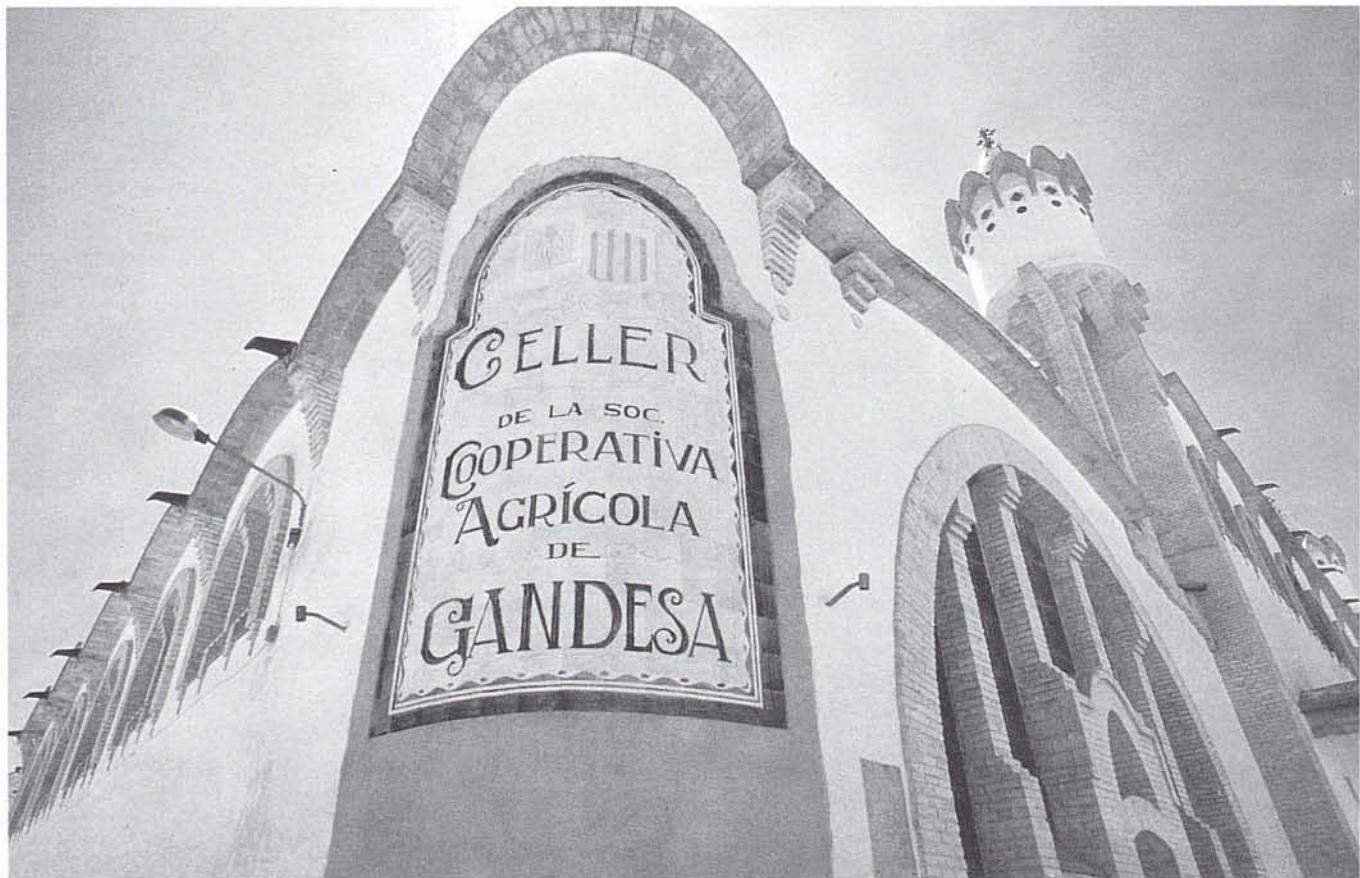


THE STILL AND SPARKLING WINES OF CATALONIA

CATALONIA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A COUNTRY WITH A WINE-MAKING TRADITION, AND THE RESULTS IT OFFERS HAVE ATTRACTED THE ATTENTION OF WINE-LOVERS ALL OVER THE WORLD.



EDUARD PUIG DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE CATALAN INSTITUTE OF GRAPES AND WINE

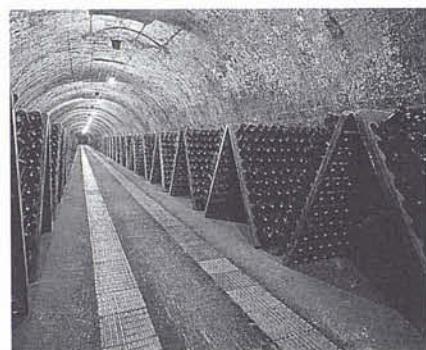
Catalonia, a wine-producing country since the far-off days of her Romanization, has remained faithful to this Mediterranean tradition and there is absolutely no doubt that the high quality of the wines she offers today makes them worthy of the attention of wine-lovers all over the world, whether connoisseurs or not. The best proof of this statement is the active and constant presence of the still and sparkling wines of Catalonia on all the international markets.

Since it would take too long to list all the qualities and characteristics of the great range of wines produced by the extensive and varied vineyards of Catalonia, I shall draw attention to just two of the determining features of our wine production.

The first is the phenomenon we call "cava", the singularly elegant sparkling wine which first emerged in Sant Sadurní d'Anoia and then spread throughout the rest of the ill-defined wine-growing region of the Penedès, until it arrived, though on a smaller scale, in other, more distant wine-producing areas. The great success of cava –this light, golden, fresh and aromatic wine– is a result of its quality, of the care that goes into its production, of the skilful combination of tradition and progress, of the "seny", or common sense which characterizes this country, thanks to which cava today has reached truly spectacular production and sales figures. Annual production of sparkling wine, made by the traditional *méthode champenoise*, stands at 150 million bottles, of which 40 million are exported abroad.

These figures are only exceeded by the Champagne region, and even then Catalonia can pride herself on having the biggest sparkling wine firm in the world using this quality method with its select results.

But the production of Cava is not only founded on our characteristically enterprising and innovative spirit, our attention to market developments, our interest in the techniques and systems used in other countries –Josep Raventós, who produced the first cava in 1872, is a perfect example of this–, but also on the particular soil conditions and climate of the Penedès region, which is specially suited to wine-growing, on the existence of grape varieties of excellent quality, such as the Xarel-lo and the Parellada, to which we can add



the Macabeu, which is more extensively distributed, and finally, on the ceaseless work of our wine-growers with their admirable and unique traditions and trade. All these ingredients and circumstances add up to produce cava, with enough character of its own so as not to have to imitate any other wine in the world, and at the same time, enough quality to be able to compete with them all. And all at a price which makes it a truly unique product, much-loved by connoisseurs of good wine.

But as well as cava, Catalonia produces a series of wines which faithfully reflect, on the one hand, the variety of her regions, and on the other, the unity of the country around a common cause: in this case, the indisputable aim of quality.

This would be no more than words if it were not borne out by a series of facts, which are none other than the presence of Catalan wines on the markets everywhere, the potential and the expansion of many companies in the wine sector, the large proportion of our vineyards (over 70 %) protected by the *appellation contrôlée*, the legal equivalent of a quality wine producer, and finally, the extensive use of new technologies in the process of elaboration, which in the last few years have revolutionized the structure and management of our wine-cellars.

But the great secret behind the quality of our wines in their process of modernization has been their ability to adapt to new market trends without sacrificing their personality. We find the wines of the classic Empordà region, the smooth and powerful *garnatxes* alongside the light, young wines, all fragrance and freshness; the legendary wines of Alella have been rejuvenated and have rediscovered their original fruitiness, while preserving their smoothness and elegance; the white wines from Penedès, as fresh, lively and vigorous as ever, together with the new red varieties, well-rounded and perfumed; the classic Tarragonas, a combination of traditionally robust, slightly sweet wines with light whites and unpretentious *rosés*; Conca de Barberà, which has gone from being Catalonia's monastic wine-cellars to become a region of light, aromatic wines, red and *rosé*, ideal for today's tastes; Terra Alta, with its strong, deep-coloured wines and now, with the incorporation of new methods of elaboration, remarkable wines of an incomparable richness of flavour; Costers del Segre, near Lleida, particularly noticeable for its modern wines, which stand proudly beside the traditional varieties; and finally, Priorat, traditional, historic, incomparable, with the surprising and undeniable character still to be found in this unique wine, robust, perfumed and round, ever more carefully prepared and aged.

This is just a glimpse of Catalonia's decidedly unique and varied wine-production, which, in spite of the difficulties, remains faithful to the objective it has set itself of quality, in the conviction, shared by wine-growers and manufacturers alike, that this is the only possible way to approach the future with any guarantee of success and satisfaction. ●