

# A Little Cava

## ON THE PORCH

story by PHILIP DE GIVE

There are many wines that make an excellent start to the meal as an aperitif. Your wine aficionado may want to drink Champagne, but there is a good alternative that's less expensive, especially at this time of year. When we eat outdoors, we focus on appetizers or small plates, and eat lighter foods. This is typical of the lifestyle in Spain, where they drink Cava.

Cava is a sparkling wine from Northeast Spain that has come full circle in the wine consumer's appreciation. It was very much in fashion 20 years ago, but fell out of favor when locally produced sparkling wines, Prosecco and French Crémant, displaced it in the market. Prosecco has become especially popular, but to understand Cava it is best to describe how it differs from that Italian bubbly, and to look at the production methods of both wines.

There are seven generally recognized methods for making sparkling wines, but the two most popular methods are Champagne and Charmat (also known as "cuve close," or Tank). Cava is produced by the Champagne method. The words *Metodo Clasico* or *Metodo Tradicional* will be found on the label of Cava as a legal reference to that method. The term "Champagne method" is not allowed on a bottle of Cava since Spain is part of the European Union, and it respects that legally protected appellation of France. So what is this special method that applies to Cava and Champagne? And how does it affect the taste of the wine?

Wine is produced when sugar from pressed grapes is converted into alcohol through fermentation; carbon dioxide is a by-product of fermentation and is mostly released as gas. If the fermentation is initiated a second time in

a closed container, like a bottle or a tank, through the addition of more yeast and sugar, the by-product of carbon dioxide is captured and held in solution in the wine. This will eventually produce the bubbles that are released upon opening the bottle. In the Champagne method, the secondary fermentation occurs in the bottle, while the second fermentation of Prosecco occurs in a tank. This is a major difference, as the former method literally produces tiny bubbles that have a certain finesse of texture. Because of the contact in the bottle with the lees or spent yeast, wines produced with this method can even take on a richer, creamier "mouth-feel," and a yeasty or "brioche" character that will not occur with Charmat-process wines. The wine then undergoes a special process for the removal of that yeast sediment. The Charmat process produces larger bubbles and emphasizes more of a fresh-fruit character so typical of Prosecco. Champagne and Cava are less overtly fruity than Prosecco, and for that reason, often more interesting or desirable.

Some of the best restaurants in Spain are located in Catalonia and Barcelona, that region's capital city. And since Catalonia is the home of Cava, restaurants there will feature many types of that wine on their lists as their de facto choice of aperitif. One can find numerous selections of Cava made from the indigenous grapes of Parellada, Xarel-lo and Macabeo (also known as Viura), with additional special vintage selections and Cavas made from international grapes as well. Of course, in the New Mexico market, our choices are more limited, but the list is growing. Here are recommendations from buyers in-the-know.

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Scott Converse, Kaune's



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MARQUÉS DE GELIDA PINOT NOIR CAVA

www.vinova.dk



VARA CAVA BRUT

www.winedirect.co.uk



SEGURA VIUDAS BRUT

varawines.com/silverhead-brut



CODORNIU CLASICO

www.eurovintage.co.nz

## WHERE CAN I PICK UP SOME CAVA?

### IN SANTA FE:

**Kaune's Neighborhood Market**  
511 Old Santa Fe Trail. 505.982.2629

**La Casa Sena Wine Shop**  
Sena Plaza, 125 E Palace Ave, 505.982.2121

**Susan's Fine Wine and Spirits**  
1005 S St Francis Dr Ste 101, 505.984.1582

**Kelly Liquors**  
2885 Cerrillos Rd., 505.471.3960

**Kokoman Fine Wines & Liquor**  
34 Cities of Gold Rd., 505.455.2219

**Arroyo Vino Wine Shop**  
218 Camino La Tierra, 505.983.2100

### IN ALBUQUERQUE:

**Jubilation Wine & Spirits**  
3512 Lomas Blvd NE, 505.255.4404

**Kelly Liquors**  
2270 Wyoming Blvd NE, 505.296.7815  
1418 Juan Tabo Blvd NE, 505.292.4520  
6300 San Mateo Blvd NE, 505.797.9966

Scott Converse, at Kaune's Neighborhood Market in Santa Fe has good insight on the market for Cava. "I see demand for Prosecco dropping and interest in Cava increasing because it is drier," he says. "I call it a 'porch wine,' great for outdoor sipping in the summertime." The prices for Cava on his shelf range from \$10-\$18 retail, and three selections stand out: Segura Viudas Brut Reserva, often described as "creamy" in wine reviews because of the quality of the bubbles, or *mousse*; Vega Barcelona, a relatively new arrival in the New Mexico market that shows a touch of pear and peach fruit along with typical minerality; and Marqués de Gelida Pinot Noir Cava, made 100 percent from that varietal, showing the richness that comes with two years of aging in the bottle.

Freda Scott, manager at the soon-to-be reopened El Farol on Canyon Road in Santa Fe, explains that Cava was a necessity for the restaurant's focus in sparkling wine. "Our aim is to emphasize authentic Spanish Tapas and capture the essence of Old World Spain," she says. "We knew we were going to serve a Cava by the glass to enjoy outside with *gambas* or even a cheese plate. We tried eight different Cavas for our wine list and liked the Codorniu Clasico." The tasting profile for this wine is clean and balanced, with a very fine mousse.

A final recommendation comes from Jon Murray, assistant food and beverage manager for the CAVA Santa Fe Lounge and AGAVE Lounge at the Eldorado Hotel in Santa Fe. With a bar named after the wine, it was important to get his take on Cava: "I can appreciate the hazelnut and yeasty character of Champagne, but for value and clean crispness, I love Cava; it is less serious," he says. "My recommendation is Vara Cava Brut. The aroma and taste are refreshing with pear, honeysuckle and green apple overtones and the lack of yeasty notes is perfect for my customers." This particular Cava has a special story as it celebrates the Canes or *Vara* of Sovereignty presented to the 13 New Mexico Pueblos by King Philip II of Spain in 1620 and issued again by Pres. Abraham Lincoln in 1863. That is quite a celebration of New Mexico's history.

If Prosecco's appeal is starting to fade, and if you're looking to save some money and buy two bottles of a dry European bubbly for the price of one, celebrate our beautiful summers and Spanish Heritage in New Mexico with Cava. *Salud!*