

The wines of Quinta do Zambujeiro, Alentejo, Portugal

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Zambujeiro is a relative newcomer to the Portuguese wine scene, and they are evidently making a tilt at the very top with their ambitious (and ambitiously priced) wines. They've already carved out quite a reputation.

The Quinta was purchased by a Swiss wine lover in 1998, and consists of 30 hectares of vines, some as old as 30 years and others newly planted. They are the usual Alentejo varieties of Castelao Frances, Trincadeira, Aragonez and Alicante Bouschet, together with Touriga Nacional and some Cabernet Sauvignon. Two wines are made, the flagship Zambujeiro (5-8000 bottles) and Terra do Zambujeiro (20-30 000 bottles). New French oak is used in the cellars (100% for first wine, 65% for second), and malolactic fermentation is in barrel. No filtering. Winemaking responsibilities lie with brothers Philippe and Alain Bramaz.

The wines are impressive. They're definitely made in a very modern style, but they retain some Portuguese character. I wouldn't age these rich, warm-climate wines for too long: they give immediate gratification. They're expensive, but the quality is there. Available in the UK from Raymond Reynolds (info@raymondreynolds.co.uk).

The notes below are from two separate occasions: the 2000 wines were tasted in July 2003, the 2001 wines in April 2005.

Zambujeiro 2001 Alentejo

Very concentrated, sweet, full and liquoricey. There's a sweet herbal richness to the palate. It's sweetly fruited, yet dry and tannic at the same time. A bold, intense wine. Very good/excellent 93/100 (£55)

Terra do Zambujeiro 2001 Alentejo

Sweet, ripe and intense, with savoury earthy undercurrents to the soft ripe fruit. Very good/excellent 90/100 (£24.95)

Zambujeiro 2000 Alentejo

A blend of Trincadeira and Aragonez, this dark wine has a beguiling exotic nose of sweet ripe black fruits and herbs, with a chocolatey edge and some vanilla undertones. The palate is ripe and chocolatey with super-concentrated herb-tinged fruit, some spice and very smooth tannins. There's some alcohol apparent (it's declared as 15%) but this is more than just another big, international wine - it has real Alentejo character to it. Drinking well now, this is thoroughly lovely. Excellent 95/100

Terra do Zambujeiro 2000 Alentejo

There's a sweet herbal edge to the spicy nose with some chocolatey richness to the fruit. Less opulent than the first wine, but showing good concentration on the palate which shows a good density of chewy, herby, spicy fruit with nice savouriness and some elegance. Appealing. Very good/excellent 90/100



