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Decanter

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82 delicious wines to enjoy now or lay down



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Premium Cava

Low prices may have made basic Cava popular, but don't forget the high-end wines which offer all the quality and style of Champagne, says Sarah Jane Evans MW



CONSIDER A BOTTLE of sparkling wine: it's made according to the traditional method, a vintage wine carefully matured in underground cellars on its lees, finally bottled with zero dosage. Clearly, it's Champagne. Actually, no, not at all. This is Cava, Spain's much-maligned traditional method sparkling.

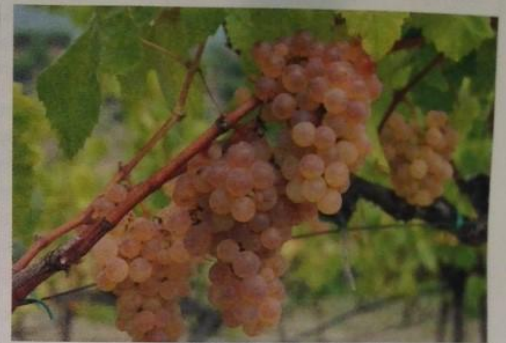
There are some fascinating wines being produced in and around DO Cava. But Cava's problem is Cava. That's to say, it's the wine's reputation as a bargain-basement fizz. While low prices gave Cava popular appeal, the same low prices prevented some of the producers recommended here from exporting their pricier fine wines. But the recent success of Italy's Prosecco as a budget sparkling has encouraged Spanish producers to focus on the high ground.

Fine Cava is always going to be a hard sell. Why spend £30 on a Cava when you could buy a famous non-vintage Champagne? I hope my tasting notes here explain just why it's worth investing in top-end Cavas today. Long-term restaurateur Martin Lam, formerly of London's Ransome's Dock, and now a wine consultant, agrees. He argues with optimism that 2015 is the year of serious Cava.

What has changed? First, the economic crisis in Spain, meaning that producers have to export. We can now buy wines that were only sold on the domestic market. Second, recent years of careful viticultural work are showing through. Notable are the wines of producers such as Recaredo and Loxarel – established biodynamic growers, who are joined by others such as Saramona.

Third, exciting results are being realised from long-term work with local grand varieties. Cava's classic varieties are Parellada, Xarel-lo and Macabeo. None of them performs well at high yields, so it's no wonder that producers moved

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Above: Xarel-lo, also known as Pansa Blanca, is one of the three indigenous varieties traditionally used to make Cava

to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. But that was then. Now try some of the new Xarel-los (also known as Pansa Blanca) – it's a remarkable transformation.

Then there is the move by Pepe Raventós to step away from DO Cava and create a group with tighter standards. There are a number of top-quality sparkling wines from Spain which are not Cava, so seek them out too. Recognising the need to move with the times, Cava's regulatory body has itself introduced a new classification for single-vineyard wines – Cava del Paraje Calificado.

The 18 wines here are all reservas (minimum 15 months ageing in bottle) and gran reservas (30 months). There is plenty of interest in wines with much longer ageing – try Loxarel's 109, for instance, with 109 months of age and a 2013 DWWA Trophy winner. In terms of style, most of the Cavas here are zero dosage. It's a style Spain particularly likes, accounting for a quarter of all Cavas consumed in Spain but only 2% of exports (in 2013). Try it: this is not Epernay, so the Mediterranean fruit carries the dryness well.

These were the best value selection of Cava wines available at £15 and over, based on a non-blind at Decanter's February 2015

For full details of UK stockists, see p107

Sarah Jane Evans MW is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional co-Chair for Spain and Sherry

Evans' top 18 wines to try



Codorníu, Gran Codorníu Gran Reserva Xarel-lo, Cava 2009
18.5/20 (95/100)

£135 (case of three) Hangingditch, Soho Wine Supply

In a wooden presentation case with the other two Gran Codorníus (right and opposite page). Brisk, vivid and penetrating – a gloriously tooth-tingling Cava. A fascinating Xarel-lo, with limpid, lemon cream notes. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 11.5%



Recaredo, Brut de Brut Gran Reserva Finca Serral de Vell, Cava 2006 18.5 (95)

£40.50 Les Caves de Pyrène, Theatre of Wine, Toasted

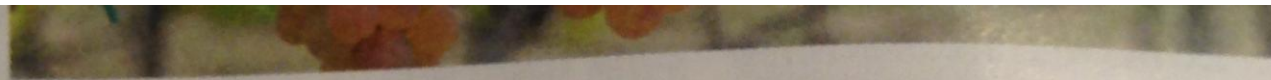
Lime leaf and crystallised lemon aromas. Full of delicate energy, with a mouthfilling blossom of very fine mousse. Finishes elegant and refined, with notes of herbs and lime. Still delightfully youthful. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Codorníu, Gran Codorníu Gran Reserva Chardonnay, Cava 2009
18 (93)

£135 (case of three) Hangingditch, Soho Wine Supply

Lovely aromatics of patisserie. Arrives with a burst of energy in the mouth, and the mousse persists to give a refreshing undertow. Powerful, limpid, lemon fruit. Zestily refreshing with no rough edges. **Drink** 2015-2017 **Alc** 11.5%



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Premium Cava



Gramona, Imperial Gran Reserva Brut Nature Cava 2008 18 (93)

£21 Berry Bros & Rudd, Woodwinters
Beautifully developed, delicately balanced and very long. This is a cava where the mousse takes second place to the complexity of the wine. Very persistent. Ready now. Most enjoyable. Drink 2015-2020 Alc 12%



Recaredo, Gran Reserva Brut Nature, Cava 2008 18 (93)

£23.49-£26.99 AG Wines, Smiling Grape Theatre of Wine
Brightly aromatic with lip-smacking acidity. Cava as it should be. From a family of biodynamic growers, the first Demeter-certified producer in Cava and Penedès. Drink 2015-2018 Alc 12%



Juvé y Camps, Reserva de La Familia Gran Reserva Brut Nature, Cava 2010 17.5 (91)

£17.50 Exel Wines, Fortnum & Mason, Handford Wines, Philglas & Swiggot, Vinoteca
One to linger over. It starts savoury then reveals notes of honey, toasted brioche, dried fig and crystallised ginger. Drink 2015-2018 Alc 12%



Loxarel, MM Blanc de N Brut, Penedès 2009 17.5 (91)

POA Carte Blanche
Delightfully complex wine from a producer choosing to work outside the Cava DO. Focus on the red fruits and rhubarb, the bright acidity, the penetrating freshness and the round, fragrant finish. Drink 2015-2018 Alc 12%



Raventós i Blanc, Gran Reserva de La Finca Brut Nature, Conca del Riu Anoia 2011 17.5 (91)

£22.99 (2010) AG Wines, Woodwinters
Everything about this speaks elegance and finesse. Delicate aromas of citrus and patisserie and a palate of green herbs and pomelo. From indigenous varieties. Drink 2015-2018 Alc 12%



Alta Alella, Privat Laietà Gran Reserva Brut Nature, Cava 2010 17 (90)

£18.33 Christopher Keiller
Luxuriantly aromatic. Palate is just as vivid, with lively acidity, a firm mousse, and a salty, spritzy finish. Full of youth despite its Gran Reserva ticket. Certified organic. Drink 2015-2017 Alc 12%



Castillo Perelada, Gran Claustro Reserva Brut Nature, Cava 2010 17 (90)

£17.28-£19.99 Champagne Tracker, Coe Vintners, Drinkshop, Field & Fawcett, Fine Wine Sellers, Great Wine Online, Telford Wines, Whitebridge
A little Xarel-lo, but aromas of roses and apples point to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Punchy and energetic. Drink 2015-2017 Alc 12%



Codorníu, Gran Codorníu Gran Reserva Pinot Noir, Cava 2009 17 (90)

£135 (case of three) Hangingditch, Soho Wine Supply
The third in Codorniu's Gran Reserva single-vineyard project. Alluringly rich with roses and violets - Champagne does not have a monopoly on blancs de noirs! Drink 2015-2022 Alc 11.5%



Juvé y Camps, Gran Juvé Gran Reserva, Cava 2008 17 (90)

£26-£28 Andrew Wilson, Amazon UK, Exel, Ministry of Drinks, Philglas & Swiggot, Noble Fine Wines
Delicately autolytic, with a vigorous bright palate. The complexity of maturity shines through: enjoy notes of roasted nuts, cinnamon and ginger. Very well balanced. Drink 2015-2019 Alc 12%



Torelló, Special Edition Brut Reserva Cava NV 17 (90)

£14.54-£17.50 Fine Wine Co, Great Western Wines, Hic!
Tense, powerful, pure and bright. The green herb and lime aromas carry through to the mineral palate. A lovely drink. Drink 2015-2017 Alc 12%



Codorníu, Jaume Codorníu Gran Reserva Brut, Cava 2009 16.5 (88)

£25 North & South Wines, The Cave, Wapping Wines
Plenty of fine mousse. Lifted aromatics, bursting with cut flowers and honeyed lemons. Bright, zesty palate with bitter lemon marmalade notes. Long, lively finish. Drink 2015-2017 Alc 11.5%



Gramona, Argent Reserva Brut, Cava 2009 16.5 (88)

£30.12-£40 Berry Bros & Rudd, Christopher Keiller, Woodwinters
Generous maturity, with roasted nuts, sweet nutmeg and ginger and a soft mousse. Complex, long, saline finish. Drink 2015-2017 Alc 12%



Parés Baltà, Selectio, Cava NV 16.5 (88)

£35 Top Selection
A Cava that's all about the wine rather than the fizz. The palate is complex, lifted by vivid pinch of citrus acidity, and enriched by a toasty, savoury finish. A complex, very interesting wine. Certified organic. Drink 2015-2017 Alc 11.5%



Oriol Rossell, Gran Reserva, Cava 2010 16 (86)

£23 SpaNiche Wines
Very aromatic, shimmering with crystallised lemon peel, jasmine and buttery brioche. The palate is broad and balanced, if a little flat, but the finish is complex, with bursts of freshness lifting the fruit. Drink 2015-2017 Alc 11.5%



Raventós i Blanc, deNit, Conca del Riu Anoia 2012 17.5 (91)

£17.49-£21 AG Wines, Bottle Apostle, Drinkshop, Ellis Wharton, Park & Bridge, Woodwinters
Pale salmon hue from this rosé Cava. Delicate brioche aromas and wafts of floral perfume. The palate shows subtle red and orange fruits lifted by zesty acidity. Long. Drink 2015-2018 Alc 12%

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Claustro

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**Raventós i Blanc, Gran Reserva de
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Codorníu, Gran Codorníu Gran

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Wines, Philglas & Swiggot, Vinoteca
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**Alta Alella, Privat Laietà
Reserva Brut Nature, Ca**
17 (90)

£18.33 Christopher Keiller
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Juvé y Camps. Gran Juvé

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Reserva, Cava

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