

Introduction to Vintage Port

Vintage Port is one of the world's great classic wines. In many respects it is the precursor of fine wine as we know it today.

Like the other historic appellations, such as Bordeaux, Burgundy and Champagne, Vintage Port forms the backbone of any serious wine collection. Iconic Vintage Port houses such as Croft, Dow's, Fonseca, Graham's, Taylor's and Warre's are among the most respected in the world of fine wine. Family owned and with histories dating back in many cases to the origins of the Port trade over 300 years ago, they produce among the most highly rated wines in the world.

Rare and of high value, Vintage Port has traditionally been regarded as the wine of the élite, associated with Michelin-starred restaurants, state banquets, London gentlemen's clubs and with the aristocratic and wealthy families which have for generations stocked their cellars with each new Vintage Port release.

Until recently Vintage Port was also closely associated with Britain, which for over two centuries was its most important market (as it is for many fine wines). Today, Vintage Port is purchased by collectors, connoisseurs and investors all over the world, including of course Hong Kong.

Vintage Port from a top Port house is a very rare wine. It represents the very best produce of the firm's own estates and is made only in the best years. Over the last forty years, only three vintages per decade were 'declared' by the top houses. Vintage Port represents less than 2% all Port shipped in the last ten years. The 'declared' vintage of a top Port house generally represents only about half of the production of the *grand vin* of a first growth Bordeaux in a given year.

Wine has been produced in the Douro Valley for nearly 2,000 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.

Vintage Port originated at the end of the 18th century, with the development of the cylindrical glass bottle. Some historians claim that a 1775 Vintage Port was the first vintage wine ever bottled, over a decade before the first vintage Bordeaux. The legendary 1820 was probably the first Vintage Port in the modern sense, bottled without filtration within 2 or 3 years of the harvest.

