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the drinks business

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MADEIRA CLARIFIES MESSAGE

11th May, 2015 by Gabriel Stone

A series of changes to the permitted labeling terms used for Madeira aim to clarify and formalise information about one of the world's most complex wine categories.



Is this the first Madeira to declare Tinta Negra on its front label?

As of last month, Madeira producers may officially recognise a fifth grape variety, Tinta Negra, on their front labels. The Madeira Wine Institute has also stipulated that all expressions must now state their bottling date, while a new 50 year old category has been introduced.

Taking guests through a range of Madeira styles and producers at the Big Fortified Tasting in London last week, writer Rui Falcao welcomed in particular the recognition given to Tinta Negra, declaring it to be "as good as any other on the island."

Previously the only grape to appear on a Madeira label were Sercial, Verdelho, Boal and Malvasia, each of which must appear as a single variety and conform to a designated sweetness style.

By contrast, Tinta Negra, can be made at any level on the sweetness spectrum, with Falcao explaining: "It's so versatile that you can make whatever style you like." As well as being the most widely planted

grape on Madeira, Tinta Negra is also the only one of these five "noble" varieties to be red-skinned, although it is vinified as a white wine.

Among the expressions shown at this masterclass was Barbeito's Tinta Negra Colheita 1996, which Falcao suggested was the first Madeira expression to feature this grape variety on its front label.

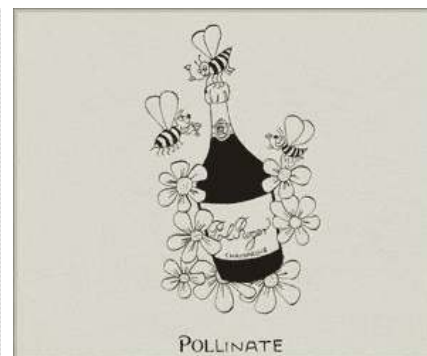
Alongside his praise for the newly recognised Tinta Negra, Falcao praised two other lesser known grapes, Terrantez and Bastardo as "absolutely gorgeous". However, with just 2.5 hectares of the Terrantez planted on the island and even less of Bastardo, he suggested that these two low-yielding, disease prone grapes were unlikely to win greater prominence in the near future.

Turning to the other changes made to Madeira's labeling, Falcao set the new 50 year old classification at the pinnacle of an existing range that extends from 3 year old through to 5, 10, 15, 20, 30 and 40 year old.

Clarifying one common area of confusion surrounding these styles, he noted that the age statement was not based on an average of the blend components as it is with tawny Port, but rather a stylistic certification ratified by a tasting panel.

Meanwhile the decision to provide consumers with information about the date their Madeira was bottled offers greater transparency for what is arguably the world's most long-lived wine.

Commenting on these three changes, Falcao emphasised that they largely represented a shift in communication rather than wine style. "Tinta Negra was already being used, but it was just not on the label," he remarked. Likewise with the addition of a bottling date, Falcao commented: "Some companies were already doing it, but it was not mandatory."



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These moves mark an effort to simplify Madeira's message as the region seeks to take advantage of the recent resurgence of interest in other fortified categories such as Sherry and Port.

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