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COLLECTIVE PORT WISDOM

# 2021 Vintage Port Forecast

**Article and Photos by Roy Hersh © October/November 2019**



**Article by Roy Hersh © December 2023**

2021 ... for whatever reason, when requesting samples from producers, the vast majority told me they were not releasing 2021s. They did not give reasons, and I did not want to seem pushy at the time and ask that question outright. And yet there are some significant names, just two examples Quinta do Noval, with both their regular bottling and their special Nacional bottling were both released, as well as the rather rare release of Graham's Stone Terraces. So, until my actual blind tasting regimen took place, I had no idea of what was coming. Sure, 2021 was my first post-Covid year back doing wine tours in Portugal, which included a couple of weeks during harvest time in the Douro, in addition to a couple of other quick visits when in the area. But I did take note of some of the facets of the growing season, which will follow.

Overall, I believe there were only about twenty declarations, so I felt lucky to be permitted to review fifteen of them for my blind assessment. After recently tasting through the 2020 Vintage Ports and having been able to receive 30 different bottlings for my tasting, it occurred to me that there was seemingly far less enthusiasm overall for 2021 by the Port trade, in comparison to the previous vintage. But some were more bullish than others, and that had to do with the sporadic issues like hailstorms and severe thunderstorms and torrential rains which caused issues smack in the middle of harvest. Some encountered huge problems and others were fortunate and faced just temporary delays.

So, this forecast of the young and just bottled 2021 Vintage Ports, and some not released but already approved by the IVDP as final blends. There are 15 well-known Port shippers that are represented here. Enough for me to make some basic determinations from the cross-section that I was able to round up. Before delving into the growing and climate conditions that shaped and determined the character of this vintage, it should be noted that my visits from the USA in early 2021 still required PCR tests before arrival and immediately prior to departure back to America.

The vast majority of Portuguese citizens were still wearing masks when I returned here in April 2021. Antigen tests were given by hotels (and in some restaurants) in a variety of regions, but by harvest time in Douro, not so much. Restaurant hours were shortened in the big cities in PT, especially on weekends, with closing times as early as three in the afternoon. Glad those days seem to be over. But back to the 2021 vintage.

Having done both 2020 and 2021 Vintage Port (VP) assessments at the end of 2023, next year I will be back on schedule and based on declarations of the 2022 harvest, I will be very willing and able to perform a much more inclusive evaluation and Vintage Port Forecast. In 2017, I had the time and desire to taste more thoroughly and made way through 74 Vintage Ports, which took me over a month.



The 2021 vintage represents my 13<sup>th</sup> overall vintage assessment since 2000, as I had only included some of the better non-generally declared years and all of the major ones during that time frame.



## **2021 Douro Weather Report**

After a fantastically hot and shortened harvest in 2020, the hottest Douro growing season on record, 2021 was a horse of another color. It was by no means perfect, nor easy ... having presented huge challenges, not the least of which was due to the near impossibility to find humans to pick the grapes during harvest ... as social distancing during the pandemic was still a thing at the time. But let's focus on the growing conditions.

The latter part of the month of December in 2020, brought frigid temperatures to the Douro. Way colder than the norm, a very dry wind was prevalent, and in all three sub-regions of the Douro Valley. It remained quite cold in January, dry too and it was hard to get work done in the vineyards. Then came some warmer weather the following month and February also brought widespread showers across the entire region. This helped restore the water levels and would be wonderful to protect against another brutally hot summer like what was experienced in June through late August during the prior year.

Unfortunately, there was too much rainwater and there was pressure on all of the Douro's dam structures, and the river flooded areas upriver, in Régua, and even in Porto. Then came March and it was a very dry month with almost no measurable precipitation. April was more problematic and there was some very significant storms during the month. May brought flowering to the region's vineyards in the middle to latter part of the month. Towards the end of the month and the very beginning of June, disaster hit. For some! Hailstorms were harsh and in some cases epic. As per usual, there is no rhyme nor reason the path they wind up choosing. Almost like what we experience in the USA with tornadoes, albeit very different kind of storms.

Although temperatures were warmer in June the hailstorm damage was dramatic. Some producers lost the vast majority of their year's ability to have any grapes. Other vineyards not only saw some damage, but had large percentages, like 90% in some cases, not hurt ... but destroyed. It was devastating! Next door neighbor's vineyards were not even touched in some cases, and that's the craziness with hailstorms in Douro. Not just the path they haphazardly take, but the financial cost involved can be devastating for a farmer, not just for the current year, but it takes several to rebound from such an incident. Veraison (Pintor) took place in early to mid-July. Overall July and August were remarkably cool and compared to other years, (2020!) there was far less raisining.

Harvest began in late August with the white grapes and the summer of warm days and very cool evening temperatures was excellent for the maturation process as well as the acidity in the grapes. Nothing like the record setting excessive heat in 2020. Then came September, which brought heavy rains. Torrential in some cases. Right at the beginning of the month, again in the middle and then for good measure, during the last week of September one more major storm.

Picking had to stop at most locations and vineyard work was on hold. In some cases this lasted for several days, others a bit shorter and some, even longer. But it was not easy to deal with. Rot was the big fear, right in the midst of harvest time, during the latter parts of the pandemic.

It wound up being the wettest September on record in more than a half decade. After the rain, the sun emerged along with cool temperatures. Fortunately, there was no rush to pick and for most, harvest carried on into the early to midsection of October, location dependent. Those not affected by the hailstorms saw larger yields, huge by comparison to the prior year. Phenolics looked good, deeply extracted colors were seen in the lagares and the aromatics were exotic and spectacular. A difficult year turned out better than could have been expected!





## OVERVIEW

Now that I am living here in Porto, it is far easier to access bottles of Vintage Port than ever before, in terms of samples from producers for this type of article. In the past, I was always reliant on others for assistance. In great years I will do extensive tastings with as many producers as possible, but years where it's immediately known that the weather or other factors complicated things, then I'll reduce the amount of VPs from small, medium, and large producers ... famous or first vintage, or Single Quinta VPs.

All of that out of the way, this is included so those who are *new* subscribers, or seeing the newsletter for the first time in this format and detail, realize they can trust ... and that there is zero influence in my tasting notes. No profit motives, no revenue from advertisers, no favors asked or done. It is strictly, what I smell and taste, one man's opinion. One with 40 years of Port loving experience. My 1<sup>st</sup> official Vintage Forecast was 2000 as mentioned earlier, but I had done a few prior to FTLOP.

My methods haven't changed much over the years. Yeap, I purchased fancier bags (instead of paper ones when I first started) but ultimately, it is all about how these are handled, blind without any label bias. The great and controversial wine writer, Robert Parker who reviewed Port, but never stepped foot in the Douro, was not a fan of blind tasting and his boast of finding label bias to be a myth, always baffled me. But maybe I am just a sucker for certain labels, as are many wine loving friends of mine. Ultimately, he may be right when you have tasted as many wines as he has.



## METHODOLOGY

### **Modified from text of the recent 2020 report, but there are some differences with 2021:**

I live in an area not walkable to the Ribeira section of Porto, where a lot of my friends live. So, finding reliable help in the daytime is harder to come by. I also do not have some of my things from the USA here yet, so I had to order bags from Garrafeira Nacional. I knew there'd be **8** bottles in a flight, and I photographed the bottles to use for promoting on social media or to use in this article.

Then I removed the capsules and corks and replaced them with random T-stoppers. This year was the first time I didn't have help to do the above and what follows next. I taped numbers to the bags, closed my eyes and shuffled the bags like a deck of cards. I then inserted the VP bottles in them and tied them shut with my eyes closed.

When they were all bagged and the numbers were facing away from me, I moved all the bottles around. A few hours later, I came back and then lined up all 8 in numerical order. The old days in rental apartments in the heart of the downtown area made this much easier to accomplish with friends assisting in this process.

I tasted ALL 8 VPs, twice in 24 hours. Once late morning, the other at night. Enough hours go by that I do not remember what was tasted or written about the wines. I use 9 parameters nowadays for every single bottle. I pre-print pages with the following parameters for typically for 3 days worth of tastings, but I skipped one day after three in a row, to see if the wines would change on my fourth day of tasting, which was the fifth day the bottles were open, although they are always kept re-corked and kept in a cool area in my home between sessions.

I write the flight # and bottle # and have day/night on each page. The parameters are: NOS, WGT, MFL, STR, FLV, +/-, AGE, FIN, and RAT.

Parameters above: Nose, Weight, Mouthfeel, Structure (acid/tannins), Flavors, +/- (significant strengths or weaknesses), Age (worthiness, to later determine the future drinking window ... one of my personal strengths after thousands of bottles of Port), Finish (length, flavors, structure involved) and Rating (the meaning of my + sign is: it represents ANY wine I taste, must have at least another full decade of solid drinkability and the ability to improve as well).

So when you read my tasting note section, you will see how the TNs are constructed and why they seem a bit "formulaic" or at the very least, almost always have the same type of information in the same order. It has ALWAYS been this way. I do not feel the need in other articles to always include all 9 parameters though, just for specific Vintage Port evaluations.



As mentioned, I taste twice a day. Unlike 2020, knowing these were going to be from a considerably cooler year, I tasted ALL a minimum of 8 times over the course of five days, (as mentioned, 3 in a row, skip day 4 and then two final tastings on their 4<sup>th</sup> day of being tasted, (on day 5) so I had eight "time elapsed" hand-written tasting notes for each VP. On day 3, IF I am not decided on STR because tannins are gaining or losing power or RAT, I am undecided on a score, because I do not take an average of my eight notes, where I have given a range like 91-93 and that night a 92-94 ... it is not a strict average, because I get a feel from my detailed notes, not just scores, whether or not the wine has improved and the final day's range should count more than day 1, as an example. It is not pure math, but it is done with consistency and not just gut feel after many years of using a nearly identical system. Only skipping day four and tasting a fourth day were new in my methodology solely for 2021 Vintage Ports

I took a couple of days off in between, because there were less bottles to taste, just two flights of 8, fairly simple compared to most years. I used that extra time to allow my palate to refresh and write up the next flight's pages, with the 9 parameters. Then start the next flight. If it sounds boring, it is not to me. I love doing this. FYI, back in the vintages from 2000-2007 they were tasted 3x a day and always in Porto, not paid for by a magazine, but for the love of Port.



**Don't take life too seriously!**





## 2021 TASTING NOTES

**2021 Burmester's Quinta do Arnozelo Vintage Port** – Exporters initially, a partnership forged between friends and Londoners, Henry Burmester & John Nash, 273 years ago, in 1750. A few generations later, in 1834, Johann Wilhelm Burmester (JWB is still on labels today) took on the challenge of his ancestor's company and turned it into a great success. Another significant character in the story of Port, that was eventually acquired by a Spanish banking company in 2005. During the four days of tasting, this was the only 2021 Port to have nearly identical range of scores due its consistency throughout. From Arnozelo's north facing property in the Douro Superior comes this very dark ruby nearly opaque VP, with garnet rim. A cuvée containing 45% Touriga Franca, 35% Touriga Nacional, 15% Tinta Roriz and 5% Alicante Bouschet. Slightly sappy scent initially, violet, pure raspberry essence, strawberry, and wisps of fresh herbs. Medium-weight and loaded with fleshy purple and blue fruits, a dry frame and medium-long finish. It possessed a sublime soft texture, was fresh and mouthfilling, this promising Port from Burmester's primary property exuded balance and verve, with soft tannins that should drink well early on and through 2054. A fine SQVP with finesse! 20% abv. **92+ points ~ 12/16/23**



**2021 Dow's Quinta do Bomfim Vintage Port** – Another in a long line of great Vintage Ports from this property, acquired in 1896. I've been most fortunate to have consumed two bottles, (years apart) of that amazing Dow's 1896, and it remains as one of my all-time greatest Vintage Port experiences. Bomfim is a stunning property, with 60 hectares and remarkable views of both the Douro River and Pinhão bridge. This 2021 is exemplary. Made in a very difficult year, with buckets of rain during the harvest, it is incredible that this Port can be this good! Aromatics include some of the usual suspects and the success of the Touriga Franca and Nacional have a lot to do with it. Filled to the brim with violets and lavender floral notes, flashy and spicy scents of cocoa and loads of esteva from the first whiff, but also black licorice and black raspberries provide the impetus to keep nose in glass, and I did so ... early and often. In fact, mixed into the 2<sup>nd</sup> flight and single blind, this Bomfim along with the Graham's Stone Terraces were the only two that I "guessed" correctly the first of the four days tasted, having handwritten notes to avoid typing them. Both were held over for a 5<sup>th</sup> day to do a single blind comparison of the top 6 Ports from 2021. This placed very well that day as you'll see shortly. Round, sumptuous, and mellifluous sum up the essence of this medium+ bodied wine. Not as densely concentrated as the fantastic 2020, yet harmonious with prolific balance coming forward to mingle with tannins soft and fine grained from the very beginning. Loads of fresh boysenberry and blueberry flavors were prevalent early on and a couple of days in, much drier lingonberry became the mainstay, and the overall harmony of this Port further emerged. While this is 2021 is already so enjoyable to sip at this point, I would advise to begin opening your bottles around 2035 and for those young enough, consume through 2065. But why wait, it is fantastic now! There will be future releases of Bomfim but an *en primeur* campaign saw 960 x 750 ml, and 300 magnums released. 20% abv. **94+ points ~ 12/22/23**

**2021 DR Port Vintage Port** – With nearly 60 hectares and all kinds of agricultural products, none is more important than the wide variety of grapes. Domingos Ribeira acquired this property in 2001 and his daughter Ana, is now running this medium-sized family-run business. This 2021 Vintage Port was approachable as soon as the bottle was uncorked and remained that way throughout, but in the four days of this tasting, it progressively improved. In possession of a lovely bouquet of fig and blackberry, the aromatic silhouette was quite earthy, with notes of cedar, tar, dried leaves and morel mushroom, and open three days, some prominent scents of dark chocolate too. Medium-bodied, dense and fleshy, the structure offered a dollop of crisp acid and very soft slightly chalky tannins. More elegant than powerful, it is a Vintage Port that has mid-term aging potential of up to 35 years. While I enjoyed this a lot, the finish was only medium in length and the tannins remained subdued throughout. Otherwise, it was quite easy to approach and delicious. **93+ points ~ 12/16/23**



**2021 Graham's Stone Terraces Vintage Port** – This is the 5<sup>th</sup> time the Symington Family has launched this very special Vintage Port bottling, as they have done in 2017, 2016, 2015 (*the troika*) along with their inaugural version from 2011. All 5 have been released between 2013 and 2023, emanating from two stone terraced parcels at Quinta dos Malvedos: Vinha dos Cardenhos and the Port Arthur vineyard. The grapes are mostly from field blends and old vine Touriga Nacional, but there are several other grapes included too, from more recent plantings. This generously scented Port presents pine, lavender, plum, blueberry, some warming spirit and high-toned notes, which made for an intense, fresh, and sophisticated

bouquet. Medium-bodied, yet concentrated and soft in the mouth, the exacting acidity kept the overtly sweet opening impression in check, while tannins were soft and mild early on and grew more prominent by the day. This 2021 Vintage Port was held back for a single comparative blind tasting on day 5, and by then the tannins were far more assertive, dry, and more grippy too. The lip-smacking ripe fig, Damson plum and blueberry flavors upfront were enhanced by violet candy, black licorice, and a sense of warming that led to a delicious and persistent finish. Bottles produced: 4,800 x 750 ml plus 280 Tappit Hens (each of which 2,250 ml = 3 bottles). 107 grams of residual sugar. The Stone Terraces VP will drink beautifully early on and over the next four decades. 20% abv. **94+ points ~ 12/22/23**



**2021 Kopke's Quinta São Luiz Vintage Port** – Based on parcels with old vines that make up two thirds of this VP, the balance of the blend consists of Touriga Nacional grapes. After a very nice effort with their 2020 Kopke VP, this SQVP from the renowned S. Luiz property came as a big surprise. So much so that I kept this for a full week, after revealing its identity the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> day of evaluation. On day one, a side note to myself, “Nacional?” as I found this to be something quite special, from a 2021 vintage that produced very few Vintage Ports that I felt were fitting of the characterization: *excellent*. Perfumed bouquet of violets, red fruits, lots of black licorice, and minerality Exuberant and complex are apt! Medium-full body weight, unctuous and suave to roll around the mouth. Bolstered by succulent acidity and light lip-grip refined tannins. Some critics believe I only give big scores for VPs that are heavyweights and possess massive tannins. This S. Luiz proves that to be nothing more than fake news. Boisterous sweet flavors that end dry, the profile here exudes black cherry and lingonberry, with a long and voluminous finish that’s infused with black licorice and bittersweet chocolate. This is the BEST Kopke VP I’ve ever tasted! And the early pricing I have seen is “advantageous” for consumers. Drink now with a long decant or wait until 2030 and then enjoy this Kopke SQVP anytime during the next 3-4+ decades. To sum it up quickly: Precision, finesse, purity & depth! Slightly more than one thousand 12-bottle cases were produced. 20% abv. **95+ points ~ 12/22/23**





**2021 Pintas Vintage Port** – Pintas was a real surprise with its stunning presence in 2020. A memorable and truly monumental VP. And while blind again, I was wondering if the folks at Wine & Soul could create the same magic with the grapes from a very different growing season, and their nearly 90-year-old vineyard. Here is the tale of 2021. While just short of opaque, the electric dark garnet glow was noticeable compared to some others, considerably lighter in the same flight. Initially, a scent I've never noted in a wine before, "Bounce, the dryer sheets" that some may instantly know, others not so much, but also ripe raspberry, fresh herbs and milk chocolate. Medium-full body weight, not often found in 2021, and the density, velvety texture and harmony was a highlight reel

moment, but the impactful acidity even more so, while the tannins arrived late after the swallow and were noticeably granular. On day one, I scribed, "a potential dark horse." This Pintas delivers big black cherry and boysenberry fruit flavors, juicy, ripe, but not overly sweet at 97 g/l of RS, with a long and classy fresh berry-filled aftertaste. While approachable now, let this one meld through the end of this decade and then begin to appreciate your bottles as this will drink beautifully through 2060: longer than most from 2021! 20% abv. **93+ points ~ 12/16/23**

**2021 Quinta do Crasto Vintage Port** – Spicy and red from day 1, with rose petal, herbal esteva notes, raspberry, cinnamon, and red licorice. Exotic lifted and spicy scents present a complex bouquet. Medium+ weight, not all that typical for Crasto VP, but plenty of lively acid to keep this Port fresh, and tannins so mild they were completely subverted to the fruit at this point, making it easy to approach. Ripe flavors for each of the four days this was tasted, with a sweet entry of ripe black plum and blueberry fruits, violet candy and warm throughout. It ended with a dry and medium-long finish. I'm still waiting for my friends at Crasto to raise their game with VP as their LBV quality is fantastic, and they consistently excel with their DOC Douro wines. **91+ points ~ 12/22/23**



**Quinta do Crasto's Vinha Maria Teresa**

**2021 Quinta do Passadouro Vintage Port** – After the passing of Dieter Bohrmann the owner of Passadouro, this property was acquired by AXA Millésimes, owners of Quinta do Noval. The winemaker has switched up from Jorge Serodio Borges to Carlos Agrellos who now has another 36 hectares to manage (a total of 181 with Noval). The 2021 VP was produced with Touriga Nacional and Franca, Tinta Roriz and Cão, and Sousão, (Vinhão in Vinho Verde, same grape but very different stylistically, in Douro!). Fragrant scents of figs and blackcurrant with subtle cacao in the background. Medium+ in weight, smooth and juicy with bold acidity at its core, the tannins are extremely soft and refined, and this is fun to sip now and will potentially age for 3+ decades. Dry, tasty and warm, there is an earthy sense to this Port that I found intriguing, but it was quite dry on the palate with cassis, marionberry and loads of brambly character, earthy tar and black olive nuances led towards a fairly long dry finish. I believed this could be the Dow's Bomfim and when I learned the level of RS, I understood why. 555 cases of 12 were produced. 88 grams of residual sugar. 19.5% abv. **92+ points ~ 12/22/23**



**2021 Quinta do Portal Vintage Port** – It all began with the awesome aromatics of this Portal VP, with pure essence of grape mosto, ripe strawberry, and raspberry notes, light hints of cocoa powder and later in the week it morphed more into the blue/purple realm, from the original red fruit fragrances. Medium-bodied and warm in the mouth, soft and suave from start to finish. A more elegant Portal than its bigger 2020 sibling, the 2021 is medium-dry in profile. From the superbly integrated acidity to the soft, slightly chalky tannins, there is enough aging potential for this to drink well over the course of the next 35 years, while also rather enjoyable to drink right now. The palate delivered delicious pure blueberry and grape flavors with quite a bit of milk chocolate towards the warm medium-long finish. A consistent performance all four days and overall, a harmonious Port and solid showing by Portal. 20% abv. **93+ points ~ 12/22/23**



**2021 Portal's Quinta dos Muros Vintage Port** – This SQVP that's part of Quinta do Portal, and the Port that comes from this fine property is vinified by Paulo Coutinho, a very underrated winemaking force in Douro, and a wonderful human being. This year's VP is not all that like the 2020 Muros, which undoubtedly was my preference. But there are certainly consistent themes and characteristics between them. A cuvée of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Roriz and Touriga Franca. The bouquet here highlighted the Touriga Nacional, with slightly high-toned violet and floral inflections including lavender, but a spicy sense as well as grenadine and cocoa. This was a lighter version of the 2020, soft and feminine stylistically, with medium weight and a genteel structure with ample acidity and light, chalky tannins that are considerably milder than its older sibling. Brambly from the first day and through the last, the fruit showed off ripe blueberry, an herbal streak and some off-dry violet candy flavors that came to the fore. I'd leave this Port to further integrate until later this decade and it will show best from 2030 up through 2052, but the midpoint of those years, will be the sweet spot for this youngster. **89+ points ~ 12/16/23**

**2021 Quevedo Vintage Port** – I have not stopped wondering if I had an off bottle of the 2020. That said, this was certainly a completely different Port and a big step up, qualitatively. The silhouette of the aromatics is nothing alike, except for the immediately identifiable violet intensity. Beyond that, beautiful blueberry, macerated cherry, purity of grape adorned by black licorice and a hint of cocoa emerged a few days later. Slight more weight, for me, medium+ bodied, smooth and unctuous in the mouth, not too bold and with a few days of air time, softer and greater elegance texturally speaking. The acidity was a real bright spot here and lifted this Port with great overall balance, and with tannins so gentle and mild. The palate was the most significant strength of this



Quevedo, great purity and briar patch blueberry and blackcurrant, a touch of kirsch with light chocolaty backdrop and again, the textural finesse that won me over with its enduring finish. This 2021 can be enjoyed immediately, it is fun to sip right now in its youth, but also will improve and peak circa 2048. 19.5% abv. **93+ points ~ 12/16/23**

**2021 Quinta do Noval Vintage Port** – No intro needed for this venerable Port shipper. The bouquet was nothing short of outstanding, prominently perfumed by plum, pure grape, a field of wildflowers, and milk chocolate. Absolutely gorgeous! Medium weight and round, warm and with a voluptuous mouthfeel. Structurally sound, with crisp acid and mild-mannered tannins. Very nicely balanced given the difficult year overall. Dry, if not tart entry with marionberry and cassis flavors, and pomegranate which emerged day 3. Each day, coincidentally, I noted a medium-long finish, and a couple of times with chocolate in the background. A very good Noval, not quite up to classic level for my palate, and a drinking window that should peak at about 35 years. A friend told me the Suckling and Dunnuck ratings after seeing my FB post yesterday (both 96), but we clearly have different viewpoints and palates. 19.5% abv. **92+ points ~ 12/16/23**



**2021 Quinta do Noval Nacional Vintage Port** – This year, I wasn't confused by guessing which was the regular bottling vs. the Nacional, as I did know they were going to be mixed into different flights. The nose on this Port was earthy with distinctive notes of sweet tree bark, a green stalky note early on (which was gone by day 3), plus esteva, Morel mushroom and forest floor. Only a couple of days in, did significant black fruits emerge aromatically. Medium+ weight, not quite medium-full until the final day/night tasting. Blessed with taut vibrant acidity, while the tannins were refined and hardly noticeable at first, as they were only perceived after swallowing. The longer this was open, the tannins became more prominent, but overall were still relatively moderate and non-aggressive. A nice mélange of briary red and black fruits ensued, with tart raspberry and blackcurrant flavors prevalent, enhanced by olive and milk chocolate after a couple of days. The finish was delicious, long, dry and stylish. I held onto this for a fifth day, as I was on the fence with my score; but the final tasting proved that my first impression was correct. Drink this Nacional from 2029-2056. 19.5% abv. **93+ points ~ 12/22/23**





**2021 Quinta do Vale Meão Vintage Port** – From the far eastern reaches of Pocinho in the Douro Superior, not far from the Spanish border, comes this fine young Port. Established 1877 this property is well known for producing superior grapes, and once belonging to the legendary Dona Antonia. It was her passionate final project and remains in the family today, lived in by her direct ancestors, the Olazabal family. I had this VP in late September at the Quinta (sighted) and liked it less, as it was seemingly disjointed at that moment in time. But tasted blind here over four complete days, it caught my attention early and often. It is the best of all 2021 Ports *with the same score*, and I put them all together at the end of the evaluations, back in bags ... to pick the best of them. It won, over the likes of Nacional and other big names to put it in perspective. This Meão had an intriguing essence of fig and plum notes, with significant esteva, tapenade and tar aromatics. Gorgeously fruited, medium-bodied, and persistent from the very first day, it made a big impression. Sumptuously round across the tongue, smooth and refined. Framed by well-defined acidity that was captivating in this Port, the tannins were extremely soft, if not demure. The fruit consisted of mostly blackberry and fig, with a partially earthy, spicy under-current and a mellifluous, lingering dry finish. Drink early on or from 2030 to 2055. 19.5% abv.

**93+ points ~ 12/16/23**

**2021 Quinta do Vallado Vintage Port** – A VP from 2 Francisco first cousins. Francisco Ferreira and Francisco “Xito” Olazabal, from the 70 hectare Vallado property of their antecedent, Dona Antonia Adelaide Ferreira. This VP’s nose consists of enticing and expansive notes of strawberry, fresh blackberry, cocoa and a hint of mint. Medium-bodied and warming spirit, soft, round and a bit granular in the mouth but otherwise, very solid symmetry. The acidity in this Vallado delivers the oomph, while the tannins remained soft and polished throughout the four days of tasting, all framed in an off-dry profile, along with juicy raspberry and black cherry flavors. Slightly simple, but very tasty and a finish which is medium long. Drink now or over the next two-three decades. 19.5% abv. **91+ points ~ 12/22/23**

**2021 \_\_\_\_\_Vintage Port** – Not going to name this one, but after 45 bottles of young Vintage Ports in the past five weeks, this was the only one with discernible TCA. To me, it was noticeable on my first whiff, but low level, maybe 3-5 ppt. and I tasted it and continued to have zero doubt. I continued to nose, but not taste it the following three days and it never got worse, but it never lost that tell-tale corkiness. From a MAJOR player, who was kind enough to replace it quickly.  
**Not Rated ~ 12/16/23**



# 2021 Vintage Conclusions

## **Speaking of dynamics, here are some key take aways from my evaluation of 2021s:**

- While there is something to be said about cool years in Douro after a blast furnace vintage like 2020, the years where low summer temperatures in July and August allow for longer hang times that result in more natural phenolic ripening like 2021, or even 2015 as another example, (both years with some rain issues that interrupted picking) it is not just about the elongated harvest periods. Deeper extraction of color is a huge benefit, as is the greater intensity of acidity, (especially when there is a wider gap in day vs. night temperatures), and finally, the overall elegance that the Ports can achieve provides earlier drinkability.
- Long term aging potential and tannic structures – I believe that it is the hotter year like 2020 vs. a cooler summertime in Douro as was the case with the Vintage Ports from 2021, that produce grapes with more concentration and what seem like more prominent tannins which typically produce better long-term aging potential. The cooler years may allow for greater overall balance, deeper color extractions and exotic aromatics that are more forthcoming, but for sheer long-term potential, it seems to me that when the tannins deliver greater structure, as long as the acidity is enough to provide balance, these are the years where the Ports can age for a half century and longer at times. While power and ageability are no longer as desirable as they were prior to the turn of this century, years like 2021 seem to be more consistent across the board, even if they do not reach the same heights. Contrasting 2020 vs. 2021 exemplifies this well.
- 2021 was a year where SQVPs excelled, (and some specific parcel VPs too) but there is a reason why some of the major Port shippers shy from declaring their top Vintage Ports in such a year. At the same time, this is a good thing for consumers. They have the chance to discern which Port house style they appreciate and can find some extraordinary value for money in a year like 2021. Seeking out some Single Quinta wines that offer exceptional quality and affordability and I believe is the best thing to come from that unique trio of years 2015, 2016, and 2017. Keep an open mind as to value when vintages like this come along. Do not judge because some big names hold back from entering the market. Seek out some great options for your cellars even if these are consumed earlier than big vintages like 2011 and 2016.





**ROY'S "TOP 4" 2021 VINTAGE PORTS – in order from left to right.**

### ROY'S TOP 4 LIST OF 2021 VINTAGE PORTS

<u>RANKING</u>		<u>SCORE</u>
<b>1st</b>	<b>KOPKE'S QUINTA S. LUIZ</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>2nd</b>	<b>DOW'S QUINTA DO BOMFIM</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>3rd</b>	<b>GRAHAM'S STONE TERRACES</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>4th</b>	<b>QUINTA DO VALE MEAO</b>	<b>93</b>

When there were 50, 60, or 70 something Vintage Ports from a specific year, a Top 10 list made sense. But with only 15 of all 20 Vintage Ports from 2021, I decided to limit my top-rated wines to **Roy's TOP 4** seen above. All four of these represent completely different house styles of Vintage Ports, and their producers. Any of these four will be a worthy investment for your future drinking pleasure!