Best of Portugal v rest of the world

22 Nov 2004 by JR

I have just received the following report of a comparative tasting in which I was asked to participate in Lisbon earlier in the month but couldn't.

> Four Portuguese red wines were included in a selection of the 12 best wines in the world, chosen by an eight member jury of renowned international wine specialists on the second day of a blind tasting organised by the Portuguese Academy of Gastronomy and held at the Palacio Fronteira in Lisbon on 3 and 4 November 2003.
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> The winning Portuguese wines, two from the Douro (Quinta do Vale de Meão 2000 and Charme 2000) and two from the Estremadura region (Quinta de Pancas Premium 2000 and Quinta do Monte D'Oiro 1999 Homenagem a António Carqueijeiro) were selected from a top-class line-up of 30 red wines - 15 from Portugal and 15 from other premium wine making countries. The Portuguese wines fended off fierce competition from the likes of a Château Margaux 1998 and a Vega Sicilia Unico 1989.
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> On day one of the blind tasting, the jury ranked the 10 best wines from the Douro, Dão and Alentejo regions from a total of 30 Portuguese wines presented. The top three reds from the Douro region - Quinta do Vale de Dona Maria 2001, Quinta do Crasto Maria Teresa 2001 and Quinta da Leda 2000 - were also voted the best overall Portuguese reds in the competition, and Tapada de Coelheiros 2002 (Alentejo) the best Portuguese white.
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> **The Best Portuguese Wines**
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> Best red wines of Douro:
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> 1. Quinta do Vale de D Maria 2001
> 2. Quinta do Crasto, M Teresa 2001
> 3. Quinta da Leda 2000
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> Best red wines of Dão:
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> 1. Pape 2002
> 2. Quinta dos Roques Reserva 2000
> 3. Quinta do Corujão 2000
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> Best red wines of Alentejo:
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> 1. Mouchão 2000
> 2. Marquês de Borba Reserva 2000
> 3. Quinta do Mouro 2000
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> Best Portuguese white wine:
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> - Tapada de Coelheiros 2002
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> Best Portuguese red wines:
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> 1. Quinta do Vale de D Maria 2001
> 2. Quinta do Crasto, M Teresa 2001
> 3. Quinta da Leda 2000
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> The 12 finalists of the international tasting (alphabetical order) of a selection of 15 Portuguese and 15 international wines:
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> - Chapoutier Ermitage Pavillon 1996 (France, Cotes du Rhône)

- Charme 2000 (Portugal, Douro)
- Château Cheval Blanc 1997 (France, St-Emilion)
- Château Mouton Rothschild 1998 (France, Pauillac)
- Dominus Napa Valley 1997 (USA, California)
- Quinta do Monte D'Oiro 1999, Homenagem a António Carqueijeiro (Portugal, Estremadura)
- Nicolas Catena Zapata 1997 (Argentina)
- Château Pétrus 1997 (Pomerol, France)
- Quinta de Pancas Premium 2000 (Portugal, Estremadura)
- Quinta do Vale Meão 2000 (Portugal, Douro)
- Ridge Monte Bello 1997 (USA, California)
- Sassicaia 1999 (Italy, Toscana)

The international jury was represented by Rafael Anson, President of International Gastronomy Academy; Carlos Falco, Marquês de Griñon, producer and founder of Spanish Gastronomy Academy; and José Peñin, author and publisher of a leading Spanish wine guide; Jacques Puisais, president of the French Taste Institute and honorary president of the International Oenologists Union; and Michael Bettane, editor of *Revue du Vin de France* and *Carnets de Dégustation*; Briton Richard Mayson, author of several books and journalist for *Decanter* magazine; Austrian Peter Moser, editor of the magazine *Falstaff*; and the North American Joshua Greene, editor of *Wine & Spirits* magazine.

The lists of Portugal's top wines strike me as providing the real interest of this exercise. Comparing them with a ragbag of top wines from around the world, made from quite different grape varieties, is a rather dubious exercise.

And since Portugal represented half the entries but only one-third of the top wines, its 'victory' is hardly resounding.

That said, I can say that at a lunch in São Paulo last Friday, by coincidence, that Marques de Borba Reserve 2000 is certainly an extremely well-made, please-all wine. Hats off to João Ramos, but it is not, alas, inexpensive: £26 in Portugal and £34 in Germany.

Dirk Niepoort will be pleased to see his 'burgundian' Douro Charme doing so well, but I can tell you that his relatively mature white Douro table wine Redoma 1999 also looked extremely good today - and by no means over the hill.

Fascinating too, by the way, but still on an Iberian theme, to taste my two favourite Spanish sweet whites together - Chivite's late harvest Moscatel 1999 from Navarra and Molino Real from near Malaga. The Chivite wine certainly looked finer, though both were impressive.

Should you ever be doing business, or anything else in São Paulo, head for Figueira for the most beautiful open-air restaurant under a spreading centuries-old fig tree with a trunk at least 15 feet across and consequent dappled light. Good cooking, great design and wonderful meat raised on the owners' farm.

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Crazy address!

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