

The White Wines of Portugal



Portugal, a thin strip of land roughly the size of Indiana, is located on the Iberian Peninsula in Western Europe. Spain literally wraps around the northern and eastern borders while the cool Atlantic Ocean lies to the west. The temperate waters of the Gulf of Cadiz form the southern border. Although grapes are grown throughout the country, the most notable wine producing districts are located inland, away from the maritime influences of the Atlantic. The main red wine producing region in the north is the Douro Valley, best known for growing Touriga Francesa and Touriga Nacional, the two main varietals found in Port wines.

South of Douro, towards the center of the country, is the Dão region, known for making distinctive red wines from several grape varietals. On the south side of the Tagus River, which bisects the country on its way to Lisbon, is the bountiful wine region of Ribatejo. Further south, in succession, are the Alentejo and Algarve regions. These last three areas are where a new breed of winemakers is starting to push the envelope by experimenting with both traditional and international blends.

During a recent trip to Portugal, I had an opportunity to sample many delicious – and affordable – wines. Here are a few white wines – perfect for the impending heat of summer - that are available in our area.

The Dao wine region is definitely one of Portugal's most up-and-coming regions and the **2014 Grao Vasco Dao White** wine is one reason why. Made from a blend of indigenous grape varietals (Bical, Cercial, Malvasia-Fina, and Encruzado), it exudes floral aromas of nectarine, apricot and steely minerals dominate the nose. In the mouth, the wine is delicate but offers up layered flavors of nectarine, orange blossom and citrus. Bracing acidity adds balance and appeal. **\$10**

In Portuguese, Vinho Verde means "green wine," but that is not a reference to its color, which is a brilliant yellow-white, but to its vivacious, youthful character. The **2015 Vera Vinho Verde Branco** from the Vinho Verde region is a fine example of this style. Made from a blend of native Portuguese grapes, Loureiro, Trajadura, and Pederna, with a little bit of Alvarinho, this Vinho Verde offers vibrant aromas and flavors of citrus, apples and white flowers, and finishes with notes of nectarine, pink and yellow grapefruit and a light, refreshing effervescent sparkle. **\$11**

Alentejo is a well-known, highly respected wine region in eastern Portugal. This hot, dry area is best known for its red wines and cork production. But over the last few decades, the region has also been a key center of Portugal's white wine renaissance. The **Esporao Reserva White** from Alentejo is a prime example with an aroma featuring fresh white floral and tropical fruit scents on the nose. The palate offers flavors of pears, apples and the ever-present mineral notes. The medium finish is smooth and well-balanced with hints of passionfruit at the end. **\$13**

The Douro wine region is tucked in the mountainous northeast of Portugal. Vines are grown on the steep, terraced hills that rise above the Douro River, producing grapes best known for classic fortified Port wines but it is also home to the **2015 Passagem White**. A mixed field blend of white port grapes made in a fresh and modern style, this wine has loads of citrus and mineral notes on the nose. The palate reveals rich, ripe nectarine and white peaches. The tight finish has just the right amount of acidity to pull off the fleshy fruit and classic flint flavors. An excellent value from this region. **\$20**