



## A GUIDE TO ALENTEJO'S GRAPES

### MEET ALFROCHEIRO, ALICANTE BOUSCHET AND ANTÃO VAZ, AMONG OTHERS

Over 4,000 grape varieties are known to exist worldwide. But for most of us in search of a bottle to go with dinner, the choice is pretty much limited to a small selection of international faves, starting with Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. So, for those bent on discovery and thirsty for adventure, look no further than Portugal. With over 250 indigenous grape varieties, Portugal has the highest density of native grapes per square mile of any country in the world, including Italy. And that's not even counting varieties that may not have originated in Portugal, but have since gone on to make their home there.

Portugal's Alentejo (*ah-len-TAY-zhoo*) region, 90-minutes inland by car from the nation's capital, Lisbon, accounts for one-third of Portugal's land mass. As with much of Southern Europe, wine has been a way of life here for time immemorial, and it is only now that Alentejo wines are starting to appear on the international wine map.

Red wines dominate in the Alentejo's hot, sunny interior, though the region's distinctive whites, currently accounting for less than 20% of production, are beginning to gain ground, notably Antão Vaz.

An all-you-need-to-know guide on Alentejo's signature grapes follow.

#### Meet the Grapes: Alentejo Reds

- Alfrocheiro
- Alicante Bouschet
- Castelão
- Touriga Nacional
- Trincadeira

#### Meet the Grapes: Alentejo Whites

- Antão Vaz
- Arinto
- Fernão Pires
- Roupeiro – aka Malvasia and Siria
- Verdelho



# MEET THE GRAPES

## ALENTEJO REDS

ALFROCHEIRO	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rich in color, with firm but fine tannins</li> <li>Extraordinary capacity to retain high acidity</li> <li>Berry fruits, especially blackberry and ripe wild strawberry</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Though native to the cooler, wetter Dão, this disease-prone vine is much, much happier in the hot, dry Alentejo</li> <li>Prefers lower altitudes. Becomes quite sharp at higher altitudes</li> <li>Usually serves as a base in blends</li> <li>Prone to oidium, botrytis rot and escoriosis, so likes hot, dry areas</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Tinta Francesa de Viseu</i> -- possibly an indication of origin</li> <li><i>Alfrocheiro Preto</i> (Black Alfrocheiro) thanks to its rich, dark color</li> </ul>

ALICANTE BOUSCHET	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A <i>teinturier</i> (coloring grape), noted for its massive structure, firmness and deep purple color. Slightly lower in acid</li> <li>Aromas of forest berries, peppery black fruit, cocoa and olives.</li> <li>Flavors of spice, peppery black-fruit compote, cola nut and cacao</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alentejo's flagship red, the most Portuguese non-Portuguese grape variety</li> <li>A French crossing of Petit Bouschet and Grenache (1886) introduced to the Alentejo over 100 years ago by the Reynolds family</li> <li>Increasingly bottled solo as winemakers learn to work with the tannins, which can be rustic if not managed properly</li> <li>Productive; buds and ripens early; sensitive to downy mildew and anthracnose</li> <li>Popular with home winemakers during Prohibition in the U.S.</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nicknamed <i>Tinta de Escrever</i> (writing ink) for an ability to produce an inky red wine</li> </ul>

CASTELÃO	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fleshy, fruity, medium-bodied; juicy, fresh red-currant, raspberry fruit when young</li> <li>Older examples from carefully controlled, mature vineyards offer plums in syrup, berry fruits and gamey notes, with hints of leather</li> <li>Strong tannins; can be acidic, but that profile also means the grape has aging capacity. Poorer examples can be rustic, thin and lacking in color</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Until recently, the most planted red variety in Portugal, accounting by far for the most vineyard space in all eight Alentejo sub-regions</li> <li>For many, J.M. da Fonseca's Periquita (meaning "parakeet"), made just south of Lisbon in the Setúbal area, was their first introduction to this grape (though Periquita is usually a blend). The name derives from the Cova de Periquita vineyard in which da Fonseca first planted Castelão</li> <li>Good aging potential</li> <li>In decline. Can be hard to work with, but can produce age-worthy, polished wines</li> <li>Especially thrives in Moura's sandy soil</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For many decades the variety was known as "Periquita," but recent legislation has mandated the name-change to Castelão. <i>João Santarém</i> and <i>Tinta Merousa</i></li> </ul>

# MEET THE GRAPES

## ALENTEJO REDS CONTINUED

TOURIGA NACIONAL	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted for the abundance and depth of aromas, from floral, to fruity or citrusy</li> <li>• Well-made examples are quite complex on the palate</li> <li>• Descriptors include: blackberries, cassis, pine, rosemary, violets, bergamot</li> <li>• A thick skin helps protect grapes from sunburn and provides dense color in the wine</li> <li>• Low yields; frequent <i>millerandage</i></li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• True to its name, this is Portugal's unofficial "national" grape and a calling card around the world</li> <li>• Probably originally from the Dão and a mainstay in Douro port production, where it is an essential part of the blend</li> <li>• Traditionally provided aromatic richness to blends, but increasingly bottled solo</li> <li>• Happily aged in oak!</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Known in the Dão and Douro regions as <i>Preto Mortágua</i>, <i>Mortágua</i>, <i>Tourigo Antigo</i> and <i>Tourigo</i></li> </ul>

TRINCADEIRA	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deep color, big body, austere tannins, high acidity</li> <li>• Aromatic, not strongly "fruit-driven/fruity," but can be plummy, with pepper and herbal notes. Some examples are more floral</li> <li>• Can turn vegetal in careless hands</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pairs well with lighter-bodied, fruity grapes such as Castelão. The two varieties are often grown side-by-side</li> <li>• Traditionally partnered in the Alentejo with the savory, but lower-acid Aragonês. Extremely rot-prone, due to very compact grape bunches, so this grape thrives in the dry climate of Alentejo</li> <li>• Familiar to port lovers as part of the traditional blend</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Trincadeira Preta</i>, <i>Tinta Amarela</i> (in the north), <i>Espadeiro</i>, <i>Crato Preto</i>, <i>Preto Martinho</i>, <i>Mortágua</i> and <i>Rabo de Ovelha Tinto</i></li> </ul>

# MEET THE GRAPES

## ALENTEJO WHITES

ANTÃO VAZ	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loved by growers and winemakers as this hot-climate variety is highly resistant to drought and disease, producing consistently reliable yields which ripen evenly</li> <li>Early picking in mid-August helps preserve acidity</li> <li>Perfumed and full-bodied</li> <li>Tropical, tangerine-peel fruit flavors and almond notes</li> <li>Early picked grapes produce vibrant wines with exotic aromas that are firm on the palate.</li> <li>Late-picked grapes result in wines with higher alcohol content and more perfumed aromas, best suited for aging in new-oak barrels</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Native to the Alentejo, with star status in Vidigueira and Évora</li> <li>The white star of the region</li> <li>Often blended with Roupeiro and Arinto for a sharper acidity</li> <li>Responds well to barrel-fermentation</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> </ul>

ARINTO	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acidity to spare is the calling card here</li> <li>Discreet aroma. Green apple, lemon and lime freshness and super-high acidity, plus mineral notes favored by many wine lovers</li> <li>Some examples show a tropical character, with exotic aromas of passion fruit</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alentejo's best white blending variety, thanks to its exuberant acidity</li> <li>Oak fermentation suits Arinto as it can become as rich as Chardonnay in outstanding years, although aging potential in bottle can be compromised in this process</li> <li>Benefits from extensive maceration and a long fermentation at low temperature</li> <li>Has large leaves for shading, but susceptible to drought stress</li> <li>Found throughout Portugal, especially in Bucelas and is part of the blend for Vinho Verde wines</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Pedernã, Pé de Perdiz Branco</i> (White Partridge Foot), <i>Chapeludao, Cerceal, Azal Espanhol, Azal Galego, Branco Espanhol</i> (Spanish White)</li> </ul>

FERNÃO PIRES	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fragrant, extremely aromatic (faintly reminiscent of Muscat), with distinctive peppery notes on nose and palate</li> <li>Grapefruit, lime, lemon, lemon-grass, lime-tree blossom, basil, roses, tangerines and orange blossom</li> <li>Crisp grapefruit and mineral when young</li> <li>Softens with oak aging</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most widely planted white grape in Portugal; has taken a stronger hold in the Alentejo. Versatile – bottled as a varietal or used in blends; can be made into a sparkling or late-harvest wine</li> <li>Blends well with Chardonnay</li> <li>Early maturing</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Maria Gomes</i> in the North</li> <li><i>Fernão</i> = “Ferdinand” in Portuguese</li> </ul>

# MEET THE GRAPES

## ALENTEJO WHITES CONTINUED

ROUPEIRO -- AKA MALVASIA, AKA SIRIA	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loved for its aromatic exuberance. Perfumed, seductive citrus notes of orange and lemon; hints of peach, melon, laurel and forest flowers</li> <li>Fresh, slightly honeyed character</li> <li>Deep-colored</li> <li>Other examples have intensely nutty character, sometimes with notes of orange peel and dried fruits</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Best enjoyed young as it quickly loses aromatic exuberance and oxidizes easily</li> <li>Used to be most widely planted white grape in the Alentejo</li> <li>Often blended with Antão Vaz and Arinto</li> <li>Geographic distribution is quite singular, extending down a long, narrow strip from north of the country to the south, hugging the Spanish border</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Siria, Alvadourão, Crato Branco, Malvasia Grossa, Códaga and Alva to Dona Branca</i></li> <li>Historic: Malvasia was Anglicized to “Malmsey”</li> </ul>

VERDELHO	
STRUCTURE AROMA/FLAVOR:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High in alcohol and acidity</li> <li>High skin-to-juice ratio</li> <li>Very aromatic (honeysuckle), full-bodied; can age beautifully</li> <li>Styles range from fresh and fruity when young, to rich and unctuous (an “oily” palate-coating trait like Riesling or Chenin) when older</li> <li>Nectarines, lemon-lime, grapefruit, honeysuckle, ripe apricot</li> <li>Careful management needed to avoid excess sugar and wines that are flabby and “hot”</li> </ul>
COMMENTS:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An undervalued grape that over-delivers</li> <li>Possibly originating in Sicily, it is now closely associated with benchmark examples from Portugal, where it is grown throughout the country</li> <li>Most associated with the island of Madeira, where it is also the name of a type of Madeira wine</li> </ul>
SYNONYMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Debunking a frequent assertion: It is <u>not</u> the same as <i>Gouveio</i>, <i>Godello</i> or <i>Verdejo</i> (the latter from Spain)</li> </ul>



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