

# ***Visa Magazin Austria***

Austria

December 1, 2003

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## **Wine Revolution in Southern Europe**

Text: Heidi Mayerhofer

*In Portugal, the winds of change are blowing, bringing not only traditional sweet port wines, but also dry red wines full of character.*

Port wine is to Portugal what Sachertorte is to Austria. We should be thankful to port for the close trading relationship between England and Portugal: whenever Portugal was at war with its neighbor Spain, England constantly stood by the little country. Thus, it was only natural that the British Empire and Portugal should enter into a privileged trading relationship. Portugal began exporting port wine to Britain early on, and the English proved to be extremely appreciative customers. Portuguese red wine from the Douro Region was very popular. The winegrowing region is named after the river that lends the surrounding areas their basic character. The Douro, one of Europe's mightiest rivers, stretches across the country to Porto, where it pours into the sea. The first Portuguese vineyards begin where the river starts to bend westward. They accompany the Douro for about 100 km, almost to the city of Régua. The 40,000 hectares of vineyards are now divided into three sections: Baixa Corgo, the western extremity, Cima Corgo, the heart of the winegrowing region with the leading names and brands, and Douro Superior, a large area with only a few vineyards.

To make sure that the wines arrived safely in England, it was decided to mix the port with brandy, which made it keep much longer. If brandy is added during fermentation, the residual sugar remains in the wine, making it more harmonious and easier to conserve. This process also made the taste more appealing to the English, as it still does today.

Until well into the 19th Century, many small vintners produced their own wines and also marketed them independently. Later on, "shippers" settled in Porto, and became increasingly powerful. To ensure their customers port wine of consistently high quality, a division of labor was made between winegrowing and aging or marketing. Shippers bought grapes from various vintners, aged them exclusively in their own cellars in Vila Nova de Gaia – across from Porto -- to ensure that the wine would have the characteristics of their own house port, and sold them from the same location. The division between winegrowing and marketing was pushed so far that a law was passed naming Vila Nova de Gaia as the only authorized port of export. In the

mid-19th Century, there were well over 80 quintas (winegrowing estates). They were not allowed to make wines themselves, however. Not until Portugal joined the EU in 1986 was the law repealed, unleashing a veritable revolution in Douro winegrowing. Suddenly, any vintner in the Douro could export independently provided he had at least 150,000 bottles and three years' worth of sales volume on stock.

The Douro Valley is now one of the best winegrowing regions in Europe with high potential and room for further development, because the above-mentioned restriction on exports applies only to sweet port wines. Every vintner has the right to make, age and market dry red wines without restriction. Thus, the area around the impressive river has been going through a lot of changes since the late 80s. The new generation of winegrowing families, previously restricted to delivering grapes, is now taking the initiative. But Portugal is still suffering from its image as a supplier of cheap wines. To counteract that stereotype and increase the fame of the new red wines abroad, five innovative Portuguese winemakers have joined forces. Their alliance not only results in more effective publicity but also helps to promote friendly cooperation among the vintners. Quinta do Vale Dona Maria, Quinta do Vallado, Quinta de Nápoles, Quinta do Carril, Quinta do Crasto, and Quinta do Meão are members of the alliance, which spreads across all three areas of the Douro.

But what is it that makes the Douro red wines so unmistakably authentic and exciting? 250,000 hectares of the Douro Valley has slate-schist soil, and the rest is almost exclusively granite, which is so hard that it makes cultivation practically impossible. Slate is hard, too, but it is also friable and splits into vertical layers under the surface. This configuration ensures long, ample conservation of water, enabling the grapes to survive through the extremely hot and dry summers. The soil composition and high temperatures give the wine its highly distinctive characteristics. The extreme conditions put the vines under stress, which is really better than it sounds. The result is a lower yield with grapes that bear fruit more intensively and with higher concentration. The distinctive character of dry Douro red wines is also due to the many native varieties of grape. Through centuries of geographical and often political isolation, Portugal obtained a broad diversity of grapes that can hardly be matched by any other winegrowing region.

The alliance enhances the efforts of the five young winegrowers

Traditionally, the vineyards have been planted with a mix of varieties, and you can still find old vineyards with up to 20 different varieties. Contrary to the general trend in the Douro region of

planting vineyards with selected, pure varieties of grapes, some of the five wine estates continue to exploit the potential of mixed planting. Since the mid-80s, five different varieties of grape have been recommended for the wines of the future, with characteristics such as a good tannin structure and resistance to the hot, dry summers, producing sweet dark-black grapes.

The winemaking methods are another decisive factor that makes Douro wines unique. Traditionally, port and red wines are processed in "lagares". The wine is pressed by foot in those square granite troughs in order to extract the color and tannin from the skin of the grapes. Port wine is fermented in the lagares, as well, but the must of the dry red wines is decanted to stainless-steel tanks or open wooden fermentation tubs. The wines are then aged in special oak casks known as "barriques".

In this age in which specialization, individuality and originality have become prerequisites for success and customers are no longer satisfied with mediocrity or products for the masses, these five young Portuguese winemakers will certainly gain international recognition for their complex wines.

[Box on page 2:]

### **Wine-tasting**

#### **Quinta do Vallado Reserve 2000**

Ripe, complex fruit aromas with clear barrique accents, red currant, powerful, with a clear finish. Roasted, caramel, vanilla, tobacco in the finish.

- QUINTA DO VALLADO

VILHARINHO DOS FREIRES; P-5050 PESO

DA RÉGUA, TEL. +351 / 254 323 147

Fax + 351 / 254 324 326

GAR.PORTO@CLIX.PT

#### **Batuta 2001**

The grapes for this Batuta all come from the vineyards of the Quinta do Carril, which are planted with very old vines. Conspicuous but finely incorporated acidity. Aromas of sour cherries, very slight barrique aromas, remaining discreetly in the background, slightly animal with ripe tannins (sampled from cask).

NIEPORT: QUINTA DE NÁPOLES

AND QUINTA DO CARRIL

NIEPOORT VINHOS S.A. P-4050-296 PORTO,

RUA INFANTE DOM HENRIQUE 16-2

TEL. +351 / 22 200 1028,

FAX +351 / 22-992 02 09

DIRK@NIEPOORT-SA.PT

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[Box on page 3:]

### **Quinta do Crasto 2001**

Violets, cranberries, red currants, blackberries, creamy, chocolate, very well blended acidity lends the wine freshness despite its 14% alcohol by volume.

- QUINTA DO CRASTO

SOCIEDADE AGRICOLA DA QUINTA DO  
CRASTO, GOUVINHAS, P-5060-053 SBROSA  
TEL. +351 / 254 920 020  
MRCRASTO@MAIL.TELEPAC.PT

### **Quinta do Vale Dona Maria 2000**

Pronounced barrique accents: vanilla, pleasant acidity that lends the wine freshness despite its 14.5% alcohol by volume.

- QUINTA DO VALE DONA MARIA

LE MOS & VAN ZELLER LDA  
P-5130 ERVEDOSA DO DOURO,  
QUINTA DO VALE DONA MARIA  
TEL. +351 / 254 732 375  
CVANZELLER@MAIL.TELEPAC:PT

### **Meandro 2001**

Let it breathe! Citrus and mint aromas, ripe tannins, long finish

- QUINTA DO VALE MEAO

F. OLAZABAL & FILHOS LDA.  
P-5150-501 CX. POSTAL 113, VILA NOVA  
DE FOZ COA, TEL. +351 / 279 762 156  
FJOLAZABAL@MAIL.TELEPAC.PT

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### **Sales Outlets in Austria**

You can also order these wines online. All the wine merchants listed below and many others accept VISA.

- VINOTHEK ST. STEPHAN  
1010 WIEN, STEPHANSPLATZ 6  
TEL. 01/512 68 58, FAX 01/512 68 58 20  
[INFO@STSTEPHAN.AT](mailto:INFO@STSTEPHAN.AT)

- WEIN & CO. AUSTRIA  
WARENHANDELSGES.M.B.H.  
1220 WIEN, MACULANGASSE 6  
TEL. 01/250 55 600, FAX 01/250 55 6500,  
[INFO@WEINCO.AT](mailto:INFO@WEINCO.AT), [WWW.WEINCO.AT](http://WWW.WEINCO.AT)

- VERGEINER, AUSGESUCHTE WEINE  
9900 LIENZ, AM MARKT 1, TEL. 048527 66 80,  
FAX EXT. 85, [WEINE@VERGEINERWEINE.AT](mailto:WEINE@VERGEINERWEINE.AT),  
[WWW.VERGEINERWEINE.AT](http://WWW.VERGEINERWEINE.AT)

- GAWEIN BRUCKNER WEINHANDEL,  
1020 WIEN, TABORSTR. 95,  
FRACHTENBAHNHOF WIEN NW, 1200 WIEN,  
LADESTR. 3,  
MAGAZIN 6, TEL. 0664/435 48 70,  
[GAWIN@EUNET.AT](mailto:GAWIN@EUNET.AT), [WWW.GAWEIN.AT](http://WWW.GAWEIN.AT)

### **Photos Removed In Email Version**

[Photo captions, page 1:] THE WORLD IN MOTION: **THE DOURO VALLEY**

Porto and the Douro River – important for wine and the country  
Terraced vineyards extend through Portugal's hot Douro Valley.

[Photo caption, page 2:] The Douro Valley is now one of Europe's most interesting winegrowing regions.

[Photo caption, page 3] THE WORLD IN MOTION: **THE DOURO VALLEY**

A Perfect Team: Portuguese vintners produce exciting red wines.

High temperatures and low precipitation characterize summers in the Douro