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## For The Love Of Port

January 2006

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Dear friends of Port wine,



Welcome back my friends. 2006 is a very special year in the history of Port wine. After all, it is the 250th anniversary of the demarcation of the Port wine region (1756). The Alto Douro was one of the very earliest wine areas in the world to have its borders clearly delineated. In fact, it came nearly a century before the Bordeaux region was geographically defined in 1855. There will be lots of celebrations in Portugal this year and FTLOP can be counted on to bring you reports of some Ports enjoyed during tastings there; as well as interesting articles on how and why the Douro River Valley was initially demarcated, and more.

The New Year brings a change in the format of FOR THE LOVE OF PORT. Now in its third year, the FTLOP newsletter will be published on a monthly basis. In up-coming months, the length of the newsletter will be slightly reduced to ensure that deadlines will be met. Changes are still in the works as to which features will stay and which may go. Your feedback is always appreciated and from my ever-loaded mailbox, I know that the recipients of FTLOP are not shy about sharing. Thank you!

The [www.fortheloveofport.com](http://www.fortheloveofport.com) website is gaining in popularity and has been accessed by members and inquiring minds from 50+ countries. The website's user friendly [FTLOP FORUM](#) has become the fastest growing interactive community for lovers of Port, Madeira and Douro wines, in the world. Prior to its six month anniversary on January 29th, there were already more than 260 members and 4,000 individual posts. We hope that more of the newsletter recipients will show their support, by registering at the Forum link above and sharing in our discussions.

This month's issue will be a fun read that includes all of the usual features. Controversy can be good and you'll find a thorough description of my step-by-step approach to removing sediment and properly aerating bottle-aged Port. It certainly is not the traditional approach but only you can decide if this is going to work for you. Lastly, the highlight of this issue is the article: Tour of Duty, which provides you with the recounting of our first group's experience joining Mario and me to discover Oporto/Gaia & the Douro. You'll want to print this out as there are pages of great tasting notes on some very intriguing wines. Look for Part 2 within the next ten days. Enjoy!

Thanks for your continued support!

Roy

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### THIS MONTH'S NEWSLETTER CONTENTS:

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- **Tasting Note:** Porto Rocha "The Glorious 50<sup>th</sup>" Anniversary Port
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THE BRIDGE OVER THE RIVER DOURO ©

by ROY HERSH 10-25-05

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## Decanting Vintage Port: The "Hersh Method"

by Roy Hersh - [www.fortheloveofport.com](http://www.fortheloveofport.com) © copyright January 2006

Much has been written about decanting bottles of Port, yet it all seems so complicated and ritualistic. Various traditional decanting regimens have been employed for hundreds of years, with all sorts of pomp and circumstance. We will explore some of these time-honored methods and understand the benefits of decanting bottles of Port, especially Vintage Port and the reasons for doing so. Just when it all begins to make sense, I'll toss tradition aside and describe a very simple and straightforward process known as the "Hersh method" which I use 100% of the time for decanting bottled-aged Port and more specifically Vintage Port.

A large percentage of all Port-related inquiries I receive request information on the proper decanting process and insight into the length of time Vintage Port should sit in decanter. Although there are many sources of information about decanting Port, most lack detailed information and don't spend enough time explaining why decanting improves the drinking experience. Mine is a slightly contrarian view to the need for complicated or time-consuming customs.

Let's explore for a moment, the rationale behind decanting Port in the first place. Why decant a Vintage Port when a Tawny Port can be easily opened and poured without breaking a sweat? Some have even asked if they could drink a Vintage Port without bothering to decant at all.

Decanting is necessary with Port wines that age in bottle versus those that age in wooden casks. Bottle-aged Ports include Crusted Port, Traditional or Unfiltered LBV Port (Late Bottled Vintage) and of course, Vintage Port (which I will occasionally refer to as VP).

The aforementioned categories of Port are not filtered before bottling (VP is not "fined" either) and therefore, age in the bottle. The "crust" or sediment (a.k.a. "deposit" or "dregs") that forms inside of the bottle is nothing more than the dead yeast cells and in the case of Vintage Port -- particulate matter from grape skins, seeds and stems. They are not in any way harmful but neither are they pleasant to drink. Wood aged Ports such as Tawny Port (10, 20, 30 and 40 years old) have their sediment filtered out before bottling and don't age further. One type of wood-aged Port known as Colheita (a vintage dated Tawny) may in some cases, contain sediment and continue improving with age in the bottle.



You will never forget the first time you experience drinking a glass of Port that has not been properly decanted. Port consumed without first removing the sediment would be akin to drinking a Starbucks cup of coffee without removing the grounds. But there is more to decanting than just the removal of sediment, as necessary as that procedure is. The other reason for decanting a Vintage Port is to provide it the time to “flesh out” by allowing it to come in contact with oxygen. A great VP may age well for 20 -100 years and on rare occasions even longer. When the bottle is opened, these VPs need time to blossom and aerate.

## TRADITION, TRADITION

So what is necessary in preparation for decanting a bottle-aged Port? The conventional wisdom has always been to stand up the bottle of Port for a day or three, which allows the sediment to fall to the bottom of the bottle. The pleasure begins with the process of removing the cork from the bottle. Some people like to have fun and try their skill at removing corks from ancient bottles of VP in one piece. Even those who are very experienced with older Ports break corks before extracting them from the bottle neck. There are all types of cork screws, Ah-so extractors, Screw Pulls, Lever Pulls and even the infamous Port tong. However, it pays to experiment with a number of these tools to find out which one works best for you. Do not get frustrated when you find that Port corks crumble or break inside the bottle neck. Using a Port tong takes practice and it's an easy skill once mastered.

Basically you take the device (pictured to the right) and heat it until white hot and then it is applied to the bottle neck below the cork. An ice cube, cold wet towel or even a wet feather may be used to “crack” the bottle by shocking the glass with cold along the hot seam. This is mostly done for show and is a fun way to impress onlookers, but does require a bit of practice to become proficient. It is great to try this on a magnum of Vintage Port!



Medieval looking, this is a Port tong

Now that the cork has been extracted, it is time to remove the sediment from the bottle. In the Port Lodges of Vila Nova de Gaia where the bottling and subsequent storage takes place, a white “splash” mark was painted below where the label would appear. This is not done anywhere else in the wine world and actually is not even seen as much (with VP) as was the case in the past. This mark shows the cellar master or consumer which side of the bottle should face up when stored horizontally to keep the cork moist. It allows for the sediment to settle onto the lower side and form a crust. That is why Port lovers have always stood up their bottles to get the sediment to slide down the side of the bottle before they start to decant.



Decanting cradle with candle

We are finally ready to follow the traditional path to decanting a bottle-aged Port to remove the sediment. First we need to have a clean decanter and I can't stress enough the importance of ensuring that there is no soap residue or musty smell in the decanter. I always give a quick rinse with warm water, followed by cold water and do my best to shake out all the excess beads of water. Some people feel the need to then rinse the decanter with a cheap ruby Port to “season” the decanter. Make sure you are in a room with good lighting, so you can see the sediment. The old ways die hard and I still come across Port enthusiasts who use the “candling” method by holding a candle beneath the bottle neck, since the old bottles were made of transparent green, brown or charcoal colored glass. It was then possible to see into the bottle neck when the sediment was about to breach. Others prefer a flashlight and one serious wine geek friend of mine does utilize an antique decanting cradle, replete with a crank handle, as pictured here. Personally, I don't use such “devices” but we're still examining the traditional methods at this point.

In reality, all that is required is a steady hand and a clean decanter with adequate lighting and although not as impressive to watch, it works. The trick is pouring by hand into a decanter in one steady stream to prevent the “wave effect” disturbing the dregs while pouring. Stop pouring when the sediment reaches the bottle's neck. Some folks prefer to use a sterling or silver plated Port funnel, but I've also seen muslin, a clean pair of stockings (no joke!) or unbleached coffee filters to remove the sediment. If you have a steady hand and practice a few times, you'll be able to extract the majority of the liquid without the fine sediment winding up in the decanter. There is nothing as satisfying as pouring a crystal clear glass of mature Vintage Port from a decanter, except actually drinking it.

At a Wine Spectator sponsored Port tasting I attended a decade ago, articulate Port expert James Suckling provided parameters for decanting Port. He mentioned that a Vintage Port that was less than twenty years old should be decanted two

or more hours prior to consumption, with VPs ten years old or less for three to four hours. He cautioned that older bottles are trickier and up to forty years of age should just receive an hour of air time and anything older should be opened and decanted just prior to being served. Richard Mayson, an astute British Port expert, author of many books on Port and a journalist for Decanter Magazine, espouses decanting young Vintage Ports for two or three hours. Ask five Port experts and you'll get a variety of opinions. It is now time to break with tradition and discover the philosophy and procedures for incorporating the "**Hersh Method**" of extended decanting, designed for bottle-aged and more specifically, VP.

Let's back up a few steps. Having opened well over 1,500 bottles of Port (the vast majority of which were Vintage Ports) over the past 20+ years, I can say that less is more. I may occasionally stand up bottles of Port, but don't find it necessary anymore. Before getting started, I gather a Port funnel, clean decanter and unbleached cheesecloth. Since the cheesecloth is food grade and used by chefs around the world to strain freshly made stock as well as incorporating things like a bouquet garni (to flavor a soup, stew or broth). So, nothing negative is added from an aromatic or flavor standpoint.



Some of the benefits of using unbleached cheesecloth as a sediment filter are:

- You can choose a Port on a moments notice, taking decanting time into consideration.
- Standing wine up the day before becomes a moot point and allows for spontaneity.
- You gain at least an ounce or two out of every bottle of Port, sometimes more.
- You can do this in a low light situation and don't need a candle or flashlight either.
- Virtually no discernible sediment will wind up in your wine and small fragments of broken cork will also be captured this way.
- It is a sanitary and disposable product that also happens to be very inexpensive.

I suggest folding the cheesecloth in half so you have 2 layers (double again for 4 layers, with older VPs that tend to have much finer sediment) and insert it inside a Port funnel. You can then pour the entire bottle through the cheesecloth and funnel this way in a very short amount of time. You no longer have to pay attention to when the sediment starts coming out and even a Port lover without a steady hand can manage this feat. In fact you want to pour every possible drop into the cheesecloth supported by the Port funnel, which has a fine mesh screen as a back up. IF you're in a real rush, you can always double decant right back into the bottle (after washing it thoroughly) to take to a wine tasting or along with you to a restaurant. Just pour into a decanter when you get there. Simple as can be? You betcha!

How many of you are thinking to yourself, "is he out of his mind"? Well the best is yet to come. I have practiced what I like to call, "extended decanting" for Colheita and Garrafeira Ports, bottle-aged Ports and especially VPs. It seems that I was one of the very first, to go against the wisdom of those who used one to four hours as their rule of thumb for decanting Vintage Ports. What I can guarantee is that extended decanting of Vintage Port normally provides more drinking satisfaction than shorter periods of aeration. Opponents of my point of view, point out that by extending the time a Port sees in the decanter is akin to artificially aging the wine, softening the tannins and changing the way it performs. I don't disagree, if they are "over-decanted".

I began experimentation with this "method" in the late 1980s after meeting Fonseca's Bruce Guimaraens and knew I was on the right path. He instilled in me the belief that extended decanting offered many benefits to Vintage Port consumption and told me that he normally opened bottles in the morning to be consumed after dinner. I got busy early and often, performing literally hundreds of trials while undertaking lots of note taking. I began sharing the results with anyone that would listen. Today there are lots of people who have been converted to "extended decanting times" for Port and share similar thoughts as to the beneficial results.

### **Not all Ports react the same, but here are some specific improvements that can be achieved by extending the decanting time of Vintage Ports:**

- Darker color:** like blood that oxygenates, the longer VP sits in a decanter the darker it gets.
- Density:** a rare example of when gaining weight is a good thing, here it happens in a few hours.
- Mouth feel:** Robert Parker likes to use the word "unctuous" and it applies to well-decanted VP.
- Softener:** a.k.a. how to tame a tannic tiger. The polymerization of tannins occurs in decanter.
- Aromatics:** the profile of Port significantly improves as the wine has an opportunity to bloom.
- Integration:** nuances of oak and spirit take time to meld with fruit and do so in the decanter.
- Flavors:** become accentuated and more complex. Cask samples or young VPs can be enjoyed.
- Aftertaste:** the length of the finish can be elongated (not always) in most young & mature VPs.

One of the most enjoyable facets of extended decanting is experiencing the metamorphosis of the Port as it evolves in the decanter. I take some small sips along the way and try to perceive the changes mentioned in the dynamics above and write down my observations. If I "plan" to let the Port decant for 10 hours and sense that it is ready at 6 hours instead, then I pour it back into the original bottle (rinsed out), re-cork it and then pour from the bottle when it is time to be served.

As to long decanting times, I want to be clear, for the record: **I don't believe in decanting Ports for more than 12 hours, except for very specific evaluation purposes.** I can count the examples on one hand where I have exceeded that limit. Cask samples and current vintage Ports aside, 12 hours in decanter is plenty as a maximum threshold. Conversely, there are Vintage Ports that I will only have in decanter for 1-2 hours too. So my recommended decanting "window" is between 1-12 hours for VPs (primarily) depending on vintage and Producer. Extended decanting of Port and especially VP is a good thing. But going too far, say 24 hours of decanting time, in my opinion, serves only to strip the Port of its true beauty while dumbing down the tannins and negating too much of the structural components of the wine. Some adhere to that practice for the sake of having something softer and (arguably) better in terms of aromatic and flavor profiles. I prefer to allow the freshness and natural components of a Port to be enhanced by decanting, not to alter its entire character.

That said, a number of factors go into deciding how long a Vintage Port should be decanted, and usually at this point in my life, experience with specific vintages and producers is my guide. Don't go by the age of the Port wine, but pay strict attention to the date of bottling. An LBV or Colheita that was bottled recently will have had little time to deposit a crust and therefore, don't need to be decanted at all. Listed below you'll find a **loose rule of thumb** that I use for Vintage Ports:

<b>7 years or less:</b>	<b>*10-12 hours of decanting time</b>
<b>8 -15 years old:</b>	<b>*8-10 hours of decanting time</b>
<b>16-25 years old:</b>	<b>*6-8 hours of decanting time</b>
<b>26-35 years old:</b>	<b>*4-6 hours of decanting time</b>
<b>36-45 years old:</b>	<b>*3-5 hours of decanting time</b>
<b>46-60 years old:</b>	<b>*2-3 hours of decanting time</b>
<b>60 years old:</b>	<b>*1-3 hours of decanting time</b>

\*Please note that the above times are generalizations and specifics of vintage and producer may often cause the above to vary. The above decanting times are meant as a guideline and not as an absolute range. For example, I'd decant a 1985 Graham's and a 1983 Warre's for 8 hours and 5 hours, respectively. A 1970 Fonseca or Niepoort, I would decant for 6-8 hours, while a Taylor 1945 for approximately five hours. Your mileage may vary.



A PERFECT SETTING © by ROY HERSH 10-24-05

### Roy's Tasting Note: Porto Rocha's New Take on Tawny

**Porto Rocha "The Glorious 50th" Anniversary Port** - The blend contains Colheitas from 1937, 1957, plus 30 Year and 10 Year Old Tawnies. Ultimately, this is a Tawny which exhibits a maple syrup-burnt orange appearance that fades to a yellow edge; while providing vibrant aromas of dates, mahogany, toasted almonds and golden raisins that play off of one another. Light-medium bodied, seductively smooth with a harmonious, elegant presence on the palate that is dry in style with well defined acidity, a good dose of glycerin and concentration. This Tawny Port delivers a complex core of flavor with pralines, melted toffee, citrus peel and a lip-smacking, persistent aftertaste which is as welcome as a warm embrace. It is a liquid tribute to those looking for the perfect celebratory drink whether for their 50th birthday or 50th anniversary. This Rocha will hold for a few weeks once opened.

93 points

**NOTE: The Glorious 50th is only available in the USA.**

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## ROY'S PORT WEBSITE RECOMMENDATION

**This is a monthly feature in which a website is selected that is related to Port and sometimes Madeira.**

Porto Solene has been around for a little over a year now. I am glad to see that this new venture has turned out to be a success. There have been a few other departures from the traditional look and feel of Port bottlings in the past five years or so. Quinta do Noval's "Raven" was followed by Warre's "Otima" 10 and 20 year old Tawny Ports, both of which came in unique packages with 500 ml bottles. Next up was Quinta do Portal with their LBV, Tawnies and excellent Vintage Ports, in very attractive non-traditional bottles. With an ever-aging clientele base, the Port trade is faced with the challenge of

attracting new and younger consumers to try their product.



PORTO SOLENE has boldly gone where no Port producer has gone before, with stunning graphic designs in uniquely shaped bottles. Their avant-garde look just might work in appealing to the young hipsters as the shape of the bottle and label design is trendy, but with a touch of class. Both the Ruby Special Reserve and Tawny Special Reserve come boxed individually or by the pair, in 500 ml bottles. Next month, these two wines will reappear in FTLOP as the co-Tasting Notes for February. For now, you'll have to settle for the cool website which is worth a look <http://www.portosolene.com/>

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

### Tour of Duty: Leading Our Way to Oporto/Gaia & The Douro

by Roy Hersh - [www.fortheloveofport.com](http://www.fortheloveofport.com) © copyright January 2006

Two years later, I finally returned to the “place of my roots” and two weeks in Portugal was exactly the tonic my spirit needed. Unlike past trips to the wine lands of Port, this would be very different. It was my first opportunity to guide a small group, along with my friend and travel business partner, Mario Rui Ferreira. It was easy to be successful, as we only had to allow our guests to experience the natural magic along the various parts of the Douro River and of course, try a few samples of Port nectar along the way.

As soon as I stepped off the plane in Oporto, I felt a sense of connectedness, as if I belonged here. After quickly unpacking, I decided to fight the overwhelming desire to sleep and instead walked along the “cais” (waterfront) of the Ribeira district, with its majestic views of the Port Lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia, just across the Douro. I roamed looking for a restaurant where I could feel comfortable and unhurried, while dining alone. Looking in the window of Presuntisco, (located in Oporto at the Rua Cais da Ribeira, 9. I knew I had found the “right” place to dine.

The restaurant staff made me feel right at home. Small at six tables and twenty eight seats, this eatery is fairly new, although their stone walls originated from an old medieval fortress that once stood there 600 years ago. The owner, Joaquim Granja, who hails from the town of the same name, exudes old world charm. He suavely and genuinely greeted both tourists and regulars alike and this is the type of restaurant where you can soak in the ambience while enjoying the diversity of regional specialties and a finely tuned wine list.



**PRESUNTISCO©**

by ROY HERSH 10-24-05

Along came some generous appetizers from the kitchen. Dates that had been wrapped in ham and gently baked, and a quiche-like dish that is much more delicate, with delicious sausage and egg baked together. I began my vinous exploration with a glass of **Porto Dalva White Port**. *It showed a nose of toasted almonds, baked apple and offered up a medium body and a hint of sweetness that finished nice and dry. Lightly chilled this was a great way to start the evening. 88 points (10/21/05)*

Next I ordered a bowl of Caldo Verde, a rustic potato and cabbage soup here in Portugal and especially up North. Here it was served "cooked to order" and steeping hot with a delicious thick slice of Chaurisico sausage and excellent bread baked from scratch. No seasoning is needed as the kitchen nailed it, and it was as good as any version of this soup that I've ever had. As an accompaniment, I had a glass of **2004 Arca Nova Vinho Verde**. *With its light effervescence, Granny Smith apple note and Bosc pear flavor. all supported by bracing acidity, yet in a nice rounded package. Not as green as most Vinho Verdes I have had, this was delicious and paired perfectly with my soup. 89 points (10/21/05)*

The main course arrived, baked cod with roasted fingerling potatoes along with string beans and carrots that were sautéed in a garlic butter sauce. The accouterments were all a pleasant addition but the Cod here was truly the centerpiece. It is not often that I get excited by Bacalhau. It is one of the typical regional staples and in the next week I would have this fish nearly ten more times, each cooked in different style. But this took first prize in my book. The cod is the specialty of the house and who can resist that? Sautéed onions were atop the enormous and thick center cut fillet, adorned with bread crumbs then baked until the top became encrusted, which offered a great crunchy texture juxtaposed to the moist and tender fish. Mr. Granja, sensing I enjoyed wine, suggested a glass of **2001 Cabeça do Pote Vinho Tinto (Douro red) – by S. Jaoa Pesqueira**. *It was medium ruby in color but light in style. This red was a gentle blend of Touriga Nacional and Tinta Roriz, which made for a surprisingly delicate cuvee, with earthy and generous red berry fruit reminiscent of a Pinot Noir in style, but not flavor. Uniquely Douro flavors were soft, very approachable and made for a pleasant drink with the delicious cod. 87 points (10/21/05)*

I could not wait any longer. It was time for Serra de Estrella cheese, my favorite of all Portuguese cheese and something I have craved since my last visit two years ago. It is next to impossible to find in Seattle and costs \$40 per pound when it is available. Goopy and orgasmic, this molten cheese makes the finest French Brie seem like eating pointless calories. Served with black currant and walnuts as a garnish, this is made to be consumed with excellent dessert wine. **Presuntisco** has a very nice dessert wine list that specializes in the Ports of Dalva, which in the USA is known as Presidential Port and is made by the parent company, C. da Silva.

I decided to try a nice pair. First, the **C. da Silva 40 year old Tawny** – *orange/amber in color with a nutty almond note, a touch of orange peel and exotic spices, which finished like a dry but fruit-filled Amontillado Sherry. Finely balanced and although there was a touch of alcohol on the nose, it did not prevail on the palate. This was a very tasty well-tuned 40 year*

old Tawny that is a great example of this genre. **93 points** (10/21/05)

And now it was time for something completely different. This really jumped off the page of the wine list. I found out that **Presuntisco** was actually part of the Dalva Port operation and their Lodge was located upstairs in an adjacent building. So for the grand finale, I decided to try the **1952 Porto Dalva White Colheita Port** - *I will admit that I didn't even know that White Colheita Port existed, so I was most fortunate to have this 53 year old as my first experience. It was a very dark amber color, more brown and initially was reminiscent of a Verdelho styled Madeira. Nice caramel and pekoe tea flavors gave way to an expansive multi-faceted finish laced with toffee.* **94 points** (10/21/05)

After my last glass, Mr. Granja showed me around the Dalva Lodge. Upstairs was a fabulous kitchen and beautifully appointed private dining room which seats thirty guests and is available to groups who book ahead. It offers a dynamic view of the Douro River, the famous bridge Ponte Dom Luis and the Port Lodges of Vila Nova de Gaia. Additionally, they stock 500 wines, many great Douro red offerings as well as their deep lineup of old and new Dalva Ports.



Gustavo Rodolfo Devesas from Vinologia

The next day I discovered a fantastic Port wine bar **Vinologia, La Maison des Porto**, (located on Rua Sao Joao no 46, Oporto) which is a very small but ultimately impressive bar of the Porto kind. If this was near my home, I'd be broke and homeless. Although it is a "bar" they consider themselves as a real "Port Wine School" offering more than 200 different bottlings of Port, with the best selection of Port by-the-glass in Oporto. Gustavo Duhard, the manager and son of the proprietor pointed out that Vinologia is a truly international place, and showed me the numerous signed guest books they've kept since their opening. The Port paraphernalia is crammed into every conceivable nook and cranny. I love this place!

Gustavo's father, originally from France, is a quieter more pensive

gent and a fellow Confrade of the Port Wine Institute's "Confraria" (brotherhood). The "bartender" is an affable young Swiss guy named Cristophe and is fluent in at least a half dozen languages. He is well on his way to mastering the mysteries of the plethora of Ports in this establishment. I found all three men extremely well versed in Port, but it was Gustavo that impressed me with his encyclopedic knowledge of small producers and off vintages. **Vinologia** specializes in mostly small if not obscure Portuguese producers that few people in America have ever heard of. Admittedly, there were a few that I had no knowledge of and was glad to have Gustavo guide my tasting, as he grasped the depth of my passion and desire to explore.



Cristophe shows off Vinologia's Ports

I knew I'd be returning that evening for an extended tasting, so I only tried one great Port that afternoon:

**Quinta do Romaneira Porto, Over 40 Years Tawny** (which is the nomenclature used in Portugal for what we in America call a 40 year old Tawny). The color was of cola or light coffee, with a fabulous nose of dates and chestnuts while providing a medium body weight, albeit feeling lighter on the tongue. Dry and smooth, with golden raisins, caramel and crème brulee on the palate. The aftertaste literally lasted for minutes and is one of the finest 40 year olds, in memory. **95 points** (10/22/05)

That evening, I returned with Stephen who had just arrived and was one of the gents from our tour. This was going to be a great initiation into the various styles of Port. I handpicked six unique wines, five of which were from producers I was unfamiliar with and hoped they'd make for an interesting tasting. Gustavo poured two extra Ports that he said we must try and discussed the specifics of the wines from producers that we were not familiar with. Along with a trio of Canadian friends, Matt and Sheila Blackman and their adorable three year old daughter Madison that I had met during my earlier visit to Vinologia, we spent the next few hours tasting and evaluating these eight Ports.

**2000 Quinta da Prelada LBV** – the actual Quinta was established in 1757, yet they were growers for other Shippers until very recently. In fact, they are the latest of the new breed of independent Port producers, having marketed their own label for the first time this year. Medium ruby color with a lighter rim, a nose of Kirsch and primary grape, the Prelada delivered promising

young flavors of strawberry with a dollop of grenadine. It offered generous forward fruit with a medium body and moderate length on the finish. **87 points** (10/22/05)

**1987 Quinta de Baldias LBV** – this Traditional LBV was bottled in 1993 which is impressive as most LBVs tend towards the minimum of 4 years rather than taking on the expense of six years in wood. This effort from Jose M. Barros, showed a very spicy nose with some cinnamon, quite light in body and smooth in texture, a bit simple on the mid-palate with plum and raisin flavors and a rather short finish. **85 points** (10/22/05)

**1958 Porto Valriz Colheita** – bottled in 1984. Light golden color with an intense nose of smoky, charred wood in a campfire and vanilla extract. Soft and elegant with toffee and pralines, smooth on the mouth feel and provides a delicious medium length to the aftertaste. Great nose, tasty but somewhat simple on the palate, possibly due to only two grapes in the blend. **89 points** (10/22/05)



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**2001 Rol Roi Reserva – “meio seco”** bottled in 2003 – Produced by Roseira and Ricou. And only 3,750 bottles produced. A blend of Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca and Tinta Roriz. From the smallest independent producer in the Douro. Blackberry brandy and cassis with a medium body and a bit grapey. Medium length to the finish. **87 points** (10/22/05)

**Quinta do Vallado 20 year old Tawny Port** – Until a dozen years ago, this producer sold their grapes to Ferreira for their Ports. In '93 they started to label their own wines and a year later began a rigorous replanting of the estate. This Tawny is light tan in color with almonds and orange zest aromatics. Soft and smooth on the palate with candied almond and hazelnut flavors. A fresh and persistent finish. This is a lovely 20 year old and well worth buying. **91 points** (10/22/05)

**Casa de Santa Eufemia Special Reserve White Port** – this white Port includes the grapes from 1972, and was produced by Jose Viseu Carvalho & Filhos, Lda. who own 40 hectares in the Baixo Corgo. Orange/amber color. Almost no spirit showing and this was a fabulous White Port and quite unique. Almond and dried apricot nuances and with terrific balance and a superb aftertaste. **93 points** (10/22/05)

**2000 Sao Pedro Das Aguas Vintage Port** – from SPR Vinhos, Franken Monopole in France. Located in the Lamego area of the Douro, this interesting VP showed dark purple in color and was fully opaque. It had a full body was smooth on the palate and was a bit simple, with a very good finish. A nice surprise, but lacked the structural components to cellar for the long term. Drink now. **89 points** (10/22/05)

**CJ Casal dos Jordoos “Organic” 10 year old Tawny Port** – I was told that this is the only *certified organic* Port made. I did not get to write much on this one, but did write, “one of the most complex and delicious 10 year old Tawnies I have ever experienced.” The fact that it is also organically grown is even more impressive, as is the rich and sumptuous lingering finish. **92 points** (10/22/05)

The following night Mario and I met with the group to have dinner and I wanted to share Presuntisco with them. To whet our palates, we began with a tasting up in the Dalva Lodge and had the opportunity to try the following wines:

**1975 Porto Dalva Colheita Port** – bottled in 2005. Fawn color with a yellowish green tinge on the rim. Notes of unblanched almonds, citrus, leather and toasted coconut. Medium body weight and smooth on the palate, I would have liked to sense a bit more acidity in this Colheita. Moderate length to the otherwise lush and nutty finish. **89 points** (10/23/05)

**Porto Dalva 20 year old Tawny** – bottled 2005. Barely pink-ruby centered with caramel color band towards the yellow edge. The aromatics were somewhat reserved initially opening to show grapefruit and maple syrup with a tangerine peel backdrop. Full-bodied and velvety on the mouth feel, with full throttle, rich and viscous nectar of honey, citrus and pine nuts with an extremely long finish that was rich and silky. **92 points**  
(10/23/05)

**1952 Porto Dalva White Colheita Port** – bottled in 2005. I was really anxious to see what the others felt about this wine that I had loved, two nights before. Dark amber with a yellow meniscus; this offered a sea mist and lemony, bees wax aroma. Great minerality and Asian spice along with a generous but medium body. Slightly drying on the finish in a Madeira sensuality and shared the length of a great Madeira as well. Not surprisingly, the others were intrigued by their first ever White Colheita and loved the wine too. **95 points** (10/23/05)

Dinner at Presuntisco was well received and it was a great way to welcome our guests to Oporto. The next day was the official beginning of the Port tour of duty!

## FERREIRA

Monday morning brought a sunny day and a beautiful view from our hotel. We got an early start due to our ambitious plans for the day. Our first visit was in Vila Nova de Gaia at the **A.A. Ferreira Lodge**. We were met by one of the most brilliant and charming women in the Port trade, Ligia Marques.



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**Dona Antónia Adelaide Ferreira**

Ferreira's properties, we learned that picking began on the first of September and finished on October 4<sup>th</sup>. There was very good weather and it rained only one afternoon in mid-September during the harvest itself. The grapes were small, concentrated and blessed with excellent natural acidity. The overall assessment is that the grapes harvested were of very good quality.

We were given the historical background of Ferreira and told that it was the first Portuguese family-owned Port Company, originally held by a group of winemakers. The Lodge we were in, had stood for well over 200 years in this place although it used to extend much closer to the waterfront, making it easier to roll the Port "pipes" (casks) off the Barco Rabelos (boats) and directly into the Lodge itself.

Up in the Douro, the 21<sup>st</sup> Feitoria (or Pombalino stone) was placed next to Ferreira's property in 1758. Ferreira owns 250,000 hectares of which 30,000 are planted to grapes. The parent company of Ferreira (Casa **Ferreirinha** (Grupo Sogrape) controls many other Port as well as table wine related ventures like the famous Barca Velha. This was Portugal's first premium non-fortified red wine, produced from the grapes of the Douro which was first bottled in 1952. Ligia provided an excellent historical insight into the eminence of Dona Antónia Adelaide Ferreira, a figure so prominent in the Port industry, that no space I can dedicate here could possibly do her legend justice.

As important as Ferreira's history is, the future seems every bit as promising. Quinta do Seixo, Quinta do Porto, Quinta do Caêdo, and Quinta da Leda (in Portuguese, Leda means a place of \*joy and divine partying\*) are properties that are now relied on heavily by Ferreira. When I asked about the recently finished 2005 harvest at



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We had the opportunity to try a nice range of Ferreira's Douro wines and Ports in a tasting presented by the Director of Enology for Sogrape Vinhos, S.A., Jose Maria d'Orey Soares Franco. Tasting Port in Vila Nova de Gaia somehow is far more impressive than sitting in my dining room or that of any of my friends. Wait until you see the picture of the view that we looked out upon while discerning the color of the wine in our glass. Simply remarkable!

**2004 Quinta da Leda, Vinha do Ribeira** – made from 40% Touriga Nacional, 30% Touriga Franca, and 30% Tinta Roriz. Nicely perfumed, dry and slightly tart red berry fruit that has a rustic quality, although it is obviously still quite young and not yet released. A solid, elegant finish offers promise for this wine's future. **n/r** (10/24/05)

**2004 Quinta da Leda, Vinha do Pombal** – Touriga Franca makes up approximately 40-45% of the blend, followed by Touriga Nacional and Tinta Roriz both comprising between 25-30% of the cuvee. It shows more reticent aromatics, greater concentration and ripe flavors, offers

firmer tannins and structure at this stage and an overall feeling that this is going to flesh out to be one massive wine. Not yet released. **n/r** (10/24/05)

**2003 Quinta da Leda Tinto** – a property of 105 hectares in the Douro Superior very close to where the Douro River meets Spain. Originally planted to field blends like much of the Douro, replanting began in 1978/1979 and grape varieties are now segregated. This property's grapes are now the backbone of Barca Velha since Quinta do Vale Meão started to bottle wine (and Port) under their own label. For the 2003, the blend was made up of 1/3 each Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz and Touriga Franca grapes that were all picked separately but vinified together. Inky and opaque garnet color. A great whiff of fresh flowers and ripe plums is bolstered by grenadine and blackberry with a gentle kiss of oak. I really enjoyed this baby and although the tannins dominate at this early stage, there is enough finesse on the finish here that this will turn out to be a very nice drink. Don't open until 2007+ **92 points** (10/24/05)

**Ferreira White Port** – I recently had the Lagrima which is the sweetest style of White Port made and it was not to my liking and I'll try another bottle to see if it was possibly an off bottle. On this day, we were trying their most basic White Port and I found some citrus and tropical notes in this wine, which I liked considerably better than the Lagrima. There was an odd banana note here and it was still too sweet for my liking, but had the alcohol in balance and possessed a long finish. **84 points** (10/24/05)

**1999 Ferreira LBV Port** – this is a smooth and easy to enjoy LBV, with a medium body, soft mouth feel, slightly grapy flavors and a touch of alcohol that heats up the finish that otherwise offers good length. **87 points** (10/24/05)

**2000 Ferreira LBV Port** – I enjoyed this significantly more than the '99. It offers an immediately approachable style, with blackberry and plum flavors that are very ripe. The mild tannins and an overall fine structure are in synch with this overt fruit-forward LBV. **90 points** (10/24/05)

**2003 Ferreira Vintage Port** – I liked this go round slightly more than the 2003 cask sample I spent a few days with back in July. It has gained a little weight yet is still medium-bodied. I had a better sense of the structural components and it did not show as hot on the finish. Enjoyable and approachable now. **90 points** (10/24/05)

**Quinta do Porto 10 year old Tawny Port** – this is truly a single Quinta Tawny Port, Light ruby centered with a dark bricking on the rim, this offers not only an overall impressive balance, but a wonderfully smooth palate presence. If that all sounds good, wait until you sense the incredible finesse and length on the finish here. What more can one ask from a 10 year old Tawny? Wow! **93 points** (10/24/05)

**Ferreira's Duque de Braganca, 20 year old Tawny Port** – this was the second time I tasted this beauty within my first 3 days in Portugal. It always has been my favorite 20 year old Tawny Port. Ferreira claims that their costly, yet competitive edge comes from the fact that they blend in a higher average age of old Tawny and therefore it exceeds that of other 20 year olds. Regardless, it hits my sweet spot and I love it. **94 points** (10/24/05)



The Ferreira tasting room looking back across the Douro River at Oporto  
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We then went to see the ancient Port cellar within the Ferreira complex. It always amazes me how many buildings there are in these complexes and how large the Lodges really are once you get inside. Over the years, I have had more old bottles of Ferreira Vintage Port than from any other Shipper, the oldest being a bottle of 1830 a number of years ago. However, this was my first time visiting the historic property where Dona Antonia's legacy lives on, which was the perfect way to kick off our week-long exploration. It was wonderful to see the excitement of the folks who had joined us on the tour. The fun had just begun!

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## COCKBURN

Our next visit was to Cockburn's Lodge, one of the great names in the Port trade. Sorry, but the real pronunciation is Coh-burn (like the actor James), contrary to its spelling. This historic firm was established in 1815 and we were told that they're the largest owners of vineyard acreage in the entire Alto Douro. After a few turbulent decades of being bought and sold numerous times, (along with sister company Martinez Gassiot) the current ownership group is deep-pocketed beverage behemoth, Allied Domecq.

Cockburn owns at least six properties in the Douro that I am aware of, the most famous of which is the gem known as Quinta do Tua, which is in close proximity to the Tua River. Since 1989, they've also owned Quinta dos Canais which grows intensely concentrated grapes, across from Quinta de Vargellas on the opposite river bank. Cockburn will bottle Single Quinta Vintage Ports from these two particular properties. The majority of their holdings are in the Douro Superior and they're located on the North side of the river in the far eastern section of the Douro. Many hectares are planted "*vinha ao alta*" (in vertical rows, a method first employed by Ferreira) in the remote flat lands far North of the river bank. Cockburn is able to incorporate mechanized farming with the help of tractors in the vineyards, that would not be possible on steeply



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terraced hillsides elsewhere in the Douro.

Since the late 1970s, they have made great strides in replanting efforts and are one of the most progressive when it comes to planting in varietal blocks to segregate the grape types. In fact at one of their properties, they have 100 hectares solely dedicated to Touriga Nacional, which shows a significant commitment to this grape. Lots of credit goes to Miguel Corte Real (Commercial & Viticultural Director), one of Portugal's most brilliant viticultural talents. He is a leading expert in canopy management and clonal selections and lectures at symposiums on these and other vineyard related topics, around the world.

Our group was treated exceptionally well and had an excellent lunch with their management team including Miguel, their General Manager and a few others. We were running short on time but went to see their amazing moldy cellar looking at awe inspiring ancient bottles. I was sad to miss the renowned bottling facility at Quinta de Santo Antonio, but there is always next time.



Ancient Dusty Bottles In Bin



Humidity is Clearly Not an Issue Here

#### Cockburn's Port folio -

**Light Dry White Port** – a fun White to nose, this fortified wine was reminiscent of golden raisins. It delivered delicate peach flavors in an off-dry style with enough sweet fruit that this would pair well with many shellfish appetizers. Gentle and medium length to the finish. **85 points** (10/24/05)

**Cockburn's "Special Reserve" Port** – I have had this wine many times at trade tastings. Spicy raspberry and a mocha nuance show the house style for which this wine in particular has become the standard bearer. A gentle and warming, mostly dry finish persists. It is the number one selling Reserve (this category used to be called "Vintage Character") and world wide sales approach 250,000 cases a year. **88 points** (10/24/05)

**2000 Cockburn's LBV Port** – generous plum and cherry flavors that are smooth while rolling around in the mouth. There is a slight alcoholic heat kick, but otherwise round and polished, this LBV delivers a soft and long finish but again, the alcohol shows up here too. **87 points** (10/24/05)

**Cockburn's 10 year old Tawny Port** – orange-light ruby in color with a beige colored rim. Sweet nose of maple syrup, chestnut and ripe orange. Great aromatics! Medium bodied with fresh ruby fruit and just slightly nutty flavors and a hint of vanilla on the extroverted aftertaste that ends up quite dry in style. **88 points** (10/24/05)

**Cockburn's 20 year old Tawny Port** – just slightly lighter in color towards the center than the 10 year old. This Cockburn Tawny offers fresh and clean nutty nuances on the nose with a bit off toffee. The medium body and soft silky elegance to this delicious wine is really fine and concentrated. The honeyed walnut flavor provides excellent length on the finish with velvety butterscotch on the aftertaste. A nice flavor progression from the 10 year old Tawny and a step up in drinking pleasure. **92 points** (10/24/05)

**2003 Cockburn's Vintage Port** – intriguing nose of leather, cassis and blackberries translate to a smooth palate with medium tannins and ripe, sweet blackberries and vanilla. It has not evolved far from my cask sample early last summer. **92 points** (10/24/05)

**2003 Cockburn's Quinta dos Canais Vintage Port** – 15% of the Canais grapes went into the Cockburn VP. Dark color

shows no signs of evolution with a nose that explodes with raisin, spice and chocolate. Easy to approach, with sweet and juicy blueberry and plum flavors. The body weight is medium and the tannins only rear their head upon the finish, which is quite pleasant and persistent. The alcohol has calmed down a bit too and has made this Port considerably more balanced and enjoyable. **92 points** (10/24/05)

**2003 Martinez Vintage Port** – very dark purplish in color and fully opaque. Complex aromas of blueberry, tar, dark chocolate and just a hint of anise. On the palate, ripe and flavor filled boysenberry and blueberry that tends toward the dry side of the spectrum. The structure here is sound although the tannins are quite round at this stage. 2,000 cases produced. **90 points** (10/24/05)

**2004 Cockburn's Vintage Port** – COMPONENT tasting: **Touriga Franca** – violets stand out with other fresh floral aromatics. Tight knit structure here will offer definition to the eventual cuvee. (10/24/05)

**2004 Cockburn's Vintage Port** – COMPONENT tasting: **Touriga Nacional** – more subdued aromas but the dark berry flavors are far more pronounced and sweet. I was surprised that this seemed more elegant and softer than the Franca sample. (10/24/05)

During lunch we learned a great deal more about the history of Cockburn's and were able to have many of our questions answered at this time. At the end of our lunch the tradition of passing around a decanter of "mystery Port" took place. We all had to guess and of course yours truly was first. Given the color and nose of the wine, I felt it was something from the mid-late 1940s. But this was a deftly thrown curve ball. I swung for the fences but looked silly with my swing. In fact, it was a Vintage Port that I never realized existed, as I have never seen the wine itself mentioned or a single tasting note anywhere.

**1977 Cockburn's Vintage Port** – Say it ain't so! From reading, I knew of Cockburn's decision **not** to declare their 1977 VP and management chose instead, to utilize their excellent grapes to support their earliest effort to launch and stock up on the now world famous, "Special Reserve" Port. Therefore, I never knew that any bottles actually existed, which made this even funnier. Even if I had, I never would have guessed this wine's age. There were actually 1,500 bottles produced and 900 are now left in the Cockburn cellars, only to be consumed on their premises with special guests. The '77 showed a light ruby with significant bricking on the rim. This is soft, smooth and very elegant with light, dried cherry fruit bolstered by toasty almond nuances that belie its youth. A mature and complex Port, which is not only tasty, but the finish is fabulous and multi-layered. It could have been a contender. **93 points** (10/24/05)

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After bidding our friends at Cockburn's a warm adieu, we headed back to Mario's old workplace the Port and Douro Wine Institute (IVDP) for a tour and incredible couple of hours seeing their laboratories, tasting rooms and had an informative session with a few of their managers. What I always enjoy most is listening to the methodology that is utilized in blind tasting the wines. There is a panel of seven professional tasters that work individually in evaluating the Ports that are seeking approval. We learned about each of the specific organoleptic (sensorial) qualifications and how the tasters use a computerized data sheet to input their analysis. There is much more to this and it was fascinating to see in person. One gets a significant comfort level when you see all of the checks and balance in place, to ensure that approved wines have been thoroughly screened before the IVDP stamp of approval is given to the specific Port.

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I.D.V.P.



Laboratory Equipment



David Spriggs, Mario Ferreira & Frédéric Blais

## SANDEMAN

As our group had not yet had our fill of Port wine today, it was time to head to the Sandeman Lodge which was now closed to the public. We met up with our friend Ligia there, as Sandeman is part of the Sogrape portfolio since earlier in the decade. It was fun to see our guest's eyes light up when we walked into the Sandeman Port Museum within the Lodge. A "must see" spot in Gaia, this museum has a permanent exhibit but also has new from time to time. In fact since my last visit in 2003, at least half of the objects were new. The historic artifacts that surrounded us here was really eye catching and the more serious you are as a Port enthusiast, the more you appreciate what is in this gallery.

After explaining the diverse artifacts and remarkably well-preserved advertisements, Ligia then guided us through the cavernous Lodge. Our guests had the opportunity to view the massive Sandeman Port holdings in pipe and huge wooden tanks, as well as the ancient "library" of Vintage Ports remaining in the cellar. It was at this point that we were joined by our hosts, Mr. and Mrs. George Sandeman. I have known George for over a decade and find him one of the most refreshing personalities in the Port trade. He has an irreverent sense of humor, does not shy away from politics and never circumvents a controversial question. He leads the seventh generation of the House of Sandeman (est. 1790) which is also known for its Sherry holdings in Jerez, Spain and wines in Madeira. Before we all sat down to a most enjoyable dinner, we retreated to one of the great old rooms in the Lodge for a fun tasting of some recent Ports. Dinner was excellent as were the accompanying wines. On this night our conversations were so engaging that I did not take notes on the dinner wines, with the exception of course, the Vintage



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Port which accompanied dessert.



MR. & MRS. GEORGE SANDEMAN

**1999 Sandeman LBV Port** – I rather enjoyed this LBV and besides just a touch of alcohol protruding, there were bright red fruit aromas and a touch of cinnamon spice. Rich and ripe raspberry intertwined with sweet strawberry flavors, which show a bit grapey on the finish but overall, still quite enjoyable. Round tannins keep this immediately approachable. **88 points** (10/24/05)

**2000 Sandeman Vau Vintage Port** – This has improved since it was a cask sample and the grip is far more pronounced whereas the tannins were reserved earlier in its life. Dark magenta color, floral note with molasses and pomegranate aromas. Great mouthfeel and smooth texturally speaking. Expressive fresh purple fruits, good grip and a longer life ahead than I had expected early on. **91 points** (10/24/05)

**2000 Sandeman Vintage Port** - Swirling aromas of cassis, figs and a spice that I know but can't identify. Smooth and viscous on the palate with chewy black fruits that are ripe, yet not too sweet. It is a well-balanced

Port that is impressive today, but will reward patience as the tannins are still quite powerful. Extremely long and satisfying

finish. This hits the pleasure zone big time. **93 points** (10/24/05)

**2003 Sandeman Vintage Port** - Dark ruby color. Floral notes, grenadine and spicy aromas are really enjoyable and lead to a palate of intense purple fruits brimming with dense plum and grape flavors that dominate the palate. It shows a very smooth texture in the mouth, with full body and ample tannins to take this for a long ride as does the aftertaste. **91 points** (10/24/05)



Sogrape's Ligia Marques



The table is set and ready for a fun evening!

**1967 Sandeman Vintage Port** – There is a first time for everything. This gentle giant is one of the very best of the Ports I have had from the lackluster 1967 vintage, which managed to produce a few very well-made VPs. The Sandeman is still in great shape. Due to the lighting it is impossible to tell the color. The aromatics dance out of the glass with ultra-potent, sweet violet and floral notes with a hint of mocha. The flavors of ripe plums, figs and maple lead to a bittersweet chocolate nuance on the extremely long finish. This '67 is a smooth operator with finesse and delivers a super smooth palate presence. This still has a good decade ahead of it too. **93 points** (10/24/05)

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