

# *A Tasting of Fine Portuguese Wines and Ports*

*(Uma Degustação de Bons Vinhos e Portos Portugueses)*

*13<sup>th</sup> January 2024*

*by Ormond Smith*

It was nine years, indeed almost to the day, that we last sampled wines from Portugal so it was with anticipation that Goustevin members and guests gathered chez James and Heather Sheerin at their home on Drummond Crescent in Inverness. Portugal's "isolation" by being situated on the south-western edge of Europe, has perhaps given the country a unique marketing advantage over other European wine producing countries – as these countries were busy planting their vineyards with French grape varieties, Portugal stuck with their indigenous vines, names that are generally little known to the majority of the wine buying public. As Connetable Nicol introduced the format of the evening and highlighted the forthcoming Grand Chapitre and Gala Dinner in May, we sipped on our apéritif, a **Port of Leith White Port**, produced by the Santa Marta vineyards on the River Corgo which flows into the River Douro at Regua. This port is a blend of Malvasia Fina, Viosinho, Gouveio and Donzelinho grapes (I did say generally little known varieties!), first fermented on their skins for a week before fortification with grape spirit and allowed to mature for an average of three years. This refreshing port exhibits orange, citrus and honeyed aromas with lemon and apple flavours on the palate along with hints of cinnamon and almonds. This wine certainly set the standard for what was to follow. Along with the port we also enjoyed Portuguese influenced canapés which proved quite "moreish".



**The very satisfying White Port**

Following on from the white port was a 2022 Vinho Verde. These vinho verde wines (literally means "green wines" but translates to "young wines") are from the Vinho Verde Demarcated Region in the North of Portugal, close to the Spanish border where the vineyards are exposed to and influenced by the Atlantic Ocean winds. This **Alvarinho 2022 Vinho Verde** is from the Sociedad Agricola Casa de Vila Nova in the Sousa sub-region north of Porta, and the estate and subsequent vineyards have been owned by the Lencastre family since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. In 1986 the vineyards were totally replanted with new investment in machinery and equipment. The Alvarinho grape, exclusively used for this particular Vinho Verde (better known as the Albarino in Spain) gave out citric aromas with hints of mandarin, the palate well balanced and structured with an appealing minerality on the long, lingering finish.



**Wine certainly stimulates conversation!**

The second white of the evening was a wine we tasted back in 2015 Portuguese Tasting so it would be interesting to see how this offering compared. It was a **2022 Alentejo Esperão Reserva Branco** from near Lake Alqueva and the Spanish border, some 200kms east of Lisbon. This wine was first produced by Esperão in 1985 and their efforts to produce a great wine has seen a move to converting all their vineyards to organic farming. This wine is a blend of Antão Vaz, Arinto and Roupeiro grapes, giving a light straw colour in the glass with golden hues. The nose is intense with notes of citrus and white peach nicely integrated with toasty and spice notes. On the palate the integrated oak gives the wine a full bodied flavour, well textured, elegant and fresh with a persistent and satisfying finish. On re-checking the notes from the 2015 tasting (see under Chapters & Reports), this wine although no longer having the Semillon grape in the blend, was quite similar in character.

The red wines beckoned, firstly a **2020 Alentejo Esperão Reserva Tinto** from the same producer as the previous white. Again the vines are cultivated organically with a selection of no less than seven varieties involved, each wine being vinified separately. After fermentation the wine spends 12 months in American (60%) and French (40%) oak barrels and then is aged for at least 4 months in bottle before being released. The grapes in this blend are Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional (the principal Portuguese red grape), Aragonez, Trincadeira, Touriga Franca and two you will recognise, Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon.



*The La Rosa Esperão Tinto with a selection of “nibbles”*

An intense ruby in the glass, this oaked red displays rich cherry and cassis nuances on the nose with a touch of sweet vanilla from the new oak barrels and on the palate fine tannins, cocoa, dark chocolate, liquorice with just a hint of black pepper. This wine, as with all others under the Esperão label are created by Australian born David Baverstock, the “godfather” of modern Portuguese wines.

The second red, a Quinta de La Rosa Tinto from an outstanding winery on the Douro beside the small town of Pinhao certainly brought back pleasant memories for Connetable Nicol and the writer who visited this Quinta in 2019 and were much impressed. Owned by the Bergqvist family since 1930 and now under the control of Sophia Bergqvist with wine maker Jorge Moreira, this quinta is in the epicentre of the Cima Corgo sub-region, home to some of the region’s finest vineyards. They rise dramatically out of the river with the imposing Vale do Inferno vineyard and climb majestically up to an altitude of 400m. Significant investment over the last few years at La Rosa has seen new granite lagares, fermentation tanks and an automatic basket press installed and a carefully thought out tasting room overlooking the Douro River has been constructed. This **2020 Quinta de La Rosa Tinto** is a blend of 60% low yielding Touriga Nacional; 12% Touriga Franca; 8% Tinta Cão and 5% Sousão. The wine is fermented in stainless steel vats before maturing for 12 months in used French oak casks and with its great structure, will age well in bottle for many years. A rich red in the glass, the nose bursts with plenty of cherry and cassis fruit flavours and the palate is well balanced with tannins and acidity with notes of cedar and spice ..... most satisfying!

The final red wine of the Tasting was a **2019 Quinta de La Rosa Reserva Tinto** blended with basically the same grape varieties save that the Sousão is replaced with Tinta Roriz (Tempranillo) which replaces the intensity of flavour of the former with intense aromas, finer and richer tannins and less acidity. This La Rosa Reserva, the Quinta’s top red wine ( obviously excluding their magnificent Ports) uses only the best grapes, which are then traditionally foot-trodden in granite lagares prior to fermentation and maturation for 18 months in French oak casks – only then are the finest lots chosen

for this Reserva, highlighting the quality of La Rosa's best vineyards and the expertise and dedication of wine-maker Jorge Moreira. For tasting information the writer cannot outdo the American "Wine Spectator" magazine which reported :- "This elegant red (2019 Reserva) has a sense of restraint, with vivid acidity and taut, sculpted tannins wrapped in a swath of plush texture that carries notes of crushed blackcurrant and pureed boysenberry (This delicious hybrid berry combines the juicy intensity of a blackberry, the sweet floral character of a raspberry and the tartness of a loganberry), violet and wild sage, sandalwood, slate and smoke. Opens in the glass, expanding on the rich profile to reveal details of ground anise and pink peppercorn, eucalyptus, espresso and toast through the lasting finish." Hmm. the consensus at the tasting was broadly along in agreement..... a really excellent wine.



**Bacalhua à Braga .....**

The call came from the kitchen "food is now served" and we were presented with a very popular and traditional Portuguese dish, "Bacalhua à Braga" which is salted cod with thinly chopped potatoes, onion and bound with eggs, roasted in the oven, served hot and accompanied with roasted Mediterranean vegetables ..... delicious



**...and roasted vegetables**

and certainly "moreish". The "quaffing" wines to go with the Bacalhua were a **2002 Vila Nova Loureiro Vinho Verde DOC**, (floral, fruity, well balanced with a long lingering finish) and a **2021 Alianca Terra Boa** from the Terras de Beira region near to the Spanish border, this wine was , warm and softly spiced, a modern "take" on traditional dark and brooding Portuguese red wine varieties.

The final offering of the Tasting, and what an offering, was a **2000 Warre's Vintage Port** which accompanied the varied cheeses. This vintage is generally accepted to be outstanding and James and Heather are to be heartily thanked for donating the only bottle for the Tasting. Warre's were the first British company established in Portugal in 1670 and have become one of the leading Port producers. Now owned by Symingtons, their principal vineyards in the Douro are situated near Pinhão, Quinta do Retiro on the south bank of the Douro opposite Quinta de La Rosa (see above) and Quinta da Cavadinha on the Pinhão river. A blend of classic Douro grape varieties, this wine has matured gracefully and whilst drinking beautifully after ageing twenty years, it will continue to age superbly for decades. The writer could describe this port from his own notes but Johnny Symington of Warre's owners, Symingtons, summed it up eloquently in 2016, "Warre's 2000 Vintage has a dark ruby colour. On the nose, excellent floral aromas of violets and mint combine with layer upon layer of ripe blackberry fruit. On the palate, great freshness and the archetypal Warre elegance with vibrant fruit flavours and velvety tannins lead to a long and persistent finish. Approachable now although three or four years from its prime, after which it will age superbly". A collective agreement on these observations was echoed by those present – what a splendid way to conclude a fine wine tasting and our sincere appreciation to James and Heather for their most generous donation – it should be noted that, when available, a bottle of Warre's 2000 Vintage Port will cost between £70 to £100!



**A hearty vote of thanks to our hosts, James and Heather!**

**Supplier details for the above wines**

Port of Leith White Port	Woodwinters, Inverness	Cost £21.00
2022 Alvarinho Vinho Verde	Woodwinters, Inverness	Cost £12.40
2022 Alentejo Esperão Reserva Branco - DOC Alentejo	Great Grog Wines, Edinburgh	Cost £16.60
2020 Alentejo Esperão Reserva Tinto - DOC Alentejo	Great Grog Wines, Edinburgh	Cost £19.60
2020 Quinta de la Rosa Tinto - DOC Douro	Woodwinters, Inverness	Cost £17.50
2019 Quinta de la Rosa Reserva Tinto - DOC Douro	Woodwinters, Inverness	Cost £33.00

**Supper Wines**

2022 Vila Nova Loureiro Vinho Verde DOC	Woodwinters. Inverness	Cost £10.50
2021 Terra Boa, Vinho Regional Terras de Beira	Woodwinters, Inverness	Cost £ 9.00

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