



**PLUMPJACK**  
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

## September 2008

When discussing Portugal in Oz Clarke's [Encyclopedia of Spanish and Portuguese Wines](#), Oz states, "Here is a country brimming with natural advantages for winemakers: flavorful native grapes, a range of climates to suit almost any kind of wine, and well-established traditions of grape-growing to provide the basis for a modern wine era second to none. The place is sizzling with potential." This month we are featuring two wines from regions at the opposite ends of the country. Our two producers are a new generation of winemakers that are creating wines that fully realize the potential Portuguese wines offer. As organoleptic pilgrims, what better way to learn about a land and its people than through its wines?

Portugal is divided into eight major wine regions (Denominacion de origen or DO) on the mainland, and one on each of the off-shore regions, DO Madeira and DO Azores. Moving to the mainland from south to north these are DO Algarve, DO Alentejano, DO Terras Do Sado, DO Ribatejano, DO Estremadura, DO Beiras, DO Minho and DO Tras Os Montes. Many of these will be unfamiliar because they are loosely equivalent to giant French regional Appellations Contrôlées such as Vin de Pays d'Oc or AC Bordeaux. For the most part, the best wineries will always opt for the sub-regional DOC classification, often the next level up in terms of quality. Like their Italian counterparts, many Portuguese winemakers have opted for the larger IGT or Vinho Regional category, to produce exciting, non-conventional wines. While Portugal is best known for Port, Madeira, and corks, it is often overlooked when consumers think of red and white still wines – but take note! The table wines of the region have improved dramatically in the past few decades, and after tasting the wines this month, they will likely become a staple in your wine drinking future.



Once upon a time, not that long ago, a talented young winemaker from Spain, named Marcial Dorado, set out to make the finest Albariño of all. Knowing that most of the top versions of this wine come from vineyards lining the Minho River, in Galicia's Rias Baixas in Northwestern Spain, Dorado searched the countryside looking for older vines, only to be thwarted by nature and topography at every turn. Though the Minho River (or Miño as it is called in Spain) marks the boundary between Spain and Portugal as it stretches from the Atlantic Ocean, there is much that both countries share in this area: soil types, climate, and grape varieties. So in 1996, Marcial crossed the river into Portugal and started Quinta do Feital. Located in the village of Paderne, near the town of Monção, the winery is dedicated to producing the highest quality wines possible utilizing the most modern ideas and latest technology. Marcial continued his search for old vines of Albariño, and in 2000, he discovered and purchased a 70-year-old Albariño vineyard the likes of which he couldn't find in Spain, overlooking the town of Melgaço, naming it Quinta do Dorado. Since the very first vintage in 2000, Dorado has been ahead of the curve. Though the old vines of Alvarinho produce very low yields anyway, he drastically thins the crops by green harvesting during the summer. In the fall only the very best bunches of grapes are harvested, and these only by hand and carried in small, open-air

*2007 Quinta do Feital  
"Auratus"  
Vinho Regional Minho  
Paderne, Portugal*



*2004 Azamor  
Vinho Regional Alentejano  
Estremoz, Portugal*

crates to minimize damage to the delicate grapes. Back at the winery the grapes undergo another rigorous sorting to prevent any foreign materials from entering into the fermentation tanks. Not content to rest after creating one great wine, in 2002 Dorado purchased a second vineyard that lies on a rare outcropping of pulverized granite at Seixas near the mouth of the Minho River. With a warmer climate and a drier soil, Dorado has taken advantage of the native Trajadura grape. The 2007 “Auratus” is a blend of 60% Alvarinho and 40% Trajadura. The fruit comes from both the Dorado and Seixas vineyards. The grapes were hand-harvested and sorted at the vineyard and then again at the winery. Fermentation took place in stainless-steel tanks, and once fermentation was complete, the wine was bottled without the use of any oak. The winery is state-of-the-art and gravity-fed, minimizing any oxygenation of the wine during the winemaking process. “Auratus” is a fresh, dry, citrusy and mineral-driven white. Aromas of yellow apples and ginger follow through on the palate with great intensity. It is light, crisp and refreshing with bracing acidity and minerality, but also has a deceptive richness in the mid-palate. The wine pairs well with seafood and poultry. Try it with lobster, or monkfish wrapped in pancetta with sage.

**The 2007 Quinta do Feital is \$18.99/bottle, \$205.10/case.**



The family-owned estate of Azamor was purchased by Alison and Joaquim Luiz-Gomes in 1998. It is located in the Alentejo region near Estremoz in Southern Portugal and across the border from the Spanish city of Badjoz. About 10% of the estate’s total 650 acres are planted to vineyards. These are situated at 1,150 feet above sea level, overlooking a vast landscape including a breathtaking view of Spain. Here, the soils consist of clay with schist bedrock and the climate is known for its cold winters and hot summers. Humidity ranges between 20% in the summer and 100% in the winter. Laid out in 2001 and 2002 by Luís Elias Carvalho, one of Portugal’s most famous viticulturists, and Joaquim Luiz-Gomes, Azamor’s vineyards are the most densely planted in the region with north-south rows spaced 7’x3’. The vines are severely pruned with substantial distance between shoots, which creates an extensive, well-ventilated canopy. Due to minimum irrigation, the entire strength of the vine and all minerals of the soil go into the grape. There are eight different varieties cultivated on the estate: three indigenous Portuguese grapes (Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Amarela/Trincadeira) and five international (Syrah, Merlot, Alicante Bouschet, Petit Verdot, Mourvèdre). The vines were developed from select estate clones or cuttings and are cultivated according to established environmental criteria and in compliance with the regulations of ATEVA (Associação Técnica dos Viticultores do Alentejo). Co-proprietor Alison Luiz-Gomes is Azamor’s Head Winemaker, supported by the famed Australian David Baverstock, winemaker from the vineyard Herdade do Esporão. The winery currently produces approximately 3,000 cases per year. The 2004 Azamor is a blend of 30% Syrah, 22% Merlot, 15% Touriga Nacional, 13% Alicante Bouschet, 10% Touriga Franca, 7% Trincadeira, and 3% Mourvedre. The different grape varieties for this blend were fermented separately in 10-ton stainless-steel tanks at relatively low temperatures for seven days. After pressing, the wines went through malolactic fermentation to increase subtlety. 15% of the wine was aged in new French Saury barrels and 15% in new American Demptos barrels for seven months. The rest of the wine was stored in stainless-steel tanks. The wine was bottled in August, 2005, but held for a full year before release. The result is a full-bodied wine with intense aromas and complex flavors. As a blend of international and indigenous varieties this is a good, modern-style introduction to the distinctive and unjustly underrated wines of Portugal, since the familiar and the less familiar are represented in almost equal measure. The wine itself is something of a miraculous balancing act between the fruity and the elegant. It reveals a minty, herbal nose with rich black fruit. It is easy to drink, approachable, and full of dense, plummy fruit with a peppery kick. It has a very smooth texture, with a little bit of chocolate on the spicy finish. The tannins are ripe and well-integrated. The 2004 Azamor is the perfect wine to have with a grilled steak or hamburger topped with blue cheese. It will surprise you when you try it with spicy Indian food, and marvel at how complimentary it is. Stock up now, only 2,000 cases were produced and our supply is very limited.

**The 2004 Azamor is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.**