

# Portugal

---

Whether you're talking about wine or international soccer superstar Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal maintains a level of individuality and national pride unique even in continental Europe. Thanks in part to its relative seclusion—surrounded on one side by Spain and on the other by the Atlantic Ocean—Portugal has bypassed the grape-sharing mentality of much of the rest of Europe, instead opting to cultivate her indigenous varietals and has succeeded in developing a palette of wines as unique as the Portuguese language. Although Portugal has been widely praised for its excellent port wines for centuries, the relatively small coastal nation has come into its own as a truly great wine producer. Virtually all of Portugal produces wine in some capacity. In the following pages, we'll take a look three regions producing some of the most interesting wines that Europe has to offer.

# The Minho River Valley



The Minho River demarcates the northernmost border between Portugal and Spain, and accounts for an eighth of the nation's wine harvest. Of the many varietals produced in this region, none is more synonymous with Minho than Vinho Verde.

As the Minho Valley is also the nation's wettest region, growers here have continually sought to counter the vine's natural tendency to sprout leaves rather than ripen the fruit, occasionally rendering vintages that are under-ripe and low alcohol with little discernible character. For this reason, Vinho Verde is often blended with a variety of other lesser-known local grapes including Azal, Loureiro Avesso and Arinto. Vinho Verde, blended or unblended is still considered

one of Portugal's great white exports.

The real highlight, of Minho, though, is the fruity and vibrant Alvarinho (Albariño in Spanish). The considerably drier and warmer subregion(s) that produce the most renowned Alvarinho, Monção and Melgaço, lie just across the river from the Spanish equivalent highlight region Rías Baixas— both of which produce superior offerings one of the Iberian peninsula's finest whites.

The region's devotion to history and artisanal production is reflected in the pastoral and stately landscape, pocked with medieval fortresses and cathedrals. Family-owned farms and vineyards predominate and artisanal tile-work (see the label of this week's offering from Nortico) is a hallmark of the region's homes and storefronts.

# The Douro River Valley

Inland and slightly south of the Minho lies the Douro valley, also known as the home of Porto or Port wine. Now widely heralded as one of the finest fortified wine offerings in the world, Douro had previously been known for mass-producing cheap and syrupy sweet port for export (mainly to France). The hot, steep and unforgiving landscape along the banks of the Douro (especially the upper Douro) has never been an obvious place for wine production, but partly due to an investment by the World Bank, production of quality wine in the region has increased significantly in recent years.

The Douro is notable for its stair-step vineyards, painstakingly built into the walls of the valley to prevent moisture

from rolling of the hillside (see below). This method has not only increased agriculture for wine, but also for olives, oranges and chestnut trees.

Although the area is ubiquitous with Port, the vast majority of vineyards also produce table wines like the Xisto Ilimitado Tinto on the following page, often in blends of a handful of hearty varietals that thrive in the gravelly, schist-dominant soils. The “new” Douro continues to develop this trend, introducing new wines each year that display the versatility of this unique region, proving that it can do a lot more than simply Port.





## Featured Wines

**NORTICO**  
Alvarinho  
Vinho Regional Minho  
2019

Nortico Alvarinho is a superb example of this grape's hallmark traits: fresh citrus, peach and tropical aromas paired with clean, juicy fruit and vibrant minerality. This humble yet serious wine showcases the best of northern Portugal's commitment to artisan production in all things.

Hailing from the best Alvarinho-growing area in Portugal. Nortico has no added CO<sub>2</sub>, making for a richer, fuller, well-balanced wine that showcases its maritime influence with a kiss of salinity on the finish. Albarino/Alvarinho is the grape to watch for ageworthy, world-class wines, and this is a perfect introduction.

**VERA**  
Vinho Verde Rosè  
Vinho Verde  
2019

Vera Rose is 100% estate fruit, estate bottled, low RS and a very light carbonation, allowing for a medium body, more balanced wine. 100% estate-grown Vera Rosè is one of the original, distinct Rosè offerings from the Vinho Verde region and from Portugal.

Expect floral notes with crisp, fresh strawberry and watermelon on the palette. Tastes like a summer Friday afternoon.

Vera's texture, bright acidity and medium body make it a versatile pairing. Lovely with fried fish, lighter cured meats, shellfish and bivalves.

**XISTO ILIMITADO TINTO**  
Red Blend  
Douro  
2018

A field blend of 6 varieties planted across 3 subzones in the Douro, Ilimitado is a survey of the schist-driven terroir in the appellation, and likewise, it offers an introduction to the dominant soil type in the valley.

With its bright garnet hue, high-toned red and blue fruit aromas, tinged with wet stone and violets, this fresh, mineral driven red that showcases the purity of fruit achievable in this region. On the palate, lush, but with bright acidity to balance the red cherry and pomegranate fruit. Pair with roast game or poultry, or ratatouille.

**NOBLE & MURAT**  
Late Bottle Vintage (LBV) Porto  
Douro  
2012

One of the newest established port houses with the oldest growing history. Utilizing the wisdom of traditional techniques, this LBV has the tannin structure of a vintage port. There is not another LBV on the market that comes close to the quality of Noble & Murat LBV.

Intense blackberry and raspberry flavors and lively acidity in this LBV allows it to pair with savory foods like duck confit, roasted pork loin with fig compote or turkey with cranberry, aged cheeses (especially blue cheese) and charcuterie. Wait for the lingering finish laced with chocolate and blueberries.

Price: \$100 for the four pack \$150 with the added bonus wine

## Featured Cheeses

### SERRA DA ESTREZA *Raw Sheep's Milk*

Made in the mountainous region of Serra da Estreza, a centuries-old community created by shepherds. Hand-made with traditional artisanal techniques. Soft and spreadable with intense flavor.

### O VELHA AMANTEIGADO *Raw Sheep's Milk*

Thistle rennet imparts a slight sour tang. Pudding-like, overall in texture and mouth feel, this cheese is delicate with floral end notes— a real spoon-in-hand cheese.

### SAO JORGE *Cow's Milk*

From the island of Sao Jorge in the Azores, this cheese has been traditionally made for centuries and was initially handed down from noblemen. It offers a firm texture, a strong, clean bouquet and a pleasant, slightly spicy flavor.

Includes: Two cans of Port Sardines \$40

Local. Inspired. Vibrant.



# Paradise Pantry