

D'Oliveira

Majestic Old Madeiras from a Legendary House

D'Oliveira is one of the greatest of the classic Madeira shippers, and one of the few to survive from the pre-phylloxera era. With origins as far back as 1820, and today housed in cellars that date from 1619, this highly important company is still owned by the same family, who were once highly important growers in the parish of São Martinho.

Its stocks of old wines have grown over time, either through marriage with other wine-producing families, or by the purchase of other old firms. But the foundation for its unparalleled library of ancient vintages was laid more than 150 years ago in the legendary São Martinho vineyards of João Pereira D'Oliveira, the great grandfather of the current managing director, Luis D'Oliveira.

João Pereira was particularly well known for his Verdelhos, building on São Martinho's reputation for this noble grape. The village's Verdelhos have long enjoyed a high reputation; in 1896, the New York Madeira merchant Charles Bellows singled out São Martinho Verdelhos from the others on the island for their "wonderful perfume."

ANCIENT WINES

Today, no other company on the island can boast such a wealth of great old Madeiras. These include five monumental Verdelhos from the family's own São Martinho vineyards, vintaged in 1850, 1890, 1900, 1905 and 1912. There are no finer examples of mature Verdelho in existence today.

Digging into the D'Oliveira's library, we can also find profound Malvasias (aka Malmseys) from 1875, 1895, 1900, 1901 and 1907; Buals from 1903, 1908 and 1922; and Sercials from 1862, 1875, 1928 and 1937.

The family also boasts superb examples of two very rare grape varieties: Terrantez (1880) and



D'Oliveira's 1619 lodge on the Rua dos Ferreiros

Moscatel (1875 and 1900).

And thanks to a recent change in the island's wine laws, it is now possible for D'Oliveira to offer for sale Tinta Negras from 1929, at three levels of sweetness: dry, medium sweet and sweet. Like D'Oliveira's other old *frasqueiras*, these wines are truly profound.

IMMENSELY POWERFUL WINES

Over the years, it has been our privilege to take part in many comprehensive tastings of D'Oliveira vintages. There is a definite "house style" to these wines. They have very powerful aromatics, great lushness and viscosity, incredible structure, and a tangy character that is essential to great Madeira.

It's no wonder that others in the Madeira trade consider these to be supreme examples of classic Madeira. In fact, during the 1970's and 1980's, when the Madeira Wine Co. (Blandy's, Cossart, etc.) was beginning to run low on old vintages to sell, it was to D'Oliveira that they turned.

Like Barbeito, D'Oliveira believes that Madeiras age best in cask. Consequently, its old vintages are kept in wood, and only enough is bottled to meet short-term needs.

MORE RECENT VINTAGES

While D'Oliveira has an unparalleled library of ancient Madeiras, it also possesses one of the most impressive stocks of relatively young vintage-dated wines. These include both *frasqueiras* and *colheitas*, the difference being time in wood. (*Frasqueiras* require 20 years in wood; *colheitas* require only five.)

As of 2017, the firm had available for sale 20 different vintage-dated Madeiras made over the past quarter century. Such stocks reassure us that, 50 years from now, just as today, d'Oliveira will be the reference point for aged Madeira.

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The History of an Island Jewel

Of all the Madeira wine shippers that survive today, perhaps only the Madeira Wine Company has as rich a history as the firm of Pereira D'Oliveira.

The original company, João Pereira D'Oliveira & Filhos, was founded in the 1880s by a major landowner and grower in São Martinho, João Pereira D'Oliveira. But early in the next century, D'Oliveira began to grow through marriage and by acquiring other companies.

The first expansion came in the early 1930s, when João Pereira's grandson, Agostinho, married into the Camacho family, adding the assets of the João Joaquim Camacho & Sons wine exporting firm.

AUGUSTO CUNHA

Some decades before, the Camachos had taken over an important 19th century producer, Julio Augusto Cunha & Sons, founded in 1820 and well-known in the 19th century for its fine vintage wines.

In his 1877 book on Madeira, Henry Vizetelly wrote about Cunha: "Senhor Cunha, who ships principally to England, Germany, and Russia, has a series of particularly fine Verdelhos, ranging from 1857 to 1873; some dry delicate Sercials, more than a quarter of a century old; a rich pungent Bual, already in its thirtieth year ... with a Malmsey something like five-and-twenty years of age, luscious and refined, and beautifully rounded."

For the first time, D'Oliveira purchased another producer in the 1980s, with the acquisition of Vasco Luis Pereira, another wine exporter that occupied a building adjoining Cunha in the center of Funchal. Vasco Luis Pereira had founded his small company in the 1920s, but his son had no interest in continuing in the business when his father died in the early 1980s.



João Pereira D'Oliveira and Family.

ADEGAS DO TORREÃO

And then in the early 2000s, Agostinho's sons, Aníbal and Luis, bought the remains of Adegas Torreão, an important *partidista* located near the historic Hinton Torreão sugar works in Funchal.

The man behind Adegas Torreão was Vasco Loja, who had built Torreão into one of the island's most powerful wine companies, supplying large amounts of wine to the island's remaining shippers. But after his death, his children chose not to continue his work. D'Oliveira purchased the company's Art Deco lodge along with the remaining wine in barrel, including such treasures as a 1971 Terrantez, a 1928 Sercial and Torreão's famous 1927 Bastardo.

D'Oliveira's latest acquisition came in 2013, when it purchased Artur de Barros e Sousa, a small and very traditional producer, next door to D'Oliveira's lodge on the rua dos Ferreiros. As with the purchase of Torreão, Barros e Sousa still had stocks of Madeira in barrel, which D'Oliveira will, with time, bottle and release.

THE MODERN ERA

By any measure, the past fifty years must be considered D'Oliveira's Golden Age. Until the 1970s, the estate didn't export, but was content to sell wine exclusively on the island. The small scale of its business at that time undoubtedly explains why D'Oliveira has such astonishing stocks of old wine today.

But from 1968 on, under the guidance of João Pereira D'Oliveira's great-grandsons, Aníbal and Luis, the firm entered a new era, where it would become world-famous for its great Madeiras.

Sadly, Aníbal D'Oliveira passed away during 2017, leaving his brother Luis and his son Felipe to insure that this would remain one of the world's great family wine businesses.