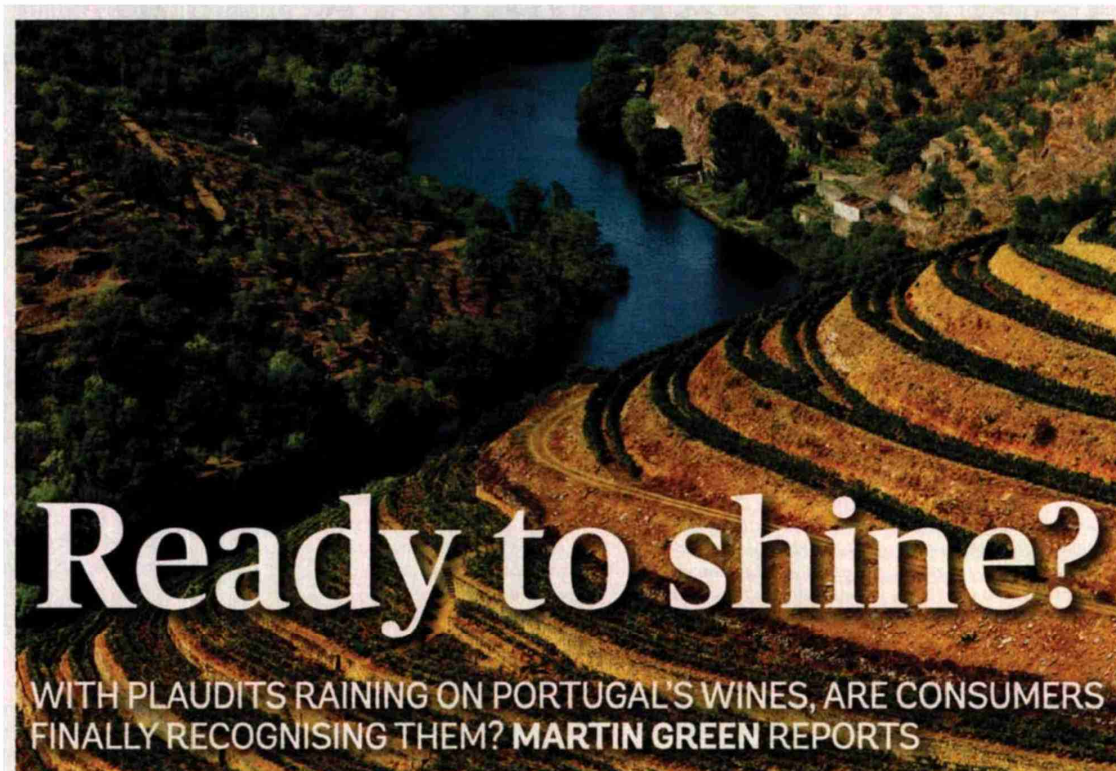


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**P**ortugal has enjoyed a magnificent year in the consumer press and, after many a false dawn, it may finally be set for its time in the sun.

"Despite the accolades, what sells most is Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rioja, New Zealand, California, and way down the list is Portugal," says Nick Oakley, of specialist Iberian importer Oakley Wines. "We see this as potential to tap, which is why we are still very excited about what we are doing. You can't continue to have such praise for Portugal and for it not to translate into sales."

And sales are on the up. Wines of Portugal says it increased exports to the UK by 23% in 2014 after targeting independent wine merchants.

The generic body's boss, Jorge Monteiro, says: "The downturn in the UK has turned into an upturn and we

are confident in this market.

"Sales were in decline here until 2010, but since then they have increased every year. The UK is a very important market to us. British consumers are important and the impact the UK has on other countries is huge.

"We are looking mostly to specialist retailers, independents and online. We are not looking to the big chains.

"We are working closely with retailers, where they can hold a tasting for their favourite customers and we will provide the wine. It helps retailers to sell wine and engage with customers better. Portugal is all about hand-selling.

"We don't want to see shelves full of Portuguese wines, but to see Portuguese wines at the top prices. The praise we are getting will turn into sales."

Regions such as Dão, Douro and Vinho Verde are finally starting to become more familiar names and suppliers are reporting a strong performance across a range of channels.

JP Ramos sales manager Roque Cunha Ferreira says: "All our brands performed well in the UK in 2014, with not only an increase in sales but also the listing of several new ranges in multiples and specialist wine shops.

"We are seeing a tendency of trading up by several of our customers which, in our opinion, reflects positive proof of the growing awareness of the category.

"A combination of reasons has led to an increase in UK sales but, in particular, general recognition by the press of the quality and competitiveness of Portuguese wines, its uniqueness in terms of terroirs and grape varieties and its

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remarkable potential regarding the

production of a myriad wines and styles, which demonstrate well the characteristics of each region."

Sogrape is seeking to build on UK success by launching Casa Ferreirinha Reserva Especial 2007, a super-premium Douro red, and revamping its Mateus Rosé.

Matt Douglas, managing director at Sogrape UK, says: "Along with taste, we recognise that modern wine consumers are interested in the colour of their preferred rosé and we want to give them what they want."

While non-fortified wine sales are soaring, Monteiro admits that port is struggling. "Younger consumers prefer other drinks that are easier to understand," he says.

But Adrian Bridge, chief executive of the Fladgate Partnership that owns the Taylor's, Croft and Fonseca brands, believes port has a bright future in the UK.

He says: "The UK has had some challenges early in the year as

a result of the election and the uncertainty of the outcome, but for the year to date our brands are all up, all showing strength.

"There has been a great interest in aged tawnies and aged single harvest port. In the specialist arena we are seeing growth."

Nielsen data to May 2015 shows that standard ruby port is down 36% in the UK, but premium ruby is up 8% and aged tawny is up 1%.

"We don't sell commodity end port and we may be taking share from some of our competitors," says Bridge, whose Taylor's brand increased its share of the category by 1% over the past year (Nielsen).

Sandeman is also exploiting the trend towards premium, rare port by launching a limited edition 2013 Single Quinta.

From the Douro to Vinho Verde, Portugal has excellent raw materials and its increasingly skilled producers are becoming more adept at turning them into wines suitable for export, and they all recognise how important the UK is.

Oakley says: "It has been said in the press that Portugal is going to be the next big thing for 25 years, and it never ever has. But Dão, Douro and Vinho Verde have gained traction very strongly."

Ferreira adds: "Praise in the consumer press will translate into sales. We do believe this message is now finally coming through and showing results in terms of sales and growth." 🍷



**There has been a great interest in aged tawnies. We are seeing growth in the specialist arena**