



PORT ROYALTY

TAYLOR'S PORT has some of the finest quality, most beautiful vineyards in the Douro Valley. (Photos: Taylor's Port)



• ADAM MONTEFIORE

Among the things I most miss from England is the easy availability of Port, Sherry, and Madeira, which I love.

We recently flew to Portugal for the Gourmand Awards, the Oscars for food and wine books. My books were nominees in three categories, and it was a big surprise when I won two of them.

A side benefit of this visit was that we visited the Douro, where I had been before, and also Porto for the first time. This is the city that gives its name to the world's most famous fortified wine, Port. The grapes are grown on steep slopes on schist soils in the Upper Douro Valley of northeast Portugal, a wine region of breathtaking beauty. It also has a long history. The first shipments of a wine called Port date back to 1678. In 1756, the Douro became the first wine region anywhere to be demarcated by law.

I first came across Port during my early days in the drinks industry with Bass Charrington. It was the largest owner of pubs (public houses) in the UK. I remember that "Port and lemon" was a popular staple of regulars of a certain age. This was a Ruby Port served on ice, topped up with lemonade.

Furthermore, if you were ill, the standard knee-jerk recommendation of the amateur doctors in pubs was for a Port and Brandy. One of the more palatable old wives' remedies! Samuel Johnson was quoted as saying: "Claret is the liquor for boys, Port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero must drink Brandy."

My son David had a very generous godmother who laid down a bottle of vintage Port at Berry Brothers every year on his birthday until he was 21 years old. She was not to know he would end up in the wine trade with a WSET Diploma. He was kind enough to share the Port with his old man.

I had two experiences with 30-year-old vintage Ports worth relating.

The first was when we opened a Warre's 1977. We opened and decanted it into my grandfather's cut glass crystal decanter before the meal, intending to drink it after dinner. We could not resist a quick taste. However, it was so fresh, balanced, and tasty that we simply continued to drink it throughout the meal. As happens with good wine, one glass follows another without thinking. It matched the food, was not too sweet and cloying, and was a revelation. By the time of the pudding course, with stilton suitably at the ready, there was none left.

The second was a Taylor's 1980. We opened this and it was tight and closed, but still with a coiled fist of potential. Had we



THE VISITORS' center entrance is through a lovely garden.

committed fratricide on a 30-year-old bottle by drinking it too young? This underlined for me the outstanding aging potential of this wine. The difference between the Port and lemon and a 30-year-old vintage Port explained the enormous variety and broad possibilities of this famous wine so steeped in history.

My distinguished forebear Sir Moses Montefiore, the English philanthropist and forerunner of Zionism, drank a bottle of Port every day and lived to his 101st year. An astonishing age in those days! Just before he died, he asked for some Port and was able to enjoy three glasses before he slipped away. He lived from 1784 to 1885. In that era, Port became the drink of English gentlemen.

What Port did Montefiore drink? I have no idea. It would be nice to think it was Port made by two famous Port houses with

family names hinting at possible crypto Jewish roots such as Fonseca or Ferreira. Or it could have been from a British company like Taylor, which was around long before Moses Montefiore was born and is still going strong after 333 years.

I WAS fortunate to be able to visit Taylor during my sojourn in Portugal. Taylor is an island of England in Portugal. It has deep English roots, is family owned, and has remained independent all these centuries. Its Ports are the benchmark for the whole sector.

Taylor is quite simply the premier cru of the Port world. The Chateau Lafite of Port, if you like. It was founded in 1692. Its story echoes the history of Portugal and is a lasting symbol of Portuguese and British cooperation, which began in 1703 with the Methuen Treaty. It has experienced the ebbs and flows of Port's fortune and witnessed a most turbulent history, including wars, invasions, dictatorships, and revolutions. When the multinationals swept in to swoop up many of its brethren, Taylor's stayed aloof and independent, focused only on making the best Port possible.

The full name of the company is Taylor, Fladgate and Yeatman, but it is known as The Fladgate Partnership. It also has Fonseca and Croft in its stable.

The Taylor's Lodge in Vila Nova de Gaia is an experience not to be missed. It exudes quality and authenticity, but in a British, homey, languid, laid-back sort of way. The first thing you see as you enter is King Charles's coat of arms. You arrive at the visitors' center after walking through what looks like an elegant English country garden. The tours and tastings are educational, and there is a mini museum telling the story with style and all the detail you would want. It reeks of history, and it is quite a jolt to find something as modern as a selfie spot among the sleeping casks and vats.

Taylor's has always been a pioneer. In 1934 it was the first to market a dry white Port. It remains until today and is called Taylor's Chip Dry Port. It is drunk as an aperitif or as a long drink with tonic added. In the 1970s, Taylor's was the first to produce a Late Bottled Vintage. LBV was a commercial savior to many Port houses, providing a ready-to-drink offering at the midway point between Ruby and Vintage Port.

Furthermore, Taylor's has a larger inventory of aged Tawny Ports than anyone else. At the top of the tree are its Vintage Ports, which over centuries have created the quality standard for the industry. The group was also the first to produce a Port rosé, known as Croft Pink.

MOST PORTS fall into two categories. There are primarily wood-aged Ports and bottle-aged Ports. The base is Ruby, which is fruit-forward and full-bodied; or Tawny, which is soft, rich, and mellow. The names give the clue to the colors of these respective Ports.

The grapes come from the Upper Douro, with its steep slopes, unforgiving soils, baking hot summers, and harsh winters. Not an easy place to grow the fruit of the vine.

The traditional stomping of the grapes by foot still takes place in large granite basins called *lagares*. Then the fermenting wine is fortified by grape spirit, which prevents the wine from fermenting dry. This gives Port its sweetness and alcohol content, between 18% and 20%. The wines are aged in Port Lodges as old as Port itself, at Vila Nova de Gaia, overlooking Porto.

Ruby Port is aged for two to three years in large vats. It is fruity, easy drinking, designed to be drunk young. If you want a long drink, try adding soda instead of the lemonade preferred by our grandparents.

Most Port houses have a reserve or proprietary brand which is an upgrade in quality from basic Ruby, but it is still designed to be drunk young. LBV Port is aged for four to six years in large vats, has a vintage year on the label, but may be opened young without decanting.

The Tawny Ports begin with a basic wine that is aged in cask for at least two years. The better expressions will stay there. They then may be found with age statements of 10, 20, 30, and up to 40 years old. These sensual wines are tawny in color, with a rich nuttiness and flavors of caramel, dried fruits, and vanilla. A Colheita is a Port from a single vintage,



TAYLOR'S VINTAGES go well with dried fruits, nuts, and chocolate desserts.

aged for a minimum of seven years in cask.

The crème de la crème is Vintage Port. These are only released in the finest vintages, sometimes only three times in a decade. A Vintage Port is aged in vats for only two years, and then aged in bottle for as long as you like. It requires decanting and may be enjoyed for up to 40 years or more. A great Vintage Port is sublime, but it also has a freshness and fruitiness that can be beguiling even if opened young. A Single Quinta Vintage will come from one property, of which the Quinta de Vargellas is considered the most classic.

Port should not be served at room temperature. The Ruby family should be served with a faint chill on them. Tawnies should be served cold, as they will soon warm up in the glass.

Ports are wines for sipping, not slurping. You need time to savor the elixir. It is not quick fix alcohol or wine to quaff. These are contemplation wines, which pair well with blue cheese, chocolate desserts, or walnuts; but best of all, they should be enjoyed slowly after dinner.

As for White or Rosé Port, they should be served very cold. These lend themselves to cocktails. Here the so-called Port-tonic is par for the course. These are good aperitifs.

A Port glass has similarities to the sherry copita or the ISO Tasting Glasses that wineries used in the 1990. If not, a white wine glass will suffice; just remember to pour less than you would of a table wine.

THE FIRST Port I saw in Israel was Sandeman, but that was because at the time it was owned by Seagram, then a Jewish-owned company. There was no market as such. It was simply sold alongside Chivas Regal and Sabra Liqueur.

The first attempt to market Port seriously was by Shaked, our No. 1 wine importer. In the 1990s, it imported the Graham's Ports, owned by the Symingtons. Graham has Scottish roots. Symington Family Estates is the largest vineyard owner and biggest player in the Port sector.

However, Port is not a big seller in Israel. Unfortunately, Jews develop a fixed, preconceived idea of sweet red wines, after receiving a lifetime of abuse from Kiddush wines, and it is not complimentary. After being weaned on the likes of Palwin, Kedem, and Manischewitz, they want to avoid anything that reminds them of a sacramental wine. I have heard more than once people lament that Port is a glorified Kiddush wine. Unfortunately, they are missing the point and could not be more wrong.

Anyway, the basic Tawny Port is the biggest seller here. For the kosher market, primarily based in New York, Paris, London, and Jerusalem, there was a kosher expression once produced called Porto Cordovera. Now there is another one,



called Alma do Mar, also imported by Shaked. It is a basic Ruby Port, giving the kosher clientele the opportunity for an introduction to Port.

But this is not the end of the story. The Fladgate Partnership, such a symbol of stability over centuries, has now made breathtaking initiatives to shake up the staid atmosphere of Port and bring it into the 21st century through tourism, education, luxury, and hospitality. The results are so impressive, it merits another article. Watch this space! I will be back to visit the World of Wine. ■

The writer is a wine trade veteran and winery insider turned wine writer, who has advanced Israeli wines for 38 years. He is referred to as the English voice of Israeli wine. www.adammontefiore.com

THE COAT of arms of King Charles III takes pride of place.



BARREL CELLARS hold thousands of casks where the Port is sleeping and maturing.

THE BASIC range of Taylor's Aged Tawny Ports extends from 10 to 40 years old.

