

SARAH AHMED'S 50 GREAT PORTUGUESE WINES 2009

THE WHITES

LISBOA

Quinta do Chocapalha Arinto 2008

100% Arinto

The tiny DOC of Bucelas specialises in Arinto but this cracking example (the maiden vintage) comes from the wider Vinho Regional, Lisboa (the new name for Estremadura), to be precise, the oldest north-facing vineyards at Chocapalha. With its Riesling-like zingy citrus fruit and crisp acidity, it's one of my favourite Portuguese white varieties. The flute bottle underlines this stylistic connection. **Corney & Barrow**

VINHO VERDE/MINHO

Quinta de Ameal Loureiro 2008

100% Loureiro

Alvarinho has well and truly made the break from its Vinho Verde locale and is fast emerging as Portugal's lead white grape variety. But let's not forget Loureiro which, like Alvarinho, can produce magnificent single varietal Vinho Verde. In 2008, perhaps as a result of adopting biodynamic practices, Ameal seems to have shot up a gear in quality from its already very high quality base. The 2008 has stunning minerality and persistence.

Raymond Reynolds

Anselmo Mendes Contacto Alvarinho 2008

100% Alvarinho

Smart modern packaging and a smart modern wine from leading Vinho Verde winemaker/consultant Anselmo Mendes. Skin contact produces a flavoursome, fruity wine with great persistence for an entry level Alvarinho - grande compra indeed! **Atlantico**

Quinta do Louridal Poema Alvarinho 2007

100% Alvarinho

I presented this lees-aged Alvarinho at last year's Wine Show. It received a fantastic reception from an audience who had pretty much written off Vinho Verde. With its bright packaging and an aroma and flavour spectrum like Viognier, but much lighter on its feet, it sold like hotcakes. No wonder Francois Lurton is making an Alvarinho Vinho Verde! **Castas**

Soalheiro Primeiras Vinhas Alvarinho 2008

100% Alvarinho

Made from this estate's oldest vines, Jamie Goode chose the 2007 last year and I make no excuses for selecting the 2008. First, I agree with Jamie that they're probably the leading Vinho Verde producer, but also because though 2007 is the higher rated vintage, I think this wine is even better in 2008. Like the 2002 I tasted in late 2008, it will age well. **Raymond Reynolds**

TEJO

Vale d'Algarés Selección White

Viognier (55%) and Alvarinho (45%)

VR Ribatejano has had a makeover – Tejo is its new name and the region is turning over a new leaf on the ground too. New plantings of premium varieties, including uber-trendy Alvarinho, are focused away from the highly fertile “Campo” soils to the “Bairro’s” clay and limestone or the “Charneca’s” poor sandy soils. Vale d’Algarés are upping the stakes even higher with their super-premium positioning and a flashy winery to match. Vines were planted as recently as 2004 & 2005 so it’s early days, but the results already look promising. **Castas**

BAIRRADA

Quinta das Bageiras Vinho Branco Garrafeira 2007

Maria Gomes & Bical

Luis Pato’s whites, especially Vinha Formal, have always impressed me and, given the region’s facility for taut, age-worthy Baga reds, perhaps no surprises that its best whites are built like Paula Radcliffe – lean and mean, at least in their youth. This has a wonderful thrust of acidity that carries a super-long, complex and mineral finish. Stunning. **Not in UK?**

BEIRA INTERIOR

Quinta do Cardo Siria 2008

100% Siria (a.k.a. Codega and Roupeiro)

One of the higher (700m above sea level)) and higher calibre players in Beira Interior, Quinta do Cardo is owned by the quality and terroir-focused Companhia das Quintas. It owns seven quintas across Portugal. This is a great example of the Siria variety. Piña Colada tropicality and a touch of residual sugar is kept in check by racy, Riesling-like citrus acidity. **Portovino, www.portovino.co.uk**

Quinta dos Currais Colheita Seleccionado 2007

50% Fonte Cal, 25% Siria, 25% Arinto

Much as I like the region’s typically tropical Siria whites, this blend allows for greater complexity, putting me in mind of Santorini’s Assyrtiko from Greece with its struck match and mineral, racy character – apparently that’s the Fonte Cal. **Not in the UK?**

DAO

Quinta de Saes Reserva Branco 2008

80% Encruzado 20% Cercial

Alvaro Castro is at the vanguard of modern, terroir-driven Dão wines. His wines have intensity and lift. This wine brims with insouciant character, its vitality underscored by a runaway finish. I love the way its different notes come at you in counter melodies and riffs. **Castas**

DURIENSE/THE DOURO

Poeira Pó de Poeira Branco 2008

65% Alvarinho, 35% Gouveio

Jorge Moreira strives to make elegant reds, marked more by acidity than tannin, hence the north-facing site responsible for one of the Douro's most finely-honed reds, Poeira – stunning, I might add in 2007. Inevitably, he's started making a white too and one based on Alvarinho. I hesitated to choose this wine because it really comes into its own on day two, showing a wonderful slatey minerality that really speaks of the Douro. **Fields Morris & Verdin**

Niepoort Reserva Redoma Branco 2008

Multiple varietal blend from old, mixed vineyards, most importantly Rabigato, Codega, Donzelinho, Viosinho and Arinto.

The Douro's whites are very exciting, especially in 2008, which Dirk Niepoort describes as "unusual for its very fresh, high acidity but with the ripeness we wanted." Super-long, limpid and textured with a reverberating finish this is a fantastic illustration of the great strides Portuguese white wines have made, though, for the record, Niepoort made the first Redoma Branco in 1996 which I tasted last September – it had become positively Burgundian. **Raymond Reynolds**

ALENTEJO

J. Portugal Ramos Vila Santa Branco 2008 (VR)

Antão Vaz, Arinto & Verdelho

If the Alentejo has a traditional white, it's single varietal Antão Vaz from Vidigueira in Lower Alentejo. The variety can be a little too rich and ripe for contemporary tastes. For my money, the best whites are a blend of Antão Vaz with Arinto, Verdelho and even Vinho Verde's Alvarinho for added zip. J. Portugal Ramos' maiden Vila Santa Branco is bang on the money and a great response to the surge in demand for Alentejo whites. **Nick Oakley**

Adega da Cartuxa Pera Manca White 2007 –

Antão Vaz and Arinto

2007 was a big vintage for this traditional, established producer. Production moved from 17th century cellars to a state-of-the-art winery and it's paying dividends for reds and whites. The cooler 2007 vintage has produced a terrific Pera Manca Branco whose aroma and flavour spectrum, not to mention complexity and power, put me in mind of a top Hermitage. My observation prompted winemaker Pedro Baptista to reveal that he's experimenting with Roussanne next year. A producer to watch. **Atlantico**

THE REDS

COLARES

Quinta das Vinhas de Areia Fundação Oriente Ramisco 2005

100% Ramisco

Colares' fame rests on the fact that it's unique Ramisco variety, planted on sand dunes, withstood the phylloxera devastation of the 1800s. That's old news! These days, surviving

property developers is the issue. Good news then that Fundação Oriente, a charitable foundation, is breathing new life into the region. It bought the largest vineyard in Colares in 1999 and has been carrying out trials of the Ramisco grape to improve know-how. This is a modern yet true take on Ramisco/Colares. It shows a subtle intensity of incense spice edged red fruits with a rub of pomegranate-like pithy tannins. **D&F**

THE ALGARVE

Monte da Casteleja Maria Selection 2007

Alfrocheiro, Bastardo

Wine-wise, the Algarve may have less history than Colares, but property development is also an issue for its growing band of wineries, 16 last count. Frenchman Guillaume Leroux took over his grandfather's Algarve farm, Monte da Casteleja in 2000, producing his first wines in 2004. Rather than seeking to pander to the tourist market with easy drinking quaffers, Leroux is focusing on quality. Vines planted on clay and limestone are tended organically and he foot-treads his reds. Though it's early days, his wines show lots of character and promise. **N/A UK www.montedacasteleja.com**

LISBOA

Monte d'Oiro Reserva 2006

96% Syrah, 4% Viognier

The maiden 1997 vintage made waves on its release in 1999. Consultancy from Maison Chapoutier (with whom Monte d'Oiro make Ex Aequo, a Touriga Nacional/Syrah blend), underlines that the focus on Syrah and Viognier is no fad. In this, the earliest picked vintage to date, the light touch of winemaker Graça Gonçalves works to great effect. New oak has been reduced to 30-40% from 100% and the wine spent less time in barrel. A finely wrought wine, worth sitting with while it unfurls. **Not in UK?**

BEIRA INTERIOR

Quinta dos Currais Reserva 2003

50% Touriga Nacional, 25% Aragonês and 25% Castelao.

Bookmarked by the Douro Superior to the north and Alentejo to the south, Beira Interior is a large region, significantly warmer to the south where this wine comes from. Production was traditionally driven by co-operatives and focused on white table wine but this is changing fast with some exciting pockets of ambition. Currais are a great example. **Importer not known**

BEIRAS

Filipa Pato Lokal Silex 2008

75% Touriga Nacional & 25% Alfrocheiro Preto

Touriga Nacional easily dominates a blend, sometimes overplaying its rich hand. In Filipa Pato's talented hands, this wine shows off Touriga at its heady yet elegant best, with Dão terroir and blending partner Alfrocheiro providing their signature lipsmacking acidity. Joyous. **Clarke Foyster**

Luis Pato Vinha Barrosa 2005

100% Baga

Luis Pato doesn't need much of an introduction but, despite his ingenuity with Baga and the variety's Nebbiolo or Pinot Noir-like traits, Baga has failed to gain the kudos of Barolo or Burgundy. It's a worry, because recent changes in the law mean that Baga is becoming dangerously niche. This single vineyard wine, from the oldest vines, bears a striking resemblance to the rather more expensive Poderi Aldo Conterno Bussia Barolo 2001. I'd like to see good Baga wines just as popular and feted as good Barolo and given the chance to evolve with time. Not produced in 2006 or 2007, but 2008 and 2009, both terrific vintages, also promise to make an eloquent case for the variety. **Raymond Reynolds**

BAIRRADA

Dão Sul Encontro 1 2007

50% Baga, 50% Touriga Nacional

This is the modern face of Bairrada and a terrific example, fleshed out with Touriga Nacional, it's perfect for those with less patience or without the storage to let pure Baga reveal its charms. It shows cool Atlantic precision and poise combined with firm but fine, savoury tannins. **Clarke Foyster**

Quinta da Dona Bairrada 2004

100% Baga

From a parcel within Quinta Rigodeira, one of Alianca's Bairrada estates, this flagship wine comes from a well-exposed slope. Only made in best years, it's quite forward compared with Luis Pato's Barrosa and has a lovely saturation of Baga plum and cherry fruit with a mineral undertow. **Boutinot/Meridian Wines**

THE DAO

Quinta Vale das Escadinhas, Quinta da Falorca T-Nac 2007

Touriga Nacional

A snappy title and, for Touriga Nacional, a snappy wine – unoaked, floral, elegant and silky, with the variety's trademark chocolate. **John Armit/Castas**

Dão Sul Quinta de Cabriz Colheita Seleccionada 2007

Alfrocheiro, Tinta Roriz, Touriga Nacional

Dão Sul are one of the region's great innovators with a range that encompasses both quantity and quality. This treads the tightrope brilliantly between heady and serious – a high wire act at which the Dão excels. **Clarke Foyster**

Quinta da Pellada Tinto Reserva 2006

Touriga Nacional, Tinta Pinheira, Jaen & Alfrocheiro

Alvaro Castro's intense but not dense reds always impress and my choice wavered between this wine and the impressively structured Carrocel 2007, a "200% oaked" Touriga Nacional. I plumped for this wine because it's a terrific ambassador for modern Dão in the more difficult 2006 vintage (September rains). It has succulent fruit to flesh its bones, floral lift and an undertow of minerality to its long, persistent finish. **Castas**

Vinha Paz Reserva 2005

80% Touriga Nacional with Tinta Roriz and Alfrocheiro

A fine example of modern Dão from a very good vintage. Foot trodden in lagares and aged in French oak it has fine tannins behind gobs of red and mostly black cherry and berry fruit. Nonetheless, it retains an underlying freshness typical of the region. **Uk – don't know?**

Quinta dos Roques Garrafeira 2003

Touriga Nacional 65%, Alfrocheiro 15%, Tinto Cão 10% and Tinta Roriz 10%

Roques have forged a reputation for high quality wines and this illustrates why, not least because this is the most recent vintage – it's only made in exceptional years from a barrel selection of best wines. That suits me, because I wanted to show a powerful wine from an older vintage which is starting to show more tertiary, savoury notes. Despite the August heatwave, this wine shows deft balancing acidity, a great Dão strength. **Raymond Reynolds**

THE DOURO/DURIENSE

Quinta de S Jose Colheita 2007

35-40% Touriga Franca, 30-35% Touriga Nacional with Tinta Roriz

João Brito e Cunha's maiden Colheita label is a great example of a new breed of high quality entry level Douro wines. Like Passadouro's Passa or Niepoort's Drink Me, it lets the terroir do the talking rather than oak do the flattery (only 50% is oaked, and in 2-3-year-old barrels). Pure, fresh and mineral, it has a wonderful vibrance and immediacy to its young vine fruit. **Nick Dobson**

CARM Quinta do Coa 2007

Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz and other local varieties

The Douro Superior's star is rising – it's seeing an explosion of plantings from leading Upper Douro players like Quinta do Crasto, Quinta do Vallado and Quinta de la Rosa. This wine from the river Coa Valley is a great example of a spicy, dark red from the hot and arid Douro Superior bordering Spain. Coming from a certified organic, schistous vineyard at 130 to 300 metres in the, it has great balance. **Raymond Reynolds**

Quinta do Noval Cedro do Noval 2007

30% of each of Syrah, Touriga Nacional and Tinta Franca with 10% Tinta Roriz

Another classy entry level wine with judicious oak use. As Christian Seeley puts it, "you don't need make up in the Douro, oak is used for that and it's not necessary nor is it a positive." Its minerality and lift is even more remarkable given that around a third of this wine comprises Syrah. Together with Labrador 2007, Noval's maiden 100% Syrah, it provides compelling evidence that Syrah is well adapted and sympathetic to the Douro's terroir and native varieties. **Gonzales Byass**

Quinta do Noval Labrador 2007

100% Syrah

Who would have guessed that Noval would release a critter label or that the Douro could produce such a beguiling expression of Syrah? With its wild Douro nose, wash of minerals

and sinewy mid-weight style, the region seems to have yet another ace up its sleeve.

Gonzales Byass

Niepoort Redoma 2007

Old (60-120 years) mixed vineyard plantings include Tinta Amarela, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, Tinto Cão.

It's a given that Niepoort retain the capacity to surprise. Niepoort's "Projectos" wines include a Pinot Noir and Riesling, varieties which give away Dirk Niepoort's philosophy – the pursuit of elegance. Even the just released Robusto 2005 is fabulously elegant! Grapes for Redoma come from high, north-facing vineyards and, in 2007, a mild summer really played into Dirk's hands. Since its 1991 debut, Redoma has been aged in 228l barrels. In 2007, 40% was aged in 2000 litre oak vats. A particularly fine, lifted, floral vintage. **Raymond Reynolds**

Quinta do Passadouro Reserva Tinto 2007

Old (c. 50 to 70 years) mixed vineyard plantings.

I very nearly chose the 2004 vintage of this wine, first tasted there years ago and again on the same day as the 2007. Both vintages share a chiselled minerality which somehow captures the energy of vine roots forcing their way through vertical strata of schist. **Richards Walford**

Lemos & Van Zeller Curriculum Vitae "C.V" 2007

Cima Corgo (Torto Valley): aged (average 60 years old) mixed vineyard plantings.

Cristiano van Zeller's CV is one of my favourite 2007s. From an older, north-facing parcel of vines opposite Quinta do Vale Dona Maria with more Touriga Nacional, it sees 100% new oak. Beautifully structured, it has a super-long, saturated finish – a lithe long distance runner. **Corney & Barrow**

Quinta do Crasto Vinha de Ponte 2007

Mixed plantings (22 different grape varieties) averaging 90 years old.

It's hard to choose just one wine from Crasto's portfolio. The single vineyard Vinha de Ponte, last made in 2004, shows such breathtaking potential in 2007, it was a shoo-in. **Enotria/Adnams**

Quinta Macedos Pinga do Torto 2005

Young vine Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz blended with mixed old vines

This Torto Valley red, made predominantly from young vines, may be the baby of the range, but it has tons of character with a mineral core and wild edge to its chunky fruit. **Raymond Reynolds**

Alves de Sousa Abandonada Tinto 2005

Old (c. 80 years) mixed vineyard plantings.

Abandonado hails from a small, elevated parcel at Quinta da Gaivosa, one of Alves de Sousa's five quintas. Difficult to work, it had fallen into disuse but, since 2004, Alves and

his son Tiago have crafted a particularly plush, brooding wine with wild, smoky eucalyptus notes.

Quinta do Crasto Reserva Vinhas Velhas 2004

Cima Corgo: old (average 60 years) mixed vineyard plantings.

Crasto were amongst the first Portuguese wines I ever tasted when I worked for Oddbins and the Reserva has always been a great value ambassador for the Douro's unique heritage of old vine fruit. It was first made in 1994. I recently tasted a vertical from 2000-2007. I'm a huge fan of the 2004 vintage and this is a cracker - mineral-laden, long and persistent, well supported by ripe but present tannins. **Enotria/Adnams**

Quinta do Vale Dona Maria 2004

Cima Corgo (Torto Valley): old (average 60 years) mixed vineyard plantings.

Having bought Quinta do Vale Dona Maria in 1996, Cristiano van Zeller reckons that they are now really starting to grasp the site's expression. I think he's being modest. At a vertical tasting from 2001 to 2008, my stand out vintages were the super-structured, precise, persistent and mineral 2001, 2004 and 2008 barrel sample. **Corney & Barrow**

ALENTEJO

Herdade dos Grous 23 Barricas 2008

Touriga Nacional & Syrah

Beja in the south of Alentejo is home to some youthful but highly successful producers and this is the first of two that I've chosen. Not entirely coincidentally, they're both made in conjunction with consultant winemaker Luis Duarte who is a master of tannin management and fruit purity. The 2008 vintage produced well-balanced wines and, with Touriga Nacional's trademark elegance and fleshy mid-palate, this is a winner. **Great Western Wines**

Terrenus Tinto 2007

Sourced from 80-100 year old mixed vineyard bush vines, includes Aragones, Trincadeira, Alicante Bouschet, Castelao, Baga and Touriga Franca.

The subregion DOC Portalegre is Alentejo's northernmost outpost. Vineyards are located on the slopes of the Serra de São Mamede which rises to over 1000m. Its elevation, rugged landscape and granitic soils have more in common with the neighbouring Beira Interior than Alentejo. The presence of northern varieties reflects the fact that, a century ago, when there were no vines to speak of in Alentejo, cuttings came from the north. As its name suggests, this wine is veritable expression of terroir (and varieties) – lean and tightly coiled, framed by firm tannins, it benefits from decanting and is best paired with food. **N/A UK**
www.ruireguinga.com

Herdade de São Miguel dos Descobridores Reserva 2007

70% Touriga Franca, 30% Aragonês

Located near Evora in northerly Alentejo, schist and granitic soils seem to bring out the rock rose in Touriga Franca, a Douro variety that I've not come across this far south before. Renowned for its fresh, well-delineated fruit, it offers an interesting point of difference from the region's more typically generous styles. **Raymond Reynolds**

Herdade do Esporão Private Selection Garrafeira Red 2007

Alicante Bouschet and Aragones

For its size of operation (around 600 ha of estate fruit with a similar quantity bought in), Esporão run a tight ship. Quality from top to bottom is high. In the cooler 2007 vintage, the Garrafeira shows terrific elegance, power and balance. **Charles Hawkins**

Herdade do Rocim Grande Rocim 2007

90% Alicante Bouschet, 10% Touriga Nacional

This new, no expense spared, outfit had a swift endorsement of this, its maiden flagship red. Grande Rocim came second to Mouchão 2005 at the FIJEV-sponsored competition at which I judged for best red wine of Vinipax 2009 (a Southern Portuguese-focused event). These results are a great endorsement for Alicante Bouschet, a teinturer, which thrives in the Alentejo heat. Its quality derives less from its fruit (its quite shy and dry), and more from a tannin and acid structure, which helps wines to age and develop complexity over time. **N/A/ UK? www.herdadedorocim.com**

Herdade da Malhadinha Nova Malhadinha Tinto 2007 (VR)

Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Aragonês, Touriga Nacional and Alicante Bouschet.

Though the first wines were produced in 2003 from young vine material, Beja-based Malhadinha Nova has rapidly shot to prominence. Owners the Soares family have a background in wine retail and have clearly been influenced and inspired by the best, aided and abetted by well-known winemaker consultant Luis Duarte. Though it can be very hot in the Lower Alentejo, a judicious selection of varieties combined with free-draining schist soils produces wines that combine impressive concentration with balancing freshness. This is a keeper. **Raymond Reynolds**

Herdade de Mouchão Tonel 3-4 2005

100% Alicante Bouschet

The 2005 vintage in Alentejo has produced plenty of butch wines but Mouchão coax a wonderful fragrance and freshness from their Alicante Bouschet. Long, sensual and heady, this is seductive. Tonel 3-4 is only made in exceptional years; the "standard" Mouchão of this vintage is also deeply impressive. **Berry Brothers & Rudd, England, Forth Wines, Scotland**

Quinta do Zambujeiro 2004

48 % Touriga Nacional, 24% Aragonez, 24% Alicante Bouschet, 4% Castelao

Quality and attention to detail are hallmarks of Swiss watches and the wines from this Swiss-owned winery clearly receive plenty of tlc. Tasting the maiden 1999 through to the 2005, the 2004 vintage stood out to me (also for the second wine Terra do Zambujeiro). Low yielding dry-farmed vineyards, elevation (340-350 m), schist soils and the use of Touriga Nacional and Alicante Bouschet make for a subtly powerful, expressive, elegant wine. **Auto Chocolat?????**

Quinta do Mouro 2004

Aragonês 50%, Alicante Bouschet 25%, Touriga Nacional 20% and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon.

A vertical tasting at Mouro mesmerised for its light and shade - a line up full of character and soul, while remaining thoroughly consistent in terms of quality - high. Though the 2005 is more powerful, during my week's visit in the Alentejo, I generally preferred wines from the 2004 vintage. This, though tightly coiled, shows great balance of fruit, tannin and acidity. **James Nicolson (N Ireland) England?**

A SWEET FAREWELL

Quinta do Portal Late Harvest 2007

Moscatel 45%, Rabigato 50%, Viosinho 5%

This wine is the piece de resistance of the "nose to tail" possibilities thrown up by the Douro's fabulously diverse terrain - table wines, pink port have been known to raise eyebrows in some quarters and this sweetie raised mine! I knew Portal made some lifted fortified Moscatels, but confess I was taken aback by the freshness, delicacy and purity of this wine. Moscatel and Rabigato are concentrated on the vine, some Rabigato was affected by botrytis and the Viosinho was made vin de paille-style. **Charles Hawkins**

Quinta da Bacalhoa Moscatel de Setúbal Roxo 1999

Moscatel Roxo

Port and Madeira are justifiably among the world's best-known fortified wines, but Moscatel de Setúbal is a fabulous alternative that offers tremendous pleasure on release. Setúbal's Roxo is a rare treat and, at this level, quality is world class. Bacalhoa's Roxo featured in 2009's Muscat du Monde® Top 10, bagging 1 of only 3 gold medals. **Ehrmanns**

Sarah Ahmed
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