

LAVRADORES de FEITORIA

DOC Porto

The 'farmers of the marked-out land' (Lavradores are farmers). This is a collaboration of 19 quintas across the 3 sub-regions of the Douro (Baixa Corgo, Cima Corgo and Douro Superior). Started in 2000, this 'kind-of-co-operative' has 48 shareholders selecting from 600 hectares of possible source material, thus summing the Douro. The wine world's Ultimate Super Group?!



The term 'Feitoria' denotes the Douro's history as a trading post, a superior land within which to make wine for export trade (predominantly for cod and textiles with the English). In 1756, the Marquês de Pombal had the region officially demarcated, by 335 totems, which served as boundary stones. This made Douro the first demarked wine area in human history.

The Lavradores wines are a refined pan-Douro expression.

Boal, Codega, Gouveio, Malvasia, Sauvignon and Viosinho are source code for the white.

The red is from Alvarelhão, Tinta Amarela, Tinta Barroca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Cão, Tourigas Franca & Nacional.

LAVRADORES de FEITORIA Douro Branco

Fruit from the Douro's highest, coolest slopes, fermented in stainless steel.

Malvasia Fina (60%) with Gouveio and Síría (Codega), from vines around 30 years' age.



A nose of crunchy citrus with a plop of white peachy-richness is nuanced with subtle herb and spice touches. The palate has clever textural elaboration – it gets good deep spread and mouthfeel down and back after a fresh entry, and then relaxes and releases. The citrus-orchard fruit hybrid is beautifully balanced between lemon drop and pear with feijoa and white pepper. Mid-weight, round in the middle with length, freshness and pop.

LAVRADORES de FEITORIA Douro Tinto

Unwooded, based on Touriga Franca (50%), with Tinta Roriz, Touriga Nacional and Tinta Barroca. Fermented in stainless steel. I love the textural maturity of this wine. It has fantastic typicity, unmasked by oak, but none of the 'tin can, going nowhere' constraint that steel can promote ... no handcuffs on this.



Beautiful, slightly meaty cherry-choc fruit with ashy-spicy licorice-and-earth underpinning. Nimble and relatively delicate, this speaks Douro plain and simple. Nicely clipped glycerine allows fruit and earth to talk loudest, with super-gentle but structurally effective tannin. The wine is harnessed beautifully and gathers to release with ease. Unwooded but mature, with no callow gassy joven edges, it has a good whack of flavour and great composure. Glinting mineral and tar, with nice juice relief, it's fun, typical, and delicious.

LAVRADORES DE FEITORIA 'TRES BAGOS' Tinto

14% a/v. Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz, Touriga Franca. Fuller, more deepset than the unwooded little brother, Tres Bagos is clean, classy mid-weight and not over-amped Douro, with snazzy blue-toot pepperminty Touriga Nacional at its heart. Well-framed on classy oak that simply choc-softens the earthen fruit, gently drying at finish.

LAVRADORES DE FEITORIA DOURO BRANCO 'Tres Bagos' Branco

12%, Viosinho, Gouveio, Rabigato. Peachy, with some almond meal and blossom, this gently worked white is well-struck, with good density and intensity without fatness or heft. Has a nice textural savoury spread, and a lively dance at the finish is refreshing.

PORTUGAL'S TABLE WINES AND PORTS



EVEN MORE THAN SPAIN, PORTUGAL IS A WINE COUNTRY RECOVERING FROM 20TH CENTURY DEVASTATIONS:

POST-PHYLLOXERA, POLITICAL UPHEAVAL, MILITARY DICTATORSHIP, POVERTY, LOSS OF CONFIDENCE, AN ERA OF COMPLACENT, UNDER-REACHING CO-OPERATIVES AND THE ONGOING WANING OF QUALITY AND LOCAL AUTHENTICITY ARE JUST NOW BEING OVERCOME. THANKS IN PART TO THE EU, A RENASCENT INDUSTRY OF DELICIOUS, AND UNIQUE WINES IS AMONG US!

THE BEST WINES OF PORTUGAL COME FROM THE VRS (REGIONAL ZONES) OF MINHO AND BEIRAS. THIS SPANS MOST OF NORTHERN PORTUGAL, STARTING JUST BELOW RIVER MINHO (MIÑO IN *CASTELLANO*) AND EXTENDING A COUPLE OF HOURS SOUTH OF PORTO; AND FROM THE ATLANTIC COAST TO THE MOUNTAINS OF THE INLAND BORDER WITH SPAIN. WITHIN THESE ZONES ARE A HALF DOZEN APPELLATIONS, WHICH, FOR US, BREAK DOWN INTO FOUR PLACES THAT MATTER: VINHOS VERDES AND DOURO (IN MINHO); DÃO AND BAIRRADA (IN BEIRAS). SOUTH OF BAIRRADA, TOWARDS LISBOA AND ULTIMATELY THE ALGARVE, THE CLIMATE IS TOO HOT FOR QUALITY VITICULTURE, WITH MOST WINES REQUIRING ARTIFICIAL ACIDIFICATION.

PORTUGUESE WINES CAN BE OFFICIAL AT ANY OF 3 LEVELS: FIRSTLY, QUALITY PROTECTED PLACE-SPECIFIC DOCS (DENOMINACEO DE ORIGEM CONTROLLADA). DOCS ARE GOVERNED BY A CVR - COMISSÃO DE VITICULTURA DA REGIÃO, EQUATING TO THE CONSEJO REGULADOR OF A DO IN SPAIN. THERE ARE CURRENTLY 31 SUCH APPELLATIONS, COVERING 29 ACTUAL PLACES, SINCE THE DOURO VALLEY AND MADEIRA HOUSE OVERLAPPING TABLE AND FORTIFIED WINE APPELLATIONS. THERE ARE A FURTHER 14 BROADER GIS, WHOSE WINES ARE LABELLED AS VR (VINHOS REGIONAIS, REGIONAL WINES). THEN GENERIC COUNTRY WINE, OR VINHO DE MESA.

RECOMMENDED READING:

'PORT AND THE DOURO'; 'THE WINES AND VINEYARDS OF PORTUGAL'; BOTH TITLES BY RICHARD MAYSON, PUBLISHED BY MITCHELL BEAZLEY WINE LIBRARY; (EASILY SOURCED FROM 'BOOKS FOR COOKS' (03) 8415 1415 www.booksforcooks.com.au)

DOCs
AND
GEOGRAPHICAL
INDICATIONS
PORTUGAL



| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| VINHO VERDE | 01 |
| VINHO VERDE | DOC |
| MINHO | IG |

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| TRÁS-OS-MONTES | 02 |
| TRÁS-OS-MONTES | DOC |
| TRASMONTANO | IG |

| | |
|--------------|-----------|
| DOURO | 03 |
| DOURO | DOC |
| PORTO | DOC |
| DURIENSE | IG |

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| DÃO | 05 |
| DÃO | DOC |
| TERRAS DO DÃO | IG |

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| BAIRRADA | 06 |
| BAIRRADA | DOC |
| BEIRA ATLÂNTICO | IG |

| | |
|-----------------|--------|
| LISBOA | |
| ENCOSTAS D'AIRE | DOC 08 |
| ÓBIDOS | DOC 09 |
| ALENQUER | DOC 10 |
| ARRUDA | DOC 11 |
| TORRES VEDRAS | DOC 12 |
| LOURINHÃ | DOC 13 |
| BUCELAS | DOC 14 |
| CARCAVELOS | DOC 15 |
| COLARES | DOC 16 |
| LISBOA | IG |

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| PENÍNSULA DE SETÚBAL | |
| PALMELA | DOC 18 |
| SETÚBAL | DOC 19 |
| PEN. SETÚBAL | IG |

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| TEJO | 17 |
| TEJO | DOC |
| TEJO | IG |

| | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| MADEIRA | 25 |
| MADEIRA | DOC |
| TERRAS MADEIRENSES | IG |

| | |
|---------------|--------|
| AÇORES | |
| GRACIOSA | DOC 26 |
| BISCOITOS | DOC 27 |
| PICO | DOC 28 |
| AÇORES | IG |

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| ALENTEJO | 20 |
| ALENTEJO | DOC |
| ALENTEJANO | IG |

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| ALGARVE | |
| LAGOS | DOC 21 |
| PORTIMÃO | DOC 22 |
| LAGOA | DOC 23 |
| TAVIRA | DOC 24 |
| ALGARVE | IG |

MADEIRA

AÇORES

PEN. DE SETÚBAL

ALENTEJO

ALGARVE

TEJO

LISBOA

BAIRRADA

BEIRA INTERIOR

TÁVORA E VAROSA

TÁVORA E VAROSA

PORTO E DOURO

VINHO VERDE

TRÁS-OS-MONTES

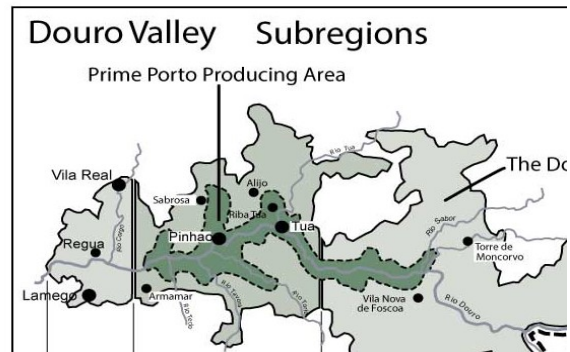


Table wines and the Douro Valley

The Douro Valley is the last wine place on a long river journey, which commences near Soria in remote north-eastern Castile. From here, Rio Duero flows roughly west and configures DOs Ribera del Duero, Cigales, Rueda and Toro, then Arribes del Duero at the border. It gets a badge change and continues as the Douro for its final stretch, from the Portuguese border into the Atlantic. The area demarcated as Douro commences 60km upstream from the coast's dual cities (Porto and Vila Nova de Gaia), and ranges east 90 km further towards the Spanish border.

The Douro Valley is home to both DOC Douro and DOC Porto. There are three Douro sub-zones:

- Upstream towards the Spanish border, Douro Superior (near Vila Nova de Foz Côa) is the hottest, highest and driest part (16 inches average annual rainfall), with an extreme continental climate.
- The central zone is Cima Corgo (east of Regua, towards Pinhão). The hills and valleys upstream of river Corgo have rainfall of 28 inches. While this sector of the Douro Valley is home to the best grapes for Port wine, the tributaries (the Corgo itself, Torto, Tedo and Pinhão rivers) are tighter valleys with cooler aspects, well suited as material for fine red wines.
- west of the Corgo towards the coast is Baixa Corgo (around Regua). The area below Corgo is colder and wetter (35 inches or more) with more alluvial soil, yielding lesser quality table wines, and base wine for Ruby Port. (1/3rd of Baixa Corgo's 45,000 hectares is under vine, compared to 1/5th of Cima Corgo's 95,000 hectares and the 10% which is planted of Douro Superior's 110,000 ha.)



But, wait! These are mere wine facts. It's time to screech to a story-telling halt.

The Douro Valley is an amazing place, facts alone don't cut it ...

The Douro itself is massive, imposing and impressive: strong, slow, deep, broad, winding. From its banks, steep hills reach up and away to a high, wide sky. Mostly, there is just river-and-hills, then sky. No room for townships and little place for roads, save for a narrow, treacherous flange carved alongside the river, into which the road up the valley is wound. It's a crazy, tight, winding drive; many hours are needed to get to the Spanish border. It is possible to take a ferry or train from Porto to the Douro: safe and scenic, for sure. However, you almost certainly *should* hire a manual Audi and fang it on the tight bends all the way up river.

The valley is very humid. The heat-sink effect of the river causes fog to plume into the morning clouds low on the river, extending a smoky, hazy overhang affect deep into the morning. And then there is the soil. Well, actually there is no soil. The hills are layers of smoky mineral schist, which join with the grey river and clouds in a menace lowering towards midday, then the heat burns off the clouds and it's all shiny metal slate glinting into the far away sky. Smoky, sultry Douro, glinting majestic.

Douro has long been home to 'Port Wine': big, strong and sweet, and fortified for the past two centuries. It has only recently been somewhere that 'Dry Red Wine' has been attempted, and these have only been successfully achieved since the early 2000s, although there is a significant historical antecedent to the idea of a Great Douro Red.

The Quest for the Great Douro Red

It's hard to overstate the scale and pace of change that is has taken place in this spectacular wine region since the 1990s. The steeply terraced vineyards contain wonderful terroirs, but due to the economic dominance of the Port trade (and the socio-economic struggles of Portugal during the 20th century), it is only recently that Douro vineyards have been afforded the investment (of money and curiosity) needed to produce premium wines. Table wine has long been made here, but has been grim stuff in the past, usually badly made from low quality grapes, surplus to the requirements of Port producers.

Traditional Douro vineyards, whether for Ports or Douro Tintos are planted to a host of varieties which were traditionally inter-planted, co-harvested and co-fermented. These are known as 'field blends'. Of late, there has been a trend towards planting varietal vineyards, particularly of Touriga Nacional and Tinto Roriz. Traditional handling was to foot tread, macerate and ferment in 'lagares' – open, shallow stone/concrete fermentation vats, and then to age wine in larger, older wood. Lately, there is more stainless steel, new small oak and other international technology in place. Such modernity is a mixed blessing here, as elsewhere, though ... today, you will find a mix of Douro expressions. You'll see 'high concept' wines that taste like they do everywhere else in the world – stupid, ego-expressive wines of massive fruit and massive oak in heavy glass bottles, that really taste of nothing and/or nowhere. You'll find straight varietal bottlings, field blends, varietal blends, and quite a few delicious earthy-textural whites, by the way. Of the reds, more-and-more we can find subtle wines expressing place with balance and grace. Mostly, the blends are best.

The Northern Grange

Antecedent to recent attempts at great Douro red wine was a Douro Superior expression known as 'Barca Velha' (the 'Old Boat'). Inspired by the great wines of Bordeaux, and hoping that the Douro was capable of making fine dry red wine, the management of AA Ferreira sent their head wine-maker on a study trip to Bordeaux in the early 1950s (almost exactly paralleling the story of Penfolds' red wine pioneer in Australia, Max Schubert, and the evolution of 'Grange'). Nicolau de Almeida began working the Ferreira-controlled estate, Quinta do Vale Meão, as source material, and Barca Velha has been intermittently produced since a first, experimental wine from 1952. Very expensive, and stylistically curious (they can be quite thin, eucalypty-woody and oxidised), it is nevertheless the precursor to the exciting wines emerging today from the vineyards of the Douro Valley. Back in the 1950s, Almeida had to resort to using blocks of ice protected in a sawdust covering and brought by boat up the Douro from Porto in order to cool his must! There's a second label, *Ferreirinha*.

Nowadays, we have the pleasure of Douro reds which avoid 'Portiness' (high alcohol, jammy fruit, low acid, thick and heavy extract). Various factors have helped reach this point. Most importantly, a critical mass of like-minded winemakers has emerged, utilising advances such as temperature-controlled crush-and-ferment, de-stemming and so on. Perhaps more important has been exploration of specific sites, aspects and soils to produce fruit better suited to table wine elegance. The chief locus of these pursuits is a group known as The Douro Boys, inimitably led by Cristiano van Zeller, maker of astonishingly good-and-good-value wines as Quinta do Vale Dona Maria. As well as working on his own project, since the mid-1990s Cristiano has also laboured long helping the other 'Douro Boys', Vallado and Meão in particular.

While the quality of contemporary Douro table wine is good overall, a variety of contradictory styles is emerging, in a similar fashion to the complex changes seen over the past couple of decades in Spain and Italy. Despite mono-varietal plantations, the introduction of new French oak, Inox fermenters - the panoply of technical possibilities - the most interesting wines retain a connection to varietal blends and the use of *lagares*. Of less interest are varietal Touriga Nacionais produced in accord with contemporary international-modernist orthodoxy, which tend to the heroic and monolithic.

A Lady of Note: meet Doña Antónia Adelaide Ferreira

The historical handprint of one Great Woman of Wine underlies this story. Adelaide Ferreira's initials are those of the company which owned Quinta do Vale Meão when the Barca Velha project commenced. Meão nowadays makes Douro's greatest red wine under its own label; the property is owned and the wine is grown and made by Adelaide's descendents, Vito Olazabel and his children. Likewise, the Olazabal's cousins, the Ferreiras of Quinta do Vallado in Cima Corgo are also descended from Doña Adelaide, and Vito's son Chito (Francisco) makes the Vallado wines as well as assisting his father with the Meãos.

AA (Adelaide) Ferreira's is a riveting story of a strong, determined and ultimately wealthy and powerful woman in the 19th century. Born in 1811, she was nicknamed *Ferreirinha* (little Ferreira), and the second wine of Barca Velha honours her in its naming. AA Ferreira herself, the Port house established by her father in 1751 has since been sold off to the giant Sogrape business. At the time of her death in 1892, she had

gathered an empire of 29 discrete *Quintas* (wine estates). But she was far more than a fierce, successful businesswoman.

During the ravages of phylloxera, for example, rather than laying off her employees, as most other houses did, she invested heavily in parallel projects to employ her people until the vineyards and wine businesses were re-established. She was instrumental in the Douro's recovery from the vine louse, traveling widely to study remedial techniques and innovating vineyard and winery practises in the process. For example, in 1868, she bottled the first ever Single Quinta Port from Quinta do Vesúvio.

Somewhat a 'Wine Socialist', during the down years after phylloxera, she began purchasing failed Quintas. This was not 'Vulture Capitalism', but a protection against that very thing: fearing British merchants preying on economically ruined family ventures, Adelaide purchased many properties and protected them while the families recovered, later selling them back at nominal prices.

Famously, she hid her 12 year old daughter in London in order to avoid the girl being married off to the Duke of Saldanha's son. The wealthier she got, the more Adelaide invested in the poor, building hospitals and assisting the unfortunate and needy. It's exceedingly appropriate that the finest wine of Portugal today, Quinta do Vale Meão Douro Tinto is her legacy.

A word on Port wine

Port wine, simply defined, is fortified wine from the Douro Valley, and is recorded as a commercial export from Porto since 1678. In truth, it's a wee bit more complicated than that!

For starters, fortification has only been the norm since early in the 19th century. The title of this section quotes the Scot, JJ Forrester whose 1844 book, "A Word or two about Port Wine" took aim at those who 'tampered' with natural (ie dry, unfortified) Port. Forrester died in a boating accident on the Douro (Adelaide Ferreira was his companion, but survived, as her giant hooped skirts trapped air and kept her afloat!). Anyway, Forrester perhaps anticipated in spirit the Single Quinta movement and the move to dry, elegant unfortified Douro wines. In the meantime, there is a 200 years-strong tradition of adding 'aguardente' to Port, in a 115-to-435 litre ratio to fill a standard 550 litre Port 'pipe' (wooden barrel). Port is roughly 1/5th of 77% abv spirit. This is erroneously termed 'brandy' in much writing about Port, a term which more properly refers to the 95% pure alcohol spirits added to Sherry, Madeira and Australian fortifieds. This spirit is usually exogenously sourced (much of it from France, these days).

Next, there are two distinct streams of Port:

- Ports matured to readiness in wood (all White, Ruby & Tawny, most Late-bottled Vintage Ports)
- Ports matured to readiness in bottle (all Vintage and some LBV Ports).

This distinction is in need of nuance: an LBV can be aged in cask for as much as 6 years and be classed as bottle-finished, whereas a Ruby could be bottled with only a year or so of cask maturation, yet be called a 'wood'-finished wine. The strength of definition comes from delineating how each wine gets to be "ready to drink": all those classified as 'wood' types are fully mature, stable and ready to drink when put into bottle, whereas (even with significant wood maturation prior to bottling) Vintage Ports will continue to mature, hence the bottle is the origin of their ultimate state. Late-bottled Vintage Ports can be classified as either type (see definition below).

Port production commences with fruit sourcing and fermentation in the Douro Valley, of course, but ageing has historically taken place in Vila Nova de Gaia – the twin city of Porto on the south bank of the Douro at the coast. Traditionally, the large Port houses based themselves in Gaia – a centre for ageing, blending, marketing and exportation. Recall the old imagery of Port workers rolling barrels down the Douro river to Gaia? No longer exactly how it's done ...! Some of the newer Single Quinta houses (such as the Douro boys) now do all of the cellar work on their estates up in the Douro itself. Many continue to make their Ports in Gaia, and some do both. Vila Nova de Gaia is a spectacular site for wine tourism - the south bank of the Douro is festooned with giant Port house branding just before the river breaches into the Atlantic.

Traditional Douro grape-growing has been on terraces (Socalcos) carved out of the steep schist slopes rising up from the river. Vineyard work was done by man and mule, and planting density was very high – around 6,000 vines/hectare, reducing vine vigour and promoting quality. In the 70s, many vineyards were re-planted to broader ramps (Patamares) allowing small tractors access, at the cost of reducing densities to 3,500 vines/ha. Recently, plantings called Vinha ao Alto running upslope allowed mechanisation and density around 5,000 vines/ha. (The latter two are only possible on less steep slopes).

Making Port starts with a relatively short, vigorous process of extraction and fermentation. Roga (gangs of foot-treaders) extract colour, flavour and tannin by treading grapes in shallow stone lagares before a short fermentation of just 2-3 days, after which fermentation is stopped by the addition of 77% a/v aguardente (fortifying spirit), leaving the requisite residual sugar in the wine. It is then racked to barrels and allowed to 'fall bright' over winter, with sediment and tartrates dropping into the bottom of the vat.



BOTTLE-MATURED PORT STYLES

Vintage Port is sort of a "that's not a Wine, THIS is a Wine" opportunity!

VP is the finest quality level of Port, and heroically concentrated. It's a red wine which finds balance and harmony at heightened levels of: picking ripeness, fruit richness, residual sugar, tannin formation, alcohol content and barrel influence. All that input aside, since they *do* in fact balance extremely well, VPs can be remarkably elegant and drinkable, and not just imposingly, demandingly concentrated. VPs are made from fruit entirely of a single harvest and are aged roughly two years in 550 litre wooden barrels known as Pipes. The wines do the majority of their maturation in glass - the classic thick, black port bottle.

Vintage Port may be bottled anytime until July 30th of the third year from harvest (ie, they can see up to 30 months in oak, roughly). Most VP need upwards of fifteen years before they are ready, and may last for decades more. It is important to note that VP suffers a flat spot about 5 years from harvest, and unlike other drinks which suffer similarly (Riesling, for one), the 'dip' period can be 10 years or more of surly adolescence. Drink them less than 5 or more than 15 years from harvest is a simple rule of thumb to observe.

A 'declared vintage', broadly interpreted, is one in which the majority of major houses release a VP. There is no 'official' process, nor existence of an objective list of declared vintages: releasing, or declaring a vintage is the purview of each shipper, and the 'list' is effectively retrospective, when it is clear that most producers have declared and successfully so. However, the whole process is changing very quickly, due to changed ideas and aspirations, particularly the advent of the Single Quinta of Origin Producers, such as The Douro Boys. Now, it will be common to see good-to-great VPs released most years, as these producers aim to reflect their estate's vintage variation successfully and faithfully (albeit in tiny quantities compared to the 'Big Houses'). However, the SQOOPS are not the only meaning of the Single Quinta term in Port wine marketing. The Big Port Houses typically have several quintas in their ownership, and even more from whom they purchase fruit. These various quintas are typically blended to make Big Brand Name Vintage Ports, released in better years at significant asking cost. Big Port Houses use their Single Quinta proprietorial names as second labels, and release SQ Vintages more cheaply in lesser years to preserve the 'brand'.

Garrafeira VPs: The so-called Garrafeira Vintages are a specialty of Niepoort. These ports from a single year age for decades, firstly in wood, then for a long time in special small glass 'demijons' (7 to 11 litre glass balloons in the form of old apothecary's bottles). These Demijons are no longer produced, so Niepoort use and re-use ancient glass in a secluded, very quiet cellar in Vila Nova de Gaia. Note, as with Madeiras and also Colheita Tawnies, the aged character of a Garrafeira VP is a function of both the year of harvest and the year of bottling. A given vintage aged in Garrafeira may well be bottled several times at different effective ages over many years as different demijons are decanted-and-bottled.

Late-bottled Vintage Port (LBV) is a VP-variant and also from a single year. The wine is aged longer though, spending 4-6 years in wood, and are more mature when bottled than regular VPs. LBVs are earlier, easier, cheaper VPs, typical, delicious, and really good value wines.

There are 2 distinct styles of LBV:

- LBVs bottled unfiltered (and relatively early at 4 years), will taste, feel and behave like a slightly forward VP. These are closed with a driven cork, will age in bottle and should be decanted. These are, of course, considered bottle-matured Ports.
- LBVs bottled later (towards 6 years), and filtered will be stable and fully-develop. Usually closed with a stopper, rather than driven cork, these are classified as wood-matured. Single Quinta producers such as the Douro Boys prefer the former, Big Port houses, favour the latter.

WOOD-MATURED PORT STYLES

Ruby Port is fresh, relatively young and fruity, bottled after 1 to 3 years ageing in 'bulk' (large concrete, wooden *balseiros* or steel vats). The fruit is selected more for its soft red fruits than for tannin. It's an excellent value drinking style and much preferable to Tawnies without indication of age.

Tawny Ports at their best are residually sweet Douro reds aged in oak for a long time, resulting in a faded tawny colour, reduced fruitiness and vinosity, with developed spirit. Affecting a deep, mutually-conditioned marriage of matured red wine and characterful spirit is the aim. This takes at least 10 years to begin, and 'completes' after 20 years. Sounds great, eh? However, there are also a plague of Tawnies labelled without indication of age. Tawnies that do not declare they are matured 10 years or more, are inferior to honest young Ruby Ports (even though these are less expensive). Often, they are only marginally older than Ruby ports, the fruit has suffered some oxidative fading without balancing mature depth developed in the spirit component. While brash, fruity Rubies wrap around the brash young spirit, weak Tawnies jar with raw spirit.

Cask or barrel size is a variable in ageing Tawny, as is duration of maturation, and also location. Coastal cellars at Vila Nova de Gaia have moderate, stable temperature (thus less annual evaporation: 1-2%) compared to those up in the Douro. Douro-aged wines experience higher, more variable temperatures with more annual evaporation (3%). These exhibit more 'vinagrinho' (a volatile vinegar tickle), and what can be an attractively complexing 'Douro bake' character, if quality control is good. Many components of different age and origin are blended to construct house-style Tawnies of 10, 20, 30, even 40 years.

Colheita Tawny Ports are single year wines, bottled and labelled according to their 'Colheita', or year of harvest (avoid the word 'vintage' in this context!). The minimum age requirement is 7 years, with no maximum, but these wines mature more quickly and broadly than blended Tawnies. Also note that Colheita bottlings carry 2 dates: that of harvest and also the bottling date. It's possible for the same Colheita to be bottled with relatively little or comparatively great cask-aged development.

White port is made from white grapes: Malvasia, Viosinho and Gouveio most commonly. The juice is fermented as a white wine until fermentation is stopped by the addition of grape spirit. This allows for a range of resultant sweetness styles, depending on how far towards dryness the fermentation goes before being stopped. White Port is a relatively heavy aperitif wine, sometimes lightly, but more usually quite sweet, with a hint of oxidation. The worst are short-aged in epoxy-lined concrete, or stainless steel, and can be jarringly phenolic. Better wines spend time maturing in large wooden vats or even in proper Pipes (550 litre oak barrels). The phenomenally good White Ports of Niepoort age more than 3 ½ years in Pipes!

Sugar (a final note): one of the truly fascinating things in wine is the relativity of sugar. To the 'average' palate, table wine is dry at 4 grams/litre residual sugar or less; fizz at 12 g/l or less, and Madeira at below 60 grams! What then is sugar in Port? Here are a few numbers: Niepoort 'Dry' White Port, 51 grams/litre; Niepoort White Port, 110 grams/litre; Niepoort Ruby 103; Vallado Tawny 110, Niepoort LBV 100, Vale Dona Maria Vintage Port 100 g/l.

Portugal's main grape varieties

The list below is only of the most prominent and high quality varieties – there are dozens more. Also note that the list of names is not exhaustive, but to give all details would be exhausting. For example, in Extramadura, Tinta Roriz-Aragonez-Tempranillo is called Abundante; however in Alentejo, the name Abundante is used for Garnacha! The list of synonyms applied with no genetic consistency across dozens of appellations will easily do your head in ...

RED GRAPES

Alfrocheiro is native to Dão (locally called 'Pé de Rato, or mouse paw), but also grows in Bairrada, Alentejo and other parts. Its genetic origins are not clear, but there are strong links to the French variety Trousseau (also planted in small quantities as Bastardo on Madeira). Alfrocheiro is a high quality grape, but its small bunches of small berries are highly susceptible to rot and oidium. It yields well and ripens early, helping to avoid disease. Alfrocheiro gives bold-coloured wines of intense blackberry aroma and flavour, with spice-anise-mint relief. It has dense but sleek tannins and good acid freshness.

Alicante Bouschet is pink-fleshed as well as pink skinned, of bold flavour and structure. Best as blending material to provide oomph, it's naturally rustic and fairly soupy in terms of tannin structure.

Baga is a small berried, late-ripening red variety grown in Bairrada, with plantings also in Dão, Estramadura and Ribatejo. When goblet trained (bush vines) and grown in well-drained soils with good sun exposure Baga can produce dark, lusciously perfumed wines capable of bottle ageing. Wines from fertile soils tend towards being lighter in alcohol and have a harder acid structure. With a high skin-to-juice content, managing the fierce tannins of Baga is the key, as the wines can be green and astringent, and de-stemming is essential.

Bastardo is found in many old vintages of Port wine. Known as Trousseau in France and Cabernet Gros in Australia, it contributes a full-bodied wine with sweet, date-like aromas. Pale in colour and fades quickly to onion skin - hence a useful contributor to Tawny Port styles. Also a rare Madeiran variety.

Jaen thrives in the cold granite soil of the Dão region (this grape is the same as Spain's low acid Mencía). It adds sweet fragrance and good balance to some blends, but is rarely noble.

Sousão is a red-fleshed grape, now at home in the Douro. It forms the backbone of Noval's legendary and expensive ungrafted single vineyard VP, Nacional. Mainly useful for colour, it has a tendency towards rasping astringency.

Tinta Amarela Also known in Portugal as Trincadeira (and as Espadaira in Alentejo), it is a Niepoort specialty. With its susceptibility to disease (it rots at a glance when in contact with humidity), and ability to "go from green to gone" in no time at all, it is "worse than Pinot to grow" according to former Niepoort winemaker Luis Seabra. Only Niepoort take it seriously and are committed to retaining it in the forefront of the blend for Batuta and Redoma, as it is the predominant variety in the field blends of Quinta do Carril. On exposed, dry soils it yields fine, poised, fragrant wine of great balance.

Tinta Barroca is a popular Douro variety. Thin-skinned and prone to shrivel and raisining, Tinta Barroca responds best to cooler situations and brings good yields of fragrant cherry-plum wine to fill and soften Port blends.

Tinta Cão - the Red Dog is not widely grown, but graces some Port wine blends with its wildflower aromas and bilberry fruit. Late ripening, of relatively low yield and low alcohol, it is a quality Douro varietal, albeit a delicate and tricky one.

Tinta Roriz (aka Tempranillo) is common in most Port/Douro blends, enriching both with dark, softly tannic fruit. In the South, its name changes to Aragonez, but in regions such as Alentejo it suffers from the heat and fails to attain the nobility it achieves in the blends of the Douro. Well-suited to the climatic cycles of the Douro, Tinta Roriz flowers late to avoid Spring frosts, and ripens early to avoid Autumn rain.

Touriga Franca (aka Touriga Francesa): there is speculation that Franca is either a recent mutation of Nacional, or the result of a varietal cross with Nacional (Franca is not recorded pre-phyllloxera). It brings violet florals, wild herbs and red fruit to many Port wines. It's the most heavily planted variety in Douro Port vineyards. Touriga Franca flourishes in the warmer Douro sites and south-facing slopes. High yielding and able to produce full sugars, deep colour and supple structure. TF has a marked earthy-rustic tendency, hence it remains a blender, virtually never bottled alone. (Elsewhere in the world, including Australia, wherever a variety called 'Touriga' is grown, it's equally likely to be Franca or Nacional).

Touriga Nacional is now considered by many the best of Portugal's native varieties. Surprisingly, it's only the 8th-most planted of Douro varieties. After the ravages of phylloxera, TN was less favoured during replanting than may have been the case, on account of its uneconomic yields: it's a poor performer on rootstocks, with less than half the natural yield of Touriga Franca. Now, many Quintas are re-planting old field blends as mono-varietal stands of Touriga Nacional. Its rich-coloured wines are intensely fruity and tannic, but velvety, and age very well. Floral aromatics of violet/bergamot can be haunting. Despite these positives, it produces texturally boring wines as a straight varietal, especially in a modernist regime (high and even levels of ripening, temperature-controlled stainless steel fermentation and ageing in new small barrels).

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Alvarinho (aka Albariño in Spain) offers wines with a fruity essence and well-balanced flavours. Virtually only grown in the far north of Portugal, just below the River Minho (the border with its Spanish home). Alvarinho grapes have a high pip ratio giving texture to fruit accented with apple, jasmine, orange blossom aromatics.

Arinto (aka Padernã) makes a fresh, steely white – sometimes overly so in Vinho Verde, where it can retain formidable levels of natural acidity and is prone to expressing in a highly vegetal register. Most often blended with Loureiro and Trajadura to make balanced Vinho Verde.

Bical (bee-kahl) is typically found in the Beiras region, in Dão and Bairrada. In the Dão it is called "Borrado das Moscas" (fly droppings) because of small specks on the skin. An early ripener, Bical has naturally high acidity; it is also rot resistant, but is very sensitive to powdery mildew). Bical can make wonderfully scented peachy, textured wines with crisp finishing acidity.

Cerceal: is grown across Portugal, under several guises: Cercial (or Esgana de Cão) in Douro and Dão, Cerceal in Bairrada, but it is not the same as Sercial on Madeira. Cerceal is characterised by delicate aroma and good acidity, yet as a mono-varietal wine it can be lacking and is usually blended with other white varieties such as Bical, Malvasia Fina and Sercialinho (a cross of Sercial from Madeira with Alvarinho, bred to improve acidity.)

Códega is the most-planted white in the Douro, and also goes by the names of Síria, Castelo Rodrigo or Alvadurão elsewhere in Portugal (and is the same as Spain's Doña Blanca). Light-skinned, and aromatic, Códega yields well and produces soft, low acid fruit, delicate and elegant melon/peach in tone.

Encruzado is at home in the Dão, and is a promising variety of the future. As with Albariño, changing philosophy and the advent of appropriate technology is helping to develop new possibilities for flavoursome, balanced, stylish wine. Encruzado naturally achieves excellent sugar-acid balance and ages well for 5 years or so. It also responds well to barrel fermentation.

Esgana Cão - don't let the translated name "dog strangler" swear you off this grape. It's an important acidic addition to white Port blends.

Gouveio as it is called in the Douro (elsewhere in Portugal it is referred to as Verdelho), is probably Godello, just to confuse things! With good ageing potential and yields, Gouveio produces wines characterised by their excellent structure, intense aromas and balanced acidity.

LOUREIRO "Loo-ray-ro": Literally, "smelling Louro-ish" – Louro being the Atlantic coastal name for the Laurel, or Bay tree. Loureiro wines are floral and smell deeply of lemon and bay. The basic characteristic is a linear, racy and acid wine with low levels of both grape sugar and phenolic material. Loureiro differs significantly from Albariño (with which it is often blended) in its terpene character (the same compounds which inform the aromatics of Riesling and Semillon). When young, the nose presents a complex bouquet of

lemon aromatics (leaf, pith, juice and flower) with laurel (bay leaf) florality. With age, complex toasty aromas (similar to developed Eden Valley Riesling and Hunter Semillon) also become apparent. Loureiro ages really well. It is occasionally referred to as Dourada – the golden one.

Malvasia Fina (Boal on Madeira) is one of the oldest white wine grape varieties and delivers full-bodied dry to sweet wines, ripe, honeyed and nutty, perhaps somewhat shapeless. Malvasia Fina is most commonly blended with other white grapes to produce white Ports but can be found in Douro and Dão table wines.

Rabigato At home in the Douro, the 'cat's tail' has elongated bunches, hence the name, and yields well with good acidity at higher altitudes. Mainly used in white table blends, Rabigato adds subtle floral, vegetal and mineral aromas.

Trajadura (aka Treixadura in Rías Baixas, Spain) is popular in Vinho Verde, particularly in the far North. Trajadura yields natural alcohol well above the norm and has relatively low acid, therefore is useful to fill out skinny Loureiros and Arintos.