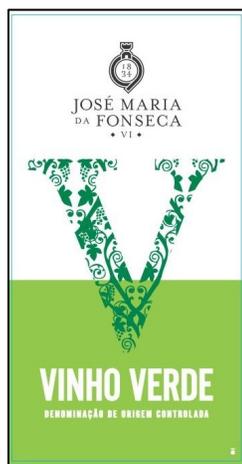


José Maria da Fonseca

Portugal



Back in 2009 we started working with Vincent Bouchard from Quinta do Tedo in the Douro Valley. He was our first producer outside of France, a fact which came about because he was a childhood friend of Jean-Pierre Charlot from Domaine Joseph Voillot in Volnay (JP's father had been the wine buyer for the *négociant* Bouchard Père et Fils back in its heyday). In turn, this led us to consider expanding into Portugal, and an obvious place to begin seemed to be with the plentiful, inexpensive, crowd-pleasing white wine from the cool northern zone of Portugal: Vinho Verde.

Early on, however, it became clear that a lot of Vinho Verde suffers from a lack of good quality control. Still, we went, and learned that almost all of the region's vineyards are piecemeal family plots whose tiny yields go to the local cooperative. We found one coop that actually made a good wine, and the manager seemed to be a keen and competent guy. Except then he took nearly a year to reply to an offer! Time had a different dimension in

this ancient land.

So we gave up. We moved on. Then out of the blue we got a call from a sales manager of José Maria da Fonseca, an august and frightfully large producer in Portugal. Our first reaction was that we only work with family estates, which elicited a rather frosty, *It IS a family estate, currently managed by the 6th and 7th generations*. We replied that our company was tiny and her company was anything but, whereby she candidly said they were not interested in us for their main range but rather for certain "small projects."

We weren't sure how to feel about that. Before we could respond, she said that she would send samples.

The small project was their Vinho Verde. In the vast category of everyday Vinho Verde (traditionally, the only category), this from José Maria da Fonseca was far and wide the best we ever tasted—so much so that it was almost shocking.

They made 10,000 cases a year. Most of this is bought by their Dutch importer and gets belted down in Amsterdam cafés (the clever Dutch; they know a good thing when they see one).

José Maria da Fonseca dates from 1834 (José Maria being the founder). In 1850 he made Portugal's first bottled table wine: Periquita, a wine that is as well known today as it was then. The company farms some 1,600 acres of vineyards, mostly on the Setúbal Peninsula but spread up and down the country, and it makes more than 40 wines. For such a large outfit, it prides itself on its environmental standards (sustainable) and its progressive winemaking (state of the art stainless steel technology side by side with over 100 amphorae for one range of wines). Among the cognoscenti, it is most esteemed for an impressive range of aged Moscatels.

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