

Verdelho O Original



The Portuguese archipelago of the Azores is home to a winemaking tradition that dates back to its colonization in the 15th century, wherein viticulture was introduced by Franciscan friars. This group of islands is home to a singular terroir and microclimate, one that draws close comparison to the island of Santorini.

Like Santorini, the Azores are volcanic islands comprised entirely of black basalt. Pico, the main wine producing island where these vineyards are located, has such poor soil that the vineyard needs to be supplemented with soil from neighboring islands to support vine growth, and even with that, the yields are a fraction of what they are in the rest of the DOC.

Additionally, the vineyards are grown in tiny plots (2-6 bush trained vines per square) protected on all sides by small walls called “currais” to ward off the strong winds that blow in from the nearby beaches.

The Verdelho found in the Azores, identical to the varietal on Madeira, is a different species than the grape often called Verdelho in the Douro, which is actually the Portuguese name for Godello. The “Original” is meant to reference the confusion between these two grapes. The “original” verdelho was the grape of kings, consumed by European royalty as far back as the 17th and 18th century. After the communist revolution in 1917, several bottles of “Verdelho do Pico” were found in the Tsar’s cellars.

Dynamic winemaker Antonio Mançanita is based in the Alentejo, but wanted to explore this unique terroir because of his family’s history in this area – his father is from the Azores, and he wanted to pay tribute to this heritage.

WHAT MAKES THIS WINE UNIQUE?: This is a micro-production wine from the tiny island of Pico in the Azores. It is grown in volcanic basalt at sea level, less than 50m from the Atlantic. This terroir and the varietal imbue this wine with incredible minerality and purity, as well as unmistakable salinity. This varietal of Verdelho dates back to the original plantings in the early 17th century, and is indigenous to the Azores and Madeira.

RATING HISTORY: 2018 91 WA; 2017 92WA; 2016 91WA, 2015 92WA, W&S "Year's Best Portugal Whites"

GRAPE: 100% Verdelho do Pico. Sustainably grown vines planted from 1984-2004. Tended in volcanic basalt at sea level, less than 50 m (164 ft) from the Atlantic Ocean.

PAIRING SUGGESTIONS: What better food to eat with a wine from the islands than the bounty of the sea! Shellfish, oysters, grilled or fried fish are all excellent pairing ideas.

VINIFICATION AND AGING: Hand harvested to 40kg baskets, heavy triage, then racked to small stainless steel tanks for 6 months with extensive battonage. These tanks were laid down in the fashion of a barrel in order to facilitate battonage during lees aging.

PRODUCTION: 117 cases (6 pack)

LOCATION, SOIL, CLIMATE: Pico, in the Azores, is about 1000 miles off the coast of Portugal. It is dominated by the volcano Ponto do Pico, Portugal’s highest mountain. The soil is entirely black basalt, which puts enormous stress on the vines, lowering yields. Vines are the only crop to speak of on Pico, as other plant life has a difficult time surviving. Temperature averages 60-70 degrees Fahrenheit, with rainfall averaging 1200mm a year.

TASTING NOTES Bright straw-yellow. Aromas of passionfruit, pineapple, sea spray and oyster shell on the nose. On the palate, vibrant and fresh with high toned tropical fruit held in balance by impressive mid-palate weight and breadth. Finishes long and clean, with the Azores’ tell-tale saline minerality running through the finish.

ALCOHOL CONTENT: 12.5%

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