

PORT



South African port has a long and honourable history both in SA and overseas – before apartheid sanctions, much port drunk in the UK actually came from South Africa. Fortified port-style wines were made as far back as the early nineteenth century but it is only in the last 70 years that Portuguese varieties have really been planted, greatly to the improvement of the category.

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Port is a fortified wine made from black grapes. Traditional varieties include Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barocca, Souzao and lots more (there are 80 varieties licenced for port production in Portugal!), all of which have deep colour and lots of tannins – perfect for wines which are going to age for a long time. Port is made by stopping the fermentation halfway through, leaving sugar still in the wine. This is done by adding in a grape spirit (basically an unaged brandy) to kill the yeast before it can turn all the sugar into alcohol. Once the wine has been fortified, it can then be aged in barrels for a short time (in the case of ruby ports) or for a longer period (in the case of tawnies).

WHAT DOES IT TASTE LIKE?

There are two broad categories of port – reds and browns – and they taste very different from each other. Red ports (this includes vintage and ruby) spend only a year or so in a barrel and then do all their ageing – if any – in the bottle. This gives them lots of dark, fruity flavours – berries, raisins, chocolate and prunes are often what you'll find in these styles of port. Brown ports, also known as tawnies, spend most of their life in a barrel, slowly oxidising and changing colour as they do so. This gives them less fruit and more secondary flavours of toffee, coffee and toasted nuts.



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WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?

In 2012, South Africa agreed to stop labelling our ports as 'port' in deference to the European Union wanting to protect the wines made in the Douro Valley in Portugal. Before that date the term was widely-used but now, most of these fortified wines are described in terms of their style with the word 'Cape' before it – Cape Ruby, Cape Vintage etc etc. Rubies and simple tawnies should be enjoyed pretty much as soon as they are bottled, but good Cape Vintages can easily last twenty years or more with most winemakers recommending leaving them at least a decade before they are broached. If you do manage to leave a Cape Vintage for any length of time, it will probably throw a deposit. Stand the bottle upright

for a couple of days before you want to drink it and once opened, pour it very carefully through a fine, clean muslin cloth into a decanter or jug.

WHAT SHOULD WE EAT WITH IT?

With simple rubies and tawnies, you can try desserts – particularly chocolate or toffee desserts which match the flavours of the wines to perfection. But for the finest Cape Vintage wines, you need something a little stronger and more complex in flavour and, although it may seem a cliché, port and cheese is not a classic pairing for nothing! Rich and savoury with sweetness and power – a wonderful combination.

