

# Barbeito

## *Fabulous 19th- and Early 20th-Century Madeiras*

*It is ironic* that among major producers of Madeira, the *youngest* firm has the most impressive stock of *very old* wines not only on the island of Madeira, but in the world.

Vinhos Barbeito was founded just 53 years ago, in 1946, by Mario Barbeito de Vasconcelos, a wealthy businessman. The firm's incredible range of old vintages today is due to his foresight, since in the 1940's and 1950's Barbeito de Vasconcelos went around the island buying up large quantities of privately owned wine, some of it dating back to the 18th century. These old wines became the foundation for one of the world's most unique wine libraries.

### **The Sources for Barbeito's Treasures**

Barbeito de Vasconcelos bought his wines from small growers who had stocks of old, high quality wine set aside for a rainy day, as well as from old families who had put aside great vintages for future generations. Included among these purchases were some of Madeira's greatest wines, from the island's most important growing areas, including Cama do Lobos, Sao Martinho, Campanario, Canico and Ribera Brava. Included among Barbeito's prizes was the fabulous, and famous, 1795 Terrantez that belonged to the Hinton-Welsh family.



Mario Barbeito de Vasconcelos' house in Funchal. Many of his old wines were cellared here, including the 1900 Malvasia.

### **Preserved in Cask**

*"We are fortunate that the old shippers and growers reserved their best vintages as a 'nest egg' or an investment against emergencies. They just kept them in wood, locked away, rarely drinking them except for a wedding or an anniversary, selling them only when they were hard up. There was certainly a loss from evaporation, calculated at two per cent per annum but, on the other hand, this ullage was far surpassed by the gain in quality."*

*Noel Cossart, Madeira: The Island Vineyard*

At the time Barbeito acquired them, these wines were virtually all still in cask, a traditional practice in Madeira, where 50 to 100 years or more in wood is mandatory for the very greatest wines. The long, slow oxidative process in cask adds to the wine's complexity. And though very costly to the owner, the evaporation in barrel concentrates the flavor and extract.

Since Mario Barbeito de Vasconcelos' death in the 1980's, Barbeito has continued to keep its old wine in 600-liter French barrels, only bottling enough to meet its needs for the next two years.

Along with D'Oliveira, Barbeito today represents the finest source for old Madeiras, not only on the island, but in the world.

# The Wines of Barbeito

## 1834 Barbeito Malvasia

Steve Tanzer: "93 rating. Amber-bronze ... suave and well-knit, with gentle acidity. Has a superb core of fresh fruit and lovely delicacy ... Very long and smooth on the back end."

## 1863 Barbeito Bual

Steve Tanzer: "94 rating (this has a rather high 4.8% residual sugar, well into the Malmsey range) High-toned, extremely aromatic nose of caramel apple. Piercing appley acidity gives this firm, very rich wine perfect balance and razor-sharp definition..."

## 1875 Barbeito Malvasia

Wine Spectator: "94 rating. Lovely concentration and richness, like drinking velvet. This has great balance, freshness and subtle length."

## 1900 Barbeito Malvasia

Wine Spectator: "97 rating. Very high-toned and complex bouquet, with resinous, treacle-like, smoky notes. Surprisingly dry, given the deep coffee-like color and concentrated aromas, with fine, racy acidity and walnut flavors augmented by treacle and a slight burnt quality. Has finesse, length and intensity."

## 1901 Barbeito Malvasia

Steve Tanzer: "92(+)" rating. Amber-bronze color ... Lovely, subtle vanilla and spice notes in the mouth; the gentle flavors build to a crescendo. An elegant, silky, understated wine ... really communicates the essence of Madeira. This seemed to put on weight with aeration."

## 1910 Barbeito Sercial

Wine Spectator: "94 rating. Rich, almost lush bouquet of caramel and green tea with a salt tang. Fills the mouth with a velvety texture and flavors ranging from caramel to walnuts, finishing with a tangy acidity that cleanses and refreshes the palate. Like a ballerina."

## 1910 Barbeito Bual

Wine Spectator: "91 rating ... chocolate and spices, all presented with fine underlying structure."

## 1916 Barbeito Malvasia

In his *Great Vintage Wine Book*, Michael Broadbent called 1916 "an excellent year for Malmsey." Barbeito's 1916 offers mouthfilling richness, a velvety texture, luscious chocolate and coffee flavors, and marvelous acidity.

## 1926 Barbeito Verdelho

A wonderfully dense, rich, moderately sweet Verdelho, balanced by brisk acidity.

## 1929 Barbeito Verdelho

Wine Spectator: "92 rating. Shows a combination of elegance and power; delivering aromas of wet earth, black tea and a slightly burnt note."

## 1948 Barbeito Malvasia

Wine Spectator: "95 rating. The bouquet changed dramatically on this wine. A streak of bittersweet chocolate or cocoa led to a beefy and eventually sweaty animal note, followed by rich caramel and plum flavors. Velvety in texture, until the tangy finish rushed in like the surf. Mouthwatering finish, with a complex aftertaste. Fascinating."

## 1949 Barbeito Malvasia

A small quantity of rich, luscious, aromatic Malmsey was released this year for 50th birthday and anniversary celebrations.

## 1954 Barbeito Malvasia

Wine Spectator: "93 rating. Though not forthcoming in aroma, displaying butter-scotch and hints of herbs, this has a seamless integration of components on the palate, balanced and harmonious, with vibrant acidity weaving throughout. Long finish, adding just a hint of dryness at the end. Gentle, but with inner strength."

## 1957 Barbeito Bual

Alex Liddell: "★★. Medium tawny; modest but delicate bouquet, with harmonious volatility; quite rich, nutty, full palate with adequate acidity ... Needs further development."

## 1960 Barbeito Bual

Already showing remarkable roundness, despite its "youth."