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FOOD & WINE

ADVICE

Hey LCBO, what about Cava?

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I'm not talking about the sub-\$15, entry-level Cava always on shelves in Ontario and elsewhere. Those budget bottlings are just the sort of uninspiring wines that gave Cava its reputation for mediocrity. I'm talking about Reserva, Gran Reserva wines and beyond — as well as new Cava-style wines labelled Corpinnat and Conca del Riu Anoaia. At these more premium levels, big changes are afoot.

The body governing Cava production — Cava DO — recently introduced a new top-tier, single vineyard category called Cava del Paraje Calificado and plans to tighten regulations around where and how all Cava is made. Wineries are expanding their portfolios to offer higher-end Cavas that cost around \$200 a pop. And some premium-minded producers have broken ties with the Cava DO altogether to focus on site-specific, Cava-style wines using organic, hand-harvested fruit and other labour-intensive winemaking methods to tease the best flavour from the terroir. Producer Raventos i Blanc, credited with making the first Cava in 1872, broke from the Cava DO in 2012 to launch a new sparkling wine appellation called Conca del Riu Anoaia. And in 2017, nine other wineries banded together to make high-quality, terroir-driven, Cava-style wine called “Corpinnat.”

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Of course Cava, even at the top end, is not a wine for everyone. It suits those with a taste for lean, dry, mineral styles with an earthy undertow. It tastes nothing like, say, Champagne or Prosecco, largely because it's made from Spanish grape varieties, including Macabeo, Parallada and Xarel-lo. These varieties impart more savoury aromas and flavours than, say, the apple-lemon character of Chardonnay-based Champagnes, Cremants and many New World bubbliies. And Cava tastes nothing like the more industrially-produced Prosecco, which is made from Glera grapes with its distinctive pear-like character. But a carefully crafted Cava can offer the elegance, delicacy and ageability of a truly great sparkling wine.

Here in Ontario, we don't see a lot of Cavas at the LCBO. But the liquor giant said in an emailed statement that it plans to expand its selection in early 2020 by listing four new labels — including Vilarnau Brut Reserva, Perelada Stars Brut Nature Reserva Cava, Muga Conde de Haro Cava, and Marques de La Concordia Cava MM Reserva Rosé.

It's heartening to see more Cavas coming into the LCBO — especially the Vilarnau Brut Reserva, which is quite good for about \$15. But these listings aren't top bottlings, which is where the big strides in quality are most evident. And at this stage, the most premium cuvees are only available through wine agents that import wine and sell directly to consumers.



quality being made at the top end of the category, here are some wines available to order through agents—starting with a sampler-style “gift pack” of three wines that can arrive in time for New Year’s Eve.

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Available in time for New Year’s Eve

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2017 Raventos i Blanc, Blanc de Blancs, Conca Del Diu Anolia, Penedes, Catalonia



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expression is lean, linear, and elegant, unravelling with delicate nuances of seashell, salt, and white flowers, as well as lemon pith and fresh bread. Long. Very dry. Score: 92

2015 Raventos i Blanc De la Finca “Vinya dels Fossils,” Conca Del Diu Anolia, Penedes, Catalonia

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Deeply aromatic with scents of crushed stones, seaspray and a touch of dried herbs and wildflowers. The attack is clean and saline, but very restrained and complex with a dry stoniness shot through with beam-like acidity and quiet, sophisticated complexity. Impeccable balance. Bone dry. Score: 94

2017 Raventos i Blanc “De Nit” Conca Del Diu Anolia, Penedes, Catalonia

This salmon-hued wine bursts with scents of crushed seashell, a touch of pear, and a whisper of orange zest. The attack is brisk and refreshing with all of the scents echoing on the palate delicately. An understated tapestry of flavours. Dry. Long. Score: 92

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(But not in time for New Year’s Eve)

