RAVENTÓS i BLANC

Raventós i Blanc - The Wine Advocate #211
Valoració de Luis Gutiérrez (Febrer 2014)

Quan Raventós i Blanc va deixar la DO Cava; això va ser una alarma real. No son només un dels líders en qualitat en aquesta categoria, son també els descendents directes del creador del primer escumós a Espanya y el primer president de la DO Cava. No busquen refugi a la DO Penedès, sinó que volen promoure una nova apel·lació Conca del riu Anoia."

Enoteca Personal Manuel Raventós 2001, 95 punts

Coupage especial de 60% Xarel·lo i 40% Parellada de les vinyes del Clos del Serral i la Creueta del Coll (des de l'anyada 2007 en endavant el coupage serà únicament Xarel·lo), que envelleixen 7 anys en ampolla i en contacte amb les lies. Té un color brillant daurat, més fosc que l'anyada 2000, amb abundants notes de avellana torrada, fumats, pa torrat, mel i caramel. Te molta frescor, i encara s'hi poden trobar notes de fruites. En boca es compacte, equilibrat, elegant i complexa, amb bombolles gairebé imperceptibles que afegeixen textura i li donen frescor amb gran persistència, molt saborós i suau, com un caldo de pollastre, el sabor umami. Un gran Cava vell. Se'n van elaborar 7.958 ampolles, la majoria d'elles van ser desgorjades i venudes fa anys i només una petita part es va mantenir a bodega, les que ara s'ofereixen com Enoteca. Es pot beure des d'ara fins al 2019.

Enoteca Personal Manuel Raventós 2000, 93 punts

Enoteca Personal Manuel Raventos 2000 es un coupage Macabeu, Xarel.lo, Parellada i Chardonnay envellit durant deu anys en ampolla en contacte amb les lies. Ple de notes minerals i balsàmiques, amb un aroma subtil i bombolles molt petites, que es perceben com una textura de formigueig al paladar, deixant al descobert un gran equilibri i longitud. Només se'n van elaborar 855 ampolles. Per beure d'ara al 2018.

Silencis 2013, 92 punts

Silencis 2013, Xarel·lo pur, es caracteritza por una anyada freda. Es va veremar el 25 de setembre, data en la que s'acostumava a veremar el Xarel·lo fa 30 anys. Introdueix grans canvis respecte l'anyada 2013, com el no filtratge o clarificació del vi, així doncs, resulta un vi molt tèrbol, i reté una mica de gas, que li aporta una gran sensació de frescor. A banda d'això, es sent molt pur, viu i inclús m'atreviria a dir autèntic. Es com la nit i el dia entre 2012 i 2013. Notes de poma, fumats, a massa de pa salada, final mineral amb excel·lent acides i frescor. Àcid pur, suc de fruites amb una sensació elèctrica al paladar. Un magnífic Xarel·lo Mediterrani que es desenvoluparà be. Molt bon preu per tot el que ens aporta. Es pot beure d'ara fins el 2018.

De la Finca 2010, 91 punts

De la Finca 2010, coupage de Macabeu, Xarel·lo i Parellada, selecció de les millors parcel·les de les seves vinyes de sols calcaris, envellit durant 32 mesos en ampolla. De la Finca s'embolica amb un paper i inclou un fulletó que explica el vi i la zona. Té un nas de fruits secs, fum i massa de pa, molt elegant. Mantingut en copa desenvolupa aromes més complexos de brioix i mel. En boca té bona harmonia, amb petites bombolles, bona acides i un elèctric final refrescant fort, encara una mica cru, però s'ha de desenvolupar bé a l'ampolla. Per beure 2015-2019.

L'Hereu 2011, 90 punts

L'Hereu 2011, coupage de Macabeu, Xarel·lo i Parellada de les seves pròpies vinyes i una part del raïm procedent de productors ubicats a la zona de la Vall del Anoia al Penedès, criança de 18 mesos. Totes les ampolles tenen la data de desgorjat a la contra etiqueta. Es pàl·lid amb notes fresques de poma i llevats, una mica de pa torrat amb un fort paladar amb alta acides, net i refrescant, potent i elegant, amb un final cítric de color groc. Per beure ara.

De Nit 2011, 90 punts

De Nit 2011 coupage de Macabeu, Xarel·lo, Parellada i Monestrell (només un petit percentatge, al voltant del 5%), en part de les seves pròpies vinyes i en part d'altres proveïdores de la zona, envellit durant 33 mesos en ampolla. Color rosa molt pàl·lid, amb notes de roses seques, llevats i fonoll. En boca es molt saborós, amb una acides picant i bombolles persistents, final molt sec. Per beure d'ara fins 2016

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Cava and Other Sparkling Wines: Quality or Quantity?

I tasted all the long-aging sparkling wines together after tasting them by winery.

I must confess that I was ashamed when I read the Cava chapter from *Christie's World Encyclopedia of Champagne and Sparkling Wine*, written by Tom Stevenson in 1998, during my research for this article. The picture he paints there is really shameful, but it is how he saw the world of Cava at the time. Much has improved since then, new names have come to the forefront (Recaredo, Loxarel, Llopart), debate about which grapes should be allowed was closed (now both Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are), and attention has shifted to the autochthonous Xarello as the main quality grape for this famous sparkling wine. What has not changed is the fact that Cava remains dominated by two big names. Codorníu and Freixenet produce and sell large volumes of Cava and, of course, compete to offer the lowest price possible. I think we all agree on giving customers good value for money, but when lower prices mean cutting corners and affecting the quality of the final product, it should raise a few eyebrows. When other producers consider that being associated with the name Cava is bad for them and they leave the appellation, it should make people really think about what's going on. Well, that is what started happening a few years ago, it has continued, and it seems like it's going to go on. Until when?

Leaving the boat

It was a slow process. Colet, formerly Colet Cava, left the appellation and started selling their sparkling wines with a Penedès back label in 1997. It gave them more freedom about which grapes they could use (they have Riesling, Gewurztraminer and other grapes that are included in some of their blends), among other things. Other names followed, Mas Comptal, Mas, Bertran, Loxarel. A slow but constant leak. But when Raventós i Blanc, a scion from Codorníu, left the boat in 2012, alarms really went off. They are not only one of the quality leaders in the category, they are also direct descendants of the creator of the first sparkling wine in Spain and the first president of the Cava appellation. They did not seek refuge in the Penedès appellation, but instead they want to promote the creation of a new, smaller appellation, Conca del Riu Anoia, on the banks of the Anoia river, but for now their bottled wines will be officially sold as VECPRD (*vino espumoso de calidad producido en región determinada*), the generic appellation for quality sparkling wines. Albet i Noya has been one of the latest to leave Cava and move their sparkling wines to Penedès. It was announced just before Christmas, the high season for sales of sparkling wines.

For some of the wineries it is unclear if a specific bottle is Cava or not, as they were produced when they were still in the appellation. I'm sorry if I made mistakes or created confusion, nothing was further from my intention, but sometimes the producers themselves don't know what to say: "if the bottle was disgorged before leaving the appellation, then it's Cava. If it was disgorged after that, even if we were part of the production during the harvest, I consider it outside Cava," explained Pepe Raventós when I queried him about some of the bottles that we had in front of us while tasting together. There is a word that appears in local articles that talks about the subject: 'stampede.' Will we see a stampede? Only time will tell.

In the meantime, the Penedès appellation seems to be taking the right approach when it comes to sparkling wines. All bottles have to carry the vintage year and disgorging date, aging in bottle in contact with the lees has to be at least 15 months, and all sparkling wines therefore fall under the category Reserva, and more important, all vineyards have to be worked organically. It seems like the ambition is that all Penedès vineyards show eventually be worked organically, and it seems like quite a goal to me, far easier said than done.

As a result I decided to group all sparkling wines in the same article under the name 'Cava and other sparkling wines' instead of including them in their own appellations of origin. On the other hand, for the article about other regions outside Priorat and the sparkling wines, there are wineries producing wines in different regions. But for now I decided to keep the regional structure rather than show all the wines produced by one winery together.

Cava or not, Cataluña is the main producer of sparkling wine in Spain

A bit of history

In the 1970s, Cava was heading in the wrong direction. They were on the verge of making the same mistake as with Laguiole knives and cheddar cheese: instead of protecting the origin, what was defined was the process or the characteristics of the given product. As long as you comply with the rules, the shape, the little bee, etc., you can produce Laguiole knives anywhere in the world! In fact, a good number of Laguiole knives are produced in Albacete, Spain, a place well

known for its cutlery, and in Asia, where production costs are low and quality can be, too! The case of cheddar cheese is a lot worse and I don't think I really need to talk about the quality and image of cheddar around the world. You'd be really surprised if I tell you that the handful of cheddar cheeses that are produced with raw milk, following the original method in the farms of the south of England rank among the finest cheeses on earth (remember the name Montgomery if you're after a truly world-class cheddar). But few of those remain, and unfortunately cheddar is today a synonym of a highly-processed, industrial, packaged and tasteless thing some call cheese. Knives and cheese apart, fortunately, when Spain joined the European Union in 1986, the rules had to change and Cava had to be turned into an origin appellation. The problem was that the appellation had to include all that were producing Cava up to that moment. That's how you end up with an appellation of origin with a core of vineyards around Sant Sadurní d'Anoia in Penedès and a scattered mosaic of pieces here and there, in Valencia, Zaragoza, Rioja or Badajoz, where Cava was being produced at the time, but where soil, climate and grapes are as different as they can be in places close to 1,000 kilometers away!

Today, the yearly production from the 32,000 hectares of vineyards covered by the appellation is around 175 million liters, which roughly translates into 230 million bottles. But you won't find focus on volume here. In fact, the selection of the wines to include here was important. I tasted relatively few wines and average scores might seem a bit high. I didn't taste many non-vintage wines, as they are impossible for consumers to identify and the idea behind not putting the vintage on your label is that you seek a homogeneous style, erasing the differences each vintage might bring, and it's therefore a waste of time reviewing those wines over and over again. Of course, there are some newcomers, wines that had never been reviewed before, or one-off special blends that are unique, but they are just a handful.

As a result of what I've explained, you will find mostly vintage sparkling wines from Cava, Penedès, Alella and Conca del Riu Anoia, and even some table wines produced using the ancestral method in this report. Will you find any Cavas from outside Cataluña? No, not really. Statistics say that around 90% of the land under vine within the Cava appellation is located in Cataluña, and around 98% of the bottles wearing the Cava name come from Cataluña. Other than just figures, can you name any Cava from outside Cataluña? I guess not. They do exist, some of them are really good, and they'll get reviewed in the future. For logistic reasons, as I tasted the appellations from Cataluña for three articles, I simply tasted a selection of Cava from there. I did taste the Cava Muga produced in Rioja, and it was included in the Rioja report. When I cover the different geographical areas, I might include any Cava of merit that I eventually encounter. Until then, this is it.

What's in a name?

Sometimes people get confused by foreign names. The spelling in Catalan language for Xarello grape is placing a dot between the double 'l'. Yes, a dot, but not a normal dot or a hyphen or a slash, this dot, '•', that I bet you cannot find on your computer keyboard unless you're a computer geek; I am one (or used to be?) and it took me a while! So it looks something like Xarel•lo. No, not Xarel-lo, nor Xarel.lo. It's Xarel•lo. Well, I've seen people talking about the grape Xarel-10 and all sorts of strange combinations. I've usually kept the Catalan spelling on most of the names, including Penedès, and I've often complained myself about the incorrect spelling of foreign names and words, but in the case of this white grape, I decided to go for the simple spelling Xarello, which would be the Spanish for it. In fact, I've used the Spanish spelling for all grape names, for the simple reason of not creating more confusion about them. Consistency? Well, for me than can be the exception that confirms the rule.

These technical corks for sparkling wines are 100% guaranteed against TCA. Can we have them for all wines, please?

Viticulture

One final word about the vineyards, which tend to be forgotten. People tend to think that viticulture and quality of the grapes, when it comes to 'special' wines, and read 'special' as sweet, fortified, sparkling, biologically-aged, etc., is not that important. Well, nothing is further from the truth. Viticulture and quality of grapes is essential for all wines. Full stop. What I want to get to is that not only do many people ignore viticulture, they don't even grow their grapes, they do not own any vineyards, they might not even ferment any grapes at all, they can buy the wine already fermented! Do you find a lot of the cheaper Cava to be very similar? Almost the same? Well, here goes a simple explanation: there are a couple of suppliers of base wines, huge industrial-style, bulk-wine producers, that provide the still wine that is bottled with yeasts and sugar to produce the second fermentation in bottle. Yes, you've guessed it! Many producers buy the same base wine from the same supplier, and their final products end up tasting very much the same, because, in essence, they ARE the same. And don't misunderstand me, there's nothing wrong with industrial or bulk-wine producers, it's just a different story. Because as it happens, the producers of the very best wines not only farm their vineyards, they pay extra attention to viticulture, they care about their vineyards, their soils, the health of their grapes to produce the best base wine they can as it sets the quality level for the final product. Sherry, Port, Champagne or Cava are not produced exclusively in the winery. They are produced with grapes, and as every small detail counts toward the quality of what you and I drink, grapes, viticulture and terroir COUNT.

I tasted the following sparkling wines between December 2013 and January 2014. The still wines for some of these producers can be found in the 'Cataluña and 10 of its Appellations' article in this issue.

—Luis Gutierrez