



**ASSEMBLEIA LEGISLATIVA DA REGIÃO AUTÓNOMA DA MADEIRA**

*Gabinete do Presidente*

**Extraordinary Chapter Ceremony 2022 - Enogastronomic Confraternity of Madeira**

**Wisdom Prayer | First Journeys for the Discovery of Madeira Island Wines**

**Speech by the President of the Legislative Assembly of Madeira, José Manuel Rodrigues**

I greet all the members of the International Federation of Bacchic Confraternities and the Eno-Gastronomic Confraternity of Madeira, present here, in particular those who came from abroad to share with us this route through Madeira wines.

I'm far from being the best person to talk about the history and current affairs of our wines, but as a politician, I can't resist a good challenge and I accepted the challenge of the Enogastronomic Confraternity of Madeira, to which I belong with great pride.

The History of Madeira Wine dates back to the time when the island was discovered and is intertwined with the archipelago's own history.

The planting, production and marketing of the vine spans the six centuries since the settlement of our islands.

The first strains arrived with the first Portuguese who arrived here, under the aegis of the Cruz de Cristo.

Wine was indelibly linked to Christianity and, in addition to the planting of cereals, the vine was one of the first crops that were planted here, after clearing the intense forest that they found and that can still be seen, and which is now a World Heritage Site. , such as Laurissilva forest.

Anyone who knows the bowels of this island knows how difficult it was to overcome the cliffs and cliffs, transform basalt into arable soil, and extract the rubinectar from it, which immediately began to enchant those who tasted it.

The hacker, who became an islander, built stone walls to support terraces and terraces and there, on the edge of precipices, he cultivated the vines that took the name of Madeira around the world.



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Just 35 years after the Discovery of Madeira, the Venetian Alise Cadamosto, in her Navigations, wrote that the island's wines were "very good" and comparable to the best in the Mediterranean, and several scientific articles and even medical treaties recommended a chalice as a good remedy for various ailments.

Basically, historians divide the region's economy into three major cycles: the sugar cycle, the wine cycle and the tourism cycle, which is still our main economic activity today.

While sugar, white gold, from which Madeira benefited greatly, was lost over time as an industry, in the face of competition from other regions, where, curiously, it was the Madeirans who brought their knowledge of how the mills worked, as in Brazil, in the case of the vineyard, its planting continues to punctuate the humanized landscape of Madeira and wine persists, to this day, as a source of income, as a good export activity and as an identity mark of the island.

From the 15th century to the present day, with more or less prosperity, wine marks the history of the archipelago.

However, it is with the introduction of Mediterranean strains that our nectar gains worldwide fame, as a result of its quality, but also of the island's excellent location in the navigation routes, for the Portuguese and English colonies.

Malvasia, especially this one, but also Sercial, Boal, Verdelho, Terrantez delights its tasters and gradually opens up new markets and a clientele that ranges from the poorest hacker to the richest monarch.

The truth is that England and its colonies are the big market and that makes many British traders settle in Funchal and make huge fortunes with the Export market.

The deep connection between Portugal and England, an old alliance that is now 650 years old, sealed by the Treaty of Tagilde of July 10, 1372, grants Madeira Wine a privileged situation in relation to other wines, such as the Canary Islands, whose strains were taken by Portuguese to Tenerife.



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It is curious that, in various literature of the time, the islands of Madeira, the Canaries and the Azores are called “the islands of wine”, but it is Madeira that prevails, supplying the English colonies in Central and North America.

But it's not just sailors, soldiers, adventurers who prefer Malvasia from these parts; its quality is present at the tables of the European clergy and aristocracy, particularly in London.

In the 18th century, this projection had an enormous reach and extended to the Americas and Asia, as well as to some Portuguese possessions in India.

The island is experiencing a period of unparalleled prosperity, and this wealth is applied in farms, manor houses, chapels and commissions for works of art that can still be appreciated today.

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the export of wine reached 20 thousand barrels, which passed through these floors that we walk today and through these cloisters that we contemplate, since the Customs of Funchal used to work here.

It was also in the 19th century that Russia, very fond of liqueur wines from the island of Pico, in the Azores, whose first strains came from Madeira, began to import considerable amounts of wine from our islands.

Tsar Peter the Great and Tsarina Catherine the Great loved Madeira wine and their cellars did not dispense with wines from these parts.

As far as is known, Mr Putin has never tasted what is good!...

Everyone, in this Hall, has already contemplated the magnificent landscapes of this island, but the truth is that for many Europeans and people from other continents, Madeira is mainly known for its wonderful wines that have indelibly marked historical moments in the History of several Nations and the good world literature.

The Russians Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, in their books; Balzac and Jules Verne in their works; Charles Dickens and Jane Austen, in their writings, among other great novelists, allude to Madeira Wine as the nectar of European Courts and have their protagonists weave panegyrics and praise our nectars.



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The great writers, poets, musicians and artists surrendered to the charms of our wine and William Shakespeare, in the play that dramatizes the life of Richard III, recalls how his brother Jorge Plantageneta, Duke of Clarence, ordered to be executed by King Edward IV, in 1478, he chose to drown in a Malvasia da Madeira kite.

Other good times...

The founding fathers of the United States of America know well the smell and taste of the nectars of this island and it was with our wine that George Washington and his companions celebrated the independence of that great Nation, and the White House still has an excellent Madeira wine cellar and it is customary to take a wooden glass when a new President takes office.

Madeira was a noble wine, present on special occasions, such as weddings and large celebrations, coveted by everyone, but only accessible to the richest and to the lavish tables of the various continents.

This inebriation around wine intoxicates the entire Madeiran society and in many corners of the island, sugarcane plantations and other cultures give way to vineyards, in an incessant search to respond to the growing demands of the market.

This situation leads some houses to adulterate the composition with mixtures of other varieties and products, which leads to some degradation of the quality that has always made our wine noble.

The spread of phylloxera and other diseases in the vineyards and the replacement of traditional varieties by American varieties, more resistant and with greater production, but of lower quality, have highly harmful effects on the excellence of our wine.

The well-known “American” delighted the Madeirans, but spoiled the nobility of our spirited wine, which has always been made with noble European grape varieties.

But the most irreparable factor for the decline of Madeira, according to historians, was the loss of the colonial market and the opening up of markets that were previously very regulated between Portugal and several countries.

Madeira Wine, which had conquered Europe, America, Asia and Africa, lost quality and market, and being the main economic activity, this reality led the island to a deep



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crisis, responsible in large part for the waves of emigration from the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

In spite of everything, there are houses and cellars that resist and, while in some European countries, our wine is seen as a wine to be used in the kitchen, as in France, in traditional consumers, such as England and the United States, it remains highly appreciated and the oldest traffic jams are rarities that are always sought after and disputed.

In the middle of the 20th century, there was a great effort in the recovery of the vineyards and, in the last decades, there was a reconversion of the so-called direct producer varieties by the varieties that have always made Madeira wine famous, which led to an increase in production. and marketing in traditional markets.

Today, we have wines that are five and ten years old again of great quality and wine houses are thriving again, with exports increasing gradually but significantly.

The fashion for wine, which today is consumed by all social strata and by all age groups, has also led to countless experiences of producing table wines, and even sparkling wines, either with existing varieties, such as Negra Mole and Verdelho, or introducing grape varieties that have been proven on several continents, such as Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

The volcanic and acidic soils, the proximity of the vineyards to the sea, the microclimates, among other characteristics, give these still wines, now also produced on the island of Porto Santo, with traditional table grape varieties, such as Listrão and Caracol, very own and even unique flavors, which have been gaining fans in the Region and in mainland Portugal, at prices above the market average.

They are different wines, where you can taste the sea air and quietness of the small islands, destined for certain market niches with purchasing power, since the islands have a difficult orography, smallholdings predominate and there is no land for large productions.

In a very summary way, I tried to draw a picture of the history of our wines and the importance they had and still have in Madeiran society.



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And I say they have because, despite the fact that viticulture no longer has the weight of the past, the truth is that wine is part of Madeira's identity and culture.

Even today, it is possible to see, in many Madeiran houses, whether rich or modest, the so-called latadas, where the Madeirans try to produce their own wine,

Likewise, looking at the humanized rural landscape of Madeira, it is possible to verify that the parishes with a greater propensity for viticulture are those that exhibit higher levels of development and those where the built heritage is richer and more significant.

And now to prove that what I have just said is not a political speech, I invite you at the end of this ceremony to a Madeira in Honor of Your Excellencies.

I am sure that from now on your taste buds will not be the same and that you will take the intoxicating perfume of Madeira wine to your lands, as did Winston Churchill, who, in 1950, after having taken this island a good shipment of bottles, a few months later he was already demanding a few more boxes of our precious nectar in a letter addressed to Madeira Wine.

He was a brave man with sophisticated taste!

Thank you.

Funchal, 25th september

José Manuel Rodrigues

President of the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of Madeira