

Vasco Coutinho

De: J Serôdio Borges <jsb@quintadopassadouro.com>
Enviado: sexta-feira, 3 de Janeiro de 2014 11:25
Para: Vasco Cunha Coutinho; Rita Mendes; Sara Guedes; Sofia Cantante; Sandra Tavares da Silva; Luis Lopes
Assunto: Robert Parker scores

Muito boas noticias mais uma vez do critico Robert Parker!!



The Wine Advocate #210, December 2013

Please see below for reviews of the following. Accompanying articles are at the bottom of this email.

Portugal's 2011 Big Reds - Mark Squires

Portugal's 2011 Big Reds - Mark Squires

WINE & SOUL Pintas 2011 – 94 points

“The 2011 Pintas, the original flagship of the winery, is an old vines field blend aged in French oak (only 70% new; 30% second pass) for 20 months. As has become the pattern, this shows more depth than its more elegant new sibling (the Manoella Old Vines also reviewed this issue), but this year it is also a very bright and relatively (it is not Manoella!) elegant vintage in its own right. This is a vintage in which the wine should excel, and does. It is likely to be on the short list as a contender for the best Pintas yet, but it is too tight and unevolved at the moment, a bit hard to read (a comment that is true for many 2011s at the moment). So, let’s be conservative just now and leave that conversation for a few years hence. In the meanwhile, it will soon be bursting with flavor. It is beautifully constructed, with crisp persistence on the finish and the promise of future development to come. It should come into better balance in time and it showed dramatic improvement the next day, still tightly wound after being open for a couple of hours on Day 2, but very focused and beautifully constructed.”

WINE & SOUL Quinta da Manoella Vinhas Velhas 2011 – 94 points

“The 2011 Quinta da Manoella Vinhas Velhas is the old vines (101 years) bottling from this vineyard, a field blend aged in (80% new, 20% second use) French oak for 20 months. The best Manoella yet? I think it will be, although it is far too unevolved at the moment. It will be fun to compare it to the 2009 as time goes on, but I suspect this will take the lead and separate itself as time goes on. As always, this is a very graceful bottling, the terroir at this Quinta invariably lending itself to elegance, rather than richness. Despite its elegant mid-palate, it is a wine that has some grip and persistence and it seems tightly wound. If its concentration is subtle, it is still there, managing that feat that the best properties do consistently: maintaining a feeling of concentration without seeming jammy or overbearing. It finishes with nice fruit flavor, too. It was far better the next day, still tight, but a wine proving that it should evolve well. It may yet have stories to tell.”

WINE & SOUL Guru Branco 2012 – 91 points

“The 2012 Guru is an equal blend of Viosinho, Codega do Larinho and Gouveio, from old vines (51 years of age). It comes in at just 12.5% alcohol and was fermented and aged in new French oak barriques for seven months. Guru has this interesting way of using oak without actually projecting so much, particularly after a year or so in bottle. While it is there at the moment, it should continue to integrate well. It also manages to come in at rather low alcohol levels - and it still seems rather solid. This is quite a nice vintage for it, and it should continue to develop in the cellar. Fresh, bright and quite tasty on the finish, it is a very lively Guru with a lot of persistence. It isn't exactly a bargain, but it is a consistent performer in the region.”

WINE & SOUL Pintas Character 2011 – 90 points

“The 2011 Pintas Character, the second wine, is produced from an old vines (46 years of age) field blend. It was aged in a 50-50 mixture of new and used French oak for 18 months. Nicely constructed, with a combination of elegance and solidity, this displays a bright, sunny demeanor, together with fine fruit and excellent structure.”

WINE & SOUL Quinta da Manoella 2011 – 90 points

“The 2011 Tinto Quinta da Manoella is 60% Touriga Nacional, 25% Touriga Franca, 10% Tinta Roriz and 5% Tinta Francisca, all aged in two-year old French barriques for 16 months. This is a lovely regular Tinto from this property, probably the best yet. Graceful, but surprisingly powerful at the moment, it has more persistence than seems apparent at first, plus fine aromatics. This property simply seems to lend itself to elegance, but this has stuff going on. Bright and penetrating, if not very deep or obvious, it should drink very nicely. I suspect the tannins will fall off fairly quickly here and it will seem much more straightforward in time. It is not overly concentrated in the mid-palate. For the moment, it still has room to improve in the cellar, not yet being at peak. In this generally pricey lineup, this is the bargain point.”

QUINTA DO PASSADOURO Reserva 2011 – 93 points

“The 2011 Reserva is Passadouro's old vines (70 years) field blend, aged in a 50-50 mixture of new and used French oak for 18 months. I've often enjoyed Passadouro Reservas, but this seems like the right year, the right moment and the right wine. It may be the best yet. Combining elegance, controlled power, freshness and depth, this is a wine that should be approachable fairly early, while developing well in the cellar. There is too much of an oaky note up front – but it was relatively recently bottled and I believe it will integrate well in time. There's not much else to quibble about with this beautifully constructed wine. Its initial, up front elegance and lively demeanor masks its subtle concentration and beautiful finish. It was better the next day and it may yet improve significantly in the cellar. While approachable young, it could use a couple of years to settle down for better results, including allowing it to absorb some oak.”

QUINTA DO PASSADOURO Tinto 2009 – 92 points

“The 2009 Tinto is a blend of Touriga Nacional, 30%; Tinta Roriz, 25%; Touriga Franca, 20%; and 20% an old vines field blend. It is revisited for a status check. Surprisingly full bodied, it is bursting with flavor. This is a big Tinto from a big vintage, another good example of how the vintage often lifted a lot of the regular wines, giving them some extra depth and general oomph. It has really evolved well. Despite its size, it still has some precision. It is carefully crafted and impressive. As it aired, I liked it more and more. More approachable now than when I first saw it, it still tightens on the back end noticeably with air while also showing a little alcohol (14.5%) with the controlled power. If I had a quibble, the finish sometimes turned just a bit harsh early on. I noticed that far less as it aired, however, a good sign. It eventually came together well. On the other hand, as it aired, it became far more intense and complex, and I loved the medley of flavors that developed. Overall, it is a robust, tasty and powerful regular Tinto that seems clearly to be from a warm vintage. This is a lot of wine for the price, but it's not for the shy.”

QUINTA DO PASSADOURO Touriga Nacional 2011 – 92 points

“The 2011 Touriga Nacional was sourced from 30 year old vines. It was oak-aged for 17 months (50% new and 50% second pass) and comes in at 14.5% alcohol. Mostly about elegance, this is all fragrance and flavor, although the wine is showing some tannic pop at the end and ability to age. Intensely flavorful and bright, it doesn't show much mid-palate concentration at the moment, but it seems to be pretty classic Touriga. The longer it was open, the better it got and the more I liked it.”

QUINTA DO PASSADOURO Branco 2012 – 90 points

“The 2012 Branco, the Estate white, is a roughly equal blend of Viosinho, Rabigato and Codega do Larinho, all tank-aged. Sourced from a high altitude vineyard (1,650 feet) with 30 year old vines, it is solidly constructed. Fresh, viscous and a bit steely at the moment, with fine focus and invigorating acidity, it has nice grip on the finish. As it warms, it shows more minerality on the finish as well. In its fresh style, it should hold rather well, but it won't hurt to drink it on the younger side. This is rather unevolved, but in a few months it should be drinking great. I loved this for its purity of fruit and intensity. Flying a bit under the radar, Passadouro doesn't get enough credit for its fresh whites – maybe I've been a bit guilty, too – but the winery

offers some good values and it has become an increasingly interesting white wine producer. They are evolving in that regard, perhaps, much like the Douro itself.”

QUINTA DO PASSADOURO Tinto 2011 – 90 points

“The 2011 Tinto, i.e., the Estate Tinto, not to be confused with the Passa, is a blend of 40% Touriga Nacional, 25% each of Tinta Roriz and Touriga Franca and 10% old vines field blend, aged in oak (80% used, 20% new) for 18 months. It comes in at 14.5% alcohol. With refined tannins and an understated demeanor, it is a gracious and carefully constructed regular Tinto that performs beautifully. It should make the winery a lot of friends. It initially has some of the same structural feel as the Passa red reviewed this issue, but with no tank-aging, more power and more concentration, this projects a more serious feel, the exuberant fruit seen on the Passa not in evidence, at least not in the same way. As it sits in the glass, it expands, showing beautiful balance and refinement. Its harmony and texture are calling cards. This won’t be the biggest “wow” wine of the vintage, but it is wine you won’t want to stop drinking, another example of what a fine year Passadouro has had – and what values are to be had here at lower levels.”

QUINTA DO PASSADOURO Passa Branco 2012 – 88 points

“The 2012 Branco Passa is a 50-50 blend of Rabigato and Codega do Larinho, all tank aged. The Passa level is showing so well these days that some may not feel the need to trade up to the regular, estate Branco reviewed this issue. That’s not entirely fair to the Estate Branco, which clearly has more concentration, age worthiness and intensity, but this is pretty nice. It comes from a high altitude site and 20 year old vines. Add a good winemaker and why shouldn’t it show well? Well constructed, it is a wine that has nice concentration for its level, plus some focus and finesse. It adds a tasty finish laced with mineral nuances and juicy crispness. Drink it young and fresh and it will be hard to resist on many levels, from porch sipping to a light food matchup. It may last longer, but I do like to advise drinking wines like this young and fresh.”

QUINTA DO PASSADOURO Passa Tinto 2011 – 87 points

“The 2011 Tinto Passa is a blend of 40% Touriga Franca, 30% Touriga Nacional and 30% Tinta Roriz, 70% tank-aged, with the other 30% aged in used French oak (second and third year) for 18 months. Let’s quickly note that wines intended for early consumption and in a soft style usually have some limitations that constrains scoring. Don’t let that scare you, though, because this so charming in its youth that some will swoon over it in the short run. Refined tannins and nice texture give way to youthful fruit that is bursting with fresh flavor. It has surprising mid-palate solidity in its youth and for its level. It will be a crowd pleaser. Many will think will think it is a steal, as with the Passa white reviewed in other issues.”

Portugal's 2011 Big Reds - Mark Squires

This issue features the first wave of top 2011s now being released on our shores, particularly from Douro. Happy Holidays! They are a fine gift from Portugal. Some 2011 Tintos have been previously reviewed, of course (even a small number of 2012s), but usually at the entry level or mid-level. The big boys are now arriving as well.

The 2011 Tintos will forever be linked with the 2011 Vintage Ports - a heralded vintage that has received acclaim, hype and enthusiasm. While not inevitably the same with table wines, the 2011 Tintos will receive more than their share of acclaim, too, their hallmark being their ability to retain fresh fruit and balance to go with concentration and intensity. They should age nicely. It is at a minimum the best red vintage since 2007, maybe a lot more. After concluding this issue's tastings, I was talking (via email) to Xito Olazabal (Vale Meão), and he summed up pretty well what I was in the process of writing, so I may as well let him talk: "The wines are powerful like the 09s or 07s, but much more elegant, with higher acidity, and the thing that pleases me the most is the quality and the finesse of the tannins. They are present in high levels, but they are fresh and vibrant." It is fair to say that this is a vintage to snap up. You really can't go wrong, other than the occasional oddity here and there.

The weather themes of early water reserves, freshness and fine harvest conditions have been quite consistent from winemaker to winemaker. João Brito e Cunha (Quinta d. S. José in Cima Corgo) made comments along the lines of what multiple producers said: "In terms of climate it was a very well balanced year, the winter was rainy, which allowed good underground water reserves to the vines during the summer; it was hot and dry and did not have large heat fluctuations. During the month of September we had nights relatively cool and heat during the day, which was crucial to get a very good phenolic maturation (with lovely and ripe tannins) of the grapes without losing good levels of acidity and freshness."

Francisco Olazabal, Jr. of Vale Meão, all the way up in Douro Superior, summed it up this way: "After a long, cold and rainy winter, spring arrived with the average rainfall for the year fulfilled - about 400 mm. This situation allowed an earlier than normal but fantastic bud break, with a promising yield in view. Up to the end of the vintage we've enjoyed perfect weather, sunny and mild, which allowed us to harvest slowly and to choose the ideal timing for picking the different varieties." Cristiano van Zeller (Vale d. Maria) said that the "harvest ran beautifully, full of sunny days and perfect grape maturity, having started at Vale D. Maria on the 8th of September. The high concentration of sugars and the heat experienced at the last part of the maturation together with the late summer rain was a clear indication of the production of very powerful wines."

Power, I hasten to add, is not what I consider to be the dominant feature here. Van Zeller also concluded: "All 2011 Reds matured into very strongly aromatic and very fruity wines, with an incredible freshness in their finish." Echoing Cunha, Sandra Tavares da Silva and others, Rita Marques

(Conceito) said that the main trait of her high altitude grapes with natural acidity was "their beautiful fresh fruit. You have perfect balance, acidity, tannin is there, but very well involved in the mouthfeel of the wine." Capping off the growing season, said Marques, "was absolutely the perfect harvest."

Vintages are not played out on paper, of course. In the glass, though, they look just as good. Qualitatively, it has to be considered the best since 2007, as indicated earlier in this article, but that is the easy call. They have better balance, more freshness and more consistency than the 2009s. They have more concentration and better structure than either 2008 or 2010. The more interesting call will be whether they are better still. Vintage 2011 will surely attract its share of votes as the best vintage in the modern era (say, roughly, 2000 and up). Lots of high quality wines? Check. An attractive, well balanced style that makes you want actually to drink them? Check. The ability to age? Check. Consistency? Check. I've certainly handed out quite a few good scores and most everyone seems to be in top form. They are impressive.

To be sure, though, not every wine encountered has made me forget everything ever made in Douro over the last 15 years. If you plunged into 2007s, for instance, and now have no money left to splurge here, don't worry, be happy. In the meanwhile, the 2011s have not yet shown us their ceiling. Many of the upper level 2011s, bottled in the summer of 2013 (some as late as September!) and then shipped not too long ago, are still tight and will require time to unwind. Considering how fine 2007 was and how much extra time those wines needed to start showing more of their stuff, it is fair to say that the 2011s will need more time to show us everything that they have, too.

Let's also have a word about 2011 from some noted Southern winemakers. Frankly, many of the comments look pretty much the same. For João Portugal Ramos, down in Estremoz (a sub-region of Alentejo), the winery said to me, regarding their Alentejo property, that they "had unusual rainfall during winter and at beginning of spring" and had to pay close attention to possible mildew issues (a comment echoed by Xito Olazabal). Ultimately, "mild temperatures allowed a slow and gradual ripeness of grapes and at the same time a good phenolic ripeness." They made roughly similar comments concerning Ribatejo at their Falua property (early rain, balanced maturation).

Alain Bramaz, at nearby Zambujeiro, filled in some details for his boutique: "Winter delivered plenty of rain and a mild spring led to a very early bud break. Flowering was around 10 days earlier than average and passed under perfect condition, hence we got a very regular and heavy fruit set. Regular bunches are one of the keys to quality. After flowering we had some unusual rainfalls and very warm weather - we had to be careful not to get peronospora infections (other companies reported damage), but grapes remained healthy. The big fruit set needed a lot of work to reduce to the level needed for quality. All July we did crop thinning. July was hot (35 plus C) and dry. August the same, maturity advanced fast. Harvest started one week earlier than usual on August 17. Aragonez peaked at 15% potential alcohol and needed to be picked. The grapes came in excellent condition; almost no selection work was needed. We could extract on skins up to four weeks with excellent results. From 22 August on we processed Trincadeira and Cabernet. These wines showed very nice while still on maceration and the Cabernet might be the best ever made. 1st to 4th September: heavy rainfalls and cold temperatures interrupted the harvest. Sugar values in the grapes dropped over 1% pot. alcohol. The following week temperatures up to 35C let the sugar levels rise rapidly again to 15% potential alcohol. This helped a great deal to improve phenolic maturity. Cold temperatures speed up the ripening of the phenolic components. Seeds got brown, sugars remained in acceptable levels (not too high). A part of the Touriga was damaged by that rain and had to be sorted out. Touriga is sensitive to bunch rot. Alicante, Petit Verdot did not show any damage and came in perfectly. Overall: A hot year with a very early harvest. Regular fruit quality. Lucky harvest with a rain interruption helped to improve phenolics. Quality is very high, we compare it with the 2009. Wines are full bodied with plenty of extract."

Finally, there are as always stragglers, and wineries with different release dates. I'm still getting 2009s and 2008s, for instance, as new submissions. More 2011s are coming, but there is no point to delaying this first detailed look at an important vintage that we are sure to keep revisiting over the years.

A Note on Drinking Windows:

I think it is worth discussing this briefly so that readers understand what I am thinking regarding drinking windows. Most of these comments have appeared in bits and pieces at other times, but they are worth repeating and putting together in one place where it might be noticed (which is why I am putting it here rather than in a separate article devoted to this issue alone).

Drinking windows, to start out with, are somewhat mystical under the best of circumstances. I would like to get rid of them entirely, replacing them with just "early maturing" and "ageworthy" and "vin de garde." It would make life much simpler because there isn't actually an answer to questions like "when is a wine ready?" that is likely to make everyone happy.

In almost all regions, I tend to be conservative by nature in creating drinking windows. That tendency is more important still with relatively new wines and wineries that have little or no track records. I prefer to take things in stages and reevaluate. But that aside and all other things being equal, there are still many variations that can't be easily factored in - ranging from storage conditions to wildly varying personal tastes on what "ready" means. With issues like that in mind, I lean to the cautious, fully aware that when I re-taste well-stored wines I will likely expand most drinking windows.

My drinking windows, therefore, always have some slush fund to them. When the longevity of many wines, for lack of track record and other things, is in some doubt, I err on the side of consumers being fairly sure of encountering them in a happy place, versus a place that is going to be in some doubt. That's even more important to do with new wineries and new wines, as noted. If you have good storage, you likely have a notable margin of error. So, take note. Act according to your circumstances and tastes.

disclosing, or using any information contained herein. Please inform us of the erroneous delivery by return e-mail to confidential@winebow.com. Thank you for your cooperation.