

Spanish winery raises the bar for sparkling wine



GEOFF LAST

[More from Geoff Last \(HTTP://CALGARYHERALD.COM/AUTHOR/GEOFF-LAST\)](http://calgaryherald.com/author/geoff-last)

Published on: May 21, 2016 | Last Updated: May 21, 2016 5:00 AM MDT



The vineyards at Raventos with Mountserrat in the background. *CALGARY HERALD*

Spain has a long history of producing sparkling wine — the majority of which is sold as Cava — and as a category it represents some of the best value out there for bubbles.

For starters — unlike Prosecco, for example (which is fermented in

a large tank) — it is made in the same method as Champagne whereby the wine undergoes a second fermentation in the bottle. A trio of indigenous grapes — Xarel-lo, Macabeo and Parellada — are responsible for most of the production but increasingly Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are making their way into the blends as well.

The vast majority of Cava (95 per cent) is produced in Catalunya, mainly in and around Sant Sadurni d'Anoia in Penedes. Two giant producers — Freixnet and Cordoniu — dominate the region's production. While their wines are acceptable as everyday sparklers, things get much more interesting as you move up the quality ladder.

I was recently in the magnificent city of Barcelona — which is about a half-hour's drive from Sant Sadurni d'Anoia — and had the pleasure of visiting Raventos i Blanc. The estate was founded by the Raventos family in 1497 and has been passed on from generation to generation, evolving over the years to become what is arguably now the benchmark for sparkling Spanish wine.

Today, the winery is a beautiful modern facility run by father and son Manuel and Pepe Raventos. Interestingly, they have opted out of the Cava DO and have proposed a new DO called Conca Del Riu Anoia, a name that already graces their labels. The new DO represents a higher quality of wine with much stricter qualitative rules for production.

It makes perfect sense when you taste their wines because they have more in common with high-quality Champagne than with basic Cava. The new DO calls for changes that include stricter yields, indigenous varieties only, new geographical boundaries, minimum aging requirements and 100 per cent organic or biodynamic viticulture (all of which they already practise).

It would be an understatement to say that changing wine laws in old world countries does not happen overnight, but eventually I expect this move will represent a new chapter for sparkling wine producers.

In Spain, Cava flows freely in the multitude of tapas bars and

restaurants. This is especially so when you are in Catalunya, a region with a rich history and vibrant culinary scene. The bone-dry Brut Nature style is typically served throughout a meal and goes especially well with seafood, a prominent component of the Spanish diet.

In North America we tend to start meals with sparkling and then move on to other wines when the food arrives. But don't discount sparkling wines with dishes like seafood paella or fish because they work very well.

The wines of Raventos cost more than many of the Cava's on the market but they are well worth it. Here are a selection of some in our market.

Raventos i Blanc L'hereu 2013 — \$30

Grown on chalky soils (and farmed biodynamically as are all of their wines), this extra-dry style has only five grams of residual sugar but still comes across as quite fruity and not overly austere. There are notes of stone fruits with some brioche and anise notes, too. It spends 18 months on its lees (yeast cells) so the wine carries a pleasant yeasty note with a fine mousse. Personally, I would rather drink this than most of the mainstream entry-level Champagne on the market, it's that good.



Raventos i Blanc L'hereu 2013. *CALGARY
HERALD*

Raventos i Blanc de Nit 2013 — \$34

This is their rose style and it uses a small amount of Monastrell in the blend, in addition to the trio of classic varietals. I drink a lot of this wine at home because I find that I have to spend about three times this much to get something better from Champagne, for example. The abundant fruit makes it a versatile food wine, ideal with appetizers but worth trying with things like spicy barbecued chicken or roast pork. At the winery, it was a perfect match with the amazing Iberico ham that is about as addictive as any meat product can be.



Raventos i Blanc de Nit 2013 *CALGARY
HERALD*

Raventos i Blanc Manuel Raventos 2007 — \$114

This is their flagship wine produced mainly from Xarel-lo (70 per cent from a single vineyard site), a rich, complex wine that could use about five years of cellaring to take the edges off of the vibrant acidity. This is a small-production wine that stands among the world's great sparklers, a special occasion bottle to be sure, but a truly remarkable effort.



Looking for wine in Alberta? Go to www.liquorconnect.com
(<http://www.liquorconnect.com>)

Geoff Last is a longtime wine merchant, writer and broadcaster and a regular contributor to City Palate and other publications. He instructs on food and wine at the Cookbook Company Cooks.

Calgary Flyers



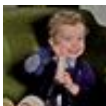
The image displays four Calgary flyers arranged horizontally. From left to right: 1. RONA flyer: 'IT PAYS TO RENOVATE SATURDAY, MAY 28 ONLY', 'SAVE THE TAX ON ALL PRODUCTS*', '15% OFF', '20% OFF', '\$319'. 2. Visions Electronics flyer: 'SURPLUS LIQUIDATION', 'WE'RE CLEARING OUT MILLIONS IN EXCESS INVENTORY WITH DRASTIC DISCOUNTS THROUGHOUT THE STORE!', '55% OFF', '50% OFF', 'SAVE UP TO 50%'. 3. The Home Depot flyer: 'Landscape event', 'LET'S BIG IN AND SAVE!', 'More savings. More things.', '\$16.99', '\$21.99', '\$12.99', '\$17.99', '\$24.99', '\$29.99'. 4. Leon's flyer: 'part of the family', 'BO DA', '\$859', '\$299'. Below each flyer is a 'HOVER FOR FLYER' button with the respective store's logo.

Comments

We encourage all readers to share their views on our articles and blog posts. We are committed to maintaining a lively but civil forum for discussion, so we ask you to avoid personal attacks, and please keep your comments relevant and respectful. If you encounter a comment that is abusive, click the "X" in the upper right corner of the comment box to report spam or abuse. We are using Facebook commenting. Visit our FAQ page (<http://www.calgaryherald.com/news/story.html?id=7195492>) for more information.

0 Comments

Sort by



Add a comment...

([HTTP://WWW.POSTMEDIA.COM](http://www.postmedia.com))

© 2016 Postmedia Network Inc. All rights reserved.

Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.

Powered by WordPress.com VIP (<https://vip.wordpress.com/?>

[utm_source=vip_powered_wpcom&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=VIP%20Footer%20Credit](https://vip.wordpress.com/?utm_source=vip_powered_wpcom&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=VIP%20Footer%20Credit))