



PICK OF THE BUNCH | Harvesting grapes in the Douro Valley in Portugal

CHRISTMAS DRINKING | PORT

Take refuge in the very best port

ANDY JONES
for thelondonpaper

WHEN the lager has lost its fizz and the chardonnay has become a shambles, you could opt for something dark and fruity this Christmas. Port is the perfect accompaniment for the festive season. Dark, rich and bold, the Portuguese wine combines many of the classic festive flavours in just one glass.

But for many who only savour its bouquet once a year, choosing the right bottle can be a little confusing. Antonio Correia, owner of the Portal restaurant, knows a thing or two about wine. He was awarded the prestigious Confraria do Vinho do Porto for his services to port in his na-



AGED | The best port rests for about 24 months

“ Good port and cheese is an excellent way to round off Christmas ”

ANTONIO CORREIA

tive Portugal, is a master taster and has even named his restaurant after Quinta do Portal, a family-run wine-making company in the Douro Valley. He says a classy

bottle must abide by a few simple rules.

“It is all about the vines. The finest grapes are Touriga Franca, Touriga Nacional and Tinta Roriz. You also have to count the time in the barrel where the wine is allowed to rest. The best vineyards allow a resting of 22 to 24 months, depending on the strength and the beauty of the port required.”

The bottle of choice for Correia is the award-winning 2003 Quinta do Portal, which has pride of place behind the bar at his restaurant.

“It’s a beautiful vintage port made of the three best grapes, and is a perfect blend of flavours and elegance. It’ll be a great pleasure to open a

bottle or two of it over Christmas.”

The deep flavour is a perfect complement to the classic British cheeseboard, although Correia prefers it with Portuguese varieties.

“Queso Serva, a runny cheese from the Portuguese mountains, goes fabulously well with a good port. That with country bread is an excellent way to round off Christmas. That said, port is an all-year-round drink – I don’t understand why the British only drink it at Christmas.”

To enjoy a bottle of Quinta do Portal (price £68) visit the Portal, 88 St John Street, EC1M, 020 7253 6950