

Quinta do Ameal's whites, Minho, Portugal

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I don't know about you but for a long time I was rather dismissive of the wines of Minho on the Portuguese bank of the river that forms the northern boundary between Spain and Portugal. Setting aside the extraordinarily light, dry, acid reds, most white Vinho Verde left me pretty cold; it seemed so tart and fruitless compared to the more sumptuous Albariños and so on produced in Rias Baixas in Spain to the north.

But clearly this part of Portugal has been touched by wine revolution and evolution just as much as any other, and producers such as **Quinta de Covela** (whose [red](#) and [pink](#) I have previously recommended) and **Quinta do Ameal** are in the vanguard, dragging the rest, I hope, in their wake.

Pedro Araujo of Quinta do Ameal is apparently the great grandson of the founder of Ramos Pinot (it should of course be Pinto, but fingers used to typing Pinot find it all but impossible to get this right), so presumably has some genetic predisposition to make good wine. He has done wonders with his 12 hectares (30 acres) of Loureiro grapes on granitic, south-facing slopes in the green, Atlantic-washed hills around Lima in Vinho Verde country. Quite apart from distinctly superior winemaking, he has designed a very clear, attractive identity for his labels and his website www.quintadoameal.com

I recently tasted a couple of his Vinho Verdes, the delightfully refreshing (yet fruity) **Loureiro 2004** and the **Loureiro 2001** which certainly wasn't dead but, as a Vinho Verde neophyte, I couldn't quite see that the tertiary flavours were actually an improvement on the youthful version. Both of these are labelled with the Vinho Verde *maximum* alcohol of 11.5 per cent (quite an anachronism) and about 4,000 cases a year are made from much lower-yielding vines than is usual in this region with its high rainfall and vines crawling up every post they can find to form generous pergolas.

But perhaps of most interest, especially to those who are not already converts to good quality Vinho Verde, is the **Escolha 2003**, a 400-case production of fully ripe Loureiro grapes fermented in French oak hogsheads (an increasingly common size for white wines, I find) and given six months' barrel maturation. This wine, just 12 per cent alcohol, adds depth and creaminess to Loureiro's unusual and distinctive green 'laurel leaf' aromas and turns it into a good wine for serving with food, whereas the Loureiro Vinho Verde makes a great refreshing aperitif for hot weather.

Corney & Barrow are exclusive UK importers and currently offer the Loureiro 2003 Vinho Verde at £8.34 a bottle inc VAT. I have not tasted this particular vintage of the Vinho Verde but cannot believe on the basis of the wines outlined above that it would be a serious disappointment. Quinta do Ameal's wines have impressively wide distribution for a property that is relatively small. According to winesearcher.com there are stockists in the US, Canada, Germany, Norway and, of course, Portugal.

What they offer is sophisticated winemaking with a completely novel flavour, in two different styles.

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