



Port Wine Crash Course

Tawny, the wood port with a leathery color, is the most typical version. It's older, lighter, mellower, and more complex than L.B.V. (described later). It's aged in smaller barrels, maximizing exposure to wood and giving it a nuttier flavor. Tawny port stays in the barrel for 10, 20, 30, or 40 years. But to enhance the complexity of the flavor, any tawny is actually a blend of several vintages (for example, a "30-year-old tawny" is predominantly 30 years old, but also has components that are 10 or 20 years old). Once blended, the various ports "marry" in the bottle for about eight months.

Inexpensive **ruby port** ages in oak vats for only three years, and then it's bottled. It's deep red, fruity, and has a strong, fiery taste of grape and pepper.

Vintage port—the most expensive—is a ruby that comes from a single harvest. Only wine from the very best vintages is

Sandeman, the most high-profile company, is the Budweiser of port. They were the first port producer to create a logo, which you'll see everywhere: a mysterious man wearing a black cloak (representing a Portuguese student's cape) and a rakish *Shadow* hat (worn by Spanish horse-riders, symbolizing the sherry that Sandeman makes in Jerez). Sandeman provides the most corporate, mainstream, accessible experience for first-timers—with a short walk led by a caped guide, a 10-minute video, and two tastings. It's also the most crowded, often giving times for you to return or sending you to their sister manufacturers. It's exciting to think that the entire Portuguese production of Sandeman Port ages right in this building (€17 basic visit, €25 for 1.5-hour tour with 5 tastes; daily 10:00-13:00 & 14:00-18:00; faces its own little square with tables and bar service along the riverfront at Largo Miguel Bombarda 3, +351 223 740 533, www.sandeman.com).



Cálem, the first place you see after crossing the bridge, offers a fine tour wandering among its huge oak casks (€14 includes 2 samples, 25-minute tours in English depart about every hour, April-Oct daily 10:00-19:00, off-season fewer tours and closes at 18:00, +351 916 113 451, www.calem.pt). They also offer 45-minute fado shows that include a port tasting (€23, daily at 19:00, reservations required)—a handy and entertaining alternative if you show up just after most of the lodges have closed.

Taylor's—near the top of the hill—is a good choice for more discriminating tastes. It's classy and more time-consuming than the options down on the riverbank and comes with stunning views back on Porto. You'll follow a one-hour audioguide through the sprawling complex, including modern museum exhibits, and end with two tastings—which you can enjoy with the grand views (€15, daily 12:00-20:00, high up but worth the hike at Rua do Choupelo 250, +351 223 772 973, www.taylor.pt). Their splurge restaurant, **\$\$\$\$ Barão Fladgate**, offers lunchtime views along with an opportunity to recharge for more tastings. Many consider it among the best dining spots in Porto (reservations smart, daily 12:30-15:00 & 19:00-22:00, +351 223 772 951, www.baraofladgate.com).

Ferreira's lodge comes with classical music “to help age the wine.” It's an interesting tour and shows off some fine museum artifacts (€17 includes 3 tastings, daily 10:00-12:30 & 14:00-18:00,

look for big sign at the end of the riverfront promenade at Avenida Ramos Pinto 70, +351 223 746 107).

selected (typically two or three per decade; 2011 was a great year, and 2000 was one of the best ever). After two years of aging in wooden casks, potential vintage port must be tested by the authorities. If they reject it, the wine stays in the casks longer to become L.B.V. (see next). If they give it the go-ahead, it's bottled and aged another 10-30 years (or more). Sediment is common, so bottles must be decanted. And if a bottle is really old, the cork may deteriorate—so the top of the bottle is heated up with a pair of red-hot tongs, then cold water is poured over it to break it off cleanly.

Late Bottle Vintage (L.B.V.) was invented after World War II, when British wine lovers couldn't afford true vintage port. L.B.V. is a blend of wines from a single year, which age together in huge wooden vats for four to six years. The size of the vats means less exposure to wood, which makes it age more quickly, but without losing its fruitiness and color. It's bottled after five years (later than a vintage port, which ages for only two years—hence the name). This more-affordable alternative saved the port wine industry.

You'll also see **white** ports, which are young, robust, and typically consumed before dinner as an *aperitif*. Most are dry (similar to Spain's *fino* sherries); for a sweet version, look for *lágrima* on the label. Aging the white ports has become trendy and produces a darker wine with some characteristics of a tawny. More recently, some vintners have experimented with **rosé** ports. And **Douro table wines** are becoming a popular and respected secondary business for many producers.