



Our Feature Story: Fitapreta (Alentejo, Portugal)

Expressing “Terroir” by balancing modern science with Alentejo tradition. Creating new value that reflects a unique region and its history.



— Antonio Macanita (Owner & winemaker)

In writing these stories with a focus on adding extra colour and enjoyment to drinking wine, it is no surprise that opening a Fitapreta wine adds a new dimension of pleasure. A conversation with owner and winemaker Antonio Macanita weaves together diverse strands of wine culture, from the chemistry of winemaking to the history of ignored varieties, to expanding the definition of terroir. With his boundless energy, curiosity and vision, he seamlessly fuses the past, the present and the future in crafting a range of small lot wines, each with its own unique story to savour, even as he is constantly redefining what Portuguese wines can be.

(Interviewer: Dion Lenting (Kiwi Copy) October 2023)

◆ Born to winemaking?

— I was born and raised in Lisbon. My mother is from Alentejo, she was born about 10km from where the winery is today, and was a historian. My father is from Sao Miguel Island in the Azores. He was a university teacher and researched photochemistry, devoting many years to understanding the behaviour of



From left: Alexandra (event space manager, Antonio's wife), Antonio, Patricia (winemaker), David (sales)

anthocyanins, the compounds that give colour to wine. So you can already see the strands of science and history coming together.

I studied in Lisbon and even though Alentejo is a lot closer, I had a huge connection with the Azores. From when I was 6 or 7 my cousins and I would spend to 2-3 months there each year. I was always a good student mainly in science, so when I went to university I wanted to be a marine biologist or oceanographer. A good friend of my father steered me towards agronomy as a first step in the sciences. So I did that, and in my second or third year got really interested in viticulture through an inspiring teacher, Rogério de Castro, who was expert on modern viticulture trellis systems.

While still at university, in 2001 I trained at Merryvale Vineyard (in Napa, California) for 5 months where I met Will Thomas, and his father Charles, who had made the first 12 vintages of Opus One. I went back the next year to work under Charles when he was the winemaker at Rudd Estate in Oakville, and wrote my final university report on 'gravity flow vs pump flow' which has influenced all my winemaking ever since, about long wood extractions vs shredding and physically accelerating extractions. Our report was very conclusive in that we could easily recognise the benefits of one method over the other in the wine's profile and precision of aroma. Subsequently I spent a harvest at d'Arenberg in South Australia, and through rugby connections got to play rugby in Bordeaux while training at Château Lynch-Bages in 2003. Through all these journeys the idea was starting to take shape that I wanted to make my own wine, but there was a financial issue.

◆ First wines – the gardener and the cook

— Though I had trained a lot in viticulture in university, I wanted to train more in the vineyards. In the meantime I met David Booth, the English viticulturalist consulting in Portugal. David was very straight-forward and kind, and I asked him if I could follow him in his business. He said yes, and I started shadowing him on his consultancies. It gave me lots of opportunities visiting 5-6 clients every day, but it was also clear I wasn't ready to be a consultant. So I challenged David to do a project together in a joint venture – he would be the gardener, and I would be the cook. David was 17 years older than me and hesitated a little, then said 'let's do it, let's make a wine together.' So we started in 2004.

The fruit was from a vineyard on the northern slope of Serra d'Ossa mountain, on schist soils. We put a lot of detail into the process in the vineyard and in a gravity flow winery. The result was our first vintage of Preta was really refined and pure, and won the International Wine Challenge trophy for best Alentejo Wine. It was a good start. The first 4 years were about winemaking and struggling to make a business based on the 3Fs, Friends, Fools and Family. We were making good wine, keeping the business afloat, but not doing a lot of thinking until about 2010.

◆ Expanding the range and expression of terroir

— A lot of my cuvees start around 2010 – I made my first wine in the Azores, first amphora white, and first Tinto de Castelão. I wanted to make a wine with the space to show what it is, looking more closely at the grape varieties, challenging my techniques, and started an evolution process.

I always wanted to do something in the Azores, and connected up with a conservation program to preserve three grape varieties unique to the islands: Terrantez do Pico, Arinto dos Acores and Verdelho das Ilhas. The program found just 89 Terrantez do Pico plants remaining, from which they created a field of 2,500 vines from cuttings over 4 years, and I made the first Terrantez do Pico in 2010. The Azores project spurred my interest in local varieties in Alentejo, and provided a toolbox for my future direction. They included a style, approach and format to undertake genetic research and research of written records to understand the origin of the grapes, and the original Alentejo formula of varieties and blends. And to balance that with 'collective memory.'

PICK UP WINE

From the single vineyard Chao dos Eremitas

CODE
12734



Fitapreta Alicante Branco 2021

Origin: Alentejano IGP, Portugal Alc. 12.4%
Varietal: Alicante Branco (Boal de Alicante) 100%

RRP ¥7,300



Alicante Branco, a varietal also found in southern Spain and Sicily, has long been cultivated in Alentejo. However, Fitapreta is the only producer making a 100% single varietal wine. Although it has large berries and a mild taste, it is highly phenolic and suitable for natural fermentation without using sulphites. It beautifully expresses the terroir where it is grown rather than the varietal, with white flowers, aromas of orange and peach, excellent body and texture.

From the single vineyard Chao dos Eremitas

CODE
12642



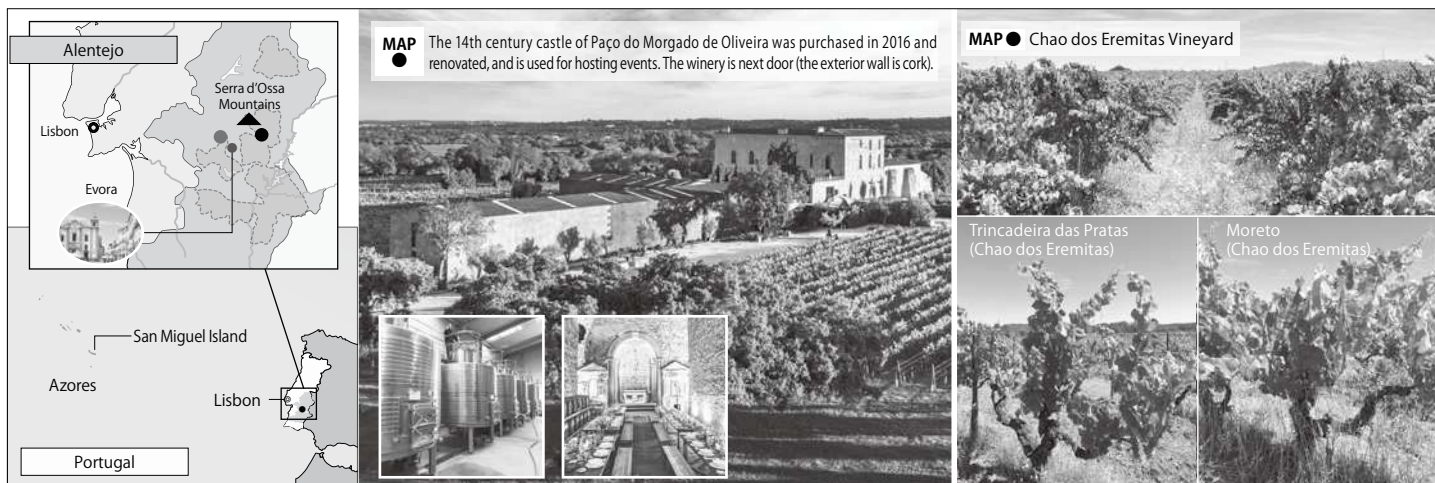
Fitapreta Trincadeira das Pratas 2021

Origin: Alentejo DOC, Portugal Alc. 13.3%
Varietal: Tamariz (Trincadeira das Pratas) 100%

RRP ¥7,300



Trincadeira das Pratas, a white grape that is a cross between white Mourisco and red Alfrocheiro, has been an indigenous varietal in Alentejo since ancient times. It has a simple flavour and is mostly used in blends. However, natural fermentation and aging on lees in old French oak for 12 months, creates a 100% single varietal wine with elegant flavours, well-balanced rich acidity and fruit, and a firm structure.



Alentejo may have the image of mass-produced wine, but if you go back in history, this isn't necessarily the case. There are records of French merchants coming to buy high-quality wine in the Middle Ages, and Alentejo wine won awards at Universal Exhibitions in the 19th. Originally, light-bodied, elegant red wines were the mainstream here. However, in anticipation of Portugal joining the European Union (EC at the time) in 1986, in the 1970s there was a shift in Portugal to international varietals with deeper colours and winemaking styles focused on export markets.

The Branco de Talha was inspired by seeing concrete eggs at Quintessa Winery in California. I thought 'these guys are inventing a shape we already have it in Alentejo'. From 1906 through to the 1970s in

Alentejo they made amphoras for winemaking from local clay coated with a beeswax/pine resin. With amphoras, my objective was to introduce another layer of Alentejo topicity, adding local techniques to what I see as terroir.

We were also testing wild fermentation, and it took me time to be convinced about spontaneous fermentations on whites. For reds that's the way I always made them. Today our white wines are all spontaneous fermentations, and we play with pied de cuve on different vineyards, so fermentations when they start here are always a mix of what comes in the fruit, the winery and the barrels, and we try to stretch it in different directions.

Our wines are not locked in on a particular style, it is a process, an evolution fitted for the market. It is not the most original formula, but it is also part of the collective memory and traditions. For me, collective memory is as important and strong as history, it is what people remember through generations. Science can show something else, but from my aesthetic point of view they can co-exist. The vineyards were planted in these grapes, and we should try to make the best wines out of them. The vineyards that I have at Chao dos Eremitas show us a vision of a different time.

◆ Exploring and expressing the Chao dos Eremitas vineyard

— It is an established vineyard that was planted in 1969-70, that we bought in 2018. The whole vineyard is 33 hectares, and we own two-thirds and one-third is owned by the grandson of the foreman who originally planted it. The vineyard was planted by variety, each row was a variety, and in part of the vineyard for whites, it was actually planted per grape, but along a line, so it was kind of an organized field blend.

Chao means low or flat ground, dos Eremitas means the hermit monks. The vineyard is under the Convent of São Paulo, the hermit monks of St. Paul, that was started in the 10th or 11th Century in the Serra d'Ossa Mountains. We know this is land that has been a vineyard for a long time, there was a Phoenician amphora found buried from the 8th century before Christ, with grape seeds inside. That doesn't mean the wine was produced there, but the amphora shows the existence of wine far inland.

The low ground was known for its ability to produce quality wine. In 1397 there is mandate from the Pope exempting the vineyard land in this area from taxes. Unfortunately that exemption didn't last until today.

It is natural ground for vineyards, with two underground streams that come from the Serra d'Ossa Mountains, that collect almost double the amount of rain compared to the low ground. The mountains are 650 meters high, and the vineyard 250-260 meters. If you speak to the locals there is no better soil in this area.

When I started working in Alentejo, I would be looking for something less vigorous, less deep, because we were working with irrigated vineyards. Now 100 percent of our vineyards aren't irrigated, which is very rare in this hot dry climate. The soils are interesting: the north slopes of the Serra d'Ossa are schist, on the south side where the vineyards it is granite. In Chao dos Eremitas we have a pH that is close to neutral, 7.2 – 7.4, the result of alluvium soil rich in limestone brought by the streams. The water table is at 5-7 meters, so the water is very close to the vineyards.

The vineyard is still quite new to us, and we want to understand each of the grapes, when is the best time to pick them, and how to handle them in the winery. We are the only vineyard producing single varietal wines like the Alicante Branco and Tinta Carvalha, and don't know enough about them both technically or their taste, so we want to put them aside and experiment with them. At the same time, we do some co-ferments and use them in some of our blends as we learn more about them.

In 2018 we made that first commitment, our first cuvees were our reference. In subsequent vintages we take into consideration what we made before, we taste it, then put it into the drawer. We think the 2019 is better than the 2018, but we don't want to limit our thinking about what this vineyard can do by admiring what we have done in the past.

PICK UP WINE



Fitapreta A Laranja Mecanica NV

Origin: Alentejano IGP, Portugal Alc. 11.4%
Varietals: Arinto / Roupeiro / Verdelho / Antao Vas /
Alicante Branco / Trincadeira das Pratas / Fernão Pires

RRP ¥4,800



This popular orange wine is now non-vintage (NV). All of Fitapreta's whites are whole bunch pressed, and using a traditional Azorean method, the leftover juice with a high ratio of skins is macerated for about a week with natural fermentation. Because timing the maceration is tricky, depending on the year the NV allows the winemakers to fine tune the taste by blending in 15% or more of other vintages to make a more consistent style. Deep late harvest flavours showing umami and complexity.

From the single vineyard Chao dos Eremitas



Fitapreta Os Paulistas 2020

Origin: Alentejo DOC, Portugal Alc. 13.8%
Varietals: Tinta Carvalha / Castelao / Moreto / Alfrocheiro /
Trincadeira

RRP ¥15,800



A blend of five indigenous varietals honouring the hermit monks of the Order of St. Paul (Paulistas), who made wine in Alentejo in the Middle Ages. Since the main varietal, Tinta Carvalha is a lighter grape, after crushing it is macerated for up to 45 days. Each varietal is fermented naturally and the blend ratio adjusted each year to create a beautifully balanced wine. Elegant and concentrated, with delicate red fruit flavours.