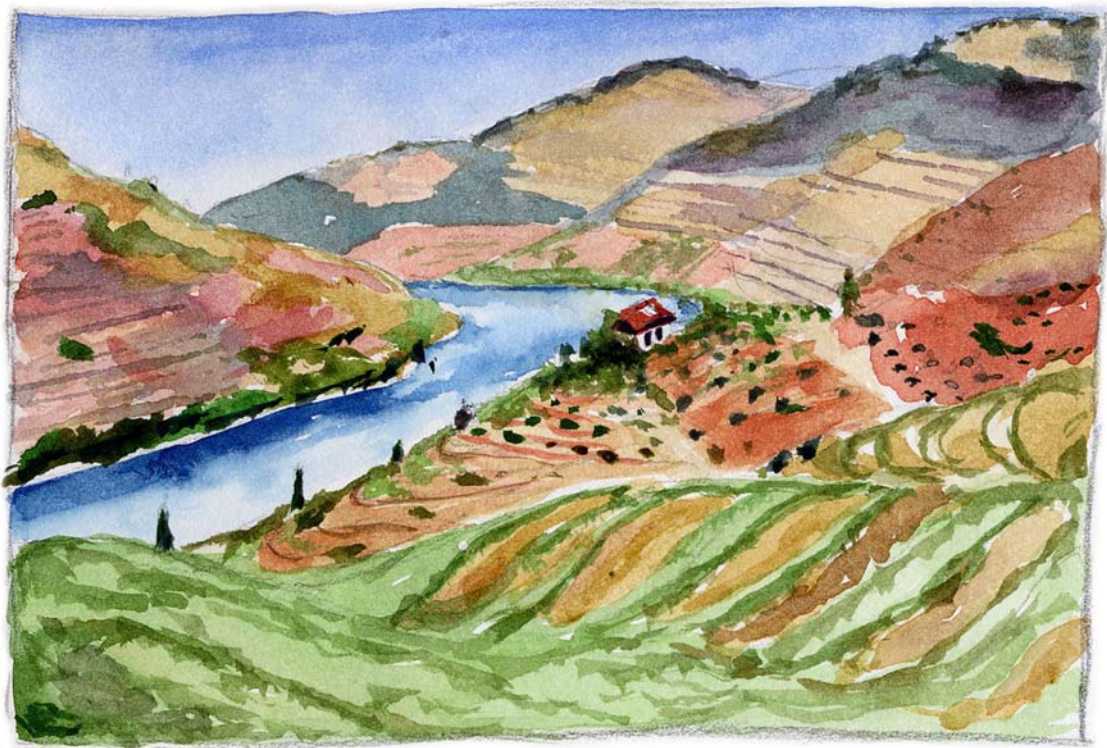


Douro

Land of port and promise



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Douro

Land of Port and Promise

“Its very unpredictability and refusal to conform to international norms are what makes Portugal such a gloriously fascinating wine country and yet such an infuriating one.”

Oz Clark

The chunks of hard grey slate clattered endlessly against the steel beneath our Mini Cooper S. Behind us I knew we would be trailing an enormous dust cloud as we tore through the arid, and occasionally wooded surroundings. The first pink light of dawn was already supplementing the focused yellow glow of the light on my map board, and soon the fatigue of the night would lift.

Even without looking up, the gears and the howling of the engine told me we were doing about 150kph, and I timed my next call accordingly, “300 meters, Tee, 90, Right.” My driver João da Silva Pinto barely grunted acknowledgement. A second later, seeing that the map showed our track ending squarely at the bank of a major river, I added a confirmatory “*Novyent, deraytoo*”. I felt the car dance its familiar ballet as it braked violently on the loose gravel and slid round the corner. I subconsciously braced for the usual din and nauseating acceleration, but it never came – just a moderately rising roar of the engine. There’s never time to second-guess the driver, but this justified a quick glance up. A paved road! Still vigorously twisty, but blessedly smooth! I exhaled fully for the first time in many hours.

On our left the shadowy concrete bulk of a dam was just passing out of sight, while ahead the wide river wound up a sinuous valley. João made an expansive gesture – or at least as expansive as is possible when strapped securely in a 6 point seat harness and talking through a helmet mounted intercom, “Look, *Gear-von* – The Douro! This is where our finest wines come from!”

It was 1969, and we were on a reconnaissance in northern Portugal for the TAP Rally; the first international class road event to be staged there since the war. Ahead of us, the early sun was twinkling through the gaps in the hills as we floated along the winding road beside the river. It was simply beautiful. On either side vineyards rose hundreds of feet up the slopes of the hills above the river, in some places supported by row after row of precipitous ancient walls that looked like medieval fortresses. Every two or three kilometers pretty little farm buildings nestled on the promontories or other scarce patches of flatter land. João interrupted my reverie. “ With the dams and these new roads, this valley will be transformed. Soon we will be making the finest wines in the world all the way up the river to Spain!” I was impressed.



That was over thirty years ago, and long before I learned that the youthful enthusiasms of developing nations sometimes take a lot longer to reach fruition than expected. In the past three decades Portugal has weathered some profound changes – a revolution and European membership - but now finally some of Joao’s optimism is indeed becoming reality. At the same time, the World Bank and Brussels’ bureaucratic dreams of a stainless steel, homogenous five-grape wine industry for the Douro are being wonderfully frustrated by intransigent tradition, to the perpetual benefit of humanity and biodiversity.

History

Unlike many Old World wine-producing areas where history merges into myth more than a few centuries back, Portugal’s history is remarkably well documented, back to the dark ages. Since the Moors were expelled in the twelfth century and despite all the usual turbulence of history, the country has never been occupied nor its borders redrawn, resulting in a largely intact historic legacy. At that time the Kings imposed a tax on all wine production, thus providing an

unbroken documented trail. Because of history's formative influence on the nature of wine from this region, it will be given more emphasis here than might normally be the case.

Evidence of vinous activity goes back millennia. Grape seeds and carbonised *Vitis vinifera* shoots have come to light in Bronze Age burial sites, particularly at Buraco da Pala. It is generally believed that the Phoenicians brought their winemaking techniques to Portugal in the 6th century BC and left behind the great proliferation of grape varieties that survive to this day, and which so typify Portuguese viticulture. In the first century BC the Greek writer Polybius even quoted the price of one drachma for a 27 liter container of Douro wine!

The Romans arrived in 216BC and evidence of their presence in the Douro region remains in the form of stone grape crushing vats and storage amphorae. The Romans were followed by waves of Christian Sueves (believed to have introduced the precursor to the current *barcos rabelos* river boats) and Visigoths, and then in the 8th century, the Moors arrived from the south. The Muslim occupiers appear to have turned a blind eye to winemaking by the locals, probably in an astute recognition of the year-round ties that viticulture requires, and thereby constraining the communities from migration and potentially subversive inter-communication. The first monastic records date from the abbey of Lourvao around 950.

With the expulsion of the Moors, Portugal became an independent kingdom in 1143, and even in that century there are records of wine exportation to England. In 1386 the Treaty of Windsor was signed, committing the two countries to mutual defense and trade, and this continues in force to this day. Through the Middle Ages the monks provided their customary catalytic role in fostering and improving viticulture and winemaking, particularly the Cistercians at their monasteries of Salzedas, S.Joao de Tarouca and S.Pedro das Aguias in the Douro. Some of their *quintas*, or estates, exist to this day. By 1532 the Douro was producing some 600,000 cases a year, noted by Rui Fernandes as being the best, long-lived wine in the land, as well as the favourite wine of the Spanish court in Castille. By 1700 the output had doubled to 1,200,000 cases per year.

History intervened again in the late 17th century, when fierce disputes between the English and French forced British wine merchants to look further afield than their customary Bordeaux. Initially they imported wine from Moncau in the extreme north, and known as “Red Portugal”, but this proved to be disappointing. Although plentiful, it was thin and astringent, and spoiled before reaching the UK. The merchants looked further afield and ventured up the hazardous River Douro. Here they found dark austere red wines, a product of a fast hot fermentation technique. To ensure stabilisation for the long voyage to market, a measure of brandy was added. This had the added benefit of adding smoothness and flavour to these “Black-strap” wines, as they came to be known.

In 1678, in this continuing quest, Liverpool merchants discovered a monastery at Lamego, where the abbot was producing a sweet alcoholic wine by adding brandy during the fermentation, thus killing off the yeast and retaining unfermented sugars. Thus was the Port we know of today introduced.



Between 1670 and 1700 several of the now famous Port merchants, Kopke, Warre, Croft, Bearsley, had established a presence in Oporto. In 1702 war broke out between Britain and France, and in 1703 the Treaty of Methuen was signed, granting major tariff advantages to Portuguese wines, a benefit which was to continue for over 150 years.

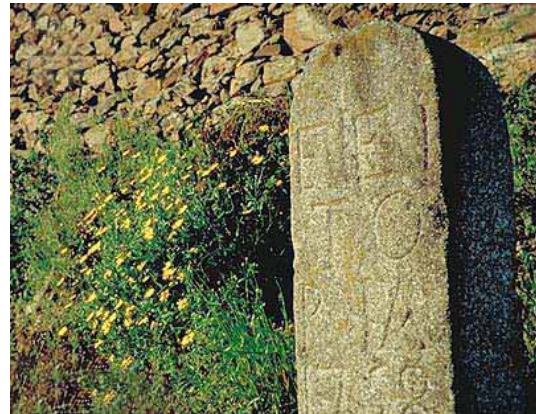
From this point forward, history and commerce emphasise Port. However, even today less than half of the wine produced here becomes Port. In any consideration of the Douro it must be remembered that huge quantities of table wine, admittedly often mediocre and usually consumed locally, have consistently been produced here, and form an essential part of the study.

Success bred deceit! The ever-increasing demand for Port far exceeded the sources of supply. Growers started picking from marginal sites higher and lower on the slopes; merchants blended their wines with imports from distant regions; sugar and elderberry juice were being added. The price of Port plummeted in the 1750s to a tenth of its former price. Succumbing to

protests from the British merchants, the growers and shippers appealed to the then Prime Minister demanding action. Fortunately for Port's future, King Jose I had recently appointed as Prime Minister, Sebastiao Jose de Carvalho e Melo following his success in reorganising Lisbon after the disastrous earthquake of 1755. Better known to history as the Marquis de Pombal, he was a man of action, as well as self-interest.

In short order he created the Companhia Geral da Agricultura dos Vinhos do Alto Douro in 1756 to regulate all matters of production and create market stability by setting prices, and even storing surplus production to balance vintages. At the same time he gave the company sole rights to sell wine around Oporto which created considerable unrest, while giving his own estates around Lisbon contracts to supply wine for blending, which apparently went without comment.

He established a commission to demarcate the permitted areas of production for table wines and for export (feitoria), and marked them with granite pillars, thus creating between 1758 and 1761 the world's first DOC. Over a hundred of the over 300 original Pombaline markers can still be seen around the Douro. All the elderberry trees were uprooted for miles around, and vineyards catalogued.



Following his fall from power in 1777, many of the rules were relaxed, allowing British shippers freedom to compete again, but nevertheless his fundamental reforms have survived intact to this day.

Trade prospered throughout the late 1700 and into the 1800s. Then, in common with the rest of Europe, the twin blights of oidium and Phylloxera struck. It wasn't until the end of the 19th century that production levels began to return to previous levels.

The early 20th century witnessed two decades of political turmoil. The king was assassinated in 1908 and twenty years of weak republican governments followed, none having the

resources or authority to maintain its own laws. Following a military coup in 1926 Antonio de Oliveira Salazar quietly assumed the position of Finance Minister, and after balancing the country's chaotic finances within a year, became Prime Minister in 1932. Like Pombal he was quick to reorganise the wine industry, setting up the Casa do Douro to regulate production in 1932 and the Instituto do Vinho do Porto (IVP) in 1933.

Recognising that the wine industry's problems were largely a result of the fragmented land holdings, Salazar introduced cooperatives to centralise wine production. While initially successful in modernising techniques, by the 1960s government bureaucracy, lack of funds, and deteriorating buildings and equipment had actually reduced the standard of winemaking.



The death of Salazar and the revolution of April 1974 marked another profound turning point for Portugal. The economy was in disarray after the revolution, the country almost bankrupt from the cost of fighting African colonial wars, and the wine industry had lost its lucrative colonial markets. Seeking stability the country took the first steps towards joining the European Economic Community¹.

To achieve membership, numerous reforms were mandated on the wine industry, including a prohibition on irrigation, a proper classification of grape varieties and vineyards, and the elimination of the earlier protective state monopolies. In return however, very substantial grants would be made available to modernise viticulture and vinification techniques. This was all finally achieved in 1986, and this date marks the starting point of the modern wine industry in Portugal. The remainder of this paper will examine how far this has succeeded in the country's prime wine region, the Douro.

¹ The terms European Economic Community, EEC, Common Market, Brussels, are used synonymously throughout this paper

Geography of the Douro



Located in northeast Portugal, the region follows the course of the Douro River, and its tributaries, from about 70kms upstream from Oporto to the Spanish border. Occupying some 250,000 hectares², it is divided into three sub-regions each with distinctive climactic and socio-economic character. The first area runs from Barqueiros to the confluence of the Corgo River, and is known logically as the Baixo Corgo, (“Below the Corgo”) while the next section, the Cima Corgo (“Above the Corgo”) runs up past Pinhão to the Cachão de Valeira gorge. From here to the Spanish border lies the Douro Superior.³

The Douro valley is a wild and beautiful area flanked by steep mountainsides. Its very nature makes communications difficult. Even today the roads into many of the valleys and vineyards are precipitous and primitive. Pombal’s original demarcation was limited mostly to the Lower Douro valley, as at the confluence of the Tua River, at the Cachao da Valeira, a vast granite boulder formed a waterfall and the upper limit of navigation of the Douro. Between 1788 and 1792 at the behest of the Queen Dona Maria II, this impediment was dynamited away, allowing for the expansion of the vineyards to the Douro Superior. A railway was completed along the entire length of the river in 1877, yet appears not to have played a significant part in the opening up of the wine trade in the region – only in the 1970s with the completion of the five dams on the Douro, were the traditional *barcos rabelos* displaced as the prime means of transport. Prior to this these flat bottomed boats had for centuries made the hazardous journey down the

² One hectare (ha) equals 2.4 acres.

³ Collectively the Baixo Corgo and Cima Corgo were known historically as the Alto Douro (“Upper Douro”), but nowadays the third area, the Douro Superior, is often referred to as the Upper Douro. To avoid confusion, this paper will use the correct Portuguese names.

rapids of the Douro every spring to take the barrels of fortified wine to Oporto for transformation into Port.



Statistically, the lower Baixo Corgo has just over 14,000ha under vines, and the more important Cima Corgo 19,000, while the Douro Superior has 8,700ha. The most remarkable statistic however relates to the number of vineyards; 83,000 at the last count, with about 33,000 growers, averaging less than 1ha each! Most larger vineyards are located in the Douro Superior where the gentler terrain permits more mechanisation.

Climate

With a terrain mostly comprised of deep valleys protected by steep mountains, the climate of the region is characterised by cold winters and hot dry summers. Temperatures range from freezing to 45C. The Douro is protected from the humid west winds off the Atlantic by the Serra Marão and Montemuro mountains. Rainfall varies up the valleys, but there are regular amounts all year. The lower Baixo Corgo has the wettest climate, with up to 8 inches a month in the winter, to 2 inches in the driest summer months, while in the much more arid Douro Superior it ranges from 2 inches to a quarter of an inch per month. With the range of mountain slopes and the serpentine meandering of the river every vineyard has its own microclimate. More recently

low water levels brought on by the severe droughts of the late 1990s have been reversed by the record wet winter of 2001.

The Soil

The demarcation of the area is essentially defined by the limits of the “schistose” soil that makes up the region. Schist is a geological term for a coarse grained rock with parallel layers which can be split into thin irregular pieces, or shale. On the terraces it is almost entirely the action of man that has created the “soil” which in fact is little more than a mixture of clay and broken rock to a depth of 3 or 4 feet. The vines have to root deeply to find the moisture, but the underlying bedrock holds the moisture consistently, away from the sun and outside temperature variation. The soil is usually acid (4.6 to 5.5pH), with very little organic matter. Only olives and almonds coexist with the vines.

Varietals

Portugal is notorious for the undisciplined and undocumented nature of its grape varieties, and the Douro is no exception. Substantial tracts of vineyards have vines totally intermixed, often with no knowledge of the varieties. Even post-phylloxera American vines still grow here. Timing the harvest accurately or conducting research on optimum varieties is impossible in such circumstances. Entry into the Common Market was supposed to clear this all up, but to date has had a remarkable lack of impact.

At the time of entry a valiant attempt was made to catalogue all the varieties, and authorize or recommend varieties for each region, but many naming and cataloging anomalies still exist. A 1982 World Bank aid program specified permitted grape varieties and this has achieved its aims, but its effect is limited to only a very small percentage of the area (2,500ha). Even now eighty-eight different varieties are authorized in the Douro, and the demonstrably superior Touriga Nacional represents only 2% of the region’s vines!



However ongoing research since the 1980s by the Oporto based ADVID (Association para o Desenvolvimento da Viticultura Duriense) backed by the Port shippers and the university at Vila Real has been successful in identifying preferred varieties and viticulture techniques. These are steadily being incorporated into new plantings, or where the funding exists, the replanting of the old, keeping them separate from the old ill-disciplined parcels.

This work has established five preferred varietals for Port; Touriga Nacional, Tinto Roriz, Tinto Cão, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Francesa. Some producers also add Tinta Amarela, Tinta da Barca, Tinta Francisca, Bastardo and Mourisco (the latter used for aged Tawnies).

Table wines use the same top five, with the addition of Tinta Amarela and Sousão (a ‘teinturier’ variety to add colour) Predominant white grape varietals are Malvasia Fina, Viosinho, Donzelinho and Gouveio.

One producer describes the characteristics of the major five as follows: “Touriga Nacional is balanced and firm, yet elegant. Tinta Roriz is powerful with lots of color and tannin. Tinta Barroca is feminine and charming. Touriga Francesa is highly floral, while Tinto Cao is refined and delicate, in contrast to Tinta da Barca which is very spicy.”

The following chart lists the range of “recommended” varieties.

White Grape Varieties

Minimum 60%	Maximum 40%
<i>Esgana Cão</i>	<i>Arinto</i>
<i>Folgasão</i>	<i>Boal</i>
<i>Gouveio ou Verdelho</i>	<i>Cercial</i>
<i>Malvasia Fina</i>	<i>Côdega</i>
<i>Rabigato</i>	<i>Malvasia Corada</i>
<i>Viosinho</i>	<i>Moscatel Galego</i>
	<i>Donzelinho Branco</i>
	<i>Samarrinho</i>

Red Grape Varieties

Minimum 60%	Maximum 40%
<i>Bastardo</i>	<i>Cornifesto</i>
<i>Mourisco Tinto</i>	<i>Donzelinho</i>
<i>Tinta Amarela</i>	<i>Malvasia</i>
<i>Tinta Barroca</i>	<i>Periquita</i>
<i>Tinta Francisca</i>	<i>Rufete</i>
<i>Tinta Roriz</i>	<i>Tinta da Barca</i>
<i>Tinto Cão</i>	
<i>Touriga Francesa</i>	
<i>Touriga Nacional</i>	

Viticulture

Of the over 40,000 ha of land under vines only 26,000 are authorised for Port production. All vineyards are graded on a scale of A to F according to a large range of factors (the *Cadastr*o system - See Appendix I). Altitude, yield, soil and location determine 70% of the grade. The highest gradings tend to be in Cima Corgo and Douro Superior, and lower in Baixa Corgo and on higher elevations. This classification system, devised by Alvaro Moreira da Fonseca in the 1940s, had been expected to require far more revision than it has, and has stood the test of time well, greatly contributing to the quality of Port.

Each year, the Casa do Douro apportions production licenses (the *beneficio*) amongst all the registered farmers, after determining the total amount of Port to be made according to market conditions and stocks in Oporto. With the demand for Port relatively stable there is incentive for the growers, and indeed the Port houses, to look to table wine production for the balance of the harvest.

Nine tenths of the vineyards in the Douro are on a slope of one in three (30%) or greater, and it is this parameter that gives rise to the regions most distinguishing feature, its terraces.



When labour was cheap and plentiful in the nineteenth century the solution was to build walled terraces (*socalcos*). Later on the trend was to wider sloping terraces still with retaining walls. These also came to be known as Pre- and Post-Phylloxera terraces, and vast spreads of both are still to be seen along the valleys.

Where the *socalcos* have been abandoned they are referred to as *mortórios*.

Both these systems required extensive maintenance and were impossible to mechanise. With the dwindling supply of labour in the 60s and 70s due to migration and conscription, change was

essential. Wider terraces with natural earth retaining banks, held in place by weed plantings, were introduced (*patamares*). With wider spacing and accessibility small tractors could be introduced. However erosion has proven to be a problem, and the lower density of planting (3,500 vs 6,000 vines/ha on the *socalcos*) has not been popular with growers. Nevertheless they have been widely adopted.



An alternative method, adopted from Germany, and most applicable to the gentler slopes, is the *vinha ao alto* – vertical rows of vines running up and down the slopes. These result in a density closer to 5000 vines/ha and provide accessibility.

In the Douro Superior the larger estates and wider valleys permit mechanisation without the need to resort to terraces. Irrigation is generally prohibited, except for “experimental” growths. In the hot hinterland much encouragement is thus given to experimentation.

Historically the vines have been low growing, to a height of one metre, but nowadays tops may reach 1.3 to 1.6 metres. The vines are trained using the single or double Guyot methods and unilateral and bilateral cordons. Trellises are not permitted for Port Wine. Regardless of terracing advances, harvesting is still done by hand.

The varieties of the region are not high-yielding. Average yield is approximately 30 hl/ha, while the maximum authorized yield is 55 hl/ha.



Wine making

As noted earlier, “wine” in the Douro means two things – Port and Table wine, in roughly equal amounts. The process of Port production, with its fast fermentation, fortification, transportation downriver to the lodges in Gaia, and subsequent aging, is extremely well documented elsewhere (See appendices). A notable exception to this is description of the aging requirements for each of the Port variants. For some reason much of the literature (and instructional texts) gets confused over one or more aspects. For clarification Appendix IV depicts the parameters that produce the many varieties of Port.

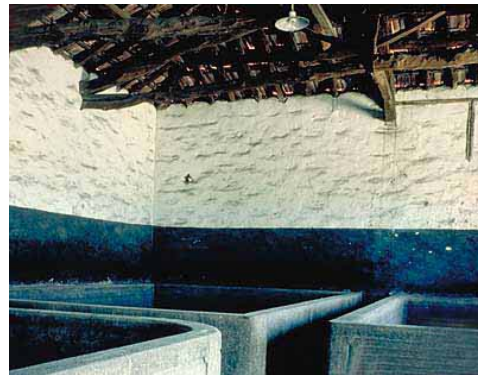
The making of table wine in Portugal follows the time-honoured practices the world over – or unfortunately in some cases the practices of a century ago. Small growers still take their crop to one of the local cooperative wineries, whose standards are not always the highest. Many still use concrete vats, which are hard to maintain, harbouring bacteria, and few have temperature control.

Most local varieties of grape yield colourless juice, so many winemakers leave the skins in the must during fermentation, which lasts a maximum of 20 days. To keep the fermentation going the resulting cap or *manta* needs to be periodically broken up and pushed under. Using a technique similar to the French *pigeage*, the winemakers traditionally push this down using sticks, known for some reason as *macacos* (monkeys). Chaptalisation is prohibited, while acidification is allowed.

The greatest advances have occurred in smaller private hands – often with backing of the Port companies looking to diversify. This trend has brought the small estate or *quinta* operation into prominence. With skilled winemakers, the use of temperature controlled stainless steel equipment, and fermentations with regular *remontage*, even fresh white wines can be made successfully in the heat of the Douro. The success of these producers lies in using the most modern processes for vinification, while incorporating as many traditional elements as possible.

As an example, some makers are now using Portuguese oak (*Carvalho Nacional*) in their cellars. More often than not, the wines are bottled unfiltered.

To the dismay of the modernists and the delight of the tourism industry, much of the higher quality Port and table wines are still being made using the traditional stone *lagares* and foot-treading of the grapes. For Port the challenge is to extract the maximum colour and tannins before the fortification occurs. For the very best table wines the sensitivity of handling of the grapes is a vital factor.



It appears the human foot still has advantages over the best that mechanization can offer!

Industry organization

The Portuguese have a love of organizations with long titles and associated acronyms, and their wine industry is no exception. A century of close government intervention did nothing to relieve this, and it is indeed often difficult to separate the political from the functional in the roles of many of the organizations. (It is worth keeping in mind that Port has represented around 20% of *all* Portuguese exports throughout the last two centuries, so government involvement will be inevitable). The Douro is subject to all the regulation of a Demarcated wine region while, at the same time, having the overlapping bureaucracy of the Port world. However there is finally light at the end of the tunnel.

Just as the research for this paper commenced, the Portuguese government announced two fundamental and very long-awaited sets of changes. The first was to simplify and redefine the role of the governing bodies for the Douro and Port, and the second was an overhaul of the permitted terminology for Port. As always, however, it will take ages for these changes to percolate through to public consciousness, so it is still necessary to address briefly what is being replaced.

In the 1930s Salazar created the Casa de Douro and the Instituto do Vinho do Porto (IVP). Very fundamentally, the former's role was to represent and control the growers of the Douro, while the latter was to govern the standards of Port wine.

The Casa originally had very wide control powers, registering vineyards, setting prices, allocating production quotas, and even warehousing production to stabilize markets. Over the years its effectiveness was increasingly muted by the limitations of funding and the cooperative movement, but in particular its monopolistic practices were removed by EEC entry, and more recently, financial involvement in one of the Port companies removed its semblance of independence and credibility.

The IVP has maintained much of its intended role, inspecting wine shipments into and out of the Port shippers' lodges at Vila Nova de Gaia, and issuing the *selo de garantia* that is stuck on the neck of every bottle of Port. On request from a producer this organization also approves the declaration of a vintage year for a given Port. In practise these functions have devolved to rubberstamp exercises, and again some of its control was lost with EEC entry. In particular the limitation that all Port must be exported through Gaia was removed, allowing for independent production and shipment.



Over the decades other groups have sprung up, often driven by the ineffectiveness of the primary two. The Exporters Association AEVP has worked for better standards; the Association of Producer-Bottlers mostly represents the direct sale independent farmers and estates, etc. In 1995 the government established a fundamentally new institution, the Interprofessional Commission for the Demarcated Region of the Douro (CIRDD). With equal representation from farmers and producers, its goal is to regulate production and control the sale of all wines from the DOC, while recognizing all the socio-economic heritage of the region. To this end there are two specialized sub-groups, one for Port and the other for quality table wines, the VQPRD, of the region. So far this seems to be working as intended, bringing credibility to the Douro DOC.

So what's the big change now? In November 2002 the Portuguese government announced the creation of a brand new body, the Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e Porto (IVDP) to completely oversee both Port and Douro wines. The Interprofessional Commission will form an integral part of this body. The Casa do Douro's few remaining roles will be to represent the growers on the Commission and to maintain the register of vineyards (the *cadastro*). After years of debate the industry finally will have a single strong body to control and represent it.

Wine laws

At almost the same time as the changes above, the government also announced regulation changes tightening up the nomenclature for Port. These are detailed in Appendix II. In addition to the specific Port laws, the remaining unfortified wines of the Douro fall under the general Portuguese wine regulations and classifications.

As with other legislation here, these have been inconsistent, unstable and often meaningless, being based more on geo-political considerations than a desire to seriously improve wine quality. However again, there are signs of hope. In 1999 the national Instituto da Vinha e do Vinho (IVV) revamped the rules again and the current categorization is relatively straightforward and familiar.

<i>Quality Wines</i>	<i>Vinho de Qualidade Produzido em Região Determinada (VQPRD)</i>
<i>DOCs</i>	<i>Denominacao de Origem Controlada</i>
<i>IPRs</i>	<i>Indicação de Proveniência Regulamentada</i>
<i>Table Wines</i>	
<i>VR</i>	<i>Vinho Regional</i>
<i>VdM</i>	<i>Vinho de Mesa</i>

DOCs are similar to France's AOC, and have recently increased to 22 (36 including the subdivisions of Ribatejo and Alentejo). Each are run by a Regional Commission (the IVDP in the Douro) which controls planting yield and wine styles.

IPRs are similar to France's VDSQ and are regions not yet ready for DOC status. Similar but slightly relaxed rules. Currently believed to be about twenty-eight, but lists vary⁴.

Vinho Regional corresponds to Vins de Pays, and follows the EEC requirements for regional typicity. The label can show a vintage date, grape varieties and a regional name. Like Italy's IGTs, many of the more innovative producers are using this category to circumvent the restrictions of the DOC rules. Currently nine are defined.

Vinho de Mesa is basic table wine. Apart from maximum yield there are no restrictions on the source of the grapes or production, and it can only carry the name of the country of production.

Marketing

While sherry and marsala sales decline, Port has thrived, particularly the premium varieties. 1.37m hectoliters of wine are shipped annually from Portugal, and Port represents 65% of that. France is by far the largest market in volume, however Britain and the US are the biggest consumers of the Vintage Port and premium aged tawnies. Quite remarkably the fastest growing market in the world for Port in 2001 was Canada!

Portugal has not traditionally done a very notable job of marketing its wines, which probably accounts in part for the universal lack of awareness of them. One example of this, the Wine Spectator's archives only reference two feature articles on Portuguese wines in the past decade. The IVP in Oporto is responsible for some generic marketing of Port, but the majority is done by the Port houses. ICEP, the official government trade organization is responsible for the promotion of its wines, and certainly features them highly in its priorities. However, for example, Harpers-wine reports the marketing budget for the UK last year was only 200,000 GBP.



⁴ Investment Trade and Tourism Portugal lists the total as 28 in its most recent edition of "Wines of Portugal", but the author was advised by the trade commission that this is out of date. However the newest data was not available in time for publication.

Taking advantage of its scenic attractions, the Douro region is marketing itself through a Port Wine Route, featuring trips on the quaint railway, and overnight stays in *quintas*. This is growing rapidly in popularity, and will do much to introduce the region's wines to the more affluent world markets.

The Wines



After so much history, industry and process, what of the wines themselves?

The richest, fullest wines come from slopes near the river where the soils are the poorest and driest and the temperatures the highest. These stressful conditions produce wines of immense concentration, body and color but somewhat low acidity – exactly what is needed for Port.

Table wines, however, require grapes that provide a more delicate balance between sugar and acid. The best producers have become skilled at blending higher acid grapes from the mid and upper-slopes with grapes from the lower ones to produce a new generation of truly superior Douro wines.

The pioneer in this region was Fernando Nicolau de Almeida, an oenologist with the leading house of Ferreira. In the 1940s he visited Bordeaux during the war and returned determined to produce a top quality table wine. In 1952 he produced the first vintage of Barca Velha from grapes grown at the Quinta do Vale de Meão in the Douro Superior. Released in only twelve vintages since, it has become a classic. In the mid 70s it was joined by two other estates,



Montez Champalimaud with its Quinta do Côtto Grande Eschola, and Ramos Pinto's Duas Quintas Reserva.

However it wasn't until the 1990s, with the results of the EEC investments starting to take effect, that a new generation of enthusiastic young winemakers emerged. At the same time an economic boom was creating an affluent middle class, and a domestic market prepared to pay for quality, although this has resulted in some overpricing.

At the forefront of this movement was Dirk Niepoort, scion of the Port house, who produced the first vintage of his Redoma in 1991, followed by Quinta do Crasto with their Reserva in 1994. Now, however, there is an explosion of small, quality-minded producers, and the Douro has rapidly become the most dynamic wine region in Portugal.

The verdict on their wines is best left to the experts:

Kim Marcus, *Wine Spectator*. "Niepoort's top red table wine, called Batuta, though not yet available in the United States, is one of the best made in Portugal today. In a blind tasting in the Douro I rated the 1999 bottling 92 points for its gorgeous fruit flavors, lovely mouthfeel and enveloping finish. It is truly light years ahead of the mediocre reds that dominated Portugal's offerings of table wine in the past."

Sandy Block, MW; "There are some outstanding quintas in the torrid far eastern end of the region, the Douro Superior, that are making their own wine now in a rich, dense, chocolatey style. The potential from this sub-district is outstanding - wines with concentrated, dense, rich super-ripe fruit. To me this is one of the most exciting emerging regions in the entire country."

John Downes MW, *Wine*, May 2000; "The Douro portfolio now includes a superb array of ever-improving red wines. Gone are the days of the baked and overly tannic efforts of old"

Food matching

Which foods should be matched with these wines?

Of course the classic match is Port with Stilton, particularly a red port; while a vintage Port might go well with a milder Cheddar. In France, Port is primarily a pre-dinner drink – chilled white or tawny with ham salami, and aged tawny with salted almonds.

For some imaginative matches, the local cuisine can often be the best place to look. The northern mountain fare is strong and flavourful, and ideally suited to the full red tannic wines of the Douro. *Alheirãs*, a veal and bread sausage from Bragança, or the *feijoada à transmontana*, a hearty bean stew from Vila Real in the heart of the Douro, would be great, but the best match may well be the famous *bola de carne* meatloaf from Lamego.



Conclusion

On December 14th 2001 the entire Alto Douro region was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. This one act symbolizes everything that is special about the region. The history, the surviving tradition, the scenery, the huge bio-diversity of its viniculture, but above all the need to recognize and preserve this entity as unique while it still exists.

Therein lies the challenge. Given the financing to replant vineyards, modernise wineries, train oenologists and market the product, the Douro undoubtedly has all the ingredients to be a world-class wine producing and exporting region. But what would the result be? Hopefully not more Chardonnay, Merlot and Cab Sauvignon! There is potential for far more here than that - an amazing range of unexploited indigenous grape varieties, a near-perfect terroir, and now a world-class designation of the region on which to build marketing awareness. No, the real challenge for the industry, the government, and ultimately the young optimists like my driver João, is to take these resources and develop a unique but successful identity for Duriense and Portuguese wines.

This will be a difficult task. Things change slowly in Portugal. It will take a generation before all the legacy of the previous régime dissipates. The high costs of building and maintaining vineyards in the Douro and the disappearance of cheap labour must be overcome. It will take courage, hard work and creativity. Already some quintas are earning more from accommodating tourists on the Port Wine Route than from grape sales. If this sort of evolution in thinking is what it takes to preserve the resources until they can be developed, then this can only be for the good. The last three decades were not easy for the Douro and Portugal. Given another three decades of stability, the Douro has the promise of its table wines becoming as famous as its Port – a fitting outcome for the world’s first DOC.

“In a world of increased standardisation, Portugal shines like a beacon of individuality and independence”

Oz Clark

Appendix I

Cadastral system

Vineyards in the Douro are assessed and graded according to the following scoring method

<i>Factors considered</i>	<i>Minimum score</i>	<i>Maximum score</i>
Soil and Climate		
Location	-50	600
Altitude	-900	240
Slope of land	1	101
Bedrock	-400	100
Rough matter	0	80
Exposure	-30	100
Shelter	0	60
Agricultural		
Yield	-900	120
Vine stock	-300	420
Planting density	-50	50
Training system	-500	100
Age	0	60

Classification of parcels

<i>Class</i>	<i>Score</i>
A	>1200
B	between 1001 and 1200 points
C	between 801 and 1000 points
D	between 601 and 800 points
E	between 401 and 600 points
F	between 201 and 400 points



Appendix II

New Port wine designations – Nov 2002

A ministerial order (Portaria no. 1484/2002) was issued on November 22nd 2002 concerning the types and designations to be used in the Port industry. The changes contain some new types, extensions of the requirements for some existing types, limitation of the number of permitted adjectives and a list of recognized colours. The order emphatically states *no other terms are permitted* after 31st Dec 2002.

(The English terms are given – the equivalent permitted Portuguese follows)

The only words allowed in addition to Tawny, Ruby and White (Branco) are Fine (Fino).

Vintage Character is replaced with a new type; Reserve (Reserva). It is a good quality Ruby with variable cask maturing (not limited anymore to 4-6 years as for VC). The only allowed additions are Special (Especial) and Finest.

Two totally new types Tawny Reserve (Reserva Tawny) and White Reserve (Reserva Branco) are created. These have to be matured in casks for at least 7 years. As above, the only allowed additions are Special (Especial) and Finest.

The designation Old (Velho) is only allowed for Tawnies of 10, 20 and 30 years old.

The designation Very Old (Muito velho) is reserved for Tawny more than 40 years old.

Garrafeira has to be cask aged for at least 7 years and has to further mature in *large bottles* for never less than 8 years before it is allowed to be marketed

Unfiltered or traditionally bottled Crusted and Late Bottled Vintage may not be marketed earlier than 3 years after bottling.

The recognized colours are:

- Retinto: red with purple for just bottled Vintage.
- Tinto: red for young Port.
- Tinto-alourado: red with yellow for young cask matured Port.
- Alourado: reddish brown for Port after at least 10 years cask maturing.
- Alourado-claro: clear brown for cask matured Port of 20-25 years old.
- Branco-pálido: pale white for not yet oxidized white Port of white grapes with hardly any intensive colour extraction.
- Branco-palha: straw white for medium oxidized white Port of white grapes with medium intensive colour extraction.
- Branco-dourado: gold white for aged white Port of which the gold colour shows clearly chestnut brown tints.



Appendix III

Promising Douro brands

A list of promising Douro table wine producers (in alphabetical order) whose wines have featured in reviews in the past year, followed by their leading brand names. Not all are available in North America yet, but should be worth watching out for.

Bago de Touriga; *Gouvyas Reserva (white)*

Crasto; *Vinhoda Ponte, Maria Theresa*

Kolheita de Ideias; *Kolheita 2001, Esboço*

Lavradores de Feitoria; *Tres bagos, Grande Eschola*

Niepoort; *Batuta, Charme, Redoma, Quinta de Napoles*

Pintas

Poeira

Real Companhia Velha; *Grantom, Evel grande Escolha*

Quinta da Vale D, Maria

Quinta do Vale Meão; *Meandro*

Quinta do Vallado; *Vallado reserva*

Symingtons; *Chryseia*



Appendix IV

Port Styles

A tabular depiction of the production of the various Port styles by a) blending technique, and b) aging process, and using the new designations

a) By Blending style

Blended from several vintages

Time in Wood	Time in Bottle	Resulting style
Approx 3 years	Min 2 years	Crusted Port
2 to 3 years	Ready to Drink	Tawny, Ruby, White
Minimum 7 years	Ready to Drink	Tawny Reserve White Reserve
Average 10, 20 or 30 years	Ready to Drink	Old Tawny
Average 40 years	Ready to Drink	Very Old Tawny

Blended from a Single Vintage

2 Years	5 to 50+ years *	Vintage
Minimum 7 years	Ready to Drink *	Colheita
4 to 6 years	Ready to Drink *	Late Bottled Vintage
Minimum 7 years	Min 8 years in large bottles *	Garrafeira

Wine from a Single Vintage and Quinta

2 Years	5 to 50+ years *	Single Quinta Vintage
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* Label states vintage and bottling date.

b) By Aging

Wood Aged; Tawny, Ruby, White, Tawny Reserve, Old Tawny, Very Old Tawny, Colheita, Late Bottled Vintage (LBV), Garrafeira (+ time in large bottles prior to marketing)
All of these are ready to drink on release and will not benefit from further time in bottle

Bottle Aged: Vintage, Single Quinta Vintage, Crusted.

Only these latter three will benefit from any further bottle aging.

(LBV falls into an indeterminate zone. According to some producers, and verified in class tastings, although ready to drink on release, some time in bottle may prove beneficial – possibly as much as 4 to 6 years.)

Sources

Web sites;

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<http://www.reservaycata.com/ingles/home.html> Great source of current news on Iberian wines and winemakers

<http://whc.unesco.org/sites/1046.htm> UNESCO World Heritage web site

http://www.espigueiro.pt/douro-vinhateiro/uk/documentacao/d_a_index.html Portuguese web site - a well documented source of accurate statistics and depictions of Douro done in connection with the application to UNESCO for the inclusion of the Alta Douro as a World Heritage Site.

www.harpers-wine.com A source of up-to-date news of the wine trade

<http://www.beveragebusiness.com/art-arch/mmblock05.html> for an incisive up-to-date report by Sandy Block MW on the state of development of Portuguese wine making

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Several articles by Jamie Goode have provided insight into the new generation of winemakers.



Original artwork by Janet Duggan