

Roy's 2000 Vintage Port Forecast

BY ROY HERSH © 2002

Enthusiasm is running high in Oporto and around the world, as Porto lovers await the highly touted 2000 Vintage Ports to reach their local markets later this year. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know this vintage intimately and hope my notes can be useful in making some early "en primeur" (futures) purchasing decisions. It is helpful to have more than one guide or palate judging cask samples of Vintage Porto (VP) in determining the worthiness of the young wines.

When purchasing wine upon release, or especially if playing the en primeur game, it makes plain sense to either sample the wines yourself if possible, or at least do thorough research. My tasting of barrel samples began with the 1991 crop of VPs and therefore this is my fifth vintage analysis, overall. My 2000 tasting notes and ratings of two dozen Vintage Ports were all compiled between April 25th and May 23rd while attending trade tastings in Vancouver, San Francisco and London. Many of the wines in my report were tasted several times.

Evaluating Vintage Port cask samples, like Bordeaux requires experience, patience and determination. Bottling of the 2000 VPs won't even begin until July 1, 2002 (through June 30, 2003) and even shortly thereafter, the wine is not easy to assess. It is difficult at best for even the most experienced palate to judge a Port's potential when tasting them at this early stage. The color, aromatics, youthful vibrancy of fruit and underlying structure must be carefully analyzed and even then, the prognosticator is just taking an educated look into a crystal ball, that is, the infant wine.

Vintage Porto, like Bordeaux, takes many years to evolve and therefore it necessitates nearly a decade in bottle before one can truly determine the wine's ageworthiness and character. That said, the ability to gauge how pre-release VPs will mature 20 to 30 years in the future can be enhanced not only by experiencing cask samples, but by watching and tasting a wide range of past vintages at various stages of their maturation cycle.

There is always pre-arrival over-hyping of generally declared Vintage Porto, not to mention Bordeaux, Burgundy et al. The fanfare that surrounded the early futures' tranches of 2000 Bordeaux epitomized this dynamic. How many times have we heard the rhetorical phrase, "Vintage of the century" indiscriminately used by savvy wine marketers each time a hot new vintage neared the horizon? Commercial viability aside, the 2000 vintage for Port does have a lot going for it.

Without being hypocritical, although going far out on a limb, this young vintage has the best across-the-board quality level I've yet to experience in prearrival VP, and I am including the revered 1994 vintage. A distinguished Port expert disagrees with this assessment and contrary views are to be expected as are the many differences in our ratings of the 2000 wines.

The much ballyhooed 1997 was very good, but clearly was not a contender when compared to either the '94 or '00 vintages at this same stage. 1994 which was a media darling and in

possession of a few 100 point wines, showed tremendous aromatics and overwhelming forward fruit in the cask samples, so much so that the underlying structure was difficult to perceive in quite a few of the wines.

That's definitely not the case with the 2000 vintage. Without generalizing too much, the quality range is narrower and higher in 2000 than in most of the recent past vintages. Chalk it up to a pretty remarkable growing season although some rain came during flowering (with heavier rains in May) and a mostly cool and wet spring prevailed. The summer was long, hot and mostly dry and lacked any significant rainfall, with some very warm days coming late in the season. Picking of the ripe, raisinous grapes began rather late. Altogether, this created extremely low yields of intensely flavored, deeply concentrated grapes, with high levels of sugar. Additionally, there have been recent technological advances and viticultural improvements in the Douro, which will augment the overall wine quality during this fifth century of Port production.

There are some noteworthy, mind-blowing examples in '00 that may eventually rate alongside legendary Ports from 1927, 1948, 1966 and 1970 (personally, I can't rate a cask sample a perfect 100 points, as this provides no room for future improvement).

Unquestionably, the 2000 vintage has provided many Vintage Ports with massive, concentrated fruit, pungent aromas, remarkable "grip" and solid structure. Some are very well-balanced wines which will grace the tables of our children if not our grandchildren. The fact is that 2000 is a very special vintage for Porto and not just because it ends with triple zeroes for the first time ever or that it is the first vintage of the 21st century. When is enough VP enough in the cellar, considering this wine's penchant for maturing in a few decades? Regardless of en primeur first tranche pricing, this is a vintage that must be a part of any serious collector's cellar. For those of you who like to use VP for "investment speculation," please leave the 2000s for those of us who care to drink them someday.

Now, on to the wine tasting notes and ratings of the 2000 Vintage Ports:

Several weeks after the publication of this forecast, I was able to taste and report on six additional 2000 Vintage Ports. The notes on Churchill, Churchill's Quinta da Gricha, Croft, Quinta do Noval "Silval," Quinta do Noval and Quinta do Portal (highlighted in dark blue below) were added on July 12, 2002.

1. BARROS - This popular Portuguese Shipper maintains a handful of "brands" in their stable. Dark and purplish-black with ruby rim. Elegant plum and crushed rose petal fragrance. A light-bodied VP, delivering gentle and tasty, yet simple fruit with mild tannins and a hot/spirity medium length finish. Pleasant wine with formidable aromatics but not up to the quality range of most 2000s. **83-85 points**

2. BROADBENT - The third Vintage Port release for Bartholomew and Michael Broadbent, who also have Madeiras produced under their family name. You can taste Dirk van der Niepoort's fresh influence here, as he is the winemaker for the Broadbent Vintage Ports. Dirk's blending talent is a significant reason why Broadbent's VPs have steadily, if not exponentially improved each vintage since their lukewarm 1994 debut. Dark reddish-purple in color, with distinctive boysenberry, laced with spice, freshly cut flowers and just a touch of youthful spirit. Medium-bodied with a balance of expressive boysenberry flavors, ample acidity and boisterous tannins that take over on the exuberant finish. The broadened palette of

grape varieties used in the final blend has significantly enhanced the depth and structural components of the 2000 Broadbent which has plenty of cellar potential. **93-95 points**

3. CALEM - A dark purple color, laced with a gorgeous nose of distinctive floral and seductive strawberry aromas. Medium-bodied with bold blackberry and raisiny fruit. A well-made VP with moderate grip and balance, although somewhat lacking intensity. The Calem delivers harmonious appeal and a gentle, smooth finish. Approachable now but has mid-term aging potential. **87-89 points**

4. CHURCHILL'S QUINTA DA GRICHA - Very dark ruby/purple hue, brimming with blueberry and grapey aromas with a touch of alcohol showing its youth. The flavors of blueberry pie and ripe boysenberry preserves were quite decadent. Firm yet round tannins help add to the style of the Gricha that possesses a lengthy finish. This Quinta has produced two very fine vintage Ports in a row. I had the 1999 Gricha earlier this year, but with a couple of years of bottle age on it then, it is probably why I liked it a little more than the 2000. Also I felt the tannins of the 1999 had a bit more grip than the 2000 which is clearly softer. At this early stage, the fruit of the 2000 is dominant. **90-92 points**

5. CHURCHILL - After a slightly disappointing showing of their 1994 vintage Porto, there was an exponential improvement from the 1994 to 1997 Churchill VP. Having tasted the 1999 Quinta da Gricha it was evident that Johnny Graham was on course to actualize full potential and would be making wines to compete with the usual suspects. The Churchill 2000 has arrived. The grapes from Quinta da Gricha and Quinta do Rio add further concentration and depth to the Churchill blend ... and it shows. Control of the grape growing was the missing ingredient in past vintages and that has now been rectified as the Graham brothers own their own quintas & grapes. The 2000 shows a dark, opaque oxblood color with wild strawberry, raspberry and a touch of oak present on the nose. A dense, chewy wine with blackberry jam flavor and black currants in a full-bodied, burly style of Porto. I feared I was having a tannic attack but it was just the incredib! le grip that was part of this classic finish. Churchill has finally nailed it in 2000. **93-95 points**

6. CROFT - Dark ruby color that is nearly opaque. Spice laced aromatics with some sweet plums, cedar and just a touch of alcohol present. Dark berry juice and a solid core of fleshy plum fruit with a hint of cedar. Medium-to-full bodied in style although a bit lighter than many 2000s. Excellent acidity level that surrounds the tongue along with the ample yet restrained tannic grip. Nice melding of flavors that shine on the generous finish of this wine. A well-made, "feminine style" of Croft, for medium-term cellaring. **91- 93 points**

7. DELAFORCE - A fairly recent addition to the Taylor & Fonseca stable in which the aforementioned Croft was part and parcel in the same acquisition. Dark, nearly black and fully opaque with grapey, violet and pretty floral notes. Delaforce's 2000 VP with Rio Torto (Twisted River) fruit presents an authoritative, typically dryer style. Displaying jammy blackberry and dried plum fruit with impressive balance and dusty, ripe tannins. Obvious charm here with a long and luxurious finish, this wine drinks well now yet still has what it takes to cellar for the long haul. Tasted several times, this is a class act and the best Delaforce in ages ... at least the past 39 years. **91-93 points**

8. DOW - Dark reddish-purple color and full opacity. Grapes from Quinta do Bomfim were harvested in late September. Ripe plum and juicy blackberry fruit with hints of spice and

cassis on the richly textured palate. The velvet glove may be missing here but certainly not the iron fist. The tannins take hold on the extremely long finish and they don't let go and yet this VP manages to show an appealing if not decadent mouthfeel. A very well constructed, full-bodied young Dow that will last for many decades. Should be right up there with the 1970 and 1977 ... and might just show them both up someday. **94-96 points**

9. FERREIRA - 100% of the grapes are crushed in lagar to commence fermentation. In addition to Quinta do Seixo, Quinta da Leda a little known grape grower upriver near the Spanish border provides some of the key grapes (as Quinta do Vale Meão was a prime supplier in the past ... they now make their own VP). These include a variety of 5 or 6 clones of the essential Touriga Nacional grape for Jose Soares Franco to use in his blend. This wine is inky, almost black in color it is so densely concentrated. The focused floral aromas lead to the typically sweet Ferreira house style, with lush plum and currant flavors that display elegance in a soft and approachable wine. Good balance and depth of flavors with enough backbone to age well, although this wine will drink nicely early on. **92-94 points**

10. FONSECA - I was fortunate to try this stunning wine a number of times in Vancouver and once again in London (side by side with Taylor). Adrian Bridge, Managing Director of Fonseca mentioned that the pricing would only increase a small percent above the 1997. Given the low yields and quality here, I would say that is quite an accomplishment. Opaque purplish inky color with pungent violet, spicy and grapey notes. For my palate, even bigger yet more elegant than the Taylor which is saying a mouthful. Depicting youthful, expressive fruit with a focused balance of power and grace. Fonseca will take many decades to mature and will drink well, late into this century given its formidable and ripe tannic structure. A monumental effort by David Guimaraens that may later draw comparisons to the remarkable 1948 and 1966 VPs (two of my favorites) from this Shipper. Approximately 12,500 cases were made. My second favorite of the 2000 vintage. **97-99 points**

11. GOULD CAMPBELL - Dark inky purple color. Nicely perfumed scents of violets, roses and black currants. A big, fruit packed and full-bodied wine that delivers that mouthful of grapey, plum and black berry fruit. The Gould is a well-balanced VP and exudes powerful tannic "grip" and a symmetrical structure. Stylistically on the dryer side and has a long, ripe fruit finish. All facets here bode well for this wine to cellar favorably for decades. **91-93 points**

12. GRAHAM - Quinta dos Malvedos went through a recent modernization and the Symington's have upgraded their fermenting tanks and put innovative robotic lagares into use for this vintage (60% of the grapes came from these lagares). They are the first Shippers to use them in production of a Vintage Porto after experimentation over the past several years. The grapes for the Graham blend were grown at Malvedos, Quinta do Vila Velha and Quinta do Vale de Malhadas for the 2000 VP. Dark purplish-black with fully opacity. Fine aromas of plum and dark cherry which translates to the sweet grapey palate with some ripe, jammy, dark berry fruit as well. Not a subtle VP by any means, with a focused, seamless structure and well-integrated round tannins. Some hot spirity character on the otherwise smooth, sweet finish was the only blemish on this excellent wine. This is not atypical though for young Graham's and in vintages like 1985 this resolved in time, albeit that is not the case with the 1977. The Graham is certainly amongst the top wines of the vintage although it is my second favorite Symington Vintage Porto from 2000. **95-97 points**

13. KOPKE - Best known for their outstanding Colheitas, this VP comes 362 years after Kopke laid claim as the first established Port Shipper. Inky purplish-black and fully opaque

color. Concentrated plums, ripe cherry berry and sweet prunes on the nose. Medium-bodied with honest flavors of plum and well endowed, dense, extremely sweet blackberry fruit. Built for mid-term aging with gentle tannins that show up on the slightly raisiny finish that is long and lip smacking. A stylish, crowd pleasing Kopke that shows that Jose Silva Teixeira (C.N. Kopke's charismatic Managing Director) has proved that Kopke is capable of making some very fine Vintage Port, and by far the best of the Barros family stable of Ports. **90-92 points**

14. NIEPOORT - Rolf van der Niepoort must be proud of his son Dirk, who has now produced 2 exceptional VPs in a row. Dark, deeply extracted purplish-black and fully opaque, this is a superlative wine. By far the biggest most unctuous young Niepoort I've ever tried, and I have long been a fan of this Shipper. A somewhat unyielding nose of violets and grapey aromas, although the brooding dark berry fruit is ultra-rich, viscous and refined for a youngster. This wine possesses a certain freshness that I thoroughly enjoyed. Magnificent balance and layers of flavor with juicy, ripe tannins that along with the minute long finish, overwhelm the palate. I tasted this wine a few times and it was my personal favorite of all 2000 VPs. I believe this may someday rival the legendary 1945 Niepoort, which is a bold statement to make at this stage. A must purchase for any serious Porto lover ... and this is a VP that will live to welcome the next century. **98-100 points**

15. QUARLES HARRIS - is a name that is not as well known as the other Ports produced by the Symingtons. Dark reddish-purple. Focused aromas of violets and boysenberry. A medium-bodied smooth operator with well-focused fruit, and a supporting cast of characters including gentle tannins and a long, lush lingering finish. A bit simple at this point and probably best consumed early, while other Symington standouts like the Dow, Graham, and Vesuvio have the necessary time to mature. **89-91 points**

16. QUINTA do CRASTO - One of the very oldest Quintas in the entire Douro dating back to ca. 1615. Owned by the Roquette family of which brothers Tomás and Miguel, handle the winemaking/production and marketing/export sales, respectively. Crasto is located just a few miles west of the Pinhao bridge. Crasto has recently gained more respect as a producer of Ports, but in the past had never been considered in the top tiers of Port Shippers. If Tomás at age 32, one of the "new generation" of winemakers in the Douro, can continue to produce vintage Ports as good as the 2000 ... the Crasto image will vastly and rapidly improve. Fully opaque dark-purple juice with voluptuous violet, floral and youthful grapey aromatics stemming from 100% lagar trodden grapes. Excellent concentration and focused dense black fruit flavors. Like many 2000s it is approachable now but this Crasto has impressive tannic grip and the right stuffing to reward those with enough patience to keep their bottles in the cellar. **92-94 points**

17. QUINTA do PEGO - Owned by Calem and located just a few miles outside of Pinhao along the Douro. This is Pego's first ever VP, as they have historically supplied grapes for other Shippers. They certainly picked the right vintage to make their debut. Medium purple hue with pleasant blackberry fruit that's juicy, but with a raspy texture that shows some hot spirit on the finish. Easy to enjoy now, in a lighter style with just enough tannins to make it cellar worthy for a decade or so. A good first effort from this property that shows promise for the future. **85-87 points**

18. QUINTA DO NOVAL "SILVAL" - Dark ruby-purple. Floral, ripe berry and light oak present on the nose. A nice, somewhat monolithic single-quinta vintage Porto that seems more like a component than a wine unto itself. Enjoyable nonetheless and an easy-to-drink,

approachable wine that may be best consumed around 15 years from now. Good concentration of flavors and gentle tannins here with a medium finish. **90-92 points**

19. QUINTA DO NOVAL - Inky purplish-red and nearly opaque, with a sweet plum and grapey aromatic profile. Densely packed with boysenberry and plump purple fruit that is lightly laced with licorice. Full-bodied, and expansive on the palate with a great tannin structure and fabulous length on the finish. A distinctive Noval and with their third big VP in a row, this Shipper is clearly back on track and at the top of their game. One of the better wines of the 2000 crop. **94-96 points**

20. QUINTA DO PORTAL - Many people are still not aware of this Shipper and unfortunately that includes most Americans. The 1995 Quinta do Portal was a simply pleasant wine, but I thoroughly enjoyed the deeply extracted 1997 vintage Porto. This was the vintage which provided a view into the portal or crystal ball that showed a very bright future for this house. The 2000 steps into the limelight and stands proud. Dark ruby that just falls short of opacity; with very pretty floral aromas of rose petals and violets. Full-bodied, depicting distinctive raspberry and grenadine flavors with lively, round tannins and possessing a lush, lingering finish. Very enjoyable! Built to last for decades. **92-94 points**

21. QUINTA de RORIZ - João van Zeller (Cristiano's father's first cousin) has given me a historic view of this property that maintains the original architecture from 1767. There are about 105 acres planted to grape at this Quinta located on the bank of the Rio Douro, and this property used to sell grapes to Gonzalez and also Kopke years ago. Quinta de Roriz gave its name to "Tinta Roriz", a grape variety brought originally from Spain to Portugal by a van Zeller ancestor, under the name of "Tempranillo." The wine from this property is now marketed by the Symington group. There are six lagares in use at the Quinta. The 2000 Roriz is a dark, opaque purple with intense sweet aromas of freshly picked flowers. Dense, chewy blackberry preserves and jammy blueberry pie. Medium to full-bodied with refined tannins for such a youngster. There is a bit of alcohol showing on the medium length finish. The aromatics here are dramatic and overall the wine is pleasant but somewhat simple. The Roriz should cellar well for the mid-term. Approximately 2,000 cases were produced. **89-91 points**

22. QUINTA do VALE DONA MARIA - I tasted this wine a few times and it was for me one of the biggest surprises of the vintage. It was made by Cristiano van Zeller and his talented young co-winemaker Sandra Tavares da Silva. Cristiano and his wife Joana own the property and the grapes are 100% foot trodden in lagar. Dark reddish-purple with sweet berry, minty and eucalyptus aromas which are enticing. Ripe raspberry and jammy plum flavors prevail here on this full-bodied, massive wine. The firm tannins underscore the structure of this impressive offering from a barely known Quinta. One of the best balanced wines of the vintage! This would have been a 1st round TKO, if the finish had a bit more length. A closefisted VP that will take ages to fully mature. **94-96 points**

23. QUINTA do VALE MEÃO - Historically this Quinta was owned by the Ferreira family for over 120 years and was the mainstay grower for their VPs. Francisco "Xito" Olazabal is the winemaker of this up and coming family owned property. I have only tried a few wines from this property in the past. Dark inky purplish-black and fully opaque. Essence of freshly chopped herbs, crushed autumn leaves and fully ripe, sweet red berries. I like this earthy style and attractive aromatics. Fruit forward and deeply extracted, albeit soft and gentle on the palate. In synch now with a medium body and the moderate tannins are nearly obscured by the sweet, youthful fruit here. Great length on the finish with a bit of spicity heat which

slightly detracts from the overall pleasure. Vale Meão is one of the new Single Quinta VPs that we'll be hearing lots more from if the 2000 is any indication. This bottling has mid-term aging potential. **89-91 points**

24. QUINTA do VESUVIO - This is my dark horse of the 2000 vintage and my favorite from the Symington stable to go the distance. This thoroughbred comes from grapes that were 100% foot trodden in lagar (50 people treading for 4 hour shifts) which is not a surprise. 40% of the grape blend came from Touriga Francesa. Quickly gaining on the other top Shippers, Vesuvio has made fantastic VPs in every major vintage of the past decade. The 2000 is a dark purplish-black with full opacity and ultra-ripe aromas of violets and blueberry preserves. Alluring sweet berry and jammy plum fruit that dominate the underlying ripe tannins which are anything but shy. This is one powerful beast with the structure to take it to the finish line. Outstanding palate crushing finish that keeps the fans applauding. Approximately 2,500 cases were produced. Will this surpass the phenomenon that was Vesuvio in 1994, only time will tell! **96-98 points**

25. SANDEMAN (QUINTA do) VAU - Dark reddish-black color, with violet and blueberry scents. Gentle, easy-to-enjoy style with soft mouth filling fruit. Can be consumed now and although it lacks tannic grip, it is designed in an a smooth and very approachable style. Drink the Vau Vintage Port young while waiting for the "classic" Sandeman to cellar properly. **88-90 points**

26. SANDEMAN - Along with a new Millennium vintage, the Sandeman "Don", one of the most recognizable icon logos in the beverage world, has subtly changed. The new image depicts the Don holding the usual glass of ruby colored Porto, but sports white highlights that show creases and muscle tone in the arms etc. Although Sandeman was recently sold to Sogrape (a positive move!), George Sandeman's steady hand has successfully guided this well-known Shipper into the 21st century. This VP is medium ruby in color with lush plum and spice on the nose. The smooth yet dense grapey and black fruit flavors are chock full of big, ripe tannins. The Sandeman masculine and dryer house style (Carlos Silva is responsible for the blends) has an intriguing chocolate note on the very smooth and lingering finish. One of the best Sandeman VPs tasted in many vintages. Excellent long term cellaring potential. **92-94 points**

27. SMITH WOODHOUSE - Vibrant dark purple color with violet edge. Ripe plum, cassis and herbal notes. Medium-bodied wine with abundant, soft sweet fruit. A gentle giant displaying raspberry, an interesting peach note and an almond nuance on the very lengthy finish. Smooth texture with relatively tight tannins that support the wealth of peripherals in this finely tuned VP from the Symingtons. Another excellent long term ager here. A very well made Smith Woodhouse that is even better than the 1977 and as good as their 1983 ... maybe better in time **91-93 points**

28. TAYLOR - After a couple of times tasting the Taylor in Vancouver, I was still undecided about the structure of this wine. The fruit was so dense and overpowering that it was very difficult to perceive the underlying tannins. I held off on rating this wine until I had another opportunity to try it. Three weeks later in London, I spent a long time with this in my glass, having had no other VP before it that morning. A dark opaque monster appeared. The nose provided cassis, mint and herbal notes. But this tasting exhibited a Taylor that showed quite differently than in Vancouver. Although the fruit was still powerful if not overwhelming, this time I was distinctly aware of the firm tannic structure which was anything but reticent. The

sumptuous blackberry, mint and a faint hint of chocolate showed incredible density. I noted a touch of spirit that showed up on the end of the impressive, lingering finish. This is a much hardier wine than the 1997 and may ultimately rival the 1994 and fantastic 1970. Approximately 14,500 cases were produced. This was one of the great wines of the 2000 vintage. **96-98 points**

29. WARRE - Quinta da Cavadinha may win the prize for having the lowest yields of any property in the Douro during 2000's harvest. Cavadinha is the backbone of the Warre Vintage Ports and at one time sold grapes for blending into Fonseca VPs. I am a fan of the Warre style for early consumption although their 1977 is a beauty today at 25 years old. The grapes for the 2000 were picked rather late and were very concentrated. Dark purple in color with full opacity. Aromas of violets and ripe sweet cherries, full-bodied, with juicy black cherry and ripe raspberry fruit. Elegant and balanced, deceptively soft fruit with mostly chewy tannins that come alive on Warre's long and luxurious finish. **91-93 points**

I hope that the above tasting notes and ratings of the 2000 Vintage Ports may assist in your purchasing decisions or just provide good old reading enjoyment.