

Vinha dos Aards



Just one decade after launching Fitapreta Vinhos in Alentejo, António Maçanita co-founded the Azores Wine Company on the island of Pico, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The project emerged from his work recovering the nearly extinct Terrantez do Pico grape and from his childhood connection to his father's Azorean homeland. Their first bottling of Terrantez do Pico drew international attention, earning a top Wine Spectator score and a feature in the 2016 article "Breaking the Mold."

Today, António and his partners farm 100 hectares of extremely low-yield, walled vineyards on Pico and source fruit from an additional 30 hectares across the archipelago, including DOP Graciosa and São Miguel. These parcels range from sea level to 500 meters in altitude, with many vines up to 80 years old. Vines grow in stony volcanic soils behind ancient currais, the 500-year-old lava stone walls that shield them from the harsh Atlantic winds. As António describes it, making wine on Pico is a "battle between the sea and the mountain," and few have succeeded in ripening red grapes in this climate.

This viticultural landscape began to take shape in 1465 with the arrival of Joss Hurtere, Captain Donatory of Pico and Fayal, who invited Joss Van Aard to the Azores. The Aards, whose name means "da Terra," became influential vineyard owners, cultivating some of the most prized seaside parcels in the 1º Jeirões.

WHAT MAKES THIS WINE UNIQUE?: Vinha dos Aards comes from one of the 1º Jeirões frontline plots. The Aard family sold it in 1923, it was replanted in 1924 by the Cardozos, and it has now returned to careful stewardship under Azores Wine Company. The vines grow in basalt rock crevices and are protected by stone currais from wind and saltwater. Their proximity to the ocean and the age of the site produce extremely low yields and a deeply expressive, maritime driven wine. Only 1,333 bottles were made, offering a singular expression of Pico's oldest viticultural heritage.

RATING HISTORY: 2023 97WA; 2020 95+WA

GRAPE: Arinto dos Açores (90%), Verdelho, Alicante Branco and Boal planted in solid lava stone soils formed 1,500 to 2,000 years ago.

PAIRING SUGGESTIONS: Shellfish and seafood driven dishes such as red mullet, sea roe and sea urchins. Its density and concentration also pair well with richer white meats with crisped fat like suckling pig or pork belly.

VINIFICATION AND AGING: Grapes are hand picked, sorted and directly pressed. Juice is cold decanted for 12 hours. Fermentation is spontaneous. First presses ferment in horizontal stainless steel vats, seventy percent of the blend. Second presses ferment in used French oak barrels at least three years old, thirty percent of the blend. Sulfites are added only at the end of fermentation. The wine ages 15 months on lees.

PRODUCTION: 1333 bottles

LOCATION, SOIL, CLIMATE: Pico, in the Azores Islands, is about 1,000 miles off the coast of Portugal—nearly halfway to New York City! It is dominated by the volcano of the same name, which is Portugal's highest peak. The vines are planted in the black basalt rock cracks at the foothills of the volcanic mountain 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 47 inches a year.

TASTING NOTES Citrus yellow with hints of straw. Aromas of iodine, salt, linden and pitanga. Dense and concentrated on the palate with vibrant acidity extending through the finish. Pronounced maritime character with persistent notes of salt and iodine. A wine that could only have been born by the sea.

ALCOHOL CONTENT: 12%

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