

Luis Pato - Another Defector From The Appellation System

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Along with its neighbour Dão, Bairrada is one of Portugal's most classic red table wine regions. Douro has been catching up fast and Alentejo is a hotbed of experimentation (hardly classic) but Bairrada is steeped in tradition and pride. In fact it is one of the few wine regions I have visited to have its own Academy and its own corpus of commissioned literature, some of it a resurrection of truly historic volumes. (Portuguese wine history is some of the best documented.)

The Angelo Gaja of Bairrada is the engaging and voluble Luis Pato but, like Gaja, his explosion of ideas and experimentation sit uneasily within the restraints of a rigid appellation system and, in this case, under the direction of an individual with whom Pato is not totally in sympathy. Pato has therefore decided from the 1999 vintage to label his wines Vinho Regional Beiras rather than have to submit them to the Bairrada authorities. (Just as Gaja has decided to withdraw his top wines from the Barbaresco DOC.)

The high acid, high tannin Baga grape is the backbone of all red Bairrada and on the evidence of this recent batch of wines Pato is, with a little help from vintage conditions, succeeding in his quest to tame the rugged Baga without sacrificing longevity.

Bical is the white grape of Bairrada which, amazingly, also produces dry and sparkling white wines as well as these really rather noble savages below.

Vinha Barrosa is his old vine bottling, Vinha Pan (not tasted here though noted in my book [Jancis Robinson tastes the best Portuguese table wines](#)) the young vine cuvée. Quinta do Ribeirinho is made from just one hectare of ungrafted vines planted in 1988.

Vinha Barrio 2000 16 Drink '05-'08

Nose unforthcoming but an impressive amount of supple fruit hits the palate before the natural acidity of the Baga grape kicks in. Tannins very well managed. Some element of cumin on a damson base. Relatively gentle for a young red Bairrada, sorry, Vinho Regional Beiras.

Vinha Barrosa 2000 Vinha Velha 18 Drink '04-'10

Deeper crimson than Barrio with a nose that is positively meaty and fleshy, with notes of licorice. Very, very slightly gassy but extremely sumptuous for Barr - Vinho Regional Beiras. There is clearly no lack of tannin underneath but this is miraculously approachable, so long as you are armed with some very hearty food.

Vinha Barrosa 1999 Vinha Velha 16.5 Drink '05-'09

Higher acidity on the nose than the 2000. Fresh attack and very vibrant but simpler than the 2000. Another admirable attempt to tame Baga but with quite different results. This is a very Atlantic wine with positively maritime breeze up the nose. A rather lighter wine than the 1999 but there is no pain. Could do with slightly riper tannins.

Quinta do Ribeirinho 2000 Vinho Regional Beiras 18 Drink '06-'12

Wild and fruity nose, verging on game and spice. Very obvious tannins in this wine made in minute quantity from ungrafted Baga vines. Hint of bitter chocolate. This is the sort of wine you could decant two to three days before serving. (It's not often you see a producer opting for a less tall bottle for a recent vintage but the slightly shorter bottles chosen by Luis Pato for the 2000 vintage carry an embossed version of his signature on the very glass if you please.)

Quinta do Ribeirinho 1999 Vinho Regional Beiras 16 Drink '06-'10

Thick and very tannic. Much more acidity than the 2000. Chunky build and something vaguely dusty about the nose. The vineyard here is sandy and supposedly planted and cultivated just as its forebears were before the arrival of phylloxera. Slightly short.

Quinta do Ribeirinho 1998 Bairrada 17 Drink '04-'08

Extraordinarily opulent on the nose but without quite the impact of the 2000 on the palate. Maturing gently and impressively. Well mannered. This seems to have matured faster than either the 2000 or 1999 (each reclassified as Vinho Regional Beiras) is likely to. Good mid palate of ripe fruit. Impressive.