

## O orgulho de Portugal

The pride of Portugal

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Opinion Wine

### The pride of Portugal

'Current vintages of Douro table wines command prices in the region of €60-€90 a bottle'

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The Portuguese are on a roll. Their football prowess is beyond question. Their two main cities are tourist meccas. And now, the ultimate accolade: [Madonna](#) has moved from New York to Lisbon and declared that she feels particularly “creative and alive” there.

Arriving in Lisbon recently, I was shamefully ignorant of this last feather in the Portuguese cap. But my hosts at an event to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the wine magazine *Essencia do Vinho* lost no time in telling me. In 30 years of visiting Portugal, I have never sensed such pride in being Portuguese.

So how does this affect the local wine scene? The most striking change I noted is that producers are no longer afraid to ask high prices for their wines.

I had been asked to nominate 10 bottles that I thought told the story of the transformation of Portuguese wine over the past 10 years and saw afterwards to my horror that one of them, Barca Velha 1999, has a retail price of about €350. Perhaps that's just because this is such a mature vintage, I thought. But no, the three younger vintages that are also commercially available — 2000, 2004 and 2008 — cost even more. That said, I should express my admiration for any wine producer who releases wine when it is ready to drink rather than ready to sell.

Perhaps this was an exception anyway because, for so many years, Barca Velha was effectively the only table wine made in the [Douro valley](#), the home of port. (Today there are hundreds of exciting table wines made here, one of the wine world's most beautiful locales.)

But no, again. By studying the shelves and website of Lisbon's excellent wine store, Garrafeira Nacional, I could see that even current vintages of the most celebrated of the many table wines to have emerged from the [Douro](#) over the past decade or two, such as Niepoort and Pintas wines, now command prices in the region of €60-€90 a bottle.

There should have been more white wines in my selection. Douro Branco can be brilliant nowadays but Vinho Verde is one of Portugal's most distinctive wines, so I chose a youthful one from one of the most respected and original producers, Soalheiro, Primeiras Vinhas 2016 Vinho Verde. They also represent the ongoing moves towards organic viticulture.