

The wines of Barbeito, Madeira

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First, some background about Madeira. It's a fortified wine style from the volcanic Atlantic island of Madeira, part of Portugal. The wine's distinctive flavour comes from a special heating process. Traditionally, casks are left in warm lofts to maderize over a number of years (canteiro method), although a cheaper process used for lesser wines involves heating the wines artificially in stainless steel tanks known as estufas. Because of this heat exposure, Madeiras are bomb proof and will drink well from an opened bottle for a number of weeks or even months. The market for Madeira in the UK is tiny, at 35 000 bottles, and this is heavily dominated by a few companies – the Madeira Wine Company (Blandy's, Cossart, Leacock's et al) and Henriques – who account for 95% of the UK market. It's also staggeringly seasonal, with 80% of sales each year in the lead up to Christmas.

Now to Barbeito, a recent addition to Raymond Reynolds' impressive portfolio of Portuguese wines and their first venture into Madeira. Barbeito is a family-owned company formed in 1995. Their philosophy is to offer 100% canteiro wines, with no added caramel or deacidification. The range was presented by Ricardo De Freitas, managing director and grandson of the founder. Barbeito wines will be launched on the UK market from this autumn. Retailers and stockists include Berry Bros, Halifax Wine Co, Nobody Inn, Fortnum & Mason, La Butlers Wine Cellar, Ballantynes, Clifton Cellars and La Forge.

Barbeito 'Single Harvest' Tinta Negra Mole 1995

Tinta Negra Mole is traditionally a bulk variety, but Barbeito are trying to show that it can produce interesting wines from it. This example is cask matured and displays a wonderful nose with spice, vanilla and caramel notes. The palate is medium sweet with a lovely huge spicy, rich complexity. Quite wonderful. Excellent (£13.95 for 50 cl)

Veramar Boal (5 Year Old)

100% Boal from a single harvest. Sweet caramelly edge to the nose which has a fresh well as notes of toffee and honey. Sweet, intense palate with a lovely texture. Rich, full and complex. Very good+ (£8.99 for 50 cl)

Boal 10 Year Old

According to Ricardo Diogo Freitas, Barbeito are trying to make a fresh style. This is a deep orange/brown colour, without any added caramel. Their stated goal is to make 'interesting wines'. Colour is lovely. Lovely intense spice and caramel nose. Good balance on the palate which is with complex sweet flavours and good acidity. Quite sweet in style, this is wonderful. Good/excellent (£18.99)

20 Year old Blend, Malvasia Special Reserve

Quite deep, sweet intense nose with some sweet herb notes and a caramel and toffee edge. Intense, complex palate has high acidity and quite a bit of alcohol. Lovely complex structure with caramel and toffee edge. Very good/excellent (£33)

Boal Vintage 1978

Ricardo calls this the young wine. A deeper orange/brown colour. Very intense almost black nose. Complex, smoky and toffee-ish. Bold spicy-edged palate is hard to describe: it but it is very complex. Very good/excellent (£38)

Malvasia 1900

It's not often you get a chance to taste a wine that's more than a century old. Deep black with a yellow/orange rim. Remarkably intense nose with toffee and caramel complexity, and

acidity. It's a little unusual. Huge, dense, thick palate with high acid. Notes of spice, t
coffee combine with the high acidity to create a remarkable wine. Excellent

*See also: a more recent review (November 2003) of [Barbeito's wines](#); [Spotlight on M.](#)
For tasting notes of other Portuguese wines [click here](#)
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