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Fortified, Aromatised and Quinine Wines

Aims and learning outcomes

This chapter introduces the fortified (liqueur), aromatised and quinine wines of the world, focusing on the principle regions, production techniques and individual classification which are used to produce these unique wines to the highest standards. On its completion, the learner should be able to:

- Explain the origins, constituents and styles of fortified (liqueur), aromatised and quinine wines.
- Define the unique characteristics, manufacturing processes, suggested service and storage methods of fortified (liqueur), aromatised and quinine wines.

5.1 Fortified wine: Port

Fortified (liqueur) wines are still wines to which grape brandy has been added to increase the alcoholic strength. This also stops fermentation midway and the wine tends to retain some of the natural sweetness of the grapes. The eventual alcoholic strength of fortified wines ranges from 16 to 21% alcohol by volume.

Portugal, the home of port

Port wine (also known as *Vinho do Porto*) is a sweet Portuguese fortified wine from the Douro Valley in the northern provinces of Portugal. It is often served as a dessert wine. Under European Union guidelines (and in Canada), only the product from Portugal may be labelled as port. In the United States, Federal law mandates that the Portuguese-made product be labelled Porto. Port is produced from grapes grown and processed in the Douro region; the wine produced is then fortified with the addition of distilled grape spirits in order to boost the alcohol content. The wine is then stored and aged, in barrels in cellars in the town of

Vila Nova de Gaia, before being bottled. The Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e Porto (IVDP or Port and Douro Wine Institute) regulates the port industry in Portugal.



Figure 5.1: IVDP label, seal of approval (On Reserve.com).

Location

Port comes only from vineyards the upper Douro valley in the north of Portugal, centred on the town of Peso da Regua. The vineyards are carved from a titanic canyon through the layered rock upwards. The port wine brought down river from the 85,000 vineyards to Vila Nova de Gaia, and must by Portuguese law be stored here for its maturation. rating for Ports start at A to F, not all grapes qualify to be made into port; a quota is established each year (using the *beneficio* system).

Port prime areas:

- Baixo Corgo, which is the lower valley and produces mainly the wood ports and inexpensive ruby and tawny ports
- Cima Corgo, the upper valley, produces the ruby, tawny, white and Late Bottled Vintage ports. It is centred around Pinhao, and is the prime port area where many of the famous port houses have their picturesque quintas (estates, farms) clinging on to almost vertical slopes dropping down to the river.

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Port production

The grapes

Grown in the upper Douro, the most improbable vineyards in the World:

Soil

Schist (slate type soil) is the best, when planting the vines because this soil is so hard (as mentioned) explosives was used to break up the top layer of soil.

Grapes varieties

Strictly regulated by the Instituto do Vinho do Porto, nine varieties are permitted to be planted but only six are commonly used in the best vintage Ports. The main ones are Tinta Barroca, Tinta Cão, Tinta Roriz (Tempranillo), Touriga Francesa, and Touriga Nacional. White ports are produced the same way as red ports, except that they use white grapes—Esgana-Cão, Folgasão, Malvasia, Rabigato, Verdelho, and Viosinho.

Method of picking

Picked mainly by *barracheiros* who carry the 75 kilo loads used in the smaller, up-country quintas, in square woven cane baskets on their shoulders, down the slopes to the trucks on the roads.

Crushing

- by foot: the ritual dance method, stamping with hob nail boots. The grapes are pressed to traditional song and dance in open *lagares* (large stone troughs).
- by mechanical crusher: mechanical crushing is the alternative, and this is by way of a vertical crusher peculiar to the Douro.

Fermenting and pressing

Two types of fermentation vat are used:

- *Lagare*: the traditional fermentation vat is the same granite or slate lagare in which the grapes are crushed. The must is broken up by men using wooden implements.
- **Autovinifier**: the port autovinifier is a closed system whereby the must is forced up and over the cap due to the pressure created by carbon dioxide build up during fermentation. As it important to extract the maximum colour from the fermenting must as quickly as possible.

Blending, maturing and transport

Assessment, blending and classification: the process of tasting commences in the Douro immediately after fermentation is finished, and continues in Vila Nova de Gaia after the wines arrive there the following March. At this point the general style of the wine will be shaped, although its precise destiny may take years to determine.

- **Wood-aging and bottling**: Vintage or vintage style port will be bottled young – between 18 months and 6 years, then left to mature in bottle.
- **Stabilization**: cold stabilization of young wines destined for any of the bottle-aged categories is extremely important as it removes the excess tartrate crystals, which would otherwise form during maturation. The wine is cooled to –10 degrees.
- **Clarification**: wood aged ports may be lightly fined before being bottled and gelatine is the most commonly used fining agent.

The port lodges: Vila Nova de Gaia

Port is taken to Vila Nova de Gaia, the port suburb of Oporto. The shipper's warehouses there are known as *lodges*. They have much in common with the sherry bodegas. In the lodges the port is kept in *pipes*, 533 litre barrels, for anything from 2 to 50 years. In perhaps three years out of ten conditions are near perfect for port making. The best wine of these years needs no blending; nothing can be done to improve it except wait.