

NEW YORK WINE DRINKS

How to Drink Madeira, the Secret Jedi Assassin of Ancient Wines

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An introduction to Madeira, a wine that will never spoil.

Michael Scaffidi is responsible for building the most comprehensive collection of Madeira on the east coast — 50 bottles by the glass, the oldest of which was from 1720 — at The Jefferson in Washington, DC. But now that he's relocated to New York, Scaffidi is working to one up his last list and amass an ever greater selection of rare and old Madeira for Danny Meyer's Union Square Cafe, where he serves as Wine Director. At the moment he's pouring an 1821 Robert Benson Rainwater Madeira (\$590/glass) named after Robert Benson of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. Below, Scaffidi sheds light on this vintage wine that, because of its indestructibility, has the ability to connect us back centuries to our nation's history.

What is Madeira?

Madeira, a rich and nutty-tasting fortified Portuguese grape wine, is the most misunderstood wine of all time. Drinking it conjures images of pirates, global voyages, sea adventures, princes, kings, queens, and the founding fathers of the USA. Classic



bottles are covered in dust with the vintage stenciled on them. They look like something from a scene in an *Indiana Jones* film. But, although you might think of Madeira as a dusty librarian, this wine is a Jedi warrior.

Madeira is a Portuguese island 350 miles off the coast of Morocco discovered in 1419 by João Gonçalves Zarco, a one-eyed explorer who is responsible for cultivating the island. Aside from Madeira's extraordinary deliciousness factor, what makes the wine so unique is that because of its distinct production method, bottles never oxidize or maderize and thusly Madeira retains its flavor once opened. So, it's a totally indestructible force of alcohol.

How many other wines have you tasted that are centuries old and will retain their flavor infinitely? The **Borges Pather Madeira [0]** from 1720 still carries a complex flavor of liquid toffee and molasses.

How It's Made

Madeira's unique wine making and cooking process is what makes it so powerful and timeless. After the wine is fortified with a neutral spirit (similar to port), Madeira is heated in stainless steel tanks at about 130°F for three months. The more traditional process utilized for the best vintage Madeiras relies on mother nature to "cook" the wine by storing barrels in warm rooms heated naturally by the sun for a minimum of three years. Some wines sit in a room for 20 years, 50 years and even up to 200 years prior to bottling. On the subject of storage, the term "Rainwater" on a Madeira label, does not refer to a grape but, rather, a style that was preferred in the United States during the 17th and 18th centuries. Rain actually seeped into Madeira barrels, which diluted the wine and made it easier to drink.

Noble Grapes

The most important noble grapes in order from driest to most sweet: Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malvasia. Bastardo and Folgasao (formely known as Terrantez,) should definitely be included in this list, but these wines are rare. Another commonly found grape is Tinta Negra. What it lacks in nobility it makes up for in availability, as it is the most widely planted grape on the island and generally used for bulk production and cooking wines. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Barbeito produces amazing single harvest wines from this grape.

Pairings




Most people think of Madeira as an after dinner wine, but its diverse styles and high acidity make it a great partner with food. The greatest pairing ever is peanut butter cups and a glass of 1912 **Verdelho Madeira [1]** (\$475). Winter and fall soups, such as butternut squash, make an amazing compliment to Bual Madeira. The almighty port has nothing on the versatile Madeira with creamy cheeses. For everyday drinking, look for Single Harvest Madeira or Colheita Madeira. **Broadbent Colheita [2]** 1999 (\$41) is widely available, a great value, and an amazing pairing with homemade brownies. The producer Barbeito in tandem with Rare Wine Company produces a series of historic wines that are based on the style of the original colonies of the US. Their **Baltimore Rainwater [3]** (\$40) is an amazing gateway into Madeira, with a light texture that makes it a terrific pairing for nuts and hard cheeses. Also, Blandys has a five-year-old wine based on the grape Bual, which is incredible with pecan pie. For a true epiphany, seek out a Frasqueira or "Vintage," with over 20 years of age.



When you taste a Madeira that is 25-years-old, 30-years-old, 100-years-old or even 200-years-old, close your eyes and go back to the past. Think about what the world

was like at that time, what has transpired since then, and how delicious that glass is right now. It is a journey that is divinely unique to this incredible wine and one that everyone should experience.

UNION SQUARE CAFE



A Google Map of New York City showing the location of Union Square Cafe. A red pin is placed on the map at the intersection of East 16th Street and 5th Avenue. The map includes labels for various landmarks and streets, such as the Hudson River, West Village, Murray Hill, and Bryant Park. A small text box in the bottom right corner of the map area says "Comunicar um erro no mapa".

Union Square Cafe [4]
21 East 16th Street, New York, NY 10003
 **FOURSQUARE [5]**  **OPENTABLE []**

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[0] <http://www.finestandrarest.com/madeira.html>

[1] <http://www.rarewineco.com/wine/1912-d'oliveira-verdelho-madeira-750ml/?from=winesearcher>

[2] <http://www.bedfordwines.com/vsku1845763.html>

[3] <http://www.winex.com/wine-1147758-.aspx#.VOS2BsaJnww>

[4] <http://ny.eater.com/venue/union-square-cafe>

[5] <https://www.foursquare.com/v/3fd66200f964a52062e41ee3>

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