

Quinta do Ameal

DOC Vinhos Verdes, sub-region Lima



Vinho Verde

Vinho Verde is both a region and a style of wine.

The 'green wines' of Vinho Verde come from north-west Portugal close to the Atlantic coast. The region commences immediately below the Minho (Rio Miño in Spanish), which separates Portugal from Galicia and extends south towards Porto and the north shore of the Douro (Rio Duero in Spain). The region is cold, with high rainfall and a permanent Atlantic foggy damp. It is Portugal's largest wine appellation. Because the climate is damp and mild, vines are typically grown on elevated pergolas, which allow for ventilation and protect from fungal infections. Some vineyards are successfully trained low with the advantages of mechanization. Vinho Verde was demarcated as a legal region in 1908 and was confirmed as a Denominação de Origem Controlada (DOC) in 1984. There are 21,000 hectares of Vinho Verde, representing 19,000 growers and producers! Vegetation runs riot here, and the typical local dish is 'Caldo Verde', a soup made from the giant local cabbages.

'Green' only in the sense of being made to drink young, Vinhos Verdes can be red or white. The reds are an acquired taste, drunk by few outside the region. Both red and white are strongly acidic, usually with a prickle of fizz, and are best drunk young and chilled. The wines are usually very light and of low alcohol (from 8.5 up to 11.5 degrees - the legal maximum, rarely achieved). Many such wines are heavily sulphured and can have as much as 15 grams of residual sugar hidden under a gassy-fizzy sulphur mask. Once, in a time of poor quality control, the spritz was resultant from malolactic re-fermentation in bottle, but is now more often an artefactual affect - the result of artificial carbonation. Quality dry, mineral still wines are the exception here!

Mostly, white Vinho Verdes are blends, with Arinto, Rabigato and another 20 varieties permitted. The best varieties include sharp, lemony Loureiros, flowery Trajaduras (the same variety that is known as Treixadura in Spain) and extravagantly fruity Alvarinhos (aka Albariño).

Loureiro

Loo-ray-ro: Literally, "smelling Louro-ish" – Louro being the Atlantic coastal name for the Laurel, or Bay tree. Loureiro wines are floral and smell deeply of lemon and bay. The basic characteristic is a linear, racy and acid wine with low levels of both grape sugar and phenolic material.

Loureiro differs significantly from Albariño (with which it is often blended) in its terpene character (the same compounds which inform the aromatics of Riesling and Semillon). When young, the nose presents a complex bouquet of lemon aromatics (leaf, pith, juice and flower) with laurel (bay leaf) florality. With age, complex toasty terpene aromas (similar to developed Eden Valley Riesling and Hunter Semillon) also become apparent. Unlike Albariño, Loureiro can age really well.

Quinta do Ameal

Quinta do Ameal is the quality wine champion of Vinhos Verdes, devoted to the Loureiro grape variety. Ameal is a single estate, a walled vineyard planted in 1948. The estate is in the northern sub-region of Lima. The soils are deep yellow granite (the yellow is from a clay component), slightly acid with little organic material. The vines are 14 hectares, facing south and sloping gently down to river Lima. Viticulture is organic and biodynamic.

Today, Quinta do Ameal is owned and directed by the energetic (perhaps, visionary) Pedro Araújo, the first to anticipate and pursue Vinho Verde wines of excellence reflecting terroir. Pedro's father purchased Quinta do Ameal after splitting from the Ramos Pinto group in the 90s (Pedro's great grandfather was Adriano Ramos Pinto, one of the wine world's first 'marketeers'). At the time of purchase, the estate was run as a mixed farm with just a small production of grapes for wine. In 1999, Pedro took over and after some research but relying on a whole lot of gut feel, he decided to phase out farming and focus on the production of wine - varietal Loureiro specifically. This was a deliberate, radical diversion from Vinho Verde's history of

cheap (usually badly made) blended wines. Given that Ameal don't align themselves with commercial Vinho Verde, the DOC identity exists discretely on the back label.

Tucked away on a secluded bend of the Lima River, Quinta do Ameal is an ecological haven, where biodiversity is nurtured. The property gently slopes to the south-east until it hits the bank of the Lima. As well as the vines, Ameal is home to a diverse forest of nut, oak and fruit trees (if you're lucky, you'll see deer at dusk). The grounds are home to a number of centuries-old buildings, restored and used for the winery, offices, and luxury ecotourism apartments, all bound by the Quinta's dry stone wall.

Quinta do Ameal Loureiro 'Clássico'



Over the past decade, organic and biodynamic viticulture has progressively added a deeper, richer fragrant bay leaf character to the lemony precision of Pedro's outstanding crunchy-yet-textured Loureiro white. After all the careful viticulture, winery action is simple and tech-driven: low-cropped old vines are sorted twice (firstly to eliminate disease, then further selected for quality); whole grapes undergo pneumatic pressing; the must is cold-settled for 48 hours, then a quite cool fermentation (max 15 degrees) takes place in stainless steel vats for 12-15 days, then matured for about 6 months at low temperature in stainless steel.

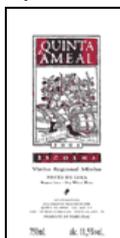
Quinta do Ameal Loureiro 'Solo Único'



Solo (meaning a tribute to soil, in this case QDA's yellow granite) is an un-sulphured and pretty much untouched wine. Pedro selects a particular part of the vineyard, whacks it in a vat, yeasts do their thing including a partial malo that adds textural development, and then it's parked in bottle. The only real touch is a light filtration with the protection of an inert gas blanket to avoid oxidation. Only 2,500 bottles produced.

Intense, wild, raw, deeply textural, pure and unadulterated. Solo is darting and nuanced, herbal with lemon (pith-and-rind) and bay tells. The palate twists and twines with essence of bay and a trace of powdery tannin; there's lilt within the intensity, and a nice saline brace to finish. There's power and creamy-softness in the outstanding body of the wine with mineral line and great freshness.

Quinta do Ameal Loureiro 'Escolha'



'Escolha' means selection; this is the very best, and most mature fruit (in terms of potential alcohol, and therefore vinosity) of the Ameal land. Extremely gentle pressing of the whole grapes precedes a cold soak and then fermentation and ageing (with bâtonnage) in old Nevers oak barriques for 6 months (oak adds nothing to the wine except deep stabilisation of the wine's rich intensity). Escolha is bottled direct from cask with the lightest possible filtration and no further stabilisation. 4,000 bottles only. Note, some of this action is outside DOC VV rules, so this is effectively an IGT, labeled as a Vinho Regional Minho, a regional non-DO classification. 11.5% a/v. Pedro made Escolha in his second vintage, 2000, and that wine is rocking on very nicely indeed ...

Clear and bright to the eye, Escolha is filled with honeysuckle and candied lemon, pastry dough, acacia florals and orange blossom. Fruitiness is countered by smoky vanilla, which moderates but does not mask Loureiro's explosive florality. This is really deep, wide textural wine featuring stunning complex acidity with a volatile nip. The wine journeys out, back, down and away, through the palate and deep into the throat. A butterfly effect. Deep-set bay kicks back in an epiglottal rebirth at the end. Utterly alive, long and complex, Escolha benefits from decanting and is a prime candidate for extended bottle ageing.

Quinta do Ameal Loureiro 'Special Harvest' (375ml sweet white)



To make this sweet white, late-harvest grapes are air-dried prior to vinification, concentrating sugar in the must. This process takes several weeks from early November and the grapes are turned and inspected 3 times weekly to avoid rot and mould. The must is partially fermented in old wine barrels, a slow fermentation which stops in the cold of late winter. The resultant wine is 12% a/v with just over 100 grams of residual sugar. 600 half bottles produced in special vintages.

A wonderful, almost acetic volatility gives room to mandarin marmalade, salt caramel-butterscotch and Madeira-like plantain. There is just enough viscosity for the sweet white register but multiple vinegar-volatile-sours dominate the sugar. It's creamy-foie-thick in parts, wild-herbal tangy in others and somehow utterly harmonious. If a wine could be Inception, this thing has a level 4 - buy it and don't regret a thing.