

# The Penedès sparkling wine revolution, what is happening?

## ABSTRACT

### MOTIVATION

The motivation for the subject of my thesis is my personal preference for Cava as a sparkling wine. First motivated by my limited budget and later by recognizing the high quality. During my WSET study I found out that the cheap image and low prestige of Cava stand in the way of quality. The creation of Corpinnat in 2019 was a revolution in the Penedès sparkling wine industry. The criticized role of the Regulatory Board and recent changes in Cava regulations makes this subject even more interesting.

### OBJECTIVE

The objective of this thesis is to explore and determine the landscape of sparkling wines in the Penedès. The question 'what is happening' is highly topical, because of the recent developments within the DO Cava, like introducing geographical indications (zones) and quality tiers. Earlier well-known Cava producers left the Cava DO founding Conca del Riu Anoia, Clàssic Penedès and Corpinnat.

### METHODOLOGY

For this thesis, I travelled to the Penedès visiting sparkling wine producers like Raventós i Blanc, Gramona, AT Roca, Recaredo, Juvé & Camps and Freixenet. Information is also sourced from literature and websites.

### CONTENT

#### History of sparkling wine in the Penedès

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century sparkling wines have been made in Spain using the traditional method. The early pioneers included members of the Ferrer and Raventós families who founded Freixenet and Codorníu in Sant Sadurni d' Anoia, near Barcelona. When Spain joined the EU in 1986, Cava was recognised as a quality sparkling wine DO produced in several specific Spanish regions. DO stands for '*Denominación de Origen*'. However, Cava is technically a method of production and not a reference to one specific area.

#### Sparkling wine industry in the Penedès

The history of Codorníu goes back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1872, Josep Raventós produced the first bottle of traditional method sparkling wine. Freixenet, founded in 1861 has been producing Cava since 1914. Freixenet and Codorníu produce around 75% of all finished Cava. Garcia Carrión is the third largest Cava producer. The Cava Regulatory Board (Consejo Regulador) is responsible for the rules regarding the growing of Cava grapes and the production of Cava.

#### The Penedès sparkling wine revolution

In 2012, leading Cava producer Raventós i Blanc decided to leave the DO Cava. In his opinion DO Cava has become a solely volume-oriented DO. The dream of the Raventós family is to establish a new DO with strict rules named after the region Conca Del Riu Anoia.

In 2014, Clàssic Penedès is established as a DO Penedès classification for sparkling wines. Joined by 15 producers after leaving the DO Cava. The Clàssic Penedès classification is based on regional specificity, organic viticulture and long ageing requirements.

In 2019 Corpinnat is founded by 6 well-known Cava producers as a collective European Union brand. Their aim is to produce premium sparkling wine made in a demarcated area in the heart of the Penedès. Using 100% organic grapes and vinified on the premises. The group of producers who created Corpinnat were all part of the DO Cava including Gramona, Llopart, Nadal and Recaredo.

### **What is happening?**

In 2020 Corpinnat announced that Clàssic Penedès and Corpinnat are talking about creating a future sparkling wine DO in the Penedès. They did not reach an agreement yet. Raventós I Blanc already submitted the application for his DO Conca del Riu Anoia.

In 2020 'zoning' was introduced in DO Cava. These new geographical indications include 4 main zones. The zone covering entire Catalonia is called Comtats de Barcelona. This zone will only have one subzone: Valls d'Anoia-Foix. This while 90% of all Cava originates in Penedès.

In 2022, DO Cava introduced two new quality tiers: '*Cava de Guarda*' which must be aged for a minimum of 9 months, and '*Cava de Guarda Superior*'. Including Reserva which now must be aged for a minimum of 18 months and Gran Reserva with a minimum of 30 months ageing. Cava de Paraje Calificado was already introduced in 2015 as is seen as the top of the '*Cava de Guarda Superior*' with a minimum of 36 months ageing.

### **The future of sparkling wine from the Penedès**

DO Cava producers benefit from the strong brand name of Cava but the association with low quality and cheap prices is a disadvantage. Producers of Cava de Guarda are most likely not interested to join Corpinnat, Clàssic Penedès or Conca del Riu Anoia. Organic production is more expensive and not an option in the competitive Cava market. It is possible some 'organic' Cava de Guarda Superior producers will leave the DO Cava, joining one of the three movements.

Despite the high prestige status of producers, the name Corpinnat is unknown to consumers. One of the main reasons for leaving the DO Cava, labelling the specific origin, is not possible without a legal status. Creating a new sparkling DO is the next natural step for Corpinnat to move forward.

Clàssic Penedès producers are the only sparkling wine producers that are allowed to use the origin 'Penedès' on their labels. Maybe not as strong as the name Cava, but the name is no longer associated with the negative image of Cava. The risk of this movement is that it remains marginal. Merging with Corpinnat with their high-prestige status could benefit both movements.

### **CONCLUSION**

One of the main reasons why Raventós i Blanc and producers of Clàssic Penedès and Corpinnat left the DO Cava is the low prestige and cheap image of Cava. The Cava Regulatory Board and large Cava producers like Freixenet, Codorníu and Garcia Carrión are held responsible for the fact that no action was taken to improve this image. The new DO Cava regulations will probably not bring the '*rebel producers*' back to DO Cava but may prevent other producers to leave the DO Cava.

On the long-term this can lead to a situation where DO Cava producers only represent entry level and medium level (non-organic) sparkling wines. While other producers take care of the premium category, most likely from one or more separate sparkling DO's. Identifying Penedès as origin and without the low prestige and cheap image of Cava. The main reasons why well-known producers left the DO Cava.