



June 2018!

Thank you for your support of our wine club. We are very happy to be celebrating summer with you all.

This month we are looking at three wines from Catalunya, the autonomous community in Spain on the northeastern extremity of the Iberian Peninsula.

It is bordered by France and Andorra to the north, the Mediterranean Sea to the east, and the Spanish autonomous communities of Aragon to the west and Valencia to the south. The official languages are Catalan, Spanish, and the Aranese dialect of Occitan.

The fiercely independent region is consistently at the forefront of changes in Spanish wine. With that in mind, we are featuring three vanguard producers. Catalunya is also the home of Cava, a widely known sparkling wine made in the traditional, or Champagne, method. Two of the winemakers, Pepe Raventos and Manel Arinyó, have brought their own, artisan vision to this otherwise monolithic industry. Pepe not only continues his family's project to elevate the traditional sparkling wines of the region, but also embraces a progressive, natural approach. Manel is an iconoclast whose passionate imagination leads him down wild paths to delicious things. Then there's Partida Creus – the mold-breaking Italian expats with a house style as articulate as their bold, two-letter labels.

We hope these wines keep you refreshed and inspired. Perhaps they offer the perfect drink to enjoy while cheering on the Spanish squad at the World Cup!

Pepe Raventos, Xarel-lo, 2016

Established in 1497, Raventos I Blanc represents sparkling wine tradition in Catalunya. Their purpose is to, "stand up for the huge potential that our terroir has for creating sparkling wines." Twenty-one generations have worked this land, 90 hectares of vines, forest and lake, with a specific microclimate influenced by the river, a lake, two streams and a hill known as the Turó del Serral. Pepe Raventos, the current scion of the estate, is something of a renegade. His role is public-facing. As an advocate for this unique microclimate of the Conca del Anoai valley, he is an enigmatic leader.

In 2014, Pepe started a small project focused on making natural wines. He wanted to learn how to make wine recovering ancient winemaking techniques. The wines were vinified in the garage of his new home in the middle of the Raventós i Blanc estate farm. We were so excited when we heard about this project. Wines that Pepe, a kind of shy guy hero, was making in what is effectively his basement, without any additions, we flipped!! We had high expectations that the wines more than exceeded.

There are currently three wines: a 100% Xarel-lo, a 100% Xarel-lo Espumoso Ancestral, and a 100% Bastard Negre (a native Spanish red grape). All of them are unfiltered natural wines without any additives including sulfites. The Espumoso Ancestral was featured in the wine club last summer.

The still Xarel-lo comes from the Noguer Alt plot on top of the Mas del Serral. The vines on this plot are almost 50 years old. 2016 was an extreme vintage producing great concentration and balance. Harvest began during a heatwave with no rain until September 13th, after 90% of the grapes had already been picked. The grape varieties that best adapted to the drought were the ones that produce larger grapes, such as Xarel-lo and Sumoll.

For this wine no additives of any kind were used including sulfites and yeast (no pieds de cuve either). The juice fermented without temperature control in a 1,000-liter ceramic amphora and a 1,600-L oak foudre. The wine in the amphora fermented quickly and finished on October 13th. The foudre, however, stopped fermenting in winter and later finished its fermentation when the temperatures rose in spring.

Our colleague Catie O. visited Catalunya last harvest. One of her biggest take aways was how naturally delicious the plush Xarello grapes taste. The wines reflect that beautiful fresh, tropical fruit and bright acidity.

To cook: Summer squash salad, pappardelle with saffron and butter

Clos Lentiscus, Rose 41 BN, 2013

Manel, as previously mentioned, is a delightful, energetic winemaker. He is known to some as simply, "the bubble man." After years of making the wines for Bodegas Nadal, he left his comfortable position there and returned home to recover his family's domaine and continue the work of generations past.

Founded in the 14th century, the farmhouse of Can Ramon was always tied to the world of wine through commerce with Southern France and the American colonies. But during the 19th and 20th centuries, with the scourge of phylloxera, industrialization and the Spanish Civil War, the property went into decline. In 2001, Manel and his brother Joan began this ambitious project to recover the brilliance that the estate once enjoyed. Located in the Garraf Mountains and along the Mediterranean Sea in Sant Pere de Ribes, the property sits on a calcareous mass, with shallow soils containing marine fossils. This terruño of soil and proximity to the sea lends a unique character with great aging potential and minerality to the wines.

This wine is 100% Samsó (the Catalan name for Carignan) from vines planted in 1939 in the Garraf National Park (just south of Barcelona), which Manel and his brother Joan farm organically and biodynamically. This bottling is from the 2012 vintage, fermented with native yeasts, with 25 months in bottle and disgorgement with no dosage. Carignan's raw, wild soul is finessed into a pale salmon sparkler with lots of surprises and complexity. Aromas of spice and musk and minerals with blood orange, wild strawberry, and sea breeze; the palate is dry and dense, with fresh saline and herbal notes that infuse tart yet rich flavors of apricot, cherry skins, bitter almond, blood orange, minerally earth, and purple florals, with a long finish of almond oil, maraschino, and fragrant Mediterranean herbs.

To cook: Gazpacho, crabcake sandwiches, creamed nettles & roast chicken

Partida Creus, MUZ Vermut

The name Partida Creus is a reference to the crosses used for separating holdings back several decades. Massimo Marchiori and Antonella Gerona are an Italian couple from Piedmont. Both of them architects who initially moved to Barcelona for that reason. Around the year 2000, they moved out to the country in search of a “slower” lifestyle. They settled in the Massís de Bonastre (Baix Penedés) characterized by its clay and limestone soils. There they started farming all kinds of local foodstuffs but had trouble finding wines made in the same style so they started making their own, recovering old vines of local grape varieties.

In most cases, these vineyards were close to abandoned. Whenever they find a new vineyard, they'll go to the nearby town, find out who the owner is and approach them to buy or at least farm the vineyard, organically. People think they're crazy for doing this as they are very old, low yielding vineyards and in most cases, obsolete grape varieties. Some have been disqualified from D.O. for lack of color, as was the case with Sumoll, others were never even accepted. Now they're known as the crazy Italians making incredible natural wines with the grapes that all of the locals had written off in exchange for the more “international” varieties.

Their vermouth is the perfect hot weather aperitif. Keep it in the fridge at the ready for cocktail hour! Experiment serving it over ice and with a little citrus. Enjoy with marcona almonds, dried fruit and firm mountain cheese, like Costa Negra!