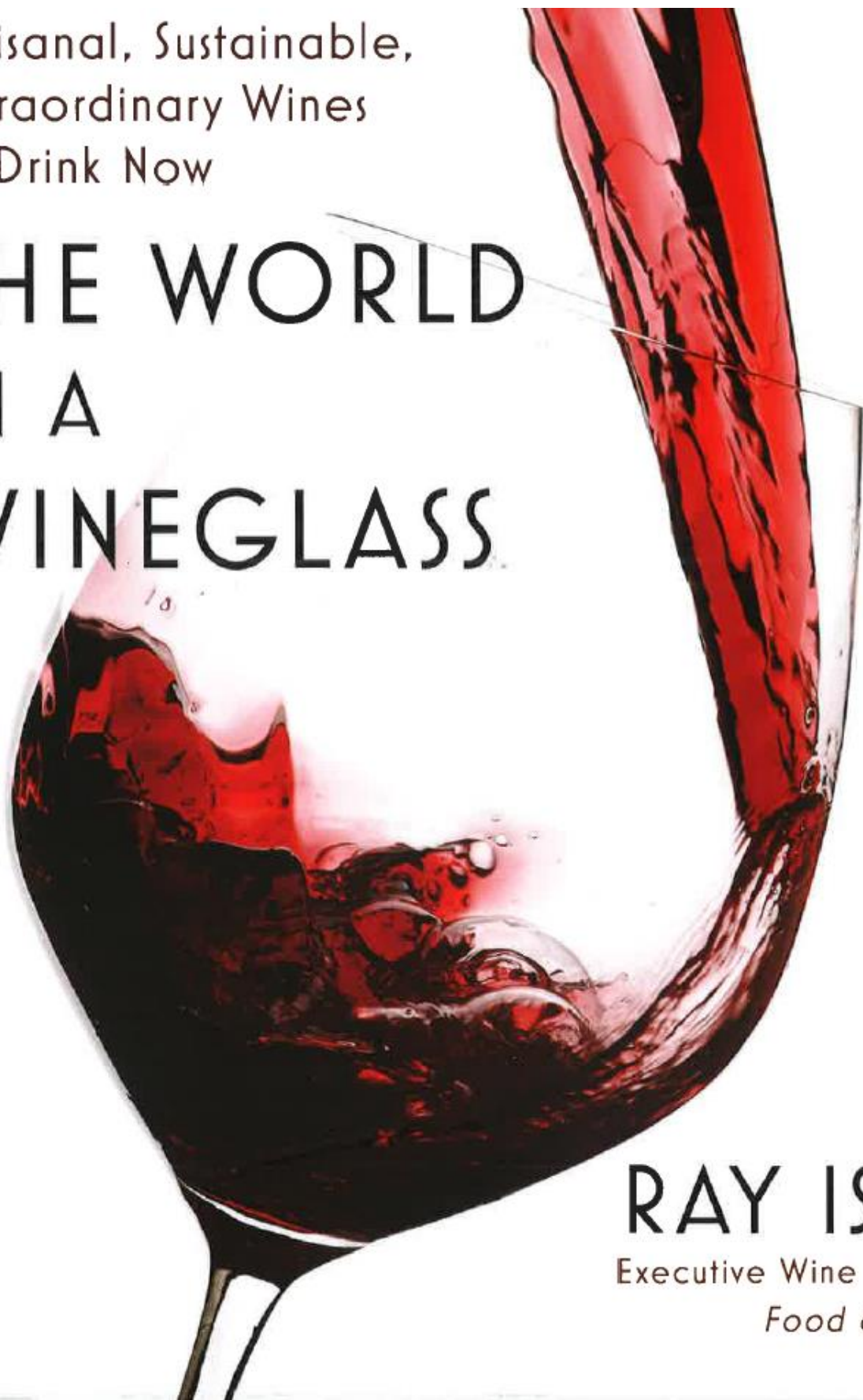


Artisanal, Sustainable,
Extraordinary Wines
to Drink Now

THE WORLD IN A WINEGLASS



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variety called Cana Vellas, Barbier Meyer says, is known locally as “Old Lady Strangler.”) Aromatically Nelin suggests dry straw from a little skin contact, stone fruits, a tiny oxidative note; on the palate, it’s savory, salty, complex. **Clos Mogador (\$\$\$)** itself is 55 percent Grenache (“such an amiable, delightful grape,” Barbier Sr.

says), 25 percent Carignan, 10 percent Syrah, and 10 percent Cabernet Sauvignon. It still has the deep, dark cherry fruit of Priorat Grenache, with pepper, baking spice, and violet aromatics. But it is fresh, bright, and lifted, with fine, chewy tannins and the Priorat’s schist-driven minerality on the end.

RAVENTÓS I BLANC / CAN SUMOI • Penedès

[certified organic / certified biodynamic]

Occasionally, your donkey wanders off. It’s one of those things—some days it rains, some days are windy, some days the donkey ends up at the *Café de la Plaça* in the middle of town. Perhaps in small Catalan towns like Sant Sadurní d’Anoia, donkeys sometimes feel a late-afternoon desire for good coffee; who can say? Regardless, when the donkey wanders off, you go get it.

It was when Manuel Raventós, who co-owns Raventós i Blanc with his son Pepe, went to retrieve the donkey that he got what he refers to as a “dark look” from one of the old men at the bar. The men are at the *Café de la Plaça* every day. It’s where they go to

drink coffee and talk about the world. But on this day in 2012, Manuel felt that the dark look seemed to be saying, “You are betraying Cava and betraying Sant Sadurní!”

The reason for that look was Manuel and his son Pepe’s decision in 2012 to quit the Cava denomination of origin and to stop labeling any of their wines as Cava. Instead, their intent was to create a new appellation, *Conca del Riu Anoia*, and also to prove that Penedès could make world-class sparkling wines on par with Champagne. The *Conca del Riu Anoia* appellation would have much more stringent rules than Cava. Among them were

that grapes would have to be grown organically or biodynamically (almost all Cava vineyards are conventionally farmed), the wines aged at least eighteen months (Cava requires nine), and every wine would need to be vintage dated (much Cava is non-vintage). "They're the strictest wine regulations in the world, including Champagne," Pepe Raventós said to me once, with pride.

This secessionist move also stirred controversy locally because the Raventós name is deeply, inextricably tied with Cava. In 1872, a member of the family created Spain's first sparkling wine. Codorníu, which the family cofounded (in 1551) and which relatives of Manuel and Pepe's still own, is one of the largest producers of affordable sparkling wine in the world. And Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc, Manuel's father, was instrumental in the creation of the Cava denomination in 1972.

Pepe says, "Look, Cava is a great value Spanish sparkling wine. But our dream is to help nature produce the best possible expression of mineral-driven sparkling wine. And the Cava name doesn't help anymore with that."

He and his father have the vineyards to make that happen. The land surrounding the Raventós i Blanc win-

ery has been in the Raventós family since the 1490s (or possibly before; the Black Plague wiped out most of Catalonia immediately prior to that, so records are thin). Pepe Raventós is the twenty-first generation to farm it. Leather-bound ledgers in the winery contain handwritten records of the family's wine business, back to the mid-1800s. Leafing through them is time travel, the entire history of Cava in neat black numbers, starting when it was known in Catalan as Xampáy; years of good harvests and bad; boom sales during wartime (Pepe's great-grandfather realized early on that whenever the Germans started a war, one of the first things they did was overrun Champagne); visits from Spain's king.

Pepe Raventós's most recent project is Can Sumoi, a joint venture with his childhood friend Francesc Escala. In 2016, the two discovered a dilapidated estate two thousand feet up in the Sierra de l'Home mountains and set about rehabilitating it. The focus here is natural wines, from seventy-five acres of old-vine Montonega, Xarel·lo, and Sumoll. If you visit, it feels like a step back in time. The place is isolated, the vines are ancient, and the farmhouses on the property, largely

untouched, date back to the end of the seventeenth century. The wines echo that pre-industrial sense. The farming is biodynamic (as it is at Raventós i Blanc), the winemaking uses little or no sulfur, indigenous yeasts, no additives or filtration, and is as low-intervention as humanly possible.

Unlike most Cava, all Raventós i Blanc sparkling wines are vintage dated. The **Raventós i Blanc Blanc de Blancs (\$\$)**, from organically farmed, thirty-year-old vines, is pale gold in hue, delicate, and aromatic; it has the apple-citrus notes typical of Cava, but with a finesse that recalls Champagne. **De Nit (\$\$)**, a rosé, is streamlined and elegant, with a floral-citrus aroma and a light yeasty note. **De La Finca (\$\$)** comes from the best sections of the estate vineyards. Aged for thirty-two months before release, it has aromas and flavors of nuts and toast in addition to citrus fruit, but more importantly, it's distinctive: clearly a wine that expresses the place it comes from. **Textures de Pedra (\$\$\$)** comes from the highest-altitude vines on the estate and is beautifully fragrant, with peach and toast aromas and flavors. Finally,

"What I'm trying to do, it's not the highway," Pepe Raventós says, about both Raventós i Blanc and Can Sumoi. "It's the little road. It's steep, and it takes time. And this place, where we are, has so much potential. I am convinced of that. We're going to make wines so good they will make you cry."

there's the extremely small production **Raventós i Blanc Manuel Raventós (\$\$\$)**, which is aged for seven years in the bottle. It satisfies the question of whether the Raventós wines have the capacity to age like top Champagne: they do.

The **Can Sumoi Ancestral Montonega (\$\$)** is a *pètil·lant naturel* (or *pèt-nat*) made from a local clone of Parellada. It's floral, lightly fizzy, and refreshing. **La Rosa (\$\$)** blends Sumoll, Montonega, and Xarel·lo for a pale orange-pink wine that's citrusy, chalky, silky, and lasting. **Perfum (\$\$)** is an unusual white blend of Malvasia, Macabeu, Moscatel, and Montonega that's aptly named; it's floral and fragrant, a pleasure to drink. And the **Xarel·lo (\$\$)**, from two different plots on the estate, offers electric acidity laced with green apple and herb notes.