Champagne’s reputation precedes it, with respect to extravagant prices as well as quality—which means that value-conscious sommeliers are always in the market for outstanding sparkling wines from other grape-growing regions. In the Spanish Denominación de Origen (DO) of Penedès, located southwest of Barcelona in Catalonia, many bodegas are proving they can deliver delectable bubblies at a fraction of the cost of good Champagne—and they do it with passion and dedication.

One such producer is Heredad Segura Viudas. Rich in history, the bodega was originally built in the 11th century as a Catalan masía (country house) for the bishop of Sant Cugat del Vallès. The Count of Barcelona converted it to an outpost, but it was restored to private status after the tower lost its military importance in the 13th century. Six centuries later, in 1959, the present vineyards were planted, and the commercial brand of Segura Viudas was launched a decade later. In the early 1980s, the estate was purchased by the Barcelona-based Ferrer family, who for the last century have been the world’s largest producers of sparkling wine. Segura Viudas has retained its competitive edge ever since, with a portfolio of high-quality Cavas at reasonable prices.

I toured the property with vineyard manager Sebastia Raventos Pascual, who realizes his goal of “harmony, balance, complexity, liveliness, and vigor” through meticulous work with grow-
ers across the subregions of Alt Penedès, Urgell, and Alt Camp. In this ancient land, the terroir is defined by limestone, clay, and sandy soils in which older, lower-yielding vines produce concentrated, long-aging Cavas, while younger plantings are used to make fruitier sparklers. Innovations in the 1960s led to the widespread modernization of bottling, racking, and storage systems. These led in turn to new vinification methods that were eventually adopted in Champagne, where the houses of Reims and Épernay began to refine their dosage levels based on the practices of Cava producers.

In Penedès, the most important native grapes are the white Macabeo (Viura), Xarel·lo, and Parellada, although international varieties such as Chardonnay, Garnacha, and Pinot Noir are also allowed by the Cava DO. As Pascual describes his work at Segura Viudas, “Our philosophy is about expressing the essence of our ancestral vineyards and indigenous white varieties,” some planted more than 50 years ago.

The méthode traditionnelle is required by regulation, but the key to expression of the grapes is the assemblage. After a crash course in blending, I can attest that Segura Viudas winemaker Gabriel Suberviola has perfected the art. Macabeo typically serves as a neutral, light, and fruity base wine; Xarel·lo is slightly acidic and earthy, providing lifted aromatics; and Parellada offers personality, with a zing of appley acidity.

Suberviola’s Cavas are excellent choices for by-the-glass programs, enabling sommeliers to keep beverage costs in line without sacrificing
quality. Traditional pairings such as shellfish and Dover sole work well, of course, but you can take it to the next level with unconventional matches such as truffles, cured hams, or Mediterranean casseroles. (For further recommendations, try Evan Goldstein’s book, Daring Pairings [University of California Press, 2010]; his insightful suggestions range from empanadas to prosciutto-wrapped persimmons.)

Like most non-vintage Champagnes, these sparklers are designed for early drinking. But if you have a chance to sample an old vintage Cava, don’t pass it up. I tried a ’76 that had been disgorged by cellarmaster Joan Anton Gómez Sabate, a mysterious and gentle soul who has carefully managed the 20 million bottles that have lain at rest in the Segura Viudas cellar over the past 43 years. “There is a great deal of work and dedication behind every bottle,” he says. Sure, the vintage in question was past its prime, but it was pungent and yeasty, with a bouquet of wild mushrooms and candied fruit—and besides, there is nothing like tasting evolution in a bottle. I raise a glass to Cava. 🥂

### OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

**Aria Estate Brut, Penedès**
N.V. $14
The Aria line is designed to highlight selected old vineyards; this well-balanced Brut contains 50% Macabeo, 40% Parellada, and 10% Xarel·lo. Notes of butter and herbs complement the apple and almond flavors; the wine finishes light and fresh. **Dosage:** 9 grams per liter.

**Aria Estate Extra Dry, Penedès**
N.V. $14
This stylish blend of 50% Macabeo, 40% Parellada, and 10% Xarel·lo boasts apple, pear, and honey flavors; admirable texture; and a long, focused, off-dry finish. **Dosage:** 18 g/l.

**Aria Pinot Noir Brut, Penedès**
N.V. $14
A fruity, pink 100% Pinot Noir with vivid raspberry and strawberry flavors, finishing with a touch of sweetness and minerality. **Dosage:** 9 g/l.

**Brut Nature Gran Reserva Torre Galimany, Catalonia**
2007 $16
Xarel·lo from 70-year-old, low-yield vines dominates, with a smidgen of Macabeo and Parellada, in a blend that’s 50% barrel fermented, 50% macerated on the skins; the wine is left on the lees for three months. Flavors of dried fruit and coconut distinguish the complex and balanced palate; a light toastiness emerges on the long finish. **Dosage:** 3 g/l.

**Brut Reserva Heredad, Penedès**
N.V. $22
This blend of 67% Macabeo and 33% Parellada offers aromas of smoke and honey and flavors of apples, dried fruit, and nuts. Creamy, mildly yeasty, and crisp, it finishes clean and fresh. **Dosage:** 11 g/l.
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