The Reason: Autolysis

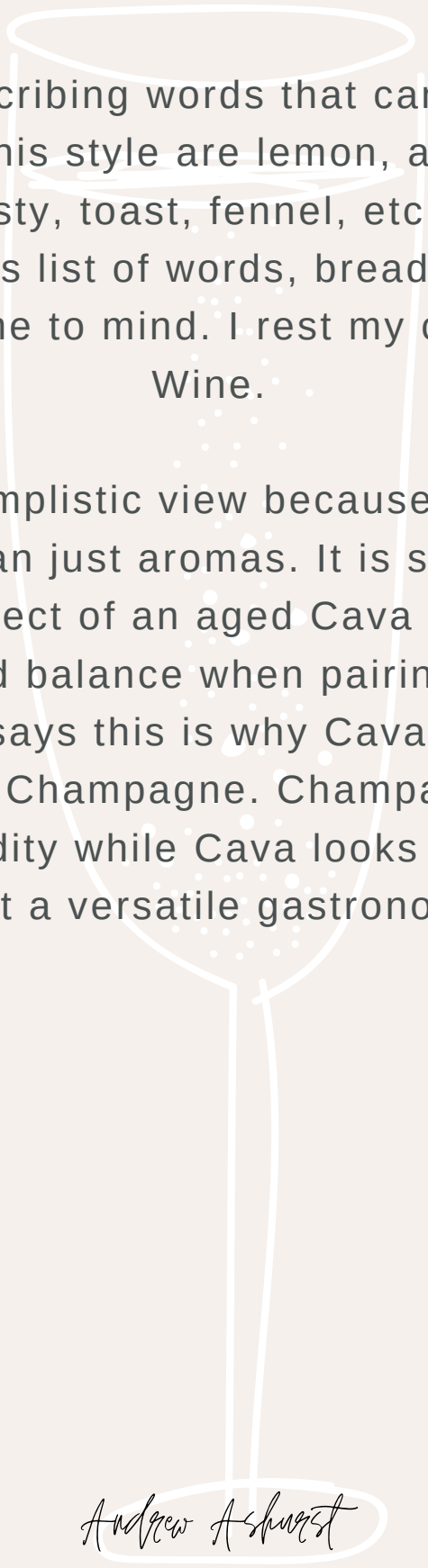
The previously mentioned Cavas have one thing in common and that is they go through or initiate the autolysis process of the yeast while ageing in the bottle. The self-destruction of the cells which enriches the wine, soon to be called cava, can only be achieved with Cavas that have gone through extended periods of time with the wine in contact with the lees in the bottle.

Autolysis is thought to start some 15 months after being bottled and can add a sensation of sweetness, unctuosity, volume and structure to Cavas. The longer we age the wine on the lees, the more concentration we will find in the resulting Cava. This is why young Cavas don’t usually reach these levels of complexity.

The list of compounds that result from autolysis is long: amino acids, peptides, mannoproteins, polysaccharides, volatile compounds (esters, terpenes, etc), etc. Some of them are aromatic but many are structural compounds that affect the taste of a given Cava (sweetness, unctuosity, balance, volume, etc).

Some of the describing words that can be found when tasting Cava of this style are lemon, aniseed, biscuity, brioche, yeasty, toast, fennel, etc. If someone were to read this list of words, bread with aromatics herbs would come to mind. I rest my case: Bread and Wine.

This is quite a simplistic view because aged Cavas are so much more than just aromas. It is said that the most important aspect of an aged Cava is its texture, complexity and balance when pairing it with food. Andrew Jefford says this is why Cava is better to pair with food than Champagne. Champagne bases its structure on acidity while Cava looks for balance and this makes it a versatile gastronomical wine.



Andrew Ashurst