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Sponsored profile: Q&A with Joao Prates, NERVIR Association

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Soul Wines is an innovative new initiative bringing together traditional Douro producing families to give them greater visibility on the international market. Joao Prates explains the big idea

What is Soul Wines and what are the ambitions of the Project?

Soul Wines is an umbrella brand concept, bringing together several producers, almost all coming from traditional Douro families, Douro and Port wine producers. The project is co-financed with Portugal 2020 and promoted by NERVIR - Associação Empresarial, a Douro Valley business association, which over the years has developed events in several foreign markets to promote the Douro and Port wines of its associates. We are coming to the UK for the first time on 29 October with a tasting of 13 of our producers, and masterclasses hosted by Dr Jamie Goode (Douro Wines) and Peter McCombie MW.

Who are the Soul Wines producers?

They are traditional Douro families that for generations have produced some of the best grapes and wines of the region, which were then sold to port wine exporting companies. Until 1986 they were not allowed to age and market Port Wine from the Douro Region. From 1986, with the creation of the Bonded Area, or Entrepoto of the Douro, this became possible and these producers began an entire process of production, ageing and bottling of Port and Douro wines, with their own brands. All the Soul producers have wines and brands that are already on the domestic and international market. The Soul Wine project helps them to gain more visibility.

What criteria does a winery have to fulfil to be a member of Soul Wines?

The members must be Port or Douro wine producers and fulfil a certain number of requirements, including legal requirements such as industrial licensing and financial autonomy, for example.

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The producer chooses the markets in which he wants to participate, according to his international commercial strategy and selects activities accordingly. Not all producers are present in all markets where there are Soul Wines promotions taking place.

Is it open to other wineries?

The Soul Wines project is open to all Douro and Port wine producers.

Why the UK market?

The UK market is an important market. It's a country that produces only a small amount of wine, so it's normal to buy from its traditional suppliers. Portugal has been supplying wines to the English market since 1373, so for more than 600 years, and Port wine is particularly important as a reference wine in the English market.

What is the main message you want to relay to the UK market about these producers and the region?

The Douro Region was the first demarcated region in the world for the production of Port Wine. However, Douro wines are more recent, and the market tends to be dominated by known wine brands and large companies.

The fact is that the traditional Douro families who now produce their own Port and Douro wines are preserving the tradition and expertise, and also introducing the latest technology and a new generation of oenologists, who tend to be from within the family too.

What are the main characteristics of the wineries within the project, and what is the synergy between them?

All of the Soul Wines wineries are family businesses; they are the youngest generation of traditional Douro families, with new ideas and concepts about making wine... and they know each other, they exchange experiences and knowledge, and they are brought together in the Soul Wines Project to promote their wines abroad.

How many of the wineries are producing Port wines?

From the wineries that are going to present their wines in London, six of them have Port wines; and these wineries offer a range from the youngest regular Tawny, White and Ruby to aged Tawnies.

As the UK is known to be a Ruby Port market how do you see White, Tawny & Rose Ports gaining popularity in this market?

It's a fact that the UK market is known as a Ruby Port market, but things are changing. For instance in 2016 exports of white Port to the UK increased by 38%, according to the IVDP – the regulatory body that oversees the production of Port. It's true that white Port only represents a very small amount of the overall market, but it's nevertheless exciting to see a non-traditional category emerging like this.

You are organising a tasting on 29 October to find distributors. Will the campaign be on-going?

Yes that is our hope!

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