

A Taste Of The Many Wines Of Portugal



✘ Most people think of port when they think of Portugal. But in recent years this region is finally becoming recognized for something more than its well-respected but sweet fortified wine. There are some great values coming from Portugal and consumers should not be deter by the unfamiliar 250 grape varieties.

Grapes have been growing in Portugal for 2,000 years but numerous interruptions have stalled its climb in international circles. Vineyards were ripped up and replanted to wheat during the Arab occupation from 711 to 1249. Then, starting in 1756, protectionism by the Douro region required farmers to uproot their vines again. The industry bounced back in the late 19th century, but was devastated by root disease, wars and economic depression. Not until a concerted effort was made to create official districts called DOCs in the 1980s did the region's wine become internationally recognized.

We tasted several blends from the **Alentejo region**, a sun-drenched region that is about the size of Massachusetts, and were impressed by their drinkability. These are wines that represent good values and are structured to satisfy most palates without additional aging. Blending is common to this region's wines.

Don't be discouraged by the unfamiliar grape varieties. Here are several blends we liked:



*Cartuxa Evora
Tinto Colheita
DOC 2016
(Vivino)*

Cartuxa Evora Tinto Colheita DOC 2016 (\$25). Aragonez, alicante bouschet and trincadeira go into this aromatic wine with red berries and velvet mouth feel.

- **Esporao Reserva Red DOC 2016** (\$24). Jammy raspberry and red berry fruit with a full body and easy tannins. The blend consists of aragonez, trincadeira, cabernet sauvignon and alicante bouschet.
- **Adega de Borba Reserva Red DOC 2015** (18). Blackberry and plum notes with hints of white chocolate and spice. It is an easy drink with a medium body.
- **Carmin Reguengos Garrafeira dos Socios 2014** (\$48). This wine shows the potential for ageworthy Portuguese blends. Alicante bouschet, touriga nacional and tinta caiada harmonize for a full-bodied wine with soft tannins and jammy plum notes.
- **Casa Relvas Herdade de Sao Miguel Colheita Seleccionada Red 2017** (\$15). Syrah and cabernet sauvignon are blended with indigenous varieties alicante bouschet and touriga nacional to round off and broaden the flavor profile of this fun wine. Classic, ripe plum and raspberry notes with a dash of mint and spice.
- **Quinta da Fonte Souto Branca Portalegre 2018** (\$25). Portalegre is part of the Alentejo wine region in Southern Portugal. Crafted from 75 percent arinto and 25



*Esporao Bico
Amarelo
2019
(Esporao.com)*

percent verdelho white grapes, this complex wine is barrel fermented, kept on its lees, and aged in French and Central European oak barrels. The resulting, stylish wine is a tremendous value and somewhat akin to a well-made white burgundy. Tropical fruit and citrus elements dominate in a very interesting and complex white wine.

Other areas of Portugal produce good wine too. Here are a few:

- **Valados de Melgaco Reserva 2017** (\$15). This fruity and expressive alvarinho from Moncao e Melgaco has ripe apple and stone fruit flavors.
- **Esporao Bico Amarelo 2019** (\$12). Making its debut, this quaffable white wine is a blend of loureiro, alvarinho and avesso grapes. Bright fruit flavors with good acidity.
- **Quinta do Ameal Loureiro 2019** (\$18). Nice citrus and mineral notes please the palate in this estate-grown wine made from loureiro grapes.

Wine picks



*Dixie & Bass
Reserve
Cabernet
Sauvignon
Red Mountain
2018
(DixieBassWines.com)*

Flora Springs Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2017 (\$50). A sturdy, big-boned cabernet sauvignon that presents very bright cherry fruit with coconut and mocha notes. A very nice classic Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon at a fair price.

- **Dixie & Bass Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon Red Mountain 2018** (\$18). Drawing grapes from Washington's Red Mountain region, this producer has created a juicy and delicious wine. Velvet texture with black cherry notes and hints of chocolate and vanilla. Worth every penny.
- **Umberto Cesari Liano Sangiovese Cabernet Sauvignon Rubicone IGT 2017** (\$30). Rubicone is part of Emilia-Romagna region of northeast of Tuscany and famous for luxury car headquarters Ferrari, Lamborghini and Maserati, as well as iconic food brands Parmigiano Reggiano, Prosciutto di Parma and Aceto Balsamic. Previously, Emilia-Romagna was known for its sweet style of cheap lambrusco that stormed U.S. shores in the 1970s. However, today lambrusco has evolved into a dry style better known in Italy. Sangiovese is becoming more recognized and this example from Umberto Cesari is an excellent example of this newfound interest. Very easy to drink and food friendly with ripe cherry and plum fruit notes, this reasonably priced table wine is a winner. The blend is 70 percent sangiovese and 30 percent cabernet sauvignon.
- **McIntyre Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 2017** (\$38). This terrific pinot noir is as beautiful on the inside as it is on the outside. Behind its attractive label is a burst of floral aromas and fresh raspberry, black cherry flavors with hints of spice and vanilla bean. Some of the grapes come from 40-year-old vines – a rarity in California pinot noir.



*FEL Anderson Valley
Pinot Noir 2018
(DrinkDispatch.com)*

FEL Anderson Valley Pinot Noir 2018 (\$38). Sporting an attractive new label, this delicious pinot noir has a medium body with effusive red berry fruit, hint of spice and long finish.

- **Gary Farrell Olivet Lane Vineyard Chardonnay 2017** (\$45). This historic vineyard offers up cool weather and an aromatic wine with notes of honeysuckle, pears and apples.
- **Gary Farrell Rochioli Vineyard Chardonnay 2017** (\$65). Beautifully textured with elegance and concentration. Meyer lemons, lush pear fruit and nice mineral notes.

- **Steele Shooting Star Santa Barbara Chardonnay 2018** (\$20). Steele makes some excellent, single-vineyard chardonnays at twice the price, but we see this as one of the best values in chardonnay. It is entirely fermented in stainless-steel tanks and transferred to used oak barrels for a finish. The result is a clean and light chardonnay that retains its natural acidity. Tropical fruit notes.
- **Chasing Rain Red Blend 2018** (\$24). From the Red Mountain AVA of Washington state, this Bordeaux-grape blend includes merlot (44 percent), cabernet sauvignon, petit verdot, malbec and cabernet franc. Generous raspberry and anise aromas are chased by complex flavors of dark fruit and herbs.

Tom Marquardt and Patrick Darr, MoreAboutWine, posted on SouthFloridaReporter.com, Jan. 25, 2021

Tom Marquardt and Patrick Darr have been writing a weekly wine column for more than 30 years. Additional Wine reviews on MoreAboutWine

All photos are randomly selected and do not indicate any preferred wine. Listed prices are subject to change

You can send questions to Tom Marquardt <mailto:marq1948@gmail.com>

Always drink responsibly!