

Wine Benchmarking Trip, Jamie Goode – March 2010

## Quinta de Sant'Ana, Mafra

Website: [www.quintadesantana.com](http://www.quintadesantana.com)



Quinta de Sant'Ana is the family property of James and Ann Frost. James is English; Ann is German, and the property was previously owned by her parents, Gustav and Paula von Fürstenberg. The Quinta is located in what was until recently known as the Estremadura region, but is now referred to as Lisboa, some 35 km north of the capital, and 12 km inland from the Atlantic. As a consequence, the weather patterns are strongly influenced by the sea, and this is quite a cool spot in comparison with say, for example, the Alentejo. This is a relatively unfashionable area, largely because in the past wine production here valued quantity over quality, but Sant'Ana are one of a small band of producers who are showing that high quality wines are possible here.





Wine is a recent development for Quinta de Sant'Ana. Although Ann's parents did plant some vines, it is only since 1999 that the project really began, when James sought the advice of viticulturalist David Booth and his enologist colleague António Maçanita (*above right*), and began planting vines. The first wines were made in 2004, but this wasn't an 'official' release. The first commercial release followed a year later, and planting of the vineyards has continued to the point where there are just a couple of hectares that could still be planted if needed. Hospitality has been a big part of the business of the quinta: this is a very popular location for weddings, and the revenue for this has funded the development of the wine side of the estate in a sustainable fashion, to the point that wine is now the main enterprise.



There are now 11.5 hectares of vineyards, with woodland, orchard and paddocks making up the balance of the 44 hectare estate. Grape varieties planted are Touriga Nacional, Merlot (1.2 Ha),

Pinot Noir (2 Ha, recently planted) and Aragonêz for reds, and Fernão Pires, Alvarinho, Riesling (0.5 Ha, recently planted), Verdelho and Sauvignon (0.4 Ha) for whites.

The soils here are quite deep, and vigour can be a problem for the vines. For this reason, James and António have been working hard to keep the canopies under control. The vines are planted on carefully selected devigorating rootsocks (3309 and Riparia), and backhoe pits were dug to assess the potential vigour of different parts of the vineyard, before canopy height was decided. Much of the vineyard is managed using split canopies (the vines are trained higher, and a canopy growing down is added to the one growing up: this is a way of dealing with high vigour sites). For example, if there is 70 cm of usable soil, the vines will typically be trained at 70 cm and the canopy will be 2 m high, giving a 1.3 m canopy height. In some of the older blocks the vine posts have been extended to give higher canopies. A typical calculation is that one kilo of grapes needs a canopy area of 2 m<sup>2</sup> to ripen where high quality is sought.

Few fertilizers are used: the idea is to get the canopy to stop growing naturally at the ideal height. For some patches, canopy growth may be a little too weak: then soil tests are carried out. In one spot last year a block of Touriga was struggling, and tests showed that while the iron was present in the soil, the pH was too high, so the iron wasn't available to the vine. The solution is to modify the soil pH of this particular block.



The winery is simple but effective. There are two lagares of 4.5 hl each; wooden vats with stainless steel inside (4 hl) and three stainless steel tanks of 2.5 hl. Whites are pressed and then racked the day after; they obtain clean juice without using bentonite or PVPP fining. Fernão Pires can tend to be terpenic, almost like Muscat, so António allows only a short skin maceration and ferments cool (12 °C) to suppress this terpenic character. This year three different pickings of the Fernão Pires took place: the upper part of the vineyard, which is really more like a red block in climate, gives richness; the acidity comes from the middle part. Before 2009 some barrel fermentation was used, but from this vintage none is practised for any of the whites.

Sauvignon Blanc is fermented a little warmer (14–16 °C) to allow the variety to express itself a little more. (Loire Sauvignon would be fermented typically at 18–20 °C.)

## **The wines**

### **Alvarinho 2009**

Whole-bunch-pressed, settled for a day, and fermented at 14 °C. Some yeast nutrients added, and inoculated with a yeast isolated from Vinho Verde. Very taut, fresh and lemony, but with some texture, too. Crisp and taut with lovely fruit. This could just do with a touch more aromatic interest, and this may come with time in bottle. 89/100

### **Verdelho 2009**

Fresh, bright, lemony and herby with lovely crispness to the fruit. Lemony and bright with good concentration and some gentle grassy notes. Lovely purity; a satisfying wine. 88/100

### **Riesling 2009**

Very nice aromatics here: citrusy, lemony. The palate is lively and fresh with lemon, herb, pear and grapefruit notes. Lovely purity and focus to this wine, which is tight but shows lovely fruit. Pithy, citrusy finish. 90/100

### **Sauvignon Blanc 2008**

Dense and fruity with nice presence and a touch of tomato leaf herbiness. Nice depth here: it's not overblown and has some grapefruit freshness. A stylish Sauvignon showing some restraint. 88/100

### **Sauvignon Blanc 2009**

Fresh and taut with some crisp green herby (methoxypyrazine) notes. Grapefruit, grass and herb characters merge well, with good acidity and some lemony notes on the finish. Very stylish with some mineral notes on the finish: a serious Sauvignon. 90/100

### **Fernão Pires 2008**

Very expressive and lively with some nice grapey richness as well as peach and pear notes, but there's restraint, too. An expressive white wine with lots of personality, and great balance between the rich fruitiness and the fresh grapefruit notes. There's a subtle nutty hint. 90/100

### **Fernão Pires 2009**

Beautiful aromas of melon and herbs with floral overtones. Lovely fresh grapefruit and herb palate with a hint of richness. The dominating theme, however, is the fresh, crisp, intense fruit with some nice mineral overtones. 91/100

### **Rosé 2009**

Very richly fruited with cherry and berry fruits and some sweetness countered by fresh acidity. A rich style with a creamy texture: a smart commercial wine. 87/100

### **Pinot Noir 2009 (tank sample)**

Lovely lifted aromas with sweet, pure, rounded cherry and berry fruit. Tastes like Pinot Noir with a hint of meatiness and some spice underneath the fresh, complex fruit. There's a nice hint of spicy stemminess (30% whole bunches used), and it's a complex, elegant wine with a degree of seriousness to it. Superb for a first effort. 91–93/100

#### Tinto 2007

A blend of 60% Touriga Nacional with 40% Aragonêz. Very fresh, focused spicy, chocolatey, meaty nose with vibrant blackberry fruit. The palate is dense and spicy with robust dark fruits and attractive spice notes. Fresh and vibrant. 89/100

#### Tinto 2008

Mostly Touriga, with 17% Merlot and 5% Aragonêz. Fresh, vibrant, juicy and plummy with nice density of pure berry fruits, backed up by some spiciness. Lovely purity of fruit here: focused, with plum and cherry notes. Finer and more elegant than the 2007. 90/100

#### Reserva 2006

Spicy, meaty, fresh dark fruits nose. The palate is focused and fresh but with a meaty, spicy undercurrent. Hints of earth and minerals. It finishes with some bretty character, but there's nice freshness here. 90/100

#### Reserva 2005

Lovely freshness and ripeness here. A generous but balanced rich, dense wine with lovely precision to the fruit. Fresh and pure with nice tannins. Just beautiful. 93/100

#### Homenagem a Baron Gustav von Fürstenberg 2007

Fresh and bright with a green leafy edge to the nose, and a bit of chalkiness. Pure, quite elegant palate with some cherry, plum and blackcurrant notes. Stylish, pure and elegant with the Merlot (50%) making its presence felt. 92/100

#### Reserva 2008

(Almost all Aragonêz.) Bottled a week ago, so still a bit shocked. Lovely freshness here: this is bright with nice cherry and berry fruit and good acidity. Nice focus and purity to this. 92–94/100

#### Notes:

- The winemaking and viticulture here is first rate. I like the way that the wines are moving in the right sort of direction, towards freshness and purity of fruit expression.
- Packaging is distinctive, elegant and modern.
- The Pinot Noir is an exciting wine. This could be big news, because Portugal doesn't currently produce top quality Pinot Noir. I think the style, with some complex savoury notes under the focused, primary fruit, is just great
- The new trio of Riesling, Verdelho and Alvarinho really add something to the range, and are made in a lovely style.