

CUTTING EDGE SELECTIONS

✧ HAND-CRAFTED WINES ✧

Stephen Tanzer's
INTERNATIONAL WINE CELLAR

Cava: Spain's Great Value in Sparkling Wine

By Josh Reynolds

Not long ago, Cava barely registered on the radar of the average bubblehead. As far as serious winos were concerned, Spain's answer to Champagne was what you consumed with orange juice at all-you-can-drink brunches or for \$100 a bottle at "gentlemen's clubs." Things sure have changed.

Thanks to the efforts of a number of energetic importers, many of Spain's best bubblyies are now available in the U.S., and at prices that are often astonishingly reasonable compared to Champagne. Yes, there's still plenty of rustic, overly sweet and downright crude Cava out there (usually identified by prices under \$10), but this category is far less of a minefield than previously. Until recently, too many Cavas were simply dull, without the clarity and energy one usually seeks in sparkling wine. The traditional Cava varieties (xarel-lo, macabeo and parellada) aren't exactly stellar, and without a skillful winemaker's care these grapes usually produce wines that are simply too rough-hewn and herbal for the palates of most Americans. Nowadays, however, some of the best Cavas incorporate percentages of international varieties like chardonnay and pinot noir. As the following notes on the finest Cavas of my recent tastings attest, there are plenty of excellent Cavas available in the marketplace now, and some of them are stunning values.

Llopart Cava

2002 Caves Llopart Leopardi Brut Reserva Cava

(\$28; 40% macabeo, 30% xarel-lo and 15% each of parellada and chardonnay) Green-yellow color with a delicate bead. Spicy lemon and tangerine aromas gain power with air, taking on richer yellow plum and poached pear character. Chewy, refreshingly bitter pear skin and peach pit flavors coat the palate and are firm by dusty minerals. Finishes lush and creamy, with a repeating pear note. This was aged for five years on its lees.

90 points

2004 Caves Llopart Brut Rose Cava

(\$20; 60% monastrell and 20% each of garnacha and pinot noir) Light, bright pink. Strong red berry aromas are complemented by orange and white flowers. Supple raspberry and cherry flavors are lifted by gentle acidity and firmed by a refreshing note of cherry skin on the back. A round, fleshy Cava that leads and finishes with supple red fruit.

89 points

2005 Caves Llopart Brut Rose Cava

(\$20; the same blend of varieties for in the 2004) Pale pink with a delicate bead. Seductively perfumed nose displays strawberry, redcurrant, flowers and baking spices. Firm, finely etched red berry and floral pastille flavors gain a spicy quality with air, along with dusty minerals and white pepper. Livelier and more energetic than the 2004, with more finishing lift and cut. (Fine Estates from Spain, Dedham, MA)

90 points