



I'm off to Portugal this evening for an intensive series of wine tastings. Last night was well spent getting into the spirit of things at [The Wine Society's](#) second 'Wines of Portugal' tasting.

Portugal buyer Jo Locke MW and I have three areas of focus in common, Portugal, the Loire & South Africa and I have great respect for Jo's choices as, evidently, do the 350 members at this sell out walk-around tasting of some 50 wines.

Great to see that level of support for Portuguese wines, also several winemakers over here to show their wares. It's so important to tread the shoe leather given how little most consumers know about Portuguese wines - the perfect opportunity to tell them what they're missing!

My stand out wines of the night? It's coming up to Christmas so I'll flag upfront my fortified favourites –

Quinta do Vesuvio 1998 is just staggeringly good and a great buy at £37. From Madeira, **Henriques & Henriques Malmsey 15 Years Old** is remarkably supple and refined. My top (bring out the oysters) white was Vinho Verde **Niepoort Dócil Loureiro 2010** and my favourite red the beautifully structured **Quinta do Mouro 2006**.

You'll find all my highlights by region, north to south below, with fortified wines at the bottom.

Vinho Verde

Niepoort Dócil Loureiro 2010 – should you be treating yourself to oysters over the festive period, this is a glorious match as I well recall from when I first tasted this wine in March at Niepoort – the fresh salty oysters and squeeze of lemon came right back to me. The Loureiro grape's floral lime blossom notes entice on the nose and follow through on a fresh, saline, off dry palate with great zesty but controlled citrus line and length. 11% £10.95

Howard's Folly, Alvarinho, Vinho Verde 2010 – packs an impressive punch with its zesty citrus attack and creamier, honeyed tropical fruit salad mid-palate and mineral finish. A very modern, lusciously fruited Alvarinho from David Baverstock 13%, £10.95

Sogrape Vinhos Morgadio da Torre Alvarinho 2010 – this more classic Alvarinho shows greater complexity to its sweet honeysuckle and tropical fruit palate which is adroitly balanced by edgier (but attractive) hints of green tomato and pear skins. Long and spicy, with a distinct fennel/aniseed nuance to the finish. 13% £12.95

The Douro

Lavradores de Feitoria Branco 2010 – in fine fettle since I tasted it in March this is a characterful, textured white with the region's typical subtly vegetal, creamy nutty palate gently buoyed by lemony acidity. A well balanced finish sports a shimmer of Riesling-like bath salts. Very well done. 12.5%, £8.50 bottle

Passadouro Branco 2009 – this blend of Viosinho, Rabigato and Códaga do Larinho always puts me in mind of a Sancerre with its fine, bright green apple and lemony palate, edge of bay leaf and salinity. Lovely purity and elegance. 12.5% £12.95

Niepoort Tiara 2010 – in a ripe year, this is a relatively expansive Tiara but, glistening with bath salts, it's jewel bright and very drinkable right now with its fresh but supple, creamy palate with (braised) fennel and hints of praline. Long and very complete. 13% £19.00

Castello d'Alba Touriga Nacional 2010 – from the upper Douro, close to the Spanish border, with vineyards at least 300 metres above sea level, this unoaked red's dark, inky flavour spectrum speaks of its upper Douro roots but the elevation makes for a well defined, floral wine with violets aplenty. A schistous/slatey minerality too. 13%, £8.95

Quinta do Passadouro Passadouro Tinto 2008 – a great example of Douro red with plenty of layers of rock rose, minerals, black currant and berry fruit on nose and palate. The whole is supported by ultra fine tannins making for a very long, fluid finish despite its density and concentration. 14.5%, £14.95

Quinta Vale D. Maria 2008 – a very polished performance with its swathe of fine tannins supporting a dense concentration of oak buffed black currant, cherry and berry fruit. So much fruit that it positively mops up the oak. A glossy, rich and concentrated yet balanced style. 14% £22.00

Niepoort Redoma 2008 – a densely layered, tight black berry and cherry mineral-edged palate with

seemingly heaps of dry extract, which makes for a fabulously schistous finish. Violets and rock rose bring delicacy and sensual lift. Lovely and very youthful. Worth hanging on to this for a few years and it'll keep for a decade plus. 13.5% £29.50

The Dão

Dão Sul Cabriz Tinto 2008 - a great example of an elegant, modern (fine tannined) Dao red with a strong sense of place, this delicious blend of blend of Touriga Nacional, Alfrocheiro and Tinta Roriz is fleshy, fluid and fresh with intense orange blossom perfume to its blood plum fruit and a hint of smoky gunflint to the finish. 13% £6.95

Alentejo

Esporão Monte Velho, Branco 2010 – this quaffer is gently fruity, juicy and well balanced with a soft talcy texture, all of which sounds very damning with feint praise but actually is no little achievement for a wine made in Portugal's warm to hot south and in such quantities. Not a hint of oxidation or coarseness. Very well made. 13% £6.50

Esporão Monte Velho Red 2010 – peppery with juicy, succulent black cherry and plums, a touch of fig and smooth tannins, this well balanced easy going but characterful red also offers great value for money. 13.5% £6.95

Quinta do Centro Duas Pedras 2009 – it's hard to believe that this blend of Touriga Nacional and Syrah fermented on Viognier skins is unoaked, given its density, dark chocolate and smoky bacon notes. There's a touch of reduction which lends a peppery grunt to its succulent core of black cherry fruit. Very satisfying – a ringer for a modern (oaked!) Crozes-Hermitage. 13.5% £8.95 bottle

Terrenus Tinto 2009 – fresh and focused with ripe but tightly structured tannins and a salty minerality, this elegant red speaks of Portalegre's granite soils and elevation – well named! 14% £11.95

Terrenus Reserva Vinhas Velhas 2007 – deeply coloured with a tight nose and just a hint of violets. Though dark and densely layered, it's superbly structured with great forward energy/linearity – that Portalegre cool elegance. Opening up it shows lifted violets and some creamy oak. One to decant. Lots of potential. 14% £25.00

Quinta do Mouro 2006 – quite possibly my favourite wine of the night, it's possessed of the wonderful freshness, structure and concentration so typical of this estate. Deeply coloured, it has a succulent core of bright black small berry and currant fruits with riper figgy fruit and lifted floral notes framed by ripe but present fine grained tannins. Excellent. 14% £29.00

Lisboa

Sanguinhal Cerejeiras Branco 2010 – this Moscatel dominated blend is gingery, grapey and spicy with a touch of tannin/spicy texture to the finish. Bright and fruity. Well done. 13% £6.95

Port

The Society's Exhibition Crusted Port - a blend of vintages bottled and shipped by Fonseca Guimaraens, this is ripe and generous with fleshy dark chocolate-edged red and black fruits and attractive balancing grip to the finish. Cries out for chocolate fondant pudding! 20% £13.95

Quinta do Vesuvio 1998 – magic!!!! This was one of my picks of a recent single quinta tasting (reported

[here](#)). In more expansive form today it shows cinnamon/spicy gingerbread edged succulent and baked black cherry fruit scored with minerals. Long, sumptuous yet balanced I found it impossible to spit! 20% abv A very smart price on this at £37.00.

Madeira

Henriques & Henriques Malmsey 15 Years Old - with its rich sweet toffeed palate and ever so subtly burned caramel this is Madeira's richest style, but it's beautifully balanced too, light on its feet even, with a seamless quality and mature spice box lift to its long, poised finish. Terrific. 20% £22.00