

# The New York Times

## Your Next Lesson: Cava



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Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

### Wine School

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Cava, like California chardonnay, has suffered from a bad reputation. Not without reason. Millions of bottles of cava, the Catalan sparkling wine, are sold every year, and much of it is inexpensive and not particularly good. Yet a [handful of cava producers](#), working conscientiously in the vineyards and diligently in the cellar, have demonstrated that it can be among the most distinctive of all sparkling wines.

Certainly its traditional grapes are the most distinctive. Good cava is made largely from xarello, with help from macabeo (also known as viura in Rioja) and parellada. Other grapes are permitted in cava, too, including Champagne's chardonnay and pinot noir, but the best cavas don't seek to emulate Champagne. Rather, they seek to distinguish themselves from it.

Even so, cava is one of the few sparkling wines that by law must be made using the same method as Champagne. That means that the cava grapes are first fermented into a still wine, and then a second fermentation is induced in the bottle, which creates the sparkle. Obviously this method is effective on a mass-production level — witness the millions of bottles of Champagne as well as cava produced every year. Yet when done carefully, it offers far greater potential than other methods for mass-producing sparkling wine.

The best cavas have a beautifully light, feathery, subtle texture that I think makes them perfect summer-weight sparklers. I recommend three bottles:

**Raventós i Blanc de Nit 2012 (Skurnik Wines, New York) \$22**

**Gramona Gran Cuvée 2009 (Eric Solomon/European Cellars, Charlotte, N.C.) \$19**

**Recaredo Brut Nature Gran Reserva 2008 (Rosenthal Wine Merchant, New York) \$37**

These wines should not be terribly difficult to find. But if you don't come across them, any other cavas from these producers will be great, as will those from Mestres, Bohigas, Castellroig and a few others.

Not surprisingly, cava is wonderful with jamón Ibérico, or any ham, really, as well as dishes often associated with tapas, like shrimp with garlic sauce, grilled sardines and other light seafood or fried dishes. It's particularly great with pan con tomate, a ubiquitous dish in Catalonia in which a yeasty local bread is rubbed with half a tomato, doused with olive oil and sprinkled with salt.

Serve the wine cold, but make sure you allow it to warm up a little so you can see how it changes with temperature. Then, drink it as you prefer.