

Portugal 2024 Tasting Report: A Fresh Twist on Heritage

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As he drives up to his tiny plot of century-old vines on the slopes of Portugal's Serra da Estrela mountain range, Antonio Madeira talks about the interconnectedness of his winemaking and the varietal heritage to be found in the Dao wine region.

"To create emotion, you need a diversity of varieties and clones," he says as we arrive at his tiny, 0.2-hectare plot, Vinha da Serra, which lies at an altitude of about 600 meters and is planted predominantly with tinta amarela and as many as 20 other varieties.

Antonio meticulously works a total of eight hectares of vineyards, including Vinha da Serra, following biodynamic principles. The offerings of his namesake Antonio Madeira winery are soulful expressions of the Dao region and some of the most impressive from our recent trip to Portugal, where we tasted hundreds of wines.

The oldest vineyards in the region, many as tiny as Vinha da Serra, contain up to 50 varieties and are a testament to Portugal's varietal wealth. Among the top wines that we tasted from these vineyards were the [Niepoort Dão Branco Quinta da Lomba Garrafeira 2016](#), the [Quinta da Pellada Dão Muleta 2020](#) and the [Antonio Madeira Dão Vinhas Velhas Branco 2022](#).



But the use of indigenous varieties wasn't always so in the Dao. Dirk van der Niepoort, the renowned Portuguese producer, said that when he first

started scouting the region in 1983, there was “a craze for foreign varietals” and for intensive production methods.

“But I was always fascinated by the traditional Portuguese blends,” he said. “I have tasted many old-vine, field-blend-based wines in the past. What I like is that in the end, there is consistency, quality and personality.”

Van der Niepoort has long been a champion of Portugal’s viticultural heritage, favoring blends over single varietals. His [Niepoort Douro Branco Coche 2022](#), a rabigato-based white blend, exemplifies the balance of texture, freshness and concentration he’s trying to achieve.

It’s a multidimensional wine that highlights the complexity these blends can achieve. It comes from 90-year-old vines planted at 600 meters and is aged in 50 percent new oak. Its name, Coche, which means “car” in Portuguese (and Spanish), is actually a nod to the legendary Burgundy producer Coche-Dury.

INTO THE WIDER WORLD

Because Portugal was very isolated from the rest of the wine-growing world under the regime of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar from the early 1930s to the late 1960s, grape growers could only sell their fruit to regional cooperatives. Aside from the major Port houses, the country was characterized by fragmented farms with small-scale production. But with the static vineyard structure, Portugal’s rich varietal heritage remained alive.

With the end of the regime in 1968, though, producers began adapting to modern practices to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive global market. By the late 1990s, many producers had moved to single-variety wines and the planting of highly productive, internationally recognized grape varieties.

“Back then, people didn’t want the old vineyards because they were hard work and produced very little; they wanted single varietals because they were more immediate and more aromatic,” explained Luis Seabra, the

owner and winemaker of Luis Seabra Vinhos.

Seabra, who makes wines from grapes grown in the Douro, Dao, Moncao, and Melgaco regions of Portugal, prefers wines from the old vineyards because they are “much more mysterious and less immediate; at best, they are good at translating the site and are better adapted to the increasingly warm climate.” His [Luis Seabra Douro Xisto Cru 2021](#), an intricate red blend made from as many as 20 varieties from two century-old vineyards in Cima Corgo, is reminiscent of a great Northern Rhone wine.

Portugal’s 2022 vintage was one of the hottest and driest on record – temperatures rose above 34 degrees Celsius (93.2 Fahrenheit) for 28 consecutive days, with 11 of those days exceeding 40 degrees – but this resulted in some remarkable Port wines.

Although it was a harsh environment for many vineyards, head-trained bush vines proved more resilient. With deeper roots, a lower canopy and less of a need for water, they were better suited to withstand the heat and drought, demonstrating a natural adaptation to these harsher conditions, according to Seabra.

The Douro, one of the oldest demarcated wine regions in the world, permits up to 80 grape varieties in its blends. Historically, many vineyards were co-planted with multiple varieties, a practice grounded in local wisdom and logic. For instance, vineyards with high proportions of tinta amarela were never planted on south-facing slopes because it doesn’t thrive in intense heat. This approach created an invisible equilibrium within the vineyards. Some of the old Port vineyards at Quinta do Vesuvio even have a high proportion of vinhao, known for its acidity, strategically included to balance the overall composition of the wine.

In the realm of table wines, the vineyards followed a similar pattern. Constantino Ramos, who runs his namesake project in Vinho Verde, said that when anyone found a variety that worked in the context of a blend or for its resistance to disease, they would hand a few sticks to their

neighbor. Little by little, a patchwork of small vineyards formed.

“Until 1994, red wine production outpaced white in the Vinho Verde region,” Ramos said as we walked through a rugged pathway while exploring his vineyard.

Today, Vinho Verde is known for its crisp, saline, luminous alvarinhos, but Ramos is on a mission to revive ancient red field blends.

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Nestled at about 400 meters altitude in the village of Riba do Mouro, on the hillsides of Sierra da Peneda in Moncao, Ramos’s vineyards can be reached by a 10-minute trek through a bumpy, old trail, crossing small creeks and moss-covered stone walls.

The site reveals a small circular field surrounded by oaks lined with two rows of latada-trained vines. The middle area, once used for growing cereal, highlights the multifaceted use of these plots. Ramos manages several such parcels around the village, each planted with traditional field blends that include brancelho (known as brancellao in Spain), espadeiro, borracal (caíño tinto), pedral, and vinhao (souson), preserving a crucial aspect of the region’s viticultural legacy.

In an ocean of alvarinho, these vineyards are a rare sight. These tiny surviving archipelagos of old plots have mostly disappeared because either the owners passed away or are too old to work them, and their children, who in most cases have moved away, don’t want to work them. The result is that many vineyards have been abandoned or ripped out. Unfortunately, this is an increasingly common pattern in lesser-known regions of the Iberian Peninsula, but you cannot blame them.

“Not all old vineyards are great vineyards,” said Mariana Salvador, the winemaker behind Textura Wines and her own project, Revela. “An old vineyard planted in the wrong place will result in equally poor wine.”

Salvador, who works in the Dao region as well as in Madeira with Barbeito, acknowledges the allure of ancient field blends but notes their scarcity. "Old field blends are intriguing, but they don't tell the whole story," she said. "For us, it is also helpful to explain our regions in terms of the market. Sometimes it's hard to explain the Dao with only field blend tutti-frutti vineyards, but it is also our heritage."

Despite the quality and rarity of these old field blends in the Dao, a region's reputation cannot rest solely on its ancient vineyards. Single varietals also hold historical significance in Portugal, and outstanding wines can emerge from these as well. Some winemakers, like Nuno Miranda of Mira do O Vinhos, make blends from younger monovarietal vineyards, with delicious results.

In the same light, a field blend is not synonymous with an outstanding wine. Filipa Pato, along with her husband the co-owner and winemaker of Filipa Pato & William Wouters, explains that "Bairrada with baga and Colares with ramisco and malvasia are the only appellations that have historically produced single-varietal wines."

Pato, her husband and their team work 20 hectares of vineyards divided into 36 microparcels in Bairrada. They work with baga for reds and bical and Maria Gomes, which is also known as Fernao Pires (the same variety named after different local farmers who claimed discovery of the grape) for the whites. Pato's father, Luis Pato, is one of the pioneers who championed the region.

Located just an hour's drive south of Porto, the Bairrada region is known for its high annual rainfall, ranging from 1,000 to 1,200 millimeters. This damp climate makes mildew a persistent challenge for grape growers. The region's dominant grape variety, baga, thrives here due to its natural resistance to mildew. However, baga's thin skin makes it vulnerable to black rot, a constant concern in such a humid environment. Baga also has a high phenolic content regardless of its thin skin, and this can result in wines with rustic tannins that will take a long time to resolve themselves.

Pato and Wouters have incredible commitment to their vineyards – they are Demeter- and Ecocert-certified – as well as to educating and creating formative environments for those who work them. This commitment shines through in wines like their [Nossa Missão 2021](#), which comes from a minuscule parcel of ungrafted boga on calcareous soils and is a great example of graceful balance between bright energy and concentration.

Other outstanding examples of boga from this report include the [Quinta de Baixo Bairrada Poerinho Garrafeira 2015](#) and the [V. Puro Boga Bairrada Outrora 2019](#).

In the face of modernization, climate change and shifting consumer patterns, Portugal's winemakers are balancing tradition with the current viticultural practices inherited from the 1990s. By preserving ancient field blends and embracing single varietals, they are redefining the country's diverse wine landscape.

While global competition and economic pressures have driven the Portuguese wine world toward uniformity, these winemakers remain committed to the expression of their unique terroirs. They are championing the country's rich viticultural heritage but also proving that Portugal's future lies in its diversity – of varieties, sites and traditions, as well as viticultural practices.

– *Jacobo Garcia-Andrade Llamas, Senior Editor*

Note: You can sort the wines below by vintage, score and alphabetically by winery name. You can also search for specific wines in the search bar.

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Quinta das Carvalhas Port Memorias

Van Zellers & Co Port Crafted by Liberty Very Old Tawny Porto XIX

Van Zellers & Co Port Crafted by Poetry Very Old Tawny Porto XIX

Filipa Pato & William Wouters Baga Bairrada Nossa Missão Pre-phylloxera 2021

Niepoort Douro Robustus 1990

Quinta das Carvalhas Port Colheita 1976

Quinta do Noval Port 40 Year Old Tawny

Quinta do Noval Vintage Port Nacional 2022

Antonio Madeira Dão A Centenaria 2021

Antonio Madeira Dão Vinha da Serra 2021

Casa Ferreirinha Douro Barca Velha 2015

**Filipa Pato & William Wouters Baga Bairrada Nossa
Missão Pre-phylloxera 2015**

**Graham's Vintage Port Quinta do Tua Vinhas Velhas
2022**

Graham's Vintage Port Single Harvest Tawny 1974

Graham's Vintage Port Single Harvest Tawny 1961

Niepoort Dão Branco Quinta da Lomba Garrafeira 2016

Niepoort Douro Branco Coche 2022

Niepoort Douro Charme 2022

Quinta das Carvalhas Port 50 Year Old Tawny

V. Puro Baga Bairrada Outrora Raro 2015

Van Zellers & Co Port Colheita Tawny Porto 1934

**Van Zellers & Co Port Crafted by Family Very Old Tawny
Porto XIX**

Antonio Madeira Dão Os Granitos 2021

Antonio Madeira Dão Vinhas Velhas Branco 2022

**Filipa Pato & William Wouters Baga Bairrada Nossa
Calcário Vinhas Velhas 2015**

Íncola Douro 2021

**Luis Seabra Alvarinho Vinho Verde Monção e Melgaço
Granito Cru 2022**

Luis Seabra Douro Branco Xisto Cru 2022

Luis Seabra Douro Xisto Cru 2021

Niepoort Dão Garrafeira 2020

Niepoort Dão Vinha Figueredo 2020

Niepoort Douro Turris 2017

Quinta da Pellada Dão Muleta 2020

Quinta da Romaneira Douro Branco Pulga 2023

Quinta de Baixo Bairrada Poeirinho Garrafeira 2015

Quinta do Passadouro Vintage Port 2022

Quinta do Vesuvio Vintage Port Capela do Vesuvio 2022

Van Zellers & Co Port 50 Years Old Tawny

Van Zellers & Co Port Colheita Tawny Porto 1935

Vinhos Imperfeitos Dão Branco I Imperfeito 2018

**Anselmo Mendes Alvarinho Vinho Verde Monção e
Melgaço Parcela Única 2016**

Carlos Raposo Wines Dão Definido 2021

Casa Ferreirinha Douro Antonia Adelaide Ferreira 2020

Dow's Vintage Port Quinta Senhora da Ribeira 2022

**Filipa Pato & William Wouters Baga Bairrada Nossa
Calcário Vinhas Velhas 2022**

Luis Pato Vinho Regional Beiras Vinha Barrosa 2013

Luis Pato Vinho Regional Beiras Vinha Pan 2001

Márcio Lopes Douro Branco Permitido Branco de Centenaria 2021

Márcio Lopes Douro Proibido Grande Reserva 2021

Mariana Salvador Dão Branco Revela 2022

Mira do Ó Dão Druida Tinto 2020

Mira do Ó Encruzado Dão Branco Grande Druida 2021

Niepoort Alentejo Vinha Ximena 2021

Niepoort Dão Branco Conciso 2019

Niepoort Douro Branco Redoma Reserva 2022

Niepoort Douro Branco Tiara 2022

Niepoort Douro Redoma 2021

Niepoort Vintage Port Colheita 2003

Quinta da Fonte Souto Serra de São Mamede 2021

Quinta da Romaneira Vintage Port 2022

Quinta das Bágeiras Bairrada 1997

Quinta das Bágeiras Bairrada Branco Garrafeira 2022

Quinta das Bágeiras Bairrada Branco Pai Abel 2022

Quinta das Carvalhas Douro Vinhas Velhas 2016

Quinta das Carvalhas Douro Vinhas Velhas 2021

Quinta das Carvalhas Vintage Port 2007

Quinta de Baixo Bairrada Lote D 2017

Quinta de Baixo Bairrada Lote D 2020

Quinta do Noval Douro Terroir Series Vinhas do Passadouro 2020

Quinta do Noval Douro Vinhas da Marka 2019

Quinta do Noval Douro Vinhas da Marka 2020

Quinta do Noval Vintage Port 2022

Quinta do Vesuvio Vintage Port 1995

Quinta do Vesuvio Vintage Port 2022

Quinta dos Carvalhais Dão Branco Especial No. 7

Quinta Vale D. Maria Douro Vinha do Rio 2020

Taylor's Port Quinta de Vargellas Vintage 2019

V. Puro Baga Bairrada Outrora 2019

Van Zellers & Co Port 40 Years Old Tawny

Van Zellers & Co Port Colheita Tawny Porto 1950

Van Zellers & Co Port Colheita Tawny Porto 1976

Van Zellers & Co Port Colheita White Port 1968

**Anselmo Mendes & Dirk Niepoort Loureiro Vinho Verde
ADN 2020**

**Anselmo Mendes Alvarinho Vinho Verde Monção e
Melgaço Parcela Única 2023**

**Anselmo Mendes Alvarinho Vinho Verde Monção e
Melgaço Parcela Única 2018**

Antonio Madeira Dão A Palheira 2021

Antonio Madeira Dão Palhete Ainda 2022

**Aveleda Alvarinho Vinho Regional Minho Colheita
Seleccionada 2016**

Aveleda Vinho Regional Minho Parcela do Roseiral 2020

**Barbeito Madeira Os Mestres Reserva Especial Meio
Seco**

Carlos Raposo Wines Dão Branco Ideal 2022

Carlos Raposo Wines Dão Ideal 2021

Casa Ferreirinha Douro Quinta da Leda 2021

**Constantino Ramos Alvarinho Vinho Verde Monção e
Melgaço Afluente 2022**

**Constantino Ramos Vinho Verde Monção e Melgaço
Zafirah 2023**

Ferreira Port 30 Year Old Tawny Dona Antonia

Ferreira Vintage Port Quinta do Porto 2022

Filipa Pato & William Wouters Bical Bairrada Branco Nossa Calcário 2020

Filipa Pato & William Wouters Bical Bairrada Branco Nossa Tola 2020

Graham's Vintage Port Single Harvest Tawny 1997

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