



ROUNDTABLE PANEL

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VOS Selections

Christy Canterbury
MW, Educator &
Journalist

Scott Carney
Dean of Wine Studies
International
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Mary Gorman
MW, Educator &
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Lisa Granik
MW, Educator

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Jean Reilly
MW, Wine Buyer &
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Jack Robertiello
Journalist

Brooke Sabel
Wine Director
Nativar/Ninety Acres
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Patricia Savoie
Journalist

Matt Stinton
Wine Director
Hearth Restaurant/Terroir

Gregory Dal Piaz
Editor in Chief
Snooth Media

Moderated by Kristen Bieler & W. R. Tish

ROUNDTABLE #2 OF 2

TEJO

TAKE TWO

*Part II of Our Look at
Portugal's Tejo Region*

BY KRISTEN BIELER



Last month we brought you the results and insights from our first group of trade professionals. This month, we are presenting the results from our second roundtable tasting with different wines, and a new group of wine industry experts.

WHITES SCORE BIG

Like the first group of tasters, Roundtable #2 was very impressed with the white wines in the tasting. Most tend to think of Portugal as red wine territory, yet the Tejo region produces as much white as red. "I was very pleasantly surprised by the whites," shared Mary Gorman, MW, educator and journalist. "They all share a lovely vibrancy; they are accessible and uncomplicated but not at all boring. An ideal choice for anyone who wants a pure, fresh white."

Jack Robertiello, journalist and frequent contributor to *Beverage Media*, agreed, adding that their acidity makes them especially food-friendly: "They have an appetizing bitterness on the mid-palate which made me want to have them with food and some fat. They could work with appetizers and many main dishes as well."

According to Lisa Granik, MW, the region's strongest case for market success and longevity is with the Arinto grape: "Arinto has proven itself to be a well-priced, accessible fresh white wine that has its own personality and offers diversity. It's a fit for consumers and trade looking for something different but not quirky, and could really establish itself here."

NATIVE GRAPES RULE

Much like Roundtable #1, this group was strongly in favor of Tejo's indigenous varieties. "These wines stand on their own with real individual character," said Scott Carney, Dean of Wine Studies at the International Culinary Center. "Adding international varieties confuses the message, because then people are making comparisons with a much larger group of wines—the region loses its trump card."

Rather than put people off, native grapes are "what make you distinct and valuable in the marketplace," says Granik. "The price points are there, but you also have to inspire interest, and Tejo's native grapes will do that. Tejo should mean something distinctive."

SPREADING THE WORD

The story that Matt Stinton, Wine Director at Terroir and Hearth, likes to tell his customers about Portugal highlights their wealth of indigenous varieties: "From my point of view, I like the fact that some grapes are unpronounceable, but that is because we hand-sell almost everything. I think of Portugal as a blending culture, so I'm particularly drawn to blends."

In less wine-knowledgeable restaurants—and particularly in large retail environments—things get more complicated. "I have trouble seeing consumers paying \$20 for a grape they have never heard of—this will be Tejo's challenge," shared Jean Reilly, MW. Even the trade needs to get up to speed on the region, said Mol-



The producers in the Tejo region present a blend of old and new, in architecture, winemaking technology and grape varieties.

lie Battenhouse of VOS Selections: “Most of us have had so few of these wines, we don’t know what to expect from a Fernão Pires or Trincadeira.”

The group agreed the Tejo message needs to be about quality, value and uniqueness. “When I have people looking for well-priced, traditional, European table wines, Portugal is the first thing that comes to mind,” said Gregory Dal Piaz, Editor-in-Chief of Snooth Media. “The unfamiliar grapes are not the issue. Without the hand-sell on or off-premise, people are going to need a tasting note and a solid staff recommendation.”

Gorman agreed: “For most drinkers, these should be promoted as delicious, fresh wines from Portugal. I don’t think it’s critical to educate about all the grapes. At these price points they are incredibly competitive, but it is a very crowded marketplace. It’s one

thing to have wines that are relevant in terms of price point, but you must keep insisting on that relevance or people move on.”

VERSATILITY & VALUE

“The great thing about these wines from a trade perspective is that I could easily sell them to someone with a traditional, more educated palate as well as a more entry-level consumer,” said Brooke Sabel, Wine Director, Natirar/Ninety Acres Culinary Center. “There is a great savory character which makes them very appealing.”

Christy Canterbury, MW, agreed, adding that they truly represent something different from the vast sea of wine already available on our shores: “Many of these are the kind of inexpensive wines you find on the shelves in Europe that I wish we had more of here—they offer lots of value and pleasure for the money,” she said.

TEJO UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

Wine, of course, has the distinction of traveling well all over the globe; yet there is something uniquely revealing when one can sample a region’s wine at its source. Being keenly aware of this truism, and rightly proud of their viticultural progress, the producers of Tejo complemented the NYC roundtable tastings with a trip for 20 U.S. writers, importers, sommeliers and retailers.

It was enlightening, to say the least. The trip tapped into the local culture (e.g., the historic town of Santarem; the wine museum of Cartaxo; famed Lusitano horses; the energy of Lisbon) and cuisine, as well as several estate visits and multi-label tastings with the winemakers. Throughout the trip, the region’s agricultural heritage was palpable; winegrowers of Tejo have an intimate relationship with their land and the river that has long

THE WHITES

Terra Silvestre 2012

Producer: Agro-Batoréu

Grape: Arinto



A group favorite. Battenhouse found this flavorful and bright, with almond cream and lemon zest notes and herbal hints. Savoie believed the soft texture and crispy acidity will make it appealing to a wide range of consumers. Granik liked its clean fruit concentration and vibrant minerality, calling it “quite fine.”
Importer: VinAmericas. **SRP: \$15**

Casal do Conde 2012

Producer: Casal do Conde

Grapes: Viognier



Robertiello praised the honeysuckle and guava aromatics and lime-rich acidity and subtle bitterness—“a great appetizer wine.” Dal Piaz found it taut, youthful and packed with crisp pineapple flavor, and a clean mineral finish. A great value for the price, commented Reilly, who found it a “stunning expression of Viognier.” *Value Vines*. **SRP: \$13**

Vinha Padre Pedro 2012

Producer: Casa Cadaval

Grapes: Arinto, Verdelho, Fernão Pires, Viognier

With lemon-lime zest, bright acidity



and a balanced finish, Sabel called this a beautifully-made wine. Gorman liked the mid-palate creaminess and layered floral and crisp Meyer lemon flavors. Dal Piaz agreed, adding that the jammy golden raspberry and apple notes and clean finish make it a great recommendation for Pinot Grigio drinkers. *VOS Selections*.

SRP: \$12

Vale de Lobos 2011

Producer: Quinta da Ribeirinha

Grapes: Fernão Pires, Trincadeira das Pratas



Canterbury was pleasantly surprised by the aromatic intensity in this white, marked by peach and

honeysuckle. The Asian spices and notes of cinnamon present on the palate make this an intriguing, lovely wine, said Savoie. Dal Piaz found it truly distinctive, with nice rocky minerals, a waxy texture and hints of banana. *Abreu Imports*. **SRP: \$12**

Qta. do Casal Monteiro 2012

Producer: Quinta do Casal

Grapes: Arinto, Fernão Pires

There is an almost Riesling-like quality to this white, noted Bieler, with floral-laced minerals and stone fruit aromatics, and a subtle petrol note on the palate. Tish liked the hint of lavender and bright citrusy acidity. *Iberian Wine Importers*. **SRP: \$10**



served as a conduit, linking their wines to the vibrant port city of Lisbon, and only recently has agribusiness been enhanced by modern technology.

But now that it has, the region is enjoying a renaissance, evident in experimental vineyards and novel bottlings alongside the traditional. The wines the group experienced “in situ” were impressive on multiple levels—value, uniqueness, versatility with food, even structure for longevity. Tellingly, when members of the group were surveyed after the trip, the range of “favorite” wines served to demonstrate the diverse appeal inherent in Tejo wines: No single wine or producer stood out. Similarly, we asked the participants, “What surprised you most on the trip?” and their impressions, not surprisingly, touched on a range of points:

“I was surprised that these wines, relatively unknown in our market, are as good quality and value as they are.”

—Linda Lawry, Director,
International Wine Center

“NOT surprised by the friendliness and professionalism of people in the Portuguese wine community. However, I was surprised by the level of quality of wines.”

—Michael Schaefer, Journalist & Educator

“Fernão Pires. If there is going to be a white that markets not only to an international palate but wine geeks alike, this is it. It is rich and supple but with a vibrant minerality. Some of the best examples are aged in old oak barriques and are reminiscent of a steely white Burgundy.”

—Victoria James, Sommelier,
Altamarea Group

“The wines have improved a lot since I was last there in 2007.”

—Patricia Savoie, Journalist

“The whites were more reminiscent of a cooler more coastal climate.”

—Adele Tolli-Capela,
Importer, Value Vines

“I found Tejo more dynamic than other Portuguese wine regions I’ve visited. There’s a lot of young blood and energy. They seem to have a big vision for their wines, especially in their outreach to the export market. They also seem to have a lot of innovative wine concepts.”

—Cynthia Sin-Yi Cheng, Journalist

“Not a single wine seemed overpriced, and lower-end ones represented extreme value.”

—W. R. Tish, Managing Editor,
Beverage Media

THE REDS

Fiuza Native 2012

Producer: Fiuza & Bright
Grapes: Touriga Nacional, Cabernet Sauvignon



There is an attractive purity of fruit here, Granik described, with soft tannins and a crisp finish which gives it commercial appeal. Gorman called it bright and lively with supple, juicy fruit flavors and medium-length. Notes of earth and tobacco nicely accent the vibrant, fruity palate, observed Canterbury. *Importer: Gabriella Importers.*
SRP: \$12.99

Quinta do Casal Branco 2011

Producer: Casal Branco
Grapes: Castelão, Trincadeira, Cabernet Sauvignon, Alicante Bouschet



Reilly was impressed with the earthy, leathery complexity and nice substance in this red blend. Sabel found it balanced and enjoyable with

notes of smoke, spice and teriyaki beef. Thanks to lasting acidity and soft tannins, it would make a great food wine, remarked Savoie. *TriVin Imports.* **SRP: \$9.99**

Qta. do Casal Monteiro 2010

Producer: Quinta do Casal
Grapes: Touriga Nacional, Merlot, Syrah



Dal Piaz found an impressive richness and spice here as well as a touch of youthful butteriness, all delivered in a smooth and polished package. Robertiello noted raisin and blackberry flavors, calling it streamlined and pleasant. *Iberian Wine Importers.* **SRP: \$10**

Quinta do Alqueve Tradicional 2009

Producer: Pinhal da Torre
Grapes: Touriga Nacional, Trincadeira, Tinta Roriz, Castelão

A group favorite. Granik called this a compelling wine for its savory complexity with “breadth and guts”



to give it commercial appeal in the U.S. “Bring on the jamon,” declared Robertiello, in response to this wine’s smoky, savory, pleasantly bitter taste profile. With chewy fruit flavors and a velvety texture, it tastes youthful in spite of its 4 years of age, remarked Prol. *Simões Import.* **SRP: \$11.99**

Casaleiro Reserva 2012

Producer: Enoprot
Grapes: Touriga Nacional, Castelão, Trincadeira



Granik’s other favorite wine, she described this as “pure, lovely fresh, juicy and well-made with floral high tones and savory flavors.” Reilly believes it has more character than one has a right to expect from a \$9 wine. Astringent tannins and bright acidity call for food, remarked Battenhouse, noting the wine’s lovely balance of floral, vanilla and raspberry aromatics. According to Dal Piaz: “A really attractive wine that uses oak intelligently—it’s simply delicious.” *MidAtlantics Sales Group.* **SRP: \$9**

Quinta da Alorna Reserva 2010

Producer: Quinta da Alorna
Grapes: Touriga Nacional, Cabernet Sauvignon



Dark fruit drives this wine, said Carney, while some tannic grip, bold acidity and hints of baking spice round it out. Pronounced oak flavors of vanilla and cedar are layered with fruit and nice spice character. *Opici.* **SRP: \$17.99**

Bridão Reserva 2006

Producer: Adega Coop. do Cartaxo
Grapes: Trincadeira, Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca

Dry, approachable tannins and fresh cherry flavors give this a great balance of structure and fruit, described Stinton. Savoie named this as her favorite, thanks to lush flavors and a nicely structured body. Sabel compared this to a modern-styled Rioja. *Wine Enterprises.* **SRP: \$13.99**

