

DIRECT PRESS
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VAMOS FALAR DE PORTUGAL

Have you ever dreamed that your small, cramped apartment had doors leading to rooms you somehow never knew about? As a wine lover that is what exploring Portugal now feels like: opening the door to a whole other world of wine that you never knew existed. This includes centuries-old vineyards, dramatically distinct topography, and learning about grape varieties I've never heard of. After more than a decade working in wine, it is humbling and a bit overwhelming to find a country that is so rich in wine tradition as to require me to do a serious amount of homework. But who am I kidding? Wine homework is pretty fun, especially if it includes traveling to Portugal.

When I visited Portugal in March of 2022, it seemed like the natural wine scene was just beginning to emerge from the dominance of big, commercial producers. Two years later, there are more and more wines coming out of Portugal that are blowing me away. We tasted so many amazing wines this month that we couldn't include in Direct Press, but we still wanted to have on our shelves, so if you like what you receive this month, there is more where that came from. I think what is particularly exciting is the group of winemakers who are using natural winemaking not as an end in itself, but as a way to express some of the more unique, distinct aspects of Portuguese terroir. That means a range of flavors and aromatic signatures that feel genuinely novel, poignant, and entrancing.

It's still the case that many of the winemakers are wealthy landowners and financial institutions. Cheap Vinho Verde and massive, inky reds were the staple of most wine shops' Portuguese sections for decades. But the perception of Portuguese wine as being mass-produced and cheap is being rethought as a younger generation reclaims old, neglected vineyards and traditions. There is a renewed interest in forgotten regions, preserving near-extinct varieties, and embracing the charm of local wines that were deemed too angular and quirky for export for many years. Many have caught on to the fact that Portugal is an untapped resource. It's a treasure trove for complex, distinctive wines that reminds me of learning about the Loire Valley or Austria when I was just starting out.

But how was all of this hiding in plain sight? Politics and economics are a big part of it. Portugal was under a dictatorship from the 1930s through the mid-1970s, led by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar. His government was proud of raising the country's GDP nearly 6% from 1950 to 1970, but Portugal was still the poorest and least literate country in Western Europe, and it still is today.

As far as wine was concerned, the Salazar period, like the Communist era of Central Europe, meant cooperatives, by law, were the primary source of wine production. This led to the dominance of mass production and industrial agriculture. It led to a huge drop in quality in the name of quantity. But much like Central Europe, the most special wine regions were left to small families for their own productions, since these landscapes were too rugged for machines and had to be worked by hand. Even despite a huge replanting and modernization effort that happened in the 1960s, it couldn't replace all of the old vines and historic grape varieties, and these are being sought out and restored by a new generation. Yet it's still the case that most wines in Portugal fall into either "very rustic or very modern" winemaking, with both extremes reflecting a general lack of traditional knowledge that has been passed down in some of the best wine regions of Europe.



XXVI Talhas

Luckily there are a handful of producers who are passionate about preserving this knowledge before it's too late. One is the project known as XXVI Talhas, started by Daniel Parreira and Ricardo Santos in their home village of Vila Alva in the Alentejo region. The name of the project refers to the 26 clay vessels, or talhas (pronounced 'TAL-ya'), that were inherited from Daniel's grandfather, along with his cellar, that they have restored. Talhas reflect a 2000 year-old tradition of making clay amphora south of Lisbon that was brought there by the Romans. Almost every country house in this part of Portugal had talhas, and though elsewhere many use clay amphora to make intensely textural wines with oxidation, the tradition here was all about freshness. To achieve this end, the talhas were lined with a mix of beeswax and olive oil, called pês (pronounced 'pesh'). If the mixture was wrong, the wines would absorb these flavors. Though the knowledge around crafting talhas and lining them with pês was handed down for centuries, today only a few people remain who know these techniques. XXVI Talhas is at the forefront of bringing this back, and you can understand why after tasting their wines (included in the Press 4 Mix and White groups this month).

Another who has inherited the pride and traditional techniques of previous generations is João Tavares de Pina of Quinta da Boavista (included in the Press 4 red and Press 2 group this month). He believes that the Dão region is the “Burgundy of the South,” as people called it back in the 1800s. He and his father have been making low-intervention wine for decades on their family home that was built in the 1700s, working with Jaen (aka Mencia), Rufete, Cerceal, Encruzado, and Touriga Nacional.

Up the Atlantic coast and more inland is Bairrada where there is renewed interest after many decades in obscurity. The Pato family is largely responsible for this, through dedication and, likely, sheer stubbornness. Luis Pato (featured in Press 2 this month) successfully kept the uniqueness of his home region alive for later generations to appreciate. The name is probably familiar since we featured his daughter Maria last month, who took over winemaking duties in 2017. Luis himself took over the family’s vines in 1980 and fully staked his name on Baga, an often-astringent grape variety, going so far as to leave the Bairrada DOC in 1999 when they permitted international varieties like Merlot and Syrah to be planted. He was one of the first to make an old-vine Vinhas Velhas wine from Baga, and they are quite special and deserving of extended aging. Those willing to wait can tap into depth and profound complexity usually only found in wines like Barolo.

Luis’ other daughter Filipa Pato (featured in Press 4 White) struck out on her own in 2001, and was one of the earliest in Portugal to embrace biodynamic practices. Today she and her husband William Wouters have 20 hectares of vines and a team of pigs, sheep, and chickens that help them. They also use local fennel, oregano, and orange trees to make their own infusions for treating the vines and preventing the mildew that is common to Bairrada.

Though coming from a respected winemaking family certainly helps, there are opportunities for younger winemakers because land prices are still relatively low compared to other countries. Lewis Kopman, who imports several of the wines featured this month, feels that Portugal is, “in many cases, only a few generations removed from a more pastoral economy, so lots of young people, even if not coming from wealth, have vines and land in their family.”

The recurring theme of everyone I talked to was that Portugal has untapped potential. It has astounding terroir, a huge diversity of soil types and microclimates, long lists of high-quality indigenous grapes, reserves of pre-phylloxera vines, and the ability to create wines that rival even Burgundy and Piedmont in terms of authenticity, finesse, and age-worthiness. Encouraging the next generation to see this heritage will hopefully be motivation to take on the intense



Photo of the Azores from GK Selections

work it requires to make wine in Portugal, a “very mountainous country that is pressed right into a pretty violent part of the Atlantic, so good farming is often very labor intensive and yields are often very low,” as Kopman puts it.

The challenges of making wine in Portugal are part of the reason many left viticultural areas for less physically-demanding jobs in cities. In many cases, this void was filled by the big, conventional producers. Though they may still dominate, even they can’t escape the conversations around natural wine. Lewis Kopman believes that “regardless of how extreme a producer ends up along the spectrum of natural/low intervention, all of the best producers in the country are at least in dialogue with the movement. The next step is creating a healthier market for the wines.”

The majority of Portuguese natural wine is still exported, and in Portugal the wine scene is not what you would find in Paris, but when I visited in 2022 I had no trouble finding spots all over Lisbon and Porto from casual lunch spots to high-level tasting menu restaurants; to crowded wine bars with wait lists for seats. The staff at the restaurants and wine bars we visited were excited to be a part of the changes that were catching like wildfire. We were utterly spoiled by the wine and the meals we had there.

José Leao of Louis/Dressner Imports was a key figure in NYC’s natural wine development in the early 2000s, most notably at the Ten Bells, Balthazar, and Restaurant 360. José is also Portuguese, born and raised in Lisbon, and he is unflinchingly optimistic. He describes the growth in the Portuguese scene as happening “faster and quicker” than in other countries. “In the past five to six years that I’ve been coming here I’ve witnessed the movement just growing up and up along with restaurants, shops, and markets. And it’s here to stay!” The numbers support this. While in the rest of the wine world, competition, costs, and oversupply are all climbing, Portugal is a rare bright spot. A recent report showed that in the first half of 2023 there was an increase of 3.4 million liters of exported wine to the tune of €16.8 million compared to the same period in 2022. So if Portugal was sleeping on its importance to the wider world of wine, consider it wide awake to the possibilities that await.

Saúde!

Jonathan Kemp

Galactic Wines 'Sarava Loureiro' Vinho Branco 2022

Vinho Verde • Portugal

Press 4 Mix/White

Miguel Viseu is the fourth generation of winemakers in the Douro, and he grew up helping his father in the cellar. But instead of taking over the family operation he left to pursue a degree in agricultural engineering and then worked at wineries all over the world including Pousse d'Or in Burgundy and Paul Hobbs in Napa. When he returned to Portugal, his passion for biodynamic farming and natural winemaking made him a shoe-in to take over as head winemaker at Aphros in Vinho Verde, one of the earliest biodynamic producers in Portugal. That's still his main gig but he and his wife Leli started making their own wines with purchased fruit in 2018 in their garage that fall under the Galactic label. "We don't plan to be big producers," he told importer Louis/Dressner in an interview. "We plan to create a lifestyle around the farming and the wine. We'll touch each bottle, wax them by hand. We don't want this to be about the money and the stress of running a business. I was born in this and it can get to a level where all the fun gets sucked out of it."

This Loureiro, one of Miguel's favorite white grapes in the Vinho Verde region, comes from vines planted about 15 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. "We wanted to make a wine that could be both incredibly fresh and rich," Miguel said. That's a great description, as it has a dangerously delicious combination of lush peach notes with spicy lemongrass and salt. There's three days of skin maceration but it's not an orange wine by any stretch. Fermented and aged in a mix of steel, chestnut barrel, and clay tinaja. Small sulfur addition, around 10ppm, only at bottling. This is an energetic and flavorful bottling with the perfect balance of tension and approachability. Fresh cut spring flowers, stone fruit, and citrus on the nose are echoed on the palate with a bit of salinity to enhance the stone fruit, with a hint of mesquite and slight spice that makes this a great wine to pair with lighter meals or as an aperitif. Serve chilled and with good company for the best results. *Jonathan Kemp*

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XXVI Talhas 'Branco de Tareco' 2022

Alentejo • Portugal
Press 4 Mix/White

XXVI Talhas refers to the 26 Talhas (pronounced 'TAL-ya') that the winery uses to ferment their wine. Daniel Parreira and Ricardo Santos started the winery with the 26 talhas and a cellar inherited by Daniel from his grandfather that they have restored. Talha is a term relating to the large mostly clay roman vessels that are traditionally used in the village of Vila Alva in the Alentejo region. Think of it as a regional style of Amphora or Qvevri. The Talha method here is very unique and is stylistically different from what we typically think of from this type of clay vessel. One of the key differences here is that the talhas are lined with a mix of beeswax and olive oil, called pês (pronounced 'pesh'). This lining is responsible for the characteristically fresh styles of wine.

The Tareco wines represent new Talha wines that are drunk in local 'Adegas' or wine houses. The wine is removed from the pots just after S. Martin's day (November 11th) and is bottled right afterwards (they have about 2.5 months of skin contact). These are light and fresh wines but with all the characteristics of Talha wine.

The 'Branco de Tareco' 2022 is a blend of Anto Vaz, Roupero, Dona Branco, and a portion of field mix varieties. The nose reveals aromas

of high toned florals, a hint of petrol, and a bit of caraway. The palate consists of a textural balance of citrus oils reminiscent of grapefruit, ginger, a bit of that petrol note, nice salinity, with a long satisfying finish.

Jeremy Hernandez

Mateus Nicolau De Almeida 'O Tinto Perfeito O Clarete' 2020

Douro • Portugal
Press 4 Mix/Red

Selection Massale, one of our favorite importers, launched a special line of everyday drinking, bistro-inspired red wines they called 'The Perfect Red' back in 2018. The Portuguese rendition was done by Mateus Nicolau de Almeida, a fifth generation winemaker from the Douro. Hailing from a family with a deep history in Port production, Mateus has branched out to explore the different subzones of the Douro through the lens of dry red and white wines. Farming is organic and biodynamic across the board, the wines are incredible values.

O Tinto Perfeito O Clarete is a field blend of 85% red grapes and 15% white, based on Tinto Roriz, Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Barroca and Malvasia Fina. The grapes are all fermented together, given a gentle 10 day maceration with short pump overs to keep extraction minimal, then fermented and aged entirely in tank. The wine comes in the most adorable Port-shaped bottle and is super fun and easy. The most

full-bodied red wine in the club this month, but still extremely friendly and ready to drink. A joyful nose of violet, eucalyptus and black pepper is met by juicy blackberry, plum and savory herbs. *Kirk Sutherland*



Rodrigo Filipe of Humus

Humus ‘Palheto’ Red 2021
Lisboa • Portugal
Press 4 Mix/Red

Lisbon is having a moment. A region that was overlooked for decades is now providing a space for young, innovative vignerons and winemakers to experiment and explore different stylistic choices in the vines and in their cellars. One winemaker that’s been leading the charge of this new and refreshing movement is Rodrigo Filipe, who took over his father’s estate in 1999. He now farms the family’s estate organically (certified since 2006) and produces wines that

reflect the cool microclimate of his lands, with low alcohol and refreshing acidity.

Palhete or Palheto wines are similar in style to Spain’s Clarete’s, field blends of red and white grapes that result in wines that sit somewhere between a dark rose and super light red. Composed of Touriga Nacional and Arinto, Fernão Pires the Palheto is decidedly darker than its rosé counterpart we’ve had in the shop recently. With rooibos tea, bright cranberry and pomegranate aromatics and marked by tart strawberry and salty, ripe citrus tones, this is perhaps the most “funky” wine in the line up this month. There is a touch of Brett and VA, without being overpowering or too wild. Drink this cold and pair with anything from shrimp to stir fried vegetables to fried chicken. *Kirk Sutherland*

Quinta da Boavista ‘Rufia’
Tinto Dao 2021
Dao • Portugal
Press 4 Red

The Dao, in north-central Portugal, has a more temperate climate compared to the coastal regions, and it has the potential to make some of Portugal’s most elegant, finessed wines, earning it comparisons to Burgundy as far back as the 1800s. João Tavares de Pina’s wines are based around pre-modern winemaking philosophies, only using “grapes, water to clean his equipment and a touch of sulfur at bottling,” according

to his importer. This was the way his father made wine, too. His vineyards are beautifully overgrown with grass, wildflowers, chamomile, lavender, clover, and serradella. Oak and eucalyptus surround the vines. João's farming is as minimal as it gets, with organic applications only as needed.

Rufia Tinto is a blend of Tinta Pinheira (aka Rufete), Jaen (aka Mencia), and Touriga Nacional fermented in steel and aged in old oak. Around 20ppm sulfur added at bottling. It can function as easy-drinking glou-glou but there are more earthy layers and vigor than most quaffers. Black cherry, black pepper, and chewy tannins are balanced with energetic, spicy cranberry notes. Crunchy and chipper with far more precision and complexity that you would expect for a humble table wine. This will pair with anything from pork belly to park hangs.

Jonathan Kemp

Da Cruz e Teles 'COZs'
vm-Castelao 2021
Montejunto • Portugal
Press 4 Red

The COZ project is a partnership of Tiago Teles of Gilda and RAIZ and Antonio Marques da Cruz of Serradinha (featured in November's Direct Press, he puts ladybugs on the corks). They joined forces in order to work the land of one of their winemaking heroes, Jose Mendonça of Quinta dos Cozinheiros, who passed away tragically. The name COZ is taken from his winery. After a few vintages

they acquired some more parcels in the Montejunto mountain range, a protected natural reserve less than 10 miles from the ocean that is dotted sporadically with vineyards.

What I like so much about their project is that they are making natural wines for all intents and purposes, but stylistically they are not afraid to have plenty of texture and tannin. The wines transcend any easy category, and truly fulfill their intent of making wines expressive of their place. They are truly distinct, speak with a real voice, and yet are so satiating and comforting. Tiago and Antonio say there is an Italian influence, and that makes sense to me with the interplay of acids and tannin.

This wine is 100% Castelao from the Montejunto mountains, planted on limestone. Fermented whole cluster in 1000L dornas and aged 11 months in Burgundy barrels. Super lively and vibrant, with cherry, seaweed, and cranberry lift. Crunchy tannins, puckery acids, and a smoky, feral umami. An exciting and yummy wine that speaks to it's coastal Lisbon origins with soul and originality. *Jonathan Kemp*



Tiago and Antonio of COZ

Insula Vinus 'Chao de Lava'

AA Azores 2022

Azores • Portugal

Press 4 White

The Azores are a group of volcanic islands 870 miles directly west of Portugal in the middle of the Atlantic, and they were uninhabited until the 1400s when it was claimed by Portugal. By the early 1800s the Azores were producing a huge amount of wine, some 13.4 million liters that was exported all around the world, including Brazil, the US, Angola, and Russia. Like the rest of Europe, this was sharply cut down by the accidental introduction of vine diseases from the Americas and both quality and quantity have suffered since the late 19th century, though things are improving considerably today.

The leading Azorean winemaker is probably Paulo Machado, who grew up there and helped start the Azores Wine Company in 2013 with vineyards he had been acquiring and relationships with local growers. This winery brought the Azores a lot of press and attention, though Paulo now is using fruit from his vineyards for his own project, Insula Vinus. These are truly impressive wines and any fan of Canary Island wines, for instance Envinante, will be blown away by Paulo's project.

The 'Chao de Lava' is made from Arinto dos Açores, not related to Arinto from the mainland, but possibly an offspring of Verdelho. It's the most commonly planted grape in the

Azores. The grapes for this wine come from south facing vineyards on Mt Pico, which are some of the coolest parcels in the Azores as they are covered in clouds and fog. As such the wine clocks in at only 12% alcohol and has more acidity than other Azorean wines. It makes for an enchanting, elegant wine with hints of creamy opulence, lemon pith, Comté rind, and complex oceanic mineral depth.

Jonathan Kemp



Paulo Machado

Filipa Pato 'Dinamica' Bairrada Branco 2022

Bairrada • Portugal

Press 4 White

Filipa Pato and her husband William Wouters are located in the Bairrada region of central Portugal. You may recognize Filipa from one of Portugal's most famous winemaking families, the Patos. Her father Luis was instrumental in putting high quality indigenous grape based wines on the map, and we featured her sister Maria in last month's club.

Filipa and William work biodynamically and with the help of a dedicated group of humans and animals. They do everything in their power to only use vineyard treatments from plants grown on their property. You should seriously follow her on instagram and check out the cutest family of pigs that help turn and weed the soil in their vineyards. The title for this month's newsletter actually came from a post she made recently.

I have been a huge fan of their sparkling 3B Rose for a very long time and has been my go to for bringing to parties or events where champagne would be under appreciated or if I didn't want to take a huge hit to the wallet. But throughout all of my encounters with Filipa's wines I have been thoroughly impressed by the quality to cost ratio. She continuously makes some of the most elegant wines I encounter. The 'Dinamica' is no different.

The 'Dinamica' is 80% Bical, and 20% Arinto and is whole cluster pressed, fermented in tank and aged in casks. A tiny bit of sulfur is added after malo-lactic fermentation is completed. The wine opens with aromas of bright citrus, almonds, and a hint of creme. The palate is generous with a slight texture of creme, with notes of citrus, almonds, hint of flinty minerality, great balance of acidity and generous length. *Jeremy Hernandez*



Filipa Pato and William Wouters



Quinta da Boavista

Quinta da Boavista 'Torre de Tavares' Encruzado 2021

Dao • Portugal

Press 2

João Tavares de Pina's organic vineyards are located in Penalva do Castelo in the Dão, a region in north-central Portugal. His family's 18th century home is surrounded by forests of oak and eucalyptus, and João works hard to maintain the natural biodiversity which includes chamomile, clover, serradella, grass, lavender and wildflowers. The vineyards, located at an altitude of 550 meters are a combination of deep granite soils, clay and schist that are ideal for his prized Jaen (Mencía), Touriga Nacional and rare Pinheira (Rufete).

The Quinta da Boavista 'Torre de Tavares' Encruzado 2021 is 100% Encruzado, considered one of Portugal's finest white grape varieties. The grapes come from a one hectare organic plot of south facing vines planted on old granitic soils. The grapes are de-stemmed and kept on their skins for 48 hours before fermentation. The wine is aged for eight months in large old chestnut casks then bottled with a touch of sulfur.

This is an elegant wine reminiscent of Burgundy, befitting the old comparison of the Dão to the region in France. The nose sparked the sense memory of quince, concentrated orchard fruit, hint of a lactic note, and a touch of spice. The palate was generous with notes of the orchard fruit being echoed, a bit of almond or marzipan, with high acidity and a fantastic saline quality. *Jeremy Hernandez*

Luis Pato 'Vinha Pan' Baga Bairrada 2013

Bairrada • Portugal

Press 2

Does Baga have the potential for greatness that Nebbiolo is known for? Luís Pato certainly thinks so, and has fought hard for this unique grape that is planted in the rural Bairrada region, located mid-coast between Lisbon and Porto. Baga certainly has the tannin and the astringency needed for extended aging, though in some cases this is so pronounced as to make it as angry as an old man returning soup at a deli. As an admitted contrarian, Baga has always appealed to me with its ornery attitude and meaty, iron funk. For the moment it's still possible to find library releases of old Baga that will blow your mind for a fraction of the price of old Burgundy or Nebbiolo, so that's another perk of joining the cult of this cantankerous cultivar.

The 2013 Vinha Pan is Baga from the Panasqueira vineyard, with chalky soils south-east exposition. It's known for producing the most Nebbiolo-like wines at the Pato estate. It's in great shape now but you can also put this aside for a few more years if you like. You don't have to decant it but we noticed the tannins resolving and the wine developing nicely after 45 minutes, so decanting will help if you can do it.

Sour cherries, brambly berries, leather, and mesquite. There's a fine balance between primary fruit, savory notes, stony minerals, and a lingering dark chocolate undertone. We even picked up hints of brisket and Cracker Jacks. There's a lot happening in this wine! Fair amount of tannins, firm and grippy, well integrated...and they soften beautifully with some air. For a wine of this age it's still surprisingly fresh. It's more medium bodied than you would think, and as such would pair nicely with fatty spiced meats; charred, crispy mushrooms; roast duck, steaks, or a flame grilled Portuguese chorizo, aka Chouriço à Bombeiro, if you can get your hands on one.

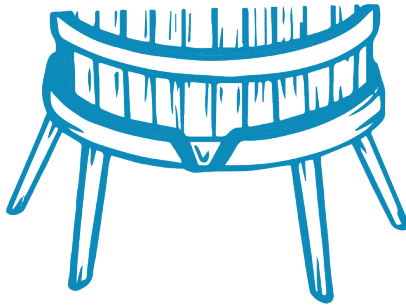
Jonathan Kemp & Nico Haunold



Maria and Luis Pato



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