



Sarah Ahmed **THE WINE DETECTIVE** The inside track on Portuguese and Australian wine

November Wines of the Month: A Hunter Shiraz & 20 Year Old Boal Madeira

My November Wines of the Month are from two classic regions – the Hunter Valley, Australia and Madeira, Portugal. Each has great depth and layer, just like the stories behind the wines. No shortage of pedigree here.

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Barbeito Verdelho 20 Years Old Ribeiro Real (Madeira)

This is one of two new 20 Year Old Madeiras (the other a Verdelho) from Madeira's great innovator, winemaker Ricardo Freitas. The bottles look eye-catching and boy, so are the wines! The secret? A good splash (15%) of 1950s Tinta Negra of course!?!?! It came from the Favila Vieira family's Ribeiro Real vineyards in Estreito de Câmara de Lobos. The family's 19th century Madeira pioneers appear on the labels. Freitas tells me he wanted to show off the quality of these wines whilst, at the same time, thinking about the character of the named varieties – Boal and the Verdelho. It was a challenge, he admits. I asked him if he had any qualms about blending away such fine examples of Tinta Negra. Not at all, he said – "you have to be happy doing that." And when I taste the wines, especially the Boal, I can see why. The more concentrated older wines introduce greater tension, pace and complexity – the patina of age which gives both 20 Year Olds a salt and pepper seasoning – gravitas! The Boal incorporates Tinta Negra from 1952, 1953 and 1954. Freitas tells me that there was no way he could have blended the '52 in the 20 Year Old Verdelho. It was simply too concentrated and would have made it impossible for him to maintain the Verdelho's youth – its tangy chutneyed fruit. And for me, the '52 adds terrific woody resonance to this Boal – echoes of history which tickle the back palate most deliciously for an exceedingly long time. True to his word, Freitas has maintained Boal's varietal character. It has a great concentration of singed, caramelised apple tatin fruit. With marvellous integration of flavours and consummate balance, this is an outstanding, truly exciting Madeira. I'm told a consignment is on its way to Berry Brothers & Rudd.