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wines in the city

with Stephen Barrett

AT A RECENT Tuesday Night Wine Tasting Club we looked at the red wines from Portugal. Essentially red wines are the mainstay of both Iberian countries so how do they fair tasting against each other?

This tasting was eagerly attended by persons wishing to glean more about red wines from Portugal as they felt that they might not be as easily available compared to Spanish reds.

So on with the tasting and an opener about the wine regions in Portugal. While most of the tasters knew of wines from Spain's Rioja, little was known about any Portuguese wine region by name. This was a great starting point for me as host, allowing simple illustrations of the importance of geography and rivers that make up the regions we were to taste.

We start with Tejo, a region also known as Ribatejo, a winding bit of countryside meandering up the river Tagus into the heat of the Portuguese hinterland.

The river Tagus (Tejo in Portuguese) is a most important river in Portugal, providing hydro electric power, drinking water and a calmer sub-climate in what can be blisteringly hot in the summer months.

Soils in Tejo are mixed but mainly alluvial with outcrops of sand and towards the estuary of Lisbon clay is found. These varied soils allow for different grape production and management.

So armed with this info, we go headlong into the tasting. And start with a couple of sound commercial reds (tinta), namely Tagus Creek Cabernet/Arogonéz 2012 (widely available) but this sample is showing some bottle age and hopefully some character?

So what is Arogonéz and why blend it with Cabernet? First Arogonéz is another name for Tinta Roriz (in the Douro district) and Tempranillo in Spain. Yes, you have heard of this grape but to keep with the Portuguese style of wine the team at Tagus Creek have blended it with Cabernet to encourage you to taste its stylistic character and if you like it maybe move on to another Portuguese wine with the same grape?

Black fruits dominated but with a gentle note of age Tagus Creek had managed a supple easy-drinking style. Next a Tagus Creek Shiraz/Trincadeira 2011 (Tejo), again another Portuguese varietal blended with Shiraz. Trincadeira (on its own) is a spicy grape often tasting of a savoury or smoked ham note but blended with the more powerful Shiraz it became a foil to the power and depth Shiraz can often show. Again some bottle age had softened the wine into an easy quaffer. Try with smoked ham to see what I mean.

On to E'Oz - Touriga Nacional/Alfrocheiro/ Jaen

2013 from the land-locked district of Dao. Starting with Touriga Nacional, often known as Portugal's best red grape and compared to Cabernet Sauvignon. Like Cabernet, it has the character of Cassis often with silky tannins.

Next Alfrocheiro a true juicy-styled grape offering a dollop of acidity – good for blends!

Lastly Jaen, a varietal offering a perfumed structure not unlike Petit Verdot from Bordeaux. This blend too was very reminiscent of a quality Bordeaux with a short time in oak giving the wine excellent structure and drinking well young.

Last Portuguese wine tasted was Vino Tinto Tercilas Touriga Nacional 2011 from Tejo. This showed a different quality and style as the classic black fruits oozed in to the bouquet and taste. One to search out for on your vinous wine forays, I think! Match with juicy beef dishes for a great combination.

So it's off to the wine shop to search out these excellent rustic-styled reds. Remembering they often like a couple of years bottle age to meld the flavours together. Value for money and excellent with food they might just be your new-found Christmas wine?

Stephen Barrett is a Wine, Food and Travel Writer based in Plymouth.

