

The classic Port houses and their traditions

Given Vintage Port's historic association with the Britain, it is not surprising that most of its iconic producers are of British origin. Famous Vintage Port houses such as Croft, Dow's, Fonseca, Graham's, Taylor's and Warre's were originally founded by British merchants and continue to be family owned and run to this day.

Each of these long established firms, several of which are now over three centuries old, has its own unique history, traditions and style of wine. In spite of these important differences, the top Vintage Port houses share certain key attributes which set them apart from the rest.

All are owners of top 'quintas' or estates. These iconic properties are closely associated with the firms that own them and are the cornerstone of their reputations and of their house style. Most are historic vineyards and contain extensive plantations of old vines. Some are regarded as being among the finest vineyard estates in the world.

All have been regarded for at least a century as being in the top bracket of Vintage Port producers and have a long record of releasing wines which are consistently among the most highly-rated in each vintage.

All have distinctive, consistent and recognizable house styles, derived from the unique *terroirs* of the firm's own estates and from its inherited traditions. This consistency is invariably greater in family owned firms where skills and experience have been passed on from one generation to the next.

All command higher prices, both on release, in the secondary market and later on at auction, than less reputed houses.

And finally, all produce Vintage Ports which are globally distributed and feature in the most prestigious wine lists and wine collections around the world.

If there is a spiritual home of Vintage Port, it can be said to be The Factory House. This unique institution, occupying an elegant 18th Century building in the historic centre of Oporto, is an association of seven British Port houses. Here, members of the various firms meet to enjoy a glass of Vintage Port at a traditional weekly lunch held on Wednesdays. There are also formal dinners after which guests move, after the meal, to a second candle-lit dining room in order to enjoy their Vintage Port in atmosphere untainted by the smell of food, surely one of the most civilized traditions in the world of wine.

