

AUTUMN FLAVORS..... THINK PORT

Portugal, relatively small in size in comparison to its next-door neighbor Spain, is nothing to sneeze at when it comes to wine production. Port (or Porto) in particular. The country, with its rocky, sloping river valleys and Mother Nature, with her generous doses of sunshine together provides the perfect combination for grape growing. Portugal reaps the rewards of its Mediterranean climate.

Port, like Champagne and Scotch, is heavily regulated and characteristic to the region and country in which it is produced. Port production takes place in the Douro Valley. There are twelve criteria to which port production adheres to. Soil type, slope of terrain and grape varietals to name a few.

Port is simply a wine to which a neutral grape spirit (usually Brandy) is added during fermentation. This arrests the fermentation process. The result is a fortified wine that is sweeter, heavier and higher in alcohol (19.5 – 20 %) than regular wine. The fortification of wine came about during the 18th century. The elevated alcohol level provided stability and prevented spoilage on long ocean crossings. It quickly gained popularity for its sweetness.

Ports are generally considered “dessert” wines due to their richness and sweeter qualities. They are a satisfying finish to a nice meal. An exception is the drier white port, which is better suited as an aperitif.

Ports are either barrel or bottle-aged. Bottle-aging results in smoother, less tannic ports.

Barrel-aged ports fall under two categories: Tawny and Colheita.

Tawnys are golden brown with a nutty flavor from the barrel wood. The age on the label indicates the average age for all grapes in the blend. A Colheita is a single vintage. The two dates displayed on these bottles show the year of harvest and the year of bottling. Some to consider:

Dows Colheita, 750 ml \$37.78
Fladgate 10 Year Tawny, 750 ml \$38.29

Bottle-aged ports have several categories. Rubys are cheapest and don't improve with age. A Reserve is a premium ruby approved by a tasting panel. Late-Bottled Vintage (LBV), Vintage and Crusted ports require decanting as they may be unfiltered. Crusted ports will improve with age. Try:

Fladgate LBV, 750 ml \$24.79
Warre's Warrior Reserve, 750 ml \$23.99

Only grapes from a declared (exceptional) year are used in Vintage ports, therefore, these ports are not produced every year. A Single Quinta Vintage is one produced from a single estate (vineyard). White ports are made solely from white grapes. Fladgate Chip Dry, 750 ml \$27.29 is a white port available at NB Liquor.

Relatively new on the scene is pink port. It first showed up on the market in 2008. These ports are best served chilled. Croft Pink by Fladgate, 750 ml \$19.99 is now available at NB Liquor.

Ports are exceptional with fresh red fruits, chocolate (especially dark) and aged and blue cheese. Port and Stilton cheese is a classic pairing. A young port will pair well with the pecan and pumpkin pies that will soon make their appearances on our Thanksgiving tables.

Once opened, your wood-aged ports will last about 1 month and bottle-aged- about 1 week.

Treat yourself to a glass of port. It just may help take the chill off and make the transition into those autumn evenings a little more pleasant.

Written by Heather Black, Product Advisor, NB Liquor, Riverview, NB