

ESCAPEMENT®

TIME FOR THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE

HOME | ABOUT US | WATCH ARTICLES | RETAILERS | WATCH GLOSSARY | NEWS | THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE | ESCAPEMENT PRIVÉE



Quick Search

[Advanced Search](#)

The Finer Things

- >> [Bespoke Tailoring](#)
- >> [Corporate Helicopters](#)
- >> [Corporate Jets](#)
- >> [Fine Wine](#)
- >> [Jewellery](#)
- >> [Motorsport](#)
- >> [Photographic equipment](#)
- >> [Prestige cars](#)
- >> [Sporting Goods](#)
- >> [Travel](#)
- >> [Whisky](#)
- >> [Writing Instruments](#)

Watch Manufacturers

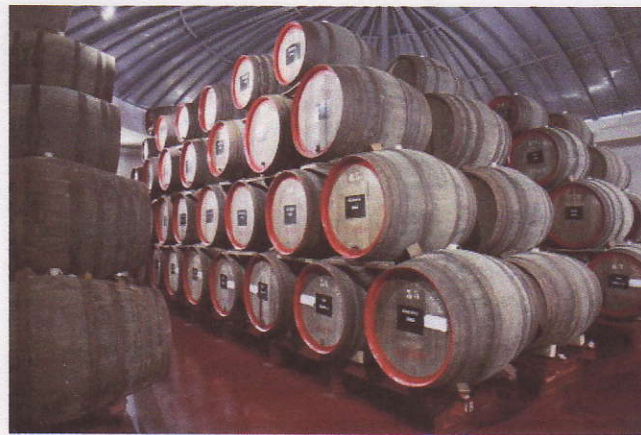
- >> [A. Lange & Söhne](#)
- >> [Audemars Piguet](#)
- >> [Baume & Mercier](#)
- >> [Bell & Ross](#)
- >> [Blancpain](#)
- >> [Breguet](#)
- >> [Breitling](#)
- >> [Breitling for Bentley](#)
- >> [Bremont](#)
- >> [Bulgari](#)
- >> [Carl F. Bucherer](#)
- >> [Cartier](#)
- >> [Chopard](#)
- >> [Chronoswiss](#)
- >> [De Bethune](#)
- >> [Ebel](#)
- >> [F. P. Journe](#)
- >> [Fortis](#)
- >> [Girard-Perregaux](#)
- >> [Glashütte Original](#)
- >> [Graham](#)
- >> [H. Moser & Cie](#)
- >> [J. L. Forsey](#)



Madeira

Written By: [Philip Day](#) 24/07/2012

From time to time friends ask me what would be a good fortified wine that suited modern tastes to bring as a dinner guest. My honest answer would be to try a fine Madeira, (ironically, one of the oldest types of wine as the islands of Madeira have a long history of wine-making, dating back to the 16th century when Madeira was a regular port of call for ships heading off to the New World or East Indies) because there is a style of wine for everyone, from dry, refreshing apéritif styles through to rich nutty or creamy digestifs.



That said, I don't mean using the occasion to off-load a bottle of the bland syrup-like tourist plonk, flogged to waves of cruise ship passengers that disgorge daily into Funchal. Rather opting for newer, fresh and pure style varieties that are slightly more acidic with less sweetness than blends of old with no indication of the somewhat cloying caramel taste that many of the cheaper blends depended on in years gone by.

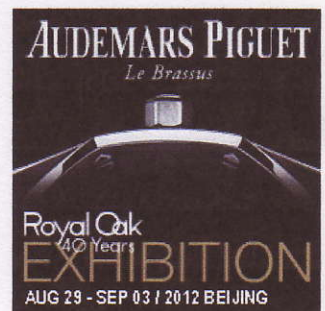
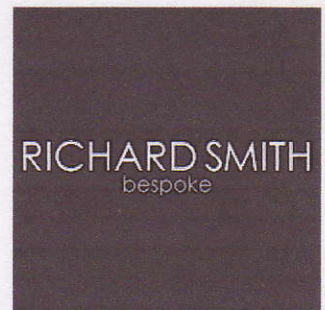
History

Historical records indicate a well-established wine industry existed on Madeira by the 16th century, when the island was a regular port of call for ships sailing to the New World and the East Indies, who needed wine for the long voyages across the oceans.

Like Port, the earliest examples of Madeira wines, were unfortified and therefore had the habit of spoiling at sea. Following the example of Port producers, a small amount of distilled alcohol made from cane sugar was added to boost the alcohol content of the wine in order to modify and stabilise it.

The most regular customer was The Dutch East India Company, who stocked up with large (112gal/423l) casks of wine (known as 'pipes') for their long voyages to the Indian sub-continent. When one shipment was returned to the island after a long voyage, it was found that the intense heat and constant rolling movement of the ships had had a transforming effect on the wine. Many customers, however, preferred the taste of this style of wine, and in consequence, Madeira labelled as 'vinho da roda' (wine that had made a round trip) became very popular.

As ageing the wine on long sea voyages was deemed too costly, methods to produce the same aged and heated style on the island were developed. Wine-producers began storing the wines on trestles at the winery or in special rooms known as 'estufas', where the heat of island sun was used to age the wine.



- >> [Harry Winston](#)
- >> [Hermes](#)
- >> [Hublot](#)
- >> [IWC](#)
- >> [Jaeger-LeCoultre](#)

The 18th century is considered the 'golden age' for Madeira, when the wine's popularity extended from the English and Portuguese speaking colonies in the New World to Great Britain, Russia and North Africa. The North American colonies, in particular, were ardent repeat customers, with as much as a quarter of all wine produced on the island each year being consumed by them.

- >> [Jaquet Droz](#)
- >> [Jean Richard](#)
- >> [Linde Werdelin](#)
- >> [MB&F](#)
- >> [Maitres du Temps](#)
- >> [Maurice Lacroix](#)
- >> [Montblanc](#)
- >> [Nomos Glashuette](#)
- >> [Omega](#)
- >> [Panerai](#)
- >> [Parmigiani Fleurier](#)
- >> [Patek Philippe](#)
- >> [Perrelet](#)
- >> [Piaget](#)
- >> [Richard Mille](#)
- >> [Roger Dubuis](#)
- >> [Roger W. Smith Limited](#)
- >> [Rolex](#)
- >> [Tag Heuer](#)
- >> [Ulysse Nardin](#)
- >> [Vacheron Constantin](#)
- >> [Zenith](#)
- >> [Other Watch Articles](#)

The end to the industry's prosperity, came about in the mid-19th century when the epidemic of phylloxera that had plagued the French and other European wine regions reached the island. The result being that by the end of the 19th century, most of the island's vineyards had been uprooted to eradicate the disease, and many wine-growers turned to sugar cane production. It wasn't until the turn of the 20th century, that volumes of production and sales started to return slowly to normal, when two of Madeira's biggest markets abruptly ended their trade (thanks to the Russian Revolution and Prohibition in North America), which mortally rocked the industry again.

The remainder of the 20th century witnessed a severe downturn for Madeira, both in sales and reputation. Like Marsala, Madeira was relegated to being primarily associated with the production of low quality wine suitable for cooking. However, towards the end of the century, some of the long established producers started a renewed focus on quality — ripping out hybrid and American vines planted after the phylloxera epidemic and replanting vineyards with the 'noble grape' varieties of Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malvasia.

The two main standard varieties of Tinta Negra Mole and Complexa are still produced and indeed are highly used, but the use of any hybrid grape varieties have been officially banned from wine production since 1979.

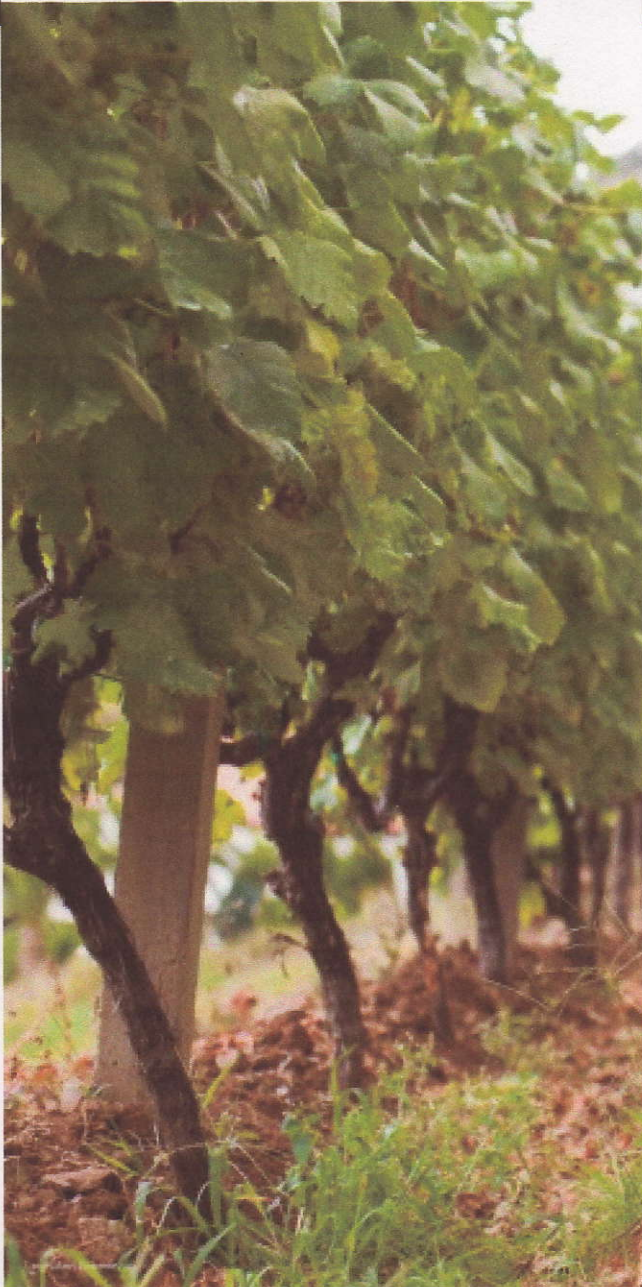
Currently, Madeira's primary markets are in the Benelux countries, France and Germany, with emerging markets growing in Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Appellation	Madeira D.O.P
Owner	Vinhos Barbeito Madeira Lda/Kinoshita International
Planted Acreage	Only around 420 hectares of the whole island is planted with the six traditional varieties permitted in Madeira. Of these, Tinta Negra Mole makes up around 85%. That means there are only around 60 hectares planted to the noble varieties
Grape varieties	Sercial, Verdelho, Bual, Malvasia São Jorge, Malvasia Fajã dos Padres and Tinta Negra Mole
Wines produced	A variety of aged wines, single harvest wines, single cask wines, vintage wines and specialised project wines
Terroir (US terroir)	Red and basaltic volcanic bedrock
Production	Undisclosed
Top Recommendations Produced	Barbeito 10 year-old Sercial (Dry) Barbeito Single Cask 113 Tinta Negra Mole 1997 (Medium dry) Barbeito Single Cask 119 Verdelho 1996 (Medium dry) Barbeito 1997 Colheita Single Cask 119 (Medium dry) Barbeito 5 year-old Malvasia Reserve (Sweet) Barbeito Boal Frasqueiras 1982 (Medium Sweet) Barbeito 20 year old Malvasia (Sweet)



Viticulture

Possessing a generally oceanic climate with some influences from the Tropics, the island of Madeira benefits from high rainfall and average temperature of 19°C (66°F), the threats of fungal grape diseases and botrytis rot to the growing grapes are ever present hazards.



In order to combat these threats, Madeira vineyards are often planted to grow on low trellises, known as 'latada', that help to raise the canopy of the vine off the ground (similar in style and method to those used in the Portuguese Vinho Verde region). The red and basaltic bedrock terrain of the mountainous volcanic island renders it difficult to cultivate, so vineyards are planted on man-made terraces, known locally as 'poios', similar in construction to the terraces of the Douro that make the production of Port wine possible. Harvesting the grapes mechanically and the use of other vineyard equipment is virtually impossible, thereby making wine grape growing on the island very costly. Consequently, in the recent past many vineyards have been sold for commercial tourist developments or replanted with such products as bananas or sugar cane for various commercial enterprises.

The four major types of Madeira (Noble Varieties) are named according to the grape variety used. Ranging from the driest to the sweetest style, they are: Sercial, Verdelho, Bual (or Boal) and Malvasia (also known as Malmsey or Malvazia).

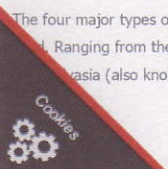




Image - ©Leigh-Ann Beverley

Sercial is fermented almost completely dry, with very little residual sugar (0.5 to 1.5° on the Baumé Scale). This style of wine is characterised by high acidity, high-toned colours and almond flavours.

Verdelho halts its fermentation a little earlier than that of Sercial, when its sugars reach between 1.5 and 2.5° on the Baumé Scale. It is characterized by high acidity and smoky notes.

Bual (Boal) has its fermentation halted when its sugars achieve between 2.5 to 3.5° on the Baumé Scale. The wine attains a much darker colour and is characterised by a medium-rich texture, and has the flavours of raisins.

Malvasia (Malmsey) finishes its fermentation when its sugars register between 3.5 and 6.5° on the Baumé Scale. This wine is characterised by its dark colour, rich texture, and coffee-caramel flavours. Like other Madeiras made from noble grape varieties, the Malvasia grape has naturally high levels of acidity, which balances with the high sugar content so the taste of the wine is not cloyingly sweet.

Occasionally, other grape varieties such as Bastardo, Moscatel and Terrantez can be seen growing at some vineyards, although these are now becoming increasingly rare on the island because of disease.





Since the phylloxera epidemic, Tinta Negra Mole and Complexa are the standard stock varieties on the island, and can be found in various concentrations in many blends and vintage wines. Of all these varieties mentioned only Bastardo and Tinta Negra Mole are red grape varieties.

Recent regulations enacted by the European Union have applied a rule that 85% of the grapes used to make a wine must be of the variety stated on the label.

Modern Madeira wines, which do not carry a varietal label are generally made from Tinta Negra Mole grapes.

The 'Estufagem Process'

The 'estufagem ageing process' is what makes Madeira wine production unique. It attempts to duplicate the effects a long sea voyage has on ageing barrels as they journey through through tropical climates.

Three principal heating methods are used to age the wine, according to the quality and cost of the finished wine:

- >> Cuba de Calor: The most common method, used for producing low cost Madeira, is bulk ageing the wine in low stainless steel or concrete tanks surrounded by either heating coils or piping that circulates hot water around the container. The wine is usually heated to temperatures as high as 55°C (130°F) for a minimum of 90 days as stipulated by the Madeira Wine Institute Regulations.
- >> Armazém de Calor: This second method involves storing the wine in large wooden casks in specially designed rooms, heated by steam, creating sauna-like conditions. This process exposes the wine to heat more gently, but the process can take from six months to over a year. This method is generally only used by the Madeira Wine Institute.
- >> Canteiro: Generally reserved for the highest quality Madeiras, wines are aged without the use of any artificial heat. They are instead stored by the winery in warm rooms and left to age by the natural heat of the sun. In respect of vintage Madeira, heating by this process can last anything from 20 to 100 years.

The characteristic flavours of Madeira wine is as a consequence of this ageing process



which hastens the mellowing of the wine and also tends to prevent any secondary fermentation from occurring, as it is, in effect, a gentle form of pasteurisation. Furthermore, the wine is deliberately exposed to air, causing oxidation allowing the resulting wine to take on a colour similar to a tawny port. In the past colourings were used to give some consistency to its colour, although this practice is on the decrease.

Since 1993, Madeira produced from Tinta Negra Mole grapes is restricted by law to use only the following generic terms on the label to indicate the level of sweetness.

- >> seco (dry)
- >> meio seco (medium dry)
- >> meio doce (medium sweet)
- >> doce (sweet)

The terms pale, dark, full and rich are also permitted to describe the wine's colour. A wine labelled as 'Finest', means it has been aged for at least three years. (This style is usually reserved for cooking.)

Wines made from at least 85% of the noble varieties of Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malvasia are usually labelled according to the amount of time they have been aged. Other permitted labelling include the following:

- >> Reserve (aged five years) - This is the minimum amount of ageing permitted for a wine labelled with one of the noble varieties.
- >> Special Reserve (aged 10 years) - Such labelled wines are often aged naturally without any artificial heat source.
- >> Extra Reserve (aged over 15 years) - Production of this style is rare. It is richer in style than a Special Reserve Madeira but with many producers prefer to continue the ageing process to 20 years to release the wine as a vintage or a colheita.
- >> Colheita or Harvest - This style includes wines from a single vintage, but it usually has been aged for a shorter period than for a true vintage Madeira. The wine is permitted to be labelled with a vintage date, but must include the word 'colheita' on it.
- >> Vintage or 'Frasqueiras' - Legally wines labelled as such must be aged at least 20 years.

A style of Madeira called 'Rainwater' is rarely produced today, and when it is, is usually shipped only to the United States. In style, it is mild and similar to Verdelho, but is made from Tinta Negra Mole grapes, and is primarily served as an apéritif. How this style was developed is subject to differing accounts. The most common states that the name derives from the vineyards on the steep hillsides, where vines were dependent on the rain water for survival as any other form of irrigation was difficult. Another theory involves a shipment of wine bound for the American colonies that was accidentally diluted by a heavy downpour of rain while it lay on the docks in Savannah, Georgia. Rather than dump the wines, the enterprising merchants tried to pass it off as a 'new fashionable style' of Madeira and were surprised by its popular reception among the Americans.



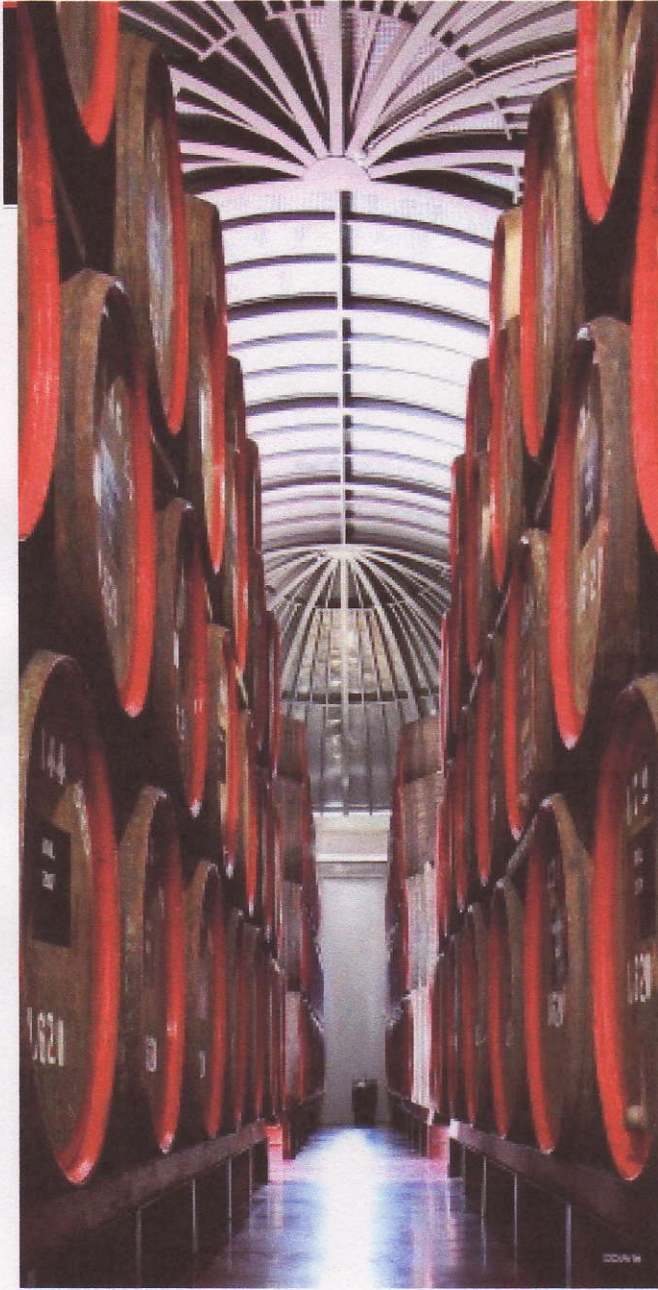


Image - DDiArte

Madeira is popular with its aficionados because it is a very robust wine that remains drinkable for quite a long time after being opened.

After being in decline for many years, its popularity is set to rise rapidly. Madeira will become a more recognised and appreciated wine over the next decade. Wine enthusiasts are currently rediscovering Madeira wines and this, together with the new, exciting, versatile and appetising styles being produced by forward thinking and innovative companies like Vinhos Barbeito promise a great future for an old favourite.

Madeira in the news

» Madeira was an important wine in the history of the United States of America. One of the key events on the road to revolution and independence in which Madeira played a major role was the British seizure of John Hancock's sloop the Liberty on May 9, 1768. After unloading a cargo of 25 pipes (3,150 gallons) of Madeira, Hancock's ship was seized, and a fierce dispute over import duties developed. It was the seizure of the Liberty that caused riots to flare up among the people of Boston, which led to acts of defiance against British rule.

Madeira was a favourite of Thomas Jefferson, and it was used to toast the Declaration of Independence.

Washington, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams were also fans of Madeira.



- » 1991 saw the beginning of many changes at Vinhos Barbeito, one being the joint venture with the Kinoshita family (who are a 50% shareholder), with whom they had already a close commercial and personal relationship dating back to 1967. This decision enabled the company to concentrate on just ageing, producing and blending the best quality wines.
- » A new purpose-built winery was built in 2008.



- » Between 2002 and 2012 Vinhos Barbeito have significantly increased their tally of Gold, Silver and bronze medals at numerous international wine awards ceremonies.
- » A significant number of journalists from several well-regarded international newspapers and wine-industry journals including The Financial Times, The Chicago Tribune, The Daily Telegraph (Weekend), The Nikkei Marketing Journal, Forbes Life, Essen & Trinken and Revista de Vinhos, pen extremely positive articles about the direction the company is taking and make numerous, exhortatory recommendations to their readers about many of Vinhos Barbeito's brands.

Contact details

- » **Vinhos Barbeito (Madeira) Lda.**
- » Address: Estrada, da Ribeira Garcia, Parque Empresarial de Camara de Lobos - Lote 89300-324, Camara de Lobos, Madeira, PORTUGAL
- » T: +351-291-761829
- » F: +351-291-765832
- » I: <http://www.vinhosbarbeito.com>
- » E: info@vinhosbarbeito.com.pt

References

- » <http://www.wine-pages.com>
- » <http://www.vinhosbarbeito.com>
- » <http://whiskedfoodie.com/mixology/understanding-madeira-the-challenges-of-this-region>
- » <http://www.madeira-shopping.com/english/>
- » <http://www.madeirawineguide.com/>
- » http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeira_wine
- » <http://www.ft.com/robinson>

Acknowledgement

Escapement.uk.com wishes to thank Vinhos Barbeito for their kind assistance with providing advice and images for this article.

About the author

Philip Day is an early-retired academic in linguistics who has published many articles.

A North-Midlander (The Potteries) by birth, he currently lives close to the Lancashire Pennines which he regularly explores with his Patterdale terrier, Max.

In particular he has a keen interest in European fine wines and good food and will be contributing further articles in the future for Escapement.uk.com.

