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THE **WINE** DETECTIVE

Sarah Ahmed – The Wine Detective

Annual Madeira Tasting: old dogs new tricks?

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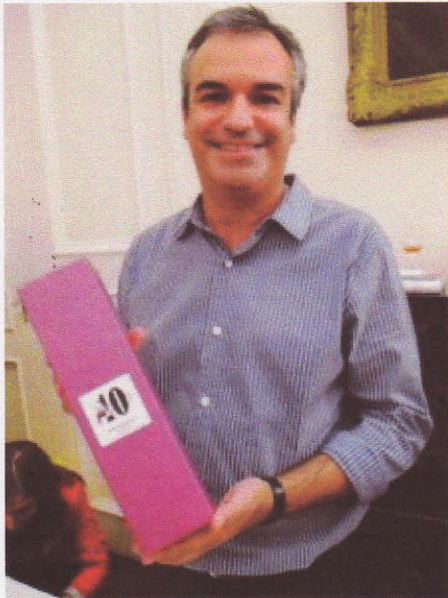


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Mum's the word

The Port trade has seen some seismic shifts in the last 20 years or so. It would seem the ripples have been felt in Madeira where there have been some interesting new developments recently.

Perhaps influenced by his time at Symington Family Estates Chris Blandy of [Blandy's](#) has overseen the acquisition of two vineyards, Quinta do Bispo (4.2ha) and Quinta do Furaio (2ha), the former

now the island's largest contiguous latada-trained vineyard. Like the Port company the move is about investing in the land to conserve the region's tradition of grape growing. Especially where, he says, a younger generation is looking elsewhere to make a living in these difficult economic times.



Quinta do Furo

It's also about increasing the footprint of (and securing sources of) the best grapes – noble white grapes Sercial, Verdelho, Bual & Malvasia, also Terrantez which the company's brand new viticultural department have planted. Blandy's has also taken over the management of his cousin's small Funchal vineyard Quinta do Santa Lucia where the focus is again on top grapes, including Terrantez, a grape on the comeback trail.

Indeed [Henriques & Henriques](#) (Madeira's only shipper with vineyards until Blandy's acquisitions), harvested 3000kg of Terrantez this year from vineyards planted in 2011, almost doubling the island's production of this rare variety.



In another recent development CEO Humberto Jardim (pictured) is also excited by early results of his bourbon barrel trials – “*you feel immediately the US oak influenced by bourbon – a burnish and caramelised character*” he told me. Of course it will be a while before we see the wines, but his

enthusiasm was palpable.

Also flying high human dynamo Ricardo Freitas of [Barbeito](#) (pictured top) is excited about the potential of the Bastardo grape. He harvested 2000kg this year which, for the first time (since 2007), he has subjected to skin maceration and foot-treading. Again, it will be some years before we see a Barbeito Bastardo – this is a long term game.



Speaking of which, Freitas was also bursting with pride about a fistful of new releases, including the first Frasqueiras (vintage Madeiras) he has personally made. Of these wines – all 1992s, a Sercial, Verdelho and Boal, he says (and I can confirm) the style is in tune with his single harvest/colheita wines – *“lighter, more elegant, showing the grape character as much as possible.”* Naturally their youth helps (20 years old is the minimum age for frasqueira/vintage Madeiras) but also, he says, ageing them at lower temperatures to keep the sugar in balance with the acidity. My pick of the bunch was the **Barbeito 1992 Frasqueira Verdelho** – the only one where he has held back some wine for further ageing. It was beautifully concentrated, with youthful verve.

Also new from Barbeito is a speciality of the house, a 40 Year Old Malvasia. This one – **Barbeito Mae Manuela 40 Year Old Malvasia** - is named in honour of his mother and, as you'd expect, is a very fine tribute – with Barbeito's hallmark zesty citrus acidity, caramelised tatin notes, smoked and richer roasted almonds and lovely, creamy dried fruits to its mid-palate. That zesty acidity ekes out a very long, fine finish. Great precision. One of my wines of the tasting.

The others? **Barbeito Malvasia 2002 Colheita single cask 260d+e** – terrific balance, zesty bell clear citrus and caramel intensity. **Henriques & Henriques 2001 Sercial Single Harvest**, with 50g/l residual sugar a relatively rich Sercial – delicate notes of tangerine and orange peel as well as classic almond and salty layers fleshed out its firm backbone of acidity. Super smooth but with consummate balance **Blandy's Colheita Bual 1996** revealed toffee-apple-edged layers of dried fruits, dates and roast almonds. New releases include **Blandy's Colheita Sercial 1998** and **Blandy's Colheita Verdelho 1998** of which the latter particularly impressed with the elegant delivery of its pungent, smoky guava fruit. Again, terrific balance.

Older vintages? Other than a very fine **Blandy's Bual 1969** not much on show (surprisingly not even from Pereira d'Oliveira, though I hope to catch up with Berry Bros & Rudd's *“new range”* of their Madeira's dating back to 1875 at their press tasting next week). Chris Blandy tells me the 69 sold very well in another (Port-like) first for the company – an en primeur campaign which is set to be

repeated next year for **Blandy's Bual 1988**.

Incidentally, the contents of some of the aged demi-johns which Blandy showed me when I visited last year – an 1887 Verdelho no less – have now been bottled and, for the first time sealed with the family crest. They will be auctioned at Christies in December. Now that would be quite a Christmas present!

Finally, on a domestic note it's good to hear that [Justino's](#) is now being represented in the UK by Liberty Wines.



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