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The Growing Importance of Vintage in Cava

Regulatory and climatic changes are putting vintage at the forefront of Cava production, giving the Spanish sparkling wine a whole new level of complexity



Juvé & Camps vineyard. Photo courtesy of Juvé & Camps.

Cava is undeniably unique in the world of sparkling wine, from its place of origin to the trio of indigenous grape varieties used in its production. Nevertheless, parallels are often drawn between Cava and other traditional method sparkling wines, such as Champagne. In light of recent changes to production regulations set out by [DO Cava](#) and the escalating impact of climate change, some of these parallels have become much more pronounced. Most notably, the growing influence of vintage.

Jose Maria Ferrer, the owner of [Familia Ferrer](#), jokes, “We used to say that the difference between Champagne and Cava is that Champagne has a very exceptional vintage every 10 years, but with Cava, it’s the other way around; we have a bad vintage every 10 years.”

However, in recent years climate change has impacted nearly every wine region, including Spain, and producing consistent crops each year is no longer a guarantee. At the same time, new DO Cava rules could make it more challenging for producers to adapt during difficult weather events, amplifying vintage differences. Now, Ferrer suspects, “we’re going to have more and more bad vintages. And we have to try to adapt to that.”

In light of this confluence of events, vintage may soon become a driving factor in both the style and quality of Cava, making the landscape—and the wines—more complex. As most buyers already do with Champagne, is it time to consider vintage when buying Cava?

The Effects of Climate Change

For Meritxell Juvé, the CEO of Juvé & Camps and a fourth-generation family member, working organically has become much more challenging in light of these climate-included changes. “In some years, when we had a strong impact of mildew in the vineyard, working organically was a clear handicap. In fact, [we saw] a reduction of our yield by about 50 to 60 percent, while nonorganic producers had only a 25 to 30 percent reduction. It really makes it more difficult.”

Embracing Vintage Variation

While the new DO Cava regulations may leave producers with fewer tools to combat challenges in the vineyard, the benefits of working organically—and embracing each vintage’s unique crop of grapes—far outweigh the costs.

Despite the ups and downs of each vintage, Juvé stresses, “This doesn’t mean that we are not speaking about excellent vintages, [it’s just] much harder to work and to deal with.” Colomer adds, “Production is higher or lower or starts earlier or later, but in terms of winemaking, the wines are still the same or even better.”

Future Planning

Juvé & Camps is also investing heavily in research. “We have recently finished a deep terroir study, with almost one hundred trial pits, that helps us to understand much better our subsoils and the reaches of each plot,” says Juvé. “With all this exhaustive information, we can plant and grow the best varieties in order of their needs, adapting much better to the different soils and increasing even more the quality of our grapes.”

With the days of consistent vintages and predictable weather behind us, vintage variation will continue to be a growing factor in the production of all wine, including Cava. Combined with DO Cava’s new organic farming and vintage dating requirements, the impact of vintage on both the style and quality of Cava will only increase. As a growing number of Cava producers embrace these variations and the challenges that come with it, Cava is gaining a whole new level of complexity—and buyers should pay attention.