

Raventós i Blanc, Vinos Espumosos

Conca del Riu de Anoia, Penedes

A small, family-owned concern, based on 90 hectares at Sant Sadurní d'Anoia, which has been in the family since 1659, and has been a wine-growing estate since 1497. Until recently, the bulk of their fruit went to the large firm, Codorniu, with whom the Raventós family have a distinguished past, in ownership and management. The Raventós i Blanc holdings, in fact, curl around the Codorniu HQ.



In 1984, family patriarch Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc and scion Manuel Raventós i Negra struck out with their own brand, produced entirely from estate fruit. As so often the case in Spain, family heritage is a matter of immense pride, particularly for a tribe who can legitimately claim to have originated an entire DO! "L'Hereu", or 'the line', is their term for the continuity of the Raventós family in sparkling from the origin of Cava (Josep Raventós Fatjó produced Spain's first in-bottle fermentation in 1872) to the present.

(re-)Introducing Raventós i Blanc, Conca del Riu de Anoia

from 2012, Raventós i Blanc have ceased calling their wines Cava, preferring their own appellation: Conca del Riu de Anoia. Riu is Catalan for the Rio Anoia, whose valley forms the heart of Cava country, half an hour from Barcelona in the Catalan hills. Raventós i Blanc are solely responsible for the birth of this would-be-appellation, which they admit will take a generation to achieve full force. The move stands as critique of the crass commerciality and carelessness of the DO that the Raventós family were responsible for. Current family head, Pepe Raventós lists organic viticulture, proper custodianship of a land for the future, and the centrality of life based around a 'Masia' (farmhouse) as key motives for the shift. This is an arcadian dream of a Catalan country culture deeply rooted in the land, resulting in a balanced ecology partly concerned with producing estate-based, high quality wines based entirely on local grapes. The 'L'Hereu' is severed ...

RiB (Raventós i Blanc) L'Hereu Espumoso



Typical of the Raventós i Blanc house style, this is a supremely elegant and delicately textured premium sparkler, featuring fresh apple and fine sand earthiness. Nestled into the characteristic fine bead are twinkles of seaspray, white nectarine and green pear; it's deft, delicious and has lovely flavor and mouthfeel as well as crunch and race. Outstanding wine for the price.

60% Macabeo/20% Xarel-lo/20% Parellada. 8.8 g/l residual sugar, lees-aged for 12 months, 11.8% a/v.

RiB (Raventós i Blanc) de Nit Rosado Espumoso

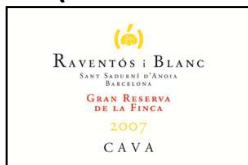


Dry pink of great elegance. Detailed and delicate, with a pink perfume dance without cloy or clutter. A lovely faded rose pink, it smells of gently boozed strawberries and dusty roses; perfumed without outrageous fruitiness or excess. Nice false sweetness on entry balances to off-dry through the palate. Juicy and gentle, high quality delicate bubbles cut the fruitiness and the mouth runs out to a super-gentle acid close.

55% Macabeo/20% Xarel.lo/20% Parellada/5% Monastrell. 7.5% g/l residual sugar.

Many would say Hooray, in Epernay, should they achieve this finesse. It's delicious!

RiB (Raventós i Blanc) Gran Reserva de la Finca Espumoso



Earthy and golden, toasty and generous but beautifully edged with a crunchy green apple finish. Mineral, with jasmine, garden weeds, honeysuckle and waxy pollen. A faux sweetness of syrup-soaked gooseberries, pistachio husk, golden bread crust then acidity and maritime minerality. The finish is long and persistent and speaks of ocean floors of eras gone by, as this is a wine of place, and that place is all fossils!

Limestone, limestone, limestone, oil lamp-come-olive brine salinity, preserved scallop shells and sour stones provide the mineral backbone.

Why leaving the DO Cava?

As you all know, Raventós i Blanc was created to give a "raison d'être" to an estate where vines have been grown since 1497, and to continue a family vine-growing tradition stretching back over 20 generations. The founder, Josep Maria Raventós i Blanc, had a concept based on the closest possible connection between man and nature, propagating the idea of Catalan country folk deeply rooted in their land. With that he wanted to create a true alternative to champagne.

We want to recover the long-lost characteristics of that life based around the traditional farmhouse of the Penedès region; that local vine-growing culture in which the land, the vines, the animals and man all worked together in harmony as an agricultural whole: bio-synergy. We believe that there is an opportunity for honest wines resulting from a single estate, a specific climate, native grape varieties and a rigorous, well-defined and respectful form of viticulture. For this reason, in November 2012, we have decided to leave the DO. We believe that we need to create a LOCAL, VITICULTURE ORIENTED and super exigent DO in order to frame our wines and help them be better understood worldwide. For that we have to leave the DO and start from zero. We can't do it inside the DO CAVA, as a sub DO because it's really impossible to make it happen.

CAVA & THE SPARKLING WINE of CATALUNYA

Penedès (mainly), Spain

Ordinarily, the first thing we imagine with an appellation is a line in the dirt, physically demarcating an area to be named. After the physical area is defined, the wine styles, grape varieties and production methods allowed are legislated. DO Cava is not like this!

Cava is an anomaly within the world of wine appellations, as it is not strictly geographical. The vast majority of Cava comes from Penedès, just south of Barcelona. However, *not all* Cava comes from Penedès. When the time came for a Cava appellation to be normalised in line with EU appellation laws (1989), the idea of Cava as a certain style of sparkling wine had already been licensed under Spanish law in a number of disparate regions: Aragon, Rioja, Valencia, Navarra and more were historical homes to Cavas licensed under Spanish law. Existing Cava producers (wherever they were located) were given permission to continue to operate and label their wines as Cava. Since then, however, new producers seeking to label themselves as Cava are only licensed within the boundaries of DO Penedès.

Not all is coherent within the Penedès boundaries, however. There is a group of producers who organise themselves apart from the majority of Cava houses (el Institut del Cava), uncomfortably housed under the roof of an appellation they largely despise. There is a rival organization legislating sparkling wine production as 'Clàssic Penedès. And one significant producer, Raventós i Blanc, has withdrawn entirely from DO Cava, and have set up their own would-be appellation for sparkling wines of the 'Conca de Riu Anoia' (the Anoia River Valley). It's a *very* long straw, but maybe one day 'Arnoia' will stand in to signify a place, a sparkling style and a notion of quality in just the same way that 'Champagne' does. Maybe ...

Anyway, the point made by all who stand aside within Cava, and those who choose to stand outside, is that DO Cava does not strive for, nor signify the kind of quality sparkling many believe possible and desirable. There's good and great Cava, there's the great non-DO sparkling wines of Raventós i Blanc ... and then there is the lake of unaspiring, uninspiring low-level fizz which gives Cava a less than compelling name around the world. This leaves the door wide open for (often unimpressive) value sparklings from the Loire and Prosecco. Nice job, Cava!

So, what is a good Cava?

Typically, Cava is a blanc de blancs sparkling wine made in the same manner as Champagne. Apple-fruited and earthy, Cavas have a reasonably full spuma (these are Vinos Espumosos). They are gentle wines, nicely shaped by easily digestible soft, friendly acidity. There are Cavas which seek to challenge Champagne itself in the upper tiers of the fizzy price range; however, most operate at friendlier prices. Almost all Cavas are single vintage wines



(the warmth of Penedès means the wines do not need so much ageing and blending for the acidity to be tamed), however it is common for Cava at entry level price points to be released without vintage specification. Cava as a style takes its name from 'caves', in the form of natural underground cellars, as in Champagne. The term used in Spain to indicate proper making and ageing in the same bottle as one consumes is 'metodo tradicional'.

The birthplace of Cava

Cava's origin, and contemporary heart, is the Rio Anoia valley in Penedès, producing 95% of Spain's Cava. Just south along the coast from Barcelona, the region consists of a plain bound by two ranges of near-coastal mountains, most notably the enormous Montserrat which towers over the key villages, Sant Sadurni and Vilafranca del Penedès. The pre-littoral (just inland from the coast) plain is gently hilly ground between 100m-300m above sea level, and the area is roughly rectangular.

Penedès has mild winters, hot and often damp summers. Rainfall is light but adequate; the vines can bud and the fruit ripen well without risk of spring frosts, which plague lower-lying vineyards in other regions. The subsoil in the Anoia Valley is a shallow topsoil of loam and clay over a calcareous base: the fresh, chalky subsoils are easily penetrated by the roots of the vines.

The future of Cava

Cava was first produced in 1879, by Josep Raventos, GM at Cordoniu and ancestor of contemporary quality house, Raventos I Blanc. Raventos I Blanc, long proud of "l'hereu", their continuous thread within the history of Cava, severed this connection and left DO Cava after more than 130 years. Their idea is an appellation of biodynamic, single-estate, indigenous varietal viticulture from the Anoia Valley, realising vintage sparklings with a minimum of 18 months' lees-ageing.

Another splinter movement (with greater numbers onside than Raventos I Blanc) is the introduction of 'Clàssic Penedès' as an appellation under DO Penedès. These wines first appeared in 2014, and are legislated as vintage-dated, 100% organic, entirely Penedès fruit and aged for a minimum of 15 months, and thus 100% Reserva wines. In 2018, there were 18 producers of DO Penedès Sparkling.

The emergence of these new classifications does not mean that all the quality producers from the Cava DO are jumping ship; far from it. Plenty of great winemakers have chosen to remain within the DO. Not only is it a risk for producers to leave such a well-recognised 'brand', but also many producers are working on improving the DO's perception to the public and moving it away from mass production. Within DO Cava, there *is* also some movement towards quality, with the introduction of site specific wines, which can be labelled 'Cava de Paraje Calificado'. Cava de Paraje is a classification for single-estate Cava, produced by stricter viticultural criteria. These must be vintage wines and may only be released in the Brut categories.

All of these changes can only be seen as a good thing for sparkling wine production in Catalunya, as quality moves towards the foreground of many producers' thoughts.

The rules of Cava

The minimum of developmental ageing for Cava, from the time of tirage to disgorging, is nine months. After 15 months ageing on lees in bottle, Cava is classified as 'Reserva' and after 30 months, 'Gran Reserva'.

Depending on the grams per litre of residual sugar, Cava are classified as:

BRUT NATURE: up to 3 g/l

EXTRA BRUT: up to 6 g/l

BRUT: up to 12 g/l

EXTRA SECO: between 12 and 17 g/l

SECO: between 17 and 32 g/l

SEMI SECO: between 32 and 50 g/l

DULCE: more than 50 g/l residual sugar.

Legal varieties for producing Cava:

Most Cavas blend three local white varieties: Macabeo, Xarel.lo, Parellada. Chardonnay is making inroads, but the traditional white varieties predominate. Cavas are blanc de blancs by tradition but not by legal definition, however, and red grapes feature a little. Some houses also make dry Pink Cavas, which may be made as an admixture of some red grapes to a white wine base, or may be a varietal wine from the pink-fleshed Trepát.

Blancos for Cava:

Macabeo (Viura), Xarel.lo, Parellada, Malvasía (Subirat Parent) y Chardonnay.

Tintos:

Garnacha, Monastrell, Pinot Noir y Trepát (Trepát is only legal for making Pink Cava).

Macabeo/Viura

Of Catalan origin, Macabeo is also planted in Rioja, where it is known as Viura. It has big, tight bunches of thick-skinned berries, yielding well, but susceptible to bunch rot. In Catalunya, it forms the basis of most Cava blends and makes modest varietal table wines – light, floral, simple but fresh and pretty. In Rioja (and to a much lesser extent Rueda) it can be successfully barrel-and-bottle aged to make complex golden, autumnal whites, where ageing artefact covers up for low acidity. It is picked relatively early to provide much the aroma and floral character of Cava blends. While sometimes criticised for tending towards neutrality, good viticulture yields wines of finesse, with floral, spicy herbal aromas.

Xarel.lo (char-rell-low , aka Cartoixa in Priorat, Pansa Blanca in Alella, Premsal Blanc on Mallorca)

Xarel.lo grows in small, loose bunches of thick-skinned berries which ripen between Parellada and Macabeo. It is powerfully perfumed and makes full-flavoured, structured wines. Relatively tannic and acidic, this is the variety which provides the structural foundation of Cava. Excessive crop levels and over-ripening can lead to rubbery characters and an earthiness akin to the smell of TCA.

Parellada (pa-rey-yada):

Originating in Aragon, Parellada is productive, with large bunches of very late ripening delicate fruit. It provides an aromatic, light wine with fruity acidity principally used in Cava sparkling blends. As with Xarel.lo (by several localised synonyms) and Macabeo, Parellada is also planted throughout Catalunya for producing table wines.