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Please The Palate

Allison Levine's Please The Palate: Four producers of Madeira

Allison Levine Jan 4, 2018





Allison Levine

Last week, I wrote about how Madeira excites the palate, but that many of the tourists that visit Madeira do not even know that Madeira wine is one of the main products produced on the island.

Madeira wine has been produced on the island since the 15th century, and today there are approximately 2000 grape growers but only eight producers on the island. On my recent first trip to Madeira, I visited four of the producers and wanted to share a bit about my visits. When a product is named after the island itself, I think everyone should know about it.

Blandy's Madeira Wine Company

John Blandy founded Blandy's Madeira Wine in 1811, and in 1840, his son, Charles Ridpath Blandy, purchased The Blandy Wine Lodges in Funchal, the main city in Madeira. Today, the company is run by Michael and Chris Blandy, members of the sixth and seventh generations. Through recent purchases, the Blandy's own three

properties on the island, for a total of seven hectares, producing white grapes only. In addition, they work with 400 growers on the island for a total of 450 hectares.

Memorable wine of the tasting:

Blandy's 1999 Malmsey (bottled in 2015) – A dark brown color, the acidity in the wine tempers the sweetness. The finish on this wine tastes like brown sugar when it has melted on the tongue and it was all the better paired with molasses cake.

Justino's Madeira

Established in 1870, Justino's Madeira is one of the oldest companies on the island, as well as the largest producer of Madeira. Founded by Justino Henrique Freitas in 1870, the family-owned company was sold in 1981 to former army Colonel Siegfredo da Costa Campos, who fell in love with the property and upgraded it. In 2008, the colonel died, and in 2009 French company La Martiniquaise purchased Justino's Madeira.

The winemaker at Justino's is Dina Luis. Originally from the Tejo on the mainland of Portugal, Luis studied food engineering with an emphasis in winemaking. She spent

18 years making wine in Tejo before coming to Madeira four years ago. I spent an afternoon with Luis, touring the newly built wine facility that is open by appointment only. She has spent her four years learning about each and every tank and most of the barrels (there are 4,000 barrels). She imagines the blends in her mind and then works with her team to taste and make sure they achieve the aspired style of wine.

Memorable wines of the tasting:

Justino's 1997 Verdelho – With aromas of apples, oranges and honey, there is a dry sensation at first on the palate. But after that first sip, the flavor rushes back onto the palate and it is impossible not to salivate.

Justino's 50-year-old Terrantez – This blend was one of Dina Luis' first blends. The wine has aromas of cedarwood and mahogany but really fresh, intense acidity. The wine starts off light and elegant and builds up to a big and intense wine.

Justino's 1988 Malvasia – My mouth watered as I smelled this wine with aromas of coffee, banana, toasted nuts and old wood, yet it was so fresh with high acidity on the palate.

Justino's Verdelho 1934 – It was a very special treat to taste this wine that is more than 80 years old. Despite its age, it was so fresh with notes of green nuts, mineral and tangerine skin.

Barbeito Madeira

Barbeito Madeira was started in 1946 by Mario Barbeito, an accountant. His daughter Manuela joined the family business in 1972 and took over as the export director after her father passed away in 1985. Her son, Ricardo Freitas, joined the business after studying and teaching history. He had spent his summers working at the winery but said it was “a good accident” that his mother needed his help in 1992.

Ricardo Freitas, who was named Portugal's Best Fortified Winemaker in 2010, introduced the idea of single casks in 2003. In addition, he recovered the almost-extinct grape bastardo. And he created the Historic Series Madeira with the idea of creating a vintage character to each wine. The Historic Series includes Baltimore Rainwater, Charleston Sercial, Savannah Verdelho, Boston Bual, New York

Malmsey, as well as Thomas Jefferson Special Reserve produced every two years and New Orleans Tricentennial Reserve, made for the third time in 20 years.

Memorable wines of the tasting:

Barbeito Malvasia 30 Year Vo Vera – Paying homage to Freitas’ grandmother, whose image is knitting on the label, the wine is linear, clean and elegant with great acidity.

Barbeito Bastardo 50 Year Avo Mario – Paying homage to Freitas’ grandfather who is reading on the label, the wine is medium sweet with a little spice and when I tried it, all I said was “Wow!”

Bual 1863 – Freitas has a collection of old wines from his grandfather who had purchased substantial stocks of old vintages many years ago. Lucky me, Freitas poured me a taste of the 1863 Bual. There are no other words to describe it than magnificent.

Henriques & Henriques

Henriques & Henriques was founded by João Gonçalves Henriques in 1850, followed by a partnership between his sons Francisco and João Joaquim in 1912. With no heirs,

the company was passed on to friends and partners in 1968, including Peter Cossart who made 53 vintages with the company.

Humberto Jardim joined H&H as a financial expert and became the general director in 1994. The winery is in the town of Câmara de Lobos, which means Sea Wolf, and is open to the public for tastings. They also own a 10-hectare vineyard at Quinta Grande.

Memorable wines of the tasting:

Henriques & Henriques Tinta Negra 50 Year – This is a truly gorgeous wine with elegant acidity and notes of brown sugar.

Henriques & Henriques Terrantez 1954 – Now at 128 grams of sugar but with intense, elegant acidity, this wine has aromas of dried fruits and nuts and has a long, full finish on the palate.

H&H Founders Solera Madeira 1894 Malvasia – A bright amber color with greenish hues on the rim, the wine is very aromatic with notes of raisins, honey, nuts and old wood.

Allison Levine is owner of Please The Palate, a marketing and event-planning agency. A freelance writer, she contributes to numerous publications while eating and drinking her way around the world. Contact her at allison@pleasethepalate.com.

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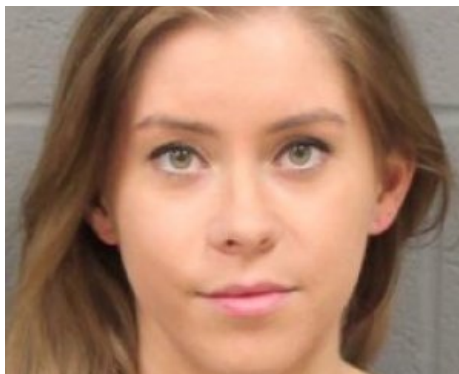
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