

BACCHUS REPORT

A Port Primer

by Aynne Ingram

Port wine as we know and enjoy it today happened very slowly; the many styles and qualities evolved over centuries—the production area was the first to be so demarcated in PORTUGAL in 1756—and today Port is one of the most regulated wines produced worldwide. Vineyards are graded by the Instituto do Vinho do Porto (IVP) and classified into six categories, “A” through “F.” There are twelve distinct physical factors taken into consideration including productivity (the lower the yield, the higher the mark), gradient, aspect, soil, exposure, and vine varieties; each factor is given a numerical value. A score of more than 1200 points out of a maximum 1680 is given an “A,” while vineyards scoring less than 200 points are given an “F.” Growers are allowed to make a certain amount of Port from their particular vineyards based on the grade they receive. Grade “A” vineyards may make up to 600 liters per 1000 vines, while those graded “F” generally have to pass on the Port market.

The **Touriga Nacional** grape, although not the most widely planted variety, is said to be, without a doubt, the best grape for making Port. Although there are over 90 different varieties of grapes grown in the Port wine region, only 5 varieties are considered to be of exceptional quality: **Touriga Nacional**, **Tinta Roriz**, **Tinta Barroca**, **Tinto Cão**, and **Touriga Francesa**.

Two broad categories define Port—**bottle-aged** or **cask-aged**. These two processes produce distinctly different wines. Perhaps the single biggest development in the evolution of Port was the glass bottle, for it is the bottle that makes vintage Port possible. Bottle-aged Ports keep their color and fruitiness into their maturity. They are aged for a short time in wood then bottled without filtration to mature. Cask-aged Ports lose much of their fruitiness and become tawny in color. These are aged in wood, then filtered and bottled. They are ready to drink right away.

Ruby is the most basic and least expensive style of Port; a blend of several harvests, it is aged for two to three years in stainless steel or wood before bottling. The term Ruby is not often seen on labels as most shippers prefer a “house brand.”

Tawny is aged in casks at least six years longer than ruby before bottling. Though some tawnys are a mixture of ruby and white ports, the best tawny Ports acquire their pale color—an amber brown or tawny hue—from longer wood aging. The flavor becomes drier and nuttier from oxidation. **Aged Tawnys**—the best tawny Ports—are created from high quality wines by a master blender. Graded by the average age of the blended wines, they are available in 10, 20, 30 and 40-year versions—with a corresponding increase in price. A 20-year-old Tawny may give a most enjoyable experience for the price.

Colheita is a tawny from a single vintage, also known as a Vintage Tawny. It must age a minimum of seven years in wood. The wine should also indicate the year of its bottling and should be drunk within twelve months of that date. This is the rarest of all Ports.

Colheita production, a specialty of the Portuguese Port houses, amounts to less than 0.5% of all Port made.

White Port is made from white grapes rather than red and ranges from very dry to very sweet. The sweetest is designated as **Lagrima**. These are best served straight up or on the rocks, often as an aperitif, preferably enjoyed in the summer in a café in Lisboa.

Crusted Port is named for the crust of sediment that forms in the bottle. It is a blend of port from several vintages bottled after three years in cask.

Vintage Character Ports, also referred to as **Super** or **Premium Ruby**, are blend aged from four to six years before they are filtered and bottled. They characteristically have more body and fruit than a tawny but lack the concentration and complexity of a true vintage Port. These Ports are usually marketed under brand names like Sandeman's Founders Reserve, Warre's Warrior, Graham's 6 Grapes, Fonseca's Bin 27, and Taylor's First Estate.

Single-Quinta Ports are made in both tawny and vintage styles but must come from only one vineyard. They are generally produced in years that are not declared. In declared

years, their grapes often form the backbone of the Vintage Port blends.

Late Bottled Vintage or **LBV**, unlike Vintage Character, is actually the produce of a single vintage. A vintage not deemed good enough to make a Vintage Port will go into the making of a LBV. Left in wood for four to six years, it is filtered before bottling; though ready to drink earlier than Vintage Port, it may require decanting.

Vintage Port is the finest and most expensive of the Port styles. At most, it accounts for about 2% of all production and is one of the most sought-after wines in the world. Vintage Port comes from a single harvest of exceptional quality, as stated on the bottle, and is bottled after two to three years of cask aging. The wine spends many years maturing in bottle. It may take 15 to 50 years for a good Vintage Port to be ready for drinking. Each shipper must decide, within two years of a harvest year, if that particular year will make the cut and be released as a Vintage Port. This is known as “**declaring the vintage**.” The first vintages were declared around 1734. From the cork one may verify the authenticity of a vintage port—the year and the house will be branded on the cork.

The best vintages from this century include 1994, 1992, 1991, 1985, 1977, 1970, 1963, 1955, 1948, 1945, 1935, 1931, 1927, and 1912.

These wines must be decanted before serving. Decanting port is not difficult. It just requires a steady hand and a good eye. In one continuous motion, slowly pour the wine into a decanter. When the sediment begins to appear in the neck of the bottle, stop pouring and discard the rest of the port. It is helpful to use a funnel since the sediment (crust) can be easily seen on its sides.

Other than White Port which is most always served chilled, Port is traditionally served at the end of a meal. Port should be treated as any fine wine. The bottles should be stored at 55 to 65 degrees

Fahrenheit and at 65% humidity and on their sides so the cork doesn't dry out. This also aids in the development of the crust. Most Vintage Port bottles have a white mark painted on the side. This mark should be kept facing up. If the bottle is moved, it can thus be returned to the same position.

The Port trade is dominated by its shippers. Although other nations are represented, Port has traditionally been a Portuguese and British venture. Since the 17th century, the shippers' lodges—their offices and warehouses—have been located on a hillside rising up from the riverbank in Vila Nova de Gaia, the main suburb of Oporto. This is the “nerve center” of the Port trade. For it is here that the Port is aged, blended, vintage decided, bottled and shipped.

Finally, a list of some of the best shippers and their Port Houses—these names on the label ensure quality in the bottle:

Cockburn Smithes—Cockburn • Martineze Gassiot
Croft—Croft • Delaforce, Sons & Co. • Morgan Brothers
A.A. Ferreir
Quinta do Noval—Quinta do Noval • Quinta do Noval Nacional • Van Zeller
Sandeman—Sandeman • Robertson's Rebello Valente
Symington Port Shippers—Dow • Graham • Gould Campbell • Quarles Harris • Smith Woodhouse • Warre
Taylor, Fladgate & Fonseca—Fonseca • Fonseca-Guimaraens • Taylor



“Everybody should believe in something. I believe I'll have another drink.”—W.C. Fields

Apocryphal Hollywood

Part 1

by Robert T. Megginson

The first Academy Awards Ceremony was held at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel on May 16, 1929. It took Douglas Fairbanks six minutes to give out all the awards.

It takes a little longer now.

Silent film director D.W. Griffith on Louis B. Mayer's brainchild invention in 1928 of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences: “What art? What science?”

Louis B. Mayer's response on learning Griffith, Charles Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford had joined together to establish United Artists: “Actors running their own studio? The lunatics have taken over the asylum!”

In 1952 Gary Cooper won best actor Oscar for “High Noon”—now regarded as the classic western, but originally thought to be so bad it was shelved for two years; producer Stanley Kramer actually considered never releasing it. Beseet by problems throughout shooting, mostly caused by Cooper's ulcer acting up—his pained expressions were real—reportedly at least a third of the takes were blown by Cooper burping mid-scene. Finally rescued by editor Elmo Williams, the picture won four Oscars, including Cooper's who, after winning, remarked to a friend, “Bet that's the first time an ulcer won an Oscar.”

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“A woman drove me to drink... And I didn't have the courtesy to thank her.”—W.C. Fields