

Esporão Reserva White 2004 Alentejo

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I went to a tasting of hundreds of exported and exportable Portuguese wines the other day and was knocked out by how sophisticated some of the top reds are now – notably from the Douro. I have been casting around trying to find stockists for such sumptuous wines as **Pintas**, **Quinta de Chocopalha**, **Quinta do Passadouro** and **Quinta do Côa** but have failed (although see * below). Corney & Barrow list older vintages of Pintas and Chocopalha, but my sense is that the winemaking is improving with every year.

So, unless you can track these recent Douro reds down somehow, I will have to recommend a wine that is much more widely available – and was arguably the most surprising wine of the entire tasting. Portugal is not famous for fine, full-bodied whites and the only ones I had previously been seriously impressed by had been **Niepoort**, **Redoma Reserva Branco Douro** and the odd **Quinta dos Roques Dão**. I certainly didn't expect to find a good example from as far south as the baking hot Alentejo where the corks come from. (Incidentally, one corner of the hall in Vinopolis where this tasting was held, most unusually, positively reeked of TCA – very odd.)

But good old Aussie winemaker David Baverstock of the vast Esporão estate, which makes a very wide range of reds, both blends and exotic Portuguese varietals, has really hit the jackpot with this 2004 blended white, **Esporão Reserva White 2004 Alentejo**, a blend of Antão Vaz, Roupeiro and the usefully lemony Arinto. You look the latter two up in the [Oxford Companion to Wine](#). According to Richard Mayson's *The Wines and Vineyards of Portugal*, Antão Vaz is turning out to be a useful blending ingredient in oaked wines because of its body and breadth.

My tasting note on this 2004 goes: "Full, opulent, tangy, masses of character and very well made. What's not to like for fans of California Chardonnay looking for more zest and interest?"

Another thing in this wine's favour is how relatively widely distributed it is. As I write (admittedly before heading off for Bordeaux where I am currently deep in 2005s) wine-searcher.com lists several US stockists with prices from less than \$9 a bottle, many in Germany with prices from less than 9 euros, two in Switzerland at about 16 Swiss francs, Peatlings and Cambridge Wine Merchants in the UK at about £9 and others in Belgium, Norway and Portugal (where it is relatively expensive, funnily enough). * As sold by UK importers Fels that this wine is also available at Bubble Wine, Postcard Wine Company, S.H. Jones and Seaburne Wine Merchants.

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Christopher Sherwood, Thameside Wines, Putney, London

We stock Pintas 2003 (wine and port); Chocopalha Tinto 2002 the better Tinto 2001, and the very interesting and unusual Branco 2003 (Chardonnay and Arinto), Esporão Branco Reserva 2004 and some of their varietal range. Unfortunately we are having a few issues with our online buying facility, but the full current list of 55 Portuguese wines can be viewed at <http://www.thamesidewines.com/>.