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DISCOVERY TASTE: Vinho Verde

Susanna Forbes

Thought Vinho Verde was solely spritz and zest? Think again. Portugal's green and pleasant north-western corner is broadening its repertoire. These six wineries, none of which yet has a UK importer, impressed at this year's Best of Vinho Verde competition.

QUINTA DE COVELA, BAIÃO

Brit Tony Smith and Brazilian Marcelo Lima have invested some €1m in this estate on Vinho Verde's south-eastern border with the Douro region since rescuing it post bankruptcy. Their first step was to hire back the original team, including winemaker Rui Cunha.

The first white vintage of the modern era came through in 2012. Further plots of Avesso and Chardonnay have been planted and the 2013 harvest will see the arrival of a rosé.

- Vineyards: 16ha
 - Key grapes: Avesso, Arinto, Touriga Nacional
 - Look out for: Escolha Branco 2012, with its textured, complex palate
- www.covela.pt, Tony.Smith,tony@covela.pt

SOLAR DE SERRADE, MONÇÃO

The estate, with its south-facing vines near the river Minho, was bought in the early 1970s by owner Adriano Alves's father. While the flagship Solar de Serrade white was already well known, the arrival of consultant winemaker António Sousa two years ago has given the portfolio a lift, with more sophisticated white vinification techniques, new blends and new wines.

- Vineyards: 30ha
 - Key grapes: Alvarinho, Trajadura,
 - Look out for: Solar de Serrade, Alvarinho Macerado Pelicular 2012 - a new wine with a floral bouquet and food-friendly palate
- www.solardeerrade.pt, Adriano.Alves,solardeerrade@hotmail.com

PROVAM, MONÇÃO

Purposely sticking to just Alvarinho and Trajadura, winemaker José Domingos says Provam's sourcing policy, drawing on the variety of soils and exposures, adds complexity. Vinification temperatures are deliberately kept low, resulting in bright, fresh aromas.

A Parcel do Fidalgo vertical tasting at



The fertile Vinho Verde region is bordered by the Minho, the Douro and the Atlantic

- Area under vine: 21,000ha
- Volume produced: 18.5m litres, 86% white
- Key white varieties: the aromatic trio, Alvarinho, Loureiro and Trajadura, but look for elegant, lemony Arinto, orange/peach influenced Avesso and fresh, citrusy Azal.
- Sub-regions: nine. Monção and Melgaço in the north are the heartland of Alvarinho.
- Proportion exported: 37% in 2012, up from 15% in 2002
- Markets: 96 countries; US, Germany and France are the top three markets; UK is no 8.
- Average yield: 4,000kg/ha

the winery illustrated how well Alvarinho can age, with the "cracking" 2007 offering exotic fruit on the nose and honeyed peaches on the palate.

- Vineyards: 12ha, buying in 2012
- Key grapes: Alvarinho, Trajadura
- Look out for: Varanda do Conde 2012 - a food-friendly, Alvarinho/Trajadura blend with tropical fruit salad and mineral notes

www.gromm.com, John.Harpers,commerc@tdgromm.com

CASA DE VELACETINHO, AMARANTE

Still under 30, the Maia brothers José and João cut a youthful dash at the helm of their family estate in Amarante.

The last six years have seen a focus on textured, single varietals alongside the original range. In the 2012 Best of Vinho Verde, the brothers scored a trophy for their Loureiro and the Gold in the Azal category. More Azal and Loureiro are being planted.

- Vineyards: 30ha
- Key grapes: Arinto, Avesso, Azal, Loureiro
- Look out for: Casa de Velacinhos,

Arinto 2012 - floral, zesty delivery and a complex fruit palate

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QUINTA DOS CARAPEÇOS, AMARANTE

The first to plant Alvarinho outside its heartland further north 22 years ago, the Pereira de Almeida family was also the first to produce a late harvest wine in 2009.

The estate's inland location allows winemaker Jorge Sousa Pinto to create slightly higher alcohol levels from his wines. He crafts age-worthy, textured Alvarinhos and lightly effervescent Vinhos Verdes, and also the worthy entry-level Vinho das Mesas in both white and red.

- Vineyards: 20ha
- Key grapes: Alvarinho, Trajadura, Espadeiro
- Look out for: Quinta dos Carapeços, Escolha 2012 - a textured, spicy Alvarinho from riper fruit, pair-aged in barrels

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VALES DE AMBRIËS, AMARANTE

The zesty Vales de Ambriës wines with floral notes and orchard flavours are worth seeking out, despite the lack of a website.

The 20-year-old estate's wines went up a gear when consultant António Sousa joined three years ago. He has already introduced single varietal wines, more Avesso is being planted, and there's talk of a rosé.

- Vineyards: 20ha
- Key grapes: Avesso, Arinto, Trajadura
- Look out for: Vales de Ambriës Avesso 2012 - the owner's favourite grape

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You can read Susanna's article in full at: Harpers.co.uk