

Barbeito 10 Year Old Sercial Madeira

24 May 2012 by Jancis Robinson

From €20.50, £18.75, HK\$310, 48.30 Swiss francs, 2,144 roubles

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This week's bft, London's third annual Big Fortified Tasting, was a joy. Possibly partly because I thought it ended 30 minutes later than it did, so I had less prolonged and punishing exposure to these potent ferments than I had planned.

The brainchild of Danny Cameron of Raymond Reynolds and Ben (cousin of Symingtons) Campbell-Johnston, the event gets better and better. The British market, or at least the more, hem, hem, traditional sector of it, is no stranger to the delights of port, sherry and madeira. But there were many younger tasters at the event, quite rightly marvelling at the quality of what they were being shown. And at this year's version we had the chance to compare these European archetypes with wines from Marsala, Setubal, Roussillon, South Africa, California and Australia.

After my recent total immersion in [Jerez's](#) and [Rutherglen's](#) finest, I gave the sherries and Australians a miss, but it would have been good to taste the carefully renamed non-ports from South Australia and De Bortoli of Riverina.

I did whizz through a few Roussillon wines and some eye-openers from the Cape before devoting most of what little time I had to madeira (on the basis that I tend to see ports much more often).

What a pleasure it was! Not least because the dominant company Blandy's really seems to have the bit between its teeth and has launched a very precise, smartly packaged range of varietal colheitas from the 1995 and 1996 harvests which are very fine indeed - as they should be at almost £50 a half litre. Definitely worth looking out for though. See my tasting notes on 16 [Marvellous madeiras](#).

But the established star of this atmospheric Atlantic island (currently suffering from a terrible winter drought) is Vinhos Barbeito, whose super-pure, almost crystalline wines are made by the gifted Ricardo de Freitas. Of the four mainstream classical styles - Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malmsey - Sercial is the lightest and driest and, along with a great Fino or Manzanilla sherry, is one of the most energising, appetising drinks in the world. Sercial and Barbeito seem like a marriage made in heaven and indeed **Barbeito 10 Year Old Sercial Madeira** tastes heavenly. My tasting note: 'Peachy pale tawny. Racy with that wonderful purity and acidity, yet heady and with massive depth of fruit. Tense, serious, complex. A marvel really. Only just off dry, this would make a fabulous aperitif.' I gave it, a possibly characteristically stingy, 17 points out of 20.

Berry Bros, whose image I have used above, is an enthusiastic retailer of the wine around the world and I'd like to share the tasting note of the relevant buyer Simon Field MW: 'Driest of the styles, yet one which manages to combine, with effortless whimsy, a certain intellectual formality with a broad luxuriant structure.'

For both whimsy and intellectual formality as well as the quality and age of the wine, and for the fact that it will keep in an opened bottle for months if you let it, this wine in its 75cl bottle is certainly not overpriced, and it seems to be very widely distributed round the world. Winesearcher lists stockists in UK, Ireland, France, Portugal, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Russia, Lithuania and even Trinidad and Tobago where I'm sure the high acidity of this wine makes it especially refreshing. I just have to hope that the wine available in all those markets is the same but I have the highest regard for the fastidiousness of de Freitas.

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