



Portuguese Assemblage

by Julia Harding, MW & Team JR

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Most of these wines were tasted by the team at various events in London, including the big ViniPortugal tasting in March, where, it seemed to me, the overall quality level was higher than ever before, with the best wines singing out their Portugueseness. I lost count of the number of times I thought, 'This can only come from Portugal'. It is partly to do with the country's rich and valued resource of indigenous varieties, exemplified so thoroughly in the reviews below, but also the trend, not unique to Portugal, to avoid excess – of oak or ripeness – and thereby better communicate the characteristics of specific regions, in terms of climate, topography and soils.

Figures released by ViniPortugal indicate that the total value of wine exports in the 12 months to March 2016 is up 1.5% although volume is down by 1.1%. Between 2011 and 2015, UK consumers have been buying more and, more importantly, better wines (value up 19% and average price up 17%). Value for money is still a key characteristic of so many Portuguese wines even though you won't find that many instances of GV (good value) below. That is not because they are not GV but rather because the prices were not generally provided at these tastings.

2014 Vadio Branco**Score: 16.5/20 Points***80% Sercial (tank), 20% Bical (barrel fermented).*

Citrus – grapefruit and lemon – and fresh pears. Tight and dry and with a fine stony texture, giving just a slight and attractive grip. Wonderful freshness and intensity without weight. Long, too. It is lovely now but I am sure this will gain complexity in bottle. (JH)

2012 Vadio Tinto**Score: 16.5/20 Points***Baga from three different vineyards, fermented and aged separately (old oak). Some old vines, some very young.*

Mid ruby. That distinctively wonderful Baga nose – sweet red fruit, sour cherry freshness. Firm, dry and a little chalky but with a fluent fruit core. (JH)

2006 Vadio Tinto**Score: 17/20 Points***Baga. They hold back a small part of the wine for late release.*

Bricky ruby. Bright with sweet-sour red-fruit aroma. Fine, dry texture, chalky finish and cool, fresh, still red-fruited with greater complexity currently than the 2012 just tasted but amazingly youthful. Sour-fresh finish, long and delicious. (JH)

2015 Herdade do Rocim “Mariana” Branco**Score: 16/20 Points***60% Antão Vaz (in its Vidigueira homeland), 30% Arinto, 10% Alvarinho. Unoaked. TA 6 g/l, pH 3.26, RS 2.2 g/l.*

Intensely perfumed, the aroma itself is intoxicating: ripe citrus, pineapple and floral. Totally seductive and distinctive - amazing that you get all these aromas from fermented grapes! The Arinto provides the acid balance to the Antão Vaz richness. Full in the mouth even at moderate alcohol. Full flavoured for such an aromatic wine and finishes fresh. Brilliant winemaking. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim Amphora Branco

Score: 16.5/20 Points

40% Antão Vaz, 20% Perrum, 20% Rabo de Ovelha, 20% Manteudo. Organic but not certified, old dry-farmed vineyards in Vidigueira. Continental climate, sandy soils. TA 5.7 g/l, pH 3.49, RS 2.9 g/l. Manual harvest into plastic boxes during the last week of September, and sorting done on a sorting table before destemming. The grapes are destemmed but then the stems are included in the vinification in clay amphora - no temperature control and the amphora left outside. Aged 6 months in these amphorae.

I smell this wine and I am deeply grateful that the wine world has such diversity and endless fascination and that I get the chance to experience it. It has lots of spice and an aroma I find hard to place, maybe wild grasses or chamomile, smoky too? On the palate, this is really distinctive - definite but not astringent tannins, just enough acidity and a creamy texture and lots of zesty fruit. A lightly grippy texture and a long fresh finish. Lots of authentic pleasure. No make up, smoky aftertaste. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim Branco

Score: 16.5/20 Points

Antão Vaz, Arinto and Roupeiro. pH 3.17, TA 6.3 g/l, RS 1.7 g/l. Fermented with indigenous yeasts. The lees spend time in 2nd-use barrels and are then reintegrated into the wine, so the amount of oak influence is very small - about 4%.

This has Antão Vaz's ripe tropical notes but also bright and intense citrus freshness from the Arinto. Perfectly balanced between rich, ripe, generous fruit and zesty, crisp acidity. There's added depth from the lees/oak work but it's mostly about the fruit, with apricot and grapefruit on the finish. A fine blend with tangy persistence and hard to think where this could come from other than Portugal. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim "Olho de Mocho" Reserva Branco

Score: 17.5/20 Points

100% Antão Vaz. Barrel fermented and aged (80% 2nd use and 20% new barrels) for 5 months (indigenous yeasts only). TA 6.5 g/l, pH 3.13, RS 1 g/l.

Remarkably high acidity for the region and the variety. Enticing aroma that blends the rich fruit of the variety, with a lees note (mealy and creamy) as well as a slightly smoky mineral quality. The oak is very much in the background though there's a light note of cedar. On the palate, the acidity is high but in balance - works well with this variety, which can be a bit heavy. No heaviness here, just concentration and excellent balance and very direct freshness. Ripe grapefruit on the finish. Moreish and vibrant. Antão Vaz can age interestingly, becoming much more complex, and this should age well with this level of freshness. In fact, I think this will be better after another year in bottle even though you could enjoy it now. (JH)

2015 Herdade do Rocim "Mariana" Rosé

Score: 16/20 Points

60% Touriga Nacional, 40% Aragonez. pH 3.15, RS 2.8 g/l.

Pale apricot colour. Fresh, red fruited with a touch of apricot and lightly floral, and surprisingly full-bodied with such moderate alcohol. Must have a good deal of fruit sweetness here because the RS is negligible and yet this is full in the mouth but still fresh and balanced. Very well judged because I think it would please a broad cross-section of drinkers without being overly sweet or simple. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim "Mariana" Tinto

Score: 16/20 Points

Named after a cloistered Portuguese nun who lived in nearby Beja castle and is famous for her love letters. 40% Touriga Nacional, 30% Aragonez, 20% Alicante Bouschet, 10% Trincadeira.

Deep crimson. Sweetly ripe red fruit, both cherry and red plum, then fruity but not so obviously sweet-fruited on the palate. A good balance of fruit and definite but not dominant tannins, making this a wine you could enjoy now without having to think too much, and it has the generosity of southern Portuguese fruit but no overripeness. A hint of dark chocolate on the finish. I don't know the price but I suspect this would be good value. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim Amphora Tinto

Score: 17/20 Points

Organic fruit (but not certified). Sandy soils. 50% Aragonez, 30% Trincadeira, 10% Moreto, 10% Tinta Grossa. Hand harvested and sorted. Grapes are destemmed but then the stems are included in the vinification in clay amphorae, which are kept outside without temperature control. Three punch-downs a day, aged 6 months in amphora. There's no lid on the amphora, just a layer of olive oil to protect the wine from oxidation. The wine is then drained out of the bottom of the amphora, naturally filtering through the stems and skins. A small amount of SO₂ is added before bottling. Vinho de Talha is an official category in Alentejo for amphora-vinified wines.

Bright mid cherry red. Pure and deeply scented with sweet and sour red cherries and perhaps just a slight smokiness. The texture is really fine and supple and the finish brings together an attractively dry texture with that scent of red fruits. Fresh acidity and beautifully harmonious. I haven't tasted older vintages but the balance is so good that I think it will age well - though it is delicious now so no need to wait. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim Alicante Bouschet

Score: 16.5++/20 Points

15-year-old vineyard in conversion to organics; foot-trodden in a traditional marble open fermenter (lagar); 12 months in 75% 2nd use 300-litre French oak barrels and 25% new barrels. pH 3.43.

Dramatically deeply coloured, as you would expect from this variety. Intense, spicy hedgerow fruit, packed with fruit and riches. Warm and spicy on the palate. More satisfying than refreshing but the savoury, dark dry texture increases the freshness and balances all that lovely spicy fruit. Full-bodied and powerful but still remarkably moreish, even with this level of alcohol. I love the dry, dark finesse on the finish. Very Portuguese, very European. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim Touriga Nacional

Score: 16+/20 Points

15-year-old vineyard in conversion to organics; fermentation in 5,000-litre oak vats; 9 months in 85% 2nd use 300-litre oak barrels and 15% new barrels. pH 3.49.

Very deep crimson. Very slightly reductive (rubbery/smoky) and needing air. I would decant this. Rich and sweet-fruited on the palate, more blueberry than blackcurrant, almost too rich for me. Bursting with fruit and yet the firmness of the tannins gives it shape. Just fresh enough, full and rich in the mouth and just a bit of heat on the finish. A powerful, chewy expression of Touriga that needs time to become more elegant. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim Tinto

Score: 16.5/20 Points

A blend of Touriga Nacional, Aragonez and Alicante Bouschet. In conversion to organic viticulture. RS 2.4 g/l, pH 3.46.

Deep crimson. More dark-fruited than the Mariana blend, more brooding with spice and black olive and yet those floral tones of Touriga Nacional are still present. Firm and chewy and very wholesome and with bright acidity to keep it fresh and lively. A big wine but not brash. Needs food or time to show its best. Has the generosity of the Alentejo but structured to balance. Satisfyingly chewy finish. (JH)

2014 Herdade do Rocim “Olho de Mocho” Reserva Tinto

Score: 17/20 Points

Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional and Tannat. A selection of the best grapes from the vintage is used for this range.

Very deep crimson. Elegant and dark-fruited on the nose. Peppery and refined with some oak sweetness. Big and chewy, replete with dark fruit and a long savoury power, with notes of black olive on the aftertaste. Still very youthful and dense, and lots more to come as it ages. Dry, firm and compact yet with enough freshness to make a whole and fine balance for a long life. Refined texture. (JH)



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