

The ASTOR Guide to...

PORT



*A*mong the array of great fortified wines on the market, there is perhaps none that deserves its fame more than port.

*P*ort is available in a range of styles. The most accessible type is undoubtedly Ruby port. Made for immediate consumption, this undergoes a few year's aging in neutral vessels, frequently in the warmest reaches of the quintas (estates). This style retains the full force of youthful fruit, but never attains the heights of delicacy and nuance that age can bring.

*P*roprietary ports, frequently labeled "Reserve" or "Special Reserve," tend to be blends of older Ruby ports that have mellowed with age and offer an added level of complexity.

*W*hile most ports are red, there are always a few exceptions floating around; these bottles are helpfully labeled "white port." They most often have a bit of sweetness to them, even though the word "dry" may appear on the label.

*L*ate Bottled Vintage ports are similar to the Special Reserve bottlings, usually containing comparably old wine from a single vintage. Sample one of these ports and you can get a sense of the character of a vintage without having to spring for true Vintage port - the crème de la crème, consisting entirely of fruit from a single harvest in a declared year. Only produced in the finest vineyards, these strapping wines are bottled after two years' aging and boast massive fruit, along with a structure that can be unyielding in youth. These frequently require decades of cellaring before they soften, and once mature, they are beloved for their glorious complexity.

*V*intage port from lesser years are frequently bottled as Single-Quinta port. (Most Vintage ports are a blend of the produce of several quintas.) These bottles offer great value in an approachable style.

*A*nother excellent option is the family of Tawny ports, often labeled with the approximate age of the blend. These wines allow the consumer to experience the progression of flavors that great ports undergo over the years, from fruity through nutty and toffeed.

*F*inally, tawnies produced in a single vintage are known as Colheitas; these combine the character of Single-Vintage port with the style of wood-aged Tawny, and they make exceptional gifts for special occasions.

