

# WINE OVERVIEW



## PORTUGAL

Content contributed by Michael Fox, Imperial Beverage



Closely review the syllabus for this wine level to determine just what items require your attention in each of the region/country overview documents.

Portugal is one of the most renowned producers of wine in the world. However, its reputation is not based on table wine, but on the fortified wines of Port. Portugal also produces excellent table wines, particularly in the North of the country. There is a large mix of grape varieties, but undoubtedly the most well known and productive is Touriga Nacional. This grape is the basis for fine Ports and the red wines of the Douro, as well as having an increasing presence in many other regions.

The regions are classified, as they are in many other European wine-producing nations, so that appropriate regulations may be laid down. The main regions are referred to as Denominação de Origem Controlada (DOC).

### WINE REGIONS OF NORTHERN PORTUGAL

#### DUORO

The Duoro region is named for the Duoro River, which is known in Spain as Ribera Del Duero. Half of Duoro wines are port, and half are table wines. Over 80 grape varieties are grown in the Duoro, but eight are prominent: Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Barroca, Tinta Roriz (aka Tempranillo), Tinta Cao, Gouveia (aka Verdelho), Malvasia Fina and Viosinho.

#### DAO

South of the Duoro is Dao, an up-and-coming region for good value, full bodied red wines. Some white is also produced. The area is surrounded by mountains, with granite and sandy soils. Red wines are made primarily from Touriga Nacional, and whites from Encruzado.

#### VINHO VERDE

Vinho Verde is Portugal's largest DOC, producing mostly red wine. The whites, however, are the most well known. The white Vinho Verde is a young, high acid, slightly effervescent wine. The reds are made mainly from Azal, Vinhao, and Espaderio. The whites are made mainly from Alvarinho, Loureiro, Trajadura, Perderna and Avesso. The wines may not exceed 11.5% alcohol.

### WINE REGIONS OF SOUTHERN PORTUGAL

#### SETUBAL

Located to the south of Lisbon, Setubal is a region known mainly for its fortified wine – Moscatel de Setubal (at least 85% Muscat) and Setubal (less than 85% Muscat). Three types of Muscat are allowed – Moscatel de Setubal, Moscatel do Duoro and Moscatel Roxo. The fermenting must is fortified with grape spirits then spends 4-5 years in casks.

## PENINSULA DE SETUBAL

This area was known as Terras do Sado until 2009. Peninsula de Setubal is a Vinhos Regional, similar to the French Vin de Pays. The Setubal DOC is to the northwest, and the Atlantic ocean is to the west. The region produces both white and red wines, which are blends of many indigenous grape varieties.

## ALENTEJO

Alentejo is most well known for its cork trees. Half of the world's supply of cork is produced here. The region is enormous, covering roughly one third of Portugal. More red than white wine is produced here, from the Aragonez, Trincadeira, Moreto and Castelao Frances varieties.

## INTRODUCTION TO PORT (SEE ALSO, FORTIFIED WINE PRODUCTION)

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The table wines of Portugal are frequently very good value, with a smattering of producers that are turning out excellent wines. The fortified wines of the Douro are, however, unrivalled.

Port is basically wine fortified with brandy spirit. The spirit is added prior to the natural end of fermentation, so the wine is always sweet, as the addition of the strong alcohol kills the yeast converting the sugar into alcohol (the process of fermentation). The eventual alcohol content is still high, however (typically 20%), thanks to the brandy that has been added. Most Port is red, although some firms also produce a small amount of white Port.

Since the 18th century, there has been a strong British presence in the Douro, as this was where British drinkers sourced their wines following the deterioration in relations between Britain and France. The firm red wines of the region were bolstered up and protected with brandy before the sea journey north, and thus Port as a wine style was born.

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## STYLES OF PORT

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**Vintage Port:** Port vintages are declared depending on the quality of the vintage, some houses declaring much more frequently than others. In general, a vintage is declared about three times each decade. A declared vintage means that the Port house feels the wine is of the necessary quality to age well in bottle. The wines are aged up to two years in oak, then do the rest of their ageing in the bottle. They may require more than fifteen years before they are ready, and may last for decades more. This is the finest quality level of Port.

**Single Quinta Port:** Most houses have quintas (vineyards) where they source their best fruit. In non-declared years they will release the wine from the quinta as a single quinta wine. These wines can be excellent value, frequently close to vintage quality.

**Late Bottled Vintage Port:** Good Port houses still produce good LBV wines. Such wines have been aged in wood for longer than Vintage Port, four years in total, or five years for a Traditional LBV. This prolonged ageing results in a wine ready to drink at a younger age.

**Tawny Port:** Wine aged in oak for a long time, resulting in a tawny color. The age will be stated on the label, frequently ten or twenty years, less often thirty or even forty years.

**White Port:** A heavy aperitif wine, varying in style, often with a hint of oxidation.

**Other styles:** Ruby is a young and simple style. Vintage Character is a Port blended to resemble a vintage wine, and Crusted Port is a blend of several Vintage Character Ports.

## MADEIRA

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The island of Madeira is a small outpost of Portugal off the West coast of Africa, which produces a fortified wine based on the Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malmsey grapes. It is made in a similar style to Port, with the addition of grape spirit causing the end of fermentation. An additional feature, however, is the heating of the wine, at approximately 120 F, for about six months. This practice stems from the improvement in the wine noted when it was transported on long sea journeys through hot climates in the 17th century. Heating the wine, together with exposure to oxygen, oxidizes and stabilizes it. As a result, Madeira is a very long lived wine.

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