

The Many Faces of Touriga Nacional

Presented by Evan Goldstein MS –
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The always ebullient Evan Goldstein led an entertaining semi-blind tasting of Portuguese red wines based entirely, or in part, on Touriga Nacional. I am inclined to accept Evan's view that this grape variety, for long a core constituent of the finest Vintage Ports, should be classed with the noble red grapes of the world. The evidence is mounting as unfortified table wines – principally but not exclusively from the Douro – confirm the variety's stature. Many of the still-new iterations, clearly among the very best wines of Portugal, do not yet have a substantial track record. Ultimately, the decision as to whether Touriga Nacional should join the illustrious company of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah will depend upon the evolution of the wines in bottle, particularly the mono-varietal examples: greatness hinges on the capacity to develop and improve over the long term. Consider Vintage Port, however, to get a sense of the likely outcome. In terms of these wines, I found Touriga Nacional successful as a stand-alone type and as a component in a blend.

The wines are presented here in the order of the answer sheet.

Burmester Touriga Nacional 2011, Douro ****

Moderately dense dark purple red. Warm, jammy aroma with notable richness and oak imprint. The palate similarly displays ripeness of fruit, viscosity and flattering oak. Nearly full-bodied, this sensual wine has a lingering soft feel and finishes with ripe acidity and fine-grained tannins. 100% TN matured one year in new 225-liter French barriques. 13.5%.

Herdade dos Grous Reserva 2010, Alentejo ****

Moderately dense dark purple red. Very fine floral aromatics expressing dark cherry and violets of moderate intensity together with complementary oak. The youthful palate of this highly successful blend conveys expressive aromatic highlights and conceals its alcohol content. There is budding complexity in the clean, well-defined finish. 20% TN, 50% Alicante Bouschet & 30% Syrah. Matured one year in new French barriques. 14.5%.

Pedra Cancela Touriga Nacional 2012, Dão *(*+)**

Dense dark purple. Deep, concentrated and very youthful nose of dark fruits and berries with a marked overlay of French oak. The taste is young and undeveloped, concentrated and full-bodied. The flavor impression is of layered dark fruit and oak. The finish is balanced and very youthful, with an integrated structure, and shows considerable reserve. This wine needs keeping to reveal its full qualities, and it has the potential to develop until 2025 and longer. 100% TN macerated in a lagar and aged for 6 months in French oak. 14.5%.

Prats & Symington Chryseia 2009, Douro ****

Moderately dense plus dark purple red. An off note at first, then ripe dark red fruit along with a warm generosity. The palate follows, with evident fruit maturity and texture. This ample wine delivers a mouth-coating sensation and a ripe, well-integrated structure and concealed, skillfully handled oak. There is a final touch of dry tannin at the conclusion. Still youthful, will continue to develop for the medium term. 70% TN, 30% Touriga Franca. Matured 13 months in all-new 400-liter French casks. 14.4%.

Quinta de Cabriz Reserva 2011, Dão ****

Moderately dense dark red purple. Very clean, fragrant and concentrated nose of attractive dark berries with a peppery accent. The wine's taste is youthful, fresh and direct, muted at first. Medium plus in weight, the wine opens slowly to reveal a core of dark fruit and a defining backbone of acidity. Balanced and subtly lasting finish. Unspecified percentages of TN, Alfrocheiro and Tinta Roriz aged 9 months in French oak. 13.5%.

Quinta de Chocapalha "CH" 2012, Lisboa **(+)**

Moderately dense dark purple red. Very youthful, warm and lifted aroma delivering blackberry and boysenberry jam and a hint of licorice along with well-married oak. In the mouth, the dominant impression is of lovely dark fruit. The wine is intense, full-bodied, and boasts a creamy undertone. The fruit is balanced by a finely calibrated structure of acidity and hidden tannin. Young yet accessible, but should also keep well. The lengthy wood contact has been absorbed by the wine. 100% TN fermented in a granite lagar and aged in French barriques for 24 months. 14.5%.

Quinta da Pellada 2013, Dão *(*)**

Moderately dense dark purple with clear purple rim. Focused, intense, high-toned aromatics characterized by beautifully expressive dark berries and fruits. The wine displays a young, clean taste with noteworthy equilibrium and a sense of transparency. The aftertaste is undeveloped and lacks the same intensity. Delicately inflected, ending with a touch of youthful grip. 30% TN, 35% Alfrocheiro, 35% Tinto Roriz. Fermented in steel lagares, aged for 5 months in barrel. 13%.

Quinta do Vallado Touriga Nacional 2008, Douro *(+)**

Dense dark red purple. Concentrated to the nose with controlled richness and mature dark fruits and berries, together with well-judged oak. In the mouth, this full-bodied wine shows fruit maturity, flesh and texture. This is a very attractive wine, but there is a final note of bitter tannin (to which I am sensitive) which may be resolved with more time in bottle. 100% TN matured for 16 months in half-new barriques.