



## Article Archive Vintage Profile

### Spain, Cataluña: Cava and the Other Sparkling Wines from Cataluña

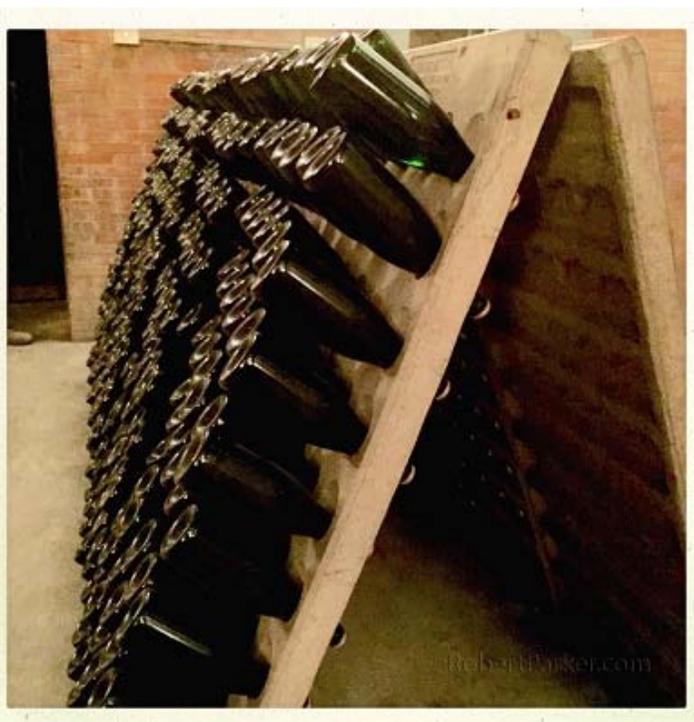
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*Most of the sparkling wines from Cataluña are produced following the Champenoise or traditional method of a second fermentation in bottle, although the ancestral method is also enjoying a small revival*

In keeping with my regional approach to tasting Spanish wines, I tasted the majority of Cavas while covering Cataluña, which is where the lion's share of Cava is located. The others will be reviewed (or not, depending on interest) when I cover their respective regions. Bottom line: this is an article about the sparkling wines from Cataluña.

You might remember that Cava is a process shoehorned into a geographical appellation. As such it's spread between Cataluña, the region of Penedès mainly, but also parts of Valencia, Extremadura, Rioja and Aragón. Even within Cataluña it includes different zones.

This definition was political, definitely not geographical, as it included all (or most) of the Cava producing zones defined by where sparkling wine is produced using the Champenoise or traditional method of a second fermentation in bottle. I'm not that interested in the political or price fights, but these factors might explain why Cava has somehow become associated with cheap sparkling wine.

Many complain that the wines produced in Requena, Rioja or Extremadura have little to do with the ones produced in Penedès. They are very different in terms of soil, climate and grapes, and in terms of *terroir*. These sparkling wines share the production process in the same way that Laguiole knives or cheddar cheeses can be produced in many different locations across the globe as long as they

comply with the production method. So Cava is a method and some producers want to have a more place-oriented approach and define, most of all, the origin.



*The Penedès region produces the majority of Cava and other sparkling wines from Cataluña*

I'm not going to repeat my rant against the volume and the low-price approach of the Cava appellation. If you are interested in my opinion you can read the article from February 2014 in issue 211. What I said then remains valid today, and the situation has not changed much. If anything I've noticed a slight improvement in Codorníu, which as a group seems to be working toward improving the quality of their high-end wines. That effort includes improvement at wineries in Priorat (Scala Dei), Rioja (Bodegas Bilbaínas) and also their Cava, with the release of single-vineyard varietal bottlings, in particular the 2009 La Nansa Xarello. All of these efforts seem to be incompatible with efforts to create appalling new "products" like their first Codorníu still wine, Viñas de Anna.

### **Vintage or Non-Vintage?**

I have nothing against non-vintage wines. All the wonderful solera wines (think Sherry!) are non-vintage. Some Champagnes are a blend of multiple vintages as some of the most traditional houses aim to make a house style wine over wines with the character of a given year. That's fine, but it's hardly the case in Spain. I only tasted six non-vintage wines this time (I tasted most of them last time). It's fine, non-vintage aims for consistency, for delivering a homogeneous product that cannot be differentiated from bottling to bottling, or vintage to vintage. So if you want to look up a non-vintage wine not in this article, chances are it's already in *The Wine Advocate* database.

On some bottles I receive, the vintage is not visible on the label. I consider those as non-vintage wines, because there is no way to know the year, and a consumer facing this bottle on a shelf doesn't know what he/she is looking at. I do not review non-vintage wines that have already been reviewed unless there is a good reason such as the bottles can be clearly identified by a new label or the disgorgement date on the back label is different, making the wine supposedly different.

And now that I've just mentioned it, what about disgorgement dates on labels? I'm totally in favor of it. Why not? For those who do not care, they can just ignore it. For those that do, it's great! Yes, we need to educate consumers and let them know that sparkling wine changes in bottle like any other wine. It's another story whether you like them young and fresh after disgorgement or with some bottle age - just like with any other wine. Cava, Champagne and other sparklers are wines. So disgorgement dates on labels, please. Well, yes, the quality-oriented and conscious producers already use them. Enough said.

As for vintages, most of these wines come from the region of Penedès, a Mediterranean zone that is a warm zone. In Penedès a cool vintage is a blessing. Among the best recent years, 2010 and 2013 produced fresher sparkling and still wines, and 2012 was less hot and ripe than 2011. Given that the wines must age in contact with the lees for a minimum time in the bottle, the 2013s I tasted are not

## Tendencies

Some producers release wines that have extended contact with the lees, and although "the more the better" approach is not usually a good idea, it seems like the extra time in bottle before disgorging creates more complexity, better integrates the bubbles with the wine and mellows the acidity. Of course, if you leave a poor to average wine in contact with the lees for a long time you hardly obtain a great wine. You have to start with quality base wine to get to achieve something of quality! The process, including the *dosage* (the added wine with or without sugar to top up the bottle once the lees are removed), does not work miracles although it can sometimes disguise shortcomings.

That's why many prefer *non-dosé*, Brut Nature or Extra Brut wines. And there seem to be more of those than Brut. But mind you, sometimes a little bit of sugar can help to balance the acidity. So, as with almost everything, it's dangerous to generalize.



*Recently disgorged? You bet! Two minutes before I tasted it! This was a superb 1996*

Talking about extended contact with the lees, there are a handful of producers selling *oenothèque* or library releases of older vintages that have had a much longer than normal time on the lees. The concept "recently disgorged" was made famous by Bollinger. Gramona, Mestres, Raventós i Blanc and Recaredo are the main adherents in this field. Not surprisingly, these *oenothèque* wines are offered in (sometimes extremely) limited quantities, selected from the very best vintages placing them at the top of the quality hierarchy.



*Recaredo, the quality leader in Cava. I tasted a stunning bottle of a limited library release from 1999. Who would have said a decade ago that the best sparklers of the region would be the ones with many years on the lees?*

One producer, Loxarell, sells a wine that has not yet been disgorged, with the idea that you continue aging the wine in contact with the lees so the wine gains complexity in your home cellar (as long as you have good storage condition). I had the chance to re-taste 2002 and 2004 and the bottles are evolving remarkably well. It is an interesting idea.

Now that we're on the subject of yeasts, a few producers ferment the base wine (first fermentation) with indigenous yeasts and even less (I think I remember one) use their local yeasts for the second fermentation in bottle. But there is interest, and I guess we will slowly see more.

When it comes to grapes, usage of French varieties is in clear decline, much the same as in the still wines. There is a clear focus on the classic blend of Macabeo, Xarello and Parellada. Some are even using the Mediterranean red Monastrell for their rosé, foregoing the elsewhere-revered Pinot Noir that is not quite at home in the local climate. For white wines, there is great interest and some of the best wines are produced with the local Xarello grape.



*Xarello in May, Xarello in September*

As for wineries leaving the appellation (see the article from February 2014 for background info), the situation seems more or less stable. At least no major labels have left since I wrote about it, and those in Penedès continue with their wines. The stampede did not happen, at least not yet. Raventós i Blanc keeps working to create a new appellation of origin for the banks of the Anoia (or Noya in Spanish) River in the northeast part of Penedès. Their main contention is that Cava is a process, not a place, and for them, place comes first.



*Pepe Raventós is fighting to create a true appellation of origin for the wines produced on the banks of the Anoia River in Penedès A new appellation in the making?*

The working name for the new appellation is Conca del Riu Anoia, precisely translated as the banks of the Anoia River in Catalán, and Raventós i Blanc has a clear roadmap toward its development. First, as I already mentioned, they want to define origin. The most common *terroir* in Spain is probably a mixture of clay and chalk. These chalky soils are ideal for the production of white and sparkling wines.



*The chalky soils from Penedès provide a fresh minerality to the best wines through the Xarello, Macabeo and Parellada grapes*

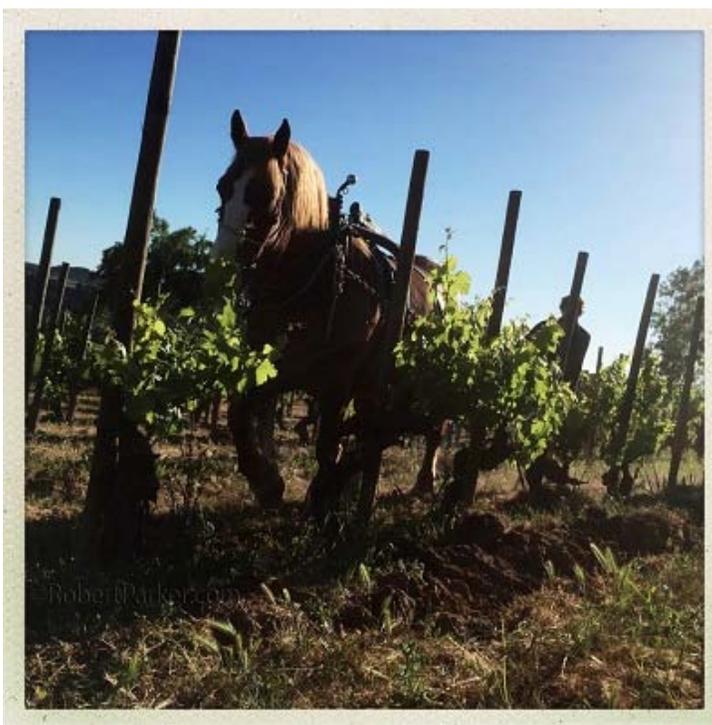
The soils of the Penedès zone are varied but being so close to the sea there is no doubt that plenty of them originated from the sea. Most of the ubiquitous chalky/calcium carbonate/limestone soils are linked to water and marine beds where the bones of countless creatures have created these particular mother rocks. Visiting the zone, the fossils of shells and snails easily found in the alluvial terraces of

the river Anoia leave no doubt that at some point in time this area was under the sea. That time seems to have been some 16 million years ago. The zone they want to define is basically the surrounding region where each drop of rain eventually ends up in the Anoia River, either directly or through its tributaries.



*The shell fossils easy to find in the alluvial terraces of the Anoia River leave little doubt about the marine origin of part of the soils from Penedès*

But their standards are not limited to origin, as the focus is on quality and origin is not enough. They also include organic/biodynamic agriculture, use of only traditional grape varieties, production of only vintage wines, Extra Brut or drier wines and a fair price paid to the growers for a maximum of 20% of purchased grapes (of course from within the zone) used in the wines. Yes, those are high standards.



*Back to tradition: horse plowing is creeping into the modus operandi of some of the best, often organic and biodynamic producers*

I explain all this because it could be one way to solve the issue of an appellation that is focused on volume and low price. Well, in reality the issue is for the producers with a focus on quality and high-end wines, not for the appellation itself. For now Raventós i Blanc are on their own in this adventure, but I think that Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, the capital city of Cava is where many of the main players are and it's of course framed by the river (it's even part of its name!) that runs on the outskirts. So we're talking about the heart of the Cava appellation, with plenty of hectares of vineyards.

### The Tip of the Iceberg

I'm making a draconian selection trying to bring only the best wines here, because there are many fresh, light and easy that offer little more. The pyramid has a very wide base and a pointy top. Few grow their own grapes and produce their own wine, but there is no differentiation between *négoçiants* and *récoltants* as in Champagne. Of course, you can mess it up with your own grapes or do a superb job with purchased ones, still there's usually a correlation.

The scores create a hierarchy of the wines, but if we group the wines by producer, we can also obtain a hierarchy of producers. As I wanted to do so, I put all my scores on a spreadsheet and did a quick calculation. This is the result, the top five producers:

Recaredo  
Raventós i Blanc  
Mestres  
Gramona  
Loxarel

I tasted the following wines between mid-March and mid-May 2015. The still wines for some of these producers can be found in a separate article in this same issue that covers the (still) wines of Catalunya (other than Priorat).



*The sunset in Penedès transported me to Tuscany; the light was magic*

—Luis Gutiérrez

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# el 3 de vuit .cat

EL PENEDÈS COM TU LENTENS

des de 1982



## Demanda

Un jove del Vendrell vol que Renfe l'ajudi a pujar als trens per poder anar a la universitat //P13

## 7d8 amb agulla

Els Castellers de Vilafranca completen aquest castell inèdit a Torredembarra //P42

## Final de Gira

Anna Roig i l'Ombre de Ton Chien actuaran el 7 de setembre a les Fires de Sant Sadurní //P15



## Commoció a les Cabanyes //PS

// FETS Un matrimoni se suïcida després d'haver mort la seva filla, que patia una greu discapacitat // PREMEDITAT La parella va deixar cartes de comiat i va avisar els Mossos abans de morir



Aquest és el camí de Pontons on es van trobar els cossos d'Alons Fructuoso, Antònia Bonilla (a les fotos de la dreta) i la seva filla Laura | JCE

## Cinc vilafranquins ferits en l'accident d'un globus a Igualada



// DETALLS Leo i Gerard Cunill, els seus dos fills i la parella del Leo fill, van patir diferents traumatismes en un sinistre en què va morir el pilot //P16

## Els regidors d'Unió de Sant Sadurní abandonen el partit

La crisi d'UDC també porta l'històric militant vilafranquí Sebastià Jané a estripar el carnet //P6

## El nou president de l'hospital assegura que no té voluntat de fer més retallades //P8

## Mas: "som un dels països que té més interioritzada la solidaritat"



El president Artur Mas assisteix a la setena edició del sopar solidari de Vallformosa contra el càncer juntament amb 400 persones //P32

# GuiaPenedès.cat

Descarrega l'app i tindràs tota la informació comercial, d'actualitat i cultural del Penedès a la teva butxaca

## Participa en el portal

Nova enquesta:  
Creus que la mobilització ciutadana serà clau per  
eliminar barreres arquitectòniques a Rodalies?



L'augment del  
mercat interior  
consolida les  
vendes de cava  
//P36

Els Tastavins  
homenatgen el  
cavista Josep  
Masachs  
//P38

ALT Penedès | Vins del Penedès a les llistes Parker

## Dos vins de Recaredo i Raventós i Blanc, els més ben valorats per Parker

// AL DAVANT Els dos cellers són els que han obtingut una millor puntuació de les empreses del Penedès

Eva López  
Sant Sadurní

La revista nord americana The Wine Advocate ha fet públiques aquest mes de juliol les puntuacions que el tastador Luis Gutiérrez involucrat en aquest projecte des de fa més de 2 anys ha donat als vins i caves catalans, que va provar en diferents sessions de tast organitzades a finals de l'any passat. Gutiérrez, que és la segona vegada que confecciona aquestes llistes, ha valorat en aquesta ocasió 660 vins elaborats a les 11 DO's catalanes. El tastador ha escrit tres articles per parlar dels productes que s'elaboren al país, un dedicat exclusivament als vins de la DOQ Priorat, un altre que tracta els

vins escumosos, i un darrer en el qual fa un recorregut per la resta de denominacions de Catalunya.

Pel que fa als vins que s'elaboren al Penedès, els que han sigut mereixedors de les puntuacions més altes han estat un cava i un escumós. Com ja va passar l'any passat, Recaredo s'ha posicionat al capdavant del rànquig amb 96 punts, en aquesta ocasió amb el Recaredo Enoteca Reserva Particular 1999. L'any passat el més ben puntuat va ser el Turó d'en Mota.

Juntament amb Recaredo, l'altre celler que ha meregut una millor valoració ha estat Raventós i Blanc, a qui Luis Gutiérrez també ha donat 96 punts pel Raventós i Blanc Enoteca 20 anys. Aquesta firma també ha aconseguit posicionar un altre producte, el Raventós i

Blanc Enoteca Personal M. Raventós 202, amb 95 punts. De la Denominació d'Origen Penedès, els vins que han rebut una puntuació més alta han estat el Cargol Treu vi 2013 del celler Alemany i Corrió i el Nun Vinya dels Taus de Cal Raspallet. Ambdós vins blancs han estat valorats amb 94 punts.

Al final d'aquest article publicarem tots els vins valorats amb 93 o més punts.

### Priorat, al capdavant

La DOQ Priorat ha estat, un any més, la que ha obtingut millors puntuacions a la llista Parker. L'Ermita, d'Alvaro Palacios, és l'únic vi que ha arribat a la valoració màxima: 100 punts. Aquesta DO també és la que compta amb més mostres tastades (163) seguida del Penedès (106) i la DO Cava (96).

ALT I BAIX Penedès | Sindicats



La jornada de JARC va tenir lloc dimarts a Vinseum | JARC

## JARC diu que no acceptarà cap excepció al pagament de raïm a 30 dies

// CRÍTICA El sindicat considera que els cellers han tingut més de 5 anys per adaptar-se al marc legal

3d8  
Vilafranca

La cap sectorial de la vinya i el vi de JARC-COAG, Isabel Vidal, va presentar dimarts la jornada que l'organització agrària va organitzar al Vinseum de Vilafranca demanant que els cellers compleixin la normativa i no evadeixin la seva obligació de pagar el raïm als pagesos a 30 dies. Vidal també va reclamar que el preu que es pagui per la matèria primera respecti els interessos dels productors, i que tot quedés clarment fixat en un contracte previ formalitzat per escrit.

Al juliol de 2010, amb la publicació de la Llei estatal de mesures de lluita contra la morositat en les operacions comercials, JARC-COAG ja va demanar a les patronals del vi i del cava catalanes que col·laboressin per fer complir la primera normativa que estableix el termini de pagament dels productes agrícoles morosos o peribles.

Segons el sindicat, aquest important aspecte, que havia de contribuir al correcte manteniment del teixit productiu agrari català, "malauradament no ha estat fins al gener de 2014 que ha començat a respectar-se", amb

la publicació del règim sancionador establert a la Llei estatal per la Millora del Funcionament de la Cadena Alimentària. "Però, encara és més lamentable, que a hores d'ara, l'Administració de l'Estat rebí pressions per part dels compradors per reinterpretar o flexibilitzar la normativa segons els seus interessos", han dit des de JARC. Durant la jornada, José Miguel Herrero, director de l'Agència d'Informació i Control de la

Cadena Alimentària (AICA), organisme depenent del Ministeri d'Agricultura encarregat de vetllar pel compliment de la llei, també va exposar l'obligatorietat de formalitzar contractes de venda per escrit previs a l'entrega del producte, en els quals es defineixi el preu, inclosos els possibles descomptes determinats en funció de factors objectius i verificables, i el termini de pagament.

### Poca capacitat de pressió

Per la seva banda, Francesc Boronat, president de JARC-COAG, va cloure l'acte, agraint al director de l'AICA la feina feta, però demanant-li també un màxim esforç per controlar i sancionar d'ofici les conductes contràries a la normativa.

Boronat va recordar que els productors tenen escassa capacitat de pressió per fer valdre els seus interessos i en molts casos depenen dels ingressos aconseguits en una única venda, concentrada en un període de temps concret. A més, el president va apuntar que els agricultors es veuen obligats a vendre tota la seva producció (productes peribles), no poden premer cap botó per reduir-la ni aturar-la, i per tant, "demanar-los que denuncin als seus compradors és excessiu", va dir.

## Multes per les empreses

La sanció establerta per no formalitzar un contracte escrit, o no incloure els requisits mínims que ha de contenir, s'eleva fins als 3.000 euros (lleu). D'altra banda, si s'incompleixen els terminis de pagament, la quantia es podria elevar fins als 100.000 euros (sanció greu), i la reincidència en la comissió de dues o més infraccions greus en el termini dos anys, a comptar des de la sanció per resolució ferma, podria disparar la quantia fins al milió d'euros.

### ELS VINS DE LA DO CAVA I LA DO PENEDÈS MÉS VALORATS PER PARKER

VI	ANYADA	COLOR	DO	PUNTS
Recaredo Enoteca Reserva Particular	1999	Blanc	Cava	96
Raventós i Blanc Enoteca 20 anys	1996	Blanc	Sense DO	96
Mestres Clos Damiana	2000	Blanc	Cava	95
Raventós i Blanc Enoteca Personal M. Raventós	2002	Blanc	Sense DO	95
Recaredo Turó d'en Mota	2003	Blanc	Cava	95
Gramona Celler Batlle Gran Reserva Brut	2005	Blanc	Cava	94
Gramona Enoteca Brut Nature	2001	Blanc	Cava	94
Loxarel 109 Reserva Brut Nature	2004	Blanc	Cava	94
Mestres Mas Via Millesimé Gran Reserva Premium	2002	Blanc	Cava	94
Alemany i Corrió Cargol Treu vi	2013	Blanc	Penedès	94
Cal Raspallet Nun Vinya dels Taus	2013	Blanc	Penedès	94
Recaredo Brut de Brut Gran Reserva B.N.	2006	Blanc	Cava	93+
Torelló Gran Torelló Gran Reserva Grandes Añadas	2008	Blanc	Cava	93+
Agustí Torelló Mata Kripta - Gran anyada	2006	Blanc	Cava	93
Gramona Enoteca Gramona Brut	2001	Blanc	Cava	93
Gramona Tres Llustros Gran Reserva Brut Nature	2007	Blanc	Cava	93
Mestres Clos Damiana	2004	Blanc	Cava	93
Naveran Perles Blanques Cuvée Antonia	2012	Blanc	Cava	93
Alemany i Corrió Sot Lefric	2012	Negre	Penedès	93
Cal Raspallet Espenyadelluchs	2013	Blanc	Penedès	93
Can Ràfols dels Caus La Calma White	2011	Blanc	Penedès	93
Can Ràfols dels Caus Sumoll	2011	Negre	Penedès	93
Can Ràfols dels Caus Xarel·lo Pairal	2009	Blanc	Penedès	93
Loxarel Gran Reserva de família	2009	Escumós	Penedès	93
Pardas Collita Roja	2012	Negre	Penedès	93