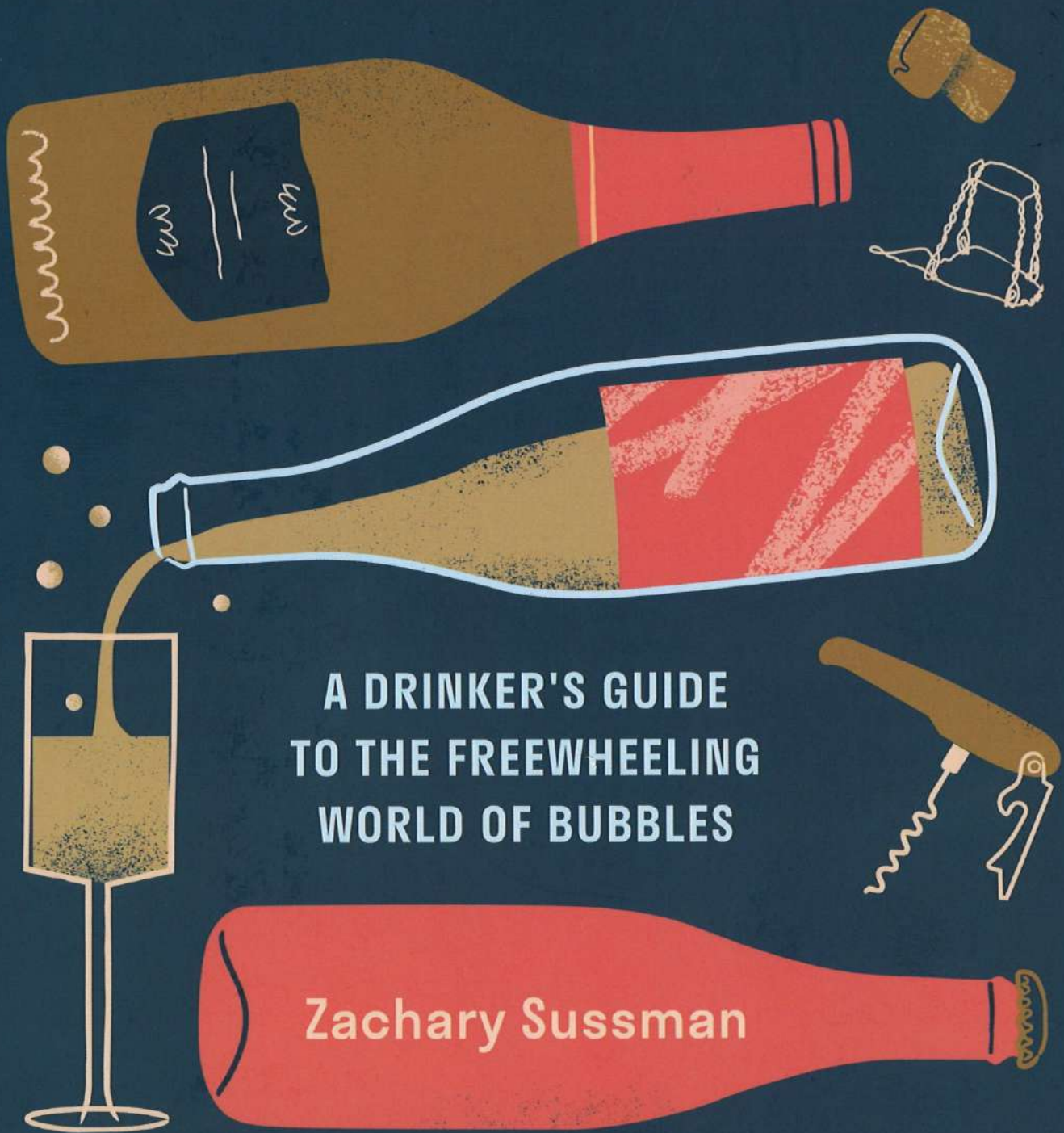


SPARKLING WINE for Modern Times



A DRINKER'S GUIDE
TO THE FREEWHEELING
WORLD OF BUBBLES

Zachary Sussman

known as “Mr. Bubbles,” Aviñó served for seventeen years as the technical director of one of the region’s large Cava houses before returning to his family property to craft some of Spain’s edgiest wines. While his single-parcel Champagne-method sparklers have won plenty of accolades, his elevated takes on the ancestral method have inspired a generation of practitioners, including natural-wine luminaries such as Massimo Marchiori and Antonella Gerosa of Partida Creus and Finca Parera’s Rubèn Parera.

The Catalan examples of what was once labeled a party wine require a different name, as they represent the invention of a new style of sparkling wine. In addition to disgorging for greater transparency, one of the hallmarks of Catalonia’s ambitious new take on pét-nat involves unusually long aging on the lees, sometimes exceeding seven years—a practice typically associated with the great Champagne-method wines of the world but virtually unheard of for the ancestral method.

The result? Truly unclassifiable sparkling wines that combine the savory depth and complexity of top grower Cava (or, for that matter, Champagne) with the raw energy of pét-nat. It’s a synthesis that could have arisen only in Penedès, where the joint insurgency against industrial winemaking has converged into something fearlessly independent and entirely its own.

PRODUCERS TO KNOW

Anima Mundi	Finca Parera
AT Roca	German Gilibert
Azimut	Loxarel
Bohigas	Mas Candí
Castelloig	Mata i Coloma
Celler la Salada	Partida Creus
Cellers de Can Suriol del Castell	Raventos i Blanc
Clos Lentiscus	Recaredo

The Wine List

Mata i Coloma “Cupada No. 22” Cava Brut Nature Reserva (\$)

After a career consulting for conventional wineries, winemaker Pere Mata now grows five hectares of organically farmed vines in the classic Cava village of Sant Sadurní d’Anoia. This bottling offers everything you could desire from a wine at this price point, combining rich flavors of burnt lemon and candied ginger with lively acidity that keeps things fresh.

Recaredo “Terrers” Brut Nature Corpinnat (\$\$)

The original archetype for Alt Penedès, the arch-traditional Recaredo estate has been organically farmed since its inception in 1924. Taut and linear with a core of yellow plums, pastry dough, and scrubby herbs, its flagship Terrers is culled from several different parcels and epitomizes the domaine’s vision for single-vintage brut nature wines marked by extended aging on the lees.

Clos Lentiscus “Greco di Subur” Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature (\$\$)

Though his groundbreaking pét-nats shouldn’t be missed, Manel Aviñó’s Champagne method–take on the rare malvasia de Sitges grape showcases his mastery of classical forms. Wildly aromatic (think rosemary and thyme) and full of raw intensity, it’s always one of the region’s standouts, cut through with chiseled acidity and a fennel-like pop of freshness.

fame) accounts for nearly 80 percent of total Cava exports. But much like the grower rebellion that upended Champagne's established balance of power, Penedès now finds itself the battleground of a sparkling wine revolution of its own. The parallels between this emerging Catalanian counterculture and the grower uprising in Champagne are hard to ignore, involving a similar indie-versus-major-record-label struggle between growers and the big houses that still dominate production. But the situation unfolding across Cava country is more than the usual story of traditionalists upending corporate interest and returning to the soil.

Coinciding with this revival, Catalonia has emerged as an epicenter of Spain's natural wine movement, fostering a radical counterculture. The dialogue between these two factions has energized the region as a whole, inviting a deeper debate about what kind of wine tells its story best. In short, Cava has become a microcosm for the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of postmodern sparkling wine.

In fairness, there have always been Cavas that aspired toward a more expansive standard—generally vintage-dated wines labeled as *gran reserva*, which are aged for at least thirty months on the lees (though many winemakers opt for far longer). To some critics, however, this emphasis on process never addressed the fundamental problem of place. All too often, especially when interpreted by the large commercial Cava houses, these high-end versions read as little more than an excuse to charge a luxury premium. As a result, in the past decade many of the area's most conscientious producers have chosen to take matters into their own hands, radically rethinking what it means to make sparkling wine in Penedès.

The New Cava Isn't Called Cava

The first shot across the ideological bow came in 2012, when one influential Cava maker, Pepe Raventós of the cult Raventós i Blanc estate, outlined his plans to abandon the Cava denomination, choosing instead to adopt a regional designation of his own invention, *Conca del Riu Anoia*. News of this defection sent shock waves through the region, and other splinter groups soon followed, including a band of top Cava producers who formed the *Corpinnat* association in 2015.

Hence, the irony behind the Cava renaissance. Many of the top versions no longer bill themselves as Cava. Rather than raze the legendary category to the ground, they're trying to reframe it as a reflection of Penedès and its centuries-old culture of sparkling wine.

Along with the embrace of organic and biodynamic farming and a strict focus on the region's native grapes (from the classic Cava varieties of *xarel·lo*, *macabeo*, and *parellada* to such lesser-known examples as the red *sumoll* and *trepal*), much of the region's evolution mirrors Champagne's grower approach: natural grape juice in place of cane sugar to kick-start secondary fermentations; a proliferation of brut nature or *zéro dosage* bottlings; and the rise of single-vineyard, vintage-dated wines. The goal, of course, is not to emulate Champagne but rather to identify a style that's true to Penedès.

Consider the *Corpinnat* sparklers from *Mas Candí*, a project that began as a collaboration among vine-grower Ramón Jané; his wife, Mercè Cusco; and enologist Toni Carbó. Having sold his family's grapes to the big Cava houses for generations, Jané started bottling his own wines in 2006. A reference point for Penedès's new wave, the winery's bracingly mineral yet concentrated "*Segunyola*," sourced from a single parcel of sixty-year-old *xarel·lo* vines, exudes a palpable energy—all ripe yellow fruits and Mediterranean herbs.

Mas Candí's example is just one of many. But like many of their peers, this grower Cava framework isn't the only one in which Jané and Carbó have chosen to operate. Both belong to a growing cohort of naturalists who, through their fluency with traditional-method winemaking, are elevating *pét-nat* to unprecedented heights.

Penedès Pét-Nat: The Next Generation of Iberian Bubbly

Perhaps it's inevitable that Catalonia, with its deeply ingrained culture of sparkling wine, would emerge as the source of some of the most ambitious *pét-nats* made anywhere. No one has done more to reconceive the style than Manel Aviñó of the biodynamic *Clos Lentiscus* winery. Locally

A History of Sparkling Wine



1531

Monks in Abbey of Saint-Hilaire, in the Limoux region, invent the world's first sparkling wine, now Blanquette de Limoux, made in the ancestral method.



1729

Ruinart, the oldest established Champagne house, is founded.



1816

Madame Clicquot of Veuve Clicquot invents the riddling process to remove yeast after secondary fermentation, resulting in the first *méthode champenoise* wine.



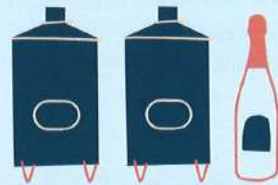
1872

Josep Raventós makes the first traditional-method wine in Penedès, Catalonia, under the Cordoníu label, called Champán (eventually becoming Cava).



1892

Paul Masson released his first "California Champagne."



1895

Federico Martinotti, a Piedmontese, patents the tank, or Marinotti, method (further developed by Frenchman Eugène Charmat in 1910), paving the way for the modern Prosecco boom.



1961

First Franciacorta sparkling wine is made by Guido Berlucchi winery.



1965

Jack and Jamie Davies purchase Schramsberg Vineyards in Calistoga, California.



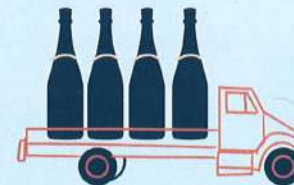
1969

Riunite corporation establishes an outpost in the United States, sparking the Lambrusco craze of the 1970s.



1979

Krug creates the first single-vineyard Champagne, its iconic Clos du Mesnil.



Early to mid-1990s

The first "Grower Champagnes" begin to arrive in the US market, thanks to the work of boutique importers such as Terry Theise, Kermit Lynch, and several others.



Late 1990s

Christian Chaussard coins the term *pét-nat* in France's Loire Valley.