

The White Vinho Verde Wines of Portugal



The Vinho Verde region is the largest sanctioned wine growing appellation in Portugal, yet it has been virtually dismissed among American consumers for years in favor of Portugal's namesake wine, Port. But that's about to change. Over the last decade or so, the winemakers and producers in the Vinho Verde region have been leading an orchestrated campaign to bring attention to their vibrant white wines. And based on the growing sales in the US marketplace, it appears to be working.

Tucked up in the northwest corner of the country, Vinho Verde shares a border with Spain to the north while the western edge of the region sits firmly up against the cool Atlantic ocean. The famed city of Oporto lies on its southwestern border, like a cool gem tucked into the verdant green setting of the surrounding hills. The Vinho Verde region is heavily influenced by its proximity to the Atlantic, providing the cool-climate wines with abundant acidity. The vines grow in fertile, granite soils that adds a distinctive minerally/saltiness component to the wines.

Vinho Verde wines are well-known for their high acidity white wines that tend to be blends of the seven certified grape varieties grown in the region. The styles vary widely, depending on the grapes used in the blend. For example, Loureiro is floral. Trajadura is steely. Arinto (known here as Pedernã) adds a mineral component while Avesso is both minerally and creamy. And the famous Alvarinho grape (Albariño in Spain), provides finesse and fragrance. The Azal Branco grape adds base structure so it's usually blended with more aromatic grapes. Most white Vinho Verde can be relied upon to be light, crisp and aromatic, often with a light prickle of fizz. Best of all, they represent a terrific value, with most wines priced under \$20 and many under \$10.

The producers in Vinho Verde have come a long way in the last several years, making wines that are interesting to drink while still retaining the fresh, vibrant flavors they are famous for. Most of the white wines in the region are best consumed within a year of bottling. And while white wine dominates the Vinho Verde appellation, there are some reds and roses that are produced in limited quantity. The reds tend to be deep and tannic, and are mostly made from Vinhão, Borraçal and Amaral grapes. The rosés are very fresh and fruity, usually produced using Espadeiro and Padeiro grapes. In 1999, the Viticulture Commission of the Vinho Verde Region, (CVRVV), the official governing body of Vinho Verde, sanctioned the production of sparkling wine.

Here are a few delicious values that are available in our area. Retail prices are approximate.

2012 Las Lilas Vinho Verde. A classic blend of Loureiro, Trajadura, and Arinto and featuring a bouquet of jasmine and gardenias. The bright palate of citrus and peaches play well off of the tangy lime-laden finish. Mineral undertones provide a sound body for the wine and a solid foil for lobster or shrimp salad. **\$10**

2012 José Maria da Fonseca Twin Vines from Vinho Verde, Portugal. Vinho Verde means "green wine," but make no mistake, this white wine, made from a blend of Loureiro, Trajadura, and Pederna, and a touch of Alvarinho, is far from "green." It offers vibrant aromas and flavors of citrus, apples and flowers, and finishes with a light, refreshing touch-of-fizz. **\$8**

2012 Quinta da Aveleda Fonte from Vinho Verde, Portugal. The nose offers stone fruit scents of nectarine and white peaches. In the mouth, flavors of ripe peach and pear are highlighted by notes of lime that linger on the finish. Try it with grilled shrimp. **\$7**

The **2012 Soalheiro Alvarinho** is from the Melgaço appellation where the Alvarinho grape is king. This single varietal wine has a very aromatic nose, with scents of white flowers and tropical fruit. The mineral-laden palate is lifted by vibrant peach, papaya and citrus notes that add a sense of richness on the palate. A touch of salinity on the finish calls out for fresh shucked oysters. **\$20**