

Bairrada

In the western part of the Beiras, between the mountainous Dão region and the surf-washed Atlantic beaches, Bairrada has a mild, maritime climate with abundant rainfall.



Although much of the Bairrada region is hilly, the majority of the vineyards are on flatter land. Vineyards are often divided into a multitude of small plots. There are two main types of soil: clay-limestone and sandy, each influencing style of wine.

This is a very important area for sparkling wines. Base wines for sparkling wines need the kind of high acidity that the cool Bairrada climate delivers. Sparkling Bairrada wines may have the fragrance of the Maria Gomes grapes (also known as Fernão Pires), or they may be more steely, based perhaps on Arinto, Bical and Cercial, sometimes with some Chardonnay. There are also 'blancs de noirs' based on quickly-pressed Baga.

Baga is the traditional local red grape. It makes tannic wines that can have high acidity if under-ripe, but if ripened and handled well the Baga can give rich, dense fruity reds that age into elegant wines of great complexity.

Since 2003, a multiplicity of other grapes has been permitted in DOC Bairrada wines – national grapes such as Touriga Nacional and Alfocheiro as well as the international likes of Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Syrah and Merlot.

Red Bairrada these days comes in a bewildering array of styles. Predominant amongst white grapes is the fragrant Maria Gomes, while Arinto, Bical, Cercial e Rabo de Ovelha can be made into steely, long-lived whites.

The Brazilian market

During D.Maria's reign (1734/1816) the wines were largely exported to Brazil, where they were much appreciated. They were also exported to North America, France and England.



Vine growing

In 1137, D.Afonso Henriques approved the growing of vines in the Herdade de Eiras, *under the public road from Vilarinum to Buzaco*. The payment to the crown was just the fourth part of the wine produced.