

Os Vinos de Portugal

January 10th 2015

By Ormond Smith

It was a cold, bleak evening with snow flurries eddying in the bitter winds off the north-west as we gathered “chez” Jeni and Neil Alexander at their luxurious, warm abode high in the hills to the south of Inverness. The subject matter for our Reunion - **The Wines of Portugal**, a tasting which regrettably had to be postponed from its original date last November.

Having enjoyed a welcoming glass (or two!) of **Vintage Prosecco** and after a brief introduction by our Connetable Nicol, which included details of both forthcoming tastings



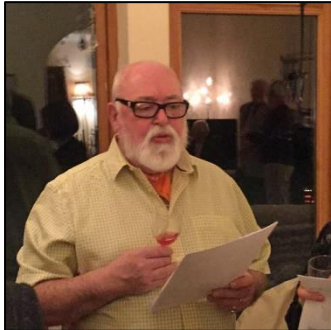
and overseas visits (see elsewhere on the website for details), the assembled members and guests proceeded to meander their way along the laid out wines, before breaking for a rather sumptuous Portuguese themed meal (excellently prepared by both Jeni and her mother, our Chancellor Heather Sheerin), and completing the evening with a tasting of Ports accompanied by a rather nice **Strathdon Blue**.....the traditional accompaniment is

of course Stilton but despite Nicol’s best efforts, no-one in Inverness was able to supply a half round.....hence the Strathdon! Incidentally it matched rather well.

The evenings degustation kicked off with a **2013 Vinho Verde** from northern vineyards in Minho near the Atlantic coast and despite its reputation for being clean, fresh and “zingy”, the wine didn’t quite match up to its reputation (in the writers estimation).....a warm summer evening with some grilled sardines on hand – now that would be a different scenario! Onto a **2013 Alandra Rosado** (Rose) from Alentejo (inland from Lisbon, indeed near to the Spanish border), the Herdade do Esporao estate is making quite a name for itself, led by Australian winemaker David Baverstock. The Rosado, light pink with fresh red berry fruit aromas and a delightful finish with a touch of “richness” found favour with most members. Made with a blend of **Trincadeira** (one of Port’s mainstay grapes) and **Aragonez** grapes, the warm atmosphere of the Alentejo region is tempered with cool breezes off the Atlantic.....excellent growing conditions.



Staying with the white wines and indeed the same Alentejo vineyards, the **2013 Alandra Branco**, cool fermented and un-oaked proved to be extremely pleasant on both nose and palate, an eminently drinkable wine showing aromatic notes with hints of orange peel. The final white of the evening was a **2013 Esporao Reserva Branco** made with a blend of grapes from 17 year old vines, **Roupeiro, Arinto, Antao Vaz** and **Semillon** (at last, a name you



recognise!!). This proved to be a very well balanced wine with ripe tangerines, honey and apricots on the nose and a creamy, complex palate with a long fresh finish.....very moreish!

The reds beckoned and staying in Alentejo, the **2013 Alandra Tinto** made with **Moreto, Castelao** and **Trincadeira** grapes was well received, a fruit driven wine fermented at quite a high temperature and then allowed to go through a malolactic fermentation with no contact with oak. The fresh red berry flavours on the nose gave way to soft tannins and good balance on the finish and like most of the preceding wines, competitively priced and good value for money. The first part of the evening concluded with a **2011 Esporao Reserva Tinto**, an intense, spicy wine made from **Aragonez (40%), Trincadeira (40%), Cabernet Sauvignon (10%)** and **Alicante Bouschet (10%)**. Initially fermented in stainless steel tanks, the wine is then aged for 12 months in 225 litre barriques, half French and half American oak. With mature red berries and oak spice on the nose, the palate proved to be equally enticing with a full bodied richness, firm tannins and a long spicy satisfying finish.....class in a glass!!

We then “addressed” the evening repast, starting with a bowl of Potato, Cabbage and Garlic Sausage Soup, a dish common in Portugal, warming and satisfying. The main course was suitably, another themed offering, Mood Beef with Portuguese Potatoes – good enough for “wee seconds”!!

The evening continued with our final three wines, a selection of Ports..... and accompanied with the Blue Strathdon. The **2009 Sandemans LBV** is made from a selection of wines from



the same vintage then matured for three years in wood, being produced for early drinking (and enjoyment!).....ripe fruit aromas followed by a rich, mature finish. Onto the **NV Graham's 10 year Old Tawny**, a vibrant

premium aged wine with a great combination of ripe fruit and aged intensity, an

harmonious balance with fine deep tawny colour and complex nutty aromas combined with hints of honey and figs. The tasting ended with a **2001 Grahams Quinta dos Malvedos**, a typically sweet, plum and fleshy vintage Port with deep ruby colour and on the nose, excellent depth of fruit combined with glorious floral scents. The palate didn't disappoint either, concentrated fruity flavours and a firm structure climaxing in a powerful and fittingly rich finish. Very memorable!!

And with that lingering, satisfying aftertaste it was time to venture back into the snowy "baltic" windswept night, **with grateful thanks to Jeni and Neil** for a most memorable evening. The wines certainly proved that Portugal is a force to be reckoned with for quality, hitherto their good wines were difficult to acquire, but nowadays and despite the fact that most of the grape varieties are virtually unknown to most of us, the wines of Portugal can rightly take their place on our tables.

-oOo-