

Havant U3A Wine Appreciation Group

15th Newsletter March 2021

Welcome

Once again hello Wine Appreciation members. I am still struggling with the choice of “the end of the beginning”, “the beginning of the end” or just plain “more of the same”. Although our daily lives are still blighted, we hope this newsletter can make the light at the end of the tunnel both larger and brighter and perhaps, given another glass or two, even a bit rose coloured.

When examining the extra two attachments I recommend ignoring the ridiculous if attempting the sublime, half full is the absolute maximum which should be attempted!

This edition looks at the wines of Portugal, with an excellent overview article which has kindly been produced for our WAG by a Portuguese friend of Russ and Sharon Searle. I have provided some detail on Madeira wine in our Study Topic. Plus a look at some environmentally driven trends affecting the humble glass bottle which protects our beloved liquid refreshment until it is consumed!

Look feel and content of these newsletters is still up to you the WAG members though Geoff and I receive virtually no feedback. Could you therefore think about:

Volunteering to provide the content of a study topic

Providing input about:

Wine experiences – like the best wine I ever had or the wine I’ve saved for a special occasion

Wine likes and dislikes – what is your favourite wine or a style of wine and why

Any wine related snippets or press stories

Please email Geoff and/or Steve.

If we cannot get significant participation for these newsletters, then they will cease.

Members News

The successful tasting in March decided dates and details for the next two tastings.

These will be on:

Tuesday April 20th at 2pm. The tasting will consist of wines from Germany, Austria and Hungary

Tuesday May 11th at 2pm. The tasting will consist of wines from the Loire and Rhone areas of France

About a week before each tasting please will you inform Geoff, ideally by email, of the wine you have chosen. Please include wine details, eg red/white/etc, grape, winery plus alcoholic content, price and purchasing source. This will enable Geoff to issue a tasting order sheet without any last minute rush.

The meeting will be held using the Zoom video meeting tool. The meeting invitation, with the meeting link, meeting ID and passcode, as well as a tasting order sheet, will be sent out near to the date.

For each meeting we will be having a group tasting and discussion. For the tasting please bring a single bottle of *the wine* you would like to sample:

Please be prepared to tell us about the wine that you are tasting – where it's from, grapes used, etc. and any other detail about the geography, terroir, winery or wine making process you are able to find.

If you have not taken part in these meetings before I would encourage you to try one; although it's a bit of computer/tablet/smartphone tech it's really not too difficult!

If anyone would like to have a one-to-one trial Zoom meeting any time before the event, please email either Geoff or Steve to ask for this.

Wine news

Many thanks to Jocelyn Booth for the following link to an article about amphora versus barrel made wine. An amphora being a clay vessel initially used by the ancient Romans and Greeks long before barrels.

<https://news.wine.co.za/news.aspx?NEWSID=31245>

This is an interesting summary about the UK wine industry and the pandemic from UK Wine Landscapes 2021 by Wine Intelligence:

The wine category has been an unlikely success story of the UK's Covid-afflicted year, but long-term issues remain

If the Covid era has proved anything, it is that wine still has a place in UK consumer hearts. Faced with an unprecedented disruption to daily life, wine consumption in the UK in 2020 remained strong, with volumes through off-trade making up for the loss of on-trade business and spend per bottle growing.

Before we declare a renaissance, it may be worth looking at the longer-term picture, which is not so encouraging. Five-year sales trends remain negative. The wine drinking population continues to decline – the UK has lost nearly 4 million monthly drinkers since 2015, even as the total adult population of the nation has grown. Younger people are exiting the wine category as competition from gin, craft beer and cocktails nibbles away at wine's franchise.

And so here is the puzzle: the UK remains a very interesting and diverse market, with niche and mainstream opportunities, but one where wine businesses often face their toughest tests. The UK wine drinking population may be shrinking, but it is getting more engaged in wine and more confident about experimenting. The retailers that service this market are tough on their suppliers because they must deliver amid a highly competitive environment, where good value wines are easy to come by.

As has been widely reported in the media, 2020 was a strong year for wine e-commerce, with a growing proportion of the population shopping for wine through supermarket websites, and one in seven drinkers using a specialist online wine retail site.

It was also a year of reversion to that which is tried, trusted and local. Traditional choice cues of varietal and country of origin are becoming dominant again, with recommendation becoming less of a driver. Our brand health data suggests that the biggest brands did well in the pandemic era, while less widely distributed brands struggled. And it was a strong year for domestic (English) wines, as UK consumers seek to buy local, in line with trends in other markets.

Two Covid trends that will also be apparent in the data are the growing interest in alternative packaging types, with smaller bag in box (2.25L), single serve and 500ml bottles all gaining awareness. And of course, the on-trade saw declining usage in 2020, thanks to being shuttered for several months.

However, there is some hope here for beleaguered bars and restaurants: despite the access difficulties, consumer-recalled wine purchase in on-trade did not decline by that much, according to our data. It might have been the successful government 'Eat Out To Help Out' scheme launched in August, between Lockdowns 1 and 2. Or it may be that consumers still see themselves enjoying a glass or two in their favourite pub or restaurant – and are just waiting for the Covid storm to blow itself out.

It still happens.....

An ordinary bottle of wine in February 21, screw top, nothing unusual about that, unscrew top, pour a dollup to taste and disaster!! Corked. One from two bottles of Errazuriz Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva 2019 from Tesco's online bought in January 2021. Second bottle opened with much suspicion but perfect, while, not exactly perfect, but as expected for the money. This is the first time I have ever come across a corked wine from a screw top bottle. So it still happens....

The Glass Wine Bottle: Reacting to Environmental Concerns

What follows is a series of extracts and some summarising from an article entitled “Rightweighting Glass Wine Bottles” found on the www.winealchemy.co.uk website.

Some propose replacing glass bottles with alternatives that offer less weight and more space efficiency because of weight and bulk. That isn’t without merit in some instances, but their materials may cause other undesirable outcomes. As usual, there is no simple magic bullet. Glass offers a longer shelf life and doesn’t allow oxygen and CO₂ to migrate through the packaging into the wine. And because glass doesn’t react with the wine, it never impacts taste and quality. As well as the material advantages of glass, the glass industry has huge-scale manufacturing and disposal infrastructure. Glass bottles are also well-liked by consumers. We see them as safe, healthy and environmentally friendly. Hence a mix of initiatives can improve their sustainable credentials markedly. That’s preferable to throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

This mix of initiatives is all about doing more and better with less. Briefly, some of these include:

- Glass manufacture. Giant high-temperature furnaces need to operate 24/7 for efficiency and enormous production. Unfortunately, they currently burn natural gas, a fossil fuel. The glass industry has taken huge strides to reduce energy usage, and furnace energy efficiency has improved by over 50% over the past 40 years. As part of the intention to achieve net-zero carbon, there is a proposal to build the first commercial glass furnace using renewable electricity. Meanwhile, in 2021, there will be a trial substituting biofuels for natural gas. Update, February 2021. British glass bottle manufacturer Encirc has now reported the successful trial of biofuel-powered furnaces making glass wine bottle from 100% recycled glass. This cuts down manufacture emissions by 90%
- Glass recycling is essential and something we can all do. Thankfully, glass recycling rates are high, though they can still improve. The UK is at 68%**, Europe at 76%. A plan for 90% glass recovery for recycling by 2030 is achievable. The recycled glass needs 25% less energy and has 30% less CO₂ than making new glass from virgin materials, so the glass industry can’t get enough of it. Indeed, every tonne of recycled glass saves the energy equivalent of 74,000 smart-phone recharges! A new green wine bottle can be up to 95% recycled glass. Clear (flint) glass has a lower recycled content because less clear glass is currently available but can still reach 40%.

- While most of our wine imports are already in glass bottles, there has been a doubling in bulk container shipments over the last ten years. Now 37% of wine imports are locally bottled in the UK.

Reducing weight is sometimes called lightweighting. However, with wine bottles, *rightweighting* is a more accurate description. The goal is to *optimise* the weight and resolve any conflicting stakeholder needs in the supply chain. Surprisingly, the demand for much lighter bottles has only been over the past 15-20 years. In the glass bottle making process, molten glass blows into a mould. It's then only as strong as its weakest spot. Hence the more complex the shape, the more potential for weak spots. Compensation for weak spots was by having thicker glass walls, which adds weight.

However, the glass industry developed "narrow neck press and blow" or *NPBB*. This enables a far more consistent thickness of glass in bottle manufacture, eliminating weak spots and allowing thinner glass, so saving significant weight. Thanks also to computer-aided design (CAD), these bottles are often stronger than their heavyweight counterparts! Hence while an average 750 ml still wine bottle was around 500 g in weight, such rightweighting means a standard Burgundy-style bottle is typically 395 g while a standard Bordeaux-style is 345 g. These are available from stock, while bespoke designs can go down to 300 g. Now, the UK is the second-largest importer of wine in the world. In 2019, the UK imported over 1.4 *billion* litres of wine. Hence, the rightweighting potential becomes enormous, further magnified by distance and transportation method

The UK's Waste and Resources and Action Programme (WRAP) and the UK glass industry developed a 300 g bottle during their GlassRite project. WRAP calculated that if adopted for all still wine sold in the UK, it would save 153,000 tonnes of glass and cut emissions by 119,000 tonnes of CO₂ – every year.

Distributors, global brands and supermarkets are all rightweighting, sometimes in partnerships. In 2019, Accolade Wines, the fifth largest wine company globally, introduced a 330 g standard bottle. Meanwhile, Kingsland Drinks worked with Tesco to introduce lighter bottles and, with the Co-op, reduced a 650 g bottle to 484 g and a 460 g bottle to 400 g.

The Wines of Portugal – a native`s guide

This article has kindly been produced for our WAG by a Portuguese friend of Russ and Sharon Searle. It gives a native`s slant on the subject that couldn`t be found in any reference book on the subject. Our thanks therefore go to Vitor C for his entertaining and informative article.

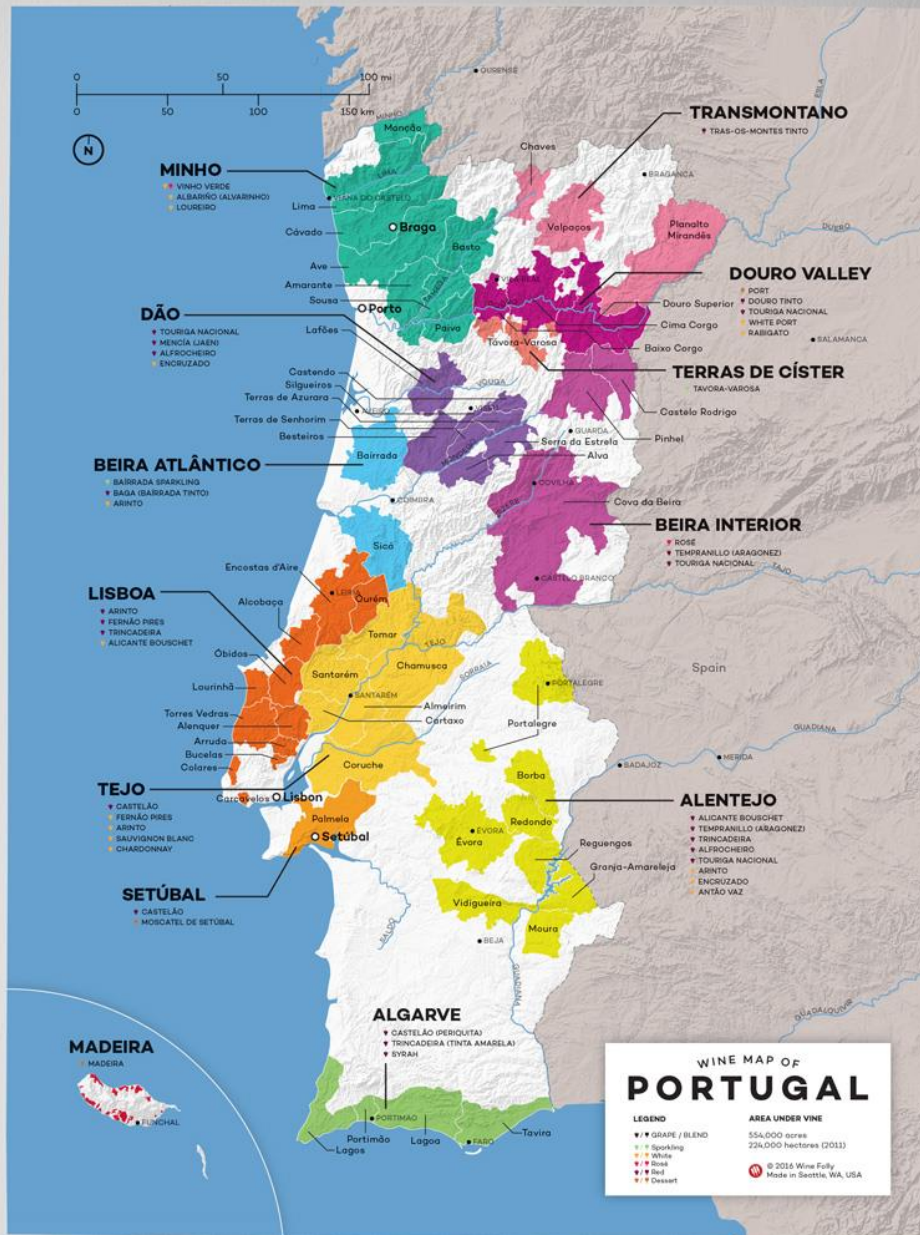
Portugal is probably the country where the largest variety of wine is produced per square mile anywhere on the planet.

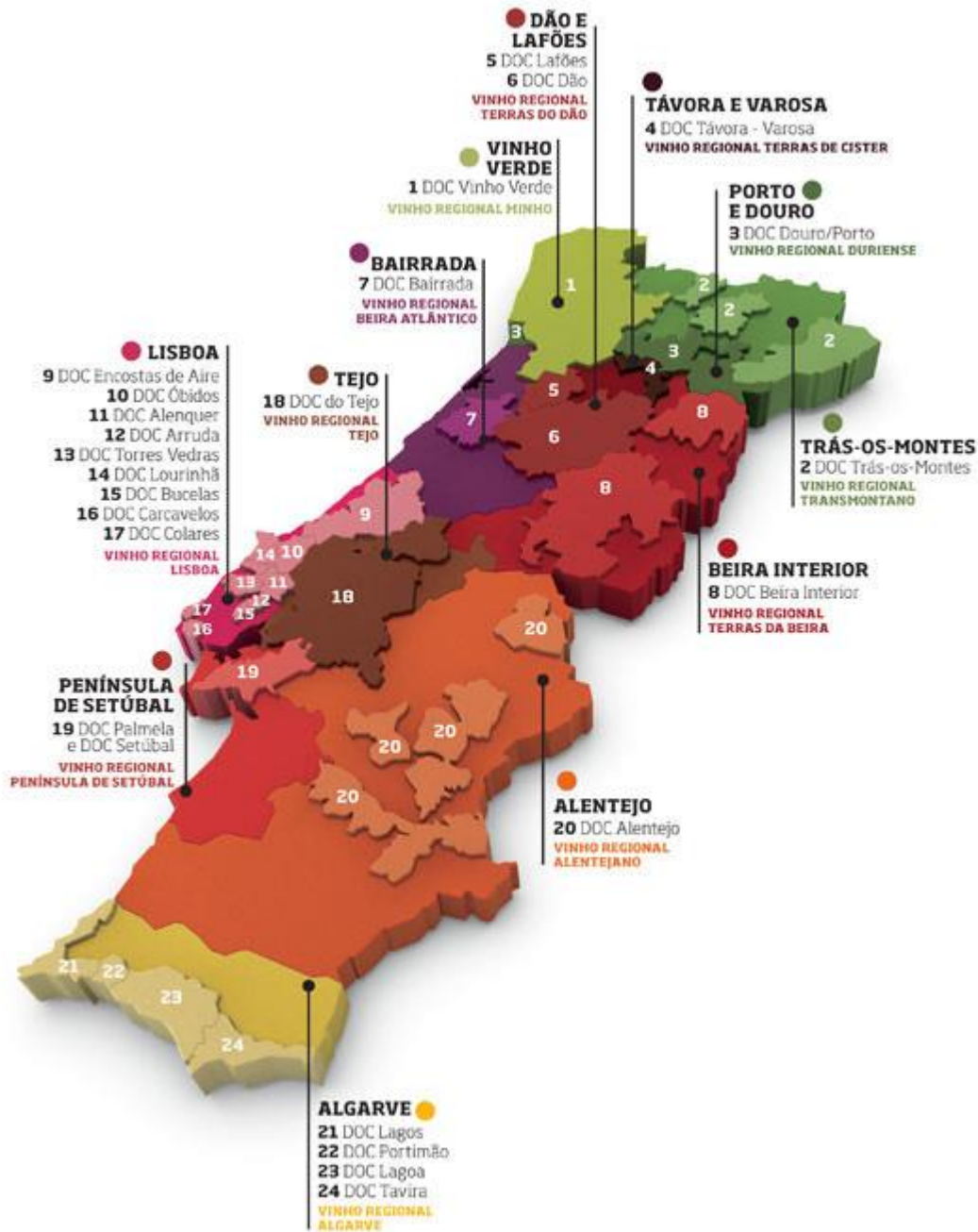
The British introduction to Portuguese wines was, for most, started with Mateus Rose, its own `70s version of Blue Nun - produced in those distinctive moon shaped bottles. It could be found on the bottom shelves of supermarkets in the UK for many years. Today this has metamorphosed into Douro, Bairrada and Alentejo wines. These arguably rival the best French wines.

Wine making can be traced as far back as the Tartessians in 2000 BC. However, it was not until the creation of an independent Kingdom of Portugal in 1143, after pushing the Moorish forces as far south as Lisbon, that Dom Afonso became the first Portuguese king and with land to start producing wine. This characteristic has been passed down the generations and to this day every Portuguese has a deep-rooted desire to become a wine producer with many living that dream in rural communities up and down the country. The majority hardly produce enough to last a whole season for themselves and close friends. Every single one of these wine `producers` claim beyond dispute that theirs is the best wine ever produced. Something that has been fuelling convivial rivalries in taverns, cellars and at dining tables for centuries. Invariably these amicable disputes are all but forgotten just in time to gather around each other`s vineyards at harvest time and restart this endless cycle of debate all over again. It is undoubtedly this inherent passion that is behind so many amazing Portuguese wines. These are best savoured in person with the inhabitants - after all, wine tastes so much better in good company!

Benedictine and Cistercian monks that settled around the fertile hillsides between Távora and Varosa rivers in the Douro region were also instrumental in starting the whole Portuguese love affair with wine. Homage can still be paid to their efforts with a visit to the São João de Tarouca Monastery, in the town of Tarouca, a Cistercian monastery from the 12th century.

It would also be unforgivable to ignore the influence that Portugal`s oldest ally, the English (British), had in Portuguese wine production and in particular port wine. For the great majority around the world, this is still the reason they recognise Portugal as a wine producing country. Following the marriage of King John I from Portugal and Phillipa of Lancaster in 1368 that led to the Treaty of Windsor the doors of trade between the two countries opened. Many English merchants settled in Portugal and port wine, for which the English had a taste for, became their most traded item. To this day the ancient Douro wine barges ply the beautiful Douro river, admittedly these days only carrying enough port to quench the thirsts of the booming river holiday cruise industry tourists.

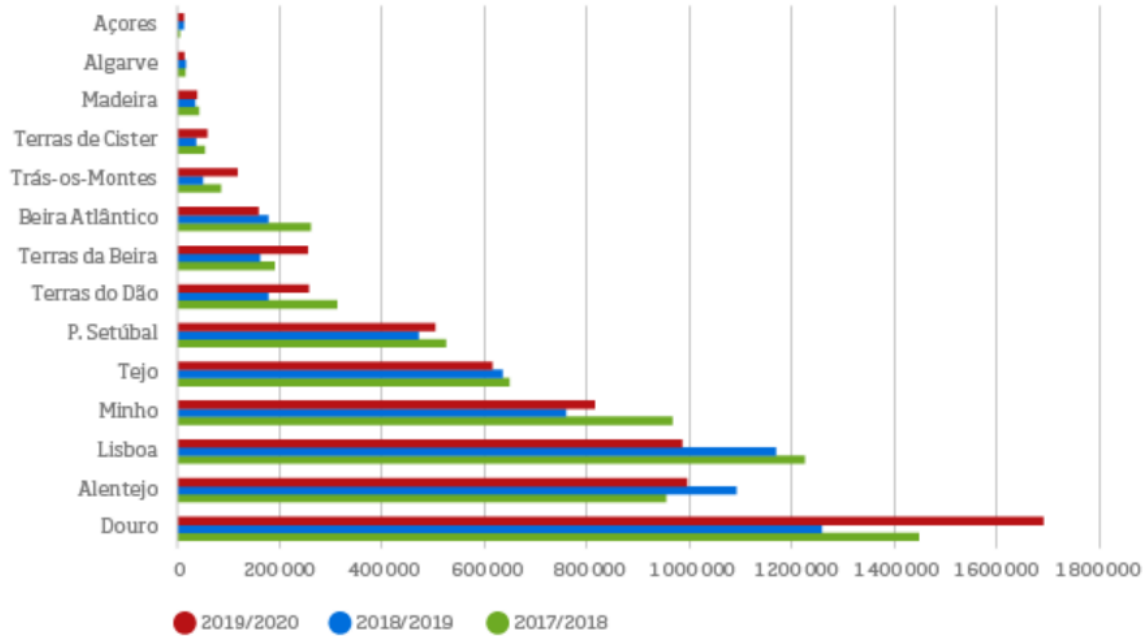




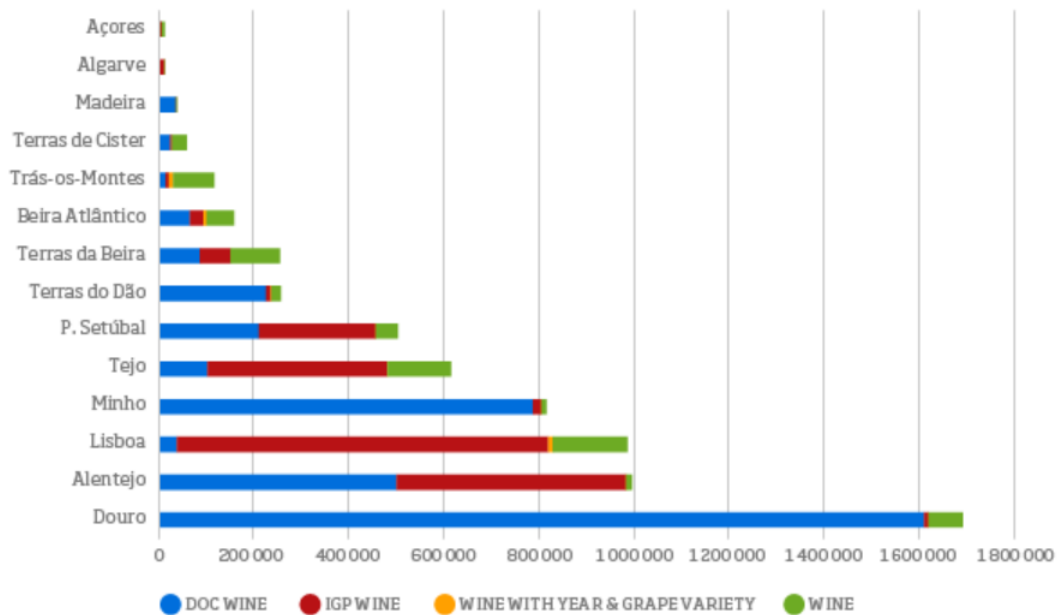
There are 5 major wine regions: Alentejo, Douro, Dão, Lisboa and Madeira. They provide a good start to anyone's journey towards Portuguese wine enlightenment but, be aware there are many more regions to be discovered. I can however assure you that once you start, you will neither stop nor ever reach your destination but, like life, it is the journey that matters. Knowledge of some of the acronyms used like DOC (controlled region of origin) and DOP (protected region of origin) also help start this journey. However, like Portuguese discoverers in the 15th Century, head towards uncharted territory and try the wines labelled less restrictively such as VR (regional wine) or even the usually inexpensive vinho de mesa (table wine), both types can pleasantly surprise you on a regular basis and, come with the bragging rights of having found a hidden gem.

Note HL is hectolitres, one hectolitre is 100 litres

PORTUGAL TOTAL WINE PRODUCTION PER REGION (HL)



2019/2020 PORTUGUESE WINE REGIONS PRODUCTION BY CATEGORY (HL)



PORTUGAL MARKET POSITION



I would argue the only reason for such variety in such a relatively small strip of land up the Atlantic coast must have been born out of the essential life necessity to complement an equally endless variety of dishes, the majority based on the simplicity of preparation that most appreciate in Italian cooking, but with much bolder flavours entering the typical regional dishes without ever detracting from the natural flavour of the ingredients.

This deviation into food is a warning to all. Any conversation about wine in Portugal with the natives will inevitably turn to food. It is unthinkable for the people of this nation to discuss wine without the mention of food. They will claim that one is pointless without the other.

For instance, Bairrada bubbly, produced using traditional methods also known as 'método champanhês', is the only one you would contemplate having with the equally famous roast piglet from that region - both have been drawing visitors for as long as written records have existed. Seafood platters by the coast in a sweltering hot summer's day with a bottle of ice cold vinho verde from the Minho region [moon-shaped bottles best avoided!] and you have the definition of perfect summer day. Feijoada (bean casserole with cabbage, pork and 3 varieties of smoked sausages) can only be washed down with the best that Alentejo region can produce, all others considered too feeble bodied to match such gut filling, heart-warming dish. Slow roasted kid cooked in a clay casserole inside a wood burning oven typical of Coimbra demands a fruity Dao wine and, those brave enough to go for the Porto tripes should reward themselves with a sophisticated wine from the Douro region, Touriga Nacional a commonly used grape variety and a favourite of mine. Once the big meal is over and everybody is getting ready for the afternoon nap, desert is brought to the table with the inevitable Port or Madeira wine.

I could go on for many more pages, but I am afraid it is time for lunch.....

Which is Portuguese tripe or Dobrada!



Study Topic – Madeira Wine

History

To begin with a whistle stop tour of the history of the Island of Madeira, putting Madeira wine into a historical context. So who found the island first? Like almost everywhere else in the Northern Hemisphere it could have been the Vikings “Tenth- or eleventh-century fragments of mouse bone found in Madeira, along with mitochondrial DNA of Madeiran mice, suggests that Vikings also came to [Madeira](#) (bringing mice with them), prior to colonisation by Portugal.

But then came the Portuguese “In 1419 two captains of Prince [Henry the Navigator](#), [João Gonçalves Zarco](#) and [Tristão Vaz Teixeira](#), were driven by a storm to the island they called Porto Santo, or Holy Harbour, in gratitude for their rescue from shipwreck. The next year an expedition was sent to populate the island, and, Madeira being described, they made for it, and took possession on behalf of the Portuguese crown, together with captain [Bartolomeu Perestrello](#).

Growing sugar started straight away relying on irrigation and slave labour. Irrigation consisted of a large number of canals ([levadas](#)), constructed by the colonists, since in some parts of the island, they had water in excess while in other parts water was

scarce. By the end of the 15th century Madeira was the world's greatest producer of sugar and production continued until the 17th century. Since then the most important product has been wine, sugar production having moved on to Brazil and elsewhere.

The 18th century was the "golden age" for Madeira. The wine's popularity extended from the American colonies and Brazil in the New World to Great Britain, Russia, and Northern Africa. The American colonies, in particular, were enthusiastic customers, consuming as much as 95% of all wine produced on the island each year.

Inventing Madeira wine

Madeira wine as we know it was discovered quite by accident (or so the story goes) in the 15th century. The Portuguese island of Madeira, which lies in the Atlantic Ocean, 480 miles southwest of Lisbon, was an important refuelling port for passing ships on the trade routes of old. Madeira wines were taken on board as victuals and brandy added to each barrel of wine to improve its keeping qualities during the long sea voyages. The heat of the ship's hold was found to have dramatically improved the wines, making them richer and more complex, as well as making them stable and capable of ageing almost indefinitely.

Terroir and grape production methods

The island of Madeira has an oceanic climate with some terropical influences. With high rainfall and average mean temperature of 66 °F (19 °C), the threats of [fungal grape diseases](#) and [botrytis](#) rot are constant [viticultural](#) hazards. To combat these threats, Madeira vineyards are often planted on low [trellises](#), known as *latada*, that raise the [canopy](#) of the vine off the ground similar to a style used in the [Vinho Verde](#) region of Portugal. The terrain of the mountainous volcanic island is difficult to cultivate, so vineyards are planted on man-made [terraces](#) of red and brown [basaltic bedrock](#). These terraces, known as *poios*, are very similar to the terraces of the [Douro](#) that make Port wine production possible. The use of mechanical harvesting and vineyard equipment is near impossible, making wine grape growing a costly endeavor on the island. Many vineyards have in the past been ripped up for commercial tourist developments or replanted with such products as bananas for commercial concerns. Some replanting is taking place on the island; however, the tourist trade is generally seen as a more lucrative business than wine-making. Most of the grapes, grown by around 2100 grape growers are from vines planted on small plots of land off of which the grape growers survive by making an income from a variety of different inter-grown crops.



Wine production methods

In the 18th century winemakers experimented with replicating this process on land. Initially they simply used the heat of the sun to warm up the barrels. This is known as the Canteiro process and it is still used. Today, after fortification with 96% grape spirit, the wines are left in casks of varying sizes normally 300 - 650 litres, in lodges where the temperature can reach over 30 degrees C and the humidity can be as high as 90%. During the process around 4 - 5% is lost by evaporation.



Later special 'ovens' or estufas were created to heat up the barrels of wine. The estufa process has been modified in recent years. The wines are now kept in containers, mainly of stainless steel, which are heated by 'jackets' containing hot water. This enables the wine to be maintained at the required temperature of 45 oC - 50 oC for a period of three months. Modern estufas can be large, ranging from 20,000 - 100,000 litres. After heating, the wines are allowed to cool down gradually.

After the Canteiro or estufa process the wines are carefully tested for quality and potential for further ageing. The length of time a wine is left to age is a decision based on quality and the style of wine required. The wine is aged in old wooden barrels and then offered as a 3, 5, 10 or 15-year-old wine, with the very best being offered as vintage Madeira after a minimum of 20 years cask ageing.

Madeira wines are without doubt the longest lasting quality wines produced. A vintage Madeira can last for a century or more, and then once opened the wine can be enjoyed, re-stoppered and stored for months without deterioration.

Madeira grapes

Look out for the name of the grape variety on the label of your bottle of Madeira. Most labels list the grape used, and if one is mentioned then the contents have to contain at least 85% of this variety. The grape varieties listed give a huge clue as to the style of the wine. The four main varieties used are as follows:

Sercial: A white grape usually grown in the coolest vineyards at heights of up to 1,000metres on the north side of the Island. It is the same grape as the 'esgana cao' (literally translated as dog strangler) which is grown on the Portuguese mainland. Due to the height at which it is grown, sercial ripens with difficulty and makes a dry and acidic wine. With fortification and cask ageing a good sercial is pale, dry, tangy and austere. Serve cellar cool as an aperitif perhaps with olives, smoked salmon or roasted almonds.

Verdelho: A white grape also predominately planted on the cooler north side of the Island, tends to produce a medium-dry to medium-sweet wine, perhaps with a slight caramel tinge. More mellow than sercial, it retains the acidity. Serve cellar cool with ham or pâtés.

Bual (Boal): A white grape grown in warmer locations on the south coast of the island, it reaches higher sugar levels than both sercial and verdelho. Produces a dark, medium-rich raisin and caramel wine which again retains its acidity. Serve at room temperature with a hard cheese, dried fruit, cakes or fruit tart.

Malmsey (Malvasia): A white grape produced mainly in the warmer locations on the south of the island around Camara de Lobos to the west of Funchal. Produces a richly sweet wine that avoids being cloying due to maintaining the high level of acidity found in all Madeira wines. Serve at room temperature with rich fruit cake, chocolate or coffee desserts.

Other more minor grapes are tinta negra, terrantez and bastardo which may sometimes be used for Madeira.

Types of Madeira

3, 5, 10 and 15-year-old. These are the most readily available wines, the label shows the age of the youngest constituent. Mainly produced in the estufa system. If the wine is made from one of the first four classic grape varieties mentioned above this will be stated on the label. If no grape variety is stated, the wine will be made mainly from the widely grown red tinta negra grape and the wine will be labelled with the level of sweetness.

Single harvest: First offered by The Madeira Wine Company, a wine labelled 'single harvest' is a wine from a single vintage that has had five to ten years cask ageing in the Canteiro system. It cannot be labelled as a 'vintage' wine as it has not had enough cask ageing.

Colheita: A single-vintage wine that has had approx 12-18 years in cask, ageing in the Canteiro system, bottled off as a single vintage probably because the blender has considered that more cask ageing (up to 20 years minimum) will not improve it enough to make a top-quality vintage wine.

Vintage: The top-quality Madeiras produced. A single vintage wine that has had at least 20 years cask ageing, in many instances up to 40 years or more, in the Canteiro system. These wines are increasingly rare but are outstanding examples of wines that can last a lifetime and beyond and still remain remarkably fresh and appealing when eventually opened. These wines share a characteristic nuttiness, with hints of caramel, toffee, marmalade and raisins. All this complexity and depth of flavour is underpinned by a bright, crisp acidity which prevents the wines from being cloying and leaves the palate feeling refreshed.



This picture is of a section of Blandy`s vintage Madeira store in Funchal, Madeira. There are several shops in Funchal especially one in the main market, stacked floor to ceiling with various makes and ages of vintage Madeira for sale, going back to the early 19th century, if of course you have 100s of euros to spare!

Healthy quaffing,

Steve Cook.