Forbes

Holiday Gift Guide 2024: The Best Catalan Wines To Transport You Back To Barcelona

This festive season, treat your favorite wine lover to a taste of some of the best wines from Catalonia, a region steeped in rich winemaking tradition.

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Catalonia may only be approximately the size of Maryland but the region in northwestern Spain, bordering southwest France and the Mediterranean, is home to 12 official designated wine regions (known as denominaciones de origen or D.O.s) and more than 300 wineries.

Top Wines From Catalonia

If you've ever visited Barcelona, the region's capital, you have no doubt sampled some of them, like a sparkling cava from Penedès, a mineral-rich white from Alella or a spicy, full-bodied red from Priorat.

To recall the authentic flavors of Barcelona this festive season, here are nine wine gifts from Catalonia to delight the wine connoisseur in your life.

Clos Galena Priorat, by Clos Galena

If you are a red wine lover who hasn't heard of Catalonia's Priorat wine region, you are missing out. The home of some of Spain's finest wineries and producer of the country's highest rated reds (along with Rioja, of course), this secluded part of Catalonia does not attract the international attention it deserves. Priorat reds are typically made from a blend of Grenache and Carignan grapes, resulting in wines that are powerful, yet at the same time sophisticated, and silky smooth. Like the Clos Galena winery's eponymous label, a mature wine with an intense, almost opaque, cherry color. Its aroma is complex, with notes of black fruit and balsamic. On the palate, Clos Galena is bulky and powerful.

Clos Galena Priorat. IMAGE COURTESY CLOS GALENA

Leopardi Brut Nature Gran Reserva, by Llopart

Llopart Leopardi Brut Nature Gran Reserva. IMAGE COURTESY LLOPART

You've no doubt tasted cava, but what about Corpinnat? This designation was founded in 2017 by an exclusive group of wineries from the Penedès region , in a bid to set a new quality standard for Spanish bubbles. Made by one of Corpinnat's original founders, Llopart, Leopardi pays homage to Bernardus Leopardi, the family's first winemaker, as documented in a recovered Latin parchment from 1385. The wine, which consistently gets a nod in the world's leading wine guides, has a seductive pale golden color, with very fine, delicate bubbles. It has a complex and fragrant aroma, and a balanced dry and smooth taste, which is rich in flavors due to its long aging.

Salmos, by Familia Torres

The Torres family is one of Spain's most prominent winemaking dynasties. Its wineries can be found across Catalonia, from Penedès, to Priorat and Costers del Segre, as well as in Spain (including Rioja and Ribera del Duero), and internationally in Chile and California. Salmos, a tribute to the monks of the Carthusian order who planted the first vines in Priorat in the 12th century, has a dark cherry color and an intense nose. Rich fruit and mature aromas intermingle with undertones of coconut and marzipan. Salmos is seductive on the palate, with fine, fragrant tannins that linger as the wine unfolds.

Reserva de la Familia Gran Reserva Brut Nature, by Juvé & Camps

The Juvé & Camps winery has been around for a cool two centuries and, over the years, its name has become synonymous with top-notch cava. Reserva de la Familia is its most personal cuvée, its great ambassador in the world of brut natures. The winemakers describe it as a wine created for "toasting at all those get-togethers where we eat and drink and share long conversations". Bright and golden, the wine is characterized by its tiny, tireless bubbles. It exudes aromas of ripe white fruit, like apple and Ercolina pears, alongside notes of citrus and hints of toasted bread. It is ample and pleasantly fresh on the palate, delightfully effervescent with a ripe fruit finish.

Vespres Montsant, by Josep Grau Viticultor

The well-rounded Grenache and Carignan-based reds produced by the wineries from the Montsant mountain range are similar to those from neighboring Priorat. The main difference is that Montsant wines are typically fresher and more affordable. This is why Montsant and Priorat are often described as two parts of a fried egg, where Montsant is the larger, more diluted egg white, and Priorat is the rich yolk. That said, there is nothing lightweight about the terroir-oriented wines produced by Montsant-based winemaker Josep Grau. Like his award-winning Vespres, with its distinctly Mediterranean character, fruity aroma, high minerality, silky texture, and fresh acidity. Vespres offers the kind of elegance, finesse and depth that has made this winery one of the undeniable leaders in this D.O.

Mirgin Cava Gran Reserva Brut Nature, by Alta Alella

Situated just a few miles from the Mediterranean coast and a 30-minute drive from central Barcelona, D.O. Alella is a fascinating wine region that is both coastal and suburban. It is best known for its white and sparkling wines, many of which are made from the local Pansa Blanca grapes (known elsewhere as Xarel.lo) that are defined by their freshness, salinity and minerality. Alta Alella is an organic winery that has emerged as something of a pioneer in the region. Made of the traditional Catalan cava blend of Xarel.lo (or Pansa Blanca, in this case), Macabeu and Parellada, Mirgin is a cava with fine bubbles and a pale yellow color with green hues. On the palate, it is light and fresh with white fruit aromas and delicate citrus and green almond

Jean Leon Vinya La Scala Cabernet Sauvignon Gran Reserva, by Jean Leon

The story of the Jean Leon winery is as downright delightful as the wine is quaffable. Jean Leon was a Spanish emigré-turned New York cab driver-turned Hollywood restaurateur. In 1962, Leon returned to Spain and set up a winery in Penedès on the outskirts of Barcelona, where he planted French grape varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay. His Vinya La Scala Cabernet Sauvignon, named after the Los Angeles restaurant he founded with actor James Dean, was served at Ronald Reagan's White House inauguration dinner in 1981. It has intense cherry jam aromas, accompanied by spicy notes and toasty, oak-imparted undertones. The palate is voluptuous and concentrated, with round tannins and balanced acidity.

De la Finca Brut Nature, by Raventos i Blanc

The Raventós i Blanc winery has one of the longest documented wine-growing traditions in the world. The farm where the wines are produced has belonged to the family since 1497. To date, twenty-one generations of Raventós heirs have worked this 90-hectare terroir in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia. De La Finca means from the estate and its 2021 vintage blends 50% Xarel.lo, 40% Macabeu and 10% Parellada grapes, mostly sourced from the sloped vineyards on the property known as Vinya dels Fòssils, or vineyard of the fossils. It is an aromatic, biodynamic wine with abundant small bubbles, which has a balsamic core of Mediterranean herbs, white flowers and fruit.

Raventos i Blanc De la Finca Brut Nature IMAGE COURTESY RAVENTOS I BLANC

Les Terrasses, by Álvaro Palacios

In any conversation about iconic Spanish winemakers, one name that always pops up is Álvaro Palacios. One of the leading figures behind the modern-day Priorat success story, Palacios makes wine across Spain, in regions like Rioja and Bierzo, but his most celebrated labels come from Priorat, where it all began. Les Terrasses is a simpler, more affordable version of Palacios' award-winning L'Ermita and Finca Dofí and, like all his greatest hits, blends power with elegance and perfect balance. Its complex aromas are floral, fruity and very subtly spicy with fine tannins and a distinctive minerality typical of Mediterranean wines.

Les Terrasses, Álvaro Palacios. IMAGE COURTESY ÁLVARO PALACIOS