



FOR THE LOVE OF PORT™
COLLECTIVE PORT WISDOM

FTLOP 2015 Vintage Port Report



Article and photos by Roy Hersh © November 2017

There were seventy-six 2015 Vintage Ports approved by the IVDP, but that doesn't mean that all of them will be released in 2017/2018 or ever. For this report, I evaluated 51 of them but two would not be included here, as the proprietors of those companies let me know later that they would not be released. One simply did not want to say why; and the other had opted to declare their 2016 instead. Ergo, only 49 are now included in this report.

Overview

Admittedly, for the first time I was fooled by a vintage declaration. We arrived in Porto for two back-to-back tours, with two days before each, visiting Port lodges in Gaia before heading up river. We arrived in the Douro immediately after the mid-harvest rain and joked that we had brought the sunny weather with us.

I was grateful to have spent time with two dozen owners and/or winemakers from the Port trade, the vast majority at their quintas in the Douro during the harvest of 2015. I took careful notes about what we were told about the growing season, and paid close attention to what was mentioned about the condition of grapes that reached their lagares and insightful impressions from the Port masters of the universe. I looked closely at the grape must (*mosto du uva*) in the lagares everywhere that it was possible, paying close attention to the coloration, as I do every year. Along with our Port harvest tour groups, we tread grapes at a couple of properties and were given the opportunity to taste a couple of lagare samples, something that is delicious and a lot of fun.

Everywhere we stepped foot, (no pun intended) there was excitement in the air, and it was palpable in 2015, unlike the previous three years, in fact it had been since 2011 when I last had that feeling. Our hosts were happy to explain how good the harvest had been so far. They gave us lots of specifics about the two days of rain that we had just missed and how it had effected the grapes, (in a positive way) and they were jazzed with their extraordinary luck immediately following the precipitation, the sun came out strong and the wind too, which helped to dry the grapes. Some had not yet started picking again. We had a lot of fun and the opportunity to see the final grapes being brought in from the vineyards at several places we visited, as our tour ended on October 4th.

After returning home, I had time to ponder all that I had taken in over the past few weeks. Going on what I had been told and what had been witnessed, there was practically no doubt that (unless something significant happened) 2015 was destined to be an excellent year for Vintage Port. Who would've thunk that 2016 might be even better at that point in time? Not me!

The FTLOP Forum was already discussing the 2015 Vintage as news spreads fast. I weighed in with my observations and impressions that were shared with me by members of the trade. As I felt that I had been spot on with "feeling" the 2003, 2007 and 2011 during the harvests; I was quite sure of myself.



It was humbling and I learned a good reason why the Port trade likes to downplay things about declarations prior to announcing whether they were going to do so, or not. But early in 2017, it was apparent that four of the “Big 5” were opting out of 2015, and instead were saying that 2016 was going to be their choice and that they’d only declare 2015 with their Single Quinta Vintage Ports.

So while disappointed, as I had been hoping to spend a month in Porto in June to take part in the celebrations, guide a tour through central Portugal and spend a few weeks tasting the next great vintage. Instead, I made the decision one night, to follow that same plan and also do the same in 2016, so I could learn why it was believed to be better than 2015 and to be able to spend another month in Portugal, which is never a bad thing.

Having requested samples of 2015 Vintage Ports, I was grateful for the support of the Port trade. When I arrived in Porto, less than two weeks after returning home from Madeira, the quantity of 2015 Vintage Ports awaiting me, was going to have to start sooner than I had planned, but I had extra time built in, as my wife would be joining me in Porto later in the month. I had rented several rooms in a flat in Porto and brought in tables and a comfortable chair to prepare for an intense few weeks of evaluating the samples.

Methodology

Following my typical methodology, I brought my trusty blue numbered bags (pictured above), and when I had all the bottles arranged, I removed all the capsules, then set appointments with two friends who would alternately come and select the number of bottles for a flight, (three flights of 12 and one of 11) then removed the corks and put the bottles in the numbered blue bags. The next flight would begin the day after the previous one was finished and the Ports then were revealed when all six tasting notes on each bottle were documented in my laptop.


My tastings took place every morning for 3 hours and right up until lunch time. I would pour about 2-3 ounces in each Port glass, and put 6 at a time in the same order as the bottles, in the refrigerator for 15 minutes to give them a slight chill knowing I'd be tasting them for an hour and a half. Just before I was done with those, I'd pour the next six to cool them down for the same amount of time. It was fun to see the differences my first pass through, evaluating color and aromatics and then again as they had re-thermalized to room temperature. I split the cost with the landlord to purchase a portable air-conditioner, which helped a little bit but my windows were away from the sun, so the room maintained a good temperature, (unlike in 2013 when evaluating 2011's and it hit 40 degrees in Porto later in the month!).

I would walk down to my favorite eatery in the back alley a block from the Pestana and had my bowl of caldo verde with a small steak sandwich. This happened for a few weeks on end, except when meeting friends or a member of the Port/Douro trade for lunch. Given where I was staying it was a nice walk back, all the way up hill and past São Bento to the neighborhood known as Batalha. Would you believe that nearly three weeks passed and I never stepped foot in Vila Nova de Gaia until our tour began? Yes, I realize this is nearly impossible for most of you to believe.

My 2nd round of tasting typically took place in the latter part of the afternoon, and finished about 7 p.m. and then I'd clean up and head out to meet friends for dinner. Each tasting of a dozen Ports averaged just over three hours and I was able to spend approximately an hour and a half with each bottle of Port over the course of the three days (6 tastings/bottle). That allowed me to not only focus on the organoleptic qualities of the wine and not rush to rate them, but also to grasp some clue as to a projected aging curve. Friends as well as our guests on FTLOP tours can attest that even when evaluating wines sighted, I am typically the last one to finish a flight. In fact, our blogger Fernando Correia has nicknamed me, "Captain Slow". But when I know I'll be posting notes publicly, I'd rather err on the safe side and take it slow and appreciate the Ports.

The Dilemma ... copied from FTLOP's Forum

The 2015 Vintage Port dilemma.

by **Roy Hersh**  » Sun Jun 18, 2017 6:21 am

I have now had three days of tastings with the first 12 bottles, which ended yesterday. Today I have begun my second 12 and am half way through and had to stop to post this.

Ok, I've only seen 18 bottles which is far from a comprehensive overview of the vintage as a whole. However, the first twelve were made up of mostly SQVPs and then 3 were first tier producers' bottlings. I have no idea what was in the bags until after day 3's final tasting yesterday late afternoon. I have six more in front of me at the moment and I am taking a break after making my notes on them and will return to those six and then chill down the next six and start anew.

My attention for each glass and parameters to painstakingly evaluate are:

Appearance

Aromatics

Body Weight

Mouthfeel (texture)

Structure

Flavor Profile

Finish

Overall observation

Drinking window

Rating range: e.g. 86-88 points.

Later on, I take all six impressions and blend them into a time elapsed tasting note. I look at the ranges of scores over the six tastings of each Port and come up with a single number, not always a pure and precise average, as I pay close attention to how the wines change from day 1 to 2 and also from days 1 to 3 and also 2 to 3. Then I give slightly heavier weighting to day 3 impressions. This has worked well for me over the past 2+ decades.

Now that you know my basic methodology, here is why I entitled this posting with the word "dilemma".

I pay close attention to the appearance. None of these are cloudy, because sediment is not an issue. But what I really wanted to pay super close attention to is the coloration of these Ports. Simply put, even with just the SQVPs I've had so far, not to mention a few bigger names, it is really difficult, if not impossible to see any real difference between the batch I've poured and evaluated and the 2011 colorations.

So I can only imagine when I wind up evaluating the big boys and to see if they are darker than some of the 2nd and 3rd tier producers that were extraordinarily extracted from my point of view. Remember this was one of the biggest initial "push back issues" from those who claim the 2016s are superior because the anthocyanins (color pigment in grapes) precipitated or dropped out of solution in 2015s and lacked the requisite depth of color. Concentration was also an issue supposedly. But for the moment, I am ONLY discussing the color issue. I just don't see it. Maybe that was the case back in January and February when decisions were made. But from where I sit, color is definitely not lacking in samples I've already had.



Vintage 2015 Seasonal Growing Conditions in the Douro

Heading into winter of 2015, there were some very heavy rains in October and significant rainfall in November too, replenishing ground waters and acting like a reservoir deep within the Douro's vertically inclined schist. This would prove beneficial later on as January and February was rather dry and quite cold with little rain over the course of the first quarter of the year. In March the temperature started to climb quicker than normal and the vine cycle took place a week or so earlier than usual and all signs pointed towards an abundant yield to that point in time; which was certainly not the case in either 2013 or 2014.

There was just enough rain in the spring to allow for a solid fruit set. Between March and June was the hottest and driest period in several decades. One massive rain took place in both May and again in June, persistent and the type that has a lasting effect soaking through soils, rather than causing runoff and serious erosion. The summer months were hot and only a couple of times with short intervals, temperatures reached the scorching point, but otherwise the summer months were hot, but without any prolonged extreme temps. By August there was a huge need for water to nurture the vines and canopy leaves were starting to dry out and the tips were browning. It was evident that the young vines were becoming stressed, due to their shallower roots. Fortunately, the night time temperatures during what is typically the hottest month of the year in the Douro, were actually quite cool, which was extremely beneficial and all that was needed was a bit of rain.

Overall the rainfall was off by nearly half, from what had been recorded as an average in the past couple of decades. Opportunely, the grapes seemed to thrive in spite of this and were picked in excellent condition. Likely this was due to the groundwater levels achieved from the wet late autumn (2014) into early winter rains and cooler temperatures in July and August which helped balance off potential RS with crisp acidity. Typically, the Douro has extremely hot summer temps that can occasionally top 40 degrees C., so it really was a benefit that the hottest months had moderate temperatures; however, yields plummeted due to the lack of rain for about ten weeks.

By early September the vines and bunches seemed to have thrived through the dry weather conditions and there was some very positive energy by the time we arrived upriver. Everyone seemed very optimistic and the grape bunches looked very healthy and harvest began a bit early. Our PHT group experienced significant precipitation in the mid-part of September, (a Tuesday into Wednesday) and it was a steady driving storm.

Choosing when to start picking is always a challenge and across the Douro there were some differences of opinion on that. Some quintas began the last week of August for their Port grapes, while others began after the first week of September.

The 2015 Port harvest lasted through the end of September for some and throughout the first week of October for most. When the massive storm hit in mid-September, (which inevitably came at the right moment) some properties wisely and immediately stopped picking, some for nearly a week, and others for ten days. As the grape vines were quite thirsty (but not dehydrated) some grapes began to plump up slightly. Some stopped the harvest for just short of a week, a few mentioned that they had “hit the pause button on the remote control” for up to 10 days.

The rain helped prevent the Touriga Franca grapes from becoming dehydrated, and as we were shown at nearly everywhere we visited, the Touriga Franca is one of the last varieties to be picked and it looked exceptional in most lagares, with dark complexions and small berries, which brought back memories of 2003 and 2011 with its firm tannins and concentrated musts. Unlike 2016’s harvest post-rain period, there were strong winds in 2015 and had warm, dry sunny days, (not too hot) which made a huge difference in drying out vineyards and allowing for the grapes (after the rain) to continue on the vine and reaching a fine level of phenolic ripeness. Actually, while visiting quintas everyone was raving about the Franca and to a lesser extent, also mentioned the Touriga Nacional, but the old vines also seemed to come through the rain in very good condition.

From my notes, there was very little wind in 2016 after the rain; it did get warm again, extending hang times, but some bunches never dried out and some rot crept in. But I digress from 2015. The optimum physiological ripeness was spot on and residual sugar levels were in the near-perfect zone. Those who were not fully picked by the next heavy rain storm in the middle of the first week of October, were pretty much “done” regardless where they were at in their harvest. Yields were said to be down 15-30%, but just about every owner and or winemaker we spoke with was super excited about the color extraction, concentration, level of RS and excellent balance. A few of them passionately and surprisingly stated that they were expecting this to be a certainty for a vintage year.

2015 Vintage Port Tasting Note Section

Halfway through this article I had a rather epiphanal moment. I realized that the drink windows I was suggesting for these Vintage Ports, in nearly every case, now exceeded my own projected life span.

- **Roy Hersh**



Suffice it to say, very few Ports from 2015 were not at least 90% opaque and some of the tasting notes below do mention color, but the vast majority do not.

2015 Alves de Sousa Vintage Port – The darkest inky tint of the first flight of a dozen. Perfumed earthy scents and primary black fruit with enticing forest floor, black plum, black cherry and truffle notes, which made it difficult to remove my nose from the glass. Full-bodied yet graceful with a soft, warm and silky presence, supported by juicy acidity and ripe powerful tannins. Dry stylistically and brimming with extraordinarily concentrated plum and fig fruits, delivering a rich and opulent dry finish loaded with milk chocolate. As well as this drinks right now and should throughout the entirety of its youth, all indicators point to the likelihood of four+ decades of aging potential. After an exceptional showing with their 2011; Alves de Sousa is proving they're serious about the Vintage Port category. **8/29/17 - 95+ points**

2015 Alves de Sousa's Quinta da Gaivosa Vintage Port – Lively fragrant nose with briary red berries, eucalyptus, licorice and a gentle whiff of esteva. Medium-full weight, unctuous and seemingly evolved compared to its bigger sibling, good acidity and chalky, initially super grippy tannins that only softened slightly in subsequent days. Filled with crème de cassis and under-ripe tart marionberry flavors, dry from the first sip through the swallow, with a noticeable degree of warming spirit, but otherwise juicy and tasty. A big, bold youngster possessing excellent aromas, an extremely protracted finish and two to three decades of extended cellaring. **6/19/17 - 91+ points**

2015 Broadbent Vintage Port – Sweet scents of lavender, plum and rose petals provide a fresh and heady bouquet. Medium-full, rich and densely concentrated flavors of grenadine and pure grape jam, with ample acidity and soft chalky tannins. The 2015 Broadbent is like drinking a delicious grape-infused milkshake and it has a lingering finish with a hint of blueberry. By day 3, tannins showed far more prominently and provided loads of upside potential along with a smoother mouthfeel. While easy to drink now, patience will benefit Port lovers who keep this one cellared for at least 10-15 years, though it will improve and reach *prime time* around the midpoint of the century. 5,000 bottles produced. **11/9/17 - 93+ points**

2015 Bulas Vintage Port – Initially there was a very odd chemical smell that I was unable to put my finger on and only on the third day did this begin to blow off, but it remained “tanky” -- but also showed an earthy nuance with black olive and tar along with evocative black cherry and cassis fragrances. The palate offered medium-full body weight, silky soft mouthfeel, slightly sharp acidity and dusty tannins which arrived late to the party, (upon swallowing) and became more grippy with *lip-lock* power. There was an off note when sipping this over several days, similar to a multi-vitamin pill, but otherwise there was delicious black fruit, slightly dry and a scoach bitter, and remained quite tanky. This likely needs more time to settle down and I will make sure to try this again in 2018 to see if things turned out for the best. The longevity of this wine is indisputable and it was very difficult to judge, but in addition to the rough edges, there was some fine underlying fruit and structure. **6/29/17 - 88+ points**

2015 Burmester's Quinta do Arnozelo Vintage Port – This Single Quinta VP is already easy to approach and is full of promise. Light and lovely scents of blueberry and cassis with tones of rose petal and a bit of alcohol protruding. There's a lot to love here, as this 2015 Arnozelo has loads of concentrated fruit and mouthfilling richness, juicy acidity and moderately soft tannins, enabling this youngster to retain its freshness and balance while drinking well early on and for the next two dozen years. I don't see this as a long-term ager, but you'll appreciate having this Port available while other bottles remain in cellar. Boysenberry and purple fruits are sweet on entry, but end up a bit drier, with a dollop of black licorice and spearmint. Very tasty! **6/15/17 - 89+ points**



2015 Cálem Vintage Port – Its beguiling bouquet includes an array of brambly blackberry, earthy sous bois, esteva, a whiff of pomegranate seeds and a tanky note that faded a couple of days in. The grape makeup of this vintage Port is 30% each Tinta Roriz, Touriga Franca and Touriga Nacional with the remaining 10% coming from Sousão. Medium-full bodied, round, smooth and chunky, it is loaded with acidity and cheek sucking astringent tannins early on; they softened considerably by the 3rd day of tasting and made this very accessible. The dense flavors boast of violet candy and grenadine syrup, ripe and modestly sweet; in a finely balanced chassis. A bit spirity towards the medium-long finish, this Cálem is one to cellar for a decade then enjoy through 2045. **6/15/17 - 90+ points**

2015 Churchill's Quinta da Gricha Vintage Port – Classy from the first sniff, a darker essence than most 2015's I've encountered with notes of black plum, milk chocolate, black licorice, pine resin and a whiff of alcohol. Tightly coiled early on and medium-full in weight, yet it rolls round and seems lighter, exotically silky in the mouth. The acidity and tannins are both powerful and in synch; the scrumptious purple-black fruit flavors and grape purity are gorgeous here, marred only slightly by the noticeable presence of aguardente on the extremely long, dry, tannic finish. The potential for the score to increase is quite likely, as the integration of this VP improves over time. The upside of this Churchill is definitive and will reward patience, as it drinks splendidly after 2030, for at least four decades. **6/24/17 - 94+ points**

2015 Cockburn's Vintage Port – Produced from 41% Touriga Franca, 37% Touriga Nacional, 9% old vine field blends, 7% Souzao and 6% Alicante Bouschet. The only full-fledged 2015 VP declaration by the Symingtons, (excluding many single quintas) due to commemorating the 200th anniversary of this venerable shipper. The 2015 Cockburn's exhibits an unmistakably tanky nose, and while liking the herbs, lavender, earthy pine and red fruit notes, there was a distinctive hit of spirit beneath it all that may or may not assimilate. Silky soft, fluid and juicy until the lip-gripping tannins take over, the palate also shows a bit too much palate poking aguardente. Fortunately there is some seriously delicious, ripe red berry and sweet plum goodness that diverted attention and won me over. This powerhouse has plenty of stuffing and if it melds and mellows with age, the upside may surprise those that were doubters early on. Cellar until 2030 and then drink this Port through the mid-section of the 21st century, possibly even longer. **6/19/17 - 90+ points**

2015 Croft's Quinta da Roêda Vintage Port – After replanting some parcels and restoration work in the old-vine field blend vineyards after reacquiring Roêda in 2001, The Fladgate Partnership has reaped rewards beginning with the astonishing 2003 Vintage Port. It was followed up by two consecutive exquisite Roêda VPs in 2004 and 2005. While the 2015 is not of the same character, nonetheless it is a pleasure to drink. The flamboyant floral fragrance of perfumed lilac, potpourri, pepper and cocoa makes for a heady scent. This Roêda is soft, gentle and is far more elegant and feminine in style than any of the three aforementioned vintages. Palate wise, it is suave, layered and intricately woven with mild mannered tannins balanced by crisp citric acidity. Ripe raspberry and grape purity stand out amongst the spicy nuances that season the profile and lead to a lingering and expressive plummy finish. Drink this Croft early and often through 2045. **6/24/17 - 92+ points**

2015 Dalva Vintage Port – As opaque as looking into a deep dark wishing well. Aromas ranged from dark earthy and smoky spiciness and truffle, to plum, boysenberry and high toned menthol. This 2015 started out as medium-bodied and after the first day I noted it continued to gain weight as it opened with more time in the bottle, and unlike most, this one was held for a fourth day of tasting. It is densely concentrated, sweet and smoky, velvety soft and loaded with ripe fresh picked plum and layered with briary blueberry nuances. The dusty tannins are currently subverted to the massive fruit yet omnipresent; this Port is likely to drink beautifully at a half century of age and with gas still in the tank. It would be easy to drink a bottle of this without realizing what just happened. After the "reveal" this was a pretty big surprise as I've never been as impressed with a young Dalva Vintage Port as I have been with this 2015. A modern day classic and a standout of the first flight of 12. **6/16/17 - 94+ points**

2015 Dow's Quinta do Bomfim Vintage Port – When tasting this again at Bomfim with Dominic Symington, he commented: "this is wine on steroids, it is not yet Port!" Both the aromatic and palate profile stuck to this theme and it resonated each of the four days of evaluation. There are new parcels high up above the quinta, with nearly 87 hectares nowadays. Fresh floral fragrances, Cheri Suisse Liqueur and an herbal/minty essence combined with ripe grape notes, creating an opulent bouquet. Full-bodied by day 2 and even weightier by the fourth; with mink-like texture ... it was a pleasure to slowly sip. Chiseled tannins joined laser-focused acidity to deliver an excellent foundation for aging; 40 years without even trying. Profound in that it presents a lighter more delicate sensation, even though at this Bomfim's core it is deeply concentrated and chewy, with strawberry / marionberry flavors that end fresh and with great length. I was very close to scoring a point higher, but will wait for another bottle to re-calibrate if need be. An intense Dow's SQVP, I can't remember any other Bomfim at this lofty level! **6/25/17 - 95+ points**



2015 Dow's Quinta Senhora da Ribeira Vintage Port – Is terroir the big difference? The Douro Superior is a hotter climate, and usually is harvested earlier than that of Bomfim's parcels, near Pinhão in the Cima Corgo, where grape picking usually ends a few days later. Hang times and temperatures also vary. I also believe the overall terroir of Bomfim is one of the truly great vineyard sites in the region and I've never had a VP from Senhora da Ribeira that could match the amazing quality generated by Bomfim. In 2015, there seemed to be a significant difference between these two Ports. At SdR the nose had a touch of tanky scents, possibly from Touriga Nacional; but also included refined notes of ripe raspberry, wintergreen, tar and blood orange. Medium-full bodied, viscous and soft, with juicy acidity and ripe chalky tannins. The fruit seemed like there may have been some raisining, as I detected a baked component. Although ultra-dry stylistically; rhubarb and cassis fruit with a bit of warming spirit that was noticeable, but not to the point of being hot. This Dow's SQVP will easily age for a quarter of a century and possibly even 30 years from harvest. A well-made Vintage Port for drinking early, or best from 2025 through 2040. **6/19/17 - 90+ points**

2015 Duorum Vintage Port – A partnership between J. Portugal Ramos, (owner of several wine properties) and Jose Maria Soares Franco, (the former Sogrape/Ferreira table winemaker). An evocative bouquet with pine needles, spices, lavender and fresh picked blueberries. This put on weight during the course of four days and finished at medium-full. Round, warm, silky and presenting fine symmetry; smooth and inviting. Generously fruited with plum and blueberry flavors in an off-dry style; the acidity of this 2015 keeps everything fresh and precise. It melded beautifully with soft chewy tannins which led to a mouth-watering warm and persistent tannic finish. Very approachable right now, but this Duorum VP will continue to improve and drink admirably in the pocket between 2030-2050. All in, 450 cases were produced. **10/15/17 - 92 + points**

2015 Ferreira's Quinta do Porto Vintage Port – The evocative and intense nose of this Port was inviting and offered swirling scents of ripe plum, herbs, kalamata, cocoa and red licorice. Early on this was a medium-bodied 2015, but within the next two days it became rounder and added girth, somehow remaining light and smooth across the palate, possibly due to the mouth-watering acidity which kicked my salivary glands into overdrive. The tannins were mild upon opening the bottle and grew more powerful with their grippy lip-grabbing flair.

Delicious flavors of blueberry and cassis, with a hint of anise, that combined with the structural components requiring multiple swallows to capture all that was going on with this sophisticated Ferreira SQVP. If Quinta do Porto could deliver so much incredible material, I honestly don't understand why Sogrape did not declare this Port with their full on Ferreira label? Loaded with promise, purity and a remarkably complex finish, this 2015 will drink well over the next 30 and possibly even 40 years. **6/24/17 - 94+ points**

2015 Fonseca-Guimaraens 'Bicentenary' Vintage Port – As this is an ode to Fonseca's 200th anniversary, why not do a full declaration to celebrate this, (as did Cockburn's) instead of using Fonseca's 2nd label for such an occasion? The aromas of this fine Port exhibit an excellent array of lingonberry, cocoa, mint and tar. Tightly knit in the beginning, it opened quite nicely over several days, providing a glimpse into the future of this Fonseca-Guimaraens. Medium-full bodied, framed by refined chiseled tannins and solid acidity, providing balance to the delectable moderately dry flavors of tart plum and boysenberry jam adorned with lavender candies and an herbal streak, which present an intriguing silhouette. Soft, fluid, with a velvety smooth mouthfeel, the finish is of medium length and ends rather dry. It's ready to drink now, or lay this 2015 Vintage Port down since it has the stuffing to age gracefully for 3-4 decades.

6/24/17 - 92+ points

2015 Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos Vintage Port – Opaque dark garnet hue. Day one, this was so tightly wound that I could not coax any aromatics from this Port, but I chalk it up to this being such an early sample. In subsequent days the nose was more forthcoming with floral fragrances, notes of kirsch, blueberry and minerals. Medium-full weight, succulent big bold and ultra-smooth with generous tarry blackberry flavors and a wave of sweet, ripe blueberry. Well-balanced by juicy acidity and refined soft tannins that turn up late, along with a warming trait that prevails from mid-palate directly to the enduring ending. There is potential for this to not only age well, but improve during the next decade. Drink upon release in 2025-2027 and through 2045 as it needs more time to fully meld, and it will certainly develop further in bottle.

6/24/17 - 92+ points



2015 Graham's Stone Terraces Vintage Port

– From two stone-terraced low yielding parcels planted on the upper part of the Malvedos property in the 1800's; Port Arthur and Vinha dos Cardenhos which is considerably smaller than Port Arthur, at just over one hectare. It's seductively scented with floral fragrances, lingonberry and plum with nuanced spice and tar. This began light-medium weight and filled out over the next two days, remaining lithe yet medium in weight; smooth, sleek and stylish. The polished tannins conceal their underlying power and remain subverted to the

fruit. There's no question of the pedigree of this liquid thoroughbred, its invigorating ripe raspberry, cassis and pure grape flavors are primary and delicious, juicy and instantly approachable ending with a smooth exuberant finish. It is worth every penny, although it is a significant step up from the Malvedos, pricewise. The first time through this flight of twelve; *Stone Terraces* was my ultimate favorite, and in retrospect, one of the top performers of all 2015 Vintage Ports. Just 400 cases were produced, so don't wait. A Port worthy of the ages, it'll benefit from a couple of decades in the cellar, enabling it to deliver its full potential to 2075.

6/15/17 -96+ points

2015 Kopke's Quinta S. Luiz Vintage Port – Sogevinus, who owns Kopke was one of the four large companies that chose not to declare 2015 Vintage Ports (except for their Calem) and opted instead for their single quinta versions. Dark magenta with full opacity, this 2015 Vintage Port was vinified from 50% old-vine field blends and the remaining half from Touriga Nacional grapes. The Kopke offered a fine aromatic display with a core of minerality, spicy plum, earthy cherry and a smoky scent providing initial intensity. Soft, round and balanced, the palate presence here is incredibly smooth across the tongue, mellifluous and proffers a fine mix of red and purple wild berry flavors, with an off-dry edge, polished tannins and medium length. A well-made and user-friendly Kopke with no rough edges, this will age for 2-3 decades. **6/24/17 -**

91+ points

2015 Magalhães Vintage Port – Alexandre and Carlos Magalhães Jr., whose father Carlos owns and used to make the wines and Ports at *Quinta do Silval*, (in Vale de Mendiz) before his retirement. I visited this property in 2006 and 2007 literally tasting their entire portfolio of table wines, LBVs and Vintage Ports having spent time at their casual guesthouse in the Douro. This summer I met up with both sons, who are the next gen to run the entire Silval property, as well as marketing and winemaking. They brought me up to speed; let me try a bunch of their table wines and a few Ports too. I hand carried this bottle back to the USA and allowed it to rest for several weeks before tasting it in a small blind lineup of 2015s. This Vintage Port is made from an even blend of Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca. It is a powerfully perfumed floral bouquet with a scoach of cocoa and dried herbs. Tasted over a four day span, tightly wound initially and by day two, the purity of purple fruits emerged alongside bittersweet chocolate and licorice. The mid-palate offered layers of depth and the structural components brought the balance into play and it all ended well with a sublime and voluminous finish. This 2015 should rival the memorable 2000 Vintage Port made by Carlos Sr., rewarding patience, while it evolves and hits prime time by age 20-25 and continues on for at least another decade. **10/15/17 - 93+ points**

2015 Maynard's Vintage Port – Alvaro van Zeller and his brother Fernando (CEO) are co-founders of Maynard's and re-established the brand in 2010. If these names sound familiar, here's why. The brothers have been around the Port trade for decades. Alvaro's winemaking chops were crafted at Quinta do Noval long ago, working with his brother and their relatives, Cristiano and Teresa. Aha! Alvaro also currently makes wine/Port at his other venture, Barão de Vilar and for its acquired "other brand" Feuerheerd; plus J.H. Andresen and a Vinho Verde property too. *For serious Port trivia fans*: It was on this exact location in Gaia, back in 1981, (currently Barão de Vilar's Port Lodge) where the former offices of Quinta do Noval burned to the ground, and all company records, (including that of the written history of the Nacional vineyard) were forever lost. But I digress. *Walter Maynard* (born in 1652) was one of the earliest Englishmen to be involved in exporting Port to England. By marrying Dorothea Augusta Kopke, he became part of the long line of van Zeller family members ... the perfect segue back to Alvaro and Fernando, many generations later. And now on to the 2015 tasting note. Classy from the first whiff, the Maynard's presents scents of grenadine, graphite, along with herbal and tar accents. Medium-bodied and slightly more heft on day 3 three, and soft as a down pillow; the fruit is ripe, but dry in the mid-section and ending; leading to firm assertive tannins which added some grip, although quite easygoing when opening the bottle the first day. More vivacity of the acidity would have helped elongate the overtly warm finish, but the raspberry and fig flavors were scrumptious. Maynard's Ports are produced in Vilar's lodge, but they are of a very different house style. This 2015 will age well for up to three decades. **6/29/17 - 91+ points**



Alvaro van Zeller during the harvest of 2017

2015 Niepoort Vintage Port – Samples sent were 375 ml. bottles. I tasted 3 half bottles, one of which was a bottle shared at O’Gaveto by Christian Gollnick, and enjoyed with Tania B. Oliveira. While I did take a note of that version too, my evaluation and rating comes from the other two half bottles, one consumed in Porto, the other back in the USA. Dirk is well known for his early harvesting decisions, focused on obtaining crisp acidity thus freshness, more than ripeness, yet he remains a true believer in achieving great balance. Niepoort’s old-vine field blend vineyard in Vale de Mendiz, (60% of the grapes for this Port) and from nearly 8 hectares of Vinha da Pisca provides (40%) plenty of concentration, with their small berries and excellent skin-to-flesh ratios. An exotic aromatic flair with spearmint and an unusual root beer nuance the first day. The next couple of days saw a more seductive earthier side with dried flowers, blackcurrant, dried herbs, anise and black truffle notes. Unctuous and captivating, rich and graceful, the symmetry is a significant strength here: precision through the spine of acidity with tongue and cheek grabbing tannins that deliver the promise of longevity, and require two full swallows. Harmonious and velvety, this Port is in a different league than all but a couple of other 2015’s I’ve had and ends with a black & blue berry blast and a smooth and enduring multi-layered elegant finish. It is a classic old-school venerable Vintage Port for the ages; and by that I mean five *or more* decades of age worthiness. Think 1927, 1945 or 2000 Niepoort VP’s and in 2015, Dirk simply nailed it! **6/16/17 - 96+ points**



2015 Niepoort Bioma Vinha Velha Vintage Port –

Samples sent were 375 ml. bottles.

Dirk Niepoort produced his first “Pisca” Vintage Port in 2007 and the next year he changed the name to *Bioma* and subsequently released three vintages: 2008, 2009 and



2011. Now comes 2015, incorporating foot trodden grapes from his Vinha da Pisca vineyard, (with 80 year old, old-vine field blends which Dirk purchased in the hot vintage year of 2003. This Bioma offers a fine fragrant array of fresh violet, earthy herbs, cocoa, mint, minerals and blackcurrant notes. Medium-bodied, silky smooth and vinous texturally, the Bioma provides a slightly drier impression than Niepoort’s regular bottling; whether that was due to the picking process, or moment of fortification, I can’t claim to know. It is odd, because the grams/liter of residual sugar show just the opposite. Aged upriver instead of Gaia for nearly an extra half year in Port pipes, rather than toneis, (huge wooden casks lying on their side) allowed for longer and more direct contact with the barrels. Structurally, this seems a bit more edgy with electric acidity and ripe brawny tannins, as the grapes were crushed along with the stems. Lively black fruits, dry and briary with a hint of mint, ripe cherry and blackcurrant flavors a couple of days later, this will drink well a decade from now, but has great capacity for cellaring too; although I believe the Niepoort regular bottling rather than Bioma, will be a longer lived Port. That said, this is a very attractive age worthy Bioma! **6/15/17 - 93+ points**

2015 Noble & Murat Vintage Port – “Rooted 1831/Reborn 2016”, this producer’s inaugural Vintage Port mostly comes from their own grapes, as the family owns three of the six parcels of very old vine (field blends) that were utilized; located near Vale de Mendiz and Vale do Têdo. The project was started by Alexandre Antas Botelho and his uncle, Antonio Taveira in 2012, (Antonio makes the Ports along with master blender, Jaime Costa). Taveira has other partners involved, and also relies on Alexandre to handle sales management duties (and Alex is learning to be a winemaker, too). Their family had been producing Vintage Port components for several of the larger firms for a few centuries, up until 2004. They are **only** focused on Port at this point. The family has revived an old brand name, *Noble & Murat*, and their main emphasis is currently LBV, but they felt the 2015 vintage should not be missed. This Port is like looking into an ink well, fully opaque. Swirling scents of cocoa, five spice, anise, just crushed grapes and a subtle hint of graphite make for an interesting elixir. Medium-bodied, structurally excellent with crisp acidity and chiseled chalky tannins, but mild overall. Ripe flavors of blackberry, redcurrant and an earthy nuance that added more sophistication. This 2015 continued to improve over the course of three days, adding weight, depth and a lush velvety texture and ended with a striking medium-dry finish. I look forward to see how this N&M Vintage Port evolves over the years. Drink early or in its prime time from 2025-2045. A fine first effort by this new player in the Port trade. 5,000 bottles were produced. **11/17/17 - 90+ points**

2015 Pintas Vintage Port – Deep purple! Wine & Soul’s dynamic duo husband/wife winemaking team, Jorge & Sandra have created an alluring and finely tuned thoroughbred of a Vintage Port. Their 2015 was very tight for the first couple of hours and I had to come back to the glass a few times the first day, to see what emerged. Graceful and sophisticated, extremely well-balanced and filled with promise, this continued to develop over several days. The perfume of voluptuous violet scents combined with black raspberry, blood orange and tar aromas, which made for a heady if not exotic bouquet. Medium weight and texturally like drinking liquid lace, soft and elegant until the powerful tannins kicked in, like taking a locking vise grip to one’s lips, cheeks and tongue. The palate was layered with ripe plum and blueberry flavors with a touch of anise in a meio-doce frame. Pintas 2015 is a superbly balanced and opulent Port, which will drink well while young and it has enough horsepower to be consumed for at least three decades. **6/29/17 - 92+ points**

2015 Poças Vintage Port – While the name Poças rolls easily off the tongue, for some reason, we don't get to see almost any Poças bottles appearing on the west coast of the USA. This unheralded shipper deserves praise for its fine Ports and three supporting quintas that most people have never heard of. In 2018, this Port firm celebrates its centennial anniversary, and to think it all began as a small family-run operation, brokering aguardente to the big name Port firms. From traditional old-vine field blend grapes harkens this statuesque 2015 Poças Vintage Porto; which like steep and deep stair steps, had an enormous transformation from day one to day two and an equally impressive uphill climb on day three.

Possessing a cunning aromatic display which included lifted scents of potpourri merged with dried herbs, black cherry and dried rose petals. Lush acidity and chalky cheek-sucking tannins are impossible to ignore, as they prop up the dense boysenberry and cassis fruit which present a creamy texture and admirable medium-long finish. Moving from medium-bodied to a heavy weight contender in just two additional days, (an impressive feat!) the hallmark of this wine is the concentration of fruit and deft structural components which will have this 2015 drinking exceptionally well, a decade beyond the 21st century's mid-point. This Poças rocks! **6/19/17 - 92+ points**

2015 Porto Cruz Vintage Port – Dark purple and just short of opacity. An expansive nose of strawberry, lavender, spicy rose petal, marionberry, mint and oodles of minerals on the nose. Light-medium bodied initially and medium weight by day three, there is plenty of material to enjoy here. This 2015 is round, soft and generously fruited with redcurrant and cassis flavors that provide sweetness on the attack and later, leave a much drier impression. This Cruz Vintage Port exhibits a fine spine of acidity and dusty refined tannins and a bit of heat too, even the last day it was tasted, with a mild-mannered medium length finish. The balance is perfect for this drink-me-now VP, yet the mid-section is linear and simple. Easy to approach and an early ager, the Cruz will continue to improve over the next 15 years and should be consumed within a decade after that, an excellent "cellar defender". **6/15/17 - 89+ points**

2015 Quevedo's Quinta Vale d'Agodinho Vintage Port – Oscar Quevedo and his Port winemaker sister, Claudia, have yet another Port to be proud of with this Single Quinta version. Vale d'Agodinho is their primary vineyard property, but in the best of years, they have grapes to select from six distinct vineyards that span 100 hectares. Oscar believes that *unlike* the prior two harvests, rain during the 2015 picking season actually was a welcome helping hand in refreshing grapes; while the clusters fully dried during four windy days of warm autumn weather during which, Quevedo's crew halted harvesting.

Offering an exuberant and distinctive aromatic profile of raspberry, earthy tree bark, herbs, lilac and rose petals. Rich and chewy; scrumptious and harmoniously balanced, this Port ticks off a lot of the requisite boxes. Its pillow soft mouthfeel is noticeable from the first sip, with juicy acidity and bad ass tannins providing the building blocks. This d'Agodinho Vintage Port is more about power, than finesse in 2015; but will reward patient loyalists who'll enjoy this Port in its youth and lay some away for up to 3+ decades. **6/24/17 - 91+ points**

2015 Quinta do Crasto Vintage Port – Visiting Quinta do Crasto with their 70 hectares of 100% old-vine field blend grape vineyards is a remarkable experience, offering one of the finest vistas anywhere in the world of wine. But this note is about evaluating Crasto's 2015 VP. One of our two group visits to Crasto during harvest 2015 tread Port grapes in granite lagare (barefoot), nonetheless, the aromatics remained fresh and pure with a tanky note, likely young Touriga Nacional, earthy esteva and black truffle, a whiff of menthol, plum and freshly crushed grapes. Quinta do Crasto has always excelled at making stellar LBV Ports and I've been a critic of their Vintage Ports over the years; as they should be every bit as mind-blowing as their exalted table wines. Yet the winemaking has remained focused on their LBV Port quality and delivering excellence with their diverse range of table wines.

I believe 2015 is a breakout year for Quinta do Crasto's Vintage Port. The only other Crasto Vintage Port at this level was 1994. The palate is brimming with spicy rock rose, ripe blackberry and tart redcurrant flavors bolstered by exacting acidity and powerful, drying, cheeky tannins. That said, this VP is captivating in its concentration and persistent fig flavored finish. Drink this Port in its youth or during the next four+ decades. An outstanding young Vintage Port by Quinta do Crasto! **6/19/17 - 93+ points**

2015 Quinta do Infantado Vintage Port – The inimitable Infantado impresario, João Roseira is a fun loving character who appreciates living a life of hard work and finds time to enjoy himself too. Along with his sister Catherine, João manages Infantado and is also the winemaker for this 100% A-rated vineyard property which has remained in the family's hands since 1816. The 2015 Vintage Port is well-made and true to form. Exhibiting an excellent array of floral notes, cocoa, kirsch and grapey aromas. Elegant and almost more LBV-like than a Vintage Port, meant in a good way, as the concentration is not a priority to João. The Infantado remained light-medium weight over three days, juicy and mouth-coating, with focused acidity and refined soft tannins. Stylistically, it's off-dry raspberry and kirsch flavor, with hints of milk chocolate towards the medium-long and warm finish. A suave and stylish Vintage Port that is instantly approachable and should remain that way for 20 to 30 years. **6/29/17 - 91+ points**

2015 Quinta do Javali Vintage Port – With roots back to 1839, you'd think that in twenty three years of visiting the Douro and thirteen consecutive harvests, I'd have been to this property by now. Unfortunately, that's not the case with Javali, even though I've known the winemaker Antonio Mendes, since 2005. Possessing an expansive nose with enticing nuances that included notes of black cherry, black licorice and roses. Medium weight, lithe and sweet upon entry, with gentle spirituous character that's not fully integrated yet. It's like liquid satin with focused acidity and firm tannins that remained entwined throughout the three days. Loaded with concentrated plum, chocolate and infused fig flavors with a simple, persistent and dry aftertaste. A bit four-square at the moment, the 2015 Javali will benefit from further bottle age. Consume between 2020-2040. *1,333 bottles were produced.* **6/19/17 - 90+ points**

2015 Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo Vintage Port – Up until the Amorim family purchase of Quinta Nova, it had been home to Real Companhia Velha, subsequently by Hooper's and most recently, Burmester. The Amorim's then acquired the property in 1999; now with 85 hectares planted to grape, (they own the largest cork production/sales firm in the world) and brought in Jorge Alves, (of Quinta do Têdo fame) to make the wines and Ports. The history of this property dates back to 1764, but is worthy of a longer story than this TN can provide. Their Douro wines have improved rapidly in the past half-decade, first released in 2005, and they are worth seeking out.

Onto the 2015 Vintage Port, which presents a deeply extracted purplish-black optic with full opacity and delivers fresh aromas including blackberry and blueberry fruit, spicy black licorice, graphite and mocha. Brooding, intense and complex, this SQVP offers a medium-full frame, with ample acidity and late arriving powerful granular tannins. The generous fresh impressions of briary raspberry and plum fruit, an earthy nuance and grape jam flavors lead to a voluminous and prolonged finish, only bested by the opulence of the mouthfeel. It needs another few years to hit full stride while allowing the tannins to better integrate; this 2015 has a long life ahead of it, best consumed during its lengthy prime time 2022-2055. A sophisticated and classic Vintage Port, amongst, if not the very best produced by the current Quinta Nova oenology team.

6/29/17 - 94+ points



2015 Quinta do Noval Vintage Port – This note was taken from my 3rd time having this Port. I spent 3 days with it in Porto, a snap shot view while visiting Noval, and this, a finished bottle to do one last analysis over several days, blind, up against other 2015's. Having been nicely surprised by Noval's 2014 Vintage Port, I looked forward to see if Antonio Agrellos could nail two very different vintages, back-to-back.

This bottling was inky purplish-black. The purity of grape, blueberry fruit along with overtones of esteva, violet and pine accents help set the stage for an opulent palate presence. The acidity is penetrating, almost aggressive and the tannins are quite tame and buried beneath layers of purple fruits, with a sublime protracted ending. The ability of Noval to remain so smooth and with a lightness of being at this stage, is one of the more striking facets that Agrellos is able to achieve with extraordinary regularity. The 2015 exemplifies this Port's character, viscous and fun to sip and slurp, vinous and delicious. Enjoyable early on, it will be drinking at peak from 2035-2060. 2,500 cases of 12 were bottled. **8/29/17 - 94+ points**

2015 Quinta de la Rosa Vintage Port – Dark garnet color with near full opacity. In Jorge Moreira's 13th harvest at de la Rosa, he knocked in a bases clearing triple with this 2015 Vintage Port. Not quite up to the extraordinary heights of the remarkable 2011 VP produced by the Bergqvist family, but that's the difference with 2015, it is a wonderful Port year, but in comparison, the 2011 will be viewed as a legendary vintage a few decades hence. Tightly wound upon opening, the nose did not show up even on the second day, so I kept this one through day four to ensure I would see, smell and taste all that it could be. On the third day I was finally able to ascertain the delightfully fresh character of the aromatics: red fruits, pine needles, lilac and kalamata scents. Possibly the most compelling quality of this Port was the sensuous caress of its decadent soft texture. Full-bodied, round and voluptuous, with ripe black plum and loads of expressive pure grape essence; off-dry in style and structurally sound with vibrant acid and fine grained tannins. The finish exhibited sheer elegance and persistence. The 2015 is a classy classic Port by Quinta de la Rosa that needs more time in bottle to properly flesh out; most of all for the aromatics to emerge earlier on. Best from 2025-2050. **6/20/17 - 93+ points**

2015 Quinta do Tedo Vintage Port – Quinta do Tedo is perfectly situated on the south bank confluence of the rivers Tedo and Douro and owns old-vine field blend plots as well as block planted parcels. Dark opaque garnet. A high-toned lavender bouquet with fresh spicy perfumed scents of briary boysenberry and black truffle. This 2015 showed its medium-body, slightly more so as it put on weight each of the last two days. Offering ripe, concentrated pomegranate and sweet plum fruit, a bit warm due to the youthful spirit and a round smooth texture. Structurally sound with citrusy crisp acidity, but very mild soft tannins. While the elegance remains unquestionable, and it is fun to drink now, the age worthiness does remain a question mark. Overall, the 2015 Tedo is an easy-going, fresh and delicious *cellar defender* possessing mid-term aging potential and early accessibility. It will drink nicely from 2020-2040. **6/29/17 - 91+ points**

2015 Quinta do Tedo Sevedra Vintage Port – After tasting my way through the Sevedra this summer in Porto, during PHT1, we were privileged to try this Single Quinta Vintage Port (SQVP) along with Vincent Bouchard who has owned this property, (along with his lovely wife Kay) for the past quarter century. My note below was from the sample bottle in Porto, tasted blind over several days, as explained. Typically when including Tedo's Sevedra (first experience for me was vintage 2003) and regular bottling of Tedo, I've always had a preference. Both were deeply extracted and opaque. The Sevedra had a gorgeous nose, say my notes from day 1: Smoky, violets and fresh herbs, black cherry and intense aromas of blueberry stand out prominently, with a backdrop of anise and cassis. It's medium-full weight, a silky heavy-cream texture, with a similar spicity characteristic that emerged in the regular Tedo bottling. Fresh and delicious just-picked blueberries, concentrated sweet fig flavors with precise and juicy acidity melded well with the ripe, chiseled chalky tannins which show considerably more grip than the regular bottling and combined, will allow Sevedra to achieve a longer aging curve. This Sevedra Vintage Port is best consumed between 8-35 years after the harvest. **6/29/17 - 92+ points**

2015 Quinta do Vale D. Maria Vintage Port – Cristiano van Zeller and his chief winemaker *Joana Pinhão*, are making some magical Douro wines these days, (actually for quite a few years now) in addition to their fine Ports. I surmise that their attention and best grapes go to their table wines, and this is not a knock, but an economic reality given how much table wine they sell in Portugal and around the world. This summer van Zeller sold the family's quinta to Aveleda in return for his immediate family becoming shareholders in that major wine firm, with its top property in the Vinho Verde region. Cristiano and his daughter Francisca will continue day-to-day management of the quinta and their brand(s), respectively, while Cristiano will also oversee the Aveleda fine wine division. A brilliant move by all, given that Aveleda's owners just happen to be cousins of the van Zeller family. Adding this blue chip wine property (in the heart of the Rio Torto Valley) to Aveleda's wine portfolio is definitely a net positive for all concerned. Anyway, I've liked many of their Vintage Ports and the 2015 is no exception to that rule. An effusive and enticing bouquet of strawberry, cocoa, anise and herbs are showcased in this Port's aromatic arsenal. Putting on weight over the three days of evaluation, winding up as medium-full and flaunting a sleek and sexy viscousness, there is a lot to love about this Vale Dona Maria. Structurally, the tannins show up late in the game and gained power after the swallow; but are drying and impressively woven with precision of the acidity, allowing for excellent aging potential. The ripe blackberry, sweet cherry and mocha flavors are *awesome* together, and that is not a descriptor that is typically part of my tasting note lexicon. The warm, tart/dry finish is long and longer with each swallow. While it is fun to sip now, patience will be rewarded. Drink now through 2055. Approximately 800 cases were produced. **6/29/17 - 92+ points**

2015 Quinta do Vale Meão Vintage Port – While in Porto the first of two bottles was flawed, so I took the second one back to the US and waited over a month for it to settle down before tasting it over a few day period, blind, up against a handful of some serious contenders. Aromatically it was generous and totally different than the one I evaluated in Porto, but identical to what I tasted when visiting Meão during PHT2. This 2015 is a fine youngster with freshness and boisterous fruit that is the hallmark of Meão’s VP’s. The nose is well-delineated and this would appeal to just about any Port lover, with spicy blackberry, anise, pine needles and an array of fresh flowers. Medium-weight, soft and off-dry, some blackberry and sweet black raspberry flavors persist with excellent symmetry due to exacting acidity and polished muscular tannins. Loads of upside, accessible now and it will be fun to drink young, or choose to cellar this young pup and drink it closer to maturity, around the middle of the century. Either way, this is another in a line of fine Meão VP’s and mighty delicious right now. **8/12/17 - 93+ points**

2015 Quinta do Vallado ‘Adelaide’ Vintage Port – What a beautiful nose, blessed with intense scents of blueberry jam, earthy black olive and rock rose with a hint of alcohol, which likely just needs more time to integrate. It’s full-bodied, smooth, poised and dry in style. Instantly approachable, structurally the crackling crisp and juicy acidity is met by fine-grained tannins and dangerously delicious, rich and concentrated flavors of brambly blackberry, tart black cherry and licorice, with a medium-long peppery aftertaste. The third day of tasting the Adelaide showed greater structure as the tannins offered a bit more power translating to longer ageability. Drink 2028-2050. Only 333 cases were bottled of this venerable Vallado Vintage Port! **8/12/17 - 93+ points**



2015 Quinta do Ventozelo Vintage Port – 2015 was not only good for Vintage Ports, but for Port company acquisitions too, as in March 2015, Quinta do Ventozelo was purchased outright by Gran Cruz, who in turn is owned by French beverage conglomerate La Martiniquaise. Their Port-folio is stacked and growing larger, with significant brands: Porto Cruz, C. da Silva, Presidential, Dalva and now Quinta do Ventozelo. But in case you were unaware of this, they also own majority stakes in two major Madeira firms: Justino's and also Henriques & Henriques. Impressive! There are 200 hectares planted to vines, out of the 400 ha total on the Ventozelo property in the Douro, (Ventozelo translates to "wind" from Portuguese) which dates back to 1569. The high quality grapes produced on this property will now go into wine produced under the Dalva brand as well as Ventozelo Douro wines. Back a few decades ago Ventozelo used to produce the Ports that were later sold under the Osborne brand. Old news for many, new news for some! That said, Ventozelo Douro wines can be very good, although my experience with them is limited, with 2000 being the oldest table wine of theirs that I've ever tried.

Now, onto my 2015 tasting note. Having stayed at this property in 2003, before FTLOP existed, I had a chance to taste three consecutive Ventozelo Vintage Ports produced by this Single Quinta; 1999, 2000 and 2001. While good, none of them were any better than that and I have only had 2005, 2007 and 2008 Vintage Ports subsequently, and none of them ever rated 90 points in my tasting notes. Generous fresh floral fragrance, intense pure raspberry and cocoa powder aromatics were well-delineated; one for the highlight reels. Medium-bodied initially, soft and juicy, with prominent cut to the acidity and mild, mostly resolved tannins. By the end of evaluations on day 3, this quite surprisingly had grown to be a heavy-weight contender, and by that I am only referencing the "body" of this Port, as the mouthfeel was seamless and uber-soft. But beyond the fine and focused aromatics, and mostly light structure, this Port was ultimately delicious and would be very easy to drink, especially appealing to those new to Vintage Port. So while picking this apart due to many characteristics it doesn't bring to the table, a Vintage Port's first duty is to at least taste good, or better. Now back to the critique. The flavor profile was quite sweet; it would be worthy to know the grams per liter of residual sugar this maintained. Ripe plum and black cherry flavors prevailed, with a sweet mocha component as well. Overall, the finish was medium-short, somewhat clipped and simple. If I wasn't sure this was a Vintage Port, I would have definitely sworn it was an LBV. With all of the negatives pointed out, I must reiterate that nonetheless, this was an absolutely tasty drink and one of the most difficult VP's to rate. No reason to stress over a drinking window, as a maximum of 20 years is apt for this 2015 Ventozelo. I am curious to see if Gran Cruz can produce the type of quality Ports that they are capable of with brands like Dalva, after needed improvements take place at Quinta do Ventozelo. **6/15/17 - 88+ points**

2015 Quinta do Vesuvio Vintage Port – One of my favorite producers of Vintage Port; the 1994 captured my heart and Vesuvio has never broken it, even in weaker vintages. A compelling mélange of fragrances, together rather exotic: vibrant raspberry, fresh violets, earthy notes of herbs, esteva and spicy red licorice. This 2015 presents medium weight, soft, smooth and round in a feminine style, with acid tensility and refined soft tannins. Ripe blackberry fruit along with flavors of lingonberry preserves and sweet grenadine in a lithe, vinous mode and with a medium-long juicy finish. It's a bit four square and with medium term aging potential. Drink early on and through 2045. *When this was revealed, it was one of the biggest surprises out of the dozens of Ports evaluated. I'm used to experiencing Vesuvio tasting samples for many years now, but my notes on this 2015 is way off my norm, in terms of character of the Port and my range of scores (for Vesuvio) during the process. Further proof (for me) that blind tasting definitely eliminates label bias. I need to try this Vesuvio again!* **6/24/17 - 92+ points**

2015 Ramos Pinto Vintage Port – On the last day of Port Harvest Tour 2 in 2015, we met at *Quinta Bom Retiro* for an outstanding retirement party, as João Nicolau de Almeida was going to be stepping down (as CEO) a couple of months after our visit. This 2015 would be the last vintage in which he was directly involved with Ramos Pinto Ports. Coincidentally, João joined us for an afternoon in 2017 too, and it was great to spend time with him and get his personal views on the 2015 Vintage and learn more about his most recent wine project. A distinctive nose of cranberry and lingonberry with fresh floral notes and plenty of pure grape essence. Medium in weight, unctuous and chewy, structurally in synch with bright acidity and refined chalky tannins. An elegant stylish standout for its impeccable balance, purity of fruit and voluminous lingering aftertaste. *Drink or hold* early on, as this Ramos Pinto VP will be best from 2022 through 2045. **6/24/17 - 92+ points**



2015 Rozès Vintage Port – In 2017, for the very first time, we visited with Rozès. Seeing their operation during the Port harvest at one of their properties upriver, Quinta do Monsul, was a ton of fun and we learned a lot about the company and tried quite a few of their Ports. On the heels of tasting two of their young 2015 Vintage Ports, I was even more curious and looked forward to this experience.

Their mainstay 2015 showed a distinctive aromatic component which included notes of ripe cherry, crushed grape, floral fragrances and underlying spicy scents. The palate presented medium weight, soft and rich with bright acidity and mild tannins adding more grip with each passing day/night. Balanced and delicious, the Rozès was concentrated, a sweet entry of boysenberry and plum prevailed, soft and round with a backdrop of grenadine and tar that led to an expansive complex finish. Ageworthy and approachable, this 2015 will improve from here and its recommended to cellar for a half decade before diving in; the Rozès Vintage Port will drink at peak performance between 2030 and 2050. Within that range this Port will be outstanding! **6/19/17 - 93+ points**

2015 Rozès' Quinta do Grifo Vintage Port – Another of the Rozès properties, I hope to visit Grifo at some point. While we had a great time at Quinta do Monsul this year in the Baixo Corgo, it was just one of 9 quintas owned by Rozès, (the others: 5 in the Cima Corgo and 3 more including Grifo, in the Douro Superior). Rozès has been an important segment of the Vranken Pommery Monopole Group since 1999. This renowned beverage company was originally founded in Bordeaux in 1855 by Ostende Rozès. No coincidence there, as he began his company as a fine wine merchant, importing and marketing Port wine.

A perfect segue, as this 2015 Grifo offers an expansive, earthy and refined nose filled with cassis and anise, dried roses, briar patch blackberry and purity of grape. Light-medium weight, fluid and velvety smooth with ample acid and moderately chalk drying tannins. This Rozès Single Quinta Vintage Port is polished, elegant, earthy and rather soft, similar to a high end LBV when tasted blind, but with slightly more depth and panache. The medium-sweet entry is met by a layered and fleshy mid-section, with red wild berry and licorice flavors, along with substantial length that is dry and warm at the end. Grifo is a solid SQVP and will drink best while young and up to the end of its peak performance, circa 2040. **6/19/17 - 88+ points**

2015 Sandeman's Quinta do Seixo Vintage Port – Sogrape's chief winemaker, Luis Sottomayor has nailed the last two major declarations for Sandeman, (2007 and 2011) with excellent Vintage Ports, restoring to greatness the reputation of this venerable Port shipper. Sandeman declared their 2015 as a Single Quinta VP while others in the Sogrape stable also released a Single Quinta VP (Ferreira), or chose not to release any '15 Vintage Port whatsoever (Offley), in a nod to the 2016 vintage. Quinta do Seixo on the southern bank of the Douro, is a picturesque property with manicured vineyards and magnificent 180 degree views. Additionally, a fairly recent renovation of the entire property added large scale robotic lagares, to name just one of several upgrades that have brought Sandeman's showplace quinta into the 21st century both technology wise along with modernized techniques employed within the vineyards.

The Quinta do Seixo 2015 VP has a bright and diverse aromatic silhouette, with sumptuous scents of spicy raspberry, marionberry, dried flowers, dried date and tar. Rather light the first day in, there was a noticeable weight gain to medium-full by the third day of tasting, offering great future promise. Likewise, the tannins which were light and demure at the beginning, morphed into muscular non-aggressive tannins by the end. This Port is smooth, warm and voluminous, with juicy black fruits showcasing ripe fig flavors, a touch of youthful spirit and spice. There is substantial length and gentle warming on the multilayered and enduring finish. Overall, the 2015 Seixo has the stuffing and plenty of fruit to carry this to the other side of the mid-point of the 21st century. However, for those that appreciate the youthful side of Vintage Ports, I recommend waiting until 2025 to begin opening your bottles. If you just can't resist popping one early on, at least provide a six hour decant in order for this Seixo to deliver its best. **6/19/17 - 89+ points**

2015 S. Leonardo Vintage Port – So you thought they only made venerable wood-aged Ports, eh? Nope. While S. Leonardo is best known for producing some of the Douro's best Tawny Ports with an indication of age; they not only make Colheita, but also White Port and Vintage Port too, all under this label. Then there are the well-aged Douro wines, but I digress. Miguel Braga is the owner and winemaker, and his small family-owned *Quinta do Mourão* makes for a particularly memorable visit. Another SQVP, it will be interesting to see if Braga commits to 2016 too, but he stated that in his opinion, he had no idea why this was not a full on general declaration given the superb quality of grapes brought in across the Douro in 2015.

S. Leonardo's 2015 VP has many things going for it. A solid aromatic profile with distinctive ripe raspberry and citrus scents plus bittersweet chocolate notes by day two. Full-bodied, densely concentrated, yet silky mouthfeel, you've gotta love the texture here. This Port is so approachable from the moment the cork is pulled, and that is a good thing. What was lacking, when I spent time with this Port, was sheer complexity. While delicious, the sophistication of the mid-palate and finish has yet to develop. As this Port did improve each day, the possibility remains for further character development with time, but for now, that remains a question mark. The structure is everything you could ask for in a young VP. The 2015 S. Leonardo will drink nicely for at least 3-4 decades. **6/15/17 - 90+ points**



2015 Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas Vintage Port – Vargellas is the main source of extraordinary grapes for Taylor's, (supported by Quinta de Terra Feita and Quinta do Junco) year in and year out, and 2015 is no exception. The diversity of this property in the Douro Superior with majestic old-vine field blend parcels bringing concentration and complexity to the Ports, and vines putting up with little rainfall and extreme heat, there's no question why it is truly the loyal warrior vineyard for Taylor's Vintage and LBV Ports. Like Quinta do Vesuvio, maybe this property should be bottling this SQVP every single year and only bottle Vinha Velha in great years? The 2015 Vargellas proves once again that this is one of the greatest sites in the entire region and that terroir matters! The aromatic intensity is noted from the first whiff, compact initially, it unfurled over several days with notes of black cherry, blackberry, violets, grapefruit and a smoky scent. The cool nights during summer months allowed for vibrant acidity, and tannins which started off slightly soft, wound up omnipresent and just short of astringent, but mouth dominating nonetheless, in providing distinctive balance to this wine.

Vargellas' concentrated flavors consist of ripe fig, boysenberry and tar with a slight bit of youthful spirit that turned up late on the palate. This is a minor distraction and will integrate as usual with bottle age. The mouthfeel is seductively smooth, the body weight is full yet blends into the big picture like a shadow and it all ends well, an opulent Port with substantial longevity on the finish. In need of time for this to meld, either wait a decade to approach or drink a bottle early on with an extended decant. The 2015 Vargellas should be best between the halfway point of the century and the beginning of the final quarter of it. **6/24/17 - 94+ points**

2015 Vista Alegre Vintage Port – Our last visit of this year's PHT2 was to Vallegre. They make nearly every category of Port you can think of with the exception of Crusted Port. ☺ My notes are from the samples received in Gaia. Exhibiting a riveting array of plum, esteva, marionberry, and an herbal essence; initially there was an overpowering tanky note, but that disappeared by the second day. It's medium-bodied, uber-soft with bracing acidity and refined gentle tannins. The Vista Alegre revealed generous plum and boysenberry flavors, juicy and quite tasty, however they were quite simple, spicy and ended with a long lasting tannic finish. My impression was that this could easily pass for a very well-made LBV as the organoleptic qualities were quite similar. An easy to approach style, with near-midterm aging potential. Drink anytime in the next 20-30 years. **6/19/17 - 88+ points**

2015 VZ (Van Zeller) Vintage Port – *For some interesting background intel on this producer, see the Vale d. Maria TN for more info.* This 2015 VZ VP is a mellifluous and easy to approach Port that would be pleasing for those just getting into Vintage Port or serious aficionados seeking out a reasonably priced cellar defender. No reason why this could not appeal to both. This youngster delivers intense aromatics that are heady and multifaceted, with scents of strawberry, carnations, fresh herbs, tree bark and tapenade. There was an initial whiff that seemed high-toned, floral, and bordering on VA, but it was gone by the second day. Medium in weight, soft and silky smooth, a touch of heat from youthful spirit that will integrate with further bottle age, although momentarily distracting. Structurally soft with ample lively acidity and modest chalky tannins that were nearly imperceptible to me. The flavors are the strong suit here ranging from strawberry and ripe pomegranate, to a minty note with a light cocoa influence. Simple and delicious with the ability to be consumed throughout its entire life and at its best from 2025-2045. 225 cases were produced. If this VZ gains further complexity in the next few years, it will certainly be worthy of another point or two. For now ... **6/29/17 - 90+ points**

2015 Warre's Quinta da Cavadinha Vintage Port – It was great to visit Cavadinha briefly during the Port Harvest Tour and then we headed to another Symingtons' quinta to do a vertical tasting of Warre's vs. the SQVP's of Cavadinha from similar vintages. Extremely educational and we had a firsthand look at how excellent these Ports are and how well they age. The 2015 Cavadinha that I spent days with in Porto, was extracted and opaque. Aromatically there were lifted floral notes with carnation and lilac, quince, currant, a touch of grape and herbs. Medium-full weight, soft, fluid and immediately approachable, the acidity was precise and the tannins grew more powerful every day and with *lip-lock* grip. Disparate flavors of red fruits, mostly cherry but also some tart cranberry and ripe sweet plum flavors too, with a protracted and sophisticated finish. There was an elegant quality to these Warre's Cavadinha Vintage Ports and they delivered a well-rounded impression and showed its soft underbelly and at the same time its ability to age well. The structural components made all the difference. Consume the 2015 Ports early on, or wait to 2025 and either cellar them or drink them up and through 2045.

6/19/17 - 91+ points

Opinion on overall quality of vintage 2015



Vintage Overview

Overall, the 2015 Vintage Ports delivered the quality that I had expected, and that was a fairly high bar. Incredibly extracted and virtually every Port appeared opaque, albeit to varying degrees. There is an uncanny beauty to the aromatics in these Ports. Loads of floral notes, and spicy nuances. By the second day, any minor issues with “off” notes were gone, (and they were few and far between to begin with). That is impressive and aguardente/alcohol issues were much less of an issue than any vintage I’ve ever evaluated. More shippers using higher quality?

In the majority of cases, the acidity was vibrant and in synch with the fruit, nothing flabby or cloying, none overtly jammy. Cool nights! The tannins are for the most part, slightly lighter than either in 2007 or 2011 and due to the balanced primary fruit in 2015, there are only a few Ports where the tannins were aggressive, or even too astringent, but noted a few exceptions when they were presented.

The fruit quality was beautiful. None too candied or over-the-top in terms of residual sugar. I prefer a dry style of Vintage Port, but can appreciate sweet ones too, and when it comes to evaluations, what I personally like has little to no play in remaining neutral. Here, the freshness factor was spot on, nearly across the board. There are some intense and attractive Ports from this particular vintage, with a few that definitely had me doing a double take!

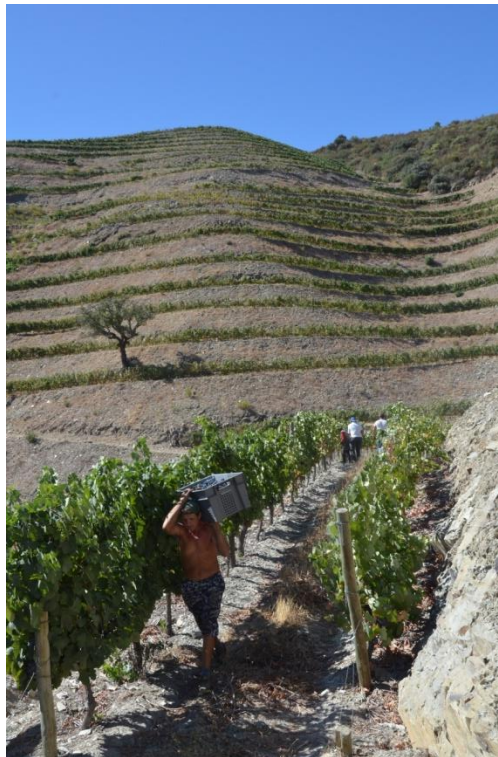
As for age-worthiness, it is not easy to generalize, but the 2015’s are on a par with most recent notable vintages in this dynamic. The length of the finishes, overall balance, but especially the structure will have most of these VP’s drinking very well for 30 or 40 years, with maybe 15% even longer. 2015’s are extremely cellar worthy, yet most will be a pleasure to drink young too!



A Buying Opportunity

To be clear, I understand there are some producers that prefer their 2016 Vintage Ports to 2015. I respect that a lot and look forward to try them next year with an open mind. In my opinion, the 2015 Vintage, could have easily been generally declared. The Single Quinta Vintage Ports across the board had all the material and depth, intensity and complexity of a year like 2007 that was generally declared. What does that mean? Due to the fact this vintage was NOT generally declared, it will be a great one to buy at deflated prices.

There are many worth owning and putting in your cellar. I've seen some prices in the USA that are a real bargain. Read widely, taste widely and decide for yourself. 2015 is the real deal and there were a bunch that were equal or even better to the very best VP that these producers had ever released. While in general the scores were in a narrower range than usual, the overall quality of 2015 is high and better than any non-generally-declared vintage since 2001. **BUY with discretion** ... is my advice; there's great QPR to be had, and I'm not shilling for the trade!



Having the responsibility of being historically accurate, or at the very least, consistent, when putting tasting notes into the public domain; is something I take quite seriously. I pride myself in getting to "know" these Ports ... even more so when tasting blind for an important vintage. There really is a method to my Port madness!

- Roy Hersh

Roy's Top 10 List of the 2015 Vintage Ports

With the 2015 Vintage Ports, I scored ten of 49 Vintage Ports with a baseline score at 94 points or above (down by two points (96) from the 2011 Top 10). Not all of the Port producers are "usual suspects." That said, gradations were narrower in 2015 than almost any other vintage I can remember, with ratings between 96 – 87 points. That speaks to the consistency of Ports from this non-generally declared vintage.

The list below represents my Top 10 Vintage Ports of 2015 in order of preference.

ROY'S TOP 10 LIST OF 2015 VINTAGE PORTS		
1st	Graham's Stone Terraces	96+
2nd	Niepoort	96+
3rd	Dow's Quinta do Bomfim	95+
4th	Alves de Sousa	95+
5th	Dalva	94+
6th	Ferreira's Quinta do Pinto	94+
7th	Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas	94+
8th	Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo	94+
9th	Quinta do Noval	94+
10th	Churchill's Quinta da Gricha	94+

When doing these vintage reports, delivering unbiased blind tasting notes that will stand the test of time based on thoroughness and consistency, is all that drives me.

- **Roy Hersh**



Special thanks to **Carlos Macedo E Cunha**, Export Manager at Portugal Premium for his extraordinary assistance in helping me with logistics to receive timely deliveries of the bottles of sample Ports that I had arranged directly with producers and lending me Port glassware, plus lots more. **I could not have done this without you!**

Also to **Diplomata Biscuit** a company that supplied me with a bunch of packages of crackers for my tastings which was greatly appreciated.

Diplomata Biscuit is a company that represents a new way to taste bread ... very simple and natural, made with bread dough. Low in fats, sugars, no added dyes or preservatives, have been developed in various types crunchy and Crispbread. Distributed by: NB Machado Unipessoal, Lda, in Lisboa, is a restaurant equipment supplier with many different products, including the Diplomata Biscuit line.

