

Roy's 2003 Vintage Port Forecast

BY ROY HERSH © 2005

Sadly, my planned Portugal trip fell through earlier this spring. It would have provided me the time and liquid resources to have this Port article ready ahead of the first tranch pricing, as was the case with my 2000 Vintage Port Forecast. I really had hoped to be one of the very first to publish a report on the 2003s, but that is not the case. Instead, I have tasted my way through a significant cross section of 2003 VPs, with nearly 50 different tasting notes to follow.

Methodology is important when tasting Vintage Port cask samples. For instance, I traveled down to San Francisco to have the opportunity to try 13 cask samples of the 2003 Vintage Ports. This excellent event featured the Ports of The Symington Family, The Fladgate Partnership and Quinta do Noval. A three hour window was provided, within which to taste the wines and meet with the Managing Directors and their top associates. I made sure to go around and taste each of the thirteen VPs twice. I also spoke at length to the key players from these three Shippers to hear their viewpoints on the vintage from a historical perspective and in comparison to specific vintages that I wanted to discuss. Trying the wines was great, but the real reason for the trip was the opportunity to converse with these Port industry moguls.

Had I written my tasting notes for this article based on my impressions from that day, my article would have done a disservice to the wines. Blind impressions have the greatest meaning to me and of course in that setting, it was not plausible. At a stand up trade tasting, I believe I would have only received a snapshot of those Ports. Writing notes while tasting in front of the Managing Director of a company is not conducive to accuracy, at least not for me. The tasting process is more about the time spent with the wine. Some critics and journalists taste alone, some on a panel, some do blind tastings and others do not. Being consistent is what I find most important when it comes to the methodology, especially when tasting dozens of cask samples over a few weeks.

That said, here is the way I approach the evaluation process of Vintage Port cask samples. I start by opening the wines first thing in the morning and blind tasting them. If tasting alone, I normally only open two VPs at a time. If tasting with another individual, I will open six, all of which are placed in numbered bags the day before. I normally spend two days with every single bottle and only a few of them were tasted on a third day. My typical regimen is to taste at 10 a.m., again at around noon, followed by 4 p.m., 8 p.m., and midnight. I retaste blind again, the following morning. I then unveil the bottles and learn which producer made which wine and add impressions over the rest of the second day in one or two tastings, with points not changing more than 1, in either direction (if at all, since I don't want the label to have any real influence on my ratings). The least number of times I tasted any of the 47 Vintage Ports was five times and the most was eight times over at least two days.

Decanting for sediment was not necessary with any of the cask samples I received. I always poured the Ports into identical Riedel Vinum stems, where the wine was allowed to open up for at least two hours in glass. The bottles were always recorked and left at room temperature. At the end of each session, the wine was dumped and fresh Port was pre-poured for the next session, except for the first tasting of the second day.

Here are my general impressions of the 2003 Vintage Port cask samples and I will provide some comparisons to the other generally declared vintages I have tasted, (going back to 1991 and '92). I was impressed with the overall extraction levels of the 2003 VPs. The top wines are extremely dark with saturated, inky colors. In nearly every case, I found the color of the wines achieved varying degrees of opacity and unless noted otherwise, they were either purplish/ruby or ruby/purple. There is a similar quantity of great wines as I had found with the 2000 vintage, and in terms of rating points, I am referring to Ports at or above the 95 point echelon. Although I love the 1994 vintage, both the 2000 and now the 2003s, have shown a greater number of wines reaching this pinnacle and a better overall consistency.

There did not appear to be an across-the-board consistency in quality with 2003 though, as I noted some variability, but less so than there had been with the 1994 and 1997 vintages. Overall, I distinguished some common threads with the cask samples this time around. Reminiscent of 1994, the fruit was extremely primary, approachable and concentrated. The structural components did not show prominently in at least half of the wines, until the second and usually the third time trying them. I found the tannins appeared late on the palate and usually towards the end of the aftertaste. This reminded me of quite a few of the 1994s early on, where the tannins were subordinated by the huge fruit forward nature of the VPs.

Nonetheless, there are certainly quite a few Ports from this vintage that have monstrous grip and mouth puckering tannins. Many of the '03 Ports had nicely delineated structures to them (after they had time to evolve), with riper tannins that are more similar to 1992 and 1997, than 1994. The mouth coating tannins tend to sneak up late in the game and don't let go, but again there are fewer examples of this style in 2003 than the "fruit forward" style.

Furthermore, given that Europe suffered through such an extremely hot summer, it should be noted that the Douro River Valley growing region typically experiences very hot summers and the 2003 season was not atypical in that respect. Fortunately, as is the case with many of the finest Port vintages, there was just enough rain during June and July, with steady showers late in August just prior to the beginning of the earlier than usual harvest. Unfortunately, a "now extinct" governmental regulatory group decreased Port harvest totals by nearly 1/5th of the production of 2002, due to surpluses that were still on hand from that disappointing vintage. Overall, production was at least 25% below that of the 2000 vintage, which is a very significant difference.

Adding to this complex situation, vineyard yields were pretty low in 2003, which further reduced the crop size. This is a mixed blessing, with the upshot being the nourishment given to the surviving clusters, which resulted in greater concentration and excellent degrees of residual sugar within the grapes. The downside was that acidity levels in some cases, had to be corrected more than in recent vintages. Also, due to the aforementioned complications, prices are somewhat higher in comparison to recent vintages.

To cut to the chase, overall, I prefer the 2003s to the 1997s and believe they will possess some of the finer qualities of both the 1994 and 2000 vintages, to use recent historical comparisons. At the top third of the vintage, these VPs certainly show the promise for long term cellaring potential. There are surprises in this vintage with some of the smaller and lesser known producers coming up with brilliant efforts. Of course, many of the usual suspects have also delivered fabulous Ports. With the 2003 vintage, I conclude that there is an historical defining moment, which should be recognized by wine consumers as well as the Port industry itself. High quality Vintage Ports are no longer made solely by the big names in the trade. The number of first time producers has increased, some of them barely known names and small family-owned operations in the Douro, who are making Vintage Ports worthy of acclaim. Additionally, a few old guard Shippers that were hanging on to well-worn reputations have finally shown signs of re-establishing themselves as significant forces with which to be reckoned. I am pleased to see and report these developments, as they bode well for the future of the entire Port industry.

The Port industry is on the road to reshaping its self image, while seeking to reinvigorate interest within younger generations of wine consumers who must be motivated to explore the wonders of Port. The Port trade, steeped in over three and a half centuries of tradition, is in the midst of a major Renaissance. Beyond the increasing number of new entrants, many of whom were contracted grape growers for the larger firms, these changes are taking place in the vineyards. These changes include technological advances which are modernizing the face of Port. It is this juxtaposition of tradition and innovation, which makes this a very exciting time for Port wine.

I pay close attention to both consumer reaction and the Port trade's issues, particularly when there is a new and "generally declared" vintage on the horizon. A recurring question I hear from consumers is: "Why should I pay the pre-arrival price for the 2003 Vintage Ports when I can buy a ready to drink 1983 or 1985 with 20+ years on them for the same price, or less? It is a very valid question. Until now I have mostly lurked on the sidelines and observed the debate on this topic, knowing that this article would provide me with the perfect time and place to offer a detailed response.

In the past six months there have occasionally been some advantageous prices for those who scrutinize the market place for older Vintage Ports. For those that do not possess mature VPs in their cellar, I would strongly suggest that you do take advantage and purchase Ports from these mid-range vintages (in terms of age). They will only become more scarce and ergo, more

expensive in the future. So, here's my answer to the consumer question -- why pay the prices for the young 2003's:

1. Rarity – with yields and production levels down significantly in 2003, prices had to escalate from where they were in 2000. Just to give you one example, there was literally twice as much volume of 1985 Fonseca available as there is 2003. I do believe that in years to come, as some of the great 2003s from the lesser known producers (today) are discovered, these will become outstanding bargains in a decade or two.
2. Something “new” – whenever there is a high quality, generally declared vintage, there is an increased demand for the pre-released Ports. The question remains whether or not the higher prices for 2003s will be accepted in the marketplace, given the current weakness of the Port market, especially at auction. Also, with some very good 2004 Port juice in wood, what will happen to prices if there winds up being a split declaration?
3. Today's marketplace – although there are some great “deals” for the patient and savvy consumer, there is a consistent depletion, if not “growing shortage” of older stocks of Vintage Port, both ex-cellars in Portugal and in the UK at retail and auction. Scarcity at these key sources of supply will send the prices upward in the latter part of this decade, as has happened with the Madeira market in the past few years. It is coming ... the difference will be felt whenever the US economy really starts to pick up, as this is the market that drives VP pricing today.
4. Provenance – the old “P” word. You may certainly buy your 2003 VPs in 201 and may not pay a significant tariff for waiting. Then again, you might. Regardless of the price, there is something very comfortable about knowing where the bottles have been for the past decade or more, during the formative years. Bottles flipping from cellar to cellar and auction house to speculator to collector ... does not bode well for any wine. I like the comfort of watching my bottles grow old in my own cellar.
5. Roy's advise – I did some damage with 2000 VP purchases and swore to myself that it would be the last young vintage I bought into, as I have a fairly mature cellar. After tasting the 2003s, I could not help myself, they are that good. Even if my daughter winds up drinking these Vintage Ports instead of me, that is ok too. So for anyone looking to add some young Port to their collection, you will be able to enjoy the 2003's while they are young or you can stash them away in the cellar with the knowledge that they have the structural components that will enable them to improve over time.

Here are the notes on the 2003 Vintage Ports. Enjoy!

Note: Ratings that are followed by a + sign, represent VPs that should age and improve for at least four decades.

1. 2003 Andresen – smoky, spicy, tar, dark cherry and spearmint on the nose. Full-bodied, juicy but almost chewy mouth feel, yet very approachable. The vibrant Blackberry and chocolaty flavors are enhanced by the balance of fruit and tannins. The ripe tannins are powerful on the medium length finish. Andresen maintains momentum in 2003 which reminds me of their fabulous 1985. This '03 will age nicely. **92 points**

2. 2003 Barros – floral like a fresh cut bouquet, purple fruits, essence of pine, with alcohol protruding. Good weight, fine acidity, somewhat simple while dry in style, riper tannins the 2nd day but still moderate overall. A well made wine with a slight bitter note on the finish along with some alcohol. Hopefully this will integrate over the years. Touriga Nacional grapes dominate this cuvee. Bonus points for the depth, concentration of fruit along with a very attractive “new” package. 1,000 cases produced. **89 points**

3. 2003 Broadbent – Bing cherry and strawberry, along with a grapy nose that yields to chocolate. Showing a medium body the first day that added significant heft the 2nd day. The Broadbent offers tart red cherry fruit in a seductive, drier style with a spicy, mint undertone. It is nicely balanced overall and very approachable in a ready-to-enjoy-now style. This will provide mid-term aging potential and finishes with a gentle, lingering aftertaste with tannins that begin as subtle but show their verve. **91 points**

4. 2003 Churchill – opaque magenta color with a nose displaying lavender, blueberry, along with a touch of oak and alcohol. This Churchill shows medium weight and a lush mouth feel with off-dry plum flavors. The tannins arrive late and are chalky. The finish is flashy but leaves a very spirit laden impression. **89 points**

5. 2003 Cockburn's – dark berry aromas with underlying earthy notes and the essence of vanilla. A more full bodied wine (than the Canais) that is chewy and dense, with cassis and dark berry fruit, a touch of oak and fully resolved tannins. Its significant strength in '03 is the luscious, chewy yet soft palate presence that provides pleasingly round, soft tannins and a well-knit structure and a fine finish too! **93 points**

6. 2003 Cockburn's Quinta dos Canais – opaque in an inky purplish way, nose of prunes, cocoa, tar and black pepper. This is a feminine style of wine with bright, sweet pure blackberry and cranberry flavors and good acidity. Delivers moderate weight and a medium to long finish with very round tannins. The highlight of heat on the nose, palate & finish detract slightly from what otherwise is a very enjoyable Port. **91 points**

7. 2003 Croft – 100% Quinta da Roeda fruit, 100% foot trodden, 90 of the 120 hectares are planted to vine with an additional 15 more planned for the near future. These are all new developments for Croft in 2003 and credit goes to their relatively new owners; this being their first vintage as stewards of the grapes. '03 Croft delivers an inimitable impenetrable blackish-purple color that rivals the darkest of the vintage. It reveals tremendous aromatics and one of the greatest profiles of a young Vintage Port in recent memory. This

showcases great acidity, massive and muscular structure, ripe elderberry and juicy blueberry flavors, providing stunning length on the cheeky tannic finish. It is extremely age worthy and is even better than the outstanding 1991 at this stage and has potential to reach the greatness of the 1945 Croft, which is my second favorite Port of all time. A classy heavy weight performer that is finally back in shape! 6,500 cases produced. **97+ points**

8. 2003 Delaforce – floral and black currant notes, that deliver full-bodied heft, with simple but very sweet, big blueberry flavors. Early on it was a bit thin and a bit hot, with a medium body. That all changed by the second day when this wine shone bigger and brighter and the alcohol integrated with further aeration. The medium length to the finish was supported by drying tannins. 5,000 cases produced. **90 points**

9. 2003 Dow's – very dark opaque ruby-purple color. It's floral nose which also displays black cherry, blackberry and obvious notes of chocolate coming to the fore. After trying this a few times, I poured a glass for my wife to try and she sipped, smiled and responded, "At first, all of these young ones seemed so different than the Vintage Ports we normally drink. This is so incredibly good, which is it?" I think she's onto something. This Dow is atypically sweet (3.7 Baume), it is so big and dense in the mouth, it literally packs a fruit filled wallop. This infant is deftly balanced, with a concentrated intensity and underlying covert tannic structure. It has all the stuffing not only to age for many decades, but to wind up in the very upper echelon of this fine vintage. I have never enjoyed a very young Dow as much as this one. A fabulous "benchmark" Port for the ages. 8,500 cases produced. **96+ points**

10. 2003 Feist – Both samples were corked. 5,000 cases produced. **Not rated**

11. 2003 Ferreira – opaque magenta color with aromatics of raspberry, anise, mocha and a dose of spirit which integrates to a degree by the 2nd day. The Ferreira offers gentle, sweet red fruits, strawberry and chocolate flavors which are very approachable and show off the lively acidity. This '03 is medium in body with medium tannins that only show up on the finish. The finish itself delivers too much heat which out lasts the rest of the aftertaste. This one is for early drinking pleasure but needs lots of air time. **89 points**

12. 2003 Fonseca – this saturated purplish-ruby effort, exhibits a wine of great balance and approachability. Warming, generous, big, juicy, feminine, super equilibrium and was even better the second day and superb on the third. It started off as a medium bodied wine and kept gaining weight until it tipped the scales. A soft, round mouth feel on the palate which shows off cassis and currants, this is a Port of finesse with a finish you could time with a sundial. Fonseca again is at the apex of another fine vintage. Although this wine can be enjoyed now, there is a compelling reason to let this reach maturity. The '03 is a sublime, complete and nearly perfect young Port and every bit as enjoyable as was their 1994 at the same stage. 12,000 cases produced. **98+ points**

13. 2003 Gould Campbell – displaying delightful scents of plum with a smoky and roasted note. The GC offers a viscous and powerful wine with semi-sweet, blackberry and currant fruit along with a hint of vanilla and licorice. It is a boisterous, intense young Port with monstrous mouth puckering tannins and a lingering aftertaste that would be better had it not shown so much alcohol. This Vintage Port should improve for two to three decades. 2,400 cases produced. **92 points**

14. 2003 Graham's – revealing the essence of grenadine and lavender. A very well made wine with finely knit acidity, medium-full bodied, ripe plum and purple fruit flavors that reaches 4.0 Baume on the sweet meter. This young Graham's was a very different wine upon first approach after opening the bottle. It was hot and not all that pleasant initially and showed its youthful power and required lots of air time. It was a much better wine the second day. It was not only bigger but offered a more dense and chewy wine that was expansive and mouth filling with round, supple tannins and a long finish with just a bit of alcohol still showing. 9,000 cases produced. **94+ points**

15. 2003 Kopke – dark ruby with a purple edge and a bouquet of violets, crushed flower petals and spice. The palate offers thick juicy boysenberry and plum with a spicy undercurrent of cinnamon and some spirituous character that shows up right before the tannins sneak up on the sweet finish. 2,050 cases produced. **91 points**

16. 2003 Krohn – sometimes noted as Wiese & Krohn, this to my knowledge is the first Vintage Port I have ever tasted from Krohn although I have had quite a few Colheitas back to their 1960 bottling. The company history is compelling as Wiese, a (cod) fish importer in Oporto, asked his cousin Krohn (both were Norwegians) to join him in a Port company in 1865. Successful after a decade, Wiese retired and went back home while Krohn stayed and retained ownership of the company. The 2003 is a very dark garnet colored Port that offers violets and red berry fruit scents once given plenty of time to open up. This started off as a light-bodied wine but over a number of hours, picked up some weight on the palate. I found it enjoyable, mostly balanced and a tad simple, yet tasty. It showed semi-sweet juice with mild tannins that allow this wine to be consumed early. There was a medium length finish depicting a slightly hot aftertaste. **87 points**

17. 2003 Niepoort – immense and intense Niepoort once again. Clean, pure dark berry and floral aromas yield to a dark and brooding, full-bodied, round, complex and brambly huckleberry and boysenberry liquid pie. The enormous almost painfully puckering and astringent tannins show up late on the scene, to hold your mouth hostage. Indubitably, this is the most overtly tannic Port of the vintage with an insanely long finish that never quite actually does. Save this for the great grandchildren. Niepoort is at the top of their game and for the third consecutive vintage, is right atop the mix in 2003. **97+ points**

18. 2003 Niepoort Secundum – dark cherry and cocoa powder with hints of alcohol on the nose. It is a light to medium weight VP that is ultimately very drinkable now, with approachable soft dark berry and primary, sweet grapy

fruit yielding to ripe and astringent tannins. Its a sweet and refreshing Port that screams, “drink me now” but can hold in cellar for years to come. The finest made Secundum to date. **93 points**

19. 2003 Offley Boa Vista – grenadine, cocoa powder, spice and significant alcohol persists on the nose, with bright medium sweet, flavors of strawberry fruit, possessing an extreme acidity level. The medium weight and big mouth coating tannins lead to a slightly coarse texture on the mouth feel, with a finish dominated by spirit. **84 points**

20. 2003 Osborne – vibrant lavender, anise and spice proliferate on the exotic if not profound aromatic profile. Sweet and delicious primary, in-your-face, brambly blueberry and boysenberry fruit juice is the mainstay of the '03 Osborne VP. It is a massive, viscous wine with great purity of fruit and sumptuous fleshy mouth feel that segues into a tannic beast as one approaches the overtly tannic and lasting finish. A very pleasant surprise from a house not generally recognized as making such fine VP, but deserving extra credit with this 2003. To excel, it must be allowed lots of air time. **94+ points**

21. 2003 Pintas – A fine first VP collaboration by husband and wife team Jorge Borges and Sandra Tavares da Silva. Their Douro red wine of the same name has gained “cult status” in Portugal (I loved the 2001). Jorge worked with Dirk van der Niepoort for a half decade and wife Sandra is the co-winemaker here, and works with Cristiano van Zeller at Quinta do Vale D. Maria. Pintas offers plum, fresh flowers and black pepper on the nose, with sweet juicy blackberry and ripe plums that provides a full body as soon as it was opened. This shows enormous concentration of flavors supported by a long sweet finish. Impressive balance was noted, immediately upon opening the bottle. Rarely do I find new producer’s very first Vintage Port effort this exciting! **93 points**

22. 2003 Poças – grapes hail from 50 year old vines. Tightly wound aromatics that needed most of an entire day to offer up some dark berry fruit, black pepper and spice. Poças is full bodied yet silky smooth on the palate with a very approachable, sweet candied violet flavor on the entry. A well-structured young Port designed for long term cellaring, with mouth gripping and powerful ripe tannins that attack the tongue and cheeks on the long lived finish that shows a dose of youthful alcohol. **92 points**

23. 2003 Poças “Director’s Choice” – this was previously called, “Poças Junior” it has a more open nose than its sibling with blueberry and black pepper which is somewhat reminiscent of a gorgeous Turley Zin nose. It is defined by very sweet plum fruit flavors, medium-full body weight and insane tannins that take no prisoners. This young Vintage Port is quite smooth but not as refined as the Poças above. Nonetheless, it is a structured, sweet and generous wine with fine aging potential. **91 points**

24. 2003 Presidential – the complex mélange of aromas here is the strong suit of this young Port, with grenadine, mocha, tobacco leaves and spice. On the palate it is one dimensional with blackberry and ripe figs. The Presidential

is a big wine with ample tannins and a very long finish that is marred by excessive alcohol. 3,225 cases were produced for the US market. Dalva is the label used for the rest of the world. **87 points**

25. 2003 Quinta do Crasto – eggplant color, nose of dark fruits with fresh Christmas tree farm mint and pine with overt alcohol. Full bodied, big, chewy, smooth in the mouth with tannin that is enveloping and chalky. Medium sweet dark cherry fruit bolstered by intriguing, cooling menthol and herbal nuances. Good length to the finish but again, the alcohol is obvious at the end of the aftertaste. There is significant long term aging potential for the Crasto. **91 points**

26. 2003 Quinta do Infantado “Vale de Gontelho” – a dark almost impenetrable color and offering floral, cassis and blackberry fruit aromas. A medium weight yet fleshy Port, with mouth filling tart Bing cherry and chocolate flavors. The gripping tannins lead up to a finish of moderate length with a bitter nuance on the aftertaste. **88 points**

27. 2003 Quinta do Noval – dark magenta color initially that darkens to an inky black color within a few hours. The '03 Noval does not show much early on and required plenty of breathing time. It finally offered up an expansive array of boysenberry, fresh flowers and a mélange of spicy components like cinnamon, mint and intense black pepper. This Noval is a sexy, full-bodied Port with voluptuous juice flavors that holds nothing back on the palate. It has outstanding symmetry at this stage and the plush, subdued tannins are hard to detect, but they are lurking about just below the surface and lead to a superlative finish. I preferred this to the Quinta do Noval Nacional (some would call this “heresy”) and the regular bottling is one of my favorite wines of this young vintage. 4,000 cases made. **97+ points**

28. 2003 Quinta do Noval Nacional – very dark in color with a restrained nose that finally opens to offer figs, strawberries and black pepper. Nacional shows deceptively massive, primary fruit with spicy tart cherry flavors and chewy tannins that are gentle and round while fully enveloping the mouth. This Port provides excellent structural components, a lingering juicy finish that ends with a distinct black pepper nuance. Built for LT cellaring and yet it is still easy to enjoy now. 250 cases produced. **96+ points**

29. 2003 Quinta do Noval Silval – the Silval possesses one of the finest, most complex noses of the entire vintage with penetrating, vibrant lavender, ripe raspberry, chocolate and black pepper aromas. Very concentrated and medium to full bodied juice with raspberry, blueberry and licorice flavors that yield to big mouth coating tannins which are by far the most powerful of the Noval family in '03. Good length on the slightly alcoholic finish. 1,000 cases produced. **92 points**

30. 2003 Quinta da Pacheca – never heard of this property? I like introducing Port producers and small ones like this (37 hectares) are worth watching. Although their first Vintage Port was produced in 2000, their roots go back to around 1551, although their vines were first noted in 1738. Pacheca is better

known for their quality Douro red wines than Port, although that image may be changing. José Serpa Pimentel oversees the operation and marketing while his sister Maria Serpa Pimentel is the winemaker. They are the 4th generation in the family owned business that was established in 1903. The Pacheca juice is 100% foot trodden in 8 large traditional lagares. The '03 Vintage Port has a seductive perfume of golden raisins, cassis and anise. With a soft, sweet, ripe red berry profile, this wine is easily approachable, simple and feminine in style with a light to medium body. This is a classy, elegant effort with an extra long ripe berry finish and a tad too much alcohol showing. It possesses an inviting mouth feel until the puckering tannins kick in, which should allow it to age quite nicely. 550 cases produced. **90 points**

31. 2003 Quinta do Portal – an unheralded rising star in the Port trade that gains more popularity with each ensuing vintage. The Portal '03 exhibits aromas of blueberry, anise, herbs and mint notes, with a scent of black pepper. This is a big and balanced full-bodied beauty with a soft approach and sweet ripe plum and chewy blueberry fruit, with lots of acidity. It's an easy-to-enjoy wine and all of a sudden waves of palate crushing tannins roll in and take over, followed by an exceptionally long finish. This will age for decades. Keep your eyes on Quinta do Portal as they continue to make consistent, age worthy wines with 2003 their best ever Vintage Port. 3,880 cases of 6 bottles, 5,500 of 375ml bottles and 300 magnums produced. **95+ points**

32. 2003 Quinta do Portal II – inky black color with strawberry, spice, red licorice and a touch of cedar. This is a somewhat softer, more fruit forward and approachable style than the classic Portal VP. I am still not sure what the name will wind up being, but I doubt it will be "Portal II." There is a grapy element to the juice although sweet flavors of plum and blueberry are also present. This is a seriously dense, age worthy wine, powerful, rich and viscous. Again, big ripe tannins dominate the drier finish of this Portal whose grapes come from Quinta dos Muros and are only 8 years old. The vinification took place in 1,000 litre stainless steel "lagares" and was later blended with wine vinified in stone lagares. 1,318 six packs and 60 magnums produced. **92 points**

33. 2003 Quinta do Romariz – beautiful violet color, displaying dried prunes, herbs and smoky notes. Light to medium-bodied in style with sweet blueberry pie and juicy plum fruit that got better as it went along. The mouth feel is a bit coarse, the tannins are ripe but not in excess and although there is very good length to the finish, the aftertaste exhibits too much heat. **89 points**

34. 2003 Quinta de Roriz – opaque ruby purple color, nose shows tightly and in time offers some violet floral notes. The Roriz leaves an impression of ultra sweet juice, a medium body that is generous and elegant, with red raspberry and prominent cranberry flavors. The tannins arrive late on the simple aftertaste, which is medium in length and highlights a touch of alcohol. Mid-term aging potential 10-20 years. 1,650 cases produced. **90 points**

35. 2003 Quinta do Tedo – Vincent and Kay Bouchard started up this venture and are making some very nice Ports, which I first discovered just two years ago. Dark cherry and chocolate sing on the nose here. This Tedo is a medium weight, finely tuned Port with Kirsch flavors and a long chocolaty finish. Extra credit was given for the smooth, succulent and complex aftertaste that stood up to the vibrant tannins. **93 points**

36. 2003 Quinta do Tedo "Savendra" – before the wine description, let me just say that without any question, the cork in this bottle, was the most difficult of any I have ever wrestled with. I questioned whether it was glued in place, as it literally bent the prongs on my Ah-So, after a waiter's cork screw had failed me. The Sevedra revealed intriguing aromatics of wild flowers, anise, spice and tar. This version has sweet smooth and juicy balanced fruit with explosive flavors followed by massive, mouth puckering and astringent tannins. The finish is long and shows a touch too much heat. Overall this is a very well made wine. **91 points**

37. 2003 Quinta do Vale Dona Maria – Sandra Tavares da Silva and Cristiano van Zeller nail another one. 100% foot trodden in lagares, this Single Quinta Vintage Port delivers raspberry, tobacco and spicy licorice notes. The fruit is dense and primary with pure grapy flavors, and cherries, almost like Smucker's grape jelly. Round, fruit forward and mouth filling, Dona Maria once again is a wine well-balanced, with a very smooth texture and huge zesty acidity. This is a simple and enjoyable Port that shows little signs of complexity at this point, yet there is no escaping the huge concentrated and lingering finish with ripe tannins that appear on the final swallow. 785 cases produced. **92 points**

38. 2003 Quinta Valle Longo – this SQVP was hand delivered to me from Quinta da Vista Alegre in Pinhao, Portugal. It is the only bottle currently in the USA. The property has 10 hectares planted equally to Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz and Touriga Franca. 2003 is the inaugural vintage from this Quinta and the winemaker Manuel Tavares also makes the Martins family's Vista Alegre Ports. The Quinta itself was purchased in 1972 and the vines were fully replanted in 1987. The wine is 100% foot trodden in traditional granite lagares. They have been growers of grapes and sold them to Taylor, Ramos Pinto and Ferreira over the years. I never tasted the 2000 Vista Alegre VP, but it took the Silver Medal for Ports at London's International Wine Challenge and their 2001 Vista Alegre VP won the Gold Medal at the prestigious, International Wine & Spirits Competition in London, shocking the rest of the field. Currently, their main markets are Canada, Belgium, France, Netherlands and Denmark. From what I have tasted, Quinta Valle Longo will be a household name in the USA someday. TN: Grenadine syrup, spicy licorice and cocoa aromatics prevail. Tasty, pure boysenberry flavor envelops the mouth with a generous medium-full body. The first day I thought "where are the tannins?" The second day the tannins appeared and were mostly resolved. The finish on the 2003 is tremendous and delicious. Impressive teeth staining juice with fine aging potential. Total '03 production was 333 cases. **93 points**

39. Quinta de Ventozelo – I visited this little known property in 2003 and was impressed by their efforts and quality of wines. Their Port from '03 is deeply extracted, with a reserved aromatic profile that shows cassis, grenadine syrup and mocha the second day along with a touch of alcohol. The palate is juicy and medium-full bodied with tart blackberry flavors and a coarse texture that improved dramatically the second day. The tannins are massive and this wine could age for the LT. The finish has good length, but a bit too much alcohol is evident, which detracts from the overall drinking pleasure. **87 points**

40. 2003 Quinta do Vesuvio – inky black and amongst the very darkest Ports of the vintage. This producer continues to impress me and this was my favorite entry from the Symington stable. It was unquestionably one of the finest VP cask samples I have had. When I first tried this wine in San Francisco, it made a huge impression on my palate. Having the opportunity to evaluate the Vesuvio over three days, I came away with even more respect for this producer. It is easy to describe this wine in one word, extraordinary. Initially the nose was reserved but eventually showed a gorgeous purity of raspberry essence along with some floral notes and spice. The blackberry and primary grape flavors are loaded with intensity, massive and powerful with tannins that attack the mouth early and often. This youngster was nearly a perfect VP when allowed to open up. Grip is that of an iron fist, but there is no velvet glove here. Although the 2003 Vesuvio should easily surpass five decades, it also is very enjoyable and approachable now, if given time to breathe properly. This is the real deal, a blockbuster which is one of the two best wines of the vintage, and a must buy! 3,000 cases produced. **98+ points**

41. 2003 Ramos-Pinto – violets and blueberries, very primary, medium-full body, soft and refined tannins provide a solid structure but make this very approachable now. Good length on the lingering finish but with some spirituous heat showing. Nice to see Ramos-Pinto's Vintage Port take a step up in quality. **90 points**

42. 2003 Rocha – revealing clean and fresh floral violets and lilac bouquet. The Rocha opened up quickly and is extremely approachable and enjoyable right now with medium weight, very sweet plum and grenadine juice. The tannins are moderate and show up on the long tasty finish that projects slight youthful heat. Best young Rocha VP I've tasted. 6,000 cases produced. **92 points**

43. 2003 Rozés – smells like the color purple with a gorgeous nose of ripe plum, mocha and vanilla extract. This VP exhibits a medium sweet entry, full-bodied fruit with good acidity and a smooth texture. Rozés delivers in 2003, with boysenberry and raspberry juice and a hint of light milk chocolate on the palate, along with moderate tannins and heat on the finish. **90 points**

44. 2003 Sandeman – red berry, grenadine and dominated by a profound sweet floral nose that yields to a flavor profile that tends more towards dark fruit. Although it showed hot and coarse initially, this is a wine that needed significant time to open up and gain balance. The Sandeman offers cassis and blackberry flavors, a smooth palate presence and a medium-full bodied

drink that improved significantly the second day it was open. This VP has solid aging potential and a lingering aftertaste with lively, powerful tannins. **89 points**

45. 2003 Smith Woodhouse – opaque dark ruby-purple with citrus, spice and violets on the nose. SW delivers a drier fruit profile, is medium-full bodied, and exhibits fleshy plum and cranberry flavors which are texturally pleasing. This is a well-made big and balanced wine. Astringent tannins stand out beneath the big fruit and assert themselves on the developed and lengthy aftertaste. This is a cellar worthy Smith Woodhouse VP. 4,100 cases produced. **94 points**

46. 2003 Taylor – a saturated ruby color with a garnet rim. Initially, the wine concealed its aromatic profile that opened much later to reveal lavender, violets and the essence of dark fruits. This wine is an enigma and changed significantly over the 3 days I kept this close at hand. It was significantly sweeter than I find typical of Taylor with a relatively high acidity level. This was a dense and chewy Vintage Port that delivers concentrated plum, black cherry and black currant flavors. The '03 Taylor is an opulent wine with smooth tannins which are deceptive and belie the sub-structure. On the second day of tasting from this bottle, the big picture became more obvious and most of the alcohol had integrated, the tannins became more obvious and the bouquet came out of its shell. Overall, I preferred both the 1994 and 2000 VPs cask samples for their completeness; however, this is a very fine Taylor. 12,000 cases produced. **95+ points**

47. 2003 Warre's – demonstrates an unyielding, reserved nose which improved significantly with lots of airtime and offered fragrant red berry fruit, mocha and a bit of spirit. Warre's '03 is a full-bodied Port, whose foundation is a super structure. In fact, it is the most tannic of the Symington's "Big 3." It possesses vibrant acidity, is deftly balanced and has the grip and characteristics to cellar for the long haul. This Port reveals very sweet raspberry, cherry and a distinct black pepper nuance that play out to support the tannic and long lasting finish. 9,000 cases produced. **93+ points**