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CHRISTOPHE BARON

A PERSONAL
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GREAT SYRAH

RED BURGUNDY:
CLASSIC STYLE
IN 2013

CHILE: BOLD
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SPRING MENU
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MAY 31, 2016



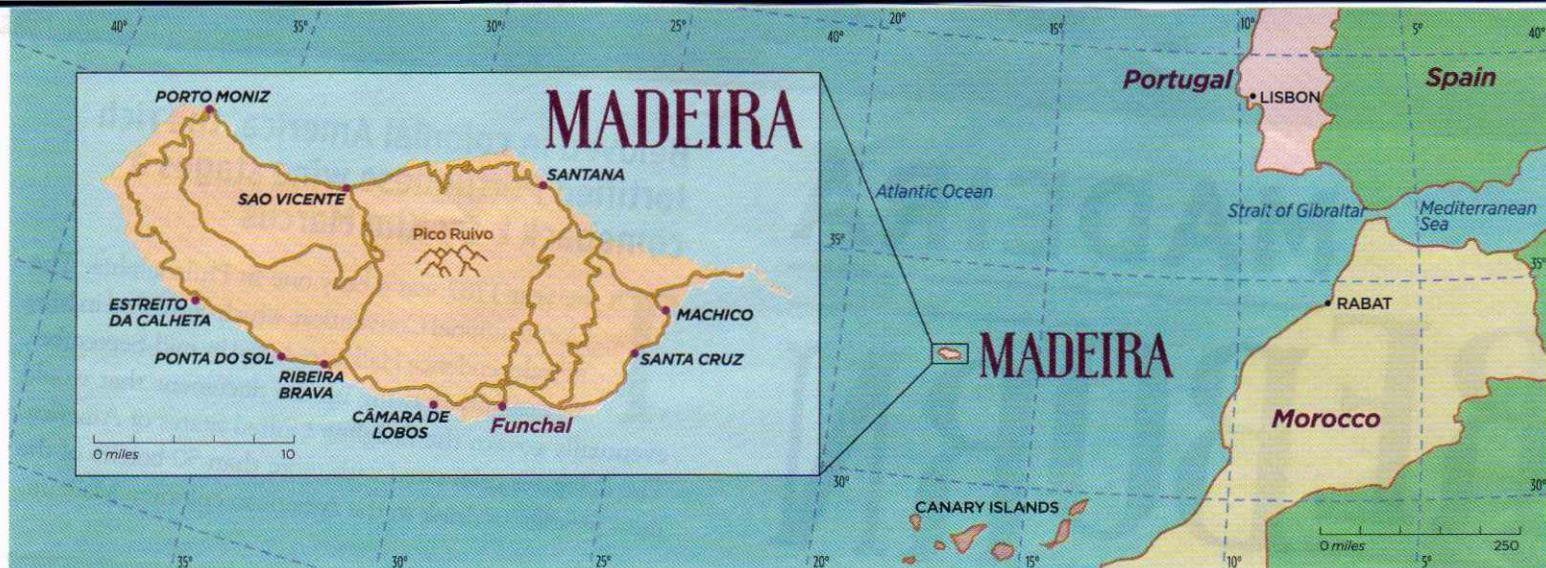
MADEIRA REBORN

Beloved in colonial America, the rich fortified Portuguese wine stages a comeback | By Kim Marcus

The year 1787 was a busy one in Philadelphia. The Constitutional Convention, which convened in May at Independence Hall, concluded by mid-September, successfully drawing up the document that would eventually govern the fledgling United States of America. The delegates celebrated with more than 50 bottles of the most prestigious drink in the American colonies: Madeira.



A patchwork of terraced farmland covers the steep hillsides of Madeira, with vineyards planted side by side with other crops.



The sweet fortified wine from Portugal was also used to toast the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and Washington's first inauguration in 1789, as well as the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. With no homegrown wine worthy of drinking, and most table wines from Europe too delicate to survive a trans-Atlantic voyage, casks of Madeira flowed to American shores. It remained the favored drink of the American upper class well into the 19th century.

Yet those who founded the nation were not just idle imbibers. Americans were also critical in setting the style of Madeira, with shippers from the Portuguese island blending vintages and grapes to suit the tastes of their clients across the Atlantic. "If Madeira wines still exist today, it is because the Americans liked our wines so much," says Ricardo Freitas, whose family owns Vinhos Barbeito, one of the island's leading producers. At one point during the colonial era, exports to America amounted to more than a quarter of the island's production.

According to historian David Maxey, an authority on one of the leading Madeira shippers of the colonial era, Henry Hill, the thirst could be insatiable. "American taste for Madeira was booming," Maxey says. "There were times when the house couldn't fulfill its orders." Hill's father, Richard, had started the business after fleeing to Madeira in 1740 to escape imprisonment for debt. He landed in the capital, Funchal, which was the center of the Madeira wine trade, and quickly built his firm, shipping wines directly to the colonies. His son's clients included John Hancock and George Washington.

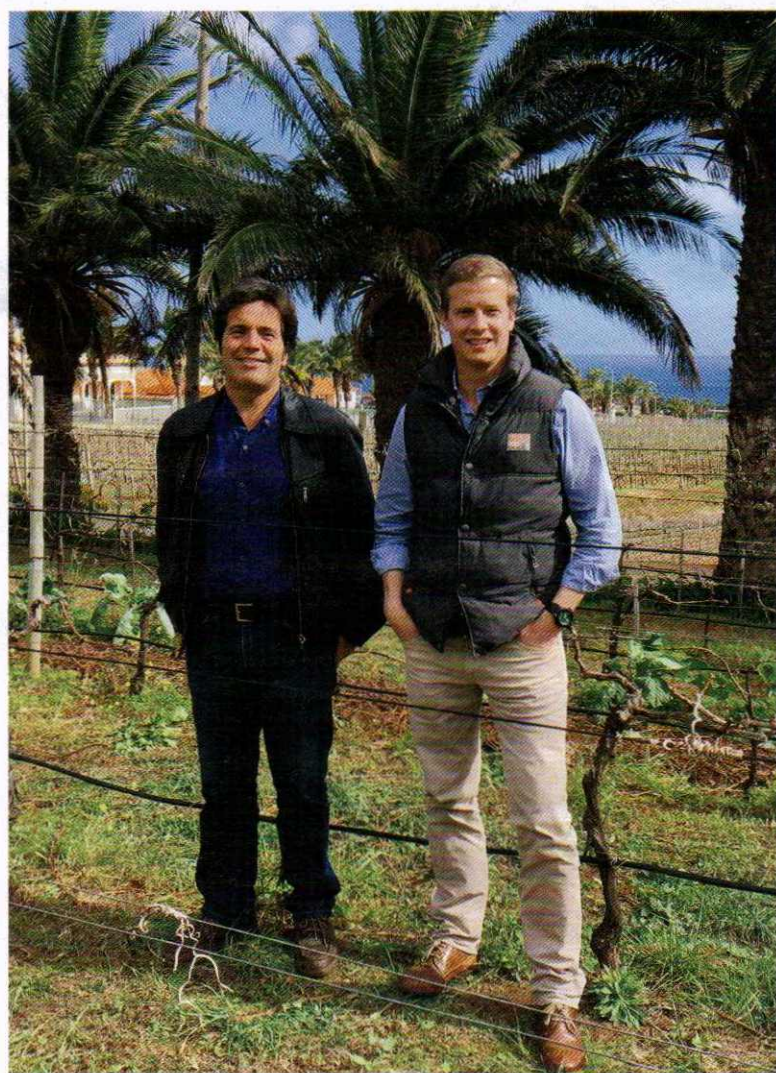
From those heights, the fortunes of Madeira would fall mightily. Eventually, the ravages of powdery mildew, phylloxera, Prohibition, the Great Depression and World War II would almost destroy its presence in the U.S. Yet within the last decade or so, Madeira has seen a comeback, finding its way once again onto American wine lists. And like the Founding Fathers, its followers today are dedicated in their passion for its distinctive flavors.

"I have collected Madeira for approximately 50 years," says Norman Cohn, chairman of ASI, a company that specializes in promotional products. "I love it, and of all the wines and Champagne I have in my cellar, this is the one that blows away guests." He counts more than 200 bottles of older Madeiras in the 13,000-bottle cellar at his Pennsylvania home.

"2014 was a record year in the U.S. for Madeira, with 59 percent higher sales in value when compared to 2002, and the total average euro-per-liter sales being 29 percent above what they were in

2002," says Christopher Blandy, CEO of Madeira Wine Company, another of the island's major producers, which includes Blandy's and Cossart Gordon among its labels.

"I can happily say that Madeira is making a very strong comeback," says Mannie Berk, who owns the Rare Wine Co., in Brisbane, Calif., a leading importer of Madeira. Berk has made it his mission to help revive Americans' appreciation for Madeira, working since 1998 in conjunction with Barbeito on a project called the Historic Series Madeira. The goal is to produce wines that taste like older vintages yet are more affordably priced.



Winemaker Francisco Albuquerque (left) and CEO Christopher Blandy oversee production at Madeira Wine Company during a time of significant growth and increased demand.

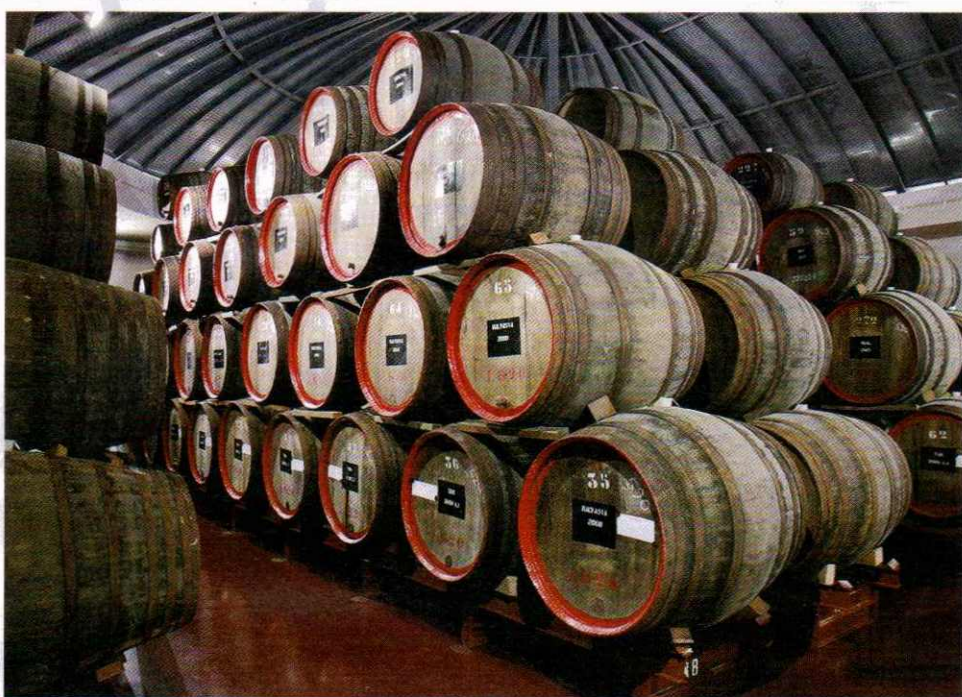
Madeira is one of the world's singular wines. Like Port, it is a fortified wine from Portugal, but the similarities mostly end there. It hails from a rugged subtropical island of volcanic origins southwest of the Portuguese mainland and about 350 miles off the coast of Morocco. Covering 286 square miles, the island's highest point rises more than 6,000 feet, with villages and vineyards—totaling about 1,200 acres—clinging to the steep slopes.

Given its location, Madeira was a favored stop-over and resupply point for mariners on their way across the Atlantic, either to the New World or to India and beyond. Madeira vintners found that adding spirits to their table wines helped preserve them during the ocean voyages. But it was only when they tasted a shipment that accidentally made the round-trip journey back to the island that they recognized the true potential of their wine. Baked in the holds of the ship while crossing tropical waters, constantly rocked by the waves of the sea and oxidized because of the extended time in cask, the wines had been transformed into something new. Madeira was born.

The island's vintners eventually realized that it was too expensive to rely on long voyages to make their wines. So they began to mimic the process on land by heating the wines in a practice called *estufagem* (*estufa* being the Portuguese word for stove or hothouse). Today, there are three ways to replicate the historic voyages. The method used for the cheapest Madeiras is called *cuba de calor*, in which the wine is directly heated in tanks at temperatures as high as 130° F. The two methods for higher quality Madeira production are called *armazém de calor*, where casks of wine are placed in a steam-heated room, and *canteiro*, in which the wine is aged long-term in warehouses heated only by the rays of the sun.

Except in unique cases such as that of Sherry, oxidation is typically the mark of a flawed wine. But the combination of heating and fortification means that Madeiras are almost impervious to spoilage once opened. They quickly secured their place in colonial America, especially in the South and mid-Atlantic, where hot, humid summers and high water tables precluded long-term cellaring for table wines.

Vineyard plantings on Madeira are dominated by the red grape Tinta Negra, which is used mainly for bulk production. The high quality versions are made from one of the island's four noble varieties, all white but each yielding a different style, from driest to sweetest: Sercial, dry and bracing, offers briny and nutty flavors; Verdelho, the most widely planted white variety, is medium-dry and smoky; Bual, which strikes a fine balance between acidity and residual sugar, makes some of the best vintage Madeiras; and Malmsey, or Malvasia, is rich with honey and molasses overtones. There is also Terrantez, which is difficult to grow and almost extinct, yet can still make excellent renditions.



Above: Casks of Madeira age in the cellars of Vinhos Barbeito. Top vintage-dated Madeira requires at least 20 years of aging before it can be released. Below: A storage cellar of aged Madeiras at Blandy's represents a vinous treasure house of rare bottlings, but the costs of maintaining the inventory can be daunting.



The best Madeiras perfectly balance sweetness and savoriness, backed by very high acidity, a product of the island's mild climate. Only the Malmseys, as well as some Buals, are overtly dominated by sweetness. Madeiras can be labeled based on variety, as well as style, which denotes a combination of age and sweetness. The rules governing Madeira are complicated: Vintage-dated wines, for example, have to be aged at least 20 years in bottle before release. (For details on labeling, see "Understanding Madeira Labels," page 93.)

The wines, especially the older, vintage-dated varietals, can be profound. Of the nearly 50 Madeiras I have tasted recently in our New York office, nine received a classic rating of 95 points or higher on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale. The older wines are rich, filled

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BONUS VIDEO: Madeira Wine Company CEO Christopher Blandy joins Kim Marcus to explain the unusual heating process that creates Madeira. Watch them at www.winespectator.com/053116.

with buttery and baked white and tropical fruit flavors, along with citrusy and meaty accents. Nutty and chocolaty notes are also present, while truffle, forest floor and exotic spice nuances add complexity. These are rare birds indeed, and you will have to search them out on obliging restaurant wine lists. They are best savored on their own, because of their complexity, or at the end of a meal.

More accessible are non-vintage bottlings such as Blandy's Malmsey 15 Year Old Rich (93 points, \$40/500ml), showing butterscotch, toffee, ginger and green olive character; Barbeito Verdelho Savannah Special Reserve (92, \$55), with powerful flavors of marzipan and dried tropical fruits backed by muscular acidity; and Madeira Wine Company Miles 5 Year Old Rich (90, \$23), with notes of butterscotch, persimmon and ripe citrus. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.winespectator.com/053116.)

Today, Madeira continues to be an outlier in the wine world. Because of its status as a mecca for European tourists, who are attracted by its subtropical climate and stunning setting, the island faces development pressures that threaten the survival of its remaining vineyards. Many native residents have sold their land to hotels and vacationers—if they didn't already flee during the tough economic times of the 20th century.

Producers such as Blandy's are continuously working to secure contracts with growers and to plant more of their own vineyards to guarantee the supply of grapes. "All of us are doing substantial investments in the vineyards, the vinification methods, the aging methods and the bottling to ensure that the positive recognition continues for the future," Blandy says. "We are stocking more wine in the traditional *canteiro* process to make sure we have enough stock to satisfy a greater consumer demand in the future."

Only six Madeira shippers remain on the island. In the mid-19th century, there were 160. Grapegrowing is marginal at best. Humidity is high throughout the year, around 80 percent, increasing disease and mildew pressure. Torrential rains can wash down with destructive force from the island's heights. Competing for agricultural space are easier-to-grow crops such as sugar cane and bananas.

Madeira is an island at the edge of history whose legacy is an enduring strength despite the travails of the recent past. It remains a subject of fascination for its American aficionados, especially in Philadelphia. The same year that the Constitution was signed, the 11 directors of the Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin as the first dedicated library in the colonies, were busy imbibing as well. They consumed two gallons of Madeira along with a selection of cheese, bread and oysters, according to the records of a November meeting.



Above: George Washington presides over the 1787 signing of the Constitution at Philadelphia's Independence Hall, an event celebrated with copious amounts of Madeira. Below: The nearby Hill-Physick House, which was once owned by a leading Madeira shipper, is a symbol of the wine's enduring heritage in America.



The Library Company exists to this day, and Madeira's role during the founding of the nation was the focus of a seminar and tasting last fall amid its bookshelves of historic documents, preceded by a fundraising dinner at nearby Hill-Physick House, built in 1786 by Henry Hill. The Federalist-style mansion in the Old City district is a stately reminder of the nation's heritage and the importance of Madeira in forming it.

"People really know about old Madeiras in this country because of the long history of Madeira in the USA," explained Ricardo Freitas at Hill-Physick House, where he poured an 1870 Barbeito Verdelho from a demijohn that had been part of his mother's collection. The wine was still lively and fresh, with peppery notes to its delicate juniper berry and ripe citrus flavors.

"Madeira was really pervasive in American society," says Berk, referring to the early days of the nation. "It was an elite beverage but became part of America's heritage."

Managing editor Kim Marcus is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of Madeira.

UNDERSTANDING MADEIRA LABELS

➤ The major designations for Madeira labeling are based on age and sweetness. The highest designations are reserved for those wines made from the leading grape varieties. In order from driest to sweetest, these are: Sercial, Verdelho, Bual and Malvasia. Wines labeled by varietal must contain at least 85 percent of the named grape and specify the minimum amount of aging.

➤ **LABELING BY AGE** Madeiras labeled by age break down into one of two categories: wines

aged for a certain period of time and wines from a single vintage. In terms of aging, the designations are: finest (three years); reserve (five years); special reserve (10 years); and extra reserve (more than 15 years). Some wines forgo these style designations and are labeled solely by their minimum amount of aging, such as 10 years old. For single-harvest wines, the designations include *colheita*, or harvest, denoting at least five years of aging in wooden cask, and *frasqueira*, or vintage, denoting at least 20 years of aging in cask.

➤ **LABELING BY SWEETNESS** The degrees of sweetness for Madeira are (in ascending order): extra dry; dry; medium dry; medium rich; and rich. These designations are mostly restricted to wines made from the Tinta Negra grape, which represents the vast majority of Madeira production. There are also labels with references to the color of the wine, from extra pale to dark. Wines labeled as Rainwater are made in a light style and are pale in color. The style originated with shipments to American shores during colonial times.

Kim Marcus' Recommended Wines From Madeira

Nearly 50 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/053116. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
BLANDY'S Bual Madeira 1966 Elegant and creamy, this is filled with rich buttery and nutty notes to the flavors of dried tropical fruit, apricot and baked apple.	97	\$300
BLANDY'S Terrantez Madeira 1977 This lively version has amazing freshness and purity, showing off-dry accents and smoky details to its notes of dried citrus.	97	\$250
D'OLIVEIRA Bual Madeira 1968 Balanced and plush, delivering buttercream, hazelnut, dried apricot and tropical fruit flavors that are still fresh and lively.	96	\$220
D'OLIVEIRA Terrantez Madeira 1971 Complex and well-integrated, this plush Madeira shows flavors of butterscotch, hazelnut cream and dried tropical fruits.	96	\$220
BARBEITO Bual Madeira 1982 A creamy version, with hazelnut, cocoa butter, white chocolate and chamomile flavors that are vibrant and plush.	95	\$195
BLANDY'S Bual Madeira 2002 Deep, rich and exotic, showing dried mango, apricot and roasted pineapple flavors, with smoky accents and notes of crème brûlée.	94	\$50
BLANDY'S Malmsey Madeira 1999 Lush hazelnut, butterscotch, white chocolate and egg cream flavors are followed by citrus and spice notes on the elegant finish.	94	\$50 500ml
COSSART GORDON Bual Madeira 1962 Pure, direct and powerfully fresh, with a spicy aroma leading to zesty apricot, citrus and apple flavors that show pastry notes.	94	\$350
D'OLIVEIRA Sercial Madeira 1969 Creamy and lush, with rich buttercream notes to the flavors of apricot tart, pear compote, dried mango and pineapple cake.	94	\$185
BARBEITO Bual Madeira Boston Special Reserve NV Nutty flavors are filled with buttery notes in this plush, sweet style, with dried apricot and mango adding to the richness.	93	\$55
BARBEITO Malvasia Madeira Ribeiro Real 20 year old NV A rich style, yet very fresh and pure, offering butterscotch and dried apricot flavors, with ripe citrus and spice accents.	93	\$120
BLANDY'S Malmsey Madeira 15 Year Old Rich NV Thick, luscious and spicy, with mouthcoating creaminess and flavors of butterscotch, toffee, truffle, ginger and green olive.	93	\$40 500ml

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
D'OLIVEIRA Verdelho Madeira 1986 This dry Madeira is loaded with dried mango and apricot flavors, with cinnamon and allspice notes and plenty of smoky accents.	93	\$135
BARBEITO Verdelho Madeira Savannah Special Reserve NV Offers aromas and flavors of marzipan and dried tropical fruits, with muscular acidity and plenty of barbecue smoke notes.	92	\$55
BLANDY'S Malmsey Madeira 5 Year Old Rich NV Fresh and pure, showing plenty of creaminess to the dried apricot, citrus peel and butterscotch flavors, with rich minerality.	92	\$24
COSSART GORDON Bual Madeira Single Harvest 2005 Crisp and just a touch off-dry, offering flavors of dried apple, iodine and apricot preserves, with an ironclad structure.	92	\$42 500ml
BARBEITO Madeira Historic Series Baltimore Rainwater NV Lush and spicy, with buttery notes to the flavors of chamomile, ripe pear and dried apple, followed by an opulent finish.	91	\$50
BARBEITO Malmsey Madeira New York Special Reserve NV Rich and spicy, with a creamy texture and plenty of buttery notes to the dried apricot and roasted pineapple flavors.	91	\$55
BARBEITO Sercial Madeira Charleston Special Reserve NV Chamomile and Earl Grey tea notes accent flavors of dried apple, tangerine and pineapple in this flinty style.	91	\$55
MADEIRA WINE COMPANY Malmsey Madeira Miles 10 Year Old Rich NV A chocolate aroma leads to deep, rich flavors of peach pastry, allspice, caramel and butterscotch that are fresh and sweet.	91	\$42
BLANDY'S Verdelho Madeira 5 Year Old Medium Dry NV Dried peach, iodine, beeswax and cream flavors show spicy notes in this crisp version, with butterscotch and dried apricot details.	90	\$24
MADEIRA WINE COMPANY Madeira Miles 5 Year Old Rich NV This shows a hint of pipe tobacco on the nose, with rich flavors of butterscotch, persimmon and citrus gliding across the palate.	90	\$23
MADEIRA WINE COMPANY Madeira Miles Finest Rainwater Medium Dry NV A tangy version, with notes of sea salt and juniper berry to the flavors of chestnut, dried mango and apricot flavors.	89	\$17