

Quinta do Feital

Spain's Most Famous White Grape Finds its Paradise

Galicia's *Rias Baixas* has become synonymous with great Albariño—producing wines of compelling fruit and fragrance from this distinctive grape. Most of the top versions come from vineyards lining the Minho river.

Yet, some of the best and oldest Albariño vineyards are actually in Portugal, directly across the river from Spain. So, when the young Gallego winemaker, Marcial Dorado, set out to make the finest Albariño of all, he crossed the river. Overlooking the town of Melgaço, he had discovered a 70-year-old Albariño vineyard, the likes of which he couldn't find in Spain.

He purchased the vineyard, naming it Quinta do Dorado. Marcial



had carefully observed the practices at Rias Baixas wineries he admired, and he adapted those lessons to his new estate.

Improving on Nature

Marcial's zealous pursuit of excellence would astonish most Galicians. For starters, Marcial limited yields and insisted on hand harvesting. As the grapes are harvested, they are first sorted in the vineyards, and then on a triage table—with all unhealthy bunches discarded. The renovated winery is entirely gravity fed—anything to keep oxygen away from the grapes. This meticulous pursuit of pristine fruit is critical, as Marcial's wines diverge from "typical" in several ways. The first way, of course, is the sheer concentration produced by low-yielding, old vines. And, unlike many Rias Baixas producers, Marcial ferments only with indigenous yeasts and uses no enzymes for clarification. In addition, he has adopted a couple of techniques common to

Burgundy's best white wine specialists: partial malolactic fermentation and extensive stirring of the lees.

There is plenty of fresh acidity in Marcial's fruit, and the malolactic



Quinta do Dorado

fermentation steals very little of it while enhancing the wine's texture. Lees-stirring provides additional aromatic complexity and a sense of depth on the palate.



A Second Path

In 2002, Marcial purchased a second estate, at Seixas on the mouth of the Minho river. The climate is warmer here than in Melgaço, but the site lies on a rare outcropping of schist. Vinho Verde's traditional Trajadura is planted along with Alvarinho, and yields wines with vivid acidity and minerality.

Marcial believes that the maturing vines will one day give him a true "grand cru." In the meantime, this fruit is used in a world-beating, value-priced Alvarinho blend called Auratus.

Alvarinho Superior "Dorado"

Dorado has the compelling floral aromatics of the best Rias Baixas Albariños but, it offers even more authority. Furthermore, it has shown an ability to age that none of today's Rias Baixas wines can match.

Alvarinho/Trajadura "Auratus"

Fresh and crisp, this wine embarrasses most inexpensive Rias Basixas wines in blind tastings. It's magical when pared with almost any simple seafood dish. An incredible value.

QUINTA DO FEITAL

Vinho Verde, Portugal

OVERVIEW

Established: 1999

First Vintage: 2000

Proprietor: Marcial Dorado

Winemaker: Marcial Dorado

Marcial had a goal to make the finest Albarino in Galicia, and searched for an old vineyard with which to work. He couldn't find the old vines he wanted in Galicia, but did find several old-vine vineyards immediately across the Minho River, in Portugal. He finally purchased a vineyard near Melgaço, in 2000.

In 2002, Marcial purchased a new vineyard in Seixas near the mouth of the Minho river. Marcial believes this vineyard, with its rare outcropping of schist, holds great potential. He has planted Alvarinho vines on many of the terraces to supplement the estate's old Trajadura. The resulting wine, Auratus, shows intense minerality, surprising fruit density, and racy acidity.

DORADO VINEYARD

Soils: Hillsides with sand and clay

Appellation: Alvarinho Superior

Vineyards: Alvarinho vines up to 70 years old, with some ungrafted.

FEITAL VINEYARD

Soils: Steep amphitheatre with schist and clay.

Appellation: Vinho Regional Minho

Vineyard: 60% Alvarinho / 40% Trajadura. 75% replanted in 1999. 25% old vines.

WINEMAKING NOTES

Marcial employs strict selections for both wines. Dorado spends a year on the lees for extra richness and aromatic complexity. Some parcels go through Malolactic fermentation, depending on the "quality" of the vintage's acidity.

Marcial uses only indigenous yeasts, and refuses to use enzyme treatments.

Viticulture is *lutte raisonnée* ("reasoned path"), with a leaning towards biodynamics.

Vintage Notes

2009 – With a warm summer, and tricky rains, this was a year that required fastidious viticulture. The top wines (like Feital's) rival the 07s and 08s.

2008 – Nearly a carbon copy of 2007, 2008 yielded vibrant, pure wines.

2007 – A vintage of fresh, clean, expressive wines.

2006 – A difficult vintage requiring fastidious vineyard work and careful selection of fruit.

2005 – A virtual replay of the great 2004 vintage.

2004 – A spectacular vintage. The wines have richness and tremendous aromatic development.

THE WINES

Alvarinho Superior "Dorado"

Fruit Source: Several parcels of 30- to 70-year-old Alvarinho near Melgaço.

Avg. Yields: 33 hl/ha

Blend: 100% Alvarinho (Albarino)

Oak Aging: none

Avg. Production: 4,500 cases.

Vinho Regional Minho "Auratus"

Fruit Source: Alvarinho and Trajadura from the Feital and Dorado estates.

Avg. Yields: ~45 hl/ha

Blend: 60% Alvarinho / 50% Trajadura

Oak Aging: none

Avg. Production: 7,000 cases.