

BRIAN ELLIOTT

'THERE IS SO MUCH TO ENJOY IN ANY CAREFULLY ASSEMBLED SELECTION OF PORTUGAL'S WINES'



PARADOXICALLY, as sales of Portuguese wines increase – and their quality surges – product rationalisation among big retailers is reducing the number of own-label bottles that supermarkets sell.

However, that does offer real opportunities to independent wine merchants – something not lost on Luvians in St Andrews and Cupar, who were recent prizewinners in a competition to promote Portuguese wines during October.

Given Portugal's range of terroirs and indigenous grape varieties, there is so much to enjoy in any carefully assembled selection of the country's wines. To whet your appetite then, here are just three (from contrasting areas) that Luvians currently offer.

Let's start in port's homeland – the Douro valley. Magnificent red table wines are produced here, despite cool winters and very steep, hard to work vineyards (more than half are on one in three inclines). Try, for example, the 2013 Drink Me Tinto (£11.99) from port producers Niepoort, which delivers



SUN TRAP Alentejo, where the rapid ripening of the grapes ensures richly flavoured wines

dark, nutty wine with minty elderberry fruit, soft tannins, well-judged acidic balance and smooth, mocha-influenced complexity.

A little further south, along the eastern border with Spain, you find the craggy, rural and relatively unknown Beira Interior. The altitude here, and very different day and night time temperatures, give the region's white wines assertively firm and crisp acidity. That is certainly so in 2014 Beyra Branco (£8.99) with its unusual combination of citrus sharpness, sweet-edged, orange-based depth, but a saline – slightly mineral – backdrop.

The pick of the selection for me, however, is the outstanding 2010 Mouchao Ponte das Canas (£17.99) from the hot, sunny Alentejo where conditions produce super ripe grapes that are often fully matured by mid-August. In this particular wine the resulting richness creates a dark, blackcurrant and black cherry-centred flavour bomb with suggestions of vanilla, cinnamon and star anise, good acidity and firm but balanced tannin to complete the picture. □

For regular recommendations on good value wines go to my new website, www.midweekwines.co.uk

BEST BUYS

2011 Corte Mayor Rioja Crianza Spain, 13 per cent

Brilliantly made rioja, which uses natural yeast and (unusually these days) new American oak. The barrel time smooths the wine nicely and adds vanilla touches yet never dims the plum and cherry fruit which merges harmoniously with the wine's minty, spicy touches and astutely judged tannic twist. £6.99, instead of £9.99, until Tuesday at the Co-op



2014 Sainsbury's SO Organic Pinot Grigio Veneto, Italy, 12 per cent

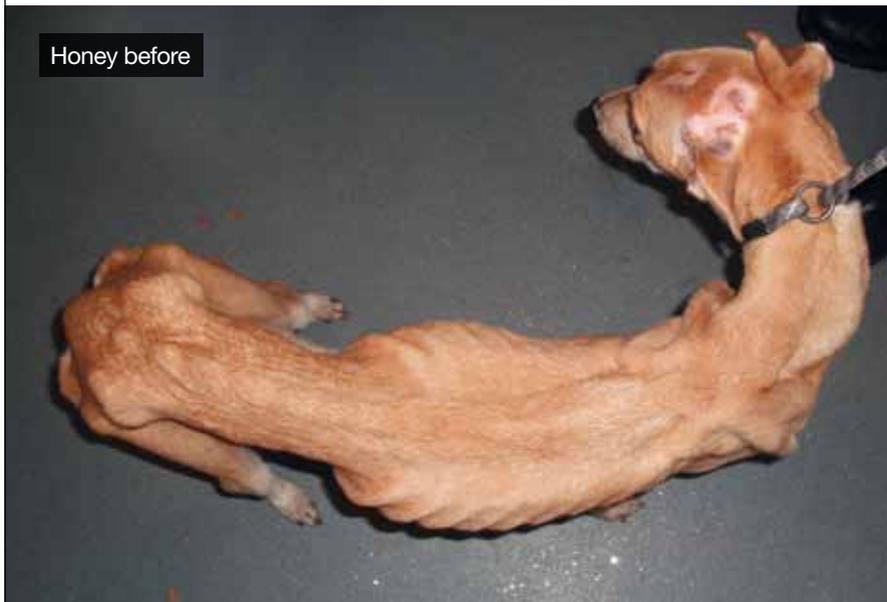
This is a far cry from the bland PG that provides a wine equivalent to lift music. The fresh apple fruit on display here has those floral, clean elements that often characterises organic wine, but is also attractively embellished with crisp acidity, an enticing orange edge and a vaguely nutty background. £6 at Sainsbury's



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