

Wine Spectator



Spanish Bubbly

Cava is only the start when it comes to Spain's delicious, affordable sparkling wines

Sparkling wines from regions around the globe are finding success with wine lovers who enjoy adding effervescence to occasions both small and large. While Spanish sparklers have long been recognized for their fair prices, many producers have also upped their game in terms of quality, securing these wines a firm foothold as global demand for bubbly rises.

Although many bottles of Spanish **sparkling wine** can be found for as little as \$10 to \$12, the sweet spot is really between \$20 and \$30. This price range gives consumers access to versions with additional aging, labeled as *reserva* or *gran reserva*, as well as higher-end introductory bottlings.

Most wine drinkers are familiar with **Cava**, a Denominación de Origen officially established in 1972 but produced in Spain as early as the 1870s. Cavas are made using the same traditional method of sparkling wine production as **Champagne**: **Secondary fermentation** (and the creation of the bubbles) takes place in the bottle sold to the consumer. For many years only three indigenous varieties—Xarel-lo, Parellada and Macabeo—were allowed in the Cava blend; today, other Spanish and international grapes are permitted, including Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The Cava DO allows for wine made from grapes harvested in four primary zones that are widely spread out across Spain, but in reality, around 90 percent of Cava is produced in the northeastern region of Penedès.

Cheap and cheerful versions of Cava at lower price points continue to make up the bulk of the marketplace. However, about 10 to 20 years ago, a number of producers began to question the Cava DO and call for more stringent regulations. This marked an evolution among Spanish sparkling producers that's still ongoing. Most notably, Corpinnat was established in 2017. This association of six wineries elected to leave the Cava DO, pledging to produce their wines with an elevated set of benchmarks, including manual harvesting, longer aging regimens and grapes sourced from estate-owned, **organically farmed vineyards**.

Other producers either chose to continue labeling their wines as Cavas or selected neither Cava nor Corpinnat. Today, many of the best of these two groups follow some or all of the Corpinnat mandates. In my opinion, the upheaval of wineries leaving the Cava DO behind has been a good thing overall for Spanish bubbly. This process has encouraged producers both inside and outside of the Cava DO to question their decisions and push a little harder.

Spain's Mediterranean climate tends to produce a rounder, more accessible style of sparkling wine. But from serious, quality-oriented producers—those that explore the country's *terroirs*, the complexities of bottle-aged bubbly and more—these sparklers can offer true bang for your buck.—A.N.

HOT TIP

Low or no **dosage** bubbly—often labeled as **extra brut** or **brut nature**—is a trendy category for sparkling wine, yet these types of sparklers from more northerly regions can sometimes seem austere. However, Spain's warmer conditions (and the ripe fruit they produce) yield harmonious examples that shine brightly without the need for added sugar.

Alison Napjus' Smart Buys in Spanish Bubbly

Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc Extra Brut Vino Espumoso de la Finca 2020 (92, \$39)

Recaredo Mata Casanovas Brut Nature Rosat Vino Espumoso Corpinnat Intens 2018 (92, \$40)

Recaredo Mata Casanovas Brut Nature Vino Espumoso Corpinnat Terrers 2017 (92, \$40)

Juvé y Camps Brut Nature Cava Reserva de la Familia Gran Reserva 2018 (91, \$23)

Roger Goulart Extra Brut Cava Gran Reserva 2019 (91, \$27)

Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc Extra Brut Blanc de Blancs Vino Espumoso 2021 (90, \$24)

Roger Goulart Brut Cava Organic Reserva 2020 (90, \$25)

Torelló Llopart Brut Nature Vino Espumoso Corpinnat Tradicional 2015 (90, \$29)

Bodegas Muga Brut Cava Conde de Haro Reserva 2019 (90, \$30)

Llopart Brut Rosé Vino Espumoso Corpinnat Reserva 2020 (90, \$35)

Agustí Torelló Brut Cava Mata Reserva 2018 (89, \$23)

Heretat Mestres Brut Nature Cava Coquet Gran Reserva 2018 (88, \$29)