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ABOUT
MADEIRA

Fajã dos Padres; 1986 Malvasia

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Every wine region has it; a property, a single vineyard, a specific wine or vintage that enjoys a particular repute. Madeira is no exception. There's this one, small but historically famous vineyard, called [Fajã dos Padres](#) which for centuries was impossible to visit without coming by boat. Today one can visit by taking the cliff railway the almost 300 meters down to the remote fajã.



Fajã dos Padres has deserved its fame for several reasons. Primarily it is of course based on the wines, wines that so few of us has ever tasted. But besides that one can add history, mystique, microclimate and the grape itself, Malvasia. The dramatic landscape with the vineyard in a close position just next to the ocean creates a micro climate of exceptional proportions. The vicinity of the sea side reflects the sun and allows the sun-



thirsting Malvasia grapes to reach perfect maturity. Protected by the cliffs and cultivated in volcanic soil, Fajã dos Padres is a text book example what the generic term terroir is all about.



So, why has only a few tasted the wines from the fajã? Easy explanation: not much wine has been produced since the Oidium and the Phylloxera louse struck the island in the beginning of the 1850's. Fed up with irregular harvests, if any, grape cultivation disappeared from Fajã dos Padres and was replaced by more reliable crops, fruit mainly.

If it wasn't for the current owner and his family, *Mário Jardim Fernandes*, even fewer people would get the opportunity to taste a Malvasia from the classic vineyard, the Grand Cru of Madeira. The Fernandes family deserves a medal for bringing back the vines to the site and not only that, also producing and aging the wine! The quantity produced is of course scarce but it's there so do take the opportunity to taste the legendary Fajã dos Padres!



Together with *Ricardo Diogo* at [Vinhos Barbeito](http://vinhosbarbeito.com), Mário Jardim Fernandes has bottled the *1986 Malvasia Vintage* from Fajã dos Padres. 654 bottles. Not much it seems, but putting it in to context there were basically nothing before. There has been other bottlings from the fajã but as Ricardo Diogo says, this is the first controlled one since 1921.



Aged the canteiro way and in 800 liters casks at the winery of the fajã but bottled at Vinhos Barbeito. I'm tasting the wine at the premises of Barbeito. The difference compared to the Malvasias of Barbeito is distinct. Not as fresh and acidity driven, more darker fruit and to put it in the words of a layman; heavy.

So, is that negative? Not at all, the beauty of Madeira wine is the differences that actually exist between the producers. For a short second I'm fantasizing that this resembles an old Fajã dos Padres, the ones produced 200 years ago and probably there's something in it. But more it is probably just the result of the terroir and placement of the canteiro.



The 1986 shows a dark color with notes of flowers, orange peel, figs, heather honey, burnt sugar and dust. Quite perfumed and very much Malvasia. On the palate quite a mouthfill. Darker notes, not as refreshing as a Barbeito Malvasia and with less acidity as well, but still in fine balance. Not so sweet which actually makes it more interesting. Dried fruits, herbs, burnt sugar, raisins, walnuts and dark bitter chocolate. Long dusty finish.

The MAM Opinion:

FORMIDABLE

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NB. The Fajã dos Padres has a mixed history. It became famous thanks to the Jesuites which had monopoly on the land from the late 16th century until 1759 when they were expelled from the island. Since then the site has seen several owners. For more information about the Fajã dos Padres long history, read *Alex Liddell's Madeira*.