

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Wine Club: Summery Bubbles with Calsecco

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: Matt, we did something really smart.

Matt: It's about time.

Tara: Last year, we went to Sonoma County, California to learn about sparkling wine from our supplier there.

Matt: Oh, I remember that.

Tara: And you'll also remember that our conversation drifted a bit to...

Matt: Well, that's pretty typical.

Tara: Yes, to an exciting new sparkling wine that was not yet available called Calsecco.

Matt: Oh, yeah. That's a play on the word Prosecco, but it's emphasizing that it's made from a California producer.

Tara: And we said it would only be available in cans.

Matt: Well, that's convenient.

Tara: We weren't ready to include Calsecco in that episode, Episode 98 that we were recording, but Calsecco is now available at your neighborhood Trader Joe's. Well, if your neighborhood Trader Joe's is allowed to sell wine, you know who you are.

Matt: Hey, that's exciting.

Tara: And here's the smart part.

Matt: I'm ready.

Tara: We saved the conversation about Calsecco to share with our podcast listeners and customers right now.

Matt: Well, okay then. Let's go *Inside Trader Joe's*.

[Theme music begins with two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

Tara: I'm Tara Miller, director of words and phrases and clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy at Trader Joe's, and a guy who's really interested in this new Calsecco.

Tara: Ooh, I am too. So with us in Sonoma was James, who heads up the wine team at Trader Joe's.

Matt: All right, let's listen to Mark and James. They are smart, and you can listen to us too.

[Theme music ends. Upbeat music begins. Transition to previously recorded conversation with James and Mark.]

Tara: We recently had a wine tasting panel in the office, James, where we tasted sparkling wines in a can, which are also coming from you fine folks. We overwhelmingly approved them.

James: The name behind the product is really a category. We're trying to create a domestic category of Charmat-style sparkling wines made in the Venetian way, made in the same way that Prosecco was made. In California, Charmat wines have typically been of poor quality. They're of non-traditional varieties, less expensive grape sourcing, and much sweeter in profile. So for us, it's California's expression of a fruit forward, high quality, complex Charmat-style sparkling wine like Prosecco.

Matt: I'm really excited about this. I think it opens up a level of quality, and I think our customers are ready for that.

[Music transition.]

James: Many people will say, "Oh, I just love Prosecco. Well, which Prosecco? Well, just Prosecco." Okay. There's brands, and everything's different. So what we tried to do was benchmark the top-selling Proseccos in the category and say, how can we produce a quality product in line with those Proseccos that are popular and overdeliver in quality based on California fruit. So our expression of a Prosecco produced style wine.

Matt: Mm-hmm. From a winemaking point of view, Charmat method... Charmat sounds like a French word. I don't know if it is, but what is Charmat sparkling wine?

James: Charmat is a method of producing sparkling wine, and it is in a large tank versus traditional method where method Champenois is produced in bottle. Charmat wine is produced in a large vessel.

Matt: And what would be the world's most well-known thing that is made in this Charmat method? Is it Prosecco?

James: Presently, yes.

Matt: Until we...

James: Until Calsecco hits the shelves.

Matt: Okay. All right.

James: Sparkling wine has no cachet, right? I mean, Prosecco sounds like champagne, Crémant, Cava. So when I got started in this business, I wanted to create a roundtable discussion with all the traditional method producers within Northern California. And I called every one of them to discuss how can we create domestic sparkling category other than sparkling wine? And I said, "This is not about secrets. This is about creating a category of domestic traditional method sparkling wine. America would have their expression of a champagne." Nobody wanted to do it. So for years we've seen Prosecco come in. In 2010, Prosecco's really flooded the market. In my mind, Prosecco actually is what assisted Americans in sparkling wine as an everyday event. High tide raises all boats. So for us, we want to create a category that can become recognizable to the consumer. Obviously, yes, it is a play on Prosecco, but it's the same method as Prosecco. So it's California's expression of a fruit forward, nicely balanced, high quality sparkling wine. The California fruit and growing region in the wine industry is phenomenal. This is a category made in the same method in which Prosecco was made.

[Music transition.]

Matt: When you look at how Prosecco came into the US and really swept a lot of people's purchases and attention, I feel like there are two, or maybe there are three, but I feel like there are two main aspects. There's the flavor profile and then there's perceived value through price point.

James: Well, I think the price point is what attracted people initially to those wines. They could buy a sparkling wine. It was different. It was non-traditional brands that were on the shelf at a price point that was very reasonable. It was an entry point for folks to purchase a sparkling wine for \$4.99, \$5.99 and try it. So I think that's probably where it first started. And then it tended to be a sweeter profile than the traditional méthode champenoise wines produced here mainly California.

Mark: How did your winemaking team gain the expertise for the Charmat method for a product like the Calsecco after really specializing in traditional method?

James: So we've sent several of our winemaking team to Europe to see the methods that they employ there, the winemaking practices throughout France and Italy. We also have a consulting winemaker that has worked with us over the years bringing practices that he sees around the world, and the evolution of new technology to stay at the top of our craft here and employing those practices and doing trials here.

Tara: I just learned so much over the course of listening to you all talk about this particular wine. And the expression of this that we just approved for sale at Trader Joe's is not going to be sold in a bottle with any kind of cap, but it's going to be sold in cans. I think that's a super exciting development. Of course, sparkling wine in cans is not a new thing, but this level of quality, it's a game changer for people. If you have one person at a party who really wants a sparkling wine, you don't need to buy a whole bottle to open for one person. There's a can. If you are going to an event at a destination that doesn't allow glass bottles to be brought in. I thought the wine was really great, but I wasn't aware of how it's made. And all of that pre-work and years of work that's gone into making that possible, I think that's super exciting.

[Music transition.]

James: What we're trying to create is a premium product using more varieties in that blend. We have Chardonnay in that blend. We have Pinot Noir in that blend. We have Pinot Blanc in that blend. We want to overdeliver because a lot of the perception is, or has been, that wine in the can is not at the same level as wine coming out of glass. And I think we've hit on something here with this sparkling wine and can.

Matt: Picnics will be greatly improved by this, truly. I mean, it's not just the portability that's interesting, but that's certainly part of it, but that it is about what's inside the package, not so much about the package itself. But the package has all this baggage, if you will, all these connotations from other types of drinks in it. And I hope, dear customers, that you're along for the ride with us too. And sermon over.

Tara: (laughs)

[Music ends. Previously recorded conversation ends. Transition to closing music.]

Tara: Big thanks to Mark and James and to us, frankly, because we were smart enough to save that recording.

Matt: It's been a while, so I'd actually forgotten most of that, and it's actually more fun that way. We should record all episodes six months in advance.

Tara: Calsecco is a new product with a great story and we love telling those. And there are more to come on this podcast. So hit that free subscribe or follow button.

Matt: It *is* free and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And try the Calsecco everybody.