A look at some of the best Brazilian wines

11 Jun 2007 by Julia Harding MW

Although I have not yet been to Brazil, I did taste a small selection of wines earlier this year in the UK. The choice of wines was made by Arthur Azevedo, President of the Brazilian Sommeliers' Association, though some wineries did not get round to sending their wines.

Below are my tasting notes. Jancis's jaw dropped (only a little and very decorously) when she saw the scores, so I have revised them down a bit since posting them here on members' forum to try to keep them in the context of world wines. I think I was more impressed than I had expected to be and was therefore tempted to be a little over-generous.

I was particularly impressed by the two Villa Francioni whites when I came back to them after the tasting, though the alcohols were a bit high, as in quite a few of the wines.

I'm not very confident about the drinking dates as I have not tried any older wines. Luiz Horta, an extremely courteous and knowledgeable Brazilian wine journalist, told me that the wines did not tend to last well, though there are of course a few exceptions.

I have listed them, reds before whites, in decreasing order of my score.

REDS

Salton Talento 2004 Tuiuty, Bento Gonçalves, RS 17 Drink 2007-10?
60% Cabernet, 30% Merlot, 10% Tannat blend. 80% new French oak and 20% stainless steel tanks. Finished sample but not released until March 2007. Bright purplish ruby. Rich black fruit aromas laced with violets and cedary oak. Delicious younger version of the above. Seamlessly blended and integrated. Firm ripe fine-grained tannins. So fresh and long. (JH)

Salton Talento 2002 Tuiuty, Bento Gonçalves, RS 16+ Drink 2007–08
60% Cabernet, 30% Merlot, 10% Tannat blend. 12.5%. 12 months in 66% new French oak, 14% new Slavonian oak, and 20% in stainless steel tanks. Bright medium garnet – remarkably youthful. Lovely perfumed red fruit. Elegant, beautifully fresh and delicate with refreshing sandy tannins. Long and moreish. (JH)

Salton Desejo Merlot 2004 Serra Gaúcha 16 Drink 2007–09
13%. 12 months in oak, 50/50 French and US. Dark black cherry with opaque core – looks younger than 04. Lovely sweetly perfumed berry fruits, spicy oak, lifted raspberry notes. Modern, inviting nose, and yet not oversweet or overripe. Excellent fruit concentration, with firm refreshing tannins and acidity. Very well made. Plenty of wine-making skill in evidence but not confected. Good length. (JH)

Miolo Merlot Terroir 2004 Vale dos Vinhedos 16- Drink 2007–09
13.5%. Ridiculously heavy bottle. Fresh plums on the nose, lifted possibly VA note, spicy and cedary oak. Dense rich fruit, lovely ripe firm tannins but perhaps a little overextracted (touch bitter on the very end?). Slightly meaty. Acidity fresh and well balanced, and firm, sure finish. (JH)

Villa Francioni Vinho Tinto Fino Seco 2004 15.5 2007–08
13.3%. Classy, simple packaging and heavy bottles. Deep mellow ruby garnet. Very oaky on the nose – toast and spice. Rich, intense red fruit with masses of chocolate and new oak spice. Soft, dense and long. Oak a little dominant still but plenty of fruit and firm ripe tannin for a while yet. Not quite enough acidity perhaps to stay the course but lovely for drinking now if you like this big fat oaky style. Slight grip on the end. (JH)

Miolo, Quinta do Seival, Castas Portuguesas 2004 Campanha, RS 15+ Drink 2007–09
13%. Equal blend of Touriga Nacional, Alfrocheiro, Tinta Roriz. Aged in French oak. Deep bright ruby garnet. Lifted red fruit and tiny hint of VA (positive), beginnings of leather but still very fresh fruit aromas and some wild herbs. Very good acidity, mouthwatering juicy red plum – perhaps even strawberry – flavours, well-balanced, smooth tannins. Marred only by a slight bitterness on the finish? (Added acid?) Good length. (JH)

Miolo, Quinta do Seival, Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 Campanha, RS 15- Drink 2007–09
13%, unfiltered. Medium garnet. Slightly odd nose and a bit confected. Sweet black fruit but slightly bitter finish. Sweet

firm tannins and very good length. (JH)

ViniBrasil Paralelo 8 2005 Vale do São Francisco 15- Drink 2007–09
13.5% Blend of 5 French and Portuguese varieties: 20% of each of the following: Cab Sauv, Syrah, Alicante Bouschet, Touriga Nacional, Aragonez. Named after the latitude at which it is produced. First vintage of their 'super premium' wine. NB ViniBrasil is a JV between Dão Sul (Portuguese producer) and Expand (S American importer). Medium deep garnet. Spicy, almost dried fruit nose – ie lacking freshness. Tannins a little dry and possibly overextracted leading to touch of bitterness on the finish. Still has elegance but tannins are currently a little tough. (JH)

Pizzato Reserve Merlot 2004 Vale dos Vinhedos 15- Drink 2007–08
13%. Med deep garnet. Strong aroma of cloves over fresh cassis. Tannins are dryish but not drying. Little bit of herbaceousness on the palate without being unripe. More like Loire Cab Franc in a ripe year. Freshness carries through to long finish. (JH)

Vinícola Argenta, Cuvée Luiz Argenta 2005 Flores da Cunha, RS 14 Drink 2007–08
14%. Cabernet/Merlot. Very deep ruby garnet. Vanilla perfume over cassis fruit, slightly dusty on the nose. Sweet soft rich cassis flavours. Very very soft tannins, just enough freshness to balance. Slight bitterness on the finish and moderate length. (JH)

SPARKLING

Excellence par Chandon Brut Réserve 15+
Only 11.7%. Apples but more yeasty than the Miolo. More bready weight. Moderate length. I know everyone says it is good but I was a little disappointed, especially after lugging the bottle around London. (JH)

Miolo sparkling wine, Brazil 14
Intensely appley nose, like pure apple juice. Fresh and firm fruit on palate, bubbles quickly dissipate and a little bitter on the finish.

WHITES

Villa Francioni Sauvignon Blanc 2006 16- Drink young
13.4%
Pale watery white. Complex and intense aromas – both grassy and tropical with an overlay of clean fresh citrus. On the palate, startlingly fresh acidity (natural??) and very intense. Very impressive for Brazil SB but maybe just a little bit sweet on the aftertaste (to balance acid). (JH)

Villa Francioni Chardonnay Lote 1 blend of 04 and 05 (as per back label) 16- 2007–08
13% Very pale gold. Quite oaky on the nose but in a tight burgundian rather than fat NW way. Powerful, perhaps a touch harsh, but intense pure citrus fruit sings out under the oak. Good length. Impressive. (JH)