Understanding & Experiencing Port Wine

COLL 127: Psychology of Taste Perception
Spring Semester, 2012

Alternate Titles:
1. Can I really wait 20 years to drink a bottle of wine?
2. Can I taste the difference between a $15 bottle of Port and a $200 bottle of Port?

Warning

While producers in Australia, California, and Bryan, TX all make wines that they market as “Port”, I will ignore these wines and focus on Port as it has been made for centuries—a rich fortified wine from the Douro region of Portugal.

Porto is highly regulated
- Grapes from demarcated region
- Production and maturation at vineyard or in Villa Nova de Gaia
- Wine certified by Instituto do Vino do Porto (IVDP)
  - Quantity & quality controlled
  - Grape prices are controlled
- We will stick to “Porto”
The Origins of Port

Port Has A Long History

• Romans terraced the land and planted farms & vineyards
  → Roman grapes ⇒ insipid wines
  → Varying rulers introduced new varietals, up until about 1756
  → About 48 recognized grape varieties used in the Douro

• Portuguese love of codfish + English love of red wine led to alliance
  → 1353: fishing rights for wine
  → 1386: broad protection for citizens & commercial venture
  ✪ Strong expat community in Oporto
The Origins of Port

Port Has A Long History

- French-British wars deprived the English of access to claret
  → Turned to “Portuguese Red”
  → Often spoiled in transit
  → Adding local brandy helped
- A sweet tooth changed Portuguese Red into modern Port
  → In 1678, two young Englishmen were given a dessert wine by the abbot at monastery in Lamego
    ✦ He added brandy early to stop fermentation & preserve sugar
  → English firms created demand for this wine over next 50 years
Port Wine

Port Is Highly Regulated

• Grapes from demarcated region in the Douro
• Wine blended & matured either at the vineyard
  or in Villa Nova de Gaia

The Instituto dos Vinhos do Douro e do Porto

• Controls quantities & styles
• Controls appellation
  → Seal of guarantee required for wines from
    Douro and wines sold as “porto”
  → Denotes inspection & approval
• Vintage ports must be registered with IVDP &
  samples must be sent to IVDP
  → IVDP had an incredible tasting room in Oporto
Tasting Porto

Taylor-Fladgate commissioned a study by Jean Lenoir to investigate the smell sensations that occur in Port. He found twelve dominant aromas.

- Coffee, caramel, blackcurrant, cherry, oak, chocolate (or cocoa), raspberry, walnut, plum, liquorice, vanilla, and violet.
- Many others claim to smell and taste cinnamon.
- Coffee, chocolate, & cinnamon come from the brandy and from the burnt staves of the casks

What causes the tastes and aromas?

- Different grapes and different years
- Coffee, chocolate, & cinnamon come from the burnt staves of the casks
- Nuttiness is caused by acetaldehyde
- Berry tastes (strawberry, raspberry) come from butanol

Don’t worry. Identifying these aromas & tastes seems to be an acquired skill.
Tasting Porto

Directions
1. Do not overfill the glass (*less than 1/3 full*)
2. Observe the wine (*at angle over white surface*)
3. Nose the wine
   → *Swirl to release aromas, sniff gently & deeply*
4. Taste
   → *Swirl and chew*
   → *Take in some air to release extra flavors*
5. Spit out the wine
   → *Who are we kidding? Swallow it unless it is bad*

Try some of the accompanying foods
→ *Cheese, chocolate, almonds*

Glasses:
An ISO tasting glass is almost ideal. A moderate-size red wine glass is close.

Foods To Accompany Port:
• Dark chocolate
• Cheese
  → Stilton with ruby or tawny
  → Mild cheddar with vintage
• Nuts
  → Walnuts
  → Marcona almonds
• Try them
The Port Hierarchy

Port is one of the few wines that has a distinct hierarchy, more akin to whiskeys than to zinfandels.

- **Young Ports**
  - White Port
  - Ruby
  - Tawny

- **Aged Tawny Ports**
  - Indicated age Tawny (10, 20, 30, & 40 years old)
  - Colheita

- **Vintage Port**
  - Traditional Vintage Port
  - Single Quinta Vintage Port
  - Late-Bottled Vintage Port

  Two to three years in wood
  — four to six for “special” or “reserve wines
  Filtered and/or fined
  Young, powerful wines

  Single harvest
  Two years in wood
  Bottle matured

  Four to six years in wood
  Filtered and finned or traditional
## Styles of Port

### Ports That Are Aged Exclusively In Wood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wines From</th>
<th>Years in wood</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Years</td>
<td>1 to 3 Young ruby, tawny, white</td>
<td>At this age, “tawny” is ruby + white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Years</td>
<td>4 to 6 “Reserve” ruby, tawny</td>
<td>Produced every year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Years</td>
<td>7 or more Indicated age tawny</td>
<td>Age is an average. Tawny color is from oxidation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Year</td>
<td>Late-Bottled Vintage</td>
<td>Developed, in part, for restaurant trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Year</td>
<td>Colheita</td>
<td>Single-year aged tawny Often, a good price point</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Produced in good years*

- These wines are bottled “ready to serve”
## Styles of Port

### Ports That Are Bottle Aged

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wines From</th>
<th>1.5 to 2</th>
<th>4 to 6</th>
<th>7 or more</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Vineyards</td>
<td>Vintage port</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Additional 18+ years in the bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Vineyards</td>
<td></td>
<td>Late-bottled vintage</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Traditional” style, will age further in bottle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Vineyard</td>
<td>Single Quinta Vintage Port</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Like Vintage, but often less complex flavors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Vineyard</td>
<td></td>
<td>Single quinta LBV</td>
<td></td>
<td>Like LBV, but often less complex flavors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Vineyard</td>
<td></td>
<td>Traditional Colheita</td>
<td></td>
<td>Read the label and look at the cork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- All of these wines require decanting
- Most benefit from an hour or two of air
The Mysteries of Port

• Decanting
  → serves two purposes: removes sediment & lets wine breathe
  → Need a funnel and, perhaps, a filter, plus a little practice
  → The Graham’s ‘83 was decanted before class & put back in the bottle

• Timing
  → With a bottle of vintage Port, the big question is when to drink it
  → Online reviews might help

• Purchasing Port
  → Prices are illogical & inconsistent; research online
  → In Houston, go to Specs downtown
  → Decide what to buy before you go
What Should You Buy?

• Decide what style you like
  → Taste a few, experiment

• Tawnies are easy to find
  → By the glass in bars & restaurants
  → Tawny shows winemaker’s skill

• If you like vintage, consider LBV except for special occasions
  → Most people cannot tell a good LBV from a Vintage Port
  → Vintage can be expensive, unless you wait 20 years

If you get serious about Port

• Lay down cases in a cool, stable place
• Wait a long time, then wonder when to drink it