

Acha que conhece o icónico vinho verde português? Pense de novo.

WINE ENTHUSIAST

Think You Know Portugal's Vinho Verde? Think Again

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Two rivers flow through the green hills and mountains of northwest Portugal: the Minho and the Lima. They flow west from Spain out to the Atlantic Ocean. On their way, cutting through the northern area of the Vinho Verde region, they create optimal vineyard conditions for quality white-wine production.

In the valleys surrounding these rivers, two ancient grapes dominate production to make some of the area's best wines: Loureiro, which populates the vineyards of the Lima Valley, and Alvarinho, planted primarily throughout the Minho Valley.

Though the two valleys are only part of Vinho Verde, they represent the change that's sweeping over the whole region. Young producers have bucked the traditional production of inexpensive wines in favor of more concentrated, serious offerings. And, in turn, large producers are challenged to show that they can also produce dry wines of great quality.

These wines are not Vinhos Verdes as we typically know them. They're not low alcohol, lightly fizzy or off-dry. Instead, they're rich, intense and often bone-dry expressions of the terroir of these rainy climes that experience mild winters and hot summers. These are wines that can change the perception of what high-quality Vinho Verde should be.

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## Alvarinho

### Rich and exciting wines from Minho Valley

If you head north from the Lima Valley over the mountains toward Spain, the next major river valley is the Minho. On its northern bank, Spanish producers grow Albariño. On the southern bank, the Portuguese cultivate Alvarinho. It's the same grape, but there's more difference between the expressions than just spelling.

"The Spanish have more acidity in their Albariño, with salinity and minerality," says António Luís Cerdeira, winemaker at [Quinta de Soalheiro](#). "Our Alvarinhos are fuller, more smoothly textured and richer."

Cerdeira's estate, which he runs with his sister, Maria João, is across the river from Spain. His winery is modern, with a glass-lined tasting room that looks down on the valley.

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"See that mountain there," he says as he points to the west. "That's the reason we can grow Alvarinho here. It protects us from the direct ocean influence, keeps the rain at bay and gives us regular diurnal [day-night temperature] differences, even in the summer."

It also makes the Minho region drier and less lush than Lima Valley.

Alvarinho is grown throughout the Vinho Verde appellation, but the Minho Valley is considered its true home. It's the only part of the Vinho Verde *Denominação de Origem Controlada* (DOC) where producers can make wines exclusively from Alvarinho and label them as such.

Within the Minho Valley, the towns of Monção and Melgaço form a subregion, Monção e Melgaço, which can be indicated on a wine's label. It's an area full of exciting producers, both small and large.

### **Quinta de Soalheiro 2017 Reserva Alvarinho (Vinho Verde); \$40, 94 points.**

Fermented and aged in oak, this is very different take on Alvarinho. The wood softens to acidity, which instead emphasizes the creaminess and ripeness of the rich fruit. It's ready to drink, although it will certainly age. Wine In-Motion.