Jancis Robinson

ALTANO BRANCO 2018 DOURO

by Richard Hemming MW | March 27, 2020





Wines of the Week: Douro

An ideal wine for a crisis?

2018 vintage from €4.95, £9.99, 77.40 Swiss francs per case of six, SG$26

Older vintages from $7.99, 297 Ukrainian hryvnia, 930 Russian roubles, 63 UAE dirhams, 89 Malaysian ringgit, 630 New Taiwanese dollars, 158 Chinese renminbi, 119.90 Brazilian reais, 870 Thai baht

Right now, the most important factors for a wine of the week are that it should be affordable, widely available and preferably home-deliverable (see our constantly updated list of Wine retailers who'll deliver to self-isolators). Thankfully, the Altano 2018 Douro white is all three – and it tastes absolutely superb, too.

As is so often the case for excellent value wine, Portugal's Douro Valley is the source, and the Symington group is the sorcerer. Their Altano brand was made wine of the week by Jancis four years ago in its red organic form (with the spookily prescient opening line 'It's an ill wind that blows no one any good'), while various vintages of the white have been scored 10 times in our tasting notes database, never scoring below 16 out of 20.

Their well-designed website tells me the blend consists of Malvasia Fina, Viosinho, Rabigato and Moscatel Galego. The winemaking is modern and straightforward, creating a wine with pinpoint technical balance yet without any sacrifice of personality. Indeed, the bottle I opened earlier this month was bursting with character, combining waxy texture with ripe citrus that evokes the hot terraces of the Douro, finishing with an appetising herbal bitterness that bears comparison with wines from another warm river valley, the southern Rhône.

As Jancis noted in October, the Moscatel element is kept well under control in the 2018 vintage, adding perhaps just a little background floral character, but the main impression is of concentrated, satisfying citrus fruit that is far lengthier that you'd expect at this price.

For those reasons alone, it makes a great wine of the week, but even more pertinent is the fact that various vintages of Altano are distributed across at least 41 countries, according to their website, and better still, appear to be widely available from independent merchants in the UK (I counted 19 such listings on Wine-Searcher). In Singapore, however, it is available only at Cold Storage supermarket, where a bottle cost me SG$21 (the equivalent of £12.33/€13.45/$14.41) on special offer but is usually priced at SG$26.

In such uncertain times, wine can provide precious moments of pleasure, and Altano Branco not only satisfies the palate, it can help support regions, producers and retailers who really need it.

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