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Vinhos Barbeito

Robotic Lagar Trodden Wines

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There's nothing like a human treading team. Foot treading guarantees that the grapes are crushed gently and doesn't release any bitter substances in the must. A human foot is not likely to crush the pips in other words. But what if a method to extract more color – and also flavor – existed, a way that didn't include the need of a lot of man power?



No news really. It does exist, *the robotic lagar*. Invented by the *Symington's* in the Douro Valley, the machine functions the same way as foot treading with a few exceptions; the treading is of course mechanic but installed to imitate the weight of an average human being's weight, artificial pads are programmed to move the same way as human feet and the robotic lagar isn't restricted to work from nine to five. Having in mind time is one of the most important factors at harvest time, the robotic lagar is a real time savior, not needing as much man power to empty after completing the treading.





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But can a machine replace the foot treading? Of course you will receive different answers depending on who you might ask. In Douro the wish to extract color and flavor are more important than in Madeira, well at least the color part. But **Ricardo Diogo** at [Vinhos Barbeito](#) is experimenting with a robotic lagar in the Madeira wine production and the results are to say the least, interesting.

At my most recent visit at Vinhos Barbeito I was poured two cask samples of **2011 Tinta Negra**. One **Bica aberta** which is a Portuguese term used to describe the method where the grape skins have no contact with the must during fermentation. The other glass poured was made in the **Robotic Lagar** which I saw live during the 2011 harvest.



For sure there were more color and fruit extracted in the robotic lagar glass. Basically two completely different wines where the Bica Aberta glass showed more elegance and floral notes and the Robotic Lagar glass showed darker color, more fruit and purity. However, the origin couldn't be questioned.

So, is this negative for Madeira – the use of Robotic lagar? That of course depends who you ask and what approach Madeira has to set for the future and its potential end consumers. A certain per centage of robotic lagar trodden wine can and will, in my world, actually higher the quality of the blends significantly. Blending is a work of art and a portion of the mechanically trodden wine will provide the winemaker with more alternatives. Perhaps it's also a necessity in order to raise the general repute of Tinta Negra and the 3 and 5 years old wines? For sure, I'm curiously following Ricardo's experiments.