

wow-factor WINES

IN SEARCH OF THAT JAW-DROPPING, SHOW-STOPPING, HEAD-TURNING, HEART-THROBBING, PLAIN OLD WOW FACTOR THAT LEAVES YOUR TASTE BUDS FIRED UP AND ENTHUSED, OUR SOMMELIER WENT ON A JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY TO A&D WINES

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I AM NOT given to gushing – occasional verbosity I will concede to – but sometimes, not often and always when I least expect it, I am simply left bereft of how to proceed next. "Wow" just about gets there, and that's all I can say by way of introduction...

A&D Wines comprises three main vineyard sites in the Vinho Verde region: Quinta de Santa Teresa, Casa do Arrabalde where their viticulture story began, and Quinta dos Espinhosos. The first is a 33-hectare plot, situated in the Baião sub-region bordering the Douro Valley, where it shares its neighbour's characteristic terraced vineyards and chalky granitic soils. Casa do Arrabalde, a family farm for generations, is where the art of viticulture and winemaking stems from, and Quinta dos Espinhosos offers a unique microclimate and is

a formative part of A&D Wines' more modern approach to viticulture and sustainable agriculture.

1. Monologo Sauvignon Blanc €8.50

It is generally hard to find Portuguese productions of Sauvignon that typify the varietal – often warmer climatic influences, longer ripening times or unsuitable soil types leave us with overly aromatic, unctuous offerings.

It is a nut not often cracked by Portuguese wine-makers. A&D though, terroir-driven and focused on pure expressions of the varietal's natural characteristics, has done a simply fabulous job.

Good sun exposure, diurnal range, single vineyard site and, most importantly, actively pursued bio-diversity in the vineyard, are all

key elements in this expressive but refined Sauvignon, where herbaceous notes from abundant rosemary nearby adds a green and leafy element to a fruit-driven white. One of the few really good expressions of the varietal I've seen here.

2. Monologo Chardonnay €8

This is a sustainably made, single vineyard, organically grown and unoaked Chardonnay, a focused exercise in expressing the potential of a vineyard site and varietal combined. One of the most enjoyable offerings of this once-foreign but fast becoming native varietal. No overworking of the grape, or heavy-handed influence of oak, just a sumptuous synergy of fruit, acidity and minerality. Fresh and zesty, but more Pink Lady apples and underripe pear, than the expected Granny Smiths.

Obvious but welcome lees ageing and batonage add texture and weight to an already mouth-filling white. I rarely return to a wine merchant two days in a row for the same thing, but now I will happily return again and again for this, never feeling I've wasted the journey. €

3. Monologo Avesso €8

Indigenous to Minho, this aromatic native is taken to expressive new heights through meticulous, sustainable vineyard management, a keen appreciation for the varietal's natural characteristics, and careful but noticeable use of oak. A nutty, sandalwood element follows on from a lychee and papaya fruit foreground, then smoky notes with the generous roll of a rich and round white, full of acidity-driven bite and bright primary fruit.

Of the three Monologo wines mentioned, this is probably the most gastronomically-driven, and would certainly sing a different tune with food: strong-flavoured fish, fatty meats, a sunny day, and secretos on the grill.

4. Pintado Rose €11.50

Pintado (painted, to take ink, represented by means of painting, full-figured or perfect) has the softest hues that no maceration can imbue. Pintado is a blend of Touriga Nacional and Vinhão, made from the 'tears' or first press of the red varietals, the almost imperceptible colour extracted from the skins as the juice of the reds runs over their tinting skins.

What a beautifully elegant way to extract

Herbaceous notes from abundant rosemary nearby adds a green and leafy element to a fruit-driven white.



what you wish to achieve. It speaks volumes to the level of care, attention to detail and unconventional way A&D approaches the process. This is not a poolside blush, it is more considered in its character as much as its production. Red summer fruit, infused with body and persistence – think strawberries and cream but nothing sweet – and soft brush strokes of flavours to savour. Imagine what fun you could have with pairings.

5. Singular €10

Singular is a fine example of what is in my mindset when perched atop my soap box and pontificating that "not all Vinho Verde is fizzy, nor is it green." Such misconceptions are commonplace and fall within the purview

of the non-Chardonnay-drinking Chablis enthusiast. Vinho Verde is a wine-producing region, and Portugal's largest one at that. Stretching from the boundaries of the Douro valley, to the Atlantic coast across to Spain, this vast swathe of vineyards, terroirs and microclimates is not the sum of its largest exports. A huge shift to developed, mature, more complex styles of white has been ongoing for some time.

Singular is a well-woven tapestry of old vines, indigenous varietals, modern wine making and environmentally-conscious practices. It is oaky, opulent, complex and confounding, a careful selection of parcels and varietals from the estate's best grapes. At just two years old, this wine is young, full of youthful exuberance, but matured by older vineyard selections, careful integration of barrel and bottle age. It is a fantastic example of just how serious an endeavour wine making in the north has become. It is ready to drink, preferably alongside food (throw some pig cheek at it and see who comes off the worse for wear). But should you – by design or oversight – leave bottles to lie for years to come, it will still likely drink as if it's young.

Not enough can be said for a production so focused on cultivating biodiversity in the vineyards, sustainable vineyard management, largely organic production, and minimal intervention. With the nation's best labelling, great wines to boot, it's a case of boxes ticked, cellar filled, plenty of white and ice.

What, folks, is not to like? ©



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