

Filipa Pato, Ensaios | FP 2007 Vinho Regional Beiras

13 Aug 2008 by Julia Harding MW

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Ensaios means 'experiments' in Portuguese but this wine seems less an experiment – with possible connotations of a work in progress - than the accomplished result of experiment and persistent refinement.

It's a 50/50 blend of two Portuguese white grape varieties, Arinto and Bical. Between 30 and 50 per cent of the juice is fermented in used oak barrels that hold 500-600 litres (that's more than twice the size of the typical Bordeaux or Burgundy barrel), depending on the vintage. This means that the oak influence is very restrained and felt more in the gently creamy texture of the wine than in the flavour, enhancing the naturally creamy characteristic of Bical grown in a good location. This textural complexity is increased by stirring the yeast lees of the wine, both for the batches that are fermented in oak and for those fermented in temperature-controlled stainless steel tanks. In addition to this creaminess there is a very attractive fine grain that comes from leaving the Arinto skins in contact with the juice for a short time prior to fermentation. (I've started to notice an increasingly indiscriminate over-use of skin contact in white wines in various wine regions but here it is very well judged.)

But the texture is not the main thing, it's more of a platform for the lovely bright fresh fruit flavours: lemon and lime, barely ripe pineapple, a sort of stony minerality and the slightest touch of white flowers and white pepper. It's deliciously pure and fresh, thanks especially to Arinto's crisp acidity, with lots of character without being too quirky – another example of some of the terrific whites being produced in Portugal at the moment (see also Jancis's recent [Wine of the Week](#) and my article earlier this year on [Portugal's hugely distinctive whites](#)). And it's a cool 12.5% alcohol.

Filipa Pato, daughter of the revered Bairrada winemaker Luís Pato (possibly best known for his championing of the local Baga grape variety), says she has inherited her father's passion for wine and especially for Portuguese grape varieties. She believes in the essential complementarity of tradition and innovation that is the reward of an open mind.

Although she loved the vineyards and the fermentation aromas that surrounded her as a child, she was not sure whether she wanted to be a winemaker, so she studied chemical engineering at Coimbra University. However, after internships at Ch Cantenac Brown in Bordeaux, Finca Flichman in Mendoza and Leeuwin Estate in Western Australia, Filipa returned to Portugal in 2001 to make wine in the Beiras region. One thing you pick up immediately when you talk to her is an intense curiosity and a constant thirst to exchange ideas and taste wines from around the world.

The experiments referred to in the name Ensaios involve an ongoing investigation of the vines in specific vineyard sites (looking at sunlight, soil type and the influence of surrounding forests) and the wines they produce. Filipa rents vineyards from local farmers and believes that after five years they are starting to show their potential. She has also been one of the first producers in Portugal to experiment with cryoextraction, ie freezing grapes as a way of concentrating the flavours. But as she says on her [website](#), 'Although I admit being fascinated by the new technology applied to oenology, the connection with good old tradition is stronger. I exclusively work with Portuguese varieties, I ferment and mature the red wines in oak vats and this vintage I'm experimenting with the use of chestnut wood (traditional wood used in the region).'

Filipa's husband William, a 5th-generation restaurateur from Antwerp and crazy about wine, opened a wine bar called Pazzo in that city 10 years ago. To help fund their constant travelling between Belgium and Portugal, in 2007 they started a wine project called Vinhos Doidos ('crazy wines'), producing two very different white wines. **Bossa 2007 Bairrada** (short for Bossanova because they met in South America!), made from Maria Gomez grapes and especially designed for partying, is straightforward, deliciously refreshing and the sort of wine I would kill for at most parties or by the glass in a pub. **Nossa 2007 Vinho Regional Bairas**, made in very small quantities, is completely different. It's a blend of their favourite white varieties – Encruzado from Dão and Bical from Bairrada – and has terrific length and intensity along with flavours of citrus, apricots and dusty stones. Very well balanced and less than 13% alcohol.

Filipa summarises her approach very simply: 'We make wines for drinking not for tasting.'

In the UK, the wine is available from Clark Foyster Wines, London (020 8567 3731), Philglas and Swiggot, London (020 7924 4494), Cambridge Wine Merchants (01954 214528), Andrew Darwin Wines, Kington, Herefordshire (01544

230534).

Around the world, the wines are available from the following importers; contact them for further details:

New York: [IPO](#) (Ibañez Plevén Offerings)

Belgium: [Wijnhuis Jeuris](#)

Poland: [Atlantika](#)

Japan: [Kinoshita International](#)

Brasil: [Porto a Porto](#)

Portugal: [Decante Vinhos](#)

Austria: Taubenkobel Restaurant

Spain: [Vinos Dulces](#)

Germany: [O Vinho Portugal Import](#) (email info@ovinho.de)

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