

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

February 20, 2019

Class G – After Dinner

Presented by Trevor Curtis (Victoria Chapter)

Intended Outcomes:

After completing this session, you should know:

- The BCAWA description and technical characteristics of this class;
- The characteristics of port and port-style wines;
- History and origin of Port;
- The areas of the world which produce this type of wine;
- Manner or style in which this wine is made;
- Tips about judging this class.

BCAWA Description – CLASS G – After Dinner

Wines in this class are for use after dinner, perhaps with nuts and cheese, or in place of a liqueur. Wines such as ports, sweet sherries, Madeiras, or other wines that are fortified, baked or otherwise made using port, sherry etc. type processes belong in this class. This does not however prevent a competitor from entering in this class an appropriate wine naturally fermented to high alcohol.

BCAWA Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	No restrictions
Alcohol:	15%-20%
Colour:	No restrictions
Sugar:	15%-20%
Specific Gravity:	1.017-1.040
Acid:	3.9 g/l-5
pH:	3.2-3.9

Introduction

Class G After Dinner wines are usually made using port or sherry processes. This tasting will only include port style wines. There are two categories of port; 1) wines matured in glass bottles (thus the retention of more of the red colour, Rubys) and 2) wines matured in wood barrels (Tawny definition – “of an orange-brown or yellowish-brown color”, the colour is the result of oxidization through barrel respiration). There are four main types of ports:

Ruby Port
Tawny Port
Rose Port
White Port

This tasting will only include Ruby and Tawny Ports and therefore the notes will not include Rose or White ports.

Descriptors for Ruby Ports: aged in oak barrels and matured in bottles

- **Ruby Port** – blended and meant to be consumed young, 2 to 5 years in barrels
- **Ruby Reserve Port** – blend of higher quality wines, meant to be consumed young, 2 to 5 years in barrels. These ports are generally made with a higher quality grape.
- **Crusted** (unfiltered) – usually a blend of Vintage ports, can benefit from cellaring but generally ready to drink. A less expensive alternative to a Vintage
- **Late Bottled Vintage** – bottled later than Vintage, 4 to 6 years, some may benefit from cellaring, most ready to drink, the least expensive Vintage style.
- **Single Quinta** – single estate vintage (previously Traditional Port) – spend more time aging in barrels, 4 to 6 years, can also be crusted, made from the years that the wine does not make Vintage quality.
- **Vintage Port** – single grape harvest, aged 2 to 3 years in barrels, then bottled and cellared in glass. The best vintages are matured 20 to 40+ years. Only the best vintages are put down, often only 2 to 3 per decade. Comprises 1 to 2% of ports produced. These ports are produced with the highest quality grapes

Descriptors for Tawny Ports: aged in neutral barrels and matured in barrels

- **Tawny Port** – minimum of 2 years in barrels
- **Tawny Reserve Port** – barrel aged a minimum of 7 years
- **Colheita Port** – single grape harvest, aged a minimum of 7 years typically matured for 10+ years, often 50+
- **Indication of Age Port:** 10, 20, 30, and at least 40 years of oak barrel aging – these ages are not the minimum but usually the average of the blends. They are raked once or twice a year and are ready to drink.

History

The history of grape growing in the Portugal Douro valley region goes back to antiquity. The Romans produced wines in the Douro valley. In 1386 the Treaty of Windsor established an alliance between England and Portugal. A wine from Viana do Castelo called red Portugal was being exported. This wine was subject to spoilage with the shipping conditions of the time. In 1667 the French and English entered a kind of trade war. In the 17th and 18th century, Britain was in conflict with France. Leaving behind their Claret from Bordeaux the Brits went to Portugal for their wine. Due to the long sea voyages, the practice of adding brandy (aguardente) to the still wine to prevent spoilage was adopted. This increased the demand on Portugueses wine supplies. Merchants expanded to Oporto and began to ship Oporto wine. The first recorded shipment of Port was in 1678. The process of fortifying wines prior to shipping began slowly and in later decades was integrated into the wine making process. Through almost 2 millennia of wine production the Douro valley in Portugal has experienced a great deal of history, both good and bad. Global demand for port has fluctuated greatly over the years. In times of high demand fraud was rampant resulting in strict regulation and the development of many rules and governing bodies. The current regulator of Port is the Port and Douro Wines Institute (IVDP, Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e Porto). Under the Protected Designations of Origin (EU) the name Port is reserved for fortified wines from the Douro Valley region of Portugal. The USA only recognizes the terms Oporto, Porto, and Vinho do Porto as foreign names and the term Port is allowed. On December 31 2013 Canada agreed to reserve the labeling terms “Port” and “Sherry” as per the Canada-EU Wine and Spirits Agreement. Compliance is voluntary.

- 1) Port will be replaced with Tawny, Ruby and Vintage for these styles of fortified wines produced and sold in Canada (<http://crushmagazine.ca/canadian-wineries-will-say-goodbye-to-port-and-sherry-by-december-31-2013/>)

Douro was the third official appellation recognized. Currently a UNESCO protected region. The first appellation was in Chianti (Italy) in 1716, the second in Tokaj (Hungary) in 1730 and the third in Douro (Portugal).

Growing Areas:

Port wines come from the Douro valley in Portugal and are named after the city of Porto where the wine was originally cellared in port houses and shipped from. Three regions: Baixo Corgo 900mm rainfall and coolest temperature, Cima Corgo, 700mm rainfall and a few degrees warmer and Douro Superior the driest and warmest. There are 30 recommended and 82 permitted grape varieties used in port production (Method of Punctuation of the Plots of Land of Vineyards of the Region of Douro, decree n° 413/2001). Over the years, that number has been reduced to six primary varieties: Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barroca, Touriga Nacional, Tinto Cao, and Tinta Amrela.

Port style fortified wines are produced outside Portugal in Australia, France, South Africa, Canada, India, Argentina, Spain and the USA.

In Australia the grapes used include Shiraz, Grenache, Mataro, and Touriga from Rutherglen, McLaren Vale, Bourassa Valley and Riverland.

In South Africa the grapes used include the Portuguese varieties as well as Shiraz and Pinotage from the Cape region.

In India the most common variety is Sultana with Zinfandel in the higher altitude Goa region.

The USA uses many varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Zinfandel, Cabernet Franc, as well as Portuguese varieties from California, Oregon, and Washington states.

In Canada Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Schonberger, Foch, etc from BC, Ontario and Quebec. BCAVA members often use Zinfandel grapes for port production.

Terroir And Tasting Notes:

The terroir of the Douro Valley is primarily Pre Cambrian-schist and granite. The Douro Valley is approximately 250 000 hectares with 38 000 hectares of vines and 26 000 hectares authorized to produce port. Roughly 2/3 of the vineyards are on rocky hillside terraces on grades of up to 30%. Many techniques have been employed to facilitate cultivation with the ancient handmade walled terraces considered the most beautiful.

Aromas of overripe berries, baked fruit, cooked berry and raisin, candied orange, and toffee.

Flavors of red fruits, strawberries, cooked fruit, plum, berries, molasses, nutty flavors, old wood, licorice, chocolate, and earth.

Older Rubys can have ripe fruit, black chocolate, and peppery tannins

Tawnys can have orange zest, dried fruit, caramel, nuttiness, toffee, and marzipan

Traditional Port Production:

The traditional method of port production begins with the selection of the grapes. The grapes are still mostly handpicked due to the steep slopes of the Douro Valley. Once the grapes have been selected they go into a shallow, open, waist deep, granite vat called a lagar. People (threaders) take turns stomping the grapes and relaxing with a glass of wine. Within hours the fermentation starts and the temperature begins to rise. This process can take up to 3 days. Once the appropriate alcohol and residual sugar levels have been reached, treading stops and the skins are allowed to rise to the surface. Gravity then carries the wine from the lagar into a vat where the wine maker adds 77% neutral alcohol. This fortifies the wine and kills the yeast stopping the fermentation. The wine will remain in the Douro Valley for about a year before it is sent down the river to Porto where it will be graded, blended, aged, matured, then bottled.

Aging And Oaking:

Young Ports and Tawnys are more fruit forward with little to no nuttiness. As they age, the fruit recedes and the influence of the oak and the respiration of the barrels will add vanilla and nuttiness. If further aged in oak barrels the oxidative effects of barrel respiration will create portosins a phenolic pigment, and oxovitisin A, a pyranoanthocyanin with a 2-pyrone component.

Bottle aged ports tend towards smoother, less tannic and oak barrel aged take on the qualities of oakiness and increased viscosity due to evaporation.

Port is heavily regulated by the Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e do Porto. Port must be produced, labeled and marketed according to a myriad of strict rules. All ports spend some time in a barrel. Ruby ports are bottled early reducing time in the oxidative and reductive barrel environment. Thus Ruby ports retain more of the red colours and Tawny ports develop the tawny colour of continued barrel aging.

Used to use aguardiente but in 1907 a decree prohibiting the distillation of Douro wines forcing the port makers to source neutral spirit from other regions.

Serving:

Temperature:

Ruby port should be served cool at 16° C.

Tawney Port should be served slightly cooler at 10 to 14° C

Decanting:

Tawny ports and Late bottled vintage ports spend years in wooden barrels and are raked between once or twice a year. This results in little sediment once bottled so they do not require decanting.

Vintage ports are bottled early, usually after spending 2 years in barrels. Once bottled the port is cellared and during the maturation process sediment will accumulate thus Vintage ports benefit from decanting.

Crusted ports are made from the best of the Ruby ports. They are aged for 4 years in oak require decanting to remove the crust (sediment).

Single Quinta can be filtered of crusted so decanting may be recommended.

Some advocates suggest decanting through muslin cloth.

Passing the Decanter:

Once port has been prepared for consumption the host will have the decanter on the right hand side. The decanter is to be passed to the left in a clockwise direction, pouring a glass for your neighbor on the right before pouring your own. If the decanter gets stopped there is a tradition of asking "Do you know the Bishop of Norwich" to remind the individual to keep the decanter moving. If the person does not understand the reference and they indicate a negative one should reply with "He's a terribly good chap, but he forgets to pass the port". It is considered very poor manners to directly request the decanter. There are several theories as the origin of this. To avoid the inconvenience of the port stopping, some decanters have round bottoms to prevent the decanter from being put down. These decanters area called Hoggits. The host will have a special plate to rest the decanter on.

Laying down:

Given Vintage ports are bottled early and require many years or decades to mature, there is a tradition of purchasing Vintage ports to be cellared (Laying Down), for special occasions.

Due to the higher alcohol content ports tend to have a longer shelf life once opened. After all, the addition of the aguardiente was to fortify the wine for travel. Oxygen, time, and temperature will impact the wine so keeping it refrigerated with help. An open bottle will last a couple weeks on the counter and around a month in the refrigerator. Tawnys, having been subjected to oxygen during the barrel maturation, will last the longest. Unfortunately, the best and most expensive Vintage ports (having been bottled early and with little exposure to oxygen) will relatively quickly experience a significant loss of the delicate aromas and flavors that the decades took to produce. A quality Vintage port should be consumed within a day.

Food Pairing:

Ports are often consumed after the meal. The sweetness of Ports allows it often times to be a dessert on its own. When selecting food to pair with port wines or post style wines, consider whether you are serving Ruby or Tawny port; just as their taste profiles differ so will the foods that best pair with your selection.

When pairing with Ruby ports: consider a selection of Stilton cheese, deserts featuring chocolate, berries, cherries or walnuts.

When pairing with Tawny ports: consider a selection of Aged Cheddar or Aged Pecorino cheeses, dark bittersweet chocolate, dried fruits, nuts, foie gras or deserts featuring apples, pears, and caramel; pumpkin pie is also a nice accompaniment.

Ports can be used as aperitifs, with the meal or after. It has been said that “There are ports for all occasions and budgets” (<https://www.taylor.pt/us/what-is-port-wine/port-ageing-styles>) so don't be afraid to experiment.

Judging

Port is semi-sweet to sweet taste profiles with older port having distinctive nutty flavors. Most of the affordable Ruby ports have been fined and cold filtered thus do not require decanting. The Tawny ports, having been racked, should have little sediment. Some of the Late Bottled Vintage and Tawnys can benefit from decanting but due to our tasting process this will not be practical. Therefore, if some haze is noticed do not mark the wine down.

This Flight includes both Ruby and Tawny ports. These two types are distinctly different and should not be compared. Ruby ports should be tasted before Tawny ports.

The Flight

The goal of this flight is to present a sample of affordable Ruby and Tawny ports as well as Port style wines. As true “Ports” can only come from Portugal the majority of the wines will be Portuguese with examples of port style fortified wines. T1 though D should be compared, then E though H. Do not compare the first half of the flight to the second.

References:

<https://www.taylor.pt/us>

<https://winefolly.com/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_wine

<https://redheadoakbarrels.com/history-of-port-wine/>

<https://www.primermagazine.com/2011/learn/the-10-minute-guide-to-port>

<https://www.fortheloveofport.com/the-tenets-of-tawny-port/>

The wines of Spain and Portugal, by Charles Metcalfe and Kathryn Mc Whirther, Salamander books 1988

The Oxford Companion to Wine, third edition, 2006.

<https://www.ivdp.pt/>