity and complexity, drinking well today, and balanced in its full-body, full-throttle style. | 92

**Juvé y Camps La Capella Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2005 DO Cava** (100% Xarel·lo; 12% ABV) | 89

**JB** | Pale yellow *ma non troppo*. White flowers and subtle rose aromas on the nose are again found on the palate. At this point of the tasting (this is wine no. 35) I have to take off my hat to this parade of good-quality sparklers, of which this is yet another good example. | 89

**AJ** | Pale gold, with a sustained, fine mousse. Impressive aromas: very powdery, long, and refined, with notes of dry grass, menthol, green malt, and wild flowers. Very fresh and pristine for a 2005: beautifully shepherded through time. Bright, poised, and elegant on the palate, though without the showy wealth of flavor of the wine we have just tried [Mestres Clos Nostre Senyor Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2006]. However, this is working in a different way: tauter, more finesse, more focused on the crushed stone and "mineral" flavors, more penetrating, more dry, perhaps even longer. If you wanted a Cava to show to a Champagne purist to convince them of the value of this different place on earth to make great sparkling wines, this would be the one to choose. | 92

**AL** | Light toward medium golden color, with lively but small bubbles. Aromatically, it certainly behaves far younger than it is—fresh lime and lemon zest with some herbs, chamomile, green



apple, and pear. Fundamentally dry on the palate, good grip and extract, yet in fine balance with a well-preserved freshness, discreet fruit, a hint of autolysis, and rather long, creamy finish. | 88



**Llopert Ex Vite Gran Reserva Brut 2008 DO Cava** (60% Xarel-lo, 40% Macabeo; 12% ABV) | 89

**JB** | Pale yellow. Pleasant, floral nose. Suggestive. Although apparently a brut, the sweetness is unobtrusive and contributing a general impression of balance. Only at the end does it show a tad *abbocato*. | 88

**AJ** | Pale gold with a fine mousse. Soft and attractive scents, with some complexity if you are prepared to root around and search them out. Fundamentally sweet aromas: dessert apple and dried peach. On the palate, this is an older Cava of great charm and intricacy: cascading sweet fruits but plenty of aromatic complexity to foil them and lend them nobility. Sumptuous and refined. Wonderfully ripe acidity in which the fruit spectrum (apple, plum, whitecurrant, peach, nectarine) spins. It all finishes with sweet precision and poise. | 89

**AL** | Medium-deep golden, with some evolution and a finely melted mousse. The nose is intense, with floral, fruity, and spicy notes of saffron, yellow plum, butter, and some vinous/autolytic hints. Quite broad on the palate, with well-preserved freshness. There's a phenolic presence but nothing bitter; rather good extract, with hints of lemon zest and a long convincing finish. Good drinkability, with the aromatic complexity from aging but the freshness of youth. | 89

**Pago de Tharsys Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2008 DO Cava** (Valencia) (80% Macabeo, 20% Parellada; 12% ABV) | 89

**JB** | Pale yellow. The nose is expressive and complex, with clean toffee notes. On the palate, it is balanced and fresh, despite its obvious age and the impression of volume due to autolysis. Long. Very good. | 92

**AJ** | Bright mid-gold. Lots of honeycomb tang here; sweet and waxy. The hillsides notes are there, too, but hidden behind that sweet front. Some fresh orange, too. Very charming and refined. Clean, pure, lively, fresh, and expressive; a little less sweet orange on the palate than the nose, and rather more dry grassiness. Complete and elegant wine, which retains freshness. | 88

**AL** | Light golden color, quite fine bubbles. The nose has some evolution, mixing yellow fruit with vanilla, butter, a hint of toast, and dry spices.

The palate has a good grip and is truly dry and salivating, with a good sense of freshness and a well-integrated mousse adding some roundness. Quite a long finish. Good development and approaching complexity. | 88



**Colet Navajos Extra Brut 2011 Penedès** (Xarel-lo + Palo Cortado as *liqueur d'expédition*; 12.5% ABV) | 88

**AJ** | Full gold, with a languid mousse. A slightly strange aromatic profile; apple pulp and compost. Disconcerting. Amply informed by air, whether deliberately or not. I'm all for a little controlled oxidation, but it might have got the upper hand here. On the palate, it is very languid, breadly, biscuity, grainy. Lots of wealth of flavor; even a Cava with some glycerol. I have to say that I like the palate a lot: totally Catalan, and a true reflection of its origins; long and meditative. Without a slightly more successful aromatic profile, though, it's hard to give this wine a high score. | 85

**AL** | Bright and intense, with a medium-golden nuance; vivid but quite fine bubbles. The nose is ripe, bold, and generous, with layers of stone fruit, some vinous and yeasty notes, not really unlike a Fino Sherry, with crushed nuts and already a certain complexity and vinosity. Bone-dry palate, good grip and weight, but distinctly dry, fresh, and mouthwatering, some spicy complexity, perhaps a slight presence of wood, good length and personality. Far from your average *apéritif* Cava, but I certainly like it. | 92

**Gramona III Lustrós Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2007 DO Cava** (75% Xarel-lo, 25% Macabeo; 12% ABV) | 88

**JB** | Pale yellow. A hint of oxidation on the nose gives it character, but it wants substance (aromas and flavors) to reach further complexity. | 86

**AJ** | Looks very youthful: almost green-gold. Quite taut, tight, nutty aromas: restrained but promising, and a sense that there is more time ahead of it, and it has more to give. Very taut and fine-drawn on the palate, too. I wonder if this hasn't been picked just a little too early? On the plus side, it is wonderfully pristine for a 2007 and certainly has plenty of time ahead of it. It's a true Catalan, even though there are other wines with a much richer level of allusion. | 88

**AL** | Still rather youthful color, less than golden, with a small stream of bubbles. The nose is intense and roasted, with pistachio, hazelnuts, citrus, and barely ripe stone fruit, quite vinous, mineral, and tempting. On the palate, there's good focus and restraint, yet with flavor intensity, good dryness, and bite; long and lingering. A really pretty drink now. | 92

**Muga Condé De Haro Brut 2012 DO Cava** (La Rioja) (90% Viura, 10% Malvasia; 12.5% ABV) | 88

**JB** | Pale yellow. This is a sweeter style than most in this tasting, but it's still balanced and enjoyable, despite my personal preference. Not complex but clean and pleasant. | 84

**AJ** | Pale, bright gold, with a fine sustained mousse. Fresh, light, bright; warm summer scents billowing off the thyme-strewn hills; dry straw and lemon. Very attractive. Pure, refined, long, and "mineral" on the palate, with what is almost a powdery textural tith on the tongue and a saline edge. The mousse is very fine: a thousand tiny points of light. There is nothing raw about the acidity: it is ripe and gracefully lemony, though the levels are high for Cava. The tone of Catalan allusiveness (the dry grasses, the fennel, the thyme) is just right. Supremely sippable, digestible finish. Outstanding Cava: bravo. | 92

**AL** | Clear, bright, and light golden, with fine bubbles. Nice purity on the nose, quite mineral and vinous, with just about ripe stone-fruit, white flowers, and crushed nuts. The palate starts out discreetly, but has good grip and length, rather elegant fruit, expansive on the palate with a fine mousse, cleansing acidity, and a fine, mouthwatering finish. Still restrained, but not in a negative way, and it should still develop nicely. | 90



**Parés Baltà Cuvée de Carol Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2009** (60% Macabeo, 40% Chardonnay; 12% ABV) Organic | 88

**AJ** | Full gold in color, with a lazy, indolent mousse. Soft, attractive, but unfocused scent of sweet, dried wild flowers and straw. As with [Parés Baltà Blanca Cuisiné Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010] (of which this is presumably a different vintage), this is a wine with pronounced acidity (though a little less pronounced in this case) and insistent drive; see my note for that wine for a discussion of this issue. However, the summery elegance of the straw, fennel, faint lavender, and white flower notes here is very attractive, and once again I love the bone-dry finish. Good Cava, which, by dint of its structure, would work well in making Cava's case on the international stage. Concentrated, long, and pure. | 88

**AL** | Medium towards deep golden, with quite tiny bubbles. The nose is intense and reveals a hot year in terms of ripe, tropical fruit, honey, almond paste, and some smoky notes. The palate starts out quite broad with unctuous fruit, but toward the finish it offers more freshness and dryness in a positive sense. A finely creamy mid-plate and a just a slight hint of phenolic/bitter notes. | 87

**Parés Baltà Blanca Cuisiné Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010** (60% Xarel-lo, 20% Chardonnay, 20% Pinot Noir; 12.5% ABV) Organic | 88

**AJ** | Deeply colored, with a languid mousse. Soft, gentle, sweet drift of aroma without a lot of picked detail, but attractive; the creamy vanilla of the French variety or varieties, plus the dry grasses and straw of the Catalan ones. After the sweetness of the scents, the dry bite of the palate comes as a bit of a surprise: dramatically and incisively acidic, with in truth a slight rawness to that acidity—presumably a proportion of very early picked material? But there must be later picked material, too, since there are also some softer, more vegetal, more developed flavors here as well. It's well crafted, but to me it is a Cava that is trying very hard to be a Champagne, with that ramrod-straight spine of acidity dominating all and in slight conflict with the more lemongy, summery profile of the indigenous varieties—whereas I think you get the best results in this region by allowing the wine to have a different, less acidic, more relaxed, open, floating structure where aromatics and "minerality" are doing the structuring work. So, it's not exactly my dream Cava, but I have to recognize that this is a Cava style that would please many Champagne lovers. | 86

**AL** | Medium-deep golden color, bright, with a fine stream of bubbles. The nose is a fine combination of ripe fruit, mineral, and autolytic character, with brioche, hazelnut, and white flower lifting the unctuous yellow fruit. Even if the nose flirts with sweetness, the palate is distinctly dry, with good freshness and bite, well-balanced extract, appearing as lemon-zest bitterness. A long and lingering finish, with a steely mineral-like character. | 90

**Raventós i Blanc Textures De Pedra 2011 DO Conca del Riu Anoia** (50% Xarel-lo, 20% Sumoll, 20% Bastard Negre, 10% Parellada; 11% ABV) | 88

**JB** | Yellow with orange hues. A note of acent on the palate, dry and clean mouthfeel, with good balance. Pleasant and sufficiently complex. | 87

**AJ** | Bright green-gold. Creamy, grassy, lemony; harmonious, seamless aromatic profile. The scent of high summer itself, up in the hills. Gentle mousse, with plenty of Catalan notes and a plumply saline edge. Good Cava, but just a little rich (despite the fact that it must officially be *brut nature* or extra-brut), which makes for a more cloying finish than the very best of its peers. A very sound effort nonetheless. | 87

**AL** | Quite deep color, almost with a pink- or

copper-tainted nuance. Complex nose, quite particular, with a slight Sherry/Fino hint, wood, almond paste, dry spices, and discreet fruit. The palate appears rather bone-dry, with good freshness and grip, no sweetness to talk about, more bones than flesh, still a quite restrained and ascetic profile, but still with a fair dash of complexity and long, lingering finish. Interesting and, I suppose, promising. | 89



**Titiana Pansa Blanca Brut 2011 DO Cava** (100% Pansa Blanca; 12% ABV) | 88

**JB** | Pale yellow *ma non troppo*. On the nose, there are annoying lactic notes that follow on to the palate and make it saturating, despite the marked acidity. | 83

**AJ** | Bright gold with a fine, sustained mousse. Lots of cream, lemon, and almond here, with less dry grass and fennel than many of its peers. Very classy and seamless. Lovely white flowers: a cascade of hawthorn. Bright, poised, elegant, flowery, and seductive: rounded ripe acidity gives the wine freshness and shape; the mousse is enduring and fine beaded; and it has length and vinosity, as well as plenty of aromatic finesse. Outstanding Cava. | 90

**AL** | Young and bright, with a light golden nuance. Open and generous nose, more on the fruity side with a hint of tropical fruit such as pineapple and ripe apricot with vanilla and a hint of creaminess. The palate is quite fleshy and opulent; it delivers instant gratification but offers a nice dose of freshness as well. It has a certain maturity and vinosity/autolytic qualities; good grip and length—it actually wins me over more and more. | 90

**Castellblanch Dos Lustrós Brut Nature Reserva NV DO Cava** (40% Macabeo, 40% Parellada, 20% Xarel-lo; 11.5% ABV) | 87

**JB** | Very pale yellow. Pleasant marzipan notes, with fine vinosity. Dry, long, clean, and balanced. Remarkable sparkling wine. This bodes well for today's tasting. [This was wine no. 1.] | 88

**AJ** | Bright silver-gold; sustained mousse. Clean, fresh, floral nose; a touch of honey and banana. Fresh, bright, and attractive. Crisp, bright, and rather brittle on the palate: incisive and edgy, with bright acidity, but lacks a little fruit resonance and the general shyness of the central palate means that the bitter finishing notes are perhaps over-prominent. Presumably very early-picked? Nonetheless, this is still a well-crafted Cava in determined *apéritif* style. | 84

**AL** | Pale and youthful appearance. A youthful and

quite discreet nose, displaying almonds, some white flower and a slight toastiness. A good dry sensation on the palate, balanced freshness, some extract or balanced bitterness appearing as citrus zest, rather lightweight but good persistence, quite long and lingering. Nicely restrained in the positive sense of the word, and more fruitiness and generosity emerges on the finish. | 88

**Castellroig Reserva Brut Nature 2011 DO Cava** (Xarel-lo/Macabeo; 12% ABV) | 87

**JB** | Pale yellow. Not particularly complex on either nose or palate, but without defects anyway. Even if it is declared as *brut nature*, possibly a little sweet for my taste, but again that is merely personal. | 83

**AJ** | Bright steel-gold, almost silver-green in color, with a fine-beaded mousse. Clean apple fruits with some dry grass, milled grain, and a pinch of lavender. Clean, fresh, apple, bright; very crisp, with carefully marshaled acidity. A Cava for Champagne drinkers, but a true Cava nonetheless. | 88

**AL** | Bright straw color with fine but intense bubbles. Pure nose with a discreet toastiness, some mineral presence, citrus, chamomile, and cool stone-fruit. The palate has a good grip, quite medium in body and weight, good restraint, freshness, and elegance, starting out discreetly and expanding on the finish. Quite vinous, with a nice mouthwatering freshness. Still appearing youthful but should doubtlessly develop well. | 89

**Codorníu Jaume Codorníu Gran Reserva Brut 2011 DO Cava** (Pinot Noir/Chardonnay/Xarel-lo; 11.5% ABV) | 87

**JB** | Pale yellow. Relatively simple but sufficiently expressive; slightly *abbocato* but partly balanced by marked acidity. | 85

**AJ** | Bright, clear gold, with a swiftly dissipating mousse. Scents of apple with steel wool and a laundry-like, cotton-wadding richness: not as classically beguiling as some. Deep and true on the palate, though, with fine depth and Catalan richness and allusiveness of flavor: vinous, long, sustained. I love the palate; I just wish there was a little more charm on the aromatic profile. A very serious contender nonetheless, and a wine I would love to drink. | 89

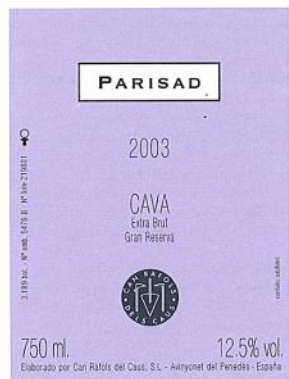
**AL** | Bright and quite pale appearance, with a medium-intense mousse. Fine purity on the nose, nothing tropical here, rather fresh herbs, chamomile, lime zest, and green, barely ripe fruit plus some chopped almonds. A quite slim palate, it barely makes it into the medium-bodied category, but it has flavor intensity and nice restraint, except a slight hint of sweetness, and a fresh, quite persistent finish. | 87

**Can Ràfols dels Caus Parisad Reserva Extra Brut 2003 DO Penedès** (50% Chardonnay, 25% Xarel-lo, 25% Macabeo; 12.4% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Golden yellow. As opposed to the previous



wine, also a 2003, the evolution is obvious, if noble and elegant, with pleasant notes of camphor and subtle spices. Remarkable structure with solid acidity. Again, a delicious and profound wine. | 94  
**AJ** | Mid old gold in color. Tangy, warm, bready, mushroomy, umami: something very different, now, from the younger wines. This certainly smells as if it is drawing its pension, but there is much to enjoy if you are open to it. Lush, soft, nutty, languid, and full, with a note of umami. Delicious but a curiosity now. | 84  
**AL** | Quite aged and faded color, not perfectly clear, with tiny bubbles. The nose has age, evolution, and oxidation, with notes of windfall, cider, spices, and some animal notes in the direction of a *vin nature*. The palate is rather dry and angular, with more acidity and extract than fruit. It certainly has length, but to me it appears a bit dried out—it should have been drunk already. | 81



**Castellblanch Brut Reserva NV DO Cava** (50% Parellada, 40% Macabeo, 10% Xarel·lo; 11.5% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Pale yellow. The nose seems to be compromised now by a recent disgorgement, but it is pleasant enough. The palate is plumper and sweeter than I would like it to be, and not very complex. | 84

**AJ** | Bright gold; modest but sustained mousse. The scents are perhaps more vegetal than floral, with some apricot/mango fruit: very classic for Penedès. On the palate, this is pure, limpid, long, translucent, delicate and beguiling, with a singing vegetal central palate (fennel, roast green capsicum, broad beans) and a very fresh, clean, deft finish. A Penedès thoroughbred, and hugely enjoyable. | 88

**AL** | Light golden with a youthful mousse. Quite intense on the nose, floral, with rather ripe yellow fruit like peach, pineapple, and candied citrus, still with a mineral presence, good bite on the palate, creamy and well rounded, with a slight hint of sweetness, moderately marked acidity, some nutty and almond notes on the palate, leading to a medium to long finish with a slightly warm/ripe sensation. | 86

**Codorníu Gran Codorníu Pinot Noir Finca El Coster Gran Reserva Brut 2009 DO Cava** (Pinot Noir; 12% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Pale yellow. A racy wine; fine nose that is a little riper than I would want it to be, but the mouthfeel is fresh: good acidity, good fruit expression, long. | 89

**AJ** | Pale gold; sustained mousse. Fresh and sweet, more "fruity" and less herbal than the pure-Catalan-variety versions, but simpler also. A pretty, poised, lively, well-constructed wine, but without the Catalan grapes you don't really get the body, the density, and the length that are so enjoyable in Cava. This is a bit acidic, finally, despite the prettiness of the fruit. It does, I admit, drink well and has a lightness of touch that many would relish. | 85

**AL** | Light golden color, a quite intense mousse. The nose is on the younger side with fruit like green apple, pear, lime, and lemongrass. The palate stays within the medium bodied frame, the fresh acidity in balance, unlike many other 2009s; not stunningly complex perhaps, but fresh and coherent until the end. | 85

**Codorníu Gran Codorníu Chardonnay Finca La Pleta Gran Reserva Brut 2009 DO Cava** (Chardonnay; 11.5% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Pale yellow. Lots of character and acidity, although it feels a little confectioned at the same time, which undeniably detracts. Noteworthy but perhaps a little too young and wanting balance—which I trust a few years of additional bottle age will provide. | 88

**AJ** | Bright mid-gold; a very fine-beaded, sustained mousse here. Cream and a honeycomb tang on the nose; sweet...barley sugar. Fragrant but rather sweet-acid on the palate, without the beguiling perfumes of the Catalan varieties, and their almond wealth and depth of flavor, too. | 84

**AL** | Light golden, still with a vigorous mousse. Rather spicy on the nose, with ginger and licorice notes, a hint of rubber, then green quince and pear. The palate feels a bit sweet, at least far from bone-dry, though the acidity still feels present. Medium weight with quite a long finish and a slight tannic sensation. | 86

**Mata i Coloma Pere Mata Reserva Familia Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010 DO Cava** (50% Macabeo, 25% Xarel·lo, 25% Parellada; 11.5% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Very pale yellow. The nose displays a vanilla note that distinguishes it from most of the rest. The palate shows the effect of oak aging even further. Spicy, intense, a tad saturating. | 84

**AJ** | Pale, bright green-gold, with a fine mousse. Pure, fine, elegantly inflected aromas of fennel and white flower. Touch of oak? Bright, fresh, crisp, and lively on the palate, with some "mineral" interest to give it depth and profundity. Vinous finish. It's not the most allusive wine on the table, nor the most "Catalan" in terms of its expressive

ANDREAS LARSSON'S VERDICT

Every tasting is a lesson. As much as we taste and as much we think we know, we'll always learn a fair deal, particularly when tasting blind. I've rarely witnessed such a diversity of style in Cava before, these ranging from reductive, flinty, firm, and fine, to lush, broad, oxidative, and funky. Even if some appealed less to my palate than others, I suppose this playfulness is only positive, as personality and style are far more fun than stereotypes.

Looking at the results, I was a bit afraid that I might have been slightly hard on the extra-brut or brut nature examples. But some of my top scores belonged to these categories, and I suppose that not having sweetness as a safety net can either bring out more clarity, precision, and complexity or make the wines more susceptible to deviations in aroma and flavor.

The same applies to oak and oxidation. When these were well integrated, the wines could show great vinosity, complexity, and depth; in some examples, however, when either dominated, the wines could appear a bit brutal and harsh.

We must be able to taste Cava and other sparkling wines without the customary comparisons to Champagne. Overall, this was a truly rewarding tasting, where the best examples clearly shone very brightly and impressed in their own distinct styles, displaying complexity, depth, joyful fruit, intellectual austerity, and the capacity to age gracefully over many years.

TOP WINES

- Mestres Clos Nostre Senyor Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2006 DO Cava 96
- Raventós i Blanc De La Finca 2012 DO Conca del Riu Anoia 94
- Albet i Noya Barrica 21 Reserva 3 Brut 2007 DO Penedès 92
- Castellroig Sabatè i Coca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010 DO Cava 92
- Colet Navajos Extra Brut 2011 Penedès 92
- Gramona III Lustrós Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2007 DO Cava 92
- Gramona Celler Batlle Gran Reserva Brut 2005 DO Cava 92
- Freixenet Reserva Real Brut NV DO Cava 90
- Gramona Enoteca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2001 DO Cava 90
- Muga Conde De Haro Brut 2012 DO Cava 90
- Parés Baltà Blanca Cuisiné Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010 DO Cava 90
- Raventós i Blanc Manuel Raventós 2008 DO Conca del Riu Anoia 90
- Recaredo Turó d'en Mota Brut Nature 2003 DO Cava 90
- Titiana Titiana Pansa Blanca Cava Brut 2011 90

repertoire, but it's beautifully crafted and delicious to drink, with a salty-stony finish of real tautness and pungency. | 89

**AL** | Bright and pale golden color. Young and pure nose, with hints of herbs, chamomile, citrus, lime, and pear; some vinous hints of lees and minerals as well. The palate is nicely restrained, rather medium body, with good freshness and flavor intensity, expanding more on the aftertaste. Pretty long, with good dryness and bite, but still appearing a bit youthful. | 86

**Mata i Coloma Pere Mata Reserva Familia Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2009 DO Cava** (50% Macabeo, 30% Xarel·lo, 20% Parellada; 11.5% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Pale yellow. The nose is interesting, with a complex mélange of vinous notes and a touch of subtle age. These reappear on the palate. A balanced wine with things to say. | 89

**AJ** | Yellow-gold, with a languid mousse. Creamy and lush, with a varnish touch, but attractive: supple, billowing, haunting. All the dry grasses and the hillside herbs are implied, not stated. Concentrated, dry, cleanly defined, elegant, and someone is very concerned about preserving and guarding acidity here. I don't feel it matters as much as all that—but this is very well done, as the acidity is ripe and long. There is, finally, that varnish cast over all, which just holds back my score a bit, but this is unquestionably good Cava. | 86

**AL** | Still straw rather than gold in color. The nose is rather perfumed, with notes of vanilla, dried herbs, and sweet yellow fruit. The palate has a well kept freshness, also with high extract/phenolic presence; medium-bodied, with barely ripe stone fruit. On the finish it displays more extract than fruit, appearing slightly bitter. It might improve with age, but it feels as though it were a complicated vintage. | 82

**Mont Marçal Extremarium Brut Reserva NV DO Cava** (35% Xarel·lo, 25% Macabeo, 20% Parellada, 20% Chardonnay; 12% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Very pale yellow. Delicately fruit-driven nose, with aromas suggestive of Chardonnay. Subtle mouthfeel that is otherwise firmly structured, with correct acidity and a slightly bitter finish that contributes complexity. Another good NV wine with which to open the tasting. | 89

**AJ** | Pale green-gold. Some green fruits here, thickened by white flower and pounded almond...but understated; you have to go looking for these. Clean, fresh, full and creamy on the palate. It is less demonstrative and allusion-laden than the pure-Catalan examples, but some may like that, and the international variety or varieties (Chardonnay, presumably) seems to have brought added flesh and creaminess. Works well. | 86

**AL** | Light golden with quite youthful bubbles, rather classic nose of green fruit, quince, pear with almond, citrus, and some herbal notes of chamomile. The palate is on the lighter side, with a certain bitterness/lemon zest, mellow acidity,

rounded and accessible, with moderate length. Quite a classic profile but not with the bite or grip of the better examples. | 83

**Recaredo Brut de Brut Finca Serral del Vell Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2006 DO Cava** (53% Xarel·lo, 47% Macabeo; 12.5% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Pale yellow. The nose displays notes of mint and autolysis, confirmed on the palate, which is harmonious and delicate but also nervy. Long, complex, elegant. Another excellent wine in this superb tasting. | 94

**AJ** | Very pale in color, but the mousse is quickly out of the wine in a visual sense. Quite intricate scents: very dry grasses, dried peach and apricot, a few rose petals or violets. Intriguing and well-defined aromas, though a little dry and cardboardy in style. A concentrated, deep, driving, and long palate of grandeur and resource. Very pure and pristine. There is mousse still dissolved in the wine. The fruit notes are surely less prominent than they would have been earlier, but the lingering dry grasses and stoniness and what almost seem like a little tannin more than make up. In fact, you quickly forget that this is "sparkling wine" and come to see it as an artful rendition of great Catalan white wine; the bubbles are almost incidental or accidental. Not a crowd-pleaser, and it's a shame about that aromatic dryness or cardboardiness, but fine wine. | 89

**AL** | Quite young color but with tiny bubbles. The nose has some aromatic deviations in terms of burned/roasted something or other, with candied fruit. The palate appears rather astringent and dry, a bit abrupt, without length nor harmony. A bit faded now and should probably have been consumed sooner. | 78



**Recaredo Terrers Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2009 DO Cava** (52% Xarel·lo, 32% Macabeo, 16% Parellada; 12% ABV) | 86

**JB** | Pale yellow. Complex nose of ripe grapes and a spicy note more evident on the palate, with a hint of vanilla. | 85

**AJ** | Clear bright gold, with a languid mousse. Lovely aromas of honeysuckle and honeycomb and freshly baked lemon tart: very pretty and beguiling. On the palate, this is a rather drier wine than the aromas suggested, but broad with it, and it also retains lots of the wildflower aromatic complexity of the nose. Lovely saline notes on the end, too. A fine, poised Cava of real intricacy, purity, terroir-print, and depth. | 90

**AL** | Clear and limpid, with a light golden hue. Quite intense and ripe on the nose, which

displays tropical fruit—pineapple, mango—with herbaceous notes of lemongrass, mint, and a gentle toastiness. The palate feels quite light in terms of fruit, and the acidity feels marked, but the finish is somehow lacking? A lot up front, but a slightly feeble finish. | 82



**Juvé y Camps Gran Juvé y Camps Gran Reserva Brut 2010 DO Cava** (40% Xarel·lo, 25% Macabeo, 25% Chardonnay, 10% Parellada; 12% ABV) | 85

**JB** | Pale yellow. Elegant nose, with flower notes confirmed on the palate and a hint of rosewood. A pity it is off-dry. I am personally put off by the sweetness. | 85

**AJ** | Bright green-gold with a fine mousse. Sweet, graceful, and charming, with softly citrusy aromas: orange and tangerine, and some wild-flower sweetness. Fresh, poised, close-grained, and pretty on the palate, with more of those sweet floral and citrus notes. Very easy to like, but classy, too. | 89

**AL** | The color is bright and light golden, with finely dispersed bubbles. The nose is quite perfumed, with tropical hints and tutti frutti, without much aged or autolytic character. The palate has a lighter structure, a hint of sweetness, mild and rounded acidity, creamy mousse and a soft finish. A gentle style for early drinking, I suppose, with little depth or complexity for now. | 81



**Huguet Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2008 DO Cava** (Parellada/Macabeo/Pinot Noir; 12.5% ABV) | 85

**JB** | Pale yellow. Although apparently including some foreign varieties in the blend, this wine displays a marked Penedès character (Parellada?), especially on the nose. The palate is dry, austere, very serious, uncompromising. | 89

**AJ** | Pale gold, with a shy mousse. Sweet, fresh, warm, comforting, and yet not particularly allusive compared to the best of its peers. Solid, poised, lively, with plenty of dry grass and wild-herb character, but not with the intricacy or sublimity of the best. | 84



**AL** | Clear, slightly developed golden nuance, with a fine stream of bubbles. The nose offers some roasted notes, a hint of rubber/plastic, with citrus and barely ripe fruit. On the palate, it shows some phenolic notes, white pepper and dry spices. Bone-dry, for sure, but it appears a bit austere and dry, lacking some flesh and fruitiness. Only moderate length, and it should probably have been drunk by now. | 81



**Mestres Visol Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010 DO Cava** (35% Macabeo, 40% Xarel·lo, 25% Parellada; 12% ABV) | 85

**JB** | Pale yellow. Not very expressive on the nose, but the palate displays spicy notes, vanilla and crème brûlée. Slightly sweet and saturating for my personal preference. | 82

**AJ** | Pale, bright steel-gold in color. A big slew of Catalan scents: fennel, broad bean, roasted green pepper, dry grasses, straw, thyme: broad and attractive. And exactly as the nose suggested on the palate: this is a wealthy, generous, palate-coating Cava, with plenty of breadth and density. Complex, secondary, and long; excellent work here. | 90

**AL** | Bright, with a pale golden nuance, quite tiny bubbles. Quite a classic nose, with dried seaweed, chamomile, lime, grapefruit, and some rubbery notes; there seems to be a slight hint of oak, brooding in the background. The palate is on the lighter side, still quite young and unresolved, with barely ripe fruit, some lemon and lime zest, a hint of sweetness/dosage, fresh acidity, and a moderately long finale. | 84

**A BIG SLEW OF CATALAN SCENTS: FENNEL, BROAD BEAN, ROASTED GREEN PEPPER, DRY GRASSES, STRAW, THYME. EXACTLY AS THE NOSE SUGGESTED ON THE PALATE: THIS IS A WEALTHY, GENEROUS, PALATE-COATING CAVA, WITH BREADTH AND DENSITY**

**Recaredo Subtil Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2007 DO Cava** (62% Xarel·lo, 30% Chardonnay, 8% Macabeo; 12.5% ABV) | 85

**JB** | Pale yellow. A first bottle is heavily perfumed, almost cloying, but a second bottle shows a beautiful wine, creamy, with excellent acidity: very lively. | 90

**AJ** | Pale to mid-gold, with a fine mousse. Rather dull and lifeless aromas compared to the best of its vintage peers. On the palate, it is a little bit brutal and forceful, lacking charm and intricacy, though it certainly has Catalan character. | 80

**AL** | Light golden nuance with a fine mousse. A quite perfumed nose, with sweet yellow fruit, candied citrus, orange zest, and nougat. Medium weight palate, with protruding extract, quite laid-back fruit, candied and sweet fruit flavors, but still rather dry. A decent effort but not with the complexity of the best examples. | 86



**Castelloig Sabaté i Coca Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2010 DO Cava** (Xarel·lo/Macabeu; 12% ABV) | 84

**JB** | Pale yellow. Not particularly complex on either nose or palate, but without defects anyway. Even if it is declared as *brut nature*, it is a little sweet for my taste—but again, that is merely personal preference. | 83

**AJ** | Onionskin or partridge-eye orange in color, with a swiftly dissipating mousse. The aromas seem rather flat and tired to me: no fresh fruit at all, and not much of the distinctive Catalan aromatic repertoire either. On the palate, it is rather soupy and sweet, I'm afraid, with no freshness, poise, or charm, though plenty of length and width. | 78

**AL** | The color is just shifting from straw to gold. The nose appears fairly youthful, with some notes reminiscent of Manzanilla or Fino, fresh almond, nuts, white flower, and ripe lemon. The palate is distinctly dry, with a good bite and restraint, lovely freshness and flavour intensity, quite slim in texture, but with a very long and grippy finish. An elegant and refined version that drinks well but should have the substance for further aging. | 92

**Castelloig Sabaté i Coca Reserva Familiar Brut Nature 2008 DO Cava** (Xarel·lo; 12% ABV) | 84

**JB** | Pale yellow. Serious and settled down, very dry, with seductive menthol notes and a character of prolonged aging with lees. Decidedly a wine of high quality. | 90

**AJ** | Full gold with a hint of green. Relatively aromatically neutral; rosy or apple if anything. On the palate, it is a rather monolithic wine, with a faintly bitter end. Sound and satisfactory but not a lot of intricacy or charm. | 83

**AL** | Light gold, with a fine foam of bubbles. The nose has some development and some aromatic deviations, slightly animal and spicy, with mint and stone fruit. The palate is bone-dry, with a slight tannic presence; rather mellow acidity but the dryness makes up for it. There is still, however, some dirt in the corners, and it finishes quite abruptly. | 80

**Colet Gran Cuvée Extra Brut 2013 DO Penedès** (70% Chardonnay, 20% Macabeo, 10% Xarel·lo; 12% ABV) | 84

**JB** | Golden yellow. Everything suggests a very ripe Chardonnay—though not overripe. The palate is pleasantly dry and complex, although a tad more intense than one would expect for a 2013. | 88

**AJ** | Very full gold, with a steady mousse. Relatively heavy, torpid aromas: some green, some dry grass, some hazel. On the palate, this is a relatively weighty style, with plenty of biscuity tang to it; almost a lemon-oil note, too. Solid, satisfying, very Catalan; just too thrusting and artless for a high score, but it's a wine I'd enjoy drinking. | 85

**AL** | Clear and light gold, with a fine mousse. A young and discreet nose, some hints of butter and vanilla together with barely ripe pear and apple. Quite broad on the palate, with marked extract/bitterness, a bit like unripe apple, some hints of fresh grapes, and a slight oxidative element. The finish feels a bit abrupt; it might develop and gain harmony, but the sensation of oxidation at this early stage and the quite harsh texture don't really seduce. | 80



**Mestres Coquet Gran Reserva Brut Nature 2012 DO Cava** (30% Macabeo, 45% Xarel·lo, 25% Parellada; 12% ABV) | 84

**JB** | Pale yellow. The nose is fruit-driven, with notes that foreshadow excessive sugar levels for my taste, subsequently confirmed on the palate. Slightly drying finish. | 81

**AJ** | Full green-gold, with a vigorous, steady mousse. Lots of grass and plant scents here, warm, very carefully defined, attractive. After a while in the glass, though, it loses its warm intricacy and becomes a little monotonous.

On the palate, the wine is full, firm, broad, structured, and long, with an intrinsic sweetness to it that has nothing to do with sugar; it's ripe and pure. A wine I'd love to drink, in truth, without the strenuous, early-peaked acidity that can leave rawness in some Cavas. Aromatically, however, it is not showing well, hence a lower score than the palate alone might have merited. | 84

**AL** | Pale and bright straw color, with a vivid mousse. Pure nose, displaying floral notes, chamomile, with lime and lemon zest. Good grip on the palate, the creaminess adding to a rounded texture, but there's still good bite and freshness, balanced acidity, and barely ripe yellow fruit with some nutty notes. Quite light in weight but balanced by well-preserved freshness and decent persistence: currently very drinkable. | 87

**Parxet Maria Cabané Gran Reserva Extra Brut 2009 DO Cava** (Macabeo/Parellada/Pansa Blanca; 11.5% ABV) | 84

**JB** | Pale yellow. Serious and well made, penalized by me for its sweetness and spicy notes, which I find a tad overwhelming. | 85

**AJ** | Bright green-gold. Slightly malty, tangy aromas; lacking a little freshness. On the palate, it has a fine seething mousse on the tongue, though, and plenty of flavor depth and typicity. The real problem is one of aromatic nuance and purity. It's a good wine that would merit a higher score with a cleaner and more pristine aromatic profile. | 84

**AL** | Light gold, with a finely creamy mousse. The nose flirts with sweetness, mixing yellow stone fruit with vanilla and melted butter. It displays high ripeness on the nose, but the palate feels a bit on the lighter side, with a phenolic presence, mellow acidity, moderately ripe fruit, and an unconvincing finish. It feels like a complicated vintage. | 82

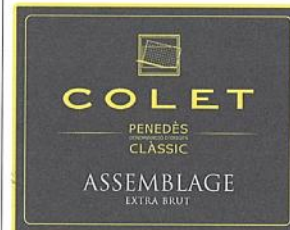
**Colet Assemblage Extra Brut 2013 DO Penedès** (55% Pinot Noir, 45% Chardonnay; 11.5% ABV) | 83

**JB** | Onionskin pink. After a first bottle plagued by unpleasant green notes, a second one shows much better. The wine is complex, clean, and enjoyable, with a pleasant vinous character. | 88

**AJ** | Bottle 1: A deep orange-pink in color, with a very languid mousse, which dissipates speedily. Rather unattractive aromas of damp cardboard, ash, and earth. No evident fruit or sweet charm. Unpleasantly ashy, foxy flavors. I would struggle to drink this, I'm afraid, though it is technically a well-made sparkling wine with a sound mousse. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the varieties aren't right here. Bottle 2: This to me is a very different wine; the color is redder, and the nose, while not particularly fruity, doesn't have the insistent ash quality of the first bottle; nor, on the palate, does it have the unpleasantly ashy flavors. It's clean, fresh, bright, relatively neutral in style, but drinkable. My score is for bottle 2. | 80

**AL** | Rather deep rose color, with an orange rim and youthful mousse. The nose is fruit-forward and generous, with sweet red berries, cherry, and grape, appearing quite ripe. The palate, however, feels more restrained, with barely ripe fruit, green

citrus, cranberry, and a marked acidity. Quite young, with a foamy mousse, and a moderately long and light finish, seeming a bit green and unripe. | 80



**Clos Lentsisc Sumoll Reserva Familia Blanc de Noirs Brut Nature 2009 DO Penedès** (Sumoll; 12.5% ABV) | 82

**JB** | Very pale pink, almost orange. Soft nose, with some volume and ripeness, and a hint of greenness that adds interest. On the palate I enjoy the difficult balance of seemingly opposed flavors (candied fruit and a green note) over the sweetness character. As with other wines, I would have preferred it to be bone-dry. | 85

**AJ** | An onionskin-orange rosé. Full, plush, rather liqueur-like aromas: attractive but exotic, decked in rich raisin-and-tea-leaf sweetness, with something rosy or earthy at the end. Very similar on the palate—very hard to see how this can be extra-brut or *brut nature*! It seems like a dessert Cava, lush and brocaded but finally a little torpid. | 82

**AL** | The color is somewhat orange and copper, with a fine mousse. The nose is sweet and offers jammy berries, quince, windfall, and nougat—far from your average apéritif Cava, for sure. The palate is lush, sweet, and broad, with a creamy texture, offering strawberry jam with vanilla flavor. A lot of flesh and perfume, but the dryness, freshness, and finish are lacking. | 79

**Parxet Maria Cabané Gran Reserva Extra Brut 2010 DO Cava** (Pansa Blanca/Macabeo/Parellada; 11.5% ABV) | 82

**JB** | Pale yellow. The first impression on the nose is toffee, butterscotch, giving way to flowers. Dry, not high acidity, long, but the end is a little saturating. | 86

**AJ** | Bright gold, with dissipating mousse. Rather caramelized, toffee aromas: unintentional oxidation surely. This has rather compromised the palate, as well, though in other respects it is well made, using fine raw materials, and is long, textured, and fine-grained on the tongue. Such a shame—let's check another bottle to see if the oxidation was an individual bottle hazard or not... [In fact, this was the only bottle.] | 77

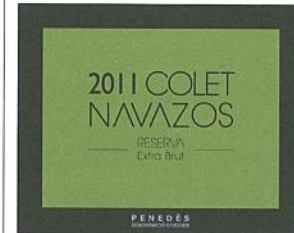
**AL** | Bright and light golden color with quite tiny bubbles. Quite buttery on the nose, with melted butter, roasted nuts, and tropical-fruit hints of mango and pineapple. The palate appears slimmer

than the nose suggested, still with those lactic/buttery notes and a rounded mellow acidity, but not particularly long—more beginning and flesh than finish or bones. | 84

**Colet Navazos Reserva (Chardonnay + Manzanilla Pasada as Liqueur d'Expédition) Extra Brut Penedès 2011** (12.5% ABV) | 81

**AJ** | Bottle 1: Full gold, with a swiftly dissipating mousse. Softly and gently oxidative: tangy honey and beeswax. Bottle 2: Similar in style, perhaps with a little more honeyed sweetness. No evident fruit, though. On the palate, it comes across as a very artisan style—maybe zero sulfur? Vinous, acid-balanced, texturally interesting, but not completely successful. | 81

**AL** | Quite developed, medium-deep golden color. The nose also shows development and a certain oxidation, with notes of windfall, walnut, wood, and dry spices. The palate feels one size lighter than the nose suggested, with marked youthful acidity, barely ripe apple, yet with some oxidative harmony, but to my palate it appears slightly dissipated at this stage. | 80



**Torelló 225 Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2011 DO Cava** (Macabeo/Xarel·lo/Parellada; 11.5% ABV) | 81

**JB** | Pale yellow. Different, with pharmaceutical and oak notes that may suggest some obscure local variety (during the tasting we are informed only about the presence of foreign varieties, nothing else is made known) or oak aging. This confers character, but I am not sure it is a character I appreciate. The result is a little saturating. | 83

**AJ** | Mid-gold, with a swiftly dissipating mousse. Yeasty, almost malty scents, like a whisky wort; different from its peers but not unpleasant. The flavors are slightly strange and overly vegetal. It's not a bad wine, and indeed it may just be an excess of Catalan allusiveness that is giving me pause. I would enjoy drinking it but feel that it is less successful in the end than many of its peers. | 81

**AL** | Pale straw color. Rather shy nose, with candied fruit, a hint of rubber, and some lactic notes like butter. Light on the palate, with a certain astringency, mild and rounded acidity. It appears a bit angular and charmless to me at the moment, and rather short on the finish as well. | 79