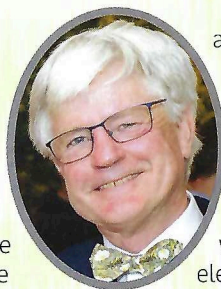




A TRIO OF PORTUGUESE WINERIES

Regular readers will be well aware of my love for Portugal and its wines. A visit earlier this year revealed just how much the industry there has evolved since my first forays in the early 1980s. Three examples highlight this success: a cooperative in the Alentejo; a mainly white wine producer from near Óbidos in the central west of the country; and an old port wine estate in new hands high up in the Cima Corgo region of the Douro.

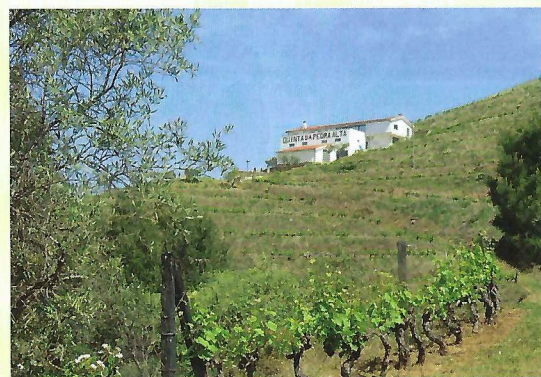
I first drank the red reserve wines of the Adega Cooperativa de Bórbia some 40 years ago, and loved them because of their depth of colour and rich complex flavours, their rusticity, and the way they complemented the hearty Portuguese cozinha, especially with Porco à Alentejana. Many cooperatives across Europe have closed since those days, but the commitment and belief in the quality of their terroir and wines has enabled the 300 members of the Adega Cooperativa in the isolated town of Borba in the Alentejo near the Spanish border to buck this trend. Today they make on average



about 11 million litres of wine a year, much of it for export to Brazil.

While I still enjoy their Gran Reserva and Reserva Reds (usually made from combinations of Aragonez, Trincadeira, Castelão and Alicante Bouschet grapes), which are now more refined and elegant than they were in the past, I was also astonished by some of their other wines, especially the delicious Adega de Borba white with tropical fruit and citrus flavours (made from Roupeiro, Arinto, and Antão Vaz grapes) - at less than €3 a bottle locally it is a great value wine for a hot summer's day.

Quinta Várzea da Pedra, is hidden away in the small town of Bombarral, north of Lisbon in the DOC Óbidos and was recommended by a good friend. In the old days, Portuguese white wine was often quite heavy and oxidised, but the "creative" Tomás Emídio has a magic ability to craft outstanding, mainly white, wines from a wide range of traditional grape varieties growing here on their 14.5 ha estate. In the old vineyard around the winery, they have even kept the traditional field blend of different local white grapes (Fernão Pires/Maria Gomes, Arinto, Vital, Diagalves, Alicante Branco, Seminário/Málvasia-Rei, Moscatel Graúdo, and Seara Nova) used to produce their Branco Macerado and Curtimenta. Perhaps my favourite was his wonderfully complex "Branco-21M", with its fine, mineral and slightly smoky aromas, and delicious fresh, intense flavours and excellent length. As Tomás says, "we listen to the vineyard and make it dance at its own pace". Its beautiful labels are based on



QUINTA DA PEDRA ALTA

the family's heritage of azulejos (tiles).

The old property of Quinta da Pedra Alta in the Douro, with its three granite markers remaining from the 1761 demarcation as indicators of its historic quality, has been rejuvenated since 2018 by the influx of two dynamic young wine-growers, João Pires and Matt Gant. The table wines made by the port wine producers in the Douro were once a secret for their own consumption, but in recent years they have emerged as one of the real successes of Portugal's evolving wine sector. Those of Quinta da Pedra Alta are among the very best. The diversity of terroirs across the property's 35 terraced hectares (between 230 and 550m above sea level), provides an opportunity to optimise their production of red, white and fortified wines with the aim of extracting the essence of what the land has to offer in as sustainable way as possible. My favourite is the distinctly savoury and gently rounded "Rio", made from parcels of Touriga Franca/Francesa and Tinta Roriz down near the river Pinhão, and aged in varying amounts of French and American oak (depending on the year) for around 20 months. They also make an excellent 10 year old tawny port.

WINES FROM PORTUGAL (please drink responsibly)

LOCAL FAVOURITES

Passionada Alvarinho (Anselmo Mendes, Vinho Verde DOC) 2024, 12.5%. An interesting and refreshing, fuller-bodied style of Vinho Verde made from Alvarinho grapes with crisp citrus flavours (Laithwaites, £14.99, **reduced to £12.99 if you present a copy of this magazine**)

SLIGHTLY FURTHER AFIELD

Vinhas de Pegões (Cooperativa Agrícola Santo Isidro de Pegões, Península de Setúbal) 2023, 13%.

Made from Arinto, Verdejo, Antão Vaz, Fernão Pires, and a touch of Chardonnay, and aged for three months in oak, this characterful well-structured wine combines freshness, with citrus and tropical fruit flavours (Majestic, £10.50 mixed six, **reduced to £9.50 mixed six if you present a copy of this magazine**).

Loved & Found Touriga Franca (Consulvinos for Waitrose, Alentejo) 2024, 13%. Waitrose's Loved & Found wines deserve to be better known. This single varietal, fresh and elegant wine with floral aromas and blackberry and black cherry flavours is made from grapes grown around Estremoz not far from Borba and is an excellent introduction to the range (Waitrose, £9.50).

WORTH GOING FURTHER FOR

Adega de Borba White (Adega de Borba, Alentejo) 2024, 13%. One of the very few Adega de Borba wines available in the UK, albeit at four times the price in Portugal. Refreshing acidity, aromatic, with citrus and tropical characteristics (Portugal Best Wines, £11.99).

Pedra a Pedra Branco (Quinta da Pedra Alta, Douro) 2024, 11.5%. Made from 59% Rabogato and 41% Gouveio grapes, this is a refreshing and aromatic reminder that skilled wine-growers can make excellent white wines even in the hottest and harshest environments (qpawines.co.uk, £17.50).

Rio Tinto (Quinta da Pedra Alta, Douro) 2022, 13.5%. Dark, rounded and full-bodied red wine made from 96% Touriga Franca and 4% Tinta Roriz, with delicious complexity, soft tannins and great length (qpawines.co.uk, £48.50).

(Wine prices and availability correct at going to press, but are subject to change at short notice)

Next issue: Sicilian contrasts

