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15 Sparklers for Everyday Enjoyment

New reviews of Champagne, Cava and Lambrusco for \$40 and under



Photo by: Courtesy of Raventós i Blanc

Winemaker Pepe Raventós is a Spanish sparkling wine leader.

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Tasting Highlights' wine reviews are fresh out of the tasting room, offering a sneak-peek of our editors' most recent scores and notes to WineSpectator.com members.

Sparkling wine shines at all price points in this selection, highlighting bubbly from three different parts of the wine world: Lambrusco from Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, Cava and other sparklers from northeastern Spain, and Champagne from France.

The Lambruscos are the most stylistically different of the offerings below. The dark-skinned Lambrusco grape native to the area in and around the city of Modena allows producers to extract plenty of color. The resulting wines are deep-hued and range from lightly fizzy to fully sparkling. Expect brambly berry and cherry fruit flavors with spice and herb accents. These wines are typically a great match for the region's famous Parmigiano-Reggiano and assorted salumi.

The area inland from the city of Barcelona is the home of much of Spain's sparkling wine, primarily labeled as Cava. Local grape varieties Macabeo, Xarel-lo and Parellada were traditionally blended to produce Cava, but today Chardonnay, Malvasia, Garnacha, Monastrell, Pinot Noir and Trepas are also allowed, producing white and rosé sparklers. Stylistically, Cava ranges from straightforward and fruity, to versions with greater complexity, integration and textural finesse. The best examples typically command a higher price point, but in general, Cava is still a great region to look to for well-priced bubbly.

Long has France's Champagne reigned over the sparkling wine world, a position it retains as much due to its association with luxury and celebration as with the high quality exhibited by many of the region's producers. Like the best Cava, a key component of great Champagne is the fine texture that these bubbly display; instead of the frothy beads of a Coca-Cola, for example, you get a fine and creamy mousse that still conveys a sense of vitality.

I also generally find a bit more length from good Champagne, more so than I do from sparkling wine produced in other parts of the wine world. But while premium Champagne can fetch as much as thousands of dollars per bottle, there are still some very good values to be found starting at around \$35.

DUC DE ROMET Brut Champagne Prestige NV Score: 91 / \$35

This juicy, lively version features ripe black cherry, candied lemon zest and grated ginger flavors set on the fine mousse. A crowd-pleaser. Disgorged July 2016. Drink now through 2020. 1,000 cases imported.—A.N.

CHARLES ELLNER Brut Champagne Carte Blanche NV Score: 91 / \$36

This lively Champagne is bright and balanced, with spicy mineral and graphite accents underscoring the poached pear, crushed black currant, toast and grated ginger notes. Crisp and lingering. Zesty finish. Drink now. 500 cases imported.—A.N.

NICOLAS FEUILLATTE Brut Champagne Réserve NV Score: 91 / \$36

An aperitif-style Champagne, with flavors of crème de cassis, lemon curd and pastry riding a creamy mousse and framed by crisp, well-knit acidity. Drink now through 2020. 41,000 cases imported.—A.N.

HENRI MANDOIS Brut Champagne Origine NV Score: 91 / \$34

Spice and floral accents are an aromatic entry for this well-balanced Champagne. Lacy in texture, with crisp acidity and flavors of apricot, pastry and candied ginger. Drink now through 2020. 500 cases imported.—A.N.

ALAIN THIÉNOT Brut Champagne NV Score: 91 / \$40

Lightly toasty and mouthwatering, this creamy Champagne offers flavors of baked pear and lemon curd, with rich hints of coffee liqueur and pastry cream. Balanced, showing minerally smoke and spice nuances on the finish. Drink now through 2021. 1,000 cases imported.—A.N.

JOSEP MARIA RAVENTÓS I BLANC Brut Nature Vino Espumoso de Calidad de la Finca 2013 Score: 90 / \$33

A minerally version, with up-front petrol and spice notes lacing the poached cherry, salted almond and lemon peel flavors that ride the delicate mousse. Elegant and harmonious. Disgorged February 2017. Drink now through 2020. 1,800 cases imported.—A.N.

JOSEP MARIA RAVENTÓS I BLANC Brut Blanc de Blancs Vino Espumoso de Calidad 2014 Score: 89 / \$25

Firm and finely meshed, this elegant blanc de blancs offers an appealing mix of pastry, glazed apricot and candied ginger notes, underscored by smoke and lemon curd flavors. Drink now through 2020. 10,000 cases imported.—A.N.

LA BATTAGLIOLA Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro Dosage 15 2016 Score: 88 / \$19

A subtle version, with sleek acidity tightly knit to layers of baked currant, smoke, black licorice and spice. Well-balanced and elegant. Drink now through 2019. 800 cases imported.—A.N.

EL CEP Brut Cava Kila 2015 Score: 88 / \$15

A minerally version, with subtle flavors of melon, apple blossom, lemon curd and light toast riding the refined mousse. Firm finish. Drink now through 2019. 4,000 cases imported.—A.N.

EL CEP Brut Cava Marques de Gelida Gran Reserva 2013 Score: 88 / \$19

A creamy Cava framed by juicy acidity, this offers a minerally undertow layered with flavors of Honeycrisp apple and biscuit, showing aromatic hints of Meyer lemon zest, dried mint and graphite. Features a lively, lingering finish. Drink now through 2020. 3,000 cases imported.—A.N.

JUVÉ Y CAMPS Brut Rosé Pinot Noir Cava NV Score: 88 / \$17

A firm backbone of acidity frames this well-balanced rosé. Light garnet in hue, this offers flavors of crushed raspberry, orange zest and smoke, with an aromatic hint of dried thyme. Drink now through 2019. 8,000 cases imported.—A.N.

JUVÉ Y CAMPS Brut Xarel-lo Cava Essential Reserva 2014 Score: 88 | \$16

A spool of fragrant ground spice and jasmine unwinds through this vibrant Cava. The satiny mousse carries flavors of baked quince, biscuit and Meyer lemon, backed by zesty acidity. Drink now through 2019. 1,400 cases imported.—A.N.

FIORINI Lambrusco Grasparossa di Castelvetro Becco Rosso NV Score: 87 | \$14

This lively Lambrusco features aromatic flavors of blackberry jam, graphite and singed orange peel, backed by bright acidity. Offers a firm, chalky finish. Drink now. 1,100 cases imported.—A.N.

SEGURA VIUDAS Brut Rosé Cava NV Score: 86 | \$10

This fresh rosé Cava is well-balanced, with notes of peach skin, spring blossom, slivered almond and fleur de sel riding the delicate bead. Drink now. 18,000 cases imported.—A.N.

CANTINA DI SORBARA Lambrusco di Modena Il Duomo NV Score: 86 | \$10

A balanced Lambrusco, with a zesty edge to the flavors of crushed black raspberry, black currant, graphite and dried herbs. Tangy. Drink now. 1,000 cases imported.—A.N.

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