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COLLECTIVE PORT WISDOM

2017 Vintage Port Report



Article and Photos by Roy Hersh © October/November 2019

Overview

Having three excellent years in a row has never happened before, and certainly not where all were worthy of Vintage Port general declarations, although in reality, 2016 and 2017 were the two that were selected by several of the larger players in the Port trade. In my opinion, from **empirical evidence of evaluating dozens of the 2017's, at this early stage ... it is the best of the three vintages, (better than both 2016 and 2015).**

When I looked at my reviews of the troika of vintages, overall, the 2017's came out with the highest average scores. For many of the 2017's, I've evaluated two bottles blind, one in June at a rented apartment and a second in August or early to mid-October. That doesn't include nearly two dozen sighted examples during this year's Port Harvest Tours, nor the Confraria tasting on Port Wine Day in Porto in early September.

In reality, all three years could have easily been "classic" generally declared years. The majority of Port producers liked 2015 a lot, but I've also heard from all that chose not to and I understand some of their rationale for deciding to go with 2016 instead. It too was a very solid year and with as many issues as 2015 and an even less consistent growing season, in my humble opinion. 2017 seemed problematic too, right from the outset; with little in the way of precipitation and an early fruit set, followed by extreme heat. But I will get more specific regarding the growing season, in due course.

Overall, yields were down quite a bit in 2017 from the previous year. I've heard numbers ranging from 18% to 26%, most mentioning 20% or so. The following comment is above my pay grade, but what happens to yields, as *global warming/climate change* continues to worsen? In the Douro where June 2017 wound up with temperatures between 40 to nearly 45 degrees C. and it was the hottest month of June recorded in 40 years, is it possible this situation could be approaching much faster than any of us could have imagined?



The talk in the Douro, from winemakers and owners is that 2018 was also quite a good year and some say, “just for Douro wines, but not Ports” and others believe it was as solid, (but different) than 2015. And as someone who had a few lagare samples of 2019 Ports and saw their depth of extraction, intense floral and fruit aromatics and concentrated flavors ... it is clear that the Douro has been blessed with five fine vintages in a row. Will this translate into DOC Douro wines becoming even more popular; Single Quinta Vintage Ports more so, or do both scenarios come into play? Lots to consider, but it is clear that the Duriense making a living as grape growers, have to be feeling pretty good as this decade comes to a close!

In considering the back-to-back scenario that I wrote about last year, (early and often) with 2016 and 2017 potentially changing the future of Port declarations as we knew them; it was acknowledged that “traditional” classic or generally declared Vintage Ports, the 3x/decade is a thing of the past. Some producers and shippers may still abide by it, but in reality, the horse has already left that barn. This is not about being a radical Port journalist, or trying to be controversial, it is being a realist.



With two back-to-back vintages declared as “Classic” ... when this had not happened with the Symingtons since the 4th quarter of the 19th century and according to Adrian Bridge, no “6 and 7” back-to-back declarations in the company since 1846 & 1847. Then again, there have been a slew of fine vintages with the last digit of “7” and arguably only the number “5” has brought the Port trade better luck.

Vintage 2017 Seasonal Growing Conditions in the Douro

The growing season of 2017 was certainly not ideal. Winter was rather dry, with ground water levels dangerously on the low side and temperatures fairly cold too. Rainfall was nearly half its normal levels and during the spring, it remained dry and warmer than usual. As mentioned, June was extremely hot and vine growth was far ahead of schedule. There was some heavy rains in early July which actually were quite welcome at the time and fortunately, they did not hang around for long.

The summer remained quite warm, but the saving grace was that the nights were quite cool and helped the grapes retain a semblance of freshness and balance due to improved acidity levels. As August approached nearly all of the Douro was 2-3 weeks further along than in typical years and temperatures were moderate compared to typical blazing hot August's in the past. In reality, 2017 was the earliest harvest that anyone can remember or find records of. It was stated that the 2017 harvest began at the same period of time that 2016's vindima had concluded. That's pretty amazing and shows how different the growing conditions of 2016 and 2017 were.

Some reported that they began picking during the first week of August and nearly all by the middle of the month. This was incredibly early to say the least, and some companies had to call back people and entire families from their vacations. As mentioned, yields were negatively affected, but 2017 seemed blessed to have excellent levels of ripeness, (some believe too much so) excellent structure from thick skins that created ripe tannins and the cool nights which kept the acidity in synch.

Extractions were so dark, that when observing this dynamic during my tastings, I quickly gave up even looking or writing the colorations, as all samples I tried were fully opaque. But given the extreme heat, I do not believe that most in the vineyards would count on the freshness that **2017's grapes exuded**. Those small and ripe grapes certainly provided more density and concentration than both prior vintages.





While touring the Douro in September and having our groups try 2017 Vintage Ports at every place we visited and when winemakers joined us for meals, we kept hearing the use of the descriptors, “intensity, freshness and concentration” which seem to be the hallmarks of this excellent vintage, along with beautifully structured wines.

In the segment, **A Question for the Port Trade** that follows, you will see what some of the key players from the trade have to say in terms of comparing the 2017 Vintage Ports to previous years. Lots used some young vintages and we also heard 1945 several times. I don’t know much about the harvest that year, but know it too was a hot and dry year; ergo the comparisons. But others you will read are equally interesting for those that follow and remember those types of dynamics.

Methodology

The luxury of completing this article one week later, allowed me to squeeze in one remaining flight of back up bottles, which I had lugged back home from Porto this summer. My daughter came to stay with me in June for just over a week, and in addition to my own wine luggage, she brought an empty suitcase for me to be able to max out many of the left over bottles. I brought the balance of my secondary bottles in two styro shippers brought empty to PT during vindima.

While I had previously evaluated the vast majority of them in recent months, I have spent the exact same amount of time with this last flight. Now having blind tasted from 119 total bottles of 2017 VP, with 726 distinctive tasting notes from bottles used for evaluation, (not including a few dozen each at both Port Wine Day and two Port Harvest Tours) I have a more thorough empirical appreciation of this vintage, than I have in any previous year.

For June and part of September, I leased an AirBnb, which had air-conditioning, a small balcony with lots of light through French doors, 24-hour access, with an elevator (for deliveries), all requisite appliances, large bathroom and very comfortable sleeping quarters. A couple of years back, the owner purchased a table and ergonomic chair that are perfect for lengthy tasting sessions. The property management team delivers them upon my arrival.

A friend of mine, **Carlos Macedo e Cunha** handles all receiving of the Ports, keeps a careful list and photo documentation of the bottles that are received and delivers the bottles promptly. I owe a debt of gratitude for his friendship and extraordinary assistance with the 2015, 2016 and 2017 troika of vintages. Without his help, I would struggle a lot more, to make the logistics work so smoothly!

Additionally, two dear friends of mine have been helping me beginning with the 2011 vintage. Dorota is in the photo above and Diana appears in the photos below. They keep everything organized and are essential for keeping my tastings 100% single blind. They remove all capsules and corks, replacing them with T-stoppers that I bring from home and intentionally mix up the tiers of bottles, and put them into my blue velvet, numbered wine bags. Although there is a dishwasher, I prefer to thoroughly hand wash the Port glassware after every tasting session.



This tried and true process makes it easy to taste VPs over the course of several days, blind of course, without any noise or distractions, (beyond occasional Fado CD's playing on my laptop). It makes staying intensely focused on the Ports at hand, very easy for me. The 3 weeks in which I was *sequestered* in my apartment, provided a perfect environment for this undertaking. It also allows the Port trade to easily ship samples locally, rather than trying to ship them to my home, which is always an expensive hardship, and a pain for them to prepare all kinds of paperwork, as US Customs post 9-11, is not easy. **And it's more natural and fun, to taste Vintage Port in Porto!**

While in Porto there were copious quantities of samples sent, (almost all companies had sent two bottles as requested) and in June these were tasted in four flights of five glasses. All bottles were tasted at least two times per day, (once before lunch and one either in the late afternoon or on occasion, later at night) for at least three consecutive days, and a dozen of the bottles were kept for a fourth day of tasting. Each session takes several hours, as I am naturally a slow taster and very deliberately, since a separate tasting note is entered on my computer including the organoleptic characteristics and other details, each time I taste a Port.

As mentioned, a few Ports required further sampling, while most remained static after a few days and did not warrant further evaluation. By the end of three weeks, I had a very clear picture of how the **2017 Vintage Ports "behaved"** and I typically spent at least one hour with every sample ... as a minimum.

2017 VP Tasting Notes

2017 Alves de Sousa Vintage Port – Fragrant rose petal and artificial grape candy smell with mixed wild berry scent. Medium weight and easy, as in already drinking very well, not just approachable, but seemingly ahead of the maturation curve. Is this due to the seriously hot weather and the fact that it was difficult to control the phenolic ripeness in the Baixa Corgo? A bit too ripe and almost a sense of the triage table staffers not getting all of the raisins off the conveyor belt? Speculation on my part, but these fit what I was smelling and tasting. That being said, the mouthfeel was nothing short of incredible with a seamless, soft velvety mouthfeel that persisted; at least until the cheek-sneak-mild-grip took hold, with tannins that are firm and stealth-like. While I am a big fan of the producer and have a strong rapport with the entire family, one cannot let friendship get in the way of honesty and Port. This is fun to drink now and will certainly be for the next couple of decades, I believe this one will never make for old bones. We shall see five to ten years down the road! **91+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Alves de Sousa's Quinta da Gaivosa Vintage Port – In 2018, I finally had the chance to visit this property and its new visitor's center and I must admit, it is a great place to spend time and to taste both DOC wines and Port of course. Over the past few years I have really become enamored with the wines from this producer and Abandonado 2004 comes **immediately to mind, but I've had the 2003 Gaivosa too. Both father and son are doing an** incredible job and Tiago has been producing some top notch wines for a while now. This 2017 is no exception, although there have been a few other recent vintages that I liked even more for this house of the rising star. The aromatics were quite different as my first note is Fig Newton, **then black cherry, "high pitched but not tanky" note but not to the level of VA. The palate shows** great concentration and medium-full body, with fine symmetry between the sweet fruit and the structural components. There's a density along with mouthfilling red and purple flavors and a lingering persistence that carries it all the way home. This is still on the upswing and has not revealed all that it is yet to become. That's saying a lot, because it is already very good indeed. Drink this Vintage Port anytime over the next 35 years. **It's my belief that this has greater** structure, better overall balance and is less ripe than the flagship VP! **92+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Andresen Vintage Port – Most mainstream Port enthusiasts have yet to find out about this niche player in the world of Port. One of the fine but relatively obscure “boutique” Port producers, they’re best known for blending excellent wood-aged Tawnies and for stocks of very old and extraordinary Colheitas. But in the past dozen years or so, Andresen has really been stepping up the quality of their recent Vintage Ports. Focus on this category has paid dividends and with 2017, their VP has finally reached the next level, in my humble opinion (although they’ve produced Vintage Ports for decades). Carlos Flores and maestro Port maker and master blender, Alvaro van Zeller make quite a team. This 2017 offers panoply of exotic fresh scents including: lavender, carnations, mint and yellow Thai curry. Medium-full weight, with authoritative structural components ... the vast Velcro-like tannins are not for everybody’s palate, (at least at this premature stage) and seamless juicy acidity maintains balance with brash blackcurrant, pure plum flavors and a scoach of tapenade. From the intricacy of the mid-palate to the expansive, elaborate finish, this is the best VP created by this company to date. If the fruit is able to hang on as long as necessary for tannins to integrate, the 2017 will develop into an *Andresen benchmark VP moment*. Best to consume this Port between 2035 and 2060+.

95+ points 11/6/19



2017 Blackett Vintage Port – Consistent and beyond reproach, the Blackett 2017 VP performed admirably and it shows great promise and delivered everything that could be expected from this house in such a fine year. The aromatic profile is simply stunning: blueberry, boysenberry, black cherries, black olives, and later on the raspberry fragrance came to the fore. Rich and medium in weight, soft and smooth. Vibrant and sumptuous and darn good from the very first sip. The Blackett VP is the kind of Port that you can pop and pour and have it open up in your glass rather than give it a long decant. Then again, your glass is guaranteed to drain quickly and without lots of thought. The approachability factor is significant and although this is only a mid-term ager, that seems just fine while sipping it. Drink it anytime over the next 30-35 years. **93+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Borges Porto "Soalheiro" Vintage Port – Another producer seldom seen outside of Portugal at least not here in the United States. This was a very solid effort by Borges. The 2017 presents lifted notes of lavender and violets, along with ripe fig and boysenberry scents that deliver a hint of the exotic, with some eucalyptus and minty fragrances in the higher register. The ripe, chalky and building tannins which are soft and round, but chalky and firm, are nonetheless prominently in abundance here, so this 2017 has the structure to drink well early on and up through 2050. After it had been open for four days, the tannins took on a more granular intrusive and drying character which is less pleasant than when originally opened. This could use a bit more aromatic fireworks and overall "wow" factor. Nonetheless, there is definitely room for growth as this was a solid effort which merits attention from a young producer that is worthy of keeping an eye on. **89+ points 9/22/19**

2017 Broadbent Vintage Port – It seems like just a few years ago, that Broadbent Vintage Port was launched for the first time. In reality, that was many vintages ago, beginning with 1994. Dirk Niepoort creates the Vintage Ports for Bartholomew Broadbent, and that's the reason why they are so consistent. The 2017 is no different and this suave VP shows its purity and quality right from the first whiff. A beautiful bouquet of fresh cut flowers, raspberry, cassis and later on as this Port opened up; notes of spicy red hots and fennel emerge. Medium weight, it was light on the tongue, yet unctuous at the same time with a touch of warming spirit, ripe if not sweet and fresh stylistically. There is a solid dose of acidity and assertive tannins that grip the upper lip, showing promise for approximately three+ decades of fine drinking ahead. The balance was a significant strength, while the spicy red fruits and long lasting finish make this 2017 Broadbent quite approachable from the first sip and a Port filled with finesse and harmony. **93+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Bulas Vintage Port – Pure and slightly high-toned lavender fragrance along with strawberry, blueberry and fruit compote. The palate exhibits more blueberry and plum flavors. It is soft and fun to roll around the tongue; while the acidity hits up your salivary glands and the chalky tannins are mostly mild, but show signs of cheek grabbing power. Together they offer up considerable balance and synchronicity. The 2017 makes for an enjoyable Bulas that should age well. Best to consume circa 2027 to 2046. **92+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Burmester Vintage Port – Half the blend is from Touriga Franca, slightly less than half are Touriga Nacional and the balance of the grapes (5%) are Tinta Roriz; all from Quinta do Arnozelo. One of the few Ports from this vintage which was closer to dark ruby in color (and not black or violet) and it's mostly opaque. It's a tale of two Ports: part is ready for prime time and pretty; while the other part seems muddled and rather far from being ready-for-release. Yet it is still quite *early days*. Where the two shall meet? The nose is tanky with high-toned VA, green and vegetal, hot and spicity, with a mix of dark berry fruit tossed in for good measure. Medium-bodied, it is a rich, smooth Port with some VA and hot streak noticeable throughout. The significant strength is the palate, which flashes signs of optimism, intensely fruited with luscious and soft ripe plum and brambly sweet boysenberry flavors. While a bit reticent today, the heat from the aguardente will likely meld with the fruit, seemingly, it's all just a matter of more time needed. The structure is firmly in place, with tannins ripe and ready to provide a strong spine and crisp acidity allowing the sweet fruit to remain balanced, while the medium-long finish shines. Wait for this Burmester to gel, it will, but may take a decade+ plus patience and a cool cellar. Drink from 2032-2050. 9,660 total bottles produced (the equivalent of 805 cases of 12). **86+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Capela da Quinta do Vesuvio Vintage Port – From nearly century old vine field blend grapes comes the 4th bottling of Capela, (2007, 2011 and 2016 prior to this) Portuguese for *chapel*. Extraction level offers an optic equivalent to an ink well, which is saying a lot given the overall coloration of the 2017's. The bouquet is equally provocative with perfumed floral notes, fresh plum, raspberry and an herbal element. Medium weight, soft and sophisticated, with powerful tannins, yet the Capela remains approachable, mouthfilling and medium dry with lovely raspberry essence and a drop of spirit in the early going. It fleshed out nicely over three days and should remain under lock & key for at least another decade. Will drink best from 2036-2058. 472 cases produced, 1% of the vineyards entire production. **94+ points 6/19/19**

2017 Churchill's Vintage Port – One can't help notice the impressive extraction here. The fragrance is expansive with some high toned lavender and violets, as well as fresh marionberry, minerality and spicy red licorice. Medium-full body weight, round and as soft as silk across the tongue, yet quite concentrated too. A hint of aguardente pokes through, and is disrupted by ripe tannins and prominent acidity. Sweet grenadine and plum flavors up front and drier redcurrant on the back end, met by another dose of spicity character that leads to a medium length finish. A bit rustic in style, but by the third day, the finish was a little bit longer. **Wait until the Churchill's fully integrates over the next decade, then consume from 2030-2045. 91+ points 6/19/19**

2017 Churchill's Quinta da Gricha Vintage Port – Records prove this Quinta's main building has stood since 1820 and the lagares were completed in 1852. Gricha has been undergoing a renaissance in recent years. It was purchased in 1999 by the Graham family and that same year, Vintage Port was produced at Gricha for the very first time. At the moment there are fifty total hectares of which 40 are planted to vine and 20 ha of which are very old vine parcels. In 2017, grapes began being harvested for Port at Gricha by mid-August, and then were foot trodden in lagares. Intensely aromatic notes of plum, grenadine, anise, minerals and pine resin presented a refined essence. Medium weight and silky smooth, with more prominent tannins on day one than day three, when they seemed better integrated with the fruit. An approachable crowd pleaser the 2017 is generously fruited with dry redcurrant and black cherry flavors; a medium-long finish that's noticeably drier than earlier sips. It should age well for 3-4 decades, but a proper decant will allow it to be consumed now or throughout its entire lifespan. **92+ points 6/19/19**



2017 Cockburn's Vintage Port – Before it went extinct, John Henry Smithes, the winemaker & viticultural maestro at Quinta dos Canais, (circa 90 years ago) literally saved the Touriga Nacional grape in the Douro region. Due to its incredibly low-yields, those growing grapes tended to avoid planting it, or at least replanting it, as it was barely financially viable. Yet **Smithes' research and tenacity saved the day** and while Canais had sold grape production to **Cockburn's for over 100 years, it would take until 1989 for the shipper to buy this extraordinary property. Canais happened to have loads of Touriga Nacional, thanks to John Henry's foresight!** But once purchased, even more Touriga Nacional was planted and cuttings were spread to other Douro properties, which is why the region currently maintains nearly 5% of this grape. The Symingtons purchased Quinta dos Canais in 2006 and have painstakingly improved **Cockburn's Ports and restored the firm's reputation, and vineyards at this enormous property. Nearly ¾ of the grapes for 2017 came from Canais, the balance from two lesser known SFE properties.** Touriga Nacional made up 52% of the blend and Touriga Franca 30%, the balance from 10% Sousão and 8% Alicante Bouschet. The bouquet is a mix of earthy pine resin, tar, esteva and briary boysenberry. Oddly, what seemingly began as a heavy weight contender the first day, by day three softened significantly and emerged as a medium-bodied Port, yet conveyed a luxurious satin-like consistency across the palate. Flavors of ripe blueberry, blackberry jam, spicy black licorice and a peppery nuance are sophisticated in their layers; while the round, well-integrated tannins meld with the fruit, supported by cleansing acidity providing deft balance and **lingering finish. The long term potential of the 2017 Cockburn's is substantial, and likely four decades. 2,500 cases = 8% of Cockburn's total vineyard production. 93+ points 6/19/19**

2017 Croft Vintage Port – The narrative of this young Croft is substantial, there's so much fine material to appreciate within the bottle. It is solid across all departments: extraction, aromatics, mouthfeel, structure, flavor profile, length and more. All the boxes have been ticked in 2017. The big question for consumers remains: should I buy it, and if so, should I purchase **an entire case? So while I won't answer that for you directly, you can decipher my tasting note** below. This Croft is filled with a gorgeous earthy bouquet of floral notes, Rainier cherry, tar, esteva and **fresh herbs. Heavier than the vast majority of Ports from this vintage, let's call it medium-full, and that is a good thing. Round, elegant and viscous; the tannins are chalky cheek grabbers, supported by vibrant acidity. 2017 Croft delivers flavors of briary blackcurrant, mocha, blueberry, black licorice, and is medium-sweet overall with solid balance, but slightly bitter edge to the medium-long finish. There were 3,900 cases produced. Drink from 2025 through 2053. 93+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Croft's Quinta da Roêda "Serikos" Vintage Port – The word Serikos is Greek, and it means, "silky" as in the production of silk after the phylloxera (root louse) destroyed the vines on the property. They were replanted in the last decade of the 19th century at Roêda which now will produce a Port, "Serikos" from these old-vine field blends. It will be akin to Vargellas Vinha Velha, Graham's The Stone Terraces and other super-premium Ports like Noval's Nacional; all of which come from hallowed ground in the Douro. Earthy scents of crushed autumn leaves, rose bush, esteva and eucalyptus along with briary strawberry, plum and anise provide panoply of aromas from this astonishing new Croft. Medium-full-bodied, rich and brash, but light on the palate, Serikos presents a singular style of Port. Chalky mild tannins are drying and assertive, without presenting any astringency. Pure, ultra-sweet fruit flavors from the old vines include refreshingly ripe cherry, blackcurrant and plum in waves which captivate the mid-palate and incredible, lingering finish. The first vintage of Serikos will always be remembered due to its launch from the 2017 vintage. 202 cases were produced. **95+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Dalva Vintage Port – Fragrant earthy notes of dried rose petal, cassis, blackberry and herbs provide food for further thought. This 2017 delivers a medium-full body weight, and exudes an unctuous and mercurial mouthfeel, with lively and refreshing acidity to cleanse the palate. This Dalva is one of the top Ports from the 2nd grouping, (four flights of five) laced with sophisticated mid-palate layers of minerality and bright black fruits. Flavorful fig and black plum dominate the landscape, with hints of grenadine and fully integrated ripe, medium powered tannins which lead to a long and dry finish. This Dalva is a deftly balanced and delicious Port with densely concentrated and focused fruit flavors that will continue to drink well early on and for the early decades due to its exemplary acidity and ease of approachability. Yet the long-term potential of this Port is outstanding too, with a minimum of four to five decades of solid drinking ahead. **94+ points 6/24/19**

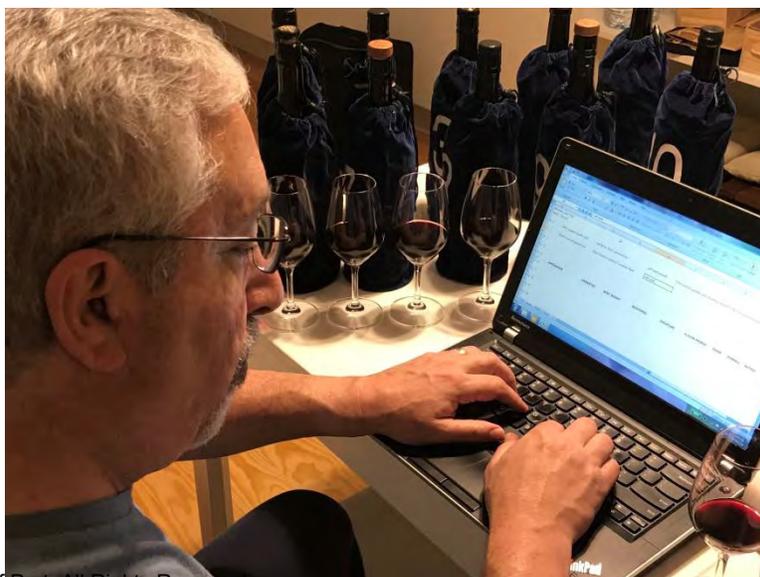
2017 Delaforce Vintage Port – Fresh and lifted impression with a tanky note all three days, but most prominent in the early going. Other fragrances include briar patch blueberry, distinctive purity of grape, a spicy scent of anise and a note of campfire charred wood. Medium weight, soft and velvety with mild tannins and citrus laden acidity. Off-dry, with pure red and blueberry flavors with a touch of fresh herbs. The mouthfeel is extremely seductive, soft and round. Overall this is a well-made and balanced Port, a bit four square in the mid-section, with medium length and it's built for medium term aging of 2-3 decades. **90+ points 6/19/19**



2017 Dow's Vintage Port – The fusion of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca grapes made up 80% of the 2017 Dow's VP blend. The spicy scents of violet, brambly black and blue-berry fruit, mocha, pine and a mild mineral inflection; are reminiscent of an overripe Zin. Best nose of its flight. Medium-bodied by day 3, so drinkable ... soft, sweet, fresh and elegant; the fruit is so dense at this point, (not reflected in the mouthfeel) and the underlying tame tannins will fool some into thinking this is not ageworthy. To that I say, 'remember 1994' at this same stage. There's great purity of purple fruits, which fade to black, fleshy yet soft and seemingly sweet for a Dow, with acidity for days. The finish is spectacular in its length and depth. Opulent, just seems to fit the character. 5,250 cases = 16% of Dow's total vineyard production. Best between 2038 - 2075. Some may believe my drinking window is *off*; but it's the exact same age differential as consuming a 1963 Dow's Vintage Port today. I don't think that's a stretch, at all. Yet, Dow's 2017 is more similar to 1966. A classic beauty; like Catherine Deneuve in her prime!
97+ points 11/6/19

2017 DR Port Vintage Port – Most Port connoisseurs are far more knowledgeable about DR Port's range of Tawnies, aged Whites, Colheitas and Very Old Tawny Ports compared to the limited number of Vintage Ports they have released. I believe that number is a mere seven, beginning with 2001. The 2017 is a well-made Vintage Port and it all begins with the aromatic profile: both floral notes and violet candies, loads of brambly black fruits and spice. The mid-palate offers a glimpse into the soul of this Port, layered with concentrated blackcurrant, fig and licorice; it is notably dry, in synch and fresh. Medium weight, rich and warm with bright acid and moderately powerful, granular tannins. By day 3, this added density and was far smoother than it began on day 1. The finish was good from the start but was more persistent and harmonious. DR's Vintage Port will drink beautifully early on and come to fruition and drink best 2026-2049. **93+ points 6/19/19**

2017 Duorum Vintage Port – An odd duck, I am not quite sure what took place, but how **this was "approved"** is confusing, to say the least. High toned medicinal notes, with menthol, smoky creosote and used charcoal, lifted candied violets, tar and fig; are fairly unpleasant and **the VA notes puncture some of the positive aromas here. But there was also an "ether" scent**, which brought back some memories of childhood operations I went through. On the palate, this VP is quite tanky and hot with aguardente poking through, and the VA seeming to be quite prominent. Nonetheless, there was some damson plum flavor, tar and minty character. Yet the quality that was most bothersome was the level of heat from the spirit that permeated every sip of this Port and remained like grappa on the finish. Typically, I would not rate a Port like this, but someone has to protect Port lovers from buying this one. **78 points 6/19/19**



2017 Ferreira's Quinta do Porto Vintage Port – The decision made by Sogrape 'not to take part' in the back-to-back general declarations came as a surprise. Why not be part of a historic tradition-breaking moment? But I digress. Ferreira's Single Quinta property, *Quinta do Porto* did make an entry with their 2017 VP. The QPR (Quality Price Ratio) is remarkable and you have to first taste this infant to appreciate how affordable and worthwhile it really is. The blend of grapes on the menu for 2017 Quinta do Porto is: 48% Touriga Nacional, 35% Touriga Franca, 14% old-vine field blends and 3% Sousão. It should be noted that the Touriga Franca grape happened to have a marvelous year all across the Douro and it is one of the great reasons for such an illustrious vintage of VP in 2017. Bright and lively briar patch and fresh cut floral aromas with intense pure grape essence. There are boatloads of tannins in this young Port, with Velcro-like upper-lip grip and bracing juicy acidity as well. Medium-bodied, smooth and mild mannered, with a touch of spirit and excellent length and layers of flavor. There are vibrant red fruits with cherry and ripe strawberry, delectable and the fruit blends well with the ample acidity and high quality grippy tannins. This SQVP requires cellaring and patience for this big and dry-styled beauty. 292 cases were produced. Parabens, Luis Sottomayor! **93+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Feuerheerd's Vintage Port – Founded in 1815, this company has bounced around the Port trade at least a handful of times, (to make a long story short) it's now owned and produced by *Barão de Vilar – Vinhos SA*. Co-founded by Chairman/CEO Fernando van Zeller and his brother, the uber-talented winemaker/Master Blender, Alvaro van Zeller. It's deeply extracted, an impenetrable black with *nearly no meniscus to speak of*. There's a nice *mélange of spice*, berries and minerality with fragrances ranging from esteva, high-toned violets, boysenberry and wet stone. All told, these scents merged to create a provocative profile that kept my nose in the glass, early and often. Displaying medium weight, soft, granular and dry character; structurally **more muscular than many 2017's with ripe, brazen tannins that present themselves late and are still integrating at this early stage, and bracing acidity providing the synchronicity**. The fig, briary blueberry and cedar flavors are voluptuous, with a very dry, spicy, long intricate finish. Wait a **decade before diving in then drink this Feuerheerd's VP for a decade after the mid-century**. In retrospect, this probably deserved one extra point. After the 2nd tasting on day 3, when the bag was removed, I was quite surprised by the reveal. It was that good! **93+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Fonseca Vintage Port – It all began with a swirling fragrant note of dried rose petal and other fresh flowers, an essence of spearmint, briar patch blackberry and a spicy green snip of esteva. The medium frame, round, robust and layered velvety mouthfeel, set the stage for incoming sweet waves of ripe blueberry, black cherry, anise and mocha; which almost sounds more like a healthy breakfast shake than a Vintage Port. Assertive dry tannins and juicy, focused acidity led to the overtly persistent finish; possessing a minimum of four or more decades of unlimited upside ... think 1970 Fonseca, today! The 2017 Fonseca is forthcoming early on, but requires more time to fully mesh, so be patient. Drink from 2030 to 2065. 675 cases produced. **95+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Graham's Vintage Port – Consider that Malvedos had 42% less precipitation than the *average of the preceding thirty three harvests!* The first bottle of 2017 Graham's assessed in June wound up within one point of my final score for the 2nd bottle, which was blind tasted too, back at home in October. So you're reading a combined tasting note incorporating facets from both bottles. Aromatically speaking the Graham's had a beautiful bouquet with mélange of a floral note of lavender, fresh-cut Christmas tree, milk chocolate/mocha and scents of dark wild berry fruit. Medium-full bodied, both unctuous and elegant, with a sweet entry and drier end game. This 2017 is a "complete" VP, with blackcurrant, cassis and fennel swirling on the palate and seductively drying tannins that approach "grippy" and meld with finely tuned acidity. It can be consumed early on, cellared for a minimum of 20 years or enjoyed for at least a half century. It will continue to benefit restraint while developing greater complexity. Seductive and intense, this Graham's comes on the heels of the outstanding 2011 & 2016 vintages. 5,250 cases of 12x 750 ml bottled; 11% of Graham's total vineyard production. **96+ points 10/20/19**



2017 Graham's The Stone Terraces Vintage Port – One of the darkest impenetrable black Ports I've ever witnessed. To call that narrowest of meniscuses a "rim" would be a disservice to that word, as that skinny purple line was barely perceptible. Not long ago, "Dr. Tawny" provided me with a single blind horizontal sample from the first 3 and only TST bottlings: 2011, 2015 and 2016. The 2011 was by far my favorite and not because of its extra years in bottle. After the impression the 2016 had left me with in Porto the prior summer, in my head, I could've sworn my choice was the 2016 from the color and pure depth of "everything". After tasting this 2017 TST Port in Porto for four days, I knew what I had to do. I brought my back up bottle back home and shared it with the biggest individual buyer of The Stone Terraces that I know of. Dr. Tawny does like Vintage Port too! In a blind flight of 8 bottles over three days, (he had no idea that "TST" was in it) finally the reveal came. We were both very surprised by this Port and my note represents this second bottle, which I preferred slightly to the first, most likely because the Port had an *additional* four months in bottle. Anyway, on to the 2017, just the fourth iteration of this singular "dual parcel Vintage Port." The 2017 harvest began on the 28th of August at Malvedos, from a property that received more than 40% less rain in 2017, than the AVERAGE of the prior 30 years. I almost feel like it is important to repeat that, yet you get the point. The aromatics of this Port made me realize how limited my knowledge of botany really is, as I smelled a wide assortment of fresh flowers ... to simplify things ... I smelled a floral garden. The intensity is hard to describe, but additional sensorial reactions included: very ripe plum, blueberry, rock rose and potpourri – loaded with lavender. Whereas expectations might lead one astray, thinking this was going to be a massive brooding monster Port, just the opposite was true. This 2017 *TST was as soft as a drink of milk*, delicate, intricate and sophisticated. While leaving no question as to whether this had the ability to age for many years, the acidity took my salivary glands for a ride and then came the underlying tannins, stealth in their approach and the last to arrive at the party in my glass. Deceptive in power, akin to a fierce teenage girl, confident in her skills as a black belt, walking away from the two bullies who had no idea what she was capable of. The mélange of flavors: ripe cherries, plums and purity of grape; in synch and delicious in the simple way they combine. The finish ... like a live version of *Ode to Joy on New Year's Eve, refined and mellifluous*. 6,360 individually numbered bottles, 180 magnums and 120 Tappit Hens. Overall this equates to just 4% of Malvedos' total production. I am starting to believe that Quinta do Noval Nacional actually does have another rival, (beyond the old vine parcels @ Qta. de Vargellas) Drink now, or anytime while your alive.

97+ points 11/6/19

2017 Gran Cruz Vintage Port – Originally founded in the late 1880's, this shipper did not create its first Port until 1926, the same year my father was born. Forty six years later, the company was sold to the French beverage conglomerate, Le Martiniquaise. Three years hence, the name of the firm was changed to Gran Cruz. This is the story of their 2017 Vintage Port. It all began with a stark dark extraction that settled into my glass, like peering into a very long tunnel. While the structure was spot on, an initial whiff of anise was accompanied by earthy and spicy nuances of cassis, esteva, blackcurrant, kalamata and tar. Medium weight, soft and sweet, this Port presented an intense acidic attack backed up by tannins that kept gaining grip the longer the bottle was open. Complementary layers of dry plum, raisins, black licorice and chewy black fruit flavors are not only balanced, but seductive in their charm. The persistence of the finish and density of the fruit attests to the beauty of this Gran Cruz during the 91st year since their inaugural Port. Wait for this to soften slightly and then drink early and often through 2055. **92+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Kopke Vintage Port – Blended from old plots with old-vine field blends at Qta. São Luiz and the other 50% is from a parcel of more recent block planted Touriga Nacional grapes. The initial bouquet delivered a bit of unfriendly vegetal plus high toned tanky notes and VA. So I held this back for a 4th day of evaluation and the VA seemed to recede on day 3 and was gone altogether by day 4. It presented an earthy bouquet of rock rose, menthol, smoky and vanilla scents along with blackberry and plum fruit that was far more pleasant. This 2017 was medium-full, super smooth, round, with a memorable silky soft texture across the palate, Like TCA, which **bothers me at fairly low levels; there's a knack for picking out tannins hiding underneath gobs of fruit**. But in this case, it just seems like the tannins were rather mild, fully resolved and nicely integrated. So, this Kopke was easier to appreciate at a young age, but it also lowered long term potential to a maximum of 3 decades. The crisp acidity helped to check some of the seemingly high residual sugar in the ripe blueberry and sweet black cherry flavors with a hint of eucalyptus towards the medium length of the finish. 510 cases (of 12) were produced. Drink 2022 to 2045. **87+ points 6/25/19**

2017 Krohn Vintage Port – The Krohn company was sold to The Fladgate Partnership in 2013 and thankfully they have continued to bottle a Port under its own name, keeping the memory of the company alive. Fresh and perfumed lavender, black wild berries and scintillating scents of eucalyptus and spearmint provide the magic aromatically. Medium-bodied, soft, warm and rich, with tannins chalky and lip grabbing, while the seamless acidity provides the freshness and harmony here. A suave Port loaded with lithe blueberry and blackberry fruit, sweet and pure; it ends well with a hint of plum and excellent length. Slightly simple at this moment, but check back in a handful of years to see the improved depth as all components will meld beautifully. Drink from 2026-2057. 1,400 cases were produced. **93+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Magalhães Vintage Port – This is a solid effort from the less well-known Quinta do Silval. In addition to the winery, which is perfectly situated in the heart of the Douro region, in the Cima Corgo, there is a fantastic, casual and very comfortable hotel. This absolutely stunning property which produces fine Ports and some very interesting single grape still wines too, can be visited on short notice as long as an appointment is made. The 2017 growing season had some issues with grapes converted to raisins because of the extreme heat, especially in the month of June. There are fragrant aromas of ripe black plums, high-toned violets with abundant spicy elements that show up even more so on day 2. What sets this wine apart is the harmoniousness of the texture, rich, full, lush, but the acidity cuts a swath across the fruit to keep this balanced **and lively** ... walking the proverbial tight rope. A thought provoking, cerebral Vintage Port made by the Magalhães family which has the stuffing to reward up to 3+ decades of aging in cellar. **92+ points 9/22/19**

2017 Martha's Wines & Spirits Vintage Port – This emerging Port company has remained mostly unknown since the 18th century, as the family-owned operation belonging to the Marta family, has continued to be based in Santa Marta de Penaguião, since 1727. For many **years they sold Port in bulk to other shippers, but in more recent times, they've been making** their own Port, Moscatel and still wines too, now that the next generation has entered the business and become integral to the success of the company. This 2017 Vintage Port, an overtly burly and meaty wine, with high toned scents of violets, ripe plums and grenadine notes with a lifted soft and velvety smooth mouthfeel. Nice cut, and grip with balanced acidity, good viscosity and sappiness to the rounded but dry finish of solid persistence and length. The 2017 is a fine effort by this young and budding Port firm. **91+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Maynard's Vintage Port – Founded in 1715, and connected through antecedents to the van Zeller family; this was one of the very early British Port Shippers in the golden age.

Maynard's is a brand within Port company Barão de Vilar and it was re-established by the van Zeller family in 1996. Port winemaker/Master Blender Álvaro van Zeller is also the co-founder of the company with his brother Fernando (who is the CEO), and Alvaro is well-known for his oenological prowess with J.H. Andresen. **In a word, "purity" as exemplified in the aromatics and flavor profile. Blackcurrant is the keynote descriptor that defines both of the above; yet there's more, of course.** On the nose: lavender and fresh roses fill the vase, along with briar patch blackberries and ripe black cherry fruit. The palate shows other qualities too: medium-full bodied and as soft as mink, elegant and balanced, yet richly concentrated. Ample citrusy acidity and ripe, moderately powerful tannins balance out this well-made **Maynard's Vintage Port, which I believe is the 5th Vintage Port they've produced, (2007, 2011, 2015 & 2016) based on our TNDB.** The finish is the significant strength of this Vintage Port, as it stood out from all of this **2017's** characteristics, as the persistence and overall longevity were mind-blowing. Drink 2025 to 2050. **92+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Messiah Vintage Port – During the Port harvest of 2019, I made my first visit to the Port cellars of Messiah in Bairrada and had a thorough look at their cellars and tasting of their various categories of Port wine. It really changed my perspective of the company and the quality of products they have vinified over the decades and that is why I greatly enjoy tasting Ports blind. Label bias is a real thing and many wine **writers don't even realize they are susceptible to** that plague or chose to ignore it altogether. The 2017 Messiah puts forth this VP with ripe sweet cherry on the initial whiff, which leads to intriguing scents of rose petal, baking spice, and a note of bittersweet chocolate. The palate offers a full-bodied, in your face style, not for the faint of heart with both red and black wild berry flavors, a touch of mint and freshness that is undeniable. This youngster also exerts exceptional concentration and balance, but also exhibits age-worthiness based on the structural components that are a hallmark of this vintage, and which Messiah has ably achieved. This Messiah VP will age effortlessly for at least 4 or 5 decades if properly cellared, but can be enjoyed early on as well. **93+ points 10/20/19**



2017 Niepoort Vintage Port – The fruit was sourced from several old-vine field blend parcels, picked early on. In a vintage replete with opaque purple-black optics, this takes the cake. My first written comment, ‘Paint it Black’ was spot on when peering into this impenetrable ink well. An effusive fragrance literally rose out of the glass to meet my nose a foot away... with boisterous scents of lingonberry, violets, crème de cassis and cherry pie. Medium-full bodied with a smooth creamy texture, electric acidity and recoiled tannins seemingly integrated with the fruit, but tensely waiting for the right moment to surge. The gobs of black and purple fruits are off-dry and pure, with black cherry and cassis at the center, seemingly sweet at times and dry at others, but here the acidity exacerbates the freshness at the core. With many things to love about this young Port, the fact that I had to swallow two or three times while tasting some spicy cinnamon stick in the background, is memorable even months later. The Niepoort 2015 was quite an achievement, but having had a handful of moments with that Port, I am convinced 2017 is the more complete wine. And as many of us have heard Dirk Niepoort say over the years, “this is the BEST Vintage Port I have ever made”... with 2017; I believe he might just be right! It’s not easy to come up with a “drinking window” for this VP, as it is fun and really approachable right now, but I’ll suggest 2085 or so. **98+ points 6/24/19**



2017 Noble & Murat Vintage Port – A fine effort from Noble & Murat which was established in 1831 and produced their very first Vintage Port in 2015. A partnership between the two owners, Alexandre Antas Botelho and Antonio Borges Taveira, they revived a brand that had been dormant for more than an entire century. Their Quinta do Bragão is in Celeirós, Sabrosa in the upper Pinhão River Valley. I would very much like to thank PtoP Wine for their introduction to Noble and Murat and use of the above photo. This 2017 Vintage Port offers more in the way of red fruits with Bing cherry, raspberry, anise, some minerality and a hint of spirit. The tannins are chalky and refined but still show enough verve that along with the vivacity of the acidity, aging will not be an issue here. A well-made **and harmonious Port that's** finely balanced and shows the type of quality that we can expect and hope to watch improve in the future. There have been many new companies joining the ranks of the Port trade due to lower startup costs associated with some relaxed IVDP regulations, cutting the quantity of Port stocks required to begin in the trade, by 50% (150,000 liters, now down to 75,000 liters) which is a fantastic development a year or two ago! This 2017 will easily age for three to four decades and I offer congratulations to the two owners who have taken the risk to restart this company again! **92+ points 9/22/19**

2017 Poças Vintage Port – Offering a gorgeous bouquet of flowers, filled with pure raspberry, ripe strawberry fruit, red licorice, graphite and pine needles. It bordered on full-bodied, with richness, deeply concentrated and unctuous with a lush velvety mouthfeel. Old school blackstrap aggressive and assertive ... yet non-astringent tannins, (reminded me of 1992 Taylor's tannins at this same stage) met up with-near perfect, balancing acidity to create an intense and focused structural spine. Brawny and profoundly overlaid waves of ripe blueberry, sweet plum and black raspberry flavors, distinctively pure led to a ridiculously long finish. 2017 Poças **IS** that good. In a flight of 5, it stood out from the other four as few others of 70+ Ports did. To be clear, this was up against some very strong competitors and Poças bested them. After day 3, I revealed the other four, but I held this back for a fourth day to ensure that it had the stuffing that I had surmised, before revealing its identity. My guess was *Graham's*, so this was a pleasant surprise. If you purchase a case, try a bottle, cellar the rest for at least a decade prior to drinking. At its best from 2032 through 2070. *The best Poças VP that I've ever encountered!* **95+ points 6/25/19**

2017 Porto Sequeira Vintage Port – Another fairly new company to most people and certainly to me as well. The company was founded in 1899. A very fine effort indeed from Porto Sequeira in their 2nd ever Vintage Port. Initially on day one, the Sequeira smelled to me very much like a fine Napa Cabernet, but it seemed out of place here, yet it still had a beautiful fragrance; also of blueberry pie melded with black licorice, and cassis. Medium to full-bodied, this comes across as liquid velvet across the tongue, coating the palate in dense, concentrated, almost unctuous viscosity. But then a wave of schist and limestone minerality finishes the back end and leads to a grippy, almost aggressively tannic dynamic, and an intricate and pleasant long and puckering finish that some bottle age will undoubtedly tone down. Drink early on while young or from 2026 through 2042. **92+ points 9/22/19**

2017 Quevedo Vintage Port – The Quevedo family produced their very first Port at Quinta Vale d’Agodinho, back in 1991 under their family’s name. The Quevedo’s now own 114 hectares encompassing six properties in two of the Douro’s sub-regions; while Oscar sells their wine to nearly 30 countries around the world. The 2017 represents the 10th Vintage Port created by Claudia Quevedo, who has crafted all of the VP’s, including the inaugural Quevedo Vintage Port of 2005. 2017 is the 5th consecutive Vintage Port produced and would have been the 8th in a row, had Quevedo not intentionally overlooked producing 2012. The fresh floral fragrances of lavender, carnations and rock rose mingle with scents of ripe black plum, herbs and cocoa to deliver an effusive and ethereal bouquet. Over the course of 3 days, this VP filled out nicely to a medium-full body, silky and seductive in its texture and presented sweet, jammy plum and ripe blackcurrant fruit. It was brazenly balanced by zesty tartaric acid and potent, chiseled tannins, together checking the very sweet-upon-entry and mid-palate flavors, with only slightly drier blackcurrant nuances on the prodigious finish. As for a drinking window for this 2017 Quevedo, there’s 4-5 decades of excellent drinking ahead. Claudia’s Port making momentum, continues!

94+ points 6/24/19





2017 Quinta dos Avidagos Vintage Port – After an initial intro to Pedro Tamagnini who manages the aforementioned property in Santa Marta de Penaguião, after several conversations, **we met very briefly on the streets of Porto, for the handoff of his 2017 VP's.** **Avidagos is one of** four vineyard properties in the Baixo Corgo, owned by the Nunes de Matos family, in close **proximity to Régua.** **The family's wine business was founded in 1757,** but it was not until 1978 that they purchased Avidagos and 21 years hence, they built a modern winery and also revamped the armazém. The 2017 is **Avidago's very first Vintage Port and it is an honor to write about another small producer's inaugural Vintage Port release.** **An evocative aromatic silhouette** emerged, (within an hour of Diana mixing up the bottles for my second round of tastings) with perfumed, ripe black cherry and kirsch in the foreground, plus an herbal essence and pine resin scent that followed. Medium-bodied, smooth, warm and round, loaded with refreshing acidity and chalky tannins by day 3, without any grippy character present. Deeply concentrated in the mid-section, with dense, fleshy fruit that is unusual from my experience with **first time** Vintage Ports, **as they're often times much lighter and less focused.** **Red fruited with flavors of bright** pomegranate and brambly raspberry, soft mouthfeel with a warm and herb-laced nuance on the persistent finish. An extremely fine first effort by this little known producer; this Port will drink very well early on due to the integration of both tannins and aguardente. It will also reward patience in the cellar and drink at its best from 2030-2048.

93+ points 6/24/19

2017 Quinta Casa Amarela Vintage Port – Established in 1885, this is a producer that I was unaware of. At first glance this solid Vintage Port is pretty, and with some minor tweaks, this Quinta could move up into the next tier. Both lively aromatically, but more so on the palate, there are minor dynamics that could easily help to add complexity, depth and overall substance to this VP from this extraordinary vintage. Upfront flavors of pure grape, blackberry, and black licorice meld with crisp acidity that provided this 2017 with fine roundness and balance to the medium-bodied soft and luxurious texture. Deeply fragrant notes of lavender, floral perfume with carnations and rose petals and black fruits are captivating. Good grip from slightly drying tannins that are chalky and keep the sweet fruit fresh and in balance. The finish is medium in length and depth and could use a bit more oomph. **90+ points 9/22/19**

2017 Quinta do Crasto Vintage Port – The finest Vintage Port by this Quinta since 2003 or possibly before that, in 1994 ... but this is the real deal. Bigger and bolder than Crasto VP's usually get, especially when they're this young and more similar to other houses Top LBV's. But the 2017 has the depth and length and achieves up to its full potential. Scintillatingly fresh fragrances of grenadine, raspberry, some pine, herbal and esteva notes. Medium-bodied and ultimately smooth and approachable, but more unctuous and charismatic than usual. Excellent overall balance and a purely harmonious Port that will age well for 30-35 years. Well done!! **93+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Quinta do Infantado Vintage Port – “And now for something completely different” is not just the name of a Monty Python movie, it is the hallmark of a Port wine from 2017, too. Besides the ultra-high-toned nose of this wine, with loads of violet and lavender fragrance, a significant tanky note, potpourri and some light VA; there was also some gorgeous fig and orange peel scents which created quite a unique elixir, not all of it pleasant. Even after four days open, Infantado's initial aromatics remained constant. Medium-bodied, concentrated, intense, and ultra-dry; the blackcurrants, rhubarb, tar and black licorice flavors were edgy, fleshy and blessed with a velvety mouthfeel. Its dry profile was unlike any other Port from 2017, and possibly the big brash and granular drying tannins had something to do with that. Yet the acidity was fresh and focused and led to a stellar long finish with a grape extract aftertaste. Overall, once past the wild roller coaster aromatics, this was a darn good Vintage Port. Quirky, singular and expressive; hold off drinking for a handful of years and allow this to all come together. It is my belief that it will, rather nicely, indeed. Then consume during its prime time from 2027-2057. **93+ points 6/25/19**

2017 Quinta das Lamelas Vintage Port – Lamelas was founded in 1836. The current owner, Jose Guedes has a very deep stock of White and wood-aged Ports. This 2017 Vintage Port is dark fruited with a suggestion of mint on the nose; this shows an overt fruity freshness on the fragrant and charming bouquet. Blackcurrant, cassis, brambly blueberry, a sprig of mint and pine needles thrown into the mix, distinguish the highly complex aromas of this young VP. The texture is voluptuous, rich and elegant. Soft, round, ripe tannins with a mineral inflected finish and just enough acidity to keep this well executed Port in balance. The finish is superb in its layers and also the length. Drink this when young or at its best from 2026 through 2048. **92+ points 9/22/19**

2017 Quinta dos Mattos Vintage Port – With seven quintas as part of this group, they often bottle their Ports under the name Porto Valriz. Their quintas possess a total of 55 hectares of vineyards, all of which are mechanized. The 7th generation of the Mattos family restored their wine business in 1986 and adopted the simpler name of Coimbra Mattos, Lda. in 2005. Although I had tried some of the Valriz Ports before, in 2018, I first had the chance to meet the family members, as I had been invited to try some of their “Special Categories” Ports, (mostly wood-aged) including the new 600-bottle cache of 1858 Porto Valriz, Very Old Tawny Port. Onto their 2017 Vintage Port: the nose remained reticent the first day open and finally emerged with a slightly off-putting medicinal note, then blue and black fruits, along with hints of tar and anise. Medium weight, by day 3, it had added some girth and was concentrated, voluptuous and mercurial in its presence. Structurally, the Mattos VP presented soft to medium, dry and chalky tannins and very lively acidity. A mix of briary under-ripe raspberries, tart blackcurrant fruit and licorice flavors were intriguing and led to a medium length aftertaste. A singular dry style, or were the grapes picked prior to phenolic ripeness? I am not sure which, but you really have to enjoy the dry side of the spectrum. This 2017 will drink well early on and improve for 3 decades. **87+ points 6/19/19**

2017 Quinta dos Muros Vintage Port – This property always sold Port in bulk up until the law change in 1974, the year of the Portuguese Revolution. With vineyards totaling nearly 30 hectares, Quinta dos Muros has always been the spine of *Quinta do Portal's* Ports. The 2017 Muros bettered itself a lot over four full days. It gained more weight, added mid-palate depth, a slightly longer finish and far more character, which is why I kept it for an extra day of evaluation. A bit high-toned early on, the boysenberry and bright floral bouquet continued to morph and later delivered a distinctive whiff of anise and fresh herbs too. Full-bodied, round and seductively smooth, the rich and unctuous nature of this infant Single Quinta VP was more overt each day of the tasting. Brambly black plum and grenadine flavors dominated well-integrated tannins and were balanced by vibrant acidity. A delicious young Portal, quite exuberant even at this early stage. So hang on, as the long-term potential is undeniable. Drink now through 2052.

94+ points 6/20/19

2017 Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo Vintage Port – The blackberry, esteva and mocha notes on the bottom of the scale, with bright and higher treble notes of spicy red licorice and ripe rhubarb, along with some blueberry and plum flavors do a great job of rounding out the middle range. There was some heat that shone as slightly unbalanced here, however, while this does not lack for size, there are some slightly sharp edges that detract from the overall pleasure this wine could deliver. A bit angular initially and through day 3; it was sharp, warm and with some aguardente protruding. The finish was exceptionally long and that definitely helped overall. I believe the Quinta Nova will ultimately flesh out over time. Drink 2028 to 2046. **91+**

points 6/28/19

2017 Quinta do Noval Vintage Port – Both the first smell and sip lay out a road map of a Port less traveled. This is a singular experience and I've tasted a few Noval's over the years. The fragrance of this 2017 focuses more on fruit than anything else, while there's also wisps of minerality and herbs in the freshest of sense, scents of mint and eucalyptus are inviting as are the kirsch, black plum and currants. While the nose is enthralling, the palate of this particular Noval reveals even more. And then some more again. Intricate layers unfurl with each further sip and they build, like a pyramid that one looks up at, in awe.

Not only a delicious drink, but rather profound in its purity, as is the texture which is, well, sexy. Dry black and blue fruits with a dollop of purple plum, tantalize the taste buds. Structurally, it is blessed and refined by both acidity and tannins, seamless and intense. The mid-palate and finish are captivating in their depth and length; while the longevity of the drinking window, allows me to daydream of what my daughter will be thinking of this Port much later in her life. There are 3,500 cases to spread around the globe. This is ready to be enjoyed right now, aficionados of Port may want to wait another 3-6 decades, when this will be equally compelling, less assertive, but far more pensive. **97+ points 11/6/19**

2017 Quinta do Noval Nacional Vintage Port – Is the 2017 Noval Nacional the modern day version of the 1931, 1963 or even the marvelous near perfect 1994? Sometimes in their infancy, even tasted side-by-side, the Noval regular bottling can seem like the “bigger Port” and I’ve been fooled enough in blind tastings, which now cause me to guess against my own better judgement and choose the tighter and seemingly more reticent Port of the two, as the Nacional. I believe *that* for my palate, describes the 2017 vintage of these two extraordinary Vintage Ports from this legendary estate. The meniscus on the Nacional is one of the thinnest lines of garnet you’ll ever see in a Port. Notes of fresh blueberry, plum, mocha, along with earthy morels, forest floor and esteva were only forthcoming on the second day. It was not easy for me to capture any of these aromatics the first day of blind tasting, as my notes explain how austere it was early on. By day 3, it was much easier to assess, and both aromatics and flavors jumped out of the glass. The nose added on a hint of spearmint and an herbal nuance. The palate delivered a soft, but extremely dry essence, similar in a few dynamics to Dow’s. Refined and layered blackcurrant, blueberry and cherry fruit melded together with a backdrop of milk chocolate which first emerged on the long and splendid finish. The tannins here were grippy, chiseled yet were vying for prominence with the bold layers of fruit in the mid-section. The acidity seemed to maintain what sweetness was present, but overall this remained quite dry throughout, even more so after the swallow, which revealed great length. It needs a lot more time to open up and show all of its beauty, and I have a feeling those tannins will be even bigger the next time I get to try a bottle and hopefully their integration will give more hints as to the drinking window. For now, I am only guessing at 4-6 decades. **96+ points 11/6/19 – Note:** when the two were exactly 3 weeks old, with bottles left in my cool downstairs but not in my cellar, the full character of the Nacional shone brightly and it outpaced the regular Noval by quite a margin, especially in concentration/depth/weight. My brother and I both were 2 points higher and he poured “blind” for me to see what I’d say. He had a hard time believing that these were open for three weeks, they were both still so fresh. This bodes really well for the Noval/Nacional siblings!

2017 Quinta da Pacheca Vintage Port – This Quinta da Pacheca was a real beauty and likely the very best Vintage Port I have had the pleasure to taste from this producer. It presents a symphony of flavors: chocolate, asphalt and black currant fill out the undertones while the black plums and purple fruit fill out the mid-range, and then add on a hint of citrus and lavender for some top note melody and the orchestra is a bunch of happy musicians. The attack here is elegant, rich and full, yet soft, smooth and mild-mannered. There is considerable length that leaves one wanting just a bit more persistence for there to be true greatness. Nonetheless, this is a fine 2017 that should drink well early on and reward a full three decades of cellar discipline.

94+ points 9/22/19

2017 Quinta do Portal Vintage Port – From the very first sip of this early bottle, I knew what was ever in this numbered blue bag at my Airbnb, was something quite special. Yet it morphed into something even more singular over the next few days. Four and a half months later, in my very last flight, I had the same reaction and it just kept getting better and better each successive day. Plus it was by far the darkest of any 2017 that I noted; there was literally no rim and the same color ink was consistent throughout the glass. Initially showcasing a lifted floral scent, with some spice, in days to follow a note similar to cherry Cola reminiscent of Oregon Pinot Noir emerged and finally, a raspberry and blackberry fragrance, along with mint and rock rose notes came out to play. This had the most body-weight of any VP in the last flight, beside some very stiff competition. My wife put some big names in there, but this was simply “bigger” with a mouth-coating richness, silky, pliant and generously concentrated Port. Very impressive to say the least, the balance was simply exquisite with iron-chiseled tannins and bold acidity. I had it in my head that this was a Fonseca, which speaks volumes. The density and textural pleasure was striking, and the length of the finish was nothing short of remarkable. This *2017 Quinta do Portal* is easily the finest of any previous Vintage Port vinified by this producer.

95+ points 11/6/19

2017 Quinta da Prelada Vintage Port – A superlative and beautiful Port in the making from the folks at Prelada. Classy and classic Vintage Port nose of ripe blackberries, dried rose petals, currants and pine resin. This complex 2017, is deeply concentrated and possessing a persistent palate which presents cassis, briary blackcurrant and hints of olive tapenade. Deep, rich and lusciously textured mouthfeel that coats and stains the palate. This generous and very fine Port takes no prisoners, has the stuffing to age effortlessly for at least four decades, and astute collectors would be well advised to find a few bottles if the opportunity presents itself. **93+**

points 9/22/19

2017 Quinta da Romaneira Vintage Port – Mostly thought of as a Tawny Port mecca, on occasion this property, (co-owned by *Christian Seely* of Qta. do Noval fame) nails Vintage Port too, as both 2007 and 2016 immediately come to mind. All of 2017 Vintage Ports are deeply **extracted and therefore I've not been providing comments on color, but this one is simply** impenetrable, like looking into a 100-foot deep well. Offering lifted scents of lavender and potpourri, plus earthy tones of dried flowers, Rainier cherry, Earl Grey tea, herbs and minerals. Exotic! Medium-full bodied, initially soft as mink in the mouth, it gained greater density over the ensuing days, remaining ultra-smooth. This Romaneira is harmonious, with kirsch, blueberry and spicy Red Vines flavors nicely melded with ripe tannins, (currently subverted to the fruit) and perky acidity adding vivacity and intensity to the core and is rather prevalent on the long finish. 1,100 cases produced. Grapes used were 70% Touriga Nacional and 30% Touriga Franca. It will drink well early on, but should drink at its best between 2033-2055. **96+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Quinta de la Rosa Vintage Port – Initially a bit tanky and by the third day of tasting, it seemed to be less so, as scents of black licorice, black fruits and pine came to the **fore. Medium weight and soft in the mouth, to its credit ... the acidity was citrusy and a standout** feature, while the tannins began very mild and became slightly chalky and lip grabbing over the next couple of days. Pleasant and approachable, de la Rosa delivers earthy black fruit flavors which fade to red from cassis to pomegranate with a rich, concentrated presence. This will be a nice mid-term ager and be best within two to three decades of age. Production was 7,800 liters. **91+ points 6/19/19**

2017 Quinta das Tecedeiras Vintage Port – When this property was owned by Dão Sul a decade or so ago, I was a huge fan of not only their Ports, but they were also the fine producers of excellent QPR still wines and especially their upscale Reserva Tinto was spectacular. I always wanted to go visit and I think that Carlos Lucas and Lucia Freitas were the key players back in the day, when the 2007 Vintage Port made such a splash! Anyway, onto the 2017 Vintage Port effort from this (seldom seen in the U.S. market) producer. Black fruits, plums, boysenberry, black olives and licorice hold down the fort while lifted scents of lavender, jasmine, violets, and a scooch of citrus sing the melody. Medium-full bodied with a plush, ripe and juicy core which finishes with a slightly drying, chalky kiss of refined tannins. I was quite fond of this Vintage Port and this too is well worth seeking out. It will drink best 2028 to 2050. **92+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Quinta do Vale D. Maria Vintage Port – TCA taint was very prevalent and while it was lighter the first morning, there was no question by that **evening’s tasting. I had only** received one single bottle as a sample; which is why I always request two. Medium-weight, round and juicy acidity, the tannins are chiseled and chalky. Black fruits emerged before the palate was fully marred by the corkiness. It appeared to be very dry stylistically and with a long and persistent aftertaste. I look forward to try this in the future. **Not Rated 6/28/19**

2017 Quinta do Vale Meão Vintage Port – During our Port Harvest Tour (2) our group tried 2017 Vintage Ports at every place we visited. This was the overall group favorite and even more than my excellent impressions from June, as part of a vertical tasting at Vale Meão in September this year, this was absolutely a standout and I understood why the group was clamoring about this particular 2017. It is a stunner of a young VP. Brilliant notes of blueberry and boysenberry and blackberry come hurtling out of the glass. It is fantastic just smelling the fresh and pure fruit essence, almost like when you are inside and treading in lagare. Loads of minerals come to the fore and this is a viscous and velvety wine that is medium-full bodied and **simply delicious, with dusty “no-grip” tannins. Flavors of black cherry and just picked grapes.** Sheer intensity and complex even at this young stage. I had identical scores, with two bottles, some months apart. This Meão should age well for approximately four decades and could even potentially make it to the 50 year mark. **Xito nailed this one; as great as any Meão VP I’ve had!**
95+ points 6/28/19

2017 Quinta do Vallado Vintage Port – A unique aromatic note that was unmistakable to me on day 1, which was a Yankee pot roast gravy smell, intense freshly cut roses, and some notes of Chateaufort du Pape earthiness. The palate showed purple fruit driven flavors with a light to medium weight, fluid, soft and upper-lip-grip with no aggressive astringency at all. Concentrated blueberry and cranberry flavors, delicious and fresh, with succulent acidity and while I did expect it would grow more prominent over the few days open, that really did not happen. Clean, refreshing and charismatic. I do not see this as a particularly long term ager, but up to 3 decades with ease, while it sleeps! **92+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Quinta de Valle Longo Vintage Port – The Touriga Nacional lent some tanky and purple essence to this Vintage Port and were accompanied by grenadine and assortment of tropical fruit fragrances. Medium-full bodied, this fine Port from Vallegre showed some signs of secondary fermentation in the bottle, so the following day, my assistant inserted the backup bottle instead. It was cleaner on the nose, but also had the spritz quality, which was not a big deal, but it will take several years for it to fully meld. The mouthfeel here was a significant strength as it was extraordinarily soft and seductive, elegant describes it perfectly. The acidity was prominent and the tannins are chalky and light and gained power by day 3, but they arrived late and typically after the swallow. Generously red fruited and ripe, the raspberry fruit was pure and sweet. This Port fleshed out nicely over the course of the tasting and became much more enjoyable with each day and the balance was excellent and obvious. Drink from 2027 to 2042.

87+ points 6/24/19

2017 Quinta de Ventozelo Vintage Port – Gran Cruz is the relatively new owner of Ventozelo, as they stepped in after an attempt by Real Companhia Velha (RCV) to acquire the property failed in 2011. Ventozelo is one of the biggest properties in the Douro, with over 1000 acres in total of which 500 acres are planted to vines. The sale to Gran Cruz, the largest Port wine exporter in Portugal, (and Madeira too!) was solidified in 2014. Convenient, as Ventozelo had its grapes processed by Gran Cruz since 2011. With the 2017 vintage, a new beginning came to this ancient and storied Douro property, where both Port and Douro wines have been produced for eons. The bouquet of this Vintage Port is filled with earthy and spicy aromas of dried rose petal, tapenade, redcurrant and red licorice. By the third day of evaluation this youngster had morphed into a medium-full-bodied Port; round, warm, soft as satin and fleshy. A slight hint of warmth existed on day one, but no sign of it existed by the third day. The dusty ripe tannins were mostly integrated, while arriving late to the party; while the crisp acidity was refreshing and overall, the structure was exemplary. The off-dry black cherry, plum, and ripe blackberry flavors were so prominent that the structure seemed like it had been taken hostage. The depth and persistence of Ventozelo's finish lingered long. Hold, then drink from 2024-2052.

92+ points 6/24/19

2017 Quinta do Vesuvio Vintage Port – First bottle tasted in four flights of five in mid-June and those notes were combined with the second bottle also done blind in a flight of six. Not coincidentally, the ratings came out exactly the same. For what it's worth, both times I've tasted the regular Vesuvio and the Capela, the regular bottling wound up on top. I am not sure why, but that has been my experience in just about all four instances. Perfumed scents of violets, potpourri, plum, fresh cut roses and grapes in lagare. Medium-full bodied, voluminous and mercurial in its density. Concentrated, fleshy and harmonious, with tannins that are chalky and drying, but non-aggressive and loaded with lively acidity. This 2017 is noticeably on the dry side of the spectrum, regardless of the sublime plum, grape and blueberry slurp-ability of the juice and gorgeous flavors that persist in waves on the pure fruit filled finish. In some ways I found this Vesuvio very reminiscent of Noval, during my blind appraisals. There is so much fine material here, I can only see my score going up in the future as the evolution adds greater sophisticated layers as it continues to age. Putting a drinking window to this Vesuvio Port would be a mistake; but suffice it to say there are many decades ahead. **95+ points 10/20/19**



2017 Ramos Pinto Vintage Port – A unique blend of 70% Touriga Nacional, 15% Touriga Franca, 10% Sousão and 5% old-vine field blends from their “Duas Quintas” at Bom Retiro and Ervamoira properties, both way up river in the Douro Superior. Some slightly off-putting notes of vitamin pill and tanky scents; not all that bad and later, joined with some floral perfume too. By day 3, this had not improved and the tanky aromas were even more prevalent. Medium-weight, voluminous and expansive on the palate, with some fresh, crisp acidity and major upper-lip grip from the tannins. Black currant fruit, ripe entry and a long dry and persistent finish with tannins arriving late and a bit less grippy with each successive day. More brawny than brainy. Nice aging potential and should drink at its best from 2030-2052. **90+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Ramos Pinto's Quinta de Ervamoira Vintage Port – Ervamoira, from the Coa Valley, one of the two main quinta properties used by Ramos Pinto, (the other is Bom Retiro) both in the Douro Superior. The grapes for this Single Quinta Vintage Port are: 60% Touriga Nacional, 15% Touriga Franca, 10% Sousão, 19% Tinta Barroca, 5% Tinto Cão. Slightly tanky upon opening and throughout both first day tastings. A fresh bouquet of cassis, redcurrant and rhubarb with earthy undertones of esteva and licorice. Lovely blackcurrant and plum flavors, medium-full, viscous and concentrated. The tannins supply the energy and spine along with the acidity to provide the potential for long life of this Ramos Pinto Port. There's slightly more grip the following days as the fruit and tannins meld. Drink between 2028 and 2055. **92+ points**
6/28/19

2017 Real Companhia Velha Vintage Port – There is light VA on the palate with a sense of peach pit, quince and violet candies. Notes that really should not exist in a solid and healthy Vintage Port. Whether that was just because of how young this was at the time, I doubt it but have experienced this in the past on occasion. Shockingly on day 3, this did seem to clean up its act a bit and there were more plum and cherry aromatics and the VA was still present but much lighter. We shall see. The medium-bodied and silky smooth mouthfeel won me over day 2 and 3 this kept improving to where it was absolutely voluptuous and sensually exquisite texturally. There were some issues for sure, but the structure was sound, tannins up to the challenge and the finish, medium long. For now, this gets the benefit of the doubt, until proven otherwise. I will only put a drinking window once I get to taste this again. **91+ points**
6/28/19

2017 Real Companhia Velha's Quinta das Carvalhas Vintage Port – This property sits on the right bank of the Rio Torto and just beyond the famous Pinhão Bridge across from Dow's Quinta do Bomfim. It is in possession of around 600 hectares with some of the greatest views in the entire Douro Valley and its famous "Round House" can be seen from many miles away. My first bottle of this Port was evaluated in Porto with excellent results and a very recent "second bottle" was studied within the past week. An expansive nose of blackcurrant, spicy dried rose petal, tree bark, Kalamata olive, creosote, pine and cocoa are a majority of the fragrance descriptors used in my tasting notes on this Port. Medium-full weight, mouthfilling and velvety texture collides with power packed grippy tannins and crisp acidity. The flavors of strawberry jam and ripe black plum meld in mouth and persist on the lengthy finish. It has a minimum of 40 years of fine drinking ahead. Indubitably, both times this was unsheathed, my jaw dropped.
94+ points 11/6/19

2017 Rozès Vintage Port – Founded by the Rozès family in 1855, it is the only Port firm established by the French; coincidentally, the world's largest consumers of Port. The house of Rozès was one of vintage 2016's most pleasant surprises, with the success achieved by their pair of exemplary Vintage Ports. A hard act to follow; the 2017 is no slouch either. Lightly perfumed nose of the color purple, with violets, plum and vibrant grape purity, darker inflections of dried rose petals, licorice and grenadine all combining to create an exotic elixir. Nearly full-bodied, the mouth presence is sensuous and voluptuous with velvety texture, and strikingly structured with bold bracing acidity and ripe chiseled tannins which were initially obscured by the fruit. The cassis, redcurrant and rhubarb flavors are dry if not tart, but the acidity provides the verve and freshness and led to a prolonged fruit filled finish. This Rozès VP is as harmonious as it is delicious and will improve for years to come. I'd advise drinking between 2035 and 2060.

94+ points 11/20/19

2017 Rozès' Quinta do Grifo Vintage Port – Only mentioning the optics of this Port because it's even darker than competing opaque blackish-purple hues. The fresh floral fragrance can't be missed when nosing this 2017, with crushed autumn leaves, a mix of wild berries, tar and tapenade; earthy and spicy notes rounding out the silhouette. The medium-full body weight, seductively smooth and fleshy mouth-coating presence delivers a whole lotta love here. Ample vibrant acidity and tooth-grabbing granular tannins provide more than enough stuffing, leading to ripe plum, fig and fennel flavors with excellent length. The 2016 Grifo showed an exuberance and major upswing for Vintage Ports from the house of Rozès; the 2017 vintage proves to be a worthy successor. Drink this Grifo now or after 2034 and up and through its zenith, circa 2052.

92+ points 6/19/19

2017 Sandeman Vintage Port – Just like my memory of the phenomenal Sandeman 2007 Vintage Port, a big precocious and massively fruited and equally powerful Port of tannins and balance ... a decade later, the 2017 is seemingly very similar. Nuanced notes of fresh herbs, minerals/graphite, with more perfumed floral fragrances along with mint and menthol scents. Soft and medium weight, vinous and velvety, the mouthfeel is rich and with a lightness of being. Great acidity and seriously tannic for days, the plum, black licorice and mint flavors are superb together. This is another in a great string of Sandeman Vintage Ports going back to every major declaration since 2000. Luis Sottomayor has literally turned the fortunes of this venerable Port shipper, not only all the way around; but on its head. It has been fun to be a sideline observer! Drink after 10-15 years, so it has time to fully integrate, but it will be remarkable through 2075.

96+ points 6/28/19

2017 Skeffington Vintage Port – From a Port house that next to no one knows anything about, even if they've heard the name before. Charles N. Skeffington established this Port shipper at the end of the 19th century. I can't tell you much else besides who owns it today, The Fladgate Partnership, and that they use grapes left over from several properties to make this blended Vintage Port. The original source of grapes years ago, is a moot point, so if you really want to know, Google is your friend; or not. I carried this back to the USA on July 1st and evaluated it in late September, so it had plenty of time to settle down from its trip. It was in a flight of nine with a wide mix of producers. It was tasted only once per day for four days, unlike the 2x a day for three days as almost all others. The aromatic profile was intense, the spirit completely integrated and fresh, with notes of cassis and blackcurrant, fresh cut flowers, herbs and a hint of mint. Medium-full weight and with a round, seductively smooth and fleshy mouthfeel which was weighty without being overbearing or jammy. The significant strength of this VP was its structure, as the acidity was spot on and refreshing and the assertive tannins had that old-school grip, that some used to call *blackstrap* but surprisingly without any astringency. The palate offered ripe blackberry and briary blackcurrant fruit flavors, with a gentle touch of fig on the complex, lingering aftertaste. When I eventually learned which Port this was, I was kind of shocked. That is exactly why I taste blind, to find hidden gems like this! While I don't believe this brand of Port ever makes its way to the USA, I checked *winesearcher* a few minutes ago and would highly suggest those in Europe do the same thing. While others will likely be afraid to give this a rating anywhere near this one, I can say that two of the four days, it was even higher. The QPR is absolutely phenomenal and my rating was conservative; higher than some major names! **94+ points 9/23/19**

2017 S. Leonardo Vintage Port – The estate where the grapes are grown, is known as Quinta do Mourão, located in the district of Lamego on the Baixo (Lower) Corgo. The mostly wood-aged Ports produced by owner/winemaker, Miguel Braga currently come under the brand, S. Leonardo, which is one of the greatest names in Douro for 10-40 Year Old Tawnies and well-aged Colheitas, from either red or white grapes. More focus than in the past has been applied to the Vintage Ports, and 2017 is no exception. The slight tanky notes were apparent all three days, but did lessen once open. The rest of the aromatic silhouette exhibited scents of grape, grenadine, potpourri and cocoa.

Although medium in weight, the mouthfeel was extraordinarily sublime and silky, giving the impression of even less weight. Approachable from the very first sip, this VP noticeably improved over the course of the tastings. Sensational purity of grape emerged the 2nd day, along with lingonberry jam, and ripe plum fruit. Potent and intricate at its core, the robust acidity and powerful tangy tannins carry this across the finish line with lots of energy and fresh wild berry flavor to spare. This will easily reach the mid-century mark and likely a decade beyond, as it shows all the requisite material to continue improving in the cellar. **94+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Taylor's Vintage Port – The 2017 required some young and especially old-vine field blend parcels from the vineyards at all three of Taylor's quinta properties, to generate this quantity of high quality grapes. After all there were 11,500 cases produced in 2017, while the 2016 vintage yielded only 6,200 cases, and surprisingly, the average production for Taylor's VP during the past 6+ decades exceeded 16,000 cases, (in generally declared vintages). While we're examining the numbers, one has to go back to 1880 and 1881 to come up with two consecutive vintage declarations of Taylor's VP. That's more than 135 years ago; so it is safe to say that it's a fairly infrequent occurrence. But the ramifications of back-to-back general declarations is nothing short of a *game changer*; and traditions aside, the Port trade will never forget the 2016/2017 duo and their historical significance. This is early to state, but 2017 is a classic, if not "epic" vintage and my impression of this Taylor's VP, is that it's truly "old school" and masculine in style, more so than 2016; due to the hotter vintage and tannic structure of the Port itself. The fact that picking began at Vargellas on September 1st is pretty remarkable, and I believe the earliest on record. The bouquet of this Port literally kept my nose in the glass for at least ten minutes before I had my first sip. Filled with floral notes of violets, lavender and carnations, with earthy minerality, esteva and fresh herbs, dominated initially by boysenberry and blackcurrant fruit. Profound! Medium-full weight and not as *heavy* in terms of sheer density, in comparison to some prior vintages at this same stage, (2000, 2003 and 2016 come to mind). **Fresh, lively and far more approachable than one would expect from a hot vintage of Taylor's;** the satin-like texture was flirtatious and enticing. Structurally speaking, the perky acidity provides fine balance, while the shingled overlay of tannins are currently well-concealed, but **omnipresent nonetheless; providing the undeniable sense of this Vintage Port's long term aging potential.** In retrospect, the 2016 Taylor had just a scooch more concentration, layers in the mid-palate and slightly greater length. Your mileage may vary. That said, 2017 will easily drink well for 5-6 decades, possibly even longer, as the tannins emerge and play an even larger role. **97+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas Vinha Velha Vintage Port – Time flies so it's hard to believe, but in reality, this is only the 8th version of Vargellas "Old Vineyard" ever produced. I don't know if that includes oldies like the 1912 or not, but either way, this is a fairly scarce bottling. From where I sit, on occasion this special version of Vargellas has been released within the same vintage as the regular Taylor's VP, and in multi-day blind tastings I've occasionally rated the Vargellas Vinha Velha (VVV) even higher than the Taylor's, (e.g. 2011) but the 2017 is a spectacular Port. It starts off with lifted scents of violets and lavender, raspberry, Rainier cherry, then earthy green tea and anise turn up on day 2. This Vargellas delivers medium weight, softer than usual with flavors of Dannon's blueberry yogurt, blackberry, fresh herbs, black licorice and the finish exhibits a nuance reminiscent of sweet grape Lifesavers. The tannins are firm, yet they're velvety and lack any astringency, ensuring solid age-worthiness. Along with the vivacity of the acid, the tannins impart superb balance and lead to a lingering finish. Low yields = low production; 467 cases of this VVV is available globally. **96+ points 11/6/19**

2017 Vieira de Sousa Vintage Port – Luisa Borges is the 5th generation of her family that's been involved in the Port wine business. With a handful of renowned, mostly old-vine field blend vineyards in the Cima Corgo, where Luisa spends a lot of time throughout the growing season. She's been producing Vintage Ports since the 2009 harvest, when fresh out of school in her early 20's. We had a chance to taste her inaugural vintage during harvest this this year and that baby shines. Fast forward to 2017, and it's clear that a decade of hands on winemaking experience has helped Ms. Borges hone her craft and create a Vintage Port that's in a different stratosphere. Its purity of grape fragrance is unmistakable, with a scoach of Earl Grey tea and an overtone hint of mint; lovely and seductive in its fruit freshness. Medium-full weight, yet soft and so approachable right now, with a sublimely silky texture. The grape purity found on the nose, translates precisely to the palate along with some pretty ripe and fleshy black plum; *meio doce* and intense, while remaining delicate and smooth due to the omnipresent, well-integrated tannins that are up to the challenge and will allow this to evolve with ease. This approachable VP will drink very well throughout its life and will be at its best nearing the mid-point of the century. This 2017 is the finest Vintage Port ever created by Ms. Borges, a bright star to keep an eye on! **94+ points 10/30/19**

2017 Vista Alegre Vintage Port – The current iteration of this Port firm, was established in the same year as the “aguardente scandal” that rocked the entire Port trade for nearly two years. That’s why there’s so little in the way of 1972 or 1973 Ports, Vintage or otherwise. While 1973 was an important year for Vallegre Vinhos, their current General Manager, Miguel Martins has done a wonderful job of expanding the market share and global impact of this Port house. The 2017 presented early signs of flaws and the backup bottle was immediately substituted the next day. There was no difference between them. Extremely high-toned tanky scents emerged along with whiffs of violet backed VA, super-sweet candied notes and flowery perfume. **It wasn’t all bad, it just wasn’t correct. Fortunately, the palate was much better and I dare say that it would not surprise me if with another ten to fifteen years, the aromatics do self-correct.** Nonetheless, this Vista Alegre delivered a medium-full body weight and velvety mouthfeel, in contrast to the dense and chewy fruit. So while the nose had its issues, the palate delivered delicious gobs of ripe strawberry, marionberry and plum flavors that merged into a Port-shake of long and luscious purple *slurpable* juice. Will this eventually turn the corner and see some of the aromatic issues disappear? I really can’t say, either way. **But give it a decade to try; then drink before 2047. 86+ points 6/24/19**

2017 Van Zeller’s VZ Vintage Port – There is NO question in my mind that this is the single best Vintage Port that I have had from the house of Cristiano, since he left Noval. A head turner to say the least, there is so much going on here, “A real badass!” Meaty and bloody notes are usually what I smell in Bordeaux or Chateauneuf du Pape, so this may be the first time I put those descriptors for a Vintage Port. Add in black licorice, forest floor and blackberries and I expect to hear, “Paint it Black” playing in the background. To finish off the aromatic descriptors I also have violets and cocoa. This is one of the old-school Vintage Ports, with medium-full weight, a chunky monkey, rich, big, warm and with tannins that kept growing like Pinocchio’s nose, my upper lip was stuck to my teeth by the end of my glass. This is a dry style of Vintage Port, concentrated, brawny, dense and lingering with warm intensity. An impactful Port with great layers in the mid-range and also reaching the end of the insanely long finish. Power, purity and poise! Let this cellar for a decade or two and you’ll be half way there, as VZ will drink well at 40! **95+ points 6/28/19**

2017 Warre's Vintage Port – The Warre's is a blend of grapes from three single quintas, with miniscule yields in 2017: Quinta da Cavadinha, Quinta da Telhada and Quinta do Retiro along with a couple of properties owned by family members; mostly from old vine field blends, plus superbly ripened Touriga Franca and Touriga Nacional. Intense bouquet of fresh cut flowers, black raspberry, mocha and esteva; the fresh fragrance is as distinctive as it is omnipresent. Medium-bodied, juicy, smooth and vinous mouthfeel, the heart of the structure is moderated by soft tannins upfront, which only became slightly more assertive after a few days and after swallowing. Sweet upon entry, the ripe raspberry and black cherry flavors were enhanced by a supporting cast of mocha and minerality, which led to a medium length and warming finish. A **very solid Warre's that is approachable and fun to drink. It will improve over the next 3 decades and plateau circa mid-century. 3,600 cs. bottled = 13.6% of Warre's total vineyard production.**

92+ points 6/19/19

2017 Wine & Soul's Pintas Vintage Port – The vineyard belonging to the dynamic duo and winemaking couple, Jorge Serodio Borges and Sandra Tavares da Silva is nearing its 90th birthday in just a few years. So what does that have to do with the launch of their finest Vintage Port ever? Obviously, a lot! Let's start with the bouquet, the schistous minerality is almost as front and center as the fruit itself; complemented by blackberry, cassis, a smidge of raisin/prune and add in some baking spices, caramel and earthy green tea leaves for good measure. It took all four days to decipher all of those intricacies, as this was held back an extra day. Medium-full, densely concentrated and voluptuous across the tongue, the **very** warm/spirit noted mid-palate, **my only reason the score wasn't even higher. The best was yet to come, as waves of flavor** rolled in with a lush sweet-ripe core of black fruits, nuanced toffee, licorice and peppery notes; then focused on the final lingering hints of kirsch and mocha. Lip-stuck tannins and acid vivacity kept it all in perspective, guaranteeing Pintas will reach its crescendo, past mid-century. If it sounds incredible, it really was and much credit goes to the aforementioned pair of Port makers, but with this 2017, the vineyard itself, should also take a bow! **94+ points 6/20/19**

Roy's Top 10 List of the 2017 Vintage Ports

With 2017 Vintage Ports, I scored 10 of 74 Vintage Ports with a baseline score at 96 points or above. Not all of them are the "usual suspects." Nonetheless, there were more "outstanding" Ports between 93-95 points than in any previous vintage I've rated. The list below represents my 10 Top Vintage Ports of the 2017 vintage, in order of preference from top to bottom and where Ports had the same score, my judgment of how well those wines showed, determined how they were placed in the list. No bias by placing personal favorites above others that I am not typically as fond of. Doing this the right way is the only way. Last but not least, congratulations are in order for **Quinta da Romaneira** and **Sandeman** both of which made it into my **Top 10** list for the very first time. **My avg. rating of 73 VP's (1 with TCA) = 92.68**

ROY'S TOP 10 LIST OF 2017 VINTAGE PORTS		
1st	NIEPOORT	98+
2nd	TAYLOR'S	97+
3rd	DOW'S	97+
4th	QUINTA DO NOVAL	97+
5th	THE STONE TERRACES	97+
6th	NOVAL NACIONAL	96+
7th	SANDEMAN	96+
8th	QUINTA DA ROMANEIRA	96+
9th	QUINTA DE VARGELLAS VINHA VELHA	96+
10th	GRAHAM'S	96+

Runners Up: ALL With 95+ points in order of preference:

Fonseca, Portal, Vale Meão, JH Andresen, Van Zeller's VZ, Poças, Vesuvio, Croft "Serikos"

Conclusions of 2017 Vintage Ports

While many of the most well-known producers did extremely well in 2017, there were lots of new producers in the Port trade; plus lesser talked about names that really hit their mark in 2017. **I'm not** necessarily talking about breaking into the **Top 10** list, but focused on ratings of extremely well-made wines that will offer buying opportunities, with ratings between 92-95 pts.

Overall, the 2017 vintage scored higher across the board than **any** prior vintage I have ever assessed. It should be noted that the **Touriga Franca** grape happened to have a marvelous year all across the Douro in all three sub-regions. **It is so influential and important to the success of a GREAT year's harvest ... it certainly proved this in the illustrious vintage of 2017.**

The more stress that challenge vines to survive, resulting in lowered yields, the greater the aromatics and concentrated quality of the grapes. This has long been a true axiom and in 2017 it epitomized the hot, dry and shortened growing season.

Ridiculously low levels of rainfall during the ultra-dry growing season, the earliest Douro harvest on record, floral freshness aromatically, velvety tannins, purity of fruit, vivacity of the acidity due to cooler than normal summer temperatures, concentration of fruit and extraordinarily balanced Ports, with **impressively long finishes ... these are just a few of the hallmarks that will be remembered when it comes to the Vintage Ports of 2017.**



Having never evaluated more than 67 Vintage Ports in any prior vintage, I had hoped to reach 75 of the **2017's**, but missed the *connection* on the 2017 Douro Boy's Vintage Port.