

Amphora Wines at Rocim

2,000 years ago the Romans introduced amphora winemaking to the Alentejo region of Portugal, specifically the small southern wine region of Vidigueira. Winemaking with amphora, or talhas as they are called in Portugal, is rarely commercially viable today. But estates such as Herdade do Rocim are rediscovering this ancient tradition with much success.



At Herdade do Rocim in Alentejo, Sr. Pedro has become a local celebrity in terms of his amphora winemaking. He grew up on the estate, and oversees the vineyards and amphora. Each year, locals gather in the small village of Vila de Frades – just a couple miles down the road from Herdade do Rocim – for the Talha Wine Festival, where for the past 30 years Sr. Pedro has won first or second place in the amphora wine competition. The ancient method has been passed down for three generations at the estate – both his father and his grandfather, who were also born and raised at the estate, made wines in this traditional fashion.

Most wines made with amphora never see a bottle and must be consumed within the year. To drink, you simply dip your jug straight into the amphora and enjoy – no bottles, no corks. It never crossed Sr. Pedro's mind to bottle his own amphora wine until it made

such a great impression on David during a visit to the estate that he decided to give bottling a try. A few years later, Herdade do Rocim became the first Portuguese estate to make traditional, authentic wine from amphora and successfully bottle it for sale.

Sr. Pedro keeps the amphorae outside and above ground, which is different from some other winemakers who keep the pots buried underground. Like the Romans did 2,000 years ago, he lines the insides of the clay pots with beeswax and olive oil made onsite with cobrancosa olives. The grapes that go into the amphora are from the oldest vines on the property – 60 to 80 years old. Due to the age of the vines, the grapes are low to the ground and are covered by a leafy canopy. Therefore, the grapes are slow to ripen and are picked at the end of September. Sr. Pedro only uses traditional, native grapes for his amphora wine. For the white wine, he uses Antão Vaz, Perrum, Rabo de Ovelha

and Manteúdo. For the red wine, he uses Aragonez and Trincadeira. Herdade do Rocim is one of the only estates in the region to grow these varieties. In fact, when Catarina and her father bought the estate, the local people told them to replace the grapes with more popular international varieties. They are glad they decided not to as these varieties are now nearly extinct.

The white and red wine are made exactly the same way. Everything goes inside the amphora – the grapes, the skins and the stems. Fermentation takes about two weeks and the grape juice, stems and skins are stirred three to four times a day. Nothing is added - no inoculations, no sulfur, no corrections. Once alcoholic fermentation is complete, malolactic fermentation takes place. After malolactic fermentation, the skins and the stems sink down to the bottom of the amphora where they lay for six months. The amphora has no lid, so Sr. Pedro puts a layer of olive oil on top of the wine as a natural protectant and to keep the wine from oxidizing. For bottling, the small tap at the bottom of the amphora is opened and the wine trickles through the skins and stems, naturally filtering the wine. Then the wine is taken to the winery, already filtered, and a tiny bit of sulfur is added before going straight into the bottle. Since the wine was left on the skins and stems for both the white and red wine, the tannins naturally preserve the wine in bottle and little sulfur is needed.

The grapes and vinification process are unique, so in turn, the taste of the wine is also unique. It is an extreme representation of the terroir, reflected in both the good and bad years. In the good years, the wines express minerality, freshness and elegance. They are not perfect in terms of winemaking, but there is beauty in its faults that cannot be experienced with any other wine.

HERDADE DO
ROCIM
VINHO BRANCO | WHITE WINE



AMPHORA

DOC
ALLENTEJO