

Madeira

Madeira is a sub-tropical island in the Atlantic 625 miles off the coast of Portugal,. The sovereignty of the island is with Portugal

The wines of Madeira originally developed their distinctive character on lengthy ocean voyages through the tropics, where the wines would be subjected to repeated heating and cooling. This is replicated today by heating the wine during the production process.

Madeira DOP wines may be produced on either Madeira or on the neighbouring island of Porto Santo

400 hectares of vineyards are cultivated on steep slopes which are frequently terraced (Poios)

Most of the vineyards are trained in a pergola system, with vines suspended on low trellises known as latada, in order to combat the dangers of fungal disease and rot in the humid climate.



Rainfall on the mountains, feeds a system of levadas, or canals, and makes agriculture possible.

Mechanization is almost impossible in the vineyards: The terraces and the small size of vineyard holdings make mechanical harvesting unworkable. The average estate is 0.3 hectares, often separated among several plots.

The Madeira Wine Company, which was formed as an association of exporters and producers in 1913, (now a part of the Symington group) has the largest market share and produces recognizable brands such as Blandy's and Cossart Gordon.

Henriques & Henriques is the largest independent producer, and the only company that relies on estate vineyards, rather than purchased fruit.

Partidistas are similar to the almacenistas of the Sherry trade. These are merchants who store wine and sell it at maturity to other traders

The 4 noble white grapes of Madeira are:

Sercial (Esgana Cão),
Verdelho (Gouveio),
Boal (Bual,
Malvasia Fina),
Malmsey (Malvasia Candida).

Other traditional grapes include the red **Bastardo (Trousseau)** and **Terrantez grape (Folgasão).**

If one of the varietal grapes is included on the label, the wine must contain a minimum 85% of the grape.

Tinta Negra A grape, a crossing of Pinot Noir x Grenache, accounts for 80-85% of Madeira's production, but it is not considered one of the noble varieties. The grape, was planted in the 19th century following the outbreak of phylloxera. Less expensive Madeira wines that are not labelled by varietal will include a high proportion of Tinta Negra. .

Bual and Malmsey are picked first, and will undergo a shorter fermentation on the skins. Sercial and Verdelho are harvested last, and are separated from their skins prior to fermentation,

For sweet style wines fortification with high strength grape spirit will occur during fermentation to preserve natural sugars. (Malmsey may only ferment for a few hours prior to fortification, so that most of the sugar remains.)

For dry Madeira, fortification will occur after fermentation is complete. Fortification raises the alcohol to 17% or higher.

Madeirisation process

The young wines are subjected to either the Estufagem or Canteiro process, the two heating methods that give Madeira its distinctive character. Most wines are transferred to the estufa, a stainless steel vat that heats the wine by circulating hot water in a jacket surrounding the tank. In this method, the wine is heated to a temperature of 45-50°C and held there for three months.



Once the Estufagem process is completed, the wine is rested (estágio) for a minimum 90 days before being transferred to cask for aging. Estufagem wines may not be released until two years after the harvest.

The cheaper wines warmed in estufas are fortified after the process is finished, to prevent unnecessary evaporation of alcohol during the heating.

A more delicate variation on the Estufagem process involves placing the wine in armazens de calor, rooms warmed by nearby tanks or steam pipes rather than the direct heat of the estufa. This technique, utilised by the Madeira Wine Company, subjects wines to lower temperatures over a longer period of time (up to 1 year).

The Canteiro method is used for the best wines. In this process, the wines are cask-aged for a period of at least two years in lodge attics, against south facing windows, or even outside exposed to the sun

In this process, the wine is subjected to the gentler, natural warmth of the sun and it undergoes a much slower process of maturation, preventing the burnt caramelisation of sugars and resulting bitter flavours associated with rapid heating.

Canteiro wines may be bottled at a minimum three years of age.

The best Vinhos de Canteiro will remain in cask for more than 20 years and may be transferred to glass demijohns for long-term storage.

All Canteiro wines are fortified during or immediately after fermentation

Wines that remain in cask for decades are often fortified again prior to bottling.



Main Varietal Styles of Madeira

- **Sercial:** The driest varietal, Sercial has high acidity and, over time, its citrus flavours evolve into a more complex almond bouquet.
- **Verdelho:** a medium dry wine of high acid, with a smoky, honeyed character. The wines are slightly fuller in body than Sercial.
- **Bual: (Boal)** a medium sweet, rich style of wine, in which the acidity is still powerful enough to dominate the finish. Highly aromatic, the wines tend to display caramel, roasted nut, raisin and coffee flavours. Bual tends to be the darkest varietal Madeira in colour.
- **Malmsey: Malvasia** wines are the sweetest and softest style whilst retaining good acidity. On the nose, toffee, caramel and vanilla, aromas.

- **Madeira non- Vintage Blends**

- **Rainwater:** A popular style in the US, Rainwater Madeira is principally Tinta Negra. The youngest wine in the blend is a minimum three years old. The wine is medium dry, and light in style.
- **Seleccionado:** Wines are often labelled “Finest”, “Choice”, or “Select”, and include a blended wine that is at least 3 years old (but below five years of age). These wines are dominated by the Tinta Negra grape, heated in Estufagem and aged in tank rather than cask.
- **Reserve (Reserva):** Madeira that is 5 years of age or older (but below 10 years of age) may use this designation.
- **Special Reserve (Reserva Especial):** Wines 10 years of age or older (but below 15 years of age) may use this designation. Wines of this category (and all older designations) are often made of a single noble varietal, heated by the Canteiro method.
- **Extra Reserve:** 15 years of age or older (but below 20 years of age) may use this designation.
- **Solera:** Madeira wines produced by fractional blending and the Canteiro method. Not permitted since Portugal’s entry to the EU but the wines laid down previous to the ban are still available. Bottled with the starting date of the solera.

Vintage Dated Madeira

- **Colheita: (Harvest)** Produced from a single vintage (85% minimum required) and is aged for a minimum 5 years prior to bottling. It may be a blend or a single varietal wine. .
- **Frasqueira or Garrafeira:** Vintage Madeira aged for a minimum 20 years in cask. + 2yrs of bottle age before release. (Canteiro process)
May be produced from a single varietal or a blend.
A minimum 85% of the vintage is required, so these wines may be topped up with younger wines throughout the aging process. may be aged for additional time in glass demijohns after the period of cask aging.
- **Vinho da Roda/Vinho da Torno/Vinho da Volta:** A rarity. Wines underwent an ocean journey across the equator.
Shortridge Lawton, (now a brand of the Madeira Wine Company), produced wines in this traditional style as late as the early 1900s.