



PORTUGAL WINE STYLES

WHITE WINE - light, refreshing, fruity

Characteristics

The cool, hilly, Vinho Verde which in the north west of Portugal is the main source of a unique style of white wine with low alcohol and high, fresh acidity. Many have a slight prickle of fizz, a remnant of the carbon dioxide of fermentation, or added at bottling time. Vinho Verde may be made from numerous grape varieties, some aromatic, some not, often a selection blended together. It may range from dry or medium-dry.



When to drink & Food pairings

These wines tend to be drunk young. Vinho Verde and other light, fresh wines are ideal in summer. They make refreshing aperitifs, are perfect with salads to balance the acidity of the dressing, good with seafood and fish, and for fatty foods or dishes. Also try with Thai or other South East Asian cuisines.

WHITE WINE - full-bodied

Characteristics

Higher in alcohol and richer in texture, these come from vineyards bathed in copious amount of sun and high summer temperatures. There are soft, rich wines from the Alentejo, intense, mineral whites from the Douro, and full-bodied whites from Trás-os-Montes. Portugal has numerous indigenous grape varieties that are able to keep their acidity in hot climates, and including these in a blend provides balancing freshness for rich white wines.



When to drink & Food pairings

Full-bodied whites may be further enriched by fermentation in oak, which adds more fullness and texture, and/or maturation in oak, which may give richness and gentle oaky flavours, or sometimes dominant oak flavour. The oak-ageing of top-of-range Reserve whites from Dão and Lisboa rounds them out to full-bodied status. These are all wines for richer food and flavours. Wine with oaky flavours can be a good match for smoked foods.



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RED WINE - light-bodied, tangy, fruity

Characteristics

The vineyards along Portugal's windy Atlantic coast make their reds in a light, tangy style, with alcohol typically around 12%. This includes the cool, often rainy Vinho Verde region in the north west. A well-kept secret of Portugal is that around 40% of all Vinho Verde is red. The deep red colour coming from the red flesh and skin of the local Vinhão grapes.



When to drink & Food pairings

Red Vinho Verde goes well with freshly-grilled sardines, and rich or fatty meats, offal and charcuterie that are popular in these parts. It tends to come in a tall, lean bottle, like white Vinho Verde.

RED WINE - rich, round, full-bodied

Characteristics

Alentejo hot summers make ripening easy, and sweet grapes mean rich fruit and lots of body. Alentejo reds are made from a variable blend of grape varieties, including Trincadeira and Aragonez, Alicante Bouschet, Syrah, Touriga Nacional and Cabernet Sauvignon. They may be rich, round and full, or even richer, dense, and oak-aged, with a certain opulence and easy-drinking charm. Red wines from upper parts of Douro and Tejo also are rich, ripe style.



When to drink & Food pairings

Relatively low tannin makes these wines quite easy to pair with food. Game, lamb, beef, pork, charcuterie, plainly cooked meats, or richly sauced meats, all can work well with this style of red wine. Ripe Touriga Nacional is particularly wonderful with beef, as is Aragonez with lamb, especially lamb flavoured with thyme.



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RED WINE - robust

Characteristics

The Douro Valley is the most reliable source for this style of red wine. Serious, big and often firmly tannic in their first few years of life, top Douro reds have their own robust style of elegance, and often complexity of flavours that comes from mixing of grapes, sometimes "vineyard blends" where old vines of mixed varieties are planted together. These are wines age and develop well with their tannins softening, their fruit mellowing. Trás-os-Montes is the wine region to the north of the Douro Valley, also mountainous, growing the same grapes and also making big, robust reds. Another source of firm, robust reds is Bairrada. In good, hot vintages, red Bairrada made from the traditional Baga grape has full body as well as high acid and tannins, maturing to a softer, complex, savoury wine.



When to drink & Food pairings

Robust reds are a fine match for game meats, and offal. The tannins of young robust wines seems softer and easier with meats cooked in stews, especially when red wine is an ingredient. Both Douro, Trás-os-Montes and Bairrada Baga make good matches with certain cheeses; both are, delicious with fresh, curdy goat's cheese.

RED WINE - elegant

Characteristics

Dão has the greatest concentration in Portugal of elegant reds due to high altitude, granite soil, cool climate, and slow ripening. Fine-quality Touriga Nacional is blended with Tinta Roriz, Alfrocheiro, Jaen and other grapes to make intensely-flavoured, perfumed reds with good acidity and lovely balance. The red wines can be elegant, with complex, fruity flavours, good acidity and balanced tannins.



When to drink & Food pairings

These are versatile wines, fine at any time of year, good to drink by themselves, and easy with a range of food, from poultry to red meats to cheese.



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ROSE WINE – fresh, aromatic, fruity

Characteristics

Like white wines, rosés tend to have crisper acidity, lower alcohol and lighter body when grown in cooler places, which means places with maritime influence or high altitude. There's not really a particular geographical place in Portugal that is famous for making rosés. Both Portuguese and foreign red grapes are used for rosé.



When to drink & Food pairings

Lovely, fruity, and fresh alternatives to crisp dry whites, most rosés slip down all too well. Dry, fruity rosés are good with a whole array of light-flavoured food, including vegetable and salad dishes, thanks to their gentle sweetness.

SPARKLING WINE

Characteristics

Sparkling wines need high acidity so they are made in the cooler areas of the country. Bairrada sparkling wine has a fine reputation, made from quick-pressed red Baga, Touriga Nacional or fragrant whites Maria Gomes, Arinto, Bical and Chardonnay. Cool, high-altitude Távora-Varosa makes sparkling wines from the Malvasia Fina, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Vinho Verde, where many wines have just a prickle of fizz, make full sparkling wines from Alvarinho grape.



When to drink & Food pairings

Sparkling wine is refreshing in the heat of summer and cheering in the cold of winter is perfect for fish and seafood. Sparkling wines are an ideal choice for dressed salads as the acidity and slight sweetness matches the dressing as well as the sweetness of the salad and vegetable ingredients. The natural sweetness of vegetable dishes fits well with the sweet edge of sparkling wines.



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PORT WINE

The Port Wine is divided into three categories; White (white grape), Tawny (red grape) and Ruby (red grape). White Port offers a range of colors that can vary from pale white to amber. The Ruby extends from light red, to very dark red, to almost black. The tawny extends from colors like auburn, copper and amber.

PORT - Tawny

Characteristics

Tawnies are amber-coloured to brown, and nutty-dried-fruit-figgy in flavour due to years of slow, controlled oxidation in large wooden barrels or vats. They go by two names, either Colheita (specifying a vintage) or Aged Tawny (with a number of decades declared on the label, from 10 to 40 years). Aged tawny is leaner and has more spirit as the longer decades it declares.



When to drink & Food pairings

Colheitas and Aged Tawnies are best served chilled, summer or winter. They might be an aperitif, or drunk at the end of the meal with walnuts to nibble. 10 or 20-year-old are the best of all ports for Stilton.



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PORT - Ruby

Characteristics

Ruby Ports are redder, firmer, slightly sweeter and fruitier than tawny. You can really taste the sweet ripeness of the hot sun of the Douro Valley in this style of port. Now the spirit used to fortify port is of finer quality, and modern methods in vineyard, cellar and warehouse make vintage port a more balanced, less tannic wine that is drinkable after only a few years, although it will still age and develop complexity. There are numerous more modest categories, like Crusted, Late-Bottled Vintage (LBV), Late Bottled, Reserve, Premium Ruby and Ruby.



When to drink & Food pairings

Ruby is best drunk at cool room temperature, and is good with certain cheeses like cheddar, even strong, unpasteurized Brie in the case of LBV. They are also a good match with bitter chocolate or coffee desserts. The French drink this style of port as an aperitif, the English after the meal.

PORT - White

Characteristics

White ports come in various levels of sweetness. Seco (dry) is actually quite sweet, meio seco (medium dry) pretty sweet, and doce a drink for the seriously sweet of tooth. A new style of port, sweet, fortified and rosé, this is made to drink chilled and neat, or in cocktails.



When to drink & Food pairings

White Ports are drunk as an aperitif, sometimes mixed with tonic, neat on ice, or in cocktails. There are longer-wood-aged versions with a nuttier flavour, also best chilled and served as an aperitif.



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MADEIRA

Characteristics

All Madeira has a nutty, deliberately oxidized, and slightly caramelized quality from wood-ageing under the influence of heat. Madeira ranges in sweetness from just off-dry to seriously sweet. The white grapes used in rising order of sweetness are: Sercial, Terrantez, Verdelho, Boal and Malvasia. The red variety, Tinta Negra, is made into all the sweetness levels by the same heating/oxidative methods. It is still possible to buy extraordinary bottles of intensely-flavoured, really complex old wines made from the old white varieties.



When to drink & Food pairings

Blue cheese is often a good partner: Boal with Roquefort, or Boal or Verdelho with Stilton. Old Boal with the caramelly-cooked Scandinavian cheese Gjetost is one of the world's most perfect food and wine pairings. Most Madeira is drunk to round off a meal, with nuts and dried fruits, or just by itself.

MOSCATEL

Characteristics

Moscatel (Muscat) grapes are turned into sweet, fortified wine in the Douro and the Peninsula de Setúbal region. Most fortified Moscatel is sold young and fruity, but with age it develops nuttier, figgy flavours that go brilliantly with pudding and mince pies, or at the end of the meal with nuts and preserved fruits. Sweet, fortified Setúbal wines are labeled simply Setúbal if they contain less than 85% of Moscatel, Moscatel de Setúbal or Moscatel Roxo (a rare and slightly different grape) if they have more.



When to drink & Food pairings

Sweet, fortified Moscatel's flavours of orange, lemon, flowers and grapes are brilliant matches for many desserts and puddings – sweet dishes flavoured with citrus fruits, coffee, chocolate, hazelnut, almond, rice pudding, crème brûlée, crème caramel and super-sweet egg-and sugar concoctions the Portuguese make to perfection. Sweet, fortified Moscatel is also best choice for Pavlova, and other meringue-based desserts.



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PICO & BISCOITOS

Characteristics

The traditional fortified wines of the Azores are in short supply these days and mostly drunk on the spot, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Not all are fortified - if the grapes naturally reach the minimum potential alcohol of 16% the wines may be left unfortified. They are made from Verdelho, Arinto and Terrantez, given a long, slow oxidative maturation in wood. Like Madeira, Pico and Biscoitos have marked, tangy acidity, and concentrated, nutty flavours. They may be dry, medium or sweet.



When to drink & Food pairings

Pico and Biscoitos might drink them chilled as an aperitif, with cheese, or with nuts and other nibbles at the end of a meal.