

vinography

a wine blog

JULY 24, 2021 — SPARKLING WINE, WINE REVIEWS

Vinography Unboxed: Week of 7/18/21



Hello and welcome to my weekly dig through the pile of wine samples that show up asking to be tasted. I'm pleased to bring you the latest installment of Vinography Unboxed, where I highlight some of the better bottles that have crossed my doorstep recently.

This week is sparkling week on Unboxed. I'll be honest, the sparkling wine samples tend to pile up in a corner, as they're just slightly more of a pain to deal with than normal wine samples, and so after a period of time, the guilt gets to me and I have to do a bit of a sparkling purge. So here goes!

Let's start with the, as usual, peerless set of sparkling wines from **Raventòs i Blanc**, the Spanish family wine estate that has been producing wines since 1497. For a long time, the family made Cava, the typical sparkling wine of the Penedès region of Spain. While they never stopped making sparkling wine, they did stop calling it Cava back in 2012 because they felt the rules for the Cava designation no longer allowed them to produce the best wine they could, the way they wanted to make it, in particular with a place of origin that is more specific than Cava. So now they're the world's best producer of *Vino Espumosa de España*, which they label with what they hope is one day their official appellation "Conca Del Riu Anoia." This week I've got their three primary sparkling wines to share.

The "De la Finca" (literally from the farm) is a traditional blend of the three primary Cava grapes: Xarel-lo, Macabeo, and Parrellada grown on clay over marine sediments (aka limestone) and from the estate's oldest vines, planted in 1964 in a vineyard they call "Vineyard of the Fossils." This wine spends 3 years on the lees, and is a lovely balance between fruit and more autolytic characteristics.

The "Textures de Pedra" (literally textures of stone) is an extremely unusual blend of 3 red(dish) grapes, a mutation of Xarel-lo that they call Xarel-lo Vermell that ends up with darker pink/red colored skins instead of green, along with two other rare local Penedes varieties, Bastard Negre and Sumoll. It's got an unusual spiced character that I really like.

And finally their "Manuel Raventòs Negra" is a blend of Xarel-lo and Sumoll that spends 6 years aging on the lees in the bottle before release, and it's a full-on mouthwatering glass of complexity and refinement that can easily compete with top Champagnes.

We're going to take a mini global journey through sparkling wine this week, it seems, with our next stop in Germany, where Ernie Loosen makes a sparkling Riesling under the Dr. Loosen label. He makes several, actually, but this "Extra Dry" version is tasty, fruity bottle with an extremely attractive price tag.

Jumping to Burgundy, you can check out Nicolas Potel's **Maison Roche de Bellene** Cremant de Bourgogne, which is also just as pleasurable and easy on the pocketbook.

From Italy, we've got a couple of Prosecco's this week, a straightforward apple and white flowers rendition from Corvezzo and another rosé Prosecco (I wrote about this new category of wine not too long ago) full of strawberries and cream from Bisol.

Perhaps the most exotic wine this week was the Keush "Origins" sparkling wine from Armenia, whose blend of Voskehat and Khatouni offers something decidedly different in terms of taste profile. Keush is a brand created by **Storica Wines**, which is an ambitious young company that has launched a number of brands to showcase the winemaking heritage and potential of Armenia.

Of course we've got regular Champagne this week too, with a solid bottle from **Piper-Heidsieck** that is on the rich side, but definitely satisfying.

From here in California, another star this week was the Caraccioli "Brut Cuvee" which, frankly, knocked my socks off a little. I've been hearing great things about this producer but hadn't managed to try any of their wines yet, and... wow. **Caraccioli Cellars** started when the third generation of Caracciolis to farm in the Salinas Valley decided in 2006 that they wanted to expand into winegrowing. But not just any winegrowing. They could

easily have just made another Pinot Noir from the Santa Lucia Highlands (and they do, in fact, produce still wines, too), but instead they decided to make a world-class sparkling wine from those grapes. They took their time (literally, making sure they gave the wine a long aging time on the lees) and ended up with what is easily among California's best sparkling wines.

There's also a nice rosé from **Cuvaison** and a surprising one from **Notre Vue Estate**, which managed to make a really tasty pink sparkling wine from a blend of Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvedre, which was a first for me.

Lastly, we've got a rosé from one of the top names in English Fizz (or British Bubbly if that appeals more), **Nyetimber**, whose non-vintage pink wine has a crunchy autumnal quality to it that appeals.

Well, there you have it. A smorgasbord of sparkling wines, which I'll wrap up with a simple reminder: sparkling wines are not just for special occasions. They're for celebrating the fact that we're lucky enough to drink wine whenever we want to.

Tasting Notes

2017 Raventós i Blanc “De La Finca – Vinya dels Fòssils” Cava Blend, Spain

Light-gold in the glass with a hint of green and medium-sized bubbles, this wine smells of honey, toasted bread, and apples. In the mouth, apples, buttered brioche, and a wonderful saline quality all offer a rich and sumptuous melange of flavors. Soft, full mousse, and excellent acidity. A blend of Macabeo, Xarel-lo, and Parrellada ages for 3 years on the lees and is bottled with no dosage. 12% alcohol. Score: between **8.5** and **9**. Cost: \$30. [click to buy](#).

2016 Raventós i Blanc “Textures de Pedra Blanc de Negres – Vinya Més Alta” Sparkling Wine, Spain

Light to medium gold in the glass with a hint of a peachy cast and medium bubbles, this wine smells of baked apples and white flowers with a bit of spice. In the mouth a full, velvety mousse delivers flavors of orange peel, mulling spices, and citrus pith. Hints of dried herbs linger in the finish along with a distinct mineral note. Unusual and distinctive. A blend of Xarel-lo Vermell (a dusky variation on the normally white Xarel-lo), Bastard Negre (not to be confused with Bastardo), and Sumoll that ages for 42 months on the lees with no dosage. 12% alcohol. Score: between **8.5** and **9**. Cost: \$45. [click to buy](#).

2013 Raventós i Blanc “Manuel Raventós Negra” Cava Blend, Spain

Light gold in the glass with fine bubbles, this wine smells of sea air and buttered brioche. In the mouth, a silky mousse delivers flavors of baked apples, citrus pith, sea air, and toasted brioche. Wonderful citrus pith notes linger in the finish. Refined and very pretty. An unusual blend of 40% Xarel-lo and 60% of a local variety called Sumoll (previous vintages of this wine have been 100% Xarel-lo). Ages for six years on the lees. Disgorged in December of 2020. 11.8% alcohol. Score: between **9** and **9.5**. Cost: \$100. [click to buy](#).



NV Dr. Loosen “Extra Dry” Riesling Sekt, Germany

Pale greenish gold in the glass with medium-fine bubbles, this wine smells of candied green apples and mandarin oranges. In the mouth, faintly sweet flavors of apple, mandarin orange, and honeysuckle ultimate finish dry as a voluminous mousse sweeps across the palate leaving it crisply clean and floral. Pretty. 12% alcohol. Score: around **8.5**. Cost: \$20. [click to buy](#).

NV Maison Roche De Bellene “Cuvée Bellenos” Cremant de Bourgogne, Burgundy, France

Light gold with a slightly bronze cast and medium bubbles, this wine smells of honey and baked apples. In the mouth, notes of candied almonds, honey, and baked apples are delivered on a velvety mousse. Hints of bitter orange linger in the finish. Quite pleasant, with an autumnal quality that I really like. 12% alcohol. A blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Score: between **8.5** and **9**. Cost: \$23. [click to buy](#).

NV Corvezzo Prosecco, Veneto, Italy

Pale greenish gold in the glass with medium-sized bubbles, this wine smells of green apples, white flowers, and lemon cucumber. In the mouth, a soft-but-full mousse delivers flavors of apples, star, fruit, and white flowers, with just a faint bitterness of apple skin that lingers in the finish. 11.5% alcohol. Score: around **8.5**. Cost: \$18. [click to buy](#).

NV Keush “Origins – Brut” Sparkling Wine, Armenia

Pale yellow-gold in the glass with medium-sized bubbles, this wine smells of white flowers, celery, and a hint of sea air. In the mouth, lovely herbal notes mix with floral high tones as a cucumber and unripe apple note forms the core of the wine. Soft mousse. Quite interesting. A blend of 40% Khatouni and 60% Voskehat. 12% alcohol. Score: around **8.5**. Cost: \$20. [click to buy](#).

2015 Caraccioli “Brut Cuvée” Champagne Blend, Santa Lucia Highlands, Central Coast, California

Light gold in the glass with medium-fine bubbles, this wine smells of sea air, flowers, and a touch of warm bread. In the mouth, gorgeous citrus flavors are lifted on a velvety, voluminous mousse, and spread electrically to every corner of the mouth thanks to fantastic acidity. There’s just a touch of brioche blended in there with the citrus pith along with a faint hint of bergamot. Quite stunning. A blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. 20% of the wine is barrel fermented. Then once the final blend is made, 20% ages in steel, the remaining 80% in barrels for two months before bottling for the secondary fermentation. The wine spends 4 years on the lees in the bottle before disgorging. 8 g/l dosage. 12% alcohol. Score: between **9** and **9.5**. Cost: \$53. [click to buy](#).

NV Piper-Heidsieck “Cuvée Brut” Champagne Blend, Champagne, France

Light to medium yellow-gold in the glass with medium-fine bubbles, this wine smells of sea air, ripe apples, and a touch of butterscotch. In the mouth, saline flavors of butterscotch, baked apple, and lemon bars are delivered on a reasonably soft mousse and backed by excellent acidity. There’s a faint bitterness that lingers in the finish. Slightly ripe for my taste, but has a nice leesy note to it. A blend of 60% Pinot Noir, 25% Pinot Meunier, and 15% Chardonnay that ages for a full 24 months on the lees before disgorgement. 12% alcohol. Score: between **8.5** and **9**. Cost: \$39. [click to buy](#).

2017 Cuvaison “Brut” Rosé Champagne Blend, Los Carneros, Napa, California

A pale, peachy pink in color with very fine bubbles, this wine smells of strawberries and citrus peel. In the mouth, a velvety mousse delivers flavors of orange peel, grapefruit, and raspberries backed by a tart, citrusy acidity that lingers in the finish with a note of blood orange. 12% alcohol. Score: around **8.5**. Cost: \$50. [click to buy](#).

NV Nyetimber Sparkling Rosé, England

A bright orange-pink in the glass with medium-fine bubbles, this wine smells of dried apples and orange peel. In the mouth, a voluminous mousse swells across the palate and delivers orange peel, dried berries and dried apple flavors that have a nice bite, thanks to excellent acidity. There’s a faint bitterness of burnt orange that lingers in the finish. The fruit comes from West Sussex and Hampshire, and is a blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. About 80-90% of the wine is current vintage, with the balance being reserve wines from previous vintages. Ends up with usually 11 g/l of residual sugar. 12% alcohol. Score: around **8.5**. Cost: \$58. [click to buy](#).

2019 Notre Vue Sparkling Rosé, Chalk Hill, Sonoma, California

A light orangey-pink in color with medium-fine bubbles, this wine smells of strawberry jam and citrus peel. In the mouth, a velvety, full-bodied mousse delivers flavors of strawberry jam, tart citrus, and a hint of white flowers. While slightly on the rich side, this wine works pretty well. I’m not sure if I’ve ever had a sparkling blend of Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvedre, but I’d happily drink this wine and any others like it. 13.1% alcohol. Score: between **8.5** and **9**. Cost: \$45.

2020 Bisol “Jeio Brut” Prosecco Rosé, Prosecco, Veneto, Italy

Pale baby pink with a hint of orange and medium-fine bubbles, this wine smells of strawberries and flowers. In the mouth, a velvety mousse delivers flavors of strawberries and cream, white flowers, and a hint of citrus peel that adds a pleasing bitter kick to the finish. This is quite nice. 11% alcohol. Score: around **9**. Cost: \$18. [click to buy](#).