

Introduction to Port

Port is one of the great classic wines, alongside Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne and the other historic ‘appellations’ of Europe.

It is produced in the Douro Valley in northern Portugal, one of the world’s oldest and most prestigious vineyard areas.

Port is often associated with Britain as many of the oldest and most famous Port houses are of British origin. However Port is recognised and enjoyed all over the world. It is an essential part of any serious cellar or wine list. The wines of the top Port producers receive ratings and scores as high as, and often higher than, any other prestigious wine.

Wine has been produced in the Douro Valley for nearly two thousand years. However the first wines under the name of Port were shipped in the second half of the 17th century. At this time, owing to conflicts with France, the British turned to Portugal as a source of wine instead of purchasing it in Bordeaux and other French regions.

In 1756 the Port vineyards became the first in the world to be legally demarcated, making Port the oldest ‘A.O.C.’. The classification of the Port vineyards took place the following year, almost a hundred years before the 1855 classification in Bordeaux.

Port is a fortified wine, made by adding a small amount of grape spirit during the wine making process. It is usually served towards the end of the meal with cheese or chocolate, as a dessert wine or as an ‘after dinner’ drink. Some styles, like white port, can also be enjoyed as an aperitif.

There are many different styles of Port, each with its own special character. The differences are mainly derived from the various ways of ageing the wine, which can mature in cask, vat or bottle.

Some other countries produce Port-style wines but these are not true Port. Only wines made in the Douro Valley, with its special conditions, are genuine Port and have its unique characteristics.

The most famous and respected Port houses – such as Croft, Dow’s, Fonseca, Graham’s, Taylor’s and Warre’s – are very long established firms, some over three centuries old. As with top producers in other wine regions, they are family owned firms in which skills and traditions have been passed down through many generations.

