

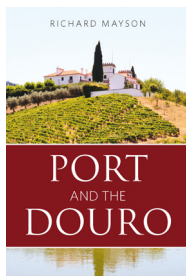


RICHARD MAYSON'S GUIDE TO

VINTAGE PORT

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VINTAGE
PORT



This directory was extracted from *Port and the Douro*, the fourth and thoroughly revised edition of Richard Mayson's authoritative but accessible study of the world of Port and Douro wines. The new edition provides an incomparable insight into the history of Port and the area from which it originates. Including a great deal of new information on the cultivation of the Douro's vineyards, along with a thorough account of how the wine is produced and matured, *Port and the Douro* is an unrivalled companion for everyone interested in fine wines. The first edition was short-listed for the André Simon Award and the second edition won the Symington Award of Excellence. This new edition is part of a series of major works on wines and spirits.

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VINTAGE PORT

Although vintage Port only accounts for a tiny fraction of total shipments, for most shippers it represents the very pinnacle of production. The British-owned shippers in particular have built (and sometimes destroyed) their individual reputations on the back of vintage Port. In spite of the reluctance of some Portuguese-owned firms to embrace vintage Port in the same way, this category has become a flagship for the entire trade.

All the approbation that surrounds vintage Port belies the fact that it is one of the most straightforward of all Ports to produce. Wines from a single year are bottled, without treatment or filtration, after spending a maximum of two years ageing in bulk. The skill in producing a vintage Port is in the selection of the *lotes* made from the finest grapes, picked at optimum ripeness after a successful growing season. To a certain extent this is predetermined as most shippers know their own *quintas* intimately, as well as those belonging to their long-term suppliers. Many of the most successful vintage Ports are therefore based on grapes from the same plots of vines in the same properties, year after year. The grapes need to be very well worked during vinification, usually either foot trodden in *lagar* and/or

subject to mechanical extraction by piston plunging or robotic treading. After the harvest these Ports are put to one side and monitored as potential vintage *lotes*. The wines have traditionally been kept in large wooden vats (*balseiros*) in order to prevent undue oxidative ageing, but since the microbiological scare of the mid-1980s a number of shippers have resorted to using stainless steel. As one well-known shipper of vintage Port remarked, 'handling and hygiene are more important than the material from which the vessel is made'.

Under the rules set out by the IVDP, the shippers have up to two years to decide whether to 'declare' the wine as vintage. As most of the major shippers have premises cheek by jowl with each other in Vila Nova de Gaia, there is inevitably a certain amount of debate about the overall quality of the harvest and the weekly Wednesday lunch at the Factory House is often a forum for discussion. But contrary to received opinion, declaration is an independent decision taken by the shipper and one that isn't made lightly. More often than not there is a natural consensus but there are a number of examples of so-called 'split declarations' where some of the principal shippers have opted for one year and others have plumped for another. Recent examples include 2009 (when Taylor, Fonseca and Croft surprised the trade with their declaration) and 1991–1992. There is no law of averages about the regularity of vintage declarations but, as a rule of thumb, three or four years are declared in a decade. Expectation mounts when there are long gaps between declarations as happened, for example, between 1985 and 1991.

The size of a declaration will depend upon the year and the market. Some shippers used to be very cagey about

revealing the information but expect a major shipper to declare between 8,000 and 15,000 cases of vintage Port. However Noval, whose wines have been on top form since the 1994 vintage, sometimes declare 1,000 cases or less. Warre declared just 500 cases of the 2009 vintage. To put vintage Port into context, it is worth pointing out that whereas the top twenty chateaux in Bordeaux make about 600,000 cases a year between them, the top ten Port shippers declare perhaps 90,000 cases every three years.

Vintage Port is often thought of as a time-honoured tradition and the shippers can be quite affronted when they are accused of changing the wine to suit the market. But with the benefit of hindsight and repeated tasting, it is fair to say that vintage Port went through a fundamental stylistic change after 1970 and up to 1994. This should not be too much of a surprise for the interim vintages (1975, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1985, 1991 and 1992) coincided with a period of profound socio-economic change in Portugal. Over-production in the vineyard, a shortage of labour and changes in methods of vinification all had an impact on vintage Port. Handling was not given top priority and the problems began to manifest themselves in the 1985 vintage (see page 49). Some shippers deliberately ceased to prioritise vintage Port during this period, preferring to build up bigger brands for the mass market. From 1975 to 1992 inclusive, there was an overall dip in quality; although some outstanding wines were still produced, there are many wines from leading shippers that do not have the same longevity as in earlier vintages.

Against this, with the steady investment in vinification that has taken place since the early 1980s, the production of high quality Port is much less hit and miss than it was. Unless the harvest happens to be a washout (as in 1993 and 2002),

wines of potential vintage quality can now be made every year. The shippers have consequently been faced with a dilemma of how to market wines from good interim years without undermining or diluting the reputation of a fully declared vintage. In the past, a certain amount of wine that was good but not quite up to vintage standard was bottled as crusted Port, usually accompanied by both the date of harvest and bottling. Since the late 1960s, the collective solution to this problem has either been to declare wines under a second label (Fonseca Guimaraens, for example) or, more commonly, to bottle a single-*quinta* vintage Port (SQVP).

The Port and Douro Wine Institute (IVDP) treats second label and SQVPs in exactly the same way as fully declared vintage Ports. In order to obtain approval for the description 'vintage', a sample of the wine must be submitted to the Institute between 1 January and 30 September in the second year after the harvest. The quantity must be registered and, pending its approval by the *Câmara de Provadores* (tasting panel), a current account will duly be opened for the wine. Approval from the tasting panel used to be a rubber-stamping exercise but a number of shippers have been taken aback when their wines were rejected and samples had to be resubmitted. Following a change in the law that accompanied the 2000 vintage declaration, the wines may be bottled as soon as they have been officially approved. Consequently most shippers are now bottling earlier than in the past, avoiding the summer heat. Vintage Port may now be bottled at any time until 31 July in the third year after the harvest. The wines may be shipped at any time after 1 May of the second year.

UK BOTTLING OF VINTAGE PORT

There is considerable bottle variation between different bottlings of the same wine from vintages prior to and including 1970, when vintage Port was frequently shipped in pipe and bottled by individual UK wine merchants. Although UK bottling was often better than that in Portugal, it was not unknown for a wine to languish in wood for an extra year or more thereby increasing the amount of oxidative maturation and changing the character of the wine. There are some who say this was for the better as the delay helped to stabilise colour. There was also a tradition in the UK to roll the pipe of wine before bottling, thereby mixing up the sediment so that it was evenly shared between bottles. However, unscrupulous merchants were also free to stretch the blend with a generous slug of young ruby, although I have absolutely no proof of anyone doing so. I have long wanted to take a single declared Port from, say, the 1963 or 1966 vintage, and compare bottles from different UK merchants with the same wine bottled by the shipper in Vila Nova de Gaia.

Once a vintage Port has been bottled, it continues to develop and evolve over a period of fifteen to twenty years or more before it is considered ready to drink. Rather like the seven ages of man, the wine enjoys a short, fragrant bloom of youth before it shuts down and endures ten, even fifteen years of surly, spotty adolescence. Then it slowly begins to emerge as a fully fledged adult, gaining stature and *gravitas* until the Port reaches its peak, often at around twenty or thirty years of age. For the finest vintage Ports the peak becomes a long

plateau. Old age need not be reached for eighty or more years, as I found when I tasted a bottle of Taylor's 1912 at Roy and Doreen Hersh's Port weekend in Seattle in 2003. It still had a fabulous rosy freshness about it and was happily alive at the age of 91. Throughout the ageing process, vintage Port slowly softens and sheds its colour, forming a 'crust' of sediment on the inside of the bottle. This means that all vintage Ports need decanting, a procedure that is a deterrent to some but is in fact just as easy as the wines are to drink.

The accepted practice in the British market of 'laying down' vintage Port to mature has been confounded by the Americans who, perhaps because of a familiarity with strapping Californian Cabernet, are prepared to broach their vintage Ports almost as soon as they have been shipped. A young vintage Port can be extremely satisfying (if mouth-numbingly tannic) and one shipper has proved to me that it can be a good match for a green-pepper steak, but I remain firmly of the opinion that it is worth waiting fifteen, twenty years or more for a classic vintage to develop and mature in bottle. A few shippers have introduced early maturing wines to meet the demands of the powerful North American market, but the majority have resisted the temptation to change the style of their wines. From tasting and re-tasting recent declared vintages like 2000 and 1997, both produced with the North American market on the ascendant, I am convinced the principal shippers are standing their ground and making vintage Port, just as they always have, for the long term. In fact, there are a number of shippers with, by their own admission, little or no reputation for great vintage Port who are now succeeding in making some classic wines.

By the very nature of the category, there is no excuse for poor quality vintage Port – but there is a considerable

variation between the great, the good and, just occasionally, the bad and the ugly as well. Individual shippers and different vintages have their own character and style, which puts some in the premier league while others fall below par.

A GUIDE TO VINTAGES

The following guide to Port vintages takes each year in turn, noting relevant weather conditions, market considerations and the overall style of the wines, and highlights particularly successful shippers. I have assessed each and every year back to 1960, which roughly coincides with the emergence of single-*quinta* vintage Port (SQVP) in between fully fledged declarations. Prior to this, only the more prominent (declared) vintages are listed. As you go back in time records inevitably become rather scanty, partly because my own experience begins in the early 1980s and contemporary vintage reports have either been lost or are nothing like as comprehensive as they are today. I am particularly grateful to the late Bruce Guimaraens, David Guimaraens and the Symington family for access to vintage reports.

KEY

As an indication of overall quality, each year is rated with stars (up to a maximum of five):

- ***** an outstanding vintage
- **** very good, some outstanding wines
- *** good all-round vintage
- ** an average year; wines generally sound but unexciting
- * generally indifferent

No stars poor

2015 *****? An outstanding year with a vintage declaration in prospect

Wet weather at the end of 2014 set the vineyards up for a dry growing season. Fortunately the rain that did fall in 2015 came in May and June and was steady and prolonged, which helped to replenish the water table rather than run off the vineyards in torrents into the river as often happens at that time of year. However the period between March and June was the hottest for thirty-six years, which led to an exceptionally early flowering and veraison. Temperatures of over 40°C were recorded on several days in late June and early July. Thereafter the summer was relatively cool without any of the heatwaves that can shrivel the grapes close to harvest. With the grapes in excellent condition by early September, picking began earlier than normal. Then the tail end of Hurricane Henri blew in from the Atlantic on 15/16 September, rekindling memories of the previous year. But the grapes were in a good state to survive the dousing and cool, clear weather returned, lasting until 4 October. Paul Symington wrote that 'the Nacional and Franca picked during the weeks of 21 and 28 September were of simply extraordinary quality, as were some of the old mixed plantings'. At the time of writing it is too early to assess the quality of the wines but comparisons have already been made with 2011. I would be surprised if there was not a general vintage declaration in the spring of 2017.

2014 ** / *** A challenging growing season followed by a stop-start harvest.

Welcome rain fell during the winter of 2013–14 after a very dry growing season the previous year. Spring was mild and budburst was early but the weather remained unsettled

through the early part of the summer, with some vineyards suffering localized hail damage. Many vineyards suffered from outbreaks of oidium. In early July an unusually heavy rainstorm caused severe erosion and many farm tracks were blocked by rock falls. The remaining summer months were mild but with the early budburst, picking began as early 11 September in parts of the Cima Corgo. But shortly after harvest began the heavens opened and vintage became a stop-start affair for the next two weeks. Many growers were fearful about quality. Jorge Moreira, wine maker at Quinta de la Rosa commented, 'when I started working in the Douro fifteen years ago, a year like this would have resulted in a mass of powdery mildew. The boxes of grapes would have given off a cloud of white powder when they arrived in the winery.' I recall years like that (1993 springs immediately to mind) but thankfully, with improved vineyard management, on the whole grapes reached the winery in good condition. In general 2014 seems to have turned out rather better than expected, especially as the rainfall was uneven across the region. However the Baixo Corgo, which bore the brunt of the rain, was largely a write-off. It is likely that some small quantities of single quinta vintage port will be declared in the spring of 2016. Expect wines for early/mid-term drinking.

2013 ***/**** Vintage interrupted by rain: excellent wines from the Douro Superior

After two exceptionally dry years, the winter of 2012–13 was very wet, with the heaviest rainfall recorded in March, which helped to restore ground water levels prior to the growing season. The spring was cooler than average and the growing season was slow to start but by early summer the vines looked exceptionally healthy after all the winter rain. Almost no rain

at all fell in June, July and August and, although there were periods of intense heat, the summer was only marginally warmer than average. Nonetheless there were damaging forest fires all over Portugal. At the start of September grape maturation was still ten days behind the norm and picking only began around 12th in the Douro Superior and 23rd in the Cima Corgo. For the next five days the weather was perfect and some very fine wines were made. Then on 27 September a deep depression blew in from the Atlantic, and it rained on and off for six days. From 4 October the fine weather returned and a cooling wind dried out the vines and top soil. The fine weather continued until 19 October, by which time most of the harvest was in. The September rain forced some to pick earlier than planned with Touriga Franca being the main variety affected. Nonetheless, shippers produced small quantities of excellent wine, making this a good single quinta Port vintage, especially in the Douro Superior, which was spared from most of the September rain. Luís Sottomayor, chief winemaker for Sandeman and Ferreira summed up the year when he said 'we narrowly missed out on an exceptional vintage'.

Pick of the Vintage: Quinta do Noval; Dow's Quinta Senhora da Ribeira; Sandeman's Quinta do Seixo

2012 ***/** A challenging year helped by naturally low yields.

The year began with an abnormally dry winter, without any effective winter rain falling between January and the beginning of April. Then timely rain fell in April and May, just as the vines were undergoing flowering and fruit set. This inevitably led to a year of low yields. There was a short

burst of intense heat over the weekend of São João (24 June), at exactly the same time as in 2011. The remainder of the summer was warm and dry without any of the extreme heat that causes the grapes to shrivel and raisinise on the vine. A virulent hailstorm swept though the upper Pinhão Valley and across to São João de Pesqueira on 25 July, devastating some vineyards. After the relatively cool July and August picking commenced later than usual in the Douro Superior but began as normal in the Cima Corgo, around 20 September, when the weather was still hot. Heavy rain fell a few days later bringing much cooler temperatures to the region and the most quality conscious producers suspended picking until the end of the month to allow sugars to concentrate. Fortunately cool, clear conditions returned in October and the rest of the harvest took place in near perfect conditions. Yields were down by as much as 50 per cent in some vineyards, producing wines with good aromatic intensity. Following the universal and well-received declaration of the 2011 vintage, most shippers opted to declare small quantities of single quinta wine in the spring of 2014. Highlighting the relatively cool summer David Guimaraens, head winemaker for the Fladgate Partnership, described the wines as ‘having crisp acidity and remarkable purity of fruit.’ I have not had the opportunity to taste many 2012s as yet but I would suggest that this is a year that will be pleasurable to drink in its relative youth and over the medium term, from 2020 onwards.

Pick of the vintage: Quinta do Noval; Fonseca Guimaraens

2011 ***** challenging year; outstanding wines for the long haul

There were smiles on the faces of winemakers at the end of

the 2011 harvest, although growers had bitten their fingernails to the quick. The spring began with good water reserves deep in the Douro subsoil and the vines (especially the old vines) weathered the summer drought of 2011 relatively well. But there was unstable weather during flowering that caused an outbreak of fungal disease and reduced yields by around 15%. This was followed by unusual heat towards the end of June (over the holiday weekend of São João) when some vineyards were literally scorched by the power of the sun. The thin-skinned Tinta Barroca grape fared badly where as the heat-resistant Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca did much better. July and most of August were relatively cool and windy but dry. Heavy but welcome rain fell on 21 August and again at the beginning of September, allowing Baumés to fall and grapes to ripen evenly. A seemingly early vintage was delayed as a result. Thereafter the sun shone non-stop for five weeks and harvest conditions were perfect throughout the region. Temperatures at the start of vintage were hotter than normal so cooling the musts proved to be essential. Aromas in the *adeiga* were wonderful right from the start (always the sign of a promising vintage) and good wines were made from the beginning to the end of harvest. By early October it was already clear that a good, possibly great Port vintage was in the bag. As António Agrellos, Technical Director of Noval, said 'we knew at once that we were potentially in the presence of a great year'.

The wines were universally declared early in 2013 and the early tastings showed some outstanding wines, characterised by their structure, ripeness and wonderful purity of fruit. The ripeness of the fruit extends to the tannins that, in the best wines, are broad as well as fine-grained. Some wines are four-square (much more so than the 2007s) but not aggressive, even at this early stage. And then there is that

wonderful purity of fruit. I found myself using the word ‘minerality’ in my tasting notes for the first time for Port, not just because it is fashionable but because the schistous terrior of the Douro really is there to see. João Nicolau de Almeida of Ramos Pinto supports this commenting that ‘the better aguardente (i.e. grape spirit) brings minerality to the wine.’ This is undoubtedly a great vintage: some compare it to another 1963 whereas others mention 1994. But I rather concur with Dirk Niepoort who likens 2011 to a blend of 2007 and 2009, the purity and definition of the former with the ripeness of the latter (see pages 21 and 18). Anyone born in 2011 probably has a wine for life.

It was a year when many of the major houses also declared small quantities of what I term ‘site-specific’ wines from a few plots of vines within an estate (see pick of the vintage below). These wines are mostly very impressive, have collectable value and are on sale for a much higher price than the mainstream house declaration. But 2011 was also a year when a dark cloud hung over many smaller growers. In response to both over-production and a decline in sales, the IVDP cut the Port *benefício* to 85,000 pipes, a 25 per cent reduction on the previous year. This, together with the huge amount of planting that has taken place in the Douro Superior, left some independent growers without a market for their grapes.

Pick of the vintage: Fonseca; Graham; Graham’s The Stone Terraces; Quinta do Noval; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Taylor; Taylor’s Quinta de Vargellas Vinha Velha; Warre.

2010 ** / *** an uneven year

The winter of 2010 brought a deluge of rain after three very dry years. At Pinhão the rainfall total from October to March was

50 per cent above average. Despite considerable soil erosion and costly damage to stone walls in the vineyards, the winter rainfall proved vital as there was no rain at all for eight weeks in July and August. With a heavy yield on the vines, grapes struggled to ripen. Temperatures in August were hot with a daily maximum in excess of 35°C and photosynthesis was brought to a halt. Older vines with root systems penetrating to 25 metres and more fared much better than younger vineyards. Some welcome rain fell at the start of September and picking was generally delayed by a week or so throughout the region. For the quality conscious, it was a stop-start harvest with an extra wait for some varieties (especially the Tourigas) to ripen. Fortunately for those who took the risk, the weather remained fine through to early October when some heavy rain fell on the 3rd. But the weather quickly improved and the grapes from the higher C/D grade vineyards were picked in near perfect, disease-free condition. At Quinta do Noval, where yields were double those of 2009, the harvest lasted from the end of August until late October. Overall, 2010 produced some good but at times unbalanced wines due to uneven ripening. The best wines were produced by the old vines able to withstand the summer heat and drought and these should provide the basis for some powerful single-*quinta* wines.

2009 **** an unusual split declaration, some very ripe opulent wines

Following a very dry winter (the third in a row), the growing season began early and stayed ahead of normal all the way through to an early harvest. Unsettled weather in April and May reduced yields throughout the region and June brought welcome rain. Early July was relatively cool but the heat built up to a peak of 40°C plus at the end of the

month and continued through August. No rain fell before harvest, which began as early as the end of August in the Douro Superior. Here, yields were down by as much as 40 per cent and low-lying vineyards suffered from the summer heat with high sugar readings and dehydrated yet under-ripe grapes. The thermometer was still touching 40°C on 9 and 10 September when many *quintas* were already picking. Sugar readings were high, especially Tinta Barroca which was heavily raisinised in places; Churchill registered a *lagar* of Barroca at 20 degrees Baumé that was so raisinised that the treaders could walk on top of it, and the average sugar reading in the *lagares* at Churchill's Quinta da Gricha gave a potential alcohol of 17.5% by volume! Tinta Roriz and Touriga Nacional both fared much better, with many of the best-quality grapes coming from higher altitudes than normal. I arrived in the Douro on 18 September (our vintage in the Alentejo already concluded) to find healthy, disease-free grapes already being picked at around 450 metres altitude under clear skies. The fine, warm weather continued nearly to the end of harvest when a heavy storm blew over the Serra do Marão. On 6 and 7 October more rain fell than in any month since January.

The prospect of a good single-*quinta* vintage was on the cards right from the outset but the trade was taken completely by surprise when the Fladgate Partnership announced an outright declaration of Taylor, Fonseca and Croft on St George's Day 2011. The other Port shippers had absolutely no inkling of their impending declaration. Fladgate were joined in their declaration by Barros, Cruz, Dalva, Delaforce, Krohn, Messias, Niepoort, Real Companhia Velha, Poças, Rozès, Skeffington and Warre. The latter chose to declare just 500 cases in commemoration

of the 200th anniversary of the liberation of Oporto in which Captain William Warre was awarded Portugal's highest military honour.

The character of the 2009s is in complete contrast to 2007, reflecting the heat of the growing season. Taylor is dense and opulent, Fonseca ripe but more restrained with Croft showing the sweet, plummy succulence that has become a hallmark. Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas Vinha Velha is outstanding: aromatic rather than opulent with ripe berry fruit and rapier-like tannins. The vintage also produced some very fine single-*quinta* wines, namely Dow's Senhora da Ribeira and Quinta do Vesúvio. Opening prices for the fully declared wines were very close to the 2007s.

Pick of the vintage: Taylor; Warre; Cockburn's Quinta dos Canais; Dow's Quinta Sra. da Ribeira, Ramos Pinto, Quinta da Ervamoira.

2008 **** Small harvest, outstanding single-quinta wines
After another very dry winter, April was wet and stormy (with snow over Easter) and May brought more rain. Consequently the flowering was uneven with *desavinho* throughout the region. Apart from a short burst of heat in the second part of July, the summer was cool with westerly winds blowing off the Atlantic. Despite the relatively low yields, the harvest looked set to be late. Charles Symington wrote on 2 September that 'the maturation studies in mid-August showed the lowest readings on record'. After some timely rain early in the month, hot weather brought on rapid maturation. Then the weather turned again and heavy rain fell over the equinox in the western part of the region. The outlook was unstable and growers resigned themselves to

dodging showers for the next two weeks, but the rain stopped and the best grapes were picked under clear skies towards the end of September. Those who panicked and picked too early found themselves with under-ripe grapes. In the three weeks from 23 September to 15 October the weather could not have been better. The grapes were picked in excellent condition, producing wines with good colour and excellent sugar (13.5–14.5 degrees Baumé) and fine acidity.

Apart from Noval who declared outright, 2008 proved to be an excellent single-*quinta* year with a large number of wines released. In general the wines are aromatic yet show restraint, and are characterised by their freshness and purity of fruit combined with firm, structured tannins. In fact the wines are in much the same style as 2007 and the temperatures for the two growing seasons were remarkably similar.

Pick of the Vintage: Quinta do Noval; Fonseca Quinta do Panascal; Taylor's Quinta de Terra Feita; Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos; Churchill Quinta da Gricha; Quinta do Vesúvio; Vista Alegre.

2007 **** / ***** relatively cool growing season, great purity of fruit; widely declared

The widespread declaration of a new vintage immediately evokes comparison with an earlier year but in a quarter of a century of visiting the Douro, I cannot recall a year like it. A good Port vintage is usually thought of as a product of heat (as 2003) but in 2007 the wines were shaped by a long and relatively cool summer.

The winter was wet and even more rain fell in June and July, reducing yields and raising the threat of disease. August was unusually cool. At Quinta do Vale Meão in the hottest part of

the Douro the thermometer never rose above 37°C. 'At the end of August' remarked Johnny Symington, 'no one could see a great vintage in prospect.' Rain in September would have been disastrous (and this was certainly a challenge for growers in the south of Portugal) but the Douro remained dry. The harvest, which started ten days later than usual, finished in mid-October and was the driest since 1985. Charles Symington wrote this on 15 October: 'It is another beautiful clear day with mild temperatures, we have become so used to this type of weather over the last six weeks that we have almost started to take it for granted. One feels very fortunate to have had near perfect conditions throughout this vintage, allowing us to produce some very promising wines.' Vasco Magalhães, speaking for Sogrape (Sandeman, Ferreira and Offley), concluded that 2007 was 'the perfect ripening season'. Dirk Niepoort described the year as 'a dream come true!'

I wrote in *Decanter* at the time of declaration that 'the 2007s have an early vivacity, vibrancy and purity of fruit that I have never seen at this stage before' (although this may also have something to do with *aguardente* – see page 25). The words 'elegance' and 'poise' are words that crop up frequently in my tasting notes, particularly among the best wines which show perfect balance and are supported by fine, tight-knit tannins. This is not an impenetrable, blockbuster, 'black-strap' vintage and there are no stewed, raisiny or pruneey flavours. Ana Rato, winemaker for Ramos Pinto, characterised the aromas of the 2007s as 'romantic'. Most of the wines were very aromatic at the outset and some have a green edge, (characterised in my notes by a floral-hedgerow character on the nose). This manifests itself as leafy greenness in a number of wines that are one-dimensional and under-ripe, a sign that some picked their grapes too early.

TASTING VINTAGE PORT: A CAUTIONARY TALE

At the end of 2008, in an effort to lose some weight, I put myself on a sugar-free diet. It worked, and with the help of a personal trainer I lost 12 kilos in a few weeks, bringing me back to the same weight I was when I graduated from university. But I hadn't accounted for the fact that my palate changed and my taste buds had become much more sugar-sensitive. Tannin also became more bitter. Along came the 2007 vintage declaration in the early months of 2009 and, without realising it at the time, I fear I assessed the vintage incorrectly. Some wines which should have rated highly, didn't. I can only apologise for this and hold it up as a cautionary tale for any wine drinker who decides to change their diet ...

There can be no cry of cynicism with 2007, declared in early 2009 when all the main markets were in deep recession. In a remarkable show of confidence, which wasn't present in 1931 (one of the best years of the past century to have been largely overlooked), over fifty producers declared, including many of the new generation of stand-alone single *quintas*. Some houses, namely Churchill, Cockburn and Ramos Pinto, declared both a single estate and a house wine. Prices were up by around 10 per cent on the 2003 declaration.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Graham; Niepoort; Sandeman; Taylor's Vargellas Vinha Velha; Quinta Dona Matilde; Quinta do Vesúvio.

2006 *** very variable year where terroir made all the difference

After the extreme drought of 2005, heavy winter rain went some way towards replenishing groundwater reserves. The spring was warm and dry, and flowering took place in good conditions. May and early June were dry and hot, except for a severe hailstorm on 14 June that wiped out some vineyards in the Pinhão and Torto valleys. July was very hot with temperatures at Quinta do Vesúvio in the Douro Superior reaching 40°C on all but seven days of the month. Apart from the localised hail damage, grapes were looking very healthy until the start of September when a late burst of heat started to shrivel the grapes on the vine. Young vineyards were badly affected whereas older vines, with their deeper root systems, withstood the extreme conditions.

Picking began in the Douro Superior on 11 September and downstream in the Cima Corgo a week or so later. However, the weather broke on the 13th and more persistent rain fell after the 20th, which took its toll on grapes picked during the latter part of the vintage. As a result, 2006 is very variable in the Douro with the best wines produced from older vineyards at lower altitudes and in the Douro Superior where picking took place earlier. Consequently this was a single-*quinta* vintage, which one shipper summed up as a 'characterless year'. At the time of writing many of the wines are still big and raw with many showing the heat of the vintage. I have not come across any outstanding wines, but 2006 has proved to be an excellent year for ripe, fruit-driven LBVs.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow's Quinta Sra. da Ribeira; Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos; Kopke Quinta São Luíz; Quinta do Vesúvio.

THE ROLE OF *AGUARDENTE* IN VINTAGE PORT

The aguardente or spirit used to fortify Port has changed since the late 1990s. Shippers are now fortifying vintage Ports with much cleaner spirit than used to be the case when they were left with no choice other than to buy the aguardente they were presented with by the government. The 2000 vintage marked the change, but it is probably best manifested in the 2007s with their purity of fruit. The spirit being used to fortify vintage and single-quinta vintage Port has a much more vinous character than in the past. This means that it interferes much less with the fruit in a young wine than the coarse, rather oily spirit of yesteryear. David Guimaraens, head winemaker for the Fladgate Partnership, maintains that the transition from youth to maturity will be much smoother in future, with much less of that awkward adolescent stage that has long been a phase in the evolution of vintage Port.

2005 *** severe drought produced powerful, concentrated wines

The harvest was one of the earliest on record after the driest and warmest growing season in living memory. Just 197mm of rain fell at Pinhão from November 2004 to July 2005 inclusive. The Douro Superior was even drier and there was no significant rainfall at all between November 2004 and August 2005, when three days of rain delayed a particularly early harvest. By this time many outlying villages and *quintas* were without water and had to have it shipped in for vintage. Younger vineyards were showing signs of extreme stress.

Although flowering and fruit set were successful, lack of water produced small berries and limited leaf cover. With heatwaves in June, July and early August, there was a high incidence of raisinisation. Tinta Roriz and Touriga Nacional suffered badly from the heat.

Picking began in the Douro Superior on 22 August, followed by the Cima Corgo on 5 September and the cooler, westernmost Baixo Corgo on 12 September – a good ten days ahead of normal. Rain fell on 6 and 9 September, causing sugar levels to dip for a few days before rising again. The rain was followed by cool clear skies, making this perfect harvest weather. Yields were down significantly on average due to the drought. Despite these challenging conditions, some exuberant concentrated wines were made from the older, more deep-rooted vines. There were also baked and unbalanced wines including some that were both stewed and green. Barros, Cálem, Burmester, Kopke and Niepoort declared outright but the majority of shippers opted for a single-*quinta* vintage. These are generally big, foursquare wines with powerful tannins for drinking over the medium to long term: 2015 to 2030.

Pick of the vintage: Croft Quinta da Roêda; Dow's Quinta Sra. da Ribeira; Fonseca Guimaraens; Kopke; Niepoort; Pintas, Taylor's Quinta de Terra Feita; Quinta do Vesúvio.

2004 *** / **** fine, balanced single-quinta wines

After the extremes of the previous two years, 2004 proved to be more amenable but still not without risk. Wet weather at the end of 2003 was followed by a very dry start to the year when just 147mm of rain fell at Pinhão during the first four months of the year (less than half the ten-year

average). The flowering went well in all three sub-regions but yields were low from the outset, especially Tinta Roriz and Tinta Amarela. July was hot with temperatures reaching 40°C towards the end of the month. Vineyards remained in excellent condition but as August approached (normally the hottest month with no rainfall at all), growers became concerned about how the vines would cope with the low water reserves in the soil. Then the unheard of happened: rain fell on three consecutive days in early August followed by yet more rainfall in the middle of the month. In total, 77mm fell in Pinhão making it the wettest August for 104 years. The weather remained abnormally cool and overcast into September, slowing down the ripening process. When more wet, unsettled weather returned in the first week of September growers faced a major dilemma: start picking under-ripe grapes early before rot set in or hold on in the hope of better weather. Most growers held their nerve and, just in the nick of time, the sunshine returned. Sugar levels rose suddenly, taking many by surprise, and continued to rise as the thermometer topped 30°C.

Picking began around the middle of the month and continued with uninterrupted sunshine. Not a drop of rain fell until 8 October when a deep depression moved in from the Atlantic, by which time the harvest was all but complete. In forty harvests, Peter Symington commented that he had never seen a vintage that could have swung so easily from near disaster to success. With yields down slightly on the previous year, the overriding feature of 2004 is the balance of the musts. With two good harvests in the bag, the shippers had plenty of work in the tasting room to decide which year(s) to declare. At the outset, Sophia Bergqvist of Quinta de la Rosa commented that

'the overall quality may be higher than 2003 although we might not have achieved the highest levels of 2003'. Quinta do Noval chose to declare both 2003 and 2004 (the latter an 'eccentric declaration' according to Christian Seely, Managing Director of AXA Millésimes who own Noval), with all the other major shippers going down the single-*quinta* route in 2004. These are impressive wines: balanced, well-structured and complete. Eccentric or not, Quinta do Noval 2004 is outstanding and should be ready in 2022. Drink the SQVPs from 2016 onwards.

Pick of the Vintage: Croft Quinta da Roêda; Dow's Quinta Sra. da Ribeira; Fonseca Quinta do Panascal; Quinta do Noval; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Quinta de la Rosa; Taylor's Vargellas Vinha Velha; Quinta do Vesúvio; Quinta do Vale Meão.

2003 **** / ***** very hot summer: ripe opulent wines, generally declared

The Douro is accustomed to heat, but 2003 brought complaints from even the most seasoned of the region's inhabitants. Fortunately the growing season was preceded by a very wet winter with 1000mm of rainfall registered between November and March at Pinhão. Bud burst occurred in the second half of March and flowering took place in the last ten days of May amid, calm stable weather. The first blast of extreme heat came in mid-June. In the Douro Superior the thermometer rose to 48°C and some fledgling bunches of grapes began to show *queima* (burn). There was a month or so of respite before a period of sustained heat between the end of July and mid-August when temperatures rose above 40°C on a daily basis throughout the region. Temperatures

stayed abnormally high through the night, with a minimum temperature of 33°C at Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas. Welcome rain at the end of August did not reach the Douro Superior where, despite the heat, most vineyards did not suffer visibly from stress due to the previous wet winter. But the hot weather brought maturation to a standstill and at the beginning of September sugar readings were still surprisingly low. As always, the younger vineyards suffered the most and when the berries began to shrivel on the vine, some growers had to start picking before the grapes were physiologically ripe. In the easterly Douro Superior, the harvest began as early as 1 September and Taylor's began picking at São Xisto on 8 September, about a week earlier than normal. Picking began in the Cima Corgo around 15 September and was underway throughout the region by the 26th. In the intervening period, Baumés rose rapidly with Tinta Barroca (the sweetest of the Port grapes) registering 16 degrees plus (I heard of one *lagar* of raisinised fruit with a potential alcohol content of 19).

The high Baumés took many growers by surprise and there were worries about the high pH, particularly in Tinta Roriz which produced large quantities in 2003. Touriga Franca and Touriga Nacional produced much better, more balanced wines. The fine, abnormally warm weather continued until 29 September when rain swept in from the Atlantic. The high ambient temperatures gave problems for those without sufficient temperature control and many *lagares* consequently took little work before they were run off and fortified. Carefully controlled fermentations produced wines with deep colour, plenty of fruit and high levels of tannin. For Croft, now under the ownership of the Fladgate Partnership, this was the first vintage to be foot trodden in

lagar since 1963. At the end of vintage David Guimaraens, winemaker for the Fladgate Partnership, described 2003 as 'a textbook year for good Port production'. It was no surprise when a general declaration was made in the spring of 2005. Despite the substantial size of the harvest, the quantities declared were generally smaller than 2000. At the time of writing many of the 2003s are going through a generally rather sullen stage and some wines seem rather stewed, jammy and clumsy. It remains to be seen how this vintage will re-emerge in ten years but, judging by my early tasting notes, 2003 should have produced some very impressive, powerful long-lived wines.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Ferreira; Fonseca; Graham; Niepoort; Quinta do Noval; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Ramos Pinto; Quinta de Roriz; Smith Woodhouse; Warre.

2002 ** near-perfect growing season, ruined by rain during harvest

There were high hopes of a fine harvest in 2002. The previous winter had been dry but cold, thereby killing off the spores and insects that lurk in the vineyards. The Pinhão river froze over at Christmas. The cold weather resulted in a late bud burst and the dry conditions led to a year of low vigour right from the start. The weather was fine during flowering and Touriga Nacional, a variety notoriously susceptible to *coulure*, produced well. Sogrape (owners of Ferreira and Offley) resorted to a green harvest of Touriga Nacional for the first time ever. The weather continued to be fine, warm and dry through the summer but without any of the extreme heat that burns and shrivels the grapes on the vine. Rain over the weekend of 7/8 September helped to swell the berries.

Tinta Roriz, the most capricious of the top five Port grapes, had ripened evenly which is usually a sign of a fine vintage. In mid-September Vasco Magalhaes, spokesperson for Sogrape, described the growing conditions as 'close to idyllic'.

Picking began in the Douro Superior during the week of 9 September but those further downstream waited until the week of the 16th. On Friday 13 September an unusually deep depression settled over western Iberia. With torrential rain and warm temperatures, the grapes began to rot on the vine and the harvest became a race against time. The old interplanted vineyards with a high percentage of Tinta Amarela (notoriously susceptible to rot) were particularly badly hit. The wet weather continued on and off into October and vintage was a stop-start affair. Those who picked before the rain set in (mostly in the Douro Superior) made small quantities of good, even great, wine – but for most producers 2002 was a damp squib. Ports made towards the end of the harvest were particularly dilute. Very few single-*quinta* wines have been released.

2001 **/** good middle-weight wines for drinking over the medium term

The year began with one of the wettest winters on record. Nearly 1200mm of rain fell in Pinhão between November and the end of March. This helped to replenish the water table after four abnormally dry years but caused a great deal of damage in the vineyards. At Entre-os-Rios the bridge over the River Douro collapsed with the loss of over seventy lives. Mild, rainy conditions led to an early bud burst in the first ten days of March but from April onwards the weather cleared and just 110mm of rain fell before the end of August. Although the first two weeks of May were cool

and wet, flowering generally took place under optimum conditions later in the month. With groundwater supplies thoroughly replenished, there was the expectation of a large crop. The summer was cooler than normal and temperatures were uneven during August. Rain at the end of the month helped to swell the grapes and the first half of September was warm and dry. The harvest began in the main on 17 September with Tinta Barroca already over-ripe by this stage. The weather remained fine through to the end of the month, and although ambient temperatures were relatively high this caused few problems as most *lagares* were equipped with temperature control. However, rain fell in early October and sugar readings fell quickly towards the end of the harvest.

Yields were up on 2000 by between 20 and 30 per cent on average in the A/B grade vineyards. Overall, 2001 proved to be a fairly useful year. David Guimaraens commented at the time that 'the quality was evident from the first. Although not exuberant in aroma, many of the wines show as much colour as in 2000'. Most shippers declared single-*quinta* wines in the spring of 2003. Dow's Quinta do Bomfim, Graham's Malvedos, Warre's Quinta de Cavadinha and Smith Woodhouse Madalena will not be released until 2012.

Having tasted most of the wines blind in the summer of 2004 and some again in 2011, I am impressed by the depth of colour but some of the wines lack structure and breadth. The best wines are soft, supple and elegant, mostly ready to drink now and with sufficient balance to keep for another fifteen years.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow's Quinta Sra. da Ribeira; Fonseca Guimaraens; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas and Quinta de Terra Feita; Quinta do Vale Meão.

2000 ****/***** a small harvest produced fine, concentrated wines with a long life ahead; unanimous declaration

Few years can have raised quite so much hope and expectation as 2000. The previous harvest concluded in torrential rain that continued until the end of the year, but the first three months of 2000 were cold and abnormally dry. The low rainfall meant that the growing season began with very little water in the soil and bud burst was irregular with potential yields reduced from the outset by *gavinhas* (excessive vegetative growth). During April and May the heavens opened and half the normal annual rainfall fell in just two months. This encouraged tremendous vigour, with vines directing their energy to the development of new shoots. Flowering in late May coincided with heavy showers and cool weather causing *desavinho* (*coulure*) particularly in the A grade vineyards. Potential yields fell by as much as 30 per cent as a result. Warm, dry weather returned during June and July and the so-called '*pintor*' (*veraison*) was homogenous, occurring in mid-July. The dry weather continued through August with high temperatures during the early part of the month, and a few days of rain in mid-September helped to finish off the ripening prior to the harvest, which began as usual around the 20th of the month.

The widely anticipated small harvest led to an unseemly scramble for grapes. Shippers without vineyards of their own were forced to pay stratospherically high prices for premium-quality grapes which were also being diverted to satisfy the growing demand for unfortified Douro wines. Through no fault of their own, Sandeman and the Symington family were apprehended receiving illegal grapes (even though they were accompanied by the correct paperwork) and scare stories

spread about grapes arriving from outside the region and even from Spain. But by the end of the harvest there was no shortage of grapes, however; production in the *altos* and the Baixo Corgo was at or above normal as the flowering had taken place later and in better weather.

In terms of vintage Port, it is the A-grade vineyards of the Cima Corgo and Douro Superior that matter. Here yields of little over half a kilo per vine produced musts of extraordinary richness and concentration. At Warre's Quinta de Cavadinha, the old mixed plantings with an average age of around fifty years produced just 190 grams per vine, the lowest yield in living memory. As the sun shone during picking, it became clear that a very fine vintage was on the cards. The musts had barely finished fermenting when one senior Port shipper had the temerity to say 'I am 95 per cent certain we will have a declaration. I am even more certain than I was at this stage in 1994.'

After spending the statutory two winters in wood, 2000 was unanimously declared in the spring and early summer of 2002. For most shippers it was only the twenty-fifth or twenty-sixth vintage to be declared since 1900, a landmark year that also happened to be a very successful vintage and was widely declared at the time. It is interesting to draw parallels between 2000 vintage Port and the crazy demand for 2000 Bordeaux when these wines were sold *en primeur* in 2001. Opening prices were up by just 5 to 10 per cent on 1997, the previous declared vintage. Although demand for the top names was strong, there was none of the speculative fever that surrounded 2000 Bordeaux, the market having been dampened by 9/11 the previous year.

As to the wines, the 2000 vintage is remarkable for the sheer depth of colour and richness that is evident across the

board. Although there are some Ports that lack intensity and show up as being rather sweet and one dimensional, the best combine seductively ripe, fleshy fruit with structure, power and concentration. It remains to be seen if the 2000s are as powerful and complete as the exceptional 1994s (some interesting comparative tastings lie ahead), but they have more depth and poise than the 1997s which are somewhat leaner in style. There can be little doubt that 2000 is a very good, classic year which, like 1966 and 1970, has produced a handful of truly great wines. For Graham (one of the greats), this was the first vintage to be made (36 per cent) in robotic *lagares*. Although there are a number of good middle-distance wines that will be enjoyable in a decade or so (Cockburn's Quinta dos Canais, Cálem, Martinez, Churchill), the finest 2000s will take at least twenty years to reach a plateau of perfection that should last through most of the twenty-first century. Quinta do Noval and Noval Nacional were both declared in tiny quantities and are outstanding.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Fonseca; Graham; Niepoort; Quinta do Noval; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Poças; Warre.

1999 */*** prospects of a small but excellent harvest dashed by rain; good wines in the Douro Superior

The winter of 1998/99 was cold and dry, which delayed bud burst until the end of March, two weeks later than normal. Wet weather followed in April and May, and light rain during flowering reduced the number of berries. July and August were dry and intensely hot with temperatures reaching 40°C. The heat, together with the already low water table, produced exceptionally small berries, thereby concentrating the juice. The total rainfall at Taylor's Quinta

de Vargellas between October 1998 and July 1999 was just 300mm, barely sufficient for the vines to survive. As wells dried up there was a serious water shortage throughout the region and some *quintas* had to bring water up from the river in bowsers for domestic use. By early September there was the expectation of a small but high-quality harvest.

The harvest began in the Douro Superior on 10 September and on 15th in the Cima Corgo. There was just enough time to gather the grapes from the old interplanted vineyards before the weather broke and torrential rain fell throughout the region as the remnants of Hurricane Floyd blew in from the Atlantic. Baumés fell by a degree or more and, as the vines rapidly took up water, the skins of the grapes ruptured leading to a serious outbreak of rot. As always, Tinta Amarela was particularly badly affected. Sunshine and showers followed from 28 September, but for many vineyards it was already too late and some growers left their grapes to rot on the vine. Although the harvest finished under clear skies, in many places sugar levels had fallen to less than 10 degrees Baumé and at one *adeiga* I encountered a batch of grapes with a Baumé as low as 8! The Symington's prototype robotic *lagar* arrived at Quinta do Sol halfway through the vintage and they had to undertake trials with indifferent grapes. But all was not lost, and some properties (mostly in the Douro Superior) managed to pick most of the crop before the rain. Some suave, middle-distance wines were produced which should be good for drinking until 2020 at least.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow's Quinta do Bomfim; Taylor's Quinta de Terra Feita; Quinta do Vesúvio.

1998 *** challenging year: tiny crop with some good, concentrated wines

The growing season in 1998 was unusual, to say the least. The winter was short but wet. Warm temperatures in February and March brought on early bud burst but cold wet weather returned in April and, as late as Easter, snow fell on the hills above Pinhão. At Warre's Quinta da Cavadinha, 259mm of rain fell in April alone (the ten year average being 55mm). The unsettled wet weather continued through May and June, provoking an attack of oidium and mildew. With the water table high, the vines sprouted in all directions, using up energy in foliage rather than fruit set. Taylor recorded 40cm shoot growth over one weekend in early May. Hot, dry weather arrived in July and continued through August into early September. Yields were some of the lowest on record and by the middle of the month there was every prospect of a small but exceptional harvest.

Picking began in the Douro Superior on 14 September and by 24 September the harvest was underway in most of the region. Unfortunately this coincided with more unsettled weather and periodic heavy showers fell, diluting sugar levels. There were exceptions. Quinta do Noval stopped picking in September and resumed again in clear weather at the beginning of October, a strategy which clearly proved itself when you taste their fine, structured Silval. Likewise, Warre's Quinta da Cavadinha only began picking on 1 October, by which time sugar readings were back up to 13 degrees Baumé. Although the grapes generally arrived cool and there was very little need for temperature control, a potentially 'great' vintage became merely 'good' in terms of quality. Nonetheless a number of single *quintas* made some fine,

balanced wines for the medium to long term. Dow's Senhora da Ribeira, picked before the rain, is particularly impressive with multiple layers of fruit and a solid, ripe tannic backbone. Drink now to 2020 plus. Taylor's Quinta de Terra Feita 1998 was sadly wiped out by the landslide that demolished part of the lodge in January 2001.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow's Quinta Senhora da Ribeira; Fonseca Guimaraens; Quinta do Vesúvio; Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos; Quinta do Noval, Silval; Smith Woodhouse, Madelena.

1997 **** very good, well-structured wines, widely declared

The winter of 1996/97 was short and sharp with snow settling at low altitudes along the River Douro in January. The weather suddenly changed in February when temperatures rose 4°C above average for the time of year leading to an early bud burst. Some vineyards were then hit by frost which reduced overall yields. Wet weather returned in April and May and temperatures remained abnormally cool through to August, allowing for a slow but steady development of the grapes. Hot weather in late August/early September saved the day, bringing about an even final ripening. By the time picking began around 20 September, Tinta Barroca registered a healthy 14 degrees Baumé with Tinta Roriz and Touriga Nacional only marginally behind. Touriga Franca (or Francesa as it was then known) also ripened evenly. This was undoubtedly helped by low yields (down by up to 40 per cent on 1996) with younger varietal plantings producing around 1 kilo per vine and older mixed plantings around 0.4 kilos (the equivalent of one bottle for every four vines). Apart from the occasional

isolated thunderstorm, the harvest continued under clear skies. Temperatures were high at the start of harvest but cooled down significantly, and the later *lagares* took plenty of work producing aromatic wines with impressive purple-blue colours.

At the outset, the wines were by no means as easy to assess as the super-ripe, opulent 1994s but the best 1997s are beautifully balanced, combining fine, firm sinewy tannins with structure and freshness. Nearly all the leading shippers declared in the spring of 1999, marking up their prices by around 30 per cent on the 1994s, which had risen sharply on the open market. From early tastings I found some wines tending to be rather lean and one-dimensional but Dow, Fonseca, Graham and Noval belong in the premier league. Niepoort, which looked impressive at the start, has suffered alarming volatility in bottle. Noval Nacional is the best for three decades – perhaps since their remarkable duo of wines from 1966 and 1963. Rather like 1963s and 1966s, the 1994 vintage will inevitably cast a shadow over the 1997s for years to come. Drink from 2015.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Fonseca; Graham; Quinta do Noval; Quinta do Noval, Nacional; Quinta do Vesúvio.

1996 *** huge crop, some beautiful balanced wines but others somewhat stretched

After a very wet winter and mild spring, there was an abundance of fruit which took time to ripen. No rain fell from June to August. As a result the harvest began quite late (end of September/early October in the Cima Corgo). This was just as well as it rained during the week of 16 September but thankfully good weather returned and sugar levels increased rapidly towards the end of the month. Yields were huge but

the *beneficio* (130,000 pipes of must) remained low, leaving plenty for producers of the increasingly popular unfortified Douro wines. There was also a 30 per cent increase in the price of *aguardente* which put pressure on prices. In general sugar levels were on the low side with the result that many wines taste stretched and dilute. Some growers picked too early and better wines were made towards the middle or end of the vintage. Warre did not begin picking at Cavadinha until 8 October. This was a good year for replenishing premium rubies and LBVs but, perhaps playing up to a receptive American audience, a handful of single *quintas* released some attractive, forward fruity wines for drinking over the medium term. The wines tend to be quite open, sometimes beautifully aromatic, soft and are fully ready to drink. Quinta do Noval Nacional is the notable exception, although it is quite forward and already sings from the glass.

Pick of the Vintage: Quinta do Noval Nacional; Smith Woodhouse; Madelena, Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas; Warre's Quinta da Cavadinha; Quinta do Vesúvio.

1995 *** concentrated but occasionally somewhat jammy and burnt

After a fairly wet winter the weather turned dry at the end of February. Early March was an exceptionally warm, dry spring and the vines were well advanced by mid-April. However at the end of April, late spring frosts inflicted severe damage on some of the higher vineyards. The early part of the summer was cool and overcast which affected the flowering, but August provided four weeks of intense and unrelenting heat. In the Douro Superior some growers began picking in mid-August and on 4 September many properties in the Cima

Corgo began to pick. However, it rained on 5 September, with sunshine and clear skies returning after the 10th. The Symingtons had finished picking in all their top *quintas* by 26 September. The extreme heat raisinised grapes and produced some rather coarse, burnt wines but the concentration of flavour (often rather jammy) justified a full declaration for some. Had it not come hard on the heels of the exceptional 1994s, 1995 might have been a more generally declared. In the event, Barros Burmester, Krohn, Osborne, Noval, Rozès and Poças declared outright with the remainder opting for second label or single-*quinta* wines. Well received by the growing American market, in the United Kingdom 1995 has provided some immensely pleasurable rich, ripe Ports for drinking over the medium term (now to 2025). Dow's Quinta do Bomfim, Fonseca Guimaraens, Graham's Malvedos, Quinta do Noval, Osborne, Quinta de la Rosa, Quinta de Vargellas Vinha Velha and Quinta do Vesúvio represent the best of the vintage.

Pick of the Vintage: Fonseca Guimaraens; Dow Quinta do Bomfim; Quinta de Vargellas Vinha Velha.

1994 ***** outstanding wines, with flesh masking structure at the outset

It was clear almost from the first snip of the secateurs that 1994 would be a fully-declared Port vintage. A wet winter put an end to three consecutive years of drought and when the sun began to shine in March and April, the vines were sprouting in all directions. Heavy rain in May served to check the overall size of the crop but from then on, despite a relatively cool summer, it was plain sailing all the way through to the harvest. Tinta Roriz flowered at the same time

as the worst spring weather. This reduced yields and helped to improve quality and overall concentration. Cloudy skies and a little light rain in mid-September rekindled memories of 1993 when the heavens opened during vintage. A few growers panicked and picked too early but, as it turned out, the rain helped the berries to swell and sugar readings rose. The majority held their nerve and by 20 September the harvest was well underway. Winemakers were helped in their task by clear skies and cool night time temperatures. (At one stage the temperature fell from 32°C to 9°C over a 24-hour period.) *Lagares* took plenty of work and long, slow fermentations gave rise to prolonged skin contact and good extraction. As the wines were run off and fortified, the big guns could hardly conceal their glee at the prospect of a major vintage declaration.

The shippers were helped in their decision by the healthy state of the market. Having tested the water successfully in 1991–1992, they knew that there was enough support for a large declaration with the Americans particularly receptive to vintage Port. Opening prices rose considerably and in some cases continued to soar, overtaking mature vintages like 1970 at auction. Tasting the 1994s at an early stage, they were characterised by super-ripe fleshy fruit, which tended to cover up the underlying tannic grip. Tasting them again some years later, the wines are still incredibly rich but the somewhat deceptive puppy fat is beginning to fall away revealing some outstandingly well-structured wines. At the time of writing, the best wines are now dumb with brooding tannins and opulence. Dow, Fonseca, Graham, Taylor and Warre are in the premier league, as always, with Quinta do Noval and Quinta do Vesúvio joining them. Croft, Gould Campbell, Martinez, Martinez Quinta da Eira Velha, Skeffington and

Smith Woodhouse are also impressive. After more than two decades of very variable declarations (and some downright faulty wines in the mid-1980s) 1994 marks a return to form for vintage Port. Drink from 2016.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Fonseca; Graham; Taylor; Quinta do Noval; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Warre.

1993 – one of the poorest years in living memory

A damp spring was followed by a cool summer. In late August, James Symington recorded that Touriga Nacional and Tinta Roriz at Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos looked 'very poor'. September weather remained cool and growers hung on for as long as they could for the grapes to ripen, then when they could wait no more the heavens opened. The pickers had a thorough drenching and were bogged down in mud. In the meantime, grapes were rotting rapidly on the vine and reaching the *adega* with Baumés as low as 4 in the Baixo Corgo. There was no colour. António Agrellos at Quinta do Noval recalls that 'we made tawnies in five minutes'. Thankfully yields were fairly low. No one in their right mind declared, though Quinta de Romaneira made an SQVP and there are one or two rather washed-out LBVs. Nobody bothered to write a vintage report at Malvedos, making 1993 a year to forget.

1992 **** rich, concentrated wines from those who picked late

The winter and spring were unseasonably dry, and the drought continued through until June when a few days' rain proved to be very beneficial. Fortunately flowering was earlier than usual, starting in the second week of May, and was not

harmful. The summer was dry but not unduly hot and a few short, sharp rainstorms at the end of August helped to swell the grapes. Most growers began picking on 21 September but the new moon on the 26th brought more rain. Those who waited for another week or so before picking (Taylor, Fonseca, Niepoort) made more concentrated wines.

A handful of shippers declared 1992 in preference to the previous year, leading to a so-called 'split vintage'. The Symingtons (Dow, Graham, Warre) chose to declare 1991 (and Smith Woodhouse in 1992) whereas Delaforce, Taylor and Fonseca preferred 1992. Niepoort declared both. Both years produced some excellent wines but, having re-tasted both years side by side in 2003 and 2010, the gap is growing between them and 1992 is undoubtedly the better year. This puts paid to the rather ridiculous story circulating at the time that Taylor only declared because it coincided with the 300th anniversary of their foundation. Fonseca and Taylor are rich, ripe and impressive with some promising single-*quinta* Ports such as Churchill's Água Alta, Dow's Quinta do Bomfim, Quinta do Passadouro and Quinta do Vesúvio. Most of the wines are ready to drink (though Fonseca would benefit from another couple of years in bottle) and should last until 2025 to 2030.

Pick of the Vintage: Delaforce; Fonseca; Quinta do Infantado; Taylor; Quinta do Vesúvio.

1991 *** ripe, full flavoured wines, some of which are soft and one dimensional

After six years without a vintage, the shippers were eager for a declaration. Growing conditions were good: a wet winter was followed by a settled, dry spring and a hot summer with very

high temperatures at the end of August and early September. The hot spell left the grapes looking rather shrivelled but heavy night-time dew helped to swell the berries. Rain in mid-September fell too late for the Douro Superior but helped swell the grapes in the Cima Corgo. When picking began, very high ambient temperatures (40°C) presented problems for those without adequate control. This has subsequently showed up in some of the wines. Cooler weather arrived during the harvest and, when the last grapes reached the *adegas*, some producers had to heat the must in order to kick-start ferments. The grapes tended to be small with little juice, and at the outset the wines seemed deep and well structured with tannic backbone and grip.

Most of the major shippers declared 1991 outright (with the notable exception of Delaforce, Fonseca and Taylor who produced some good SQVPs). The market for Port was strong at the time, especially in the US which bought more vintage Port than the UK for the first time in history. Given the American penchant for drinking vintage Port young, most 1991s have probably been drunk by now. This is all to the good because many of the wines have turned out to be rather soft and early maturing, some marked by a hot, raisiny character. All the 1991s are ready to drink and some are already falling apart.

Pick of the Vintage: Croft; Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas; Rozès.

1990 *** unusual year: quantity matched by reasonable quality

A prolific harvest followed a wet but mild winter and good weather during flowering. July and August were very

hot leading to *queima* (burn) but some heavy rain in mid-September saved the day. Temperatures were high during vintage and outlying properties without temperature control had to draw off their *lagares* early, with the wines suffering as a result. There were more problems during vintage when some shippers ran out of fortifying *aguardente* only to find that the Casa do Douro had issued licences to produce Port in excess of the annual *benefício*. No full declarations but some rich, ripe single-*quinta* wines were released. Dow's Quinta do Bomfim, Graham's Malvedos and Warre's Quinta da Cavadinha are all good for the medium term (drink from now to 2020).

Pick of the Vintage: Dow's Quinta do Bomfim.

1989 ** attractive wines for the short to medium term

A dry winter was followed by sporadic rain throughout the spring. Localised hailstorms caused problems in June. There was extreme heat in late July and August, by which time some vineyards were showing considerable signs of stress. Yields were thankfully up on 1988 but still below average. Picking began early (6 September at Quinta dos Malvedos), but in retrospect better wines would have been produced if the harvest had been delayed for a week or so as heavy rain fell on the Pinhão and Rio Torto areas on 8 and 9 September. However, the grapes were in perfect condition and there was little or no disease. Most rain fell in the Baixo Corgo and the wines here were considerably better than normal. Picking continued under warm, clear conditions and some appealing, full-bodied SQVPs were produced, all of which are fully ready to drink.

Pick of the Vintage: Quinta do Vesúvio.

1988 ** tiny crop, a few concentrated wines, others unbalanced

A very challenging year in all respects and an expensive one for growers. A wet winter was followed by a cool, wet spring and early summer. The flowering took place under wet conditions and there was widespread mildew. Comparatively cool weather in July and August finally gave way to heat in early September when the thermometer rose to over 40°C for five consecutive days. Yields were tiny; Michael Symington reported that one property in the Douro Superior which usually produced 130 pipes yielded just four in 1988, having been hit in turn by mildew, *desavinho* (*coulure*) and hail! From mid-September, however, vintage weather was absolutely perfect with dry sunny days followed by cool nights. Some single-*quinta* wines were bottled, some of which now look hot and unbalanced although Graham's Malvedos would have still benefitted from a few more years in bottle when I tasted it in 2010.

Pick of the Vintage: Graham's Malvedos; Taylor's Quinta de Terra Feita.

1987 *** a handful of dense wines for the medium to long term

After an exceedingly hot, dry summer, picking began in mid-September with the grapes in near-perfect condition. The weather at the start of vintage continued to be hot and grapes arrived at the *adegas* with temperatures above 30°C. Some producers, however, had installed must coolers and these undoubtedly helped these ferments (see 1985). Sugar readings were high but as the grapes were small and sometimes shrivelled, yields were low. At Quinta dos Malvedos it

took 820 kilos of grapes to produce a pipe of must. James Symington recorded at the time that 'fine, dark wines have been made. Perhaps due to the extreme heat during ripening the wines are a little lacking in aroma but they are extremely intense'. However, mid-way through the harvest, heavy rain fell throughout the Douro continuing into October. Sugar readings fell and only a strong wind prevented the onset of disease. Perhaps because of this, 1987 is one of those 'nearly but not quite' years when a handful of shippers declared (Ferreira, Martinez, Niepoort, Noval, Noval Nacional) but the majority held off and bottled single-*quinta* wines. The market for vintage Port was also looking distinctly shaky by the time of the would-be declaration in 1989. The heat may have contributed to the somewhat ponderous, roasted character now evident in some of the wines although the low yields of grapes provided some dense, concentrated Ports which, without a general declaration to support them, are often under-valued. Niepoort started off well but seems to have become slightly volatile in bottle. Graham's Malvedos, tasted in 2010, still had more to give with characteristic opulence backed by solid, ripe tannins. Drink now to 2020.

Pick of the Vintage: Graham's Malvedos; Martinez, Quinta da Eira Velha.

1986 ** attractive, open fruity wines which continue to develop well

The growing season began with a cold snap in April followed by a very dry summer, although hail did great damage to vines on the north side of the Douro around Castedo and Alijó. The rain, when it finally arrived, was copious and delayed the start of harvest by a week or so. When picking

began, sugar readings were relatively low but fortunately, despite more rain on 23 September, there was little sign of rot in the Douro Superior and Cima Corgo. The Baixo Corgo fared differently with outbreaks of rot everywhere. Fortunately the clouds cleared just in time and warm dry weather from 24 September helped to avert a potential disaster. The remainder of the harvest took place in near-perfect conditions until the weather broke on 10 October. After the universal 1985 declaration, there was never much prospect of a declared vintage in 1986 but attractive single-*quinta* Ports were bottled, with an exceptional trio from Dow's Quinta do Bomfim, Graham's Malvedos and Warre's Quinta da Cavadinha matched by a very good wine from Fonseca Guimaraens and Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas. Drink now to 2020 plus.

Pick of the Vintage: Graham's Quinta dos Malvedos.

1985 **** a few outstandingly good wines for the long term but some seriously faulty; caveat emptor

The winter of 1984/85 was cold and wet with temperatures falling below freezing during January in Pinhão. Cool wet weather continued into the spring. Bud burst took place in early April and with dry weather from June onwards, the berry set was above average. The summer was dry and warm and the Douro was so low at Tua that it was possible to wade across. Heavy rain on 7 September helped swell the grapes. Picking began around 18 September in very hot conditions. Sugar graduations were good but, without temperature control, fermentations were fast and furious and *lagares* took little work before being run off and fortified. Michael Symington wrote in his vintage report that 'never can the

grapes have been gathered under better weather conditions', and I recall Bruce Guimaraens remarking at the time that 'it was clear from the colour and aromas of the fermenting must that 1985 would be a high quality year'.

The declaration, when it came in the spring of 1997, was unanimous. It was a big vintage – the only year producing more wine was 1927; Fonseca, for example, declared 20,000 cases. The wines were impressively plump and rich (especially in comparison with the 1983s) and a great deal of interest was shown by the trade. But 1985 has subsequently thrown up some rather nasty surprises. Wines that seemed to be exemplary at the outset (e.g. Cockburn) soon turned volatile (vinegary) in bottle. Cockburn are by no means alone and from subsequent tastings of the 1985 vintage Calem, Churchill, Niepoort, Quarles Harris, Ramos Pinto and Sandeman all appear to be experiencing varying degrees of difficulty as well. It seems likely that hot weather during the vintage, over-use of chemical fertilisers producing musts of low acidity, and poor handling and hygiene are probably collectively to blame. However another theory put forward is that the wines were not fully fortified at the outset, making them even more vulnerable to bacterial spoilage. When it became evident that there was something seriously wrong with many 1985s, it provided the impetus for shippers to clean up their act. The power and concentration of fruit that was the hallmark of the vintage continues to live on in a handful of wines. Graham was still surprisingly tight-knit and not as rich or sweet as you would expect when I tasted it in 2010. With a good, ripe tannin structure to support them, Dow, Taylor and Warre are ready to drink and continue to develop well until 2030 at least. Fonseca would benefit from more time in

bottle. Gould Campbell and Martinez have been drinking well for sometime and are still good for the medium term.

Pick of the Vintage: Fonseca; Graham; Taylor.

1984 ** well-rounded, straightforward single-quinta wines

Despite an unstable spring and early summer, the flowering was successful. The weather in July and August was generally hot with occasional heavy rain. The first grapes were picked in fine, dry weather but at the end of September the weather broke, temperatures dropped sharply and there was heavy rain. A cyclone knocked over two vats at a new winery near Ervadosa. The grapes nonetheless withstood a certain amount of dilution and there was no rot to taint the wines. Average Baumés were a degree or more lower than in 1983. Sandwiched between 1983 and 1985, no one declared but the single-*quinta* movement was gathering momentum. Well-rounded wines like Dow's Quinta do Bomfim and Delaforce's Quinta da Corte have developed well in bottle. Drink soon.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow's Quinta do Bomfim.

1983 **** firm, muscular, lasting wines

The year began inauspiciously with a long, cold winter and spring, and snow fell on the Serra do Marão as late as 20 May. The cool weather caused a certain amount of *desavinho* (*coulure*) which reduced yields. During the early part of the summer the weather was hot but unsettled and the vines were three or more weeks behind. A fine September saved the day. Michael Symington reported that the sugar graduations in the Douro Superior were on average at

least 1.5 degrees Baumé above 1982 and that despite hot fermentation temperatures 'above average wines have been made throughout the Douro Superior and we are sure that some will prove to be outstanding'. Dow, Gould Campbell, Graham, Smith Woodhouse, Quarles Harris and Warre proved him right and stand alongside Taylor and Niepoort as the finest examples of the vintage. Cockburn (which started out well) can be very good indeed but also very variable, and Fonseca is on the light side and rather disappointing. Initially 1983 was overshadowed in the marketplace by 1985. The austere and more muscular '83s were certainly much less easy to taste than the plump '85s, but the earlier year has gained stature with age. Although some wines are on the lean side, the hallmark of the vintage is the tannic backbone that stands the wines in good stead for the long term. The 1983s can be drunk with pleasure now and prices at auction are keen, making this a good, easily accessible choice for lovers of fine mature vintage Port.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Graham; Warre.

1982 ** soft and early maturing

I have fond memories of the summer of '82, having spent much of July traversing the terraces of *quintas* in the Torto valley researching my undergraduate dissertation on vineyard microclimates. August and early September were hot and the start date of vintage was brought forward by ten days throughout the region. Michael Symington wrote 'one can confidently assume that those grapes gathered after 16 September, when the weather started to cool, will have produced really first class wine in colour, body and fruit'. A handful of shippers chose to declare 1982 in preference

to 1983 leading to a so-called 'split vintage'. In retrospect it was a mistake, for the wines are generally soft and lacking in substance. The heat of the late summer is reflected in the soft, sweet raisiny character of the wines. The best (Churchill, Sandeman, Niepoort and Quinta do Noval) proved to be no more than useful wines to drink while waiting for the 1983s to come round and they lack the backbone to last. Croft and Delaforce were both disappointing. Those who decided not to declare bottled some successful single-*quinta* wines. Drink soon.

1981 *

An extraordinary year in all respects. A severe drought began in the autumn of 1980, lasting all the way through the winter. The spring and early summer were unusually cold, giving way to searing heat in mid-June. The hot, dry weather continued through the summer, delaying the development of the vines and turning grapes to raisins. But by mid-September, when the growers could wait no longer and picking began, the weather broke and the mother and father of storms swept through the Douro. Gales brought down electricity pylons, leaving Pinhão without power for fourteen hours. Better wines were made in the Baixo Corgo (where picking began later) than in the Cima Corgo, where a small crop produced dark wines that tended to taste cooked and were lacking in freshness.

1980 ***/** open, fresh, attractive, fruit-driven wines drinking perfectly now

Perhaps deterred by a substantial hike in prices, the 1980 wines were largely overlooked by the trade and the year subsequently became a 'Cinderella vintage', overshadowed by 1977, 1983

and 1985, the last of which turned out to be something of an ugly sister. The growing season was variable. Spring arrived early, then exceptionally cold weather in May and June delayed flowering. The summer was warm and dry but sugar readings were relatively low when picking began at the end of September. Temperatures were high during the harvest and the *lagares* fermented furiously fast and therefore took little work. In spite of these difficulties, the wines are generally very well balanced. Fonseca is on the light side but Dow, Graham, Niepoort, Offley, Smith Woodhouse, Taylor and Warre all produced open, attractive wines that are drinking very well indeed and will continue to develop. Drink now to 2025.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Graham.

1979 *

A wet winter was followed by a hot, dry summer with no rainfall at all until just before the harvest in late September. Despite the drought, yields were high. No declaration but a handful of straightforward single-*quinta* wines, which are now fully mature. A trio from Dow's Bomfim, Graham's Malvedos and Warre's Cavadinha were still showing quite well in 2011 with Malvedos the best of the bunch. Drink soon.

1978 **

Cold weather in spring and early summer was followed by drought from June until late October with a heatwave in September. A handful of shippers preferred 1978 to 1977 (Ferreira, Krohn and Quinta do Noval). Niepoort and Kopke declared both years. The wines are generally soft, quite rich and approachable although Noval is weak. Noval Nacional

was better and is entirely ready to drink. The year was notable for the number of single-*quinta* vintage Ports, some of which appeared on the market for the first time. Drink soon.

1977 **** ripe, concentrated wines at the outset, many developing faster than expected

The winter of 1976/1977 was exceptionally wet and the spring and early summer were cool and unsettled. Frost inflicted great damage in the higher vineyards on 12 May. The flowering was uneven, reducing the potential yield, and the *pintor* (*veraison*) arrived late, only occurring in the third week of July. From mid-August onwards the weather improved but at the beginning of September Michael Symington records that sugar readings were still as low as 10.5 degrees Baumé. Fortunately September was hot with temperatures over 30°C and the grapes ripened evenly. Picking in the Cima Corgo began around 28 September and fine weather continued through the early part of the vintage into October. Even then, sugar readings were not all that high and the warm weather meant that the early *lagares* took little work before being run off. However the ambient temperature fell markedly in early October and the musts began to take more work. Rain fell from 5 to 8 October and although yields were high and grape skins were fairly thin, bunches resisted disease. From the colour and flavour of the musts at the time it was clear that some fine wines would emerge. All except Cockburn, Noval and Martinez decided to declare. From early on, the 1977s were compared in stature to the 1963s. This was praise indeed, and although 1977 produced wines that must have looked very impressive up against the 1975s and other wines from the early 1970s, none are quite up to the standard of the finest wines from 1963 or 1966. The 1970 wines have much more staying

power. Many of the 1977s are now beginning to show their age. Cálem, Croft, Quarles Harris, Rebello Valente, Rozès and Sandeman are fading and should be drunk quite soon. Dow, Graham, Warre and Smith Woodhouse are extremely good; sweet, quite soft, suave and ready now but with the capacity to keep for another decade or so. Unusually, Dow bottled two pipes of Quinta do Bomfim 1977 for shipment to Denmark and apparently this is holding up better than the fully declared wine. Graham is particularly good, not big like Smith Woodhouse but with a haunting violet-like aroma that is the hallmark of a really fine, mature vintage Port. Taylor and Fonseca are fabulous and it is perhaps on these wines that the reputation of the vintage has been established. Both are still quite closed and dense with bitter cherry fruit and have more to give. These may be drunk now to 2030 plus, but they are not wines to last a lifetime.

Pick of the Vintage: Fonseca; Taylor; Smith Woodhouse.

1976 ** soft, sweet and early maturing

The winter of 1975/76 was extremely dry. A hot, dry summer followed and wells dried up all over the Douro. Much-needed rain fell in late August and September was cool with light rain. The harvest began in the Cima Corgo on 23 September and grapes were free from disease. Sugar readings were high and cool temperatures meant that fermentations were slow, but it rained throughout vintage causing an outbreak of rot, mainly in the Baixo Corgo. Michael Symington wrote at the end of vintage that 'dark wines were produced but lacking "freshness" due to the exceptionally dry year.' With one or two exceptions, most of the wines are soft, intensely sweet and early maturing. The exception is Fonseca Guimaraens: a

wonderfully deep, dark opulent vintage Port that overshadows all the 1975s, and many of the 1977s as well.

Pick of the Vintage: Fonseca Guimaraens.

1975 ** soft, early maturing vintage; drink up

Christened the *Verão Quente* (hot summer) both because of the heat and the political temperature at the time, 1975 has always been a controversial declaration. There is absolutely no truth in the tale that the wines were only declared due to the revolution and the threatened nationalisation of the Port industry, because by the time the shippers chose to declare (in the spring of 1977) Portugal had settled down as a mild-mannered but economically ruined democracy. The growing season followed a wet winter but the hot, dry summer delayed ripening. The vintage began in early October by which time heavy September rain was beginning to dilute sugar levels. Slow fermentations produced wines with considerable colour but seemingly without sufficient structure to make lasting wines. Reading vintage reports from the time, the majority of shippers talked themselves into a declaration. Even Quinta do Noval Nacional is disappointing. In general, the 1975s are now soft and rather hollow but have been quite attractive to drink while waiting for the 1970s, 1966s and 1963s to mature. Cálem, Delaforce, Dow and Graham are still drinking well but should not be kept for anything other than academic interest. Drink soon.

1974 *

The year of the revolution. After a winter of average rainfall, the spring and summer were perfect for the development of the vines. Following a hot July and fine August, September

was cool but no further rain fell. Picking began around 26 September and the large crop produced rather soft, dilute wines. Good 'traditional' LBVs from Smith Woodhouse and Warre and an SQVP from Taylor's Vargellas. Drink up.

1973

Unusually heavy demand for wines caused prices to rise by as much as 150 per cent on the previous year. Early September was wet and cold, and when picking began under clear skies around 20 September, sugar levels were surprisingly low and the initial feeling was that the harvest had begun too early. In the event, wet weather returned in early October. High yields produced undistinguished wines. I have never seen or tasted a Port from 1973.

1972 *

A number of shippers made attractive wines in 1972 in spite of heavy intermittent rain during the harvest. The vintage was blighted early on by the alcohol scandal that broke shortly after Dow, Offley and Rebello Valente declared. Although rarely seen, many of the wines are still curiously attractive, retaining their simple, fresh fruit character. The Casa do Douro still holds a substantial stock of wine from this era which surfaces from time to time in old tawnies. Drink up.

1971

Hot weather in July was short in duration and the following six weeks were cool and cloudy. Regular spraying was necessary to combat mildew. By early August, growers in the Rio Torto could not recall a year when the grapes were so far behind. Nothing of any consequence was made and no wines were declared.

1970 ***** classic, tight-knit wines; the best with a long future ahead

Early tastings tended to play down the 1970 wines and they are only now being judged in their true light. January and February were wet, followed by cold, dry weather in March. April was warm which favoured early flowering. Although May and June were wet there was very little rain, with the exception of few timely downpours in late August, until October. In the Cima Corgo picking began on 21 September with temperatures of 35°C. Michael Symington wrote at the time that 'fermentations were therefore rapid, but colours are nonetheless excellent'. There was a high incidence of raisinised grapes which may have led to some early doubts about the wines. A few wines have developed burnt, high-toned aromas and, this being the last vintage to be bottled both in Gaia and in the UK, there is inevitably a certain amount of variation from bottle to bottle (see my qualifying note earlier). There were some big declarations with Taylor, for example, declaring 31,400 cases of 1970.

In retrospect this was the last old-fashioned vintage where the majority of leading shippers were still treading their wines properly in *lagar*. Some, such as Sandeman and Noval, were already going off the boil. The overall quality is by no means as uniformly high as in 1963 but there are wines that deserve to be ranked among the century's greats. Dow and Graham certainly deserve this accolade, followed up by some undeniably impressive wines from Cálem and Kopke. Cockburn, Delaforce, Fonseca, Niepoort, Noval Nacional and Taylor are also very good, displaying the tight-knit concentration that is the hallmark of this vintage. Taylor's also bottled some 1970 Quinta de Vargellas, produced from vines

that were shortly to be lost to the river. I suspect that many of the 1970s have been drunk too early, for the best only recently reached a long plateau that will see them through much of the twenty-first century. Drink now to 2030 plus.

Pick of the Vintage: Cálem; Dow; Fonseca; Graham; Kopke; Niepoort.

1969 *

Desavinho (coulure) in May and an attack of mildew in early June cut down potential production, ensuring that 1969 would not be a high-yielding year. A hot summer followed but by early September the vines continued to be very backward. Rain fell in mid-September, bringing on rot in some districts. A late harvest produced wines that were much better than was previously thought possible. Taylor produced an attractive wine from Quinta de Vargellas, but otherwise no one declared.

1968 *

Late flowering followed by a hot, dry summer. Heavy rain just before harvest led to some rot. Attractive but early-maturing wines represented by Fonseca Guimaraens, Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas and Graham's Malvedos. Drink up.

1967 ** / *** middle-weight, middle distance wines; most fading

A wet spring followed a dry winter. This had a negative impact on flowering and resulted in poor berry set. July, August and September were hot with almost no rainfall. Picking began on 26 September and the weather remained good throughout. Musts were described as being slightly green and unripe at the

time (perhaps a function of the heat) but with plenty of colour. Many people picked too early. Four shippers chose to declare 1967 in preference to 1966, with Cockburn and Martinez following their own rather idiosyncratic hunch that 1967 was a better year. Sandeman (who declared both years) produced a wine that is just as good as their excellent 1966. On the whole, 1967 produced good, gentle, middle-distance wines, which are now looking rather tired around the edges. However I have enjoyed Cockburn on a number of occasions, and Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas is sweet, peppery and fully mature. Quinta do Noval Nacional is beautiful with a honeysuckle nose and crystallised fruit character but quite loose-knit nonetheless. Most wines should be drunk fairly soon.

Pick of the Vintage: Cockburn; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Sandeman.

1966 ***** power and elegance; complete

History has been rather unkind to the 1966s and until quite recently they were completely overshadowed by 1963. A warm, wet winter prepared the vines for a very hot, dry summer with May registering unusually high temperatures. The flowering was successful with a good berry set but the vines remained very backward until early September. In August the temperature in the Cima Corgo twice exceeded 45°C. The vintage began, as normal, around 20 September and the weather remained fine until the 30th. The rain was in fact beneficial, as the cool weather kept temperatures down and the grapes (some of which were raisinised by the heat) resisted disease. Sugar levels were high (14 degrees Baumé was normal) and the musts took plenty of work, producing impressively deep, powerful wines. On 9 October, Ronald Symington wrote that 'yields are the

lowest for many years... We are delighted with the prospects for the 1966s. It will be surprising indeed if 1966 does not prove to be an excellent vintage for Ports'.

Although the standard is not as quite as high across the board as in 1963, there are a number of really stupendous vintage Ports combining structure and quintessential 'bitter chocolate' intensity. Quinta do Noval Nacional typifies the vintage, matching its cast-iron tannic backbone with supreme elegance. Dow and Fonseca are two of my all-time favourites followed by dense, brooding wines from Delaforce, Graham and Taylor. The latter, when I tasted it in a vertical in 2007, was even more impressive than the 1963 from the same house. Cálem is also very fine. The 1966s may be drunk now but the best of these wines will keep for a lifetime or more.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Croft; Graham; Fonseca; Quinta do Noval Nacional; Sandeman.

1965 **

The winter of 1964/65 was dry and, after a wet spring, hot, dry weather returned for the summer. The vines suffered and the rain, which fell sporadically during vintage, actually benefited the grapes. The wines can be a bit green and simple as a result but with good body. No fully-fledged declaration apart from Wiese & Krohn, but there are some fine second-string wines like Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas, Dow's Bomfim and Graham's Malvedos which have developed well. Drink fairly soon. Fonseca Guimaraens is a little burnt and prune-y in style but will keep. A Sandeman wine (tasted in 2011) was still surprisingly youthful with firm tannic grip running right through to the finish; an example of just how good wines from this house were before the multinational owners stepped in.

1964 *

Coincided with the introduction of autovinification. Exceedingly hot weather during the vintage produced some round, full-blown jammy wines that are either fully mature or fading. Ronald Symington commented at the time that 'the forecasting of the quality is a difficult and open question, as rarely have weather conditions varied to such extremes during vintage'. Graham's Malvedos was displaying a roasted quality when I tasted it in 2010. Quinta do Noval Nacional (tasted in 2011) is now fairly pale, with the aroma of violets and icing sugar, elegant, succulent but falling away on the finish. Drink soon.

1963 ***** a classic vintage, ready now and with years ahead

A textbook growing season in northern Portugal: a cold winter followed by a wet spring set the vines up for a long, warm summer. Rain helped to swell the grapes just before the harvest, which took place under ideal conditions with warm days and cool nights. Ronald Symington reported at the time that '*mostos* [musts] look very nice indeed and seem to have plenty of flavour and colour even if perhaps lacking a little in "guts"'. Dick Yeatman of Taylor's recorded that the grapes were ripe but the stalks were still green at the start of vintage, 'rather like the 1924s' (which also turned out very well indeed). A large volume of wine was made and Dick Yeatman noted 'acidification widely needed'.

Widely declared, 1963 has subsequently become a benchmark vintage. The vintage was good across the board. All the wines have evolved well, although a number are now really showing their age (Martinez, Quinta do Noval). The best

wines still retain layer upon layer of rich, ripe fruit backed up by a powerful tannic streak that stands them in good stead for years to come. Nearly every shipper produced an impressive vintage Port in 1963 and this consistency is reflected in today's auction prices, which are around a third more than the 1966s, some of which are equally fine. The superstars of the vintage are Croft, Fonseca and Quinta do Noval Nacional. The 1963 Nacional (last tasted in 2010) is still dense, powerful and focused, bitter sweet with perfect balance. It is a wine that will go on and on and on and counts among the most wonderful wines that I have ever tasted. Cockburn, Delaforce, Dow, Graham, Taylor and Warre all produced superb wines.

Pick of the Vintage: Croft; Fonseca; Quinta do Noval, Nacional.

1962 **

Catastrophic winter floods, followed by long summer drought. Some wines tasting burnt. Not generally declared but some good second-string wines and a rich, lasting Quinta do Noval Nacional.

1961 **

I take a particular interest in this vintage because it is my own birth year. Some successful wines (Graham's Malvedos, Fonseca Guimaraens, Wiese & Krohn and Noval's 1961 so-called 'Crusted' (bottled in 1964), generally drinking well although not for long-term keeping. Taylor's Quinta de Vargellas is suffering from excess volatile acidity. Drink soon.

1960 *** gentle wines that are now over their peak

After a severe, wet winter, June and July were warm. By the

end of July the vines were advanced and Ronald Symington wrote 'should the weather be favourable for the next six to seven weeks till the beginning of vintage, the quality will probably be excellent'. Late August and early September were hot and much-needed rain came just before the harvest, which began for most on the 19th, although some picked as early as the 8th. The weather at the start of harvest was fine but then became dull, rainy and cool. Described at the time with 'good colour, flavoury, slightly green', 1960 was widely declared and well received by the trade. The wines seemed to peak in the late 1970s or early 1980s, some suffered from excess volatile acidity but the best wines are now soft, sweet and open. Mostly mid-weight and lacking in backbone, the best wines of the vintage are still soft, sweet and open. Cockburn, Dow and Graham showing particularly well. Drink soon.

Pick of the Vintage: Cockburn.

1958 * / **

A good summer followed by rain during picking. A handful of shippers declared although the wines were never very powerful and are now declining. Sandeman was showing its age when I last tasted it in 2011. Noval Nacional is still drinking well. Otherwise, drink up.

1957

Irregular weather with a very wet June. Apart from a few isolated examples, not generally declared. Wines generally rather one dimensional. A soft, sweet *colheita* from Cálem, a fine though fully mature Fonseca Guimaraens and an unusually impressive vintage Port from Royal Oporto are almost all that remain.

1955 ***** outstanding, concentrated wines for the long term

An early heatwave in April/May was followed by wet weather which necessitated regular spraying. Following hot weather in July and August, John Symington wrote 'grapes looking wonderful and fairly sweet considering there is still about four weeks to go before the vintage. A little rain ... should make for ideal conditions'. After a week of heat at the beginning of September the rain arrived on cue prior to vintage, which began at the end of the month. Apart from a little rain in early October, the harvest took place in perfect conditions.

Reading through Ronald Symington's notes from the time, it was clear that he thought a fine vintage was on the cards. So it has proved; the best 1955s are still complete wines retaining wonderful balance and masses of concentrated fruit. It was a small declaration and the 1955s are now quite hard to find but anyone with bottles remaining need be in no hurry to drink up. With so much of the vintage bottled in the UK, even the Port shippers lack stock. Croft is stupendous, showing just how good this house used to be when it was on form. Taylor is gentle, without the backbone that tends to characterise this vintage but very elegant and showing lovely purity. Dow, Graham, Niepoort, Sandeman and Warre are also very impressive.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Croft; Graham; Quinta do Noval, Nacional; Niepoort; Sandeman.

1954 **?

Tiny vintage, now a rarity. I have only ever tasted one 1954 (a very fragrant, elegant wine from Sandeman) but the vintage had a good reputation at the time. Most shippers opted for

1955 but there were a number of successful second-string wines.

1950 ** on the whole, soft and early maturing

After a challenging growing season, conditions were apparently ideal during the harvest and a number of shippers declared despite the difficult market conditions. Sandeman was still scented and fresh with more to give when I tasted it with George Sandeman in 2011. Cockburn (tasted 2012) is still deep and looking very good. Quinta do Crasto is still very fresh and vigorous and Graham's Malvedos continued to display good fruit and acidity into the 1990s. Dow, Ferreira and Cálem (last tasted in 1999) are looking hollow and pale. Drink soon.

1948 ***** rich, ripe, opulent wines

Following a wet winter, bud burst was prolific and fruit set was good, except in the higher areas where the flowering coincided with wet weather. The *pintor* arrived early following hot weather in June but July was unusually cool. High temperatures and dry easterly winds (*Nem bom vento...*) dried the grapes during August and September. Picking began early (around 15 September) but most waited for another week or ten days. The weather during vintage was hot, but the nights were cool. Sugar levels were high, many grapes were over-ripe and the fermentations were rapid. Many farmers faced huge difficulties in the light of post-war quotas and an impossible market for vintage Port at the time and, as a result, 1948 was not widely declared or shipped. Those that did declare made fabulous, opulent wines. I have only tasted the 1948s on a few occasions, most recently in 2003 at the Hersch's Seattle Port weekend. Taylor (last tasted in 2007) is

so rich it is almost caramelised. Still fresh, with floral aromas, it is amazingly rich and intense but almost unbalanced by so much sweetness. Similarly Fonseca, still fine and expressive with rapier-like tannins cutting through the fruit which has the sweetness of Demerara sugar. Not quite as powerful as either of these, Graham is nonetheless bolt upright with 'hot' sweet fruit and wonderful length. Sandeman is variable, but when I last tasted the 1948 in 2011 it was powerful and fresh with great length and depth. A 1948 Dow's Quinta do Bomfim which was neither declared nor shipped but bottled for home consumption is almost syrupy in its richness and intensity. The wines are not as solid as the '45s but they are certainly more sumptuous. Drink now or keep.

Pick of the Vintage: Taylor; Sandeman.

1947 **** very fine, balanced wines that have developed well; now rare

A year with ideal weather conditions: wet spring, hot summer and low yields. The weather was fine during the harvest and the *lagares* took plenty of work. Reluctantly declared by a number of shippers, 1947s are now very hard to find. Both Cálem and Ferreira are now fragile but Sandeman (last tasted in 2011) is youthful in appearance with great poise with bitter-sweet berry fruit and firm tannins still propping up the finish. Cockburn (who did not declare 1945) is undoubtedly the best: mellow, fully mature but retaining its bitter chocolate concentration at the core. Drink soon.

Pick of the Vintage: Cockburn.

PASSING THE PORT: THE BISHOP OF NORWICH

Port, either in bottle or decanter, is traditionally passed from right to left or clockwise around the table. There are a number of explanations for this, one of which is an ancient Celtic superstition that all left-hand turns were an ill omen. A much more down to earth reason is that the majority of people are right-handed, making it easier to pour the wine with the right hand and pass it on with the left.

With the lively conversation that usually follows a meal, it is not unusual for someone to neglect to pass the Port and for the decanter to come to a standstill. Rather than ask directly for the Port, the reminder used by members of the trade at Factory House lunches is to turn to the person on your right and say 'Do you know the Bishop of Norwich?' The origin of this expression is obscure but must relate to a former bishop, some say a Dr Wright of Norwich, who neglected to pass the Port. Upon this gentle reminder the Port should immediately continue its clockwise course around the table. There is a story, (possibly apocryphal) about a lunch at the Factory House when the Church of England Chaplain was asked by a Port shipper if he knew the Bishop of Norwich. He replied that he most certainly did as the then Bishop of Norwich was his brother-in-law. The decanter of Port stayed put!

1945 ***** 'victory vintage': wonderfully solid, lasting wines

'This being the first vintage spent in peace after the defeat of Germany and Japan it is disappointing that conditions may not allow a 1945 Victory Vintage,' wrote Ronald Symington at the time. The flowering was exceptionally early and fine weather during berry set held the prospect of the large vintage. The *pintor* arrived early but searing heat in June raisinised the grapes, cutting yields by about 50 per cent. Further drought caused yields to diminish even more. The harvest began early and, according to Dick Yeatman, the wines 'took fair work but were inclined to reach very high temperatures towards the end of fermentation'. Everyone except Cockburn declared. Due to shipping restrictions, the wines were mostly bottled in Oporto (sometimes in brown sherry bottles due to lack of glass) and have developed very well indeed. Some are starting to look rather frayed (Ferreira, Quinta do Noval, Sandeman) but Croft, Dow Niepoort and Taylor are bolt upright, reflecting the depth and concentration of this small but exceptional vintage. One of my favourites is Croft (tasted twice in 2007), which is scintillating: wonderfully fresh and pure with powerful tannins to back up the sweet berry-fruit. Drink now or keep forever! Taylor (last tasted in 2007) is, if anything, more powerful with voluptuous fruit supported by a massive tannic superstructure. It combined power and elegance. The best 1945s will continue to evolve well through the first half of the century and will still be alive to celebrate their centenary.

Pick of the Vintage: Croft; Dow; Taylor.

1942 **** wartime vintage; wines now rare

Declared by some and bottled in Gaia, but very little was shipped due to the restrictions in force at the time. A dry winter was followed by a cold and wet spring. Flowering was late and the crop was small. Rain in August helped to swell the grapes. Fermentations took some work. I have only tasted two wines: Croft is still fresh, beautifully poised and refined; Niepoort has sweetness and richness that can only be described as exotic, supported by tough, foursquare tannins, and is still hugely impressive.

1935 ***** classic wines with great finesse, some with real staying power

A split vintage: some shippers went for 1934 while others went with 1935. There is little to choose between them as both years produced some fantastic wines that are still drinking very well. 1935 was the smaller of the two harvests and the weather was cool and fine during vintage. The grapes were not particularly rich in sugar but they produced wines with great finesse and considerable staying power, making up in balance and harmony for what they lack in structure. Taylor (last tasted in 2007) does not lack structure: it is still introverted on the nose but hugely powerful with ripe broad tannins lingering onto a sweet finish. Cálem and Ramos Pinto are light, delicate, crisp and still alive. Croft and Delaforce have elegance, poise and retain some depth. Cockburn (last tasted in 2008) is glorious: ripe, retaining dark chocolate concentration and beautifully poised. Sandeman, when I tasted it in 2011, was still youthful and tight-knit, amazingly with more still to give.

Pick of the Vintage: Cockburn; Sandeman; Taylor.

1934 **** firm, well-structured wines, now showing their age

A dry winter was followed by a wet spring. Flowering and fruit set were late. July was hot and dry but September rain helped to swell the grapes. John Symington wrote: 'The vintage started on September 24th. Except for one day of rain it has been perfect vintage weather and fairly warm most days. The grapes have all come in fresh and very healthy. It should prove good wine as there was an absolute absence of disease of any kind.' The wines are now scarce but from tasting on a number of occasions (most recently at the Seattle Port weekend) the 1934s have the edge over 1935s in terms of structure but lack the elegance and finesse. Sandeman (tasted in 2011) is tight-knit and focused although not as expressive as the 1935. Fonseca is well structured, aromatic, alive and very, very fine. Ramos Pinto is fresh and delicate and Dow's is soft, smooth and sweet with a rather lean tannic grip. Niepoort have an impressive 1934 colheita.

Pick of the Vintage: Fonseca.

1932

I have only ever tasted one wine from this generally undeclared year, a Fonseca Guimaraens which was high toned but still sweet and fresh, albeit more like a colheita than a vintage, in 2003.

1931 ***** an outstanding year; overlooked by most shippers

Bypassed by the majority of shippers because it coincided with the worldwide depression, 1931 is almost certainly the best year never to have been fully declared. The trade was

still well stocked with the 1927s and every one of the British shippers ignored 1931. As a result there are few records of the 1931 vintage but the wines that have survived are outstanding and count among the best I have tasted.

Ernest Cockburn writes that 'demand this year was unusually small and the produce of some *quintas* could be bought at very low prices which hardly paid the farmer's expenses'. According to Amyas Warre, the summer 'was conspicuous for low temperatures, and although just before and during the vintage warmer weather prevailed, the grapes have never ripened properly... In the finer vineyards some good wine with plenty of colour is promised but elsewhere the *mostos* [musts] are thin and green. There was however very little if any mildew this year and consequently no *escolha* [selection] was necessary. The quantity of wine produced especially of VT [Vinho Tinto / Red Wine] is rather more than expected (about 30 per cent) and as the wines were free of disease and the fermentation of the musts regular it is probable that the wines will be sound.'

They were in fact a great deal better than 'sound'. One of very few shippers to declare was Quinta do Noval, which built its reputation on this vintage. The Nacional is so rare that Christian Seeley (President and Managing Director of Noval) has only had the opportunity to taste it on one occasion and the wine was oxidised, the cork having dried out! It still commands the highest price ever paid for a bottle of vintage Port (5,900 US\$ at a restaurant in 1988). I have never had the opportunity to taste the Nacional but the straight Quinta do Noval which I have tasted on a number of occasions, is, I am told, nearly as good. Last tasted from in 2003 from an English bottling, the wine still shows few signs of age, is still youthful on the nose with a wonderfully

fresh, assertive, powerful flavour and peacock's tail of a finish. Niepoort also declared a deep, dense 1931, which was effectively 'late bottled' and still looks youthful and very impressive. Other shippers kept back small quantities of 1931, mostly for their own consumption. Ramos Pinto is fine, seductive and elegant with some underlying power. Cálem is fine, firm with crisp acidity keeping the wine alive and Sandeman, now a pale pink-tawny, has a soft creamy texture with underlying richness. In the spring of 1998 I tasted what I am told was the last remaining bottle of Cockburn 1931 which, although not as rich or dense as either Noval or Niepoort, retains the balance and elegance of an outstanding but almost overlooked vintage.

Pick of the Vintage: Quinta do Noval; Niepoort.

1927 ***** classic, dark, concentrated wines

Embraced by most shippers, 1927 has stood the test of time and remains a truly monumental vintage. Although yields were not huge, in terms of vintage Port it appears to be one of those rare years that combined both quality and quantity. Both Cockburn and Croft apparently declared around 30,000 cases apiece.

The grapes were far advanced by the end of July but August was unusually cold with only a few really hot days and the grapes ripened slowly and evenly. September remained cool with some rain. Towards the end of the month, good weather helped to conclude the ripening process. The vintage began on 3 October. According to Ernest Cockburn, 'the grapes were ripe except those very high up, and the weather [during harvest] was hot and perfect. The *lagares* stood a great deal of work and the strengths were good'. The wines were widely

declared at the top of the market, shortly before the Wall Street Crash, and subsequently proved difficult to sell.

I was fortunate to taste eleven 1927s side-by-side in 1989 when James Suckling was researching his book on vintage Port, and recall debating at the time whether Fonseca was ready to drink! I have tasted a number of wines individually since and continue to be amazed by the wines, some of which are so dark and dense that they will continue to improve in bottle over eighty years later. Taylor (tasted in 2007) is the most recent example of this: still deep, ripe and supple supported by powerful, cast-iron tannins with a peacock's tail of a finish. Sandeman, tasted in 2011, is lighter but still rich and shows the balance of the vintage. Niepoort (last tasted in 2003) was still closed; tight, solid and not particularly expressive initially, it opens up to reveal an incredibly powerful wine. Likewise Cockburn (last tasted in 2012): more expressive but still incredibly youthful with beautiful floral aromas and bitter-chocolate intensity.

Pick of the Vintage: Cockburn; Niepoort; Taylor.

1924 **** high quality wines, the best still keeping well

It was apparent from the time of the harvest that 1924 would be out of the ordinary. The summer had been cool but dry. After rain fell in early September the grapes, which were small and dried up due to the drought, began to swell and ripen evenly. Ernest Cockburn notes that some grapes were not properly ripe when the harvest began on 29 September but yields were low and the wines produced had 'good colour, medium body and fair sweetness'. Gordon Cosens (of Silva & Cosens) concluded at the time 'that the 1924s will turn out to be a better than ordinary vintage...' He has been proved

right. Dow's (last tasted in 1998) is extraordinary: still deep in colour for its age, round mid-palate with a good tight, firm tannic backbone rising on the finish. Taylor (tasted in 2007) is richly scented with fine dark chocolate backbone, combining length and depth. Ramos Pinto and Ferreira on the other hand (last tasted in 1999 and 2003 respectively) are now fragile, their residual charm vying with creeping decay.

Pick of the Vintage: Dow; Taylor.

1917 ***

A late spring and very dry summer resulted in the grapes being rather burnt. The weather remained favourable until the start of September when two weeks of very hot weather were followed by thundery rain at the end of the month. The harvest began late (8 October) but the weather remained fine throughout. Some shippers declared but others overlooked 1917 due to the war. I have only tasted two wines from this vintage. Sandeman is still fine with berry fruit, tannic spice and sweetness balanced by fresh acidity. Ramos Pinto has a strong hint of resin on the nose and is now a relic.

1912 ***** classic vintage, some wines still standing up well

Generally declared, 1912 was considered to be a great vintage (perhaps the greatest of the early twentieth century). The summer was fairly cool but dry and during the first week of September, Ernest Cockburn notes that 'the grapes looked good though by no means ripe as the sugar had up to this time not developed, but fine weather on and after 18 September with additional warmth enabled them to make rapid progress... The wines showed a good average

percentage of sugar and had considerable flavour but the yield was on the short side; as they developed, however, they showed good colour and the year produced some extremely fine wines for bottling'. The 1912 Cockburn (tasted in 2002 and again in 2012) is still very much alive. The fruit may be drying out but the wine retains much of its spicy tannic grip and has an extraordinarily powerful finish. When I tasted it in 2003, Taylor was even more impressive but a subsequent bottle in 2007 proved to be similarly slightly roasted but light and rather fragile. Sandeman retains a vestige of fruit but Dow is maderised and Ferreira somewhat rustic and drying out.

Pick of the Vintage: Cockburn.

1911

Just one shipper, Sandeman, declared a wine for King George V's Coronation. Now autumnal in character but very sweet and unctuous.

1908 **** / ***** fine, long-lived vintage

A cold winter was followed by a hot summer. Both Ernest Cockburn and John Warre concur: 'It seemed probable from the start that the year would be declared a vintage Year,' wrote the former; 'Everything points to 1908 turning out to be the best year since phylloxera swept away all the Portuguese vines,' declared the latter. The weather during vintage was hot and there was no rain. The grapes matured evenly and were free from disease. The 1908 Cockburn is reputedly their greatest-ever wine, and I tasted it for the first time in 2012. It is now quite pale but ethereal with beautiful richness. I can certainly vouch for Dow (last tasted at their

bicentennial tasting in 1998), which has a deep amber-tawny colour, slightly caramelised, milk chocolate richness with succulent texture and great complexity. It is outstanding by any measures. Sandeman (tasted in 2003) and Taylor (tasted in 2007) are fading fast but Cálem, though fragile, is still quite impressive.

1904 **** light wines; waning

The summer was very dry but rain in mid-September helped to swell the grapes. It seems from a contemporary report that some growers picked too early and that although 'there were some very good grapes, the skins were hard and the grapes had little liquid in them. The vines were so overloaded with grapes that, although the weather was favourable, they could not bring them to ripeness, and it was found in some *quintas* that the last wines were far more green than those made earlier'. Yields were in fact so much greater than expected that the fortifying *aguardente* was in such short supply that it had to be rationed. The large crop nonetheless produced some fine wines, lighter than in 1900 and now fading into old tawny. Cockburn however was still deep in 2012; quite rich and structured but a bit clumsy on the finish. It must have started out as a very tannic wine. Sandeman was still just about alive when I tasted it at the Port Wine Institute's Vintages of the Century Tasting in 1999 – but was sadly corked when I had another opportunity to taste it twelve years later.

1900 **** fine, delicate wines; some now fragile

The twentieth century began with a fine, abundant vintage that turned out well in spite of an initial lack of body and colour. Harvest was late, starting on 1 October. Ernest Cockburn wrote that 'the vintage lots shipped

showed wines of great delicacy with appreciable breed, and although lighter in colour than many previous vintages they appealed to connoisseurs of Port Wine'. The most recent 1900 that I have tasted (in 2007) was Taylor's which had been bottled in Ireland. Surprisingly deep and youthful in colour for a wine of 107 years, fresh if caramelised on the nose, it is still elegant and in fine condition. I tasted Ferreira and Sandeman at the IVP's Vintages of the Century tasting in 1999. Although Ferreira was more like a very old *colheita* than a vintage, Sandeman still retained a vestige of fresh fruit and some milk-chocolate intensity. Dow's (tasted at their bicentennial a year earlier) is scented, high-toned with soft, tawny flavours and a medicinal finish.

Pick of the vintage: Taylor.

1897 ****

After the widely declared 1896 vintage, only a handful of shippers declared, mostly as a mark of respect to Queen Victoria who celebrated her Diamond Jubilee this year. There was a shortage of fortifying spirit and Sandeman apparently used Scotch whisky. I have only ever tasted one wine from Harvey, still fresh in 2010 with a delicate, lifted tealeaf and citrus character and still very drinkable.

1896 ***** watershed year: the first great post-*phylloxera* vintage

The turning point for Port: the best vintage since *phylloxera* struck the Douro in the 1870s. Ernest Cockburn records that 'in May the vines were looking very well and the prospects were good, but from then on the vines began to be attacked by various diseases that had done so much damage in the

past...' (presumably oidium). The harvest took place amid favourable weather conditions although Ernest Cockburn – who seems to be quite pessimistic about most vintages – wrote that 'the grapes were not as ripe as they should have been'. This is not borne out by Cockburn's 1896 when I tasted it in 2012, which still retains a pink hue with a lovely chocolate core and caramelised finish. Similarly, Dow's 1896 (tasted at their bicentennial tasting) still had a remarkable colour for its age with fresh berry fruit evident and extraordinary firm, peppery tannic grip. A remarkably bold wine, even after 102 years!

1880

This must have been the height of phylloxera and so very few wines were made. I have only tasted one, a wine from Ramos Pinto (the year of their foundation) bottled in 1914 so technically a colheita. It was tasted in 2000 to celebrate the 120th anniversary of Ramos Pinto: old mahogany colour with olive green rim, high toned on the nose but with a vestige of fruit; tasting fresher than it smells, still sweet and spicy with a tawny marmalade character but fading fast in the glass.

1873

Phylloxera broke out in the Douro in 1863 and was spreading steadily through the region at this time, reducing yields. Nonetheless, sixteen shippers declared including Sandeman, whose remarkable wine I tasted with the Port Forum in London in 2011: still quite intense and aromatic with a lovely caramelised orange character, velvety richness with a vestige of tannin remaining, sweet and very beautiful.

1854

A so called 'comet' vintage, coinciding with Halley's Comet. Tasted at Dow's bicentennial tasting and made from pre-phylloxera vines: very pale amber in colour, green-tinged rim; high toned but scented, almost floral and slightly caramelised; lovely creamy caramelised tawny flavours, burnt sugar. Light, fine, fragile and quite short but still just about alive, even retaining the last vestige of tannic spice.

1851

Produced from pre-phylloxera grapes, I tasted this wine at the birthday celebration organised for me by members of the Port Forum. According to Michael Broadbent this was a year tainted with mildew although oidium only made its presence felt a year later. From an unknown shipper, this wine was still deep and amazingly youthful in the centre of the glass, browning on the rim; subdued, a touch high-toned but still fine and focused; dusty cherry fruit still evident, a touch of coffee, bitter-sweet cherries with some sweetness coming through again on the finish. Still retaining its youthful grip, amazingly fresh if quite dry in style. An astonishing wine that illustrates the staying power of a good vintage Port.

1844

The oldest Port I have tasted. From Quinta de São Martinho (a Rebello Valente property): pale mahogany colour with an olive green rim, high toned but ethereal; very, very delicate, light and just off-dry but still fresh with searing acidity keeping the wine alive in the mouth. This wine was fortified but almost certainly made to a much drier style than is customary today.

STORING, AGEING AND SERVING PORT

So much has been written about the rituals of storing, serving and drinking Port that people are sometimes deterred from opening a bottle. In reality there are no hard and fast rules, just practical suggestions that help you to enjoy a wine to the full. So-called 'wood-matured' Ports (ruby, reserve, all tawnies, colheitas, white and the majority of LBVs) are bottled ready for drinking and should be stored upright. With the possible exception of some colheitas, they do not benefit from keeping and will begin to deteriorate with bottle age. Aged tawnies, however, are fairly resilient even though they may lose some of their freshness if kept for too long.

Given the correct storage conditions, bottle-matured Ports (vintage, crusted and unfiltered LBVs) will evolve in bottle over the medium to long term, gaining character and complexity with age. The ideal cellar for all wines is a cool, dark space with a reasonably even temperature of 10 to 12°C, winter to summer, day to night. Port is more resilient than many wines but will still be damaged by excessively high or fluctuating temperatures; seepage around the cork and capsule is often a symptom. Bottles should be laid on their side to maintain the elasticity of the cork with the label uppermost so that the sediment or crust falls to the underside. Vintage Ports are often marked with a splash of whitewash that survives even after the label has disintegrated. If the bottle is moved for any reason it should be returned to its original position with the label or white splash facing upwards.

As a rule of thumb, wood Port intended for early drinking is bottled with a stopper cork whereas bottle-matured Port for laying down has a driven cork.

Serving port

With the exception of vintage, crusted and unfiltered LBV, all Port can be poured directly from the bottle into the glass. White Ports should be served chilled, straight from the refrigerator. Tawny Ports also benefit from being served 'cellar cool', especially during the summer months. Be careful not to over-chill the wine (an hour or two in the fridge will suffice) as this tends to mask the delicacy of the aromas and flavours. All other Ports should be served on the cooler side of room temperature, remembering that rooms in modern centrally heated houses are considerably warmer than those of yesteryear. A Port that is too warm will appear unbalanced as heat brings out the spirit on the nose.

Once a bottle has been opened, all Ports begin to deteriorate after a short period of time. Rubies and filtered LBVs begin to lose some of their freshness and vibrancy a week or so after opening and should be drunk within three weeks. Having matured for longer in cask, aged tawnies will stay in good condition for longer after opening; a month or more if kept in the refrigerator. Like all great wines, vintage Ports (along with crusted and bottle-matured LBVs) should be consumed within a few days of opening. Older wines tend to be more fragile and are likely to lose their freshness and complexity after a relatively short period of time. Ideally these should be drunk within a few hours of decanting.

The pleasure gained from a great wine is all too often marred by the use of an inappropriate glass. I recall the occasion when a senior Port shipper received the Fortified Winemaker of the Year award and a major London hotel served vintage Port in thimble-sized glasses, filled to the brim. Although Port is generally served after a meal and

therefore drunk in smaller quantities than the average red or white wine, it should still be served in reasonably capacious glasses, filled to a maximum level two-thirds from the brim. This leaves plenty of space for the Port to be swirled and aired in the glass so that the aromas can be appreciated to the full. The Port and Douro Wine Institute (IVDP) have their own recommended glass, designed by Portuguese architect Álvaro Siza Vieira. It is tulip-shaped with a square stem. An indent marks the position where it should be held.

Decanting port

Vintage Port is one of few wines to be bottled without any fining or filtration. Consequently, after around five years in bottle, a substantial amount of sediment begins to form. This is not like the fine-grained sediment that appears in a bottle of mature Claret or Burgundy, but a heavy 'crust' that sticks to the side of the glass and slides slowly to the base of the bottle when stood upright.

Decanting vintage Port (along with crusted and bottle-matured LBV) is a relatively straightforward procedure requiring only a steady hand and reasonably good light. The traditional use of a candle to illuminate the neck of the bottle adds a certain romance but as most vintage Ports are bottled in opaque, black glass to protect the wine from the light during storage, it is of limited effect. Good background light is, however, useful to illuminate the neck of the decanter as the wine is being poured.

Ideally, the bottle should be stood upright some two or three hours before decanting (although there are many spontaneous parties at *quintas* in the Douro where a bottle of vintage Port is opened and decanted at short notice without detriment to the wine). If a wax seal covers the

cork, a few sharp raps with the handle of the corkscrew will cause it to break away and fragment. More challenging are the thick plastic capsules used in the UK in the mid-1960s, which require a Stanley knife and a great deal of patience to remove.

The cork should then be eased slowly from the bottle, causing the minimum of disturbance to the wine. In the case of older vintages this can be quite difficult as the cork will often break where it fans out about three-quarters of the way down the neck of the bottle. It may therefore take two or more attempts to remove the cork in its entirety and fragments will fall into the wine. A decanting funnel equipped with a fine mesh screen or a clean nylon stocking will catch the pieces of cork. Always use a good corkscrew with a sharp point and an open helix as cheaper examples with a solid 'worm' will pull the core from a soft or spongy cork.

If the bottle has been shaken and the crust disturbed, leave it standing upright for thirty minutes after pulling the cork for any loose sediment to settle. Then, keeping the label or splash of whitewash uppermost, pour the wine steadily and slowly into a clean, freshly rinsed decanter. Many wines are tainted by musty decanters and either the Port or the cork takes the blame. Tilt the decanter as you pour. As the level of wine in the bottle falls, tiny particles of sediment will start to appear on the side of the decanter. This is the cue to stop pouring. If the bottle has been handled carefully there will be, at the most, four centimetres of wine left behind. Pour this into a glass and the wine and sediment may be used to enrich the gravy if the wine has been decanted before a meal. Younger vintage Ports will benefit especially from two or three hours exposure to the air before serving, so a limited amount of pre-planning is recommended.

A great deal of unnecessary ritual surrounds the use of Port tongs which, at first sight, look rather like a medieval instrument of torture. The tongs are meant to be heated in an open fire until red-hot before being clamped around the neck of the bottle. Subsequently, a damp cloth is applied whereupon the neck is supposed to break cleanly. Contrary to perceived opinion, Port tongs are almost never used in Vila Nova de Gaia and have mostly been mothballed as museum pieces. Another myth surrounds the use of a specially made ornamental decanting machine. This apparatus (usually made from brass) has a cradle for the bottle, which is controlled by a screw device and handle. However, once the first sediment starts to appear you have to rewind the handle quite fast, a feat that is beyond the mechanism that controls the bottle's incline. A steady hand is always the safest option!

2

PORT PRODUCERS AND SHIPPERS

THE STRUCTURE OF THE TRADE

The Port trade is dominated by brands. It has been, to a greater or lesser extent, since the eighteenth century when many of the famous Port-shipping firms came into being. But household names like Sandeman, Cockburn, Graham and Taylor represent the apex of a much larger pyramid. There are over 34,000 individual *lavradores* or farmers in the Douro, the vast majority of whom farm far too little land to justify investment in a winery. A few continue to produce a few pipes of wine in time-honoured fashion (*adegueiros*), but most sell their grapes either to one of the major shippers or to a co-operative.

The shippers often have long-term contracts with individual growers and/or *adegueiros*. 'Contract' is perhaps too strong a word, for these are mostly gentleman's agreements based on mutual trust which stretches back for generations. A senior member of the shipping firm (usually the winemaker) will visit his growers at least

once a year, usually just prior to the harvest. Deals are invariably done over a glass of ancient tawny from the farmer's own stock followed by a handshake. In the past it wasn't unknown for the farmer's daughter to be offered as part of the bargain!

Until 1986, all Port wine had to be traded through the *entrepoto* or bonded area of Vila Nova de Gaia. The legislation that came into force in June of that year opened the way for wines to be exported directly from growers in the demarcated Douro region. Although a number of leading *quintas* and some co-operatives have begun to market their own wine, the pre-eminence of the established brands has meant that their share of Port wine sales has not passed 1 per cent. The co-operatives in the region produce 20 per cent of all Port, most of which is bought by the shippers as the basis for their standard ruby and tawny. There are also a number of powerful *intermediários* (intermediaries), private companies who make and/or broker wine as a commodity and sell to many of the larger shippers.

The term 'shipper' dates from the era when Port companies were little more than agents taking a commission on the wines they shipped abroad. Nearly all shippers are now intimately involved in the production of Port with their own *quintas*, centralised winemaking and bottling plants as well as ageing facilities in Vila Nova de Gaia.

The Port shippers have been in a state of flux for the past fifty years. In the downturn that followed the Second World War, many smaller family-owned shippers were taken over by their larger brethren. Some of the leading brands fell into the hands of multinational firms who were seen as the white knights of the Port trade in the 1960s. After mergers, takeovers and restructuring, Croft and Delaforce

were acquired by United Distillers (ultimately Diageo), Sandeman by Seagram and Cockburn and Martinez by Harvey's (subsequently Allied Domecq then Fortune Brands). Even the Symington family (owners of Dow, Graham and Warre, Gould Campbell, Quarles Harris and Smith Woodhouse) relinquished 20 per cent of their family firm to Pernod-Ricard in order to secure distribution.

The multinationals have all now backed out, and from 2001 to 2010 the Port business underwent another restructuring which put many of the former multinational companies back under family control. Sandeman joined Ferreira and Offley in the hands of Sogrape, Portugal's largest winemaker, which has itself become a multinational with interests in Argentina, New Zealand and Spain. Croft is now part of the Fladgate Partnership which was formed jointly with Taylor and Fonseca. Delaforce, briefly part of the Fladgate Partnership, is now controlled by Real Companhia Velha (Royal Oporto). Cockburn and Martinez, the last of the multinational firms to be sold on, now belong to Symington Family Estates.

There are no officially released figures as to which companies are largest in terms of shipments, but five groups now dominate the trade. Symington Family Estates (with Cockburn, Dow, Graham, Warre among other brands under their belt) are the largest shippers and the largest landowners in the Douro. Porto Cruz, a French-owned company that came from nowhere in the 1970s, are a close second and have by far the largest single brand, Gran Cruz. They are followed in third place by Sogrape (Sandeman, Offley, Ferreira), controlled by the Guedes family. The Fladgate Partnership, with some of the best-known premium brands – Croft, Fonseca and Taylor – are in fourth place. They also control

the Port house of Romariz, own a small share of Messias and recently acquired the firm of Wiese & Krohn. A relatively new Spanish-owned group, Sogevinus, who own Burmester, Barros, Cálem, Gilberts and Kopke, comes in fifth place. Between them, these five groups account for nearly 80 per cent of sales by volume. As ever, the Port trade is a cultural melting pot with well-known Portuguese and British companies working alongside firms of Danish, Dutch, French, Norwegian and Spanish ownership and extraction.

At the time of writing, a total of ninety shippers are registered with the Instituto dos Vinhos do Port e do Douro (IVDP), of which seventy-eight are exporters. The following directory of Port producers and shippers is by no means exhaustive but includes all those with a significant presence on export markets. A few of the names that follow are historic but merit inclusion because their wines continue to be sold at auction. Shippers and producers are listed in alphabetical order by brand name with the full company name, address, telephone/fax numbers and website below.

Andresen

J. H. Andresen Sucrs. Lda

Rua Felizardo de Lima, 74, Apartado 1510, 4401-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 770 450

www.jhandresen.com

Jann Hinrich Andresen was born on the North Sea Island of Föhr, part of Denmark. At the age of fourteen he left for Portugal and, five years later in 1845, established his own Port shipping firm. His heirs continued to run the company until 1942 when, like many shippers at the time, they were forced to sell. The company was acquired by Albino Pereira

dos Santos whose successors still run the firm. Álvaro van Zeller is the winemaker. The company specialises in tawnies and sells mainly to France, Belgium, Germany, Holland and Denmark. At the top of the range is 'Royal Choice' a soft, silky twenty-year-old. Andresen only declared their first vintage Port in 1950 and now seem to be making up for lost time with frequent declarations in the late 1990s and 2000s. LBVs, bottled unfiltered, have been produced since 1992 and are more impressive than the vintage Ports which are relatively light and early maturing. The company also maintains a small stock of excellent old white Ports and colheitas dating back to an undrinkably concentrated 1900. Andresen own Quinta das Aranhas ('Spider's Quinta') with forty hectares of A-Grade vineyard near Tua. They have two lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia, one of which used to belong to Mackenzie Driscoll, and the name has served in the past as a second brand.

Barão De Vilar

Barão de Vilar Vinhos SA

Rua Candido dos Reis, 575, 4400-075 Vila Nova de Gaia
Tel. (351) 223 773 330; Fax (351) 223 751 939

Although this company bills itself as being 'established in 1715', it is in fact one of the most recent of all the Port shipping firms having been founded in 1996 by Fernando and Álvaro Van Zeller. Nevertheless it has good connections as the van Zellars can trace their origins back to thirteenth century Flanders and migrated to Portugal in the seventeenth century. The family used to own Quinta do Noval. Barão de Vilar is a title granted by the Queen of Portugal D. Maria II to Cristiano Nicolau Kopke, the 1st Baron of Vilar, in 1836, which is still in the van Zellar's possession. The company occupies part of the lodge that used to belong to

Noval. Despite being a small shipper, the company produces a comprehensive range of wines from ruby through tawny to some good mid-weight vintage Ports. Some rather rustic colheitas, dating back to the 1950s, have been bought in from stock matured by the Casa do Douro. The company owns a winery near Vilariça in the Douro Superior. Barão de Vilar also ships Port under the Feuerheerd and Maynard brands. The latter is a tribute to Walter Maynard, born in 1652 and an ancestor of the van Zeller family through his marriage to Dorothea Augusta Kopke.

Barros

Barros Almeida & Ca

Vinhos SA, Rua D. Leonor de Freitas,
180/2, Apartado 39, 4401-955 Vila Nova de Gaia
Tel. (351) 223 752 320
www.porto-barros.pt

Barros is one of the principal brands belonging to Sogevinus, a Spanish group that includes Burmester, Cálem, Gilberts and Kopke. Barros itself is a relative newcomer to the scene, having been founded in 1913 when Manoel de Almeida left the firm of Motta & Vaz to create his own independent company – Almeida em Comandita. His sister married Manoel de Barros, who reputedly started out as an office boy and then entered the firm as a partner, altering the name to Barros Almeida. Barros weathered the depression of the 1930s and used it as an opportunity to buy up a number of ailing firms. The last acquisition was Kopke (founded in 1638 and purchased by Barros in 1953). The Barros family themselves sold out in 2006 (retaining Quinta Dona Matilde) and Sogevinus is currently controlled by Nova Galicia, one of the largest *cajas* in Spain.

The bulk of Barros wines are young rubies and tawnies

destined for the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Germany and the home market. However, its strength at the quality end of the market lies less in vintage Port than in aged tawnies and colheitas. Barros maintains substantial stocks of these wines in Gaia dating back to the 1930s. Wines like the finely tuned 1966 colheita, a rich, concentrated 1937 colheita and a beautifully lifted thirty-year-old tawny put Barros into the premier league. Vintage Ports can be open, supple and attractive (1995, 1987, for example) but Barros declares on a frequent basis and the wines tend to be relatively light and early maturing.

Borges

Sociedade dos Vinhos Borges SA

Rua do Infante D. Henrique, 421, Apartado 18, 4439 - 909
Rio Tinto

Tel. (351) 223 745 770

www.vinhosborges.pt

Borges & Irmão used to be one of the best known names in Portugal. The company was founded in 1884 by two brothers, who began trading in tobacco, matches, textiles and wine. They made enough money to establish a high-street bank which, like all Portuguese-owned banks, was nationalised in 1975, a year after the 25 April revolution. Subsidiary companies like Borges & Irmão Vinhos went with them. In the ensuing confused political situation, Borges faced an uncertain future as successive governments talked about ways of returning Portugal's moribund state sector to private ownership. The quality of the wines suffered although by the mid-1990s, under the auspices of winemaker Anselmo Mendes, there were encouraging signs of improvement.

After decades of uncertainty, Borges & Irmão was

completely restructured in 1998 and stripped of its principal assets to realise capital. Much of the stock and two of the company's *quintas*, Junco and Casa Nova in the Pinhão Valley, were purchased by Taylor. This leaves the company with Quinta do Soalheira in the Rio Torto. The company is now integrated into JMV, a Portuguese group which owns Torrié Café. Rosés, Vinhos Verdes and Douro wines are now more important than Port but some fine old tawnies and rather attenuated vintage Ports from Borges can still be found for sale on the market.

Burmester

J.W. Burmester & Ca., SA

Rua Barão de Forrester, 73, 4400-034 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 747 290

www.burmesterporto.com

The Burmesters are a large family who came to Portugal from Germany in 1730 and began to specialise in Port twenty years later. The name is a corruption of *Burgmeister*, who was effectively mayor of a town or city in the middle ages. There are nine branches of the family altogether, one of which settled in the United Kingdom, forming the company Burmester Nash & Co. with offices in both London and Oporto. Frederick Burmester subsequently became a founding director of the Westminster Bank (precursor of NatWest) and the family name is still represented by Burmester Road in the London suburb of Wimbledon. In 1834 Johann Wilhelm Burmester arrived in Oporto to work for the family company; when he became sole owner in 1861 the name was changed to J. W. Burmester and Ca. The firm remained in family hands until 1999 when it was sold to Amorim, a Portuguese family

conglomerate which began by selling corks to the Port trade. Amorim subsequently sold the firm on to Sogevinus in 2005, retaining the company's only vineyard, Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo.

Burmester still scores highly with its supremely good old tawnies and colheitas. Burmester's ten-year-old is delicate but rich, while its twenty-year-old is soft, high-toned and beautifully balanced. The company also maintains outstanding old colheitas dating back to 1890 and 1900, both bottled in 1977. In 1998 it was able to present an intriguing vertical tasting covering a century of its colheita Ports. Gilberts, a subsidiary company named after Karl Gilbert, belonged to Burmester before being brought by Sogevinus.

Butler Nephew

c/o Porto Vasconcellos

Avenida de Diogo Leite, 8, 4400-111 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223756358

vasconcellosoporto@yahoo.com

The company was established in Oporto by H. Burmester and John Nash in 1730 where they traded as general merchants. In 1789 J. Nash and H. Burmester dissolved their partnership. James Butler, a clerk and employee of the firm, was taken in as a partner and the firm became Nash, Butler & Co. In 1829 James Butler's nephew, Robert Butler, joined the firm and the firm was renamed Butler, Nephew and Co. The firm had a good reputation before the Second World War but fell into relative obscurity, first under Gonzalez Byass then subsequently Porto Vasconcellos. The name has recently been revived by Stephen Christie, owner of Vaconcellos and Castelinho. The company owns Quinta Dona Mafalda, which is currently being replanted and restored. A full range

of Port wines is now being offered under the Butler Nephew label.

Cálem

Sogevinus Fine Wines SA

Av. Diogo Leite 344, 26-42, 4400-111, Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 746 660

www.calem.pt

Cálem was a family-owned company, founded in 1859, which grew into one of Portugal's leading brands. In 1998 it made history by becoming the first shipper in Gaia to be bought out by a company based in the Douro. This reversal was short lived, as in 2003 Cálem was bought out by the Galician bank the Caixa Nova, and now forms part of Sogevinus along with Barros, Burmester and Kopke.

The company has been separated from Quinta da Foz, the property that formed the backbone of Cálem's vintage Ports for over a century as well as their more recent SQVPs. At the confluence of the Pinhão River with the Douro, Quinta da Foz remained with the Cálem family until it was sold in 2012. The vinification centre at São Martinho d'Anta near Sabrosa and Quinta do Pego were retained as part of the company. In 2004 Cálem bought the A-grade Quinta do Arnozelo in the Douro Superior.

Cálem produced superb vintage Ports in 1966 and 1970 but subsequent wines have been very inconsistent. Three vintages (1985, 1990 and 1991) were sensibly withdrawn from the market. Aged tawnies and colheitas dating back to 1957 (the latter bottled to order) look much better. The company's main brand is Velhotes, a standard tawny which is brand leader on the home market. The company's stocks are split between four separate lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia.

Their main lodge is located by the lower tier of the Ponte Dom Luíz and receives over 100,000 visitors a year.

Churchill

Churchill Graham, Lda

Rua da Fonte Nova, 5, 4400-156 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 703 641

www.churchills-port.com

Churchill's gravitas as a Port shipper belies its youthful age. Deprived of their family Port house by the sale of W. & J. Graham to the Symingtons in 1970, brothers Anthony, Johnny and William Graham established Churchill Graham in 1981. It was the first new British Port shipper in half a century. The Grahams named the company after Johnny's wife (née Churchill) and his own family surname, but trade under the Churchill brand. With a lodge rented from Taylor and a shoestring budget, Johnny Graham quickly gained a reputation for small quantities of high-quality wines pitched mainly at the UK market. The company had no *quintas* to call its own and bought in wines from properties belonging to the Borges de Sousa family. From 1982 to 1999 Quinta do Fojo, Quinta da Manuela and Quinta da Água Alta have provided the backbone for some ripe, plump vintage Ports. Quinta da Agua Alta, with its own distinctive *terroir*, was bottled as a single-*quinta* wine.

In 1999, Churchill changed direction and bought two properties, Quinta da Gricha on the bank of the Douro above Quinta de Roriz and Quinta do Rio in the Torto Valley. These now form the basis for Churchill's thick-set vintage and LBV and Gricha is produced as a single-*quinta* vintage in good interim years. The company also makes a range of Douro wines known as Churchill Estates. With

few stocks of old wine to draw on, the Churchill range has gradually developed to include a ten- and twenty-year-old tawny and a well-aged dry white Port.

Cockburn

Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal

Tel: (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

The butt of many a pun over its pronunciation, Cockburn is one of the best-known names in the Port trade. The story of Cockburn's success is an intriguing tale of six enterprising families and a multinational. The firm was established in 1815 by George Wauchope and Robert Cockburn (whose younger brother Henry, Lord Cockburn, was a Scottish judge). Originally called Cockburn Wauchope & Co., the name was extended to Cockburn Wauchope & Greig when the two founding partners were joined by Captain William Greig in 1828. Casks branded with the initials 'C. W. G.' can still be seen at Cockburn's lodges in Gaia. The company has always looked outwards, and in 1829 (just fourteen years after it was formed) Archibald and Alexander Cockburn established an office in London. The family was joined in 1845 by Henry and John Smithes and the firm was renamed Cockburn Smithes, the name which survives to this day. John Smithes subsequently married Eleanor Cobb whose brother, Charles, joined the London office in 1863. John Smithes continued to work for Cockburn until the 1970s and Peter Cobb retired in 1999.

In the slump that followed the Second World War, Cockburn became prey to outsiders. The company was

taken over by Harvey of Bristol in 1962, a year after Harvey had acquired arch-rivals Martinez Gassiot. Harvey was subsequently bought by Allied-Lyons (subsequently Allied-Domecq) making Cockburn an increasingly small cog within a very big wheel – but with the media support afforded by a multinational, Cockburn became the leading Port brand on the UK market. In the revolving door of takeovers and mergers, Allied Domecq was taken over by Pernod-Ricard, leaving Cockburn with Fortune Brands until it was bought by Symington Family Estates in 2010.

Having invested heavily in vineyards in the 1970s and 1980s, Cockburn has a number of substantial properties in the Douro. Quinta de Santa Maria on the outskirts of Régua relieves the pressure on the lodges in Gaia. Upstream, Cockburn has long-favoured the Douro Superior as a source for its fruit, and in 1978 the company planted 250 hectares of vineyard on relatively flat land at Vilariça (Quinta do Ataíde). Grapes from Vilariça once made it into Cockburn's vintage Port but these vineyards are now used by the Symington family to produce red and white Douro wine. In 1989 Cockburn's added the spectacular Quinta dos Canais to its vineyard portfolio. Wines from Canais have long formed part of the vintage *lote* and are bottled as single-*quinta* vintage Ports in good, interim years. Once a famous Cockburn estate, Quinta do Tua is now rebranded to Graham and Quintas Vale Coelho and Telhada are attached to Warre.

Cockburn's produced some superb vintage Ports in the twentieth century, notably 1908, 1912, 1927, 1947 and 1963. But despite investing heavily in vineyards, Cockburn neglected their winemaking over many years. Without a central winery worthy of the name, many of Cockburn's

wines were made in bits and pieces in some fairly primitive conditions. This goes some way to explain the inconsistency of their vintage Ports from 1975 onwards. During this time Cockburn set their store by Special Reserve, deservedly the bestselling brand of Port in the United Kingdom and, despite the lack of winemaking facilities, one of the most consistent reserve Ports on the market. The Symington Family have conducted a thorough reappraisal of Cockburn in recent years with the intention of rediscovering the company's soul. Special Reserve maintains the same high quality even if it has moved to a younger, fresher style and there are promising signs from recently launched LBVs, tawnies and single-*quinta* vintages. Based on Quinta dos Canais and made with a high percentage of Touriga Nacional, Cockburn's 2011 has all the makings of a great vintage Port.

Champalimaud

Montez Champalimaud, Lda

Quinta do Côfto, Cidadelhe, 5040-154 Mesão Frio

Tel. (351) 254 899 269

www.quintadocotto.pt

Miguel Champalimaud is a controversial figure in the Douro. Since taking responsibility for his family estate, Quinta do Côfto, in the mid-1970s, he has been vociferous in his criticism of the status quo. Champalimaud's bugbear is that the official system of vineyard classification rates the Cima Corgo and Douro Superior higher than the Baixo Corgo where his own family's properties happen to be situated. With some justification he likes to remind visitors that the Baixo Corgo was the part of the Douro where the Port trade began, but loses respect with his perpetual tirade against today's Port establishment. Perhaps for this reason it has been difficult to

take Champalimaud's Ports seriously, and Quinta do Côtto has become much better known for its range of red and white Douro wines. Although he has only declared four vintages to date (1982, 1989, 1995 and 2001), Champalimaud has done much to advance the cause of the 'single *quinta*' (and perhaps much to damage it). In 1986 Quinta do Côtto became one of the first properties to take advantage of the new legislation which permitted Port exports directly from the Douro, whereas previously it had to be shipped from the *entrepoto* in Vila Nova de Gaia.

Miguel Champalimaud has now retreated to the safer haven of property development at Quinta da Marinha near Lisbon. Nonetheless, a rather quirky philosophy remains with the 1995 and 2001 vintages made in a much drier style than is the norm (2.8 degrees Baumé as opposed to around 4 Baumé). With a concentrated raisin-like aroma and a flavour akin to bitter chocolate, the wine bears a strong resemblance to an Italian Recioto. Filtered before bottling, it is enjoyable to drink young but it should never be thought of as serious vintage Port.

Quinta do Crasto

Sociedade Agrícola da Quinta do Crasto

Quinta do Crasto, Gouvinhas, 5060-063 Sabrosa

Tel. (351) 254 920 020

www.quintadocrasto.pt

Best known for its unfortified red Douro wines, this well-situated *quinta* midway between Régua and Pinhão also produces both vintage and unfiltered LBV Port. Unusually, many of the best grapes from the older low-yielding vineyards are used to make Douro wine and Port is often relegated to second place. Nevertheless, Quinta do Crasto produces some

attractive firm, middle-weight Ports, entirely foot trodden in *lagares* in the traditional manner. Crasto's vintage Ports are gaining in stature and compare favourably with many shippers' wines but are still some way from matching the truly exceptional Quinta do Crasto 1950, of which painfully few bottles now remain.

Croft*

Croft & Ca. Lda

c/o Fladgate Partnership, PO Box 1311, EC Santa Marinha
4401-501 Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal

Tel: (351) 223 742 800

www.croftport.com

Croft is one of the oldest and most distinguished names in the Port trade. It was established in Portugal in 1678 under the name of Phayre & Bradley but the company can trace its origins back to the Armada year of 1588, when Henry Thompson was admitted to the Merchants Company of York having set up a firm trading in wine. The Crofts became involved through the Thompsons who began trading with Portugal in around 1660. Thomas Croft married Frances Thompson and it was their grandson, John Croft, who joined the firm in 1736 taking the name to Tilden, Thompson & Croft. The most famous member of the Croft family was another John (born in 1732), who commuted between York where he was Sheriff and Oporto where he was a member of the British Factory. John Croft wrote *A Treatise on the Wines of Portugal* (published in 1787), which provides a valuable insight into the development of the Port trade. Another colourful member of the Croft dynasty was 'Jack' Croft who worked as a spymaster during the Peninsular War. He was honoured by the Portuguese with the Torre e Espada medal.

By 1827, Croft & Co. was the fourth largest Port shipper. The firm continued to grow steadily during the nineteenth century and in 1875 it acquired Quinta da Roêda near Pinhão, which has been retained as Croft's flagship property. In 1911, Croft became part of Gilbey Vintners, who were subsequently taken over by International Distillers and Vintners (IDV). In the corporate merry-go-round, Croft became part of UDV (United Distillers and Vintners), a subdivision of drinks and fast-food multinational, Diageo.

Despite being a significant player in the Port and Sherry business, Croft (and its sibling Delaforce, then known jointly as CD Vintners) became lost within Diageo. In 2001 CD Vintners was acquired by Taylor-Fonseca and now forms part of the Fladgate Partnership. Interestingly, this restored the historical link between Taylor and Quinta da Roêda which was owned in the nineteenth century by John Fladgate, Baron of Roêda, who was a partner in Taylors. Croft's interests in Jerez were acquired by Gonzalez Byass.

The company's reputation for fine vintage Port, built on the back of outstanding wines in 1945, 1955 and 1963, was largely squandered with the 1980s with wines that were simply not worthy of the name. Under the direction of Nick Delaforce, vintages in the early 1990s improved markedly, reflecting the strong, muscular character of the Ports from Quinta da Roêda balanced by wines from Vale de Mendiz and the Ribalonga Valley. The wine making at Croft is now overseen by David Guimaraens who has completely revamped the winery at Roêda, restoring the *lagares* and installing piston plungers in place of the old *remontadores*. However the 1970s winery which was built (for reasons best known to the management of Croft at the time) to withstand earthquakes, is virtually indestructible

and is still rather a blot on the landscape.

The bulk of Croft's production is represented by Triple Crown, a soft easy ruby, and Distinction, a rather deeper, richer reserve wine. In 2008, Croft pioneered 'Pink Port' using New World technology to produce a pale, delicate, fruity rosé, which is marketed as a mixer. During the 1970s and 1980s Quinta da Roêda was a rather inconsistent SQVP, but since 1997 the wines have been looking more and more promising. With a return to traditional wine making with recent vintages (2003, 2007, 2009 and 2011) Croft has found a new house style producing very satisfying sweet, plump wines that are a reflection of the *terroir* at Quinta da Roeda. Croft is very much back on form.

Cruz

Gran Cruz Porto, Sociedade Comercial de Vinhos SA

Rua José Mariani, 390, 4400-195 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 746 460

www.porto-cruz.com

Almost unknown in English-speaking markets, Porto Cruz is a bestseller in France and Belgium/Luxembourg. With annual sales of around ten million bottles, Cruz is the largest single brand of Port. The company was established in 1887 and was bought in 1974 by the French drinks distribution group Martiniquaise, who also own Justino's and Henriques & Henriques in Madeira.

Cruz is a very clever and efficient exercise in branding. In the past much of the wine was bought in from local co-operatives but now over 50% of its annual requirements are made in wineries under the company's control. Grapes from around three thousand growers are monitored by an in house technical team, from the vineyard to the winery.

In 2013 a new winery was opened at Alijó on the northern margins of the Douro and the percentage of in-house production is therefore set to increase with greater emphasis on premium styles. The new winery has the capacity to store 22 million litres of wine and spirit. In 2015 Cruz acquired Quinta do Ventozelo, one of the largest and most spectacular estates in the Douro.

The lodges in Gaia are impressive, with 220 wooden *balseiros*, together holding eight million litres of wine, and stainless steel vats each with a capacity of 350,000 litres. There are also an additional 3,500 pipes in the C. da Silva lodge (see *Dalva*). Highly automated, Cruz was one of the first companies to mechanise bottling. The best selling wine is the Cruz Tawny, a soft, easy-drinking lightweight wine which spends a year in wood and goes down well in France as an aperitif. Cruz also produces white Port, ruby, reserve, ten and twenty year old tawny, LBV and, since 1982, vintage. Wines in the latter category are sweet, rather jammy and early maturing. Cruz also own C. da Silva, known for its fabulous old white Ports and tawnies. Together their annual sales amount to 24 million bottles.

The company operates a prominent visitor centre, Espaço Cruz, on the waterfront in Vila Nova de Gaia.

Dalva

C. da Silva (Vinhos) SA

Rua Felizardo Lima, 247, Apartado 1530, 4400-140 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 746 040

www.cdasilva.pt

Founded in 1862, C. da Silva is named after Clemente da Silva who came from Brazil in the 1930s. The company now

belongs to La Martiniquaise alongside Gran Cruz, the largest single brand of Port. C. da Silva maintain a huge stock of old wine at lodges in the less-fashionable part of Gaia. An eighteenth-century house at the centre of the complex is thought to have belonged to Baron Forrester. The bulk of C. da Silva's wines are standard rubies and tawnies destined for Germany, Belgium, Holland and France, sold under the names Dalva and Presidencial. However, the company has an excellent stock of colheitas dating back to the 1930s which are mostly well kept and used for blending into a competent range of aged tawnies. Deliciously rich 1952 and 1963 'Golden White' colheitas form part of an unusual, mature, honeyed Branco Velho blended to an average age of about fifteen years. Vintage Ports, which tend to be light and early maturing, sometimes show well in comparative tastings. Jim Reader, who used to head the winemaking team at Cockburn, has come out of retirement to advise the firm.

Delaforce

Delaforce Sons & Ca - Vinhos Lda

Rua Azevedo Magalhães, 314, 4430 - 022 Vila Nova de Gaia
Tel. (351) 223 775 100

www.delaforce.pt

The Delaforce family were Huguenots who fled from France to London in order to escape religious persecution in the seventeenth century. Their connection with Portugal began in 1834 when the young John Fleurriet Delaforce went to Oporto to set up a new Port-shipping company for the partners of Martinez Gassiot. John's son, George Henry Delaforce, founded his own firm of Port shippers in 1868 and rapidly established strong trading links with countries as far-flung as Russia, Scandinavia, Germany and the UK.

By the end of the nineteenth century, George Delaforce was purveyor to the Portuguese kings, an unusual honour for a non-Portuguese citizen. Delaforce remained in family hands until 1968. Unable to finance the *lei do terço* (two-thirds stock ratio) during those bleak years, they sold out to IDV who already owned Croft. The family retained a strong link with the firm until it was taken over by Taylor Fonseca in 2001. Having briefly formed part of the Fladgate Partnership, Delaforce was sold to Real Companhia Velha (RCV) in 2008.

Without a vineyard of its own, Delaforce maintained a long-term agreement with the owners of Quinta da Corte, well located in the lower reaches of the Torto Valley. Alongside wines from the Roncão and Tavora Valleys, Corte provided the basis for Delaforce vintage Ports and, since 1978, has been the source of a single-*quinta* vintage. In the 1970s and 1980s, Delaforce suffered in much the same way as its sister company, Croft. Although the wines improved substantially in the 1990s (Delaforce produced a full, fleshy 1992), you have to go back to 1970 to find a big, concentrated wine in the classic mould. It remains to be seen how Delaforce vintages will fare under the ownership of RCV. Delaforce drew on stocks of old wine at Corte to produce two excellent tawnies: 'Curious and Ancient' is an apt title for a particularly fine, delicate twenty-year-old, and 'His Eminence's Choice' is a richer ten-year-old. At the other end of the spectrum, Germany is the company's principal market with a standard tawny formerly known by the brand name 'Paramount'. Delaforce have recently launched a range of Douro reds from vineyards owned by RCV.

Dow

Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 776 300

www.dows-port.com

Dow is the brand name for Ports shipped by the firm of Silva & Cosens. I have to admit to an in-depth interest in Dow, having written a book – *The Story of Dow's Port* – to commemorate the company's bicentenary in 1998. The story is an intricate tale of five families, each of whom have contributed significantly to the history of Port.

The business was established by Bruno da Silva, who left Oporto for London in 1798. He imported a wide range of Portuguese goods (including Port) and quickly built up a thriving business in England. Bruno da Silva was joined by one of his sons, John J. Silva, who brought in Frederick William Cosens as a partner. Silva & Cosens were then joined by George Acheson Warre, the only son of George Warre, a partner in the eponymous firm. Warre became a driving force in Silva & Cosens and in the Douro, where he was among the pioneers in the restoration and replanting of vineyards that followed the phylloxera epidemic in the 1870s. Dow & Co., a company with roots dating back to the late eighteenth century, merged with Silva & Cosens in 1877, and James Ramsey Dow took charge of the London side of the business. Although considerably smaller than Silva & Cosens, Dow had a fine reputation for its vintage Ports and it was decided to attach the name to the company's entire range of wines. Professor George Saintsbury later wrote 'there is no Shipper's wine that I have found better than the best of Dow's, 1878 and 1890 especially'.

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Family Estates

WWW.DOWS-PORT.COM

It was in 1882 that Andrew James Symington came to Oporto from Glasgow and began working for the Grahams' textile firm. Taking a greater interest in Port than cloth, he became a partner in the firm of Warre & Co. in 1905; within a few years had become its sole proprietor. In 1912 George Acheson Warre returned to London and offered Symington the opportunity to manage the Portuguese end of the business with a partnership in Silva & Cosens. This bi-partisan arrangement continued until 1961 when the Symington family took control.

Symington Family Estates (also owners of Cockburn, Graham, Warre, Smith Woodhouse, Quarles Harris, Gould Campbell and Quinta do Vesúvio) has been careful to maintain a separate identity for Dow Port. The wines are closely linked to Quinta do Bomfim at Pinhão, which was bought for the company by George Warre in 1896. Until 1996 it served as the firm's main vinification centre but in order to relieve pressure on the *adega*, production is shared between Bomfim and a new winery downstream at Quinta do Sol. Wine from Bomfim's vineyards, supported by Quinta do Zimbardo and Senhora da Ribeira, has formed the backbone of Dow's vintage Port for over a century. Since 1978, Quinta do Bomfim has been released as an SQVP in good years between fully-fledged declaration, followed by Quinta Senhora da Ribeira from 1998.

Dow Ports are made in a slightly drier style than most. In some years the wines can verge on austere with a rather bony structure showing through. This is not to denigrate them in any way, for Dow's vintage Ports are among my personal favourites. In ripe years like 2003, 2000, 1994, 1970, 1966 and 1963 the wines have tremendous appeal with a cast-iron tannic backbone offset by intense concentrated fruit.

Dow also performs exceptionally well in lesser years like 1980 and 1975. A tasting in London organised to celebrate the company's bicentenary in 1998 brought together an array of Dow's vintage Ports with stupendous wines from 1945, 1924, 1908 and 1896, all of which are still drinking extraordinarily well.

Mainstream wines in the Dow range share a similar hallmark, right down to ruby, now called 'Midnight' on the UK Market. 'Trademark' is a dense, full-bodied reserve and its LBV is a structured wine packed with berry fruit. Aged tawnies tend to be rich and seemingly on the youthful side – perhaps not as refined or delicate as some. Dow's crusted Ports present much of the breadth and concentration of a declared vintage Port at a fraction of the price. Dow is at the top of its game.

Feist

c/o Sogevinus Fine Wines, SA

Avenida Diogo Leite nº 344, 4400-111 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 746 660

www.sogevinus.com

In 1836, two cousins left Germany and established themselves in London as Port merchants. By the 1870s, the business had expanded to the extent that Carl Feist left London for Oporto to establish a new branch of the business. The company remained in family hands during the first half of the twentieth century, run by the founder's son-in-law and grandson. During the Second World War, the London headquarters were completely destroyed in an air raid and the family retreated to Oporto. Feist was subsequently taken over by Barros and became an integral part of the Barros group. Since Sogevinus bought Barros the Feist name has

been quietly dropped, although some old colheitas can still be found on sale.

Ferreira

c/o Sogrape Vinhos SA

Aldeia Nova, 4430-809, Avintes, Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 227 850 300

www.sograpevinhos.eu

Founded in 1751 by José Ferreira, it was his great-granddaughter, Dona Antónia Adelaide Ferreira, who effectively built the company up into the force it is today. She was nicknamed *Ferreirinha* ('little Ferreira'), an affectionate Portuguese diminutive, which lives on in local vernacular and on some of Ferreira's labels. The company remained under the ownership of her descendants until it was sold in 1997 to Sogrape, progenitors of Mateus Rosé and Portugal's largest winemakers. Until 1999 the company was managed by Francisco ('Vito') Olazabal, Dona Antónia's great-great-grandson, who represented the eighth generation of the Ferreira family. Olazabal himself owns Quinta do Vale do Meão, the spiritual home of Portugal's most prestigious red wine, Barca Velha.

Ferreira owns three superb properties in the Douro. Quinta do Porto, just downstream from Pinhão, was purchased by Dona Antónia in 1863. Quinta da Leda is situated high up in the Douro Superior, close to the Spanish border and a third vineyard, the fifteen-hectare Quinta do Caedo, was purchased in 1990. Ferreira's properties have been the subject of considerable research and development in the 1980s. Under the auspices of the late Jorge Maria Cabral Ferreira (to whom this book is dedicated), they pioneered the *vinha ao alto* or vertical planting system at Quinta do



PORTO

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Seixo (their fourth property, now rebranded to Sandeman). Ferreira also purchase both grapes and wine from properties owned by members of the family. Until 1989, it had the use of Quinta do Vesúvio, one of the largest and most stately properties in the Douro, which used to belong to the Ferreira family before it was bought by the Symingtons.

Ferreira's vintage Ports are frequently underrated. Although not quite in the heavyweight mould, wines from the 1980s onwards are well structured with richness and staying power. Ferreira 2000 is a middle to heavyweight blend from Quintas Leda, Seixo and Caedo. The company began producing an excellent unfiltered LBV in 1987, and in subsequent years the wines have been consistently solid, dense and fruit-driven. They are among the best of the genre.

Ferreira produce some very fine aged tawnies. Quinta do Porto is a well-developed ten-year-old tawny made from grapes grown on the estate. Blended from a number of properties in the Cima Corgo and Douro Superior, the twenty-year-old Duque de Bragança is a deliciously smooth, refined tawny combining freshness and the complexity that comes with age. With an average age of around six years, Ferreira's Dona Antónia Reserva Pessol has a hint of true tawny character with summer fruit and a peppery finish. Sound, well-made ruby and tawny (the latter popular in Portugal) complete the range. Ferreira is a leading brand in Portugal, helped by the advertising slogan, *Foi você que pediu ... Porto Ferreira?* (Was it you who asked for ... Porto Ferreira?) which was on everyone's lips in the 1970s and 1980s. France and Canada are also important markets.

Hunt Roope and Constantino are brands belonging to Ferreira. They have been amalgamated in a single subsidiary firm: Hunt, Constantino Vinhos Lda.

Feuerheerd

Founded in 1815 by the German trader Dietrich Matthias Feuerheerd, the company was linked to Quinta de la Rosa (see page 142) which was given as a christening present to Claire Feuerheerd in 1906. In 1926 Feuerheerd was sold to the Barros family and the brand now belongs to Barão de Vilar (see page 91).

Fonseca

c/o Fladgate Partnership

PO Box 1311 EC Sanata Marinha 4401-501 Vila Nova de Gaia,
Portugal

Tel: (351) 223 742 800

www.fonseca.pt

Catch a Port shipper at a candid moment and many will admit that, aside from their own, Fonseca is their favoured Port. Few other shippers can flaunt quite such an accomplished range of wines.

The first evidence of the firm trading in Port is an entry dated 8th April 1815 recording the purchase of Port by João dos Santos Fonseca. In the period that followed the business prospered and in 1820 he went into partnership with Francisco Gomes Monteiro, member of a prominent merchant family. As a result the company became known as Fonseca & Monteiro. In 1822 Manuel Pedro Guimaraens from Barcelos, north of Porto, began to work with Fonseca & Monteiro and established a business in London named Fonseca, Monteiro & Guimaraens. Manuel Pedro was by all accounts a man of strong political views and his support for the liberal Dom Pedro in the 1820s conflict with the absolutists may have encouraged his move to London,

where he remained until his death in 1858. In 1844 a contract was drawn up which merged the companies in a single partnership and in 1863 the Guimaraens family acquired the company outright. The company continued to be based in London until 1927 when it was repatriated to Oporto.

In the slump that followed the Second World War, the Guimaraens family became reliant on loans made by the firm of Taylor Fladgate & Yeatman and in 1949 the company was sold to its principal creditor. Successive members of the Guimaraens family have nevertheless continued to steer the firm. Frank Guimaraens, followed briefly in the mid-1950s by Dorothy Guimaraens and then Bruce Guimaraens, are collectively responsible for every one of Fonseca's remarkable vintage Ports from 1896 to 1991. The mantle has passed to Bruce's son David who, having graduated from Roseworthy in Australia, is now the company's head winemaker.

Fonseca's wines are based on three *quintas*. Cruzeiro and Santo António in the Pinhão valley were both acquired in the 1970s but have long contributed to Fonseca's vintage blend. Having been replanted in the 2000s, Santo António is now certified organic. Quinta do Panascal, in the lower reaches of the Távora, complements them with a different *terroir*. It is open to passing visitors who want to experience a working *quinta*.

Fonseca's best-known wine is Bin No. 27, a ripe, hearty reserve ruby wine that has a loyal following in North America. The company also bottles a small quantity of good, solid unfiltered LBV. But Fonseca reigns supreme with its fine ten- twenty- and forty-year-old tawnies. The

company also produces some of the most thrilling of all Vintage Ports, which manage to combine both power and finesse. Leaving aside 1983 and 1980 (both of which are light and rather disappointing) 1994, 1985, 1977, 1966, 1963 and 1927 are classic rapier-like wines that are at the top in comparative tastings. Recently declared vintages such as 2011, 2009, 2007, 2003 and 2000 are also on a par. Wines from good years when Fonseca is not declared are sold under a second label, Guimaraens. Fonseca Guimaraens 1976 consistently outscores other fully declared vintages, notably many 1977s!

Forrester & Ca.

(see under Offley)

Gonzalez Byass

Sherry giant Gonzalez Byass maintained a strong presence in Oporto from 1896 until its stocks of Port were sold to Vasconcelos in 1983. From the turn of the twentieth century until the 1930s, Gonzalez Byass had an arrangement with the van Zeller family to buy the production of Quinta de Roriz. Fearing that Spain would be invaded by Hitler in 1940, Manolo Gonzalez, the third son of the Marquês de Torre Soto and a director of Gonzalez Byass, was sent to Portugal. After the Second World War, he continued to divide his time between Jerez and Oporto. Some good vintage Ports were declared by Gonzalez Byass as late as the 1970s. Without a reputation to uphold, they are frequently undervalued at auction. In 2001 Gonzalez Byass acquired Croft's interests in Jerez.

Gould Campbell

Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

This is one of seven companies belonging to the Symington Family Estates, collectively the largest single Port shippers. Gould Campbell was founded in 1797 when Garret Gould left Ireland for Portugal and established Messrs. Gould Brothers & Co. with offices both in Lisbon and Oporto. Messrs. James Campbell, merchants and bankers, joined the partnership after the end of the Peninsular War. The company was acquired by the Symingtons (along with W. & J. Graham) in 1970.

Gould Campbell is still relatively unknown and is often thought of, somewhat unfairly, as a *sous-marque* of the more famous Symington brands. The company has no vineyards of its own and sources its fruit from independent *quintas*, mainly in the Covas area downstream from Pinhão. Gould Campbell produce some big, beefy vintage Ports, which are often good value for money but lack the finesse and refinement of their better known Symington peers.

Graham*

Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

Graham is indisputably one of the great names of Port. The company is of Scottish origin and began as a Glasgow-based

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"SUPER STUNNING"

JANCIS ROBINSON MW: 19/20
Jancis 2011 Port picks – Graham's,
one of five "super stunning" Ports.
"(...) thoroughly exciting and
complete. Spicy and noble."

Financial Times, May 4th 2013

"A GREAT GRAHAM'S"

eROBERT PARKER/THE WINE ADVOCATE:
95-97 POINTS

"Graham's is utterly harmonious,
with a pure core of ripe black cherries,
damson, clove and spices, and the
finish lingers long in the mouth."

Neil Martin, May 28th 2013

"REAL DEAL"

JAMES SUCKLING: 96 POINTS
"Aromas of licorice, wet earth
and berries follow through to
a full body, medium sweetness
and a chewy finish. Real deal."

May 21st 2013



SYMINGTON
Family Estates

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textile concern. With an office in Oporto, the firm entered the wine trade by accident in 1820 after accepting twenty-seven pipes of Port in lieu of a bad debt. The Graham family name has a strong presence in Oporto, linked to Port, construction and textiles. There is even an area of the city at the western end of the Avenida da Boavista known as 'Graham'. W. & J. Graham continued to belong to the family until 1970 when, like so many others, the business fell on hard times and was sold. It was bought by the Symington family who also own Cockburn, Dow and Warre.

Graham Ports are closely identified with Quinta dos Malvedos overlooking the Douro near Tua, which was bought for the company in 1890. Following the Second World War, the vineyard went into decline and the property was sold off, only to be repurchased in a poor state in 1982. In the interim, much of Graham's finest Port was sourced from Quinta das Lages in the Rio Torto and this continues to be an important component in the vintage *lote*. Malvedos was completely replanted and a new winery has been built on the site, equipped with robotic *lagares*. Over a third of Graham's 2000, one of the best wines of the vintage, was made by robotic *lagar*. Although the Malvedos name has been used purely as a brand in the past, an SQVP is now bottled in good undeclared years under the Malvedos label.

Graham Ports are generally richer, sweeter and rather more fleshy than wines from the other houses belonging to the Symington family (3.8 degrees Baumé as opposed to 3.3 Baumé for Dow). The company boasts a phenomenally good range of wines. Six Grapes is an upmarket reserve that always does well in comparative tastings. Graham's powerful, fruit-driven LBV is also consistently good; richer than most and invariably satisfying. Fined before bottling, it counts

among the best of the modern genre and has deservedly become brand leader in the UK market. Graham's ten- and twenty-year-old tawnies have a sumptuous, mellow texture that make them all too easy to drink.

The house style is best illustrated by Graham's exceptional vintage Ports, which are consistently rich, plump and fleshy, yet backed by a rod of tannin, which is often concealed behind the fruit. Among recent vintages, 2007, 2000, 1997 and 1994 are wines in the classic mould, balancing intensely sweet, concentrated fruit with beguilingly firm, broad tannins. Graham's 1970, 1963 and 1945 are among the finest vintage Ports declared in the twentieth century. It already looks as though 2000 will be among the finest vintage Ports of the twenty first.

Hunt Roope

Hunt Roope has one of the longest and most colourful histories in the Port business. It was established by a number of the Dartmouth and Devon families of Newman, Roope, Holdsworth, Hunt and Teage. The Newmans carried out a thriving trade in dried cod (*bacalhau*) with their own ships as far back as the fifteenth century. In 1735 Hunt Roope opened lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia and Viana do Castelo, the former for wine, the latter for fish. The company's ships had a number of escapades and adventures; for instance, their brig *Jenny*, en route to London with a cargo of Port, beat off a French privateer with eighteen guns. This is commemorated in a panel of *azulejos* (tiles) on the wall of the *adega* at Quinta da Eira Velha, which belonged to the Newmans until 2007. Ferreira bought the firm of Hunt Roope in 1956. With the exception of a Hunt Roope 1963, all vintage Ports were bottled under the name Tuke Holdsworth.

Quinta do Infantado

Quinta do Infantado – Vinhos do Produtor SA

Rua Pedro Escobar, 140-A 4150-596 Porto

Tel. (351) 226 100 865

www.quintadoinfantado.com

Infantado began selling Port on the domestic market in 1979 and was already well established by the time the law changed in 1986 allowing wines to be exported directly from the Douro without going through the *entrepoto* in Gaia. Until 1978, Infantado sold wine to Taylor. The estate belongs to the Roseira family, who endeavour to farm Quinta do Infantado's forty-five hectares of vineyard using the minimum amounts of pesticide and herbicide. Two plots are completely organic and Quinta do Infantado bottles a small quantity of powerful, concentrated organic reserve Port.

João Roseira is in charge of the winemaking while his sister Catarina runs the business side. Most LBV and vintage Port is foot-trodden *lagar*. Infantado's 2000 was entirely foot trodden. Wines are much drier in style than average (2.4–2.7 degrees Baumé) but make up for this with huge concentration of fruit. Infantado's 1997 vintage Port is incredibly dense and opulent, made from fruit picked at 16 or 17 Baumé and fortified with 50 litres of *aguardente* as opposed to the 100 litres per pipe that would normally be required. Infantado's LBV is only produced from non-vintage years and is effectively declassified vintage Port. In 1991 Infantado produced a varietal vintage Port made entirely from Touriga Nacional. Although the legislation does not allow for varietal Port to be sold as such, it is to my knowledge the first such Port on the market.

Casal dos Jordões*

Arlindo da Costa Pinto e Cruz

Casais do Douro, 5130-052 São João de Pesqueira

Tel. (351) 254 738 302 / (351) 259 092 358

www.winedouro.com/index_en.html

The Jordão family are the only producers making entirely organic Port, certified in Portugal by Socert. Their forty-three hectares of vineyard are well located in the Rio Torto at an altitude ranging from 90 to 300 metres above sea level. Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz and Tinta Barocca are the principal grape varieties. The company produces reserve ruby and tawny Ports as well as organic Douro wines under the Quinta da Esteveira label. I have only tasted their reserve Port which is full bodied, rich and spicy. Casal dos Jordões also produce organic olive oil.

Kopke*

C. N. Kopke & Ca. Lda

Rua de Serpa Pinto, 183-191, Apartado 42, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 752 420

www.kopkeports.com

Established by a German, Cristiano Kopke, in 1638, this is the oldest company of foreign origin in Portugal. Little is known of the intervening period as much of the company's heritage was destroyed by a fire in 1882. Kopke was bought by Barros Almeida in 1953 and became part of Spanish-owned Sogevinus in 2006 but is still run as a separate entity with its own cavernous lodge in Gaia.

Kopke boasts a very fine range of tawnies and colheitas with stocks going back to 1938. Vintage Ports can also be impressive, particularly the 1970, which has developed better than some of the well-known names. The wines

are based on Quinta de São Luís, which was acquired by the company in 1922 and now serves as one of the main vinification centres for the companies belonging to Sogevinus. (See also Barros, Burmester and Cálem.)

Krohn

Wiese & Krohn Sucrs, Lda

Rua Dr. António Granjo, 122, Apartado 1, 4401-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 771 720

www.krohn.pt

Norway is not a country usually associated with Port, until that Portuguese delicacy bacalhau (salt cod) enters the equation. Theodor Wiese and Dankert Krohn were in the business of selling fish to Portugal and shipped Port back to Norway, setting up their own firm in 1865. In 1906, an English family by the name of Arnsby briefly entered the business but the company came under the control of Edmundo Augusto Carneiro in 1937. Acquired by the Fladgate Partnership (owners of Taylor, Fonseca and Croft) in 2013, Wiese & Krohn is currently run by the third generation of the Carneiro family.

Wiese & Krohn has developed a good reputation for colheitas and aged tawnies. It maintains remarkable stocks of old Port with one wine dating back to 1863, two years prior to the foundation of the company. This is almost undrinkably concentrated with an aroma and flavour of black molasses. Such wines are occasionally used to add complexity to younger blends. Krohn's twenty-year-old tawnies and colheitas from the 1960s and 1970s generally combine a lifted character with the sweetness and concentration that comes from ageing in wood.

Krohn's frequent vintage declarations are often overlooked. Although lighter than the mainstream, in many years the wines are soft and elegant for drinking in the mid-term. In 1989 Krohn bought a small vineyard; Quinta do Retiro Novo at Sarzedinho in the Torto valley, which serves as the company's main vinification centre.

Martinez

c/o Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

Martinez is a distinguished, old-established Port firm with a relatively low profile today. It was founded in 1790 by Sebastian Gonzalez Martinez, who sold Port, Sherry and cigars from an office in Mincing Lane in the City of London. In 1822 Martinez was joined by an Englishman, John Peter Gassiot. They acquired a lodge in Vila Nova de Gaia in 1834 and entrusted the management to John Fleurriet Delaforce, founding father of the Delaforce dynasty in Portugal. By the time Sebastian Martinez retired in 1849, the company was the largest shipper of Port and Sherry to the UK. The business passed to the Gassiot. By the turn of the twentieth century, they had no successors and Martinez Gassiot became a public company in 1902. In 1961 it was taken over by Harvey of Bristol. A year later Harvey acquired Cockburn and two of the keenest rivals in the Port trade found themselves together under the same umbrella. Both companies formed part of Allied Domecq before being taken over by the Symington Family in 2010. The Symingtons intend to retain Martinez as a specialist Port brand in certain markets.

Under Allied Domecq, Martinez was largely relegated to a vehicle for 'own label' sales. Nevertheless, a small amount of Port was bottled under the Martinez label including some good aged tawnies and middle-weight vintage. Past Martinez vintages (like 1963) were relatively lightweight, but wines from 1994, 1991 and 1985 score more highly than those from its sibling Cockburn in comparative tastings. Until 2007 Martinez had the additional support of Quinta da Eira Velha, which was also bottled as a single-*quinta* vintage Port.

Maynard

(see under Barão de Vilar)

Messias

Sociedade Agricola e Commercial dos Vinhos Messias SA

Rua José Mariani, 139, Apartado 1566, 4401-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 745 770

www.cavesmessias.pt

The Messias family entered the Port business in 1934 and run it in tandem with a winery in Bairrada. The company has a substantial vineyard holding in the Douro with two properties, Quinta do Cachão and Quinta do Rei at Ferradosa in the Douro Superior, adding up to 130 hectares of vines. The company's main markets are Belgium, Holland and Portugal and, reflecting demand, the majority of its wines tend to be light and insubstantial young tawnies. Messias has a rather quirky approach to vintages, declaring years like 1979, 1984 and 1989. From 1989 to 1994, Quinta do Cachão underwent substantial replanting and no vintages were declared. In the 1970s and 1980s, Messias vintage Ports have proved to be very

variable in quality but I have tasted some attractive wines from the 1960s, among them the fresh, floral Cachão 1960. Messias also produce a range of Douro wines from Quinta do Cachão.

Morgan

Morgan dates back to 1715 and the company remained in family hands until 1952 when it was bought by Croft. The company had a strong reputation for tawny Port in the nineteenth century and the old Morgan brand of 'Dixon's Double Diamond' is mentioned by Dickens in *Nicholas Nickleby*. When Croft was sold by Diageo to the Fladgate Partnership in 2001, it was a requirement of the sale that the Morgan brand name should no longer be used, owing to the fact that Captain Morgan rum is owned by Diageo.

Niepoort

Niepoort (Vinhos) SA

Rua Candido dos Reis, 670, 4400-071 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 777 770

www.niepoort-vinhos.com

For five generations this Dutch-owned family firm has been hoarding wines in a cramped lodge in the heart of Vila Nova de Gaia. The firm was founded in 1842 and, for many years, Niepoort lay virtually undiscovered, particularly in English-speaking markets. Dirk Niepoort, who took over the reins from his father Rolf, has done much to promote the family name at the same time as maintaining and building on the quality of the firm's wines. Although single-minded about wine, his interests extend way beyond Port and the Douro. Dirk Niepoort has been dabbling in wine throughout northern Portugal and has built up an eclectic cellar of wines from around the world. His commitment shows.

Until the late 1980s, the company had no vineyards of its own. Instead Niepoort built up strong contacts with small farmers, mainly in and around the Pinhão valley. In 1988 and 1989, Niepoort bought two adjoining properties, Quinta de Napoles and Quinta do Carril overlooking the River Tedo, giving them a total of fifty hectares of grade-A vines. The company owns the Museu dos Lagares in Vale de Mendiz where Ports are made under the auspices of Nick Delaforce (ex-Croft and Delaforce). Niepoort have built a new winery, designed by an Austrian architect and mostly for Douro wines, at Quinta de Napoles.

Niepoort earned its reputation for some fine tawnies and colheitas, but from ruby to vintage, Niepoort ship small quantities of excellent wines. Vintage Ports tend to be solid and foursquare in their youth, not as 'showy' as some, needing time for that surly facade to break down to display underlying fruit and finesse. Niepoort 1970, 1955 and 1927 count among the very best of those vintages: huge, concentrated wines with the power and depth to develop further in bottle (even the 1927). Recent vintages have proved impressive with a ripe, tannic underbelly supporting dense, concentrated fruit although there is a worrying incidence of volatile (vinegary) wines from 1987, 1994 and 1997. LBVs produced in larger quantities from interim years are bottled unfiltered and, given sufficient bottle age, they can be more impressive than some shippers' fully declared vintages!

The company also bottles a very fine array of aged tawnies, graduating from so-called 'Junior', through 'Senior' to ten-, twenty- and thirty-year-old wines, all of which belong in the premier league. Stocks of colheitas date back to 1935, becoming increasingly maderised with

age, and I was recently presented with a half-bottle of extraordinarily rich dessert white Port dating back to 1895. Niepoort is unique in maintaining a stock of garrafeira Ports, which age in wood followed by glass demi-johns before being 'decanted' into bottles. In an era when many Port shippers have become prey to economies of scale and standardisation, Niepoort is a welcome idiosyncrasy.

Quinta do Noval*

Quinta do Noval - Vinhos, SA

Avenida Diogo Leite, 256, Apartado 1319, 4401-111 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel.(351) 223 770 270

www.quintadonoval.com

Noval brought the word '*quinta*' into the international lexicon. The property first appeared in the land registries in 1715 and passed through the hands of the Rebello Valente family and Visconde de Vilar d'Allen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Having been ravaged by phylloxera in the 1880s, Quinta do Noval was sold in 1894 to Port shipper António José da Silva. The estate was thoroughly renovated and the major part of the vineyard was replanted on phylloxera-resistant American rootstock. It seems, however, that da Silva planted a small parcel of vines on their own roots, thoroughly fumigating the soil in advance. This marked the beginning of Quinta do Noval's now legendary Nacional Port, produced entirely from ungrafted vines (see pages 132–3).

António José da Silva was followed into the business by his son-in-law Luís Vasconcelos Porto, who ran Noval for nearly three decades. Vasconcelos continued where da Silva left off, transforming many of the narrow terraces into the

wider inclined terraces that made better use of the space and allowed more exposure to the sun. He also did much to build Quinta do Noval's reputation in the UK, targeting Noval's sales on Oxford and Cambridge colleges as well as private clubs. Noval claims a number of firsts: the first inclined terraces (*socalcos*) were apparently built here in the 1920s; the first tawnies with an indication of age and, more controversially, Noval claims the first LBV dating from the mid-1950s.

Vasconcelos retired in 1963 and his grandsons, Fernando and Luís van Zeller, took over the running of the company. This marked a turning point. The vineyard was not as well looked after and Noval's wines began to suffer after 1970. In 1981 the company suffered a fire at its lodges in Vila Nova de Gaia, which destroyed 350,000 litres of stock as well as the company's archives. This, combined with a long-running family dispute, eventually brought the company to its knees. In 1993 the van Zeller family sold out to the French insurance company AXA. Quinta do Noval is now part of AXA Millésimes, a group that includes a number of distinguished Bordeaux chateaux (Château Pichon Longueville, Château Suduiraut) and owns Disnoko in the Tokay region of Hungary. The Noval vineyard was largely replanted from 1994 onwards. Noval is very ably managed from France by the Managing Director of AXA Millésimes, Christian Seely, who has spent years 'putting things right' – to use his own words. Continuity has been maintained by António Agrellos who worked for the van Zellers and looks after the estate and the winemaking.

Taking advantage of the change in legislation in 1986, Noval moved lock, stock, and barrel from the Vila Nova de Gaia *entrepoto* to the Douro. A lodge was built on the

estate with air-conditioning to mitigate the summer heat, and a bottling plant has been set up on the cooler *altos* above Alijó. About one third of the company's production originates from Noval's own vineyards, which include the neighbouring Quinta das Canadas and rented properties in the Roncão valley. Noval now extends to 109 hectares including Canadas, with a further 35 hectares in Roncão. Wines bearing the name 'Quinta do Noval' are produced entirely from grapes grown on the estate whereas 'Noval' signifies a wine sourced from other growers. Around half the *quinta's* production is foot trodden in *lagar*. Noval's technological makeover includes a robotic treader which works in the existing stone *lagares* but each one is foot trodden first.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Quinta do Noval had a somewhat patchy record for vintage Port, preferring to declare 1978 and 1982 to 1977 and 1983 respectively.

Many of the wines from 1975 to 1987 inclusive (including Noval Nacional) are very disappointing, reflecting a lack of flair and technical expertise. Since AXA took over, this slightly idiosyncratic approach to vintage declarations has continued with declarations in 1994 and 1995, 2003 and 2004, and in 2011 and 2012. But since 1994 declarations have been much smaller than in the past, sometimes amounting to less than a thousand cases. The overall quality of Noval's Ports has risen considerably and in recent vintages Noval and Noval Nacional have been among the very best wines of the vintage. Since 1995 the name 'Silval' is attached to a vintage Port made from grapes grown off the property. This is also rich, dense and well-made but is ready to drink earlier than Quinta do Noval itself.

QUINTA DO NOVAL NACIONAL

Ungrafted vines are a rarity in Europe, having succumbed to phylloxera in the nineteenth century. Although the odd survivor is occasionally found, there is nothing like Noval's Nacional vineyard. It comprises around six thousand vines planted on traditional terraces either side of the main drive to the house at Noval. The name is derived from the fact that the vines are planted on their own roots ('attached to the soil of the nation') without recourse to American rootstock. Vines are generally replanted on an individual basis when they become weak from age or disease. The age of the vineyard therefore averages around thirty-five years, although there are individual vines up to eighty years old. It is therefore a complete misnomer to describe them as 'pre-phylloxera vines', a phrase that appeared on the label of Nacional Port as recently as 1994. The Nacional vines are much less vigorous than the surrounding vineyard and berries tend to be small, yielding around 15 hectolitres per hectare (compared to an average of 30 to 35 hectolitres per hectare elsewhere on the estate). There is a relatively high percentage of Sousão, which contributes colour to the blend. The grapes are worked hard with five men treading for five days in a small lagar (capacity no more than five pipes). The must is fortified when the sugar levels decline to about 8 degrees Baumé and run off into stainless steel where it spends the winter before being racked into well-used pipes. Over a two-year period, the wine is regularly re-tasted, and if it is not of a sufficiently high standard it is not declared. Christian Seely declares that there are some 'secret Nacionais' that may be released in twenty years,

and there is speculation about a future Nacional colheita.

Quinta do Noval Nacional is one of the most powerfully concentrated of all vintage Ports with a deep opaque colour when young and an almost overpowering intensity of liquorice and bitter chocolate fruit. It is not merely confined to generally declared vintages, a trait established in 1931 when just three shippers had the temerity to declare. The wine is all the more remarkable for the fact that the vines were only around five years old at the time. The 1931 Nacional is legendary for being the most expensive bottle of Port ever sold, fetching US\$5,900 (c. £4,000) at the Graycliffe Restaurant in the Bahamas in 1988. It is such a rarity that Christian Seely who manages the Noval estate has never tasted it; neither have I!

The 1962, 1963, 1966 and 1970 Nacional belong to the days when the estate was still being well managed and count among the finest vintage Ports that I have tasted: tight-knit and intensely ripe, with flavours of dark chocolate liquorice and allspice shrouded in tannin. There was a big dip in quality in the 1970s and 1980s, when Noval went through what can only be described as Vintage Port car crash! Since 1994, recent vintages have been outstanding with 2011, 2003, 2001, 2000, 1997, 1996 and 1994 all declared. Noval's Nacional is only available on a strict allocation basis and bottles rarely come to auction where they always fetch more than any other vintage Port. The entire declaration amounts to an average of around 250 cases, of which 80 cases are sold at the time of declaration. Croft tried to emulate Nacional in the 1980s by planting an ungrafted vineyard at Quinta da Roêda, but the vines were attacked by phylloxera and died.

Noval's entire range is extremely competent and well made. From the vibrant Noval 'Black' through a ripe, unfiltered LBV, the wines all retain freshness, power and depth. Bolstered occasionally in the past by declassified Nacional, Noval's aged tawnies are also very good: attractively rich, with a hint of tannic grip still lingering in the ten-year-old. Noval also maintains small stocks of colheita Port dating back to 1937. Colheitas and LBVs are made entirely from fruit grown on the *quinta*.

Noval also make a good range of Douro wines and have a shop on the waterfront at Vila Nova de Gaia.

Offley

c/o Sogrape Vinhos SA

Aldeia Nova, 4430-809, Avintes, Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 227 850 300

www.sograpevinhos.eu

Offley Forrester, as it used to be styled, is a company with a long and distinguished history, which has been kicked from pillar to post for the last fifty years. Fortunately, the quality and reputation of the wines did not suffered greatly in the process. The firm was established in 1737 by William Offley, one of whose ancestors was Lord Mayor of London and another sheriff of Stratford. In 1803 he was joined in the firm by Joseph Forrester. Forrester's nephew became Baron Joseph James Forrester, the great nineteenth-century dilettante cartographer, photographer and artist who did so much to open up the Douro before drowning at Cachão de Valeira in 1862. Offley bought Quinta da Boa Vista from the Barão de Viamonte in the 1820s. In a complicated restructuring of the company involving litigation a century later, Boa Vista became separated from Offley – only to be repurchased in

1979. Then, in a move that surprised everyone, Boa Vista was sold in 2013 and now belongs to an Anglo-Brazilian company named Lima Smith. It no longer has links to Offley.

In 1962, Offley Forrester was bought by Sandeman. Three years later they sold half the shares in the company to Martini & Rossi who picked up the remainder of the business in 1983. It was sold again to Sogrape in 1996 where it now sits alongside Ferreira and Sandeman. Sogrape's acquisition of Offley was a shrewd move, reinforcing its position as one of the bestselling brands on the domestic market with an inexpensive ruby and tawny duo known as 'Duke of Oporto'. Ten-, twenty- and thirty-year-old tawnies under the Baron de Forrester label are made to a high standard and since 1988, Offley has been producing a good, unfiltered LBV, which is slightly drier in style than the norm. Offley's vintage Ports have been bottled under the name 'Boa Vista' for much of the twentieth century, even though the *quinta* was outside the company. A certain amount of confusion was created in 1987 when Offley declared two vintage Ports – Offley *per se* and Offley Boa Vista – because of demand from the US. In spite of this, Boa Vista is a brand rather than a single-*quinta* Port. Offley's vintages are not massive, long-lived wines but they do have huge appeal after ten years or so, developing wonderful violet-like aromas. Rainha Santa is a *sous-marque*.

Poças

Manoel D. Poças Junior – Vinhos SA

Rua Visconde de Devesas, 186, 4401-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 771 070

www.pocas.pt

The Poças family is a relative newcomer to Port, having set up in business as a brandy trader in 1918. This lucrative business

ceased abruptly in 1934 when the Salazar regime imposed a monopoly on the distribution of the *aguardente* used to fortify Port. The company was forced to sell its distilleries for a paltry sum and the founder's grandson, Manuel Poças Pintão, who runs the company has been vehemently opposed to the authoritarian politics of the Estado Novo ever since. Helped by the acquisition of Quinta das Quartas near Régua, the Poças family began to export wine. In spite of the depression in the early 1930s, sales grew and Poças captured lucrative markets. However, they never declared a vintage until 1960, preferring to concentrate on colheitas and tawnies instead. The company's founder, Manoel Poças Junior, firmly believed that vintage Port was the preserve of the English houses but this did not stop him from bottling small quantities for his own consumption. When he died in 1976, his grandson found 142 bottles of 1927 vintage Port stashed away in the cellar!

Since 1960 Poças has made up for lost time, declaring 1964, 1978 and 1990, as well as all the mainstream vintages. In good years like 1963, 1970, and 1995, the wines are rich, medium-bodied, middle-distance Ports although in 2000 Poças made a heavyweight which is one of the leading wines of the vintage. In 2000 Poças bought an A-grade *quinta* in the Caedo valley, now rechristened Quinta de Santa Barbara. Bottled as a single-*quinta* vintage since 2001, this will certainly help reinforce the company's position as a serious player among shippers of vintage Port.

In the past the majority of their Poças Ports were destined for Belgium, Holland and Denmark. This was reflected in the sweet, slightly jammy style of standard rubies and tawnies, shipped either under the Poças, Pousada or Seguro brands according to the market. With Bordeaux-trained

Jorge Pintão in charge of the winemaking, Poças has been going upmarket.

Quinta do Portal

Praça Francisco Sá Carneiro, 2933E 4200-314 Porto

Tel. (351) 225 512 028

www.quintadoportal.pt

The Mansilha family has owned vineyards in the Favaio area for over a century and, in 1991, set up their own company producing Port and Douro wine with a well-equipped winery near Celeirós. Grapes are sourced from four *quintas* owned by the company, all in or above the Pinhão valley. After a somewhat shaky start, the Ports have been improving, especially aged tawnies which regularly win awards. Vintage Ports have gained stature from the 1999 vintage onwards. Portal is one of very few firms to specialise in fortified Moscatel, mostly grown at Quinta de Abelheira near Favaio. Two wines are produced under the Portal label: a simple, clean, aromatic youthful non-vintage and a richer, more subdued *reserva* with the appeal of thick-cut marmalade. Unusually for this style of wine, it also has a hint of new oak.

Quarles Harris

Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barnão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

Founded by Thomas Dawson in 1680, Quarles Harris is among the oldest of all the Port houses. The Harris family were wine suppliers in the City of London and entered the company when Quarles Harris married Dorothea Dawson in

1752. The firm grew substantially during the latter part of the eighteenth century and by 1792 Quarles Harris was the second largest Port shipper. It remained independent until the 1920s when Reginald Quarles Harris sold the firm to Andrew James Symington, who was related to him by marriage.

The Symington family manages Quarles Harris in tandem with two other subsidiary brands, Smith Woodhouse and Gould Campbell. It is the least well known of all the Symington houses and the name is often incorrectly pronounced ('Quarles' rhymes with 'squalls'). The company has no dedicated vineyards to call its own and represents a deft exercise in blending. At the upper end of the spectrum, Quarles Harris produces some good vintage Ports that are well made and well priced. Vinified and blended to a firm, dry style that often resembles Dow, the wines don't have the same depth or staying power. In a comparative tasting with Smith Woodhouse and Gould Campbell vintage Ports from 1970 to 1994 held in 2011, Quarles Harris was the weakest of the three.

Ramos Pinto

Adriano Ramos Pinto (Vinhos) SA

Avenida Ramos Pinto, 380, 4400-266 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 707 000

www.ramospinto.pt

Ramos Pinto has long been a company with foresight. In 1880 Adriano Ramos Pinto founded a Port shipper in his own name with the idea of tapping into the competitive Brazilian market. At this time most wine was shipped in bulk and little attention was paid either to marketing, presentation or image. Ramos Pinto backed his sales drive with a series of rather risqué posters depicting scantily clad women. *Tentação*



RAMOS PINTO
PORTO & PORTWINE



A LEGENDARY TAWNY

(temptation) was the byword – the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms would certainly draw the line at such advertising today! The campaign succeeded and Ramos Pinto managed to sell its wines at twice the price of Ports normally shipped to Brazil.

The firm suffered more than most when the Brazilian market collapsed in the 1920s, but continued in family hands. In the early 1970s José Ramos Pinto Rosas was among the first to enter the brave new world of the Douro Superior when he purchased Quinta de Santa Maria (now Quinta da Ervamoira) for the company. Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, Ramos Pinto was at the forefront of research and development in the Douro, while its ornate, brightly painted lodge on the waterfront at Gaia remained in a time warp without a computer in sight. In 1990 the Champagne house Louis Roederer stepped in to purchase a controlling stake in the firm and began introducing some necessary changes in the management of the company as well as maintaining a commitment to investment in the Douro. But Roederer has been careful to maintain family continuity. Wine maker since 1976 and Managing Director since 2001, João Nicolau d'Almeida (son of Fernando Nicolau d'Almeida of Barca Velha fame, and a direct descendant of the founders) retires in 2016. He is replaced by the current Export Director, Jorge Rosas, son of José Ramos Pinto Rosas.

Ramos Pinto's wines are based on four widely spread Douro quintas: Bom Retiro and Urtiga in the Rio Torto and Bons Ares and Ervamoira in the Douro Superior. The latter, threatened for many years by a hydro-electric dam project, was saved following the discovery of Palaeolithic rock engravings in the Coa valley. In 1998 it was declared a World Heritage Site.

Keeping it in the family, wine making at Ramos Pinto is the responsibility of Ana Rosas Ramos Pinto, cousin of João Nicolau d'Almeida. The company is better known for its wood Ports than for vintages. Single-*quinta* vintages from Quinta de Ervamoira can be impressively ripe and minty in style. Fruit from Quinta da Ervamoira provides the basis for a rich, candied ten-year-old tawny, with Bom Retiro producing one of the finest of all twenty-year-olds: pale, delicate, poised and supremely refined. The company produces 'Collector', a ripe, spicy, reserve Port and also a rich, unfiltered LBV, which has the capacity to age. A 1927 'LBV' from Bom Retiro (bottled in 1932) was still alive though soft and creamy with age when the cork was drawn in 1998. In line with its forward-thinking approach, Ramos Pinto was one of the first of the major Port shippers to spend time and effort in producing a range of unfortified Douro wines.

Robertson

Established in 1847, Robertson Bros. once owned the famous Quinta do Roncão upstream from Pinhão. In 1881 the company took over Rebello Valente, which it reserved as a brand name for its renowned vintage Ports. After a number of changes of ownership, Robertson was taken over by Sandeman in 1963. Since 1970 Rebello Valente Vintage Ports have been disappointingly light in style and are no longer produced.

Romariz

Rua de Rei Ramiro 318, 4400-280 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 742 800

With a strong presence in Portugal and on the continent of Europe, Romariz is almost unknown in English-speaking markets. The company was founded in 1850 by Manoel de

Rocha Romariz and spent many years trading with South America, especially Brazil. In 1966 the last of the Romariz family retired and sold the brand to Guimaraens & Co. It was subsequently reconstituted as an independent company in 1987 by a British consortium closely linked to Taylor, managed by Albino Jorge. Without any vineyards of its own, Romariz mainly produces large volumes of inexpensive Port and a popular reserve tawny called Reserva Latina, as well as Douro wines.

Quinta de la Rosa*

Quinta da Rosa - Vinhos do Porto, Lda

Quinta de la Rosa

5085-215 Pinhão

Tel. (351) 254 732 254

www.quintadelarosa.com

Father and daughter Tim and Sophia Bergqvist, are leading pioneers of single-*quinta* Port. This A-grade property near Pinhão has been in the family since 1906, but by the early 1980s the Bergqvists felt that the wines were underperforming. Helped by the change in legislation in 1986, the family wrested control of the winemaking from Sandeman (who used La Rosa for Robertson/Rebello Valente) and began to produce their own single-*quinta* vintage Port. Despite being soft and relatively early maturing, their first vintage (1988) was a significant improvement on wines from the 1970s and early 1980s. All the grapes for La Rosa's vintage Port are now trodden in stone *lagares* before fermentation whereas Sandeman used the ill-fated *movimosto* system. With increasingly rigorous selection, recent vintages have gained greatly in stature and, depending on the year, are now wines for drinking in the medium to long term. 1997 and 2000 are

the best wines that La Rosa has produced to date. In 1999 a super-concentrated vintage Port was bottled from Vale do Inferno, the most sheltered part of the Quinta with some of the oldest vines.

La Rosa works on the 'chateau principle', declaring a vintage in all but the poorest of years. At the time of writing, 1993 is the only year to have been bypassed. With one of the largest traditional *armazens* in the Douro, La Rosa also acts increasingly like a Port house in its own right. The Bergqvists ship an increasingly broad range of wines spanning standard ruby and tawny, a robust premium ruby known as 'Finest Reserve' and a ten-year-old tawny. Apart from vintage Port, La Rosa's most fulfilling wines are a firm-flavoured, unfiltered LBV and a properly wood-aged, dry white Port. All the wines are aged on the property, which reinforces the house style.

Quinta de la Rosa began producing a red Douro wine in 1990. They also sell olive oil from the property.

Royal Oporto

Companhia Geral da Agricultura das Vinhas do Alto Douro, SA

Rua Azevedo Magalhães, 314, Apartado 22, 4431-952 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 775 100

www.realcompanhiavelha.pt

Known in English as 'Royal Oporto' and in Portuguese as Real Companhia Velha (RCV), this company has a controversial history. It was established in 1756 by Royal Charter as a monopoly controlled by the then Prime Minister, the Marquês de Pombal. With its headquarters at Régua, the Companhia continued to enjoy numerous privileges and regulatory powers into the nineteenth century. It was briefly

dissolved but re-established in 1865 as a public company.

The firm grew quickly in the twentieth century, becoming the largest single Port shipper some years before downsizing in the late 1990s. For many years the fortunes of the company have centred on one man, Manuel da Silva Reis, who began as an office boy in the firm of Souza Guedes and by the early 1970s owned twelve wine-producing companies including Pombal's former monopoly. Then came a setback: following the 1974 revolution, Royal Oporto was occupied by its workforce and nationalised by the government. In an effort to keep afloat, much of the company's better-quality Port was sold off to other shippers. The company was returned to the Silva Reis family in 1978, stripped of its most important asset, and Manuel da Silva Reis never forgave the other shippers for purchasing Royal Oporto's stock. In 1990, 40 per cent of the firm was bought by the Casa do Douro, one of Port's quasi-official controlling bodies. Tantamount to insider dealing, this sent a wave of protest through the establishment. The government nevertheless consented to the sale before acting to withdraw many of the Casa do Douro's regulatory powers. The acquisition of RCV virtually bankrupted the Casa do Douro.

RCV is the second largest single vineyard owner in the Douro after the Symingtons. The company's principal estate is Quinta das Carvalhas, which covers an entire hill opposite Pinhão, crowned by the famous round house. Quinta dos Acipretes faces Tua, Quinta do Cidrô is on the plateau near São João de Pesqueira, and Quinta Casal da Granja, on the *altos* near Alijó, serves as the company's main vinification centre.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, RCV tended to put quantity before quality. Frequently declared vintages were

weak and the company's main focus lay in shipping large volumes of standard tawny to France at bargain-basement prices. The wines have been sold under any number of different names, among them Silva Reis, Souza Guedes, Hooper's, Pitters, Real Companhia Velha and Royal Oporto. Since the late 1990s the company has changed direction under the under the auspices of Pedro da Silva Reis (Manuel's second son). Douro wines have gained in importance and the company is focusing on higher quality across the board. Aged tawnies (particularly the twenty-year-old) are balanced, refined and delicate. After a let up in vintage declarations in the early 1990s, Royal Oporto's 1997 vintage Port showed a return to form perhaps not seen since the 1950s.

Rozès*

SPR Vinhos SA

Rua Candido dos Reis, 526-532, Apartado 376, 4401- 070
Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 771 680

www.rozes.com.pt

The fortunes of Rozès have been linked inextricably with those of France since the firm was founded by Bordeaux wine merchant Ostende Rozès in 1855. His son Edmond developed the brand name 'Rozès' and established a lodge in Vila Nova de Gaia. During the Second World War the company ceased trading when the partners returned to France to take part in the Resistance. Activities only resumed again in 1956 when Guy and Yves Rozès returned to Portugal. The company was sold by the family in 1974 and, after a number of changes of ownership, Rozès was bought by the French luxury goods conglomerate LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët-Hennessy) in 1987. Having built up

the brand, the company was sold on to the Vranken Group (now known as Vranken-Pommery-Monopole) in 1999 who merged the company with São Pedro das Águias three years later.

Having had no vineyards of its own, since 1999 Rozès has built up a vineyard holding high in the Douro Superior on the Spanish border. Many of the wines bear the brand name Terras de Grifó and are made from the three properties in the Douro, the principal one being Quinta de Grifó, named after the vultures in the area. Rozès Ports have improved in quality and since 2000 vintages are to be taken more seriously. Prior to 1997, Rozès vintage Ports tend to be simple and early maturing.

Sandeman

c/o Sogrape Vinhos SA

Aldeia Nova, 4430-809, Avintes, Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 227 838 104

www.sograpevinhos.eu

The Sandeman Don is one of the most instantly recognisable of all logos and helped to propel Sandeman into being one of the largest single Port brands. The company was formed by a Scotsman, George Sandeman, in 1790. He was lent £300 by his father and began selling Port from Tom's Coffee House off Cornhill in the City of London. The business flourished and by 1792 Sandeman was representing the sherries of James Duff of Cadiz (forerunner of Duff Gordon). In the same year he shipped and bottled one of the earliest vintage Ports: Sandeman 1790. As the business grew, Sandeman moved from the coffee house and eventually established a headquarters at St Swithin's Lane, also in London. The company remained there until the lease finally expired in 1969.

SANDEMAN 225
VINTAGE PORTO

QUINTA DO SEIXO
2013
VINTAGE PORTO
BOTTLED IN 2018

IN THE HEART OF THE DOURO VALLEY, WITH ITS WONDERFUL VIEWS OVER THE RIVER AND ITS STEEP TERRACED VINEYARDS, LIES SANDEMAN'S QUINTA DO SEIXO. IT IS FROM HERE THAT THE BEST GRAPES WERE HAND SELECTED TO CREATE THIS FINE SINGLE QUINTA VINTAGE PORTO.

SANDEMAN
ESTD 1850

WINEinMODERATION EU
Art de Vivre

Be responsible. Drink in moderation.

On his death in 1841, Sandeman was followed into the business by his nephew, George Glas Sandeman, who enlarged the company to include insurance and the export of British linen and textiles. The firm even ran its own schooner, the *Hoopoe*, which plied the high seas under the company flag until 1875. George Glas Sandeman was the first in a long line of Sandemans whose direct descendants continue to oversee the firm today. Under his son, Albert George Sandeman, the firm began to promote its own brand name and in 1880 the House of Sandeman became the first Port shipper to export wine bottled and labelled in Oporto. In the early years of the twentieth century, the firm began a high-profile marketing and advertising campaign based on the Sandeman partners. 'Three Star', 'Picador' and 'Partners' were the Sandeman Port brands of the day. The Don reinforced Sandeman's pre-eminent position at a time when other shippers were still shipping Port in bulk without brand names of their own.

Despite the focus on volume, Sandeman's vintage Ports were among the very best in the business. A vertical tasting held in London in 2011 showed how the wines excelled, sometimes in unusual years like 1948, 1950, 1965 and 1967. There were some outstanding wines from mainstream vintages like 1966, 1955, and 1935, even back to an ethereal 1873. But standards began to change after the Sandeman family lost control of the company when it was forced to go public in 1952. For the late David Sandeman, who chaired the firm from London in the 1980s, this marked 'the beginning of the end'. The company became easy prey for a takeover. Forestalling an unfriendly bid from Rumasa, chief predator in the Sherry trade of the 1970s, the firm was sold to drinks multinational Seagram in 1980. With control of the company remote from both Jerez and Oporto, Sandeman seemed to wander directionless and

the wines lacked something as a result. From 1970 onwards vintages shed much of their depth and dimension while Founder's Reserve, one of the bestselling brands of Port in the US, became a pale relic of its former self.

In 1990 Sandeman celebrated its bicentenary. It proved to be something of a milestone in the company's history, marking the beginning of a period of retrenchment. George Sandeman was appointed Managing Director in Oporto, bringing back the direct involvement of the family. Quinta do Confradeiro, a relatively low-grade vineyard, was sold and over three hundred farmers were laid off, leaving the firm with Quinta do Vau, an A-grade riverside vineyard which the company purchased in 1988. After a run of rather light vintage Ports in the early 1980s, Sandeman decided not to make a declaration between 1985 and 1994. Based on Quinta do Vau, which was extensively replanted at the end of the 1980s, Sandeman's vintage Ports changed in style with the 1994 and subsequent declared vintages showing more depth and breadth.

One style of wine, which never suffered during the years of upheaval, is aged tawny. Sandeman possess excellent stocks of old wine, some of which are aged at Cambres in the Douro, which form a chain of tawnies from Imperial Tawny Reserve (approximately seven years old) to a distinguished forty-year-old. These wines regularly win trophies in international wine competitions.

In 2001 Sandeman's Port and Sherry interests were acquired by Sogrape, who now run the company in tandem with Ferreira and Offley. Quinta do Seixo, once a Ferreira property, has been rebranded to Sandeman. As if to show their intent, in 2007 Sandeman made a solid, serious vintage Port for the first time in over forty years. Sogrape are working hard to revive the Sandeman brand in the US,

UK and the Republic of Ireland which have traditionally been Sandeman's strongest markets.

Senhora do Convento

Sociedade de Vinhos Senhora do Convento, SA

Quinta de S. Pedro das Águias – Tavora, 5120 Tabuaço

Tel. (351) 254 782 070

www.senhoradoconvento.com

This magnificent property deep in the Tavora valley dates back to the twelfth century. It was a Cistercian monastery until 1834 when it fell into the hands of the state following the abolition of the religious orders. In 1986 it was bought by Paul Vranken who established São Pedro das Águias ('St Peter of the Eagles') as a Port brand, mainly for the French market. A decade later, the monastery and vineyards were separated from the brand as part of a divorce settlement and Quinta de São Pedro das Águias now belongs to Vranken's ex-wife, Mauricette Mordant. The estate comprises eighty-five hectares of vineyard split between four *quintas*, all in the Tavora valley. Much of the vineyard property is on granite, so only forty-two hectares have *benefício* for Port. In 1999 Mme. Mordant established Porto Heredias, which now produces a full range of Ports from ruby through to vintage; Senhora do Convento is the company's second brand. The wines are not, as yet, made on the estate although there are plans to build an *adeiga*; however, the cool granite cellars underneath the monastery are unique in the Douro and perfect for ageing (one of the cellars even served as the local prison until 1986). With the exception of old tawnies which are bought in, Senhora do Convento Ports are characterised by their fresh, vibrant fruit flavours. Vintage Ports declared from 2000 and 2001 not as big or bold as some but fine, middle-distance wines with lovely purity of

fruit. Senhora do Convento also produce Douro wines. The monastery has been restored and is open to overnight guests (*turismo de habitação*).

C. da Silva

(see under Dalva)

Silva & Cosens Ltd

(see under Dow)

Skeffington

c/o Fladgate Partnership

PO Box 1311, EC Santa Marinha, 4401-501 Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal

Tel: (351) 223 742 800

www.fladgatepartnership.com

Charles Neville Skeffington was a nineteenth-century partner and vineyard manager in the firm of Taylor, Fladgate & Yeatman. Facing increasing competition from own-label sales in the 1980s, Taylor's created a new associate company, adopting the name Skeffington for the purpose. Since the suspension of bulk shipments in 1996, Skeffington has increasingly become a brand in its own right, with a full range of Ports from a fruity ruby through to a good but relatively early-maturing vintage.

Smith Woodhouse

c/o Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel: (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

Sometimes considered to be a second-string shipper, Smith Woodhouse is an old-established company producing Ports

that can compete with the best. The company was founded in 1784 by Christopher Smith, a British Member of Parliament who went on to become Lord Mayor of London. His sons were joined by the Woodhouse brothers in 1818 and the firm acquired its present-day name. In the late nineteenth century, Smith Woodhouse vintage Port gained a high reputation, with Professor Saintsbury claiming in *Notes on a Cellar Book* that 'I have never had a better '87 than some Smith Woodhouse...'. The brand was taken over by Louis Gordon & Sons Ltd of London in 1956 and the wines were shipped by W. & J. Graham. When Graham was sold to the Symington family in 1970, Smith Woodhouse became part of the group.

The company has a small vineyard, Quinta da Madelena, in the Rio Torto, although most Smith Woodhouse wines are an exercise in blending. Much of the company's production is standard tawny destined to be sold as own-label Port. This is not to denigrate the wines sold under the Smith Woodhouse label, for the fact is that these Ports are good, and sometimes extremely good. Through the 1970s, 80s and 90s, Smith Woodhouse vintage Ports have been on consistent form, perhaps midway between Dow and Graham in style, combining sweetness and muscular strength if a little one-dimensional compared to their bigger and better-known brethren. The 1977 Smith Woodhouse is particularly good with plenty of life remaining when many wines from this rather over-rated vintage are on a downhill path. Without the cachet of some of the big names, Smith Woodhouse Ports are frequently good value, making them wines to drink rather than collect.

Smith Woodhouse was one of the first shippers to produce unfiltered LBV. Unlike many of the more recent so-called

‘traditional’ LBVs, the wine is not released until it has been aged in bottle for six to ten years. The result is a poor man’s vintage Port.

Taylor

Taylor, Fladgate & Yeatman S.A.

c/o The Fladgate Partnership, Rua do Choupelo, 250,
4400-088 Vila Nova de Gaia.

Tel. (351) 22 3742800.

www.taylor.pt

Taylor has built up the reputation as a ‘first growth’ among Port shippers and is now the leading house in the Fladgate Partnership alongside Fonseca and Croft. Partners have come and gone but Taylor is the only British company to have been handed down through the generations without having been sold, bought or taken over. The company was founded in 1692 by Job Bearsley, who started out in the port of Viana do Castelo around 1670. Like so many Port shippers, Taylor began as general traders and the enigmatic 4XX symbol, which continues to form part of the company’s livery, originated as a wool mark.

The Bearsleys left the firm at the end of the eighteenth century and a number of families, Webb, Sanford, Gray and Camo, came and went before the first Taylor entered the partnership in 1816. Joseph Taylor joined a firm known as Campbell, Bowden & Taylor but within ten years he was running the firm under his own name. In 1836 he was joined by John Fladgate, and two years later Morgan Yeatman, a wine merchant from Dorset in southern England, became a partner in the firm. Joseph Taylor himself died in 1837 but his name was retained. In 1844 Fladgate bought Quinta da Roêda and John Fladgate, ennobled as a baron

by the Portuguese, took his title from the property. Due to his daughter's marriage, Quinta da Roêda later went to Croft but Taylor duly compensated for this by acquiring Quinta de Vargellas in 1893. Having been devastated by phylloxera, the property produced a miserable six pipes, but by the great harvests of 1908 and 1912, Vargellas was making up a third of Taylor's 300-pipe vintage *lote*. Today it serves as one of the company's flagship estates. Quinta de Vargellas and São Xisto in the Douro Superior are joined by Quinta da Terra Feita and more recently by two properties from Borges, Quinta do Junco and Quinta de Casa Nova, making up a substantial holding in the Pinhão valley.

Much of Taylor's nineteenth- and twentieth-century success was due to the Yeatman family who continued to run the firm until Dick Yeatman, great-grandson of the Dorset wine merchant, died in 1966. His widow, Beryl, briefly took charge and asked her nephew Alistair Robertson to join the firm as a partner. He was ably supported by two partners: Huyshe Bower (Sales Director and a cousin of Dick Yeatman) and the late Bruce Guimaraens (Estates Director and a descendant of the Fladgates and of the family who sold Fonseca Guimaraens to Taylor shortly after the Second World War). This is the team that steered Taylor through the 1974–1975 revolution and transformed a small old-fashioned concern into one of the most successful of all players in the Port trade. Their not-so-secret weapon has been LBV, a style which Taylor popularised during the 1970s.

The success of Taylor's LBV has undoubtedly been reinforced by their reputation as one of the leading producers of vintage Port. For over a century two vineyards, Quinta de Vargellas and Quinta da Terra Feita, have provided the backbone for the blend. In great years like 1927, 1963,

1977, and more recently 1994, 2000 2003, 2007 and 2011, Taylor's vintages have a massive structure with a characteristic 'peacock's tail' of powerful tannins on the finish. Few other wines rise to the challenge in comparative tastings although Taylor is sometimes pipped at the post by wines from its sister company Fonseca, which seem to be slightly more opulent in style. Taylor were the first of the current generation of shippers to commercialise a single-*quinta* vintage Port. In good interim years, both Quinta de Vargellas and Quinta da Terra Feita are bottled individually. Whereas Vargellas tends to produce firm, tannic wines that sometimes seem rather reserved when young, the wines from Terra Feita are big and powerful with huge amounts of ripe fruit.

With so much adulation over wines at the top of the spectrum, it is easy to overlook Taylor's rich reserve wine known as First Estate after the property at Salgueiral established by Bartholomew Bearsley in 1744. Taylor also produce a full range of aged tawnies which includes a delicate, fresh twenty-year-old and culminates in a supremely refined forty-year-old. In 2010 Taylor's launched a pre-phylloxera tawny port named Scion, setting in motion a spate of similarly pricey limited releases of old tawnys from other houses. In 2013 they followed this up with an 1863 Single Harvest (colheita) from stocks acquired by the take over of Wiese and Krohn (see entry on *Krohn* above).

The winemaker currently responsible for this exceptional range of wines (and those of Fonseca and Croft) is David Guimaraens, who took over from his father Bruce in the early 1990s. Alistair Robertson retired as Managing Director in 2000 handing over the day-to-day reins to his daughter Natasha and son-in-law, Adrian Bridge. With an energetic approach, they look well placed to sustain Taylor's role as a

trendsetter in the Port establishment. Capitalising on Oporto as a tourist destination, their latest venture has been the Yeatman Hotel.

VARGELLAS VINHA VELHA: A NEW CLASSIC?

One of the attractions of vintage Port is its rarity and collectability, something that Taylor have addressed since 1995 with Vargellas Vinha Velha. The wine is a *lote* blended from five plots of old vineyard at Quinta de Vargellas: Polverinho (the varietal plot planted by Frank and Dick Yeatman in 1927), Renova do Depósito, Renova do Armazém, Gricha and Vinha Grande. The age of the vines varies from around 80 to 120 years. Seven vintages have been declared to date (1995, 1997, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011), with around 300 cases having been made each year, representing about 2 per cent of the total production of Vargellas. Made from a time-honoured field blend of grape varieties, Vargellas Vinha Velha doesn't have the impressively deep colour of a modern-day vintage Port, yet the wines are remarkable for their elegance and refinement, evident even at a relatively early age. The underlying structure and rapier-like tannins suggest the wines will last and last.

Tuke Holdsworth

(see under Hunt Roope)

Quinta do Vale Dona Maria

Quinta do Vale D. Maria

5130-141 Ervedosa do Douro, Portugal

Tel. (351) 223 744 320

www.quintavaledonamaria.com

After Quinta do Noval was sold in 1993, Cristiano van Zeller began producing both Port and Douro wine from his wife's family estate, Quinta Vale Dona Maria in the Rio Torto. Van Zeller has restored the *lagares* on the property and, having relied on outside help for a number of years, employed Sandra Tavares de Silva as winemaker. Vintage Ports, all foot trodden in the traditional manner, are declared most years on the Bordeaux chateau principle. They are mid-weight, fine, well balanced and usually offer great value for money.

Quinta do Vale Meão

F. Olazabal & Filhos Lda

Quinta do Vale Meão

5150 - 501 Vila Nova de Foz Côa

Tel. (351) 279 762 156

Francisco ('Vito') Olazabal is no stranger to the Port business, having been Managing Director of the Port shipper Ferreira until he retired to take charge of his own property in 1999. In the past Quinta do Vale Meão has supplied both Ferreira and Taylor but the Olazabals, father and son, are now making some fine Douro wine and opulent vintage Ports. Vintages are also shipped under the name of Whytinghams.

Vasques de Carvalho

Vasques de Carvalho, Soc. Agr. Com Lda.

Av. Dr. Antão de Carvalho n. 43, 5050-224 Peso da Régua

Tel. (351) 254 324 263

vasquesdecarvalho.com

A new brand name in the Port business, the Vasques de Carvalho family has been producing wine since the mid-nineteenth century. With vineyards in the Vale de Rodo near Régua, the family originally only made wines for themselves, until a century later, in the 1970s, they were registered as a Port producer. The company was reconstituted in 2012 and launched a good range of aged tawnies, of which the 20-, 30- and 40-year-olds were medal winners at the Decanter World Wine Awards in 2015. The winemaker is Jaime Costa, who used to work for Burmester.

Quinta do Vesúvio

c/o Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel: (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

The Symington family bought this stately *quinta* from the Ferreiras in 1989 and turned Vesúvio into an independent shipper in its own right. There was much to be done to restore the property which extends to over 400 hectares and includes a twenty-three-bedroom house, much the largest in the Douro. The eight granite *lagares* (each with a capacity of twenty-five pipes) are some of the most impressive in the region and have been equipped with an ingenious cooling system, very necessary in this part of the Douro. Under the

legislation, as well as being made on site, all the wine must be aged and bottled on the property. The *armazém* has therefore been restored and the old olive oil bins have been modified to store bottles of Port, with air-conditioning installed to maintain a constant temperature over the summer months. The 132 hectares of vineyard on the property produce around 800 pipes, of which around 3,000 cases are bottled as a vintage Port in all but the poorest years (1993 and 2002). The first Vesúvio vintage was 1989. Despite its relatively short track record, the Symingtons have established Quinta do Vesúvio as one of the leading properties in the Douro making red wine as well as outstanding vintage Port.

Vista Alegre

Vallegre, Vinhos do Porto SA

Rua do Sporting Club de Coimbrões, Apartado 101, 4431-902

Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel. (351) 223 745 630

www.vallegre.pt

Vallegre belongs to the Cunha Barros family who own two *quintas*, Vista Alegre and Valle Longo, located close to Pinhão and in the Tedo valley respectively. Like many Douro families, Cunha Barros used to sell to other shippers but in 1988 decided to go it alone and produce wines under their own label. Vista Alegre is now the brand name for a full range of Ports from white and ruby to vintage. All the wines, including Douro red under the Encostas de Pombal label, are vinified at Quinta de Vista Alegre and aged in the company's *armazém* in Régua. With two magnificent *quintas*, Vallegre cannot be short of good fruit but in the past I have found Vista Alegre Ports to be rather variable in quality, although in some years the estate can excel.

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PRANKSTER

Plenty of good pranks are played after a glass or two of good Port. William Warre, born in Oporto in 1784, used sealing wax to fix the pigtail of Pedro Alves (an elderly Portuguese member of the firm) to his desk as he slept, no doubt after a heavy lunch. The ensuing indignation meant that the young William Warre left the firm and pursued a military career. Having distinguished himself in the Peninsular War, being present at every major battle except Bussaco, he went on to become Lt. General Sir William Warre. His letters, edited by his namesake William ('Bill') Warre, show that Wellington asked to be supplied with Warre's Port. A portrait of Lt. General Warre hangs in the Factory House.

Warre

c/o Symington Family Estates

Travessa Barão de Forrester, 86, Apartado 26, 4431-901 Vila Nova de Gaia

Tel: (351) 223 776 300

www.symington.com

Established in 1670, Warre (pronounced 'War') is the oldest of the British-owned houses. The first name associated with the company is John Clark, who may have brought the company to Oporto from Viana do Castelo, where it began as a general trader. Certainly by the time the Indian-born William Warre joined the firm in 1729 it was firmly established in Oporto and trading in wine. Warre married Elizabeth Whitehead, sister of John Whitehead who was later British Consul in

Oporto and was instrumental in building the Factory House. Warre's eldest son, also named William, followed his father as Senior Partner and went on to become British Consul himself.

In the late nineteenth century, the Warre family ceased to be directly involved in the firm. Dr Edmond Warre was Headmaster of Eton from 1884 to 1905 and Provost from 1909 to 1918. George Acheson Warre became a partner in the competing firm of Silva & Cosens. It was in 1905 that Andrew James Symington, who had arrived from Glasgow in 1882, became a partner in Warre. He soon took a share in Silva & Cosens as well and established the foundations of the Symington's dominion, which now includes Cockburn and Graham as well. The Symingtons and the Warres ran the firm of Warre & Ca. in tandem until the Warre family sold out in the early 1960s. William ('Bill') Warre M.W. continued to work for the company in London until he retired in 1991.

Warre has always been on the top tier of the Symington family Port houses and produces some of the finest, most elegant of vintage Ports. Grapes for Warre's vintages were traditionally sourced in the Rio Torto. The wines were on the light side in the 1940s and 1950s but regained substance and flesh during the 1960s and 1970s. They are characterised by their fragrant, perfumed aromas and opulent fruit and yet, as the 1963, 1966 and 1970 vintages of Warre prove, they have the structure to last. In 1978 the company acquired Quinta da Cavadinha, an A-grade property overlooking the Pinhão valley, followed by Quinta do Retiro Antigo in the Rio Torto in 2006. Together these two properties form the backbone of the Warre *lote*, the style of which is deliberately in between that of Graham and Dow. In good interim years, wine from Cavadinha is declared as a single-*quinta* vintage, which shares much of the fragrant aromatic

character of Warre's vintage. Quinta de Cavadinha has an *adega* equipped with robotic *lagares* which produces about 45 per cent of the company's needs with the rest produced either at Quinta do Bomfim or Quinta do Sol.

Warre's LBVs are unfiltered and bottle-matured, released around six years after the harvest. These wines have genuine vintage character. Warre also produce a pair of excellent aged tawnies bottled as Otima, as well as a good reserve Port known as 'Warrior'. The wines are drawn from the same properties that produce Warre's vintage Port and 'Warrior' has much more substance and character than many other wines in this category. In continuous production since the 1750s, it is the oldest brand in the Port business.

Wiese & Krohn

(see under Krohn)

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