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COLLECTIVE PORT WISDOM

2019 Vintage Port Report

Article and Photos by Roy Hersh © December 2021



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Knowing I was not going to be in Porto in early June and wanting to stay as safe and healthy as possible, I decided to forego my annual review of Vintage Ports and in this case, specifically the 2019 vintage. Only later, did I consider it and by then I was already back in the USA at home.

So obtaining more than the 14 bottlings that I was able to come by, was not going to happen at that point in time.

So my options were limited and my views and scores skewed by the fact that I was only able to then obtain the biggest names in the Port trade, mostly through their USA importers, but some through direct means shipping overseas. And my thanks for their support in getting samples to me so quickly!

While I may likely get accused by some usual suspects of “score creep” which seems to be an acrid discussion point in certain circles, the reality is different. When you see the names, you will think, how does Roy’s average scores from a vintage like 2019, surpass the recent classic vintages like 2015, (yeah it is!) 2016, 2017 and likely even 2011? That’s just not possible!

Well, if you don’t have access to the middle and lesser known or new producers that are not yet atop of the game, as their vines gain age slowly and are far from full on A-rated vineyard sites in some places in Baixo Corgo, for example, it begins to be more explainable. Sometimes they can surprise and wind up at the top of my annual blind tastings, so I cast no aspersions.

Additionally, when you really look at what happened in 2019, it begins to make even more sense. Ok, maybe it wasn’t a perfect growing year. There could have been some more rain in the winter that would have brought the water tables up higher to make things more sustainable had there been huge heat spikes ... which there weren’t. But let’s have a real look at what was the growing season of 2019 and then make better assessments, before getting to assess my tasting notes and ratings, (the latter of which, to me, are less important) but I realize consumers love the numerical ratings, which is quick and easy to assess a vintage or producer at a glance. And consumers tend to have their favorite journalists that they trust. I know that I do!

From where I sit, (and I spent a full 3 months during the heart of the Port growing season, in Porto, Gaia and Douro during 2019) constantly talking to winemakers, friends who work at quintas and owners of companies. I am certainly detached from the vineyard managers, but I did keep a close ear to the ground and followed the progress, not knowing that the following year, I would not even be allowed to get into the country at all.

So what really took place in 2019?

I am going to work backwards from my overall observations based on a sub-set of 2019 Vintage Ports and what I felt were the hallmarks of the vintage from what I knew and tasted. Then I will provide my understanding of what the generalities were of the entire growing season and how that determined what were some of the take aways from 2019. Here is what I learned by tasting through the upper crust of the vintage and paying close attention to the growing season.

The hallmarks of 2019:

- Consistency – it started with the growing season and that did not change at harvest
- Approachability – these are extremely easy to drink young, with very few exceptions
- Extraction – maybe not the ink well blackish-purple of 2016s, but dark enough for VP
- Complexity – Impressive depth, density, sophisticated mid-palates and great length
- Moderated levels, if not evenness of the tannins – not manipulation ... growing conditions
- Structures – the growing season impacted the freshness and acid levels big time
- Evenness – A vintage built with solid RS levels and not a single over-ripe VP whatsoever
- Single Quinta Vintage Ports were the norm, nearly across the entire spectrum
- Age worthiness – I can't remember tasting any SQVP (or classic) year, where every single Port I tasted could easily reach 3-4 decades of age, with ease, and a few with a couple of extra decades beyond that. Due to overall balance, not grippy or overbearing tannins

The blessed pre-Pandemic vintage of 2019, had a splendid growing season:

The winter saw modest levels of rainfall in Douro, but then the precipitation dried up during the peak months of grape maturation, with near drought from May and through the following three months. Warm sunny days ensued, but much less "hot" and consistently quite a bit cooler than in recent vintages, without any major heat spikes, avoiding any raisining or the need for sulfur treatments due to a lot of rain. Very different than say, 2016.

The rain that came late in the summer of '19 really made a big difference in a positive, beneficial way, unlike what was seen during harvest time this year of '21; (hard driving rain several times, and arriving late, which stopped the '21 harvest in its tracks and created lots of unevenness, more so for the Port grapes than table wines). But back to 2019: the rain during the last days of August, made a huge difference, elongating the harvest by allowed for a longer stretch of grape picking. Small quantities of precipitation later in September and in mid-October also refreshed the grapes rather than overwhelming or rotting them during the final peak of picking time.

So instead of being in a hurry to pick, the steady pace was more relaxed and solid phenolic ripeness was achieved by these longer hang times, especially in the center sub-region of the Douro, from the end of September to mid-October; providing most producers with an entire five and often six weeks of harvest. Basically, the last pre-Pandemic harvest was a thing of beauty in the Douro.

Harvest yields were stronger than in most other recent vintages, but what grapes were allocated specifically for Vintage Ports is another story entirely. Low VP production ensued. Expect there to be some outstanding LBVs in another few years from 2019 grapes. But possibly the biggest take away was the steady coolness of summer temperatures that created extraordinary acidity levels and freshness and allowed for the prolonged hang times and natural ripeness. In my opinion, this was the key factor that made 2019 so special.

Now look back at my “hallmarks” with a better understanding of what the growing season had to do with those assessments. Then read my tasting notes with those dynamics clear in mind, and it all makes more sense. At least it did to me!

Slightly modified tasting regime for the first time since 2003:

First and foremost, I was not tasting the 2019’s while in Portugal. Only a few producers allowed that to happen, and I do not make assessments based on single momentary snap-shot tastings during visits or while have meals with friends anyway. These 2019 tasting sessions were all done at my home in Sammamish, WA. All were tasted single blind, over a four day period rather than my usual regime of just three day tastings, while in Porto. In Porto, I am paying to rent a place to taste and so three days, twice a day is sufficient.

Additionally, this season, my tastings were done in the early evening, in mostly smaller blind flights ... but prior to dinner. Also, there were no afternoon tasting sessions this year, another modification for 2019, these bottles were only tasted once per day, not twice, (back up to 2007 and I was tasting three times per day and late into the early morning. No good reason for that anymore, although when in Portugal, I will definitely go back to two sessions, once per day and once at night.

All bottles were allowed to settle down, after their travel for a minimum of a couple of weeks prior to tasting. Some had more than a month; but that was often not in my control. Most came from their American importers, while a few were sent directly from Portugal.



Roy's 2019 VP Tasting Note Section

2019 Cockburn's Quinta dos Canais Vintage Port – Bottling now for further ageing and future release. From the first day, this Canais was very impressive, both aromatically and on the palate, as well as the structural material of this Port. Rarely do I find my score not change between the first and the last time tasting such a young VP, but day four was every bit as incredible as my initial sips. The nose presented purity of grape, licorice, grenadine, cassis and graphite. Big bold flavors right from the first pour, medium-full bodied with precision and classic structure present. I couldn't wait to see how this would morph the next day, then the next and finally the last. It presented different aromatics and the flavors changed too, from blackberry to redcurrant, medium-dry, but always harmonious and with increasing intensity. By the end, the massive waves of fruit, balance and length, were clearly in the top handful of the first grouping; which included several ringers, inserted to keep everything quite analytical. After having tasted the entire range, this was deservedly in the top handful. This 2019 will age well for a minimum of four decades, I'm positive of that; but it's fun to drink right now too. To be clear, it's definitely the BEST young Cockburn's or Canais, I can ever remember tasting! **95+ points – 12/5/21**



2019 Croft's Quinta da Roêda Vintage Port –

Declared, and to be released at a later date. Initially this struck me as one of the two best of its flight. It did not disappoint from there. The hallmark of this Port is its structure and balance. The aromatics were beautiful with lush floral fragrances, blueberry, boysenberry, and innate spiciness that persists throughout. The overall balance was undeniable, as was the seamless nature of the tannins, which gained prominence with every passing day. This Roêda is built for aging and was not as much fun to sip in the early goings, although the fruit is dense and delicious, but the tannins showed their power every day it was tasted. This will be a beauty in 30 years, possibly even better a decade or two hence. But leave this Croft in the cellar for a dozen years or

more as this bear sleeps. While somewhat approachable now, those adverse to “grip” might find fault with it. There is none whatsoever, as this Roêda SQVP is extremely well-made and a big muscular youngster! 2,950 cases produced. **94+ points – 12/28/21**

2019 Dow's Quinta do Bomfim Vintage Port – Bottling now for further ageing and future release. Like most of the Ports from 2019, the colors Fresh floral bouquet, spicy, black fruits, tar and a bit austere on day one. It was more expressive each day and added some blackcurrant and rhubarb notes. Medium-bodied, medium acidity and prominent tannins that are not grippy. As the days passed, this Port was softer on the palate and easier to approach. Brambly, spicy, blackberry and blueberry medium-dry pleasing flavors. I don't see this as a long-term ager, but drink anytime through 2050. Its significant strength is the chalk dry and persistent finish. This was one of two Ports I guessed blind, correctly. **93+ points – 12/5/21**



2019 Dow's Quinta Senhora da Ribeira Vintage Port – Bottling now for further ageing and future release. Initially there was pure grape essence and briary boysenberry upfront with a hint of mint, joined by bright lavender and plum notes the third day open. Medium weight early on, this fleshed out nicely and put on some weight in subsequent days. Noticeably sweet and voluptuous, with a measure of heat on the back palate, grenadine syrup flavor emerged by the last day of tasting. It was the first time ever that I preferred the Senhora to Bomfim and I was quite surprised by that, once revealed. A very well-made Dow's SQVP, with an impressively long finish and serious aging potential too. Currently, it is so enjoyable, but plenty of room to drink well through 2060. 375 (12 x 750 ml cases) were made and put away. **94+ points – 12/5/21**



2019 Fonseca Guimaraens Vintage Port – This captivated my attention, and my first comment was that “it has everything.” It began with the aromatic hints of the Touriga Nacional grape, plum, cocoa and a strong scent of pepper; gorgeous! While it was medium-full bodied early on, it never got much richer, the intensity and balance of fruit vs. acidity was the strong suit of this Guimaraens. Brash, bold and dense from the beginning, it had a stunning core of medium sweet black and purple fruits that was absolutely delicious throughout all four days and it was the one 2019 that I most looked forward to revealing. Sophisticated and suave, with mid-palate depth and superb balance, it was a standout and my co-favorite of the entire 2019 vintage. David and his team hit a homerun with this beauty and it is not only great to drink right now, but this will have the ability to reward patience for more than a half century. The structural material is already in place and while the tannins are not as massive as a few others, they are clearly subverted to the fruit right now. 4,000 cases were produced of this second label Fonseca.

96+ points – 12/28/21



2019 Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos Vintage Port – Bottling now for further ageing and future release. Great extraction! It was the bouquet that first caught my attention, sophisticated and intense notes of spicy anise, blackberry pie filling, with seductive plum and blueberry notes as the days went on. Medium-bodied, densely concentrated fruit flavors and mid-palate depth, the acidity is ample and mild chalky tannins promise age worthy drinking for 3-4 more decades. A beautiful young Malvedos with loads of potential, but so delicious now! **94+ points – 12/5/21**

2019 Niepoort Vintage Port – The first out of the gate to declare 2019 this year, was Dirk Niepoort. He decided to be the early bird and declared on his birthday, March 11th, and plans to do so for all future Port declarations! Pretty plum, violet, wildflower fragrance, pure crushed grape, stony minerality and herbs. An off-dry essence with powerful grip and exquisite lively acidity framed by medium-full-bodied dense and intense boysenberry, purple fruit and plum flavors, pure and harmonious. The tannins grow more powerful on days 3 and 4, grippy yet soft. Well integrated and excellent balance at this stage and it should age quite nicely and drink well for 4 decades or so, but I liked it early and often. Bottled in 375 ml for this finished sample. A fine Niepoort and very much in Nick and Dirk's style; putting freshness first. **94+ points – 12/10/21**



2019 Quinta da Devesa Vintage Port – This Port showed some issues on the nose and both bottles contained a variation on the theme with stemmy/stalky scents, milk chocolate, black raspberry, umami and teriyaki, clearly red fruited beyond the vegetative notes. The weight started out as medium-full, but by day four, the mouthfeel had filled out and this Devesa was full-bodied and unctuous. Flavors of tart rhubarb and cranberry. Big Velcro like tannins persisted. Aging potential should reach between four to five decades IF the fruit can hold up and lose its vegetative character. The average score and conglomerate tasting note of 2 bottles tasted blind (87/90). **89+ points – 12/10/21**

2019 Quinta do Noval Vintage Port – This was the 9th VP poured and it smelled very similar to the 7th which had already been evaluated. The Port later revealed as Nacional, seemed unmistakably Noval-esque from the nose. Here, fragrant black and blue fruits, with an earthy olive tapenade, Kalamata nuance that I often associate with Noval. Over the next few days other notes emerged: leather, grape lifesaver, and rock rose. Medium-bodied, soft and sensuous across the tongue. The vibrancy of the acidity, a stand out; with tannins ripe and dusty. Over 4 days, it was clear this VP offered excellent long term aging po. The unctuous and seductive mouthfeel led to a very long and succulent finish, while the overall harmony is something really special. It drinks well and is pleasure packed now, yet I would love to see this Port in 40 years!

94+ points – 12/5/21



2019 Quinta do Noval Nacional Vintage Port –

The only question for me was if this was the regular bottling of Quinta do Noval or was it the Nacional. I am wrong more often than right when it comes to answering that question over the past two decades. I don't *seem* to remember that the regular bottling is typically the more brash, heavier weight and the Nacional is usually far more easy and generous at this exact stage; while the Noval delivers the knockout punch. Fresh notes of fig and blueberry, with an earthy essence highlighted by esteva and brambly blackcurrant. Medium-full the first three days and day four it put on significant weight. Off-dry style and tight, but great promise was apparent as my score stayed consistent through the reveal. Blue and purple fruits emerge and are stunning in the mouth, supported by juicy

acidity and grippy drying tannins, and by far, the most expressive and longest finish of all but one Port tasted. The earthy qualities evoked more prominence on day 3 and 4, as the Nacional became softer in the mouth but gained weight. I will need to re-calibrate in a few years, but the potential is there for 5 decades of cellaring and great drinking ahead. **96+ points – 12/5/21**



2019 Quinta do Vesúvio Vintage Port – Bottling now for further ageing and future release: 775 cases of 12 x 750 ml bottles produced. Initially a slightly tanky, Touriga Nacional note was present along with lifted scents of red vines, cocoa, licorice, lavender, and hint at herbal. Medium weight, soft, chewy, yet concentrated and balanced by potent acidity and mild chalky tannins. Never was there a sense that this would live more than three decades; but the flavors were delectable with confected blueberry, plum and raisin in a modestly sweet frame. By the end this SQVP had grown slightly heavier, but I never found the complexity nor long finish that I expect from this property's VP.

My love for Vesuvio had me slightly disappointed when the reveal took place, but that's exactly why ONLY blind tasting ... for honest evaluations, must be the rule! **91+ points – 12/5/21**

2019 Taylor's Quinta de Terra Feita Vintage Port – Immediately this struck me as one of the most tannic beasts of the vintage, right from the first sip and that never really changed until the 4th day. Brash in every sense of that word when it comes to Port. The bouquet was filled with black flowers, black licorice, black fruits and black olives. Massively fruited, yes, brash and bold, with densely concentrated flavors screaming from the complex mid-palate, warm and at one point a bit hot, but that calmed down in days to come. Juicy black fruits on the palate too, with intensity from both the lively acid and in-your-face ripe tannins that don't quit. Day 4 the fruit had softened slightly, offering purple fruit flavors as well as black. The finish was multifaceted and persistent and everything about this Port assured me this was going to be Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas. Wrong again, but one thing I'm right about; this phenomenal showing by Terra Feita not only surprised me, but it will indubitably cellar beautifully for a full four decades, likely five. While this is the bigger of the two Taylor's in 2019, and I believe it will be the longer lived ... I had already tasted and rated the Vargellas, only 1 point higher. An absolutely stellar Terra Feita!

94+ points – 12/28/21



2019 Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas Vintage Port – As mentioned in the Terra Feita note, this Vargellas was tasted prior to that one, by a few other VPs. But the familial similarity was apparent, unfortunately by noticing the tell-tale Taylor lip on the bottle, as they were both poured. As much as I loved the Terra Feita, having already consumed this Port each of the four days, I felt it had more complexity and a hedonistic quality that was not part of the Terra Feita's makeup, which was more about muscle and power. Vargellas was more friendly and easier to appreciate without the lip-lock tannins of its younger sibling. Fresh fragrant figs and floral notes were joined by grapy, grenadine and blueberry pop tart aromas. Medium+ bodied, filled with a mix of red and black fruits, and loads of chocolate in the early going. The acidity was in synch and the tannins began mild and became ever more noticeable by day four, dusty, ripe and bigger. Nonetheless, they never seemed like drinking liquid Velcro and remained user friendly. While this likely will never reach 2070, as the Terra Feita will, I don't have to worry about that at this point. This Vargellas is another in a long line of lively and lovely Vintage Ports and 2019 is worthy of a case purchase while you polish off your bottles from the '80s! 5,000 cases produced.

95+ points – 12/28/21



2019 Warre's Quinta da Cavadinha Vintage Port – Fragrant floral bouquet and fresh scent of a briar patch with blueberry, plum, minerals and herbs. Delightful to smell over and over. Medium in weight and sweet upon entry, this is a really fine Cavadinha with flavors that are rich, long and lingering. Balanced and generous with great depth in the mid-section with an earthiness, licorice, and Fig Newton flavor that continues on to the round, smooth and long finish. There's plenty of structure here and I'd put the cellaring window between 30 and 35 years. But this home to Warre's has nailed it in 2019 and is one that is going to be pleasurable along the way. **94+ points – 12/5/21**

Conclusions of 2019 Vintage Ports:

When you have SQVP Ports from a fine year like 2019, you can reduce the quantity of what goes into your Vintage Port lottes and wind up with excellent quality grapes and therefore the wines show that. Meaning, it is not a requisite to produce large quantities even with gorgeous grapes. They can go towards excellent LBV and Colheitas, depending on how you play the *law of thirds*.

The density and richness of most 2019s I tasted, rivaled most generally declared vintages. The structural components are more about balance than sheer power, albeit there were a few that went in that direction, but I doubt intentionally. Generalizing, the acidity showed freshness and none stood out as sharp or lean, but really in great harmony with the fruit overall. Tannins were fairly mild in most instances, far softer than in 2015, 2016 or 2017 across the board. But instead of grip and power, they were more refined, yet omnipresent.

I believe the producers are wise to hold back on releasing these 2019s right now. I did not taste a single VP that won't last 30 years at a minimum and the best of them have a full five decades of ageability. I really can't think of a single non-classic vintage where I could make that claim before. Make no mistake, the 2019 vintage may not have earned the pin as a "classic" but the growing season was beautiful and without any worries.

FTLOP 2019 Vintage Port TOP 7

RANK	PRODUCER	RATING
1st	Fonseca Guimaraens	96
2nd	Quinta do Noval Nacional	96
3rd	Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas	95
4th	Cockburn's Quinta da Canais	95
5th	Niepoort	94
6th	Dow's Quinta Nossa da Senhora	94
7th	Taylor's Quinta de Terra Feita	94

