

# Ep 170: Cava and Priorat Changes and Pre-Phylloxera varieties with Rob Buckhaven, Drinks Columnist for The Metro (Part 1)



**Janina Doyle 00:00:07** Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Hello, wine friends and welcome back to another episode. So, grab your passports because today we are heading over to Catalonia in Spain and we will be guided by Rob Buckhaven. So many of you Londoners, maybe if you're reading The Metro will know who Rob is. He is the Drinks Columnist for The Metro and he's also released his own book called 'The Algorithm.' But we'll be getting to that in part two.

For this episode, part of Rob's history was as a brand ambassador for the very famous winery Torres. And so, Torres has a stronghold in Catalonia with wines from Conca de Barbera, from Costes del Segre, but more famously known, Cava and Priorat. And these are the two main regions that we are going to be focusing on today.

So, we'll be discussing some of the new regulations and labelling terms that you should be looking out for but also keeping in mind we're talking about Torres. Did you know that they have been focused on reviving pre-phylloxera Catalonian varieties?

Well, get your pen and paper together or just go to my show notes, download the transcript and there you'll find all of the grape varieties and how they're spelt because we will be talking about several ones that you I am sure have never heard of. So, pop open a bottle of Cava, you deserve it and enjoy the episode.

**Janina Doyle 00:02:09** Tell me all about this harvest you did in South Africa, because this was the start of your whole love into wine, right?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:02:09** Yeah. So, it was South Australia actually. It was my first foray into wine. I knew I wanted to get into wine because my mom used to read my sister and I, Oz Clark's book, when we walked the dog.

So, I was like, I really want to get into wine. But at that stage, there was no clear path into it. I remember, I just reached out to loads of companies and Adnams of all companies were trying to diversify from beer into wine.

**Janina Doyle 00:02:47** Okay.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:02:48** And so, I worked with them and before you can even sell or market wine, you've got to know how it's made. So, they said, "Look, here's some options." I think there was one in New Zealand, one in South Australia and one in California possibly.

And I decided on South Australia. And so, I reached out to them and they said, "Yeah, come and do a harvest with us." So, this was about sort of March time, back in 2002 or 3, I think. And so, yeah, I did. This was all self-funded. I was staying in a caravan on the site of the winery.

**Janina Doyle 00:03:25** Oh, my God! Really? Do they provide you with the caravan?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:03:30** No, I had to pay for that. They paid me like a minimum wage while I was doing it. So, I got there and I had to do everything from cleaning tanks to mixing up sort of tannin powder into water and putting it into the wines, into the vats. I had to tie up those wood chippings into big tea bags and put those into...

**Janina Doyle 00:03:55** Oh, my God! Okay, this is old fashioned South Australian winemaking.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:04:00** It was really old fashioned, but the wines weren't even cheap. So, I think Waitrose sold them. It was called Step Road Winery and Waitrose sold them and they were about sort of like 10, 11, 12 quid.

**Janina Doyle 00:04:11** No. No.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:04:12** They weren't exactly cheap, I know. So, I was doing everything. I was their kind of dog's body. But it taught me about winemaking, not in the traditional sense, not in the kind of sense we know about today, but in, as you say, old fashioned.

**Janina Doyle 00:04:28** And I can't believe funny enough, they were selling wine at that price. That Chardonnay that was so buttery and out of balance that has basically made so many wine lovers around the whole world say, "ABC – Anything But Chardonnay." How dare they? Everybody make a note of that winery. No that's awful.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:04:45** Yeah, and I was part of that problem. I was part of that problem.

**Janina Doyle 00:04:50** You're the problem!

**Rob Buckhaven 00:04:51** I'm the problem. Yeah. And then I complained about it when I was a journalist. When I got into being a journalist, I was like, I don't know what they think

they're doing making these wines. And I was like, I was making those wines for them. So, it was my fault.

**Janina Doyle 00:05:03** Yes, it's definitely a hands-on experience. I mean, were there any wine disasters then? Did you fall in any tanks?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:05:08** Oh my goodness. Worse than that. Worse than that. Yeah.

**Janina Doyle 00:05:12** Really?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:05:12** And it's part of the thing of never try and be proactively sort of helpful when you're doing these kinds of things. Because I remember I just went, Look, I'm going to clean the tops of the tanks. And I went up the catwalk to the top and I saw one of the tanks without a lid on. I thought, I'm going to be really helpful. I'm going to put the lid on.

**Janina Doyle 00:05:31** Oh no... CO2?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:05:36** I put the lid on and carried on. So, I cleaned the rest of the tops of the tanks, and came down after about an hour. And everyone was standing around their biggest tank in the winery.

I think it held something like 90,000 litres or something. And this was harvest time. So, everyone was stressed. And this tank had gone in on itself like a Coke can. What they were doing was they were pumping wine out of the tank into another tank. And so obviously, when you do that, you don't want a lid on because you don't want it to, suck it's tank into itself.

And I put the lid on. So, as soon as it finished with the wine, it then sucked the tank into itself like a Coke can. And it looked like a Coke can, you know, when you scrunch up a Coke can. And I just and I went, "oh, my God, who did that?" They went, "You did, you bloody pom." And I was like, "oh, God." So, they forever named it the Pommy Tank. And it's named after me.

**Janina Doyle 00:06:32** That was so funny. Well, they didn't get rid of you then.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:06:37** I think that was quite near the end of my tenure there. So, yeah, I think they were pleased. Yeah, after that, I think we had a party and all was forgiven, but they've named it the Pommy Tank. So, I'm kind of weirdly honoured.

**Janina Doyle 00:06:52** Okay, cool. But any wineries listening, don't hire Rob.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:06:58** Yeah, it's not my strong suit. Yeah, like DIY, practical things are not my strong suit. No.

**Janina Doyle 00:07:05** And communications are a strong point. I suppose, coming back to England, it makes sense then actually becoming like a brand ambassador, which was for Torres, right?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:07:17** So, immediately when I came back, I did a number of other things. I worked with Bibendum. Actually, Bibendum wine was my first ever job in the trade. And I first teamed up with them because I worked for Tesco. They were working with Tesco to evaluate the role of the wine advisor in the store.

So, I had to do a kind of five month thing there, then ended up working for Bibendum as a kind of salesperson. And then after that, I thought, look, I really want to get into marketing. So, I had marketing in my mind and I thought, I really want to get into marketing, so what would give me an edge? And I'd seen somewhere that they were running in Bordeaux, these wine MBA.

So, wine MBA, which was a year long course. And then by the end of it, you would become an MBA. So, it included business, wine making, everything. And I thought, plus, I want to be a student again. And so, I signed up for it, got it, and stayed. So, I lived in Bordeaux for a year. Our homework was to go and visit Chateau Pichon Longueville Baron and stuff.

**Janina Doyle 00:08:18** Oh, poor thing.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:08:19** And taste their wines. I know, I'm terrible. And that sort of thing. And then you have to do a big thesis. And then I got an MBA from that. And then long story short, after that, I worked for Thierry's and then I decided I wanted to be a classic brand manager. So, I saw the Torres job being advertised and went for that and got it. So, I was Torres brand ambassador for seven and a half years.

**Janina Doyle 00:08:40** Okay. That's a fair amount of time to get to know such a big company. I imagine though, you learnt a lot from Torres.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:08:51** Yeah. I think from Torres you do tend to, because it's a machine. It's a juggernaut. So in a weird way, it's one of these things that's so big that it doesn't really need someone to look after it because they are so prescriptive in terms of what they need from this market, what they need from this market. So, you really have no creative input into it whatsoever.

So, you're essentially an account manager. So you are managing the account, you're managing the budget. So, it taught me about budget management. It taught me about sort of the way they marketed themselves.

New product development, they'd sort of announced to us, here's a product, you've got to sell it. So, it was all about this kind of thing. And so, you do learn a lot from a company just by looking at it and seeing how they operate. I mean, they operate in 150 different markets. So, they are massive.

One of the key things I learned from them actually was the fact they have a huge range. I think it's over 50 SKU's. But they are known as a supermarket brand because of Viña Sol and Sangre de Toro. A lot of time and effort was put into actually trying to change the opinion of sommeliers to say, look, there's only two wines or three at a push because there's Esmeralda there, but the rest is all to do with the restaurants and the hospitality.

But yet people had it in their minds. They were saying, no, it's a supermarket brand. In tastings, they'd almost pass by your stand and they go, oh no, I know Torres. And you go, but hang on. We've got Mas La Plana, we've got all these other ones.

So, it was an eye opening one. They know what they want from each market. They know who they want to represent them in each market. You feel under scrutiny from them at all times. And it's one of those companies that they have people to micromanage you at all times. It was a bit like you were under the spotlight. But something like this, the pressure does, it is character building and it leads you on to other things that you want to do.

**Janina Doyle 00:10:54** Well, the people on the board, they have big dreams. Hence why they're also in Chile. And I mean, actually, do you remember the volume or the actual quantity of wines, even coming out of, say, Spain division, ignoring Chile?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:11:08** My goodness, it was just millions.

**Janina Doyle 00:11:09** Yes. Millions and millions.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:11:10** Yeah, millions and millions of bottles. I mean, it was just millions. I mean, I finished working with them about 10 years ago, so I looked after Chile, their Sonoma and their spirits as well. So, they've got spirits, they've got brandies, they were going into the Pisco market as well.

What I did love about them, they were pioneers in trying to kind of bring back to life those forgotten varieties in Spain. You'd have thought for such a big company, they would do what's easy and go for the international varieties, but they were the opposite of that.

If you look at Viña Sol, it's 100% Parellada, which is one of the three Cava grapes. So, for a wine that popular to be such an obscure grape, that probably people can't even pronounce it if they knew, but they don't care. It's so rare because usually it's the grape you lead on. But I think I love the way they were really sort of at that point focusing on Xarel·lo and Parellada. So, as still wines rather than in Cava, I think, actually, they went into Cava.

**Janina Doyle 00:12:11** To be honest, I love Xarel·lo as a still wine variety. And I mean, obviously in the Cava component of which it's most famous, it gives that lovely high acidity, but on its own, the earthy, the herbal vibes – I mean, some people call it rubber, or I think I've even heard people call Xarel·lo boiled cabbage, which is unfair.

It's totally unfair, but obviously it is giving the idea that these are not beautifully aromatic perfumed aromas coming out of Xarel·lo, but it's a really cool, grape variety. And I think more and more winemakers are going for that 100% Xarel·lo, which is exciting. It's great, right?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:12:54** Super exciting. And so, moving forward to my journalist hat on, I remember going to DO Cava, well, it was Penedès, obviously, but looking at the Cava houses there, actually looking to see many of them were working on, at that point, and it was quite a new thing, but still Xarel·los.

And Xarel·lo was really the hero grape out of all three, out of Parellada, Macabeo, that was the hero grape that they really wanna push. And you can see why, because it does have that lovely acidity, which is why it works so well in Cava.

**Janina Doyle 00:13:25** Yes, yeah.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:13:26** But equally, it can take some oak ageing, a little bit, you don't want to overwhelm it. But for me, it's got this kind of almost waxy. It's almost like when you wax a lemon. It's like that kind of waxy lemon. And I just love that, it's got texture to it as well. I think there's real promise for it.

**Janina Doyle 00:13:44** I agree, and even like a lovely, ginger note. I did a video a long, long time ago on YouTube. There you go. A plug, everyone. I haven't done a video on YouTube for like, I don't know how many years, but there's some old videos of a wine. It was Xarel·lo although they called it Pansa Blanca. Just to confuse us all.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:14:03** Because they always need those.

**Janina Doyle 00:14:04** Yes. Because it's not confusing enough, but yeah, a DO just by Barcelona, it's called Alella and it's actually really close to Barcelona and they really love working with Pansa Blanca or Xarel·lo. And so, I was talking about this and yeah, ginger tones, lemon pith. Yeah, we both vote for it, right?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:14:25** So, so good. Yeah, I could be there. It's Pansa Blanca on the north and then Prensall Blanc in the island of Mallorca. So, it's got all of these different synonyms and pseudonyms. To me, it's like Tempranillo, which has got over a hundred pseudonyms and you just think, what? Oh, come on.

**Janina Doyle 00:14:45** Well, okay, question. Obviously, Tempranillo grows in the Catalonia region. Typically, they're calling it Ull de Llebre.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:14:51** Ull de Llebre – The Eye of the Hare. But another thing is, I love the way it's not the hero grape in that region. You know, it's not. You've got the likes and we're coming into it later, Priorat. And all these amazing regions, which they are very much

focusing on...there are some international varieties. There is obviously, Ull de Llebre and there's also Garnacha, Cariñena, which are really the heroes of that region.

**Janina Doyle 00:15:17** Absolutely. So, you've mentioned a few. I think during your time working at Torres, they make wines in obviously Penedès. They make wines also in lesser known regions, which I want to touch on because you've obviously been there. So, you've been to Costers del Segre and the Conca de Barbera. Like, what do they like to go and visit?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:15:42** So, we've been back about 10 years. And I remember when I did go and visit Torres, we would obviously go and see some of the other regions within the area. We didn't spend as much time there as we did in Priorat. But what I did glean from these areas is you've got this rusticity to them.

Torres, you could always bank on the fact that they had these beautiful wineries there. So, for example, in Conca de Barbera, they had Milmanda Castle. So, that was just beautiful, this kind of ancient castle, the ruins of a castle.

I just think, the region itself, and it reminded me of Priorat in the fact that it is so remote, like super remote within them in the middle of it, you'll find these little villages. But it's just so remote.

And particularly, Priorat is so sort of rugged and dramatic and almost operatic in terms of landscape. It's just rocky. You just feel that you're the only person there. It is so silent. I found it to be some of the most striking scenery. I've been to quite a few of these wineries in these regions and I thought that Penedès just has such a beauty to it, a magnificence and a kind of drama to it that you don't really find in many other places like that.

Going to Priorat, I was just thinking, got that obviously very particular slate. So, it's got that Llicorella slate, which is kind of grey, but then in the sun, it's got this red-y tint. It sparkles of the light because of this Mica within it. And you can literally, you pick it up and you can snap it. It's totally brittle.

I always say this to people, you feel like you're on Mars. It is remote. The echo, you know, if you shout or even speak, you've got the echo, you can't see anything for miles. And you just feel like you're the only person there and it is just absolutely stunning. It's extraordinary.

**Janina Doyle 00:17:41** Well, see now it's interesting and it's fine because we're allowed to jump about. There's no rules on this podcast. You've brought it down. Well, I should say up the steep hills of Priorat. Actually, ignoring the lesser known regions like Costers del Segre, was Priorat, is that the favourite place for you then? Because it sounds like it.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:18:02** Yeah, I think so. I think out of all the places I've visited and they've all got their own merits, we'll come on to some of them later but I just found Priorat, and I haven't been for a while, but I just found it had this magic to it. It's got this magic.

And I do find that it's got this kind of almost sort of volcanic looking slate. And I do find that that seeps into the wine. There's something spiritual about them. And I know Priorat, a lot of that is to do with the monks, is to do with the Carthusian monasteries, is to do with those ruins. It's almost an auto suggestion for me because it creeps into this.

It kind of makes the wines quite mystical to me. They've got a smokiness that you really don't find anywhere else in that way. And it's probably because it sounds like it, but there's a kind of licorice note coming through. And the whole mystique of the area, I could just go back to over and again. It's just stunning.

**Janina Doyle 00:18:59** I love that. Again, I love Priorat. In fact, tasting, I haven't been and you love the place, the wines. So, this is one of the most premium wine regions of the whole of Spain yet it's often overlooked. Why is that?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:19:17** I just think it's a lack of communication. It's like anything. When people don't know about it, it's difficult. It's the best kept secret. I've been reading it up since and it's an area that is under so much development.

They are really sort of modernising themselves in a way, because I think the wines used to be known as quite sort of big wines and now they are modernising them. They're sort of taking back the use of oak a little bit, making it a bit more sensible, sensitive. There's less kind of extraction of fruit.

So, I think the wines themselves are becoming much more within people's palates. It's like the modern palate, what people want. They want fruit, but they don't want too much because otherwise it's almost like the wines of Cahors lost out to Argentine because Argentine took that grape and made it much more sort of palate friendly.

And I think with Priorat, it ties in with what they're doing in terms of sustainability. They're making their vineyards organic. They're almost leaving mother nature to do as much as she can. So, the wines are much more natural. I think now is the time to kind of communicate. Whereas before, I'm not sure it would have fitted in with the palate of the people, the general palate.

I just love it. I just think you have these old vine Garnacha and Cariñena on these kinds of terraces because it is such an almost hostile place to grow grapes in a way, if you think about it. These arid summers that reach over 40 degrees. And what they've got going for them as well is the diurnal temperatures are so different that you do get this lovely acidity coming along. Obviously, Cariñena can put up with these arid conditions much more than Garnacha.

So, Garnacha is higher up. It's typically sort of planted higher up in these terraces, so it can reach up to 900 metres. So, it's really impressive. Weirdly enough, if you think about 900 metres, yes, it's a lot, but compared to some others, it's not that.



**Janina Doyle 00:21:31** Well, not compared to South America.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:21:32** Not compared to South America, but I think it's the fact that it is so hilly and just so dramatic. It reminded me of the Douro. It really did.

**Janina Doyle 00:21:40** Okay.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:21:40** And it is so steep that you almost have to abseil down them to harvest. And obviously, it's very low yielding. So, what you do get is really concentrated fruit. So, I think they need to almost temper that to fit in with what people like.

In answer to your question, I think it's the communication one. And I think the wines, they're not to everyone's palate. I think they're becoming much more like that. And I think now having sort of read up on it more, it's weirdly the whites that people are seeing more promise with for Priorat, which I never kind of appreciated before. I think it's with Garnacha Blanca with all these, with Trepat – with all these other grapes and I just think that's really exciting.

**Janina Doyle 00:22:24** If Priorat can get its name out there to become more household known, if it has to be on the whites because they're delicious as well. Garnacha Blanca, I adore. In fact, actually, gosh, at some point, I should just do a podcast on the white varieties of Spain because Viura is incredible. We all kind of know about Albariño now. Anyway, that's a whole other podcast.

So, you said you think that in Priorat they are modernising and maybe now is the time. Well, what do you think about this whole Noms de la Terra? So, the name of the land, I guess, is what it translates to. So, they're trying to, I guess, copy the Burgundy system with village names, single sites, Premier Crus and Grand Crus, right? What do you think of that?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:23:16** Yeah, I agree. I mean, that came in, I think, it was 2020. Whatever the case was, I think it was about five years after I left working with Torres. So, it came sort of well after that. You know what? With anything like this, and I know we're going to get on to talk about sort of Cava, what they're doing there.

But I think anything that rings in a sense of typicity of that area, I think, with the Noms, although I'm not overly familiar with it, I do think what they're trying to do there, and I know it was spearheaded by Torres, which doesn't surprise me. I think they're almost trying to sort of hone in even more on that particular area.

What does that particular area and microclimate and soil, what does that do to that wine? It really gives it that really focused sense of place. I think they've got to be careful not to go overboard, because I think for people, it's like Cava, which has now become quite complex in the way systematically. And I think in a way people are like, whoa, this is a lot.

So, I think at the top end, which this is, I think it's great for collectors, for people who are particularly interested in Priorat, that's great. I think for the average person, it's probably like, what is that?

**Janina Doyle 00:24:35** Absolutely! And I suppose even the names of what they're calling, people might get very confused, like The Village Wine, a Vi de Vila is like, what does that mean? But for anybody really interested, knowing there are these tiers, they can look them up. And like you said, Torres, it's no surprise that Torres pushed for this to happen because there's only three Grand Cru sites and they have one of them.

So, it makes sense. But actually, like you said, for a collector, if somebody's listening to this saying, actually, do you know what? I want to know Priorat a little bit more. And then, you can Google who are the best wineries in Priorat. But you can actually look now and be like, well, who's got the Grand Cru sites? And who's, I think there's...

**Rob Buckhaven 00:25:17** Absolutely.

**Janina Doyle 00:25:18** I can't remember how many Premier Crus are, but you could look at those two. And then you're going to be like, cool, well, actually, I'll buy those wines to cellar. So, at least, there is a little bit more of a system to make it easier to what do you purchase if you want something super premium or age worthy?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:25:34** Absolutely. I know, I completely agree. I like the fact that they're using Catalan names to actually name the system rather than make it international. Again, even more confusing for the consumer possibly.

**Janina Doyle 00:25:45** Yeah, I can't pronounce any of it, but whatever.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:25:51** Stop making new levels that I can't pronounce.

**Janina Doyle 00:25:51** Anyway, for everyone to know, Village Wine, like Single Site Wine, Premier Cru, Grand Cru. And then, they have their old vines as well, which is amazing. And you can fit into, I think, all the different levels. But if you have old vines over 75 years, then they can on the label put Velles Vinyes. And actually, that's really cool.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:26:11** That makes sense. That really makes sense. And it actually rewards people who are doing that. It actually does give them that kind of, okay, that echelon that they need to promote their wine. So, I'm all for that.

That's another thing about Torres that I really liked. I loved the fact that they were constantly, and it goes towards sustainability as well, they're so pioneering in so many ways, and never really stand still. They are always the ones to galvanise everyone up.

And looking at sustainability, which would, for a second, because it all ties in. What I love about Spain, and actually, weirdly – so I mentioned, jumping back, that I did my MBA. My thesis was Spanish wine in the UK market.

**Janina Doyle 00:26:56** Okay, convenient.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:26:58** Convenient. So, that's what I specialized in. And I remember, during my interview with Torres, I gave them this really thick, it must have been, I can't remember how many, like 20,000 word thesis, and I gave them it. I was like, "Have a read of that. That tells you everything you need to know about my opinions about Spanish wine."

And I remember in my thesis, just being so amazed by, A, Spain has pretty much more surface area than anywhere else to grow grapes. They've got so many different microclimates, so many different regions, so many different indigenous grapes.

So, obviously, that all helps. But what I love is that these regions are coming together, there's a real unity with Spain that I find and a real collaboration between, obviously there is competitiveness, but there's actually more that unites them than anything else.

So, that's what I love about them. And if you think about it, I think now, certainly in 2021, they had more organic vineyards than anywhere else in the world. I think a quarter of their vineyards were organic. And I think that must be even more now.

I think they're still leading the way and looking at what those Cava producers were doing, I mean, their system they've got in place is now. I mean, the Vinas de Guarda, the Parajes system, all of this, great, very difficult to understand for the consumer.

**Janina Doyle 00:28:22** Again.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:28:22** Again, but really good. So, I think there's a middle ground for all this.

**Janina Doyle 00:28:28** No, totally. And it's interesting that you touched on the organics because in the DO Cava and part of this whole new system that they're trying to put in place, which is to showcase the quality, it's to give a certain amount of control so people really know what they're getting. But they have said that every producer in Cava will be organic by 2025.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:28:52** It's so punchy. Yeah.

**Janina Doyle 00:28:53** Yeah.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:28:54** I think that's fantastic. I just think it's hugely punchy. So, what I love, DO Penedès has come together. And I think that's their mantra. They want all vineyards to be fully organic by 2025, which doesn't leave them a lot of time.

But if you think about it, Spain much more than many other countries is naturally quite an eco-friendly country for winemaking and grape growing. And it's only sort of latterly, I think, when they wanted to modernise the way they did things, which actually then would use up

more energy in winemaking practices, et cetera. So, they're almost pulling it back to what they used to be.

Anyway, they're only having to go – it's almost like what's old is new, is that thing with anything. And again, with Spain, it's the same thing. They're going, let's get back to how we used to be, which is pretty eco-friendly.

**Janina Doyle 00:29:45** I agree. And it's nice that you said it helps to have a big body like Torres doing their climate change and teaming up with Jackson family wines, but it kind of shouting and screaming and putting that noise out there, which is always going to also keep everyone in Spain going, actually, yeah, what more can we do as well, I assume. Yeah. I mean, so now going back to Cava, because I find this really, really interesting with their new system. That's really confusing. It doesn't matter.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:30:13** Yeah.

**Janina Doyle 00:30:14** And Rioja has done the same thing, but for anyone who decides, for instance, no, I really like sparkling wines and I want to have great – I mean, I don't know what your opinion is. I think this came out after some of the producers of Cava had had enough and moved away and created the Corpinnat brand where they said, hey, vines are going to be this old. It's going to be from your own vineyards. The wine is going to be made this way. And I think so now Cava said, okay, fine. This is our structure.

And what's nice about it, actually, if anyone sees 'Superior' on the label, now that it already is organic. It has to be. All of those ones already are. But they've gone more into the regions because, actually, Cava is not a place. Of course, we both know, Penedès is the heart. But you don't know if you're drinking a Cava from Rioja or a Cava from Extremadura.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:31:08** I think it's 90% or it might be slightly higher now is from Penedès. But you're right. There are six places around Spain that can actually, legally make Cava. So, it's funny because it's not like Prosecco, it's not like Champagne because it's not from one particular area. Cava just means seller. It's not from an area.

Because I interviewed Javier Pagés for The Drinks Business. So, he is obviously the head of DO Cava and a lovely, lovely guy. It was two years ago – was it two or three years ago, they completely changed the way their system. And they made it much more complicated because I think it was a backlash from having been viewed as cheap and cheerful, that kind of thing.

They wanted to make themselves much more policy driven, basically, and much more traceability – a massive point, which I think is great. And I asked Javier, I said, "Look, do you think you went overboard? Because you have all these different tiers and layers and things have been changed as in Reservas and Gran Reservas.

He was really candid actually and it's all in the piece that I wrote. And he said, "Look, it's definitely when you're trying to galvanise this many producers, there's confusion as to deadlines, there's confusion as to what's required from them, that kind of thing. But I think we're headed in the right direction." I said, "Would you take it back at this stage?" And he said, "No," I think, he said, "Any decision like that to change things so radically wouldn't happen overnight."

So, you really have to think about it. I'm not about to take it back. I think it just needs time to bed itself in. I think it's really working because people really want to be part of this. I just think he's done so well. But I do think for the consumer, one of my questions to him was, "What are you doing to communicate it to the consumer, the end consumer, because at the end of the day, that's what really matters."

That's a tricky one. Yeah, that's a tricky one. He was really candid. He said, "At the end of the day, there's some consumers who don't care. They will never care. All they want is to know is does that Cava go with this food?"

But there are others who actually want to know, probably the younger generation. I would say that Gen Z, if you look at them, they're much more about provenance and traceability and wanting to know from field to glass, etc. And I said, "So, what are you doing? What practical steps?" And he said things like teaming up with Jose Pizarro, doing evenings like that. Lovely.

So, having these select kinds of chef ambassadors, because obviously, it goes so well with food. They actually did some research with a flavour scientist and the flavour scientist picked Cava as the wine worldwide that went the best with food. It had the best flavour components to go with food.

So, I think they're really sort of playing on that, which is great. And yeah, he's doing things like that. And I think they've had one already last year, bringing influences over there, educators and content creators and getting them to shout about it. That's almost what Priorat needs to do as well.

**Janina Doyle 00:34:22** Yeah. But it's like at the moment, we know that 90-95% of Cava is produced in the Penedès region. And so, now they've broken up. They've created these, I think five zones and Comtats de Barcelona is basically where most of this Cava is coming from.

But when people start seeing that on the label or they decide to investigate and see what the other places are, this could be quite interesting because I, if somebody said to me, "What does a Cava taste like from Penedès compared to a Cava from Rioja?" I don't know. I've never had the opportunity to taste, specifically, Cavas from those places.

You would have to have investigated online where each Cava is from before to try and figure it out. Whereas now, if you're interested, you can actually look on the label and see those regions, which is the next step for people getting to know how terroir affects minds all over the world. Why would it not do that in Cava?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:35:21** No, I completely agree. I completely agree with you. You mentioned Corpinnat as well. That was one of the questions I asked Javier and I said, "Are you trying to reel them back in with this new sort of qualification system?"

**Janina Doyle 00:35:35** What? The producers that left Cava?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:35:38** Yeah, the producers that left. And there was no animosity there, which I thought was amazing.

**Janina Doyle 00:35:42** None that they're willing to admit.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:35:44** He was very transparent. What I loved about him is he had such a paternal sort of take on it. He just went, "Look, it's like your children. If they have the money to do it themselves, and they want to go, break off and do their own thing, all power to them." He said, "What I'm keen not to have is confusion from the outside world on the quality."

And I think that was the key. It was, "We do not want confusion as to what Cava is and what it stands for and what the quality levels are based on these people who've gone off and done their own thing.

So, effectively, he was saying, as long as they keep the quality up, and it's all basically tied in with what we're doing, we're fine. We're fine with it. I mean, obviously, he'd like them to come back into the fold. But I loved that kind of quite magnanimous way of looking at it. He was kind of like, "Well, let them do their own thing. And if they've got it, they've got it. But let's just keep the quality up."

Because he mentioned areas like regions like Rioja, like Chianti – these different areas that are known for their quality. And he said, "We need to have that, too." Yeah. So, I thought that was really telling.

**Janina Doyle 00:36:50** Well, everybody who's listening, cava is not just cheap plonk. When people are having their vintage Champagne that needs to be aged for at least three years, you know, you have that category now. You just need to look for the Cava de Paraje Classificada. Is it clasificada?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:37:08** Calificado.

**Janina Doyle 00:37:08** Oh, Calificado. Yeah, exactly. I'm acting like I can speak Spanish.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:37:14** You can. But I love it because Paraje literally means place. So, it's like Guarda, the Vinos de Guarda. Guarda means to keep. For example, it's a minimum of nine months of ageing. So, that's very similar to Champagne. So, Cava de Guarda Superior. So, the minimum reserva ageing has gone up 15 months to 18 months.

So, that was part of what they put in and then 30 months for Gran Reserva. So, it's pretty punchy in terms of Gran Reserva. And then, you have Cava de Paraje Calificado. In terms of the Superior, there's a ceiling on production levels as well, which I think, because they were going crazy with production, that was part of the problem for Cava, because they were just churning out all of this Cava that was being sold at these ridiculous prices and the quality just wasn't as it should be. So, I think this one, we probably won't be able to tell for a few years whether it's actually working.

**Janina Doyle 00:38:12** But it definitely keeps the winemakers, the vine growers focused at the very least.

So, I think that Spain is so interesting when we talk about the Catalonia region with Cava, which so much is going on, Priorat, they're really trying to hone in on showcasing their quality. But also, we did mention Torres is like trying to work with these pre-Phylloxera vines and creating wines. So, there's actually so much interesting stuff in this northeast corner of Spain...

**Rob Buckhaven 00:38:45** Oh, my goodness.

**Janina Doyle 00:37:45** Considering it's a region that people don't necessarily go to. But if people are not going to it, it allows them to be modern, to innovate, to change, to be exciting, right, and evolve?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:38:55** Completely. And you're right. And I think it's that thing of the ancestral varieties that you were talking about. And even when I was there, one of their wines, which is one of their top end wines, is Grans Muralles, and you go there.

So, that's Conca de Barbera and they have these, it's called your Grans Muralles, which are the big walls. So, it's all part of these ancient walls that were there as a kind of mediaeval fortress. And you can still see them in the vines there within that blend, they have things like Querol, which is...

**Janina Doyle 00:39:27** Which is what?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:39:28** Which is basically, so an exclusively female vine, which is...

**Janina Doyle 00:39:35** What? Okay.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:39:36** I know. I know because they're usually hermaphrodites, these grapes. So, this is exclusively female. The wines are really big and concentrated. I remember

I had a tasting, they only had a tiny bit of it because they have these nursery vineyards that they actually grow them on.

I had a tiny bit. I just remember it being super concentrated, quite inky, sort of dark, high acidity and sort of very fresh as well. So, a great freshness. And that was one of them that was in their blend a small sort of proportion.

The other one was Garró. And then they had Samsó, which is just another word for Carignan or Cariñena, isn't that it? Because it needs more. The other one they're working on is, and I don't know how to pronounce this properly, Gonfaus. Gonfaus?

**Janina Doyle 00:40:22** Oh, my God! Gonfaus. Okay, sure. Don't ask me.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:40:26** Yeah. So, this was discovered. And part of what Miguel and his team were doing was he was sending out notes to local farmers. Not just farmers, the local people of Catalonia to see.

I think, he was putting adverts in various papers and things, saying, look, if you find a vine in your garden, in your field, that you can't identify, send it into our lab, and we will try and identify it and just see if it's one of these phylloxera-resistant or ancestral vines. And this is the way they brought quite a few of them in, by other people saying, I found this one, what do you think?

So, it was mad. It's crazy. So, Gonfaus was discovered in 1998 in the village of Santa Eulàlia de Puig Oriol and it's named after a field in the village. So, the grapes are now grown in the heart of Lleida. Again, this is another female variety. So, some of these are sort of female rather than being hermaphrodites are just female varieties, which is crazy. So, in the heart of Costers del Segre, these grow. The other one is Moneu.

**Janina Doyle 00:41:30** I mean, the thing is, they're so ancestral. Hardly anyone has them. You can't really ask how do you pronounce it? Right? I guess, it's open to interpretation.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:41:39** No one knows. Probably not even they do but I know with a couple of them. So, there's a couple of them that DO Penedès are really focusing on bringing it back to life, but not just in a kind of tokenistic way of like, we'll put some in the blend, but actually bringing them back to life. Because there's a couple of those that are really kind of naturally resistant to climate change.

And so, obviously, they are able to store water better. So, they have naturally better ways of coping with climate change than some of the others, which I think is brilliant. I think it's great. So they're using it in the fight against climate change to naturally help them out.

**Janina Doyle 00:42:15** That's fascinating. Anyone who's interested, I mean, you can go onto Torres's website and they have the Forcada, which is actually they've made into a single variety where they make a few hundred bottles that you can actually buy.



**Rob Buckhaven 00:42:29** You can actually buy it. I think that's one of the only white grapes they have.

**Janina Doyle 00:42:33** I love that. I'm glad you said it was a white because I don't even know. And then, Perine. Or Perine? Is that white? Is that a white grape?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:42:40** I don't know. I don't know that one. Perine. Yeah. I don't even know how you pronounce it.

**Janina Doyle 00:42:47** Of course not. But these are actual grapes as well that they have made as a single variety or that you can actually put. Well, you can actually buy. So, it's exciting, right?

**Rob Buckhaven 00:43:00** Exciting, I think a lot of them, they use as library stock as well, because you think about it, such small quantities. But yeah, Perine grows on the estate at Tremp in the foothills of Pyrenees. And again, I think Perine is one that is kind of slightly resistant to climate change. The other one is Sumoll. It's another one.

**Janina Doyle 00:43:20** Yes, Sumoll! Wait, I've heard of Sumoll. I can't think of...

**Rob Buckhaven 00:43:23** Okay.

**Janina Doyle 00:43:25** I've heard of Sumoll.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:43:27** That's a start.

**Janina Doyle 00:43:27** I feel like that's in more places. I don't know.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:44:30** So, Sumoll, a high quality, but again, resistant to climate change issues. That's all I know about, to be honest, Sumoll. But watch this space. But it's the sort of thing, you're right, that no matter how little you just see the name, you can just Google it and just start researching it and then hopefully get to try it.

**Janina Doyle 00:43:49** I love it. That's perfect.

**Rob Buckhaven 00:43:50** I love it. Yeah.

**Janina Doyle 00:43:54** Part two with Rob continues next week and I am really picking his brains about what it's like to be a drinks columnist and a writer for The Metro. He travels to many places around the world so he'll be sharing his discoveries, wine trends, wine stories and we will be discussing that book, The Alcorithm.

So, if you like one grape variety, you should probably like another. So, I will be looking at certain grapes and asking Rob why he suggested another. So, you'll be learning about different flavours and hopefully, learning maybe about a grape variety you haven't tried before.

Now, as you know, my incredible sponsor for this season is [Wickhams Wine](#). You can go to their site, put the code in, 'EatSleep10' and get yourself 10% off your first order. Their website is in my show notes so you can click directly from there.

And if you haven't already poured that glass of Cava that I very subtly suggested, I've checked out online and Wickhams Wine has an interesting Blanc de Noir from Garnacha. So, this is a white sparkling Cava made from the red grape Garnacha and it's a Brut Nature which means no sugar added at all.

So, that could be a very interesting one for you to try. Now, if I wanted a quote for Champagne, I could find hundreds online, but Cava, not so many, but thankfully one of the biggest producers of Cava, Freixenet, has come to save the day with a lovely simple quote, which I quite agree with. And they said:

“There is only one thing better than a glass of Cava, a bottle.”

So, get yourself that bottle of Cava. You know what's happening next week. Until then, wine friends, cheers to you.