

HOME

PORT NOTES

MADEIRA NOTES

PORTUGUESE NOTES

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New Releases from Barbeito

Wed 6th Apr 11

I was fortunate to spend a morning with Ricardo Diogo at Barbeito's new *adega* above Câmara de Lobos. It was the day of the Big Fortified Tasting in London and some of these wines were on show there but it is even better to taste them *in situ* with the winemaker.

Ricardo explained his philosophy to me during the tasting which goes some way to explaining the character of his wines. He told me how he had been bowled over by a tasting from cask at Chateau d'Yquem (who wouldn't be) and that he came to love late-harvest wines, especially Riesling which share the high natural levels of acidity encountered on Madeira (in fact for many years Sercial was reputed to be related to Riesling). Consequently Barbeito have recently been making a much more restrained delicate style of madeira with less power and pungency which marks them out from other houses on the island. They also have a purity and honesty about them. Ricardo Diogo is emphatic about eschewing the caramel that other shippers use to colour their sweeter wines.

Barbeito's wines can be over-powered by others in comparative tastings (and I fear that they are marked down for not tasting like madeira) so they need to be seen on their own, hence the beauty of this flight (below). They are versatile wines and can indeed be drunk like late harvest wines with dessert at the end of a meal.

Since 2007 Ricardo has been experimenting with making wine in *lagar* and in 2010 he installed a purpose-built stainless steel *lagar* at his new winery equipped with robotic plungers. This is being used for experimental quantities of Malvasia grapes to give a *maceração pelicular extreme*(!) with five or six days of slow, cool maceration before the fermentation is arrested. The results were on show in a vertical tasting of Malvasias (below).

Malvasia 2010 (lagar): deep golden colour, lovely depth showing already, fresh apricots and pears. Concentrated and delicious.

Malvasia 2009: mid-deep amber, smoky aromas, dusty but beautiful already, clean, sweet, lemon drops.

Malvasia 2008: slightly turbid, closed but fresh, toasty-nutty character beginning to show with a smoky bonfire finish

Malvasia 2007: deeper amber, smoky, casky nose, still very fresh, lovely acidity and clean, steely length, crystallised fruits and dried apricots, the true Madeira character just beginning to emerge.

Malvasia 2004: green tinged, old gold; dried apricots, savoury sweet, very pure, lemon and lime marmalade finish.

The following wines have been recently released by Barbeito, many of them single cask bottlings

Single Harvest 2000, Meio Seco (bottled June 2010) ***

One hundred percent Tinta Negra from a single vineyard at Estreito, 50% / 50% picked a week apart to safeguard the natural acidity in the grapes: mid deep, lemon-gold; very clean pure aromas, dried apricots, slightly smoky; soft, gentle, clean lime marmalade character, lovely crisp acidity on the finish. 15.5

VB Lote, Casks 7, 136, & 272 * / ******

A blend of Verdelho (60%) and Boal (40%), hence the name from the 2003 harvest: pale amber – gold; honeyed aromas and flavours, very clean and pure, soft, medium-sweet in style with a lovely late harvest feel to it. 16.5

Boal 1996 Colheita Cask 307 ****

Green tinged amber; gentle lifted aromas, naturally caramelised smoky aromas; full butterscotch and tawny marmalade flavours offset by lovely acidity, long and very beautiful with great poise for a young wine. Very fine expression of Boal. Just 404 litres of this wine will be bottled in 2011 from a cask of 620 litres set aside 13 years ago. The rest has been lost to evaporation. 17.5

Dôce, Colheita, 2002, Cask 110 (bottled June 2010) ** / ***

100% Tinta Negra: pale amber colour, smoky, rubbery aromas rather off-putting, cleaner on the palate, honeyed sweetness and a good clean finish. 14.5

Colheita 1995 Cask 24 (bottled November 2010) * / ******

The first Colheita from Barbeito made from Tinta Negra: green tinged mid-amber; delicate citrus aromas, a touch synthetic on the nose perhaps, floral, violets; lovely depth and concentration of age, intense, clean crystallised fruits (Elvas plums), fine thread of acidity to offset the sweetness (not quite 3 baumé). Who says Tinta Negra can't make really good wine? 16.5

Madeira Collection Lote 1 ****

The first of a new range of wines from Barbeito bottled as 'The Madeira Collection. This is a complex blend of Tinta Negra, Verdelho (dry) and Malvasia (sweet) from 2000 (29%), 2002 (30%) 2003 (40%) with 1% of the blend made from wine that is 60 years old. Mid-amber colour; lovely gentle orange peel aromas, spring flowers; very fresh, very pure, delicious citrus flavours, lime and orange, complex yet clean as a whistle. Elegant. 17.5

Malvasia 2000 Casks 39 a & e (bottled November 2010) ****

Mid-amber; quite powerful on the nose, perfumed too, lifted and expressive aromas; figs and apricots, sweet, intensely so, gentle and very pure with fine sinewy acidity on the finish. 17.5

Malvasia 20 Anos Lote 10292 (bottled November 2010) ** / *******

Mid-deep green tinged amber; lovely smoky perfume, touch of autumn bonfire and decaying flowers; lovely depth (extract) and mouth feel, butterscotch, vanilla and quince, very complex but with a lightness of touch and so, so fresh for a 20 year old blend. 18.5

Sercial 1988 (bottled January 2011) * + ?**

A recently bottled vintage or *frasqueira* madeira: mid-orange amber; high toned, slightly rubbery on the nose, porridge and honey, not that expressive as yet, the rubberiness goes after an hour in the glass; steely fresh, dry but not austere, caramelised orange offset by typically grassy acidity, lovely clean finish. 1.4 baumé so not quite dry. 15.5 +

Bual 1978 (bottled January 2011) ****

Pale mahogany; apple, toffee and bonfire, lovely concentration and depth, rich and quite powerful, savoury-sweetness offset acidity on an explosive finish which is just a touch casky. 17.5

Savannah Verdelho, Special Reserve ** / *******

A wine bottled specially for The Rare Wine Company in the USA (www.rarewineco.com) which includes some very old wines in the blend: mid-pale mahogany, green tinge; lovely aromatic quality, floral, leafy hedgerow character on the nose; very fine and expressive with lovely concentration and depth, touch of butterscotch offset by leafy acidity. Peacock's tail of a finish. Not expensive: I love this wine. 18.5

Benjamin Franklin Special Reserve ** / *******

A blend of all the main madeira varieties made to a medium sweet Bual-style wine for The Rare Wine Company and bottled in September 2010. Wines back to 1920 in the blend: deep, green-tinged mahogany; touch of treacle (molasses) on the nose but lifted, elevated and slightly singed; lovely, intense, rich wine with beautiful texture and feel, liquorice, tobacco too, essence of madeira yet fine and delicate too like an old Terrantez. 18.5

Malvasia 1920 *****

From a magnificent madeira vintage: very deep mahogany; beautifully perfumed, lifted, leafy, expressive – stunning aroma; rich, sweet, intensely so (6.3 baumé), quite powerful and concentrated as a result but the richness but offset by oh so fine, steely acidity, this has everything going for it – so beautiful on the finish that it makes my eyes water! 19