

Quinta do Feital

Spain's Most Famous White Grape Finds its Paradise

Galicia's *Rias Baixas* has become synonymous with great Albariño—producing wines of compelling fruit and fragrance from this distinctive grape. Most of the top versions come from vineyards lining the Minho river.

Yet, some of the best and oldest Albariño vineyards are actually in Portugal, directly across the river from Spain. So, when the young Gallego winemaker, Marcial Dorado, set out to make the finest Albariño of all, he crossed the river. Overlooking the town of Melgaço, he had discovered a 70-year-old Albariño vineyard, the likes of which he couldn't find in Spain.

He purchased the vineyard, naming it Quinta do Dorado. Marcial had carefully observed the practices at *Rias Baixas* wineries he admired, and he adapted those lessons to his new estate.



Improving on Nature

Marcial's zealous pursuit of excellence would astonish most Galicians. For starters, Marcial limited yields and insisted on hand harvesting. As the grapes are harvested, they are first sorted in the vineyards, and then on a triage table—with all unhealthy bunches discarded. The renovated winery is entirely gravity fed—anything to keep oxygen away from the grapes. This meticulous pursuit of pristine fruit is critical, as Marcial's wines diverge from "typical" in a couple of ways.

The first way, of course, is the sheer concentration produced by low-yielding, old vines. But Marcial also adopted a couple of techniques common to Burgundy's best white wine specialists: partial malolactic fermentation and extensive stirring of the lees. There is plenty of

fresh acidity in Marcial's fruit, and the malolactic fermentation steals very little of it, while enhancing the wine's richness and limiting the need to



Quinta do Dorado

filter or add SO₂. Lees-stirring provides additional aromatic complexity and a sense of depth on the palate.

A Second Path

In 2002, Marcial purchased a second estate, at Seixas on the mouth of the Minho river. The climate is warmer here than in Melgaço, but the site lies on a rare outcropping of schist. Vinho Verde's traditional Trajadura is planted, and yields wines with vivid acidity and minerality. Marcial has replanted the steepest portions of the vineyard with Alvarinho, and believes that the maturing vines will eventually produce something unique and magical. In the meantime, this fruit will be used to produce a fresh, inexpensive blend called Auratus.

Alvarinho Superior "Dorado"

This wine has the compelling floral aromatics of the best *Rias Baixas* Albariños but, it offers even more authority. Named to **Saveur Magazine's "Top 100"** in 2002.

Alvarinho/Trajadura "Auratus"

Fresh and crisp, this wine is what most Vinho Verde hopes to be when it grows up. For technical reasons, it cannot hold that appellation, yet it does more to honor that tradition than 99% of Vinho Verde on the market.

