

Going Green with Vinho Verde

White, red, and rosé, these Portuguese wines have youth on their side



It ain't easy being green. It ain't easy being Vinho Verde—the so-called "green wine" of Portugal—either. Why not? The name is charming, but it can be a little confusing to consumers, since "green" merely alludes to the wine's young age and not its color. In fact, Vinho Verde—whether white, red, or rosé—is intended to be youthful and consumed soon after bottling.

Some Vinhos Verdes have a slight fizz, while others are full-on sparkling. And unlike wines whose names identify their varietal or geographic origin, the term Vinho Verde doesn't necessarily give you any sense of what's in the bottle. The wine is produced in Minho, Portugal's largest wine region (in the northeastern part of the country), and can be made from a half-dozen different grapes, so it's not a shock that a tasting of Vinho Verde can literally be all over the place.

The full gamut of possibilities was on display when I sampled 26 bottles recently, the majority of which were white, the most prolific Vinho Verde option. Alvarinho, the Portuguese version of Spain's Albariño, is the grape producers most commonly use. The characteristic linking all the wines I tasted is a tartness that ranges from fresh and delightful to downright bracing. I'm not going to lie: A couple of them baffled me. But six hit their mark well, though in characteristically very different ways. Four of those winners cost no more than \$13, putting Vinho Verde smack-dab in the middle of a wallet-friendly zone—as long as you pick carefully.

In the wine world, it's the producer that matters most. Don't sweat vintages or even grapes, and certainly not details such as how much a wine was oaked. Pay attention to the folks making it. Generally, if they know what they're doing with one bottle, they will do so across grapes and years.

Certainly the value-of-the-month award goes to **Hera Vinho Verde Branco 2011** (\$8), perhaps the least expensive wine I have recommended in this column to date. It has the slightest effervescence and hints of tart blood orange. While delicate in body, it also means business. Contrast it with a medium-sweet dessert like **Three Grape Sorbets** and sit back in a comfy patio chair. That's the taste of summer.

Have you tried Vinho Verde? Red, white, or rosé, and what did you serve with it? Hit me up on Twitter [@LoosLips](#) or [@epicurious](#) on Twitter.

Prices and availability subject to change.



Ted Loos, a former editor of *Wine Spectator*, has written about wine for *Bon Appétit*, *Decanter*, *Town & Country*, and many other publications. He also covers design and the arts for *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, and *Architectural Digest*, among others.

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