

APRIL 18, 2016

George Washington was President when this wine was made - AND IT'S STILL YOUNG, BRILLIANT AND LIVELY!



The highlight of a two-day Madeira tasting in Seattle, WA, this past weekend was a 1795 Barbeito Terrantez. There aren't many left in the world.

To call this a transformative experience is an understatement; once you've had a wine of this age and eminence, it changes the way you think about all other wines, our collective social history, life on the planet itself.



What the group tasted Day One

Let me back up and put the wine tasting into perspective.

Fifteen Madeira-crazed individuals from the US and Canada descended on Seattle this past weekend and collectively brought 30 bottles of their favorite wine to share.

The event was held over two long, languorous afternoons.

Some of the Madeiras approached 150 years of age. Even older than Bernie Sanders, though not by much.

The oldest Madeira served was 221 years old, the 1795 Barbeito Terrantez. More about this later.

The person who brought us together for the tasting was Roy Hersh, a local wine expert who spends his life in the pursuit of pleasurable fortified wines like Port and Madeira.

Roy is so passionate about the subject that, three times a year, he leads groups to Portugal, or to Madeira, the North Atlantic island where the world's tastiest, and rarest, elixirs originate.



What we tasted on Day One.

The youngest Madeira in this group was 59 years old (1957 vintage) and the oldest was 136 years old (1880 vintage). In Madeira-speak, this is still a baby wine.

Roy's passion is so deep that he maintains a website devoted to the two beverages. It's called *For The Love of Port*. In shorthand, that's **ftlop.com**.

If you want to learn more about Port, or Madeira, or read Roy's thousands of detailed tasting notes, sign up for a subscription (\$59 annually).

I was impressed by Roy's skill at identifying nuances in Madeiras we tasted; his descriptive notes of all the Madeiras he's had are rich and illuminating. His tasting notes on **ftlop.com** are worth the price of admission.



Event organizer, Roy Hersh

Speaking about this weekend's tasting, Roy noted, "This is an incredible line up of Madeiras. I would have flown from anywhere in the US to taste these assembled wines."

Many attending the event, including napaman, did just that -- travel from distant cities. Each participant was required to bring a distinguished bottle of Madeira for each of the two tastings, and, as well, old, and still significant, wines for a dinner, which followed each day's tasting.

Roy was like an orchestra conductor, making sure that all the Madeiras and dinner wines were in total harmony, that each complemented others, and that there were no duplicates, and no duds.

The afternoon tastings evoked debate and discussion; topics included:

"Which was the best Madeira of the tasting?"

"Could this really be a Bual (one of several grapes, which may be used to make Madeira)?"

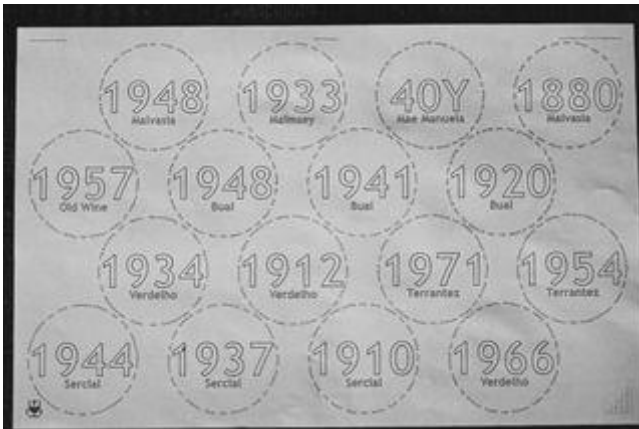
"How many angels can dance on the top of a 200-year-old Madeira cork?"

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Each guest hunched over 16 glasses of Madeira at the first day's tasting.

Here's what each placemat looked like, once you removed the 16 Madeira-filled glasses.



How Madeira is made would take four times more space than this tasting recap. As such, if you'd like to learn more about this venerated beverage, go to:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeira_wine

Unlike most wines, which have a reasonably short shelf life, and which lose their potency if held too long, Madeiras are prized specifically because they CAN last 200 to 250 years. In fact, the older they get, the better they become!

There are essentially half-a-dozen different grapes which can be used to make the fortified wine we call Madeira; these include Sercial, Verdelho, Bual, Malmsey (aka Malvasia) as well as Terrantez, Tinta Negra, and occasionally Moscatel or Bastardo.

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My favorite wine of the first day's tasting was, in fact, the oldest. The 1880 Barbeito MMV Malvasia had a rich mahogany color and lush notes of chocolate, treacle, torched sugar; throughout the swallow, there was a bright, sweetly acidic core, resembling a well aged Balsamic vinegar. The long, herbaceous and aromatic finish persisted for a minute.

The flavors of this wine cascaded over my palate unlike other wines in the first panel, and I was drawn to the rich, sensual mouthfeel. Easily 95 points, but I was saving my top scores for Day Two, when Roy was going to roll out really old, dowager Madeiras, worthy of ooohs, ahhs, and reverence.

Participants sniffed and sipped through their wines on Day One:





And then Day Two dawned, anticipated by participants as Christmas morning is by small children. We knew, just *knew*, that there were going to be some mighty special wines in the second paneling.

Day Two was the Great Reveal, the moment I had the oldest wine I have ever tasted - the 1795 Barbeito Terrantez, a wine with such profound aromas, flavors, and age that I had to pause to think about this wine in the context of when it was made.

The wine, although 221-years-old, is still vibrant, vivacious, full of life, full of acidity, nerve and allure.

This wine was made when George Washington was President.

The grapes were harvested the year that Beethoven gave his first public piano performance.

It was made the year that France adopted the metric system. That's a long time ago.

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It is so long ago, in fact, that the US flag only had 15 stars and, curiously, it had 15 stripes.

When you drink a wine of this age, you must stop and think about it in historical context; EVERYONE WHO WAS ALIVE when this wine was made is now dead.

There is NO ONE ALIVE ON THE PLANET who was alive when this wine was made. Period. No one. Not one living soul.

In fact, eleven full generations have comeand gonesince the grapes to make this wine were picked.

When you sip this beverage, you are not just tasting wine, you are sipping HISTORY.

Here's the line-up of Madeiras tasted on Day Two:



The second day's tasting produced three of the best wines I have tasted all year to date. Including:



1795 Barbeito Terrantez

Terrantez is one of the original grapes used to make Madeira. This bottle presented a wine of profound depth and harmony. On the nose there were bright, warm scents of chocolate, amber-grade maple syrup, marzipan, and of the salted caramels made by San Francisco chocolatier Michael Recchiuti.

The wine was dark mahogany, the color of a sideboard found in an old southern colonial home.

I was knocked out by the peppery attack and long lasting finish. Even at 221 years of age, this wine is lively and spirited, delivering flavors of warm bread, yeast, treacle, and molasses.

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This wine is a complete symphony of flavors and scents; there are fruited notes, including strawberry on the finish, which lingers for more than a minute. There are hints of rum raisin and hot cross buns, wine-y wine gum candies and a persistent undertow of cola.

In short, this wine is a religious experience; it must be what Heaven tastes like.

100 points.



1886 Barbeito Malvasia

This was one of the Madeiras, which I brought to the tasting; it was a favorite of many at the event, me included. The grape chosen to make this wine was Malvasia, which tends to be a sweet grape with a one-two knockout punch of rich flavors.

This bottle did not disappoint. The initial tastes were of honey, yeast, malted barley, molasses, tobacco bordering on dark cigar wrapper, marzipan, and there was even a hint of slippery floor wax, but in a positive way.

This is a vibrant wine exhibiting great acidity; you'd NEVER guess that, if served to you blind, this is a wine of 120 years' age. Very complex, gorgeous in every aspect.

98 points.



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1895 D'Oliveiras Malvasia

On the nose, hints of orange peel, honey cake, spearmint, and tobacco. On the palate, there are elements of orange peel and fruit cake, fused with a core of bright acidity. Extremely complex and compelling.

96 points.

Some of the guests attending the event:



Alan Gardner, one of the most knowledgeable Madeira drinkers I know, is head of Toronto's Madeira "Estufarian Society."



Eric Ifune, from Las Vegas, helps pour wines for the Day Two tasting; Eric has been to Madeira numerous times and has a sensational taste memory of every Madeira he's ever had. He contributed the best single wine to the weekend event, the 1795 Barbeito Terrantez. Thank you, Eric.



Weekend host Roy Hersh.

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My knees are sore from having genuflected so many times this weekend in front of rare vinous treasures. Thank you to all who participated for sharing your rare liquid wines.

If UNESCO were in the business of sanctifying great wine tastings the way they do World Heritage Sites, this weekend would have been worthy of UNESCO recognition as a Significant Wine Heritage Tasting.