

MEININGER'S WINE BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL

The lockdown effect

China takes to wine at home

The rise of the red blend

A very profitable trend

Paris fashion

What the city of wine is drinking

AN ITALIAN MAESTRO

An interview with Andrea Sartori

WHO'S WHO IN PORTUGAL

No traditional wine country has changed as much as Portugal. Dr Luís Antunes looks at the people and institutions driving the change.



four years after the damaging 2008-09 recession, Portugal went through a political crisis which further delayed recovery. Despite major cuts in the national budget, financial problems persisted until 2016, when a new government was elected. However, even if administrations are slow to organise themselves, individuals and companies may be more resilient. Once it became apparent that Portugal's internal market could not provide enough demand for its increasingly highly-regarded wines, producers made serious efforts to boost sales to other countries. With the help of EU funding to encourage exports, this strategy rapidly yielded good results. From a total value of €600m (\$648m) in 2007, exports rose to €700m in 2012, and the momentum was sufficiently maintained for it to have risen to around €820m by 2019.

The goal of €1bn set two decades earlier no longer seemed so unobtainable, even though the 11% increase in Portuguese exports between 2014 and 2018 was less than half the global figure of 23% for that period.

Changes in recent years

One major trend has been a bigger emphasis on grape varieties. Portuguese vineyards were traditionally made up of a great number of varieties, with the oldest plots including apparently haphazard planting of both white and red grapes. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing focus on discovering the contribution of each of these varieties to field blends.

On the one hand, there has been an increase in planting blocks of individual varieties and production of single varietal wines. On the other, careful scrutiny of some older vineyards revealed that the way they had originally been planted was by no means random. Varieties had been carefully chosen according to their suitability to terroir characteristics such as solar exposition, soil depths and slope. Today, some recent plantations follow the same principles, continuing the field blend tradition.

Some single-varietal wines have not been released to the public, but have been used for blends, while being watched by a young generation of university-trained and widely-travelled winemakers.

Another, apparently insignificant, factor has



Sogrape's The Sandeman Hostel is part of a new wave of tourism that's revitalising Porto.

also made a huge impact. People across the world have suddenly become less concerned about the colour of a wine. Light salmon-pink rosés and bright ruby reds have become popular. Deeper-coloured white wines have emerged. Even young vintage Ports can now show a less-than-black hue. This greater tolerance of colour has been accompanied by similar changes into attitudes about style. And this had a consequence in the types of grape varieties that can be used, allowing a renaissance of many that had been neglected in favour of deeper, more concentrated and powerful ones. Quite rapidly, Portuguese consumers and winemakers have revealed a

world of wine that is much more varied, rich and exciting, offering more versatile partners for food. This is particularly important in Portugal, where most wine is consumed with meals.

The consequences of these trends are exciting. Portuguese wine today is boiling with experimentation and discovery. Forgotten regions are being revived. New techniques are being tried out. Minimal intervention is widely favoured, and 'natural' wines – however they are defined – are getting better and better.

What follows is a look at some of the significant businesses and people shaping the Portuguese industry today.



Adrian Bridge, CEO of OnWine



António Madeira, winemaker, Dão

Notable importer

Garcias SA is a family-run company founded in 1981, that distributes wine and spirits across Portugal and its territories, including the islands of Azores and Madeira. Their 15,000 clients include super- and hyper-markets, wine shops, restaurants, bars and hotels, other regional distributors, and even private customers. Their portfolio is extensive and well chosen, and includes a wide range of foreign imports, spanning from day-to-day super-premium cult wines.

Notable distributor

Decante Vinhos, founded in Algarve in 1996 and impeccably run by Américo Maia, is clearly Portugal's most important distributor, not only

because of its well-chosen portfolio, but also because of its prompt and knowledgeable service. Not open to the public, Decante is focused on the hospitality industry and wine retailers.

Notable retailer

When it comes to wine retail, department store El Corte Inglés wins, hands down. Along with an extensive array of Portuguese wines from every region, it also offers several high-quality international imports, and has well-informed employees. The Club del Gourmet area extends the shop selection. Frequent tastings with producers expand public knowledge and curiosity.

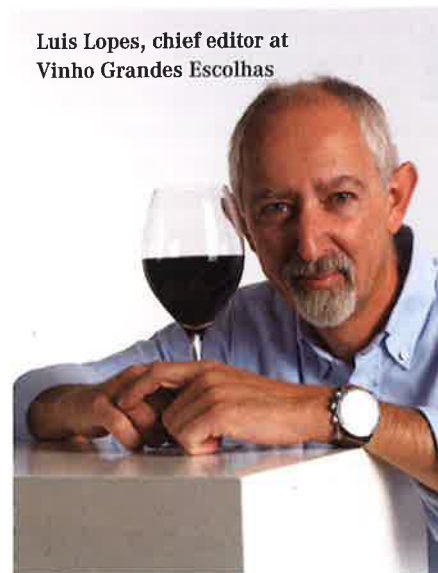
Notable wine stores

The Garrafeira Tio Pepe shop in Porto, opened in 1986, is owned by the Cândido da Silva family, which has been trading wine since the 1940s. Located in a modern building on the outskirts of Porto, Tio Pepe combines a wide selection of wine, including rare, fortified and old vintages, with skilled service.

Notable direct to consumer business

OnWine, an online business, has seen sales soar during the Covid-19 lockdown. Owned by the Fladgate Partnership, it's part of a portfolio of businesses that includes production of Port brands like Taylor and Fonseca; wine tourism initiatives like The Yeatman hotel and

Luis Lopes, chief editor at Vinho Grandes Escolhas



restaurant; wine experiences in Quinta da Roêda in Pinhão in the Douro; and the huge World of Wine museum and visitors centre in Vila Nova de Gaia. Another area of expansion has been distribution, with a subsidiary, Heritage Wines, distributing their Port brands and selected non-fortified wines. OnWine is based on the portfolio of the group's cash & carry operation, Grossão.

Notable restaurant wine list and service

Pedro Lemos is a Portuguese chef who has given his name to one of the top restaurants in Porto. Lemos's 30-year-old sommelier Pedro Ferreira has been responsible for wine and front-of-house since 2013 and, in his hands, the wine list has changed significantly, but service has always been impeccable. Ferreira



Importer Garcias SA

has focused on listing wines that pair with the house dishes and, while offering wines from a wider range of areas, he has cut down the number of similar wines from each region. The result is a selection that may be criticised for its high prices, but which makes no concession when it comes to quality and variety.

Best Wine Bar

Prova Wine Food & Pleasure, in downtown Porto provides a great environment for enjoying and discussing wine, while nibbling on a range of well-conceived dishes. Wine bar culture has exploded in Portugal with the recent upsurge of tourism, so this formerly sparse category now boasts a myriad of great contenders. Many bars, however, have been transmuted in restaurants with a strong wine focus. Prova stands out for remaining true to the passion its sommelier Diogo Amado has for wine and its culture. Prices are reasonable and the range is broad, and Amado is always keen on explaining, challenging and inviting customers to discover new tastes.

Notable publications

There was a major reshuffling of wine publishing three years ago in Portugal. Ownership of some titles changed, and the team working in the 30-year-old *Revista de Vinhos* moved to found a new monthly publication called *Vinho Grandes Escolhas*. In a country where most major newspapers do not keep regular wine columns and there is little wine on television or radio, enthusiasts follow these well established and respected names – making this Portugal's most reliable and influential title.

Notable wine journalist

Luis Lopes is chief editor and writer at *Vinho Grandes Escolhas* and coordinator of its tasting panel. This makes him the most influential wine writer in Portugal today. His contributor and regular columnist for the weekly *Expresso* newspaper, João Paulo Martins, is also a major contender for this accolade, but the fact that his comprehensive guide is now published every other year rather than annually has reduced his readership. Lopes also runs wine courses and masterclasses in several

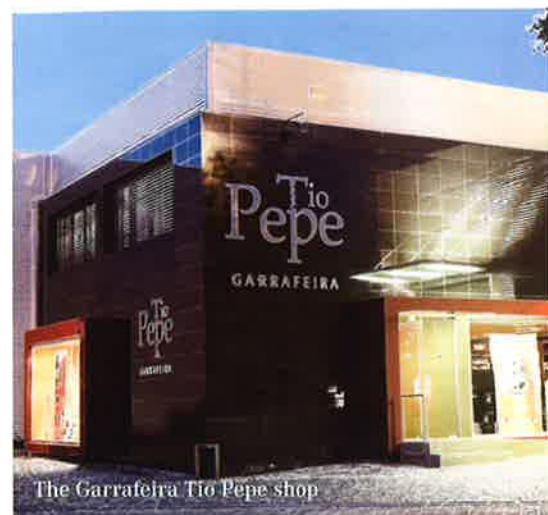
venues, extending influence to an audience of international visitors, wine writers among them.

Significant promotional body

ViniPortugal is an inter-professional organisation financed by taxes on wine. It coordinates the promotion of Portuguese wine worldwide, which in Portugal mainly involves providing training for sommeliers, and organising visits for buyers or media coming to the country. Abroad, this means organising tastings, arranging exhibition stands, collecting and delivering samples from producers to wine events, and generally connecting Portuguese producers to the outside world.

Most influential wine personality

Can one man change the wine world? Arguably not, but sometimes one man's action can start something that makes a difference and change history. Over the last decade, no-one has done more to influence Portuguese wine than former Paris-based, ex-engineer António Madeira. A Frenchman of



The Garrafeira Tio Pepe shop

Portuguese descent, he moved to his parent's home in Dão, close to Serra da Estrela and in 2010 began to save old, dying vineyards. He also obtained technical and strategic advice to make wines using as little intervention as possible, and fought to defend tradition in a world then obsessed with modernity. Little by little, his persistent efforts began to attract attention as his wines proved it was possible to have a deep respect for ancient terroir while engaging with (and educating) consumers. As the new superstar of Dão, he is rapidly becoming a role model for a new generation of Portuguese winemakers. ■



The team at Decante Vinhos