

My Wine Trip to Portugal September 2011
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winner of the 2010 Ramos Pintos Travel Award

21st September 2011:

DAY 1

Another grey, cold and windy morning in Scotland. Departing on the Red-eye from Inverness, going via Gatwick, arriving early evening in warm and windy Portugal, ready for an incredible guided tour through the world of Adriano Ramos Pinto.

With a taxi the four of us set off to our first overnight stay in Porto – the Teatro Hotel in the centre of Porto. The entire hotel is themed around theatre and stage. Arisen in the same place where “The Teatro Baquet” was inaugurated in 1859. One hundred and fifty years later, the unique, refined and bohemian environment of the theatre has been revived as a hotel.

After check-in and a quick aperitif in the hotel bar to get to know one another, we headed out for dinner. A gorgeous restaurant right next to the beach, with amazing ocean view – The Shis Restaurant. Here we had our first encounter and chance to try a selection of various Ramos Pintos wines (white & red), including Port matched with fantastic food. On the way back to the hotel, our taxi took us along the river to catch a first glance at the various Port houses located there – a great finish to a long day.

22nd September 2011

Day 2

After a delicious, yet too early breakfast, we started heading up into the Douro to Ramos Pintos Quinta de Ervamoira. The drive took us through some amazing, ever changing scenery of Portuguese landscape, from cloudy sky and normal vegetation to bright sunshine with olive- and almond trees mixed amongst vines.

To give us a chance to stretch our legs after a three hour drive, we stopped in a little village for a quick coffee, sunshine and a taste of some local cheese with bread – gorgeous, very tasty, something one could really get used to. At noon we arrive at our base camp where we had to swap cars in order to go up to the Quinta, located deep into the mountains. A very bumpy and dusty ride gets rewarded by an amazing view of vines upon vines, olive- and almond trees surrounded my vast terroir and in the middle of all the stunning Quinta de Ervamoira.

Located in the Upper Douro, the site was inaugurated in 1997 in the heart of Cõa Valley Archaeological Park, which protects 17km of Palaeolithic rock etchings classified as a World heritage site by UNESCO. This Quinta was also the first one where the vine rows were planted totally vertically.

Here we were served a delicious dry white port and tonic aperitif to refresh us after the ride, followed by a portugese themed three-course lunch, matched again with Ramos Pinto wines and port – amazing.

To complete the visit we had a guided tour through the Quinta’s own museum, showing its history through the various ages.

Quinta de Ervamoira



After coming back down by car from the Quinta, we were surprised with a train ride along the Douro river instead of driving back. So we started our one and a half-hour adventure at Pocinho going to Pinhão. Words cannot describe the impression and emotions taking the train along this amazing landscape – wow. In Pinhão we were met by our drivers to take us to Quinta do Bom Retiro for our second night in Portugal.

Another impressive Quinta in the heart of rural landscape simply surrounded again by olive and almond trees and of course vines. Before dinner we enjoyed cocktails in the Quinta's own beautiful garden, including trying some of the own home-grown and roasted almonds – one couldn't get enough.

This Quinta is located in the Douro region, sub-region of Cima Corgo, in the parish of Valença do Douro, Pinhão, and is supplied by the waters of the river Torto. The varieties produced here are exclusively red and are an average age of 25 years old.

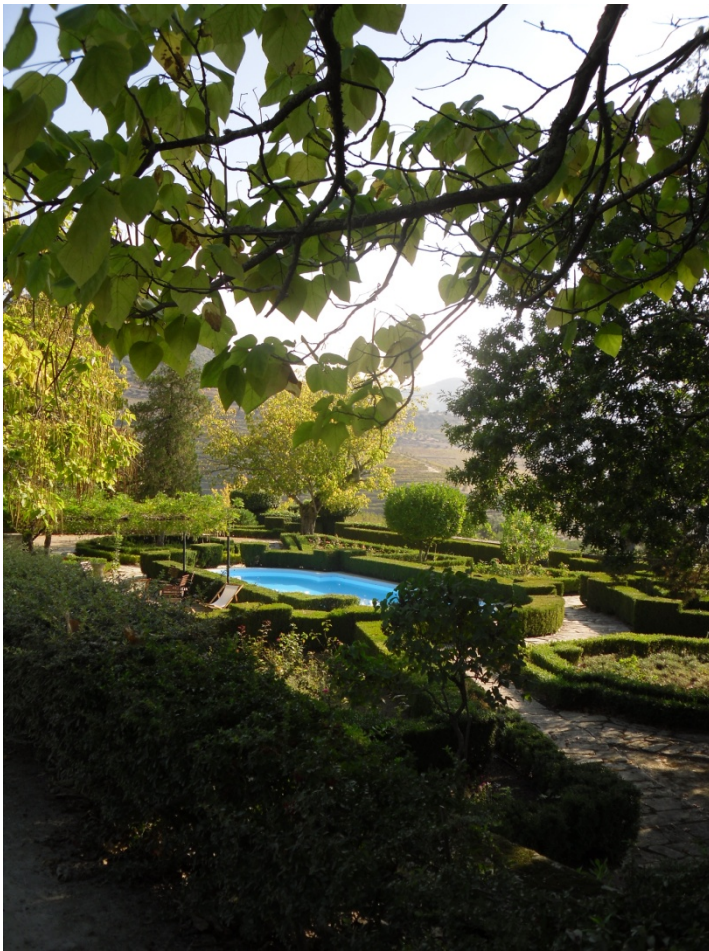
The Train Ride from Pocinho to Pinhão





Quinta do Bom Retiro





Quinta do Bom Retiro is simply another beautiful and impressive Quinta in the heart of rural landscape surrounded again by olive- and almond trees and of course vines. Before dinner we enjoyed cocktails in the Quinta's own beautiful garden, surrounded lush green scrubs and trees, trying some of the own home-grown and roasted almonds – I couldn't get enough.

It is quite clear from the start why this Quinta is considered the Visitor's Card of Casa Ramos Pinto, as it is a privileged site to receive guests.

Dinner was served on the wide-open terrace, again matched with delicious Ramos Pintos wines and ports. No rest for the wicked though, before dessert we were given a pair of shorts and t-shirts and were told to help trotting the grapes in the lagar - several hundred litter of red grape must, partially fermented in two big concrete vats – definitely a weird experience and great fun. Encourage by the beats of the drum player and the music of the accordion a conga-line was formed trotting through the must. Several rounds to the left and right, various interesting foot movements later it took serious scrubbing and cold pressured water to get rid of ones stained legs. An experience I won't forget for a while. This trotting is in age-old –technique allowing for the juice of the fruit to be extracted more efficiently and less violently. After having concluded the first steps of vinification, the wines are transported to the historical wine cellars at Vila Nova de Gaia, where they undergo a long ageing process.



The night continued with some blind port tastings (guess the vintage), lots of laughter going back through the experience and evidence pictures of the previous trotting, a few card games into the early hours, simply enjoying a warm summer night sitting outside, before heading off to bed.

23rd September 2011

Day 3

After a delicious, again too early breakfast out on the terrace, surrounded by warmth and sunshine, we went on a tour through the Quinta's own vinification centre. Being there during harvest gave us an insight into the production of wine/port right from the start – delivery of the grapes, the separation process and fermentation and so much more. We finished our stay at the Quinta with an amazing walk through the surrounding vineyard and its amazing views.



Late morning we departed to our final leg of this incredible adventure – Ramos Pintos Headquarters. Again the drive took us through some amazing landscape filled with eucalyptus- and wild chestnuts-, olives- and almond trees and vines in various styles of plantings.

At HQ's we had a guided tour through their brand-new bottling facilities, vinification/storage centre and cellars, finishing in their own tasting room.

The aim of Casa Ramos Pinto's latest study is to find the best choice of wood for a perfect marriage between wine and barrel- type, size and origin. Ramos Pinto wishes to respect the choice of refined style defined by the great complexity and elegance of its wines.



The tasting room hasn't changed since the early days of Adriano Pintos himself. The big feature in this room is the piano – a row of shelves filled with small bottles of all available port casks. This is used by the port-master to check, create and/or improve the offered selection of ports – all bottles are being changed every 15 days.

Here in the tasting room we had another opportunity to taste the great variety of Ramos Pinto port wines, from Tawny to LBV, to Special Selection Reserve and Vintage. We also had the chance to have a look at the new labels for the various bottles of Ramos Pintos port – wow.

The pursuit of excellence is evident in the effective quality of the wines it produces and the continuation of a pioneering tradition in the areas of research, which for decades has guided its production strategy.



After this amazing experience we headed of to the final destination of our trip – the Ramos Pinto Museum. Here we were served another delicious three-course lunch, matched with Ramos Pinto wines and port – very tasty. The visit concluded with a tour through the museum itself; gaining an insight into the history and ideas of the family and sometimes even the struggle to produce and maintain an incredible product – definitely an inspiring trip into their past.





Now being back to reality, I want to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to various people: to Mark Leveson-Gowen, for being a great tour guide and fun to be around; to the two Anna's from Ramos Pintos, but especially Anna Rato for driving us around, going above and beyond to see to all our needs, making unforeseeable stops, getting us to try new things (food and wine), simply making this trip even more special – THANK YOU.

Last, but not least I wanted to thank the Academy of Food and Wine Service for providing this amazing opportunity in the first place. I can only encourage anyone to enter the various awards, you never know what will come out in the end.

