

Spanish cava: five sparkling wines to try for Christmas 2021



Author: Fiona Beckett | 22/12/2021

Cava is making a comeback, with a new generation of drinkers having developed a thirst for this dry and fruity fizz.

Historically, cava has been starved of affection in the UK, having been eclipsed by prosecco and never been seen in the same league as champagne. But why haven't we taken to it more? Partly, it's a question of price — it's often almost too cheap, which has diminished the perception of quality. But taste is a factor; at times, I admit, I've struggled with its slightly coarse, too obviously yeasty flavour. However, upon revisiting it recently, I've been surprised how much the quality has improved.

The Cava DO (designation of origin) was established in 1986. Before then, the term ‘cava’ was used for almost all Spanish sparkling wines. Today, most cava is made in the Penedès region, to the west of Barcelona, but it’s also made elsewhere — up in the Ebro Valley, in the north, for example, and in the Viñedos de Almendralejo, in the west.

Cava undergoes a similar secondary fermentation and ageing process to champagne, although it’s based on different grapes — usually macabeo, parellada and xarel-lo. And all cavas are now classified as either cava de guarda (aged for at least nine months), reservas (aged for 18 months) or gran reservas (aged for more than 30 months), although many exceed these requirements.

It’s distinctive because it’s produced in a climate that’s much warmer and sunnier than Champagne. This results in riper, fruitier, often positively peachy wines that don’t need the same level of ‘dosage’ (added sugar). In fact, many cavas are labelled extra brut or even brut nature (no added sugar). The climate is also drier, which makes it easier to cultivate the grapes organically.

As the quality of cava has improved, it’s gone from being merely cheap to great value for money. This is reflected in sales, which were up 65% at London’s The Whisky Exchange (which, despite the name, also sells wine).

“At the start of lockdown, there was a lot of uncertainty,” recalls head buyer Dawn Davies. “People still wanted to drink fizz but maybe didn’t want to spend the money or didn’t feel it was appropriate to buy champagne. Cava has a flavour profile that’s more akin to champagne than prosecco — and at a better price point. It’s just kept on selling.”

Five of the best cava bottles to try



4. Cygnus Giannah Organic Brut Rosé Cava

Rosé or rosado cava is generally quite deep in colour, but this whisper-pink wine is as pretty as a picture. It’s dry enough to go well with seafood, too.

- Read the full [article here](#).