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# Decanter

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# Douro new releases

Snap up these 2012 reds and 2013 whites for now or for the cellar. They show great intensity allied to real freshness, elegance and sense of place, says Sarah Ahmed



PITY THE VINTAGE which follows on from an ecstatically acclaimed year like 2011. It's undeniable: 2012 Douro reds cannot match the stature of 2011s, neither in fruit or tannin power nor, in all probability, in longevity. But it would be a mistake to overlook this charming vintage where, trust me, 'charming' is not

shorthand for lightweight, à la lunchtime claret.

This popular euphemism might fairly have been applied to 2010 Douro reds but, while approachable like the '10s, the 2012s are more concentrated thanks to low yields of small-berried fruit in this dry year. And while a mild summer meant that '12s are spicy and fresh like 2008s, '12s have riper tannins. So what 2011 and 2012 do share is a delicious intensity born of precipitous sites, lean soils and low yields.

This intensity is particularly striking where, like many of the recommendations to follow, wines are sourced from the Douro's old field-blend (varietally mixed) vineyards. They are hotbeds of local talent – not just the top five (Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barocca, Tinta Cão), but another 30 or more native grapes which bring a wild forest-fruit character to the Douro's old-vine blends.

There is a genuine advantage over the 2011s too, which lies in the sheer detail already apparent in 2012's elegant, mineral-sluiced reds. For table wines these qualities are increasingly treasured over the full-throttle power which this hot, dry region can so capably deliver, vintage Port being the ultimate case in point.

This about-turn is perhaps most evident at Niepoort, which aptly named its full-bodied first (unreleased) 1990 red Robustus. It's an excellent wine, like a top Hermitage Syrah. But, these days – and especially in a year like 2012 – Niepoort's Turrís 2012 shows how the Douro's individual brand of charisma can be bottled to compelling effect.

*'2012's elegant, mineral-sluiced reds are increasingly treasured over the full-throttle power which this hot, dry region can so capably deliver'*

Verging on austere, Turrís is at the far end of the spectrum for the Douro's growing number of elegant reds. However, full-bodied, single-site reds such as Quinta do Vale D Maria's Curriculum Vitae or Quinta do Passadouro's Reserva mop up oak with ease and, despite the muscle, retain remarkable balance and terroir expression in 2012.

These days you don't have to break the bank to taste the Douro's unique florality, minerality and wild fruits – or site expression. In 2012, even entry-level estate wines show delicious detail and character. For a little over £10, Quinta do Vallado's fresh, mineral red captures the coolest of the Douro's three sub-regions (Baixo Corgo) while Altano's svelte, chocolatey Quinta de Ataíde showcases its warmest (Douro Superior). In the middle, the Cima Corgo sub-region offers the best of both worlds, though it's hard to beat the consistency of the Douro Superior's super-fine tannins.

For the Douro's relatively new (and less numerous) breed of white wines it is harder to generalise. However, mineral and vegetal notes characterise the region's leading grapes (predominantly Rabigato, Viosinho, Códèga and Gouveio). So this is not a region for fruit-driven styles, especially with the new 2013 releases. After high summer temperatures, savvy producers picked early to safeguard acidity and all three whites here show wonderful freshness. New oak brings greater thrust and dimension (Conceito), while old oak (Niepoort) makes for greater limpidity.

Freshness is also an exciting attribute of the 2012 reds – and one which winemakers anticipate will help these broachable wines age well, making it a versatile vintage. But more importantly, where leading winemakers strive better to portray the Douro's thrillingly multi-faceted terroir every year, 2012 is a gift. To them and to us.

*Sarah Ahmed is the DWWA Regional Chair for Portugal*

*These wines were the best of those tasted, non-blind, in the region, in December 2014*

*For full details of UK stockists, see p115*

## Ahmed's top 18 to try



**Wine & Soul, Guru, Cima Corgo 2013** 19 (96)

£28 Corney & Barrow, Fortnum & Mason, Vin Cognito  
Uber-taut with flinty cordite, lime peel, pith and oil and smoked hazelnut. A racy, mineral wine with exceptional purity, line and length.  
**Drink** 2015-2021 **Alcohol** 12.5%



**Conceito, Branco, Douro Superior 2013** 18.5 (95)

£33 D Byrne & Co, Define Food & Wine  
Classy French oak to the fore but intense fresh lemon, lemon oil and salty, piquant minerality take the breath away. Wonderful concentration, freshness and length. **Drink** 2015-2021 **Alc** 13%



**Niepoort, Tiara, Cima Corgo 2013** 17.5 (91)

£25 Bottle Apostle, Corks of Cotham, Fortnum & Mason, Highbury Vintners, Wadebridge Wines  
Saline with a fresh cucumber and celery salt lift. The shapely, vegetal palate is teased out by lingering, pebbly acidity. **Drink** 2015-2021 **Alc** 12.5%



**Niepoort, Turris, Cima Corgo 2012** 19.5 (98)

£120 Bottle Apostle, Corks of Cotham, Fortnum & Mason, Highbury Vintners, Wadebridge Wines  
130-year-old vines aged in 80-year-old, 1,000-litre foudres. Exceptional intensity and singularity. Crunchy, peppery, mineral and forest-floor red fruit and bony tannins. **Drink 2015-2028 Alc 13%**



**Quinta do Passadouro, Reserva, Cima Corgo 2012** 19 (96)

£42.85 (2011) The Wine Society  
Beguiling floral and coriander seed lift with deep-seated blackcurrant and cherry fruit, chiselled minerals and firm but fine tannins. Iron first, velvet glove. **Drink 2016-2027 Alc 14.5%**



**Quinta do Vale D Maria, Curriculum Vitae, Cima Corgo 2012** 19 (96)

£51.45 Corney & Barrow  
Powerful but polished with a terrific slow burn delivery of oak-mopping blackcurrant and wild berry fruit. Pithy, mineral tannins lend gravitas. **Drink 2017-2028 Alc 14.5%**



**Poeira, Cima Corgo 2012** 19 (96)

£34.50 Woodwinters  
Elegantly perfumed with structured tannins and minerality to the fore; tightly wound, spicy blackcurrant and forest fruit brooding with potential. **Drink 2017-2028 Alc 14%**



**Churchill's Estates, Quinta da Gricha, Cima Corgo 2012** 18.5 (95)

£34.26 Christopher Piper, New Generation Wines  
Characterful, structured, single-estate red with savoury, sinewy old-vine tannins, floral lift and spicy, concentrated but juicy, coal-edged black fruits. **Drink 2016-2028 Alc 14%**



**Niepoort, Charme, Cima Corgo 2012** 18.5 (95)

£66 Bottle Apostle, Corks of Cotham, Fortnum & Mason, Highbury Vintners, Wadebridge Wines, Woodwinters  
Tight, well-defined, crunchy red fruits with subtle plum-skin tartness and pronounced minerality. Fluid tannins accentuate the fine, long finish. **Drink 2015-2026 Alc 14%**



**Prats & Symington, Chryseia, Cima Corgo 2012** 18.5 (95)

£50-£55 Berry Bros & Rudd, Fortnum & Mason, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, The Wine Society  
Poised and very classy with spicy, bright, very persistent red and black fruits, ultra-fine tannins, mineral acidity and perfumed oak. **Drink 2015-2026 Alc 14%**



**Quinta do Crasto, Tinta Roriz, Cima Corgo 2012** 18.5 (95)

£37-£42.50 Berry Bros & Rudd, Great Western Wine  
Lovely purity, saturation and length of cinnamon-kissed succulent damson and blackberry fruit. Very firm but fine mineral tannins bode well for ageing. **Drink 2017-2026 Alc 14.5%**



**Quinta do Vale Meão, Douro Superior 2012** 18.5 (95)

£70-£75 Corks of Cotham, D Byrne, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Highbury Vintners, Lockett Bros, Uncorked, Woodwinters  
Velvety rich bergamot and woodsmoke-edged blackberry, fine powdery tannins and mineral-sluiced acidity. **Drink 2015-2026 Alc 14%**



**Quinta de la Rosa, Reserva, Cima Corgo 2012** 18 (93)

£34.95 (2011) Hedonism, Huntsbridge, The Good Wine Shop, Woodwinters  
Vivid, well-defined blackcurrant and blackberry fruit, toasty oak and crushed coriander seed spice. Ripe, coolly present tannins bring length and refinement. **Drink 2015-2023 Alc 14%**



**Casa Ferreirinha, Quinta da Leda, Douro Superior 2012** 17.5 (91)

£35 (2009) Hedonism  
Juicily persistent, mineral and spicy blackcurrant and berry fruit with bergamot lift and sooty, fine tannins. Very refined and elegant. **Drink 2015-2023 Alc 14%**



**João Nicolau d'Almeida & Filhos, Quinta do Monte Xisto, Douro Superior 2012** 17.5 (91)

£70 Prestige Wines Portugal  
A finely honed, elegant, food-friendly red with spicily persistent blackcurrant and violet notes, schistous minerality and seamless tannins. Stylish. **Drink 2015-2021 Alc 13.5%**



**Quinta do Crasto, Reserva Old Vines, Cima Corgo 2012** 17.5 (91)

£19.95 Great Western Wine, Hedonism  
Always great bang for your buck: sweet oak, floral lift, lashings of blackcurrant, juicy plum and crushed berry fruit. Long fine tannins and rolling acidity. **Drink 2015-2023 Alc 14.5%**



**Altano, Quinta de Ataíde Organic, Douro Superior 2012** 17 (90)

£9.99-£12 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Davy & Co, Fenwicks, TJ Wines, Waitrose  
Rich plum and juicy satsuma with garrigue, dark chocolate, salty minerality and velvety tannins. Svelte and satisfying. **Drink 2015-2018 Alc 13.5%**



**Quinta do Vallado, Baixo Corgo 2012** 17 (90)

£12.99 Cru, Latitude Wine  
Thoroughly charming, characterful entry-level red with inky florals, vibrant cherry fruit, persistent acidity, silky tannins and schistous minerality. **Drink 2015-2017 Alc 13.5%**