

Vasco Coutinho

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Douro for dummies

21 Nov 2013 by Jancis Robinson

I had the great pleasure of spending time in the magical Douro Valley recently, concentrating on improving my acquaintance with three significant (and nearby - travel in the Douro is not easy) producers.

Firstly I visited Ramos Pinto, a company in which women have played an unusually important part. They kindly opened, for me and for Portuguese specialist wine writer Richard Mayson, significant vintages of their well-known Duas Quintas Douro table wine. The pictures show the gardens of their Quinta do Bom Retiro and some of the bottles on the dining-room table of this French-owned property before we attacked them.

It was interesting to me to learn that the reason that the head honcho João Nicolau d'Almeida wasn't there was because he was busy in their prime export market Angola (or was it Brazil?). I also noted that everyone told me that they always ran short of their Douro white wine. The 1994 vintage of their regular bottling of Duas Quintas Douro Branco was absolutely amazing. I strongly recommend that you try cellaring the current vintage - for 10 years perhaps.

They also showed us the 1981 varietal Tinto Cão from the Bom Retiro estate where we tasted that persuaded Jean-Claude Rouzaud of Louis Roederer to (a) buy Ramos Pinto and (b) go into Douro table-wine production.

We then had a wonderful lunch on the terrace at Jorge Serôdio Borges's recently inherited, atmospheric Quinta da Manoella. (His sister Margarida has inherited the Quinta do Fojo nearby and is in the process of relaunching it.) With his ex-model winemaker wife Sandra Tavares Da Silva, Jorge is responsible for Wine & Soul, the company behind such reds as Pintia and the white Guru so this was a great chance to catch up with their output. Manoella needs considerable restoration but is very much a source of port as well as Douro table wine.

And finally, a bone-rattling drive across the valley to Jorge Moreira's small but thoughtfully formed and orientated north-facing vineyards for his delicious Poeira wines. He also makes wine for Quinta de la Rosa and for the big Royal Oporto port and wine company.

I will be writing more about what I learnt on this trip on Saturday and in one of my syndicated articles.

The tasting notes I took are grouped and listed in the flights and order served.

WINE AND SOUL

Quinta do Passadouro 2012 Douro 15.5 Drink 2014-2016
2008 first vintage. Rabigato, Codega de Larinho, Viosinho. 5% oak. White grapes are bought from 500-600m near Murça 20km NE of Pinhão. Schist and granite.

Quite broad and almost Muscaty nose. A bit pinched and lacking the fruit intensity of the white Ramos Pinto Duas Quintas 1994 and 2007 I have just tasted. Certainly fresh but a tad austere.

Wine and Soul, Guru 2012 Douro 16+ Drink 2015-2020

2004 first vintage. Field blend of 50-year-old Rabigato, Codega de Larinho, Gouveio, Viosinho in Murça. Barrel fermented, lees contact, bâtonnage, especially after alcoholic fermentation, to keep wine cloudy in the barrels so as to encourage oak integration. Five months in oak.

Pale lemon. Oak just a little dominant and sweet. Still quite chewy. They are picking earlier now. 12.5%

Wine and Soul, Guru 2006 Douro 16.5 Drink 2010-2015

Pale greenish gold. Resin and pine nose. Fat and ripe on the palate. Still quite tight. Very fine. Lots of chew and personality. Bone dry finish. A little severe on the end but in an admirable way. 13.5%

Quinta do Passadouro 2011 Douro 15.5 Drink 2014-2017

The first vintage was 1994, so one of the earliest. This is the current vintage. Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz.



Fermented partly in lagares and partly in tanks. Aged 16 months in French barrels, 20% new.
Bright crimson. A little simple on the nose but very clean and refreshing. Lighter than early Douro reds. 14.5%

Quinta do Passadouro Touriga Nacional 2011 Douro 15.5 Drink 2013-2017

Lagar-fermented. 50:50 between the two different estates, Quinta do Passadouro and Quinta do Sibio. Intention was to produce something refreshing.

Pretty and aromatic. Transparent and friendly. Just very slightly dry on the end. 14.5%

Quinta do Passadouro, Reserva 2011 Douro 16.5 Drink 2013-2020

Lagar-fermented. Single vineyard – a 70-year-old field blend at Quinta do Passadouro with a little touch of Touriga Franca from Quinta do Sibio. Just 5,000 bottles made.

Blueish purple. Very charming nose. Substantial depth and complexity without rusticity. Savoury and really appetising. Lovely texture. 14.5%

Wine and Soul, Quinta da Manoella 2011 Douro 17 Drink 2013-2018

30-40 year old vines (young for Douro) just below where we were sitting. 60% Touriga Nacional, 25% Touriga Franca, 10% Tinta Roriz, 5% Tinta Francisca which brings elegance and acidity but not colour.

Pure purple. Lovely scent. Gentle and really is quite burgundian. Lifted and fragrant. Really quite delicate but not at all skinny. **GV** 14.5%

€13 euros in Portugal

Wine and Soul, Pintas Character 2011 Douro 17.5 Drink 2014-2021

Wine that followed Pintas (name of a vineyard). Inspired by the port wine category Vintage Character which was abandoned. Immediately, in 2005, they registered the brand because they wanted to make a link between Pintas and this. 46 year-old vineyards below the Pintas triangle. Also foot trodden. Made mainly for restaurants because Pintas is too expensive for most of them.

Dark purple. Very intense and complex. Mulberries. Broad, hints of port. Very firm tannins but not closed. Dry finish. Not at all heavy. Beautifully made. 14.5%

€24 euros in Portugal

Wine and Soul, Quinta da Manoella Vinhas Velhas 2011 Douro 18 Drink 2015-2025

Dark purple. Oldest vines on the estate, over 100 years. Field blend with lots of Tinta Francisca. Surrounded by forest which maintains acidity.

Suave, complex, lifted, very fine. Dense and deep and with lots of tannin and structure. Oozes character. Dry finish for the moment but promises well.

Wine and Soul, Quinta da Manoella Vinhas Velhas 2010 Douro 17.5 Drink 2015-2023

Cooler year. Closed down a bit on the nose but lovely texture and roundness. Peppery but with lots of resin and herbs. Broad and seductive. Definitely lighter than the 2011.

Wine and Soul, Pintas 2011 Douro 18 Drink 2015-2025

First vintage 2001 from a 2 ha, 80-year-old field blend with a big proportion – 10-15% – of Rufete – unusual in the Douro. It is floral apparently, thereby confirming the link with Touriga Nacional posited in Wine Grapes. Pintas 2001 was a perfect wine for that time, as 2001 saw the boom of Douro wine: 'What was perfect for us then is different today.' Now they are looking for much more elegance – keeping Pintas fruit but showing it in a different way. Very refined and even more complex than the Quinta da Manoella Vinhas Velhas.

Well balanced and fresh. Broad across the palate but certainly not hot or heavy. Some light balsamic notes and very appetising. Still lots of tannin.

Wine and Soul, Pintas 2010 Douro 18 Drink 2015-2023

Balsamic notes and ripe black fruits. Perhaps less finesse and roundness and more sinew than the 2011. Lots to chew on – really satisfying. Complex and subtle. No excess of alcohol though the tannins stand out more than on the 2011.

MOB 2011 Dão 16.5 Drink 2014-2022

MOB, short for Moreira, Olazabal and Borges, is the Dão joint venture from Poirira's Jorge Moreira, Quinta do Vale Meão's Francisco Olazabal and Wine & Soul's Jorge Seródio Borges. MOB already registered in the US! Alves de Sousa invited them. Some Dão producers accused them of making chocolate bombs but in fact they went for cool vineyards and seek freshness and lightness. They love the more transparent Dãos. They've taken out a 15-year lease, and have 20-year-old Touriga Nacional, Jaen, Baga and Alfrocheiro vines. Wine based on acid not tannins. The three guys love to get together and gossip and taste so long that they forget to decide what they meant to!

Light and fresh and zesty. Damson fruit. Certainly lots of acidity but fresh and fine. Clean and fun.

Tags: Douro, Portugal