



Reference Notes for Wine Trade Professionals who are providing consumer tutored tastings.

## Madeira

### Introduction and History

The island of Madeira is the largest of the Enchanted Isles (23km x 57km), and lies 600km off the North African coast. With a total area of 732km<sup>2</sup>, its highest point is 1861m (Pico Ruivo).

Hugh Johnson's description of Madeira as being as "steep as an iceberg and green as a glade" is hard to improve upon.

The earliest known reference is in the Medici Atlas of 1351. But it was not colonized until 1420 by the Portuguese (who had landed two years earlier on Porto Santo), by three deputies of Henry the Navigator.

The Portuguese had allegedly heard of these islands by one Robert Machin, who had been cast ashore there whilst eloping with another man's wife. The ship was captured and the survivors ended up in a Moroccan jail.

The settlers cleared land for agriculture by burning the forests (Madeira means 'wood' in Portuguese), laying out terraces ("poios") and by 1461 building levadas (2150km of watercourses) for irrigation. By 1466, sugar cane, grain and grape vines were all well established.

Vineyards had been planted shortly after settlement, on the orders of the Infante, and chose the then famous Malvasia of Candia in Crete (Malvasia Candida was the wine which became known as Malmsey).

In the early 1500s cheaper sugar from Brazil led to expansion of Madeira's vineyards.

Madeira's growing prominence led to publicity such as Shakespeare's Falstaff selling his soul for a glass of Madeira and a Capon's leg!

The English Navigation Acts of 1660/61/63 bound that European goods destined for America (or other English colonies) had to first shipped to England, on English vessels, unloaded, inspected for tax payments, and then shipped onwards also only on English 'bottoms' (ships). This was designed in order to give the English mercantile fleet a shot in the arm against the Dutch shipping merchants, and contributed to the outbreak of the first Anglo-Dutch war. But with Madeira being off the African-, rather than European-coast, it was

exempt from this time-consuming and expensive legislation. Within 20 years, Madeira accounted for more than 90% of wine exports to the Americas.

1660+ wine which had been on a trip across the equator (Vinho da Roda, or Round trip) (West Indies) and the backloaded was found to have imbued Madeira wine with much more special character than when it had left. This formed the principle of maturing Madeira with warmth.

1730+ “Vinho do Sol” (wines naturally left to mature on the warmth of the island, often in environments with higher temperatures, such as lofts of houses) and also fortification introduced at this time

Madeira was the wine used to toast the American Declaration of Independence in 1776.

1794ish Estufagem (see below) was introduced, because of a combination of high demand, and risks to mercantile fleets on the high seas.

Currently 250,000 population, 30,000 visitors per annum.

In 2009, 3.9 million kilos of grapes were harvested, and made 3.7 million litres of Madeira wine.

### **Vineyards**

Soils here are volcanic, mainly basalt (acid, and rich in organic matter). The climate is sub-tropical, with hot, humid summers and mild winters. Rainfall varies between 500mm and 3000mm (depending on altitude and aspect).

Vineyards extend to approximately 493 hectares (in 2010), with elevations from almost 0m to around 600m, with ownership divided between around 1600 farmers, most of whom own very small landholdings, and have other jobs as their main income.

Traditionally, vine training is “latada” trellis (as a pergola), with the trellis averaging a height of 1-2 metres. More recently, there is also espalier training (“espaldeira”) on flatter land.

### **Grape Varieties**

#### **Black Grapes**

Tinta Negra (Molar, 80-85% of vinifera)

#### **White Grapes**

Sercial (Esgana Cao)

Verdelho

Boal / Bual (Malvasia Fina)

Malvasia / Malmsey (Malvasia de Sao Jorge, and very small plantings of Malvasia Candida)

The above four varieties, despite their fame, only represent around 12% of plantings; around 60 hectares.

### **Peripheral vinifera varieties**

Terrantez, Listrao, Bastardo

### **Winemaking**

The degree to which fermentation is allowed to progress before fortification depends upon the amount of residual sugar required in the finished wine. So, for a sweet Madeira fortification may take place as soon as a day after the start of fermentation, for a dry Madeira it may be up to eight days after the start of fermentation.

And the amount of grape spirit added to the part-fermented, or fully fermented must, depends upon how much sugar has been converted to alcohol during the fermentation. A sweet Madeira requires an addition of around 18-20% by total volume, whilst a dry one needs as little as 8-11%.

Post fortification, the wine will have 17-18% abv.

### **Maturation**

There are two methods for ageing Madeira, both of which employ warmth to bring develop the classic flavour of Madeira.

#### **Estufagem**

The wine is placed in a vat, which is then heated by a hot water pipe or heat jackets, to between 45 and 50 C, for at least three months. It then rests ("estagio") for at least 90 days, and only goes to market after at least after 31<sup>st</sup> October of the second year after the harvest.

An estufa is normally between 20,000 and 100,000 litres.

#### **Canteiro**

Wines are aged in cask, and subject to the natural warmth of the island (usually in a warehouse, which may have different height – and so warmth – levels, up to loft height). Canteiro wines must be aged for a minimum of three years after the 1<sup>st</sup> January the year following the harvest.

Temperature range can be from high 20sC to high 30sC, also with high humidity (70-90%). The nature of this maturation is oxidative, with evaporation (4-5% per annum) and caramelisation of any sugars in the wine.

Barrels for canteiro maturation are typically between 300 and 650 litres.

## Styles of Madeira

Extra Dry – below 0.5 Baumé

Dry, Seco (including Sercial) – below 1.5 Baumé, about 25-60g/l residual sugar

Medium Dry, Meio Seco (including Verdelho) – 1-2.5 Baumé, 60-80 g/l r.s.

Medium Sweet, Meio Doce – 2.5-3.5 Baumé, 80-100 g/l r.s.

Sweet, Doce (including Malvasia) – more than 3.5 Baumé, 100-140 g/l r.s.

Seleccionado – between 3 and 5 years of age.

Rainwater – less than 5 years of age, medium dry.

5 Year old (Reserva)

10 Year old (Reserva Especial or Reserva Velha)

15 Year Old (Reserva Extra)

20 / 30 / 40 Year Old

Solera – minimum 5 years canteiro, with 10% maximum bottling per year, with equal quality replacement, up to a maximum of ten additions, before being allowed to be 100% bottled. Year indicated must be of first base wine.

Colheita – minimum 5 years old, also known as Single Harvest.

Vintage (Frasqueira) – minimum 20 years in cask

## Producers

Madeira Wine Company (Blandy's) = 80%+ of market in UK

Henriques & Henriques

Vinhos Barbeito

H M Borges

Justino's

Pereira d'Oliveira

J Faria & Filhos

Barros e Sousa

## Market

UK Approx.. 34,000 cases (9 litres)

In 2009, market share breakdown of all sales was:

France 35%

Madeira Island 14%

Germany 10%

UK 9%

Japan 7%

7% of sales were 5 year olds, 2% were 10 year olds, and less than 1% colheitas and vintage wines.

## **Madeira and Food**

The days of fashionable parties in the colonies combining roast terrapin with Madeira may be gone, but Madeira can be a terrific partner for specific foods.

Dry and Medium-Dry Madeiras have a fabulous affinity with Umami-type flavours, often where other wines don't work well. But specific suggestions can include:

Mushroom dishes  
Welsh Rarebit  
Peking Duck  
French Onion Soup  
Game Terrine with onion marmalade

Medium Sweet and Sweet Madeiras work very well in desserts which feature caramel, toffee, ginger and dried fruits, as well as a very fine Malvasia pairing well with foie gras or blue cheese. Boal can be a good all-round choice for a cheeseboard too.

### **Service**

Madeira should always be stored standing up, as the acidity in Madeira can damage a cork over a period of time.

It is recommended that older and vintage wines should be decanted before serving, more for the purpose of aeration than separation from sediment. Very old vintages, if a long time in bottle, can benefit from up to two days in a decanter.

Once opened, Madeira is the best protected of all wine from further oxidation ("You only destroy it by drinking it!")

Opinions vary as to the best service temperatures, from chilled to cool room temperature. High quality Madeiras are probably best served between 14C and 16C, but there is plenty of room for personal preference here.

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